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**Responding to Settler Colonialism in the
Community Archive:
Jewish Approaches to Reconciliation**

Abstract

This article explores how Canadian Jewish community archives are responding to and engaging with reconciliation. Reconciliation, which entered national public discourse largely through the activities of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC), is a process that restores or repairs relationships between settler society and Indigenous peoples. Based on a survey of nine archives, I identify how Jewish organizations are responding to the TRC, critically engaging with Canada's ongoing history of settler colonialism, and building relationships with Indigenous nations. Canadian Jewish archives do this in various ways: Formal statements of reconciliation; presenting history in a way that includes Indigenous peoples and illuminates settler colonialism; acknowledging Indigenous peoples, lands, and treaties; programming that builds relationships or facilitates dialogue; and decolonizing or Indigenous projects related to archival collections. I demonstrate that Canadian Jewish archives have begun to engage with reconciliation in substantial ways, although many of these responses are still nascent. Furthermore, the majority of these practices focus on educating Jewish audiences rather than building relationships with Indigenous communities, thus signalling the need for more collaborative approaches. Approaching reconciliation in a way that is rooted in the history and experiences of a particular settler group, rather than the premise of state supremacy, may be a productive way to avoid the colonial politics of recognition and facilitate social change in the place now called Canada.

Résumé

Cet article explore la façon dont les archives de la communauté juive canadienne réagissent et s'engagent à faire avancer la réconciliation avec les peuples autochtones. La réconciliation, qui est entrée dans le discours public en grande partie grâce aux activités de la Commission de vérité et de réconciliation du Canada (CVR), est un processus qui rétablit ou répare les relations entre la société issue du colonialisme et les peuples autochtones. À partir d'une enquête menée auprès de neuf archives, j'identifie comment les organisations juives réagissent à la CVR, s'engagent de manière critique dans l'histoire du colonialisme de peuplement au Canada et établissent des relations avec les nations autochtones. Les archives juives canadiennes s'y prennent de diverses manières : déclarations officielles de réconciliation ; présentation de l'histoire de manière à inclure les peuples autochtones et à mettre en lumière le colonialisme de peuplement ; reconnaissance des peuples, des terres et des traités autochtones ; programmes visant à établir des relations ou à faciliter le dialogue ; et projets de décolonisation ou « d'autochtonisation » liés aux collections d'archives. Je démontre que les archives juives canadiennes ont commencé à s'engager dans la réconciliation de manière substantielle, bien que beaucoup de ces réponses soient encore naissantes. En outre, la majorité de ces pratiques sont axées

sur l'éducation des publics juifs plutôt que sur l'établissement de relations avec les communautés autochtones, ce qui souligne la nécessité d'adopter des approches plus collaboratives. Aborder la réconciliation en s'appuyant sur l'histoire et les expériences d'un groupe de colons particulier, plutôt que sur la prémisse de la suprématie de l'État, peut être une façon productive d'éviter la politique coloniale de la reconnaissance et de faciliter le changement social dans ce pays qu'on appelle maintenant le Canada.

Archives play an important role in Jewish communal life because, while they provide a window into the community's past, they are also sites of contemporary action. On one hand, archives mediate relationships to the past. They are repositories of documents, images, artefacts, and other aspects of material culture that enable historians to better understand how people experienced the world in another time, albeit usually in a particular place. On the other hand, archives reflect a community's relationship to the present. The way people use archives to engage with and interpret the past can yield insight to contemporary experiences of place, identity, and the social milieus in which they exist.¹ The fact that archives encompass multiple moments in time—what Janice Rosen, director of the Alex Dworkin Canadian Jewish Archives, describes as “the ability to speak across time to the reader”—means they can illuminate both historical processes and social realities.² As such, archival collections have potential to reveal but also catalyze social change.³

Such changes are evident in the way Canadian archives have begun to respond to the histories and experiences of Indigenous peoples. In 2022, the Steering Committee on Canada's Archives (SCCA), a multi-disciplinary committee that addresses issues concerning Canadian archives, released *Reconciliation Framework: The Response to the Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Taskforce*. This framework “envisions a Canadian archival community that respects and supports First Nations, Inuit, and Métis sovereignty and self-determination and is committed to actively building equitable relationships.”⁴ Jewish archives in Canada have also begun to address these issues, although they are less systematic in their approach than the SCCA. One example is a recent article by Roberta Kerr, archivist for the Jewish Historical Society of Southern Alberta, that explores Jewish family history on the prairies. The article begins by acknowledging Indigenous peoples and land: “The primary locations of this story are the traditional territory of the Cree, Saulteaux, Nakota, Lakota, and Dakota Nations; the Métis Nation (Eastend, SK); the traditional territory of the Kainai, Piikani, Siksika, Stoney-Nakoda, and Tsuut'ina Nations; and Métis Nation of Alberta Region 3 (Calgary, AB).”⁵ Although these conversations are only beginning to emerge, Jewish and non-Jewish archives are increasingly aware that their buildings and collections, as well as the communities they serve, are entwined with Indigenous peoples and the country's ongoing history of settler colonialism.

The type of territorial acknowledgement that Kerr includes has become widespread in university and activist spaces across Canada, although they are also used in settings that range from government speeches to public sporting events.⁶ Advocates contend that these statements are an important step towards reconciliation between settler society and Indigenous peoples, and scholars demonstrate that territorial acknowledgement can be an effective way to combat Indigenous erasure and disrupt settler identities.⁷ Yet archives, museums, and other heritage institutions are deeply rooted in the history of colonization, and they may engage with reconciliation in ways that reproduce colonial structures and contribute to the marginalization of Indigenous peoples.⁸ Acts of reconciliation can become “spectacles whereby white settler Canadians engage in hollow performances of recognition and remorse” while distancing themselves from the realities of colonial violence.⁹ It is therefore crucial that statements on reconciliation are accompanied by concrete action that works to transform society and dismantle settler colonial structures.¹⁰ Although Canadian Jewry has expressed support for Indigenous peoples and issues over the past two decades, these displays usually fail to address how Jews are implicated in settler colonialism and colonial violence.¹¹ Moreover, some scholars question whether Jewish acts of reconciliation represent “a progressive change [or] a further misuse of the displacement and dispossession of Indigenous peoples.”¹² These criticisms suggest that reconciliation has both potential and peril within Jewish institutional settings. In the absence of systematic analyses of the subject, it is pertinent to consider how Jewish organizations have begun to navigate this difficult and contested terrain.

This article explores how Canadian Jewish community archives are responding to and engaging with reconciliation. Through a survey of nine archives, I identify key ways that Jewish organizations are critically engaging with Canada’s ongoing history of settler colonialism and building relationships with Indigenous peoples. My purpose is twofold. First, I seek to document current reconciliation practices because understanding the status quo is necessary to determine the course of future engagement and to identify next steps. In this regard, I contend that Canadian Jewish archives have begun to engage with reconciliation in intentional and substantial ways, although many of these responses are still nascent. Furthermore, the majority of these practices focus on educating Jewish audiences rather than building relationships with Indigenous communities. As such, my second purpose is to provoke archives and other Jewish organizations to continue, and in some cases begin, the work of reconciliation. Approaching reconciliation in a way that is informed by the history and experiences of a minority settler group, rather than the premise of state supremacy, may be a productive way to avoid the politics of recognition and facilitate social change in Canada.

Reconciliation in Canadian Archives

Reconciliation is the process of bringing together or restoring relations between two or more parties. In Canada, the concept entered public dialogue largely through the activities of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC), which was established in 2008 and released its final report in 2015. Designed as a public inquiry into the history and legacy of the Residential School system, the TRC concluded that “the central goals of Canada’s Aboriginal policy were to [...] cause Aboriginal peoples to cease to exist as distinct legal, social, cultural, religious, and racial entities in Canada. The establishment and operation of residential schools were a central element of this policy, which can best be described as ‘cultural genocide.’”¹³ The TRC and its institutional successors, including the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, advocate for the restoration of damaged relationships between settler society (represented by the British Crown and/or Canadian government) and the Indigenous nations of the land now called Canada. A central part of this plan is a list of 94 Calls to Action, released as part of the TRC’s final report, that outline concrete ways for Canadian governments, churches, and public institutions to facilitate reconciliation. Many of these calls address historical and educational institutions, and several apply specifically to Canadian archives and museums. The 70th Call to Action, for example, “call[s] upon the federal government to provide funding to the Canadian Association of Archivists to undertake, in collaboration with Aboriginal peoples, a national review of archival policies and best practices.”¹⁴ Canadian archives can begin to play a role in reconciliation by responding to these calls.

While it is imperative that settler society and Indigenous nations build respectful relations, reconciliation remains a controversial framework. David Garneau challenges reconciliation on several grounds and, in particular, argues that the idea is inherently flawed because the Canadian state has never had a healthy relationship with Indigenous peoples. Instead, Garneau proposes “conciliation”—a continuous and perpetual “seeking rather than the restoration of an imagined agreement”—as a more productive framework.¹⁵ A further concern is that reconciliation can contribute to the colonial politics of recognition. Glen Coulthard observes that, over the past half-century, recognition has become a dominant framework for addressing Indigenous rights and Indigenous claims to sovereignty and self-government in Canada. Because recognition is inequitably mediated through the state’s legal and political institutions—since it is the colonial state that *sees* and Indigenous peoples who are *seen*—“the politics of recognition in its contemporary liberal form promises to reproduce the very configurations of colonialist, racist, patriarchal state power that Indigenous peoples’ demands for recognition have historically sought to transcend.”¹⁶ Reconciliation often operates within the politics of recognition, especially when sanctioned by or administered through the state, and can thereby contribute to social and political inequality.¹⁷ Such criticisms reveal the limitations of reconciliation, and they should

be taken seriously by any institution or organization that plans to engage with this process. However, this also suggests that reconciliation practices that exist outside the state's purview, such as those practised within community organizations, may be an effective way to build relationships and address colonial violence.

While the TRC focuses on relationships between Indigenous peoples, the Canadian state, and Christian churches, it is informative also to consider the role of minority groups. As David Koffman observes in regards to Jewish–Indigenous encounters in the United States, early Jewish settlers often built respectful and reciprocal relations with Indigenous nations but also acted as agents of empire. Jewish migrants in the 19th century “enjoyed nearly all the legal, practical, and cultural benefits built on colonization writ large [which] put Jews in a distinctly privileged position in relation to Native Americans.”¹⁸ This privilege extends to Jews living in Canada as well as other minority groups within settler society.¹⁹ Scholars are beginning to consider the role that minorities, especially recent immigrants and refugees, can play in reconciliation. Jebunnessa Chapola contends that immigrant and transnational perspectives can contribute to reconciliation “because they foreground issues of colonization, nationalism, global capitalism, and empire in an analysis of gender and sexual oppression, resistance, and other socially constructed biases.”²⁰ Reconciliation practices that engage both Indigenous peoples and recent migrants can therefore enable deeper understanding of colonialism and imperialism as global processes.

The following analysis examines reconciliation practices at Canadian Jewish archives. It comprises a survey of nine archives: The Jewish Museum and Archives of British Columbia in Vancouver, Jewish Historical Society of Southern Alberta in Calgary, Jewish Archives and Historical Society of Edmonton and Northern Alberta in Edmonton, Jewish Heritage Centre of Western Canada in Winnipeg, Ontario Jewish Archives—Blankenstein Family Heritage Centre in Toronto, Ottawa Jewish Archives in Ottawa, Jewish Public Library Archives in Montreal (Montreal JPL), Alex Dworkin Canadian Jewish Archives in Montreal (Montreal CJA), and Saint John Jewish Historical Museum in Saint John.²¹

I selected these archives because they are Jewish community institutions, contain significant collections of archival material, and represent diverse Canadian regions. As such, a survey of Canadian Jewish archives provides a focused analysis that can nevertheless yield insights for other Canadian Jewish organizations. However, I do not claim that this survey is exhaustive of all Jewish archival collections in Canada. I have excluded two types of archives from the analysis. First, I excluded non–Jewish organizations that contain Jewish collections, such as Library and Archives Canada, in order to focus on Jewish community responses. Second, I excluded Holocaust museums and memorial centres because, while they are potentially productive sites of reconciliation, I believe they deserve a separate analysis.

My survey entailed reviewing reconciliation practices that each archive has initiated or is involved with. Reconciliation practices can include any act or statement, either formal or informal, that responds to Canada's ongoing history of settler colonialism and seeks to illuminate, build, or restore relations between Indigenous peoples and settler society. This entails a range of projects and programming that can include public statements, use of territorial acknowledgement, Indigenous or decolonizing projects, programming that focuses on Jewish-Indigenous relations, among other responses. I identified these practices by reviewing publicly available materials for each archive such as websites, annual reports, newsletters, and publications.²² I also contacted archivists at each institution to better understand their approaches to reconciliation. This review was conducted during spring and summer 2022.

More than half of the archives surveyed have engaged with reconciliation in some way, although the degree of involvement differs considerably. Two archives, Vancouver and Winnipeg, are deeply engaged with reconciliation and have implemented various practices at their respective institutions, often integrating reconciliatory content into exhibits and programming. Several archives (Calgary, Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal CJA, and Montreal JPL) have begun to engage with reconciliation in more limited or preliminary ways. Only two archives (Edmonton and Saint John) are not currently engaged with reconciliation. Overall, these findings suggest that Canadian Jewish archives are concerned with reconciliation, although some institutions have taken more steps or advanced more quickly than others. I propose viewing the following repertoire of practices as the basis for a Jewish reconciliation framework. Although this study is by no means a step-by-step guide, and while some of the practices may be problematic, it nevertheless provides a starting point for archives and other Jewish organizations that seek to develop a response to reconciliation.

Statements of Reconciliation

Archives can respond directly to calls for reconciliation through the release of official statements. Developing and publishing an official statement is one way for an institution to articulate its position on a subject, outline any action it has taken or plans to take, and publicly demonstrate its commitment to (and therefore accountability for) this course of action. It also suggests a high degree of institutional priority to that issue or project. Only one Canadian Jewish archive, Winnipeg, has released official statements on reconciliation. The Winnipeg archive issued its first statement in June 2021 in response to the "discovery" of unmarked burial sites at the former Kamloops Indian Residential School that contained the remains of 215 Indigenous children. A similar statement was released in September 2021 to correspond with the first National Day of Truth and Reconciliation. These statements articulate Winnipeg's perspective on and commitment to reconciliation:

We at the Jewish Heritage Centre express our unequivocal support for the Calls to Action made by the National Commission for Truth and Reconciliation. We have a responsibility to do all we can to foster reconciliation and to firmly condemn the systemic racism that continues to be a stain upon our country.

As Canadian Jews, we identify with the injustices suffered by our Indigenous brothers and sisters. Like them, we remember the pain of racism and exclusion, as well as both recent and historical crimes committed against us, including the burial of millions of unidentified Holocaust victims in mass graves.

For far too long, a false narrative of the history of Indigenous peoples has been taught to generation after generation of Canadians, a history that ignored the genocide committed against our Indigenous brothers and sisters.²³

Several aspects of this statement are noteworthy. First, Winnipeg frames the statement as a response to the TRC's activities and its Calls to Action. The archive expresses full support for calls to reform Canadian archives as well as other calls for institutional and systemic change. Second, it explains that Canadians have perpetuated a "false narrative" about Residential Schools and the history of settler-Indigenous relations. Indeed, scholars observe that "official" narratives often present a sanitized version of Canadian history that erases colonial violence and does not reflect the experiences of Indigenous peoples.²⁴ It is this erroneous, or at least incomplete, version of history that the TRC challenges through its truth-telling activities.²⁵ Finally, the statement affirms that the treatment of Indigenous peoples constitutes an act of genocide and explores parallels between Indigenous genocides and the Jewish Holocaust (and unlike the TRC, it does not qualify colonial violence as *cultural* genocide). This comparison suggests that similar histories can help to create empathy between groups. To this effect, the statement proceeds to address the history of Jewish-Indigenous encounters in Canada, using archival documents to illustrate relationships between the Flam family, who immigrated to Canada in 1929, and the Brokenhead Ojibway First Nation. By releasing an official statement that focuses on Indigenous experiences while also highlighting Jewish perspectives, the Winnipeg archive begins to map out the shared histories that can form the basis for renewed and respectful relationships between Canadian Jewry and Indigenous nations.

Comparing Indigenous and Jewish histories can be a productive approach to reconciliation but it also has limitations, especially when engaging histories of genocide. As critics observe at the Canadian Museum for Human Rights, comparative approaches to genocide can result in "'Oppression Olympics' whereby groups compete for the mantle of the most oppressed without dismantling dominant structures and discourses that generate dominant standards of a competition."²⁶ The effect is to privilege certain histories, typically the Holocaust, while concealing or minimizing other

atrocities. Moreover, focusing on victimhood can deny agency to survivors and reinscribe unequal power relations within Canadian society; in particular, settler society uses discourses of victimization and traumatization to construct Indigenous peoples as deviant and undermine Indigenous self-determination.²⁷ Scholars therefore stress that comparative approaches should, rather than fixate on superficial similarities and differences, explore how the Holocaust and Indigenous genocides are shaped by common socio-political forces, such as modernity, capitalism, or racial ideology.²⁸

Rewriting History

Reconciliation involves framing Canadian history in a way that challenges dominant narratives—the aforementioned “false narrative”—while critically engaging with the contemporary realities of settler colonialism. Observing that national history is often presented through a colonial lens, the TRC stresses that “reparations for historical injustices must include not only apology, financial redress, legal reform, and policy change, but also the rewriting of national history and public commemoration.”²⁹ From this perspective, reconciliation becomes the practice of “remembering the past together,” that is, in a way that is collaborative and includes diverse experiences from both Indigenous nations and settler communities.³⁰

The Calgary archive has begun to rewrite Canadian history, and especially the history of Indigenous–Jewish encounters, in a series of editorials in its triannual newsletter, *Discovery*. These editorials explore the history of Jewish settlement in Alberta, acknowledge that Canadian Jews are mostly settlers on Indigenous lands, and consider the implications of these historical relationships. One article, “*Our Place in This Place*,” written by University of Calgary professor Betsy Jameson, asks:

Many Jewish homesteaders had fled antisemitism and pogroms. . . They didn’t come to dispossess anyone; they just sought a better life. But they and their homesteads were part of the process that academics call settler colonialism—a form of colonialism that seeks to replace the Indigenous population with a new society of settlers, either by assimilating or removing the Indigenous people. What did that mean for Jewish homesteaders themselves?³¹

While focusing on the experiences of early settlers, Jameson also considers what this means for contemporary Jewry: “I did not personally take these lands from Indigenous North Americans; I inherited the claims of those who did. I wrestle with what this means to me as a historian and as a Jew.”³² By raising these questions, the editorial series opens up a dialogue with readers that encourages them to reflect on these issues and asks them to join the conversation. Indeed, staff at Calgary received an especially positive response from members who expressed their interest in and support for these ongoing discussions.³³ This sort of grassroots strategy is therefore

important because it involves not just the archive but also the broader Jewish community in reconciliation.

The Vancouver archive takes a curatorial approach to rewriting history. It regularly includes content on settler colonialism, Indigenous-settler relations, and reconciliation in its exhibits and programming. This is particularly evident in its online exhibit “On These Shores,” which documents the early arrival and settlement of Jews in British Columbia. Toward the beginning of the exhibit, there is a detailed section on “First Peoples” that acknowledges the diverse nations of the Pacific coast and describes them as “self-sufficient and thriving, following sustainable traditions within a delicately balanced ecosystem. They were rich in culture: art, politics, spirituality, economic production and social and family structure.”³⁴ The exhibit proceeds to explain how colonial activity had a “detrimental effect on traditional First Nations economic structures and ways of life [which left] First Nations as racialized outsiders.”³⁵ The exhibit does not limit its discussion of Indigenous peoples and land to this section but rather integrates this content throughout, framing the region’s history as an ongoing encounter between Indigenous nations and various migrant groups. Yet “On These Shores” is not without its limitations. At times the exhibit reproduces a colonial and distinctly Canadian myth that Paulette Regan refers to as “the foundational myth of the benevolent peacemaker”; this myth erases colonial violence by framing settlement in Canada as a relatively peaceful process.³⁶ For example, the peacemaker myth undergirds statements that “the ostensibly benevolent approach of the British to the First Nations was markedly different from the much less favourable one of the Americans to Native Americans.”³⁷ By framing Canadian settlement, which is characterized by the imposition of British law and commerce, as superior to the overt physical violence of American settlement, the exhibit dismisses the impact of epistemic and cultural destruction. Nevertheless, the exhibit provides an insightful model for how Jewish archives can rewrite history in a way that illuminates inter-group relations and provides an historical basis for relationship building.

Territorial Acknowledgement

Another way to address historical and ongoing relationships is through territorial acknowledgement. This is the most common way that Jewish archives engage with reconciliation; at least seven archives have used some form of territorial acknowledgement in archives or exhibits, publications and communications, or during events and programming. The practice of acknowledgement varies considerably between archives, however. For example, Calgary has policies that determine when and where acknowledgement may be used while Vancouver leaves this decision to the discretion of curators and content designers.³⁸ Moreover, acknowledgement can range from broad statements about Indigenous land to more complex discussions that address multiple nations, treaties, and neighbouring peoples. Ottawa employs a

standard acknowledgement, which was adapted from the City of Ottawa's territorial acknowledgement:

The Ottawa Jewish Archives would like to acknowledge that we, and the entire [Jewish Federation of Ottawa] community campus are built on un-ceded Algonquin Anishinabe territory. The people of the Algonquin Anishinabe Nation have lived on their territory for millennia. Their culture and presence have nurtured and continue to nurture this land. We honour the peoples and land of the Algonquin Anishinabe Nation.³⁹

This statement includes several key components. First, it identifies the specific people with ancestral ties to and who have traditionally occupied this territory. By observing that the territory remains unceded, the Ottawa archive acknowledges Anishinabe Algonquin historical and legal claims to the land while also highlighting the complexities of settlement, occupation, and land ownership in Canada. Finally, this statement recognizes both the past and continued presence of Indigenous peoples in this region, stressing that their relationship to the land begins in time immemorial. Although not included in Ottawa's statement, territorial acknowledgement may also reference treaties and political agreements, historical land usage, and an institution's openness to relationship building or other action.⁴⁰ However, there is no formula for the "ideal" acknowledgement, and each one should be adapted to the specific people and places involved.⁴¹

Another example comes from Winnipeg. This acknowledgement is noteworthy because it appears prominently on the homepage of the Winnipeg archive's website; as such, it may be the only archive to publicly acknowledge Indigenous territory at the institutional level. The centrality of this statement implies that the archive does not engage with reconciliation in a fragmentary way (i.e. only at some exhibits and programming, as many archives do) but rather that reconciliation is an integral part of its mission.⁴² This statement acknowledges Treaty 1 and Métis territory while affirming the TRC and related public inquiries, namely the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. It concludes by observing that "elements of [Indigenous] genocide continue to the present day. We affirm that our commitment to 'Never Forget' must also include confronting attempt [sic] to destroy Indigenous culture and nationhood, and condemning attempts to deny that historical reality."⁴³ By invoking the "Never Forget" slogan, which is entrenched in the history and memory of the Holocaust, Winnipeg situates this acknowledgement within Jewish tradition and focuses on shared experiences of suffering. It suggests that Jews, through their experiences of the Holocaust, have a responsibility to respond to the oppression of Indigenous peoples and to promote healing and respectful relationships. Yet Winnipeg's acknowledgement also manifests some of the perils of comparative genocide. In particular, rather than view Indigenous genocides on their own

terms, it positions genocide consciousness as an extension of Holocaust memory. As such, the statement privileges the Holocaust as an interpretive and memorial framework and thereby preserves uneven power relations within Canadian society.

Outreach Programming and Intercultural Dialogue

Archives can also use programming to promote relationship building. Programming is important because, in contrast to historical or narrative approaches, it allows people to engage with reconciliation in concrete and experiential ways. Several archives, especially those affiliated with museums or active in education, have begun to introduce this sort of programming, which takes various forms such as presentations, workshops, training sessions, guided tours, and other activities. Through its annual Holocaust and Human Rights Symposium at the University of Winnipeg, the Winnipeg archive puts Holocaust survivors into dialogue with the survivors of other genocides. In 2020, the event included Holocaust survivor Edith Kimelman and Residential School survivor Theodore Fontaine.⁴⁴ Montreal JPL, which hosts the MTL YA FEST, has included Indigenous panels in its programming, such as the “Indigenous Own Voices” panel that “counter[s] the accepted historical narrative, a narrative largely written by settlers, and challenges [young adult] readers to reimagine the story.”⁴⁵ Vancouver has organized several programs that promote relationship-building with Indigenous peoples as well as other groups, such as a speaker series on cultural exchange, the “Cross Cultural Strathcona Walking Tour” that explores Vancouver neighbourhoods and includes Musqueam Elder Larry Grant, and a guest lecture from Elizabeth Shaffer, executive director of the Residential School History and Dialogue Centre at the University of British Columbia.

An especially notable initiative is the Indigenous Awareness Training Program provided by the Jewish Federation of Ottawa (JFO).⁴⁶ Although the training program does not focus on archives, it operates in the same institutional context as the Ottawa archive (which operates under the JFO) and has influenced reconciliation practices within the archive. The JFO organized this program in response to the 92nd Call to Action which, among other things, “call[s] upon the corporate sector in Canada to [...] provide education for management and staff on the history of Aboriginal peoples.”⁴⁷ Facilitated by First Peoples Group, it entailed a series of three virtual sessions led by Indigenous advisors Guy Freedman (Métis), Charlotte Qamaniq (North Baffin Inuk), and Bob Watts (Mohawk and Ojibway). Each session introduced participants to the histories and cultures of Indigenous peoples in Canada and explored past, present, and future relationships between Indigenous nations and settler society. The virtual sessions were held in Spring 2022, although recordings are publicly posted on the JFO’s website. A separate session was also held for JFO staff. Teigan Goldsmith, archivist at Ottawa, explained that these training sessions have already inspired her to post a territorial acknowledgement in the public research room of the archives.⁴⁸

The Indigenous Awareness Training Program underscores key elements of the aforementioned 70th and other Calls to Action, namely that reconciliation occurs “in collaboration with Aboriginal peoples.”⁴⁹ As such, it provides an informative example for how Jewish organizations can begin to educate members while also collaborating with Indigenous people and peoples.

Decolonization and Indigenization

Reconciliation is closely entwined with similar practices such as decolonization and Indigenization. While these concepts remain contested, they can be viewed as responses to colonialism and the subjugation of Indigenous peoples and land. Decolonization involves challenging, disrupting, and dismantling colonial structures and ideologies, and it takes settler colonialism and other modes of empire as its subject. Indigenization often entails Indigenous-led initiatives to protect or restore languages, lifeways, or cultures, revitalize traditional practices and knowledge, and therefore may or may not engage directly with colonialism. While decolonizing and Indigenizing initiatives are uncommon in Jewish archives, a few archives are approaching reconciliation from this perspective.

The Vancouver archive has initiated an Indigenizing project in regards to its Leonard Frank Photography Studio fonds. This collection comprises tens of thousands of photographs taken by Leonard Frank and Otto Landauer that document the landscapes, scenery, and architecture of British Columbia. Alys Routtenberg, archivist for Vancouver, described a project that would “put back the First Nations place-names” for the locations depicted in these images.⁵⁰ Although still in the early planning stages, this project would include Indigenous place-names in digital and physical archival records, add further information about the Indigenous meanings and significance of these places, create an interactive map, and possibly consolidate this content into an online exhibit. This would be coordinated in consultation and conversation with local Indigenous nations. Routtenberg refers to this project both as “indigenization” and as a form of “intellectual repatriation.”⁵¹ She noted that reconciliation has been a community-driven effort at Vancouver, and the archive has received multiple inquiries from the local Jewish community about reconciliation and repatriation projects.⁵² Yet repatriation is not a pressing issue for an archive whose collection largely comprises Jewish documents donated by Jewish community members. By framing this project as an act of repatriation, Routtenberg responds to these inquiries while also acknowledging the urgency of repatriation in other museum and archival contexts.⁵³ Moreover, she suggests that the imposition of Euro-Canadian place-names—the appropriation of Indigenous places through the erasure of Indigenous place-names—is a harmful practice that undermines Indigenous self-determination.

The Toronto archive has begun to implement decolonizing initiatives as part of its broader anti-racist strategy. This strategy, which is also early in the planning stages, originated in 2019 when a contract staff person reviewed anti-racist practices in archives and prepared a list of recommendations for Toronto.⁵⁴ While the archive only has a small body of materials that include or address Indigenous peoples, staff are exploring how to engage with this content using the principles of “care” and “respect.”⁵⁵ One approach is to add or revise metadata for photographs that include Indigenous people, such as the Jack Leve collection which documents the fur trade in northern Ontario. This involves identifying the Indigenous communities in each photograph and using their preferred language to indicate people and places. A related initiative addresses derogatory images in the collection, such as photographs of people in “redface” (i.e. non-Indigenous people wearing costumes or makeup that stereotype Indigenous identity). These are important and potentially productive initiatives, although it is useful to consider the limitations of positioning decolonization within a broader anti-racist framework. According to Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, decolonization is distinct from other social justice projects and “cannot easily be grafted onto pre-existing discourses/frameworks, even if they are critical, even if they are anti-racist.”⁵⁶ In particular, they warn against framing Indigenous communities as “asterisk peoples”—i.e., as one of many minority groups—“because it erases and then conceals the erasure of Indigenous peoples within the settler colonial nation-state and moves Indigenous nations as ‘populations’ to the margins of public discourse.”⁵⁷ Framing decolonization as an anti-racist strategy may therefore contribute to the marginalization of Indigenous peoples.

Organizations should exercise caution and precision when framing practices as reconciliation, decolonization, Indigenization, anti-racism, or otherwise. Although often overlapping, these approaches respond to settler colonialism in different ways and imply varying degrees of engagement with Indigenous nations. Framing a project as decolonization or Indigenization, rather than reconciliation, implies a commitment to Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination that would result in the “negation of the colonial realities of the archives themselves.”⁵⁸ In this sense, reconciliation can play a role in the broader and more systemic project of decolonization, but the two are by no means synonymous. Indigenization, which is rooted in Indigenous self-determination, may or may not involve reconciliation between Indigenous peoples and settler society. It is crucial that organizations distinguish between these approaches and use terminology that accurately reflects their openness to structural and systemic change. Since initiatives in Vancouver and Toronto are still in the planning stages, it remains to be seen whether they constitute reconciliation or go beyond to become acts of decolonization and Indigenization.

Conclusion: First Steps and Beyond

Within popular and scholarly discourse on reconciliation, it is common to hear people and institutions describe practices, programs, or statements as the “first step” on what is an otherwise long journey toward healing and respectful relationships. Even the TRC refers to government and church apologies for Residential Schools as “a necessary first step in the process of reconciliation.”⁵⁹ It is understandable why this way of thinking is widespread. First steps are often easy because doing something, no matter how superficial or perfunctory, is more than doing nothing. Yet the idea of “first steps” is problematic because it risks celebrating small gestures while ignoring the need for ongoing, concerted, and concrete action and systemic change. In this vein, I offer the preceding analysis as a critique of, or perhaps movement away from, this approach. As I have demonstrated, Jewish archives have already taken their first steps. Through formal statements, public programming, curated exhibits, and other initiatives, Jewish archives are beginning to address the impact of settler colonialism on Canadian history and settler-Indigenous relations. Many of these practices focus on educating Jewish audiences about settler colonialism and the histories and experiences of Indigenous peoples. Community education and unilateral statements are not necessarily problematic since the onus of reconciliation is on settlers, not Indigenous peoples. This is important work—the TRC stresses the need for both relationship building *and* truth-telling—and it helps to ensure that Jewish spaces are informed, respectful, and potentially decolonial spaces, but it is nevertheless only part of the reconciliation process. Krista McCracken provides several recommendations regarding next steps for Canadian archives, which includes developing archival standards that reflect Indigenous worldviews and removing systemic barriers for Indigenous heritage professionals.⁶⁰ A few Jewish archives have begun to build bridges with Indigenous communities. Several consider how experiences of racialization and genocide can be the basis for meaningful relationships, while some programs put Jewish and Indigenous speakers into dialogue with one another. Practices that facilitate Jewish-Indigenous encounters or contribute to relationship building remain in the minority, however. It is imperative that archives consider how this sort of practice can constitute second, third, and beyond steps.

While Canadian Jewish archives are in the process of developing substantial responses to reconciliation, these responses are largely uneven between and within archives. This is evident when comparing regions. Archives in western Canada are generally more engaged than archives in Ontario, Quebec, and the Maritimes. It is also noteworthy that archives in Toronto and Montreal, the two major centres of contemporary Jewish life in Canada, have been slower to adopt reconciliation practices. Furthermore, reconciliation practices are applied unevenly within each archive. I demonstrate that, while many archives engage with reconciliation, most are still navigating this process and rely on more cursory practices such as terri-

torial acknowledgement. Although some archives integrate reconciliation practices throughout multiple exhibits and programs, such as Vancouver, this is usually initiated by individual archivists, curators, or educational programmers rather than implemented at the institutional level. Only Winnipeg provides a public institutional response to reconciliation, although Toronto is currently in the process of developing institutional policies.⁶¹ This underscores the value of surveying reconciliation practices rather than focusing, for example, on case studies. While case studies can yield insights to specific organizational practices, they are limited by the fact that many Jewish organizations engage with reconciliation in limited ways.⁶²

The uneven approach to reconciliation reflects the distinctive way that settler colonialism has taken shape in Canada. Several factors can account for regional differences: The size of Jewish communities and their integration into each city, the age and history of each community, political interests and partnerships, and the broader socio-political context, among others. Yet they can also be attributed to the fact that settler colonialism is itself an uneven process.⁶³ For example, Rima Wilkes and colleagues observe that territorial acknowledgement takes different forms in different regions. Institutions in western Canada focus on land, territory, and political relationships while those in eastern Canada have practices that are less developed or rooted in multiculturalism. They attribute these variations to the presence or absence, as well as the intent and content, of treaties.⁶⁴ Canadian Jewish archives to some degree follow this pattern, suggesting that they are as embedded in their regional contexts as they are in a national network of Jewish organizations. These archives may be separate from the state, but they are nevertheless entrenched in settler colonial structures.

Jewish community archives have a role to play in the reconciliation process. These archives are not part of the Canadian government that uses law to dispossess and disenfranchise Indigenous peoples, nor do they belong to the Christian churches that operated Residential Schools. But as the SCCA observes, “archival practices have perpetuated racist, colonial ideology and supported the legislated dispossession, silencing, assimilation, and genocide of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples.”⁶⁵ It is noteworthy that many archives approach reconciliation in a way that is not guided by the Canadian state. For example, while “On These Shores” acknowledges the realities of empire and the emerging state in the 19th century, it frames history as a series of encounters between Indigenous peoples, Jewish settlers, and other groups on the Pacific coast. In this way, Jewish archives often conceive of and practise reconciliation in ways that do not assume supremacy of the Canadian state. In other words, they engage with reconciliation without necessarily reproducing the colonial politics of recognition. This is not always the case, such as Winnipeg’s statement released for the National Day of Truth and Reconciliation. Moreover, it is important to consider how Canadian Jewish organizations support the state and are complicit in settler

colonialism. One should remain critical of all reconciliation practices and the sometimes problematic ways they reproduce the politics of recognition, settler mythology, or other colonial ideologies. By intentionally and critically engaging with reconciliation, Jewish archives can be sites that not only document the past but also provide guidance for how Indigenous peoples, settler society, and other migrants can build respectful and reciprocal relationships in the present and future.

Acknowledgements

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