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Cross-Cultural Museum Bias: Undoing Legacies of Whiteness in Art Histories

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Abstract

When museums are used as sites of knowledge production and research, what are their responsibilities for anti-racist public education? Examining the racial logics that govern, organize, and fund museums, this essay focuses on institutional bias within knowledge production and argues that locating racial logics within museums can be an act of radical pedagogy. Museums are being challenged to become sites of social change, making it vital to study their power structures and the ways in which they organize and study other cultures, illuminating imperial and colonial biases existing at their foundations. The Canadian Museum of Civilization's exhibition *The Lands within Me: Expressions by Canadian Artists of Arab Origin,* is a relevant case study as it opened within weeks of September 11, 2001. The moral panic surrounding the show provides a powerful glimpse of the ways in which certain narratives are excluded from Canadian national projects and how these racial projects exist within museums. Works by Camille Zakharia, an artist included in the exhibition, will be analyzed and the fragmented forms of his photo collages will be used as an organizing metaphor to discuss Canadian multiculturalism, racialization, and citizenship.

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Keywords

museum pedagogy – photography – visual art – critical race theory – Arab Canadian – diaspora – Canadian multiculturalism

1 Introduction

Educators have a responsibility to create accessible interdisciplinary, anti-racist, and postcolonial content that influences research institutions and public audiences. The urgent need for educators to reflect diverse histories and viewpoints is apparent, especially within urban universities that maintain large multicultural and Indigenous student populations. Operating within a broader societal context of social unrest, state violence, xenophobia, and intolerance, educators have significant responsibilities that shape people's lives, experiences, and worldviews.

Eurocentric curriculums have long excluded certain voices by centering whiteness in textbooks and museum exhibitions. Consequently, the logic of superiority becomes a building block of nationalist discourse and the foundation for pedagogical practice.[1] Those who have historically controlled the white-centered historical narrative of patriotism attempt to maintain an imperial worldview by accusing anti-racist advocates of historical "erasure" or "censorship." Debates about what it means to preserve history are witnessed all over the world as protests opposing racism and police violence have renewed attention to legacies of injustices. Some necessary corrections resulting from this debate include the removal of statues and monuments depicting the dignified portrayal of colonial leaders who were proven to be racists, white supremacists, slave owners, or all three. In England, a statue of a seventeenth-century slave trader was dumped into Bristol Harbour (2020). In Antwerp, a monument of a Belgian king who brutalized the Congo was burned and ultimately removed from a public square (2020). And in the United States, more than a dozen statues have been toppled, including several Confederate figures (2020). In dozens more cities, remaining monuments to empire have been marked with graffiti, challenged anew with petitions and protests, or scheduled for removal. Those who oppose the removal of statues symbolizing colonial brutality claim that this iconoclasm is historical erasure. Struggles to represent history have always been present, but issues of racial visibility (or invisibility) in the dominant national imaginary and the subjugation of people of colour within a white

1 Anna Brzyski outlines how the canon of art history can be a vehicle for exclusion when Eurocentric histories are prioritized over others. See Anna Brzyski, "Introduction: Canons and Art History," in *Partisan Canons*, eds. Anna Brzyski, Robert Jensen, James Elkins, James Cutting, and Paul Duro (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 1–26.

supremacist society have been propelled in recent years by important movements like Black Lives Matter and Land Back.

Collective efforts to fight invisibility within the dominant discourse stem from an urgent need to see an equitable global society where studies in visual culture are rooted in human dignity and historical knowledge. Who gets remembered, and for what do they get remembered? Those wishing for colonial monuments to remain in public squares, courthouses, and government buildings have an unfounded fear that the white men they monumentalize will be forgotten. But are we not also concerned about forgetting the violent acts of racism these aggressors were undisputedly guilty of? The issue is not whether history will remember Christopher Columbus, but rather people not remembering his complicity in genocide, colonialism, and the dispossession of the Indigenous peoples of the Americas. The issue is shrouding colonizers in a political fiction of saviourism by monumentalizing white supremacism with bronze sculptures. While some mourn the toppling of the Columbus monument in Saint Paul, Minnesota after George Floyd was brutally killed by police, others mourn the loss of life and dignity that a statue of a colonizer represents when installed at important apparatuses of the state, such as courthouses and governmental buildings. What about the cancellations, removals, erasures, and exclusions that people of colour have faced, and continue to face, in North America and in Europe? White supremacy has not weakened with time, but instead has become a troubling ideology that Western nations like Canada and the United States actively mask as the status quo. Pressure to displace Eurocentric logic in the public sphere means that, as UK-based education studies scholar Shari Sabeti suggests,

> museums and galleries are under increasing pressure from policy agendas in the last decade or so to justify their existence as public institutions through their roles as educators. In the past, this function may have been seen to operate implicitly through the display of artifacts or the curation of exhibitions. However, the educational remit is now being made more explicit through the creation of museum education departments whose job it is to privilege learners over objects.[2]

Canada, like other white settler states, was created through the careful management of Indigenous and immigrant populations, the elevation of certain white-identified populations over others, and the persistent production of national narratives that align with the social, economic, and political goals of

2 Shari Sabeti, "'Inspired to be Creative?': Persons, Objects, and the Public Pedagogy of Museums," *Anthropology & Education Quarterly* 46, no. 2 (2015): 113. See also: Sian Bayne, Jen Ross, and Zoe Williamson, "Objects, Subjects, Bits and Bytes: Learning from the Digital Collections of the National Museums," *Museum and Society* 7, no. 2 (2009): 110–124.

a capitalist nation managed—to a significant degree—by drawing on notions of white supremacy.[3] In this essay on racial biases within museums, I think through the museum as a site of contested representation and posit how shedding light on these tensions can be a source of radical pedagogy.[4] When used as sites of knowledge production and research, what are the anti-racist responsibilities for the education that museums deliver to the public? After all, "as educational institutions, art museums are poised to help communities unravel White supremacist values in order to create more just and equal societies."[5]

This essay maps out the legacy of Islamophobia and anti-Arab rhetoric within arts education in Canada in order to locate moments of racialization and how they shape processes of heritage formation within museums and exhibitions. At a time when museums are being challenged as sites of social change, "racism thrives in all corners of museums—from curatorial decisions that often exclude artists of color and information about the racial context of objects to workplace cultures that prioritize white cultural modes of communication."[6] The Canadian Museum of History's (formerly known as the Canadian Museum of

3 Lise C. Vaugeois, "White Subjectivities, the Arts and Power in Colonial Canada: Classical Music as White Property," in *The Palgrave Handbook of Race and the Arts in Education,* eds. Amelia M. Kraehe, Rubén Gaztambide-Fernández, and B. Stephen Carpenter II (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 45–67. See also: Himani Bannerji, *The Dark Side of the Nation: Essays on Multiculturalism, Nationalism and Gender* (Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 2000), Eva Mackey, *The House of Difference: Cultural Politics and National Identity in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), Sherene Razack, *Race, Space, and the Law: Unmapping a White Settler Society* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2002), and Sunera Thobani, *Exalted Subjects: Studies in the Making of Race and Nation in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007).

4 The concept of "radical pedagogy" has many different meanings. For some, a discussion of radical pedagogy implies an analysis of the deeply politicized aspects of educational institutions, policies, and practices—that education can and must be oriented towards radical social change. For others, radical pedagogy refers to cutting-edge developments in the field of education: the latest theories, methods, and practices that promise to reinvent fundamentally the processes of teaching and learning. Radical pedagogy is all about knowledge and education, and how they can and should change to best serve students in becoming socially conscious global citizens. See Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 1970), Paulo Freire, *Mentoring the Mentor: A Critical Dialogue with Paulo Freire* (New York: Peter Lang, 1997), Henry A. Giroux, *Pedagogy and the Politics of Hope: Theory, Culture and Schooling* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997), Peter McLaren, *Life in Schools: An Introduction to Critical Pedagogy in the Foundations of Education,* 3rd ed. (New York: Longman, 1998), and Ira Shor, *Empowering Education: Critical Teaching for Social Change* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

5 Marit Dewhurst and Keonna Hendrick, "Decentering Whiteness and Undoing Racism in Art Museum Education," in *The Palgrave Handbook of Race and the Arts in Education*, eds. Amelia M. Kraehe, Rubén Gaztambide-Fernández, and B. Stephen Carpenter II (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 452.

6 Dewhurst and Hendrick, 451.

Civilization, or CMC)[7] exhibition *The Lands within Me: Expressions by Canadian Artists of Arab Origin* is my main case study because of its unique position, opening within weeks of the attacks in New York City on September 11, 2001. Located within Canada's National Capital Region, the museum functions as an official site of knowledge formation. The exhibition—and the moral panic that nearly shut it down—provides a powerful glimpse of the ways in which certain narratives are excluded from the Canadian national project, and points to the policing and boundary maintenance of Canadian identity, citizenship, and heritage.[8] Combining a critical race methodology with studies in museums and art education, this analysis illustrates how Arab and Middle Eastern histories are being told and narrated at a national level in Canada. As a way of developing methods of decolonizing visual culture to support an anti-racist pedagogy, this discussion will investigate the links between government-funded museums, racial logic, and the direct silencing of Arab Canadian identity from the broader Canadian social sphere. In examining the demonstrations of Islamophobia and racism that followed these events, what assumptions can be made about Arab identity somehow being oppositional to Canadian nationalism through the decisions made at the Canadian Museum of Civilization? How does this subliminal and insidious categorization affect the Middle Eastern immigrant population and the diaspora in Canada? Analyzing the specific artworks by Arab artists within the show, how is visual art used in cross-cultural environments where an image can be an agent of political contestation or violence? In other words, art museums were built as monuments to White supremacy and to promote a national cultural identity that normalized Whiteness and structural racism.[9] Marit Dewhurst and Keonna Hendrick argue that "twenty-first-century museums that wish to serve as inclusive and culturally relevant institutions have the responsibility to understand how they play a role in either perpetuating or upending racism."[10] Case studies from moments of high racial tension—such as this one—offer a deep reading into how race thinking has evolved over the years within the context of a national museum, illustrating why museums must play a central role in envisioning a radical pedagogy that upends—rather than reinforces—racism.

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7 The Canadian Museum of Civilization, or CMC, rebranded in 2013 as the Canadian Museum of History, or CMH. In this essay, the museum will be referred to as the Canadian Museum of Civilization, or CMC, since this was its name at the time of the exhibition.

8 A comparative analysis of other Canadian museums is outside the scope of this study, and this limitation should be explored in future research to offer a more complete view of how world culture and heritage are organized at other national institutions.

9 Corinne Kratz and Ivan Karp, *Museum Frictions: Public Cultures/Global Transformations* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 1–34.

10 Dewhurst and Hendrick, 456.

2 Photography of Arab Canadians: Race Thinking before 9/11

The mixed media photo collages of artist Camille Zakharia demonstrate a desire for belonging and illustrate the alienation felt in coping with transnational identity. Born in Tripoli, Lebanon in 1962 during the height of the civil war, Zakharia spent time in the United States, Greece, Turkey, and Bahrain before immigrating to Canada in 1995, taking residence in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Artwork *Lebanon-Canada, via Bahrain* (1998) narrates the artist's personal story through representations and depictions alluding to traditional stories and culturally relevant settings (fig. 1). In this photo collage, Zakharia creates scenes that exist visually in one piece, however by fragmenting and placing them on wooden columns with multiple sides, the viewer can only see one scene at a time and only from certain angles can a picture or story be viewed in its entirety. An example of this is the multi-sided photo collage, where on one side, Zakharia depicts the story of how he met his wife in Bahrain. The setting of the story is the Khamees Mosque, believed to be the first mosque in Bahrain built during the era of the Umayyad caliph, Umar II. Zakharia's wife is pictured adorned in traditional clothing—a black *abaya*—and surrounded by an exoticized scene of a highly religious site (fig. 2). In other representations of his wife within this work, she is visually flattened, appearing to be wearing less traditional clothing (or as the artist describes, more "Western garments"), and situated in a much less fantastical setting—an almost desolate environment of barren trees where she bears the only colour in the scene (fig. 3). Using visual methods of revealing and concealing, Zakharia created a harmonious space in which to live and narrate his life story. This fragmentation and pasting back together of cultural tradition and personal experience is coupled with the third side of the artwork, a textual narrative written in Arabic that is highly personal, detailing letters presumably written by Zakharia's father to his son. On this side of the artwork, Zakharia struggles to locate himself spatially in ways that align with various nation state borders and identities. He constructs a transregional and transgenerational representation to better describe an identity narrative he is actively working through.

Arab Canadian identity is entangled within a larger Canadian and settler colonial national project, and Arab art and photography reflects on and speaks to the identity politics caught within this dynamic. All of the artworks included in *The Lands within Me* were made prior to September 11 and demonstrate the relationships these artists had to their Arab-ness and their Canadian-ness before the ensuing heightened Islamophobic racism. It is important to discuss how artists in *The Lands within Me* actively created art about their unsettled Arab identity in Canada *prior* to September 11, making the analysis of the

FIGURE 1 Camille Zakharia, *Lebanon-Canada via Bahrein,* 1998. Photo collages and gouache on paper, affixed to triangular wooden columns. Each panel 122 x 203 cm.

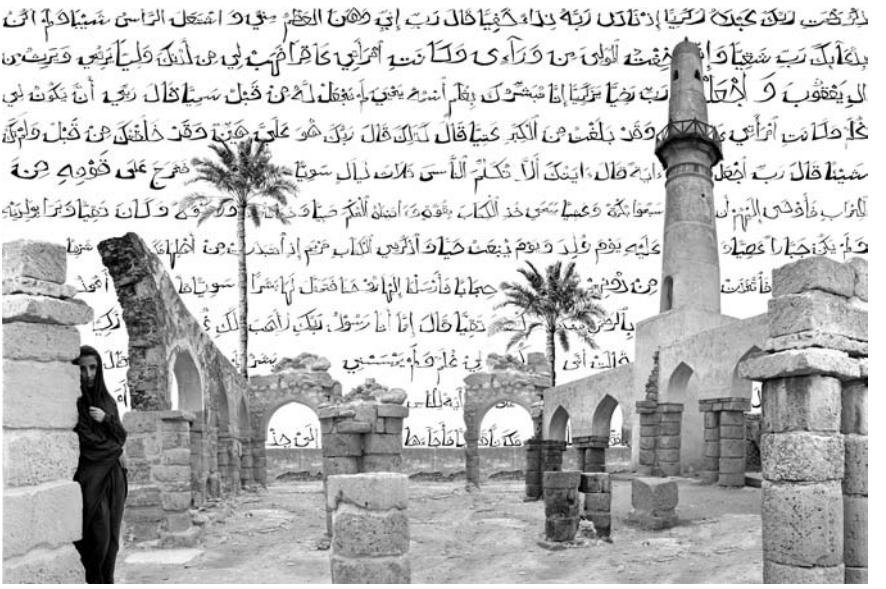

FIGURE 2 Camille Zakharia, detail from *Lebanon-Canada via Bahrein,* 1998. Photo collages and gouache on paper, affixed to triangular wooden columns. Each panel 122 x 203 cm. © CAMILLE ZAKHARIA. IMAGE PROVIDED BY THE ARTIST.

coverage of the exhibition employ new meanings when discussed in relation to themes of racialization and nationalist discourses. Narratives of belonging, diaspora, and hybridity come to the fore in powerful ways when juxtaposed with race thinking that aims to silence, distance, and alienate Arab Canadian identity from a distinctly Canadian identity. Eminent scholars like Edward Said and Linda Nochlin wrote about Orientalism prior to September 11, and the ideas of racist representations are not new. Not only is it important to historicize orientalist ideologies within visual art, but this analysis bridges the contemporary and lived experiences of Arab Canadians and the art they produce within a deeply entrenched visual lexicon of race thinking. To take this further, "the so-called 'culture wars' that have raged for five decades on university campuses across the United States and Canada hinge on whether one thinks that what counts as 'great' works of art have the essence of being great or, more accurately, the essence of being White."[11]

Using fragmented narrative storytelling to depict the trauma associated with transculturation, Zakharia's photographic collages are a productive visual that complicate Arab Canadian identity and its cultural artifacts. Arab Canadian art and representation often relies on interpretations of the racism suffered after

11 Kraehe, Gaztambide-Fernández, and Carpenter II, 2.

FIGURE 3 Camille Zakharia, detail from *Lebanon-Canada via Bahrein,* 1998. Photo collages and gouache on paper, affixed to triangular wooden columns. Each panel 122 x 203 cm.

September 11, and rightfully so. But I wish to encourage a contrapuntal reading that resurrects the narratives of exclusion, isolation, and disconnects to Canadian national stories that already existed before the September 11 attacks. Indeed, institutionalized race thinking did not exist in a vacuum, nor did it arise solely from the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center. Arab Canadians have had a vexed and complicated relationship with Orientalism and various racial structures that have always aligned them as Other. The events of September 11 created a catalyst for things to worsen or magnify, but it must be understood that for the mechanics of such racism to have been instigated, then undeniably there must have been pre-existing factors in play that positioned those who are included within a successful Canadian national project, and those who are left outside.

3 Diaspora Studies: Locating Anti-racist Pedagogy

The inaugural issue of *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies,* published in 1991, arguably marked the start of institutionalized studies of diaspora. Attempting to define diaspora consciousness, in his influential text William Safran concluded that the main features of diaspora include "a history of

dispersal, myths/memories of the homeland, alienation in the host (bad host?) country, desire for eventual return, ongoing support of the homeland, and a collective identity importantly defined by this relationship."[12] Unpacking Safran's rigid guidelines, James Clifford later encouraged a multi-local definition of diasporic identity, stressing that transnational connections linking diasporas need not be articulated primarily through a real or symbolic homeland.[13] During this same period, visual artists increasingly produced work about their own diasporic experiences and contributed to this dialogue on transnational identity. Diaspora studies have impacted museum studies, offering more nuanced understandings about the importance of diverse visual representation in museums to pedagogy and knowledge production. Museum objects have the potential to be a source of radical pedagogy, and according to Fabiana Fazzi and David Lasagabaster, students in their sample study "often commented on the uniqueness of the museum objects and specimens, expressing fascination and empowerment when engaging with them."[14] They conclude that while classroom learning is text-based, museum learning revolves around objects that provide direct access to the original creative act or natural artifact,[15] thus triggering amazement, positive emotions, and curiosity.

But who is in charge of telling these stories? Though museum exhibitions are often used as a site of knowledge production, the museum's structure can limit the ways diaspora and cultural exchange are displayed and curated. As art educators Rubén Gaztambide-Fernández, Amelia M. Kraehe, and B. Stephen Carpenter articulate:

> Succinctly put, dominant understandings of 'the arts' and what it means to be an artist are profoundly shaped by racial logics and racist assumptions. Yet, because racism is foundational to Eurocentric understandings of culture and cultural production, it is always implicit in how the arts and artists are recognized and valued. This is particularly the case in those places that have been influenced by European conquest and where

12 William Safran, "Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myth of Homeland and Return," *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 1, no. 1 (1991): 83.

13 James Clifford, "Diasporas," *Cultural Anthropology* 9, no. 3 (1994): 302.

14 Fabiana Fazzi and David Lasagabaster, "Learning *beyond* the classroom: students' attitudes towards the integration of CLIL and museum-based pedagogies," *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching* 15, no. 2 (2021): 156–168.

15 M. E. Evans, M. S. Mull and D. A. Poling, "The Authentic Object? A Child's Eye View," in *Perspective on Object-Centered Learning in Museums,* ed. Scott G. Paris (London: Routledge, 2002), 72.

> the concepts of 'the arts' and the 'artist' have historical and socio-cultural salience.[16]

Globally, there are few museums devoted to representing the Middle Eastern diaspora, like the Arab American National Museum in Dearborn, Michigan. Exhibitions such as *In/Visible: Contemporary Art by Arab American Artists,* in 2005 (to only name one) deal with erasure, stereotypes, stigma, and broad issues of representation that affect Arab Americans. Since its opening in 2014, the Aga Khan Museum in Toronto has likewise mounted exhibitions dedicated to engaging with diasporic identity, initiating public programming with the city of Toronto's multicultural local population. Notable exhibitions dealing with issues of diaspora include *Home Ground: Contemporary Art from the Barjeel Art Foundation* (2015), which showed artists struggling with geopolitical borders and the boundaries of nation-state identities, as well as *HERE: Locating Contemporary Canadian Artists* (2017), which focused on a wide range of Canadian identities and artists who dealt with the burden of grappling with multiple geographies within their own complex histories and identities. A recent study conducted by Abdelhadi et al. explored how engaging with visual art impacted the language and cultural education of secondary students in an Arabic school in north London.[17] Showing what radical museum pedagogy can look like, "findings reveal that engaging with the target material culture within the museum had a positive effect on students' language and cultural awareness, engagement, confidence, and active citizenship skills, and, finally, appreciation of the aesthetics of multimodal design in the context of Arabic history and culture."[18] Exhibitions like the ones mentioned above indicate that an anti-racist approach to knowledge production is a form of radical pedagogy that can productively engage with diasporic identities on a more impactful institutional level.

4 Racism and Moral Panic in the Cross-Cultural Museum

The Lands Within Me: Expressions by Canadian Artists of Arab Origin provides an interesting starting point to address the politics surrounding Arab and Arab Canadian representation in Canada. *The Lands Within Me* had been in the

16 Kraehe, Gaztambide-Fernández, and Carpenter II, 2.

17 Reem Abdelhadi, Luma Hameed, Fatima Khaled, and Jim Anderson, "Creative Interactions with Art Works: An Engaging Approach to Arabic Language-and-Culture Learning," *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching* 14, no. 3 (2020): 273–289.

18 Fazzi and Lasagabaster, 159.

planning stages since 1996 and was scheduled to open on October 19, 2001.[19] The exhibition featured 50 pieces of contemporary art by 26 Canadian artists of Arab descent from around the Arab World.[20] The attacks on the World Trade Center, led the administration of the CMC to postpone the exhibition, ostensibly until March of the following year. Public and political outcry at the implications made in postponing the show led museum officials to reconsider, and the exhibition opened on October 19 as originally intended. Exhibiting artist Jamelie Hassan described how the events of September 11 impacted the exhibition's opening night:

> A record five thousand people attended the opening night in support of the artists and went through the security measures that were specifically set up for this exhibition and of the now all too familiar security measures of an airport rather than a visit to a public institution. Many viewers who attended and commented in the museum's visitors' book expressed puzzlement as to why such an exhibition would have been considered a threat to the Canadian public and the nation's security.[21]

The outcry following these events has been well documented.[22] However, Elayne Oliphant's 2005 thesis, "11 n'y a pas de 'potentially hot issues'? Paradoxes of displaying Arab-Canadian Art within the Canadian Museum of Civilization" suitably traces the events using interviews with museum officials and archival documents from both the museum and the media at the time of the incident. As Oliphant states, the narratives associated with this display caused temporary ruptures in the traditional categories used in the structuring of a national culture and history museum.[23] Oliphant poses salient questions about the

19 Oliphant, Elayne. "11 n'y a pas de 'potentially hot issues'? Paradoxes of displaying Arab-Canadian Art within the Canadian Museum of Civilization." (MA thesis, Carleton University, 2005), 5.

20 *The Lands within Me* was curated by Dr. Aïda Kaouk, former curator of Asian Art at the Canadian Museum of Civilization. It was the first survey exhibition in a national museum to focus on the contemporary art practice of Arab Canadians. Artists included in the exhibition were: Adel Alnaser, Hannah Alpha, Mirella Aprahamian, Yasser Badreddine, Laila Binbrek, Marc Eliany, Rawi Hage, Abd Hanafi, Jamelie Hassan, Liliane Karnouk, Farouk Kaspaules, Ali Kichou, Bernice Lutfie Sorge, Nihal Mazloum, Joseph Moukhtar, Hadikira Preure, Aldin Rashid, Karim Rholem, Ishrak Sahar, Jayce Salloum, Taouffik Semmad, Shwan, Sanna M. Wassef, Camille Zakharia, Nicolas Zeitouni, and Sami Zubi.

21 Jamelie Hassan, "Across Landscapes of Diaspora and Migration," in *Politics, Culture and the Lebanese Diaspora*, eds. Nathalie Nahas and Paul Tabar (London: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), 122.

22 As seen in the works of Erin Macnab, Katie Cholette, and Jamelie Hassan to name a few.

23 Oliphant, ii.

museum's motives and the mediation tactics of museum officials: 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 September 11 and the story of *The Lands within Me* reveal about modern national identities? I aim to further nuance and contribute to these questions in the rest of this analysis.

Before discussing the impact of labeling Arab Canadian artists in an exhibition featuring immigrant and diasporic artists a national security threat, it is important to map out the political fervor surrounding the exhibition of Arab Canadians in public space, let alone at a national institution.[24] Using the interviews conducted by Oliphant, I would like to map the space Arabs are permitted to take within the public consciousness and the role of Arab Canadians in the construction of Canadian identity, nationalism, and multiculturalism. In one of Oliphant's interviews, Dr. Stephen Inglis, the CMC's Director General of Research and Collections at the time, discussed the decision to postpone the exhibition:

> [Very telling …] 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?[25]

This statement offers an interesting view of the institutional responsibility taken for certain lives and not others. According to the mandate of the Canadian Museum of Civilization, the national institution is "responsible for preserving and promoting the heritage of Canada, and contributing to the

24 The fact that the Canadian Museum of Civilization is a publicly funded national institution should not be glossed over. Political alignment is integral to the financial and bureaucratic success of the institution, so instances of political tension—like this exhibition—need to be examined critically. As outlined by Oliphant, "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" (Oliphant, 26).

25 Interview with Dr. Stephen Inglis, 2 February 2005, cited in Oliphant, 34.

collective memory and sense of identity of all Canadians."[26] The contribution to collective memory and sense of identity seems to hold a caveat, and the exception is when Arabs or Arab Canadians are included in the collective national imaginary. This becomes even clearer in the CMC's initial Q&A document, which states:

> 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 isnecessary to review and expand the information presented in the exhibition in light of the new context created by recent tragic events.[27]

The exhibition went from being "an exhibition on migrant experience and *métissage,* as expressed by 26 Canadian artists of Arab origin,"[28] to a collection of foreign artworks and a "controversial show of Muslim-Canadian art (…) at Ottawa's Museum of Civilization" according to coverage in the *Globe and Mail*.[29] This oppositional positing of Arab identity as foreign, or the racist reduction of Arab-Middle Eastern-Muslim as being one and the same (as seen in the changing of "Arab-Canadian" to "Muslim-Canadian" in the previous quote) is not accidental and is part of racial discourses that mark Brown identities and dictate how these identities are able to participate in the production of Canadian nationalism and the public imaginary.

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26 The CMC's mandate was based on the *Museum Act* in place at the time of the exhibition. This quote was taken from "Guiding Principles," on the Canadian Museum of Civilization's website, and can be found on page 13 in Erin Macnab's thesis. Since then, the act has been amended: "As an amendment to the *Museums Act*, the *Canadian Museum of History Act*, received Royal assent on December 12, 2013. Through the *Canadian Museum of History Act*, the Canadian Museum of Civilization was renamed as the Canadian Museum of History, and the Museum's purpose was defined as being "to enhance Canadians' knowledge, understanding, and appreciation of events, experiences, people and objects that reflect and have shaped Canada's history and identity, and also to enhance their awareness of world history and cultures.'" See Canadian Museum of History, "About the Museum," https://www.historymuseum.ca/about/the-museum/, accessed 13 December 2021. See also Erin Mcnab, "Passages Between Cultures: Exhibition Rhetoric, Cultural Transmission and Contemporaneity in Two Exhibitions of Contemporary Middle Eastern Art." (MA thesis, Carleton University, 2011).

27 Collection of the Canadian Museum of Civilization, Institutional Documents, The Lands within Me. Fonds Ai'da Kaouk, 2001–2003, The Lands within Me: Q & As, Canadian Museum of Civilization. B.1–121, No. 1/5. f. 2002-1-0034. Cited in Oliphant, 39.

28 Dominique Bourque and Aïda Kaouk, *The Lands within Me: Expressions by Canadian Artists of Arab Origin* (Gatineau: Canadian Museum of Civilization, 2003), 9.

29 Roy Conologue, "'Some felt the show was derailed'," *The Globe and Mail*, 5 July 2003, https://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/some-felt-the-show-was-derailed/article1018360/.

The exhibition marks an instance where Arab Canadians were organized, written about, and conceptualized prior to September 11, and how this conceptualization shifted through the backlash and panic in its aftermath. It illuminates the racial frameworks within museums that condition and dictate both cultural identity and successful Canadian nationalism. The exhibition taking place at the cusp of rupture, the locus of heightened Islamophobic and Arabophobic violence and the neo-Oriental construction of the Brown Other, [30] marks a significant moment when, as Arab American comedian Dean Obeidallah puts it best: "Before 9/11, I am just a white guy, living a typical white guy's life. All my friends had names like Monica, Chandler, Joey, and Ross (…) I go to bed September 10th white, wake up September 11th, I am an Arab."[31]

5 Constructing the Brown Other: The Arab-Middle Eastern-Muslim

To better understand the museum's role in constructing race, nationalism, and identities, it is necessary to bring the field of museology in close dialogue with critical race theory. Cultural theorist Mehdi Semati has mapped how "Brown" became used as an identity category within Islamophobic race politics. Semati argues that Brown, once the signifier of exoticism, has come to embody the menacing Other in today's geopolitical imagination, in a context where September 11 provided the horizon to recast (global) socio-political antagonisms in "cultural" terms.[32] In this argument, Brown also becomes an identity category in its own right. The formation of the generic "Arab-Middle Eastern-Muslim"[33] is seen in the interchangeable use of "Muslim" and "Arab" by the author of the aforementioned review in the *Globe and Mail,* and in the unabashed othering by the CMC in aligning the artists with *foreign* origins. Conflating politics, histories, societies, and cultures of the Middle East into a unified and negative identity creates what Semati refers to as an absolute Otherness of the Muslim Other.

30 It is important to discuss racism in the language of racism itself. While ideally Islamophobia can be more clearly separated from Arabophobia since not all Arabs are Muslim, this is not the reality of racist thought. Islamophobia affects Arab Christians and non-Arabs alike, reducing their identities to the "Brown" Other (a concept that will be developed further in the next section). It is for these reasons of overlap and conflation that I use the term Islamophobia even when speaking about non-Muslim Arabs.

31 Dean Obeidallah, comedy skit from "The Axis of Evil Comedy Tour," 2008.

32 Mehdi Semati, "Islamophobia, Culture and Race in the Age of Empire," *Cultural Studies* 24, no. 2 (2010): 257.

33 Semati, 257.

The critique and study of this racist imagination have been central to the work of post-colonial and anti-racist feminist theorists who argue that the production of a new racial category exposes arbitrary racial constructions that are emerging globally. "Anyone who looks like a Muslim" becomes a target of racism, including Muslims, Arabs, Sikhs, and any other people with olive or brown skin.[34] The same processes of racialization are happening in Canada, according to sociologist and critical race theorist Sherene Razack, who maps the racial structure of Canadian citizenship. Razack shows the importance of examining the production of a new Other at the forefront of all racial critiques of nationalism, belonging, and inclusion. Razack notably uses the terminology of "Muslim-looking" for the racist nature of the discourses confusing what is Muslim Arab with what is Arab (both Muslim and non-Muslim), as a part of the resurgence of an old Orientalism that "provides the scaffold for the making of an empire dominated by the United States and the white nations who are its allies."[35] Methodologically, the terminology used by these thinkers is crucial for radical pedagogy and understanding museum bias as it speaks to the reduction and creation of Brown as an identity category, and provides a more specific grammar to locate the Islamophobic rhetoric within this process of racialization. Razack's use of "Muslim-looking" and Semati's deconstruction of the Brown subject are only two examples that are part of a larger network of racialization in which Brown identity is effective in locating the intersections of Arabs, Muslims, and Middle Eastern, and how these bodies can be "cast out," as Razack puts it, from national identity and legal sanctions.[36]

34 Paola Bacchetta, Tina Campt, Inderpal Grewal, Caren Kaplan, Minoo Moallem, and Jennifer Terry, "Transnational Feminist Practices Against War," *Meridians* 2, no. 2 (2002): 305.

35 Sherene Razack, *Casting Out: The Eviction of Muslims From Western Law and Politics* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 5.

36 I first started writing about these ideas in the direct aftermath of the attacks in Paris on 13 November 2015, which led to a resurgence of Islamophobic sentiment and anti-Muslim-looking violence, reminiscent of the racial climate following the September 11 attacks. Since then, Donald Trump was elected President of the United States and introduced overtly racist policies targeting Muslims. The resurgence of Islamophobia in Canada is directly related to racist legislative policies and scare tactics from the US government as 29 January 2017 marked a mass shooting at a mosque and cultural centre in Quebec City. White supremacy in Canada is prevalent and acts of aggression towards Muslims are becoming more numerous. With hateful anti-Islam protests outside of a Toronto mosque on 17 February 2017, it becomes clear that examining the process of racialization and belonging is urgent and unrelenting. Most recently, our communities mourn the lives of the Afzaal family, who were targets of a white supremacist terrorist attack in London, Ontario, on 6 June 2020. The family of five was waiting at an intersection when a driver intentionally mounted the curb and struck them, killing four, in a premeditated Islamophobic attack. The pressure to ask these questions becomes as important now as ever before.

6 Making Art while Brown: Organizing Culture within Museums

In this section, I interrogate the narratives of multiculturalism that are purported in Canadian museums and reflect on the processes of inclusion and exclusion at the institutionalized level of cultural representation. As cultural theorist Rinaldo Walcott pinpoints, "in Canada the discourse of heritage is central to how those who are not the founding peoples of the nation mark their belonging to the nation. This discourse of heritage (…) is under-theorized in critiques of Canadian multiculturalism."[37] Walcott identifies that the project of building a distinct heritage on the back of multiculturalism is foundational to the policing of Canadian national identities. It is important to see how these narratives are permitted to happen within the structure of the museum.

In the aftermath of September 11, six imams were removed from a flight from Minneapolis to Phoenix because passengers and flight crew were "spooked" by their appearances and their speaking Arabic. The dangers of "flying while Brown,"[38] to use Inderpal Grewal's phrase,[39] are still relevant in locating the fear that the Brown-Arab-Middle Eastern-Muslim instills.[40] This issue of human security is linked to the reductive racial categories of identification that are constructed out of xenophobia. The same rhetoric of human security was used by CMC officials aligning Brown, Arab, Middle Eastern, and Muslim as an imminent threat. Like the vulnerabilities associated with "flying while Brown," in this museum setting I posit that we see an instance of "making art while Brown" through the disavowal of Arabs in public space (in proposing to postpone the exhibition), and in the firing of the exhibition's curator, Aïda Kaouk.[41] According to *Fuse* art magazine, "after public attention had moved

37 Rinaldo Walcott, "Caribbean Pop Culture in Canada: Or, the Impossibility of Belonging to the Nation," *Small Axe* 5, no. 1 (2001): 127–128.

38 Joshua Freed also uses the term "flying while Muslim". See Joshua Freed, "In some Muslim eyes, removal of Imams from Minneapolis flight a case of 'Flying while Muslim'," *Associated Press*, 22 November 2006, https://www.mprnews.org/story/2006/11/21/imamfolo.

39 Inderpal Grewal, *Transnational America: Feminisms, Diasporas, Neoliberalisms* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 214.

40 Just a week after the November 2015 bombings in Paris, we see the same Islamophobic narratives as we did in the incidents of the imams almost a decade prior. Two men were profiled in Chicago and were restricted from boarding the plane after a passenger heard them speaking Arabic and said he was afraid to fly with them. See Karen Araiza, "Philly Pizza Shop Owner Calls 911 After He Says He Was Profiled on Flight Home," *NBC Philadelphia,* 19 November 2015, http://www.nbcphiladelphia.com/news/local/Philly-Pizza-Shop-Owner-Profiled-Southwest-Airlines-351944441.html.

41 As an employee of the Canadian Museum of Civilization, Aïda Kaouk was the curator and researcher in charge of the Museum's Middle East and Southwest Asia programme.

away from the fiasco at the museum, its directors fired Dr. Kaouk, declaring her position redundant."[42] In removing Dr. Kaouk as curator, the head of the programme devoted to the Middle East and Southwest Asia was also terminated.

The National Council on Canada-Arab Relations (NCCAR)'s inquiry into the removal of the department further uncovered issues with the museum's organizing structure based on limited geographic and cultural designations. Museum officials responded to the NCCAR by claiming "[the museum] wanted to 'get out of ethnic categorizations'."[43] Oliphant's research has highlighted that despite this claim, the CMC continued to use a number of "ethnically" designated programmes.[44] An interesting shift has happened since Oliphant completed her research in 2005. After dissolving the Middle East and Southwest Asia department shortly after 2001, the research and collections sector of the museum had one director and the curatorial departments were divided into "Canadian Folklife," "Canadian Crafts, Decorative Arts and Design," "Africa and Ethnomuseology," "Southwest Europe and Latin America," "North-East Africa," "East and South-East Asia," and "French America."[45] It is important to note that although Dr. Kaouk was later rehired (after consultation with the Human Rights Commission) as the curator of Northeast Africa, the programme devoted to the Middle East and Southwest Asia was never reinstated.

In the museum model following the September 11 attacks, we see the already broad cultural categorization of the Middle East and Southwest Asia reduced to the focus of Northeast Africa. These changes mark instances of Arab identities being disavowed from public nationalism, and in this case, institutionalized race thinking. The Arab World was erased as a site of study, and to reference the museum's mandate once more, Arabs were therefore not included within the heritage of Canada. This model excludes Arab Canadian histories from "contributing to the collective memory and sense of identity of all Canadians."[46]

The museum model today sees a further flattening of geographic histories and regions. Since *The Lands within Me* exhibition, the museum has undergone a major rebranding, which includes a name change from the "Canadian Museum of Civilization" to the "Canadian Museum of History." While I will not focus on the shift from focusing on "Civilization" to "History," one can read the

42 Laura U. Marks, "Citizen Salloum," *Fuse* 26, no. 3 (2003): 19.

43 Oliphant cites the NCCAR website: National Council on Canada-Arab Relations, "Museum of Civilization Bias Against Arabs," 8 July 2003. See Elayne Oliphant, "Il n'y a pas de 'potentially hot issues'? Paradoxes of displaying Arab-Canadian Art within the Canadian Museum of Civilization" (MA thesis, Carleton University, 2005).

44 Oliphant provides an organizational chart of the Museum of Civilization as it pertains to the timeline of the exhibition on page 130 of her thesis.

45 Oliphant, 130.

46 Oliphant, 130.

Canadian nationalist agenda within this renaming, and it is directly related to the shift in the organization of research and collections at the museum. Since the post-September 11 reorganization of the museum that reduced the Middle East to the department of "Northeast Africa," the museum's curatorial departments were subsequently reorganized into "Eastern Archaeology," "Western Archaeology," "First Peoples and Early Canada," "British North America," "Political History," "Contemporary Canada and the World," "Cultural Expression," "French North America," "Social History," "Central Archeology," "Western Ethnology," "Post-Confederation Canada," "Economic History," and "Physical Anthropology." Eventually, this led to the simplification of the current pedagogical and research structure of the museum, and today the museum consists of only three main branches: "Contemporary Canada and the World," "First Peoples and Early Canada," and a new organizational category titled "Repatriation and Indigenous Relations."[47]

Camille Zakharia's photo collages offer a compelling metaphor (or even, description) for the shifting paradigms of the CMC's structural organization that fragment the globe. The artwork negotiates this fragmentation, forcing the artist, as well as the viewer, to try to get a complete picture. Zakharia's strategy of fragmenting images and compiling them into an object with multiple sides hauntingly mimics the fragmentation of world culture through a colonial apparatus that organizes, collects, and curates global heritage.

The inclusion and exclusion of various departments at the CMC needs to be examined in more depth, for one can draw further links between ideologies of the Conservative government that was in power at the time of the museum's reorganization and rebranding in 2013, and how the museum is used as a strategic tool for Canadian nationalist projects. For the purpose of this analysis, I focus on the location—or absence—of the Arab World and the Middle East, and how the emergence of global departments like "Contemporary Canada and the World" have replaced localized specificities. The relationship between "Contemporary Canada" and "the World" is also interesting, for it subtly and subliminally builds on sociological frameworks of the Global South. However, it collapses most of the non-Western world into unspecific categories. The erasure of these histories, engulfing them in a globalized system of organization, holds insidious powers in the stories that get told. Accountabilities shift and the museum has no obligation to narrate certain histories. According to Kraehe, Gaztambide-Fernández, and Carpenter II, as a field the arts in education

47 Canadian Museum of History, "Research and Collections," http://www.historymuseum.ca/research-and-collections/research-staff/, accessed 13 December 2021.

> has been late to reckon with its racist past and white supremacist present. This is in part because the scholarship of the arts in education has been largely about arts advocacy, and as such, there has been a general reluctance among arts educators and researchers to recognize, theorize, and address the ways in which the arts operate in relation to and are implicated in white supremacy.[48]

This is to say that radical anti-racist pedagogy cannot be left to a select few to engage with and develop. Instead, arts education scholars and curators need to actively engage with how the dynamics of race and racial oppression manifest both explicitly and implicitly through assumptions, practices, and frameworks that define the field.

This rhetoric is important. As the organizational structures of the CMC demonstrate, shifts in the museum's curatorial and research categories resulted in a global framework that eventually became too broad to be inclusive. The framework reproduces logics of coloniality in the sheer positing of "Contemporary Canada" as other/exceptional to "the World." When examining the current museum structure and its changes since September 11, the insidious ways that nationalisms are produced become evident. Understanding museum biases helps build upon ideas that multiculturalism in Canada is an attempt to make the origins of the nation pure.[49] The idea of multiculturalism being intertwined with the discourse of origins is not new, yet I want not only to focus on the concealments of multicultural discourse, but also the re-invention of the Other within this discourse. It is important to interrogate how racialized bodies are imagined in tandem with how they are concealed. Processes of creation and concealment within race thinking do not happen independently, but simultaneously. This is illustrated in the panic that an exhibition on Arab Canadians created, and the automatic associations with terrorism and foreignness.

7 Where Do We Go from Here?

Analyzing the structure of the CMC after September 11 makes clear that a more global system of cultural organization within museums is not the answer, or at least not in a way that reproduces an exceptionalist narrative placing Western cultures over others. Such reductive globalized approaches to museum studies

48 Kraehe, Gaztambide-Fernández, and Carpenter 11, 2.
49 Walcott, 129.

and pedagogy have the potential to erase non-Western histories by ignoring the frictions present within multicultural discourses. In the case of the CMC, it ignores the role that the rhetoric of globalizing plays in avoiding the study of non-Western regions rather than being accountable for exhibiting their stories and including them within discourses of national identity. Can themes of globalization and worlding be developed productively through the diaspora? Can globalization and national projects co-exist within museums given the ruptures that a transnational diasporic identity might produce? Are these issues seen as oppositional museum structures that rival between the local and the global, and if so, how can this speak to the center-and-periphery structure of historical narratives? In this analysis, I have outlined the problems and gaps within the ways current museum models organize and categorize world cultures. Additional scholarship is necessary to explore the potential that illuminating museum biases in other contexts can have to contribute to a radical pedagogy that brings critical race theory in closer proximity to museum studies.

To develop and work through these questions productively, one needs to reimagine the types of knowledge that are being produced institutionally. This reimagining of knowledge formation must unsettle a white supremacist logic that has been internalized, institutionalized, and normalized. Radical pedagogy offers alternative approaches. *The Lands within Me* offers just one example of how race thinking is present at the governmental organization of national stories and how certain erasures—in this case, that of Arab Canadian and Middle Eastern histories—are a reality. These realities are due in part to the Islamophobic racialization of the Muslim Other, and the reductive flattening of different cultural regions, societies, and histories of the Middle East into an essentialized vision in opposition to Canadian history. These dichotomies are seen in the subtle differences of the two types of Canadian citizens: the non-Canadian-born variety (Arab and Muslim) and Canadians, the rest.[50] The exhibition calls into question such narrow constructions of citizenship, for all of the artists were in fact Canadian citizens "established in the different regions of Canada, from the Maritimes to British Columbia."[51] The "precarious" Canadian identity of immigrant and diasporic artists was however highlighted during the process of essentialization and racialization, leading to the artists being relegated as foreign. We must ask ourselves, after immigrating to Canada in 1995, what makes an artist like Camille Zakharia not Canadian? What makes his photo collages, like *Lebanon-Canada, via Bahrain*, not a depiction of the

50 Robert Fisk, "Has Racism Invaded Canada?", *Counterpunch*, 12 June 2006, http://www.counterpunch.org/2006/06/12/has-racism-invaded-canada/.

51 Bourque and Kaouk, 9.

experiences faced within Canada's history of immigration? *The Lands within Me* remains relevant as an important case study of the evolution of racial logic, illuminating its cementation within institutions of knowledge production. The "foreignness" of immigrant, diasporic, and racialized artists in Canada is still a major roadblock within structures of heritage formation that seek to naturalize a white-centric Canadian nationalism that excludes racialized and Indigenous populations from the national imaginary.

When looking at institutional structures that reinforce global inequalities, I am reminded of the writing of Stuart Hall. On culture, identity, and belonging, Hall has posited that "we belong to the marginal, the underdeveloped, the periphery, the 'Other'. We are at the outer edge, the 'rim, of the metropolitan world—always 'South' to someone else's *El Norte*."[52] A key thread throughout this essay is the notion of belonging. Belonging to a nation dictates successful multiculturalism and successful nationalism. Multiculturalism as a nation-state narrative organizes insider/outsider politics where belonging becomes an ethnic static performance so that "some remain outside [of its] constitutive/performative ruse."[53] We need to consider the bodies that remain outside in order for the inside to be created, and what consequence this narrative construction can have on Brown, Black, Indigenous, and racialized groups of people, and their connections to the settler colonial nation.

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52 Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference,* ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1998), 228.

53 Gayatri Spivak, "Scattered Speculations on the Question of Cultural Studies," in *The Cultural Studies Reader,* ed. Simon During (London: Routledge, 1999), 179.

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