British Legacy in Canadian Military Museums: Shallow Symbolism and a Comfortable 'In Between' Nationhood

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Abstract

This article examines how military museums in Canada represent Britishness. As a former British colony, Canadian government agencies have long emulated British institutions. Britishness, as well as the British Royal Family, has played a central role in Canadian culture throughout the first half of the twentieth century, including in the military. We examine how military museums depict the relationship between Britain and Canada and the effect of representations of the former Queen Elizabeth II on these museum displays. Our analysis examines the way Canadian identity has been constituted vis-à-vis Britain's over time and how this process of forging nationalism plays out in the military context. We argue that these museums depict a militaristic nationalism which is located in an 'in-between' space of the nation, in the sense that the representations in these museums align themselves neither with old Britain and its colonial consciousness, nor with new Canada and the contemporary political tension between settler and Indigenous groups. Instead, the museums depict Canada as a fraught member of the British Commonwealth, neither accountable to the Crown nor to the 'othered' groups within its borders. This analysis raises questions about the function of this vision of nationalism depicted in military museums and the symbolic purpose of the British-Canadian relationship portrayed in these spaces.

Keywords: military museums; Britishness; nationalism; Canadian identity; curation

Introduction

In examining exhibitions at military museums throughout Western Canada, spanning from Manitoba to British Columbia, we have found that representations of British identity advance an in-flux and ambiguous narrative about the Canadian military's relationship to the British Empire and Great Britain in general. Military museums in Canada are often located in active armouries – many are curated by veterans and have a strong commemorative focus while some sustain active military status with programs that provide services like weapon check-out by affiliates of corresponding regiments (e.g. Seaforth Highlanders of Canada Regimental Museum). Though there is no federal or central military or heritage agency that dictates how regimental histories should be represented, most of the museums we examined followed a consistent organization beginning with WWI and/or regimental inception (whichever came first) and followed by a chronological narrative of regimental involvement in subsequent wars including WWII, the Balkans conflict, Korean War, Cold War, the war in Afghanistan, and UN 'peace-keeping' missions. The Canadian military's relationship to its British ancestry and indebtedness to the projects of the British Empire is explicit and implied throughout these chronological narratives, resonating through the museum curators' cursory, and often inconsistent, narrative choices around Canada's relative involvement in/separation from British military forces, as well as through persistent, symbolic invocations such as images and stories featuring Queen Elizabeth. The museums in our study advanced a connection to the British monarchy through repeated displays of regimental insignia suggesting British heritage, displays (usually one per museum) honouring Queen Elizabeth II and/or the Royal Family, and placards (usually pertaining to WWI or the inception of the regiment) that navigate

Museum & Society, March 2026. 24(1) 163-181 © 2026, Haley Pauls and Kevin Walby. ISSN 1479-8360

Canadian military indebtedness (or distinction from) the British military. The shallowness of these elements, coupled with the tendency of the museums to be commemorative and artefact-focused while also housing excess content (making it difficult for visitors to discern specific narratives), relegates the British-Canadian relationship in these spaces to mere symbolic status, at best.

The notion that Canada's relationship to the Crown has devolved into a symbolic state has been theorized extensively. However, the function of this symbolism in the Canadian cultural industries is a subject that remains ripe for inquiry. Sarah Carter (2006) discusses the relationship between Britishness, Canadian-ness and whiteness as they pertained to a petition for British women's acquisition of property rights in the 'homesteads for women" movement that began in Canada in 1913. She writes that in the Canadian lexicon, '"English" or "English-speaking", "British", "Canadian" or "pioneer" were used instead of "white" to mark the distinction from the "foreigner" or the "stranger"' (Carter 2006: 47). Britishness in Canada has been invoked as part of the nation's formation as a mode of justifying the 'common sense' (Rifkin 2013) narrative of Canada's natural whiteness, or of whiteness/Britishness as native (Smith 2016) to Canada. Canadian identity was formulated as a white identity, not because of any exclusive or assimilationist policies (though these certainly did, and do, exist), but because it was founded by the British. This logic pervades in many different forms. In Canadian military museums, we show, the mobilization of British imagery and narratives, though relegated to the level of lip service and symbolic associations, continues to forward Canada's self-image as a naturally white nation. But what to make of the fact that these associations and symbols are ambiguously placed and often lack depth? Canadian regiments and their respective curators seem to hold onto the historical contributions of the British to Canada's creation while avoiding a deeper examination of this colonial history, invoking Britishness as a way to understand Canadian military nationalism while by-passing histories of Indigenous genocide and erasure. Research has shown that curatorial interpretations of representational strategies used to explore British identity in military museums in Great Britain have pointed to 'collective amnesia through the promotion of a one-sided, celebratory and uncritical story of British imperialism and colonialism' (Danilova and Purnell 2020: 294). Drawing on research conducted at Scottish military museums, Nataliya Danilova and Kandida Purnell (2020: 294) observed that certain representational trends, in particular portrayals of the Scottish Highland soldier as a sacrificial, humanized figure, obscure the force of the British colonial project and erase its impact on local populations. Along similar lines, we argue that rather than focusing on any tangible projects of the British Empire in Canada, such as their colonial project and subjugation of Indigenous people, the museums in our study present flimsy, symbolically-inclined images and narratives about Britishness to suggest a natural, chronological national development from white Britain to white Canada, avoiding a deeper engagement with the British Empire's legacy in Canada.

Following the period when nations that were formerly part of the British Empire gained independence and joined the Commonwealth, the nature and role of British identity has become more contested across the globe. In Canada, a country that has been independent since 1931, the consistent commitment to British imagery in heritage spaces warrants further examination, especially considering the declining formal significance of the British monarchy within Canadian governmental systems. Critical for our military museum inquiry, then, is not only an understanding of Britishness as a heterogenous force united by imperialism, but of Britishness as a pervasive system of symbols that is indebted to this history of unification by othering.

Examining museum displays in Canada, we show that Britishness is invoked as an entity that Canada is both intertwined with and indebted to, and also in the perpetual process of moving away from. If Canadian military museums were to forward a definite, fixed Canadian identity within the terms of the British Empire in their displays, they would be required to confront with the destructive colonization of the Americas. Conversely, if they were to eliminate the potency of Britishness in these spaces, they would likely need to grapple with this uncomfortable history and perhaps consider examining more equitable engagements with Indigenous governmental systems. However, these museums, we show, decline to advance a meaningful understanding of Canada's present relationship with Britain

while also neglecting to treat Canada's persistent occupation of Indigenous territories. This trend, we propose, is reflective of the Canadian military psyche's desire to advance Canadian identity as liminal by nature. These museums do not meaningfully address Britain's imperial consciousness or Canada's formulation as a settler-colonial nation and instead forward a symbolic and avoidant narrative of Canada as a fraught and questionably involved member of the British Commonwealth, accountable neither fully to the Crown nor the 'othered' groups within its borders. The symbolic and superficial treatment of Britishness in the Canadian military museums we studied operates to naturalize Canadian sovereignty modeled on the British colonial/imperial model, distracting from pertinent contemporary questions about the legitimacy of Canada's dominion.

Theoretical Framework

In military museums, war is often depicted in ways that focus on individualized stories rather than the political economy and power relations behind the battles (Haymond 2015: 463; see also Furneaux and Prichard 2015). Stock tropes such as cold, deprivation, lice, trenches, mud, heroism, and bravery are common. Military museums and heritage spaces tend to adopt limited angles on the topics they are representing despite the vastness of the content that could be explored in these sites. For this reason, military museums tend not to be reliable venues for addressing difficult histories (Haymond 2015: 466). James Scott (2015: 490) likewise argues that curators are often impelled to sanitize objects and artefacts of their complex socio-political histories, noting that honest, realistic representations are sometimes difficult to find in military museums since these can be displeasing to visitors. Scott examines this process of curatorial sanitization, arguing that it is achieved by distancing objects from crucial contexts. Objects like guns and grenades are often dislocated from their violent functions (Scott 2015: 493; see also Ott et al. 2011) in order to safely present them as objects of museological interest. Military museums often appear to be immune from, or show disdain for, the legitimation crisis or crisis of representation that other museums must deal with directly (Jenkins 2008: 112), and this may be because many of the visitors of military museums tend to be military personnel or their families. Often these museums exist not only to document history but to boost the spirit of a particular unit or division (Tythacott 2015), and displays are curated to achieve this effect.

Military museums are also places where imperial allegiances and colonial power relations are depicted. The role of colonial outposts and nations in relation to the colonial homeland are depicted in ways that deserve scholarly analysis. Some museums continue to adopt clear colonial messaging that links homeland and hinterland using tropes from the nineteenth century. Elizabeth Rankin (2006: 66) calls this 'nationalizing the dead in the name of empire' and it can take the form of narratives or even architectural replicas. Yet other museums may adopt an ambivalent attitude (Rankin 2006: 59) toward a colonial homeland or empire – there can be more nuance found in some museums as nations and their related heritage spaces seek independence. As David Clarke (2023: 81) puts it, these representations are often more complex than simple identification with a colonial homeland or imagined national community.

To understand how Canadian nationalism (and specifically, the Canadian military imaginary presented within cultural institutions) positions itself in relation to Britishness, a working definition of Britishness must first be established. Though on the surface it might appear self-explanatory, with further investigation it becomes clear that what is meant by 'British' is complex, multifaceted, and contested. Jessica Jacobson (1997: 184) discusses how though some semblance of a British identity certainly did emerge across Wales, Scotland and England over the course of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries 'for the Scots and Welsh there remains to this day a clear distinction between a (perhaps negotiable) political identification with Britain and an ethnic or national identification with Scotland or Wales'. It is important to recognize that many scholars have bracketed Ireland off in their studies of Britishness, noting Ireland's unique relationship to the UK, the political turmoil in Europe and limited response to the Protestant Reformation. Linda Colley (1992: 314) notes that 'Ireland, as a whole, was only part of the Union between 1800 and 1920', and though she is wary of completely disregarding Ireland's political, cultural, and economic links to Great Britain, it is undeniable that 'the bulk of its population was never swept into a British identity to the

degree that proved possible among the Welsh, the Scots and the English' (Colley 1992: 314) and that to a large extent Ireland continues to be viewed as an alien 'other' by these three nations. Though the Welsh and the Scots are sometimes lumped in with the English in historical (and contemporary) conversations about Ireland, Colley notes that Wales and Scotland have also seen heightened nationalist movements since the 1960s and decline in Tory support post-Thatcherism. She writes: 'the current political situation has encouraged some English scholars to view the Welsh and the Scots as the "other" in a more deliberate fashion' (Colley 1992: 313).

It seems, then, that one of the essential qualifiers of Britishness is the existence of an internal hierarchy, and the often contentious religious and political positioning of Wales, Scotland, and Ireland in relation to England. England, of course, as Jacobson writes, has not historically struggled in its ethnic alignment with Britishness. On the contrary, Englishness and Britishness have grown into a state of symmetry in what John Osmond (1988: 86) has described as 'a fused identity that is best described as Anglo-British'. Though England is the central superpower in the history of the British Empire, English identity is now suffering more acutely than Welsh or Scottish identity in the wake of globalization and transnationalism. Jacobson (1997: 186) notes how globalization induces a reactive response in which groups attempt to particularize, so as to remain distinct and in the face of an advancing 'global culture'. Irish, Welsh, and Scottish national efforts have been somewhat successful in shoring up ethnic and cultural borders within the context of a threatening 'global culture'. However, England has notably retreated from the spotlight; its essence is increasingly nebulous. What constitutes 'English culture' is precarious at best. Robert Young (2008: 232) writes that though there are a few 'improbable forms of English nationalism (dancing, pageants)', these were 'invented at home by folk enthusiasts'. Theorists have begun to discuss the '"curious emptiness of Englishness", its lack of a "cultural essence" and the difficulty people have in filling it with any "substantive content"' (Kumar 2010: 470).

Scholars describe this 'substanceless' phenomenon as a result of England's central role in British imperialism (Taylor 1991). For one, there is now an element of shame associated with identifying as 'English' and many non-white people born in England find that definitions of both Englishness and Britishness exclude them from membership within the nation (Jacobson 1997: 184). Evidentially, England's central role in British imperialism necessitated its development as a nation that to some extent lacks 'internal cultural characteristics attached to a specific place' (Young 2008: 232-3) and instead imposes 'a transportable set of values which could be transplanted, translated, and recreated anywhere on the globe, embodying the institutions and social values of Anglo-Saxon culture' (Young 2008: 232-3). Britishness today remains tied to the memory of imperialism and, in particular, clashes with 'othered' populations.

National identity is often formed around the notion of a shared set of qualities that are defined by what a nation is not (Colley 1992: 311). Though British identity is certainly defined by in-fighting and cultural tension between the English, Welsh, Scottish, and Irish, it notably became a distinct and definable entity when it became an imperial force – members of all of these communities united in their attempt to self-define against foreign communities and empires that they sought to subdue. Britishness, in short, came into being as an imperial force, as an agent of othering. Understanding representations of Britishness in Canada, then, critically requires asking who *the other* is in Canadian contexts, and how this relates to the essential quality of othering and pacification that we have identified within imperial Britishness. As a settler colonial nation, Canada's process of othering is complex – it is both internally and externally directed. For one, it is important to first acknowledge that the lands that are now called Canada have been home to Indigenous (First Nations, Metis, and Inuit) groups for millennia, and that the history of the British and French arrival on North American shores involved a destructive form of nationalism that attempted to erase the land claims of these original groups. Heather Jane Smith (2016) writes of a key element of Western nationalism that aids in this erasure: 'racist nativism', the effective cooption of the status of 'native' by whites in Western democracies. Research has shown that racist nativism is driven by defensive nationalism and arises particularly in times of national crisis such as terrorist attacks (Lippard 2011: 573). Though this mindset is often outwardly directed (towards immigrant groups) it is also implicitly inwardly targeted (towards Indigenous groups) justifying what has been called

'settler common sense' (Rifkin 2013: 323) – a process by which non-Native possession of Indigenous lands comes to be lived as a given. In Western nationalisms, though some homage tends to be paid to Indigenous groups (particularly in cultural institutions), whites have tried to claim the category of 'native' through years of eliminatory practices. Patrick Wolfe (2006: 388) writes: 'Indigenous people obstructed settlers' access to the land, so their increase was counterproductive', leading to a series of practices from forced assimilation, to miscegenation, to blood quantum rules, that attempted to make Indigenous people 'less native' and co-opt their position as original stewards of the land.

The 'old stock' British in Canada have a specific relationship to this concept of racist nativism. In the nineteenth century, the British leveraged their power to 'ensure that a sense of Britishness, combined with whiteness, became equated with Canadianness' (Carter 2006: 44; see Smith 2016). Initially, this association was leveraged to justify the dispossession of Indigenous people – British whiteness became native to Canada and Indigenous people were 'othered' as backward and foreign in their own lands. Later, this racial hierarchy was projected amongst the whites, marking groups such as Eastern European immigrants as 'other'. This hierarchy continues to have a hand in the way non-white immigrants in the present day are excluded from what is seen as the 'natural' national identity (i.e. British and white in origin), and reflexive association with whiteness against otherness continues to shape contemporary Canadian identity as well.

Britishness, perhaps, requires more attention in contemporary Canadian heritage spaces (and other spaces in the Commonwealth, for that matter) than it is often given. Though references can appear symbolic, superfluous – leftover arbiters of old, worn-out histories – they carry the weight of centuries of unification through othering: unification specifically reserved for members of a white, Canadian elite. We might ask why it is so easy for curators to fall back on repeated British symbolism, and how, by way of this gesturing, contemporary issues that might challenge the domination of this white-British-native national image are quietly omitted. Britishness, formally identified by its own pacification of the 'other' and as a distinctively empty quality, is the perfect cultural placeholder, allowing Canadian military heritage spaces to divert from their own relationship to colonialism.

Research Design

Our approach to museum research understands museums and heritage sites as key vehicles for communicating dominant discourses about the past and present. We are attuned to the objects and material culture on display in these sites (Ott et al. 2011; Dickinson et al. 2005; see also Clarke 2023) and we understand these material dimensions of museums as communicating rhetorical and metaphorical ideas to audiences. We use multiple methods to examine this object-rhetoric nexus throughout museum sites. We have conducted field research at 21 military museums in Western Canada (see Table 1).

MUSEUM	LOCATION
MANITOBA	
26th Field Artillery 12th Manitoba Dragoons Military Museum	Brandon
Air Force Heritage Park and Museum	Winnipeg
Fort Garry Horse Museum	Winnipeg
Naval Museum of Manitoba	Winnipeg
Royal Canadian Artillery Museum	Shilo
The Royal Winnipeg Rifles Regimental Museum	Winnipeg
Legion House Museum	Winnipeg
SASKATCHEWAN	
Saskatchewan Military Museum	Regina
Saskatoon Museum of Military Artifacts	Saskatoon

ALBERTA	
The Military Museums (7 different sites)	Calgary
Cold Lake Air Force Museum	Cold Lake
The Hangar Flight Museum	Calgary
Lethbridge Military Museum	Lethbridge
Loyal Edmonton Regiment Military Museum	Edmonton
BRITISH COLUMBIA	
CFB Esquimalt Naval and Military Museum	Victoria
Vancouver Island Military Museum	Nanaimo
The Canadian Scottish (Princess Mary's) Regimental Museum and the Museum of the 5th British Columbia Field Regiment Royal Canadian Artillery	Victoria
Ashton Armoury Museum	Victoria
Royal Westminster Regiment Museum	New Westminster
Seaforth Highlanders of Canada Regimental Museum	Vancouver
Canadian Museum of Flight	Langley

This research was conducted roughly 12 months before the passing of Queen Elizabeth II, which certainly could account for the prominence of the depictions of the Queen that we observed. We observed all exhibitions in each museum, writing fieldnotes on each. In this paper, we are primarily examining the exhibits drawing from our fieldnotes and photographs at the Canadian Scottish Regimental Museum, Calgary Highlanders Regimental Museum, The Cold Lake Air Force Museum, CFB Esquimalt Naval and Military Museum, King's Own Calgary Regiment (RCAC) Museum, Museum of the 5th (British Columbia) Regiment Royal Canadian Artillery, Loyal Edmonton Regiment Military Museum, Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry Regimental Museum, Canadian Scottish Regiment Museum (Princess Mary's) Regimental Museum (in Victoria B.C.), Seaforth Highlanders of Canada Regimental Museum, and Ashton Army Museum. We also examined the websites and advertisements of the museums and compared this material to the physical exhibitions. We conducted interviews with curators (many of whom were former military personnel) and staff where possible, resulting in 15 interviews. We anonymize the names of curators here in this paper, however, our ethics protocol did not require anonymization of research sites or respondents. Where possible we participated in guided tours and asked for tour scripts. This documentation was collected to enhance our understanding of these commemorative spaces as a whole. For this research, which focuses on staging, sanitization, liminality, and above all, representation, we consider that purpose is less important than product, and though we have listened to and consulted the curators' statements, we refer to them to expand on our findings rather than as the foundation for them (also, we were unable to interview curators at every site). Much of our analysis relies on the photographs we took at these museums which documented key curatorial elements of displays and augmented our fieldnotes (Camp et al. 2000).

We subjected the entire dataset to open coding to locate themes that we had not anticipated or determined in advance (Giske and Artinian 2007). Our focus on how military museums in Canada represent Britishness emerged from open coding. Once this theme was discovered, we then assessed each representation of Britishness in these museums. In terms of limitations, as mentioned, we were not able to interview curators at all sites. Below, we also draw from interview excerpts regarding notable silences and absences in these museums, which contribute to the trend we note of associating whiteness with Canadian-ness. However, curators had limited comments about Britishness specifically. In other words, with only a few exceptions (see below), these exhibits that continue to forward Canada's self-image as a naturally white nation appear to be 'common sense' (Rifkin 2013) to most curators. In addition, and relatedly, we have not focused on the broader political economy and social networks

that shape the content (see Rex 2018; Raths 2012) in these specific sites, such as ties to the Canadian Department of National Defense or The Royal Canadian Legion. Additional interviews at the federal and policy level would be further illuminating of the reasons why certain trends appear in Canadian military museum displays.

The Queen Mother, Feminized Homelands, and Symbolic Spaces

Notable throughout the museums are displays that pay homage to Queen Elizabeth through visual imagery, domestic artefacts, slogans or placards discussing her ascension to the Crown. Though there were at least two references to 'the king' throughout the museums studied, representations of Queen Elizabeth II (occasionally called 'the Queen of Canada') were consistent throughout the museums and numerous in quantity. These displays tended to appear in earlier areas of the museums, often existing in relative isolation from surrounding displays. Given their stand-alone nature, they were easy to skim over, and, differing from surrounding displays that feature items like guns, batons, battlefield maps, and soldier uniforms, these displays read as official discourse. A few of the museums showed images of Queen Elizabeth with little context. In the Canadian Scottish Regimental Museum, a small wall is devoted to photos of women in military leadership positions, with a recent photo of Queen Elizabeth II situated at the top. This exhibition does not further contextualize the photos, leaving visitors with the task of inferring meanings about women's leadership and the Crown.

In the Calgary Highlanders Regimental Museum (part of the Military Museums complex), a similar display shows a photo of Queen Elizabeth II smiling above a case of teacups and saucers. The contrast between this 'domestic' display and surrounding exhibits that present military tactics and artefacts with the potential for brutality is particularly indicative of Canada's symbolic relationship to the Crown. Ghassan Hage (1996: 473) questions the functions and status of 'homeland' within nationalist ideology, writing: 'on the face of it, the homeland appears almost the opposite of the space of the national order in that in it the subject is a subject of enjoyment rather than a subject of duty'. Portrayals of home, homeland, duty, domesticity, and enjoyment are complicated in these military museum spaces that tend to be filled with weapons of war, pausing from more brutal portrayals only in cases such as these occasional, surface-level representations of Queen Elizabeth and/or Canada's indebtedness to its British parentage. The display in Calgary Highlanders Regimental Museum that positions Elizabeth II above the teacups and saucers indicates a fraught narrative about homeland and domesticity that, when read through Hage's theory of homeland and, specifically, motherland, suggests an ambiguous allegiance to the British monarchy.

Attempting to define how a nation may locate its 'homeland', Hage (1996: 473) hypothesizes that a 'homely' space, instead of being a site simply of abstract enjoyment, is, in fact, 'a site of pleasing material, symbolic, and emotional "goods and services.'. He explains: 'what makes the home a home is precisely that things and other people are laid out in it in such a way that they can perform *functional* tasks for its inhabitants'. Considering the domestic artefacts placed below the de-contextualized image of Queen Elizabeth II in the Calgary Highlanders Regimental Museum against Hage's framework of homelands as *both symbolic and functional* demonstrates how the Canadian military museums in our study are forwarding a fraught and contradictory sense of Britain/England as homeland.

The choice to position the Queen above a display case of teacups and saucers indicates an attempt by museum curators to draw on a specific symbolic, cultural aesthetic of British culture – teatime – though the purpose of this representation remains in question. Krishan Kumar (2010) explains that English/British culture has become a questionable and arguably empty category as Great Britain descends from status as a global superpower to only a 'moderate power'. 'There are scraps of cultural Englishness,' Kumar (2010: 481) writes, 'a love of the countryside, an aversion to cities, a distrust of intellectuals – but much of this is nostalgic and backward-looking'. In general, he argues, Englishness is a nebulous category, stating that 'the idea that there is a "void" that needs to be filled is one of the most common tropes of the contemporary literature of Englishness' (Kumar 2010: 477). Empty cultural symbolism certainly contributes to the overarching lack of a national identity. By drawing on the cultural reference to 'teatime' (which exists in stark contrast to surrounding exhibitions

directly handling topics such as war and violence) the museum functionally confirms the status of English/Britishness within the Canadian military culture as part of such a void. On the one hand, this curatorial choice could read as a blatant simplification of British influence in Canada, reducing it to a superficial and unimposing status. On the other, this display suggests museum curators' desire to indicate 'homeliness', and by extension, possibly something 'homeland-y' about the Queen, teatime, and 'Britishness': a symbolic message with complex implications. Hage (1996: 473) writes that feelings of homely national belonging can be invoked through images ranging from 'national cooking and familiar and aesthetically pleasing landscapes'. It is possible that the choice to place the teacups below the Queen indicates an attempt to instill nostalgia for homely Britishness. The question then becomes how homely British nostalgia impacts museum-goers in a contemporary military heritage space, and how this may contribute to an overarching definition of contemporary Canadian national identity.

Figure 1: Photo of Queen Elizabeth above teacups - Calgary Highlanders Regimental Museum

Of course, these representations may not succeed in establishing such a connection for visitors and viewers. As Hage (1996: 473) explains, though the homeland is understood as a ‘peaceful and loveable space’, it is also a space that is coordinated by the presence of both pleasing and *functional* elements. The teacups, in this case, no matter how lovely and domestic, have no function for Canadian museum-goers. They are held in a case, preserved as artefacts rather than offered as functional objects. This, coupled with the fact that these domestic artefacts are flanked by displays showing weapons that carry troubling histories that reek of terrible violence, makes the teacups appear useless, small, irrelevant, and renders the attempted ‘homely’ connection to Britain fragile at best.

This sense of decorativeness proliferates through similar displays about the Queen in the other museums. At the Cold Lake Air Force Museum, significant wall space is devoted to Queen Elizabeth and the Royal Family. Like in the Calgary Highlanders Regimental Museum, this display case boasts six decorative British dinner plates, a teacup and saucer, as well as stickers depicting the Queen’s foot guards.

Figure 2: Decorative plates in England display case - Cold Lake Air Force Museum

The display is also flanked by a collection of images of Queen Elizabeth II – a painting of the Queen at a younger age and five photographs of older Elizabeth, each in a different monochrome outfit, smiling. Other black and white photos on either side of the case show members of the Royal Family, adults and children, in public and domestic spaces. The choice by curators of the Cold Lake Air Force Museum to establish a 'British connection' by presenting kitchenware, offering photos of Elizabeth in various colourful dresses and of the Royal Family in various domestic situations, relates to another important aspect of Hage's (1996) homeland framework: that nationalist visions of homeland tend to be gendered as either a motherland or a fatherland. Nationalist discourse that imagines homeland as 'motherland', Hage (1996: 473) writes, arises from associations between homeland and mothering, invoking qualities of 'protection, warmth, emotional and nutritional security', often referring to love and/or protection of the motherland. Discourse linking national belonging with fatherland, he says, most often relates to the sovereign actively projecting a communal body on the international field (Hage 1996: 475). As Hage (1996: 476) puts it:

> During wars, motherlands are what is protected if it is the land, the sense of community, the productive potential . . . it is the incarnations of the fatherland (in the name of the fatherland, 'the sons' as many national anthems have it) who fight the battles.

Figure 3: Photos of Queen Elizabeth with England display - Cold Lake Air Force Museum

Presented with feminized, domestic objects and images in the two above discussed displays, visitors are encouraged to consider Elizabeth II and by extension, Great Britain/England as a Queen Mother, as a feminized parent country. We posit that these exhibitions are performing a dual function for visitors – referencing an aesthetics of domesticity, homeland, and mothering that is tied to Great Britain, while failing to prescribe any functional element to these references. As Hage (1996: 474) writes, though home as motherland is a feminized construct, 'what makes the home homely is the existence of the mother as a functional object for its inhabitants/children'. Lacking substance, these displays, though superficially referencing 'mother England' present viewers with a decorative motherland, suggesting that perhaps the homeland in question is, in fact, located elsewhere (Canada) or perhaps split between Canada and Great Britain. The inconclusive and symbolic gestures of these exhibitions indicates the way museum curators have chosen to project comfortably liminal notions of Britishness and 'the motherland', demonstrating a devotion to Canada's 'British-connection' in these spaces, but obscuring tangible connections between contemporary Canadians and their purported homeland.

Narratives in Flux: Devoted Canada? Independent Canada?

The museums we examined recount a history of both Canadian allegiance to the Crown and a growing independence from it. In several of the museums, narratives applauded military efforts that distinguished Canada from its British predecessors. Others offered a sustained relationship to England/Great Britain, with displays that presented items such as British news articles that applauded Canadian military efforts, foregrounding the continued importance of British approval and validation in Canadian contexts. Overall, the museums were inconsistent in their depictions of Canada's indebtedness to or independence from the Crown.

At the CFB Esquimalt Naval and Military Museum (located in Esquimalt on Vancouver Island), a significant series of placards discussed the transfer of naval power on Canadian coasts from the Royal Navy to a new Canadian navy. The opening placard is titled: 'The Royal Navy pulls back', followed by a description of how, as the Naval arms raced accelerated in the early 1900s, 'the Royal Navy was forced to evaluate its policy of keeping strategic bases around the world'. It describes how the Pacific Squadron headquarters at Esquimalt and the Royal Navy's base in Halifax were closed to reduce the Royal Navy's costs. The placard reads:

> Closure of these bases would leave Canada with no permanent naval defences and create a large economic deficit on both the east and west coasts. The obvious way to counter this was for the Canadian government to establish its own naval force.

Interestingly, another placard that immediately follows re-tells this narrative, re-framing the transferal of power from Britain to Canada as an ideological issue rather than a fiscal tightening. It reads:

> Early in the 20th century, there was widespread debate within the British Empire regarding the role of the Dominions of the British Crown – realms and territories under sovereignty of the Crown – would play in defence and foreign affairs. Due to the emerging naval arms race with Germany, a key area of this discussion focused on naval issues.

This statement completes the narrative espoused by the first placard, explaining how 'after extensive debate, the politicians chose to set the stage for Canada to develop a navy of its own'.

Overall, the establishment of an independent, Canadian naval force is framed as positive. However, it is notable that these placards, which are located in close proximity, frame this development differently – on the one hand as elicited by a fiscal retraction on the part of the Royal Navy within the context of a naval arms race in Europe, and on the other as a result of rising debates about the sustained role of the British Empire within the dominions of the British Crown. Within the fiscal framework, the choice to establish a Canadian navy appears inevitable and reactionary, as Britain had left Canada with unprotected shores. Within the ideological framework, the decision reads as a conscious shift, an act of will, and

something commendable, independent, and brave. Rather than fixing this piece of Canadian naval history firmly within either one of these frameworks, the museum curators have allowed both to exist simultaneously, sitting beside one another, positing Canada's independent navy as both an inevitable reaction, and an act of will. Whether it was Britain's retraction or Canada's desire to establish itself as an independent force on the international playing field is not a distinction that appears to matter. The museum provides space for both narratives, presenting an ambiguous sense of Canadian military motivation.

Introducing the onset of WWI in the King's Own Calgary Regiment (RCAC) Museum (part of the Military Museums complex), a placard titled 'Alberta August 1914', reads: 'the war clouds forming over Europe were to have an astounding effect on Alberta…whether it was the need for adventure or the call to protect the Motherland, thousands joined'. This framing is of interest; by leaving the term 'Motherland' without attachment to any specific nation, it is unclear whether Albertans joined the Canadian forces due to feelings of allegiance to the Crown, due to allegiance to Canada, or even for something as nebulous as 'the need for adventure'.

Though several of the museums frame the outset of WWI within the terms of the 'Empire's call' (e.g. Museum of the 5th (British Columbia) Regiment Royal Canadian Artillery) there is an undeniable push within the museums that presents this major world event as a catalyst for Canada's development and distinction as a nation. In the Loyal Edmonton Regiment Military Museum, a placard on Canada's involvement in WWI includes a large section titled: 'A sense of identity' which explains that 'the new soldiers began encountering an intensified emphasis in their lives on the fact that they were Canadian', concluding that 'long before the Battle of Vimy Ridge the army was an incubator for a sense of Canadian identity'. A section discussing the end of WWI in the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry Regimental Museum (part of the Military Museums complex) titled 'England…and home' presents a clear distinction between the militia's location in England at the end of WWI and the home (Canada) that they would return to. One of the museums even reframed the classic 'mother England' by referring to 'mother Canada' (King's Own Calgary Regiment Museum).

Although most exhibitions discussing WWI were consistent in their emphasis on the development of a Canadian military identity during this period, the narrative about Canada's relationship to Great Britain does not do away entirely with the importance of Britishness for its development. In the Calgary General Museum, for example, displays of weapons from various wars frequently referred to 'British' guns, remaining relatively unclear as to whether the British guns were used by the Canadian forces/members of the British Commonwealth, or whether they were only used by the British military itself. With the meaning of 'British guns' left intentionally ambiguous for the visitor who is possibly entering with little contextual information other than a vague understanding of Canada's British heritage, the Canada-Britain connection is established and not temporally bound. The Loyal Edmonton Regiment Museum, which spent time establishing the fact that WWI helped build a sense of national identity in Canada, goes on to devote significant wall space to the regiment's badge (with many associations to England in these sections) as well as the presentation of colours to the regiment (by the King) in 1941. Though (according to this museum's narrative) Canada had already established itself as an independent nation and military on the international plane, references to Britishness remain a focal point throughout. In the case of the presentation of colours to the Edmonton Regiment in 1941, the placard makes a point of noting that two years after the regiment was presented with the King's colours, he 'accorded the regiment a more distinctive honour by changing its name to *The Loyal Edmonton Regiment*'. Similar moments relating to Britain and the Crown make appearances throughout the museums, contributing to a narrative that posits British identity as something that is simultaneously past and present. Like the placard in the CFB Esquimalt Naval and Military Museum that offers competing narratives about the advent of a Canadian naval force, museum curators across the board appeared to be grappling with Canada's British legacy and its continued relevance. Most museums in the study posited Canada as both independent and devoted. These realities appear alongside one another, allowing for a nationalism in flux – a nationalism that lacks clarity, and thus distracts from its own practices of extermination and subjugation.

Alongside this dominant homely British nostalgia noted above and references to Britishness indexed to nationalism noted in this section, we observed silences and absences

regarding the use of British or Canadian militias and military conquest against Indigenous peoples in Canada (which indeed occurred in Western Canada in the nineteenth century). This has the effect of pushing aside questions about the legitimacy of Canadian sovereignty and the right of Indigenous self-determination, questions that persist in the contemporary period. In addition, there were very few depictions of Indigenous soldiers and their contributions to the Canadian military: historical facts that would trouble this homely British nostalgia and its role in constituting Canadian-ness. Only two curators offered reflections on this matter. As one curator noted: 'there is more of a push to include indigenous perspectives and if there are stories out there we will include them. Going forward we may have more opportunities to be more inclusive'.[1] A different curator noted how there is: 'increasing pressure to include indigenous and diverse experiences. We highlight women's involvement, but we didn't have a lot of diversity in our history to share'.[2] Women's whiteness is enough for them to be claimed as Canadian and linked to the motherland in these military museums (see Pauls and Walby 2021), however Indigenous histories and a host of others have no such stake that can be claimed.

Domesticating Otherness: Canadian Multiculturalism and the Celtic Fringe

As we have shown, the majority of references to Britishness across the museums in our study took the form of:

1. images of Queen Elizabeth
2. other references to the Royal Family
3. narratives considering Canada's development and eventual individualization within the context of the Commonwealth
4. regimental insignia and badges that included symbols and imagery related to the British monarchy

Despite these tendencies, a few of the museums presented an undercurrent of cultural questioning, unearthing the existence of cultural difference within the definition of 'British' in a Canadian context. This undercurrent is present in several museums and displays that consider Scottish legacy in Canada – particularly in the Canadian Scottish Regiment Museum (Princess Mary's) Regimental Museum (in Victoria B.C.), and the Seaforth Highlanders of Canada Regimental Museum. The other museums in our study, have confirmed, to a certain extent, theories that view Britishness as a colonizing force that was 'superimposed from the centre' (Colley 1992: 315), largely neglecting the existence of the 'Celtic fringe'. These two museums, however, integrate representations of Celts – specifically, the Scots – within the concept of Britishness at large (though notably, the Irish and the Welsh appear to remain absent).

Research has explored representations of Scottish soldiers in war museums, largely focusing on museums located in the UK. Nataliya Danilova and Kandida Purnell (2020: 290), write that that in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries British authorities propelled a notion of Scots, specifically Scottish Highlanders as 'men who are biologically or culturally predisposed to the arts of war' (Streets 2004 quoted in Danilova and Purnell 2020) to increase the effectiveness of Scottish regiments. Scottish soldiers, throughout the twentieth century, and in the British museums that were built to commemorate WWI and WWII, were canonized as '"noble savages" in kilts' (Danilova and Purnell 2020: 292). Danilova and Purnell contend that representations of Scottish soldiers, in the British museums in their study, are romanticized, decorative, and propel the notion of the hero-warrior, shoring up Britain's martial superiority by drawing on these myths of the skill of Scottish soldiers.

We suggest that in a Canadian context, in spaces where myths of Scottish military heroism perhaps resonate less widely, decorative representations of Scottish military garb, bugles, etc. convey different meanings. We argue that imagery related to the Scottish soldiers in Canada, contributes to an overarching sense of British military superiority, like in UK museums. However, in a Canadian context, this superiority is confirmed through a sense of humanized Britishness, or a Britishness that becomes detached from its imperial dominion, insofar as the Celts, and specifically the Scottish, are presented as an 'other'. The Canadian

Scottish Regimental Museum presents Scottish artefacts and flags within a Canadian narrative, establishing a connection between Scottishness and Britishness and thus naturalizing the relationship between Scottishness and Canadian-ness. This parallels Katie Markham's (2018) argument about organized innocence and how the violence of some groups is framed as condonable due to association with other nations or causes. In this museum, there are several displays that produce this effect. One example is a *Times Colonist* article (a Victoria-based publication) that is mounted on the wall in the museum. The article is entitled 'Pipes come home', telling the story of the recovery of a lost set of bagpipes that were said to be a 'symbol of heroism' and were finally returned home in 2006 after 84 years. That Canada is the 'home' to a set of bagpipes implies the firmness of Scotland within the umbrella of Britishness and of Britishness's native claim to the lands called Canada. To shore up this narrative, the museum presents other significant artefacts such as bugles, and the Canadian Scottish Regiment's flag located directly beside a Canadian flag.

The Seaforth Highlanders of Canada Regimental Museum expands on this association, raising some critical questions about Scotland as an 'other' within the British Empire. The museum's opening placard firmly establishes the regiment's connection to Scotland, writing: 'Our name, lineage, and customs hail from the Highlands of Scotland'. This regiment notably wore kilts – a uniform that the Museum positions as a barrier, narrativizing it through language of (white) otherness, adversity, and eventual acceptance: amalgamating Scottishness within the overarching image of a white, British, Canada. There are several displays of the impressive regimental uniform comprising kilts, sashes, and badges, unmistakably Scottish in origin. In one such display, a quote is highlighted above, reading: 'they'll fight much better in kilts!' Contextualized below, a section of text reads:

> Brigadier-General J.H. MacBrien asked Lieutenant-Colonel J.A. Clark why he had not followed through on an order that the 72nd were to turn in their kilts and wear trousers. Clark replied that if the unit was expected as accustomed they should be allowed to wear their own uniforms. Laughing, MacBrien agreed. The troops marched to battle and victory in their kilts.

The demonstration of this conflict – showing how Scottish cultural garb and instruments were initially suppressed, but ultimately accepted within a Canadian context – indicates the way the internal hierarchies of Great Britain have proliferated within Canada. A residing sense of British heterogeneity seems to have migrated, quite wholly, into Canadian cultural institutions. Holding onto elements of this culture clash by and large deepens representations of Britishness in these museum spaces, and possibly distracts from the homogeneity of the previous images we have traced (the Queen, independence, the monarchy), positing the existence of subtle otherness within British hegemonic spaces. However, this otherness is rendered positive as part of the multicultural momentum of Canada. Britishness (seen through the eyes of the Canadian military) thus retains its internal culture clashes and its English centre, suggesting that the Canadian nation's British parentage has empowered it to retain an association with both the English Crown and with the cultural particularities of the 'Celtic fringe'.

These museums that directly handle the internal clashes and contradictions of Britishness seem more preoccupied, overall, with notions of otherness. Both museums in question, as well as the Loyal Edmonton Regiment Military Museum and the Ashton Army Museum, have large displays of Nazi paraphernalia, which by and large serve to 'other' the enemy – which, of course is positioned as something external to the nation. All of these museums included a significant case or area in the WWII section devoted to captured Nazi paraphernalia including German war badges, flags showing swastikas, S.S. knives, uniforms, helmets, and weapons. These displays tend not to be contextualized, though staff at these museums noted that a significant body of Nazi paraphernalia had been smuggled home by returning soldiers and that similar items continue to be uncovered in the homes of veterans by family members and loved ones and then donated to the regiments.[3] Decontextualized, Nazi imagery and symbolism come to stand in as the 'other' that Canada imagines itself against, with the corresponding implication that Canada is a whole, unified self. A similar effect can be traced in later exhibitions on 'the War on Terror' and Islamic extremism. Examined in the context of a project on representations of Britishness, these displays present a highly 'othered'

enemy, which has the effect of softening the perceived conflict between disparate groups that fall within the category of Britishness and diverting attention from more pressing practices of othering that continue to operate and oppress Indigenous groups in Canada. Danilova and Purnell (2020: 294) have written that imagery of decorative garb and specialized war paraphernalia in the museums in their study usually had an 'invisiblising' effect, in which 'local populations of former British colonies as faces, bodies and experiences were often entirely absent from museum displays'. We note that decorative Scottishness similarly distracts from the lack of Indigenous content in the museums in our study, locating peaceful 'otherness' within a nexus of British identity and contrasting it with the threatening 'otherness' of groups like the Nazis and the Taliban.

Figure 4: "They'll fight much better in kilts!" - Seaforth Highlanders of Canada Regimental Museum

Figure 5: Another mannequin presenting regimental uniform/kilt - Seaforth Highlander's Regimental Museum

The plight of the Canadian Scottish, whose right to wear traditional garb was initially repressed and then eventually accepted, presented in this museum, demonstrates the Canadian military's willingness to incorporate 'otherness' into its national narrative. Presented alongside the horrors of Nazi war tools, the internal culture clashes of the British are synthesized as part of a broader Canadian multicultural identity. Canada becomes, at once, a national body capable of recognizing and making space for peaceful otherness (represented by the Scottish Canadians) and capable of subduing and triumphing over dangerous 'otherness' (represented by the Nazis, and the Taliban). Within this narrative, viewers are distracted from the dangers of colonialism, and of the 'othering' that was necessary for the British to initially assume the status of 'native' on Canadian soil. Presented with an overwhelming body of British references,

coupled with an advancing sense of peaceful 'otherness' and a sanitization of dangerous 'otherness', visitors are distracted from the intentional omission of British colonial histories and colonial domination in these museum spaces.

Conclusion

There is more to say about both the subtle and overt ways that British identity has come to stand in as 'native' in Canadian contexts, and in particular, the way Canada's/Great Britain's victory in WWII has played into the naturalization of Canadian history as white and British (with space for British cultural particularities, like kilts, of course). National identity is constantly being remade, and the moment of WWII and the allied triumph against the Nazis has been historicized as one of those nation-building moments in which Canada has decided 'who we are by reference to who and what we are not' (Colley 1992: 311). The otherness that exists within British identity itself becomes naturalized as a component of Canadian multiculturalism in these military museum spaces, shored up by a contrast to the *real* 'other', the external 'other': the Nazis, and the Taliban. The present-day Canadian military imaginary is united in its sense of its own Britishness through confrontation with the alien 'other'. What deserves more research is the way the suppression of Indigenous peoples and the initial colonization of Canada is omitted through this practice of external othering.

If the 'otherness' of the cultural particularities that exist within the 'British identity' are synthesized as a part of Canadian multiculturalism and the 'otherness' of the Nazis are used to shore up a sense of self in comparison to this barbaric 'other', where are the 'others' that were subjected to the colonial project that made Canada what it is today? Perhaps it is this 'othering' – the 'othering' of the nations with ancestral rights to these lands – that these ambiguous, fluctuating, feminized, and faulty representations of Britishness are attempting to circumvent? Perhaps it is Britishness in-flux – a specific form of Canadian Britishness that is at once preoccupied with surface level reflections on symbols such as the Queen and teatime, as well as with making space for a peaceful Celtic fringe – that distracts from the complete omission of the histories of colonization in these spaces. It must be remembered that Britain was the largest player in the colonization of the Americas. With special attention paid to Canada's British heritage throughout large parts of these museums, and with an explicit impetus to locate otherness as external to Canada (or as something that has happily been incorporated, as with Canada's liberal inclusion of cultural particularities such as those of Britain's 'Celtic fringe'), visitors are directed into thinking that Great Britain's legacy in Canada has been fully explored in the museum spaces. Reinforced by the illusions created through repetition, Britishness becomes imagined as nonfunctional, barely relevant, and highly symbolic. The real, functional aspects of the British colonial project in Canada are, subsequently, sanitized, subdued, omitted, and forgotten. These omissions further point to the role of contemporary museums in perpetuating certain myths of nationalism that rely on exclusion of the racialized 'other'. There is, in fact, an effort led by the Canadian Museum Association among other groups to decolonize museums. Drawing from such efforts, military museum curators should do more to challenge this reflexive association of Canadian identity with whiteness and the subsequent subjugation of 'otherness' and Indigenous peoples it produces.

Notes

[1] Museum Curator, interview by Bryce Gallant, digital recording, 30 July 2022, The Museum of the 5th (British Columbia) Regiment Royal Canadian Artillery, Victoria BC.

[2] Museum Curator, interview by Bryce Gallant, digital recording, 21 June 2022, The Canadian Scottish Regiment (Princess Mary's) Regimental Museum, Victoria BC.

[3] This was mentioned by staff at The Canadian Scottish Regiment (Princess Mary's) Regimental Museum, Ashton Army Museum, and Loyal Edmonton Regiment Military Museum.

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