Pictures of Culture:

Photographic Objects as Sites of National Identity

by

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Abstract

Pictures of Culture: Photographic Objects as Sites of National Identity   2014

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This thesis paper examines specific bodies of work by three Ontario-based emerging artists, Meryl McMaster, Basil AlZeri and Kristie MacDonald, who explore questions of depicting national identity in a culturally diverse country like Canada. Focusing on the passport, the postcard and the ethnographic portrait as objects of cultural significance, the artists and their works appropriate these sites of photography, and, in turn, their embedded histories, as ways to renegotiate them. The specific representations taken up by McMaster, AlZeri and MacDonald portray a variety of culturally specific perspectives and histories in relation to Canada. The artists in "Pictures of Culture" trouble the ideological imperatives of national identity by rethinking photographic representations as signifiers of inclusion, recognition and participation that arise from their distinct subject positions as Indigenous sovereign citizens or immigrants within national borders.

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Finally, to my parents, my most heartfelt thanks of all for your continued support.

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[1] A play performed by The Dancing Sky Theatre Company in 2007; as cited in Lynn Caldwell, Carrianne Leung and Darryl Leroux, eds., *Critical Inquiries: A Reader in Studies of Canada* (Winnipeg: Fernwood Publishing, 2012), 122.

Introduction

Canada's visual culture over the past two centuries has largely been shaped by those in power. Historically, French and English European settler culture produced images that reflected colonial and nationalist histories while at the same time excluding, misrepresenting and codifying Indigenous and non-white bodies. Anthropologist Eva Mackey explains that these complex variants of power, history and economics have contributed to "a situation in which the multiple identities [that] make up the nation are constantly at battle with each other."[2] The artworks of early career Ontario-based artists Kristie MacDonald, Basil AlZeri and Meryl McMaster engage with this situation, appropriating dominant representations of the nation in order to think through issues of inclusion, participation and recognition. Their contestations focus on three particular sites of photographic representation: the ethnographic portrait, the national postcard, and the passport. In so doing, they create a field of counter-representations that I argue in this paper constitute specific cultural relationships to the nation.

"Nation" and "colony" are volatile terms that require specificity in their use; in this paper they provide consistent reference points for my readings of the artists' works. I use the term "nation" to refer to a sovereign territory inhabited by diverse groups of people who shape its collective sense of identity. I use the term "colony" to refer to a territory under direct control of another nation-state within the historical context of empire building and its consequences. In Canada, visual expressions of nation and colony are inextricably linked to an overarching colonial narrative, one that perpetuates the dominance and normalcy of European settlement, or what is known as "settler-colonialism." Settler-colonialism

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[2] Eva Mackey, *The House of Difference: Cultural Politics and National Identity in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 13.

functions as a process of land occupation and colonization established by white Europeans that involves the profound displacement and "elimination of native societies."[3] Scholar Patrick Wolfe explains, "[S]ettler colonialism destroys to replace"[4] and bears a close relationship to cultural genocide, hence we must be critical of its normalization in processes of nation-making. The term "settler" evokes notions of race, power and privilege, and today, connotes different settlement patterns, each with their own cultural specificity and power dynamic. For instance, indentured and enslaved non-white bodies arrived on this land known as Canada for very different reasons than most Europeans (including my own ancestors). The same can be said for Canada's more recent wave of refugees, who likewise left their countries at no choice of their own.

Language plays a paramount role in the construction of dominant ideologies and their related identifications. Language has long been used as a colonial tool, enabling the subjugation of people whose cultural language, values or names differ from the dominant white European vernacular. Terms such as "white," "non-white" and "racialized," for example, are inadequate descriptors, as they fail to articulate the complexity of these diverse, heterogeneous and shifting positionalities. In this paper, however, I use the terms "white" and "racialized" to distinguish between Caucasian bodies that have been constructed as the norm – so normal that they seem to lack ethnicity – and those who are perpetually placed outside of this racial norm. The term "racialized" reflects the process of attributing identities based on racial categories to groups who did not consider themselves in such terms by groups in dominant positions in order to further domination. The terms also highlights the fact that race is a socially constructed category whose meaning shifts

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[3] Patrick Wolfe, "Settler colonialism and the elimination of the native," *Journal of Genocidal Research* 8, no. 4 (December 2006): 388.
[4] Ibid., 392.

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over time and space. I use the term "racialized" rather than "people of colour" as I do not believe identifications based on positions of "colour" are productive and perpetuate essentialist notions of race. Identifying based on one's skin colour sets up unrealistic binaries, where unless one is "white" or "black," it becomes difficult to identify. It should be noted that the term "Indigenous" reflects a recent shift in the inclusion of international experiences of colonized peoples. While positive, the term "Indigenous" has the tendency to "collectivize many distinct populations whose experiences under imperialism have been vastly different."[5] For this reason, I use the term "Indigenous peoples" to acknowledge this multiplicity.

Language also requires specificity in its expression, as terms such as "stateless" and "sovereign," for example, hold very different meanings for people across different subject positions. I use the term "stateless" throughout this paper to describe the legal condition of being unrecognized as belonging to a nation-state hence lacking citizenship and nationality and 'sovereign' to refer to a nation's autonomy or political independence. I am writing from a position of European descent and realize that I bring a particular perspective as a white settler to issues of representation in relation to nation and colony, and thus cannot articulate all of the rich viewpoints that Canada encompasses. Although the language employed throughout this paper has been chosen with great thought, care and reflection, language remains an imperfect means of communication that one must continuously be critical of. An integral part of writing this thesis has been the deep reflection and consideration of language it required: in particular, how language has been used at different points in history, by whom and to what purpose. This process allowed me to reflect critically on my own relationship to place and history. As a white settler of Scottish and

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[5] Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples,* 2nd ed.. (London: Zed Books, 2012) 6.

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Italian ancestry, born in Anishinaabe, Haudenosaunee and Wyandote territory (Toronto), I have been compelled to think deeply on colonialism and neo-colonialism in Canada.

Drawing on photographic images of nation and colony, the artworks of this study look at specific histories of representation and how these histories have defined senses of identity, inclusion, participation and recognition in relation to specific subject positions in Canada. I am interested in teasing out the visual strategies employed by each artist, as well as interrogating their use of photographic objects as both official and art-historical signifiers to unsettle the enduring visual power of colonial narratives. A number of factors have influenced my decision to focus on MacDonald, AlZeri and McMaster. My emphasis on artworks by early career artists amplifies a generational dialogue on issues of land, identity and representation that I share, allowing for multiple contemporary perspectives to intersect, which is an important reflection of the ongoing human condition in a place like Canada. I also have chosen these artists because of the geographical proximity that MacDonald, AlZeri and McMaster and I share as residents of the province of Ontario. Geographical proximity allows for comparisons to drawn between and across diverse subject positions, though, within the boundaries of provincial specificity. Within Ontario fall the nation's capital, Ottawa, as well as the largest urban population, Toronto. For this reason, I use first-person voicing throughout this thesis as a means to reflect such realities of entanglement.

Chapter One addresses histories of Canadian occupation, settlement, treaty-making and representation as a way to locate the contestations to which MacDonald, AlZeri and McMaster's works respond. I also provide an overview of the scholarship on which my research builds, highlighting the work of cultural theorists Benedict Anderson, Himani

Bannerji and Eva Mackey, whose writings on nation-making are particularly helpful in shaping my own interrogations of dominant visual representations of the nation. The writing of professor/lawyer/activist Pamela Palmater on Idle No More, scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith on decolonizing methodologies, and scholar Gerald Vizenor on "postindian survivance" provides important perspectives on how practices of Indigenous colonial resistance have always existed, as evidenced by their critical scholarship.

Chapter Two looks at the various strategies employed by Toronto-based artist Kristie MacDonald to challenge the authority of photographic representation. MacDonald's ancestry is a mix of Scottish, Irish, French Acadian and Míkmaq. In her work-in-progress *Siiri Juliana Hillervo Pelkonen* (2013–14), MacDonald uses a found passport as the object through which to tease out the complexities of representing settler European identities. MacDonald uses translation - a process of re-signification - to remap the passport owner's route of transnational immigration to Canada, and in doing so, draws the viewer's attention to processes of inclusion, recognition and participation for those that fall within the settler-colonial paradigm. In this particular work, translation operates as a mirror in which to consider our place within a nation – whether we are "native" or "alien" to it. By way of installation and cabinetry, MacDonald's presentation style conforms to senses of authority and austerity that passports (and the archiving of documents in general) are commonly thought to hold. However, through subtle processes of printmaking and forgery, MacDonald complicates notions of legitimacy in relation to photographic representation.

Chapter Three examines the strategies Basil AlZeri uses to interrogate representations of occupation in his series *The Post Card Project* (2013–14). The installation is comprised of images, projected in a loop, of the artist interacting with popular postcards of the Canadian

landscape. The images reveal how the artist views himself as someone of Palestinian descent living on Canadian land. The depiction/presence of AlZeri's body within each new image asserts the imperative for Palestinian bodies to continually negotiate their inclusion and recognition within representations of the nation.

In Chapter Four, I examine how Meryl McMaster's work *Ancestral* (2008–10) challenges ethnographic representations of Indigenous peoples, thereby illuminating and offering counter-narratives of Indigenous survival, perseverance and sovereignty. *Ancestral* is a photographic series that layers composite portraits of Indigenous peoples, appropriating historic images by non-Indigenous artists like Edward S. Curtis, George Catlin and Will Soule and juxtaposing them with self-portraits of McMaster and her father who are of mixed Plains Cree heritage. These striking juxtapositions create photographic entanglements that force the viewer to negotiate the confluence of ethnography, self/familial representation and the steadfast gaze.

By way of conclusion, Chapter Five reflects on what was accomplished through the writing of this paper and proposes work that still needs to be done. While I was originally interested in curating this research as an exhibition project, writing a formal thesis paper gave me the time and space to critically explore portrayals of Canada through contemporary and historical photographic representations. It has also enabled me to establish a framework for a future exhibition, a task I greatly look forward to. As evidenced in the curatorial project by Charmaine Nelson, curatorial practice remains a critical and productive way to engage the politics of representation. For now, I hope that the following chapters offer points of entry for multiple readers, regardless of subject position.

1 | Visual Representations of Canada

There exists a strong relationship between the ways in which Canada has been visually represented and the ways in which settlement and colonization have occurred over time. Colonization refers to the establishment of colonies, which, in Canada, occurred through European settlement and community-building as early as the fifteenth century, and with the permanent occupation and expansion of land as defined by treaties between Indigenous peoples and the Crown. These negotiations of colonial settlement took place throughout the nineteenth century through immigration, and thus settlement, and are processes that still continue in Canada today. Artworks and artists commonly associated with Canada have inevitably contributed to representations of the Canadian nation and its national imaginary, as well as to a recognition of who is part of the nation. Understanding how national histories of colonization and settlement have affected photographic representations of Canada enables a more political reading both of historical images and of how artists use them today in subversive ways. This chapter explores the relationship between photographic representations of nation and colony and notions of identity in Canada.

Artist/writer Gail Tremblay argues that "photographs are artifacts of culture,"[6] and thus need to be read within a critical cultural framework. There exists an inherent violence in the act of photography. As a mode of representation, photography emerges "from a long history of colonization that includes war, physical genocide, loss of territory, political upheaval, cultural genocide, relocation, denigration of indigenous culture, and miseducation."[7] The language around photography is problematic by nature, as expressions

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[6] Gail Tremblay, "Constructing Images, Constructing Reality: American Indian Photography and Representation," *Views* (Winter 1993): 8.
[7] Ibid.

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such as "taking" or "capturing" pictures implies both an aggressive and possessive stance to image-making. The term "snap-shot," for instance, sounds as if a photograph is a casualty of gun violence. Similarly, the act of attentively looking through the camera lens and pressing the shutter button is akin to the act of looking down a rifle and pulling the trigger. These violent undertones refute the innocence of photographic objects, which will prove relevant to how one approaches the image-based work of Kristie MacDonald, whose artwork *Siiri Juliana Hillervo Pelkonen* (2013–14) complicates the banality of the passport portrait.

My emphasis on photographic representation throughout this study is significant in both historical and contemporary contexts. Early photography played a pivotal role in art history as a colonizing tool, when the camera came to North America and commercial artists such as Francis Frith, A. Zeno Shindler and William S. Soule were frequently hired to document the expanding "Western Frontier" in the early nineteenth century. Early photographs depict the signing of treaties and council discussions, which form an important record of Indigenous presence and negotiation with European settlers. However, it is mostly the photographs of non-Indigenous photographers like Curtis and Soule that have been canonized, Curtis and Soule's images played an important role in shaping and disseminating false ideas about Indigenous peoples as cultural artifacts who images were to be documented "before their cultures vanished."[8] This is a colonial stereotype, and it is in fact the *photograph* that refutes the notion of 'vanishing' cultures and offers us proof that Indigenous peoples were always present. Indeed, Tremblay explains that such photographs

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[8] Ibid., 9.

reveal "a powerful resistance to the wholesale loss of the cultural autonomy and identity of native people."[9]

Gerald Vizenor is an Anishinaabe scholar whose writing focuses on acts of resistance and creativity that has ensured the presence of the Indigenous people despite the cruelty of the colonial project through representations of the "postindian". He uses language as a tool of reimagining, creating terms, such as "postindian" and "survivance," that articulate important realities of Indigenous contestation and survival. He describes the contradictory nature of the "indian," which is "a simulation, the absence of natives." Further, "the *indian* transposes the real, and the simulation of the real has no referent, memory, or native stories. The *postindian* must waver over the aesthetic ruins of *indian* simulations."[10] His statement illuminates the lack of agency in the word "indian" and in its constructed representations. Instead, he proposes shifting to the self-identifier "postindian". Vizenor explains that "survivance, in the sense of native survivance, is more than survival, more than endurance or mere response; the stories of survivance are an active presence."[11] This perspective refuses Indigenous victimry and domination, and instead, points to the notion of sovereignty as an inherent condition rather than state-mediated one.[12] Vizenor's discussion on Indigenous presence and the image is vital to my understanding of the long histories of self-making presented in Meryl McMaster's work that is discussed in Chapter Four.

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[9] Ibid.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Gerald Vizenor, *Fugitive Poses: Native American Indian Scenes of Absence and Presence* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 15.
[12] Ibid.

Alongside photography and documentation as colonial practices is the role of the photograph as a colonial object in and of itself. For example, to own an image of a Canadian landscape is, in a sense, like owning a piece of Canada. Art historian Graham Clarke explains, "The photograph not only signals a different relationship to and over nature, it speaks very much to a sense of power in the way we seek to order and construct the world around us."[13] As a mode of representation, photography continues to construct images that perpetuate the colonial gaze and the objectification of alterity. This divisive effect is amplified through the control or "taming" of nature that is produced in the boundaries of the photographic frame, as in national postcard images of Canada. The dominant representational history of the Canadian landscape, and the photographic frame's power in "taming" such landscapes are essential ideas informing my approach to the contested landscapes of Basil AlZeri's *The Post Card Project* (2013–14).

In his essay "Picture and Witness at the Site of the Wilderness," cultural historian Jonathan Bordo argues that the kinds of representations made popular by artists like the Group of Seven, Tom Thomson and Emily Carr have "always been a negotiation between settler culture and its first inhabitants."[14] Unlike how photography provides a visual record of existence, painting enabled artists a material way to "sublime" and literally "paint over" histories of Indigenous peoples in Canada. As art historian W.J.T. Mitchell suggests, landscape acts as a locus for historical erasure, "a strategic site for burying the past and veiling history with 'natural beauty.'"[15] In the colonial Canadian context, this convention has given strategy to those whose imaginary is based on the evacuation of entire peoples from the landscape. The landscape, particularly within the genre of painting, harbours

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[13] Graham Clarke, *The Photograph* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 11.

[14] Jonathan Bordo, "Picture and Witness at the Site of the Wilderness," in *Landscape and Power,* 2nd ed., ed. W. J. T. Mitchell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 310.

[15] W. J. T. Mitchell, "Holy Landscape: Isreal, Palestine, and the American Wilderness," *Landscape and Power,* 263.

secrets, selective memories, and self-serving myths that one must continuously consider when looking at representations of the Canadian nation.

Talking Back / Indigenous Self-Representation

While representations of national landscapes based on settler ideologies persist even now, they have not gone unchallenged. Both the production and presentation of Indigenous art over the past fifty years has addressed issues of representation and, in particular, drawn attention to the ways in which images denote identity. The following section provides a brief genealogy of Indigenous artistic self-representation as a lens through which to view practices of Indigenous self-determination in Canada, and in turn, allowing for Meryl McMaster's work *Ancestral* (2008–10) to be read within a trajectory of political and artistic resistance.

An important entry point to such a genealogy is Expo 67, as it signifies a particular flashpoint between Indigenous and settler relations regarding issues of representation. As an international event staged in Montreal in the summer of 1967, Expo 67 was Canada's opportunity to showcase the nation to the world. But upon noticing Indigenous representation was absent from the planned narrative, a group of Indigenous artists collaborated in approaching the Canadian Tourism Commission on the matter of inclusion in the event. The "Indians of Canada" pavilion, which was an essential component showcasing Canada, segregated Indigenous peoples and at the same time celebrated contemporary artworks made by Indigenous artists. Alongside the artworks were placed purposefully provocative photographic texts demonstrative of the oppressive conditions faced by many of Canada's First Nations people. These documentary-style images were

interventions on the part of the Indigenous artists behind the "Indians of Canada" pavilion, and were meant to reflect the ongoing struggle for Indigenous sovereignty in Canada. Such a charged juxtaposition of images ensured public controversy. Métis scholar David Garneau describes this moment as "a profound site of dissent and the birth of new possibilities"[16] in resisting the ongoing representation of Indigenous art as simply cultural or aesthetic objects.

This influential moment, though followed by other smaller strides forward, would not be paralleled until the 1986 purchase by the National Gallery of Canada (NGC) of Ojibwe artist Carl Beam's mixed-media work *The North American Iceberg* (1985). This acquisition was the NGC's first purchase of work by an Indigenous artist and was acquired for its contemporary art collection rather than for its historical or ethnographic collections. Although this momentous event placed Beam's work alongside canonical European work and signaled the national recognition of a contemporary Indigenous artist, the purchase was based on Beam's ethnicity as an Indigenous person. In retrospect, the circumstances of this purchase tokenized Beam's practice. On the significance of the purchase, Beam reflects,

> I realize that when they bought my work it wasn't from Carl the artist but from Carl the Indian. At the time, I felt honoured, but now I know that I was used politically – Indian art that's made as Indian is racially motivated, and I just can't do that. My work is not made for Indian people but for thinking people. In the global and evolutionary scheme, the difference between humans is negligible.[17]

Beam's statement brings to light the fact that work was celebrated for its "difference" rather than as an artwork. It also draws attention to the tokenistic terms on which dominant

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[16] David Garneau, "Indian to Indigenous: Temporary Pavilions to Sovereign Display Territories" (paper presented at the Aboriginal Curatorial Collective Conference *Revisioning the Indians of Canada Pavilion: Ahzhekewada (Let us look back),* Toronto, October 15–16, 2011).
[17] Carl Beam in conversation with John Grande, September 23, 1992, as quoted in John K. Grande, "Carl Beam: Dissolving Time," *Balance: Art and Nature* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1994).

institutions engage with the inclusion, recognition and participation of non-European artists.

Beam's purchase was not singular in bringing Indigenous art into the national consciousness, disrupting some of the country's most Eurocentric spaces. *The Spirit Sings: Artistic Traditions of Canada's First Peoples*, first presented by the Glenbow Museum in Calgary in 1988 in conjunction with the Olympic Arts Festival, featured more than 650 Indigenous artworks from museum collections around the world, selected by non-Indigenous curators and without any Indigenous consultation. Although presenting Indigenous works as "art" rather than as anthropological "artifacts" was an important step forward in the inclusion of Indigenous cultural production within contemporary spaces like the white cube, the controversies surrounding the exhibition's curatorial process as well as its corporate sponsorship by Shell arguably outweighed its accomplishments. These tensions raised important questions about what scholar Ruth B. Phillips describes as "Indigenous voice and power in the representation of their culture"[18] – in other words, the importance of Indigenous self-representation. It is important to note that the controversy surrounding the exhibition's Shell sponsorship is not simply about the rejection of corporate sponsorship; rather, it is about the lack of accountability and responsibility corporations like Shell demonstrate with their projects across Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities alike.

Other landmark exhibitions of Indigenous art that followed in the 1990s similarly saw questions of Indigenous representation taken up in both the national consciousness and mainstream art world. Most significantly, exhibitions were planned in 1992 to coincide

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[18] Ruth B. Phillips, *Museum Pieces: Toward the Indigenization of Canadian Museums* (Montreal: McGill/Queens University Press, 2011), 49.

with the quincentennial of Columbus's arrival in the Americas, and provided a context for Indigenous artists and non-Indigenous curators alike to interrogate Canada's colonial history. Helga Pakasaar, curator of *Revisions,* an Indigenous exhibition presented by Walter Phillips Gallery, Banff, positioned the work of Indigenous artists like Joane Cardinal-Schubert, Jimmie Durham and Hachivi Edgar Heap of Birds as potent "revisionings" of national narratives and representations of Indigenous subjugation. Pakasaar also framed her role as a non-Indigenous curator who enabled the valorization of Indigenous artists by white culture as something that we must be cautious and critical of, explaining that Indigenous artists must have "their own ground to stand on [and] … represent themselves in their own terms."[19]

Other momentous Indigenous exhibitions in 1992 included *Indigena: Contemporary Native Perspectives on Five Hundred Years* at the Canadian Museum of Civilization (Gatineau)*, Land, Spirit, Power* at the National Gallery of Canada (Ottawa) and *New Territories: 300/500 Years After* at Maison de la culture (Montreal). Curated by Indigenous curators Gerald McMaster and Lee-Ann Martin, *Indigena* presented a critical examination of Indigenous representation in Canada through the juxtaposition of works by living Indigenous artists with more traditional and historical pieces from the Museum's collection. McMaster and Martin successfully produced a dialogue between historical and contemporary perspectives on Indigenous cultural production that enabled a fruitful museological intervention, notably framed by Indigenous curators rather than non-Indigenous ones. Also significant is the fact that *Indigena'*s lead curator is the father of artist Meryl McMaster, whose artwork encompasses a generational relationship by

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[19] Ibid.

featuring McMaster in her photographs – a strategy of collaboration that I discuss further in Chapter Four.

Despite these important Indigenous-led exhibitions over the past several decades, issues of Indigenous self-representation and self-determination still persist due to the long history of colonization and misrepresentation. In 2005, the Aboriginal Curatorial Collective (ACC) established an official presence for and recognition of the professional development of Aboriginal curators and artists across Canada. The Collective emerged from the need to contest the "existing authority of the non-Aboriginal curatorial and academic community within the discipline of Aboriginal arts in Canada."[20] As a national, nonprofit, bilingual organization, it also aimed to build more "equitable spaces for the Aboriginal intellectual and artistic community."[21] I had the privilege of attending the ACC's 2011 symposium, *Revisioning the Indians of Canada Pavilion: Ahzhekewada (Let us look back),*[22] which is where my own political engagement with issues of Indigenous/settler relations critically began in advance of starting this thesis research.

That same year saw another groundbreaking event in terms of Indigenous international recognition, when Anishinaabe artist Rebecca Belmore represented Canada at the 2005 Venice Biennale with the work *Fountain* (2005). While Jewish-Mohawk scholar Steven Loft problematizes the site of the Venice Biennale as an "anachronistic throwback to

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[20] Aboriginal Curatorial Collective. *Aboriginal Curatorial Collective* http://www.aboriginalcuratorialcollective.org (accessed April 10, 2014).
[21] Aboriginal Curatorial Collective, "Mandate," *Aboriginal Curatorial Collective* http://www.aboriginalcuratorialcollective.org/about/mandate/ (accessed April 10, 2014).
[22] Presented in collaboration with the Indigenous Visual Culture program at OCAD University, formerly titled the "Aboriginal Visual Culture program."

notions of nationalism,"[23] he also acknowledges the inevitable power it represents within the international arena.[24] The work *Fountain* (2005) offered a moving perspective on the relationship between land, identity and Indigenous peoples in Canada in the form of a large-scale video installation. Using her own body as a vehicle of representation in the piece - a strategy used by many Indigenous artists, including McMaster - Belmore struggles with the natural elements: fire, water, air and blood. Her violent interactions are uncomfortable for both her and the viewer, and at times appear apocalyptic: the water-filled bucket we see her struggling to carry soon turns blood-filled as she splashes it at the camera. This is a potent reminder of the violence that has taken place on Canadian land. By placing Canada's history of Indigenous colonization within an international context, Belmore succeeds at illuminating an important Canadian narrative of cultural genocide that has often been erased from national and international memory.

A number of critical curated exhibitions have positioned Indigenous art and curatorial practice at the forefront of contemporary cultural production in recent years. Large-scale travelling exhibitions like *Decolonize Me* (2011), *Beat Nation: Art, Hip Hop and Aboriginal Culture* (2012) and *Sakahàn: International Indigenous Art* (2013) take up concerns of "Indigeneity," or what scholar Ruth B. Phillips describes as the contemporary hybrid and dialogical conditions of being an Indigenous person within the "Canadian model of pluralist negotiation."[25] The increasing number of travelling exhibitions of Indigenous art in Canada and internationally reflects the ongoing importance of cultural

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[23] Steven Loft, "Reflections on 20 Years of Aboriginal Art," (paper presented at University of Victoria, Victoria, BC, February 8, 2012).
[24] Although Métis artist Edward Poitras had already represented Canada at the Biennale almost a decade earlier, Belmore was the first Indigenous woman to represent Canada – a notable distinction in and of itself.
[25] Phillips, *Museum Pieces,* 10.

dialogues that challenge and resist dominant representations of settler national identity and colonialism.

Theoretical Perspectives on the Nation

Critical understandings of nation are most commonly linked to sociologist Benedict Anderson and his writings on nation-making. In his influential text *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983), Anderson contends that nation-making is a modernist project that imagines and produces notions of "community."[26] He argues that it takes strenuous work to create the nation and to sustain its representations, particularly, since the nation space is composed of multiple ethnic groups at once. Ethnographer Anthony D. Smith builds upon Anderson's discussion by questioning Anderson's notion of diversity as a modern phenomenon, arguing that human communities have always existed around ethnic affinities.[27] It follows from Anderson and Smith's thinking that Canada is a nation state that has always encompassed people of diverse cultural backgrounds, from its earliest Indigenous communities that have long had their own socio-political, cultural, and economic practices. The following section offers a concise overview of theoretical approaches to understanding the nation, and in turn, its representations.

Canada's early nationalism was based on a homogenous settler ideology that imagined Canada as the "Britain of the North," populated by white immigrants of Anglo-Saxon heritage. Yet despite official policies discouraging non-white immigration, Europeans

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[26] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism,* 2nd ed. (Brooklyn, NY: Verso, 2006).
[27] Anthony D. Smith, *The Cultural Foundation of Nations: Hierarchy, Covenant, and Republic* (Mississauga, ON: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008).

arrived from countries as far away as Portugal, Spain, France and Britain to help settle the land from the late nineteenth century up until World War I. Following this early twentieth-century wave of Western European immigration, "increasing numbers were arriving from Asia and Africa, constituting an ever-larger group of non-white immigrants"[28] needed for physical labour. Eastern Europeans were also arriving and played a paramount role in Canadian expansion and settlement across the Prairies. Georges Erasmus, President of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, reminds us that "the subjects of historical wrongdoings, redress, healing, and reconciliation have many localized variants."[29] In Canada those subjects include Japanese- and Italian-Canadians interned during World War II, and African-Canadians displaced from Africville in the 1960s, among many other examples.

Cultural historian Daniel Francis elaborates on the ways in which visual representations of Indigenous peoples in Canada have been shaped by white settler culture in his text *The Imaginary Indian: The Image of the Indian in Canadian Culture* (1992).[30] Francis explains that French and English Europeans over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have romanticized the view that Indigenous peoples were the only visible link back to the land's "prehistory." Representations of the "weak" and "passive Indian" within the Canadian imaginary depict settler encounters with Indigenous peoples as both friendly and inevitable – an image that we know is hardly the truth. The belief that Indigenous peoples were "uncivilized" and thus needed to be tamed greatly fueled national narratives around difference in racist and discriminatory ways. These ideologies of difference, fear and hate

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[28] Ibid.
[29] Ashok Mather, Jonathan Dewar and Mike DeGagne, eds., *Cultivating Canada: Reconciliation through the Lens of Cultural Diversity* (Ottawa: Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2011) vii.
[30] Daniel Francis, *The Imaginary Indian: The Image of the Indian in Canadian Culture* (Vancouver: Arsenal Press, 1992).

allowed Canada to codify its people as "insiders" and "outsiders," or colonizers and colonized, and thereby to manage its population accordingly.

Postcolonial theory offers one fertile lens through which to read representations of nation and colony, as it focuses on the effects of colonialism and thus allows for the acknowledgement of its histories and ongoing processes. Part of its relevance stems from the fact that Canada is technically a post-colonial state, though this is in no way implies that it is decolonized. Canadian citizenship still requires pledging allegiance to the Queen and our currency still bears her image. Postcolonial theory contests and decentres notions of history and Eurocentrism through intertextual readings based on art history, social and political thought, and geography, as well as other disciplines, of which provide a fitting approach to looking at how MacDonald, AlZeri and McMaster's works challenge colonial narratives. Postcolonial engagement also allows me to ask questions of inclusion, recognition and participation based on the power dynamics of colonization. There are, however, limitations to its perspective, especially in relation to Canada's First Nations. Postcolonial thought can flatten the cultural specificity of colonized people, equating their varied experiences of oppression as one master narrative. As an intellectual discourse, it also contradicts itself, as postcolonial theory seeks to question structures of power, while simultaneously embodying it, as it exists primarily within the academy. If postcolonial theory is an intellectual state of being, then where does it take place as an action or activism? This is where practices of decolonization prove relevant.

The ongoing movement for decolonization is also an important lens through which to critically engage with representations of Canada. This process is achieved through the practice of reclamation of culturally specific Indigenous ways of knowing in order to

rebalance misrepresentations of Indigenous cultures within the dominant/mainstream culture. A potent articulation of the decolonial imperative is the grassroots movement Idle No More (INM) – the largest Indigenous movement in Canadian history, which "began as a series of teach-ins throughout Saskatchewan to protest impending parliamentary bills to erode Indigenous sovereignty and environmental protections."[31] According to the INM manifesto, "The Treaties are nation to nation agreements between First Nations and the British Crown who are sovereign nations,"[32] binding both Indigenous and settler Europeans in honouring and respecting the reciprocal relations defined in treaties. Lawyer/activist/ scholar Pamela Palmater describes INM as "a peoples' movement that empowers Indigenous peoples to stand up for their Nations, lands, treaties and sovereignty"[33] alongside the rest of Canadians. It calls for critical reflection to re-situate Indigenous nations, as well as settler ones, within an overarching interdependent relationship of treaties.

In addition to Palmater's perspective, the ongoing writings of art historians, critics and scholars like Richard Hill,[34] Marcia Crosby,[35] Lynda Jessup[36] and Charlotte Townsend-Gault[37] have shaped critical discourse on Indigenous art production and presentation in

[31] Idle No More. "History," *Idle No More* http://www.idlenomore.ca/story (accessed April 20, 2014).
[32] Idle No More. "Manifesto," *Idle No More* http://www.idlenomore.ca/manifesto (accessed April 20, 2014).
[33] Pamela Palmater, "Idle No More: What do we want and where are we headed?" *rabble blogs*, January 4, 2013 http://rabble.ca/blogs/bloggers/pamela-palmater/2013/01/what-idle-no-more-movement-really (accessed April 5, 2014).
[34] Richard Hill, "Graveyard and Gift Shop: Fighting Over the McMichael Canadian Art Collection," *Beyond Wilderness: The Group of Seven, Canadian Identity and Contemporary Art*, eds. John O'Brian & Peter White (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007), 210–15.
[35] Marcia Crosby, "Construction of the Imaginary Indian" in *The Vancouver Anthology: the Institutional Politics of Art,* ed. Stan Douglas (Vancouver: Talon, 1991), 267–94.
[36] *On Aboriginal Representation in the Gallery*, eds. Lynda Jessup and Shannon Bagg (Ottawa: Canadian Museum of Civilization, 2002).
[37] Charlotte Townsend-Gault, "First Nations Culture: Who Knows What?" *Canadian Journal of Communication* 23, no. 1 (1997).

Canada since the early 1990s. Maori scholar, Linda Tuhiwai Smith, discusses

decolonization as both methodology and epistemology in her text *Decolonizing*

Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples. Tuhiwai Smith highlights the

imperative of Indigenous peoples to "reclaim control over Indigenous ways of knowing and

being."[38] She also recognizes the role that visual culture plays in relation to the presentation

of Indigeneity. Tuhiwai Smith writes, "representation is important as a concept because it

gives the impression of 'the truth.'"[39] She draws upon feminist writer Audre Lorde's

famous expression to highlight the problematic and limiting nature of even discussing

issues and histories of colonial subjugation, stating, "[T]he master's tools will never

dismantle the master's house."[40] Instead, Indigenous peoples must reclaim and reimagine

their own terms of reference, as someone like Gerald Vizenor clearly demonstrates through

his writing on Indigenous "survivance." In McMaster's photographic series, *Ancestral*

(2008-10), we see evidence of Tuhiwai Smith and Vizenor's notions of Indigenous

resistance as embodied through strategies of self-portraiture and appropriation.

Tuhiwai Smith provides a rich overview of the Western paradigm and its implications on

research and Indigenous/settler relations, illustrating the imperative to "reclaim control

over Indigenous ways of knowing and being."[41] Her writing also recognizes the role visual

culture plays, explaining "representation is important as a concept because it gives the

impression of 'the truth.'"[42]. This thesis project appropriates the "master's tools" –

language, the photograph and ethnography – to undermine their objecthood as colonial

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[38] Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies,* 19.
[39] Ibid., 35.
[40] Ibid., 19.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid., 35.

signifiers and to focus on how artists use them to tell counter-narratives of nation and colony.

Postcolonial scholar Edward W. Said's essay "Invention, Memory, and Place" offers a rich perspective on issues of collective historical experience. Said's essay illuminates the inseparable relationships between nationalism, mythmaking and memory. He explains this cultural entanglement as a kind of "imaginative geography" that involves "the mapping, conquest, and annexation of territory,"[43]and is, reinforced through the images that are produced to narrate Canada, such as those painted by the Group of Seven, that erase Indigenous histories. Said's notion positions memory as a slippery terrain that serves to select, suppress or promote dominant narratives while at the same time subordinating others. Thus the memory and mythmaking of Canada as a settler state engages non-white bodies in ways that make them visible and at the same time removes them from representations of and participation in the nation. These elisions of memory draw attention to the question of how different identities are represented within the nation space. The following chapters consider how the works of McMaster, AlZeri and MacDonald use photographic objects to challenge representations of identity predicated on white settler ideologies of inclusion, recognition and participation.

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[43] Edward W. Said, "Invention, Memory and Place" in *Landscape and Power*, ed. W.J.T. Mitchell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 247.

Representations of Canadian identity have largely been shaped by processes of settler-colonialism. The passport is an object that allows for both personal and political discussions to emerge, particularly around practices of national identification. The small booklet denotes national citizenship through visual, legal and textual information, including a photographic portrait and data of one's gender, age, and birthplace, as well as transnational movement. The passport is valued as a legal object that ascribes citizenship status and allows the state to monitor the owner's movement across national borders. Most importantly, it serves to delineate the citizen from the non-citizen of a given nation. The following chapter uses an artwork by Kristie MacDonald to argue how cultural objects that use photographic representations such as passports, which are of personal and state significance, have shaped notions of settler-colonial identity in Canada.

MacDonald's work-in-progress, *Siiri Juliana Hillervo Pelkonen* (2013–14), features a found passport as its object of inquiry and takes its title from the passport's original owner [see **Figure 1**]. This work lies slightly outside of the art-historical frame that I use to read the other artists' works; instead, it focuses on the cultural objecthood of passports as official documentation of national inclusion. MacDonald draws on strategies of archival practice, museological display, translation and forgery to unsettle the ways in which notions of evidence and legitimacy are entrenched in both photographic representations and cultural objects, of which the passport is both.

A number of questions about identity, citizenship, a citizen's relationship to a nation, and accountability to a state arise out of MacDonald's use of the passport in this work. How

Fig. 1. Kristie MacDonald. Passport study (cover and interior photo) for *Siiri Juliana Hillervo Pelkonen*. 2013−. Installation with found passport. Photo courtesy of the artist.

does a passport signify nationality and identity? How does it operate as both a public and private document? How does MacDonald make visible official and unofficial histories through her use of the object? In order to explore these questions, one must examine how MacDonald decodes and presents the passport's visual and linguistic information, as well as what affinities can be made between the artist and object. MacDonald – who is trained as an archivist and holds a Masters of Information degree – visits flea markets regularly to source archival material. Upon discovering the Finnish passport on one of her visits in the spring of 2012, she began contemplating the life of the object and of its original owner, in particular, how it relates to protocols of identification within the settler-colonial paradigm.[44]

Based in Toronto, MacDonald identifies as a Canadian artist of mixed European heritage; she descends from Scottish, Irish, French Acadian, and Míkmaq ancestry. MacDonald's mixed identity is not uncommon among Canadians today and is reflective of the diverse European ethnicities that compose what is simply referred to as white. The passport tells the story of a woman named Pelkonen who emigrated from Finland to Canada in 1952. The object and its interior photo of Pelkonen show an image of a white settler-European of Finnish nationality, a European cultural background that is overshadowed by the English and French settler-colonial narratives of Canada. Pelkonen's passport marks her as a legal entity in relationship to a particular nation-state – in her case, Finland. While Pelkonen's citizenship status or legal relationship to a nation-state is seemingly secure, the question arises: what does the passport mean for people whose identities fall outside of those recognized by the state, such as those who are stateless or are in contestation with the state over issues of sovereignty?

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[44] Kristie MacDonald, e-mail message to the author, February 24, 2014.

MacDonald places an official passport front and centre to explore notions of identification. She does so by remapping Pelkonen's immigration through the passport's visual traces – its dates and stamps – which are indicative of larger questions of inclusion. MacDonald's archival approach uses museological practices of encasement, such as cabinetry – as used elsewhere in her practice – to draw the viewer's attention to standards of archival conservation, preservation and presentation [see **Figure 2**]. For this work MacDonald builds a custom vitrine to the scale of her objects using traditional cabinetmaking techniques and materials such as wood and glass. The resulting three-dimensional space encloses the passport and presents it as "official history," a presentation aesthetic that locates viewers "firmly in the present"[45] by requiring them to consider their relationship to the object within their space.

MacDonald's encasement creates an air of importance that allows her to reference the archive in relationship to the passport and its accompanying documents, giving further legitimacy to the content's particular story of European settlement to Canada. As archivist/scholar Sue Breakell suggests, we should not leave this presentation style unquestioned: it is important to complicate the archive's association with legitimacy. Breakell urges us to "look at the process of creation rather than the product itself"[46] so that we expand our focus to include the object's transmission of cultural memory. Breakell's concern arrives from two paradoxical notions of archives. The first is that although it is commonly held that archives are permanent and stable, they are not immune to change. The

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[45] Caoimhe Morgan-Feir, "What Was Will Be and Yellow Font Forest Green," catalogue essay (Toronto: Gallery 44, 2014), 3.
[46] Sue Breakell, "Perspectives: Negotiating the Archive," *Tate Papers,* no. 9 (April 1 2008).

Fig. 2. Kristie MacDonald. *Incomplete Archive: Speculative Forgeries of Cards 1, 2 and 5* installation view. 2011. Installation with found letters, found postcards, found stamps, relief prints on postcards, wood, glass, fabric, acrylic artifact stands. Photo by Erika Jacobs, courtesy of the artist.

second is that, while the archive performs cultural memory, it is selective it what it "remembers." What is held in the archive is inevitably fragmentary or incomplete. Fragmentariness along with the aura of authority appear to have an effect on the way we view archived items. A similar observation can be made in relation to the photograph, which appears to present reality, yet, in actuality, present selective portions or frames of reality as determined by the photographer, the editing process, or the very boundaries of the photographic frame. MacDonald's work plays with these tensions by challenging archival and photographic representations as evidentiary objects. By looking at "everyday history," such as the lives of average people, she illuminates anonymous perspectives through familiar objects. Interestingly, MacDonald uses an official document to do so, which further enmeshes notions of the public and private, and the personal and political.

MacDonald's work also reflects the increased use of the archive within contemporary art practices to illuminate alternative, invisible and often forgotten histories. Breakell elaborates on this growth, explaining, "the archive is popularly conceived of as a space where things are hidden in a state of stasis, imbued with secrecy, mystery and power."[47] Art historian Hal Foster refers to archives as a "site of construction,"[48] a methodology for artists, curators and scholars to consider historical contexts through analysis of contemporary practices. Bassnet and Foster's perspectives see the archive as a productive site, one that empowers artists to revisit archival objects as rich historical and cultural texts. Breakell directs this productive potential toward shaping our collective understandings of ourselves, stating "archives are traces to which we respond; they are a reflection of ourselves, and our response to them says more about us than the archive itself."[49] Art

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[47] Breakell, "Negotiating the Archive," 1.
[48] Hal Foster, "An Archival Impulse," *OCTOBER 110* (2004): 3–22.
[49] Breakell, "Negotiating the Archive," 1.

historian Sarah Bassnet describes this as a type of "affective response" that can be elicited by images that employ archival materials or subjects. The role of affect in archival-based representation produces important connections between objects and viewers, inciting nostalgic and emotional self-reflection.

Although not overtly politicized, MacDonald's artwork also draws attention to the passport as legal object and signifier of who the state recognizes, includes or allows to participate within the nation. The stamps, markings and texts found in passports narrate and contextualize the owner's geographic movement in both time and space. In Pelkonen's passport, the dates 1949 to 1954 allow the object to be understood within a critical social, cultural and political context. This period, which followed World War II and spanned the Korean War, saw a wave of multiethnic immigration to Canada, as well as major changes to the Indian Act. The political climate of Finland, which until this time was regarded as a mainly agrarian nation, became progressively more hostile due to rising tensions and impending conflicts with the Soviet Union. This is an interesting consideration in light of the role European settlers played in the history of Canada in "settling the land," which suggests specific cultural labour practices are transported through immigration.

The history of Finnish immigration is also taken up in the installation by Alfredo Jarr, entitled *One Million Finnish Passports* (1995/2014), which examines Finland's restrictive ascription of citizenship to immigrants to that country. Using more than one million passports – all forged – to create a massive accumulation, Jaar's installation critiques representations of legitimation, amongst many other things, such as practices of the state and processes of recognition. Jarr's artist statement explains,

> Finland has the lowest number of immigrants and refugees. Maintaining inhospitable, restrictive policies, Finland has guarded its status quo at a time when other countries are re-examining their moral and political positions on refugees and exiles…. Assembled in a formidable arrangement, [the one million passports] collectively represent the number of people who have been turned away from Finland.[50]

Both Jaar and MacDonald's works challenge the austerity of Finnish inclusion as represented by the cultural objecthood of the passport and its classifications. However, unlike Jaar's focus on a critical mass of objects to demonstrate notions of collectivity to draw our attention to the number of individuals who are affected by Finnish immigration law, MacDonald's emphasis on a singular passport and the image within it to allow the object to be understood within the specific context of the owner's movement across numerous national spaces.

Like Jaar and MacDonald, Canadian artist Hajra Waheed, who is of Indian descent, also challenges the ways in which one views visual culture through the passport. Similar to MacDonald's use of museological display, and later, forgery, Waheed's meticulous process of drawing photographic portraits problematizes our notion that photographs and archives are the truest and most stable forms of representation. In her work *The Anouchian Passport Portrait Series* (2008–11), Waheed draws on the photographic archive of Tripoli-based Armenian artist Antranik Anouchian, which dates from 1935 to 1970. In it, she sketches each of his ID images in pencil and reclassifies them based on each subject's physical characteristics. Waheed's new images reveal how previous colonial signifiers, such as beards, reflect new culturally discriminate stereotypes in a post-9/11 context. The series, which includes 198 drawings, subverts the conventions of photographic portraiture found in passports to illuminate important shifting cultural prejudices.

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[50] Alfredo Jaar, "One Million Finnish Passports" artist statement, http://www.alfredojaar.net/index1.html.

Both Waheed and MacDonald's works challenge practices of identification, of which the passport serves as an important site of interrogation For Waheed in particular, who grew up inside Saudi Arabia's Aramco oil compound, the passport "outlined her relationship to the place and determined her movement– barring or allowing her access to place on the compound and within the country as an expatriate, a young female, a Muslim and Canadian national."[51] The diverse convergence that makes up Waheed's identity is similar in range to that of MacDonald, though Macdonald's is largely flattened by her "whiteness."

Both Waheed and MacDonald begin with archival photographic objects and recontextualize them, so that questions of present importance are raised, especially those of how histories and peoples are represented. MacDonald's representation of Pelkonen through the passport and Waheed's representations of Anouchian's IDs through the medium of drawing, point to the complex history that lies behind the faces of those identified in passport portraits. The faces' specificity are obscured through the act of drawing, which allows "viewers to imagine who they may be or what their lives might have been like"[52] explains writer Kristine Khouri – an inference that bears rich potential in looking at artworks that use passport imagery.

MacDonald elaborates on her affinity towards the passport, not only as a historical object, but also as a gendered one. She explains, "What drew me to this object, besides my ongoing interest in documentation and travel, was that it belonged to a woman."[53] The passport as a document marks gender in a number of ways: by sex, marital status, and

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[51] Kristine Khouri. "Cut and Paste – Paper, Faces and Memories," in *field notes and other backstories: Hajra Waheed* (Windsor, ON: Art Gallery of Windsor, 2013).
[52] Ibid.
[53] Kristie MacDonald, e-mail message to the author, February 24, 2014.

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photographic identification. MacDonald goes on to say, "I was particularly drawn in by the object's inherent sexism. Particularly, that it requires women to identify their status in relation to a man – although Pelkonen does not do this. A fact that is also interesting when considering her age, and social norms of the time."[54] MacDonald's statement suggests resistance in Pelkonen's positionality as a young single woman, where following World War Two, it was still regarded negatively, and thus was uncommon, for women to be unmarried past a certain age. Born in 1919, Pelkonen was 30 years old when she received her passport from the Finnish government. She was 33 years old in 1952 when the Canadian Government granted her status as a "Landed Immigrant." Pelkonen's unwed status in the passport represents a sort of societal deviation from the norm at that time in both Europe and North America.

MacDonald's artwork remaps Pelkonen's movement as evidenced through the stamps in her passport. The passport represents a type of technology based on governmental practices of identification that employ photography. MacDonald emphasizes that our passports are considered property of the Canadian government,[55] meaning that the passport is not a benign object. It carries with legal obligations to a particular nation. It is also a signifier of nationality and membership to a particular nation. In a quiet and understated way, MacDonald's artwork highlights the processual nature of what sociologist Benedict Anderson famously termed "imagining community."[56] The passport's insistence on state identification and photographic representation works to entrench notions of "belonging" to the nation, as Pelkonen's various proximities to Canada are revealed with each country's specific stamp and marking. By deciphering Pelkonen's pattern of migration through the

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[54] Ibid.
[55] See Passport Canada, www.passport.gc.ca/protection/index.aspx?lang=eng.
[56] Anderson, *Imagining Community*.

passport's national traces, MacDonald narrates an important cultural memory – one of European settlement to Canada.

MacDonald presents the original passport alongside meticulously translated versions of its text, stamps and notations [see **Figures 3** and **4**]. The passport's cover reads "Suomi," meaning "Finland" in Finnish.[57] The accompanying documents that detail the process of translation signify a multiplicity of things. The act of translation suggests a sense of movement between the passport's official languages – English, Finnish and Swedish – and Pelkonen's geo-cultural movement to Canada. The translation of text also works to render cultural memory on a variety of levels. First, translation itself places emphasis on the importance and specificity of language as communication. Translation reflects the "work" of retrieving and evoking memory, which is similar to the "work" needed in producing national identity. Second, as a highly specialized skill and tedious process, translation reflects the labour involved in making meaning between languages. Translation acts as a mirror to Pelkonen's complex cultural entanglements, symbolic of how she might have had to navigate processes of cross-cultural emigration, translating herself from one culture to another as this emigration unfolded.

MacDonald's installation is a record of a body as it moved through space and time – the

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[57] See Finnish Language Institute, www.kotus.fi/?l=en&s=1.

Fig. 3. Kristie MacDonald. Passport study (interior) for *Siiri Juliana Hillervo Pelkonen.* 2013−. Installation with found passport. Photo courtesy of the artist.

Fig. 4. Kristie MacDonald. Passport study (translation notes) for *Siiri Juliana Hillervo Pelkonen.* 2013−. Installation with found passport. Photo courtesy of the artist.

history of Pelkonen moving towards Canada. Unlike the other artists' works that I look at

in this paper, MacDonald does not use her own body as a strategy of engagement or means

of representation. Rather, she uses another's body to as a means of signification, allowing her to better understand Pelkonen as both an individual and subject of the state. And since there exists a temporal, cultural and linguistic gap between the artist and subject, MacDonald is forced to seek out additional help in understanding what the document articulates. Collaboration with professional international translators enables MacDonald to participate in a critical reading process, which, in turn, allows MacDonald to emphasize the vital role language plays in understanding the context of information within and across borders. Using the information generated through the help of translators, MacDonald then forges the passport, creating a counterfeit that is presented as if authentic within the installation's glass encasing. Through the meticulous process of printmaking, a strategy that MacDonald frequently employs throughout her practice, she reprints the passport and select pages to challenge the inherent value of the original. She goes one step further, interchanging one of the open page's markings into another of its other languages - Finnish, Swedish or English.

The complexity in which MacDonald resituates the passport as an object of significant cultural bearing requires patience and attention in the way that one looks at it. In her online project *treatycard* (2004), artist Cheryl L'Hirondelle, who is of Cree, Métis, German and Polish ancestry, uses a website as both a participatory platform and strategy of accessibility.[58] Like MacDonald, L'Hirondelle draws attention to practices of identification as defined by the state. L'Hirondelle, focuses specifically on the Canadian Government's "Certificate of Indian Status," which identifies Indigenous peoples in Canada. As a democratizing strategy, L'Hirondelle's web-based project allows anyone log-in access, so that they can create a treaty card of his or her own, or modify a preexisting one. The

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[58] See treatycard, http//www.treatycard.banff.org.

interactive nature of *treatycard* is a uniquely politicized approach, as it engages others in a process of critical consciousness. L'Hirondelle's simulation is similar to MacDonald's forgery, though the artists use these strategies to different ends. L'Hirondelle appropriates the design of treaty cards in order to critique their legitimacy (their very existence) as colonial documents. While MacDonald also critiques assumed legitimacy via her forgeries, she does so in order to question the use of photographs, archives and cultural objects as a stable body of evidence.

Through text, stamps, markings and portraiture, the passport denotes one's identity as defined by the language of the state. The passport also represents enduring colonial practices of identification that dramatically shape practices of inclusion, recognition and participation within the nation space. Passports literally grant mobility both within and across borders. MacDonald's installation *Siiri Juliana Hillervo Pelkonen* (2013–14) represents and presents the partial story of a Finnish immigrant drawing attention to other European ethnicities who settled in Canada. Her exploration of the cultural implications of passports is part of a larger interrogation of archival documents by artists, as evidenced in the recent works of Alfredo Jaar, Hajra Waheed and Cheryl L'Hirondelle. The interconnectedness of personal and collective experiences of identity and identification, as found in the passport works of MacDonald and others, demonstrates the ways in which cultural entanglements work to illuminate how national histories collide.

3 | Basil AlZeri – *The Post Card Project*

Representations of nation and colony have often revolved around images of the landscape. In Canada, these representations are especially controversial, as the land continues to be a site of contestation between settlers and Indigenous peoples. The land plays a central role across Indigenous cultures, and is viewed as a part of the world to be honoured and nurtured, not as a commodity to be owned or traded. Notions of occupation thus hold very different meanings and embody distinct cultural practices for Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities across the country. National postcards, which often depict images of wilderness landscapes and gardens, as well as highly symbolic structures such as totem poles, monuments and the Parliament buildings, construct a national imaginary based on settler-colonialism. This imaginary has perpetuated notions of occupation – the act or process of possessing a place – as an inevitable event in the settlement, colonization and development of Canada. This chapter uses Basil AlZeri's photographic installation *The Post Card Project* (2013-14) as an example of how artists reimagine representations of national occupation.

AlZeri explores how photographic representations of settlement and occupation in Canada have been portrayed through postcard imagery in his series *The Post Card Project* (2013). While AlZeri's work broadly addresses questions of identity, difference and representation, his narrower concerns are on issues of Canadian and Middle Eastern sovereignty, which continue between the state, and Indigenous and Palestinian people. This consideration emerges from AlZeri's complex positionality as someone born in Jordan to Palestinian exiled parents and now living in Canada. Strategies of appropriation, performance, staging and juxtaposition enable AlZeri to advance his interrogations, while his identity as an Arab in Canada affords him the unique subject position from which to highlight alternative questions of inclusion, recognition and participation.

Like MacDonald, AlZeri draws on archival photographic representations – specifically, postcards of Canada. AlZeri's interest in how occupation is portrayed through images of national identity arose during his research on the Canadian Postcard Collection at the Toronto Reference Library. Because the collection's inventory is catalogued by topic rather than typical art-historical categorization by date, artist or biographical fact, AlZeri was put in the position of trying to make sense of what seemed a daunting visual record of Canada. After mining his own expansive postcard collection for a variety of images of the Canadian landscape, AlZeri then documented his interaction with each postcard's image in collaboration with artist Manolo Lugo. AlZeri's new photographs, which form a new image bank, reflect his "position on this land as another settler and a new citizen."[59] AlZeri's self-conscious identification as a "settler" implies he sees responsibility in his role in a colonial nation, causing him to consider how histories of settlement and ongoing practices of occupation continue to take place in Canada. AlZeri's conscientiousness of place is moving, as it reflects an active process of negotiation in the new country in which he lives.

The Post Card Project is an installation that features a slide projector playing photographs of the artist interacting with postcards that depict Canadian landscapes and staging them with everyday objects. AlZeri's use of familiar objects is a common strategy of his practice, as it enables him the ability to draw connections between the seeming banality of everyday objects and their greater cultural implications. Objects such as national postcards, though often cliché and at one time overused, have international currency stemming from their widespread dissemination as tourist and postal documents. The national imaginary they help create extends internationally because of there dissemination. Postcards also

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[59] Basil AlZeri, e-mail message to the author, March 1, 2014.

function within their own national borders as a reminder to Canadians of what Canada is "supposed" to look like.

Begun in 2013, *The Post Card Project* had its first iteration during the Creative City Summit, when AlZeri was commissioned by the Ottawa Art Gallery to animate ByWard Market.[60] Located in Lower Town Ottawa – literally down the street from Parliament Hill – this open-air market operates as a tourist destination complete with souvenir shops, museums and cafes within its four-block radius. For his contribution to the Summit, AlZeri recreated a popular tourist stall that featured a rack of Canadian postcards, AlZeri acting as the stall's keeper. Although AlZeri's postcards of Canada appear familiar and somewhat banal upon first glance, their images subtly reveal Canadian landscapes that include AlZeri's body interacting with them. *The Post Card Project* installation was in situ for three days, where the embodied presence of the artist added a performative element to the installation. In encounters with the public, AlZeri encouraged individuals to choose a postcard to keep or send, extending the opportunity to participate in the dissemination of alternative narratives around Canada.

My analysis of AlZeri's project focuses primarily on its later iteration as a looped slide projection, due to the importance of image-based representation in this study, in which photographic materiality plays a significant role. Both slides and projectors act as critical cultural signifiers. Firstly, the monotonous process of slide repetition references the on-going work necessary to processes of nation-making and negotiating one's identity, where the continual dissemination of images creates a sense of familiarity or "imagined community". Secondly, since projection as a technology literally "reproduces" images, one

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[60] In partnership with the Creative City Network of Canada and made possible by the Ontario Arts Council.

must consider, then, how the projection of images works to "reproduce" collective

ideologies. For instance, the clicking sounds of each slide transition, the steady projection

of images, and the grainy light of the projector convey notions of nostalgia for a time when

simpler technologies still ruled, such as slides and postcards.

Notions of longing and yearning are also reflected in AlZeri's poses in the projected

photographs. For instance, image *#2* from the series shows AlZeri's arm extended, hand

open, in an attempt to contain a postcard of the Canadian wilderness within his grasp – a

poetic gesture suggestive of longing for something out of reach [see **Figure 5**]. This is the

same wilderness scene we see AlZeri gazing at in image *#1* [see **Figure 6**]. The original

postcard, now blurred in the background, could easily be mistaken for a Group of Seven

painting portraying a vacant Canadian wilderness awaiting European conquer. The space

within AlZeri's new photograph can be read as a suggestion of distance, reminiscent

of the void created in The Group of Seven's images with regards to Indigenous

histories. The out of focus effect brings to bear a critical disconnect between

representations of Canada and the reality of its habitation: namely, that Indigenous

presence has been largely elided through idealized Western representations of the

wilderness. Since European settlement and occupation have been depicted as inevitable

processes of "civilizing" Canada, our national imaginary has been based on representations

of nation and colony as they fit into narratives of settler- colonialism. In this sense, the

wilderness, as shown in national postcards, reflects what cultural historian Jonathan Bordo

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Fig. 5. Basil AlZeri. *#2* from *The Post Card Project*. 2013. Printed postcard. 8 x 5 inches. Photo courtesy of the artist.

Fig. 6. Basil AlZeri, *#1* from *The Post Card Project*. 2013. Printed postcard. 8 x 5 inches. Photo courtesy of the artist.

Fig. 7. Basil AlZeri. *#14* from *The Post Card Project*. 2013. Printed postcard. 8 x 5 inches. Photo courtesy of the artist.

calls a "void and a voiding."[61]AlZeri confronts this void directly in the artwork entitled *#7* [see **Figure 7**], where we see AlZeri holding a postcard of the wilderness over his face, essentially obstructing our view of the artist's identity. The postcard's strategic positioning reflects its signification as an object of cultural and historical repression, an effect that has been achieved through its legacy of representing a very narrow and exclusive national narrative. With patient looking, however, one notices that this particular image has the most prominent shadows, which work to evoke feelings of apprehension or unsettlement in its viewer. Art historian W. J. T. Mitchell emphasizes the need for criticality in looking at images of the landscape, which he relates to the belief that "every holy landscape seems to be shadowed by evil."[62] Although Mitchell's essay refers to the site of Israel/Palestine in comparison to the American wilderness, I find his quote particularly apt for describing a colonial landscape like Canada's in relation to an artist of Palestinian descent, as it implies that cultural misrepresentation is a cross-national phenomenon, one relevant to images of landscapes in Canada and beyond.

Discrepancies between fact and fiction, past and present, European and non-European narratives are brought to the surface in AlZeri's work. The images are all the more disruptive of national representations of the landscape and their service in supporting Canada's settler-colonial paradigm because the artist includes himself in them, as a Palestinian man. AlZeri heightens his embodied interventions through meticulous aesthetic choices. Each image's blank white background, paired with AlZeri's muted grey T-shirt, make him, and thus his Arab body, highly visible. These careful formal choices reflect how AlZeri engages with dominant representations of whiteness as a Palestinian person living in Canada. According to cultural theorist Richard Dyer, the normalization of whiteness has

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[61] Bordo, *Landscape and Power*, 291.
[62] Mitchell, *Landscape and Power,* 261.

shaped definitions of identity on multiple levels. In his text on white cultural production,

White: Essays on Race and Culture (1997), Dyer explains that the state of being unmarked

constitutes unbalanced hierarchies of power and cultural authority.[63] Whiteness thus

represents "privilege," or what is unwarranted social, cultural or racial "supremacy" over

non-white bodies. Through AlZeri's bodily articulation of "non-whiteness," multiple

questions naturally arise related occupation and how different cultural identities are

included, recognized or able to participate within representations of a "white" Canada.

AlZeri's images also reflect on Palestinian statelessness and, in particular, what this means

for a Palestinian person living in a transcultural context. Notions of occupation and

sovereignty thus have explicit associations for AlZeri, first as a "stateless person" in the

Middle East and now as an "immigrant" in North America. Not only does AlZeri's

Palestinian body not "belong" within dominant representations of Canadian settler-

colonialism, it also does not "belong" to a homeland – a situation that brings up larger

questions of statelessness as related to the ongoing Palestinian/Israeli conflict, a topic that

lies beyond the scope of this paper.

Another artist who explores critical issues of representation in relation to Arab and

Canadian identities is Jamelie Hassan, born in London, Ontario, to Lebanese parents. One

of her earliest filmic works, *The Oblivion Seekers* (1985), juxtaposes Western archival

news material with other audio and visual layers, including some of Hassan's own family

footage from London, Ontario, and Lebanon. Hassan appropriates and layers diverse

cultural texts, such as music by Egyptian singer Umm Kalthum and prose by Swiss writer

Isabelle Eberhardt, in order to challenge Western understandings of cultural production and

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[63] Richard Dyer, *White: Essays on Race and Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

its relationship to Arab diaspora. The myriad of imagery, both textual and photographic, reflects the contested nature of cultural-identity representation within and across national borders. Moreover, the inclusion of news headlines, such as "1,000 Moslems Expected in City for Convention," alongside intimate materials, such as footage of Hassan and her family, shows the startling disconnect between media representations and personal representations. The little girl we see dancing throughout the work's various scenes is in fact the artist herself, a trope of intergenerational self-representation that suggests Hassan's absence as much as her presence within representations of Canada's national imaginary.

Drawing our attention again to the work of Hajra Waheed, we must consider how representations of identity shift over time according to the ways in which political, cultural and social events influence national ideologies. Waheed's series of ID drawings from *The Anouchian Passport Portrait Series* (2008–11) depict how Middle Eastern identity has been portrayed since 9/11, a period when the "war on terror" has enabled racialization and surveillance that in turn have shaped notions of Arabs as "terrorists." While this kind of fear mentality and institutional racism is far more commonplace in the United States, it is not absent from Canada, and thus holds relevance as a concern in the representation of Arab identities within North America as a whole. Waheed's work, like AlZeri's images, reveals how layers of personal and political histories collide through cultural archives and objects of photographic representation. Waheed's work also traces narratives of statelessness through the appropriation of Antranik Anouchian's photographic archive. Anouchian, who was an Armenian photographer of Turkish descent, fled the Armenian Genocide in 1915 as a refugee, eventually settling in Tripoli, in northern Lebanon, where he would go on to start Studio Anouchian. Today, the thousands of photographic portraits of unidentified people taken there by Anouchian reflect a legacy of individual and cultural

existence, regardless of whether Anouchian and his subjects were recognized by the state

or not, where, again, the photographic record is the proof.

AlZeri's depicted presence, and at times, absence, as an Arab body within the works

similarly raise questions of sovereignty, but ones directed toward Canadian situations:

Quebec's ongoing call for separatism, and Indigenous peoples' calls for nation-to-nation

relationships between themselves and non-Indigenous peoples. As understandings of

sovereignty are highly varied and singular to a given context, it is important to discuss

issues of sovereignty within their specific situation. However, since the 1960s, ethno-

nationalistic concerns of assimilation – fears of losing language and culture – have plagued

Quebec's relationship to the rest of Canada, and driven its movement toward attaining

sovereignty through separation. These concerns are difficult to ignore, as the use of

assimilation as a state policy has a very real history in Canada in its use against its First

Nations peoples.

Linking ideas of sovereignty to practices of occupation, curator cheyanne turions asks,

"What if we approached our relationship to the land from the position of stewardship rather

than ownership? Would we construct no fences at all?"[64] Similarly, Cherokee artist and

American Indian Movement activist Jimmie Durham asks, "What if we had a world law

against the buying and selling of land? If, as so many stateless people say, the earth is the

earth and not a commodity?"[65] turions and Durham's questions of occupation and

sovereignty raise a number of points in relation to AlZeri's artworks. For instance, what is

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[64] cheyanne turions, "A Table for Negotiation, Mediation, Discussion, Difference," http://cheyanneturions.wordpress.com/2014/03/21/a-table-for-negotiation-mediation-discussion-difference/.

[65] Jimmie Durham, "Against Internationalism," *Third Text* 27, no. 1 (January 2013): 32.

our relationship and responsibility to the land that we live on? What does it mean to intervene in the process of occupation by way of its representation?

Alzeri uses postcards as a means to challenge colonial narratives of occupation, and he is able to do so because occupied territory – Banff National Park, the land on which totem poles stand, Parliament Hill, horticultural gardens, etc. – has always been the subject of postcards. Works *#5* and *#6* depict AlZeri interacting both with postcards that are recognizably Canadian and with plant-related objects that work as stand-ins for nature [see **Figures 8** and **9]**. In image *#5*, we see AlZeri's arm outstretched again, this time holding the tip of a postcard that is now submerged in a pot of soil. The slightly buried postcard still effectively displays its scene of lush gardens but is now poetically re-rooted in "the earth." A sort of 'returning to nature' is implied through AlZeri's material and conceptual gesture that attempts to 'give back' or to return a piece of Canada to the land. This is a potent consideration in relation to the colonial formation of nations like Canada and its historic expropriation of Indigenous lands.

In image *#6*, we again see part of AlZeri's arm outstretched, firmly planting a postcard in a pot of soil accompanied by other plants: a lush spider plant on the left and two African violets on the right. The potted postcard depicts a monument of the late Scottish poet Robert Burns erected in Stanley Park, Vancouver – a site now occupied by the Lower West Side's homeless population after being notoriously displaced during the 2010 Vancouver Olympics. AlZeri's conceptual photograph reconstructs a familiar representation of the landscape, one where the monument appears hardly out of place atop a hill of soil and surrounded by "nature." The use images of national gardens and provincial parks reflects

Fig. 8. Basil AlZeri. *#5* from *The Post Card Project*. 2013. Printed postcard. 8 x 5 inches. Photo courtesy of the artist.

Fig. 9. Basil AlZeri. *#6* from *The Post Card Project*. 2013. Printed postcard. 8 x 5 inches. Photo courtesy of the artist.

AlZeri's interrogation of a particular kind of colonial representation: those produced by Eurocentric values of "grooming" and domestication of the land. Following the popularization of Victorian and Edwardian landscaping in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries throughout Europe and North America, the garden has come to represent and disseminate Eurocentric values of "taming" the land. Thus, images of tidy Canadian landscapes perpetuate notions of "civility," while their visual counterparts – images of the rugged wilderness – obscure sites of Indigenous history.

Artworks *#3* and *#4* challenge collective narratives of settler-colonial occupation in Canada by subverting their visual legibility and, thus, their supremacy. Both images portray AlZeri holding an assortment of national postcards: in *#3,* a banal and tidy deck of postcards, and in *#4,* the untidy opposite. The postcards in the latter image are held upside down and are thus reflective of the destabilizing act of AlZeri's rearrangement – his overturning of the ideals represented in them. AlZeri's reordering of popular tourist destinations into a visual chaos works to disrupt the settler-colonial imaginary from which the images emerge.

While the aforementioned works of Hassan and Waheed offer points of relevance in exploring representations of cross-cultural identity and occupation in Canada, perhaps the most salient comparison to make to AlZeri's *Post Card Project* is to artist Jin-me Yoon's photographic series *Souvenirs of the Self* (1991–2000)*)* and *Group of Sixty-Seven* (1996). A Korean-born, Yoon immigrated to Canada in 1968 and began her practice in the early 1990s in Vancouver where, like AlZeri, she started working with images of national landscapes as depicted in the postcard. Begun in 1991, *Souvenirs of the Self* marked Yoon's first major body of work, and includes photographs of Yoon standing in front of iconic national landscapes, such as those in Canadian postcards. In the work *Lake Louise* (1991–

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2000), we see Yoon against the majestic backdrop of Banff National Park. Yoon uses her body as the image's main focus to disrupt the sublime landscape it stands against, drawing our attention to the fact that certain types of bodies have historically been absent from representations of nation and colony. In Yoon's case, her body specifically stands in for those of the Korean diaspora in Canada. Yoon explains that her images challenge "the very terms of inclusion as to who belongs 'naturally' to these iconic Canadian touristic landscapes,"[66] and in turn, who "unbelongs" to them. Like Yoon, AlZeri's images reiterate the push-and-pull related to the visual representation of nation and colony in a place, like Canada, that has many histories.

In her later series *Group of Sixty-Seven* (1996), Yoon asked 67 members from her local (Vancouver) Korean community to stand amidst iconic artworks by the Group of Seven and Emily Carr – artworks that have rendered the landscape absent of multicultural bodies such as those of the Korean diaspora – and be photographed in front of them. Sublime landscapes such as Lawren Harris's *Maligne Lake, Jasper Park* (1924) and Emily Carr's *Old Time Coast Village* (1929–30) emerge from behind Yoon's subjects. Yoon then combined all 67 portraits into a large-scale installation or "group portrait," challenging notions of inclusion, recognition and participation in relation to how Korean-Canadians fit into representations of Canada. This series, along with *Souvenirs of the Self,* shares many visual similarities with AlZeri's more contemporary investigation, as both artists take up popular representations of the Canadian landscape and insert their bodies into them as interventions. Both "immigrants," Yoon and AlZeri challenge their exclusion from national representations of the landscape, subverting their "difference" in order to open up and eventually dispel settler-colonial representations of the nation.

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[66] Jin Me Yoon, artist biography, http://jin-meyoon.ca/bio.

Despite the commonalties between AlZeri and Yoon's works, the artists' different visual strategies reflect their distinct cultural histories and realities. For instance, unlike in Yoon's series, none of AlZeri's images reveal his gaze or facial identity. This is an interesting choice for AlZeri, as eye contact or asserting one's gaze often reflects agency and resistance. Since we do not see who AlZeri is – we only see parts of his body – *The Post Card Project* lacks a kind of presence and personal identity that the works of Yoon foreground. However, AlZeri's denial of identity is strategic, as it allows him to emphasize his body as a referent of cultural identity rather than of personal identity. Another distinction between the two artist's works is the cultural specificity of their representations. While AlZeri's images bring up issues regarding the construction of the Canadian narrative, they also draw attention to the nuanced history and statelessness of Palestinian people. Yoon's images, on the other hand, represent how Korean immigrants must negotiate their cultural identities while living within the national borders of Canada.

Representations of our national landscape and its inhabitants are selective: they rarely bear witness to or materialize Canada's hidden histories and diverse populations. Like passports, national postcards represent national narratives, both to Canadians and to people receiving them outside of Canada. AlZeri's series *The Post Card Project* (2013–14) draws our attention to the ways in which images of the landscape uphold notions of occupation as related to settler-colonialism in Canada. He challenges the familiarity, and thus authority, of national postcards as cultural signifiers by inserting his body into the images as a marker of Palestinian statelessness and Canadian occupation. By emphasizing his body as a racialized figure – a similar strategy used by Yoon, and by McMaster in the next chapter – AlZeri depicts various mediations that are at once spatial, conceptual, cultural and

historical. *The Post Card Project* challenges dominant understandings of the postcard as

history and of history as a finite, unshifting and homogenous thing.

4 | Meryl McMaster – *Ancestral*

Depictions of Indigenous peoples in North America have largely been shaped by practices of ethnography, which perpetuate notions of "difference" in relation to settler-colonialism. Critical ethnography, by contrast, analyzes how cultural objects have been positioned as "ethnic artifacts" and how non-white cultures have often lacked agency in their representations as romanticized subjects. Ethnographic portraiture, in particular, as practiced by white artists such as Edward S. Curtis, William S. Soule and George Catlin, has created an image-bank of Indigenous and non-white subjects. While it is important to recognize the use of ethnographic portraits as colonial objects, these images hold their own meaning for Indigenous viewers. These kinds of portraits represent an important record of Indigenous presence and visibility, a "refus[al] to "vanish" regardless of the punishment and oppression imposed upon them."[67] In this chapter, notions of Indigenous sovereignty are revealed through the critical analysis Meryl McMaster's *Ancestral* series (2008-10) that revisits ethnographic portraiture as an archive representative of "survivance".

In her photographic series *Ancestral* (2008–10), Meryl McMaster appropriates ethnographic images and projects them onto the posed bodies of herself and her father, artist/curator Gerald McMaster. Her works challenge colonial perspectives of ethnography by illuminating the significance of Indigenous presence, and opening up the possibility of Indigenous sovereignty within the archive. Using strategies of layering, make-up, the gaze, nudity and collaboration, McMaster's images create an ancestry of Indigenous pictorial resistance.

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[67] Tremblay, "Constructing Images, Constructing Reality," 9.

The photograph is a mode of representation associated with notions of visual accuracy, to the extent that it is regarded as a mirror of reality. Its evidential materiality plays an important role in relation to Indigenous representation, where the photographic record offers proof that Indigenous peoples have never actually been "vanishing." Artist/writer Gail Tremblay, who is of Onondaga, Mi'kmaq and French Canadian ancestry, describes the Vanishing Indian myth as the belief that "indigenous cultures were disappearing due to their innate inferiority"[68] to European cultural supremacy, and would eventually vanish completely. In her essay "Constructing Images, Constructing Reality: American Indian Photography and Representation," Tremblay highlights how these kinds of representations have displaced settler responsibility "from the weight of their own brutality toward native people."[69] She goes on to say that "for an indigenous person, choosing not to vanish, not to feel inferior, not to hate oneself, becomes a political act."[70] Tremblay elaborates on photography as a defiant gesture, explaining, "[E]very image a native photographer makes relates and reacts in very complex ways to [the] history of forced assimilation, and to the history of images of Native Americans."[71] In this vein, McMaster uses the photograph to emphasize the ways in which Indigenous resistance is revealed through ethnographic portraiture, drawing attention to histories of Indigenous and non-Indigenous representation, as reflective of her own position as someone of mixed Plains Cree and European ancestry.

Begun in 2008, *Ancestral* is a series of layered photographs that feature an evolution of thematic imagery. Beginning with the black-and-white photographs of Curtis and Soule, and continuing through to the colourful paintings of Catlin, McMaster's series also includes jpegs of wild animals, though these images are not the focus of my study. In the

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[68] Ibid., 8.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Ibid.
[71] Ibid., 9.

Fig. 10. Meryl McMaster. *Ancestral 9*. 2008. Digital chromogenic print. 40 x 30 inches. Photo courtesy of the artist and Katzman Contemporary.

Fig. 11. Edward S. Curtis. *Wishham Girl*, from *The North American Indian* series. 1910. Photogravure. Edward S. Curtis Collection, Library of Congress, Evanston.

first part of the series, McMaster appropriates ethnographic portraits, which she then projects onto her photographic subjects. In *Ancestral 9* (2008), for example, we see a compound photograph of McMaster's upper body overlaid with Curtis's *Wishham Girl* (1910) [see **Figures 10** and **11**]. The ornate jewelry of the "Wishham girl" – necklaces and headwear seemingly made of beads, shells and bones, along with body piercings – are now superimposed onto McMaster's face and neck, which stand out and take shape against her purposefully lightened skin. McMaster highlights through the application of theatrical makeup the ways in which whiteness has been imposed on the Indigenous body and its cultures, and how Indigenous peoples have thrived in spite of assimilationist ideologies.

Layering is important strategy for McMaster, allowing her the ability to portray Indigenous identity in multifaceted ways that move beyond the boundaries of cultural stereotypes. The two-dimensional projection onto McMaster's three-dimensional body creates a layered effect, which evokes both a distance and an interconnectedness between McMaster and the Wishham girl's bodies and, on a broader scale, a continuity between past and present histories of Indigenous representation and survivance. History is thus represented as a veil, one that we must continually look past in order to critically read images. Tremblay describes this composite strategy of historical reframing as a common feature of Indigenous self-representation, in which "photographs are altered, constructed, or collaged to create multiple layers of context."[72] McMaster's composite portraits echo cultural theorist Stuart Hall's notion of identity as a kind of work that is never complete. Rather, it is ongoing.

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[72] Ibid., 10.

Fig. 12. McMaster, Meryl. *Ancestral 14.* 2009. Digital chromogenic print. 40 x 30 inches. Photo courtesy of the artist and Katzman Contemporary.
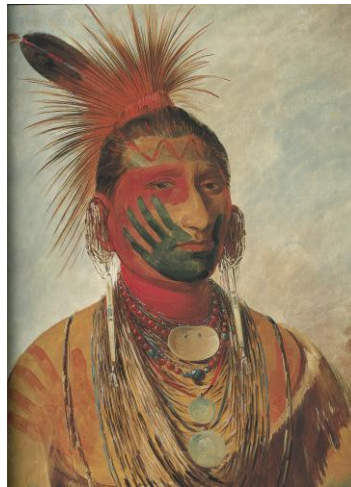

Fig. 13. Catlin, George. *'Wash-ka-mon-ya,' Fast Dancer, A Warrior. Iowa,* 1844, oil, 29 x 24 in. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of Mrs. Joseph Harrison, Jr., 1985.66.520.

In the work *Ancestral 14* (2009), McMaster projects Catlin's vibrant portrait of Iowa Chief *Fast Dancer* (1844) onto the upper body of her father [see **Figures 12** and **13**]. Breaking away from the monochromatic and sepia-toned images in the earlier part of the series, McMaster's appropriation of colourful portraits of chiefs and warriors. It is purposely difficult to distinguish where McMaster's photograph of her father begins and Catlin's painting ends. The seamless entwinement of the two images is unsettling and forces one to think critically about "his or her assumptions, and to seek new meaning in order to understand juxtapositions that are not always obvious."[73] McMaster's photographs reclaim ethnographic portraits in order to tell counter-narratives of Indigenous survival, perseverance and sovereignty.

The juxtaposition of historical and contemporary Indigenous representations within *Ancestral* reflect the ongoing negotiation that Indigenous peoples face with regards to sovereignty. Curator cheyanne turions suggests that "sovereignty manifests through intimacy, contact, and sociality as processes of negotiation,"[74] an insight into the embodied and relational nature of sovereignty that allows us to see McMaster's images in a new light. With this perspective, McMaster's images can be seen as playing what turions considers an important role in shifting the location of sovereignty "from the nation state to the self." Perhaps nothing is more exemplary of sovereignty than the gaze in McMaster's photographs, where there exists an undeniable intimacy in the "living eyes [that] pierce through the projections."[75] By way of her subjects' acknowledgement of the gaze, and thus also through the viewer's implication in the process, McMaster's images present a particular resistance to colonial subjugation, which signals us to pay attention to the layered

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[73] Ibid.
[74] cheyanne turions, "A Table for Negotiation, Mediation, Discussion, Difference," curatorial research blog, March 22, 2014, http://cheyanneturions.wordpress.com
[75] Suzanne Morrissette & Lisa Myers, *past now* (Barrie: McLaren Art Centre, 2010), 3.

looks at play.[76] In this potent articulation of resistance, both the historical and contemporary subjects' piercing gaze expresses Anishinaabe scholar Gerald Vizenor's notion of "survivance as an active repudiation of dominance, tragedy, and victimry."[77]

In addition to the subjects' piercing gaze, another tension is evoked in McMaster's images: the presentation of Indigenous subjects against the backdrop of Western art history – a history in which non-white bodies have been largely exoticized. McMaster's use of nudity subverts its function as a trope of colonial dominance and, instead, signals the physical and bodily undoing necessary for the deconstruction of identity. For example, looking again to the work *Ancestral 14*, the presence of McMaster's nude body rejects Catlin's ethnicized portrait of "an Indian in full dress." Although McMaster's series focuses specifically on representations of "Indianness," the push-and-pull between "being" and "being made up". In particular, the series asks us to consider how one makes sense of how images have been "constructed" rather than "captured." While this implies a critique of the photographer's intentions and the ways in which intentions frame photographs, the construction of images does not necessarily denote a subject's agency. For instance, as curator Andrea Kunard points out, "many Aboriginal people understood the power of the camera and adopted certain Eurocentric pictorial conventions as a means of empowerment."[78] Through tactics such as the gaze, and at times one's posing, Indigenous subjects were able to negotiate, and in turn, communicate resistance in spite of their photographic exploitation.

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[76] Ibid.

[77] Vizenor, *Fugitive Poses*, 15.

[78] Andrea Kunard, "Photography, Ethnology, and the Domestic Arts: Interpreting the Sir Daniel Wilson Album," in *The Cultural Work of Photography in Canada,* Carol Payne & Andrea Kunard eds. (Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2011) 49.

Another interesting point within McMaster's series is the fact that McMaster features her father as a subject, which not only emphasizes the meaning of the work's title; it also represents an important intergenerational practice of collaboration among Indigenous artists today. McMaster's practice follows the critical success of her father's career as a renowned Canadian artist and curator in his own right. He was the first Indigenous curator to represent Canada at the Venice Biennale in 1995 and was the co-curator of the blockbuster exhibition *Indigena: Contemporary Native Perspectives* (1992). Self-defined urban Iroquois photographer Jeff Thomas and his video-artist son Bear Witness (who is also part Cayuga*)* similarly take up strategies of intergenerational collaboration. As many of Thomas's photographic series expand over decades, his images offer a visual record of how people engage with issues of Indigenous representation over time. His works primarily employ friends and family as subjects, and frequently include his son, Bear, who acts as a temporal marker as he ages throughout Thomas's photographic archive. My illumination of McMaster and Thomas's familial practices attempts to show how the interrogation of colonization remains important work across generations.

Métis scholar Sherry Farrell Racette explains, "Aboriginal people have a historical relationship with two distinct bodies of photography: the ethnographic salvage project [and] the emergent genre of family photography."[79] Both McMaster and Thomas simultaneously address these sites or photo-colonialism – refusing to reject them - and recontextualize their images through contemporary photographic juxtapositions and embodied (self)-portraiture. In the work *A Conversation with Edward S. Curtis* (1990–2005), Thomas reimagines the context, order and combinations of Curtis's images from *The North American Indian* series and compares them with some of his own more light-

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[79] Sherry Farrell Racette, "Returning Fire, Pointing the Canon: Aboriginal Photography as Resistance," in *The Cultural Work of Photography in Canada,* 71.

hearted images of family and friends. In one of Thomas's diptychs from the Curtis series, the combination of Curtis's historical portrait with one of Thomas's contemporary images creates an especially powerful juxtaposition between past and present. On the left, Curtis's image *Three Pigeon Men: Spotted Eagle, Heavy Gun, Robert Calf Robe* (c. 1910) portrays three solemn Indigenous brothers dressed and posed as "mythic Indians" for the camera. In stark contrast to Curtis's staged image is Thomas's more candid scene, *Four Indian Guys from Winnipeg* (2005), which depicts a group of Indigenous friends posed together in an embrace. Juxtapositions become genealogies, or as Farrell Racette explains of Thomas's double portraits, "the vanished become visible, stoic faces smile, and the continuing vitality of Aboriginal peoples is asserted."[80] Thomas's photographs reveal uniquely personal representations of contemporary Indigenous peoples, an intimacy that is unfortunately absent from Curtis's pseudohistorical portraits. McMaster's *Ancestral* images also communicate intimacy in their subjects' active gaze, where each of her self/familial portraits show piercing, outward-looking eyes that directly confront viewers.

The works in *Ancestral* reveal unique ways in which a contemporary Indigenous artist reimagines representations of colony and nation in relation to Indigeneity in Canada. Similarly, Thomas's images demonstrate the continued importance of challenging these kinds of representations, work that he has engaged for more than twenty-five years. Both McMaster and Thomas's appropriations of, and contestations and conversations with, dominant images of Indigenous peoples work to disrupt Eurocentric readings of historical images by visualizing Indigenous selfhood. Both artists also engage collaborative photographic practices across generations to create nuanced portraits of Indigenous identity and link threads of generational artistic resistance. The ethnographic images that overlay

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[80] Ibid 81.

McMaster's contemporary Indigenous subjects stage confrontations between ideologies of the past and realities of the present. She, like the other Indigenous artists I point to, advance the need for nation-to-nation recognition.

Fig. 14. McMaster, Meryl. *Owl* from the *Ancestral* series. 2010. Digital chromogenic print. 40 x 30 inches. Photo courtesy of the artist and Katzman Contemporary.

Conclusion

"Pictures of Culture" is a thesis project that engages the role of photographic practices in both forging representations of nation and colony and in unsettling them. The image-based works of Meryl McMaster, Basil AlZeri and Kristie MacDonald challenge dominant visual narratives around Canadian identity through the use of several strategies. The artists each use appropriation to engage historical imagery, specifically, the ethnographic portrait, the Canadian postcard and the passport. The artists take up these archival representations in different ways, reflective of their distinct positionalities as immigrants in the case of MacDonald and AlZeri, and Indigenous subjects in the case of McMaster. MacDonald, AlZeri and McMaster renegotiate what these kinds of photographic representations mean within contemporary contexts, using self-portraiture, intervention and museological display as aesthetic means to do so. The works of MacDonald, AlZeri and McMaster challenge dominant representations of history in Canada, illuminating ongoing questions of settlement, occupation and sovereignty in relation to notions of inclusion, recognition and participation.

Distinct visual strategies mark each artist's work, despite their shared employment of appropriation and focus on national representations of identity. In *Ancestral* (2008–10)*,* Meryl McMaster appropriates ethnographic images in order to subvert art-historical tropes such as the gaze and nudity, while at the same time highlighting genealogies of cultural resistance. Basil AlZeri's slide images in *The Post Card Project* (2013–14) re-present his body as a signifier of occupation through performance, juxtaposition and photographic staging. Kristie MacDonald, on the other hand, does not focus specifically on art-historical representations, but rather on kinds of official documentation and presentation. Her

installation *Siiri Juliana Hillervo Pelkonen* (2013–) re-contextualizes notions of settler-colonial identity by both translating and highlighting what is communicated in governmental documentation by way of museological display.

Curatorial practice remains an important and productive way to engage issues of representation, such as those of inclusion and exclusion. As a dialogical act, curating raises questions for publics in ways that demand both critical consideration and personal encounter – not only with the content of the artworks, but also with the ways in which the artworks are positioned together and presented within a space. The presentation and juxtaposition of visual artworks enable critical dialogues to unfold between diverse works, practices and publics. Such dialogues can transcend boundaries of "difference" and open up culturally specific conversations.

Like my examination of the different cultural significations found in photographic objects, many curators similarly engage historical artworks to both illuminate and subvert their multiple meanings. I use the singular example of *Through An-Other's Eyes: White Canadian Artists – Black Female Subjects* (1998), a curatorial project by art historian Charmaine Nelson presented at the Robert McLaughlin Gallery, as a model for approaching the curation of culturally complex representations. In particular, her use of comparative methodologies provides an example of how curators can engage multiple perspectives in the presentation of artworks.

Nelson, who is a leading scholar in postcolonial and black feminist studies, reevaluates how the colonial legacies of Western images hold multiple meanings around the representation of "racialized" bodies. In *Through An-Other's Eyes,* she re-presents canons

of Canadian painting by white artists who depict black subjects in their images. She frames the show by way of postcolonial theory in order to challenge the nation space as an evolving continuum of both personal and political contestation. Specifically, her postcolonial critique draws attention to some of the ingrained effects colonization has had on representations of racialized bodies in Canadian art history. The effect is to broaden public knowledge about issues of representation as related to notions of national inclusion, recognition and participation.

As a model of curatorial practice, *Through An-Other's Eyes* productively demonstrates how postcolonial critique can be helpful in facilitating more informed and critical kinds of looking practices such as I hope to achieve in my own analysis of McMaster, AlZeri and MacDonald's works. It also suggests how Western art history and its colonial representations do not have to be disavowed, nor are they to be taken lightly. Rather, visual representations of settler Canada require careful looking at in order to understand their relationship to representations of Indigenous peoples and other non-white bodies. As someone who occupies a white settler perspective, it is important for me to continuously return to these kinds of images and look deeper.

The dialogical nature of making exhibitions for public audiences remains a dynamic and pedagogical way to disseminate ideas and pose questions related to diversifying Canada's visual culture. For this reason, turning "Pictures of Culture" into a curatorial exhibition is my next step, as it will enable other perspectives to participate in the dialogue I have attempted to frame within this paper. I hope to refine this interdisciplinary examination of the artists' works into a more cohesive curated group exhibition of the same title. The exhibition "Pictures of Culture" will present the works of McMaster, AlZeri and

MacDonald discussed in this paper and will enable the works to be experienced in time and space. By confronting the artworks in person, viewers become implicated in the processes of looking and of making sense of where they themselves fit into representations of Canada.

As scholar Rinaldo Walcott explains, "[O]ne of the central and complicated dynamics of geo-political spaces like Canada" is to think through the complexity of its past and present forms of colonialism, which "overlap, producing new neoliberal modes of individualism, citizenship and belonging."[81] It is with the kind of combined historical and contemporary consciousness Walcott speaks of that one should proceed in looking at representations of Canada and the Canadian nation. This research, like the ongoing processes of colonialism in Canada, continues to unfold. My perspective expressed in this thesis paper thus reflects a current trajectory of thought, though in no way fixes it. I hope space has been opened for readers to form some of their own questions about looking at representations of nation and colony in Canada. While I am trying to more fully comprehend how histories of settler-colonialism have shaped my understanding of Canadian identities and their representations, this thesis project reflects merely one step forward in a lifelong process of decolonization.

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[81] Rinaldo Walcott, "Towards a Critical and New Canadian Studies: Lessons on Coloniality" in *Critical Inquiries: A Reader in Studies of Canada*, eds. Lynne Caldwell, Darryl Leroux and Carianne Leung (Winnipeg: Fernwood Publishing, 2013), 3.

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