The Question of Repatriation:
An examination of the debate over ownership of Indigenous remains in a Canadian context

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Introduction

The skeleton is one of the most valuable scientific resources we have available to us. Through deep analysis of the skeleton, one can learn much about an individual's life, including their sex, occupation, and genetic ancestry. While the skeleton can provide insight into an individual's life, it can also provide a view into the past of a certain culture or group of people. Because of this, many skeletons are housed in museums and universities for continued study. The skeleton can provide a great deal of knowledge, but can also be the source of a great deal of controversy.

Many of the skeletons held in these museums come from Indigenous peoples, and it has recently become a topic of debate whether or not to repatriate these remains to their communities of origin as a form of reparation for the traumatic experiences that Indigenous peoples experienced. I moved to Canada in 2021, seemingly at the peak of the debate on repatriation and calls for reparations for the Indigenous communities harmed by Canada's settler-colonial past. I was greeted by many reminders of this issue, including flags at half-mast, Indigenous land acknowledgements at Ottawa Senators games, and the first official Orange Shirt Day recognized at a federal level. What amazed me, was that these protests, calls to action, and apologies from the government developed from the uncovering of skeletons of missing and murdered Indigenous children from unmarked graves, and the history that these bodies represented. For a number of months, a memorial was established at the centennial flame outside of Parliament to serve as a poignant reminder of these issues. Past treatment of Indigenous peoples was even a subject in the most recent national election. In a debate at the Canadian Museum of History, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said:

> *When we called the national inquiry into missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls after years of governments avoiding doing that, we ensured that we brought the truth forward. Then we worked with Indigenous leaders' groups, Indigenous women's groups to co-develop the action plan that we are now fully funding, so we can get justice for the victims, healing for the families and put an end to this ongoing national tragedy*.[1]

The debate over remains and the treatment of Indigenous persons by the Canadian state is inherently a political and moral one. Many activists place the responsibility for these tragedies on the Canadian state, and have also blamed it for the lack of action taken to address these issues. Trudeau's response prompted New Democratic Party leader Jagmeet Singh to say:

> *Mr. Trudeau, sadly, and I don't take any pleasure in this, The Calls for Justice are out there and you haven't acted on them. I meant it when I said you can't take a knee one day, if you're going to take Indigenous kids to court the next. That's not leadership*.[2]

Here, Singh not only highlights the lack of action that the Trudeau government has done with Indigenous peoples, but also points out a key issue in the debate of repatriation, that being the alleged ongoing colonial character of the Canadian state, and of its practices towards Indigenous peoples. While the debate only focused on the unearthing of remains from residential schools, what has been less discussed in the media is the continued holding of Indigenous remains in museums and other institutions.

Similar to Indigenous remains found in unmarked graves from residential school sites, remains of Indigenous peoples in museums and academic institutions remind us of colonialism

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[1] CBC News, "Federal Leaders' Debate 2021," YouTube Video, September 9, 2021, 57:14 to 57:51, (53) Federal Leaders' Debate 2021 - YouTube

[2] CBC News, "Federal Leaders' Debate 2021," YouTube Video, September 9, 2021, 57:51-58:03, (53) Federal Leaders' Debate 2021 - YouTube

and racism, with the return and reburial of both assisting in reconciliation efforts between the Canadian state and the Indigenous peoples that inhabit Canada. Through the establishment of ownership of these bodies by institutions, Indigenous people are distanced from their culture and ultimately have their cultural identity eliminated.

I will divide my text into three sections. The first section will discuss settler colonialism and how it permeates into our present-day Canadian context, along with how the desire for repatriation had its origin. The second section will be a general discussion of the repatriation debate, the reasoning on both sides as why to repatriate or not repatriate remains. Lastly, I will discuss how museums are acknowledging the role of repatriation in reconciliation, and how this development is changing the role of the museum from one that perpetuates the colonial state, to one that works with other communities that have suffered historic harm to provide a more accurate account of history.

Chapter 1: Settler Colonialism in Canada: Past and Present

In this chapter, I will describe the nature of Canadian settler colonialism as a structure, and not simply an event in the distant past. I will also note its particular emphasis on the eradication of Indigenous culture and sovereignty over territory. I will pay particular attention to such methods as the role in residential schools to eliminate Indigeneity and how the blood quantum serves to provide a state mandated definition of Indigeneity, which can be rescinded at any time. Against this context, I note the movement of Indigenous sovereignty struggles from territorial claims to the issue of repatriation of remains, and the struggle for Indigenous cultural articulation and revival.

The objectives and methods of settler colonialism

Canada, like many settler-colonial countries, has strained relations with its Indigenous populations on account of its history of colonialism and exploitation of Indigenous peoples. Colonization of the region had two main objectives; first, to remove the existing inhabitants thereby appropriating their lands for the purpose of settling and extracting resources, and second, to assimilate Indigenous peoples to purported European norms, "civilizing" them through the destruction of their native culture. Settler colonialism is the process in which the colonizer gains access to Indigenous territory and eradicates their claim to the land. This access to territory is the primary reason for the elimination of Indigenous peoples during the colonial process. Many may think colonialism to be a singular phenomenon that took place in the past, but in reality, we may understand it as a process that necessarily endures in the present.[3] As Patrick Wolfe states: "settler colonizers come to stay: invasion is a structure, not an event."[4] In other words, colonizers

[3] Patrick Wolfe, "Settler colonialism and the elimination of the native" *Journal of Genocide Research*, 8, no. 4 (2006): 387-388.
[4] Wolfe "Settler colonialism" 388.

come to create new nations in their own image in the lands that they conquer. Settling implies that the group comes to stay and settle into their new surroundings. Therefore, a structure must be made surrounding this.

The process of European expansionism and settler colonialism is outlined with a Fanonian lens in Glen Coulthard's *Red Skin, White Masks*. Coulthard speaks on the role of the Canadian state in the colonial process, and Indigenous peoples' contemporary struggle for recognition. Coulthard details the process of assimilation and the eradication of Indigeneity in his discussion of the infamous *Statement of the Government of Canada on Indian Policy*, or the "White Paper," as a formative piece of legislation to do away with the "Indian problem."[5] Published in 1969, the White Paper called for the integration and assimilation of the various Indigenous peoples of Canada through the removal of status Indians and turning reservations into private lands that could be sold. This was largely seen as a way for the Canadian state to finalize its goal of integration of Indigenous subjects into the confederation. Coulthard describes how the colonial dismantling of Indigenous political institutions, appropriation of land, sequestering of native children, creation of Indigenous reserves, and the discriminatory provisions of legislation, served to:

> *...marginalize Indigenous people and communities with the ultimate goal being our elimination, if not physically, then as cultural, political, and legal peoples distinguishable from the rest of Canadian society*.[6]

While the 1969 White Paper was a thinly veiled attempt to eliminate Indigenous culture entirely, it had the opposite effect, galvanizing resistance to western forms of governance and

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[5] Glenn Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks* (Vancouver, BC: Langara College, 2017), 1-5.
[6] Coulthard *Red Skin, White Masks*, 4

integration measures by the state. The signing of the White Paper by then Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau caused numerous Red Power movements to form in resistance to the government's overreach. This moment has largely produced the basis for Indigenous sovereignty movements in the present day.[7]

For Fanon and Coulthard, the colonized subjects are caught in an impossible position, owing to the inherent contradictions of colonial "assimilation." They are unable to celebrate and practice their native culture, while also being unable to utilize and take advantage of the new opportunities supposedly offered by the colonizing nation due to their ascribed racial inferiority.

Residential schools and cultural genocide

One of the most egregious methods of assimilation and removal of Indigenous culture was the establishment of residential schools. These schools were frequently founded by Christian religious institutions with approval from the Canadian government to perform what many scholars call "cultural genocide" upon their Indigenous students.[8] Residential schools were first established in Canada in the mid 1880s with the goal of re-educating the Indigenous subjects. These schools were built under the pretext of civilizing Indigenous communities, under the assumption that they were teaching Indigenous peoples to better adapt to life in the colonial state that they now lived in.[9] A typical day for a student at the school consisted of studying for half the day, then a half day of trade related activities, such as cooking, or carpentry.[10] While these

[7] Coulthard *Red Skin, White Masks*, 5
[8] Kevin Clarke, "A Burial Site for Indigenous Children Was Found in Canada. Could It Happen in the United States?" *America* 225 (2021): 20–21
[9] David B MacDonald, and Graham Hudson. "The Genocide Question and Indian Residential Schools in Canada." *Canadian Journal of Political Science / Revue Canadienne de Science Politique* 45, no. 2 (2012): 431
[10] Macdonald and Hudson "Genocide Question" 430-432

seemed to be a charitable way to help Indigenous people, this could not have been farther from the truth.

A publication by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, which was established to shed light on the atrocities committed by residential schools, describes how religious institutions and the Canadian state sought to eliminate Indigenous cultural elements and replace them with European values. This included the abandonment of Indigenous language, and the teaching of English or French in an attempt to make the students "more Canadian." This forced integration only served to deepen the divide between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians, entrenching the view of distrust among Indigenous persons towards the Canadian government and public.[11] Former deputy Minister of Indian Affairs Duncan Campbell Scott stated on the subject of residential schools:

> *I want to get rid of the Indian problem ... Our object is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic and there is no Indian question, and no Indian Department.*[12]

This speaks on the goal of integration into Canadian society, and showed that many teachers at these schools believed that by eliminating the Indigeneity of their students they were helping them adapt to a better way of life. To many government officials organizing this assimilation, it was in the best interest of Indigenous peoples to become western as the western way of life was palpably superior. The Canadian state saw itself offering a humanitarian hand to

[11] Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Canada's Residential Schools: The Legacy: The Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, Volume 5* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015) 105-110.
[12] Quoted in: Macdonald and Hudson "Genocide Question" 431-432

uplift Indigenous peoples out of their "savage" conditions and make them better suited for the new Canadian nation.

Studies and accounts from survivors have shown that the conditions in these schools and the treatment of the Indigenous children were appalling, including insufficient food, exposure, forced prayer, abortions, manual labour, and even force-feeding a person's own vomit to themself.[13] By punishing the Indigenous students for being who they were, they were taught to view their own culture as one of savagery and barbarism and to foster feelings of shame among themselves. In one former student's account of life in a residential school, she said:

> *I remember was, there was all these screams, and there was blood over the, the walls. [Crying]… and we were told that if we, if we were, if we ever told, or tried to run away, we would, the same thing would happen to us. [Crying] So, it was a dangerous time for, for children, and for me at that, those days. [Crying] We never really knew who would be next to be murdered because we witnessed one already. [Crying]*[14]

It is because of stories like these that even today there is great shame and generational trauma felt by Indigenous groups in Canada. These stories have brought about feelings of loss and despair that have left scars upon the Indigenous communities of Canada. Many of the remains of these individuals have yet to be located or recovered. In many reports, RCMP officers listed the death of the individual to be that of illness, or accidental death, essentially absolving the residential schools from any charges that may have been placed upon them.[15]

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[13] Donald Chrétien and Karen Restoule. *An Overview of the Indian Residential School System* (North Bay, ON: Union of Ontario Indians, 2013)
[14] Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Canada's Residential Schools* 189.
[15] Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Canada's Residential Schools* 189-191.

In order to understand the affront and damages that these unmarked graves cause, we must first seek to understand the politics and importance of funerals to Indigenous peoples. Burying and honoring the dead are important parts of any culture. Writing about the village of Stoney Creek in Ontario, Adam Barker explains how the dead help to reinforce cultural claims within a geographic area. Barker tells the story of how British settlers in this region established graveyards, memorials, and other "deathscapes" as he refers to them.[16] These physical constructs, created a representation of this group's cultural claim over the region. Such memorials will last for years and serve as a constant reminder of the people who lived there. By building a graveyard to house these remains, future generations may visit them to pay their respects.[17] This could be another motive leading to the secrecy surrounding the unmarked resting places and hidden bodies of the Indigenous persons. By hiding where they were buried, the institutions that forced these children into residential schools undermine Indigenous sovereign claims to territory, and contribute to the settler colonial-process while also removing evidence for their crimes.

In the landmark "Standoff at Oka" in 1989, the town of Oka in Quebec tried to expand a golf course onto an Indigenous burial ground. Mohawk protesters were forcibly removed by the Canadian military and Quebec provincial police for trying to protect their land from this neo-colonization[18]. The case resonates with Barker's argument about colonial deathscapes for here, we see dead bodies being symbolic of a cultural claim of a certain group on an area. The removal

[16] Adam J. Barker, "Deathscapes of Settler Colonialism: The Necro-Settlement of Stoney Creek, Ontario Canada" *Annals of the American Association of Geographers*, 108, no. 4 (2018): 1135-1136
[17] Barker, "Deathscapes of Settler Colonialism", 1137
[18] Maxwell "Healing the Indigenous Child- Victim": 974-975

of these bodies effectively clears the way for a structure that dominates the landscape and further enforces a more settler cultural claim upon the land and surrounding area.

Contemporary settler colonialism

In turning back to Coulthard, we can see features of settler colonialism in our modern Canadian context. The state, he argues, recognizes the Indigenous land claims and sovereignty so long as they do not interfere with its aims, and recognizes Indigenous people as a unique group as long as they fit within state mandated parameters. In the 1970s, Jean Chretien, the then Minister of Indian Affairs who later became the Prime Minister of Canada, allowed Panarctic Oils, a company that in which the federal government had 45% equity, to drill for oil and gas on Indigenous lands in the Northwest Territories.[19] This land had been previously negotiated by Canada and Indigenous peoples to ensure that Canada would respect and recognize Indigenous sovereignty over this region. This recognition of Indigenous sovereignty over the Northwest Territories is an example of the Fanonian critique of recognition, which Coulthard mirrors in his own thinking. The colonizer dictates the terms of sovereignty of Indigenous peoples, but can rescind this recognition at any time, indicating the conditionality of state "recognized" Indigenous identity.[20]

The Canadian state acknowledges its past mistreatment of Indigenous peoples, but fails to address settler colonialism as an ongoing process. In Steven Harper's famous apology to Indigenous peoples for residential schools, he stated that:

[19] Coulthard *Red Skin, White Masks*, 6-7
[20] Glen Coulthard, "Subjects of Empire: Indigenous Peoples and the 'Politics of Recognition' in Canada" *Contemporary Political Theory*, 6, no. 4 (2007): 438-440.

> *I stand before you today to offer an apology to former students of Indian residential schools. The treatment of children in Indian residential schools is a sad chapter in our history…Today, we recognize that this policy of assimilation was wrong, has caused great harm, and has no place in our country…*[21]

While this seemed to be great step forward towards reconciliation between the Canadian government and the Indigenous peoples that it sought to eradicate, Harper contradicted himself fairly soon after in the G20 meeting where he stated that:

> *There are very few countries that can say for nearly 150 years, they had the same political system without any social breakdown, political upheaval, or invasion, we are unique…we also have no history of colonialism...*[22]

The line "we also have no history of colonialism" is particularly grating. Canada not only has a history of colonialism, but also has a continuing presence of colonialism. While the government condemns the mass killing of Indigenous peoples, it still participates in territorial expansion and forced integration of Indigenous individuals.[23]

One way in which this is realized is the mediatized figure of the Indigenous "child victim," an Indigenous child who has been abused and traumatized by the colonial process, but then has been adopted and seemingly given a better life. Through the adoption of these children, the state is portrayed as offering a beneficent hand to Indigenous people, while also being the structure that caused this violence and dispossession among Indigenous children. In doing so, the state washes its hands of its colonial crimes, instead placing the blame of the child's victimhood

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[21] Dan Eshet, *Stolen Lives: The Indigenous Peoples of Canada and the Indian Residential Schools*. (Toronto, ON: Facing History and Ourselves, 2015), 64.
[22] Kiera L. Ladner and Michael McCrossan, "Whose Shared History?," *Labour / Le Travail* 73 (2014): 201.
[23] Maxwell "Settler-Humanitarianism" 975-976

on the pathologies of Indigenous culture. Indigenous peoples are seen as a fallen nation, a group that needs the help of others, as they cannot function without aid. Like Harper, the Canadian state acknowledges the dispossession of Indigenous children in the past, but does not refer to its current efforts to assimilate Indigenous peoples, still viewing colonialism as a singular event and not a process.[24]

Illusions of Sovereignty

We can also see more systemic examples of the portrayal of Indigenous peoples as victims in the health care system. According to Mary Jane Logan McCallum and Adele Perry, the creation of an underfunded, understaffed and entirely separate system of Indigenous health services in Canada was done with dual intentions; to create the appearance of Indigenous self governance, but also the justification for further colonial humanitarian intervention. By creating circumstances that force Indigenous persons to become reliant on the colonial state, Indigenous people are unable to fully and completely liberate themselves of their colonial bonds, and are never truly able to separate themselves from the colonial system of governance that displaced them.[25] Echoing Maxwell, McCallum and Perry indicate that the Canadian state refuses to acknowledge this fact because in doing so, it would acknowledge the prevalence of white supremacy in its operating procedure, a fact from which the state has tried to distance itself in recent years.[26]

The destruction of Indigenous cultures, languages, and the acquisition of Indigenous lands through both violent and humanitarian means is a cultural genocide performed with the

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[24] Maxwell "Settler-Humanitarianism" 975-978
[25] Mary Jane Logan McCallum, Adele Perry, *Structures of Indifference: An Indigenous Life and Death in a Canadian City* (Winnipeg, MB: University of Manitoba Press, 2019),5-17
[26] McCallum and Perry *Structures of Indifference* 17-20.

intention of unification and absorption into the colonial state. We see a more contemporary version of colonial humanitarianism in which the colonizer is seen as a benevolent individual helping the native, while also creating an environment in which the native can never truly prosper. We may also view colonialism from a Fanonian lens with the likes of Coulthard, whereby Indigenous populations of North America are increasingly distanced from their own culture through primarily violent means, and the almost paradoxical relationship between Indigenous people and the colonial state; in that Indigenous people are allowed to have recognition and sovereignty so long as they follow the rules dictated by the state.

Blood quantum and colonial governmentality

The blood quantum is the primary way that the state dictates Indigenous identity, whereby one must have a certain percentage of one's ancestry be Indigenous in order to officially receive Indigenous status. While at first glance this may appear to protect Indigenous rights, this system serves simply to distance Indigenous people from their culture, culminating in their eventual dissolution and integration into colonized society.[27] In Canada, we see this in the Indian Act, a law passed by the Canadian parliament in 1876 with the intent of facilitating the absorption and cultural elimination of Indigenous peoples. The state divided Indigenous peoples into two groups, status and non-status Indians based on the amount of Indigenous "blood" within their veins. By having status, one was permitted to live on reserves and take part in tribal politics, but if one were non-status, these permissions were lost and could never be reattained.[28] It was extremely easy for one to lose their status through trivial reasons such as attending university, voting in Canadian elections, or even if an Indigenous woman married a non-

[27] Jeffrey Sissons, *First Peoples Indigenous Cultures and Their Futures.* (London, UK: Reaktion Books, 2005), 42-44.
[28] Sissons, *First Peoples*, 47-50.

Indigenous man. In the eyes of the state, this showed that the individual sought to no longer be Indigenous and wanted to embrace the new Canadian identity.[29] In 1985, the Canadian parliament adjusted the bill, removing restrictions on marrying non-status individuals, but adding a clause about children of unions between status and non-status individuals. Jeffrey Sissons explains this as:

> *...after two consecutive generations of marrying non status Indians, the children of the third generation are not eligible for status. Officially, their blood will have become too diluted for them to be considered authentic Indians. This rule applies equally to women and men.*[30]

Despite the changes made to this act, the state still dictates who is Indigenous, and how Indigenous people can live their lives, and guarantees Indigenous extinction through integration. Returning to Coulthard, we can again see that the Canadian state dictates the terms of Indigenous sovereignty and identity, restricting agency and self governance.

These various methods of control over native identity by the state can be described as forms of what David Scott describes as "colonial governmentality." Colonial governmentality is an extension of Foucault's original concept of governmentality. Governmentality can be understood as the practices in which the state governs over its subjects, or "the art of government."[31] Governmentality also explains how governance, or the methods by which governmental power is put upon a society, is exerted and created to pave the road for establishing the foundations of systems of power. Colonial governmentality describes how

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[29] Sissons, *First Peoples,* 50-51
[30] Sissons *First Peoples*, 51
[31] Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, Peter M. Miller, and Michel Foucault, *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality.* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 94-99.

colonial power seeks to produce these governing effects upon its colonial subjects through policies which work through, rather than against, the subject's freedom.[32]

From territorial sovereignty to cultural sovereignty

Despite the state's continued efforts to eradicate Indigenous identity, we still see Indigenous peoples resist the advancement of colonial domination. This has been realized in the Land Back movement, which was established in the late 20th century in North America, Australia, and other colonized regions throughout the world. The goals of the land back movement were, as the title suggests, to force the government and other private Western institutions to return stolen land back to the Indigenous peoples who were once in possession of the territory. It was founded during the peak of the civil rights movements in the 1960s and 1970s, partly due to the efforts of equality of black Americans led by Malcom X and Martin Luther King Jr. in the United States.[33] This movement seemingly reached its climax in 1969 during the occupation of Alcatraz Prison in which signs were painted "INDIANS WELCOME, YOU ARE ON INDIAN LAND".[34] Since Alcatraz was government property, and a prison in which many Indigenous persons were incarcerated, the occupation was a powerful, symbolic gesture of Indigenous peoples reclaiming their land from the colonial powers that had worked so hard to take it away from them. Today, the land back movement's aims are considered too difficult to accomplish by many. While the movement does give Indigenous leaders agency and control over their society, the movement has lost traction due to the difficulty of returning land. Land has been built on for generations, and its return is seen as an impossibility without having

[32] David Scott, *Refashioning Futures: Criticism after Postcoloniality* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 13-19
[33] Carolyn Strange and Tina Loo, "Holding the Rock: The 'Indianization' of Alcatraz Island, 1969-1999," *The Public Historian* 23, no. 1 (2001): 55-56.
[34] Strange and Loo "Holding the Rock" 56.

to spend millions of dollars and displacing the new families who currently live there.[35] The return of objects and remains from museums and institutions however, is seen as being much more attainable, and a more achievable way to help in the dismantling of colonial establishments and institutional practices, along with giving a sense of agency to the Indigenous and allowing them to reclaim their lost culture.[36] In the United States, repatriation activists lobbied the government and have contributed to the creation of the Native American Graves and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA)[37], legislation which, as of 2008, has contributed to the return of:

> *50,518 individual human remains; 1,185,948 associated funerary objects; 219,956 unassociated funerary objects; 4,914 sacred objects; 8,118 objects of cultural patrimony; and 1,624 objects that are both sacred and patrimonial*.[38]

At the heart of the discussion of repatriation and the motivation of Indigenous persons to bring about the return of their remains is colonialism. After years of mistreatment at the hands of the colonial government and other western institutions for the purpose and ideals of integration, Indigenous Canadians wish to empower themselves and take control over the institutions that once shackled them in irons and forced them to feel great shame in their own culture. Repatriation is one way in which they are able to do this and have a renewed sense of pride in their own people.

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[35] Nikki A Pieratos, Sarah S Manning, and Nick Tilsen, "Land Back: A Meta Narrative to Help Indigenous People Show up as Movement Leaders," *Leadership* 17, no. 1 (February 1, 2021): 49–51

[36] Clegg, Margaret. *Human Remains: Curation, Reburial and Repatriation*. Cambridge Texts in Human Bioarchaeology and Osteoarchaeology. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020, 110-113

[37] NAGPRA is a federal legislation in the United States of America that requires scholars and archaeologists abide by the wishes of Indigenous persons when Indigenous remains or grave goods are found at a site. Grave goods can include sacred artifacts or important possessions buried with the person. NAGPRA has also been used in a museum context to facilitate the return of Indigenous remains and artifacts back to their group of origin. Visit Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (U.S. National Park Service) (nps.gov) for more information on the subject matter.

[38] Jennifer L Dekker, "Challenging the 'Love of Possessions': Repatriation of Sacred Objects in the United States and Canada," *Collections* 14, no. 1 (March 1, 2018): 37, https://doi.org/10.1177/155019061801400103.

Chapter 2: Reframing the debate of repatriation: The museum's role in the settler-colonial state and a critique of archaeology

This chapter will focus more closely on the issue of repatriation, and the historical implication of museums, archaeologists, and custodians of Indigenous remains, in colonialism. Through reading scholarly justifications for institutional retention of remains, I note how these arguments devalue Indigenous ways of knowing, cultural traditions, and present Indigenous realities and create a definition of scientific progress that favours Western colonial practice. This definition of progress fails to understand and acknowledge the role of archaeological practice in colonialism, and fails to recognize that Indigenous claims to repatriation and ownership of remains are actually sovereign claims. Finally, I will turn to Indigenous critiques of archaeological science and museums, and provide an alternative understanding of scientific value and progress that stem from these arguments.

Reframing the debate

When discussing whether or not to repatriate Indigenous remains, two main points of view dominate the landscape and can be easily identified. Namely, those who support the repatriation and reburial of remains, and those who support the continued study and colonial possession of Indigenous remains. It is important to recognize that neither of these groups are monoliths, that is to say, that there are nuances on each side.

Oftentimes, the debate is construed as being one between science and religion, in which scholars studying remains are seen as continuing the noble pursuit of the study of the past, with the Indigenous merely obstructing this study, and objecting to it due to their traditional religious and cultural beliefs. One scholar who is a staunch defender of this approach is Elizabeth Weiss, who has published a somewhat controversial book about repatriation entitled *Repatriation and*

Erasing the Past. Weiss objects to the repatriation of Indigenous remains on grounds of discrimination, claiming that certain legislation currently in place to protect Indigenous remains from study racially discriminate against non-Indigenous scholars. She discusses NAGPRA, a formative piece of legislation in the United States designed to protect Indigenous sovereignty over remains. She writes that:

> *Racial discrimination is at the heart of NAGPRA. The objects of its protections are racially defined and the individuals and organizations that are given legal powers are racially defined. The simple fact that a material object or person can be labeled "Native American" entails a whole series of legal consequences that are enforced by the U.S. government on persons of all races*.[39]

In this quote, Weiss gives several different reasons for her justification of the continued holding of remains in institutions. She focuses very heavily on the idea of "racial discrimination" and how by giving Indigenous people full autonomy in thae decision of studying the remains of their ancestors, the governments of Canada and the United States are giving a clear racial priority to Indigenous peoples. She considers this to be unreasonable, as Indigenous people are now citizens of these colonizing countries and therefore should abide by their laws, and should not receive preferential treatment. She believes that despite various circumstances affecting groups of people differently throughout history, the law should continue to be blind to these differences and provide no exceptions based on differing histories and cultures. Giving communities preference in cases of repatriation, in her opinion, perpetuates the "victim mentality" of Indigenous persons.[40] The term "victim mentality" is used by Weiss to show that while

[39] Weiss, Elizabeth, and James W. Springer. *Repatriation and Erasing the Past*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2020, 170
[40] Weiss *Erasing the Past* 171

Indigenous persons have been persecuted throughout history, they continue to devalue themselves, and can also be justifiably characterized as being lazy because they blame their problems on the descendants of white settlers who colonized North America.

In her discussion of the Delgamuukw trial, Weiss emphasizes that the debate over the ownership of remains is one between religion and science. Multiple groups of Indigenous people in British Columbia had protested the excavation of a particular area because of the religious importance of the land to their people. In this case, the Gitxsan and Wet'suwet'en peoples were successful, and excavation was halted. Weiss asserts that this decision was wrong and is hindering the academic freedoms of researchers studying Indigenous peoples. This is because, on her understanding, such a decision would not have been reached were it a Christian organization making these claims. Here, she reduces Indigenous beliefs to mere "hearsay" rather than looking at them as historical fact, or as something important to Indigenous culture.[41] Beliefs of Indigenous persons are relegated to something that can be overridden and discarded rather than as an integral foundation of their cultural identity. Weiss claims that favouring of Indigenous belief is giving religion power over science, and argues the researchers who wanted to study the historical and geographical features of the area are racially discriminated against.

Sovereignty over history and culture

Reducing the debate over repatriation to an opposition between religion and science fails to do justice to the Indigenous point of view. At its core, the repatriation debate does not reignite any conflict between science and religion, but rather hinges on the question of sovereignty over history and information. Oftentimes, scholars like Weiss, cite that Indigenous people are not a

[41] Weiss *Erasing the Past* 180-183

distinctly different entity from the modern-day colonial nations that they now inhabit, meaning that the nations and organizations that they belong to are purely ceremonial. The debate is as much about who has the right to tell Indigenous history as it is about the physical remains themselves. This is referred to as "Indigenous data sovereignty," or more simply put; the control that Indigenous peoples have over information pertaining to them, including how people study their culture. I believe that this concept of data sovereignty is best defined in a publication by The First Nations Information Governance Centre, which states that:

> *A sovereign nation/state has the jurisdiction to govern, make laws, manage, control, and make decisions about their own peoples. With any sovereign authority also comes the right and responsibility to exercise jurisdiction in relation to information governance – to protect and govern all aspects of their citizens and nation's information and data.*[42]

Here, we see a parallel between Indigenous claims to ownership of remains and that of a sovereign nation. Sovereignty is usually thought of as the right of a group of people to control territory. The First Nations Information Governance Centre states that Indigenous data sovereignty is "the right of a nation to govern the collection, ownership, and application of its own data"[43] and links this to the group's right to govern its own people and property. The concept of sovereignty is therefore applied to Indigenous remains as the remains are the sovereign property of Indigenous groups.[44]

This idea of an Indigenous claim to culture is reinforced in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). Article 11 of this declaration states:

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[42] The First Nations Information Governance Centre "First Nations Data Sovereignty in Canada." *Statistical Journal of the IAOS* 35, 1 (IOS Press 2019): 58.
[43] First Nations Information Governance Centre "Data Sovereignty" 58.
[44] First Nations Information Governance Centre "Data Sovereignty" 59-60.

> *Indigenous peoples have the right to practise and revitalize their cultural traditions and customs. This includes the right to maintain, protect and develop the past, present and future manifestations of their cultures, such as archaeological and historical sites, artefacts, designs, ceremonies, technologies and visual and performing arts and literature.*[45]

Article 11 of UNDRIP reinforces the claims to cultural traditions and ownership of their material, especially over institutions. Article 11 of UNDRIP continues, stating that:

> *States shall provide redress through effective mechanisms, which may include restitution, developed in conjunction with indigenous peoples, with respect to their cultural, intellectual, religious and spiritual property taken without their free, prior and informed consent or in violation of their laws, traditions and customs*.[46]

UNDRIP thus not only reinforces Indigenous claims of cultural ownership of remains but also states that nations that have an Indigenous population must listen to and respect the wishes of the Indigenous communities on what to do with their remains. UNDRIP is a massive step forward for Indigenous sovereignty as it emphasizes that Indigenous peoples are a distinct cultural group and have rights to their own property.

Weiss seems to believe that scholars are the "stewards of the past," meaning that they have the right to tell the history of others in an unbiased manner. This belief is shared by Robert McGhee, a former archaeologist at the Canadian Museum of History. McGhee writes about his fears of biases in the field, particularly his fear of Indigenous scholars, and their influence on archaeology and the supposed application of a concept of "aboriginal exceptionalism." In his

[45] United Nations, United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 2008, 6
[46] United Nations, UNDRIP, 6

opinion, the remains of Indigenous peoples should stay in the hands of institutions. Archaeologists, anthropologists and historians are the stewards of the past for most nations and ethnic communities; therefore, they are the most qualified when dealing with this subject matter.[47] McGhee considers that Indigenous belief and western science often mix as well as water and oil, noting that both are based on different conceptions of the past. He states that while Western scholars see the past through the evidence that they can ascertain from artifacts and human remains, Indigenous peoples view the past through continued traditions and rituals that extend from the past into the present.[48] McGhee fears that if Indigenous communities claim ownership of remains, then the truth about the past world would be forever lost.

The vast amount of scientific data that can be ascertained from the skeleton, and the study of human remains in general, cannot be denied. From the skeleton, one can understand how a person lived and died. From the size and shape of the pelvis, one can tell the sex of the individual. Markings on joints may tell of their occupations, and if they were subject to violence. Analysis of teeth can tell you what they ate. The study of the human skeleton was even used to develop the "Out of Africa" theory, a fundamental theory to dismantle white supremacy and ethnocentrism.[49] Such facts show that the scholars studying the remains of Indigenous persons can in fact create positive, progressive outcomes. It is the belief of many curators of human remains that research can never truly cease while new technologies are being developed, meaning that remains must be kept by the institution indefinitely. Repatriating remains makes it functionally impossible for further study of them. In an example of a Tasmanian repatriation of skeletons belonging to the Natural History Museum of London, the Tasmanian delegation openly

[47] Robert McGhee "Aboriginalism and the Problems of Indigenous Archaeology." *American Antiquity* 73 (Cambridge University Press, 2008): 579-580
[48] McGhee "Aboriginalism" 582-583
[49] Clegg *Human Remains*, 33-40.

said that they wished to "destroy" these remains and "put them beyond the reach of science," which was not looked upon favourably by the curators of the museum.[50] The delegation did not wish to literally destroy these remains, but merely to make it so no more work and analysis may be done on them by putting them in an inaccessible location, as they were frustrated with museums appropriating their culture.

The desire of these institutions to retain human remains stems from an "encyclopedic" conception of history: since human remains represent the culmination of millions of years of evolution, they belong to humanity as a whole. Skeletons are scientific commodities that the institution has the right and duty to protect and give everyone access to learn from.[51] One scholar is quoted as saying:

> *I explicitly assume that no living culture, religion, interest group, or biological population has any moral or legal right to the exclusive use or regulation of ancient human skeletons since all humans are members of the same species, and ancient skeletons are the remnants of unduplicatable evolutionary events which all living and future peoples have the right to know about and understand. In other words, ancient human skeletons belong to everyone*.[52]

To many scholars, unearthed Indigenous skeletons have no relation to the Indigenous people of the present, so claims of ownership from various Indigenous activist groups are nullified because of their inability to establish a secure relationship between contemporary Indigenous communities and the remains.[53] The idea of remains belonging to all, while noble in

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[50] Clegg *Human Remains* 113-118.
[51] Ann M Kakaliouras "An Anthropology of Repatriation: Contemporary Physical Anthropological and Native American Ontologies of Practice." *Current Anthropology* 53, no. S5 (2012): S210–211.
[52] Kakaliouras "Anthropology of Repatriation" S211
[53] Jenkins, Tiffany. *Contesting Human Remains in Museum Collections: The Crisis of Cultural Authority*. New York: Routledge, 2010. 35-39

theory, fails to take into account the history behind the acquisition of these remains, and how Indigenous societies' systems of knowledge differ from Western ones. While many scientists simply see the scientific value of these remains as holding the potential for the betterment of society, many are empathetic to the Indigenous peoples' wishes. Although some scholars may not support the repatriation of remains as it would be a loss to the scientific community, they do understand why Indigenous people would be hesitant to allow scientists to study them. Tiffany Jenkins, a scholar who studies the controversy surrounding the display of funerary objects and bodies in museum collections writes that:

> *Archaeologists support the return of remains from recent generations to local communities for reburial, because social and spiritual factors outweigh other factors. The Kow Swamp bones, however, are rare survivals from the millions of burials which have occurred and vanished across the past 15,000 years. Their kin cannot be presumed to have shared the same cultural values or religious concepts of this generation. Neither can a few people 'own' them in the sense of being free to destroy them*.[54]

Here, Jenkins brings up a central topic of the debate on repatriation; sovereignty over history and remains, along with the continuation of Indigenous identity. Jenkins argues that while Indigenous groups and repatriationists use claims of genetic ancestry to establish their case of ownership, ownership is almost impossible to determine due to the length of time passed. Moreover, Indigenous cultural traditions have changed a great deal over long periods of time. Therefore, while Jenkins does acknowledge Indigenous grievances against archaeologists analyzing the remains of their ancestors, she continues to view the remains as an object of

[54] Jenkins *Contesting Human Remains* 34

historical and scientific value, and claims that the remains should be open for everyone to view and experience.[55]

Origins of stewardship and misconceptions of study

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Indigenous culture was seen by European settlers as one destined for inevitable extinction with its gradual integration into settler society. Given European understandings of the inevitability of the extinction of Indigeneity, scholars of this period sought to preserve the memory of the Indigenous cultures of North America. Various institutions and privately wealthy individuals began to remove large amounts of cultural material, including remains, from Indigenous North Americans, and to create a narrative around them in the process of "salvage ethnography." The exhibits developed using this material were designed to highlight how strange and exotic Indigenous culture was, and were referred to as "cabinets of curiosity." Needless to say, Indigenous peoples were not consulted on how their cultural material should be "preserved."[56] In this instance, the museum and the discipline of archaeology were used as tools of settler colonialism, by eroding the ownership that Indigenous peoples have to their own cultural material with claims of it being for the good of mankind and science.[57]

This older colonial attitude towards Indigenous peoples continues in our present archaeological context. This lack of consent of Indigenous persons to the removal of their remains is one of the main underlying issues in the debate. Many scholars who advocate against repatriation do not mention that the remains in possession of museums are there because they

[55] Jenkins *Contesting Human Remains* 35-40
[56] Ashleigh Breske "Politics of Repatriation: Formalizing Indigenous Repatriation Policy." *International Journal of Cultural Property* 25, no.3 (Cambridge University Press, 2018): 350-352.
[57] Breske "Politics of Repatriation", 352-353.

were excavated without consent.[58] Because of the lack of Indigenous voices in the original retrieval of the remains, many institutions housing these bodies did not fully understand the damage that they were causing to Indigenous communities in Canada, nor did they understand their value, resulting in incorrect data and misconceptions about many Indigenous groups that carry over into the present day.

One such example of these misconceptions is the concept of being Métis. Chelsea Vowel writes about her own personal struggles with this in *Indigenous Writes: A Guide to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Issues in Canada*. Many Western-trained scholars utilize the concept that the Métis are a "half-breed" between Indigenous people and white settlers. This is used today by scholars to demonstrate that Canada is a blending of both European and Indigenous North American cultures.[59] Originally, this claim was a true one. Most Métis in the colonial period came from marriages between white fur traders and Indigenous people, primarily in Quebec. However, what is unique about the Métis is that the children of these marriages chose to live together and intermingle with one another to create their own culture and their ancestral land in the prairie provinces of Canada. Because of this, a Métis individual is not simply half Indigenous and half white, they are usually Métis because one or both of their parents were Métis. However, scholars still continue to advance this notion of hybridity and that the Métis are a mixture of both cultures, with some even going as far as saying that Canada is a "Métis Nation," a claim many Métis dispute.[60]

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[58] Union of Ontario Indians. "A Toolkit for Understanding Aboriginal Heritage and Burial Rights and Issues," 2015, 18-21.
[59] Chelsea Vowel *Indigenous Writes: A Guide to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Issues in Canada* (Brantford, Ontario: Highwater Press, 2018) 42-44.
[60] Vowel, *Indigenous Writes*: 39-41, 43.

While scholars who support the continued study of Indigenous remains tend to view the skeleton as a scientific commodity and consider their work as being for the betterment of humanity, many Indigenous groups view archaeology as a tool used by western scientists to continue to separate Indigenous people from their history, and claim that it actively works against the people being studied. One particularly vocal critic of the archaeological method when dealing with Indigenous communities is Kisha Supernant of the University of Alberta, an Indigenous archaeologist of the Métis Nation. Supernant is critical of archaeological theory and its relationship with traditional Indigenous values, and claims archaeology not only works against Indigenous communities but is also used as a tool of the settler-colonial state to further its claims upon Indigenous lands. When an archaeological dig occurs, the material found from this dig is usually taken by a museum or institution with the intention of analysis and study, to educate others about the culture in question. Supernant argues that this institutional appropriation perpetuates the colonial practice in its assertion of claiming ownership of Indigenous history. An archaeological dig when undertaken without express permission from the local Indigenous organization is effectively an invasion of sovereign Indigenous lands and denies Indigenous persons their sovereignty and decision-making capability.[61]

Supernant notes various misconceptions of Indigenous persons within the discipline of archaeology and believes that they arise from a lack of diversity in the field. She calls for more Indigenous representation within archaeology and further consultation with Indigenous groups in the hope that in changing its practice, archaeology will gradually move away from its colonial roots and become more inclusive and more representative of Indigenous values and histories.

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[61] Kisha Supernant "Reconciling the Past for the Future: The Next 50 Years of Canadian Archaeology in the Post-TRC Era." *Canadian Journal of Archaeology / Journal Canadien d'Archéologie* 42, no.1 (Canadian Archaeological Association 2018):146-148.

Supernant does not demand the removal of nonindigenous archaeologists but simply calls for more consultation with and representation of Indigenous groups within the field. She suggests this will ultimately produce a much clearer view of the past and hopefully better the future.[62]

Differing systems of knowledge

Many Indigenous activists suggest that archaeology works against and disregards Indigenous traditions, due to archaeologists' self understanding as custodians of the past. Robert Chapman and Alison Wylie symptomize this critique when they write that:

> *As a profession, archaeologists are committed to the premise that the past is knowable, and indeed have had remarkable success in teasing apart the history of human achievement, evolution, and lifeways. But two unavoidable questions are: how do we know what we know about the archaeological record; and what types of evidence suffice for providing adequate "proof" for our interpretations?*[63]

Archaeology is a very "physical" science. It requires material objects, be they artifacts or human remains, to give credence to the theories that are developed by archaeologists. Using these physical objects, archaeologists believe that they can reconstruct the past. And yet, this approach is often at odds with Indigenous understandings of time. Unlike archaeologists who understand the past and present as two distinct and separate entities, many Indigenous communities believe that the past permeates through the present day. Indigenous accounts of the past are narrated through and embedded within oral traditions. This mode of relating the past has been viewed as very unreliable by Western scholars due to its likelihood to change over time and

[62] Supernant "Reconciling the Past" 147-158.
[63] Robert Chapman and Alison Wylie *Material Evidence: Learning from Archaeological Practice* (London, Ontario: Routledge, 2014) 287.

its subjectiveness. One might claim that archaeologists often disregard Indigenous oral histories when they conflict with the theories that they have developed on a site, and only give them credibility when they accord with their research.[64]

This perhaps harkens back to the disciplinary ethnocentrism that I referred to earlier, which holds that Indigenous people cannot own their own history in different ways. Western knowledge has largely been defined as "legitimate" knowledge, with scholars such as Weiss claiming that these oral histories should be disregarded due to the near impossibility for them to be proven.

Colonial knowledge viewed Indigenous ways of understanding as inferior, superstitious and primitive, and yet both Western and Indigenous systems of knowledge are validated in the same way.[65] Both ways of understanding are originally told, be it orally or written down, and verified by someone of authority who is considered knowledgeable. For Western knowledge, this is seen as publishing a peer-reviewed document, or even the publication of this major research paper. The author has to present it in front of a committee of people knowledgeable in the subject matter, who determine whether or not the paper is legitimate. Indigenous knowledge is verified by elders and leaders of the group, who verify the stories being told to younger generations to keep their traditions alive. Both systems rely on repetition, verification, and observations, yet many place greater value on the Western system rather than the Indigenous one.[66]

In discrediting Indigenous knowledge and history, many scholars implicitly believe that the history of North America began with the European colonizers rather than with the Indigenous

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[64] Chapman and Wylie *Material Evidence*, 287-288.
[65] Francis Adyanga Akena. "Critical Analysis of the Production of Western Knowledge and Its Implications for Indigenous Knowledge and Decolonization." *Journal of Black Studies* 43, no. 6 (2012): 600-602.
[66] Chapman and Wylie *Material Evidence*, 289-290.

peoples who first inhabited the land. Yet, humanity is involved in history as both the actor and the narrator. The control over this narrative of history is essential for control over the people. Through certain scholars portraying themselves as unbiased interpreters of truth, they have worked to erode Indigenous control over their land and their past.[67] Something written down in a Western language during the colonial period does not necessarily give it any more credibility than an oral history passed down for generations by an Indigenous group. History can easily be filled with false stories and biased interpretations as with any form of knowledge production.[68] The narrative of history is dependent on the breadth and trust within its archive. However, what happens if this archive is incomplete? If only certain sources are selected to be a part of this archive, then our understanding of the past is fragmented. If historians write from the information that is given to them by the past on the basis of these sources, then in doing so they risk bringing with them past biases, prejudice, and incompleteness into our modern understanding of the past.[69]

Colonial actors established Western knowledge as the only legitimate form of knowing and are responsible for why so many Indigenous remains lie in institutions. Before 1990, all Canadian archaeological material was primarily entrusted to the hands of the archaeologists and institutions that acquired these artifacts through digs or purchases from private collections. The institutions were well equipped to take care of and research the archaeological material recovered from the field, and the employees were understood to be the experts in how to tell the history of Canada. Unfortunately, surviving Indigenous peoples were not consulted, even though these remains and artifacts were relevant to their personal history. Because these remains were

[67] Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*. Beacon Press, 2015, 1-5.
[68] Trouillot, *Silencing the Past* 5-10.
[69] Trouillot, *Silencing the Past* 17-21.

found on land that was no longer Indigenous, the remains were seen as belonging to the finders and the researchers, rather than the Indigenous peoples who once had inhabited this land and owned this material prior to its discovery.[70]

While many scholars champion the notion of the past being open to all, oftentimes they seek to tell the past through a purely Western lens, rather than letting the people of study be free to tell their own story. Joe Watkins, an Indigenous archaeologist at the University of New Mexico, expands upon the relationship between archaeologists and Indigenous persons, specifically how Indigenous activists fight to protect their history from being stolen and appropriated by Western institutions. According to Watkins, many consider Indigenous peoples to be outside the realm of science and do not know how to best treat their histories because they have not been properly trained in the field. [71] In an interview that Watkins had conducted with a member of the Pawnee tribe, the interviewee states that:

> *Individuals who violate the sanctity of the grave outside of the law are viewed as criminals, Satan worshippers, or imbalanced. When caught, tried, and convicted, the guilty are usually incarcerated, fined, or placed in mental institutions. Yet public opinion and legal loopholes have until recently enabled white society to loot and pillage with impunity American Indian cemeteries. Archaeology, a branch of anthropology that still attempts to sanctify this tradition of exploiting dead Indians, arose as an honorable profession from this sacrilege*.[72]

To many Indigenous peoples, archaeologists do not seek to tell their histories, but are instead trying to legalize and advance settler colonialism, and colonial extraction of cultural

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[70] Margaret G. Hanna, "The Changing Legal and Ethical Context of Archaeological Practice in Canada, with Special Reference to the Repatriation of Human Remains" *Journal of Museum Ethnography,* no. 17 (2005): 141-142
[71] Joe Watkins "Through Wary Eyes: Indigenous Perspectives on Archaeology." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 34, (Annual Reviews 2005): 432-433.
[72] Watkins "Through Wary Eyes" 434.

material. The comparison of archaeologists to grave robbers is a bold one. Archaeologists do not necessarily intend to act with this in mind, nor do they operate with the intent to steal artifacts of Indigenous peoples. It is simply that these are consequences of their actions, and due to archaeology's disciplinary structure, Indigenous voices are excluded from the field.

Michael Wilcox, another archaeologist of Indigenous descent, writes on the importance of having Indigenous representation in the field but also warns against creating a segregated version of archaeology, in which Indigenous and Western archaeologists work separately from one another to create separate conclusions from their research. Wilcox states that it is a myth that Indigenous peoples and scientists cannot find common ground in the study of remains and cultural material. He suggests that instead, it should be understood that archaeology is changing and that many western-trained archaeologists do not want to accept or participate in this change. Wilcox writes that previously, if one wanted to learn about the history of the Pueblo, one would have to read through the anthropological literature of the early 20th century, which is littered with incorrect statements. This focus on older literature with its biases at the expense of the expertise of Indigenous knowledge keepers highlights the differences between Western and Indigenous knowledge systems.[73] Wilcox states that this scholarly neglect of Indigenous voices and the invalidation of Indigenous knowledge of the past contribute to the myth that Indigenous people are of an "intellectually lower class" and that Indigenous opinions of the study of remains stem wholly from religion.[74] He argues instead that it is actually scholars who constitute and impediment to Indigenous communities' access to what is rightfully their cultural property. An

[73] Michael Wilcox "Saving Indigenous Peoples from Ourselves: Separate but Equal Archaeology Is Not Scientific Archaeology." *American Antiquity* 75, no. 2 (Cambridge University Press 2010): 222-223
[74] Wilcox "Saving Indigenous Peoples 223-224.

example that he gives is the scholarly opposition to NAGPRA, due to it impeding upon archaeologists' work and academic freedom.[75]

Academic freedom and its relation to the debate

Academic freedom is an interesting concept, that I touched upon earlier in this chapter in my discussion of Elizabeth Weiss's book. Weiss refers to academic freedom frequently and often mourns its death, with the government disallowing so many anthropologists from studying Indigenous remains, specifically through legislation such as NAGPRA. Weiss fails to understand that academic freedom does not afford the right to cause harm to the subjects of study, nor does it allow a researcher to go against their subjects' will and to disregard ethical imperatives to treat cultures that that are the object of study with dignity and respect. This is a basic cornerstone of anthropology that many learn in their undergraduate years. Weiss takes a somewhat colonial attitude throughout her book, purposely calling the Indigenous peoples that she wishes to study "Indians," a term that obviously has deeply colonial roots. Her book and thought processes demonstrate why so many Indigenous people view the archaeologist as the settler-colonizer.

Unlike Weiss, I believe that scholars are not necessarily the objective "truth seekers" that she claims them to be. Rather, they seek to understand how something came to be. They, like anyone else, have inherent biases and are not arbitrators permitted to decide right from wrong. Scholars must be open to other opinions on their work. It is an essential part of academia to receive critiques of publications, and it is an essential part of modern anthropology to respect the group of people that is being studied, or else we run the risk of returning to our colonial roots.[76]

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[75] Wilcox "Saving Indigenous Peoples" 223.
[76] Rosemary A. Joyce "Science, Objectivity, and Academic Freedom in the Twenty-First Century." *International Journal of Cultural Property* 28, no. 2 (May 2021): 196-198.

The display of remains in museums is often seen as a method of control to demonstrate the power and authority of the institution over the people. A prime example of displaying a body to show power is that of Lenin's corpse being displayed in its mausoleum, as a means of consolidating the power of the Soviet Union. Preserving the body of such a popular and influential figure projected the power of the state over the people and government.[77] The display and continued study of Indigenous remains demonstrates the state's power over the Indigenous peoples of Canada, and its sovereignty over the land that they had once inhabited. The body, therefore, is first and foremost a political object, as well as a scientific one, and one that may be used by institutions to demonstrate power.

The debate over the repatriation of Indigenous remains is not a debate between science and religion, but a rather a debate about who has sovereignty over their treatment and the information that can be gleaned from them. Archaeology has long been seen as a settler colonial discipline, and one that institutes a degree of colonial sovereignty over the Indigenous past with its disregard of Indigenous knowledge structures. Indigenizing archaeology, and recognizing Indigenous sovereignty, is a means of not only tackling the ongoing legacy of settler colonialism, but also the structure of colonial sovereignty and governance.

[77] Jenkins *Contesting Human Remains* 106-108.

Chapter 3: Decolonization and reconciliation: The future of relationships between Indigenous peoples and museums, and the museum's role in the healing process

In my final chapter, I turn to contemporary efforts to reform archaeological and museological practice. I note the new emphasis on cultural sensitivity and collaboration in these experiments, as well as redefined notions of scientific progress and value that underpin them. I emphasize how the recognition of Indigenous ownership of remains is critical to healing past and continuing trauma, Indigenous cultural revival, and advancing the cause of reconciliation and decolonization. Here, I pay attention to the nature and function of repatriation ceremonies.

Repatriation as decolonization

Decolonization is often deployed as a buzzword by many Canadian politicians and activists to advocate for the broad reform of institutions, and the general betterment of relations with Indigenous organizations. Decolonization also has more nuanced dimensions that may include apologies from those involved, or, on behalf of those involved, in heinous acts, promotion of the advancement of reconciliation initiatives to improve the quality of life of individuals affected by these acts, and also a greater respect for Indigenous sovereignty over land and cultural material. The repatriation of Indigenous remains to their communities of origin is realized through the process of decolonization, and assists in the healing process of Indigenous communities and fostering a healthier relationship between the communities and the institutions.

Decolonization, in its most basic definition, is how formerly colonized nations remove Eurocentric influences from their society and help to incorporate a more just and representative system of governance and knowledge. Eurocentric norms of knowledge, governance, and culture were created and sustained by the spread of European imperialism. Because of this, Eurocentric

forms of government have been viewed as the norm.[78] Decolonization efforts by Indigenous peoples of North America are now predominantly focused on the assertion of the sovereignty of Indigenous groups and rejection of the colonial state's role in mandating rights and privileges relating to their way of life.[79]

As mentioned in my second chapter, museums have had a history of exploitation of certain cultures and individuals for the enjoyment of others. Many museums have statues celebrating Western colonizers who worked to remove Indigenous individuals from their land. It has become the belief of many scholars in the field that museums cannot properly decolonize without removing these connections to colonialism and remaking exhibits to showcase the horrific deeds that these people performed. Another way in which this decolonial process can continue is with the repatriation of Indigenous remains and cultural material to their communities of origin.[80] This process is not only a transference in material, but also symbolizes a transference in sovereignty over Indigenous culture.

Sovereignty and self governance are terms that are conventionally used when discussing territorial claims. However, as I have suggested, claims to information and cultural objects can be conceived in terms of sovereignty. Through the repatriation of remains, we can see the tenets of decolonization realized, in that the Canadian state must take a step back to allow Indigenous peoples to hold greater sway over their cultural material.

In our present museological context, we are seeing greater cooperation between Indigenous groups and the institutions that worked to distance them from their cultural heritage.

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[78] James Morris Blaut, *The Colonizer's Model of the World* (New York, NY: Guilford, 2000): 1-15
[79] Zig-Zag, *Colonization and Decolonization: A Manual for Indigenous Liberation in the 21st Century*. (Vancouver, BC: Warrior Publications, 2006): 20-25.
[80] Janine Francois, "Decolonise This Museum," *Architectural Review*, no. 1479 (March 2021): 49–51.

In a joint publication by the Royal BC Museum and the Haida Gwaii Museum in British Columbia, we may see how Indigenous and Western scientists are working together for the common goal of educating others about Indigenous culture and how to go about reconciling the past between the two groups. Written by members of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous backgrounds, this handbook details how to respectfully repatriate the remains of Indigenous individuals. It states that one of the most important tools in repatriation is to understand and accept the history of remains and how museums came to own them. Allied to recognizing the damages of colonialism prevalent throughout Canadian history, this approach also entails understanding the history of the Indigenous community that is the recipient of repatriation. Here, the emphasis is more on the community's cultural history rather than its geographic location which may have changed over the years due to migration or removal.[81] The book also encourages the museum or activist performing the repatriation to dialogue with elders and others in a community, listen to their requests, and respect their wishes, suggesting that one must establish a committee of both parties to decide the proper course of action. It also warns the reader of the emotions that meetings may arise, including feelings of anger and sorrow.[82] This is in stark contrast to earlier approaches to the role of museum, which often viewed them as necessarily distinct and differentiated from their Indigenous objects of study. This text not only encourages institutions to listen to Indigenous communities but also suggests that Indigenous communities should always have sovereignty over remains. This constitutes a dramatic role reversal when we take into account the historically poor relationship between museums and

[81] Jisang Nika Collison, Sdaahl K'awaas, Lucy Bell, and Lou-ann Neel *Indigenous Repatriation Handbook* (Victoria, British Columbia: The Royal BC Museum, 2019) 29-31.
[82] Collison, K'awaas, Bell, and Neel *Indigenous Repatriation Handbook* 13-20.

Indigenous groups. This puts the rights of ownership of the Indigenous past squarely with the descendants of these ancestors.

Similar to the Royal BC Museum, Parks Canada has also released a manual detailing its policies of repatriation. This text also emphasizes Indigenous agency in the management of remains, enhanced communication between Parks Canada and Indigenous communities, greater care in the handling of Indigenous remains, and the importance of research into the provenance of remains.[83] Since Parks Canada is both a governmental and archaeological institution, embodying two functions that have historically been at odds with Indigenous communities, the publishing of a revised and renewed formula for repatriation is a step forward for decolonization and reparations between Indigenous organizations and the Canadian state. In this book, Parks Canada explicitly says that Indigenous communities should have complete control and sovereignty over what is done to these remains, a divergence from previous years of Indigenous repatriation policy which prioritized the opinions of Western scholars and researchers who located the remains. Seemingly in response to various critics who call repatriation the end of scientific research and the end of academic freedom, Parks Canada also reframes its definition of progress in research to incorporate repatriation. It claims that repatriation helps scientists continue with their research, as anthropologists and archaeologists are called upon to identify the genetic ancestry of these remains prior to repatriation.[84] It would appear that these recent changes in museological policy are informed by a desire to recognize the significant cultural claims of Indigenous groups, and create a blending of Western and Indigenous ideas and cultures. The Royal Saskatchewan Museum for example engages in frequent negotiations with

[83] Virginia Myles, "Parks Canada's Policies that Guide the Repatriation of Human Remains and Objects" in *The Long Way Home: The Meaning and Values of Repatriation*, ed. Paul Turnbull and Michael Pickering (Oxford, NY: Berghahn Books, 2010): 51-54.
[84] Myles "Repatriation of Human Remains", 52-53.

the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations, in order to come to a compromise in which science and tradition can work hand in hand.[85] The museum has also implemented an "Aboriginal Internship Program" to allow young Indigenous persons the opportunity to tell their own story, and to care for their artifacts, along with protecting their culture from eradication.[86] This also allows Indigenous peoples sovereignty over their own information, which is an important step in decolonization.

Reframing scientific progress

As mentioned in my second chapter detailing the arguments of both repatriationists and anti-repatriationists, one of the main arguments against repatriating Indigenous remains is the detrimental impact that it has on the scientific community, due to the irreparable loss of scientific data. Like Parks Canada, many other scientists are starting to reframe scientific progress, showing that a betterment of relations with Indigenous communities is a natural evolution of scientific progress, rather than the death of it. When speaking about the Haida people of British Columbia, anthropologist Cara Krmpotich states that:

> *Repatriation is not an obstacle to knowledge. Quite the contrary, the processes, oratory and material culture of repatriation articulate people's values of death and life. They are potent symbols of identity, continuity and adaptability*.[87]

Where many scientists see repatriation and Indigenous claims of ownership as an end to academic freedom and knowledge that would be lost forever, Krmpotich claims that repatriating remains fosters a closer, deeper connection between the two groups allowing for knowledge to

[85] Hanna "The Changing Legal and Ethical Context of Archaeological Practice in Canada", 146-147.
[86] Hanna "The Changing Legal and Ethical Context of Archaeological Practice in Canada", 148.
[87] Cara Krmpotich "Repatriation and the Generation of Material Culture." *Mortality* no. 16 (2011): 158.

be more easily accessible to both and allowing for a better understanding of history. This demonstrates that repatriation is not the death of science and research, but rather a changing of our system of understanding and the turning of a new leaf in Indigenous and Western relations.

Repatriating Indigenous remains also allows for a renewed sense of pride in Indigenous communities and culture. The culture that was forcibly removed from them is now being celebrated and honoured.[88] We can see how repatriation helps to heal communities affected by colonial violence in Sonya Atalay's "Braiding Strands of Wellness," along with an explanation as to what repatriation of remains means to Indigenous communities. Atalay is an Indigenous Archaeologist of Anishinaabe-Ojibwe descent. In her article, she writes that repatriation has led to spiritual, intellectual, and emotional healing for Indigenous communities as well as a reclaiming of cultural heritage and history from Western-dominated institutions. This is typically so because when dealing with the remains of Indigenous individuals, many members of Indigenous communities feel connected to the past trauma that their ancestors experienced in a form referred to as "generational trauma."

Repatriation as a healing method

While people who experience generational trauma did not necessarily experience the traumatic events of early colonialism, it may still mentally scar and effect them merely by their association to their ancestors.[89] The degree of trauma is usually related to the magnitude and severity of the event that is in question. In this instance of colonialism and violence associated with the practices of integration, the severity is extremely high.[90] The concept of "historical

[88] Krmpotich "Repatriation", 147-153.
[89] Thomas Laqueur, review of *We Are All Victims Now*, by Didier Fassin, Richard Rechtman, and Rachel Gomme, *London Review of Books*, July 8, 2010, https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v32/n13/thomas-laqueur/we-are-all-victims-now.
[90] Laqueur, review of *We Are All Victims Now*

trauma" describes how a group of people still feel the pain and loss of a certain historical event, even though they were not the ones who directly experienced such an event. To many, the skeleton is not just the remains of a deceased individual, but represents the Indigenous experience of colonial violence. Viewing it triggers feelings of grief and loss associated with this ongoing historical legacy.[91]

Through the return and reburial of Indigenous remains, this horrific past is addressed and the connection to Indigenous culture is re-established. It is considered healing to see the people who were once deemed to be mere colonial commodities returned home and buried, and even more so because they were repatriated from institutions that fought hard to uphold the possession of these bodies.[92] For many, the presence of their ancestors is felt during repatriation ceremonies, and repatriation also helps to build pride in one's community through a celebration of Indigenous cultural heritage.[93]

The repatriation ceremony is perhaps the most important aspect of the entire repatriation process, symbolizing a transference in sovereignty and authority over knowledge and the material. The main objective of these repatriation ceremonies is to honour Indigenous culture and traditions, and to show that sovereignty over Indigenous history and remains now belongs to Indigenous peoples. These ceremonies are performed to symbolically put to rest the restless spirits of the ancestors who inhabit these remains. Such ceremonies are often very emotional, filled with anger over the mistreatment of their ancestors, grief, and guilt over not reburying sooner, and jubilance at the fact that finally, the remains have received the respect that they were

[91] Krista Maxwell, "Settler-Humanitarianism: Healing the Indigenous Child- Victim" *Comparative Studies in Society and History* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2017): 979-980.
[92] Sonya Atalay "Braiding Strands of Wellness." *The Public Historian* 41 no.1 (2019) 81-83.
[93] Atalay "Braiding Strands" 84

due. The ceremony often focuses on the community as a whole, with the repatriation and reburial of the remains being symbolic of the community overcoming a great tragedy, and adversity.[94] During these ceremonies, members of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous origin are present. In one instance, Ralph Klein, the former Premier of Alberta, repatriated remains and cultural material belonging to the Blackfoot people on behalf of the Glenbow museum in Calgary. The ceremony acknowledged the difficult past with both cultures, and involved the official signing of a "memorandum of understanding" between the two groups, showing how they would communicate and work with each other going forward, to protect Indigenous rights and sovereignty. The ceremony also involved traditional Blackfoot prayer, and a smudging ceremony, a Blackfoot tradition in which bundles of sage and grass are burned to purify a person and to banish negative emotions and to heal the community from the trauma of the past.[95]

The detail of the smudging ceremony reveals a revitalization of the importance of Indigenous cultural traditions through a shift in the storytelling of history, which prioritizes an Indigenous view of history over a European one.[96] In common with many Indigenous groups, the Blackfoot community's culture was forcibly suppressed by British colonists. The Blackfoot relied heavily on the buffalo which the Europeans had hunted to near extinction. Relying on this creature made the Blackfoot nomadic, and with its near eradication Blackfoot cultural practices were abandoned as they were forced onto reservations and taught how to farm and live a traditional sedentary European way of life. Collectors came and took much of their material, including medicine bundles. Gradually, traditional Blackfoot culture began to disappear from the

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[94] Susan and Hausler "The Journey Home" 208-211.
[95] Gerald T. Conaty, Robert R. Janes, Allan Pard, and Jerry Potts. *We Are Coming Home: Repatriation and the Restoration of Blackfoot Cultural Confidence* (Edmonton, Alberta: Athabasca University Press, 2015) 257-259.
[96] Moira Simpson, "Museums and Restorative Justice: Heritage, Repatriation and Cultural Education" *Museum International* 61, no. 1-2 (2009): 121-123.

world. The usage of these bundles in the repatriation ceremony therefore symbolizes a return to this culture. Moreover, the involvement of both non-Indigenous and Indigenous peoples in the ceremony indicates a context of mutual respect between both parties for this cultural revival.[97]

This place of import that has been assigned to the culture of the Indigenous people in repatriation ceremonies has also resulted in the creation of new cultural practices. This in turn reinforces the identity of the communities associated with the remains, and helps to revive the distinctiveness of culture that they had lost in the past. One such example of this is the repatriation of Haida remains. Here, Haida members of the repatriation committee researched traditional burial practices and spoke with elders on how to properly care for the remains of their ancestors.[98] Such practices help to bring communities together by creating newfound pride in their own culture. This in turn affords Indigenous people some sense of self determination over their own culture, and therefore the sense of being a sovereign group.

Following a repatriation, conditions among Indigenous people begin to change. Members of the Haida repatriation committee describe this in the following terms: "After each ceremony, one can feel that the air has been cleared, that spirits are resting, that our ancestors are at peace, and that healing is visible on the faces of the Haida community."[99] This demonstrates the reconciling power that repatriation can have, and shows how the role of the museum is changing from one of colonial preservation, to one of facilitating the healing of these communities from the scars of the colonial process.

The shifting role of the museum and the discipline of archaeology

[97] Simpson "Museums" 125-126.
[98] Simpson "Museums" 126-127
[99] Simpson "Museums" 128

In order to protect Indigenous sovereignty over land and material, decolonization initiatives have found their way into archaeology. In British Columbia, archaeology has responded well to increasing calls for decolonization by abiding by the wishes of Indigenous communities whose stories it tries to tell. In contrast to past instances, in which the discipline was dismissive of Indigenous stories in favour of archaeological theory, archaeologists now work to incorporate Indigenous knowledge to help change archaeological theory and help create a better understanding of the past. One method of utilizing Indigenous explanations of the past has involved studying land use and the use of traditional knowledge, both of which provide archaeologists with information on locating and interpreting sites of Indigenous activity and settlement. In addition to this, archaeologists have consulted with Indigenous peoples to obtain permission to work on their ancestral land, rather than obtaining permission from an organization in the new settler Canadian government.[100] This in turn promotes Indigenous sovereignty over both their land and their history. In addition to this, we are seeing an interesting role reversal with archaeologists. In British Columbia for example, archaeologists are working with Indigenous groups to help prevent land development on traditional Indigenous lands, halting the advances of settler colonialism.[101]

In continuing to analyze how repatriation contributes to the healing process of Indigenous persons, we should note various repatriation initiatives throughout the world, one being "The Journey Home," a repatriation project founded in 2005 at the University of British Columbia's Laboratory of Archaeology. The project focuses on helping Indigenous people to retrieve the remains of their ancestors. Because many Indigenous persons lack the funding and the research

[100] George P. Nicholas, "Decolonizing the Archaeological Landscape: The Practice and Politics of Archaeology in British Columbia," *American Indian Quarterly* 30, no. 3/4 (2006): 350-351.
[101] Nicholas "Decolonizing the Archaeological Landscape" 361-362.

capacity to find their remains, The Journey Home assists Indigenous persons in locating the remains of their ancestors, along with helping them to submit the proper forms needed to repatriate their remains.[102] The project sees itself as proving that the repatriation of ancestral remains can help to re-establish and rebuild relationships between Indigenous communities and the institutions that housed their remains.

Across the ocean in the United Kingdom, there have been greater efforts to repatriate cultural objects and remains from the British Museum by Indigenous activists in the US and Canada. This institution has long been seen as the exemplar of colonialism and cultural theft in a museological context, with halls full of artifacts from the former British Empire. However, while repatriation in North America is considered a great issue, this is not the case in Europe. This is because Indigenous peoples are less politically present in European than in North American contexts. This lack of Indigenous voices within Europe accounts for the relatively small number of requests for repatriation on the continent. As of 2003, only 33 requests for repatriation had ever been made to British institutions from Indigenous groups. Of that amount, only seven had been agreed to be returned.[103]

While it does not strictly bear on the subject of human remains, one recent case shows the difficulty of repatriating cultural material from European museums. This concerns a totem pole belonging to the Nisga'a people in British Columbia that now resides in the National Museum of Scotland. The totem pole was taken in 1929, at a time period when such appropriation was common place. The Nisga'a people have repeatedly requested its return due to its cultural

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[102] Rowley Susan and Kristin Hausler "The Journey Home: A Case Study in Proactive Repatriation" in *Utimut: Past Heritage – Future Partnerships – Discussions on Repatriation in the 21st Century*, ed. Mille Gabriel and Jens Dahl (Copenhagen, Hovedstaden: International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, 2008): 202-203.
[103] Tiffany Jenkins, "Dead bodies: The changing treatment of human remains in British museum collections and the challenge to the traditional model of the museum" *Mortality* 13, no. 2 (2008): 105-107.

significance. Initially, it was requested to be returned in 1991 by a delegation of elders. However, the museum stated that it was too fragile to be removed from the collection and if it was transported back, it would likely be damaged beyond repair. It was later discovered however that the totem pole was moved when the museum had been undergoing renovations and was not damaged. In addition to this, many Canadian experts have determined that the pole is sturdy enough to be returned to Canada and to the Nisga'a nation.[104] Yet despite this, it seems that the museum has no intention of returning it to the Nisga'a people.

Again, this lack of desire to repatriate cultural material can likely be attributed to the lack of presence of Indigenous people in Europe. Because of this, repatriation is not as great of a political issue in Europe as it is in North America. This allows repatriation requests to be more easily dismissed. It also showcases a traditionally European view of the past, in that the past and present are two separate entities, a view which is being steadily phased out of practice in North America owing to the efforts of Indigenous activists.

One other complicating factor in the repatriation process is the establishment of a cultural connection between contemporary communities and the remains they claim. In British Columbia this process is particularly fraught, for, since British Columbia has the largest and most diverse Indigenous population in Canada, it can prove difficult to find to whom the remains belong. This is compounded by the fact that the ancestors who were brought to the museums did not receive the care and meticulous categorization necessary to establish their origins.[105] Yet, through initiatives such as The Journey Home, Indigenous communities become more open to the idea of

[104] Brieanna Charlebois "B.C. First Nation Arrives in Scotland, Asks Museum to Return Totem Pole Taken in 1929." *Toronto Star*, August 20, 2022, B.C. First Nation arrives in Scotland, asks museum to return totem pole taken in 1929 | The Star.
[105] Susan and Hausler "The Journey Home" 204-207.

sharing knowledge with institutions to help them to develop new policies when dealing with Indigenous remains respectfully.

The repatriation of Indigenous remains not only represents the turning of a new leaf for the discipline of archaeology and museums, but is also a celebration of Indigenous culture, and a substantive transfer of sovereignty over Indigenous history and storytelling. Through the repatriation of Indigenous remains, we are seeing greater cooperation between institutions and Indigenous groups and a greater level of respect for the concept of Indigenous sovereignty over information, territory, and cultural material. This constitutes a move towards a broader recognition of past and present settler colonial violence and therefore some form of reconciliation.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have used the question of the curation of Indigenous remains as a lens to identify how museums and the discipline of archaeology continue to be connected to settler colonialism. I agree with the insight of contemporary scholars that settler colonialism should be viewed as a structural process, premised on the denial and eradication of Indigenous sovereignty to territory and cultural material. I have also shown how museums and institutions are changing to become more progressive when working with Indigenous communities on the subject of their ancestral remains and cultural material. Looking beyond a Canadian context, it is evident that the question of repatriation has global resonance.

During the summer of 2022, in a particularly emotional meeting, various survivors of residential schools and Indigenous leaders travelled to the Vatican City, the seat of the Catholic Church, an institution that has been synonymous with Western colonialism and religious violence, to discuss the possession of Indigenous artifacts by the Holy See. In the meeting, Pope Francis formally apologized for the church's role in settler colonialism and residential school violence and has since stated that it is "open" to the idea of repatriation of Indigenous cultural material.[106] Despite some critiques from various Indigenous groups, his visit to Canada in the same year was a massive step away from the old colonial beliefs of uplifting and integrating "primitive societies."

The royal family of the United Kingdom, another prominent symbol of colonialism, has also faced pressure to apologize. The head of the British royal family is the head of state of Canada, and the head of the Anglican church. While this may be a symbolic position, the laws

[106] Olivia Stefanovich "Innuit Leader Says Vatican Museums Open to Repatriating Indigenous Artifacts." *CBC News*, March 30, 2022, https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/vatican-museums-indigenous-repatriation-1.6402182.

put in place to establish residential schools were signed in the family's name, and the Anglican church did operate residential schools during Queen Elizabeth's reign. During the then Prince Charles and the Duchess of Cornwall's royal visit to Canada in late May in celebration of Queen Elizabeth's platinum jubilee, King Charles addressed Indigenous people in The Northwest Territories, calling upon all Canadians to do more to decolonize, and to listen to the lived experiences of residential school survivors and other Indigenous persons in Canada. King Charles notably did not mention or apologize for the British Crown's role in colonization and residential school violence, but merely acknowledged that this violence happened saying that:

> *It has been deeply moving to have met survivors of residential schools who, with such courage, have shared their experiences. On behalf of my wife and myself, I want to acknowledge their suffering and to say how much our hearts go out to them and their families*.[107]

Now, shortly after Queen Elizabeth's reign has concluded, the royal family has spoken little about its historic role in colonization or in the residential school system that was in place while Queen Elizabeth herself was head of state of Canada and leader of the Anglican Church.

Despite these shortcomings, in a variety of scholarly contexts we are seeing greater acceptance of Indigenous sovereignty over information and the right of communities to themselves tell the story of their ancestors. It is important for people to challenge preconceived notions that repatriation is a debate between science and religion, and instead one about the right of Indigenous peoples to have sovereignty over their history and their culture. Many custodians

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[107] Janet Davidson "Whistlestop Royal Visit Touched on Serious Subjects but Had Lighter Moments Too" *CBC News*, May 22, 2022, https://www.cbc.ca/news/world/prince-charles-camilla-royal-visit-queen-elizabeth-1.6461387#:~:text=A%20three%2Dday%20visit%20to,mark%20Queen%20Elizabeth%27s%20Platinum%20Jubilee.

of these remains are not stewards of the past, but rather function to continue the control of the state over Indigenous peoples. This being said, I believe that the future of repatriation will be a positive one. Museums and archaeologists have already begun to be more receptive to repatriating remains and allowing greater representation of Indigenous peoples within the field. I believe that with Indigenous activists and scholars from museums working together, we will develop a much clearer picture of Canadian history, one that is more representative of the diversity of this country's people and culture.

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