



## MUSEOGRAPHY AND NARRATIVES OF NATION-BUILDING

### DECONSTRUCTING THE CANADIAN WAR MUSEUM

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The Canadian War Museum (CWM) was established to showcase Canadian military history, focusing its attention on conflicts that occurred on Canadian soil, or that involved the Canadian forces. The museum can be traced back to 1880 when a collection of military artifacts was placed under the authority of the federal government. However, the CWM in its present form and with its current mandate is much more recent. In 1990, it was officially incorporated as a component of the Canadian Museum of Civilization, one of the crown corporations<sup>1</sup> set up by the *Museums Act* of 1990. In 2005, the museum took on new prominence when it was installed in a newly constructed building designed by the internationally acclaimed architect Raymond Moriyama.<sup>2</sup> The CWM now finds itself in the institutional heart of the nation's capital, at one end of a symbolic stretch of road that begins with the War Memorial, and then goes past the Parliament Buildings, the Bank of Canada, the Supreme Court, and the National Library and Archives, before reaching the CWM. These two changes—crown corporation status and the prominent new building in a symbolic location—have greatly increased the museum's visibility, but they have also created new difficulties. The new symbolic location overlooking the Ottawa River, a

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<sup>1</sup> A crown corporation is the term used in Canada for a government owned corporation. Wholly owned by government, a crown corporation is created by an Act of Parliament, and given a clear mandate. However, once established, it is managed independently in a competitive market environment. In Canada crown corporations were prevalent in the late 1960s and 1970s, at both the provincial and federal levels, as a means to achieve the nationalization of key industries. Many of these were privatised in the 1980s and 1990s, but the same institutional arrangement is used today to allow public assets to be managed with a private sector philosophy.

<sup>2</sup> The CWM official website provides images of the striking architecture. <http://www.warmuseum.ca/>

stone's throw from the provincial border, has put implicit pressure on the museum to become a symbol of national unity, and to present a normalizing discourse on national identity. This new role has required the museum to attempt a delicate balancing act between its objective and neutral preservation function and its patriotic promotional function. This paper will argue that, in spite of its government mandated objective to aim for historical objectivity, the Canadian War Museum has in fact become a vehicle for pan-Canadian nationalism.

*Conflicting objectives: presenting objective history while promoting the political construct of identity*

The creation of a crown corporation to manage the Canadian War Museum in 1990 was designed to serve two purposes. On one hand, the Canadian government hoped to limit expenditures by giving the museum private sector management techniques and strict budgetary objectives. However, the new administrative arrangement was also invoked as a means to guarantee an objective, independent and politically neutral presentation of collections. The objective of neutrality was reinforced by instructions that insisted on the roles of education and preservation<sup>3</sup>. However, the mission statement established for the War Museum was not so limited. It states: "Through its activities, the Corporation practices museological excellence, thereby promoting a greater understanding of Canadian identity, history and culture."<sup>4</sup> The CWM was thus given an official directive to aim for the highest standards of objectivity, but at the same time two new elements were inserted into the mandate, namely "promotion" and "identity". These much more political objectives were not invented by the museum's board of directors. They can also be found in the Act of Parliament that created the new crown corporation: the museum's official mandate included the

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<sup>3</sup> "Educate. Preserve. Remember. Meeting this mandate by educating present and future generations on Canada's military heritage, preserving historical artifacts, and encouraging Canadians to reflect on past sacrifices will help to ensure that the memory and meaning of Canada's military past will never be forgotten." Source: Official Canadian War Museum website, <http://www.warmuseum.ca/>, retrieved 14/11/2011.

<sup>4</sup> "Mission statement", Canadian Museum of Civilization Corporation. Available online: <http://www.civilization.ca/about-us/corporation/about-the-corporation/about-the-canadian-museum-of-civilization-corporation>. Retrieved 10/11/2011.

provision of “promoting the heritage of Canada, and contributing to the collective memory and sense of identity of all Canadians.”<sup>5</sup>

Not surprisingly, the two objectives of aiming for historical objectivity and promoting national identity have not always been compatible. Identity is not a recognizable reality that can be presented objectively in strict neutrality. Instead, identity must be seen as a political construct that reflects an ideological consensus at a given moment. While the museum does indeed make a visible effort to take distance when observing manifestations of nationalism at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it can no longer take the necessary distance when it is asked to take on the role of constructing and promoting a contemporary Canadian identity. On one hand, in spite of its theoretical independence, the CWM has been subject to direct political pressure in its presentation of collections both from lobby groups, some of which have participated directly in financing the museum<sup>6</sup>, and from politicians, and this has been detrimental to attaining its mandated objective of “museological excellence”. On the other hand, far from achieving distance and impartiality in its treatment of national identity, the Museum has become a vehicle for pan-Canadian nationalism by presenting a narrative told from the point of view of the dominant English-speaking majority.

### *Dealing with political pressure*

The crown corporation status of the CWM was presented as a means to ensure the museum’s editorial independence. Set up at arm’s length from the Canadian armed forces, the museum’s official crown corporation status not only includes a mandate for objectivity, but also ensures budgetary independence; the museum would thus seem to be well equipped to avoid political interference. During an interview with the author<sup>7</sup>, Dean Oliver, senior director of research and exhibitions, insisted on the fact that the Museum has no administrative links with the Department of National

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<sup>5</sup> *The Museums Act*, S.C. 1990, c. 3. (assented to by Parliament January 30<sup>th</sup>, 1990; enacted by the Governor in Council on July 1<sup>st</sup> 1990.) Available on-line: <http://laws.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/M-13.4/page-1.html>. Retrieved 10/11/2011.

<sup>6</sup> Veterans groups raised more than 15 million dollars towards the cost of the new museum and continue to actively participate in fundraising activities. Source: “The new Canadian War Museum”. *Legion Magazine*. May 1, 2005. Available on-line : <http://www.legionmagazine.com/en/index.php/2005/05/the-new-canadian-war-museum>. Retrieved 30/11/2011.

<sup>7</sup> The author of this paper would like to thank Dean Oliver for taking the time to discuss these issues, and for allowing unlimited access to public collections.

Defence, and that it maintains complete independence when dealing with the different lobby groups representing veterans, even with the Royal Canadian Legion that had provided funding for construction and was honoured in the central gallery.<sup>8</sup> It was the crown corporation status that allowed the CWM to show Canadian history “warts and all” and thereby fulfill its mission of objectivity as announced in its mandate. However, the museum is nevertheless confronted with the conflicting objectives of its mandate. It is asked to present a balanced, historically accurate picture of Canadian military history, but at the same time, it aims at fostering a sense of national pride in Canadian military history. This second objective is clearly revealed in the CWM’s official web site whose home page includes the slogan “the spirit of a country—the courage of its people”.<sup>9</sup> Two episodes have revealed the importance of the patriotic promotional function. The two cases differ in content and outcome, but both show that the CWM has been subjected to pressure from politicians, from NGO’s representing veterans, and from public opinion, to put a glorified vision of history on display.

The first case of political pressure concerned the choice of CWM curators to put paintings on display that depicted a scandal involving the Canadian army.<sup>10</sup> During the 1993 intervention in Somalia, Canadian troops took a prisoner who had tried to break into the compound, likely with the intention of stealing supplies. The youth was captured, and then violently tortured. He died at the hands of his torturers. The incident gave rise to a major national outrage with stories on the front pages of newspapers for weeks in a scandal dubbed “Canada’s national shame”. The media frenzy was followed later by a public inquiry and, as a result of the inquiry, by the disbanding of the Canadian Airborne regiment and the sentencing of the protagonists. The Canadian War Museum decided to include two paintings depicting the events in its public collections. Veterans groups opposed the decision claiming that focusing on this episode paid a disservice to the memory of those who had sacrificed for the nation’s freedom and for the values of democracy. In short, for the veterans lobby groups, these paintings depicting a shameful episode had no place in the country’s national war

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<sup>8</sup> This gallery, entitled “The Royal Canadian Legion Hall of Honour” and located at the very heart of the museum, functions as a synopsis providing a small scale, chronologically organised recapitulation of the main galleries. As its title indicates, it also provides recognition for the remembrance work carried out by the Legion.

<sup>9</sup> CWM home page: <http://www.warmuseum.ca/home/>. Retrieved 15/11/2011.

<sup>10</sup> These paintings are available via the official CWM website: <http://collections.civilization.ca/public/objects/common/webmedia.php?irn=5199771>

museum. They raised a question that would give rise to a major public debate.

Confronted with this emotional national debate, the Museum organised what they characterised as “a lengthy, open and productive dialogue with several groups, including some veterans associations that disagreed with our position and wished to see the paintings removed.”<sup>11</sup> In the end, the CWM stuck to its guns, and chose to maintain the paintings. They even used the media exposure to publicise their consultation process, and their decision to show military history, as they had promised, “warts and all.” In this example, the Museum was able to count on the high level of public outrage inspired by the killing, and a general agreement in public opinion that it was legitimate for this incident to be shown in the museum as a means to prevent future cases of brutality. Given the national consensus, and in spite of the continued opposition of veterans’ associations, politicians had little choice but to support the decision to maintain the controversial paintings and to point out that the museum had been made a crown corporation to ensure its editorial freedom.

If the Museum was successful in this example in maintaining its commitment to historical objectivity, it was due to the concomitance of the objectivity and promotion of identity functions. In this case, the museum was able to insist on the openness of Canadian democracy, and the continued attachment of Canadians to the peacekeeping principles in spite of the regrettable events. However, the CWM was destined to completely lose face on a second controversial subject, namely the WW II bombing campaign targeting German cities. In this second example, the Museum could not count on a large consensus of support in public opinion—there was instead a mixed reaction—and this time, the Museum was also confronted with a case of direct political influence. In the showdown between the Canadian War Museum and a Canadian Senate sub-committee set up to study the question, the result was a severe defeat for the Museum's theoretical editorial freedom: it was forced to modify an exhibit to meet the demands of veterans associations, Conservative Party politicians and the hostility of a segment of the population. The final chapter in the story saw the resignation of the CWM’s director.

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<sup>11</sup> Dean Oliver, Senior Director of Research and Exhibitions. Quoted during a private interview with the author.

The controversy concerned Gallery 3 of the CWM, which is devoted to depicting Canadian involvement in the Second World War.<sup>12</sup> Curators had created a series of panels dealing with Allied bombing of German targets, and included the information that some of these bombs had killed civilians. In its presentation of the German bombing campaign, the Canadian War Museum had tried to present what they saw as a balanced, historically accurate display. But veterans' groups immediately took a hostile view and asked for changes. The subject had already given rise to a first controversy in 1992 when a documentary was released suggesting the ineffectiveness of the bombing campaign, and focusing on the civilian casualties in Germany. The documentary, entitled "Death by Moonlight" by Brian McKenna, vilified Bomber Command, claiming that they had chosen to turn their attention to German cities, and that they had killed more than 600,000 German civilians, due to their inability to hit military targets with any precision. For the producers of the documentary, the civilians died, not as a result of collateral damage, but as part of a deliberate campaign.<sup>13</sup> The film gave rise to major controversy and, although the producers tried to spare veterans of any responsibility by suggesting that they had been unaware of their true mission, veterans' lobby groups took the producers to court for slander. Canadian courts consistently refused to hear the case, arguing that the veterans did not have standing for a civil suit because they had not been denigrated.<sup>14</sup> But the decision to take the filmmakers to court, and to appeal the decisions right up to the Supreme Court, was not completely ineffectual. They obtained an official apology from the CBC, and also a Senate inquiry, whose report was critical of the film. Most of all, their legal battle created a wave of support in public opinion which would prove to be very useful in their future battle over the display presented at the Canadian War Museum.

The CWM curators were satisfied with the Gallery 3 display as prepared; they felt it was balanced and historically accurate. Four distinguished historians, commissioned by the CWM to write reports on the display,

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<sup>12</sup> This episode of political interference has been thoroughly analysed by the Canadian historian David Dean in his article "Museums as conflict zones: the Canadian War Museum and Bomber Command" *Museum and Society* 7-1 (March 2009) : 1-15.

<sup>13</sup> *Death by Moonlight*, Dir. Brian McKenna, National Film Board of Canada, 1991, 104 min. The documentary has been criticised by historians who question its historical accuracy. See David J. Bercuson and S.F. Wise. *The Valour and the Horror Revisited*. (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994)

<sup>14</sup> The film was aired in Britain by Channel Four; British High Command, which did have standing, could have sued if they had wished, but they chose not to litigate.

unanimously agreed that the display was balanced. However, the lobby groups aired their concerns publicly and a national public debate was waged in the media. This debate was taken up by politicians and an official Senate sub-commission was formed. In the end, the Senate forced the Museum to re-write the panels, and precipitated the resignation of the director, Joe Guertz. The episode reveals much about the conflicting roles given to the museum in its official mandate. Historian David Dean, who wrote an article dissecting the episode, maintained a critical eye when studying the museum's retreat. However, he was interested in trying to understand why the CWM caved into the public pressure, and wrote:

Opposing the veterans – and this is certainly how the Museum was often portrayed in the press – seemed ungrateful at best, even unpatriotic. Nor should we forget the context of the current war in Afghanistan; celebrating veterans resonates with demands to 'support our troops' (as the bumper stickers say) in the current war against terror. Veterans have become an essential part of the narrative that shapes Canadian identity, celebrated through the re-naming of highways, new and rededicated memorials, coins and stamps. They have become imbedded in a powerful narrative of sacrifice, honour and nationhood. [DEAN : 10]

Dean sensed that the CWM's decision to cede to the political pressure, even at the expense of its attachment to historical objectivity, was directly linked to a secondary role it had taken on of contributing to the narrative of identity. Dean's article focuses on other issues and he does not pursue this question further. However, the bomber campaign affair should be seen as just one example of a general tendency. In fact the "promotion of identity" function, which became apparent in this episode, can instead be seen as the leitmotiv of the whole museum.

*De-constructing the CWM to reveal a normative narrative of national identity*

The CWM was given a mandate to promote identity. Fulfilling this part of its mandate is achieved by portraying military history as an integral component of nation building. This is certainly not a new idea. In fact, it corresponds to a cliché among national historians generally expressed in the formula "Canada was forged in war".<sup>15</sup> The decision to structure the

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<sup>15</sup> This is a common cliché. It can be traced to widely read "official" historians like Donald Creighton, George Ramsay Cook, Pierre Berton, Arthur R.M. Lower or

museum around the wider nation-building theme is perfectly transparent and is evident from the moment visitors enter the museum: at the entrance to Gallery One, visitors are presented with a text stating that “[t]he wars of the First Peoples, of the French and the British shaped Canada and Canadians”. However, while the connection between war and nation building is indeed openly put on display, we need to deconstruct the museum to notice that the CWM’s narrative is told from the point of view of the dominant English-Canadian majority, and contributes to a legitimisation of past conquests. As visitors make their way through the museum, they are exposed to a normative narrative, told chronologically, in which the victors integrate the losers into the fabric of the nation. This is accomplished by mitigating past conflict through the unifying lens of contemporary multiculturalism. The museum attempts to soften the violent nature of the wars on Canadian soil by portraying English Canada as the generous victor, eager to integrate the defeated into the nation-building narrative. The CWM’s story of Canadian nation-building is therefore not focused on victory, but instead on how the losers were incorporated into the narrative. The story is told from the point of view of the dominant, and the losers are asked to applaud the generosity of their conquerors.

As we have noted, the CWM was established as a crown corporation in part to ensure the museum’s independence. However, in spite of its editorial freedom, and its mandated commitment to objectivity, the CWM finds itself playing the role of an institutional actor portraying the dominant discourse. This fits perfectly with the work of Pierre Bourdieu, who wrote about how the dominant *élite* produces and imposes its vision of the world. It is via this cultural domination, through their central role in writing the national narrative, that the *élite* maintains its control. The main features of the nation-building narrative have become so widely accepted in the culture of the majority that they go unseen if we do not make the effort to deconstruct them. In the case of the CWM, curators are not actively playing the role of propagandists. Instead, ironically, they are using their jealously guarded

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Desmond Morton, whose work is synthesised in high school text books. It has been a widely held view, for example, that the birth of a national sentiment in English Canada coincides with the victory of the Canadian Corps at Vimy Ridge in 1917. The same idea was expressed more recently in the call for papers for an international conference: organisers hoped to “examine Canada not as a static entity, but rather as the *result of conflicts*, both past and present” (italics added). Conference held in November 2009 entitled *(Dis)Arming Canada: Protest, Conflict and (Un)Steady States*, Trent University, Peterborough, Ontario.



editorial freedom to reproduce the dominant discourse on nation-building. To use the term coined by Bourdieu, the CWM is stuck in the domain of the *doxa*, the term used by the French sociologist to talk about the tacit assumptions we make about the world, the cultural heritage to which we are exposed without even being aware. To quote Bourdieu:

Il ne faut oublier que cette croyance politique primordiale, cette *doxa*, est une orthodoxie, une vision droite, dominante, qui ne s'est imposée qu'au terme de luttes contre des visions concurrentes. [...] La *doxa* est un point de vue particulier, le point de vue des dominants, qui se présente et s'impose comme point de vue universel; le point de vue de ceux qui dominent en dominant l'État et qui ont constitué leur point de vue en point de vue universel en faisant l'État.<sup>16</sup>

If war is ultimately about victory and defeat, the War Museum is about how in Canada the winners have tried to integrate the losers, entwining them as one strand in a *national* narrative, swallowing them whole and then asking them to reflect on their place in a wider story. The overall message is nonetheless one of domination. The museum begins with galleries devoted to aboriginal peoples and the art of warfare in the pre-colonial period. As visitors continue through subsequent galleries, these groups are progressively conquered and assimilated into the national myth. The next step is the Plains of Abraham. Again the museum proposes a narrative of conquering, assimilating and integrating, this time with regard to French Canadians. The final chapter is about the rise of a multicultural nation and the role of war in forging its construction. The multicultural nation created through conflict is presented to visitors as a model of tolerance, allowing conquered minorities to pursue their dreams and to celebrate their recognition within the nation.

An aboriginal person would likely have a positive first impression of the museum. One interesting innovation is to begin Canadian history *before* the

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<sup>16</sup> Pierre Bourdieu. *Raisons Pratiques*. Paris : Seuil, 1994 : 128-199. Translation proposed by the author: "It must not be forgotten that this primordial political belief, this *doxa*, is an orthodoxy, a rigid, dominant vision that has imposed itself only after prevailing over competing visions. (...) The *doxa* is a particular point of view, the point of view of those who dominate, who present themselves and impose themselves as the universal point of view; the point of view of those who dominate by dominating the State and who have constituted their point of view as the universal point of view while building the State".

arrival of Europeans. Gallery 1 begins with displays on warfare between tribes in the pre-colonial period. We see wooden armour and are presented with fortress techniques reminiscent of European systems of defence in the distant past. There is an active attempt by CWM curators to be inclusive and to say that pre-contact history is also part of *our* collective story. But on another level there is an appropriation of aboriginal peoples' history. The insistence on war-making among the tribes of pre-colonial North America—admittedly a natural tendency for a war museum—implicitly inspires the visitor to legitimise the conquest: defeat is seen as simply the unfortunate outcome for peoples who, founded on warring principles, were confronted with a stronger opponent. This over-simplification, the refusal to assume the role of aggressor in the confrontation, leads the visitor to interpret the aboriginal peoples' defeat as legitimate. Moreover, the presentation of comparative war-making technology leads the visitor to see the defeat as inevitable.

The museum visitor is only a few steps into the Museum and the Native Peoples have already been conquered. The rest of the museum strikes a clumsy balance between “positive” images of a victorious Canadian army advancing against their First Nations adversaries during the North-west rebellion, and the valiant archival research to find proof of aboriginal participation in the national war effort in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>17</sup> The CWM attempts to tell the story of how the new pan-Canadian nationalism is inclusive of native peoples, while at the same time showing us the history of their conquest. This is a difficult tightrope walking act that uses contemporary multiculturalism as its balancing bar. The conquest of the original peoples' land and the quasi-destruction of their culture are sublimated by insisting on the continued presence of native peoples and on their valuable contribution to the national identity. The museum neglects to make any reference to discriminatory practices towards aboriginal peoples in Canada, nor to the poverty and the litany of social ills affecting native communities. Abandoning any effort to show history “warts and all,” it instead chooses to present a highly romanticised vision of vibrant aboriginal communities playing an important role in the narrative of nation-building.

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<sup>17</sup> We do not wish to deny or denigrate the participation of aboriginal soldiers in 20<sup>th</sup> century world wars. The qualification of “valiant archival research” refers to the difficulty today to find evidence of their participation. *At the time* there was not yet any real recognition of the value of aboriginal societies, and there was no particular effort made by officials to document the participation of aboriginal soldiers.

The second problematic episode for pan-Canadian nationalists, the battle of the Plains of Abraham, is also addressed in the first gallery. Traditionally, French Canadians have labelled this battle, which saw the English army under General Wolfe defeat the French under Montcalm in 1759, as *la Conquête*. It was the story of a tragic defeat, and the beginning of a long period of resistance. Conversely, in English Canadian historiography, the victory of the English over the French has been presented as the expression of the inevitable British domination in North America. But in this version of history, the victorious British would immediately address the concerns of the French minority, make concessions in respect of their language and religion, and provide them with the benefits of the English parliamentary tradition. For the CWM, seen here as an unconscious partner in the pan-Canadian nationalism project, and as a fully conscious agent of contemporary identity and pride in being Canadian, the historic episode needs to be effectively mitigated. There is a need to address both narratives and provide a healing synthesis.

The Museum manages to deflate a potentially divisive subject, a subject that for centuries has given rise to opposing interpretations and opposing nationalisms, by using two strategies. The first way to deal with the problematic episode is by choosing to see this confrontation, not as a Canadian battle between the ancestors of French and English Canadians, but instead as one element in the much larger Seven Years War. A link is clearly drawn with subsequent galleries that focus on the two 20<sup>th</sup> century world wars, by presenting the Seven Years War as the first World War, that is to say, the first European war which included battles carried out in distant lands. Transforming the defeat of French Canada into a European struggle which had consequences in Canada is one clear way to dissipate the conflict. The second ruse is to present the battle as ancient history. A very interesting display has been developed that puts together 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century paintings with contemporary photographs of the same sites. Immediately we are confronted with the passage of time. The wooden building seen in a painting is no longer present in the modern urban landscape; the farm animals of an earlier time seem strange and foreign when imagined in the contemporary landscape with roads and street signs. Particularly striking is a photo of the shores of the St Lawrence where Wolfe ascended with his troops in 1759. The contemporary photo reveals a railway line that has since been constructed by filling in the river and artificially widening the shoreline. The immediate effect on the visitor of these juxtaposed images is to focus on the passage of time, the distant nature of the conflict to a contemporary citizen of a bilingual, bicultural country.

A third technique used by curators is particularly interesting and illustrates the nation-building discourse which is developed throughout the museum. As part of this first gallery, the CWM commissioned a film which presents three contemporary Canadians watching a documentary about the Battle of the Plains of Abraham. The play within a play technique allows the Museum to present an objective version of the battle, while at the same time insisting on the distance between those events and the lives of contemporary citizens. The three Canadians watching the documentary are all wearing hockey sweaters. The first wears the colours and logo of the Toronto Maple Leafs, emblematic team of English Canada; the second dons a Montreal Canadiens sweater, the team traditionally supported by French Canadians. As the camera pans back, a third friend appears on the sofa in front of the TV, this time wearing a Vancouver Canucks sweater, the logo of which was inspired by the art of the west coast Haida Indians. When Dave and Jean look over in surprise at the man next to them on the sofa and ask "when did you get here?" the Amerindian Paul replies "I've always been here". The three characters provide a sort of national catharsis, with humour used to deflate conflicting interpretations of the colonial period conflicts. Each character comments on the events recounted in the balanced, objective, but rather staid documentary, each representing a stereotypic reaction for the community he personifies. The film ends with the documentary being interrupted by one of the characters, who uses the remote control to change channels and reveal that this banal documentary has led to them missing the start of the hockey game. They all cheer together for a goal scored in the unseen match, and the study of an ancient, potentially problematic, battle is put to rest.

Overall, it is fascinating to see the paternalistic attitude towards the French Canadians as expressed throughout the CWM. Just after a panel dealing with the defeat of the French in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, visitors are confronted with an appeal to respect the French fact in Canada today. Images of Sir Wilfrid Laurier, the first French Canadian to hold the office of Prime minister in 1896, and of the astronaut Marc Garnier, the first Canadian in space, show how French Canadians have contributed to the nation building narrative. Just after these panels, a map of Canada with a vision of "bilingual federalism" is exposed. In this presentation, Quebec is seen as one of ten bilingual provinces, rather than the only province with a French-speaking majority. In each of the nine other provinces, the graphic focuses on the French-speaking minority in that province. It's a pan-Canadian nationalist presentation which neglects the statistical decline of the French-

speaking minorities in each of the English-speaking majority provinces.<sup>18</sup> The CWM contents itself with the myth of an inclusive pan-Canadian, bilingual liberalism that allows each member to reach fulfillment, in the language of his or her choice.

Introduced with the idea that the country was “shaped” by its colonial period wars, the first gallery ends as if combat had allowed the conflicts to be resolved once and for all. The following galleries are dedicated to subsequent wars, from the Boer War right up to the contemporary intervention in Afghanistan. As in the first gallery, displays are presented within the wider nation-building narrative. These international conflicts allowed the country to consolidate its new found unity as Canadians of all origins fought together for common causes. Here the CWM tells stories about heroism, about Canadians united in the defence of democracy and human rights. Throughout the twentieth-century galleries, the visitor is constantly reminded of the diverse origins of the soldiers, presenting the camaraderie of the soldiers as the cement of the multicultural nation. The museum culminates with a look at the Canadian-led initiative to create the United Nations Peacekeeping forces. This provides a perfect conclusion to a museum dedicated to presenting a positive image of the contemporary Canadian multicultural identity, forged around the ideas of diversity, compromise, and fair play.

### *Conclusion*

The Canadian War Museum is not an ordinary museum. No longer considered simply as a collection of artifacts, its crown corporation status and its relocation in a new building in a symbolic location have transformed it into an institution with a much wider mission. The new mission includes a brand new function, namely recounting a normative narrative of nation-building from the standpoint of the conquerors. Maybe this should come as no surprise for a museum dedicated to war, dedicated to telling the story of winners and losers. However, it is problematic for an institution that was mandated to aim for historical objectivity. The inherent conflict between historical objectivity and the desire to present a glorified, patriotic image has

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<sup>18</sup> Numerous studies on processes of language shift in Canada reveal a decline in the number of native speakers of French in Canada, outside of the province of Quebec. See Charles Castonguay "[Nation Building and Anglicization in Canada's Capital Region](#)", *Inroads Journal* 11 (2002): 71–86; Martin Howard, ed. *Language Issues in Canada: Multidisciplinary Perspectives*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007.

been illustrated on two memorable occasions, the Somali torture paintings and the German Bombing Campaign display. But what is most striking about the museum is how it plays its second mandated role of portraying and promoting Canadian identity. Here we see the presentation of a narrative of nation-building as seen through the eyes of the dominant English-speaking majority. The CWM attempts to sublimate the conquering of aboriginal peoples and then of French settlers by portraying the two groups as integral components of an inclusive multicultural nation. The CWM functions here as the agent for expressing a discourse of inclusion, addressed outwards from a position of domination. A war museum might be expected to tell another story about domination and conquest, about the cold realities of combat. But the CWM prefers to dissimulate the violence in order to tell a story about Canadian military history that is in keeping with the image the country wants to portray of itself. In the final analysis, the Canadian War Museum has become a forum for the dominant discourse of pan-Canadian nationalism. In this way, the Canadian War Museum reveals the ultimate form of domination: history is written by the winners.