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Intersectionality and the Construction of Cultural Heritage: Indigenous Women's Presentation and Participation at Canadian Heritage Sites and Museums

Abstract

Indigenous women experience multiple layers of discrimination. In their struggle for self-determination and recognition, they are fighting to maintain control over their identities and cultures. In that respect, heritage is of great significance, as it can be used to create a sense of community, to foster respect for cultural and social diversity, and to challenge prejudice and misrecognition. The dominant discourses and representations within museums, however, often present the past in stereotypical manners, especially in relation to gender. This "Authorized Heritage Discourse" (Smith 2006) is conceived as an 'official' way of understanding heritage, stressing the importance of expert knowledge, involving only a limited scope on gender relations and representations. One way of challenging this discourse is to critically analyze the curatorial and management practices of museums from an intersectional perspective. Examining four Indigenous heritage sites in Canada, this paper looks at the representation of Indigenous women and their engagement with these sites, exploring questions of visibility and representation as well as their roles in site management.

Résumé

Les femmes autochtones vivent plusieurs niveaux de discrimination. Dans leur lutte pour l'autodétermination et la reconnaissance, elles se battent pour maintenir le contrôle sur leurs identités et cultures. A cet égard, le patrimoine revêt une grande importance pour les communautés autochtones, puisqu'il peut servir de base pour créer un sentiment de communauté, pour consolider le respect de la diversité culturelle et sociale et pour défier les préjugés et la méconnaissance. Cependant, les discours dominants et les représentations muséographiques continuent majoritairement à présenter le passé de manière stéréotypée, notamment en ce qui concerne la question du genre. Ce « discours autorisé sur l'héritage » ("Authorized Heritage Discourse", Smith 2006) est conçu comme manière 'officielle' de comprendre le patrimoine et souligne l'importance du savoir spécialisé. Toutefois, les représentations de genre et leurs interrelations n'y sont prises en compte que de façon très réduite. Une manière de contester ce discours est

l'analyse critique des pratiques curatives et des modes de gestion des musées d'une perspective intersectionnelle. Par l'étude de quatre sites de patrimoine autochtones au Canada, cet article observe la représentation des femmes autochtones et leur implications sur les sites, tout en explorant les questions de visibilité et de représentation, ainsi que leur rôle dans la gestion de ces sites.

1. Introduction

"I am My Own Celebration" is the title of Mohawk artist Amanda Marie Flynn's painting that was shown at the First Nations Art Exhibition at the Woodland Cultural Centre in Brantford, Ontario, in 2017. The mixed media painting is a self-portrait of the artist in a feathered headdress. Her face is white, with a red stripe across her eyes. Her head and shoulders appear to be floating in front of a white background, almost like an apparition or dream; there is no reference to a particular time, location, or space. Her eyes are dark and it is difficult to say whether she is looking at the observer or into the distance as she is wearing the red paint¹ like a mask. Her gaze is serious, maybe questioning, maybe reproachful, yet strong and attentive. The title is a reference to the Canada 150 celebrations, criticised by many Indigenous people for ignoring Indigenous history and downplaying the contemporary hardships faced by Aboriginals.

Inspired by the life of the artist's grandmother, a full-blood Mohawk, the painting "represents the celebration of individuality and of Native American women living in the modern world," as Flynn describes it: "We are of the wolf clan and both my mother and aunt raised their daughters to be strong wolf women" (A. Flynn, personal communication, 2018). The feathered headdress or war bonnet, traditionally worn by male Plains warriors, is appropriated by a woman, and, as Flynn states, "the warrior woman in my painting wears it proudly," while the red stripe "connects her to the element of spirit, as represented in the traditional medicine wheel" (ibid.). The headdress and the red stripe can also be seen as references to North American popular culture² and modernity. With the painting the artist is celebrating herself, for everything she is – a woman, an Indigenous woman, a Mohawk from Tyendinaga, a

1 The colour red symbolizes both violence and strength and is considered by many Indigenous people as the colour of war, but also of festivity and joy, the sun, light, life, energy, and power.

2 In popular culture, the mask can be linked to the fictional character of Zorro, a masked vigilante created by American pulp writer Johnston McCulley in 1919, and to the Lone Ranger, a fictional, masked Texas Ranger, based on a radio show and books written by Fran Striker in 1933, who fought outlaws in the American Old West with his Native American friend, Tonto, and has become an enduring icon of American culture.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lone_Ranger - cite_note-7



Figure 1: Amanda Marie Flynn, *I am My Own Celebration* (2016 Mixed Media, 61 x 96,5 cm), Part of the First Nations Art Exhibition at the Woodland Cultural Centre, 2017 (Photo by Susemihl 2017). Printed with permission of the artist.

female artist, a Canadian, and more.³ She is celebrating her Indigenous identity – her culture, language, and heritage – the three things that make a person, as Han Gwich'in Chief Isaac Juneby believes (Panel, Dänojà Zho Cultural Centre, Dawson City, 2018).

Inspired by this painting of a strong Mohawk woman I started to look more closely for representations of Indigenous women in museums and exhibitions. After visiting a number of museums and heritage sites dedicated to Indigenous culture and history in Canada, I realized that at many sites Indigenous women are hardly visible – a situation that suggests several questions,

among them: How are Indigenous women represented, and how do they present themselves in the context of museums? To what degrees have they been given agency and are allowed and enabled to participate in or interact with exhibitions?⁴

In this paper I will take a closer look at the representation of Indigenous women in and their involvement with exhibitions at four museums and heritage sites in Canada – two exhibitions on the Iroquois in Ontario, and two exhibitions on the Blackfoot in Alberta. While the management and ownership situations at the four sites are different, they all tell a story of traditional and, to a certain extent, contemporary Iroquois and Blackfoot life, using mural paintings and dioramas. Examining the curatorial and management practices, I will argue that the participation of Indigenous women in the administration and operation of the exhibitions are significant for giving Indigenous women a voice and are thus eminent in terms of self-determination and empowerment. Applying an intersectional approach to representational practices, this article will identify, critically analyse, and deepen the understanding of how the social categories gender and ethnicity are inscribed and

3 Amanda Marie Flynn is of mixed-blood heritage, Mohawk and Italian/Croatian. She is a graduate of Sheridan College and OCAD University, Toronto, and a tattoo artist (Personal communication with A. Flynn 2018).

4 This project is part of a larger research project on cultural heritage and Indigenous empowerment that I have been working on for the past few years.

interlinked in the narratives outlined and performed by the various actors in the field of museums and cultural heritage. The analysis of this condition can thus contribute to the existing knowledge and raise the level of awareness of the construction of identities that are present at a structural level of representation, which may increase the understanding of how the societal feeling of being Indigenous is created.

2. Intersectionality and Indigeneity

Intersectional theory asserts that the concerns of one group of people, for example, Indigenous women, differ based on various factors and that all aspects of a person's identity are relevant (Rodenbeck 2017). Cultural concepts such as race, gender, and socioeconomic status interact in various ways, influencing a person's experiences and shaping her identities. Intersectional approaches thus try to move beyond examinations of singular aspects of identity and power, since "inequities are never the result of single, distinct factors," but "the outcome of intersections of different social locations, power relations and experiences" (Hankivsky 2014, 2).

The terms 'intersectionality' and 'intersectional theory' refer to American scholar Kimberlé W. Crenshaw's (1989) concept, which claims that people inhabit multiple interacting spheres that shape and determine identity. While the central ideas of intersectionality have long historic roots, Crenshaw underscored the "multidimensionality" of marginalized peoples' lived experiences. Critical race theorists such as Crenshaw, Collins, and others applied intersectionality to explain intersections of race and gender, particularly in the context of US history, law, and politics, arguing that cultural patterns of oppression are bound together and influenced by the intersectional systems of race, gender, class, and ethnicity (Collins 2000). An intersectionality approach to the study of politics and culture generally refers to "the complex [...] effects which ensue when multiple axes of differentiation – economic, political cultural, psychic, subjective and experiential – intersect in historically specific contexts" (Brah and Phoenix 2004, 76). This approach, then, shifts the analysis from one factor to multiple interacting factors and to the relationship between them at individual and structural levels of analysis (Crenshaw 1991).

Indigenous feminism is a growing field with a significant decolonizing message, and a number of Indigenous scholars have written about intersecting powers as they relate to the lives of Indigenous peoples, focussing on Indigenous feminism, roles of women, or different aspects of gender identity.⁵ Yet few Indigenous scholars have explicitly used the term intersectionality, which has resulted in a relative lack of Indigenous voices in intersectionality scholarship.⁶ In 2012, a group of Indigenous people gathered in Coast Salish territory (in downtown Vancouver) for a "Dialogue

5 See Buffalohead 1983; Goeman 2007; Green 2007; Medicine 1983, 2001; Simpson 2014a, 2014b; Stewart-Harawire 2007; and Suzack et al. 2014.

6 See for example Anishinaabe-Métis scholar Karine R. Duhamel (Duhamel and Peristerakis 2017).

on Intersectionality and Indigeneity.” Their purpose was an examination of the complexities of extending this analysis in the context of colonial relations and the possibilities and limitations of accounting for Indigenous systems of knowledge using the frameworks of intersectionality. The stories shared by participants demonstrated that Indigenous and Western worldviews are founded on distinct categorizations, which are expressed in language. Indigenous participants were uncertain about how Indigenous knowledge corresponded with intersectionality and expressed that the language of intersectionality may be alienating to Indigenous people because of its academic framework, as Hunt states: “Whereas the language of intersectionality might be needed to make sense of western ideologies [...], in Indigenous worldviews, concepts of intersectionality already exist. Understanding the animation and cross-fertilization of categories (of race, gender, animal, human, law, etc.) is the foundation of intersectional frameworks” (Hunt 2012, 3).

Hence, participants at the workshop were rather inclined to use Indigenous concepts and ways of knowing. They believed that “Indigenous epistemologies allow for diverse forms of knowledge to be valued, including the wisdom of elders, dreams and spiritual guides” (ibid.). Using a variety of metaphors to describe the interrelatedness of diverse aspects of life in Indigenous knowledge, including ‘weaving our knowledge together,’ intersectionality “might be useful for understanding how colonial systems or axes of power work together, but it is not needed to validate the inherent complexities of Indigenous knowledge” (ibid.). English and Indigenous languages are expressive of ontologically distinct concepts of identity in relation to the world, and Indigenous traditional knowledge is indicative of moral and ethical teachings that cannot be captured in the English language. Thus the expressive potential of intersectionality may be limited by its Western, academic foundation. Indigenous worldviews are inherently intersectional, and intersectionality within an Indigenous context and framework might be visualized as a Blackfoot dream catcher, an Iroquois basket, or a Coast Salish blanket, the interwoven threads symbolizing the interrelatedness of Indigenous women’s lives.

3. Intersectionality and the Construction of Cultural Heritage

Heritage is of great significance to Indigenous communities, as it can be used to give a sense of belonging to disparate groups and individuals, to create jobs on the basis of cultural tourism, to foster respect for cultural and social diversity, and to thus challenge prejudice and misrecognition. Cultural heritage is essential to the restoration and permanence of Indigenous people’s cultural distinctiveness (Susemihl 2013, 2019). The dominant discourses and representations within museums and heritage sites, however, often present the past in rather reduced, stereotypical manners, especially in relation to gender. Even if the contexts are different, the stories are often told in the same way they have been narrated before – a way that has been termed the “Authorized Heritage Discourse” (AHD) by Laurajane Smith (2006). Conceived as an ‘official’ way of understanding heritage, the AHD is, according to

Smith, stressing the importance of expert knowledge and privileges the cultural recollection of a limited social stratum, including a limited scope on gender relations and representations. One way of challenging the AHD is to critically analyze the curatorial and management practices of museums and heritage sites from an intersectional perspective (Crenshaw 1991; Lykke 2010; Grahn 2011; Grahn and Ross 2018), and ask questions of how exhibitions and community participation configure and shape our remembrance and perception of the intertwined relations of social identities such as gender and ethnicity.

Several scholars have applied intersectional theory in Museum and Heritage Studies,⁷ contesting that women have generally received less space (literally on the tapestries and figuratively), and that their roles have been simplified or understated. According to Porchia Moore, museums are dedicated to collective cultural heritage – but, she asks, “whose cultural heritage and how does that answer correlate to the politics of visibility within museum spaces” (Moore, in Jennings 2016)? Moore considers two notions embedded within intersectional museum work as important, namely who is rendered visible and invisible by museum policies and structures, and what marginalized identities are muted within museum spaces. The representations of Indigenous women in exhibitions can thus be read as intersectional from a Western theoretical framework, and Moore posits that “employing intersectionality as the catalyst and container for action and change within institutional systems is the key to unlocking the kinds of revolutionary participation and engagement needed for the growth of the future of museums” (ibid.).

Intersectional theory in this context implies that the practices of curation are intrinsically rooted in a Eurocentric and androcentric tradition. Not only are Indigenous women exoticized and ‘othered’ by historically Eurocentric curatorial practices that emphasize the experience of the white settler society while treating Native American cultures as consumable objects (Cobb 2005; Jenkins 2009; Rodenbeck 2017). Indigenous women are also partially erased from history, since “museums, and Western culture as a whole, privileges [sic] male experience” (Rodenbeck 2017, 4), which results in androcentric idealization and stereotypical representation (Bergsdóttir 2016; Horowitz 2017; Machin 2008; Torreira 2016). Rodenbeck asserts that “the intersections of these factors of identity cannot be divided into discrete parts” and thus it is important to “understand how both of these spheres of oppression work in tandem to downplay the unique and important contributions and experiences of Native American women” (2017, 4). This results in a unique phenomenon where Native American women face multiple spheres of repression and White supremacy, which has distinct effects on identity formation and societal narratives that influence their lives.

7 See for example Bünz 2012; Davalos 2001; Dhamoon and Hankivsky 2015; Rodenbeck 2017; Thedéen 2012.

Indigenous women in Canada today still face a high amount of discrimination and prejudice. Compared to non-Indigenous women, they are less likely to have a post-secondary qualification and more likely to endure higher unemployment rates, to receive lower median incomes, to be diagnosed with at least one chronic illness, and to die of violence (Arriagada 2016; Suzack et al. 2014). In their struggle for self-determination and recognition, they are fighting to maintain control over their identities, cultural heritage, and ancestral land. Indigenous women's social positionings, however, are dynamic and complex, informed by culture and post-colonial politics; gender and ethnicity intersect with age, socioeconomic status, and social hierarchies. These intersections are not merely "products of chance or a naturalized way of being – but rather multiple oppressive institutions which function to systematically push these women [...] into the margins of society where their position is more than likely to be maintained by the same systems" (Price 2017).

Anthropologist Julie Cruikshank states that "museums and anthropology are undeniably part of a Western philosophical tradition" (1992, 6). And while Christina Kreps argues that "western museology is rooted in the assumption that the museum idea and museological behavior are distinctly Western and modern cultural phenomena," she also points out that "many cultures keep objects of special value and have created complex structures or spaces for the objects' safekeeping as well as technologies for their curation and preservation" (2005, 1), which is true for the Blackfoot (Onciul 2015), amongst others. In any case, ownership and control, community involvement, and visitors' expectations have significant implications and consequences for Indigenous empowerment and independence and, consequently, for the modes and contents of the site's storytelling (Susemihl 2013, 2019), as will be illustrated in the subsequent discussion of my case studies.

4. Indigenous Women's Representation at Museums and Heritage Sites: Case Studies

Examining the representation and participation of Indigenous women in four museums and heritage sites in Canada, I will in the following part consider the ways museums as a cultural form frame Indigenous female voice and comment on different ways of female Indigenous involvement with exhibitions and galleries. Exploring two exhibitions on the Iroquois at the Crawford Lake Conservation Area and the Woodland Cultural Centre and two exhibitions on the Blackfoot at Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump and the Glenbow Museum, I will show that female Indigenous involvement in the curation, administration, and organization processes will make their representations and narratives more diverse and inclusive.⁸

8 For reasons of space, I will predominantly focus on a mural or diorama in the discussion of each case study, even though representations of Indigenous women can be found at several points throughout the four exhibitions.

4.1. Crawford Lake Conservation Area

The Crawford Lake Conservation Area (CLCA) near the community of Campbellville in Milton, Ontario, is owned and operated by Conservation Halton, a community-based management agency. Besides Crawford Lake (a meromictic lake at the heart of the park), a reconstructed 15th-century Iroquoian village is the main attraction of the area. This heritage site invites visitors to “explore local history” and “learn about what daily life was like over 600 years ago” (Halton Conservation, 2018). Archaeological excavations uncovered remains of eleven longhouses and countless Iroquoian artefacts, which are interpreted in archaeological terms. Furthermore, texts on plates throughout the village describe the use of different tools or the life inside a longhouse, an interpretive program takes the visitor through the site, which includes a fire-starting demonstration and the examination of pottery and plastic replica corn, and school groups may use the village green for a traditional game of lacrosse.

In one longhouse, a wall is draped with a large painting depicting daily life in a longhouse. Not only does the interior of the house look empty (there are no provisions stacked against the walls), but the whole atmosphere seems to be dreary. The people in the painting – the women are in the foreground – seem to be fading and disappearing into the shadows of the past. They look rather dull and depressed, low-spirited and miserable, as the non-Indigenous guide explicitly pointed out to a

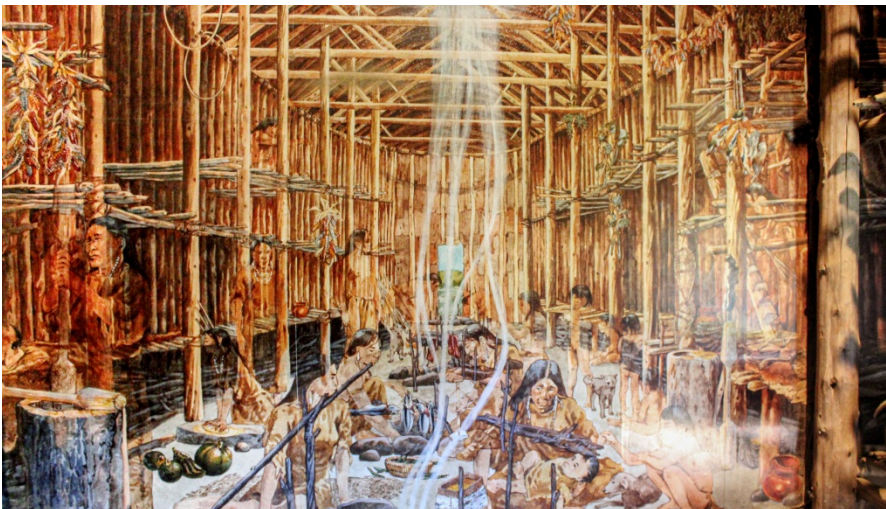


Figure 2: Wall painting at a reconstructed longhouse in the Iroquoian village at the Crawford Lake Conservation Area, Milton, Ontario (Photo by Susemihl 2017).

group of students on a tour.⁹ The women in the painting are depicted squatting on the earth and working, tending the fire, preparing a meal, and caring for the children, while two men are shown standing at the side, empty-handed, watching the women. Short texts describe the use of different tools or the life inside a longhouse; there are no explanations contextualizing the painting.

CLCA management is aware of the dated and stereotyped representation of Indigenous people in general, and the need to revise visual images and texts. Recently, interpretations have been updated, as a sign explains, since “new information from archaeological investigators, consultation with First Nations scholars and elders and historical documentation is revealed” (Plate, CLCA, 2017). Throughout the village, however, there are no references to Iroquoian women who played important roles in Iroquoian society, planting corn, beans, and squash, processing the food, or making clothing and basketry, as cultural objects throughout the village suggest.

On special occasions, visitors may have the opportunity to experience the modern space of the Deer Clan House and have lunch of “Three Sisters Soup”¹⁰ with a local Indigenous caterer, engaging with the Iroquois women who are preparing and serving the food.¹¹ This encounter and conversations about recipes and the catering business brings Indigenous women back into modern life. Most visitors, however, do not get to have this kind of experience, as Indigenous women are not involved in the management of the site. Every year, more than 32,000 students aged from 6 to 16 and other visitors thus receive a somewhat ambiguous message: While the archaeological remains, paintings, and panels narrate the story of a vanishing people, a panel at the exit advises the visitor to acquire more information about Indigenous people today without really engaging with them, stating: “After you leave the village we would encourage you to continue to learn about the rich and diverse cultures of the First Peoples who live across Canada today” (Plate, CLCA, 2017).

4.2. The Woodland Cultural Centre

The Woodland Cultural Centre (WCC) in Brantford, Ontario, tells a different story, one in which Iroquois women feature prominently. The Centre was built in 1952 as overflow classrooms for the Mohawk Institute, the adjacent red-brick residential school. The latter is one of 17 established residential schools in Ontario (Sponagle 2018), and is currently turned into an education centre through the “Save the Evi-

9 I visited the site during the 2017 Canadian History and Environment Summer School (CHESS) on “Gender and Indigenous Landscapes in Southern Ontario” on June 1, and was present at a tour for a school class.

10 The term refers to the three main crops of the Iroquois, corn, beans, and squash.

11 Our group at the CHESS workshop had a lunch of Three Sisters Soup during our visit on June 1, 2017.

dence" Campaign (Brown 2016).¹² When the school closed in 1970, the WCC moved in. Established under the direction of the Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians, the centre is governed by three Haudenosaunee communities¹³ and employs 21 people within the departments of administration, museum, language, education, library, and maintenance. As other Indigenous cultural centres, the WCC is a critical community hub, tasked with an array of cultural chores, from teaching language and craft, to housing archaeological objects and art, providing historical resources, and hosting contemporary art. With over 35,000 artefacts accessioned in the collections, the museum is one of the largest facilities in Canada managed and administered by First Nations (WCC Museum 2019).

Presented in a dramatic storyline beginning with the Iroquoian and Algonquian pre-contact past to the 21st century, the centre displays archaeological specimens, ethnological and historical material, documents, furniture, photographs, and fine crafts, along with contemporary paintings and installations. This combination of past and present draws a powerful picture of Indigenous knowledge, inclusiveness, and sharing of First Nations cultures that leaves the visitor with a notion of the cultural and social strengths and the vulnerability of Indigenous people and women in particular (Gunaratnam 2013). The exhibition starts with a life-size diorama of a pre-contact Haudenosaunee village scene.¹⁴ In it, two women are depicted in the foreground; one woman (an actual figure) is shown sitting and talking to a boy (also a figure), the other (a painting) is leaving the place. On the painting in the background, four boys are playing lacrosse, an Iroquois man seems to be coming home from a hunt, carrying a bow and a dead animal and looking at the clouds, and two women are processing corn. Women are in the majority and seem to be running the place. The caption explains:

Life in the Village: You have just entered a palisaded village of Neutral-Iroquoians during the Woodland Period just before the arrival of the Europeans. It is a settled village life with a clear division of labour: women remain in the village caring for the children, raising corn, beans, squash and sunflowers, making clothing and pottery; men prepare the fields and journey away from the villages to hunt and fish, or perhaps engage in war. The village and its adjacent field of crops are the concern of the women while men's interests are beyond the boundaries of the clearing.

12 Launched in 2013, the "Save the Evidence" Campaign seeks to raise funds for repairs and renovations to turn the former Mohawk Institute into a space for learning and reconciliation and to ensure that the physical evidence of the dark history of Residential Schools in Canada is not forgotten.

13 The WCC is run by three support or member communities, the Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte, Six Nations of the Grand River, and the Wahta Mohawks, who serve on the board of the Centre (WCC, About the Centre 2019).

14 The Woodland Cultural Centre did not grant permission to print a photo of the diorama.

As a result, by the time the first Europeans set foot on the area, women had a primary voice in all matters concerning the welfare of the village, although public business and dealing with other Nations remained the responsibility of the men. (Plate at the WCC, 2017)

In this text, the different roles of women in pre-contact times as nurturers and family-providers are explained, and visitors get a sense of women's importance and significance. Throughout the labyrinth of galleries, there are also many artefacts displayed that are used or made by women such as baskets, blankets, and clothing, as texts point out.

In the Woodland Cultural Centre, Indigenous women are visible and audible. Their ideas and voices are not only seen and heard throughout the galleries, they also narrate their own stories. Mohawk women are involved in the management of the centre, and thus in the storytelling. Working at the cash register, as cultural interpreters and museum educators, and teaching arts and crafts workshops, they represent modern Indigenous world views and interpret their heritage and culture.¹⁵ Executive director Paula Whitlow and Education Program Coordinator Lorrie Gallant, both Mohawk, keep a keen eye on the accuracy of the displays and the interpretations. As the WCC serves as "an emblem of the gulf between Indigenous communities and mainstream Canada" (Whyte 2017), the representation of Indigenous women and their stories are of great importance to all visitors.

4.3. Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump

At Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump (HSIBJ), located in Southern Alberta, by contrast, Blackfoot women are rarely visible. The site is one of the oldest, largest and best preserved buffalo jumps in North America and was designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1981.¹⁶ First explored in 1938 by members of the American Museum of Natural History, since the 1950s, HSIBJ has been the object of systematic excavations which have considerably enriched the knowledge of prehistoric arms and tools and transformed current thinking on the use of game as food and in clothing and lodging. In 1987, a multi-million-dollar Interpretive Centre opened. It depicts and interprets the ecology, mythology, lifestyle, and technology of the Blackfoot within the context of archaeological evidence. Its galleries were planned by non-Indigenous archeologists with little Blackfoot input (Brink 2008; Susemihl 2019).

15 I visited the Woodland Cultural Centre in 2010, 2011, and 2017. In 2017, I was able to participate in a tour through the centre, a screening of the film "Mohawk Institute Virtual Tour" (55 min) with a subsequent discussion, and a beading workshop with cultural interpreter Kaley Reuben (Mohawk/Cree), who talked with our group about her experiences with visitors and residential school survivors.

16 As part of a larger study, I visited the site and conducted interviews at HSIBJ in 2011 and 2012.

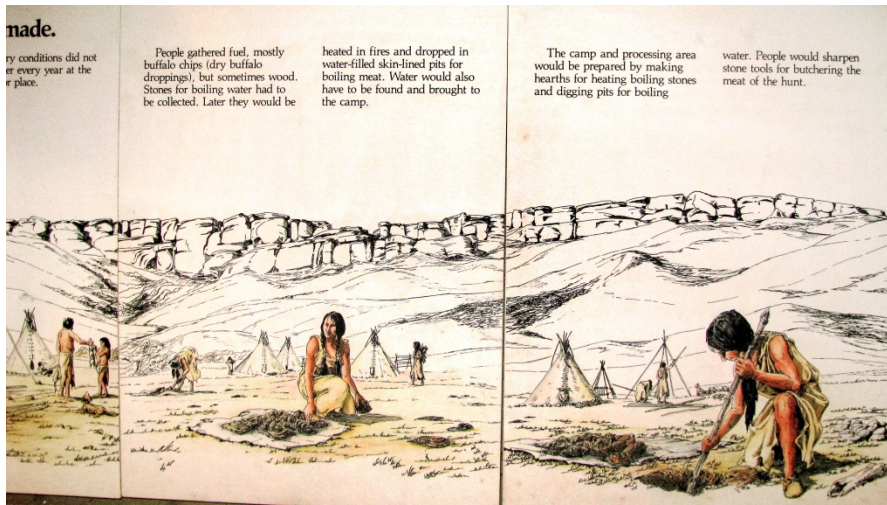


Figure 3: Mural of a Blackfoot camp at the Interpretive Centre at Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump, Fort Macleod, Alberta. (Photo by Susemihl 2012.) Printed with permission of Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump.

At HSIBJ, only few representations of Blackfoot women can be found throughout the exhibitions. One mural depicts a village scene at the foot of the jump. Women are shown in a crouching position, working at a fire pit or scraping hides. In the background, small and almost unnoticed, they are carrying fire wood and setting up tipi poles. There appear to be very few women in the village; indeed, the village looks deserted. Women are busy, but seem to be without much power, considering their positions and size, and almost lost within the landscape. Moreover, the women are depicted as wearing inaccurate clothing, as Piikani guide Stan Knowlton explained: “Women would never have worn clothes exposing their shoulders; that would not have been considered appropriate” (interview with Stan Knowlton 2011). The mural is thus not an accurate self-image, but the imagination of a white artist. The women appear Pocahontas-like, tanned and slender, with beautiful black hair and exposed cleavage. The text accompanying these inauthentic representations of Blackfoot women reads:

People gathered fuel, mostly buffalo chips (dry buffalo droppings), but sometimes wood. Stones for boiling water had to be collected. Later they would be heated in fires and dropped in water-filled skin-lined pits for boiling meat. Water would also have to be found and brought to the camp. The camp and processing area would be prepared by making hearths for heating boiling stones and digging pits for boiling water. People would sharpen stone tools for butchering the meat of the hunt. (Exhibit HSIBJ, 2012)

The text is as problematic as the visual image. Women are not mentioned, only “people,” although the tasks described would typically be performed by women. There are also no explanations of the roles of Blackfoot women or their positioning within the community. Considering that HSIBJ is a major tourist attraction with more than 50,000 visitors annually, there is a clear message communicated: Blackfoot women did not seem to play a major role in the past.

The site of HSIBJ is owned, controlled, and managed by the Government of Alberta with minimal Indigenous involvement in the executive decision making process. Holding the majority of jobs at the centre, including those as site interpreters, however, the Blackfoot play a key role in the operation of the site, although there are few Blackfoot women employed there. While some work at the cash register and in the gift shop and others put on traditional dance shows for tourists once a week, they rarely work as guides. There are several reasons for this: The wages are fairly low, it is expensive to travel to the site, as the two Blackfoot reserves (Piikani and Kainai) are both about 50 kilometres away, and women often have to find child care when working at HSIBJ. Moreover, engagement with a government-run site can be a double-edged sword for Indigenous community members. Sometimes, their reputations are in jeopardy through their engagement, and Blackfoot people have been credited, but also criticized and ostracised for working at and collaborating with a government-run site (personal interviews at HSIBJ, 2011; Onciul 2015). Indigenous involvement with a museum is thus not always as empowering as museums would like it to appear. Cultural anthropologist Nancy Mithlo critiques:

The policy of inclusion, anticipated by both Natives and non-Natives as *the* solution to representational divides places an undue and often unworkable burden upon Native museum professionals to ‘bridge’ broad conceptual gaps. Museums are self-perpetuating institutions that generally maintain authority, despite efforts to ‘give Natives a voice.’ (Mithlo 2004, 746, emphasis original)

At HSIBJ the “gap” is further widened as the exhibitions represent Blackfoot people generally as people of the past, thus reinforcing existing stereotypes (Sussemihl, 2019). Throughout the galleries Indigenous women are not given a voice; they are silenced and almost invisible.

4.4. *Nitsitapiisinni: Our Way of Life* at the Glenbow Museum

The permanent exhibition *Nitsitapiisinni: Our Way of Life* at the Glenbow Museum¹⁷ in Calgary, as the fourth site to be discussed in this study, shows that Blackfoot women can be represented as strong and powerful. Here, the different roles of women in traditional Blackfoot society are explained and recognized and in doing

17 I visited the exhibition at the Glenbow Museum in Calgary in August 2018.

so they have been given a voice. Located in downtown Calgary and opened in 2001, Glenbow serves as an example of “how sharing power and repatriating cultural material can enhance Indigenous community representation and museum community relations” (Onciul 2015, 106). Acknowledging the site of the public museum on Treaty Seven territory, visitors may journey through the Blackfoot Gallery and uncover the traditions, values, and history of the people who have lived on the Northern Plains for thousands of years. In this exhibition, the Blackfoot share their story in their own words, with artefacts and interactive displays that guide visitors through Nitsitapii history into the present. Over a four-year period, a team of Glenbow staff and the Blackfoot community worked together to develop the exhibition. Of the thirty-two members of the team, seventeen were from the Blackfoot community, five of them women. All of them are individually acknowledged with a photo, framed and displayed in the museum gallery.

Throughout the exhibition, visitors encounter many representations and depictions of Blackfoot women – as mannequins in a tipi, exhibited as sitting next to the men; on historical photographs, their attire of beaded and decorated clothes described in detail; or in stories or anecdotes, narrated by women, that can be listened to over earphones or viewed on screen. In a diorama, a woman is sitting on the ground as part of an enlarged photograph in the background of the display. She is tanning hides, as the accompanying text explains, which “was a very skilled task and one that brought esteem to women who were talented at it” (Panel, Glenbow 2019). While her activity is given credit, another panel provides further explanations on the tasks of Blackfoot women:

Our women's roles were focussed on the camp. They were the foundation of the family; nurturing the children. Women always brought food to those who had none. Visitors to our camps were entitled to a meal, a bed and rest. They also cared for our Sacred Bundles, which are regarded as living beings. Our women's skill at making dry meat and *moki-maani* (pemmican), at tanning hides, and sewing clothes and tipi covers kept us fed, clothed, and sheltered. Many women were herbal healers, as well, caring for the wellness of our people. (Exhibit *Nitsitapiisinni: Our Way of Life*, Glenbow Museum, 2018)

By way of texts and visual images, visitors learn about the diverse and vital roles that Blackfoot women played throughout history. In Blackfoot society, men and women had different, yet complementary roles and had “great respect for each other and for the differences in their roles,” as “they knew and understood how much they needed each other to survive” (The Blackfoot Gallery Committee 2013, 32). While women's roles focused on nurturing the family, they also were well-respected healers and leaders of community life.



Figure 4: Diorama at the the permanent exhibition *Nitsitapiisinni: Our Way of Life* at the Glenbow Museum in Calgary (Photo by Susemihl 2018). Printed with permission of the Glenbow Museum, Calgary, Alberta.

The use of different media throughout the gallery makes it especially interesting and easy for visitors to understand women's lifestyles. Visitors also encounter Blackfoot women through storytelling. The Blackfoot and the museum staff have produced videos to help people understand how the Blackfoot learn through stories, and to help preserve their language and oral traditions. In a circular room, resembling the space of a tipi, visitors can choose from a number of films. In one film, Rosie Day Rider and Louise Crop Eared Wolf tell the "Story of the Wolf Trail" in Blackfoot and English, and visitors are invited to listen.

At this exhibition, people have the opportunity to listen to Elders' pre-recorded stories in Blackfoot or English via phones placed around the gallery and on films, in addition to Blackfoot guides providing tours of the exhibit in both Blackfoot and English. Even though represented in smaller numbers than men, Blackfoot women are thus visible and audible throughout the exhibition – visitors can hear their voices and see their faces, both in the past and in the present. Despite the primary audience being non-Blackfoot, the exhibition team made a conscious decision "to use first person narrative and Blackfoot terms to emphasise to visitors that the exhibit comes from a Blackfoot perspective" (Onciul 2015, 129), and community voices can be heard throughout the exhibition through different audio-visual presentations.

5. Discussion of the Four Case Studies

Indigenous women's (self-)representation at the four sites is complex, and the exhibitions are layered with meaning and seek to simultaneously achieve multiple goals. At a first glance, Indigenous women's representations on the paintings and dioramas may appear to be rather similar in content and proposition. Women are shown pursuing their work chores such as tending a fire, preparing a meal, caring for children, or tanning hides. When considering further depictions of and information on women throughout the galleries and when compared to representations of men, however, the differences between the various representations and the messages become obvious. At two sites (CLCA, HSIBJ), Indigenous women, whether in the past or present, are rarely visible, and visitors are left with little information on Indigenous women's roles and little connection to contemporary Indigenous women's lives. Besides, at these two sites, men's stories seem to be privileged as there is more information on men. In the displays at the two sites men are depicted in an upright position next to the women who are sitting or crouching, thus appearing smaller and less important. At the other two sites (WCC, Glenbow), the dioramas focus on women in both the visual representations and the accompanying texts, which explain their roles within traditional society. Additionally, visitors learn more about women's traditional roles and responsibilities in different displays and texts throughout the galleries and encounter Indigenous women today, through photographs and texts or in person (e.g. as guides).

Women's representation thus depends on the discourses and the storytelling at the sites. Two of the sites investigated – CLCA and HSIBJ – tell a complex story of history, science (i.e. archaeology), and environment within the Authorized Heritage Discourse (Smith 2006), stressing the expert knowledge of archeologists and historians. Both sites are stimulating introductions to traditional Indigenous cultures and lifestyles; yet, the exhibitions present Iroquois and Blackfoot history and culture from an archaeological perspective and generally remain within the past (Peers and Brown 2003). At HSIBJ, interpretation intends to describe life at the camp and processing site within an archaeological framework (Susemihl 2013, 2019) and the UNESCO designation of HSIBJ is predominantly based on archaeological findings; cultural aspects were only included in 1987 when the centre opened. Archaeology, however, is a Western concept, containing both a record of the past and the interpretations and values that people apply to that record today. Many Indigenous people do not view archaeological artefacts or sites as things of the past, though, but as active elements of their contemporary world. These objects, places, and stories are valued as much for their heritage values as for "being repositories of beings and powers of importance within their worldview" (Nicholas 2006, 218). Both the Iroquoian village at CLCA and HSIBJ might thus satisfy the expectations of tourists who are looking for "people of the past," but the sites leave them without a connection to contemporary Indigenous women's cultures and challenges.

Visitor's perception of the relations of social identities such as gender and ethnicity are shaped by visibility and voice. All four sites strive to tell the story of Indigenous people to interested visitors, who can learn about history and culture at the sites, take this knowledge home, and pass it on. Since, as Bird (2003) and Brady (2009) emphasise, people tend to recreate what they know and evaluate new situations by using frames of references based on existing knowledge, visitors read exhibits based on past experiences or assumptions. This behaviour holds the danger that people not only undervalue Indigenous women's roles in history, but also place Indigenous women (and men) in the past. Functioning as "a public face, for non-Indigenous audiences" (Lawlor 2006, 5), the exhibitions thus either confirm or challenge existing views and stereotypes. Hence, women's (self-)representations have "to negotiate with colonial constructs that remain in the public imagination about who 'Others' are" (Onciul 2015, 63), and the ability for women's voices to be heard within the museum is "limited by the audience's ability to understand what is said" (ibid.). Women's voices are not always heard, however. At the Glenbow Museum, Krmpotich and Anderson, for example, found that "visitors rarely recognized the extent of the collaboration, and thus rarely equated *Nitsitapiisinni* with concepts of self-representation or self-determination" (2005, 377). Even within community settings, self-representation must deal with colonial stereotypes, instilled through assimilation politics and popular culture that still have an impact on identity constructions. Visitors from the Indigenous community may relate with the narratives of their culture through images and language, and Indigenous (self-)representation thus needs to produce exhibits that speak to different audiences.

Crucially, representation seems to be determined by Indigenous women's degree of engagement with the site, the degree to which they have been allowed to articulate their own perspectives, challenge misinformation, and tell their own stories. Women are engaging in a conversation with the public through the creation of exhibits and, as Onciul puts it, their voice "is both framed through the cultural form of the exhibit and mediated by the need to communicate cross-culturally" (2015, 195). At the four sites, different ownership and management structures can be found. While the WCC is owned and managed by the Indigenous community, the other three sites are owned and managed by non-Indigenous organizations. This has consequences for the curation and representation of Indigenous women, as the owner determines how the processes of curation and operation are organized. At the two sites of WCC and Glenbow, women have been engaged in the curation, management, and organization, working as guides or administrators, and they are involved in the storytelling and interpretation of the sites. Here, Indigenous women are allowed, required, and empowered to tell their own stories; they are involved in shaping visitors' perceptions of Indigenous women in modern Canadian society.

Representation matters, because it influences how people interact with each other. Presenting Indigenous women as less able and in control has an impact on visitor's perceptions and on women's self-perception. For a long time, storytelling at

museums and heritage sites was characterized by streamlined and simplified, and even 'whitewashed' representation of Indigenous women, and as part of the AHD their marginalized identities were muted within the museum space. Even today, women are still made visible or invisible by the sites' policies and structures. Indigenous women, though, have a lot to gain or lose in the way their heritage is defined, understood, managed, and controlled, because the representation and interpretation of their heritage is significant for their own identity constructions. Heritage can be seen as "a process in which meaning and identity are continually constructed and negotiated anew as political and cultural circumstances dictate" (Smith 2006, 297). It thus holds the power "to represent and validate a sense of place, memory and identity" (ibid.). As a process of remembering, heritage also helps to support "the ways in which individuals and groups make sense of their experiences in the present" (Smith 2006, 276) and thus strengthen identity. The ability to control this heritage process is, as Smith argues, "an integral element of the heritage process itself":

Without control over this process, or a sense of active agency in it, individuals and communities become subjected to received notions and ideas about who they are or should be – control is vital if the heritage process and the identities it constructs are to have real personal and cultural meaning for those associated or engaged with particular heritage places. (Smith 2006, 297)

Control over the heritage process not only means exercising power over identity constructions, but it also has political implications, as the power to legitimize (or delegitimize) identity claims may be important in negotiations over access to economic and other resources. In this process, both authorized or subaltern heritage discourses "grant or withhold power to other conceptualizations of identity and social and cultural experiences," as Smith explains: "These discourses compete with each other for authority and legitimacy, so that the meanings about the past and present they represent are validated, and this in turn will help to validate present social and cultural experiences" (Smith 2006, 297-298). Depending on the defining discourses, the identity that is created may revolve around a sense of gender, ethnicity, and other collective experiences of Indigenous women.

Cultural concepts such as gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status play an important part in women's involvement in museums and heritage sites. These concepts, however, intersect with community structures. Tribal communities are not void of patriarchy. In fact, Indigenous women experience unique challenges when it comes to patriarchy as there are often cultural or traditional beliefs that surround the dynamics between men and women, and asserting power becomes a sensitive

issue for women (Begay 2018).¹⁸ Calling for the deconstruction of patriarchy and “toxic masculinity” in communities and beyond, Diné filmmaker Jade Begay states that “patriarchy and colonization are no longer vague, hidden structures,” but “exposed and vulnerable” (ibid.). Indigenous women, therefore, “need to stretch” their “imaginations to envision a world where the systems are completely dismantled because [...] these systems do not work and are oppressive by design” (ibid.).

6. Conclusion

The four sites discussed in this paper fall within traditional First Nations territory and have engaged in living and dynamic relationships with non-Indigenous communities and museums to help shape the representation of First Nations and the management of their cultural material and history. As powerful places of (self-) representation they play an important role in the healing processes of Indigenous communities. They give inspirations, facilitate the process of reconciliation, and are important sources of empowerment and capacity building for Indigenous peoples (Susemihl 2013, 2019).

Applying an intersectional approach to the critical study of museum exhibitions has revealed that because of their gender and ethnicity Indigenous women at two sites have been exoticized or presented as passive or absent from history. Other aspects such as class or socioeconomic status have not been taken into consideration, but they play a role when it comes to the engagement of Indigenous women with museums and heritage sites. Indigenous women with a higher education, for example, have a higher chance of getting hired as guides or being involved with the curation. The four sites I have examined confirm the need to maintain different perspectives of the use of Indigenous heritage, which is useful as a post-colonial trope, making visible the specific cultural gaze of museums and heritage institutions and processes. Since “heritage construction and protection processes have a real and distinct impact upon the lives of people” (Ween 2012, 257), certain aspects of the course of these processes such as opportunities of co-management, the continuation of cultural practices, and opportunities for economic development are of great significance for Indigenous women.

This study has also shown that while gender studies constitute a broad and dynamic interdisciplinary research field, the influence of gender issues within the field of heritage studies are still understudied. Questions concerning how gender and heritage are intertwined and have been created and transformed in the past and present, and what consequences this has, need to be emphasized. Not only historical connections between heritage and gender need to be focussed on, but also visual representations and heritage discourses. Consequently, gender constructions

18 At some heritage sites such as at Taos Pueblo, New Mexico, USA, Indigenous women have acquired leading positions in the site management due to their formal education, but are only marginally involved in tribal politics (interview with Ilona Spruce, Tourism Director at Taos Pueblo, 2017).

within the heritage field and their implications for cultural heritage management and community engagement need to be analyzed.

Relationships between museums and Indigenous communities tend to be sensitive as “they are built upon personal relationships between individuals which are subject to change” (Onciul 2015, 242). The observations in this study indicate that the relations between museums and heritage sites and communities can be further improved. At every site, Indigenous involvement is distinctive, yet changes to the museological approaches to engagement, curation, and representation of Indigenous women would make relations easier. Indigenous people and women in particular must be actively involved in the development of exhibitions, because, as this paper has shown and as Battiste and Henderson (2000) correctly note, “their participation will develop new sensitivities to what is sacred, to what is capable of being shared, and to what is fair compensation for the sharing of information among diverse peoples” (292).

Heritage sites and museums are meant to be spaces of creativity, conversation, and confidence, bringing together different voices, knowledge, perspectives, and methodologies to educate, entertain, and offer unique experiences. If the practices of exhibiting and representing Indigenous women change, if they draw a more diverse and inclusive picture free from colonial stereotyping, we might be able to see more strong and independent Indigenous women at heritage sites and museums in the future – women such as the one painted by Mohawk artist Amanda Flynn, women that help to strengthen the rights and visibility of Indigenous women in Canada. The use and control of heritage and the cultural, social, and political work that heritage does is important for Indigenous women. It is part of the “urgent decolonizing project of Indigenous feminism today,” in which, as Maori scholar Makere Stewart-Harawira argues, “Indigenous women warriors [...] re-weave the fabric of being in the world into a new spiritually-grounded and feminine-oriented political framework” (Stewart-Harawira 2007). In this process, intersectional approaches to representations in the heritage field can be vital to the reshaping of the future of Indigenous museology and the use of heritage for Indigenous communities.

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