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**“Il n’y a pas de ‘potentially hot issues’?”
Paradoxes of Displaying Arab-Canadian Lands within
the Canadian Museum of Civilization Following 9.11**

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

Institute of Political Economy
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April 2005

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the implications of the attempted delay and eventual reinstatement of the contemporary art exhibit *The Lands within Me: Expressions by Canadian Artists of Arab Origin* at the Canadian Museum of Civilization in Gatineau following the attacks of September 11, 2001. Located in a national culture and history museum in a multicultural nation in the immediate post-9.11 period, the narratives associated with this display caused temporary ruptures in traditional categories associated with these spaces. As an ethnography of a museum exhibit, this project examines the controversy surrounding *The Lands within Me* as a critical moment in which the contradictions between the narratives and experiences of belonging in the nation are revealed.

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There are numerous individuals whose assistance and guidance throughout this project must be acknowledged. Patricia Forget at the Canadian Museum of Civilization made the archives an enjoyable and accessible place to conduct lengthy research. Staff at the museum freely offered their time and stories, including Dr. Victor Rabinovitch, Dr. Stephen Inglis, Dr. Andrea Laforet and Dr. Aïda Kaouk. These discussions were always informative and enlightening. I am thankful to Farouk Kaspoules for his insightful comments and patience in organizing our meeting.

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PREFACE

I began the work for this ethnography in the fall of 2004. Having recently returned to Ottawa from a summer away, I was delighted to discover that the Canadian Museum of Civilization (CMC), where much of my research would be conducted, was within walking distance of my new home. The season was particularly warm and sunny, allowing the bright colours to remain far longer than anticipated. Perhaps it was this vibrancy that first distracted me from noticing the multitude of representations of the very work I was conducting present on my walk each day. Throughout the year, I discovered that the national capital region was filled with symbols of the various struggles that have occurred around Canada's national multicultural identity.

The daily walk to the museum is brief and requires no more than half an hour of travel in each direction. I begin on Bank Street, a space that always struck me as an aberration from the typically clean, conservative and orderly streets of Ottawa. The city is kept in good working order by a bureaucratic institution known as the National Capital Commission (NCC). This powerful body is charged with encouraging the flourishing culture and vitality of Canada's capital.

Although Ottawa is not a city of extraordinarily high rates of immigration, there are a number of visibly distinct communities within its boundaries. Prominent among these are a multitude of Arab Canadian communities. Before I travel far from my home, along Bank Street, I pass four shawarma houses, a Middle Eastern Bakery and two Middle Eastern grocers. Continuing my journey I encounter a number of buildings where some of the numerous governmental organizations are housed. At Wellington Street I turn due east and walk past the full length of Canada's parliamentary buildings. Gothic

structures, many dating from the century only just recently passed, their already impressive stature is thrown further into relief along the crest of a highpoint overlooking the Ottawa River.

Crossing the Rideau Canal I reach the scenic site of one of Canada's grand old railway hotels, the Chateau Laurier. Throughout my recent studies I have learned that these seemingly innocuous sites provide the content for one of the great myths of Canadian nation building. Typical of a settler-colonial worldview, the land, presumed empty and untamed, is populated and modernized through the construction of the railway, creating a single unified link across the vast, wild geographical space. Through this process, particular visions of sovereignty are both expressed and established. Prior to the arrival of Europeans, it was assumed, "the whole of the land is 'unused,' hence no sovereignty can exist." In 'using' the land, European colonialists and Canadian nationalists staked an irrevocable claim upon it – an act whose repercussions continue to reverberate for both the land and its early inhabitants today.¹

Here, I can see the museum for the first time; its curvatures and slopes make it immediately distinguishable among the strict lines of the century buildings and factories by which it is surrounded. Turning north once again, I stroll down Sussex Drive. At the opposite end of this street, far from my current location, are the residences of the Prime Minister and the Governor General. At this point the street is occupied by expensive boutiques on the east and the massive structure of the Embassy of the United States of America on the west. To increase perceptions of security following September 11, 2001, concrete barriers were erected surrounding the Embassy, engulfing a lane of traffic on two sides. The fortress quality of this structure never escapes my notice as it presents a

¹ Kuehls in Magnussen and Shaw, 2002: 184.

stark contrast to the relatively easy access of its neighbour, the Canadian Parliament Buildings. That the view of the Parliament Buildings from the east is blocked by the Embassy's overwhelming presence reveals for me the role of the world's only superpower within the borders of its neighbour to the north.

Following the American Embassy I encounter the pointed peaks of the National Art Gallery. This glass, cathedral-like building, nestled in the peak atop the Ottawa River, looks across the river to the province of Quebec. The towers of the Catholic Cathedral that are located directly across the street from this Canadian institution amplify the connotations of ritual and worship often accompanying this 'secular temple'. The gallery is the last structure I pass upon leaving Ontario for Quebec and the first when I arrive from the other direction. As I walk across the bridge connecting these two – often deeply contested – territories, the last image I encounter is the bold shape of a statue commemorating one of Canada's first 'explorers'. The figure, situated at the peak of a hill, stands tall looking out over the land below. A few years ago, before I moved to Ottawa, another shape was settled next to and below the statue. Kneeling and pointing, this statue of an Indian scout represented the aid given to the newly arriving Europeans in 'discovering' the vast, 'empty' territory that lay before them. First Nations' groups in the region questioned the value of this particular piece, noting the subordinate position of the Aboriginal 'scout' as compared to the lofty, brave and superior stance of the 'explorer'.

A passionate debate erupted over requests from Aboriginal groups to alter the statue in some form. Some felt the monument should remain untouched. Others, including myself, felt that to alter the statue would ignore the colonial history of oppression symbolic within and felt the addition of a plaque explaining the variety of

messages portrayed and expressed in the monument would be more appropriate. In the end, however, the scout was removed from the statue and relocated to another park across the road. The ‘explorer’ remains in his highly visible locale, now unaided in his journey. Representation, within and outside of museums, it appears, remains an incomplete process. As contexts shift and alter, so too do the meanings and narratives implied in a nation’s symbols.

Located just inside the boundaries both of the province of Quebec and of the newly named city of ‘Gatineau’ (formerly known as Hull) the Canadian Museum of Civilization sits on a sloping site at the meeting point of the Ottawa River and the Rideau Canal. Designed by Blackfoot Canadian architect, Douglas Cardinal, the CMC has the look of an archaeological excavation, whose circular shapes move ever upwards in slow, rhythmic patterns. Directly across the river from the museum sits the rear-side of Canada’s Parliament Buildings. The sharp angles of the copper roofs, rusted to a soft green palette, offer a distinctive juxtaposition to the museum’s sloping curves. Facing one another across the Ottawa River, these two structures play an integral role in shaping, reflecting and constructing perceptions of Canada’s national identity, and I will interrogate both in the analysis below.

The space in which the CMC is located reflects and reproduces the contradictions and challenges implicit within Canada’s multicultural identity. Similarly, this thesis will highlight the multiple narratives found in myths and representations of the ‘multicultural’ nation. I will confront the ongoing dialogue occurring between colonial frameworks implicit within this settler state and the simultaneous attempts to overcome these limitations. Ultimately – by examining a relatively small moment in a specific space and

time – this ethnography will reveal the infinite complexity offered in those moments where paradoxes accompanying modern identity formation are revealed. While this study is centred on a contemporary art exhibit, *The Lands within Me: Expressions by Canadian Artists of Arab Origin*, the surrounding discourses, as opposed to the exhibit itself, will act as the focal point of analysis. Relatively little space, therefore, has been given to the artistic works in the exhibit. Not wanting them to remain completely absent, however, I have placed a reproduction of a work from the exhibit ahead of each new chapter. I have chosen works that are compelling, and are evocative of the debates found within the chapters they open. On the page immediately following the reproductions, I have offered a brief summary of the ways in which, for me, the pieces act as metaphors of the analysis in the chapter to follow. Clearly, each piece is open to many interpretations and my own are framed by the perspective I have brought to this project. I hope however that, despite these limitations, the integration of visual representations of the theoretical and practical debates in this project adds another layer to the analysis, further displaying the infinite complexity of identity and belonging in the current period.

. . . and at night we leave our dreams on the window sill, memory of a place . . .¹

is a deftly layered piece. In this 2000 installation by Farouk Kaspoules, multiple frames exist within the larger framework yet, at first glance these images create a seamless array of impressions. It is only upon closer examination that the diversity of ideas, pictures and memories found within become apparent. The multiplicity of these layers and images is further reflected in the use of a variety of mixed medium techniques including non-silver printing processes, silkscreen, and painting. Pictures of stonewalls, deities, learned men and ancient places rest as a background, evoking visions of a traditional era where one image alone could represent the totality of experiences lived. However, these pictures are then layered over with imprints and influences. The muted colours allow one to resist the temptation to imagine a simpler time destroyed or 'stamped upon' by the forces of modernity. Instead, the ongoing process of mixing, contrasting and influencing throughout history is perceived.

A window is positioned at the fore of each picture so that the viewer may enter into the piece, lessening the distance between here and there. For Kaspoules, these images are deconstructed and reconstructed memories of a place that – due to the prominent role played by Baghdad on the nightly news – has moved closer to his current location. These daily pictures, however, are far removed from his own memories of the sights, smells, and sounds of his place of birth.²

¹ Kaspoules, Farouk. . . . and at night we leave our dreams on the window sill, memory of a place (detail), 2000. Collection of the Artist. Wall installation: mixed media on BFK Rives paper, 444.5 x 287 cm. Kaspoules, Farouk. . . . and at night we leave our dreams on the window sill, memory of a place, 2000. Collection of the Artist. Wall installation: mixed media on BFK Rives paper, 444.5 x 287 cm. Both pieces were retrieved from the © Canadian Museum of Civilization website, www.civilization.ca/cultur/cespays/pay2_11e.html in March 2005. The six pieces from *The Lands within Me* reproduced in this thesis were copied from the Canadian Museum of Civilization website and the publication accompanying the exhibit with the permission of the curator.

² Interview with Farouk Kaspoules, 18 March 2005.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Everyone comes from somewhere else; each carries within himself or herself the story of a rupture, of wandering, of conflicts – but also the possibility of an East and West reunited.¹

Philippe Baldini, *Passage* [Text Panel, *The Lands within Me*]

Introduction

The process of modernization was once thought to imply an end of sorts, when humanity would have evolved towards a more advanced state of being. However, it has become increasingly apparent that the effects of the relatively brief reign of the Western world are far more ambivalent than such teleological perspectives would suggest. Consequently, the assurance with which one may speak about contemporary trends has been muted. In response, theorists attempting to describe the present era have increasingly turned to terms implying movement and transition. A sense that the contemporary period is characterized by flux abounds: anthropologists endeavour to describe ‘living’ and ‘fluid’ cultures, geographers depict the ephemeral and porous nature of borders and boundaries, and historians acknowledge that stories of the past remain incomplete. Through this process, assumptions that have long provided strength and prominence to Eurocentric perspectives are also being called into question.

In contrast to this overarching theme of movement, however, narratives associated with identities and cultures, particularly within the space of the nation, remain rigid, fixed and unrelenting. The crisis of modernity, to my mind, is situated here – in the contradiction between postmodern visions of alternative ways of being and the continuing influence of modern hegemonic frameworks. The ambiguity created in the

¹ © Collection of the Canadian Museum of Civilization, Institutional Documents, *The Lands within Me*. Fonds Aïda Kaouk, 2001-2003, Dessins, Plans & Textes, B.1 – 306, No. 5/5, Text Panel Philippe Baldini, *Passage*.

void between these two stories of the social world is often hidden beneath the surface, barely visible among the vast number of images, recollections and pictures spinning around our daily existence. Only at specific moments or points of convergence, often during periods of uncertainty, can the enormity of the gap between these narratives be glimpsed.

The story of the Arab-Canadian art exhibit, *The Lands within Me: Expressions by Canadian Artists of Arab Origin*, displayed at the CMC in the National Capital Region in the months immediately following September 11, 2001, is representative of one such moment. While the planning for this contemporary art exhibit had been ongoing since 1996, in the wake of the attacks upon the World Trade Center the desirability of this form of representation in the new and unexpected context created by world events was re-examined. Museum officials decided to delay the exhibit, but their attempt was met with surprising resistance from the public, media and Members of Parliament, ultimately forcing the museum to retract the postponement and go ahead with the display as planned.²

One may wonder at the usefulness of studying what is, admittedly, a rather small event. This controversy had a relatively brief lifespan in the Canadian mediascape as the overwhelming presence of 9.11 and its aftermath occupied the majority of the public's attention. Throughout this analysis, however, I have found the narratives surrounding the potential postponement of this exhibit to be expressive of broader discourses of the day. By revealing those paradoxes often ignored in the contemporary period, I believe that this controversy was both unexpected and unprecedented. Veena Das has produced a

² A more detailed description of the events surrounding the exhibit will be described in Chapter 2, however, a brief summary of the attempted delay and its aftermath can be found in a timeline in the Appendix, Figure 2, page 131.

fascinating examination of those ‘critical’ events in contemporary India that have helped to alter categories of meaning and modes of action within the state. Das’ study revealed that, following critical events “new modes of action came into being which redefined traditional categories” and “new forms were acquired by a variety of political actors.”³ It must be acknowledged that the events of which Das speaks include the partition of India and the lethal poisoning of tens of thousands in Bhopal. Clearly the overwhelming significance of these critical events make the use of this term in relation to the delay of a museum exhibit somewhat problematic. However, in the discussions to follow, I will examine the potential for a seemingly minor event to have a large impact.

Out of this particular ‘critical event’ a number of questions arise. How are an exhibit and its reception affected by the space and time in which they are located? Why did the museum attempt to delay the exhibit? What stimulated the public response to the museum’s decision? What have been the repercussions of the exhibit’s reinstatement? More generally, this thesis also asks: how do stories and narratives of multiculturalism relate to the actual *experience* of this national identity? What role do museums play in modern nation states? What do critical events such as 9.11 and the story of *The Lands within Me* reveal about modern national identities? In this introductory chapter, I will lay down the theoretical and methodological frameworks through which these questions will be examined.

Narrative as Social Analysis

The following inquiry will be informed by an interest in understanding the significance of narrativity in the contemporary social world. For theorists Jaber F. Gubrium and James A. Holstein, “narrative analysis refers loosely to the examination of

³ Das, 1995: 6.

the diverse stories, commentaries, and the conversations engaged in everyday life.”⁴ Margaret R. Somers expands upon this definition by recognizing the increasingly active role played by stories in analyses of the social world. Somers believes “all of us come to *be* who we *are* (however ephemeral, multiple, and changing) by being located or locating ourselves (usually unconsciously) in social narratives *rarely of our own making*.”⁵

Relying upon a narrative analysis will allow me to explore a diversity of stories relating to the exhibit, thereby displaying the meaning and significance of each as told and perceived by the narrators. However, how does this process play out in practical terms? Arthur Frank wonders whether or not we can “hear others’ stories as discoveries of what things matter to them – since ‘things that matter’ are not there *a priori* but are discovered in the course of living and narrating.”⁶ Somers may offer a solution to this difficulty as she insists that narrativity be combined with the study of identities and identity formation. In order to avoid the rigidifying components of both identity and narrativity Somers suggests the incorporation of “the categorically destabilizing dimensions of *time*, *space*, and *relationality*”⁷ into analyses of the social world. Stories about identities cannot be told, therefore, within a void. Instead they must be positioned comparatively by articulating the spatial, temporal and relational settings in which they are situated. In telling stories associated with *The Lands within Me*, this analysis will locate the exhibit at a museum of history and culture in a ‘multicultural’ nation during the period of uncertainty immediately following September 11, 2001.

⁴ Gubrium and Holstein, 1999: 561.

⁵ Somers, 1994: 606.

⁶ Frank, 2002: 12.

⁷ Somers, 1994: 606.

However, if stories help to define the social world in which we live, how does one explain the simultaneous presence of overarching ‘meta’ narratives, long presumed to be categories of universal meaning, and stories which present alternatives to these? Somers’ analytical model offers four different levels or types including ontological, public, meta and critical narratives. Ontological narratives refer to “the stories that social actors use to make sense of – indeed, to act in – their lives.”⁸ An ontological narrative, therefore, could simultaneously be a public, meta or critical narrative; the category simply implies a narrative in use, one to which we refer in order to construct identities and stories about ourselves. Public narratives refer to the larger, institutional frameworks from which we may choose to define our daily experience. “Public narratives range from the narratives of one’s family, to those of the workplace, church, government, and nation.”⁹ Metanarrativity “refers to the ‘masternarratives’ in which we are embedded as contemporary actors.”¹⁰ The metanarratives of the current era are now painfully familiar and while they may be protested at various levels, to presume that they have shifted away from the experience of daily life would be premature. Finally, critical narratives are present whenever public and metanarratives are protested and alternatives visions articulated. It is, of course, important to recognize that narratives found within any one category can shift and flow as relational settings transform. Alternative visions may, at times, become public narratives before again being relegated to the realm of ‘critical’. This thesis presents one attempt to interrogate those times and spaces where the variety of narratives from which we construct our identities may be articulated, debated and even, perhaps, reformulated.

⁸ Somers, 1994: 618.

⁹ Somers, 1994: 619.

¹⁰ Ibid.

At the outset of this project I accessed and reviewed the newspaper clippings relating to the exhibit collected by museum staff and kept in the library at the CMC. Some months later I interviewed the curator of the exhibit who pointed me in the direction of the museum's extensive archive collection. I realized that my interviews would be more informed and effective if I consulted this resource before continuing my discussions with those involved in the exhibit. Archival staff collected all of the material relating to *The Lands within Me* (approximately 8 boxes of documents and pictures) and made it freely available to me. Restrictions placed on the photocopying of documents in the archives¹¹ forced me to spend the better part of four months in this section of the museum.

Once I completed the archival research, I returned to and completed my original interview with Dr. Kaouk. In the subsequent months I conducted interviews of varying length with different directors in the museum including the Director of Ethnology and Cultural Studies Dr. Andrea Laforet, the Director General of Research and Collections Dr. Stephen Inglis, and the President and CEO of the CMC Dr. Victor Rabinovitch.¹² Towards the end of this project I was able to meet with one of the artists who contributed to *The Lands within Me*, Farouk Kaspoules. Following the method laid out by Shelley Butler in her museum ethnography, *Contested Representations*, I wrote extensive transcripts of each interview and then returned them to the interviewees for their review, encouraging them to make any changes they felt were necessary to most accurately

¹¹ In order to photocopy any text in the archives I was required to write out its precise location, hand a form into the archivists and then wait for them to receive approval to provide me with a copy. As I was unsure how long this process would take, I simply copied the necessary texts verbatim on to my laptop. I received repeated assurances from archive staff that, interestingly, there are no restrictions placed upon this rather lengthy process.

¹² A partial organizational chart of the divisions and programmes within the CMC is found in the Appendix, Figure 1, page 130. The position of these individuals in relation to one another and to other staff whose voices are encountered in this analysis can be found here.

reflect their experiences and point-of-view. Dr. Rabinovitch, Dr. Inglis and Dr. Kaouk offered additions to the original text and due to a language barrier between Dr. Kaouk and myself, we met a third time to go over the transcripts and make changes together to ensure our mutual understanding.

A variety of unexpected challenges arose throughout my examination of this 'critical event'. I encountered limitations in my archival research, during my interviews and in the overall timing of my analysis. Unfortunately, the archival record of the exhibit remains incomplete. No video recording was made of the exhibit's path and only some of the text panels and captions that were displayed in the exhibit can be found in the museum's extensive archives. During the controversy I was studying outside of Canada and I did not move to Ottawa until after the exhibit had closed. Thus, my only interactions with the exhibit have been second hand, in archival and journalistic accounts and through pictures and representations. While re-creations of the exhibit may be found on the museum's website and in its accompanying publication, changes from the original exhibit have undoubtedly occurred as the passage of time has allowed for changes in focus and orientation. Any reconstruction of the exhibit I may attempt here, therefore, will necessarily be inexact. Apart from the difficulty of describing an artistic display in a written text, the information required for a realistic recreation of *The Lands within Me* has not been preserved.

I encountered limitations, as well, in my attempt to incorporate a variety of narratives by conducting interviews with individuals who had different relationships to the exhibit. Despite this diversity, it is important to remember that in my interviews with museum staff I was speaking with each individual in light of his or her public position

within the museum. Due to the nature of their location, therefore, the extent to which each of these individuals could express their views was limited. In a hierarchical bureaucratic institution such as the CMC, the flow of information is carefully controlled. This is not to suggest that each interviewee received a list of topics they were allowed or prohibited to discuss, in fact I saw no evidence of this form of direct control. Instead, through a variety of mechanisms, individuals within the museum become their own self-regulators, implicitly controlling the topics they approach and the extent to which they speak openly and freely. Indeed, the institutional framework guiding those involved is apparent not only in the responses of the directors, but also in those of the curator. During our interviews, which occurred three years after the controversy, her responses remained within the confines of the institutional expectations. Inevitably, the views of all interviewees within the museum had to represent and reproduce discourses and narratives prevalent within the museum.¹³

Additionally, in many respects, this interview method required a great deal of flexibility on my part. I was constantly amazed at the wide diversity of viewpoints I encountered regarding this seemingly small event. Every time I sat down with someone new, we developed a rapport and I became sympathetic to that person's view, despite its many contradictions with others I had heard. Their responses often took them back to difficult experiences, which I then analyzed from my own privileged position. It was difficult, when I sat down to write about these discussions and offer my own interpretations and analyses, to realize that those who had shared their experiences with me would not always agree with, or in fact appreciate what I would, in the end, write

¹³ This process of self-regulation would be true of any museum, due to the nature of professional ethics. However, this is even more the case at the CMC as it is part of the federal civil service where strict privacy and "whistle-blowing" rules apply.

down. The power implicit in this process was, in this manner, clearly displayed. Writing is in fact a series of decisions. Whose particular voice at any given time will be emphasized, which aspects of the story will be conveyed and, perhaps more importantly, those voices, narratives and components of the archival record that will remain silent all betray the challenges faced in an ethnographic project. These limitations further heighten the partiality of this particular account of *The Lands within Me*.

Finally, I encountered challenges in the ambiguity surrounding the timing of this study. I found that unexpected difficulties arose in my examination of *The Lands within Me* and September 11 three years after the fact. In some respects, too much time had passed to allow me to rely solely on the memory of my interviewees for the reproduction of this tale. The distance created by this passage of time had, admittedly, blurred the finer points of each narrative. However, not enough time had passed for all the classified documents to be released into the museum's archives, leaving them, and this story, incomplete. Further, too little time had passed since the attacks of September 11 and the controversy surrounding the exhibit to create the necessary distance to evaluate the long-term implications of these disruptive and disconcerting events.

In response to the complexities described above I have found it most effective to view this project as an ethnography of a museum exhibit. In a seminal text that distinguished anthropology as a discipline from ethnography as its preferred methodology, George E. Marcus and Michael M.J. Fischer suggest that "anthropology's distinctive method of research, ethnography, has long been focused precisely on the problems of the reading, interpretation and description of closely observed social and

cultural processes.”¹⁴ For Veena Das, “the mode by which knowledge is produced in anthropology is the mode of intimacy.”¹⁵ Ethnography, by its very nature, is an intimate form of study and requires positioning oneself within the space of examination.

Anthropology has been tangled in the difficulties of narrating experiences between the self and other since its inception during the period of nineteenth century colonial and imperial expansion. In this postmodern era, many anthropologists have been forced to confront the ghosts of their discipline’s past in order to overcome the hierarchical positioning of the researcher over the ‘objects’ of analysis. Charlotte Aull Davies, in her examination of the nature of ‘reflexive ethnography’ suggests that contemporary ethnographers, instead of allowing themselves to disappear, should “make themselves more visible, even central in the production with the idea that in so doing, in presenting their gropings toward understanding, they undermine their own authority so that their interpretations become simply one perspective with no superior claim to validity.”¹⁶ By clearly stating my own views about the role of museums in contemporary nation-states and the actions of this museum in this space and time I attempt to make evident my perspective within the narrative to follow, avoiding the presumption of presenting a single ‘true’ story of *The Lands within Me*. As such, I hope to display the challenges I encountered in interpreting these events and to provide a space for a variety of narratives to be expressed.

Ultimately I found this exhibit and its controversies to be revealing both of the position of museums in the context of Canadian ‘multiculturalism’ and of the nature of the post-9.11 environment. Museums, I believe, are most effective when they act as

¹⁴ Marcus & Fischer, 1986: 15.

¹⁵ Das, 1995: 2-3.

¹⁶ Davies, 1999: 15-16.

forums where diverse identities can be represented, mediated and discussed. Museums that are deeply connected to the state, however, are limited in their capacity to express a variety of perspectives. However, I have found that, due to the nature of visual display, debate and discussion will inevitably arise in museums. The ideas presented in *The Lands within Me* and the controversy surrounding it are representative of the museum's inability to purge the possibility of debate from the space it offers. Following September 11, many individuals and groups within Canada – particularly journalists and Parliamentarians – found it useful to deplore the museum's attempt to postpone *The Lands within Me*. To insist that Canada, as a 'multicultural' nation, could not tolerate suppression of Arab-Canadian voices following September 11 helped to deflect attention and critique away from the contradictions inherent in Canadian 'multiculturalism'. These contradictions were implicit within the museum's decision, however, they were also found in prevalent discourses of the day. In this respect, the CMC, in part, served as a 'scapegoat' for essentialist narratives expressed (before and) after 9.11.

Protesting against the (Post) Colonial: Identities, Nations and Hybridity

A number of theories connected to discourses of postcolonialism help to frame many of the terms upon which this 'critical event' is discussed. Postcolonial theory can, perhaps, most effectively be imagined in a similar manner to the way in which Nestor Garcia Canclini imagines "postmodernity not as a stage or tendency that replaces the modern world, but rather as a way of problematizing the equivocal links that the latter has formed with the traditions it tried to exclude or overcome in constituting itself."¹⁷ While many critique postcolonial scholars for presuming the end of an institution that remains latent throughout the world, theories connected to this perspective can best be understood

¹⁷ Canclini, 1995: 9.

as a protest against the continuing presence of this limiting framework. For, how can the boundaries produced and reproduced by colonial frameworks be overcome if they are not protested against and alternative lenses through which to view the world brought forward?

It is clear that neocolonial narratives continue to have implications for daily life. According to the Nuuchahnulth hereditary chief Umeek of Ahousat, “the nature of this discourse is unilateral, evolutionary, linear, hierarchical and presumptuous.”¹⁸ Nowhere is the persistence of these narratives more apparent than in the experience of nationalism. Stories of the nation are intertwined with the history of colonialism as both have their birth in the expansionist period of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Thus, within the framework of each nationalism is a story which articulates the civilized and primitive, modern and traditional, inside and outside. Edward Said has clearly portrayed how, through discourses that accompanied colonial expansion and continue to be found today, the history of Europe – deemed to be entirely distinct from its neighbours – is imagined as undergoing a permanent, progressive development towards enlightenment, rationality and technological advancement.¹⁹ In contrast, regions outside of the ‘core of history’ (particularly, according to Said, the Middle East) are designated as rigid, unchanging spaces of ‘tradition’, and, ultimately, death.²⁰ For the seminal postcolonial theorist Homi K. Bhabha, by defining the ‘native’ encountered abroad, the colonizer is subsequently capable of recognizing himself, in opposition to the other.²¹

¹⁸ Umeek in Magnussen and Shaw, 2002: 200.

¹⁹ Said, 1979.

²⁰ Hentsch, 1992.

²¹ Bhabha, 1994.

The current postcolonial interruption of this history has produced new language to replace problematic modes of depicting the social world. While the excessive re-fashioning of the terms used to describe a world whose essential elements remain unchanged can distract from critiques of exclusivity and Eurocentrism, rethinking the manner in which the social world is depicted (or narrated) can provide an effective counter to the status quo. The term 'hybridity' is one example of this ambivalent process. In preferring to articulate the world as a series of purities, the exclusive and hierarchical nature of colonial or 'orientalist' dogmas is able to persist. Alternatively, studying identity through the lens of hybridity, *mélange*, *métissage*, or interculturalism offers one attempt to overcome these limitations.

Hybridity is a term that opens easily to slippage as it allows for and, in fact, promotes multiple points of interpretation. As the French historian Serge Gruzinski has warned, when "perceived as a shift from homogeneous to heterogeneous, from the singular to the plural, from order to disorder," hybridity "carries connotations and assumptions that should be avoided like the plague."²² Debates over globalization are outside the scope of this discussion, yet it must be stressed that any assertion that presumes the world is experiencing *métissage* for the first time is one fraught with difficulty. To assert that the world prior consisted of distinguishable purities and it is only through the current height of technological advancement and economic integration that groups have begun to blend and intermingle is to overlook the expansive history of interaction over time. Instead, hybridity ought to be viewed in both the historical and contemporary locations it occupies.

²² Gruzinski, 2002: 19.

Encounters between cultures have occurred time and again, to the point that it is difficult to attest to any singular ownership or creation of cultural formations. “Hybridization as ‘raceless chaos’,” for Robert Young, “produces no stable new form but rather something closer to Bhabha’s restless, uneasy, interstitial hybridity: a radical heterogeneity, discontinuity, the permanent revolution of forms.”²³ Studying identity through the framework of hybridity is useful, therefore, because it brings attention to historical exchange between cultures and recognizes that cultures are never closed, but always shifting and transforming. Cultures and identities cannot be defined with any conclusiveness because influence, integration and interaction occur endlessly, continuously transforming and disrupting that which they encounter. For the historian James Clifford “there are no postcolonial cultures or places: only moments, tactics, discourses. ‘Post-’ is always shadowed by ‘neo-.’ Yet ‘postcolonial’ does describe real, if incomplete, ruptures with past structures of domination, sites of current struggle and imagined futures.”²⁴ Stories told through the framework of hybridity, therefore, offer an effective disruption to essentialist narratives that continue to occupy identities associated with the nation.

Supporting each of these theories as well as the analysis to follow are the insights of the French theorist Michel Foucault. Specifically, Foucault’s theoretical concerns and methodological leanings contribute to this project in two significant ways. The first is found in the fluid nature of power which “is not exercised simply as an obligation or a prohibition on those who ‘do not have it’,” but “it invests them, is transmitted by them and through them; it exerts pressure upon them, just as they themselves, in their struggle

²³ Young, 1995: 25.

²⁴ Clifford, 1997: 277.

against it, resist the grip it has on them. This means that these relations go right down into the depths of society.”²⁵ Secondly, Foucault contributes to this thesis in the connection he reveals between power and knowledge. Importantly, Foucault insists upon a complex and dynamic understanding of the relationship between these two forces. A Foucauldian analysis recognizes that

power produces knowledge (and not simply by encouraging it because it serves power or by applying it because it is useful); that knowledge and power directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations.²⁶

These insights are articulated – often implicitly – throughout the following analysis as they allow for a holistic and fluid examination of the events related to *The Lands within Me*.

Exhibiting Hybridity: The Content of *The Lands within Me*

A multitude of intentions and desires lie behind any exhibit, arising from a variety of sources and perceptions. The needs and wishes of the institution can be understood as an example of Somer’s “public narrative” and act as an implicit framework that may be encouraged or subverted at various points and levels. The intentions of the institution may differ however, from those of the curator, who often plays a more independent but lowly position in the museum hierarchy. Further, the interpretation of the exhibit by the artists whose work will be displayed is open to the slippage that occurs in all acts of translation, because the subsequent *re*interpretation of the works by the curator and the institution are likely to produce alterations in meaning.

²⁵ Foucault, 1995: 27.

²⁶ Foucault, 1995: 27.

The curator of *The Lands within Me*, Dr. Aïda Kaouk earned a PhD in cultural sociology at the École des hautes études en sciences sociales in Paris and pursued postdoctoral research at the University of California, Berkeley. Her scholarly and curatorial research has focused on issues of identity and hybridity.²⁷ Dr. Kaouk served as the curator for the Southwest Asia and Middle East Programme from 1992 to 2002 and now works as head of research on Canadian women from Northeast Africa.²⁸

The Lands within Me was an exhibit that portrayed the concept of hybridity in a variety of ways because it foregrounded diversity at multiple levels. The exhibit itself included fifty pieces of contemporary art by twenty-six artists of Arab origin.²⁹ The contributing artists have connections to a variety of places in the Middle East; they speak multiple languages, borrow from a diversity of cultural formations and, through the diasporic experience, have been located in many places around the world. Many artistic genres and media were present in the exhibit, including sketches, oil paintings, prints, calligraphy, installations, pictures, postcards, video, jewellery, earthenware, mixed media, silkscreen prints and furniture. The works were grouped under five themes including 'Traces of Images', 'Where am I from?', 'Dialogue', 'All these countries . . .' and 'The Third Place',³⁰ which were arranged in a clear sequence, each building upon the preceding ones. The distinction between the themes however, was not rigid, because the borders between the spaces mixed and blended, allowing the visitor to move seamlessly throughout. Many of the artists contributed more than one piece to the show, and their

²⁷ Kaouk and Bourque, 2003: 127.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ © Collection of the Canadian Museum of Civilization, Institutional Documents, *The Lands within Me*. Fonds Aïda Kaouk, 2001-2003, Fact Sheet: *The Lands Within: A traveling exhibition* (under consideration). B. I – 0034, No. 3/5, f. 2002-I-0034.

³⁰ © Canadian Museum of Civilization Corporation website. *The Lands within Me: Expressions by Canadian Artists of Arab Origin*. www.civilization.ca/cultur/cespays/paysinte.html.

works appeared in more than one space. Of course, each piece is open to many interpretations and while the curators and researchers attempted to provide some structure and form to the exhibit by locating each piece within one of the five themes, any work could contain references to many of the ideas expressed in the exhibit.

The majority of works included in *The Lands within Me* can be categorized as modernist in style. The inclusion of modern art by Arab artists speaks directly to the intentions behind the exhibit in two important ways. First, unlike the objects and artifacts more traditionally displayed in cultural history museums such as the CMC, this exhibit was unique in its reliance upon contemporary artistic forms. In our discussion, the President of the museum, Dr. Victor Rabinovitch suggested that it was not until the controversy surrounding the exhibit arose that he realized just how distinct *The Lands within Me* was from other displays at the CMC. For Rabinovitch,

one of these differences was that it was overwhelmingly an art exhibition, particularly of commissioned art, as opposed to historical or material artifacts. This is rare for the CMC. We may commission one piece as part of a larger exhibition, but to show an exhibit based entirely on commissioned art is different from our mandate.³¹

The President's analysis of the unique nature of *The Lands within Me* also reveals his feelings regarding the use of the contemporary art in exhibits at the CMC. It is clear that his preferences lie in a focus on historical and material culture. While modern art promotes a diversity of interpretations, it is easier to assign fixed meanings to historical objects like the pasta, cappuccino makers and wedding dresses which were the focus of the next exhibit on Canada's ethnic communities presented at the CMC, the Italian-Canadian exhibit, *Presenza*.³²

³¹ Interview with Dr. Victor Rabinovitch, 10 March 2005.

³² Peressini, Mauro, curator. *Presenza*, Canadian Museum of Civilization.

Secondly, the choice to include artistic forms that reflect the shift in seeing brought upon by ‘modern’ art further highlights the distinctiveness of *The Lands within Me* in an institutional setting such as the CMC. The Nigerian curator, Okwui Enwezor believes that the history of modern art *itself*,

sits at the intersection between imperial and postcolonial discourses. Therefore, any critical interest displayed towards exhibition systems that takes as its field of study modern or contemporary art necessarily refers us to the foundational base of modern art history and its roots in imperial discourse, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the pressures that postcolonial discourse exerts on its narratives today.³³

Enwezor does not want the contemporary producer or consumer of modern art to forget the encounter between African sculptures and European artistic expressions where the purportedly ‘primitive’ forms offered a strong artistic challenge to European classicism. While some might suggest that the disruption offered by non-European artistic expression has been assimilated into modernist forms, this history of imperialism, challenge and hybridity is implicit within modern art and the choice for it to play the primary role in the exhibit is noteworthy.

According to Dr. Kaouk in the publication that followed the exhibit, *The Lands within Me* “does not seek to underline the ‘exoticism’ of works by Canadian artists of Arab origin – rather, and emphatically – the contrary.”³⁴ Instead, the works chosen for the exhibit endeavoured to critique the simplistic essentialization of identities implicit within ‘universal’ frameworks described above. The twenty-six artists who were selected to contribute to this exhibit are individuals – according to Alexis Nouss, one of the contributors to the publication – whose “Arabness is not a symbol of exclusionary ethnicity, but rather an emblem of exile experience. Most have lived in many countries

³³ Enwezor, 2003: 59.

³⁴ Kaouk and Bourque, 2003: 9.

in the course of their migratory wanderings, as if, with the departure from their place of origin, they were abandoning all origin in place and all identity attached to a territory.”³⁵ Many contemporary theorists have suggested that the experience of migration creates a space which is “in-between”; a void between here and there that can allow for “multiple viewpoints” to be expressed.³⁶ The exhibit is thus characterized by themes of disruption, alteration, and discontinuation. An essentialized, unified, intrinsic expression of Arab identity is not the focus. Instead, the exhibit presented a disjointed hybridization that speaks to the ongoing movements and transformations inherent in a nomadic diasporic experience.

In this context, the decision to include only artists who identify as Arab-Canadian could be seen as contradictory. If *The Lands within Me* was intended to be an exhibit about *mélange*, exile and identities ‘in-between’, some may wonder why artists from a wider variety of origins were not included. In this manner *The Lands within Me* could have been similar to the far less controversial exhibit *Crossings*, displayed at the National Gallery of Canada from August through November of 1998.³⁷ Ali Kichou, whose tapestry *La vache des orphelins* was included in the CMC exhibit, alludes to the reasoning behind this paradoxical decision. In responding to questions about his identity, Kichou claims, “honestly, I don’t feel Arab, I feel Algerian. When I dream, I don’t dream in Arabic . . . I dream in Berber, I cry in Berber. But I feel concerned because I

³⁵ Nouss in Kaouk and Bourque, 2003: 6.

³⁶ For a detailed and insightful examination of these theories which create the foundation upon which this analysis is based see Clifford (1997), Appadurai (1996), Bhabha (1994) and Mirzeoff (2000).

³⁷ © Collection of the Canadian Museum of Civilization, Institutional Documents, *The Lands within Me*. Fonds Aïda Kaouk, 1999-2000, Recueil *Crossings: National Gallery of Canada*, 7 August – 1 November 1998, B I-121, No. 1/5, f. 2002-I0034.

am part of the Arab world . . . and the Arab world is rejected.”³⁸ Even before the planes struck on that morning in September 2001, the popular North American media had stereotyped and demonized images of Arabs around the world. In this light, the decision to focus a critical, ‘hybrid’ exhibit on the experiences of artists originating from the Middle East could both refute contemporary stereotypes associated with the region and offer even stronger support for the theoretical claims made by the exhibit.

In my examination of re-creations of *The Lands within Me*, I noticed that the overarching sentiment accompanying the texts of the exhibit and, to a certain extent, many of the works of art was one of hope, optimism and critical assuredness. While these assumptions must have made the exhibit both enjoyable and compelling, they also present two possible difficulties. First, in offering mostly positive perceptions of the experience of immigration, the ongoing violence, complexities and challenges associated with ‘hybrid’, ‘diasporic’ experiences may be overlooked. One of the texts accompanying the art installations proclaimed that “to exile oneself is that: to force change. In oneself and in the other!”³⁹ In current postcolonial theory, the premise that all individuals can experience a certain existential element of belonging in the modern world is much debated. The assumption that we are all creatures in exile and that we are all migrants removed from traditional sites of belonging pervades both contemporary theory and this exhibit. Some theorists, such as Amal Treacher, take issue with this assertion.

It has become commonplace to argue that the story of exile is the story of the twentieth century and of the postmodern condition. . . . [However,] most people did not have to begin again in the most profound way imaginable – do not have to

³⁸ © Collection of the Canadian Museum of Civilization, Institutional Documents, *The Lands within Me*. Fonds Aïda Kaouk, 2001-2003, The Lands within Me: Artists’ Biographical Notes, Version a l’ouverture de l’exposition, B I-306, No. 5/5.

³⁹ © Canadian Museum of Civilization Corporation website. *The Lands within Me: Conclusion*. www.civilization.ca/cultur/cespays/pays1_18e.html.

learn a new language to dream in and to express experiences, thoughts and feelings. This rupture is not shared . . . I am not talking about a loss of a romantic past, of an imagined wholeness, but actual losses of scenes, family, friends.⁴⁰

These losses, and the challenges and difficulties associated with the experience of immigration, are overlooked within the theoretical premise and display of *The Lands within Me*.

Interestingly however, a close examination of some of the exhibit's artistic pieces (particularly those reproduced in this text) reveals an attempt to resolve the paradoxical experience of immigration. In my interview with the artist Farouk Kaspoules, he suggested that "from the beginning of the exhibit and throughout . . . there was conflicting direction regarding the theme of the exhibit." For many of the artists, the exhibit was, "first and foremost, about contemporary art that happened to be from the Middle East." The museum, on the other hand,

wanted the show to be diverse. They wanted to present many religions and cultures in the Middle East and many of the countries, and all of the provinces in Canada. In some ways, this desire for diversity limited the exhibit. Some of the artists were chosen for reasons of representation, not for their art. Because of this process of selection, much of the work was craft as opposed to contemporary art. This influenced the reading of the exhibit, it made it a different type of exhibit.⁴¹

The diversity of narratives accompanying any exhibit are clear in Kaspoules' remarks. Ultimately, while some of the works within the exhibit attempted to portray the difficulties of immigration in the current period, the organizers of *The Lands within Me* focused upon the hope, optimism and diversity associated with this process. This is likely, in no small part, due to the type of exhibitioning that occurs in national museums.

⁴⁰ Treacher in Brah & Coombes, 2000: 105.

⁴¹ Interview with Farouk Kaspoules, 18 March 2005.

In this space, the successful components of belonging are preferred to the negative elements accompanying identities in the nation.

Secondly this framework may have been problematic in the manner in which concepts such as hybridity and diaspora are presented throughout the exhibit with a taken-for-grantedness that may not be warranted. *The Lands within Me*, in this respect, is reminiscent of another controversial exhibit in the Canadian landscape, *Into the Heart of Africa*, displayed at the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto from November 1989 until August 1990. In her thoughtful examination of this display and the public protest it sparked, Shelley Butler suggests that the irony displayed in *Into the Heart of Africa* acted as somewhat of an ‘inside joke’. Butler argues that in order “to understand the irony of the exhibit’s texts, a certain amount of shared knowledge with the curator was required.”⁴² *The Lands within Me* did not rely upon the use of irony to convey its deeply theoretical ideas. However, there was a sense that in order to understand the complexity of the experience of migrancy, a certain degree of ‘shared knowledge’ between the curator, the artists and the visitors may be required. This shared knowledge, while presumed, may not have been as widespread as the organizers expected.

For her part, the curator felt that the receptiveness of the public to the exhibit was both substantial and gratifying. Despite the complexity of the theories behind this representation of identities and migration, the public ‘got it’. She was thrilled with the sensitivity displayed towards the exhibit and felt that many people took a lot away from the complexity that was portrayed.⁴³ Any attempt to come to conclusions about the public reception of an exhibit by examining its accompanying public comments is a problematic

⁴² Butler, 1999: 20.

⁴³ Interview with Dr. Aïda Kaouk, 10 February 2005.

strategy. The vast majority of people attending an exhibit do not leave their thoughts behind, making it difficult to assess the overall visitor experience. Yet the hundreds of public comments written about the exhibit offer evidence of the connections many visitors felt with the art and the artists. However, most suggest that the majority of viewers were not fully engaged with the issues being displayed.⁴⁴ For example, one visitor commented that, for her, *The Lands within Me* was “a touching exhibition of people, nomadic like all of us, seeking meaning in a world of juxtaposed cultures – a wonderful series of insights that will help understanding and compassion.” On the other hand, another visitor suggested that “many of the works would have been more enjoyable and no doubt had more impact if a real attempt had been made to provide context/interpretation.”

The positioning of *The Lands within Me* in the national cultural museum may have limited the extent to which it could fully examine the topics approached, creating the possibility that the difficulties associated with migration and the complexity of the theoretical premise were not fully perceived by the viewers. Ultimately, however, the controversy surrounding it was clearly sparked primarily by the moment in time in which the exhibit came into being. In the following chapters I will examine the relationship between these events and the exhibit, keeping in mind the original intentions and theories which sparked this unusual and compelling representation of immigrant identities.

In the next chapter I will narrate the events related to the production and display of *The Lands within Me* as they unfolded in 1998-2003, while recognizing that each telling of any story is inevitably incomplete and reflective of the particular perspective of

⁴⁴ I received a copy of all of the public comments left at *The Lands within Me* from October 2001 until March 2003 from curator Dr. Aïda Kaouk during our final interview on 17 March 2005.

the storyteller. In the third chapter, the exhibit will be positioned in the historical and contemporary context of national historical-cultural museums and, in particular, the role they play in processes of nation building. Following, Chapter 4 will analyze the exhibit from a 'spatial' perspective as the relationship between Canada's central national myth of a multicultural identity and the exhibit will be discussed. Finally, the fifth chapter will position *The Lands within Me* in light of the implications of the events of September 11, 2001. A conclusion will bring back the central themes for a final discussion.

Camille Zakharia's 1998 installation, *Lebanon-Canada, via Bahrain*¹ is a revolving collage, visible from three unique perspectives. This complex piece demands ongoing translation and interpretation. According to Zakharia, the work stands as a highway billboard, stalled midway through its transition. Implying the movement invoked in the journey of migration, the viewer of this piece is able to imagine driving past the sign, only briefly glimpsing impressions of the stories that shift according to the position from which they are viewed.

Collage is an inherently complex and diverse technique. In attempting to create a seamless and coherent image, the artist relies upon numerous, tiny fragments. A diversity of stories, therefore, is present within and it is the artist who decides which narratives will be included and which will be excluded. It is the artist who, in the end, makes the image whole. The revolving nature of this installation, however, suggests that this production is never complete. The story that is, ultimately, expressed in this piece is not the only one possible. A slight reordering of the fragments and images would create a different work, with its own unique perspective, implying the never-ending process implied in the act of representation.

¹ Zakharia, Camille. *Lebanon-Canada, via Bahrain*, 1998. Collection of the Artist. Photocollages and gouache on paper, affixed onto triangular wooden columns, 203 x 122 x 25.4 inches. Retrieved from the © Canadian Museum of Civilization website www.civilization.ca/cultur/cespays/pay2_24e.html in March 2005.

CHAPTER 2: RETELLING STORIES OF *THE LANDS WITHIN ME*

There is a story I know. It's about the earth and how it floats in space on the back of a turtle. I've heard this story many times and each time someone tells the story, it changes. Sometimes the change is simply in the voice of the storyteller. Sometimes the change is in the details. Sometimes in the order of events. Other times it's the dialogue or the response of the audience. But in all the tellings of all the tellers, the world never leaves the turtle's back. And the turtle never swims away.¹

Thomas King, *The Truth About Stories*

Introduction

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the French Impressionist Claude Monet depicted fixed objects and spaces under varying atmospheric conditions, creating endless representations of a single image. Monet referred to this effect as 'l'enveloppe'.² In a similar manner, *The Lands within Me* will act as an unstable center to this analysis; one which shifts and transforms according to the light shone upon it. Any attempt to reconstruct an event, a history, or a story is riddled with tensions and contradictions. The Aboriginal comic novelist Thomas King, in his clear and eloquent prose, emphasizes that each time someone tells a story, the same story, time and again, the narrative shifts, ever so slightly. To seek out the constant, consistent truth of a moment in time, a contentious event, or an interaction between a diversity of groups and individuals, is a journey without a satisfying destination. I had encountered this assertion in many theoretical and philosophical debates, writings and lectures. However, it was not until I began to research the stories of *The Lands within Me* that I came face to face with the reality of this claim.

It is clear that September 11 had a profound effect on the North American collective consciousness, and while a museum exhibit is a much smaller (both literately

¹ King, 2003: 1.

² Lochnan, Katherine. senior curator. *Turner, Whistler, Monet*. Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 2004.

and figuratively) event, it has similarly ruptured and shaken those involved. In an interview with Dr. Stephen Inglis, the Director General of Research and Collections, suggested that “there is something about a museum particularly, which is that it rests, to some extent, on its reputation.” A museum’s reputation, he said, “is something that is nurtured and something that is thought about a lot. When something happens that suggests a blow to that, the consequences are quite far-reaching.”³ In our discussion, Farouk Kaspoules also revealed the effects of the exhibit’s controversy upon the contributing artists. Kaspoules wondered if, “in the future, there will be displays of the work of Canadian artists of Arab origin in mainstream institutions.” Kaspoules believes that, most likely, “we won’t have this opportunity again, which is unfortunate.”⁴ In order to evaluate the significance of this critical event it is important to first describe the details surrounding the delay and subsequent reinstatement of *The Lands within Me*.

Narratives of *The Lands within Me*

The Lands within Me had been in production since it was first conceived of in mid-1996. Dr. Kaouk first intended to create a small exhibition of the work of four artists who, although currently living in Canada, had originated in Iraq and had since spent time in places around the world. It was the multi-locality of these artists that Kaouk hoped to capture and build upon. The similar visions expressed in their work, however, eventually led to the expansion of this project into the largest exhibition of Canadian artists of Arab origin ever created. As Dr. Kaouk wrote in a newsletter produced by the museum prior to the controversy,

at the time, I was devoting most of my time to developing the CMC’s still-embryonic Middle East collection, and producing an exhibition did not

³ Interview with Dr. Stephen Inglis, 2 February 2005.

⁴ Interview with Farouk Kaspoules, 18 March 2005.

immediately occur to me. The meetings with these four artists moved me deeply, however. Their work not only spoke to me personally, but awoke in me a desire to share what I was witnessing. Now, some years later, the Museum is presenting the works, the life-journeys and the words of not 4 but 26 Canadian artists of Arab origin.⁵

The initial exhibit proposals, made to the museum's executive committee, were met with extremely positive reviews and high expectations.⁶ Approval for the exhibit was given on 10 November 1998, with comments including "excellent," "tres bien," "felicitations," and "une grande premiere".⁷

Letters requesting applications from Arab-Canadian artists surveying topics associated with immigration, movement and belonging were distributed over a variety of networks and brought eighty-five submissions and portfolios into the museum.⁸ The criteria guiding the selection process demanded that the artists' work be evocative of the exhibit's subject, 'metissage'. Further, the selection committee sought pieces that would strike a chord with the viewer, thereby creating a linkage between the artist and the public. Finally, the exhibit was to include a variety of media, profiles, religions and languages. The artists selected (as well as their works) were intended to reflect this diversity.⁹ From 1998 until 2001, extensive research and collaboration were devoted to this project, set to open on 19 October 2001.¹⁰

⁵ © Collection of the Canadian Museum of Civilization, Institutional Documents, *The Lands within Me*. Fonds Aïda Kaouk, 2001-2003, Periodique de musee "Entre nous" (5 ex. Vol. 4, no. 1; automne 2001), B. I – 0034, No. 3/5, f. 2002-I-0034.

⁶ © Collection of the Canadian Museum of Civilization, Institutional Documents, *The Lands within Me*. Fonds Aïda Kaouk, 2001-2003, Du compte-rendu de la reunion de Comite executive du 10 Novembre 1998: Presentation sur l'exposition *Lettres aux pays*/Presentation on *Letters Home* exhibition, B. I – 121, No. 1/5, f. 2002-i-0034.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Interview with Dr. Aïda Kaouk, 15 September 2004.

⁹ Interview with Dr. Aïda Kaouk, 17 March 2005.

¹⁰ The archival record also suggests that an earlier delay of the exhibit had occurred as an opening date in 2000 was discussed for many years. Apparently, the exhibit space was needed for a display about the Canada War Museum and *The Lands within Me* was postponed until October 2001. Although it is impossible to know exactly what would have occurred, one may very well wonder how the exhibit would

The frantic last minute details accompanying any large exhibition were still being put in place when that unforgettable day arrived. In the wake of September 11, 2001, a feeling that a new world had been created out of the settling dust – unexpected, unprecedented and never-before-seen – seemed to settle across North America. Under the glare of constant media attention, much that had been taken for granted came to be examined anew. For example, in an interview with the *Ottawa Citizen*, Iranian-American photographer and artist Shirin Neshat, whose work was being displayed at Montreal's Museum of Contemporary Art during the same period as *The Lands within Me*, acknowledged that “audiences will view her work differently because of the Sept. 11 attacks. She is viewing her own art differently. But she hopes her work will add to understanding and debate.”¹¹

Similarly, many individuals connected to *The Lands within Me* recognized that the exhibition could no longer be viewed within a pre-September 11 context; the lens through which this contemporary art exhibit would be seen had indeed been altered. This shift in seeing, for many, further increased the importance of the project and many of its goals and ideals were renewed after the day's events. During our interviews, Dr. Kaouk often found it easier simply to point to the publication which had followed the exhibition, rather than respond directly to my questions. She was hesitant to be recorded or to answer specifically, referring me instead to this text. In its introduction Kaouk writes, “when ethnic and religious belonging is being used – with devastating effect – for political ends, it is important to be aware that cultural identities are multiple and

have been viewed and what, if any, press the museum would have received if the exhibit had simply been displayed in 2000. I would venture to suggest that this thesis would be very much altered had this been the case.

¹¹ Gessell, Paul. 29 September 2001.

complex.”¹² While this statement was not written in the accompanying publication because of September 11, for Dr. Kaouk, its truth rang ever clearer following the events of the day.

Members of the executive and administrative bodies within the museum also began to re-evaluate the public exhibitions opening in the period immediately following 9.11. According to discussions with Dr. Inglis, “when 9.11 happened, there was a number of different issues that the museum was forced to consider.” During our interview, Dr. Inglis went out of his way to clarify that “there were never any suggestions, that I am aware of, of canceling the exhibit. It was only a question of whether it was an appropriate time to open the exhibit.”¹³ This discussion in the museum touched upon a variety of concerns and issues, which, as Dr. Laforet later pointed out to me, were bound to arise, given the nature of the political climate following September 11.¹⁴ Dr. Inglis’ depiction of this discussion clearly portrays the anxiety felt in the museum at the time, and is worth quoting at length. One of the issues discussed

was the sort of rising anxiety about Arab-Canadian relations, generally. Most of that discussion centered around whether, in the security climate which was so volatile at that moment, it was a good idea to bring a whole group of Arab-Canadians together in one place at one event. Of course, many people thought that that was an excellent idea and demonstrated Canadian support for citizens of Arab descent at a time, when they were being targeted. At the time, there was some overt backlash against the Arab-Canadian community and Muslims in general, in public places. There was a sense, including a sense amongst some Arab-Canadians, that an opening of an exhibit is a celebration of heritage, that’s what it is, and was this the right moment for that celebration to take place?¹⁵

The result of these discussions was contained in a press release distributed on 24 September 2001 in which the CMC’s Media Relations staff wrote, “the Canadian

¹² Kaouk and Bourque, 2003: 9.

¹³ Interview with Dr. Stephen Inglis, 2 February 2005.

¹⁴ Interview with Dr. Andrea Laforet, 10 February 2005.

¹⁵ Interview with Dr. Stephen Inglis, 2 February 2005.

Museum of Civilization is reviewing all of its fall programming in light of current national and international circumstances.” Due to this review, “the exhibition *The Lands within Me* scheduled to be open on October 19, 2001, is being postponed”¹⁶

Equally interesting to the reasoning behind the decision to the delay the exhibit is the manner in which this decision was made and communicated within the museum. According to a Question and Answer document (which will be discussed in further detail below) that was created following the announcement of the exhibit’s postponement: “the decision has been made by the Executive Committee of the Corporation.”¹⁷ However, an internal document produced on 20 September 2001, four days prior to the public announcement, in which the necessary steps to begin the postponement of the exhibit were laid out, suggests otherwise. This step-by-step chart states that members of the executive committee were to be informed of the decision by Dr. Rabinovitch through voicemail on the morning of 21 September 2001.¹⁸ That Rabinovitch would begin this particular Friday morning making phone calls to the museum’s executive committee explaining the situation, places in question the assertion that the decision was a collaborative one. Once members of the Board and the Executive Committee had been informed, the directors most affected by the decision would learn of the postponement from Dr. Inglis and Dr. Sylvie Morel (Director General of Exhibitions and Programmes). After the upper echelons of the museum’s hierarchy were made aware of the delay Inglis

¹⁶ © Collection of the Canadian Museum of Civilization, Institutional Documents, *The Lands within Me*. Fonds Aïda Kaouk, 2001-2003, Canadian Museum of Civilization Press Release: September 24, 2001 B. I-121, No. 1/5, f. 2002-I-0034.

¹⁷ © Collection of the Canadian Museum of Civilization, Institutional Documents, *The Lands within Me*. Fonds Aïda Kaouk, 2001-2003, *The Lands within Me* Q & As: Canadian Museum of Civilization, B. I-121, No. 1/5, f. 2002-I-0034.

¹⁸ © Collection of the Canadian Museum of Civilization, Institutional Documents, *The Lands within Me*. Fonds Aïda Kaouk, 2001-2003, *The Lands within Me*: Plan for Announcing Postponement, September 20, 2001, B. I-121, No. 1/5, f. 2002-I-0034.

and Morel would sit down with the team responsible for *The Lands within Me* and “inform them of [the] decision and public messages [,] outline their role (to inform artists, to refer any media questions [to Public Affairs and] to advise management of reactions from artists).”¹⁹

Finally, also on 21 September, according to the step-by-step document, the twenty-six artists whose work was to be exhibited at the museum would be notified of the postponement when Dr. Kaouk and members of the exhibition team would fax the press release and make a follow-up phone call.²⁰ In our interview, Dr. Inglis acknowledged that the artists were informed of the postponement “through the curator, and that was hard. That was very hard for the team and for the curator, because they work very, very hard on these things, it absorbs their whole existence for a long period of time.”²¹ However, to merely inform the curator, the designers and the artists of a major delay of their years of work without any pretense of discussion, dialogue or inclusion clearly highlights the nature of the CMC’s organizational style. Artists who spent years preparing for the largest exhibition of its kind, instead of being asked how they felt the museum ought to respond in this changing context, were simply informed that the decision to postpone the exhibit had been made. The manner in which the artists were informed of the postponement can be found in an email sent by Constance Nebel, assistant curator of *The Lands within Me*, to Rawi Hage, a photographer whose works were included in the exhibition.

We have to inform you that the Canadian Museum of Civilization will review all of its fall programming in light of the recent events in the U.S. In the context of this review, the CMC has decided to postpone the opening of *The Lands within*

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Interview with Dr. Stephen Inglis, 2 February 2005.

Me. We wanted that each of the participant artists be informed prior to the decision being made public. Next week, we will contact you to further discuss the changes (travel arrangements, etc.) related to the postponement of the opening.²²

Thus, while the artists were given the consideration of being informed prior to the public announcement of the imminent postponement of their exhibit, they were not given any more information about the reasons for the delay than the public.

Interviews with Dr. Inglis suggest that, with hindsight, he thinks that the manner in which the artists were informed could have been improved. When I asked Dr. Inglis how he might react differently if he could go back, he admitted that the decision would include “wider consultation with the artists. I don’t know whether the decision would have been better received had there been wider communication with the artists, but one always assumes that that might be the case.” Inglis also wonders if museum staff “would have been a little better aware of what was about to hit us, if we’d done that. It might have made a better platform for the decision.”²³ Hindsight, however, is 20-20 and for Inglis, “events were such at the time, 9.11 had just happened, the exhibit was just about to open, and we’re in the middle of this thing.”²⁴ Interviews with Dr. Laforet suggest that she partially agrees with Inglis on this issue. According to the Director of Ethnology and Cultural Studies, “the world felt different after September 11, on that very afternoon, our bags were checked by security in the museum. This was not an ambience of calm, intellectual discussion.”²⁵ However, she does not go so far as to suggest that more consultation would have been appropriate. Instead Laforet wonders if “consultation with

²² © Collection of the Canadian Museum of Civilization, Institutional Documents, *The Lands within Me*. Fonds Aïda Kaouk, 2001-2003, email correspondence from Jayce Salloum to Chantal Baril, Christiane Saumur and Susan Gervais, sent Saturday, September 22, 2001, “CLOSED! *The Lands within Me* Arab-Canadian artists at the Museum of Civilization, B. I-121, No. 1/5, f. 2002-I-0034.

²³ Interview with Dr. Stephen Inglis, 2 February 2001.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Interview with Dr. Andrea Laforet. 10 February 2001.

the artists may not have been appropriate in this case,” as “the executive of the museum has to make decisions according to the needs of the museum.”²⁶

Once the decision was made known to the general public, the response to the attempted delay was nothing short of explosive. Media outlets around the country latched onto the controversy and spared no time in lambasting the museum for its actions. During the week of September 22-28, 40 provincial, 13 national and 68 local television, radio and newspaper sources covered the attempted delay of *The Lands within Me*,²⁷ and almost all of these reports placed the museum in a negative light. Two different ‘Question and Answer’ (hereafter Q & A) documents were prepared to respond to this media attention. One was written immediately following the announcement of the exhibit’s delay and the other for its eventual opening. The two are quite different in their format and design. The first is far less structured and contains no title, author or distinguishing marks of the museum. It is unclear who is presumed to be asking the questions – museum staff, journalists, members of the public, government officials – nor does it clarify who would provide the responses. This document, therefore, may be an earlier version, the official, perhaps, not yet included in the archives. Regardless of the nature of its finality, it remains a fascinating document, as does the more official Q & A created for Dr. Aïda Kaouk, Constance Nebel, the associate curator and Dr. Carmelle Begin, Curator-in-Charge of Cultural Studies (a position which is now held by Dr. Andrea Laforet under a different name) in their role as spokespersons on the opening night of the

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ © Collection of the Canadian Museum of Civilization. Institutional Documents, *The Lands within Me*. Fonds Aïda Kaouk, 2001-2003, Media Coverage Synopsis: September 22-28, 2001, *The Lands within Me: Expressions by Canadian Artists of Arab Origin*, prepared by Media Relations, Public Affairs. B. I-120, No. 1, f. 2002-i-0031.

exhibit. Both documents are revealing about the museum's concerns as well as the questions staff in the museum believed the public and media might ask.

In the initial, and perhaps unofficial, Q & A document the museum insists that although "the project started in 1996 . . . the context has changed. . . . The active preparation and production of the show began two years ago in the spirit of examining the artistic expressions of Canadian artists of *foreign* origins. . . . We believe that it is necessary to review and expand the information presented in the exhibition in light of the new context created by recent tragic events."²⁸ It is interesting to note the use of the term 'foreign' to describe the artists whose work was displayed. Not only does this remove connections between the exhibit and the "Arab" world, it also is reminiscent of colonial frameworks where that which was considered 'foreign' was perceived to be dangerous. The events of September 11 had clearly once again raised concerns, anxieties and fears about the presence of the 'foreign other,' and brought to the fore the need to place these others outside of the boundaries of the nation.

The Q & As go on to state that although an exhibit at the CMC had never been postponed in this manner before, this particular moment was far from ordinary. "The world is living through extraordinary events that call for caution and reflection."²⁹ In response to what public affairs staff presumed would inevitably be asked, "is this censorship", the document declared that "it is a matter of being sensitive and caring about what work we do as specialists in a public museum, and about how and when we do it. We want the exhibition to be appreciated on its own merit, not through the lens of recent

²⁸ © Collection of the Canadian Museum of Civilization, Institutional Documents, *The Lands within Me*. Fonds Aïda Kaouk, 2001-2003, *The Lands within Me: Q & As*, Canadian Museum of Civilization, B. I-121, No. 1/5, f. 2002-I-0034.

²⁹ Ibid.

and ongoing events.”³⁰ Many, however, might suggest that the very act of postponement linked the exhibit to the September 11 attacks far more than would have been the case if it had been allowed to go ahead as planned. Indeed, many of the artists whose work was included in *The Lands within Me* suggested that “the real problem with postponing it was it sent the message that somehow anything Arab should be treated differently.”³¹ Although museum officials wanted to make clear that “no community of any origin is likely to want to be singled out at this time, in particular the Arab-Canadian community,”³² the attempt to delay the exhibit was viewed by many in the media in the opposite light.³³

In our discussion, Dr. Inglis admitted that he had received and read most of the media coverage of the attempted postponement. He acknowledged that “people portrayed our decision as cowardly, they portrayed it as racist, we received all of that kind of reaction, or as if we had targeted the Arab-Canadians more than anybody else and shone a spotlight on them that was inappropriate. We actually didn’t feel that that’s what we were doing.”³⁴ Dr. Inglis wanted to make clear that “anyone who thinks that this was done without seriousness, or without a lot of discussion and soul-searching, is really mistaken.”³⁵

An additional point of debate surrounding the attempted delay and its subsequent opening should also be mentioned. Museum staff received the video installation, *everything and nothing*, by artist Jayce Salloum much later than the other exhibited

³⁰ © Collection of the Canadian Museum of Civilization, Institutional Documents, *The Lands within Me*. Fonds Aïda Kaouk, 2001-2003, *The Lands within Me: Q & As*. Canadian Museum of Civilization, B. I-121, No. 1/5, f. 2002-10034.

³¹ Ditchburn, 2001: A4.

³² Ibid.

³³ Colongue, 2001; Ditchburn, 2001; Gessell, 2001; Cobb, 2001 and Harris, 2001.

³⁴ Interview with Dr. Stephen Inglis, 2 February 2005.

³⁵ Ibid.

works. In an email from Christiane Saumur (a project manager in the Exhibitions and Programmes Division) to Salloum, dated 20 August 2001, Saumur notes that the museum has “not yet received your videos. Could you please send them right away by courier as it is urgent that they be transferred to DVD format. The process takes several weeks and then installation is upon us! We were hoping to get them into the hands of our technician by Aug. 1.”³⁶ According to interviews with Dr. Kaouk, Salloum’s video installations did not arrive until after 11 September 2001.³⁷ As such, she was unable to view them outside of the climate of concern and anxiety found within and outside of the museum. Contained in *everything and nothing* was an interview with a Lebanese activist who had been held in solitary confinement in an Israeli prison for the better part of a decade. According to discussions with Dr. Laforet, “the video installation by Jayce Salloum was a cause of some concern, for, how can you present the nature of a conflict when only one side is present?” However, Dr. Laforet suggested that ultimately, “this particular piece and the entire exhibition were immeasurably complicated by September 11.”³⁸

The Q & A document acknowledged that the question “what element/work of the exhibition has prompted you to postpone the exhibition,”³⁹ may arise, in response, officials would insist that “no single work of art prompted this decision.”⁴⁰ According to the writers of the Q & A document, the museum’s decision to postpone *The Lands within Me* was not connected to one component of the exhibit. For journalists, however,

³⁶ © Collection of the Canadian Museum of Civilization, Institutional Documents, *The Lands within Me*. Fonds Aïda Kaouk, 2001-2003, email correspondence from Christiane Saumur to Jayce Salloum, sent Monday August 20, 2001, “video masters needed for DVD formatting”, B. I-121, No. 1/5, f. 2002-I-0034.

³⁷ Interview with Dr. Aïda Kaouk, 15 September 2004.

³⁸ Interview with Dr. Andrea Laforet, 10 February 2005.

³⁹ © Collection of the Canadian Museum of Civilization, Institutional Documents, *The Lands within Me*. Fonds Aïda Kaouk, 2001-2003, *The Lands within Me*: Q & As, Canadian Museum of Civilization, B. I-121, No. 1/5, f. 2002-I-0034.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

everything and nothing appeared to offer the ‘smoking gun’ many were looking for to explain the actions of the CMC.⁴¹

In addition to the seeming unending media coverage, letters and emails flooded into the museum. Artists involved in the show and supporting artist networks initiated a letter-writing campaign to encourage the museum’s executive to go ahead with the show as planned.⁴² One representative email pointed to “what a golden opportunity the museum has to participate in educating Canadians and helping . . . to understand the many different Arab cultures and points of view. This is a time to promote this exhibit not postpone it.”⁴³ In an unusual twist, the issue was then debated in the House of Commons. Prime Minister Jean Chrétien and his ruling Liberal party spoke out against the actions of the museum and demanded the exhibit be opened, without changes and on schedule. According to one newspaper report “Chrétien criticized the museum executives,” directly “saying they made the wrong decision.”⁴⁴ These critiques had their effect and a few days later, on September 28, 2001, museum officials announced that the exhibit would open on October 19, as planned.

Thus, in the end, *The Lands within Me* was exhibited as planned from October 19, 2001 to March 9, 2003. The eighteen-month run meandered along with relatively little press or public controversy, particularly in comparison to the furor during the month prior

⁴¹ Fraser and Palmer, 2001; Petricevic, 2001; “The Controversial Video”, 2001; “Hull: Arab-Canadian Art Exhibit Opened”, 2001; “Controversy Hits Arab-Canadian Art Exhibit”, 2001; Gessell, 19 October 2001; Boddy, 2001; “Pull Video from Art Exhibit”, 2001.

⁴² “Postponement of Exhibit on Arab-Canadian Art.” *Artist Resource*, September 25, 2001, www.e-flux.com.

⁴³ © Collection of the Canadian Museum of Civilization, Institutional Documents, *The Lands within Me*. Fonds Aïda Kaouk, 2001-2003, email correspondence from Diana Yaros to Victor Rabinovitch. cc. Aïda Kaouk, sent Wednesday, September 26, 2001. “These lands within me, cancelled?, B. I-121, No. 1/5, f. 2002-I-0034.

⁴⁴ “Afghans face massive privation: a roundup of the events, big and small that made news this week”. *Gazette*. Montreal, September 29, 2001: B2.

to the opening evening. However, following the opening three shifts occurred in the institutional policies and structure of the CMC. The first of these occurred not long after the opening. Due to the high degree of negative press received throughout the attempted delay and immediately following its opening, museum officials had an interest in preventing similar events from occurring again. One existing practice that was examined with an eye toward preventing future controversies was the display of contemporary and commissioned art in exhibitions. In an article in the *Kitchener Waterloo Record*, the Chairman of the museum's Board of Governors, Dr. John Inglis declared that "the board will probably discuss whether or not the museum should commission work or use only existing artifacts. 'These are works of art and we are a museum,' English said."⁴⁵ While extensive research in the archival record of *The Lands within Me* did not unearth any written proof of this shift in policy, interviews with museum staff suggest that the change is indeed being encouraged, if only unofficially.

Dr. Inglis was quite forthright in admitting that "it's unlikely that we'll find ourselves again in a position where we're commissioning a work of art, the content of which we don't really understand, with a commitment to show it, because if somebody does a work of art that calls another group of people in Canada, or denigrates them, we don't want to be obligated to present that to the public." Clearly, this shift in policy was directly connected to perceptions surrounding the display of Salloum's work. Implicit within this decision is the presumed distinction between the display of 'art' and 'artifact'. Inglis acknowledges that some may suggest that as a publicly funded institution, the CMC has a responsibility to display artistic expressions of the communities it represents. Inglis, however, is "confident enough that there are forums where that takes place in

⁴⁵ Petricevic, 2001: B10.

Canada and will continue to take place and that the expertise and the mandates are in place in those places to do it, and I don't think that we necessarily fall into that category."⁴⁶

A second decision made by the museum was related to the possibility for *The Lands within Me* to travel to other museums upon the completion of its display at the CMC. In early 2000 museums around the world were contacted in the search for other venues for the exhibition. In total, 182 "Request for Expression of Interest" packages were sent to museums in Canada, the United States, Europe, North Africa and the Middle East. Of the 64 replies received, 6 museums expressed interest in displaying *The Lands within Me*. The interested parties included the Royal British Columbia Museum in Vancouver, the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto, the Musée d'ethnographie de Genève in Switzerland, the Staatliches Museum für Volkerkunde in Munich, Germany, the Musée Nicolas Ibrahim Sursok in Beirut and the Orient House in Arab East Jerusalem.⁴⁷ It is here, however, where a break occurs in the detailed archival record.

The next mention of travel associated with *The Lands within Me* is found in journalistic as opposed to archival accounts. On 5 July 2003 the *Globe and Mail* reported that the "participating artists have been told their work is being returned to them. CMC officials state that no Canadian museum was interested in taking the show, and no sponsors could be found for an international tour."⁴⁸ The six museums expressing interest in the exhibit in 2000 (including two located in Canada) contradict the claim that no museums desired to host the show. Further, reports by the National Council on

⁴⁶ Interview with Dr. Stephen Inglis, 2 February 2005.

⁴⁷ © Collection of the Canadian Museum of Civilization, Institutional Documents, *The Lands within Me*. Fonds Aïda Kaouk, 2001-2003, Call for Expression of Interest Results: *The Lands Within*, 13 September 2000, B. I-121, No. 1/5, f. 2002 – I0034.

⁴⁸ Colongue, 2003.

Canada Arab Relations (NCCAR) suggest that the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT) “made a considerable effort to gather one quarter of the funds needed for the exhibit to travel, over \$250,000. [It was] the museum, however, [that] failed to do its part in coming up with the funds needed.”⁴⁹

Discussions with Dr. Inglis, however, provided an alternative interpretation of these events. Inglis declared that reports which claimed “that DFAIT came up with money and we refused to match it, got it backwards, absolutely backwards.” Inglis admitted that museums had expressed interest in hosting the exhibit, but suggested that most of these were unable to afford the rather prohibitive costs of displaying *The Lands within Me*. “DFAIT felt that it might be very popular to travel this exhibit back to some of the countries in North Africa, for example, from which some of the artists had emigrated to Canada.” Part and parcel of this agreement, however, was the assumption that DFAIT would help to support the cost of traveling the exhibit, as North African museums would not be able to do so. However, when the moment arrived, “they [DFAIT] didn’t come up with any.”⁵⁰ This discussion indeed places the cancellation of the tour of *The Lands within Me* in a different light. However, it must also be acknowledged that if there indeed is a desire to be more inclusive and show exhibits in regions outside of Europe and North America, this must be accompanied by a willingness to find the money to support this type of work. Currently, approximately half a dozen CMC exhibits are being displayed outside of the museum. While a variety of reasons for the fact that *The Lands within Me* was never displayed outside of the CMC may exist, one may be reminded of the old adage, when there is a will, there is, most often, a way.

⁴⁹ NCCAR website “Museum of Civilization Bias Against Arabs”, July 8, 2003.

⁵⁰ Interview with Dr. Stephen Inglis, 2 February 2005.

The final change to occur after *The Lands within Me* is related to the organizational structure of the CMC. According to the art magazine, *Fuse*, “after public attention had moved away from the fiasco at the museum, its directors fired Dr. Kaouk, declaring her position redundant.”⁵¹ The significance of this action is two-pronged. First, the curator in charge of the controversial exhibit was told “on October 26, 2001, one week after the exhibition’s opening and the end of the controversy,” according to a letter written by Dr. Kaouk to the Prime Minister, “that my contract of 2001-2002 would be my final contract and that ‘there would be no prolongation after November 30, 2002’.”⁵² Secondly, in removing Dr. Kaouk, the position of head of the program devoted to the Middle East and Southwest Asia would also be terminated.

Although Dr. Kaouk was later rehired (after consultation with the Human Rights Commission), the program devoted to the Middle East and Southwest Asia has never been reinstated. When the NCCAR inquired why this department had been canceled, the museum responded that “it wanted to ‘get out of ethnic categorizations’.”⁵³ Despite this, however, the museum’s organizational chart (Figure 7) reveals the CMC’s continued use of a number of ‘ethnically’ designated programs. When I inquired about the reasoning behind this decision, Dr. Inglis suggested the museum had “installed the curator in a position to do that show so that we could represent that community at a particular time. And when that was done, we knew, I knew, that we weren’t going to focus on that particular area of the world for some time as we have done [with] others after we finish a

⁵¹ Marks, 2003: 19.

⁵² Kaouk, November 2002. Letter to Prime Minister Jean Chrétien accessed in September 2004 at <http://lists.econ.utah.edu/pipermail/rad-green/2002-November/005468.html>.

⁵³ NCCAR website. “Museum of Civilization Bias Against Arabs”, July 8, 2003.

big exhibit and we just move on to another responsibility.”⁵⁴ It is interesting to note, however, that despite the obvious interest in the Middle East since 9.11, the CMC did not and does not see any need to continue a curatorial position devoted to this region.

This version of the story of *The Lands within Me* will most likely be contested. My telling is simply one among many associated with this exhibit. As the story continues to be told and retold, changes in the focus and details will occur. One may ask, however, does the distance created by time or removal actually allow for a clearer picture to be drawn? Or, by relying upon the devices of memory and reconstruction, does the image become further obfuscated? Immediately following the museum’s reversal of its decision to delay the exhibit, *Globe and Mail* columnist Ray Conologue provided one of the more thoughtful analyses of the controversy. Yet, two and a half years later, Conologue could barely remember the name of the show, let alone its subject. Referring to *The Lands Within Us* in a 2003 article about the closing of the exhibit, Conologue quickly reverted to the stereotypes which have become commonplace in the, now firmly established, post-9.11 world, referring to “the controversial show of *Muslim*-Canadian art . . . at Ottawa’s Museum of Civilization [closing] after a successful 18-month run.”⁵⁵

Conclusion

It is clear that a diversity of experiences and perspectives accompanied the events surrounding *The Lands within Me*. I have attempted to faithfully portray the experiences and points-of-view of those who agreed to discuss these events with me. I am hesitant to wrap up this chapter with a ‘final’ interpretation of this narrative. Ultimately throughout the course of this project, I realized that a variety of versions of this story must remain

⁵⁴ Interview with Dr. Stephen Inglis, 2 February 2005.

⁵⁵ Conologue, 2003, emphasis mine.

present. The reader, provided with a diversity of voices, will hopefully discover the challenges associated with ethnographic research, as it is impossible to relate any one, single 'truth' of the events surrounding *The Lands within Me*.

The explanation offered by museum officials when asked why the exhibit had been delayed is, for me, revealing of the challenges associated with this methodology and my own understanding of these events. According to the museum, the exhibit was postponed so that historical and political 'context' could be added to the artistic works. In the words of Dr. Rabinovitch, following September 11, officials in the museum wanted to "take three months and work out whether the exhibition works out its hypothesis [and] look at the art through the context, in other words, let's do our job as a social history museum (not an art museum)."⁵⁶ I found it particularly interesting to note the diversity of opinions regarding the appropriate 'context' as expressed by the public, the curatorial team, the contributing artists and the museum's management.

Prior to the opening of the exhibit, during Front End Interviews (surveys conducted with museum visitors about the themes in *The Lands within Me*) respondents expressed their desire to learn about the experience of adjusting to a new country, information about the country of origin and biographical information about the artists. According to interpretations of these surveys, the art, for many participants, appeared to be secondary to the information.⁵⁷ The team responsible for the exhibit responded to this request by including personal and narrative information from each of the artists. Accompanying each piece was a brief biography of the artist describing the migratory

⁵⁶ Interview with Dr. Victor Rabinovitch, 10 March 2005.

⁵⁷ © Collection of the Canadian Museum of Civilization. Institutional Documents, *The Lands within Me*. Fonds Aïda Kaouk, 2001-2003, Front End Evaluation Study for 'Letters Home' Exhibition. Prepared by Karen Graham May 1998, B. I-121, No. 1/5, f. 2002-I-0034.

journey, his or her artistic development and the experience he or she has encountered upon arriving in Canada. This information was intended to create a linkage between the artist and the viewer.

Conversely, the context deemed necessary by the museum's management was geographical, historical, and political. It was assumed that viewers would want to understand more about the artists' countries of origin – their political make-up and historical development. According to Dr. Rabinovitch, "we have to say something about the Arab world if we are going to have an exhibition about people who have left the Arab world. We can't just say this person is from Lebanon; we have to give some context of the Lebanon they left behind, about the religious strife, the civil war. Context is important." For Farouk Kaspoules, however, this type of context would have reduced the meaning of the exhibit, which attempted to avoid images of a singular Arab identity. Kaspoules suggested that the artists "knew that this would mean the addition of rugs and other such objects. If this had gone through we would have pulled our work. If the exhibit was postponed, we would have pulled our work."⁵⁸

This debate, I believe, is revealing of the various perspectives surrounding the purpose of national museums in the current period. While the 'Arabness' of the artists was not the focus of the exhibit, it was a point of concern for the museum's management following the events of 11 September 2001. The artists wanted to display their contemporary artistic interpretations of the experience of migration in the normally restrictive space of a mainstream cultural institution.⁵⁹ Conversely, in the eyes of Rabinovitch and others, it was the responsibility of the museum to educate the public on

⁵⁸ Interview with Farouk Kaspoules, 18 March 2005.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

the history of the Middle East. Inevitably, however, this ‘context’ would not have been neutral – it would have offered a specific vision of the region, thereby reducing the multiplicity and diversity implicit within the exhibit. As I suggested in Chapter 1, I find museums to be most effective when they are viewed as places for experimentation, confrontation and deliberation. Ultimately, the controversies surrounding the display of *The Lands within Me* reveal the museum’s hesitancy to open up the CMC to such wide-ranging debate. Following September 11, the museum felt it necessary to provide a single, unified explanation of Arab migration – one which would support Canadian multiculturalism and acceptance. It is therefore not surprising that the rupture and diversity inherent within *The Lands within Me* would be perceived as threatening by CMC officials during this period.

Thus, the manner in which various individuals within and outside of the museum felt the exhibit would be received and how it ought to be changed was directly linked to their perspectives regarding immigration, multiculturalism and the role of the museum. These issues will be discussed in further detail in the chapters to follow but it is important to again acknowledge that while the stories we tell have important implications for how we experience these same events, these narratives do not occur in a void, but are shaped by a diversity of influences. This complex process makes it possible for an endless number of explanations to surround any one event.

*Québec, la cinquième saison*¹ produced by Joseph Moukhtar provides one of the more optimistic contributions to the exhibit as he imagines a different time in Quebec where identities merge and blend with ease. The pointed roofs of the Chateau Frontenac are transformed into the smooth circular peaks of Islamic mosques. The vibrant colours and shape-shifting lines cause the painting to move and dance, invoking both the transformative nature of migration and the hope that accompanies this transition. The third space created in the experience of knowing more than one place, for Moukhtar, allows one to imagine and construct new ways of being. Absent from this piece, however are the difficulties, challenges and constraints placed on these processes. Clearly, this ‘fifth season’ does not yet exist. Instead Moukhtar offers a unique vision of an imaginary space and time, where new ways of being and belonging will arise.

¹Moukhtar, Joseph. *Québec, la cinquième saison (Quebec City, The Fifth Season)*, 1996. Collection of the Artist. Oil on canvas, 91.2 x 61 cm. Retrieved from the © Canadian Museum of Civilization website. www.civilization.ca/cultur/cespays/pay2_15e.html in March 2005.

CHAPTER 3: NARRATIVES OF THE MUSEUM

Thinking the museum, then, involves the acknowledgement of the ambivalent nature of modernity, the ability to conceive of paradox as an essence of modern life. This has been the historical double-bind of the museum.¹

Nick Prior, *Museums and Modernity*

Introduction

That the controversy surrounding *The Lands within Me* was centered in Canada's national museum is an aspect of this analysis requiring extensive examination. Museums have played a vital role in the production, reproduction and reflection of modern nation-states for more than two centuries. In this role, museums have, inevitably, become intertwined with processes of modernity more broadly. I will suggest that museums ought to be viewed as public expressions of the paradoxes that accompany the formation and reproduction of modern nation-states and the institutions and identities which attend to this history. To speak of museums, as Nick Prior has revealed, is to illuminate the contradictions associated with contemporary (post) modern life.

Jean and John Comaroff, in their classic anthropological text *Modernity and its Malcontents*, speak broadly about the difficulties associated with modernity and the institutions it has produced. Their insights prove valuable when applied to the context of museums in modern nation-states. For the Comaroffs, "the greatest virtue of the recent Western scholarly preoccupation with 'postmodernity' is what it has revealed about 'modernity' itself. Above all else, we have been made aware that the latter – and all it has come to connote – is profoundly ideological and profoundly historical."² The rise of postmodernity has revealed that the history which modernity lays down, including the

¹ Prior, 2002: 8-9.

² Comaroff & Comaroff, 1993: xi.

‘inevitable’ progressive rise of advanced modern nations from the classical civilizations of Greece and Rome through the vital period of European Enlightenment, is simply one narrative among many. This particular story is one that is intimately tied up with modernity’s teleological assumptions that continue to focus and limit the lens through which the social world is viewed. If we are unable to see modern colonial constructions, it becomes difficult, if not impossible, to escape the implications that accompany the stories told within these frameworks. However, in pointing to their liminality, in acknowledging that these frameworks are not universal categories and that other perspectives and histories indeed exist, images and assumptions accompanying modern processes can be clarified and, perhaps, reformulated.

If museums (as we shall see below) are intricately connected to the rise of modernity as a universal framework, it may be inferred that, through a variety of means, museums have attempted to display this history in a visual form. Subsequently, one may inquire about the limitations attached to museum exhibitions attempting to express alternative, critical and more inclusive narratives. If museums are intertwined with the history of modernity (and are, as such, constricted in scope), how do exhibits such as *The Lands within Me* interact in this paradoxical space?

The History of the Museum

In order to assess the contradictory space of the museum in the contemporary period, it is necessary to first conduct a brief genealogy of the role it has played historically. Many museological scholars have already deconstructed and reconstructed this history,³ providing an impressive body of theory in which to ground this narrative. In his introduction to *Art and its Publics*, Andrew McClellan suggests that “the most

³ In particular, see Bennett (1995), Prior (2002), and McClellan (2003).

significant innovation in eighteenth-century Europe was the gradual opening of royal and princely collections to an increasingly broad cross-section of the public.” For McClellan, “these fundamental transitions [were] part and parcel of the evolution towards modern nationalism.”⁴ As the world came to be constructed in its present form, carved into a variety of purportedly unified nations, museums played a vital role in the construction of these new identities and forms of belonging.

Benedict Anderson has provided one of the most significant descriptions of the history of modern nation-states or ‘imagined communities’ by illuminating nations as spaces that have only very recently been imagined, constructed and reconstructed.⁵ The initial and subsequent attempts to create unified and homogeneous identities out of a diversity of groups, languages, cultures and religions were neither natural nor clear for any nation-state. Instead, this was a convoluted process necessarily accompanied by a wide variety of institutions, values, norms and ideals. The citizenship theorist Aihwa Ong acknowledges that “the governmentality of state agencies is often discontinuous, even fragmentary, and the work of instilling proper normative behaviour and identity in newcomers must also be taken up by institutions in civil society.”⁶ In this process, museums, as visual representations of their communities, play a vital role. According to Donald Preziosi, museums “therefore constitute a particular mode of *fiction* – one of the most brilliant and remarkable genres of modern fiction, and one which has become an indispensable component of statehood and of national and ethnic identity in every corner of the world.”⁷

⁴ McClellan, 2003: 4-5

⁵ Anderson, 2003.

⁶ Ong, 1996: 738.

⁷ Preziosi, 1995: 13.

As museums developed from openly viewed royal collections to state-funded apparatuses of nation building, the nature of what was implied by a 'public' institution grew and developed. For Tony Bennett, two interrelated political demands accompanied this shift. In order to ensure public ownership of these vital institutions, it was essential, first, that all groups be represented in exhibitions and displays and second, that the 'exhibitionary complex' be accessible to the largest number of people.⁸ The modern museum, therefore, came to imply not only public access to the wealth of a nation but the materials, objects, treasures and inert constructions of history found within had to be representative of and accessible to the populations flocking to this new public space.

In the early years of nation building, the manner in which governments began to view 'culture' also transformed. Instead of insisting upon the exclusive ownership of 'culture' by elites, nationalist governments found it useful to envision 'culture' as the clay with which to mould the new community coming into being. According to Bennett, it is

in the mid to late nineteenth century – that the relations between culture and government come to be thought of and organized in a distinctively modern way via the conception that the works, forms and institutions of high culture might be enlisted for this governmental task in being assigned the purpose of civilizing the population as a whole.⁹

While the opening of collections marked the initiation of a 'democratization' of sorts, making the treasures of the state available for all to see was also a mechanism of control.

Bennett has revealed that governmental debates and documents of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries evidence the prevalent desire to civilize the classes now merging in the new urban and national landscapes. The British Social Reformer James Silk

⁸ Bennett, 1995: 9.

⁹ Bennett, 1995: 19.

Buckingham envisioned the creation of a battery of institutions to help dissuade the lower classes from their addictions to drink, sex and general mischief. He brought “three bills before parliament proposing that local committees be empowered to levy rates to establish walks, paths, playgrounds, halls, theatres, libraries, museums and art galleries so as ‘to draw off by innocent pleasurable recreation and instruction, all who can be weaned from habits of drinking’.”¹⁰ It was hoped that the mere availability of art, music and other institutionalized cultural formations might increase “the sobriety and industriousness of the populous” thereby preventing “riot and sedition.”¹¹

Thus, the early development of museums is tied not simply to the public ownership of wealth, treasure and history – an ownership that is integral to the collectivization of society through the construction of national identities – but is also directly connected to the pressing need to ensure a structured, homogeneous civil(ized) society, capable of self regulation and control.

Debating the Function of the Museum

Due to this complex history, contradictory images of the function of museums in the contemporary era abound. Theorists continue to debate the role museums ought to play in the in the nation today. In 1972, Duncan Cameron proposed two possible roles of the museum as ‘temple’ or ‘forum’. As a temple “the museum plays a ‘timeless and universal function, the use of a structured sample of reality, not just as a reference but as an objective model against which to compare individual perceptions’.”¹² Carol Duncan expands upon this perception by theorizing the museum visit as a secular ritual of citizenship. For Duncan, similar to “most ritual sites, museum space is carefully marked

¹⁰ Bennett, 1995: 19-20.

¹¹ Bennett, 1995: 21.

¹² Karp & Lavine, 1990: 3.

off and culturally designated as reserved for a special kind of attention – in this case, contemplation and learning.”¹³ In contrast, viewing the museum as a forum suggests “the museum is a place for ‘confrontation, experimentation, and debate’.”¹⁴ Most contemporary museums do not fit neatly into one or the other category, shifting instead between the two. The story of *The Lands within Me* clearly points to this ebb and flow. For, however much museum officials attempted to purge the possibility of conflict from the CMC, they could not prevent a debate over who ought to be included and excluded in representations of Canadian society from occurring.

This debate references the integral ambiguity associated with museums both historically and in the contemporary period. Bennett’s Foucauldian analysis clarifies this central paradox. Bennett suggests that the museum constructs the modern individual “in a relation of both subject and object to the knowledge it organizes.”¹⁵ If the role of the museum visitor is both the subject and the object of the information he or she consumes, the complexity of museum displays increase as the authority with which exhibitors may present their work is reduced. The production of the viewer as both subject and object ensures that displays of knowledge leave the museum open to contestation and debate. The space for discussion made possible in the museum will consequently have implications for national narratives. For, when the subject encounters a display that does not reflect his or her own experience (as the object), the museum inadvertently highlights the gap that exists between narratives of the nation and the daily experiences of this space.

¹³ Duncan, 1995: 11.

¹⁴ Karp & Lavine, 1990: 3.

¹⁵ Bennett, 1995: 7.

Displaying Subjects and Objects of the Nation

Modes of exhibition display have always been deeply connected to the manner in which the subject and object are viewed more broadly. Historically, ethnographic museums – often associated with natural history museums – relied on scientific classifications to organize exhibitions and displays of more ‘primitive’ societies. This process reduced the subjects of these displays to tales of history now lost in the rise of modernization. In analyzing debates surrounding the emergence of a new national museum in Australia, Greg McCarthy highlights the rupture to this exhibitionary process caused by postmodern theory. For McCarthy, “the emergence of postmodern and post-colonial theory questioned the irreversibility of modernity and exposed the power relations that underlay colonial expansion. In so doing, it placed in question the whole nature of museums and their collections.”¹⁶ Postmodern theory has – with varying degrees of success – forced museums to shift away from displays that objectify complex cultures and identities. This process has been initiated by involving those groups whose histories and material collections have been viewed through a decontextualized lens more directly in the production of exhibitions. These changes have marked an important transition away from the traditionally paternalistic role museums have played, where the nature and history of a community were displayed in a top-down fashion with very little dialogue occurring between museum curators and the public whom they purportedly represented.

Robyn Gillam suggests that there are presently two views of exhibiting within museology. The first of these is a ‘populist’ perspective, concerned with educating the public through its displays. In contrast, curators working within the framework of

¹⁶ McCarthy, 2004: 1.

'aesthetic-contemplative' exhibitions find the idea of catering to the needs of those who want to be entertained problematic and believe that "explaining exhibits in a simplified or entertaining manner misrepresents them to the public and degrades their status as sacred objects."¹⁷ Clearly, the debate between museum as temple or forum is implicit within this discussion. This distinction is one, however, that oversimplifies the spectrum of exhibitionary strategies currently being debated in museological circles. Since its inception, the CMC has been associated with the former, populist category, particularly under the direction of the first President in its new building, George MacDonald.¹⁸ In the case of *The Lands within Me*, Rabinovitch and others may argue that curatorial staff could be associated with the latter, elitist category. Perhaps in refusing to bow to pressure to add 'context' to the works, Dr. Kaouk and the artists wanted the art to be appreciated according to its own intentions and designs. However, the exhibit's extensive use of biographies and statements of the artists provided a great deal more context than typical art exhibits would produce. Thus, to place *The Lands within Me* in either category misses the mark as the exhibit was neither purely entertaining nor simply de-contextualized aestheticism.

It is interesting to note that the above debates ultimately never question the success of a museum's intentions. Stephen E. Weil offers a refreshing position. According to Weil, "museums are not and never can be as autonomous, as permanent, as inherently virtuous or as broadly capable of serving an educational role as their more

¹⁷ Gillam, 2001: 146-147.

¹⁸ George MacDonald repeatedly stated that his inspiration for the model of the CMC came from Disney's Epcot Center. The disgust which accompanied this comparison offers further evidence that the debate between museum as temple or forum remains far from complete. For more on MacDonald's 'populist' views, see the publication that accompanied the opening of the newly constructed CMC, *A Museum for the Global Village: The Canadian Museum of Civilization*, (MacDonald and Alsford, 1989).

zealous advocates claim and sincerely believe them to be.”¹⁹ Weil criticizes curators who claim an objectivity not possible within the realm of the museum, particularly those deeply connected to the modern nation-state. For Weil, “the thrust of every museum is ultimately shaped by the dominant authority under which it operates.”²⁰ Whatever the viewpoint held by curators regarding the nature of museums or appropriate modes of display, all exhibits, particularly those found in national museums, are subject to and limited by the narratives and discourses implicit within the communities in which they are situated.

Canada’s National Cultural Institution: The Canadian Museum of Civilization

Attempting to understand the role of the structure of the CMC and its connections to the nation-state in this controversy feels a bit like diving into waters deeply muddled by the many who have been here before. Critiquing the CMC has become somewhat of a Canadian national pastime. At many times museum staff have opened Canada’s daily newspapers with great trepidation as the media, along with scholarly, museological, public and governmental sources appear to have reveled in the opportunity to denounce the museum and its policies.²¹ A closer examination of this important public space, however, soon reveals that while the CMC has received mixed reviews at home, outside of Canada museum professionals from around the world have written favourably about the museum’s design, strategies and exhibits. Not wanting to fall into this national pattern, I will attempt to reveal the role the national museum has played in the Canadian museum community.

¹⁹ Weil, 1995: xiii.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Gillam, 2001: 148.

Canada's national cultural museum has a history that long predates the opening of the current building on 29 June 1989, however, it is the more recent history of the prior National Museum of Man which will be the focus of this account. Architecturally and aesthetically, the Museum of Civilization holds a unique and respected position in the Canadian landscape. Initially, many within the Canadian public questioned the innovative designs of architect Douglas Cardinal.²² Critics of Cardinal, however, would soon be silenced as his geologically inspired designs came to be broadly appreciated.

Robyn Gillam views the short history of the CMC in a highly critical light, yet for him, Cardinal's decision to construct the Museum of Civilization in the image of geological formations offers a welcome change from the surrounding architectural landscape. Gillam suggests that designing an important national institution such as the CMC in this unique manner "rather than [as] a studied series of references to other architectural styles," has, most likely "helped [to] make the Museum of Civilization one of the most popular tourist sites in the National Capital Region."²³ In contrast, for Gillam, Cardinal's design "seems to imply that an institution such as the National Gallery represents a system from whose meaning many are excluded, by education or by cultural background."²⁴ Interestingly, it is the gentle rounded curves of the CMC, not the gilded peaks of the National Gallery, that have welcomed formal state dinners, provided space for constitutional conferences and negotiations and hosted national literary, art and humanitarian award ceremonies.²⁵

²² Gillam, 2001: 152.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Gillam, 2001: 139.

²⁵ It should be acknowledged here that the Grand Hall of the CMC is large enough to host functions of significant size and this space also has an unparalleled view of Parliament Hill. However, I believe that the unusual designs of the building and its positive reception by the Canadian public more broadly have also played an important role in the choice of this space as host to important events.

Cardinal's architectural designs have helped to construct the CMC as a unique and open public space in comparison to other national galleries and museums. The symbolic representation of an alternative form of belonging implicit within the museum's exterior however, has not always implied that the exhibitions displayed inside have been similarly critical. The close connection between the CMC and myths associated with the nation-state is responsible for limiting the extent of debate made possible within the space of this national museum.

In describing the controversy surrounding an exhibition of the *Enola Gay* at the National Air and Space Museum in Washington DC, Timothy R. Luke suggests that "the ferocious political combat" which surrounded this particular display

can be chalked up, in part, to the prestige of the venue itself. As a major institution receiving public monies to display cultural truths in the nation's capital city, this museum might be expected to appear 'objective' or 'nonpartisan', because it is at these places that America, in some sense, tells its stories to itself in the broadest possible terms.²⁶

Similarly, the Museum of Civilization has been closely associated with the Canadian government and, subsequently, Canadian national narratives, particularly those connected to multiculturalism. Pierre Elliot Trudeau, one of Canada's most popular leaders, inaugurated the first policies to support Canadian multiculturalism during the 1970s. Some years later, during his third term as Prime Minister, Trudeau and his ruling Liberal Party initiated the construction of both the Museum of Civilization and the National Gallery.²⁷ According to the museum's website, "the Museums Act (1990) establishes the Canadian Museum of Civilization Corporation (CMCC) as a national institution

²⁶ Luke, 2002: 22-23.

²⁷ Gillam, 2001: 151.

responsible for preserving and promoting the heritage of Canada, and contributing to the collective memory and sense of identity of all Canadians.”²⁸

Prime Minister Jean Chrétien’s quick response to the museum’s attempt to delay *The Lands within Me* is undeniably unique as, normally, when governments interfere in the actions of museums, as *Globe and Mail* columnist Ray Conoglu points out, it is usually to “put the brakes on an institution that gets a little wild and decides to do something controversial. The opposite seems to be the case here.”²⁹ On September 26, 2001 the leader of the New Democratic Party, Alexa McDonough asked in the House of Commons: “Will the Prime Minister show some leadership here? Will he speak out forcefully against this decision by the Museum of Civilization?”³⁰ In response, Prime Minister Jean Chretien declared – in an admittedly subdued fashion – “Mr. Speaker, I entirely agree with the leader of the NDP Party. I think the wrong decision was made. I have been informed that it wants to put on the exhibition in the month of March. If it is good for March 2002, it should be good for October 2001.”³¹ However, the Prime Minister’s declaration that the exhibit should go ahead as planned also revealed the various ways in which the Museum of Civilization continues to be enmeshed within governmental discourses and processes.

In my discussions with Dr. Rabinovitch I asked him what he thought the museum did well during the controversy. He replied that the CMC “responded well to strong expressions of political concern. When the Prime Minister says there is no reason to

²⁸ © Canadian Museum of Civilization website. *Guiding Principles of the Corporation*. <http://www.civilization.ca/societe/principe.html>.

²⁹ Colongue, 2001.

³⁰ © Collection of the Canadian Museum of Civilization, Institutional Documents. *The Lands within Me*. Fonds Aïda Kaouk, 2001-2003. House of Commons Debates, 37, (86), 1st Session, 37th Parliament, Wednesday, September 26, 2001:5592, B. I – 121, No. 1/5, f. 2002- i-0034.

³¹ Ibid.

postpone, he is not trying to censor me or ask me to pull back on an issue, he was making a fine point and one that my conscience could agree to.”³² While the Prime Minister’s remarks in the House of Commons may be seen as necessary and appear to fall in line with general public opinion at the time, his actions also point to the lack of space given to the museum to express narratives that contradict dominant public discourses.

It is difficult, perhaps, considering the peculiar nature of this controversy to find the relationship between the museum and the government problematic. However, a brief discussion of the debates arising out of the construction of the new National Museum of Australia (NMA) will illustrate the contradictions implied in this rapport. The NMA has many similarities to the CMC. Originally imagined in 1975, “the NMA was to be a dialogue between nation and national identity. The political dilemma came when this dialogue became pluralist: wanting to include people’s history, being postmodernist in its architecture and post-colonial in its indigenous sensibilities.”³³ By the time the museum came into being in 2001, the political climate and the ruling government had changed. The pluralistic nature of the NMA appeared a threat to the new government’s neoliberal agenda. The mission statement and opening exhibits of the NMA were openly criticized for being one-sided and inappropriate. In fact, according to Greg McCarthy, the problem with the newly opened museum was the lack of connection between its narratives and the ideologies of the current Australian government who took a “celebratory position on Australian history and national identity.”³⁴ The ensuing debate led eventually to major changes in the structure of the museum and its exhibitionary strategies.

³² Interview with Dr. Victor Rabinovitch, 10 March 2005.

³³ McCarthy, 2004: 25.

³⁴ McCarthy, 2004: 3.

What would come to be lost in the new vision for the NMA are the contradictions implicit within Australian national identity, the ongoing struggles faced by the Aboriginal people and the new challenges confronting an increasingly unstable economic reality.³⁵ By presenting a stable and unified vision of Australia, the political concerns of the ruling government could be promoted and the ongoing difficulties in the nation ignored. While in the case of *The Lands within Me* the Canadian government appeared to be the benevolent party, in reality its actions are comparable to the Australian case. By insisting upon the stability of Canada's multicultural identity during a period of uncertainty and fear, the contradictions accompanying this national narrative – which were in fact amplified after September 11 – could be brushed aside.

Exhibiting Alternative Narratives: Canadian Museum Controversies

According to Reesa Greenburg, “museums, particularly ethnographic museums, are paradigmatic sites for testing the limits of tolerance of, for and within, minority cultures.”³⁶ By viewing the museum as a test site, a forum where the limits of inclusion and exclusion of the nation are pushed and prodded, the controversy surrounding *The Lands within Me* may be viewed in a clearer light. Indeed, *The Lands within Me* is not the first exhibit in the Canadian landscape to encounter controversy. As I mentioned in Chapter 1, in 1989 the Royal Ontario Museum mounted *Into the Heart of Africa*. This exhibit was met with almost daily protest and, similar to *The Lands within Me*, had its tour cancelled. In fact, the CMC was one of the institutions that, following the protests, cancelled its plans to host *Into the Heart of Africa*. In 1988, another Canadian exhibition relating to a group long marginalized within Canadian society was met with searing

³⁵ McCarthy, 2004.

³⁶ Greenburg, 2003: 125.

critique. Aboriginal groups initiated a boycott of *The Spirit Sings: Artistic Traditions of Canada's First Peoples* because "the exhibit's chief sponsor, Shell Oil, was drilling on land claimed by the Lubicon Lake Cree in northern Alberta."³⁷ Shelley Butler points out that while this controversy was rooted in the funding of the exhibit, the protest surrounding *Into the Heart of Africa* "was deeply enmeshed in the exhibit itself, and with the very question of how we exhibit culture."³⁸ The events surrounding *The Lands within Me*, on the other hand, were not directly related to either issue. The actions of the museum and the manner in which it was received and viewed by the public were more closely connected to the relational setting in which it was located as opposed to the exhibit itself.

It is interesting to note that the most controversial exhibits in Canada have been those attempting to display issues related to identities and cultures found at the fringes of Canadian identity. While Canada is purportedly a multicultural nation, the experience of this identity has differed greatly from the myths and narratives through which it is articulated. Therefore, it is, perhaps, more than likely that the manner in which identities of the 'other' are represented and displayed in Canada's museums will be situated on deeply contested and controversial ground. The difficult decisions and problematic actions taken by the CMC in response to *The Lands within Me* reflect the inconsistent place of both the museum and 'multiculturalism' in the modern national context. In this case, the exhibit's attempt to represent contested identities and the museum's resistance to this process produced the rather embarrassing effect of reflecting national paradoxes as opposed to the national unity normally found in Canada's most important cultural

³⁷ Butler, 1999: 2.

³⁸ Butler, 1999: 2.

institution. The ambitions behind the exhibit reflect and recreate some of the critical work occurring in museological studies in Canada and around the world, while the fears that arose in the wake of the terrorist attacks reflect and reproduce narratives and discourses that are equally present in the contemporary era.

The history of the nation and the museum both revolve around the attempt to create a homogenous whole out of diversity and hybridity. It is not surprising therefore, that *The Lands within Me* – an exhibit illuminating the complexity and fluidity of modern identity formations – would inevitably reflect the roughness of this terrain. However, without the space provided by the museum, would these contradictions ever become clear? Steven Dubin sees the contestations that occur over representation in museums as explicit ‘displays of power.’³⁹ However, the story of *The Lands within Me* requires a more nuanced explanation. Museums, more than merely expressing the will of elite classes, can also inadvertently reveal the contradictions associated with nationalist narratives. While, often, the essentialist narratives of the nation are reproduced visually in this space, the museum is also a site where national stories can be debated and critiqued. Thus, when the museum visitor as subject encounters the display of him or herself in exhibits – as object – the chasm found between narratives and experiences of the nation may be revealed.

Clarify and Unify: The CMC after *The Lands within Me*

As suggested in Chapter 1, the controversy surrounding *The Lands within Me* may be understood as a critical event. Veena Das suggests that following critical events, new categories of meaning and modes of action are constructed and new forms are adopted by

³⁹ Dubin, 1999.

political actors.⁴⁰ Following the controversy surrounding *The Lands within Me*, new institutional frameworks were established inside the CMC, altering many of the museum's organizational structures and guiding principles. While interviews with some museum staff suggested that few changes had occurred in the CMC following *The Lands within Me*,⁴¹ Dr. Rabinovitch was clear about the various ways in which the institution had changed following the controversy. Dr. Rabinovitch suggested that, in some respects, "the impact of the controversy was positive for the museum in terms of process, self-awareness and understanding of its mandate. Because of it, we are in a better intellectual position."⁴² It was not until after the experience of *The Lands within Me* that the museum formulated its Guiding Principles, now prominently displayed on the museum's website. Other important changes included clarification and reinforcement of the process by which exhibitions and other educational programs are produced. According to Rabinovitch "there is now a wide representation of knowledge on curatorial teams, and wide participation and approval at the executive level."⁴³ Finally, following the seemingly rogue nature of this exhibit, museum officials "elaborated on a long-term exhibition and research strategy. We know what we're trying to do, the areas we want to focus on, how we will use our budgets."⁴⁴

Thus, for Rabinovitch, the controversies surrounding *The Lands within Me* stimulated the museum to present a renewed and united front – to agree on the nature of its research strategy and exhibitions. Implied in this shift is a move away from exhibits

⁴⁰ Das, 1995: 5-6.

⁴¹ While Dr. Inglis felt that the exhibit had the unfortunate effect of harming the museum's reputation, in the long-term, he suggested that other changes were few and far between. Dr. Laforet felt that the implications of *The Lands within Me* should not be exaggerated as controversies are bound to happen in museums.

⁴² Interview with Dr. Victor Rabinovich, 10 March 2005.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

similar to *The Lands within Me*. According to Rabinovitch, *The Lands within Me* had failed to implement the museum's policies. At some point during its development "it became an art show rather than a strong, analytical exhibition with a point." This was due, in part, to management's inability to keep exhibits on track with the museum's purpose. Many of the museum's values, guidelines and processes while "well-meaning", had been "implicit" for too long,⁴⁵ and following the controversy, the Guiding Principles were written and displayed for all to see. The experience of *The Lands within Me* is evident in the wording of the principles and three are worth examining at some length.

Authenticity

Authenticity in our Museum means that we are truthful and comprehensive. We are committed to showing artifacts from CMCC collections and from other public collections. Authenticity involves communicating accurate information which is balanced and in context.

Coherence

Coherence applies to all our Museums' activities as we aim to be consistent, united in purpose and easily accessible. We strive for coherence in our research, exhibitions, programmes, services and design, in our behaviour as teams, and in our use of the Museums' physical spaces.

Choice and Respect

The collections, programmes and exhibitions administered by our Museums reflect a wide range of people and subjects. Making choices is necessary for good management: we can never include all themes, all perspectives, or all proposed artifacts. Our choices are informed by respect: we will not engage in activities or present materials which may promote intolerance.⁴⁶

Exhibits which do not present views that are 'balanced and in context' would no longer be tolerated following *The Lands within Me*. In the future, all exhibits would be 'coherent' and in line with the museum's values. Difficult 'choices' would sometimes have to be made; there would not be space for 'materials which may promote intolerance'. Clearly, the uncertain nature of displaying commissioned art is expressed in

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ © Canadian Museum of Civilization Corporation website. *Guiding Principles of the Corporation*. <http://www.civilization.ca/societe/principe.html>.

these principles. Jayce Salloum's *everything and nothing* and the debate between the value of 'art' and 'artifact' are also implied in this attempt to clarify the museum's purposes. For Rabinovitch, as a national museum, the CMC must present a unified perspective and the possibility for this increases when the content of cultural studies exhibitions is limited to material artifacts and historically contextualized accompanying texts.

When I asked Dr. Kaouk about the difference between displaying art and artifact, she appeared somewhat surprised by the question. After thinking for a minute, she suggested that a work of art might evoke a variety of things to different people. She recalled that during the run of *The Lands within Me* she received many different testimonies about peoples' experiences with various pieces in the exhibit. In particular, she remembered a visitor who felt that one piece – Mirella Aprahamian's *Ma Cabane au Canada*⁴⁷ – evoked ideas of suffering in the Holocaust. "While this was not the subject of the piece, it was interpreted this way by the individual, according to his perspective."⁴⁸ Personally, Dr. Kaouk was more interested in presenting people's work, as it is "more alive, connecting and making them proud. It is not an object they brought with them, but an expression of their perspective and experience, it affects their life more."⁴⁹

The diversity of experiences associated of *The Lands within Me* is representative of the challenges facing national museums. Displaying issues related to complex identities and cultures is always a difficult process – one which is amplified in national museums charged with supporting and promoting myths of the nation. In his recent analysis of controversies surrounding the NMA, S.G. Foster suggests that "perhaps it was

⁴⁷ See Figure 3, page 132.

⁴⁸ Interview with Dr. Aïda Kaouk, 15 September 2005.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

fitting that an institution charged with presenting national identity (though even this was contested, from contrary perspectives) should have so much difficulty with its own.”⁵⁰ The controversy surrounding *The Lands within Me* could, perhaps, be equally understood as ‘fitting’ for, in attempting to delay the exhibit, the museum inadvertently revealed the contradictions accompanying Canada’s national identity. Subsequently, the exhibit and its controversies forced the museum to re-examine its purpose, values and processes. That these were designed to be more cogent and unified suggests that the space for national museums to move outside of sanctioned national discourses remains limited.

Conclusion

As the insightful Shelley Butler reminds us, the museum, along with national identities, is a living force in modern nation-states. For Butler, these debates become more effective, the longer they are allowed to continue. The CMC’s attempt to delay the exhibit brought into the open the disconnections found between narratives of Canada’s multicultural identity and the experiences of migrant groups within the nation. The Prime Minister’s insistence that the exhibit go ahead as planned allowed this critical narrative to be expressed while simultaneously limiting future debates by reinforcing the close relationship between the museum and the government of the day. The changes seen in the CMC’s policies following *The Lands within Me* have – in some respects – further restricted the space for diverse experiences to be displayed in the museum as all exhibits and research must now reflect the museum’s principles and long-term exhibition strategies. It is unlikely, however, that the CMC will be able to avoid controversies in the future. According to Dr. Inglis, living through *The Lands within Me* “identified for us

⁵⁰ Foster, 2004: 6.

some of the real challenges of representation in a diverse cultural context.”⁵¹ So long as the complex act of representation continues, the discrepancies, disruptions and contradictions accompanying nation-states and modern life more generally are provided a space in which they can be acknowledged, debated and, perhaps, reformulated. The task of maintaining public debate regarding the nature of belonging does not, however, rest solely on the shoulders of museum curators. Museum exhibits are ephemeral experiences, and as such they offer a limited period of time in which these discussions may occur. Instead of purging controversy from the space of the museum, or dismissing the actions of the CMC as racist, the opportunities created in these moments of contestation should be seized upon. While national museums in particular are unlikely to welcome the possibilities presented by exhibition controversies, they nevertheless offer a space in which the narratives of the nation may be debated.

⁵¹ Interview with Dr. Stephen Inglis, 2 February 2005.

A Great Country Welcomes You,¹ a series of sketches contributed to *The Lands within Me* by Adel Alnaser, were inspired by the drawings made in the margins of notebooks dating from English language classes Alnaser attended in a community center in Toronto soon after his arrival. Disconnected lines, awkward shapes and rough contours are found throughout each piece. The complexities, contradictions, fear and hope that accompany a migratory journey are expressed in these simple lines.

The gangly awkwardness of the figure identified only by his baggage tags reveals that even in a 'multicultural' nation, the newly arriving citizen stands out in a crowd. Belonging in a multicultural nation is never a seamless experience. Instead, the unfamiliar image of the 'other', now found within, remains fragmented, existing both inside and outside, mourning for that which has been lost in the transition.

¹ Alnaser, Adel. *A Great Country Welcomes You*, 1989. Collection of the Canadian Museum of Civilization. Pencil and ink on paper. Retrieved from the © Canadian Museum of Civilization website. www.civilization.ca/cultur/cespays/images/pay2_01p2.html in March 2005.

CHAPTER 4: NARRATIVES OF MULTICULTURALISM

If we refrain from questioning the validity of the political structures that guarantee our 'safety' within the discourse of the home, we are blinded to the ways in which the home mirrors the politics of state-sovereignty, offering protection from the outside by condoning an ethics of exclusionary violence on the inside.¹

Erin Manning, *Ephemeral Territories*

Introduction

While globalized forces and hybridized influences are undeniable trends of the current era, the concept of the nation – as a single and homogenous identity – remains, according to Benedict Anderson, “the most universally legitimate value in the political life of our time.”² Arising out of specific political and economic circumstances in eighteenth-century Western Europe, nation-states have since spread throughout the globe. As such, they play a vital role in the contemporary period. In viewing nation-states as ‘imagined communities,’ one may interrogate the cultural formations that accompany these quintessentially modern institutions. Through this process it becomes clear that nation-states – far from merely existing as administrative structures – are in fact, ‘cultural formations’. To recognize that the nation-state has cultural foundations and implications does not confuse the diversity and variety found within its boundaries with a singular ‘primordial’ national identity. Instead, the cultural components of the nation must be understood in terms of how the nation is perceived and experienced, both in broad conceptual terms and at the level of daily life.

Within the framework of the nation multiple narratives – existing simultaneously and in contradiction with one another – can be found. The discourses of any state invoke images of the ‘natural’ progression of each national identity. Histories and myths are

¹ Manning, 2003: xvi-xvii.

² Anderson, 2003: 3.

subsequently constructed around these identities to be told and retold to further reinforce the bonds struck within the nation. In their 1985 analysis of the state, Philip Corrigan and Derek Sayer describe the modern nation-state in terms of ‘governmentality’.³ This Foucauldian framework allows Corrigan and Sayer to acknowledge that the cultural formations of the state are aimed at creating a “‘unitary and unifying expression to what are in reality multifaceted and differential experiences of groups within society’.”⁴ Beginning from the framework set out by Corrigan and Sayer, Aihwa Ong refers to ‘cultural citizenship’ in order to describe complex experiences of being within the nation-state. For Ong, ‘cultural citizenship’ invokes images of “the cultural practices and beliefs produced out of negotiating the often ambivalent and contested relations with the state and its hegemonic forms that establish the criteria of belonging within a national population and territory.”⁵

Similar to Corrigan and Sayer’s ‘governmentality’, the process of citizenship serves to create a homogeneous group out of a variety of identities, experiences and histories. Further, encountering processes and narratives of citizenship, similar to the nation, implies the articulation of power at a variety of levels. This power is not simply expressed in and through institutional bodies connected to the state but also at the level of groups and individuals seeking or interacting with these categories of belonging. By relying upon Foucault’s notion of “self-making in shifting fields of power,”⁶ Ong articulates the multiple ways in which immigrating groups experience and express the networks of power implicit within the boundaries of the nation-state. Specifically, Ong

³ Ong, 1996: 738.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

reveals citizenship as “a cultural process of ‘subject-ification,’ in the Foucauldian sense of self-making and being-made by power relations that produce consent through schemes of surveillance, discipline, control and administration.”⁷ Even a cursory glance at the controversy surrounding the exhibit reveals that networks of power are found at a variety of levels in experiences of the nation and citizenship. While the actions of the museum must be interrogated, the oppositional stance taken by the government precludes an analysis that constructs the response of the museum as simply a reflection of those in power. Capillaries of power are evident throughout the stories of *The Lands within Me* as the protests of the public and extensive media coverage following its attempted delay confuse any clear declaration of power’s position in this context.

Narratives of an Imagined Community: Canadian Multiculturalism

For more than thirty years, officially sanctioned images of Canada and *the* Canadian identity have focused on and endorsed the concept of ‘multiculturalism’. According to the narratives that accompany this discourse, “in 1971, Canada was the first country in the world to adopt multiculturalism as an official policy. By so doing, Canada affirmed the value and dignity of all Canadian citizens regardless of their racial or ethnic origins, their language, or their religious affiliation.”⁸ Despite the neutrality suggested in this simplified history of Canada’s adoption of multiculturalism, it is vital to remember that far from an inevitable ‘primordial’ identity, the choice to encourage multiculturalism as a national narrative is a decision inspired and justified by a diversity of political and

⁷ Ong, 1996: 737.

⁸ Heritage Canada, http://www.canadianheritage.gc.ca/progs/multi/inclusive_e.cfm. Many of the following references to multiculturalism are taken from the Heritage Canada website. While similar documents may be found in publications from this Department, governments have found extensive use of internet websites to be an effective means by which to provide populations with ‘living’ representations of their policies and narratives. The internet is more frequently and easily accessed by citizens and visitors and documents found here, I believe, offer a current and accurate look at prevalent government discourses and debates.

economic concerns.

Canada's 'multicultural' heritage runs alongside (and often collides with) two other discourses, equally embedded in the Canadian context. The first of these articulates anxieties regarding the infiltration of the foreign 'other' into the Canadian landscape. In times of financial uncertainty and high unemployment, narratives regarding the 'immigration problem' are frequently expressed. Perhaps it has not yet been universally accepted that, as former Prime Minister Jean Chrétien once claimed, "Canada has become a post-national, multicultural society. It contains the globe within its borders, and Canadians have learned that their two international languages and their diversity are a comparative advantage and a source of continuing creativity and innovation. Canadians are, by virtue of history and necessity, open to the world."⁹ Within this 2000 statement the second narrative or process accompanying Canada's multicultural identity can also be found. Reference to Canada's 'comparative advantage' alludes to the reality that the Canadian economic system has and continues to be reliant upon the influx of temporary low-wage labour from groups around the world. This process exists simultaneously with concerns of the foreign 'other' found within, and narratives of an enlightened multiculturalism.

The history of the Canadian nation is one of movement and migration. The arrival of European settlers and the subsequent years of Canadian nation building, according to sociologist Daiva Stasiulis, produced race and ethnicity as integral features of the complex social relations in this settler-colonial state. For Stasiulis, these processes "structured free and unfree labour markets, the constitution of the Canadian state and liberal democracy, the official and popular discourses of belonging, and entitlement to the

⁹ Heritage Canada, http://www.canadianheritage.gc.ca/progs/multi/inclusive_e.cfm.

rights of an imaginary Canadian” nation.¹⁰ The process of deciding who was to be included in the definition of ‘Canadian’, therefore, has proven to be an ever-present challenge in the construction of this nation of immigrants.

Shifting patterns of migration have forced numerous changes in the images of belonging, self and other, inside and outside, since the initiation of North American colonial expansion. Research conducted by Stasiulis reveals that between 1867 and 1961, immigrants originating from various countries within Europe (first from the North and West, followed later by the South and East), made up ninety percent of those who arrived. These forms of migration were not simply accidental, as laws restricted access to those groups deemed appropriate in the context of the new Canadian state. According to a 2004 study produced by Kruger et al, the 1910 Immigration Act outlined that “the Governor in Council may prohibit . . . the landing in Canada . . . of immigrants belonging to any race deemed unsuited to the climate or requirements of Canada, or of immigrants of any specified class, occupation or character.”¹¹ It was not until 1962 that changes were made to Canada's Immigration Act so that “any suitably qualified person from any part of the world could be considered for immigration to Canada, without regard to his race, colour, national origin, or the country from which he comes’.”¹² In 1967 this shift in immigration policy was further clarified by the introduction of a points based system of screening potential immigrants. For Kruger et al, this system shifted perceptions of preferred and non-preferred immigration from the level of groups to that of individuals.¹³

¹⁰ Stasiulis in Clement, 1997: 141.

¹¹ Kruger et al, 2004: 72.

¹² Heritage Canada, http://www.canadianheritage.gc.ca/progs/multi/inclusive_e.cfm.

¹³ Kruger et al, 2004: 74-75.

Following this shift in policy, between 1961 and 1981, individuals from Europe made up only twenty-five percent of newly arriving immigrants.¹⁴

While the groups given access to Canada have indeed shifted in the last fifty years, many of the more intricate restrictions placed upon permanent residency have remained the same. Throughout Canadian history, even the most maligned groups have been granted limited access to the nation for the purposes of supplying cheap and flexible labour. Interestingly, in recent years, despite the positive reputation of the immigration and refugee efforts of the Canadian government, applications for temporary work visas have been equal to those for permanent landed status.¹⁵ For people who are able to enter Canada in this limited form, their stay is “accompanied by few benefits as workers or citizens, routine and deskilled work, job insecurity and lives filled with uncertainty and instability on many levels (spatial, financial, familial, and so on).”¹⁶ In a poem accompanying *A Great Country Welcomes You*, the artist Adel Alnaser articulates the difficult relationship persisting between discourses of race and class in the Canadian economic context.

Canadian Experience
‘Do you have Canadian experience?’

That was the question they asked me every time I applied for a job.

If you don’t give the newcomer a chance to work, how can they get such experience?

I eventually got a job in a lumber factory.

The experience I had was:
60 hours of work that needed

¹⁴ Stasiulis in Clement, 1997: 142.

¹⁵ Stasiulis in Clement, 1997: 154.

¹⁶ Stasiulis in Clement, 1997: 155.

20 hours of transportation.¹⁷

The first, and often only, experience many immigrants encounter upon arriving in Canada is one of economic segregation. Lacking 'proper' work experience or references, immigrating groups are kept on the fringe of employment, thereby increasing the flexibility and decreasing the costs of employment overall.

Changes to the Immigration Act and related policies are almost as frequent as changes in government. According to the political climate, narratives associated with immigrants have been used to explain concerns regarding taxation, criminality, employment and stagnant economic growth. In 1992 the Progressive Conservative Party instituted changes to immigration policy to reflect concerns about migration, crime, security and border control including fingerprinting, screening and 'indenturing' groups to remain in specific geographical regions for at least two years after their arrival.¹⁸ Throughout the 1990s, the Liberal Party contributed equally to this process as they slashed the number of refugees accepted and placed further restrictions on sponsorship.¹⁹ As subsequent governments have increased and decreased measures of this type, it is likely that immigrants will continue to be the site for the expression of conflicting narratives of belonging.

According to documents promoting Canada's multicultural identity, Canadians have, over time, come to accept and celebrate demographic diversity. Canada's multiculturalism policies are consistently celebrated as unprecedented. In July 1988, the Canadian Multiculturalism Act was passed, stating that it was "the policy of the

¹⁷ © Collection of the Canadian Museum of Civilization. Institutional Documents, *The Lands within Me*. Fonds Aïda Kaouk. 2001-2003, Book of Information accompanying the sketches of Adel Alnasser, *A Great Country Welcomes You*, B. I-306, No. 5/5.

¹⁸ Stasiulis in Clement, 1997.

¹⁹ Ibid.

Government of Canada to foster the recognition and appreciation of the diverse cultures of Canadian society and promote the reflection and the evolving expressions of those cultures.”²⁰ While much of the literature surrounding this identity admits to difficulties in the past, a sense of increasing acceptance is generally affirmed. However, even at the time of its passage, the Multiculturalism Act was described as “a solution to both demographic and economic ills.”²¹ Multiculturalism, as a national identity, could perhaps be viewed as an inevitable stage in processes accompanying a country of immigrants, but it is also a politically and economically expedient narrative. For Aihwa Ong much of the current analysis of citizenship in modern nation-states tends to focus upon its broader legal and political components and implications. “Seldom is attention focused on the everyday processes whereby people, especially immigrants, are made into subjects of a particular nation-state.”²² This is especially true for narratives associated with multiculturalism. A focus on official statements of a peaceful and open society causes the lived experience – which reveals the ambivalence of these discourses – to be overlooked.

Limits of the Debate: Contesting Canadian Multiculturalism

It should not be presumed that narratives of multiculturalism are uncritically accepted throughout Canadian society. Many writers have pointed to the contradictions between narratives and experiences of multiculturalism. Neil Bissoondath is one of the more vocal critics of this official version of national identity. A writer whose work is often found in some of Canada’s more popular publications, Bissoondath finds the

²⁰ Excerpt from Multiculturalism Act, R.S., 1985, c.25. 1988, c. 31, *assented to 21st July, 1988*. Accessed from the Heritage Canada website http://www.canadianheritage.gc.ca/progs/multi/inclusive_e.cfm.

²¹ Kruger et al. 2004: 76.

²² Ong, 1996: 737.

Canadian Multiculturalism Act “to be a document that, through the repetition of gentle and well-meaning generalizations, seeks to seduce.”²³ Bissoondath argues that narratives of multiculturalism, apart from having little connection to daily life in Canada, are in fact structures restricting perceptions of minority groups in this country. By recognizing that Canadian nationalism has consistently involved the articulation of differences between Canada and its neighbour to the South,²⁴ Bissoondath reveals that

it may be that one of the unstated desires behind the institution of multiculturalism was a wish to mark ourselves as different from the United States: if they have a melting pot, then we’ll have a mosaic. If they ask immigrants to shrug off their past and assume a new identity, we’ll ask immigrants to conserve their past and make it their only identity.²⁵

It is interesting to examine Bissoondath’s remarks in light of the debate surrounding the delay of *The Lands within Me*. While the exhibit hoped to reveal the multiple identities accompanying any experience of immigration, by attempting to add political and historical context to the works, museum officials desired to reposition the artists according to multicultural perceptions of cultural identity. That is, despite efforts in the exhibit to articulate the opposite, officials within the museum attempted to define the Arab identity of these artists as the one and only identity they could occupy.

In her recent examination of the relationship between perceptions of space and belonging through the lens of alternative cinema, art and literature in the Canadian context, Erin Manning²⁶ presents a survey of the implications of bounded perceptions of territory and identity. Simultaneously, she offers an optimistic vision of the possibilities associated with the critical narratives implicit in these alternative artistic expressions.

²³ Bissoondath, 1994: 38.

²⁴ In a 2000 article, Erin Manning examines a wildly popular and award-winning television commercial based solely upon this premise. See Manning (2000).

²⁵ Bissoondath, 1994: 230.

²⁶ Manning, 2003.

According to Manning, “we must attend to and engage with these cultural and political landscapes – be they artistic, cinematic, or literary – not as peripheral instances of de-territorialization, but as living examples of an engagement with the other who is not the same.”²⁷ In this examination however, Manning insists upon studying these artistic narratives outside of the context in which they are situated. That is, Manning prefers to examine the artistic expressions found within these alternative exhibits without referring the details surrounding their display.

The significance of the events related to *The Lands within Me* makes the type of analysis conducted by Manning impossible in this case. The controversy surrounding *The Lands within Me* requires that the timing as well as the physical location of the exhibit be examined at length. The fact that Manning neglected to mention this exhibit in her examination of critical artistic voices may be somewhat revealing in this regard. For, while alternative stories may indeed be found and their significance should not be overlooked, these voices continue to compete with – and at times may be silenced by – powerful public national narratives influenced by dichotomous representations of self and other, citizen and foreigner, inside and outside.

I have already described the ways in which the exhibit itself was bounded by its limited acknowledgement of the problems associated with immigration in Canada. Here, it is interesting to note the continuation of this trend in the responses of the artists and their supporters to the attempted delay of the exhibit. According to my interview with Farouk Kaspoules, the artists decided to present a united front in the face of the media attention following the announcement of the exhibit’s postponement. “The media is smart,” Kaspoules declared. “They knew how to ask us certain questions, looking for

²⁷ Manning, 2003: 23.

certain answers. So we made one artist – Jayce Salloum – the spokesperson, not allowing the media to play us off one another.” The decision to have only one artist speak was not an attempt by the artists to censor themselves. However, they “realized that this was a serious matter and we would do some things differently. After a hurricane, you don’t go on with life as usual, you change your behaviour.”²⁸

Upon first hearing of the postponement on Saturday, September 22, 2001, Salloum immediately wrote to officials within the institution. It appears that, being out of the country, Salloum had not been informed of the postponement directly but instead received a forwarded email from his fellow participant Rawi Hage. In an outraged response, Salloum questioned the logic of the decision. His comments are worth quoting at length.

If this is true I think it is utterly pathetic that you would do this at this time when this type of exhibit is needed more than ever! How could you even contemplate it when all of the racist backlashes are happening to Arab Canadians? You need to stand up to show your support for the Arab Canadian community and to do what you are supposed to do, show exemplary cultural works that will help to bridge the divide between Canadian cultures and help to bring about an understanding between the Arab-Canadians and other communities here. Help to educate the country, not run cowardly away. I am completely shocked that you would take this destructive position. Where is your will and determination to carry out the Museum’s mandate?²⁹

Salloum’s remarks are warranted. It is, according to the museum’s website, the task of this national institution to promote the country’s multicultural identity. The artists’ insistence that the museum live up to this responsibility was effective and well founded. However, although *The Lands within Me* was intended to be an exhibit about migration,

²⁸ Interview with Farouk Kaspoules, 18 March 2005.

²⁹ © Collection of the Canadian Museum of Civilization, Institutional Documents, *The Lands within Me*. Fonds Aïda Kaouk, 2001-2003, email correspondence from Jayce Salloum to Chantal Baril, Christiane Saumur and Susan Gervais, sent Saturday, September 22, 2001, “*The Lands within Me* . . . Arab-Canadian artists at the Museum of Civilization,” B. I-121, No. 1/5, f. 2002-I0034.

movement and belonging in its broadest sense, it was through the restrictive framework of the Arab-Canadian identity that the artists were forced to demand the exhibit be displayed as planned. It is interesting that, despite their limitations, narratives of multiculturalism also offer an effective platform from which to demand rights to representation in the Canadian context. Despite the fact that multiculturalism is clearly a problematic and contradictory form of national identity it appears that Canadians have not been able to escape its clutches as even those offering alternative narratives find it difficult to escape the terms upon which debates about multiculturalism are uttered.

Public Debates of Canadian Identity in the Museum: *The Lands within Me*

Racial categories of belonging continue to influence the manner in which Canadian identity is perceived. As Bissoondath has written, multiculturalism may in fact help to inscribe these singular racialized narratives upon minority groups. Another space in which I encountered these racial categories was in the early stages of planning *The Lands within Me*. In May 1998, curators and researchers associated with the exhibit asked Karen Graham and her staff to conduct a 'Front End Evaluation'. Front End Evaluations are conducted in order to determine "the prior knowledge, ideas and interests that visitors bring to an exhibit. When exhibit planners recognize these they can communicate more effectively, addressing any misconceptions directly and building on familiar points of reference to make their intended message relevant and accessible."³⁰

Front End Interviews were conducted on the spot, at the museum. Visitors aged 11 and older were approached and the responses of willing participants were recorded verbatim. In order to construct the questions asked in these surveys, the team working on

³⁰ © Collection of the Canadian Museum of Civilization, Institutional Documents. *The Lands within Me*. Fonds Aïda Kaouk. 2001-2003, Front End Evaluation Study for 'Letters Home' Exhibition, Prepared by Karen Graham May 1998, B. I-121, No. 1/5, f. 2002-I-0034.

The Lands within Me was asked to define the exhibit's overarching themes. According to curators and researchers, the basic messages included the recognition that a diversity of immigrant experiences and realities exist and, consequently, that immigrants carry many realities and have a sense of belonging to many places. This sense of multiple belonging subsequently broadens concepts of citizenship and cultural identity. Further the exhibit team hoped to reveal the many ways in which Arab identities are multiple and diverse. Stereotypes, whether they are negative or positive, fail to represent the reality of this diversity.³¹

Responses to questions based on these messages displayed ambivalence toward the 'multicultural' and 'welcoming' ideal Canadian image and the continuing existence of racialized stereotypes. One of the first questions forced participants to consider how they understood the term 'citizenship' in its broadest sense. "The most frequent responses to this question were 'belonging to a community' (65%) and 'living in a country' (22%)." In addition however, many of the respondents also suggested "that citizenship carried with it 'responsibility' and an obligation to 'follow the rules' (20%)."³² While citizenship has become one of the only legitimate forms of belonging in the current period, it is interesting to note the persistence of perceptions that frame citizenship as a 'privilege', not a 'right', and those who are given the privilege must act responsibly in this role. This is especially true for those who immigrated rather than acquired citizenship by birth. The first indication of anxiety about immigration can be discovered in responses to the question: "Could you tell me what you think the experience of leaving your home country to come and settle in another country might be

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

like?”” The most popular responses given to this question articulated “the difficulty of the experience with only two specifics mentioned including it being ‘difficult if there are language problems’ (20%) and the ‘difficulties that may be experienced by women and visible minorities’ (8%).”³³ Immigration, it seems, is most often associated with those that are visibly ‘other’. Despite suggestions that Canada’s multicultural identity encourages the acceptance of diversity, responses to the Front End Survey betray the fact that those who are different, particularly those who are visibly and linguistically different, will encounter problems upon arrival.

Following, respondents were asked about the ideas they held about Arab culture in Canada. Their answers are revealing. For the most part, respondents “had difficulty answering this question with 35% stating that they didn’t know what Arab culture meant.” Others focused on “the differences between Arabs and themselves mentioning religion (29%), restaurants and food (18%) and the fact that ‘they don’t integrate well’ (18%).”³⁴ Again, distinctions, as opposed to unity are the images that accompany questions about immigrants, particularly in relation to Arab immigrants.

In assessing the interview responses, the Front End Evaluation team suggested that the visitors and the curator were working with very different assumptions when using terms such as citizenship’, ‘immigration’ and ‘Arab identity’. In their conclusion, the evaluation team suggested that “the term ‘citizenship’ was defined,” by respondents “in a very narrow sense as 65% felt it meant simply ‘belonging to a community’. 10% believed that it meant ‘being born in Canada’. It was a static term.”³⁵ Far from viewing citizenship and belonging in ‘diasporic’ or fluid terms, most respondents held rigid views

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

of this concept. Critiques of positivist analysis have highlighted the limitations of survey research, particularly those conducted on the spot in the style of these Front End Interviews. The responses provided are always influenced by the manner, tone and expectations surrounding the questions asked. It is, perhaps, with caution, therefore, that one should examine the fact that “diversity in terms of immigrants and immigration was seen as bad”³⁶ by many of the respondents. However, when questioned about Arabs in Canada, interviewees did not hesitate to articulate their assumptions, fears and anxieties. “Stereotypes of Arabs in Canada were mentioned with religion, food, crafts and dress being referred to as the images which most often came to mind. Arabs were seen as separate and apart from mainstream ‘Canadian’ culture.”³⁷

From the outset, the curatorial team encountered a number of obstacles and challenges in representing the perceptions of identity and belonging they wished to portray in *The Lands within Me*. However, it is interesting to note that in the early stages of planning, researchers in the museum encountered the ambivalence about Canadian multiculturalism through stereotypical responses given regarding immigrant communities. That the exhibit team continued to work within the framework of their own assumptions regarding the nature of citizenship is emblematic of the generally optimistic tone regarding migratory experiences expressed throughout *The Lands within Me*. I suggested in the first chapter that the curator believed the responses of the public to the exhibit revealed their superior understanding of its themes. While I have responded with caution to this assertion, it is revealing to once again examine some of the public comments left at the exhibit.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

Of the 239,346 people who visited *The Lands within Me* over its 18-month run, many filled out comment cards that have been saved in the archival record of the exhibit. These remarks continue to reflect and express the ambivalence, anxieties, fears and hopes about Canadian identity. The curator is correct in recognizing the significant amount of positive and optimistic feedback given to the exhibit. Examples of this response, which made up the majority of visitor comments include: “my most sincere appreciation for the artists of this exhibit. And for Canada for having hosted this exhibit despite the hypocrisy of current times which only result in blind hatred.” According to another visitor, in *The Lands within Me*, “a story is told that any immigrant can relate to.” Another viewer asked “what is the world but a wonderful celebration of cultures?”³⁸

Others, however, took issue with the political content of some of the pieces included, particularly the video installation contributed by Jayce Salloum. According to one angry visitor, the video “is one-sided, propaganda in its content and unartistic in its format, but above all, what does it have to do with an exhibition of this sort?” Another individual acknowledged that “most of the exhibits and artists reach us with their roots and their connection to Canada. Unfortunately the one piece that has been fingered as unequal to the others – remains unacceptable to me on several counts.” Finally, another comment suggested that “coming from the Middle East I was delighted to see such beauty created by artists. However, the video . . . killed my enthusiasm. The video is pure propaganda . . . not belong[ing] to a human society what a disappointment.”³⁹

³⁸ © Collection of the Canadian Museum of Civilization, Institutional Documents. *The Lands within Me*. Fonds Aïda Kaouk, 2001-2003, Commentaires de visiteurs: *The Lands within Me* (2001, 17p). B. I – 0034, No 3/5, f. 2002-I-0034.

³⁹ Ibid.

Thus, it appears that many of the comments made regarding this exhibit expressed delight regarding the optimism of the exhibit and its validation of the diversity inherent within the Canadian context. Problems arose however, with those pieces attempting to examine the political realities of the current period. Overall, what remains absent from these comments is recognition of the difficult, racist, exclusive and challenging experiences felt by immigrants in Canada. Criticisms of the exhibit rest in its vaguely political content, not in the overly optimistic view it presents of immigration in the Canadian context.

During this controversy, the *only* point at which the ambivalent experiences of Canadian multiculturalism were acknowledged was, ironically, in the moment the museum attempted to postpone the exhibit. The actions of the museum were not entirely unprecedented or unexpected. Instead they were part and parcel of larger processes accompanying Canadian multiculturalism throughout its history. What the museum's hesitation contributed in this case was the capacity to express this paradox aloud, to recognize that multiculturalism has not implied universal unity and acceptance but instead has masked the continuation of discourses which define and malign particular groups according to categories of race and class. Far from a neutral collection of various cultures, identities and experiences, the construction of the nation has involved the clear and bounded articulation of belonging, of insider and outsider, of citizen and foreigner. The economic and political segregation of groups according to limited perceptions of race and culture contradict the story of 'multiculturalism,' thereby revealing the disconnections found between the narratives told about and the manner in which we experience daily life.

Conclusion

Canadian multiculturalism, far from a unified articulation of the acceptance of diversity, has a contradictory and paradoxical history in the nation. Ong, Stasiulis, Kruger and Bissoondath have provided searing critiques of perceptions of citizenship that overlook the accompanying categories of class and race. Yet, multiculturalism, in the end, saved the exhibit. This, perhaps, is the central paradox of *The Lands within Me*. Because of this history and due to the moment in time in which *The Lands within Me* was viewed, I have examined the optimism presented by Manning and the Kaouk with caution, preferring instead to point to the gaps between perceptions of belonging and the experiences of Canadian identity.

By focusing my analysis in this manner, I do not intend to dismiss those alternative narratives which are expressed. Returning to Ong's Foucauldian perception of citizenship, I must acknowledge that the fact the exhibit was displayed and that it attempted to push the limits of perceptions of immigration, citizenship and belonging reveal that power is not simply articulated through processes of the state upon the population but is found at all levels, weaving through various groups within the nation. The link between power and knowledge and the fluidity of power are evident in the debates surrounding multiculturalism. It is clear that this identity has not gone uncontested. The intentions behind and effectiveness of multiculturalism are both questioned and critiqued in the Canadian context. Through this process of questioning, the space in which alternative stories are expressed is opened further as the disconnect persisting between the narrative and the encounter can be more clearly deciphered. For Gary C. Shaw, "our challenge now is to recognize these 'losses of coherence' as fields of

opportunity, not for the reconstituting of centrist cohesion, but for the creating and the ‘seeing’ of new political relationships, forms, and strategies.”⁴⁰ While the task of articulating new modes of being in the nation is indeed important, the experiences of *The Lands within Me* reveal that these attempts must be accompanied by a clear acknowledgement of the paradoxical experience of Canadian multiculturalism.

⁴⁰ Shaw in Magnussen and Shaw, 2002: 234.

From my earliest glimpses of *The Lands within Me*, the gouache on paper contribution by Nicolas Zeitouni, *Le Regard (The Look)*¹ has offered one of the most compelling and haunting pieces associated with this exhibit. Borrowing images from folk art originating in northern Egypt, Zeitouni imagines himself as a storyteller, narrating his memories of other places and times. For me, the wide eyes in this piece have managed to portray two different, but equally vital experiences of immigration, particularly following 9.11. The anxious nature of this wide-eyed stare is evocative of the difficulties and uncertainties associated with leaving one's home and venturing out into the unknown. In addition, the stare or 'the look' from those in the country of destination is an equally common experience for immigrants. Following 9.11, for people of Arab origin, that stare became all the more frequent as racialized discourses of the day wondered at the connections between individuals who had attacked the World Trade Center and those bearing similar external characteristics.

The look, therefore, is both vulnerable and powerful. It manages, in one face, to portray the uncertain and paradoxical nature of migrating to a multicultural nation while also articulating those same stereotypes and stares that make this process so complex and challenging.

¹ Zeitouni, Nicolas. *Le Regard (The Look)*, 1995. Collection of the Artist. Gouache on paper, 45 x 55.5 cm. Retrieved from the © Canadian Museum of Civilization website. www.civilization.ca/cultur/cespays/pay2_25e.html in March 2005.

CHAPTER 5: NARRATIVES OF 9.11

The experience of colonialism is the problem of living in the 'midst of the incomprehensible'.¹

Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*

Introduction

The final story to be told about *The Lands within Me* analyzes the significance of the moment in time in which the exhibit came into being. Theorists far more experienced than myself have found the task of explaining the origins and repercussions of that sunny morning in September of 2001 to present a difficult challenge. In his reflexive introduction to a collection of essays about the events of 9.11, the New York-based critical theorist, Craig Calhoun alludes to the ambivalence and hesitation that accompanies any attempt to interpret the attacks upon the World Trade Centre. Due to the overwhelming scale of the event as two of the world's most recognizable sites crumbled in the one of the world's largest cities, any attempt to summarize an event of such mammoth proportions will inevitably feel incomplete. "To be across the street from the cinematic horror was to be an eyewitness, perhaps, but not to grasp the whole picture," writes Calhoun. "My memories are still startlingly clear, but they are fragments. They do not go to the center of the events of September 11, though they weave my connection to them. Standing alone they do not give the events meaning."²

Very little consensus has arisen from the diversity of texts produced in the last three years about the collapse of America's central images of capitalist power. Perhaps the absence of consensus can be welcomed. To continue telling stories accompanying this day, without ever creating the final version or the last word, fits well with current

¹ Bhabha, 1994: 213.

² Calhoun et al, 2002: 1.

trends in postmodern theory and the analysis underway here. With this in mind, some of the stories told about 9.11 will now be reviewed. Following, I will discuss the manner in which these stories add another layer to the events surrounding *The Lands within Me*, further altering the manner in which they are viewed.

The Naming of 9.11

What theorists analyzing 9.11 have been able to agree upon has been its undeniable significance. The French theorist, Jean Baudrillard, affirmed the unprecedented magnitude of the World Trade Center attacks in an article written in the days immediately following the attacks. Here, Baudrillard declares “events are back with such an ardor that we were confronted with the World Trade Center attacks, by the absolute event, the ‘mother event,’ the pure event that concentrates in itself all the events that never took place.”³ Some theorists, such as James Der Derian go so far as to suggest that “under such forced circumstances of being beyond experience, outside of history, and between wars, 9.11 does not easily yield to philosophical, political, or social inquiry.”⁴

If agreement may be found in declaring the unprecedented nature of September 11, 2001, how should this critical event be described? In “Calling 911,” Simon Dalby reveals that how 9.11 was named had important implications for how groups, individuals and nations responded to the attacks. According to Dalby, immediately following the towers’ descent, war was the term used to describe 9.11. Despite the assurance with which this name was used, the many signifiers normally accompanying a war were absent in this case. “The category came quickly to many lips, but no other state declared war,

³ Baudrillard, 2002: 403.

⁴ Der Derian in Calhoun et al, 2002: 178.

nothing else warlike happened. A strangely ominous silence filled the discursive space where political declarations were expected.”⁵ It is significant to note that while no other state could respond to the call to war following the offensive attack, certain countries around the world and particular groups, identities and individuals within the nations of the West felt the implications of this declaration far more than others. While this war could not (only) occur in the typical manner, between states, through the demonstration or threat of violence, this conflict continues to be expressed in very real ways around the world.

The decision to narrate 9.11 in the framework of war allowed states – even those only indirectly affected by the attacks – to reinstate and re-entrench notions of identity, belonging and sovereignty within the framework of specific perceptions of space and territory. First, relying upon images of war allowed Western nations, in particular the United States, to consolidate support behind the actions that followed. Veena Das proves helpful once again in understanding the process whereby ‘critical events’ such as 9.11 come to be incorporated into discourses of the nation. Das suggests that the suffering of the victims of the Bhopal tragedy in India came to be used by institutions of the state to demand a particular sort of response to this critical event and, in effect, they appropriated the very real pain experienced by the victims. For Das, “suffering here comes to serve as a trope to legitimize the producers of the discourse, and becomes separated from the pain of the victims.”⁶

In discovering the ways in which individual and group suffering is incorporated into discourses of the state, Das suggests that we need to understand theodicy – an

⁵ Dalby, 2003: 61.

⁶ Das, 1995: 2.

argument defending the innate goodness of God, despite the existence of evil – not simply in the religious sense. “Theories of theodicy are located not only in the domain of religions but also in other domains, such as those of bureaucracy, law and medicine.” I would extend this argument to suggest that we also need to understand how particular tropes of right and wrong, good and evil, are incorporated by state institutions into narratives of large scale suffering of the nation. More recently, Das has offered a similar analysis of the events of 9.11. In this insightful critique she laments the careless manner in which the tragedies faced by individuals and groups are appropriated in national discourses “as if nations and individuals were painlessly substitutable.”⁷ It was precisely this strategy which the United States government found most effective following the attacks upon the World Trade Center. In drawing direct connections between the suffering of the victims and the pain of the nation, government officials were able to consolidate unquestioned support for their domestic and foreign policy and military responses to the attacks.

The second way in which invocations of ‘war’ continue to affect the contemporary period has particular relevance to the project at hand. One of the more familiar signs of war that followed 9.11 was the restriction of political and civil rights in order to contain this new perceived threat. Throughout the last century, wartime has provided a space in which measures normally abhorred by democratic populations could be implemented and justified. The United States government, in particular, instituted changes in its civil and political institutions following the attacks. The American

⁷ Das, 2002: 105.

organization, *Lawyers for Human Rights* examined these shifts in American polity and explained

in the days and weeks that followed, a wide range of new security measures were put in place in public and private venues throughout the country. Many of these changes were grounded in common sense. But others taken by the government violated traditional notions of liberty with no clear connection to increased safety.⁸

The complex relationship existing between democratic and civil liberties in the United States and the angry cry to ‘protect American soil’ has been a concern expressed by many human rights groups in numerous reports and protests since the attacks.⁹ That the measures enacted to restrict movement and privacy have affected individuals and groups originating from the Middle East, more than any other group, is of fundamental importance here. “As the search began for accomplices in the attacks, the Department of Justice swept up more than 1,000 immigrants from Middle Eastern and other Islamic countries, many of whom were subsequently held for months without formal charge or trial.”¹⁰ Many months later, over 600 remained in U.S. prisons. Among other breaches of their civil liberties, these individuals continued to be “denied counsel and even visiting rights with their families. In numerous cases, their crime seems to be no more than infractions of immigration laws like overstaying their visas.”¹¹ These violations serve to draw connections between immigrants from the Middle East and an imminent threat which must be contained at any cost. The significance of this trend cannot be overlooked in this examination of the attempted delay of *The Lands within Me*.

⁸ Walsh, 2003: xi.

⁹ Amnesty International, in particular, has provided a lengthy and coherent examination of the more than 1200 arrests made in sweeps following September 11, 2001. See the March 2002 Amnesty International Report entitled *United States of America: Amnesty International's Concerns Regarding Post September 11 Detentions in the USA* at www.amnesty.org.

¹⁰ Walsh, 2003: xi.

¹¹ Benhabib in Calhoun et al, 2002: 247-248.

Changes in Canada Since 9.11: A Nation in Bed with an Elephant

In order to establish the importance of 9.11 for *The Lands within Me* it is necessary to understand the impact of the World Trade Center attacks in the Canadian context. Although the attacks occurred on American soil, and the flights originated within the United States, it was not only here that changes in security policy were implemented. In Canada as well, measures restricting the free movement of groups and individuals were enacted. In order to understand the impetus behind these shifts in policy, it is necessary to first discuss the relationship between the world's only superpower and its quiet neighbour to the north. This complex connection is one that is endlessly debated in Canada. A nation of thirty million people with little historical presence and limited international clout can hardly avoid feelings of insecurity and insignificance in the shadow of a neighbour such as the United States.

Despite the distinctions between the positions of these two countries in the global context, the histories of Canada and the United States display many similarities. Both of these former settler-colonies are nations that have been constructed out of varying relations of power between immigrants and indigenous peoples. The implications of these multiple sets of origins for the articulation of a national identity have produced a variety of challenges for governments of both nations. Beyond their similar histories, the economies of these two nations inevitably intertwine, producing many implications for the Canadian population. In his analysis of the impact of September 11 on the global economy, Barry Eichengreen reveals Canada's subordinate and dependent position in this equation.

A survey of 250 Canadian CEOs, taken a little more than a month after the terrorist attacks . . . yielded an overwhelming consensus that the two neighbours

urgently needed to agree on a common set of immigration rules in order to protect Canadian access to the U.S. market. . . . They have a strong incentive to make us see the relevant security zone as North America and not simply the United States.¹²

Thus, as Canada is invariably linked to the United States both in the physical connection of their borders and through the global division of those who benefit from and those who pay the costs of globalization, its response to 9.11 clearly articulated the mutual concern for the continuing economic and political dominance of America.

While, at the time, Prime Minister Jean Chrétien was criticized for his delay in declaring Canada's unequivocal support for the United States in this new time of war, the creation of a department devoted to national security and the quick introduction and approval of bills making many changes in Canadian immigration and security policies clearly revealed Canada's support for the war on terror. One example of this support is seen in the 'war measures' act created following 9.11, known as Bill C-36, The Anti-Terrorism Act. According to Kruger et al, this act, introduced in October 2001 includes a variety of actions that may be taken to prevent terrorism. It is interesting to note that the Anti-Terrorism Act was introduced in the same week the USA Patriot Act was approved and includes many similar measures to those found in the American legislation.

It includes measures to prosecute, convict, and punish terrorists by 'defining and designating terrorist groups and activities, tougher sentences for terrorism offences, making it a crime to knowingly collect or give funds in order to carry out terrorism, making it easier to use electronic surveillance against terrorist groups, and allowing the arrest and detention of suspected terrorists to prevent terrorist acts and save lives'.¹³

Interestingly however, although the Bill passed rapidly through Parliament following the attacks, none of its measure have ever been invoked. Instead, Canadian authorities have

¹² Eichengreen in Calhoun et al, 2002: 124.

¹³ Kruger et al, 2004: 77-78.

relied upon a form of coercion predating 2001. In order to gain access to those individuals for whom insufficient evidence has been gathered, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) and the Canadian Security and Intelligence Services (CSIS) have used national 'security certificates'. According to CSIS documents published on their website in November of 2004, "a security certificate is one way for the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) to remove from this country a person who poses a security threat to Canada or Canadians. A certificate is only issued when there is sensitive information that needs to be protected for reasons of national security or the safety of any person."¹⁴

Kruger et al suggest that the increasing use of security certificates following 9.11 has been part and parcel of changes made to the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act in 2002. "With a notable emphasis on security measures directed at foreign nationals, this legislation expedites the removal of people who are deemed to be security threats, imposes harsher penalties for migrant smuggling, and limits access to the Canadian refugee determination process."¹⁵ For Kruger et al, the various shifts in security and immigration policy after the attacks of 9.11 have served to reconstruct immigrant populations in terms of 'preferred' and 'nonpreferred' groups, harkening back to terms and definitions used prior to changes to the Immigration Act of 1962. The points system established in 1967 helped to shift perceptions of desirability of immigrants away from stereotypes of groups towards individual criteria. However, various measures taken in recent years have reversed this trend.

¹⁴ Retrieved from the Canadian Security and Intelligence Agency website.
http://www.csis-scrs.gc.ca/eng/backgrnd/back14_e.html

¹⁵ Kruger et al, 2004: 77.

By linking the threat of terrorism to unimpeded access by immigrating groups to the nations of the West, new security and immigration policies have effectively linked 'foreign nationals' and terrorists. Under the new legislative categories, "the foreign national . . . becomes an object of security to be tracked, assessed and monitored."¹⁶ Recent news stories have revealed that individuals of Arab origin have been on the receiving end of these methods of control more than any other group. This is a horrifying trend, affecting many Canadian citizens and landed immigrants who have found themselves the object of suspicion by CSIS officials and the RCMP. For some individuals, this suspicion has even led to their arrest, detainment and, on occasion, deportment to countries where they have faced persecution. "Other direct problems for individuals of Muslim and Arab descent included surveillance of charitable donations, restrictions on travel to or from the United States, and increased surveillance on the part of Canadian law enforcement and intelligence officials."¹⁷

The increasing desire to limit access to this nation inevitably has run up against Canada's reliance upon a 'multicultural' identity. For both the United States and Canada, the need to balance the apparent threat created by unlimited access of the 'foreign other' to the national territory against the requirements of inexpensive and flexible labour within a global economy presents many challenges. These contradictions are revealed in the title of a recent security and immigration report compiled by the Privy Council, entitled *Securing an Open Society: Canada's National Security Policy*. In the Prime Ministerial address opening this report, the inconsistencies between these competing narratives are

¹⁶ Kruger et al, 2004: 80.

¹⁷ Kruger et al, 2004: 85.

reproduced. Prime Minister Paul Martin makes clear that while Canada has encountered security concerns in the past, it has done so

in a way that has strengthened the open nature of our country – open to immigrants from around the world and respectful of the differences among us. Our prosperity is directly linked to this openness and to our ability to flourish in an increasingly interdependent world. The horrific events of September 11, 2001, demonstrated how individuals could exploit such openness to commit acts of terrorism that attempt to undermine the core values of democratic societies.¹⁸

The continuing threat posed by ‘foreigners’ both inside and outside modern democratic nations is evident in this text as the need to protect the country from those individuals and groups who take advantage of Canada’s benevolent immigration policies exists simultaneously with the promotion of desired levels of prosperity within the nation. While Canada would like to remain an open and multicultural nation, in recent years it has been equally necessary to contain the apparent threat posed by these same differences.

Paradoxical Discourses: Parliamentary and Media Responses to 9/11

It is interesting to examine the debates occurring in the House of Commons on the same day the Prime Minister declared that *The Lands within Me* ought to be opened as planned. These parliamentary statements continue to express the ongoing competition occurring between narratives expressing concern for capitalist markets, anxiety about the infiltration of the ‘foreign other’ and the overarching need to promote diversity within the borders of the nation following 9.11.

On September 26, 2001 Mr. John Duncan, a member of the now defunct far-right political party, the Canadian Alliance, challenged the ruling Liberal party to respond to the attacks of September 11 by acknowledging the importance of continuing economic

¹⁸ Privy Council of Canada, April 2004: iii.

productivity. For Duncan, “disrupting international trade in North America would be victory for terrorism. Last week the U.S. trade representative wrote an article entitled ‘Countering Terrorism With Trade’ in which he calls on U.S. leadership to promote international economic and trading systems.”¹⁹ By calling on the Prime Minister to ensure that trade and prosperity would not be interrupted by the new threat offered by increased international terrorism, this Member of Parliament alluded to the contradictory narratives accompanying the call to war post-9.11.

Running alongside fears of a wavering economy were valiant calls for Canadians never to forget the fact that they belong to a peaceful, welcoming, multicultural nation. Liberal Party representative Mr. Gurbax Malhi opened the parliamentary session with renewed calls for tolerance among the Canadian people. The concepts of identity and citizenship implicit within his remarks are fascinating and worth citing at some length.

Mr. Speaker, a headline in the *Globe and Mail* on Friday said ‘Tide of hate crimes rising in Canada’. Some people in their anger lash out against those who because of their dress, culture or religion remind them of the terrorists who did the evil act which must be condemned and punished in no uncertain terms. Our government is saddened by the fact that the terrorist attacks provoked actions against Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus in Canada. Every Canadian must affirm the values of multiculturalism and tolerance that are so much a part of Canada and make Canada respected throughout the world.²⁰

Attacks upon groups and individuals whose appearance resembled the ‘evil-doers’ were indeed disturbing, although predictable. The Canadian government, as a promoter of multiculturalism would of course find these patterns saddening and disturbing. However, it is through this national self-image that Members of Parliament are also able to declare that all Canadians must reaffirm their commitment to the narratives of multiculturalism.

¹⁹ © Collection of the Canadian Museum of Civilization, Institutional Documents. *The Lands within Me*. Fonds Aïda Kaouks, 2001-2003, House of Commons Debates, 37, (86), 1st Session, 37th Parliament, Wednesday, September 26, 2001: 5589, B. I – 121, No. 1/5, f. 2002- i-0034.

²⁰ Ibid. House of Commons Debates, September 26, 2001: 5587.

Subsequently, the role that racialized discourses prevalent in the Canadian context may have played in these violent expressions of anxiety and fear is brushed aside.

Among these reminders of the importance of trade and the need to be mindful of multicultural tolerance, there were also examples of discourses of the dangers of unfettered immigration. Another member of the Canadian Alliance, Mr. Rob Anders from Calgary insisted that the Liberal party confront perceptions that Canadian borders were porous and unprotected. “Mr. Speaker, last weekend I was talking to some of our border guards south of Montreal. I asked them what they needed to intercept incoming terrorists, criminals and drug smugglers.” In his examination of Canada’s borders, Anders discovered that, in the new era of a war on terror, Canadian border security guards felt ill equipped to deal with the onslaught of these new threats. In response to questions regarding the effectiveness of immigration policy to prevent the movement of potential terrorists Prime Minister Jean Chrétien revealed, in his characteristically confusing fashion, that he and the U.S. President were discussing ways in which their immigration policies could be brought in line.

On the question of people crossing the border who cause problems, as I said to the President, half of the people who come to Canada and are rejected as refugees come from the United States. We probably do the same to them. Of course we have to work together with them because if they did not come from the United States to us we would not have to reject them and if they did not go from Canada to them they would not have to reject them.²¹

The Prime Minister’s assurance that Canadian and American immigration policies would become further aligned reveals that the importance of multiculturalism was far from the only concern being expressed following 9.11. While none of the above Parliamentary statements clearly articulate the contradictions between Canada’s national identity and its

²¹ Ibid, House of Commons Debates, September 26, 2001: 5590.

lived experience, the many competing narratives determining perceptions of insider and outsider are implicitly expressed throughout.

The paradoxical nature of these narratives is also revealed in a brief examination of journalistic accounts of the post-9.11 period, particularly in regards to the attempted delay of *The Lands within Me*. Throughout the relatively short period of time in which the debate around the exhibit's opening occurred, the media presented highly contradictory positions. Among fearful articles concerned with the implications of the terrorist attacks, journalists and editorialists were deeply critical of the museum's actions. In a single edition, national newspapers would present essentialist articles attempting to "understand Islam," while responding with shock to the suggestion that the exhibit might be delayed. Often these divergent opinions were expressed within the space of a single article.

In one particularly confusing piece in the *Toronto Star*, an update on the exhibition was placed at the end of a piece discussing whether or not Canadian Defense Forces would shoot down passenger planes in the future if necessary.²² The *Montreal Gazette* examined the reinstatement of the exhibit at the end of an article entitled, "Afghans Face Massive Privation: A Roundup of the Events, Big and Small that Made News this Week."²³ In the *Vancouver Province*, staff writers suggested that the period following 9.11 offered "an opportunity to *increase* the dialogue between Canadian citizens – not squelch it. It's a decidedly uncivilized decision, and – a sadly racist one as well."²⁴ Declaring the museum's actions to be racist was somewhat confusing since this

²² Lawton, 2001: A10.

²³ "Afghans face massive privation: a roundup of the events, big and small that made news this week." *The Gazette*, Montreal. 29 September 2001: B2.

²⁴ "Fraud-resistant ID for Immigrants in the Cards." *Vancouver Province*. September 28, 2001: Page A28.

analysis was found in an article describing new fraud-resistant measures being applied to identity cards for new immigrants. The vast majority of media coverage during the attempted delay of the exhibit criticized the museum's decision and suggested that it unfairly linked the artists with the terrorist attacks. For this reason, the popular media demanded that the exhibit should go ahead as planned. Ironically however, many of the articles that took this stance positioned their support for the artists and the exhibit alongside fears of immigration, the new terrorist threat, and concerns about Arab and Islamic culture more generally. The museum, therefore, was not alone in the construction of these problematic relationships.

Museums and 9.11: Representing Paradoxes

Thus, it was within a context of fear, uncertainty, racism, concerns of economic decline and shifting perceptions of what is implied by civil liberties in the west that *The Lands within Me* opened. The varying degrees to which state judicial departments, critical theorists, journalists, and politicians responded to 9.11 have been summarized. However, one may wonder how other museums acted following these same events. Interestingly, many museums in Canada and the United States had been planning exhibits involving the representation of Arab, Middle Eastern or Muslim identities prior to the events of September 11. The responses of these museums across North America were nearly as diverse as the academic analyses of 9.11.

In Canada, two large museums besides the Museum of Civilization had planned exhibits with connections to the Arab world. The Museum of Anthropology (MOA) at the University of British Columbia had been planning an exhibition aimed at displaying "the aesthetics, spirituality, and principles of education related to the world of Islam

through the art of calligraphy”²⁵ entitled *The Spirit of Islam: Experiencing Islam through Calligraphy*.²⁶ This exhibit, interestingly, was set to open on precisely the same day as *The Lands within Me*. A week following the New York and Washington attacks, on September 18, MOA released a statement expressing their belief that

given recent tragic events in the United States, we feel strongly that now more than ever, exhibitions such as *The Spirit of Islam* are needed both to educate and break down barriers of misunderstanding between peoples around the world. The Museum of Anthropology and its Muslim community partners therefore wish to affirm their commitment to the project, and to opening the exhibition October 20 as planned.²⁷

While I was already aware that this statement had been released more than a week before the Museum of Civilization attempted to delay *The Lands within Me*, I came across it again in the archives of the CMC in an email distributed between staff connected to *The Lands within Me*. Assistant curator Constance Nebel forwarded the press release from MOA to Carmelle Begin (Curator-in-Charge of Cultural Studies), Monique Carnell, Christiane Saumur (two project managers assisting with *The Lands within Me*) and Dr. Aïda Kaouk. As an introduction to the press release, Nebel suggested that “this information” was “very interesting and certainly important” and wondered if it should be passed on to managers within the museum.²⁸ Her desire for MOA’s decision to be widely known within the museum implies that there was some apprehension of the actions soon to follow.

²⁵ © Collection of the Canadian Museum of Civilization, Institutional Documents, *The Lands within Me*. Fonds Aïda Kaouk, 2001-2003, email correspondence from Constance Nebel to Carmelle Begin, cc. Monique Carnell, Christiane Saumur, Aïda Kaouk, sent Tuesday, September 18, 2001, “MOA affirms opening of ‘Spirit of Islam’ exhibit”, B. I-121, No. 1/5, f. 2002-I-0034.

²⁶ In the interest of full disclosure, it is perhaps pertinent to mention that the director of MOA, at the time, was Dr. Ruth B. Phillips who later acted as one of my supervisors for this project.

²⁷ © Collection of the Canadian Museum of Civilization, Institutional Documents, *The Lands within Me*. Fonds Aïda Kaouk, 2001-2003, email correspondence from Constance Nebel to Carmelle Begin, cc. Monique Carnell, Christiane Saumur, Aïda Kaouk, sent Tuesday, September 18, 2001, “MOA affirms opening of ‘Spirit of Islam’ exhibit”, B. I-121, No. 1/5, f. 2002-I-0034.

²⁸ Ibid.

The Question and Answer document analyzed in Chapter 2 acknowledged that the comparison between MOA and the CMC would likely provide a point of critique from the media. Executives within the museum were therefore prompted with responses to the question: “the UBC Museum of Anthropology is going ahead with its exhibition, *The Spirit of Islam*. They say it is needed to educate and break down barriers of misunderstanding between peoples around the world. Do you not think your exhibition would achieve the same objectives?”²⁹ In response, the “mandate and scope” between the two institutions were deemed to “vary a great deal. An exhibition of calligraphy has ethnological and cultural contents that are positioned through a wide historical approach. Contemporary works of art are contemporary and actual by nature, and are very different when presented in a changing environment.”³⁰ This statement further reveals anxiety about the nature of the exhibit within the CMC. It appears that because the MOA exhibit included ethnological and cultural objects as opposed to works of contemporary art, in the eyes of the CMC, it was easier for MOA to continue with the exhibit as planned. The uncertain and provocative nature of contemporary art was, for the CMC, part and parcel of what made the exhibit so threatening following 9.11.

The decision by MOA could not have been more distinct from the actions of the CMC. Instead of acting with trepidation and uncertainty after September 11, the Museum of Anthropology preemptively responded to inquiries regarding the display of *The Spirit of Islam*. The press release simultaneously recognized the significance of the 9.11 and insisted on the increased relevance and importance of exhibits fostering debate

²⁹ © Collection of the Canadian Museum of Civilization, Institutional Documents, *The Lands within Me*. Fonds Aïda Kaouk, 2001-2003, *The Lands within Me*: Q & As, Canadian Museum of Civilization, B. I-121, No. 1/5, f. 2002-I-0034.

³⁰ Ibid.

and understanding in this environment. Further, while the CMC attempted to delay the exhibit without first referring to the views and opinions held by the curator or the contributing artists, organizers of the MOA exhibit sat down with community partners in order to discuss the best course of action. The decision they came to, seated together, was to go ahead with the exhibit as planned.

During this same period, Montreal's Museum of Contemporary Art was preparing to host a display of the award-winning work of Iranian born artist Shirin Neshat. The Museum of Contemporary Art also showed no hesitation in continuing with the production as planned. In a Media Coverage Synopsis of the press from the week September 29 to October 5, 2001, prepared by the Media Relations and Public Affairs department within the CMC, the negative comparison that was drawn between these two museums, located within hours of one another in the same province, was acknowledged. "The CMC," according to Media Relations writers, "was unfavourably compared to the Musée d'art contemporain in Montreal in a *Globe and Mail* article." The article is then quoted at some length.

Sometimes an exhibition just happens at the perfect moment. Such is the case with the show of monumental video works by Iranian-American artist Shirin Neshat . . . In contrast to the bungling timidity of the Museum of Civilization in Hull, Que. – which postponed, then waffled, then finally recommitted to its upcoming exhibition of work by Arab-Canadian artists after the events of Sept. 11 – the Montreal museum opened the exhibition of Neshat's work with proud confidence in its responsibility to foster public debate.³¹

Perhaps even more interesting in the case of Ms. Neshat was the fact that a show of her work was also set to open in New York City before the end of September. While this

³¹ © Collection of the Canadian Museum of Civilization, Institutional Documents, *The Lands within Me*. Fonds Aïda Kaouk, 2001-2003, Media Coverage Synopsis Septebmer 29 to October 5, 2001: *The Lands within Me: Expressions by Canadians of Arab Origin*, prepared by Media Relations, Public Affairs, B. I-120, No. 1, f. 2002-i0031.

exhibit appears to have occurred in a private (and not a public) gallery there were “no cancellations there either.”³²

The showing of Neshat’s work was not the only display relating to Arab identities set to open in New York at the time. In fact, the Museum of the City of New York encountered similar difficulties to those experienced at the Museum of Civilization. Prior to the attacks upon the World Trade Center, curators had been planning to open an exhibit highlighting the experience of Arabs in New York, *A Community of Many Worlds: American Arabs in New York*. Immediately following the attacks, the area of the city in which the museum was located became inaccessible. Subsequently, many museums closed their doors and shifted their exhibition plans in the aftermath of the attacks. According to museologist and New Yorker Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, “9.11 now provided an inexorable – and uncontrollable – context for everything they and other museums in the city had been planning.”³³ Following the re-opening of the museum, however, the Museum of the City of New York decided to further delay the opening of *A Community of Many Worlds*. In all, the exhibit’s opening was postponed for six months (the same amount of time which the Museum of Civilization had requested to re-evaluate and add context to *The Lands within Me*).³⁴

Eventually the display opened on 2 March 2002, running until 11 September 2002. This perhaps explains the impetus behind the Arab New Yorkers who sent in additional photos, after the exhibit opened, including many highlighting the mourning

³² Gessell, 19 October 2001: B3.

³³ Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 2003: 24.

³⁴ I attempted to contact staff at the Museum of the City of New York to find out if there had been any protest to the delay of *A Community of Many Worlds* but never received a response from staff at the museum. Discussions with Dr. Inglis, however, suggested that little of the furor expressed about the CMC was felt by the Museum of the City of New York.

and remembrance that had occurred within the Arab community post-9.11. These photos were included in an online display accompanying the physical exhibit at the museum.³⁵ While indeed, a striking comparison can be drawn between *The Lands within Me* and *A Community of Many Worlds*, it is vital to remember that because it took place in New York City, *A Community of Many Worlds* was positioned in a context quite distinct from *The Lands within Me*. If September 11 was the moment felt around the world, it was an event that would continue to permeate through the streets of New York for years to come.

As the quarantined area of Ground Zero got smaller, the event got bigger. The epicenter may have been off limits, but the event was – and still is – everywhere. It is ambient. The disaster suffuses the life space. Smoke and dust, carried by the wind, coated the surface of the city. New York wore the disaster like a garment. We breathed the dust and inhaled the particles of the dead that floated in the air.³⁶

It is evident that life in New York, unlike that in Ottawa, took many months to return to normal, perhaps helping to explain the delay of *A Community of Many Worlds*. However, it is clear that the delay of the exhibit served to forever alter the manner in which it was displayed and viewed. *A Community of Many Worlds*, in addition to displaying the contributions of Arab New Yorkers, became an exhibit of and about 9.11. This linkage is a problematic one that may have been avoided had the museum simply gone ahead with the exhibit as planned.

In Chapter 3 I examined the nature of museum displays in the CMC and the role this may have played in the controversy. In the fourth chapter I looked at the paradoxes of Canadian multiculturalism and the significance of these contradictions in producing the delay and subsequent reinstatement of *The Lands within Me*. It is clear that both contributed to these events. However, they alone do not explain the museum's actions.

³⁵ This online exhibit of photographs sent by Arab New Yorkers following 9.11 may still be found on the museum's website at www.mcny.org/Exhibitions/arabs/gallery.A.htm.

³⁶ Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 2003: 26.

The demands of Canadian multiculturalism have required the CMC to display many other 'hyphen-Canadian' exhibits. The Cultural Studies department in the museum (formerly known as the Center for Canadian Folk Culture Studies) has regularly rotated exhibits devoted to examining different ethnic groups in Canada including Chinese-Canadians, Ukrainian-Canadians, Indian-Canadians, German-Canadians, Dukhubor-Canadians, Jewish-Canadians and many others.³⁷ *The Lands within Me* simply represented the Arab-Canadians 'turn' to be exhibited. None of the other cultural studies exhibits caused the same anxiety within the museum, or the level of public response seen with *The Lands within Me*. While this exhibit was unique in its reliance on art this, too, was not entirely unprecedented. A permanent position has been created for the curator of Aboriginal art in the CMC and one of the most successful exhibits ever displayed at this museum was *Indigena*, a critical Aboriginal artistic examination of the nature of First Nations life in Canada. Thus, despite the museum's claims that it was the type of exhibit and not the topic that made *The Lands within Me* problematic following 9.11, many other similar exhibits have been mounted in this same space. Despite the seemingly self-evident nature of this statement, I must acknowledge that the fact that Arab-Canadians voices were articulated in this exhibit played a role in its attempted delay after 9.11.

It is clear that the exhibit came to be re-examined in light of the events in New York and Washington. However, this fact should not overlook the history of caution and anxiety that had accompanied the production of *The Lands within Me* since its early stages of planning. Hesitancy about *The Lands within Me* was indeed expressed prior to 11 September 2001. Emails sent around the Cultural Studies department in the museum

³⁷ See the list of past exhibitions on the Canadian Museum of Civilization website, <http://www.civilization.ca/expo/expoe.asp?type=past>.

as early as March 1998 shows that there was uncertainty about the exhibit's topic from the outset. The director general of Exhibitions and Programmes Dr. Sylvie Morel circulated a request to be informed of any 'potentially hot issues' implicit within upcoming exhibits. A response suggesting that no controversial topics were being examined was given. A few days later, however, the archival record shows that an additional email had to be sent reaffirming the lack of concern required regarding *The Lands within Me* (which, at that time had the working title 'Lettres aux pays'). Project Manager Danielle Goyer declared "mon message n'était vraiment pas clair! L'exposition Lettre aux pays parle de l'expérience immigrants tout simplement. Il n'y a pas de 'potentially hot issues'."³⁸

It thus appears that an exhibit relying upon Arab-Canadian voices had always been considered a risk in the museum. It, more than other cultural studies exhibits planned at the time, brought anxiety about the 'potentially hot issues' it may invoke. Following September 11 concerns about 'potentially hot issues' once again were brought to the fore. Almost immediately following the attacks, questions regarding the exhibit were articulated. Emails from September 18th requested immediate information regarding the Arab festival that was set to accompany the opening of the exhibit in which a series of films originating from the Arab world were to be shown. The anxious tone of these emails reveals the uncertainty and fear felt at the time. Pierrette Amiot of the Media Relations department asked Maureen Ward who helped to organize the Arab Festival, "did you find out the original language of each film? We would also need the producers' names. There will be a meeting at the Management Level to discuss Cultural

³⁸ © Collection of the Canadian Museum of Civilization, Institutional Documents. *The Lands within Me*. Fonds Aïda Kaouk, 2001-2003, email correspondence from Danielle Goyer to Sylvie Morel, sent March 17, 1998 "re: re: Hot or potentially hot issues in exhibit", B. I-121, No. 1/5, f. 2002-I-0034.

sensibilities. It is urgent that you give us more info on the films, even if it is just in English and unrevised.”³⁹ A week later a response to this request explained “there are no politically sensitive issues in this film series. No terrorists are portrayed nor any religious conflicts.”⁴⁰

The films were not the only points for interrogation after 9.11; performance artists and musicians slated to accompany the opening of the exhibit were also re-examined to ensure the absence of political messages. Once again, a response that endeavoured to allay concerns was supplied. Maureen Ward attempted to reassure Pierette Amiot that “as for the music, they are performing songs of love and chivalry.”⁴¹ However, claims that the performances offered no threat to the museum were not, in the end, able to alleviate fears about the relationship between the exhibit and September 11. With all of the reassurances being offered, it is fascinating that the bureaucratic structure in the museum still felt it necessary to delay the exhibit.

The fear and anxiety expressed in these emails suggest that the theodicy of the state was clearly reproduced in the museum. Recent “global and domestic events have served to shift the focus from affirmative views of immigrants as contributors to Canadian society to more negative connections of them as criminals and threats to personal and national security.”⁴² The above survey has revealed how this has been especially true for immigrants originating from countries in the Middle East. While the

³⁹ © Collection of the Canadian Museum of Civilization, Institutional Documents, *The Lands within Me*. Fonds Aïda Kaouk, 2001-2003, email correspondence from Pierette Amiot to Maureen Ward, sent September 18, 2001, “Arabic Films and Music”, B. I-120, No. 1, f. 2002- i0031.

⁴⁰ © Collection of the Canadian Museum of Civilization, Institutional Documents, *The Lands within Me*. Fonds Aïda Kaouk, 2001-2003, email correspondence from Pierette Amiot to Maureen Ward, sent September 18, 2001, “Arabic Films and Music”, B. I-120, No. 1, f. 2002- i0031.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Kruger et al, 2004: 77.

museum was not the only institution which vocalized racialized fears after September 11, it was the museum alone which expressed these in a manner that revealed the ambivalent nature of Canada's multicultural identity. In our discussion Farouk Kaspoules, eloquently explained why the museum's actions were so harmful for the artists involved on a personal level. "For me," Kaspoules said of the period immediately following 9.11, "suddenly, because of your name, you feel so vulnerable. You leave your home country because of the violence, because of the lack of human rights and then, feeling vulnerable in your new country, you find yourself with no exit."⁴³ It is this vulnerability felt by a group already marginalized in Canada following 9.11 that makes the attempted delay of the exhibit not only embarrassing for the museum but also highly problematic for the artists and others connected to Arab-Canadian communities.

That some museums were more successful in avoiding these problematic discourses, it appears, related primarily to the possibilities associated with distance. Both the MOA and the Museum of Contemporary Art were situated relatively far away from the epicenter of the attacks. More importantly however, these museums are also somewhat removed from nationalist discourses and governmental control and therefore are able to approach topics with less caution than the CMC.

Conclusion

Inevitably, as Dr. Laforet suggested, the events of 9.11 affected the manner in which the exhibit was viewed. The way in which the CMC responded to this shifting context, however, should not be perceived as a complete aberration. Changes in security and immigration policy and discourses found in parliamentary and media debates attest to

⁴³ Interview with Farouk Kaspoules, 18 March 2005.

the fact that the connection between the perpetrators of the terrorist attacks and Arab immigrant communities more generally implied by the museum's response were part and parcel of trends of the day. Thus, while the museum's decision was problematic, it served the somewhat paradoxical purpose of bringing to the surface contradictions that were hidden in other popular spaces. The representation of identities is, in this way, never a simple process. While exhibit curators attempted to suggest "il n'y a pas de 'potentially hot issues'" associated with this display, exhibiting contemporary forms of belonging is a highly contested and complex process.

CONCLUSION

My first impression upon hearing the story of *The Lands within Me* was a slightly cynical one as I imagined the controversy to be one typical of Canadian contradictions. Despite copious study and research, I have found it difficult to escape the boundaries of my early analysis. The eminent anthropologist Clifford Geertz, in his reflexive journey *After the Fact*, suggests that first impressions “because they are first, and perhaps as well because they are impressions rather than worked-up theories or pinned-down facts, set a frame of perception and understanding.” In his research Geertz has found that these initial feelings and responses toward the subject matter “could not afterward be wholly discarded, only critiqued, developed, filled out, moralized upon, and brought to bear on more exact experiences.”¹ I am hardly in a position to argue with this experienced ethnographer, and if I were honest with myself I would have to agree. Despite the diversity of opinions presented to me, I found that I could not overcome some of my initial thoughts about the events surrounding *The Lands within Me*. However, by briefly relating the final interview I conducted for this project, I will attempt to illuminate the challenges connected to my attempt to narrate *The Lands within Me* and the power implicit within this process.

My conversation with Farouk Kaspoules forced me to step back and critique many of the knee-jerk reactions that had underlined my analysis for many months. He spoke freely, openly and honestly about his relationship to *The Lands within Me*. He, too, brought his own perspectives and experiences to our conversation. However, unlike the other individuals with whom I had conversed, Farouk was not constrained by

¹ Geertz, 1995: 13.

association with an institutional framework, and was able to speak frankly about his experience with the exhibit.

After several failed attempts, Farouk and I finally met on a warm, sunny afternoon in mid-March. We had communicated through email and phone messages on numerous occasions, but for various reasons had never been able to connect in person. It was with surprise, therefore, that I found his studio only a few blocks from my home, above an art supply store on Bank Street. An unassuming door led up to numerous studios and apartments. The building was heated to a temperature far warmer than the early spring day required, and I quickly became overheated as I attempted to find the correct door. Farouk's studio door was ajar and it took some time for him to hear my calls. He warmly invited me into the surprisingly large space. A few of the windows were open, likely for the first time in some months, and the cool breeze, combined with the warm rays of late afternoon sunlight, instantly made the studio welcoming and inviting. Farouk excused himself, he wanted to run down and grab a coffee, but he encouraged me to stay and explore his studio.

Farouk had just opened a new solo exhibition in one of Ottawa's alternative galleries the previous evening. His studio had the look of a space that had recently seen many late nights. A large open space occupied the main area. Lights hung haphazardly from beams and posts, or stood bare, focusing upon piles of slides, silkscreens and prints in the center of the open area. A dark room stood off to one corner and an opening to a surprisingly vast back area appeared from the opposite wall. Paintings, canvases and prints occupied the back room. I wandered back into the main space, enjoying the quiet of the afternoon above the bustling street.

Farouk returned shortly, as promised. We moved towards two of the few spaces to sit in the studio and began speaking about his current work and last night's opening. He was thrilled that so many people from the community and fellow artists had attended. It was gratifying, he said, to be supported by your peers. He has been a part of the Ottawa art community since 1988, occupying various studio spaces around the city before coming across his current situation, which, he observed, was one of the largest studio spaces in the city. "I am quite spoiled, really," he said, laughing. "Sometimes I just come here, not to work, but to be here. Artist friends often ask to share this space, but I just can't. I've been here so long, it is my own. It is where I work, I couldn't possibly imagine having someone else move in."²

We spoke for over three hours and could have continued had I not been leaving for Toronto that evening. One part of our conversation, in particular, stayed in my mind throughout the following days. Farouk responded to my question "what did you think about the Prime Ministers' statement about the delay of the exhibit" with a story that forced a re-evaluation of the assumptions with which I had been working for many months. While I did not record our conversation, I took detailed notes, from which I will attempt to relate the story he offered to me.

It was a difficult time then. It reminded me of another difficult time, more than a decade ago. When the first Gulf War began, Canada agreed to send troops to support these efforts. This was hard for me, growing up in Baghdad, leaving for political reasons, and then my new country invades Iraq. It was hard, I felt unsure. Right around this time, a friend from Ottawa invited me over for dinner. He invited me into his home to have dinner with his family. At this time, this small act was very important to me. It made a big difference to how I felt. This, in some ways, is how I felt when the Prime Minister said the exhibit was important for dialogue, and should go ahead as planned. I know they are different, but they are connected. Do you see?³

² Interview with Farouk Kaspoules, 18 March 2005.

³ Ibid.

My experience with Farouk that afternoon once again revealed for me the power implicit in an ethnographic project and the accompanying difficulties and challenges. In the weeks following our discussion, Farouk's story remained with me. It took some time, however, before I was able to understand the implications of this narrative for my project and see the layers of power and representation within his words. In many respects, Farouk's comparison between the Prime Minister's statement and an invitation to dinner are revealing of the immensity of the chasm existing between narratives of Canadian nationalism and the way immigrants experience Canadian society. That it was necessary for the Prime Minister to declare that there was no relationship between the terrorist attacks and an exhibit about immigrants in Canada speaks to the implicit fear regarding the 'other' within the Canadian multicultural context. However, in the end, despite Canada's tenuous hold upon its multicultural identity, it had been symbolically and practically important for the exhibit to be displayed following September 11. On a practical level, it is clear that, had the postponement gone ahead, had the museum added objects, essays and other signifiers of stereotyped perceptions of 'Arab' identity, many – if not all – of the artists would have removed their work from the exhibit. It is more than likely therefore, that had the delay gone ahead *The Lands within Me*, if displayed at all, would have been shown in a drastically altered form.

Symbolically, the exhibit's opening on schedule also had important implications. For the artists, the Prime Minister's declaration was a welcome one. The vulnerability, fear and sense that, after the long journey, another 'exit' would not be found made the exhibit's reinstatement absolutely necessary on a personal level for the artists and others. Throughout this project, I had dismissed the comments of the Prime Minister as typical of

a country that was ‘multicultural’ only in word and not in deed. I have devoted a great deal of space in the chapters above to argue this vital contradiction. I felt and continue to believe that it was an aspect of this story which must be expressed. Farouk’s response, therefore, was not one I was expecting.

Veena Das’ critical event theory has played a recurring role throughout this project. However, at its completion I have been forced to examine whether or not this theory has in fact helped to explain these events. For me, critical events – if they do succeed in forever altering categories of meaning – appear to carry a timeless sensibility. They seem to exist apart, outside of the multitude of external and internal influences and take on their own space and time. This was certainly not the case for the controversy surrounding *The Lands within Me* – an event that could not have existed outside of its particular spatial and temporal location. At the end of this analysis of these ‘events’, I believe that the most effective way to understand *The Lands within Me* would be to combine the definition offered by Das with Clifford’s ‘postcolonial moments’. More than an event, the controversy related to the opening of *The Lands within Me* presents a *critical moment* of rupture where traditional categories and norms were temporarily altered. For a moment, a national museum was about to show an exhibit based in art and not artifact; for a moment, the national museum tried to postpone an exhibit about immigrant identities – the very identities it was supposed to endorse. For a moment, the paradoxes of the national multicultural identity were, thereby, revealed. For a moment, the government – which normally would try to constrain an institution attempting to step out of its boundaries – acted as the revolutionary force, demanding a provocative exhibit

be displayed as planned. In the moment of 9.11, the vulnerability and violence associated with the world's only imperial power were displayed in all their horror.

These moments, however, passed, and familiar categories were – if anything – reinforced and not transformed. Following 9.11, the power of the world's only superpower was confirmed and re-entrenched. The security of the Canadian state was firmly established by re-connecting perceptions of the 'foreign national' with 'nonpreferred' or 'terrorist'. This threat can now be contained through exclusion and surveillance, further highlighting the singular, stereotyped perceptions of these identities. Following *The Lands within Me*, Canada's multicultural identity – based upon a multitude of discernable, distinct and singular cultures – was re-established. At the Canadian Museum of Civilization, the diversity, hybridity and fluidity of contemporary artistic examinations of critical narratives were quieted. The preference for the historical and contextual nature of material objects over the multiple meanings possible in an artistic piece was clearly articulated. That all of these categories were re-confirmed following the ephemerality of these critical moments does not, however, suggest that they will not continue to be contested, debated and discussed. For Erin Manning, postcolonial narratives can best be seen as drips of water upon a rock, each leaving an imperceptible, but significant mark – eventually allowing for transformations to occur.⁴ The same may well be said for these and other similar critical moments.

In the end, therefore, both the postponement and the re-instatement of the exhibit were critical moments, both were necessary, and both were revealing. As the delay itself was brief, so too were the insights it revealed. The attempted postponement of *The Lands within Me* clearly expressed the power imbalances found between groups in the Canadian

⁴ Manning, 2003.

nation and its multicultural identity. Its reinstatement, however, confirmed that power is present at all levels. As Farouk revealed to me, it was necessary that the exhibit be seen – both practically and emotionally for the artists involved and symbolically for the broader critical narratives expressed within. The reinstatement of the exhibit, therefore, expressed the power of the seemingly powerless. In declaring that the exhibit should go ahead as planned the Prime Minister was able, however briefly, to acknowledge that the artists and the Arab community were not left ‘without an exit’, nor did their community have any relation to those responsible for the attacks upon the World Trade Center; instead, their multiple identities and the power of their narratives were briefly articulated.

The limitations associated both with the exhibit and the museum’s response reveal that we remain caught up in institutions and frameworks associated with modernity. The exhibit itself was unwilling to examine this fact while the museum appeared unwilling to move outside of its structures and assumptions. While the creators of *The Lands within Me* preferred to examine immigration in terms of its postmodern possibilities, the reaction the exhibit received following September 11 forced those involved to confront the continuing presence of fears and assumptions associated with modernity. From this perspective, Amal Treacher’s position regarding the postmodern condition appears fitting. For Treacher, “talk of the ‘postmodern predicament – belonging everywhere and nowhere at the same time – has never felt quite right. There is something about this vision of free-wheeling identity which seems bereft of history and of passion’.”⁵ *The Lands within Me* tested the limits of a national museum in numerous ways: through its focus on immigration, its reliance on artists of Arab origin and, perhaps most importantly, the prominent position given to contemporary and commissioned art. This exhibit can,

⁵ Treacher in Brah & Coombes, 2000: 105.

therefore, be perceived of as critical in that moment in which groups and individuals demanded it be seen, on that night where it was so warmly received, and in the period following 9.11 where the Canadian public was forced to re-commit itself to an ideal that – as of yet – has never been a reality.

The Lands within Me is indeed a critical moment in time when, as Clifford suggests, the post occurs alongside the neo. The intentions behind the exhibit reflect and reproduce current trends in critical theory which offer alternative perspectives to those produced by modern colonial assumptions. The fact that such an exhibit was deemed to be a threat in the post-9.11 context illuminates the ongoing presence of neocolonial perspectives. However, that these multiple sites of struggle and contestation are ongoing and incomplete does not imply that such attempts are meaningless or futile. Instead, these struggles for representation offer a vital opportunity to evaluate the most taken-for-granted assumptions occupying the national landscape. The attempted delay and the subsequent reinstatement of *The Lands within Me* makes the need for such exhibitions, in all their successes and failures, all the more apparent.

APPENDIX

FIGURE 1: ORGANIZATIONAL CHART OF THE CANADIAN MUSEUM OF CIVILIZATION

Directorate

President and CEO
Dr. Victor Rabinovitch

Exhibitions and Programmes

Dr. Sylvie Morel – Director General,
Exhibitions and Programmes

Divisions:

Exhibitions and Canadian Postal Museum

Helene Arsenault – Manager, Travelling Exhibitions
Myriam Proulx – Coordinator, Travelling Exhibitions
Danielle Goyer – Project Manager
Sophie Doucet – Project Manager
Michele Courtemanche – Project Manager

Museum Services

Research and Collections

Dr. Stephen Inglis – Director General,
Research and Collections

Divisions:

Archaeological Survey of Canada

Canadian Ethnology Service

Dr. Andrea Laforet – Director Ethnology and
Cultural Studies

Cultural Studies

Dr. Sheldon Posen – Curator, Canadian Folklife
Alan Elder – Curator, Canadian Crafts, Decorative
Arts and Design
Dr. Carmelle Begin – Curator, Africa and
Ethnomuseology
Dr. Mauro Peressini – Curator, Southwest Europe
and Latin America
Dr. Aida Kaouk – Curator North-East Africa
Dr. Banseng Hoe – Curator East and South-East
Asia, Curator, French America
Louise-Nathalie Boucher – Assistant Curator

History Division

FIGURE 2: TIMELINE OF *THE LANDS WITHIN ME*

FIGURE 3¹

¹ Figure 3: Aprahamian, Mirella. *Ma cabane au Canada* (My House in Canada), 1987. Private Collection. Acrylic on Arches paper, 50 x 38.5 cm. Copied from Kaouk and Bourque, 2003.

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