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# The Canadian Museum for Human Rights: the ‘uniqueness of the Holocaust’ and the question of genocide

A. DIRK MOSES

This article analyzes the debate about the controversial Canadian Museum for Human Rights by reconstructing the efforts to establish a government-sponsored Holocaust museum from the late 1990s. This history reveals that the controversy inheres in part in the conflation of the rival imperatives to promote atrocity memorialization on the one hand, above all of the Holocaust, and human rights education/activism on the other. In multicultural Canada, memory regimes, which utilize the egalitarian concepts of genocide or crimes against humanity to emphasize the suffering of all, also vie for official validation with the Holocaust uniqueness agenda. The article concludes that the museum is caught on the horns of a dilemma of its own making: the more it emphasizes commemoration, the greater the competition among migrant group leaders for exhibition space dedicated to ‘their’ experience. The more that human rights are emphasized, the less the interest from the private donors whose generosity is essential to museum’s financial viability.

## Introduction

On 6 December 2011, senior staff of Canadian Museum for Human Rights (CMHR), under construction in Winnipeg, ran its first, annual public meeting. After introductory encomia about the museum’s progress, the floor was briefly opened to questions, revealing bitter disputes about key elements of the planned exhibits, as CBC News reported:

... there were shouts about why the museum’s *Examining the Holocaust* gallery will be devoted almost entirely to the genocide of European Jews, while other genocides recognized by Canada will be squeezed into a different gallery, *Breaking the Silence*.

‘Is it the museum’s intention to teach our children that all human rights flow from the Holocaust?’, shouted one woman, Anne Thompson, from the gallery.

The Ukrainian Canadian Civil Liberties Association (UCCLA) and Ukrainian Canadian Congress have previously raised concerns about the lack of a full exhibit to mark the Holodomor, a genocidal famine that took place in Soviet-occupied Ukraine in the early 1930s.

‘How did you concretely address some of these concerns that were raised by the UCC,

## A. DIRK MOSES

regarding the. . . possibly too much concentration on the Holocaust, vis-a-vis the other tragedies of the world?', Ostap Hawaleshka, a Ukrainian–Canadian and retired professor asked museum officials at Tuesday's meeting.

'We think that there are other tragedies. . . that are at least equivalent in terms of magnitude [to the Holocaust] but you know, there's nothing worse than counting my dead are more than your dead'.

Museum CEO Stuart Murray responded by saying they are listening carefully to many groups and have done extensive consultation—and the process is still evolving.

But 'we try to be very clear with all communities we talk to, that we're not a genocide museum, that we're really a human rights museum in the sense of how we're looking at some of these issues', he said.

Museum spokesperson Angela Cassie added the exhibition plan has changed significantly in response to concerns raised by the Ukrainian community, as well as other genocide-affected national groups, such as Rwandans and Armenians.<sup>1</sup>

These heated exchanges highlight the various points of controversy about the CMHR: the Holocaust's centrality in its design concept; the vehement opposition to this placement, especially by Ukrainian Canadians; general sensitivity about the representation of particular migrant group leaders' genocidal experiences; and the museum's attempts to acknowledge them while also insisting that its subject matter is human rights rather than genocide. Several background contexts are needed to understand this conflict.

The first is contemporary museum praxis. Over the last twenty years or so, museums have tried to forge new relationships with their publics by problematizing issues and encouraging visitor reflection, rather than by conveying high culture to the passive masses: 'exhibition as process rather than product', like the Exploratorium in San Francisco, for example.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, other more political museum agendas have come to the fore: a commemorative one that memorializes atrocities, and an activist concern with combating racism and other sorts of prejudice.<sup>3</sup> These are not easily commensurable agendas, but examples of their successful reconciliation can be found in the Caen–Normandy Memorial for History and Peace, and the Simon Wiesenthal Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles.<sup>4</sup>

Mention of the Museum of Tolerance points to a second context: the prevalence of linking the Holocaust to human rights and genocide awareness: for example, in the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights report on Holocaust and Human Rights Education; the Committee on Conscience of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM); the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research; Anne Frank House's work on discrimination; and the move to integrate 'other genocides' into Great Britain's Holocaust Memorial Day. In all these cases, the attempt is made to elicit universal lessons from the particular events that have been called, retrospectively, the Holocaust.

The proponents of this 'lessons of the Holocaust' approach would likely subscribe to Holocaust's uniqueness. The heated debate about this contention since the 1980s is another important context of the Canadian dispute. Its latest iteration centers on east-central Europe—and especially in Lithuania—in the form of the

'double-genocide thesis' which posits that the Soviet and Nazi regimes committed genocides of equal gravity against the Baltic, Slavic and Jewish inhabitants of what Timothy Snyder calls the 'bloodlands'.<sup>5</sup> Thus in 2008 mainly central and eastern European states signed the 'Prague Declaration on European Conscience and Communism' to highlight the crimes of the Soviet regimes, and soon after the European Parliament inaugurated 23 August as the 'European Day of Remembrance for Victims of Stalinism and Nazism'.<sup>6</sup>

As might be expected, this memory competition in Europe occurs wherever the affected Europeans have settled. So yet another context is the struggle for recognition among immigrant community leaders in multicultural Canada, an identity politics that threatens the reconciliation of competing museum agendas mentioned above.<sup>7</sup> These leaders tend to invest 'their' groups with ontological status, so that they, and not individuals, are the significant bearers of human rights and memory. The liberal agenda of individual human rights is thus undercut by such communitarian assumptions, particularly when collective traumas that occurred outside Canada are competitively invoked. The widespread use of the genocide concept indicates the 'groupness' of traumatic injury and its memory: the suffering of 'the Jews' and 'the Ukrainians', for instance. Their experiences are not adequately captured by the largely individualistic human rights terminology. In a democratic system where political leaders can highlight these experiences to court particular electoral constituencies, this struggle for recognition is laden with irresistible political temptations, especially in the contemporary global environment in which genocidal intentions against Israel are ascribed to Iran; remembering the Holocaust thereby becomes enlisted into the 'war on terror', for example.

Finally, an important context pertains to Indigenous Canadians. They have been conspicuously absent from the debate, perhaps because attention has been focused on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission that has been investigating the fate of Indigenous children in residential schools, or because the museum includes a dedicated gallery to Indigenous experiences. At the same time, critics have raised questions about the incomplete archaeological survey of the museum site, which contains Indigenous heritage.

This article focuses on the first two contexts; I address the others in another publication.<sup>8</sup> Here I highlight how the controversy about a human rights museum in Canada since the late 1990s demonstrates the difficulty of combining atrocity memorialization on the one hand, and human rights education/activism on the other, in an entrenched culture of identity politics. The CMHR became a lightning rode for such claim-making by attempting to operationalize the new participatory museum pedagogy: as an 'ideas museum' rather than display of artifacts, it invited Canadians in 2009 to contribute their experiences of human rights—usually stories of their violation—for inclusion in the planned exhibitions, thereby creating a commemorative expectation. Overwhelmingly, the stories of suffering revealed that their victimization related to their group membership—as Indigenous people, Chinese or Ukrainian immigrants in Canada, or Jews, Ukrainians, Armenians and Rwandan abroad—for which they often invoked the genocide concept. What is more, this expectation has been intensely experienced

A. DIRK MOSES

and publicly expressed by migrant community leaders in heated debates about a government-sponsored Holocaust or genocide museum since the 1990s.

Not surprisingly, this conjuncture set in motion a general political dynamic: the attempt to institutionalize a particular memory regime entailed seeking the support of governments that in turn need to appease important electoral constituencies. All the while, the ability of museum supporters to raise private monies depends on their ability to deliver the promised memory regime, making the memory wars about more than symbolic capital alone: actual capital is involved. The attempt to place the Holocaust—as a unique event of world-historical significance—at the CMHR's center was initially successful. In multicultural Canada, however, a rival memory regime, which utilizes the concepts of genocide and crimes against humanity to emphasize the equal suffering of all, vies for official validation.

What follows is a dense narrative reconstruction that begins with efforts to found an official Holocaust exhibition/museum in some form in the late 1990s. It will show that until 2003 governments avoided publicly validating any particular memory regime. Subsequent partiality by Ottawa then opened a Pandora's box of irreconcilable traumatic memory competition between those who postulated the Holocaust's uniqueness and those who rejected it. Because no history of the debate about the CMHR has been written, the purpose of this article is also to provide the first account and analysis of its development, although it is necessarily a preliminary undertaking based on publicly available sources. In time, hopefully, historians will be able to draw on currently unavailable documentation produced by the museum and government agencies.

### **Before the Canadian Museum for Human Rights, 1998–2003**

The initial debate about Holocaust memorialization in Canada warrants detailed attention, because it shows the essential continuities between the arguments for and against it since the later 1990s. A significant flashpoint was the controversy about a proposed Holocaust gallery in the Canadian War Museum. In early 1998, a subcommittee of the Canadian Senate heard representatives of various ethnic communities make respective submissions. Jewish groups argued that such a gallery was consistent with the museum's mission, indeed that it demonstrated the moral stakes of the Second World War. As a 'free-standing permanent structure' to symbolize 'the nation's commitment to memorializing the horrors of the Holocaust for generations to come', as the Canadian Jewish Congress (CJC) and B'nai Brith expressed their bid, the gallery would fulfill their desire for a government-sponsored Holocaust museum.<sup>9</sup>

Opposing them were, among others, Ukrainian Canadian leaders, whose submission pleaded for a separate genocide museum, and argued that any Holocaust exhibit should include all victims of Nazism, not just Jews.<sup>10</sup> Veterans' groups adamantly opposed the gallery, angered that they had not been sufficiently consulted about possible inclusion. The Chairman of the National Council of Veteran Associations, Cliff Chadderton, suggested that, in any event, other

genocides would need to be included in such a gallery. The country's most prominent Holocaust historian, Michael Marrus, likewise had reservations about a Holocaust gallery, although he thought a Holocaust museum should be built in 'the national interest'. The subcommittee's report, *Guarding history*, approvingly recorded Marrus as advising that such a venture 'should not be a project which pits groups of Canadians against each other'.<sup>11</sup>

In the end, noting 'the many sensitive and complex aspects of the possible construction of a Holocaust Gallery', the subcommittee reached a compromise that represented a setback for the CJC and B'nai Brith: their gallery proposal was rejected even if the principle of a 'free standing [Holocaust] gallery' in another context remained intact. The subcommittee's subsequent recommendation was calculated to keep the social peace by offering all sides some hope. For what it gave with one hand—'a national Holocaust Gallery that will serve and educate Canadians for years to come'—it took away with the other in its twelfth recommendation: 'that the Government undertake a meaningful and thorough study as to the feasibility of a national holocaust *and/or other acts of genocide gallery*'.<sup>12</sup>

Defeated but undeterred, Jewish groups read the recommendations as a Balfour-Declaration-like commitment to a Holocaust museum, in part because the museum's accompanying press release stated that the Canadian Museum of Civilization Corporation would 'assist in the exploration of an alternative site for the eventual development of a stand-alone and independent Holocaust Museum'. Quoting this press release in 2000, Eric Vernon, Director of Government Relations at the CJC, insisted that 'there is a commitment on the table to establish a stand-alone Holocaust museum, which we now prefer to refer to as a Holocaust and human rights museum'.<sup>13</sup> So far as I can tell, this is the first mention of a Holocaust *and* human rights museum.

Jewish leaders had prevailed in the face of opposition before and were confident that they could prosecute their case successfully. For example, in 1995, Sarkis Assadourian, a Syrian-born member of parliament of Armenian descent, proposed making 20–27 April an official week to remember crimes against humanity, coinciding with 27 April, Holocaust Memorial Day ('Yom Hashoah'). His intention was plain; he wanted 'members of the House to view the Holocaust and genocide as more than crimes against one group, but to see them as crimes against humanity'.<sup>14</sup> In the event, Assadourian failed. All ten Canadian provinces recognized Holocaust Memorial Day, followed by the national government in 2003.

The successful Holocaust Memorial Day campaign was led by Moshe Ronen, President of the CJC, who in early 1999 accompanied Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chrétien on an official visit to Auschwitz. His Holocaust survivor father, Mordechai, and Jack Silverstone, the CJC's Executive Vice-President and General Counsel, also travelled with them.<sup>15</sup> This visit sparked a new chapter in the Canadian memory wars, because the Prime Minister declined to consult with other victims of Nazism in Canada, especially those of Polish background, who felt affronted that the Nazis' mass killing of their compatriots during World War II was not honored. Soon after the trip, Jewish groups claimed that the prime minister had verbally promised them a Holocaust museum, a claim

A. DIRK MOSES

Chrétien denied.<sup>16</sup> The CJC felt the national government should now honor its perceived commitment.

Accurately sensing that a Holocaust museum was still on the agenda, Assadourian applied public pressure on the prime minister while he was still in Europe by urging the government to establish a museum for all victims of mass violence. ‘You can’t say one group of victims is more worthy than another’, he declared.<sup>17</sup> He then submitted a private members bill for an exhibition on crimes against humanity in the Canadian Museum of Civilization as soon as Chrétien returned in February 1999. The Ukrainian Canadian Congress (UCC) immediately supported the bill, just as it had used Chrétien’s visit to Europe, which included Ukraine, to advocate a ‘federally funded Genocide Museum in Ottawa’. It was hard for the UCC to complain of bias when the prime minister had participated in a wreath-laying ceremony at the national memorial for the Holodomor—the famine-genocide of 1932–1933—while in Kiev.<sup>18</sup> The Canadian Ethnocultural Council and the new Canadians for a Genocide Museum—a coalition of many immigrant communities led by John Gregorovich of the UCC and founded in November 1998 after the *Guarding history* recommendation—backed it as well.<sup>19</sup> The CJC declined to join the coalition. Manuel Prutschi, its National Director of Community Relations, explained that ‘our clear impression was that this was an effort to dilute the national Holocaust museum project, so we didn’t see any way to be productively involved’.<sup>20</sup>

As might be expected, Ronen rejected Assadourian’s bill, which he tried to out-flank by proposing two museums:

We want a genocide museum but we recognize that the Jewish community wants a Holocaust museum, and that it’s appropriate for them to lobby for it. . . The Jewish community feels it’s such a special case that it shouldn’t be included with other genocides, as it would detract from [the Holocaust].<sup>21</sup>

The *Canadian Jewish News* reported him as suggesting that ‘lobbying for a genocide museum was being orchestrated by individuals who cannot tolerate the notion that the Holocaust was a form of genocide unlike any other, and that it is unique in history in “terms of the size and scope of its murderous agenda”’.<sup>22</sup> Other Jewish leaders criticized Assadourian in the same way: ‘not only does Assadourian oppose the construction of a Holocaust museum’, said Amos Sochaczewski, National Chair of the B’nai Brith Canada’s Institute for International Affairs, ‘he also opposes the construction of any museum on intolerance that would place emphasis on the Holocaust as a unique event in history’.<sup>23</sup> Sol Littman, Canada’s representative at the Simon Wiesenthal Center for Holocaust Studies, accused Gregorovich of ‘issue envy’ and of trying to portray Ukrainians as ‘victims’.<sup>24</sup> In March 2000, Ronen called on Minister for Canadian Heritage, Sheila Copps, ‘to allocate an existing site to house a museum on the Holocaust and human rights, to be established in partnership with the Canadian Jewish community and Canadians of good will from across the country’.<sup>25</sup>

Employing a different strategy, B’nai Brith was willing to entertain Assadourian’s bill so long as the Holocaust stood at its core. The alternative, said its

president Ruth Klein, was ‘a scramble, almost like a competition for minorities to have their particular historical pain recorded’.<sup>26</sup> Klein’s was a prescient observation, as the debate about Assadourian’s private member’s bill revealed. She would have likely rejected the proposition that the bone of contention was the attempt to have the government recognize the Holocaust as unique; or have predicted that Jewish communities leaders would participate in such a scramble as avidly as other migrant group community leaders.

The Canadian parliament’s Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage invited community and museum representatives to speak to Assadourian’s bill in mid-2000. He introduced the discussion by reminding all that he did not propose a genocide exhibit, because that would exclude victims of other sorts of mass crimes, ‘like the Chinese, with 35 million slaughtered’. His preferred concept was the more inclusive crimes against humanity. Giving prominence to the suffering of one group entailed excluding that of another, which was discriminatory and, he added, repeated the racist logic of the genocide.<sup>27</sup> James Kafieh, a Palestinian–Canadian lawyer of Canadians for a Genocide Museum, followed with a lengthy submission. While welcoming the bill’s emphasis on ‘equity and inclusiveness’, he did not think it went far enough, as it did not form the basis of an education campaign. Consciousness of genocide was lacking in Canadian schools, ‘except for perhaps one case of genocide, where material has been proliferated widely’, namely the Holocaust. It was particularly important to increase ‘knowledge and awareness of genocide’ and ‘the forgotten victims—the Gypsies, the Ukrainians, the Cambodians’ so that Canadians can ‘become more supportive in the effort to put an end to these atrocities’.<sup>28</sup> Like Assadourian’s bill, these pedagogical notions struck at the heart of the Jewish groups’ agenda to have schools teach the Holocaust as the lesson about the Second World War, genocide and human rights.

Nate Leipicer, chair of the CJC’s Holocaust Remembrance Committee, responded by first noting the great strides in Holocaust memorialization made elsewhere in the world: the new Holocaust exhibit in London’s Imperial War Museum and the International Forum on the Holocaust in Stockholm whose charter was signed by Canada. International government and academic recognition of the Holocaust underwrote its special status, he said: ‘It was the opinion of a large majority of those who attended [Stockholm], and substantiated by historians and social scientists, that the Holocaust is unique’. Leipicer set out the reasons for this claim in detail, though trying to avoid giving offence to others: ‘All genocide, all human tragic events, are of equal importance. There’s no question about that. We do not want to get into a contest on whose tragedy was larger or who suffered more. This does not lead us anywhere’. As so often happens in these debates, this type of statement was immediately qualified: ‘However, the Holocaust encompasses all genocide and all mass murders, wherever they happen and whenever they occur’. On this basis, the CJC proposed ‘a Holocaust and human rights museum that would focus on the Holocaust as such and would also include the question of human rights’. This was still an inclusive agenda, he insisted, mentioning the other victims of Nazism. Holocaust education entailed talking ‘about all atrocities that were perpetrated against other people’.<sup>29</sup>



## A. DIRK MOSES

Leipicer's message was underlined by Sheldon Howard, Director of Government Relations at B'nai Brith, Canada. The Holocaust would be a 'central theme' and 'springboard, if you like, for a discussion about genocide, about crimes against humanity, and about the horrors of this century'. He too emphasized education. Justifying the Holocaust's centrality was easy: 'The answer is so that crimes against humanity witnessed in the past 100 years, the pinnacle of which was the Holocaust, will never, ever happen again'. While it was important to be inclusive 'to reflect the spirit of our multicultural Canadian identity', the museum's depiction of history also must be 'exacting', by which he meant that the Holocaust 'was unique': it was 'not just another example of state-sponsored killing in the twentieth century'. This was a fact, he continued, 'that must be honoured, honoured without in any way detracting from the other genocides perpetrated in the twentieth century'. The Holocaust, he thought, could be a 'central reference point' without 'undermining the experience of other ethnic groups', because its lessons were 'universal' and invited comparisons with other cases, thereby drawing them into the social field of vision.<sup>30</sup>

Howard outlined three rationales for a Holocaust and human rights museum. As nothing said by CMHR representatives and supporters in 2010 and 2011 was not already expressed by the CJC in 2000 for this first iteration of a Holocaust and human rights museum, they warrant reproduction here.

First, the Holocaust is the most completely documented genocide of the century, so from a practical perspective, the foundations exist to support the study of other atrocities. Second, the lessons of the Holocaust are particularly pertinent here in Canada since we live in a western, industrialized democracy that shares many of the cultural traditions and values of pre-war Germany. Third, the Holocaust experience illustrates the step-by-step map that leads to genocide: from pervasive social bias to legalized exclusion; from state-sanctioned removal of rights to brutal dehumanization; from ethnic cleansing to, finally, the systematic, industrialized mass murder of the 'final solution' as an open and protected government policy.<sup>31</sup>

The only difference between the CMHR's rhetoric and this list is that human rights substitute for genocide, although a few lines later Howard added that 'the Holocaust contains all the elements of human rights abuse'.

As might be expected, speakers from other groups focused on their own experiences and challenged the Jewish representatives' case. Ukrainian, Arab and Rwandan representatives made the now familiar pitch for an 'equitable' and 'inclusive' genocide museum while pointing out the special, even 'unique' dimensions of their own experiences. Another turn of phrase would recur a decade later. Marsha Skypuch from the Ukrainian Canadian Civil Liberties Association (UCCLA), like Kafieh, stressed the ignorance about genocide among Canadian school children, and added 'I want them to think of themselves as Canadians and to think that everyone is equal, not that anyone is more equal than someone else'.<sup>32</sup>

The standing committee met again five days later to continue deliberations, this time inviting officials from the Canadian Museum of Civilization Corporation.

John English and Victor Rabinovich were models of tact, gently reminding ethnic community leaders that the private memorialization of their tragedies should be regarded as adequate while also empathizing with their suffering: 'in a society as complex as our own', said the latter, 'memory is not necessarily something that is state sanctioned or government sanctioned'. What Rabinovich meant by 'complex' was indicated by the multiple references to 'social cohesion' in the two men's presentations. So when pressed by Assadourian whether the museum would sponsor a Holocaust museum, Rabinovich assured him that it would not. Making plain the government line, he added that 'All of us have terrors in our past, whether as communities or as individual. Focusing history only on terrors is not a constructive way of moving forward'.<sup>33</sup>

In light of the two hearings, the standing committee reached the same decision as the Canadian War Museum: a strategic deferral of the question. The only consensus it could discern among the quarreling community representatives was to establish a separate museum that focused on research, education and memory. But whose model would prevail? The 'Canadian way of reaching consensus', reported the committee, emphasized 'tolerance and reconciliation', which entailed avoiding 'disagreement over the form and content of a traditional museum'. Accordingly, it recommended that academic centers conduct research on 'all genocides and crimes against humanity'.<sup>34</sup> No-one's memory would be officially consecrated—at least for now.

Defeated yet again, Jewish community leaders kept up their contact with high level government figures. Writing in December 2001, Dr. Israel Unger and Eleanor Getzler, co-chairs of the CJC's National Holocaust Remembrance Committee, were frustrated by the lack of progress. 'Six months have now elapsed since your frank and open dinner meeting with leaders of the Jewish community of Canada', they wrote to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, '... at which you outlined your vision of how the Museum should unfold'. Invoking the terror attack in New York and World Conference Against Racism in Durban a few months earlier, they submitted that 'now, perhaps more than ever, we need to establish an educational and research facility in the nation's capital dedicated to promoting human rights and Canadian values of respect for diversity and equality while sensitizing visitors about the dangers of extreme racism and hate that are the lessons of the Holocaust, the supreme manifestation of race hate and genocide'.<sup>35</sup> After 9/11, geopolitics and the evocation of a 'new antisemitism' featured in the electoral calculus of the museum's pitch.<sup>36</sup>

### **The Museum is conceived, 2003–2009**

In the event, it was the Asper Foundation, led by media tycoon, Israel Asper, which achieved the breakthrough. Set up in 1982, the foundation is a philanthropic organization that in 1997 commenced a 'Human Rights and Holocaust Studies Program' in Winnipeg, his home town. Among other elements, the program entails the expensive and logistically complex exercise of taking students to the USHMM in Washington, DC.<sup>37</sup> Why not have a similar institution in Canada,

## A. DIRK MOSES

the Asper family asked after a visit there in 2000?<sup>38</sup> Asper, a senior figure in the Manitoba Liberal Party scene as well as a prominent businessman, understood that, after two parliamentary committees on the subject, the government was uninterested in a stand-alone Holocaust or genocide museum because it threatened the official commitment to social cohesion. During 2000 and 2001, he investigated the feasibility of a Canadian Museum for Human Rights in Winnipeg, and sought the support of local and regional politicians. In November 2001, he wrote to Chrétien—they knew one another from Liberal Party politics—and to all levels of government with a three-volume feasibility study for a human rights and Holocaust museum in the vein of the Simon Wiesenthal Center's Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles.<sup>39</sup> His supporters think he approached government after realizing that private funding would be inadequate.<sup>40</sup> Already before the November 2001 submission, Chrétien had been attracted by the proposal's link to the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms that he had championed, as well as the private-public partnership funding model: while government would contribute funds, Asper would raise private monies and contribute the balance himself. Chrétien agreed to fund 100 million Canadian dollars although no written agreement to this effect was signed.<sup>41</sup>

Negotiations dragged on during 2002 as different levels of government weighed up the opportunity cost of such an investment; federal monies for this project would mean essential infrastructure could not be funded. In April 2003, the Minister of Canadian Heritage agreed to contribute as a way to stimulate private fundraising that in turn might induce further government backing.<sup>42</sup> This tentative support suggested that the communal differences about such a museum might have been resolved to the government's satisfaction.<sup>43</sup>

Unlike in previous proposals by Jewish community leaders based in Ottawa, the Asper Foundation's executive director, Moe Levy, assured all that the venture was a 'museum for human rights, not the Holocaust'. Asper also insisted that 'This museum will be totally apolitical and antiseptic in terms of trying to preach a message of one kind of inhumanity over another'.<sup>44</sup> Significantly, there was no opposition from the UCC, which purports to represent a significant electoral constituency of over one million Canadians who can claim some Ukrainian descent (more than three times as many as Jewish Canadians), hundreds of thousands of whom live in Manitoba. Levy promised the UCC in letter of 11 April 2003 that the Asper Foundation proposal was for 'an all-inclusive Canadian genocide museum', invoking that term much-used by non-Jewish groups during the parliamentary committee debates of 2000. Indeed, the proposed museum would house exhibits on many human rights abuses, including those perpetrated by Canadian governments. The letter continued in the manner of previous proposals: 'As you are aware, the CMHR goes well beyond a genocide museum. The CMHR's objective is to recognize and celebrate human rights as the foundation for human equality, dignity and freedom'. The sweetener was the promise that the 'Ukrainian Famine/Genocide' would feature 'very clearly, distinctly, and permanently', as would the internment of Ukrainians in World War One. In return, Levy requested a letter of support to include in the media package.<sup>45</sup> Indeed, the UCC was grateful

that the Ukrainian story would be told here. 'The museum will be the first place in the world where the famine will be given attention', said the UCC's executive director, Ostap Skrypnyk.<sup>46</sup> The UCC was enamoured of the projected museum's genocide memorial function rather than solely its human rights agenda, as was the Armenian community affiliated Zoryan Institute after a meeting with Gail Asper at the same time. The Armenian–Canadian leadership was trying to reach a compromise between the Holocaust and genocide rivalry and thought the Asper approach provided the answer.<sup>47</sup>

This Jewish–Ukrainian unanimity was remarkable in view of the acrimony between the communities during the 1980s and 1990s regarding the war crimes prosecution campaign against some Ukrainian immigrants—above all the mainly Ukrainian-manned *Waffen-SS* Division 'Galicia'—for collaborating with Nazis in World War II and the Holocaust. The UCC and UCCLA felt that Ukrainian–Canadians were being unfairly singled out by the government's Commission of Inquiry on War Criminals, established in 1985, especially in view of the fact that communists responsible for Holodomor and other crimes, who might also be in Canada, were not pursued. Ukrainian–Canadian leaders also thought that Jewish leaders, who had pushed for the prosecutions, were not sufficiently anti-communist, as they needed to rely on the Soviet Union to furnish evidence for the war crimes cases. In fact, the UCCLA was founded in the mid-1980s because its members felt that the UCC was not campaigning effectively against the war crimes allegations.<sup>48</sup> In this vein, it declined to follow the UCC's endorsement of the project, instead advocating the position of the Canadians for a Genocide Museum coalition—its spokesman, after all, was John Gregorovich, then the UCCLA president—namely equal treatment for all genocides, which meant no special treatment for the Holodomor either.<sup>49</sup>

The UCCLA's consistent view that the Asper plan was a Holocaust museum in disguise was borne out by Jewish groups leaders' expectations. They certainly did not interpret the new museum in the terms that Levy set out in his letter to the UCC. Its attraction was the Holocaust commemoration focus. It was no secret that the Asper family wanted 'to create a Canadian setting to explain the Holocaust'.<sup>50</sup> The Asper Foundation press announcement of the project also made plain the Holocaust's centrality. A Holocaust gallery would be one of the permanent ones; at this point, there was no mention of a gallery for other genocides or crimes against humanity. As if to head off the anticipated objections to the Holocaust gallery, the museum project's announcement presented a detailed case for the Holocaust's uniqueness in the same terms as the parliamentary committee heard three years earlier, although without relating it to human rights.

You may ask why there is a focus on the Holocaust in the Consequences Gallery. The Holocaust represents a singular, unprecedented event in human history. Though other systematic mass murders of specific groups in the multi-millions represented great evil, many scholars around the world are of the opinion that the Holocaust is unique in its breadth and depth. It is the first and only time in history that an entire people across the planet (referred to by the Nazis as 'world Jewry') were openly targeted for annihilation for the sole purpose of their religion by a democratically elected modern government of one of the most advanced,

## A. DIRK MOSES

cultured, and intellectual countries in the world. Almost two thirds of European Jewry, one third of world Jewry, were murdered because of government-sanctioned prejudice based on ignorance, fear and misunderstanding. European Jewish civilization was effectively wiped off the face of the planet. Another unique aspect of the Holocaust is the fact that the Nazis were able to implement their 'Final Solution' by maintaining the racist ideology that the elimination of world Jewry (also referred to by the Nazis as 'the destructive race') would benefit Germany and the world when in fact the Jews were no threat. Finally, the uniqueness of the Holocaust prompted the coining of the word 'genocide' by Rafael Lemkin [sic] in his 1944 book *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe*.<sup>51</sup>

An Asper Foundation press release a month later mentioned its commitment to create a major human rights museum that will also 'incorporate the largest Holocaust gallery in Canada'.<sup>52</sup> The continuity of this framing is apparent. In 2005, Kim Jasper, a spokeswoman for Friends of the Canadian Human Rights Museum, was quoted as saying that 'the Holocaust will be a key part of the project'.<sup>53</sup> And in 2008, Gail Asper—who led the foundation after Israel Aspers' death in 2003—praised the fact that the CMHR 'will contain the first national gallery in Canada dealing with the Holocaust. This is something that is long overdue for Canada. It's highly appropriate that the gallery dealing with the Holocaust and anti-Semitism today be in the museum for human rights'.<sup>54</sup>

The battle over the Holocaust's uniqueness, with the familiar arguments from the earlier parliamentary committee debates, continued in the press in 2003 and 2004. Barney Sneiderman, a law professor at the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg, reminded readers of the *Winnipeg Free Press* that the 'Holocaust is unique in a way', after Lubomyr Luciuk had contested Moe Levy's statement that 'the Holocaust stands out as a unique event in history'.<sup>55</sup> Luciuk, the son of Ukrainian political refugees, director of research for the UCCLA, and a much-published political geography academic at the Royal Military College of Canada, responded with an article in *The Ukrainian Weekly* called 'All genocide victims must be hallowed'.<sup>56</sup> Referring to the guarantee of Gail Asper of '100% satisfaction' with the museum, Luciuk wrote it could only mean that 'many millions of Ukraine's victims are not marginalized, somehow made less worthy of memory than the Holocaust's victims. The Holodomor was arguably the greatest act of genocide in 20th century Europe. Recognizing that would not only ensure that the proposed Canadian Museum for Human Rights is a unique institution, it would make it a truly world class one as well'.<sup>57</sup>

This debate may have been largely academic because, by the end of 2003, Asper had died and Chrétien left office, leaving the museum's fate in the hands of his Liberal Party successors. The project languished until a change of government in 2005 and election campaign in the next year during which the Conservative Party leader Stephen Harper agreed to make it a national priority.<sup>58</sup> Not surprisingly, the Aspers' family-owned newspaper, the *National Post*, run by Israel's son David, also stood behind it; the paper supported Harper during the election campaign. Harper was also adamantly pro-Israel, and he was rewarded for both positions with the CJC's 'Saul Hayes Human Rights Award' in 2009.<sup>59</sup>

These links between the CMHR, Holocaust commemoration, combating global antisemitism and anti-Zionism featured in parliamentary debate that year. While Irwin Cotler, Chief Counsel to the CJC during the divisive war crimes investigations in 1986, raised the spectre of Iran's threat to Israel, Brian Jean entreated the CMHR's role to 'allow people to learn about the values of democracy, freedom, human rights and the rule of law, and indeed to remember such atrocities [like the Holocaust]'.<sup>60</sup> Anita Neville, representing Winnipeg South Centre, reminded the house about the Canadian Parliamentary Coalition to Combat Antisemitism established earlier that year to confront antisemitism in the guise of anti-Zionism, before turning to what she saw as the CMHR's essential purpose, namely Holocaust memorialization.

However, the important issue is that the genesis of the Canadian Museum for Human Rights in Winnipeg was that it would be a Holocaust museum. There was much discussion over it and much input from a whole host of communities as to whether it should be a Holocaust museum or indeed a museum of human rights, as it is now established.

It is equally important that there be a permanent Holocaust gallery in the Canadian Museum for Human Rights. It was the vision of the late Israel Asper in promoting this museum. It was the basis upon which many private sector donors made their contributions to it.<sup>61</sup>

Neville understood the fund-raising logic of the Holocaust commemoration focus. The financial dimension was also an inducement for the Winnipeg business community, as it promised to bring much-needed investment and jobs to the depressed inner city. Consistently supportive was the *Winnipeg Free Press*, whose owners, Ronald Stern and Bob Silver, donated between CAD\$500,000 and CAD\$999,999 to the CMHR.<sup>62</sup> Leo Ledohowski, the Ukrainian-Canadian owner of a large hotel chain and supporter of Holodomor memory, gave between one and two millions dollars, perhaps in keeping with Moe Levy's encouragement to ethnic communities to tell their stories and raise money so they could participate in the museum's orientation. 'We believe the people who pay should have a say in how it is run', he said in 2003.<sup>63</sup>

In August 2008, the Museums Act was amended to make the CMHR the country's fifth national museum and the first outside Ottawa. Stuart Murray, a Manitoban Conservative Party leader, was appointed its director a year later. Now the federal government would run the museum, but its 'say in how it is run' was unclear in the transitional year before Murray took control. In the meantime, a Ministerial Advisory Committee consulted focus groups for a report about the museum's possible content. The Holocaust received a low 7 per cent support, ranking below First Nations, genocide, women, internments, and war and conflict, an outcome that mollified Luciuk at the time.<sup>64</sup> This ranking was inconsistent with the political and fund-raising imperatives that had hitherto informed the museum's plans.

After construction commenced in April 2009, near the junction of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers, the historic center of Winnipeg known as 'the Forks', the museum's staff conducted new meetings with citizens across the country to

## A. DIRK MOSES

ascertain their human rights experiences. The results were collected with commentary and recommendations by a Contents Advisory Committee led by Asper confidant, the lawyer Yude Henteleff, also a member of the advisory board of the B'nai Brith National Task Force Leadership whose executive director is Ruth Klein.<sup>65</sup> The Contents Advisory Committee Final Report was released on 25 May 2010.<sup>66</sup> It signaled a new phase in the museum wars.

### The Contents Advisory Committee Report and its aftermath, 2009–2011

The report's controversial recommendation was to effectively up-end the ranking of the 2008 Ministerial Advisory Committee by now featuring the Holocaust in the museum's central gallery, a decision that journalist Ira Basen regarded as all too 'predictable' in his much-cited article on the CMHR.<sup>67</sup> The impression of partiality was hardly dispelled by the report's transparent reasoning, for, without explicit justification, it adopted the perspective of Holocaust survivors rather than those of other trauma victims, whose testimony it chose to exclude. Moreover, the reasoning repeated the now well-known arguments used a decade before in the parliamentary committee hearings, plus the new post-9/11 concern with the so-called new antisemitism:

Those who advocated that the Museum should recognize the centrality of the Holocaust emphasized that it is the Holocaust that provides our paradigm for understanding the causes and processes of all mass, state-sponsored violence, as well as provides the inspiration for human rights protection on a world-wide scale. As such, it merits a permanent home and a major focus within the Museum. With such an essential foundation secured, the Museum can and should explore relationships between other genocides and the Nazi atrocities: for example, how the Nazis learned from the earlier genocide in Armenia. At the Vancouver bilateral meetings, we were exhorted to use the experience of the Nazi Holocaust as a lens through which to view all genocides. . . Indeed, many of those who attended the sessions across Canada spoke not only of the Holocaust but also of the resurgence of anti-Semitic views and behaviour.<sup>68</sup>

That the Holocaust would always constitute the museum's heart seems likely considering that the architectural designs had been delegated to Ralph Applebaum Associates, a New York firm that designed the USHMM, in 2005 and completed already in late March 2007, at which stage the Holocaust gallery was allocated 'approximately 4,500 sq. ft., a significant part of the 47,000 sq. ft. of exhibit space'.<sup>69</sup> In other words, the Contents Advisory Committee Report seems to have been tailored to match the architectural concept and designs that were decided long before the public consultation. What changed is its public rationale after the museum became a federal crown corporation in 2008; the explicit appeals to Holocaust uniqueness were dropped and the link to human rights asserted.

The CMHR was now proposing twelve galleries. After the introductory gallery, a substantial one was to be devoted to First Nations-Indigenous peoples, highlighting their survival and culture as well as suffered wrongs. The next was the largest, the Holocaust gallery. Then followed a smaller one on 'mass atrocities' in which the Holodomor, internment of Ukrainians in World War One, and other events in

twentieth-century Canadian and global history were each granted a little space. The remaining galleries were devoted to human rights issues and activism. In effect, the idea floated by the CJC and B'nai Brith in 2000 that two museums be constructed—one for the Holocaust and another for genocide—was incorporated within the new CMHR, the ‘mass atrocity’ gallery representing other genocides and crimes against humanity.

As might be expected, the UCC now felt that the deal sealed in 2003 had been broken, while the UCCLA was dismayed that the 2008 Ministerial Advisory Committee report had been superseded.<sup>70</sup> Being ‘lumped’ in the mass atrocity gallery was considered particularly objectionable. The Ukrainian–Canadian leaders spent the rest of 2010 and 2011 mounting an unremitting campaign against the Advisory Committee’s report. It took various forms: lobbying the museum, lobbying politicians and pressing their case in the media. They were not alone. Tony Bergmeier, National President of the German–Canadian Congress, said ‘We shouldn’t have a Holocaust exhibit as a permanent exhibit if no one else has one’, but on the whole it was the Ukrainian community leaders who drove the campaign. Voices from First Nations, African and Asian migrant communities were conspicuously absent.<sup>71</sup>

Some of the demands varied, as before. The UCC wanted a Holodomor gallery that bore comparison with the Holocaust one, while the UCCLA advocated twelve galleries that are ‘thematic, comparative and inclusive’, in which no genocide predominated; where the UCC wanted to elevate the Holodomor to the Holocaust’s lofty status, the UCCLA wanted to bring the Holocaust down to the same level. Both agreed that Gail Asper and her foundation should not be associated with the museum—she still chaired the Friends of the CMHR—and that the museum’s leadership should be changed to reflect the demographic diversity of the country. Tactics have included organizing their own poll which showed that the Holocaust was not a popular priority, and a postcard campaign featuring a cartoon from the 1947 Ukrainian edition of George Orwell’s novel *Animal Farm*, with a whip-bearing pig overlain with the quotation that ‘All animals are equal but some animals are more equal than others’, as well as ‘All galleries are equal but some are more equal than others’, evoking Marsha Skypuch’s remark to the parliamentary committee in 2000.<sup>72</sup> Not surprisingly, the postcard provoked accusations of antisemitism. The UCCLA denied that the card painted Jews as (communist) pigs although it is not hard to understand why it would be interpreted in this way.<sup>73</sup>

Luciuk could invoke the authority of Michael Marrus who criticized the CMHR in an interview in April 2011. Marrus thought that the community consultation had predictably resulted in the public preoccupation with the museum’s memorialization function as immigrant communities sought to have their experiences represented, thereby pitting them against one another, as he had warned in 1998. He also disputed the museum’s claim that the Holocaust animated the postwar human rights movement. ‘Unfortunately, there is very little evidence for this contention. To the contrary, in the immediate postwar period there still does not seem to have been a very clear sense about the nature of the Holocaust, and it takes until



A. DIRK MOSES

the 1960s or 1970s for this to really gel. I think the prominence given to the Holocaust, however well meaning, is historically incorrect'.<sup>74</sup> Marrus was consulted by the museum but ignored.

Predictably, he was dismissed by Dan Lett in the *Winnipeg Free Press*. The author of many articles defending the CMHR, Lett reminded readers that an open letter of 91 academics had attacked the UCC/UCCLA campaign for inflating the death toll of the Holodomor so it exceeded the Holocaust, and for failing to mention that Ukrainian nationalists had collaborated with the Nazis in the Holocaust.<sup>75</sup> But Marrus was not alone. Roger W. Smith and George Shirinian, both of the Armenian–Canadian community-affiliated International Institute for Genocide Studies, wrote separate pieces urging genocide as the master concept of the CHMR because it was a de facto genocide museum irrespective of official insistence that it was really a human rights museum.<sup>76</sup> Like Paul Grod of the UCC, Shirinian argued that each unique experience of genocide would be distorted if filtered through the Holocaust lens. The latter did not in fact encompass all other genocides, as so often asserted by Jewish leaders, they said.<sup>77</sup>

The campaign began to bite by early 2011. One by one, parliamentarians, especially those of Ukrainian background or with many Ukrainian–Canadian constituents, publicly criticized the prominence of the museum's Holocaust gallery and pleaded for the Holodomor's equal status.<sup>78</sup> In March, the museum board invited Lindy Ledohowski, a literature scholar of Ukrainian descent, to join it, much to the UCC's pleasure.<sup>79</sup> The museum also began to backpedal on its claim that the Holocaust had given birth the human rights movement. Now it stressed that Nazi Germany represented the ultimate assault on human rights, and that the Holocaust gallery would include non-Jewish victims of the Holocaust. Finally, the museum's spokesperson, Angela Cassie, began to stress that the Contents Advisory Committee Report represented only interim advice and that the museum's contents were still under review.<sup>80</sup>

At the same time, proponents of the museum's Holocaust-centrism continued to advance the older arguments. The *Winnipeg Free Press* thought the Holocaust should take the 'front seat' in any human rights museum because it had inspired postwar human rights, an argument made by the same newspaper earlier when it observed that 'The museum is not saying that individual Jews suffered more than Ukrainians, but it is saying that some crimes are more revealing and consequential than others'.<sup>81</sup> The claim to uniqueness continued to be an article of faith for academics like Arthur Schafer, who insisted that the Holocaust be given 'primacy of commemoration because of the ideology that was behind the murder of the Jews';<sup>82</sup> and to Catherine Chatterley of the new Canadian Institute for the Study of Antisemitism, who argued that the Holocaust is 'unique because its antecedents are two thousand years old and yet still persist today. One cannot say that about the ideologies at work in other genocides'.<sup>83</sup> An online petition of the Jewish Federation of Winnipeg to support the Holocaust gallery stated that 'the Holocaust is unfortunately the ultimate prototype for the study of human rights violations' but that it 'in no way detracts from the histories of other human rights violations. In fact, the opposite will be the case; to learn about the Holocaust

will allow one to acquire greater insight into other human rights violations'.<sup>84</sup> They could not understand the UCC/UCCLA objections as other than ignorance, bad faith or antisemitism.

The fear that the Holocaust gallery would be somehow diluted or abandoned was most acutely expressed by Rhona Spivak, editor of the *Winnipeg Jewish Review*. In an 'Open Letter to Lubomyr Luciuk' in March 2011, she rejected his polling ploy, arguing that, as a tiny minority, Jews would always be unpopular with the non-Jewish majority. The gallery decision should instead be made by 'scholars of genocide', who she thought would agree that the Holocaust's uniqueness was an unassailable fact. Again, the evidence on the public record suggests that the Jewish community's interest in the CHMR was driven by the commemorative uniqueness agenda.

At the very beginning of this project, even before it ever became a government funded museum (remember that time Mr. Luciuk?), it was held out to the Jewish community that there would be a permanent gallery dedicated to the Holocaust in the CMHR. If you and your supporters have your way, that will not be the case. Clearly, there is no point in waiting to speak out, or holding back. We as a community are going to feel extremely resentful if efforts to eliminate a permanent Holocaust Gallery are successful.<sup>85</sup>

If Luciuk thought the Asper Foundation broke its deal with the UCC, Spivak was arguing that the Jewish community's deal was being broken as well. Its expectation, as the critics had suspected all along, was that the CMHR would be the vehicle for the Holocaust museum for which Jewish leaders had been striving since the 1990s. Yude Henteleff's address to the University of Manitoba in January 2012 likewise expressed alarm at the prospect of the Holocaust's decentering: 'If this ['position of the Holocaust separate zone'] is in any way diminished it will significantly impair the museum in carrying out its stated objectives as noted in its enabling legislation'. To ensure that 'this diminshment [sic] will not occur', he urged the museum to appoint a permanent 'recognized international scholar with respect to the Holocaust', because 'ad hoc consultations even with experts in the field falls far short of the necessity of such a staff person'.<sup>86</sup>

In the event, Jewish journalists were quickly reassured about the size and permanence of the Holocaust gallery when they expressed concern in late 2010.<sup>87</sup> A year later, they seemed less sanguine because of the continuous changes underway in exhibition planning. Antisemitism, for one, seemed underplayed for the tastes *Jewish Post and News's* editor, Bernie Bellan, who also noted the steady diminution of the Holocaust's dedicated gallery space since Asper's original 2003 concept. He attributed the introduction of the Armenian genocide and Holodomor into its space as contextual background—though he doubted whether the Holodomor was really a genocide—to the CMHR's need to find 'a compromise approach' with the Ukrainian lobby.<sup>88</sup>

To be sure, the tone has changed. The public campaign against the Contents Advisory Committee Report seems to have taken its toll on the nerves of senior management, who also receive advice about best practice from the museum's professional researcher–curators. External peer review by scholars like the historian

## A. DIRK MOSES

Doris Bergen and sociologist Chris Powell also led to a recasting of the Holocaust and mass atrocity galleries in 2011. Whereas the Holocaust was once said to be ‘the heart of the museum’, its ‘center-piece’, ‘conceptual core’ and ‘emotional anchor’—the hitherto successful pitch to donors about its uniqueness—now the planned gallery space is beginning to downplay its memorialization function by instead highlighting three aspects that intersect with human rights issues: the corruption of state power, the spreading of fear and hatred, and war. Acknowledging that Nazi persecutions cannot be captured by the human rights concept alone, an exhibit on Raphael Lemkin, the originator of the genocide concept, is also envisaged.

The mass atrocities gallery will now be called ‘breaking the silence’. Its purpose is, again, to downplay the commemorative dimension of the selected events by highlighting issues such as resistance and responses to gross human rights violations, for instance, breaking the silence about them. Some of them are genocides, like the five formally recognized by Canada’s parliament: Armenia, Holodomor, Holocaust, Rwanda and Srebrenica. Some are not genocide, like Taliban restrictions on women in Afghanistan. Moreover, material on Canadian Indigenous peoples will now feature in all eleven galleries in addition to the gallery devoted to Indigenous rights. The more the design process becomes integrated into academic protocols, the more it tends in the direction of a human rights museum, and the less the political imperative from above to commemorate the Holocaust as unique can impose itself.<sup>89</sup>

### Conclusion

There are limits to this professionalization, however, because the existence of a Holocaust gallery cannot be expunged for political and financial reasons, even though its justification is hardly convincing. Consider the strained reasoning of the museum’s head Stuart Murray at a university event about the CMHR in September 2011.

So if you look at the role of the Holocaust in the museum, as one important example, commemorating the suffering of the victims isn’t going to be the aim.

But, examining how a modern, advanced, democratic society could so quickly and violently collapse into genocide? Well, there’s an exceedingly relevant lesson there. In the same way, there are lessons to be learned from other past abuses that our visitors will find inside the walls of the museum.

But comparing the suffering of one individual over another? Not here. Not ever. That’s never been our game. And if we need to be clearer on that, then so we will. There’s no question that I’ve heard concern, as one somewhat prominent example, from the Ukrainian–Canadian community.<sup>90</sup>

Having abandoned two previous justifications for the Holocaust’s centrality—namely that its horror led to the United Nations Universal Declaration on Human Rights and the Genocide Convention in 1948; and that it is the best documented and/or most commemorated genocide, i.e., the only one of world historical significance—the CMHR now presents the Holocaust as the archetypal collapse of

democracy into genocide from which human rights lessons can be drawn. But why this archetype? Most societies where gross human rights abuses have occurred in the twentieth century were not democracies that collapsed. Why not take as a model the Great Leap Forward in China in which so many millions starved or were killed?<sup>91</sup> Moreover, in Murray's words, genocide is (again) commingled with human rights, reintroducing the atrocity memorialization question through the back door. By offering the Holocaust as the prototypical human rights violation, coupled with a separate gallery for other genocides and gross human rights violations, a human rights museum perforce becomes, at least in part, a genocide memorial whether it intends to or not.

Moreover, as presented here, Elie Wiesel's formulation of universal and essentially Jewish character of the Holocaust, designed to address why others should learn about the Holocaust, is transformed into a phenomenological stance that the Holocaust provides the archetype for understanding all other genocides or human rights abuses. Yet the ways in which the Holocaust is phenomenologically distinct make it a poor archetype for understanding other genocides.<sup>92</sup> That is why to claim that singling out the Holocaust or the Nazi regime as somehow paradigmatic does not implicitly compare suffering is difficult to square with metaphors and judgments used by museum supporters like 'front seat' and more 'consequential'; by implication, others must occupy the back seat and are less consequential. Whatever its amendments, the museum is still not studying and presenting genocides comparatively, as Armenian–Canadian groups have consistently advocated, which is why the International Institute for Genocide and Human Rights Issues continues to criticize it, despite the inclusion of the Armenian genocide in the breaking the silence gallery. 'It seems that the CHMR is playing community politics by contacting different groups at different times, while ignoring the challenging questions raised by an institute whose mission is the study of these very issue',<sup>93</sup>

In view of Canada's migrant demographic and multicultural policy consensus, the museum's current architecture cannot be better designed to pit groups against one another, thereby ignoring Marrus's warning in 1998. The tension between commemoration and human rights education outlined at the beginning of this article are irresolvable, despite the best efforts of the museum researcher–curators, so long as the museum's management insists on its politically and financially driven vision. The researcher–curators have to emphasize the human rights agenda as best they can within parameters set since 2003.

The signs are that the tension between commemoration and human rights activism, on the one hand, and the controversy it has generated, on the other, is beginning to undermine the museum's financial viability. As was revealed in late 2011, the CMHR did not have the money to finish construction and open as planned in 2013; that has been postponed till 2014. No level of government any longer regards the museum as an electoral asset, and they refuse to top-up promised levels of funding, demanding that the Friends of the CMHR make up the shortfall with private donations. Yet that source seems ever less promising now that the museum's commemorative dimension is perceived as diminished. Amid these

## A. DIRK MOSES

troubles, the museum's chair of the board, Winnipeg businessman Arni Thorsteinson, resigned, as did senior staff.<sup>94</sup> At the time of writing (March 2012), the CMHR's prospects appeared as grim as a Winnipeg winter; a project foundering on its internal contradictions and misjudged political calculations.

### Acknowledgement

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## A. DIRK MOSES

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A. DIRK MOSES

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