

David S. Koffman

**Suffering & Sovereignty: Recent Canadian Jewish  
Interest in Indigenous Peoples and Issues**

*This essay analyzes ways that Canadians Jews have been engaging with Indigenous people and issues since the turn of the millennium. It argues that communal Jewish interest in Indigenous issues developed in the wake of the Ahenakew affair in 2002, and then grew in breadth and depth after the launch of Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 2008. The expansion of Jewish engagement in Indigenous matters bespeaks newfound mobilizations by Canadian Jews in the identity politics of ethnic/religious coalition building, toward multiple and sometimes competing ends, two of which are particularly salient: suffering and sovereignty. While the sufferings of the Jewish people and Indigenous peoples have been inexactly mapped onto one another, the attachments that many Canadian Jews have to the legacies of oppression, resistance, and recovery have profoundly shaped their eagerness to contemplate and engage Indigenous issues in particularly Jewish ways. Jewish engagements with First Nations also focus on the idea of "indigeneity" for the rhetorical power it may provide in debates about Israel as a colonial, post-colonial, or anti-colonial state. Canadian Jews to champion liberal support of First Nations, Jewish conversations around Indigenous suffering, heritage honour, and reconciliation have also foregrounded a set of tense questions about the extent to which Canadian Jews are and have been implicated in colonialism writ large, and about how Canadian Jews can or should best respond to its legacies. The two themes, suffering and sovereignty, are intertwined in a dynamic and unresolved tension, with one theme (suffering) inherently grappling with powerlessness, and the other (sovereignty), inherently grappling with power.*

Encounters between Jews and Indigenous peoples in the places we now call Canada began before Confederation and run through to the present.<sup>1</sup> Even a cursory search at local, provincial, and national Jewish archives hint at a complex history of engagements between these diverse populations, which touch on some of life's fundamentals: money and land, sex and violence, art and God. The sources suggest that Indigenous history is, *ipso facto*, a part of Canadian Jewish history, just as the modern Jewish experience has, in some way, been woven into Inuit, Métis, and First Nations' histories.<sup>2</sup> Though the task of reconstructing and making sense of these entangled histories has not yet been researched, written, or synthesized, this article aims to begin this work by examining the last decade and a half of Jewish-Indigenous relations, and by approaching the material with a focus on the perspectives of Canadian Jews.<sup>3</sup>

This article asks firstly: how have Canadians Jews engaged with Indigenous people and issues since the turn of the last millennium? To answer this question is to provide a map of Canadian Jews' recent interest in First Nations histories, politics, and lived experiences. I argue that self-conscious, communal Jewish interest in Indigenous issues developed in the wake of the Ahenakew affair in 2002, then grew in breadth and depth after the launch of Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 2008. The expansion of Jewish engagement in Indigenous matters bespeaks newfound mobilizations by Canadian Jews in the identity politics of ethnic/religious coalition-building toward multiple and sometimes competing ends. Jewish interest

in First Peoples and Indigenous issues reaches across Jewish political lines (from mainstream and conservative voices, through the liberal middle, to the far-left, and other anti-establishment progressives) and across the religious spectrum (all four denominations, unaffiliated, sometimes working together).

This article also aims to contextualize the stakes of these engagements for Jewish Canadians and interpret what they reveal about contemporary Canadian Jewry. Though disagreements are certainly found between and among Canadian Jews, I argue that two overarching themes emerge as the central axes around which revolve recent Canadian Jewish interest in Indigenous peoples and issues: suffering and sovereignty. Firstly, Jewish efforts to articulate terms for solidarity with Indigenous peoples, in general or with specific First Nations or Inuit groups, sprang from a sense of sympathy with hardships and historical predicaments Indigenous communities faced and face. Though the sufferings of the Jewish people and Indigenous peoples have been inexactly mapped onto one another, the attachments that many Canadian Jews have to the legacies of oppression, resistance, and recovery have profoundly shaped their eagerness to contemplate and engage Indigenous issues in particularly Jewish ways. This impulse to highlight suffering has produced a sense of affinity for some Canadian Jews with Indigenous peoples, bonded by the deeply emotional legacies of persecution as a creative force of identity. This impulse has been nearly uniform among Canadian Jews.

A second theme that Canadian Jews' engagements with Indigenous people and issues that has risen steadily in salience since 2008 is national self-determination, which is distinct from, but sometimes related to suffering. This theme makes use of the notion that Jews are an indigenous people – a solidarity claim with First Nations and Inuit, but not Métis, that seeks to advance arguments about the nature of Jewish belonging in the Middle East, in or on the biblical land of Israel. Unlike the theme of suffering, the sovereignty theme is far from uniform in its application by Canadian Jews. On the contrary, Canadian Jews have deployed this theme in multiple and competing ways. The two themes, suffering and sovereignty, are intertwined in a dynamic and unresolved tension, with one theme (suffering) grappling inherently with powerlessness, and the other (sovereignty), grappling inherently with power.

## **A Solidarity Emerges**

The intensity of Canadian Jews' interest in thinking through Indigenous issues and establishing relationships with specific individuals and First Nations organizations compounded after the turn of the millennium, when Jewish organizations responded to the anti-Semitic comments of a former Assembly of First Nations' (AFN) National Chief, David Ahenakew, after a lecture he delivered to the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations in 2002. Ahenakew said that Hitler was justified in

trying “to make damn sure that the Jews didn’t take over Germany, or even Europe. That’s why he fried six million of those guys, you know. Jews would have owned the goddamned world.”<sup>4</sup> Asked explicitly about the Holocaust in follow-up, Ahenakew retorted “How else do you get rid of a disease like that, that’s going to take over, that’s going to dominate?”<sup>5</sup> Ahenakew’s words set off a maelstrom of reproach and bewilderment among Canadian Jews. Hate speech criminal charges were brought against him in 2005. He was convicted, fined, and stripped of his Order of Canada. On appeal, his conviction was overturned by trial order; a new trial in 2008 acquitted Ahenakew of intent to incite hatred.<sup>6</sup>

Before the Ahenakew affair the organized Jewish community had some involvement in Indigenous issues and had shown interest in fostering closer ties with certain First Nations communities or leaders. The Jewish Labour Committee had built some solidarity bridges in the 1960s and 1970s and helped develop the Canadian Labour Congress’s human rights program, which devoted attention to Indigenous cases.<sup>7</sup> Canadian Jewish Congress (CJC) had engaged organizations like the Indian-Eskimo Association of Canada, the Canadian Association for Support of Native Peoples, and the Aboriginal Healing Foundation in the 1950s, mostly on anti-discrimination policy, and on Native rights, land claims, and sovereignty issues from the 1980s onward.<sup>8</sup> CJC petitioned the federal government in 1990 to urge the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development to resolve the Oka crisis, and sent an open-letter to British Columbia’s premier in 2003 expressing concern about the province’s referendum on treaty principles.<sup>9</sup> Individual Jewish lawyers, activists, doctors, and civil servants working outside Jewish organizations also promoted a range of Indigenous issues throughout the twentieth century.<sup>10</sup> The Ahenakew affair, however, was a turning point in Jewish communal interest in First Peoples. Canadian Jews considered Ahenakew’s humiliation a victory against racism and anti-Semitism. More significant to the history of Jewish – Indigenous encounters, the event awoke Canadian Jewish leaders to the possibility of a strategic alignment with a minority in Canada that had, before 2002, barely been on the radar of the organized Jewish community.

After Ahenakew, the Canadian Jewish establishment took Indigenous relations more seriously. The *Canadian Jewish News* reported that the CJC was actively engaging Indigenous leadership.<sup>11</sup> Representatives of First Nations and Jewish organizations met, touting goodwill publicly. Members of the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations met with CJC and Saskatchewan Jewish community leaders to tie ties. The CJC also invited the AFN’s National Chief, Phil Fontaine, to speak at one of its plenaries on the theme of national unity. The National President of the CJC, Ed Morgan, reciprocated, addressing the AFN general assembly in Yellowknife on matters he deemed to be of mutual concern to Jews and First Nations, emphasizing their respective histories of dispossession and dispersal, their struggles for continuity, and their resistance to racism.<sup>12</sup>

The Ahenakew affair also led to the first of a series of First Nations missions to Israel sponsored by the Jewish community. These intertwined themes of suffering, genocidal victimhood, and resiliency in the land of Jewish sovereignty. On the first mission, chiefs and elders from eighteen nations discussed “common tragedies while visiting *Yad Vashem* [Israel’s Holocaust museum], shared stories of the Shoah and residential schools, and [felt] each other’s pain in the wiping out of generations, the loss of culture and the failed attempts to destroy our tradition,” according to Bernie Farber, who served as CEO of the Canadian Jewish Congress at the time.<sup>13</sup>

Viewing Indigenous issues through this empathic lens of parallel histories, Farber later joined Fontaine in urging Canada to recognize its mistreatment of Indigenous peoples as “genocide” as defined by the 1948 UN Convention on Genocide. Arguing that Canada’s first Prime Minister Sir John A. MacDonald’s policy of starving Indigenous people to death in order to make way for the western expansion of European settlers meets the criteria, Farber laid bare his own position and motivation. “I have long tried to be a champion of the underdog,” he wrote in the *Canadian Jewish News*, drawing on the idea of shared experience of racism, and rooting this empathy in a metaphor of immutable, biological identity:

As a son of a Holocaust survivor, this [desire to champion the underdog] was simply in my DNA. As I continued my work... I began to see a synergy between the tragic histories of our two peoples. We, too, were an aboriginal people faced with prejudice, bigotry and genocide. As a Canadian Jew, I believe we have much to share with and much to learn from our First Nations. We’re two peoples that have for so long travelled different, yet in some ways parallel, roads.<sup>14</sup>

Over the past fifteen years Farber has been explicit and outspoken about parallels and symmetries between Jews and Indigenous peoples, speaking in various leadership capacities other than as CEO of the CJC (following the Congress’s demise in 2011). “Our [Jewish] history is one fraught with all of these elements; exile, inquisitions, pogroms and ultimately even genocide,” he wrote in a 2015 editorial, at this point the executive director of the Mosaic Institute, an organization devoted to advancing peace and justice among Canada’s diverse communities. “It’s for all of these reasons that we [Canadian Jews] of all people should also embrace the plight of Canada’s First Nations people.”<sup>15</sup> Farber’s sentiments capture neatly the complexities, ambiguities, and common threads among Canadian Jewry’s newfound interest in Indigenous issues, and indeed the major terms of the discussion afoot since the Ahenakew affair.

## Mapping the Jewish Stakes of Jews' Interests in Indigenous Peoples

In the past decade and a half Canadian Jewry has shown an explosion of popular interest in First Nations (more so in than Métis or Inuit) and a rapid proliferation of events, meetings, and programs focused on First Nations issues, which reflects the broader trend among Canada's non-Indigenous people. Writings, talks, and engagements – all performances of sort – have been designed to forge connections among and between the Jewish and Indigenous individuals and organizations who participate in them, and also among those who hear of the events but who do not themselves participate. The events and their press coverage blend various rationales for solidarity-seeking, including religious and values-based identity building projects, concern for injustice, promoting Jewish environmentalism, and helping to bolster collective rights in law and the public sphere.

Solidarity claims have ranged across modes of articulation, spanning the artistic, the religious, the educational, and the political. Artistic and literary explorations of religious symmetries, ethnic parallels, and overlapping communal values between Jews and Indigenous peoples use inter-ethnic dialogue and programming to foster Jewish identification and pride, like Charles Heller's "The Two Ravens" for solo flute, solo viola, narrator, string quartet, and percussion.<sup>16</sup> Heller worked with Rivka Golani, the viola player and commissioner of the work; both are children of Holocaust survivors. Together with Troy Twigg of the Blackfoot Theatre, Heller's "Two Ravens" stand in as embodiments of "spirits" of the Jewish and Indigenous "nations," who meet and interact in the Canadian west.<sup>17</sup> Writers and artists with both Indigenous and Jewish heritages have begun to explore ways that Jewish and Indigenous themes overlap and speak to one another as well.<sup>18</sup> There are a surprising number of such artists, like the Mohawk-Jewish musician and producer Robbie Robertson, Ojibwa-Jewish novelist David Treuer, and Monique Mojica, a Toronto playwright, actor, and social activist, born of Guna, Rappahannock and Jewish ancestry. In fact, Jewish-Indigenous hybridity is one of the themes of both Treuer's and Mojica's work.<sup>19</sup> Tamara, Jennifer, and Sarah Podemski, sisters raised in Toronto to a Jewish father and a Saulteaux Ojibway mother of the Bear/Thunderbird Clan, from Muscowpetung First Nation in Saskatchewan, produce multi-disciplinary work on stage, film, and in text that focus on the intersection that informs their identities.<sup>20</sup> While some artistic efforts are more explicit than others about blending religious inflection with political action, the political is never far removed from these artistic-religious experiments.

### Jews and The Truth & Reconciliation Commission

If the Ahenakew episode broke the proverbial ice with respect to broad-tent Jewish public engagement with Indigenous issues, the Truth and Reconciliation Commis-

sion of Canada (TRC) provided a watershed for organizing Canadian Jewish forays into Indigenous matters. The TRC arose in 2008 out of the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement, a class-action settlement of \$2 billion in compensation that the federal government of Canada and some 86,000 Indigenous survivors of these schools had agreed to in 2006.<sup>21</sup> Between 2008 and 2014 the Commission gathered statements from survivors, and in 2015 it released its highly anticipated TRC Report.<sup>22</sup> In a sense, major national Jewish organizations had to respond to the Report; it triggered a monumental public, civic, political, and moral reckoning with settler Canada's past and identity, and virtually no national civic organization remained silent, including hundreds of provincial and municipal organizations, from district school boards and universities to city councils and police bureaus.<sup>23</sup> The TRC's focus on the Indigenous experience of a century of residential schools made it a particularly resonant flashpoint for Canadian Jews, given its focus on, and use of the language of, cultural genocide. Other national public flashpoints on Indigenous issues, like the Oka Crisis of 1990, the Highway of Tears crisis concerning the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women campaign that began in 2005, and the reconsiderations of the Royal Proclamation for the British territories in North America of 1763 (the so-called "Indian Magna Carta" on its 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2013), could have but did not evoke rigorous public Jewish response. The Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs (CIJA), which arose in the wake of the demise of the CJC as the primary advocacy wing of the organized Jewish community, was present at several national events during the compilation process of the TRC, participating in the gathering of statements by survivors of residential schools, in performing traditional ceremonies, and in education days. CIJA and the Jewish Federation of Greater Vancouver, along with a delegation of synagogues and other community organizations, also walked as a contingent in a Reconciliation Walk, where they put their Jewish religious identities on display by constructing a *sukkah* for participants in the march to visit.<sup>24</sup> At another TRC day in May 2015, Bernie Farber, speaking as the chair of the board of Ve'ahavta, a Toronto-based Jewish humanitarian organization devoted to Jewish social responsibility, made a case for Jewish-First Nations affinity, solidarity, and responsibility. "First Nations and Jews share a common bond," he said. Both

have a strong sense of community and honour of our elders and teachers. We also share the experience of having faced trauma and discrimination. While we have travelled separate but parallel roads, we understand the need to stand in solidarity as we face the truth of Canada's treatment of First Nations people.<sup>25</sup>

Major Canadian Jewish organizations banded together to pen a "Statement on Jewish-Aboriginal Solidarity" which they released at the official TRC report ceremony in Ottawa in June 2015. Signed by Ve'ahavta, CIJA, the Canadian Council for Reform Judaism, Reform Rabbis of Greater Toronto, Canadian Rabbinic Council, and

the Toronto Board of Rabbis, the statement formally acknowledged the residential school experiences, their impacts on First Nations individuals, families, cultures, and communities, and the ongoing inequalities faced by First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities. The statement included a “call to action,” which entreated the Jewish community to engage in dialogue and collaborative effort to build partnerships with Indigenous communities, and committed its signatories to “meaningful public education in the Jewish community and beyond and outreach to Indigenous communities to help improve the quality of life of Indigenous peoples.”<sup>26</sup>

The Statement on Jewish-Aboriginal Solidarity couched its commitments in the language of “obligation to pursue social justice,” language that has become ascendant in Jewish discourse on First Nations, and neatly captured by Adam Moscoe, a member of CIJA’s Young Leaders Circle and its Ottawa Chair of Global Dignity.<sup>27</sup> Moscoe carried a Jewish-Aboriginal solidarity banner at a reconciliation walk, having served as an honorary youth witness at another TRC event in Toronto in 2012. In an editorial for the *Canadian Jewish News*, Moscoe reflected that he “was deeply influenced by my upbringing as a justice-minded, socially conscious Jewish Canadian.”<sup>28</sup> Calling on Canada to adopt and implement the UN’s Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as the framework for reconciliation, he wrote that the work of reconciliation is fundamentally derived from – and exalted by – Judaism. “Nothing [in the Jewish tradition],” he concluded, “compares to the importance of education and the pursuit of justice – *Tzedek, tzedek tirfof*.” Indeed, the dominant source of affinity in these recent Canadian Jewish engagements with First Nations focuses on the theme of historical suffering and the legacies of facing oppression and racism, most frequently articulated through Jewish historical and religious idiom. The theme is born out amply in all manner of comments and programs.<sup>29</sup>

### Seeking Affinity for Multiple Audiences

Though solidarity claims by Jews have been aimed at various constituencies – Jews within their communities, outward from Jewish communities to the general Canadian public, and directly at Indigenous communities – they tend to share the same basic themes. They also tend to feature a call to action, though the specific calls vary, with some arguing for decolonization and others for economic uplift, endorsing treaty rights, or more rudimentary anti-racism education.<sup>30</sup> After a family visit to the Quadra Island First Nation’s Nuyumbalees Cultural Centre, one of the *Canadian Jewish News*’s regular columnists, Jane Gerber, described for Jewish readers the personal-cum-political resonances she experienced learning of First Nations suffering. Being targeted for missionizing, enduring propaganda, prohibition, and policy aimed to encourage Native people to abandon their “pagan” ways, ceremonial dances, and hunting practices, confiscation of religious regalia, and enduring residential schools all found their parallels in Gerber’s understanding of the Jewish



historical experience of forced conversion, despoiling of sacred objects and books, missionizing, targeted acts of violence, and genocide. Such empathic observations led Gerber to insist, “we [Canadian Jews] owe it to Canada’s First Nations to stand with them as they reclaim their heritage.”<sup>31</sup> Echoing this sentiment, a *Huffington Post* article by Phillippe Assouline argued that Canadian Jews have a special duty born of shared experience to actively support First Nations’ efforts “to be a free people in their own land,” quoting from the Israeli national anthem. “Their fight is every Canadian’s fight but it is ours in particular,” he claimed, going so far as to suggest that “Jewish experience can serve [First Nations] as a guide... [to] preserv[ing] an ancient culture through displacement and persecution and turn[ing] it into a thriving democracy.”<sup>32</sup>

Jewish philanthropic efforts involving First Nations activism and partnerships flourish alongside sympathetic editorials in the Canadian Jewish press, targeting both Jewish and non-Jewish audiences. Most of these efforts emphasize parallelism in anti-Jewish and anti-First Nations bias, like Elizabeth Comper’s anti-racism organization “Fight Anti-Semitism Together” (FAST) which offered educational tools for high school teachers, and reportedly reached 1,000,000 students in 2005.<sup>33</sup> Major figures of Canadian Jewish philanthropy, including Murray Koffler, Izzy Asper, Larry Tanenbaum, and Michel Dan have made First Nations issues central to their philanthropic visions<sup>34</sup> One of Tanenbaum’s initiatives focused on health improvement and capacity-building for Anishinaabe communities around Kenora, Ontario was intended to bring Jewish and First Nations’ “minds, culture and historical experiences together for the benefit of both communities and Canada,” and, in the philanthropist’s consideration, it “truly reflects Jewish values of social responsibility, and rings loud and true to the testament of ‘Never again.’”<sup>35</sup> Tanenbaum traced his involvement with Native issues to a visit to the White Dog Reservation in northern Ontario in 2010, reportedly taking “great pride that the Jewish community is engaged with and working on behalf of Canada’s aboriginal people.”<sup>36</sup>

If Jewish editorial and philanthropic interventions on First Nations issues emphasize parallel communal histories of injustice, prejudice, trauma, and recovery, they also frequently concern themselves with bolstering *Jewish* identity, and voicing this ethical commitment in distinctly Jewish language. *Ve’ahavta* began working with First Nations populations even before the Ahenakew affair. By 2015, it offered statements and programs reflecting a more focused set of efforts in support of reconciliation efforts as part of a Jewish spiritual sensibility, producing educational and promotional materials, for instance, that called Canadian Jews to do *teshuvah* [undertake repentance] in order to advance First Nations’ reconciliation. In advance of a recent *Yom Kippur*, it offered “four questions and answers for reconciliation and *teshuvah*” that claimed that pursuing a just Canadian society “is fundamental and at the heart of Judaism [since Canadian Jews] inherited the legacy of colonization [and therefore] have a responsibility to repair broken relationships.”<sup>37</sup> At a complementary program

offered in the fall of 2014, five Toronto congregations hosted a Shabbat event targeting young professionals aged 22–39, with prayer, dinner, and a panel discussion. The event, entitled “Azor Taazor Lo: The Challenges Facing Native Canadians and Our Jewish Responsibility to Help,” was part mixer, part synagogue outreach, and part social–justice work.<sup>38</sup>

Variations on the theme of suffering that Canadian Jews have organized are also targeted to Indigenous audiences.<sup>39</sup> Forging parallels in historical suffering can begin with First Nations’ experience, and analogize it to Jewish suffering, or the other way around, like one TRC event planned by Jewish organizations for a primarily First Nations audience that hosted Robbie Waisman, a Holocaust survivor, as keynote speaker.<sup>40</sup> The event, entitled “Compelled to Remember,” cosponsored by the TRC and CIJA and presented at the Native Canadian Centre of Toronto during Holocaust Education Week, invited survivors of the Holocaust and residential schools and their children and grandchildren to discuss experiences of historical trauma, the processes of healing and recovery, the work of keeping memories alive, and the theme of reconciliation.<sup>41</sup>

The initiatives of Jewish community leaders to bind together parallel, if distinct, histories of suffering between Jews and First Nations have likewise been geared toward First Nations youth. Between 2001 and 2015, over a thousand Indigenous students from every province and territory participated in the Asper Foundation’s Human Rights and Holocaust Studies Program, including students from the Kinosao Sipi Cree Nation, Cross Lake First Nation, Pimicikamak First Nation, and the Opaskwayack Cree Nation.<sup>42</sup>

Not infrequently, statements and programs that emphasize parallels in the histories of Jewish and First Nations suffering, experiences of racism, or attempted genocide urge their participants to engage in political or social action. The Canadian Social Action Committee of the Canadian Council of Reform Judaism, along with the steering committee of the Union for Reform Judaism Canada and the Religious Action Centre of Reform Judaism hosted an event called “Nuts and bolts of effective advocacy” which included a panel discussion addressing poverty and First Nations issues from an advocacy perspective.<sup>43</sup> The Union of Reform Judaism passed a National Social Action Committee resolution to “take up the cause of the Aboriginal community” in Canada in 2013, and, since then, has offered a wide range of initiatives to advance its mission, “governed by [the tikkun olam] (repair the world) imperative.” Under the leadership of Helen Poizner and Fran Isaacs, its “Resolution on First Nations,” resolved to support First Nations self-determination, call on the government of Canada to abide by its treaty commitments, and support Canadian Jewish congregations to strengthen relationships with the First Nations community.<sup>44</sup>

These Jewish–First Nations solidarity efforts have been promoted among the broader, non–Jewish and non–Indigenous political public, not just reflecting the moral commitments of their agents and agencies, but also highlighting the optics of such displays of solidarity. In 2013, CIJA began acknowledging and celebrating National Aboriginal Day, announcing to the general public that it “values its relationship with the First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people of Canada.”<sup>45</sup> In 2015, Toronto’s Holy Blossom Temple hosted former Prime Minister Paul Martin, who heads his own organization, the Martin Aboriginal Education Initiative, to lecture on First Nations traumatic memory and the impacts of economic marginalization.<sup>46</sup> Other political leaders have also engaged Jewish Canadians, inviting them to consider their own privilege in relation to First Nations disenfranchisement. In his interview in the *Winnipeg Jewish Review*, for instance, the Premier of Manitoba Greg Selinger discussed income inequality of First Nations and aimed to deepen his Jewish readers’ commitments to his own political policy initiatives for First Nations education, economic growth, land–use planning, employment, and other social uplift.<sup>47</sup>

Indigenous leaders have also struck solidarities between Jews and First Nations in the political arena. Anishinaabe leader Bob Goulais evoked his pleasure to work “alongside some of Canada’s finest Jewish citizens” working to “fight tooth–and–nail alongside our people” during the federal election season of 2011. He participated in the campaign of Jewish Liberal MP hopeful Karen Mock, performing song, speaking about the Liberal party aboriginal platform, and placed a *mezuzah* on the doorpost of a campaign office with Chabad Rabbi Meir Gitlin.<sup>48</sup> Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak Grand Chief David Harper expressed his admiration for the Jewish people’s strength and continuance in the face of attempted genocide, and spoke at a Holocaust memoir launch event in Winnipeg in 2012, co–sponsored by the Azrieli Foundation and B’nai Brith.<sup>49</sup>

Some of these displays of political and social solidarity between Jews and First Nations peoples work simultaneously to advance the economic and professional ambitions of the individuals promoting them (though aspersions need not be cast on their sincerity). Jason Murray, a man with many involvements in Jewish and Israel advocacy groups, for example, is a partner at the Vancouver office of the law firm Eyford Macaulay Shaw & Padmanabhan LLP, litigators specializing in aboriginal law.<sup>50</sup> The Asper Foundation’s senior program manager Jeff Morry, a co–founder of the First Phoenix Fund Company, an investment management company that worked exclusively with First Nations clients, was also an active volunteer in Winnipeg’s Jewish community. Likewise, Bryan Schwartz, the veteran aboriginal law specialist and Asper Professor of International Law at the University of Manitoba, launched a program focused on Israel and International Law entitled the “Mishpatim Program,” whose 2012 theme was “Traditional Peoples and Newcomers in the Start–Up Nation.”<sup>51</sup> Murray and Schwartz are among many Canadian Jewish attorneys whose

practices represent Indigenous clients on Indigenous legal issues in cities across the country.<sup>52</sup>

Similarly, Michael Dan, the neurosurgeon, First Nations advocate, and philanthropist mentioned above, established his Paloma Foundation in 2002 with a \$10 million gift to create the Institute for Indigenous Health research at the University of Toronto. Dan is also the president and CEO of Gemini Power Corporation which holds a significant investment in a hydroelectric project with the Lac La Croix First Nation, about 200 kilometres northwest of Thunder Bay. Dan claimed that the energy project he hoped to build would pay dividends for First Nations bands in of Manitoba and Ontario. His business interests clearly overlapped with his philanthropic efforts. Dan explained his connection to First Nations in filial terms; his grandfather, Winnipeg businessman Harry Henteleff, hunted and fished with guides-cum-friends from First Nations communities.<sup>53</sup>

The recent Jewish interest in First Nations issues, solidarity, and engagement has been wide enough to encompass attention from a range of Jewish civic leaders of varying political stripes. Some of the most influential leaders of Canadian Jewry have emphasized First Nations matters. Looking back on more than three and a half decades of service to the Jewish community as the CEO of B'nai Brith, Frank Dimant thought it important to articulate that Jews fight for aboriginal rights.<sup>54</sup> Ve'ahavta's executive director Avrum Rosensweig castigated Canadian Jews for failing to discuss Canada's "attempt at cultural genocide levied at the Aboriginal Peoples [in residential schools]," and demanded that Jews "teach it [the crimes Canadians have committed against First Nations people] to our children through the filter of *'v'ahavta l'recha kamocho* [you shall love your neighbour as yourself]."<sup>55</sup>

### **Empathic Education**

This sort of learning through empathic engagement with other "minorities" was similarly evident at a meeting in 2014 at Toronto's Beth Tzedec, during which a Conservative rabbi, a Reform rabbi, and an Orthodox Jew told Dene elder Stephen Kalkwi, the former Premier of the Northwest Territories and then-current Director of Canadians for a New Partnership (an organization that aims to raise awareness of Indigenous history and contributions to Canada), that it was "good for the Jews" to encounter First Nations people because, they reasoned, asking Jews to think about the nature of Indigenous experience and difference "inevitably" led them to further reflections about Jewish experience and difference, and thus to a stronger Jewish identity.<sup>56</sup>

Indeed, educating Jews about Indigenous experience, history, art, and politics has taken an increasingly large share of Canadian Jewish educators' attention in schools,

Jewish Community Centres, informal settings, and synagogues.<sup>57</sup> Jewish high school students in Montreal participated in a Jewish eco-leadership training program for teens, sponsored by Montreal's Federation CJA (Combined Jewish Appeal), CIJA's Gen J, the Mona Elaine Adilman Endowment, and Teva Québec, a Jewish environmental group founded by Rabbi Schachar Orenstein.<sup>58</sup> The teens participated in environmental programming, traditional Jewish text study with local rabbis, and a shabbaton trip where they met students from the Kahnawake Mohawk reserve. While the intended purpose of the exchanges was, according to Rabbi Orenstein, for students from both communities "to learn about each other's cultural and spiritual connection to nature and its protection," these encounters undoubtedly provide a vehicle for Jewish self-discovery and identity building; to encounter the "other" is to learn about oneself.<sup>59</sup>

The heuristic value of having Jews confront "others" in general, and Indigenous people in particular, has not been lost on Jewish educational leadership.<sup>60</sup> The curricula of Toronto's Paul Penna Downtown Jewish Day School include a unit on First Nations' "contributions to Canada's culture as a founding people in Canada's mosaic," a visit from a guest from the Native Canadian Centre, and a drumming circle.<sup>61</sup> Two Jewish organizations, Ve'ahavta and Facing History and Ourselves Canada, fund full-time educators who work to integrate aboriginal history and education into Jewish day school curricula in informal educational settings.<sup>62</sup> Ve'ahavta's Danny Richmond and Sarit Cantor designed and ran a four-part educational series on Indigenous issues called "Walking Together," focused on learning about Indigenous culture, history and struggles as Jews.<sup>63</sup> Similar themes and ambitions have taken centre stage at Facing History and Ourselves Canada, whose executive director, Leora Schaefer, commissioned a book on residential school history for high school readers. The work sits beside the organization's published volume on the history of anti-Semitism.<sup>64</sup>

Educational work through synagogues, particularly in adult and informal settings, is a growing trend in cities across Canada. Following programs that engaged Jewish synagogue communities in discussions about Indigenous experience, organized by Helen Poizner, the Social Action chair of Toronto's Temple Emanuel, members from six Toronto synagogues sent a delegation of Jews to the 15<sup>th</sup> Annual Shawanaga First Nation Powwow on their reserve north of Parry Sound at the invitation of Kim Wheatley, an Anishinaabe drummer, singer, and member of the Shawanaga First Nation.<sup>65</sup> Toronto's orthodox Shaarei Shomayim sisterhood hosted a panel discussion, co-sponsored by Holy Blossom Temple (Reform) and Congregation Beth Tzedec (Conservative), and organized by Steven Strauss, the founder and president of Steven A. Strauss & Associates, a consulting firm focused on advancing goals of First Nations communities and organizations.<sup>66</sup> Winnipeg's Congregation Shaarey Zedek's Sisterhood presented Jordan Bighorn, a Lakota, Fort Peck Assiniboine Sioux, Standing Rock Sioux activist, and Bahá'í member as its guest speaker during

its interfaith luncheon in the spring of 2015.<sup>67</sup> Jordan Bighorn had been awarded a Manitoba Hero Award in 2014.<sup>68</sup> Also, Winnipeg's section of the National Council of Jewish Women hosted an event for young professionals on missing and murdered aboriginal women, while the Winnipeg Jewish Federation funded various missions for First Nations to Israel and First Nations outreach programs in collaboration with the city's Aboriginal Council.<sup>69</sup>

### **Blending Activism, Environmentalism, and Religion**

In many of the recent engagements and proclamations – like that of Rosensweig, Orenstein, and Richmond – theological claims from the Jewish prophetic tradition have been presented seamlessly, motivated by a blend of political activism, religious spirituality, and environmentalism that is quite new. An 2008 event entitled “Communities Joining Together for Mother Earth” included First Nations, black, and Muslim leaders, as well as CJC's Quebec Region president Victor Goldbloom (the province's first environment minister) and a founding director of the Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business (along with Murray Koffler), and Rabbi Orenstein, who spoke about ways he believes Judaism “emphasizes connection with and appreciation of nature, and that the Jews, like the First Nations, emerged from tribes.<sup>70</sup> “We too” said Orenstein, “are an aboriginal people, an ancient people with deep roots to the earth.”<sup>71</sup> *Shtetl Montreal*, a web-magazine that appeals to millennials, similarly, has published a large portion of its podcasts and print material to issues that treat the intersection of Jewish and Indigenous interests. In its support of the Idle No More movement, *Shtetl Montreal's* editor analogized Chief Theresa Spence with the Biblical heroine Esther for her protest and hunger strike advocacy of Attawapiskat. Connections that evoked biblical or rabbinic holidays or themes resonated with the sensibility of the popular site, and were echoed in Montreal's Mile End Chavurah, which held a community Passover seder in 2013 dedicated to drawing parallels between Canadian Indigenous experiences and the biblical Exodus, a ritual replete with creative religious analogy and innovation, including the “10 Aboriginal Plagues of Canadian Colonialism,” and a public request that Jews across the country place a red feather on their seder plates on future Passovers as a way of acknowledging the Jewish connection and commitment to First Nations.<sup>72</sup> Similarly, Rabbi Orenstein hosted exchanges between members of the Spanish & Portuguese Synagogue with members of the Mohawk Traditional Council at Kahnawake, and invited a Mohawk Wolf Clan environmental activist to the *Le Mood* festival of Jewish learning to discuss and compare Jewish and Mohawk creation stories. Initiatives like these, organized by Jewish leaders for mostly Jewish audiences, aim to expose Jews to Indigenous leaders and to draw parallels in ritual and religious life (often nature-based rituals like *shofar* and *sukkot*) as a way of shedding new and inspiring light on old Jewish rituals and lore for possibly alienated Jews.

Jewish religious environmentalism is not the only dimension of Indigenous matters that have been recruited for deepening Jews' religious commitments to Judaism. Beth Tzedec Congregation in Toronto offered a learning session during Yom Kippur in 2017 featuring its Rabbi Adam Cutler and the Honorable Sidney Linden (a previous Chief Justice of the Ontario Court of Justice and Commissioner for the Ipperwash Inquiry), a residential school survivor, and an Indigenous educator, entitled, "Repentance and Reconciliation: Listening to the Voices of Indigenous Canadians."<sup>73</sup> Cutler has been instrumental in organizing and promoting Jewish – Indigenous engagements. His "Commentary" in the Beth Tzedec synagogue congregational newsletter described a trip he and forty others took to the former Mohawk Institute Residential School in Brampton and argued that Jews ought to "make amends" with First Nations by considering the sins of Canadians against First Nations in their *al het* prayers of penitence on Yom Kippur. "While many are eager to dialogue and to use conversations with Indigenous peoples as a spring-board into understanding our own identity as Jews, the first things we have to do is hear the voices and the stories of our Indigenous neighbours."<sup>74</sup>

## A Second Theme Emerges: Sovereignty

As is amply evident, Canadian Jews have been forging a wide range of links between themselves and Indigenous people. Though the wealth of educational, religious, and political programming since 2002 touches on diverse themes and issues, it tends to cohere around the theme of suffering, with variation. Augmenting and complicating this theme was a second theme that emerged in the late 2000s, namely sovereignty. The addition of this second valence signified a shift in the discourse that Canadian Jews used when engaging each other, the public, and Indigenous people when discussing Indigenous issues: a shift from diaspora to indigeneity. But what do Canadian Jews talk about when they talk about "indigenously" and "sovereignty"?

Observing subtle changes in the language Canadian Jews use helps to explain why this new element entered the public Canadian Jewish discussion at the particular historical juncture it did. The most salient and sincere reason Canadian Jews have become so active in respect of Indigenous affairs is that, as Canadians, Jews began to take reconciliation seriously on its own terms, particularly since the establishment of the TRC in 2005 and Prime Minister Stephen Harper's historical apology for residential schools in 2008.<sup>75</sup> Canadian Jews have seen their own history of oppression reflected in the findings of the nation-wide history of Indian residential schools and its goal of obliterating Indigenous cultures, religions, and communities. Canadian Jews believe their efforts will not only help Indigenous individuals and communities, but can help build the more just and equitable Canada in which they wish to remain securely rooted. This recognition and empathy lead Jewish communal leaders – educators, rabbis, and organizational directors and programmers – to perceive

encounter programs to be good for Jewish identity building. Exploring Indigenous “others” histories, identities, dilemmas and differences provides a uniquely productive counterpoint to the discovery of the unique elements of Jewish religion, culture, and history, as discussed above.

In general terms, identifying with obviously vulnerable minorities keeps the spectre of Jewish social and political precariousness alive, suggesting that Canadian Jewry remains a vulnerable minority in need of public, legal, and state vigilance even if Jews appear to be secure. It behooves Jewish leaders of all political leanings to cultivate linkages and connections with those whose communal suffering is very much in the Canadian public spotlight. However, while this connection with Indigenous peoples has much to do with diversity and racism in Canada, it has little to do with indigeneness.

Indeed, the idea of indigeneity has become a powerful rhetorical trope, and a concept that appears to offer a useful aid for contemporary Jews thinking through questions about colonialism. Jews are perhaps still often thought of (and think of themselves) as the quintessential “diaspora” people, or even the nation whose identity is hewn on exile. First Nations, on the obverse, are still often thought of (and think of themselves) as the standard bearers of indigeneness. Diaspora is the conceptual flipside of indigeneity. Exile is the underdog of colonialism. The subtext here is the single issue that occupies the largest share of Canadian Jewish consciousness and the subject of its preoccupation in public forums, synagogues, and philanthropic initiatives: whom, Jews or Palestinians, is “aboriginal” to Israel/Palestine. A zero-sum logic judges that one cannot be both colonist and indigenous.

Of critical importance is that Canadian Jews became intensely concerned with a new incarnation of anti-Jewish sentiment – anti-Zionism – at precisely the same moment that they began to forge empathic and political bonds with Indigenous organizations and allies, and at precisely the same moment as the Harper apology, the TRC, the Highway of Tears crisis, and the Idle No More movement. The Canadian Jewish turn to the rhetoric of indigeneness emerged around 2005 in response to the rise of the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement (BDS), which grew in intensity.<sup>76</sup> Canadian Jewish responses to the BDS movement began incorporating the rhetoric of “indigeneity” as a direct counterpoint to the language of resistance to colonialism that the BDS movement used and still uses, casting Israelis (or Jews more broadly in some incarnations) as colonizers in the Middle East.<sup>77</sup>

Despite the general agreement among Canadian Jews to champion liberal support of First Nations, Jewish conversations around Indigenous suffering, heritage, honour, and reconciliation have also foregrounded a set of tense questions about the extent to which Canadian Jews are and have been implicated in colonialism writ large, and



about how Canadian Jews can or should respond best to its legacies. To what extent do or should Canadian Jews see themselves as agents of the Canadian settler process or beneficiaries of it? To what extent do or should Canadian Jews see themselves as beholden to the treaties that the Canadian government made with Indigenous peoples? To what extent do or should they see themselves as perpetrators of an ongoing and systemic process that courses through the present? These questions evoke and necessarily contain within them other potent questions, anxiety, and ambiguity: the debates over whether Zionism can or ought to be understood as a colonial, anti-colonial, or post-colonial ideology, and whether the State of Israel is or was a colonial enterprise.

### **Indigeneity, Canadian Jews, and Israel**

Jews across the political spectrum have been studiously tying Indigenous themes and language to questions of Israeli/Palestinian politics.<sup>78</sup> Of the Canadian Jewish rhetorical engagements with Indigenous peoples on Israel matters, both the Zionist right and left evoke the idea of Jewish indigeneity to the Land of Israel, though they differ in crucial respects.<sup>79</sup> Leftist and progressive Jews tend to consider that two peoples might be Indigenous to the same land – having their respective identities and communal existence embedded in it at different times. Non- or anti-Zionist Canadian Jews frame the Jewish connection to Israel as “historical” rather than “indigenous,” and tend to accept Palestinians as an indigenous people. Zionist and non-Zionist Canadian Jews express ambivalence about the ways Jews may have acted in colonial or imperial terms, and of the consequences of their settlement on Palestinian lives and identity. These Jews grapple with what they perceive to be their histories as oppressors, urging Israelis and their fellow Jews to end the occupation of Palestinians, which for them, weakens Israel’s moral standing, its democracy, its ability to negotiate peace, and its security. This critique does not preclude Jews on the left from conceiving of the European Jewish experience from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries as one best characterized by “colonization.” Nor does this critique necessarily convince them to rescind their commitments to Israel’s existence, or to Zionism as moral or political necessity.<sup>80</sup> The right, on the other hand, tends to tell the origin story of Israel either without reference to colonialism, or, not infrequently, with explicit argument for why colonialism is an inappropriate term of analysis. This either elides Palestinian claims to aboriginal status, or aims to explicitly undermine those arguments.

The important point here is that the language of indigeneity has emerged as a dominant thread in debates about the Jewish entitlement – or lack thereof – to the lands where Jews live in Israel and the territories. The keywords (aboriginal, indigenous, native) regularly appear in contemporary Jewish media outlets, large and small, right and left, including *Tablet*, *Times of Israel*, *Ha’aretz*, *The Jerusalem Post*, *Israel Nation-*

*al News*, and dozens more, in the non-Jewish Canadian press, and in open letters, editorials, organizational statements, think tank position pieces, and innumerable blogs.<sup>81</sup> The keywords are commonplace; their use is contested.

Some of this rhetoric and mobilization to identify Jews as “indigenous” to the Land of Israel is subtle. In its description of “Hanukkah” for example, CIJA’s website defines the holiday as “a core milestone in the history of the Jewish people to live in freedom and security in their aboriginal homeland.”<sup>82</sup> Similarly, in an editorial in the *Canadian Jewish News*, Dafna Strauss, a government relations consultant working with First Nations in Ontario, has written about the bonds between nationhood and language, comparing the language revival work by early Zionists and that for Anishinaabemowin by Ojibwe people in Ontario and Manitoba. Such work, she noted, was essential in “conscious nation building effort to unify around a shared history, cultural competency, and a return to an Indigenous world view.”<sup>83</sup>

Other mobilizations are more direct, like Allen Z. Hertz’s editorial essay, “Aboriginal Rights of the Jewish People”:

The Canadian First Nations strongly believe that their sovereign rights to their tribal lands extend back to the beginning of time ... In the same way, the Jewish People’s claim to its ancestral homeland reaches back to antiquity... Conceptually, the Jewish People is aboriginal to its ancestral homeland in the same way that the First Nations are aboriginal to their ancestral lands in the Americas. ... Spot on is the comparison between the aboriginal rights of the Jewish People and those of Canada’s First Nations.<sup>84</sup>

When Irwin Cotler addressed the House of Commons in the spring of 2014, the long standing Mount Royal Liberal Member of Parliament, onetime Minister of Justice and Attorney General echoed this theme. Cotler encouraged Parliament to commemorate “the 66th anniversary of the establishment of the State of Israel, which comes one week after the commemoration of the Shoah,” suggesting that “Israel, at its core, is the embodiment of Jewish survival and self-determination, the reconstitution of an ancient people in its ancestral and aboriginal homeland.”<sup>85</sup> Columns in *The National Post* and *The Toronto Sun*, written by both Jewish and Indigenous authors, explicitly rejected Palestinian (and Palestinian supporters’) efforts to tie their advocacy to Indigenous rights and rhetoric while advancing Israel’s claims to aboriginality.<sup>86</sup> In 2013, Métis activist and Idle No More organizer Ryan Bellerose argued that “Natives cannot let themselves be used merely as ornamentation to often-damaging Palestinian propaganda,” while Barbara Kay more recently argued that BDS supporters “accept the premise that the Palestinians are Indigenous and oppressed by white colonialists [but] have it backward... In fact, it is the Jews who meet internationally endorsed measures of authentic indigeneity, while the Palestin-

ians (a people literally 60 years old) do not.”<sup>87</sup> This language was virtually absent from Jewish public discourse about Zionism and Israel prior to the 2000s.

This effort at isomorphism is not limited to Jewish *rhetoric* that merely evokes First Nations or the idea of aboriginality. Observing this subtext – that Jewish claims to aboriginality are rhetorically powerful – helps explain why Canadian Jews have devoted attention to Indigenous partnerships, established communal connections, and subsidized missions for First Nations youth, women, and leaders to Israel.<sup>88</sup> One Jewish-sponsored trip to Israel focused on agricultural best practices, aquaculture, and minority-languages preservation, which aimed “to show that Israelis and aboriginal peoples share a sense of responsibility for taking care of the earth,” according to its organizer.<sup>89</sup> Another delegation took seventeen First Nations women to discuss female empowerment and capacity building links with Israelis at the Golda Meir Carmel International Training Center in Haifa, among them members of the Tagish First Nation in Carcross, Yukon.<sup>90</sup> A third group toured aboriginal artists performing with and for Israeli singers, dancers, and artists. Winnipeg’s CIJA official Shelley Faintuch organized ten-day Cree Youth Development mission with the support of Norway House Cree Nation, after which Chief Ron Evans, the former grand Chief of the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, and current Chief of Norway House Cree Nation in northern Manitoba (Kinosao Sipi), pronounced the Jewish people “the true, historic Indigenous people of Israel.” Indeed, Evans has become the darling child of Canadian Jewry’s Zionist-First Nations linkages, commenting:

Israel is first and foremost the land of the heritage of the Jewish people, who have achieved self-determination in a modern democracy and diverse state. Those of us from First Nations communities can appreciate the fascinating balance between modern and ancient that we see in Israel, and especially the sense of connection to the land of one’s ancestors.<sup>91</sup>

Canadian Jews have likewise praised other Indigenous leaders, including Christian ones, for their work as Israel boosters, like the Rev. Irvin Wilson who reportedly declared “we are going to stand with the real Indigenous nation, the people of Israel,” and Winnipeg’s Raymond McLean, a pastor of the First Nations Family Worship Centre, who launched an organization called the World Indigenous Nations for Israel to galvanize support for Israel.<sup>92</sup> McLean reportedly decorates his church with Israeli flags he purchased during one of his eight trips there.<sup>93</sup> Noam Bedien, the director of Sderot Media Center for the Western Negev, quoted MacLean at a presentation he gave to a Winnipeg B’nai Brith Jewish / Aboriginal / Christian Round Table: “The beautiful connection the First Nation people have with the Jewish people’s rights to live in Israel, is summed up as “the inheritance of the land by the ancestors.”<sup>94</sup> Since 2003, McLean has visited Israel sixteen times. He participated in an *Indigenous Tour to Israel* in February 2012, sponsored by CIJA, alongside the Cree leader Evans, Inuit

leaders, Australian aboriginal leaders, and Indigenous elders from Fiji, New Zealand, Samoa and Greenland, in an interesting pan-Indigenous trip that culminated in a photo-op on the floor of the Israeli Knesset. The scene performs a simple message: *we are all indigenous peoples here.*<sup>95</sup>

The objective of missions like these is precisely to perform this mutual identification, because, I argue, much of the recent Canadian Jewish interest in Indigenous leadership has to do with Israel / Palestine politics insofar as Canadian Jews debate unanswered questions about the extent to which Israel is a case of European expansion colonialism, a case of post-colonialism, or a case of anti-colonialism in action.<sup>96</sup> Seeking partnerships, solidarity, and support from First Nations leaders and communities have been used to harness the rhetorical power of inherent belonging, each “people” on its sacred land. These elements of parallels sought (and found) are ineluctable. It is no coincidence that Jewish mobilizations of the discourse of indigeneity arose at precisely the same historical juncture of the rise of the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (of Israel) movement (BDS) in 2005, which cast Israel’s policies and existence as the paragon of twenty- and twenty-first century colonialism. As critics or outright opponents of Israel marshaled the language of colonization, Israel’s defenders responded with the language of indigeneity.

In the publicity battle for Zionism, Israel advocacy groups deploy the rhetorical power First Nations ties with purpose. Canada’s largest Israel advocacy training workshop or conference, for instance, featured Ryan Bellerose, mentioned above, an outspoken supporter of Israel, the founder of Calgary United with Israel, and more recently the Advocacy Coordinator of B’nai Brith Western Canada, to speak on the “effective use of the Indigenous rights argument in Israel advocacy” in the spring of 2017.<sup>97</sup> Calgary’s B’nai Brith posted a job advertisement to hire a “Jewish Indigenous Rights to Israel” researcher and advocacy strategist to develop and implement a campaign that includes liaising with Indigenous groups both in Canada and around the world.<sup>98</sup>

Engaging analogues between Canada and Israel has also, unsurprisingly, provoked tense dissent and raw debate among Canadian Jews. Consider Mira Sucharov’s lead editorial about the anniversaries that Canadian Jews were in the midst of in 2017: Canadian Confederation (1867) and the Six Day War (1967) which marks one or both the “reunification of Jerusalem” and the start of the “Palestinian occupation.”<sup>99</sup> Her editorial encouraged Jewish readers to reflect on the deleterious impacts of settler societies in Canada and Israel on First Nations and Palestinians during their respective 150 and 50 year “celebrations.” Condemnatory reactions to Sucharov’s editorial led her to resign from her position as a *CJN* columnist.<sup>100</sup>

## Grappling with Settler Societies

Yet these recent expressions of parallelism and performances of affinity ought to be understood in a still-broader historical context than recent *hasbarah* (pro-Israel advocacy) efforts. The overarching theme that binds together all these activities is colonialism's discontents, its supposedly obvious victims and beneficiaries. The two dominant themes that course through Canadian Jewish engagements with Indigenous peoples – suffering and sovereignty – share a common, thematically linked undercurrent of anxiety about grappling with both definitions and legacies of settler societies. Zionism is not the only site of debate about the implications of colonialism for modern Jewry.

There are fascinating intellectual pivots at play here. It is important to note that Canadian Jewish talk about Jewish-Indigenous parallels in Canada *reflects back on the Israel talk*. For Canadian Jews, Indigenous issues in Canada serve, in part, as a proxy for disagreements about Israel. Even when Canadian Jews don't mention Israel when discussing First Nations similitudes, they are at work in building the perception amongst Jews, for First Nations, and for the broader Canadian public that the histories of Jewish and First Nations' persecutions overlap, as must their matters of sovereignty. Canadian Jews aim to shore up moral authority that many Jewish writers believe is valuable in Canadian Jews' ongoing battle against anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism.

In reverse, however, the same refraction effect is not seen. The Canadian Jewish discussions and programming about First Nations and the theme of indigeneity that centres on Israel *tend not reflect back to discussions about Canada*. Often overlooked in these sources is that colonialism can be a valuable framework for understanding the broad context of the *Canadian Jewish* experience. In respect of Canadian colonialism, recent Jewish interest in Indigenous matters and persons indicates both an acceptance of and an evasion of culpability. On the one hand, liberal and progressive Jewish efforts, as discussed, explicitly acknowledge that Canadian Jews derive their fundamental benefits of living in Canada on its history of colonial persecution and dispossession. For this reason, they argue, Canadian Jews are obligated to work toward reconciliation.

On the other hand, even the most progressive of these voices tend to efface any direct participation in colonialism by Jews, despite that Jewish *immigrants* were, by definition, *settlers* in Canadian immigration history. Jews took active roles in the fur trade with Indigenous people from the late eighteenth century to the early twentieth, engaged in commerce and the larger battle between Europeans and Indigenous peoples for control of land and resources.<sup>101</sup> Jewish peddlers impacted First Nations communities.<sup>102</sup> Their settlement in agricultural colonies in the prairies, small towns

and larger cities across the country was made possible by the systematic removal or containment of Indigenous communities.<sup>103</sup>

Typical of this erasure are the words of one letter to the *Canadian Jewish News* editor, a Toronto doctor who works with First Nations patients, who claimed that

the reality is that while we [Jews] may not have been colonizers, Jews share privilege of living in this great and beautiful county, a privilege garnered at the expense of First Nations peoples.... If any community should understand the significance of a collective past, the legacy of intergenerational trauma and the importance of hearing survivors' voices, it is the Jewish community. We most certainly have a role in healing the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.<sup>104</sup>

The letter writer, clearly committed to trying to affect positive change among her Indigenous patients, understood the role Jews ought to play derived from being Canadian, despite that “we may not have been colonizers.” Or consider one of the “Rabbi-2-Rabbi” column-features of the *Canadian Jewish News*, in which Rabbi Adam Cutler of Toronto’s Conservative Beth Tzedec and Maharat Rachel Kohl Finegold of Montreal’s orthodox Shaar Hashomayim, discussed the role of Jewish community in reconciliation efforts, under the discussion question, “Is Native reconciliation a mitzvah?”<sup>105</sup> Rabbi Cutler, one of the most energetic rabbinic voices among Canadian Jews interested in working through Indigenous issues, claimed (erroneously) that “Jews may not have been in this country when wrongs were committed [against First Nations], but all Canadians continue to live with the collective past of this nation.” Championing Jews’ efforts to seek justice, but distancing Jews from culpability, Cutler noted that members of Beth Tzedec sent a youth delegation to meet First Nations teens at the North Bay Indian Friendship Centre, have partnered with synagogues to hear speakers, and have organized shabbat dinners to discuss Indigenous issues. Maharat Finegold “wonder[ed] to what extent we must take responsibility for the actions of our Canadian predecessors [...since...] for many of us (myself included), our ancestors were not on Canadian soil when these wrongs were committed [against First Nations]. Must we repent for the sins of those who came before us?” The two rabbis exchanged readings of liturgy and law as proof texts, with Finegold concluding (and Cutler almost certainly agreeing):

as Jews, we have been fortunate enough to be welcomed in Canada. Our cultural needs have been respected and honoured. We can help bring about that honour and respect for all cultures. And as Canadians, we are the ones who have wronged those more vulnerable. We have the opportunity, even the duty, to ensure *darchei shalom* for all the citizens of our country. The reconciliation effort is surely a Jewish imperative.

The positions of the doctor and the rabbis are examples of what decolonization scholars Eve Tuck and Wayne Yang call “moves to innocence.”<sup>106</sup> While Jews “have a role in healing the relationship,” tensions are construed as between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, or *as Canadians*, rather than between Canadian *Jews* and Indigenous people. Canadian Jews tend to write about their own responsibility or culpability vis-à-vis First Nations as beneficiaries of a colonial process they believe ended in the past, with the closing of an undefined settler colonial era.

Canadian Jews cast themselves in Canadian settler history, but at distance. While Canadian Jews have begun to see themselves as beneficiaries of a process that ended before Jews began their lives as Canadians, they tend to deny (or simply do not recognize) their longer history in Canada. A stronger articulation of Canadian Jewish agency in Canadian colonialism would emphasize – as most Indigenous scholars, leaders, and activists do – that the process of colonization is *ongoing*, and that Jews thereby were *and remain* active participants in this process (even in the absence of face to face encounters with Indigenous individuals).<sup>107</sup> This missing version of Jewish colonial agency would necessarily require Canadian Jews to see themselves as guests or settlers, and grapple with decolonizing Jewish communities. Canadian Jewish writing on Indigenous issues rarely implicates Jews themselves in what decolonization thinkers argue is an on-going colonial process that implicates all non-Indigenous Canadians.<sup>108</sup> Programs and writings debate neither if nor how Canadian Jews ought to relinquish political privilege, overhaul the Constitution, or cede land back to Indigenous communities.

Recent Canadian Jewish interest in Indigenous experience and history is most certainly animated by both a universalistic empathic humanism and a particularly Jewish ethic. Canadian Jews tend to make elected affinities with Indigenous people based on parallels they draw between their histories of persecution and their commitment to their respective sovereignty projects, though other dimensions including environmentalism, justice seeking, heritage pride, and religious parallelism seamlessly interweave. First Nations talk is simultaneously, however, often a proxy for Israel. Canadian Jews rarely talk about their own roles in Canadian settler history.<sup>109</sup> The larger history of Jewish – Indigenous relations history, if ever it is written, will elucidate the twists and turns of how this came to be.

**1**

I would like to thank Stephanie Tara Schwartz, Elizabeth Moorhouse-Stein, and the two anonymous peer reviewers for their thoughtful, helpful, and detailed critiques of earlier versions of essay. Faults with this version, of course, are entirely my own responsibility.

**2**

To my knowledge, the only two peer-reviewed articles that focus on specific aspects of Jewish-Indigenous encounters in Canada are Rebecca Margolis, "Jewish Immigrant Encounters with Canada's Native People: Yiddish Writing on Tekahionwake," *Journal of Canadian Studies*. Vol. 43, No. 3, Fall 2009, p.169-193; and George Colpitts, "Itinerant Jewish and Arabic Trading in the Dene's North, 1916-1930," *Érudit: Journal of the Canadian Historical Association*, Vol. 24, no.1, 2013, p. 163-213.

**3**

Note that this article does not attempt to synthesize, analyze, or contextualize contemporary Indigenous peoples' interests in or engagements with Jews, Judaism, or Israel. Such an investigation would be valuable, however.

**4**

"Ahenakew Charged with Spreading Hate," *CBC News*. June 11, 2003.

**5**

"'Hitler Had His Reasons,' Ahenakew Tells Court," *Saskatoon Star Phoenix*. November 28, 2008.

**6**

Paul Lungen, "CJC, First Nations Group Putting Ahenakew Behind them," *Canadian Jewish News*. May 7, 2008; "Canada native leader cleared in second hate trial," *Reuters*. February 23, 2009; "Ahenakew stripped of Order of Canada," *CBC News*. July 11, 2005. For a fuller discussion of this Ahenakew affair, see Ira Robinson, "David Ahenakew and His Antisemitism," in Nathan Elberg and Machla Abramovitz (eds.) *Zionism, An Indigenous Struggle: Aboriginal Americans and the Jewish State*, *Israzine*. Montreal: Canadian Institute for Jewish Research. No. 4 Vol. 49, November 2014.

**7**

Harry Simon Fonds. Jewish Labour Committee, Fonds 23. Files 3-6, and Canadian Jewish

Congress Ontario Region. Fonds 17; Series 5-4-1, File 156. Ontario Jewish Archives. My thanks to Christopher Chanco, a Masters student at York University's Department of Geography for bringing this to my attention.

**8**

See, for instance, CJC EB 02-30 "Canadian Association for Support of Native Peoples"; DA 10.5-02-70 "Indian Eskimo Association of Canada"; and DA 19-26-06 "Aboriginal Healing Foundation," at the Alex Dworkin Canadian Jewish Archives, Montreal.

**9**

"B.C. Treaty Referendum," *CBC News*. July 2, 2004; see also Phil Fontaine and Ed Morgan, "Aboriginals, Jews stand together," *Globe and Mail*. July 12, 2005.

**10**

The outcomes of these involvements were far from uniform and not always positive. Jewish Child and Family Services placed Indigenous children into Jewish foster care and adoptive families in Montreal during the infamous Sixties Scoop, with social workers and Jewish community leaders acting in what they believed were in the best interests of indigenous young people. Nakuset, "Sixties Scoop adoptee recounts growing up in Jewish Montreal family" *CBC News*. March 15, 2016.

**11**

Paul Lungen, "CJC, First Nations group putting Ahenakew behind them," *Canadian Jewish News*. May 7, 2008.

**12**

Ibid.

**13**

Carolynne Wheeler, "Native leaders visit the Wailing Wall," *The Globe and Mail*. February 21, 2006.

**14**

Bernie Farber, "My Fir Kashas – My Four Questions," *Canadian Jewish News*. April 22, 2015.

**15**

Bernie Farber, "Jews and Aboriginals Make a Powerful Team," *Canadian Jewish News*. January 26, 2015.

**16**

"Chamber Music at Head-Smashed-In Buffalo



Jump," *Fort McLeod Gazette*. May 14, 2014. <http://www.fortmacleodgazette.com/2014/chamber-music-at-head-smashed-in-buffalo-jump/>.

**17**

Another of Heller's projects, performed at the Kiever Synagogue in Toronto in 2015, wove together First Nations oral storytelling and Biblical lore from the Book of Ezekiel as a musical mediation on the themes of reconciliation and Holocaust education. <https://www.musiccentre.ca/node/37920/biography>.

**18**

For more thorough readings of the literary dimensions of recent Jewish writings that engage First Nations (and Native Americans in the United States), see Sarah Phillips Casteel, "Jews among the Indians: The Fantasy of Indigenization in Mordechai Richler's and Michael Chabon's Northern Narratives," *Contemporary Literature*. Vol. 50, No. 4, Winter 2009, pp.775-810; Stephen Katz *Red, Black and Jew: New Frontiers in Hebrew Literature*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009; Andrea Most, *Making Americans: Jews and the Broadway Musical*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004; and Rachel Rubinstein, *Members of the Tribe: Native America in the Jewish Imagination*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2010. See also Judith Cohen, "Three Canadian Sephardic Women and their Transplanted Repertoires: From Salonica, Larache and Sarajevo to Montreal and Kahanawá:ke," in Anna Hoefnagels and Gordon Smith, *Folk Music, Traditional Music, Ethnomusicology: Canadian Perspectives Past and Present*. Cambridge, MA: Scholars Press. 2007, pp.150-162.

**19**

These creative engagements have been subject to an unpublished analysis by Eugenia Sojka (University of Silesia), "Exploring the idea of 'Indigenous Shtetl' in Canada: Aboriginal-Jewish writers and artists embracing their complex histories, identities and cultures in the 21<sup>st</sup> century." Paper presented at the Polish Association for American Studies, 2014. *Polish Association for American Studies Newsletter*. No.35, 2014.

**20**

Similarly, Gregory Scofield, a poet, playwright, teacher, and social worker, makes work of having ancestry of Cree, Scottish, and Jewish descent; the Ottawa-born, Lac Des Mille Lacs First Nation member bothers Nathan and

Howard Adler, are also writers and multi-disciplinary artists who make use of their Jewish and Anishinaabe ancestry.

**21**

For more on the settlement, see Robyn Green, "Unsettling cures: Exploring the limits of the Indian residential school settlement agreement." *Canadian Journal of Law & Society/La Revue Canadienne Droit et Société* 27.1 (2012): 129-148.

**22**

For more information, see the TRC's website: <http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/index.php?p=3>

**23**

The outpouring of response by religious groups, police boards, school boards, municipal and provincial governments, universities, the military, press, scholars, and many others are numerous; they crossed virtually every sector of public life in Canada.

**24**

The temporary huts used by religious Jews during the fall holiday of sukkot indexes simple living in nature – a moment of Jewish "primitivism" in the annual holiday cycle; echoed perhaps in the shofar that Rabbi Jonathan Infeld presented on behalf of CIJA and Jewish Federation of Vancouver at another TRC event. Vancouver's Jewish community also took part in an All Nations Canoe Gathering in Vancouver in September 2013. Pacific Chai Dragon Boaters Support First Nations," *News and Publications e-Yahad*, Jewish Federation of Greater Vancouver. <https://www.jewishvancouver.com/news-and-publications/e-yahad/pacific-chai-dragon-boaters-support-first-nations>

**25**

Jewish Organizations Present a Statement of Solidarity and Action that Aims to Strengthen Relations with Aboriginal Canadians," CIJA: <http://www.cija.ca/statement-of-solidarity/>

**26**

Opening Remarks on Statement of Solidarity and Action at Truth and Reconciliation Commission: <http://www.cija.ca/opening-remarks-trc/>

**27**

For a full text of the Statement of Solidarity, see <https://www.statementofsolidarity.com/>

See also Ve'ahavta's Press Release, June 2, 2015: <http://veahavta.org/jewish-organizations-present-a-statement-of-solidarity-and-action-that-aims-to-strengthen-relations-with-aboriginal-canadians/>, and Temple Sholom's <http://www.templeholom.ca/truth-and-reconciliation-statement-of-solidarity-and-action/>

**28**

Adam Moscoe, "The Way Forward in Jewish – Aboriginal Relations," *Canadian Jewish News*, June 25, 2015, p.7

**29**

Such programs and parallels rarely face critique, though there are exceptions. See Catharine Chatterley, "How to avoid a victimization Olympics – the Holocaust and Residential Schools," *Huffington Post*, June 17, 2015. Reprinted in *The Winnipeg Jewish Review*. June 29, 2015.

**30**

For a rich discussion of solidarity making, see David Featherstone, *Solidarity: Hidden Histories and Geographies of Internationalism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press / Zed Books, 2012

**31**

Jean Gerber, "Jews should stand with First Nations" *Canadian Jewish News*. June 18, 2008.

**32**

Phillipe Assouline, "Why Canadian Jews Must Show Solidarity with Natives," *The Huffington Post*. July 1, 2013. [http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/philippe-assouline/jews-aboriginals\\_b\\_3518606.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/philippe-assouline/jews-aboriginals_b_3518606.html); See also Diane Weber Bederman, "First Nations and the Jews: A Common History," *The Huffington Post*. May 15, 2013. [http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/diane-bederman/first-nations-and-jews\\_b\\_3237519.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/diane-bederman/first-nations-and-jews_b_3237519.html)

**33**

Comper and her husband Tony, a retired BMO CEO, reported that the inspiration for their philanthropic efforts grew in the wake of the 2004 firebombing of Montreal's United Talmud Torah Day School, and the Holocaust-echoes it engendered for them, coupled with their ongoing concerns also cyber bullying, aboriginal experience, gender issues, and history of Chinese immigration. "FAST Launches high

school anti-racism curriculum," *Canadian Jewish News*, Feb.3, 2015.

**34**

Michael Dan is the president of both Regulus Investments Inc. and Gemini Power Corp., a hydroelectric company that builds partnerships with First Nations communities. A portion of his philanthropic initiatives, and his speaking engagements focus on Indigenous health, education, and economic uplift. Most recently see, "Dr. Michael Dan urges grads to close the gap for Canada's Indigenous peoples," *yFile: York University's News*. June 26, 2017. <http://yfile.news.yorku.ca/2017/06/26/dr-michael-dan-urges-grads-to-close-the-gap-for-canadas-indigenous-peoples/>. On Murray Koffler and his Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business, see J.P. Gladu, "Canada 77/150: JP Gladu," Canadian Race Relations Foundation's 150 Stories. June 19, 2017. <https://www.crrf-fcrr.ca/en/our-canada/150-stories/search-150-stories/item/26480-canada-77-150-ccab-26480>.

**35**

Paul Lungen, "Initiatives bring Jews, First Nations closer together," *Canadian Jewish News*. March 24, 2004.

**36**

Ibid.

**37**

Ve'ahavta also undertook social welfare programs in conjunction with Na Me Res Native Men's Shelter, and established a health promotion program called "Briut," in partnership with the Kenora Chiefs Advisory in Anishinaabe territory, sponsored by the Tanenbaum Foundation and Ontario's Trillium Foundation.

**38**

November 28, 2014. Holy Blossom Temple. Co-sponsored by the Annex Shul, Beth Tzedec, Temple Sinai, Adath Israel Congregation and Ve'ahavta. Flyer in possession of the author.

**39**

There have also been a few programs organized by First Nations groups, for instance a Reconciliation Canada and the Na'kalkala Management Group Inc.'s educational materials for dialogues around Canada's immigration policies on Jewish Holocaust survivor-refugees. [http://www.reconciliationcanada.ca/wp.../ReconciliationCanada\\_Dialogue\\_workshop-guide.pdf](http://www.reconciliationcanada.ca/wp.../ReconciliationCanada_Dialogue_workshop-guide.pdf)

**40**

Vicky Tomianah, "Survivor experiences," *The Jewish Independent*. November 27, 2012.

**41**

November 4, 2012, <http://www.cija.ca/compelled-to-remember-exploring-parallels-and-differences-the-jewish-and-aboriginal-legacies/>. The event has been analyzed and discussed in detail: Willow J. Anderson, "Compelled to Share: Exploring Holocaust and Residential School Survivors' Stories," in Kraenzle C., Mayr M. (eds.) *The Changing Place of Europe in Global Memory Cultures*. Palgrave Macmillan Memory Studies, 2016, pp 179-199. A similar lecture/program was held at the 2015 Holocaust Education Week, co-sponsored by Facing History and Ourselves, the University of Toronto's Equity Studies Program, the Winchevsky Centre, and the United Jewish Peoples Order. There, Maurice Switzer, a citizen of the Mississauga of Alderville First Nations, a member of the sons of Jacob Synagogue in North Bay, and the former director of communications for the Assembly of First Nations and the Union of Ontario Indians, explored the parallel legacies of oppression. November 3, 2016

**42**

"Program Celebrates Significant Success with FN, Métis, and Inuit Students." <http://human-rights.asperfoundation.com> The media mogul and philanthropist Izzy Asper himself made a public commitment to mentoring Indigenous people in the broadcasting field, has awarded a "Broadcaster of the Future Award for Aboriginal People" of \$10,000, including a placement for the recipient in a four month paid internship program at a Global Television station.

**43**

Temple Israel in Ottawa on October 18-20, 2013

**44**

Union for Reform Judaism, Resolution on First Nations: <http://www.urj.org/what-we-believe/resolutions/resolution-first-nations>; Reform groups have also organized youth action programs, fund raising initiatives, talks, lectures, and screened films for Jewish audiences about First Nations experience. The NSAC and the CCRJ partnered with the Keep the Promise initiative, which aims to end child poverty in Canada and advocate for First Nations. <http://www.ccrj.ca/national-social-action-committee#sthash.QCloy7d7.dpuf>

**45**

CIJA Announcement: <http://www.cija.ca/national-aboriginal-day/>. The Canadian Federal Government first established national Aboriginal Day in 1996. The title of the day was changed to "National Indigenous Peoples Day" in 2017.

**46**

Paul Lungen, "Initiatives bring Jews, First Nations closer together," *Canadian Jewish News*, March 24, 2014

**47**

Faith Kaplan, "Premier Selinger Speaks with the Winnipeg Jewish Review about Life in Manitoba," March 6, 2016. [http://www.winnipegjewishreview.com/article\\_detail.cfm?id=5001&sec=6&title=Premier\\_Selinger\\_Speaks\\_with\\_the\\_Winnipeg\\_Jewish\\_Review\\_about\\_Life\\_in\\_Manitoba](http://www.winnipegjewishreview.com/article_detail.cfm?id=5001&sec=6&title=Premier_Selinger_Speaks_with_the_Winnipeg_Jewish_Review_about_Life_in_Manitoba) Accessed: 28.06.2017.

**48**

Bob Goulais, "Day 13: A First Nation Vision of Canada," April 7, 2011. <http://www.anishinaabe.ca/index.php/tag/anishinabek/>.

**49**

See David Matas, "The Azrieli Memoirs: a picture of one survivor's life can tell us more about the Holocaust than a thousand general words," *Winnipeg Jewish Review*, October 16, 2012, and Shaked Karabelnicoff, "Azrieli Foundation Launches Three Holocaust Memoirs at Event In Partnership with Bnai Brith," *Winnipeg Jewish Review*, n.d. [http://www.winnipegjewishreview.com/article\\_detail.cfm?id=2969&sec=5](http://www.winnipegjewishreview.com/article_detail.cfm?id=2969&sec=5)

**50**

Murray served as a chair of the Pacific region for CIJA, on its board of directors, a director of the Jewish Federation of Greater Vancouver, a director of the United Israel Appeal. <http://www.cija.ca/about-us/board-of-directors/jason-murray/>.

**51**

Brian Schwartz "Specific Claims Law": [http://www.specific-claims-law.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=6&Itemid=5](http://www.specific-claims-law.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=6&Itemid=5); and [http://bryanschwartz.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=623&Itemid=118](http://bryanschwartz.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=623&Itemid=118)

**52**

See, for example, Calgary's Peter Feldberg and Hannah Roskey from Fasken Martineau, Toronto's Jessica Orkin of Goldblatt Partners, Vancouver's personal injury and class action lawyer David Klein, and Michael Wilchesky of Toronto's Rochon Genova LLP.

**53**

Paul Lungen, "Initiatives bring Jews, FN closer together," *Canadian Jewish News*. March 24, 2014. Michael Dan spoke at Holy Blossom Temple on April 10, 2015. Note too, the work of Steven Strauss and Jon Telch, orthodox Jews and former government consultants who now run a private lobbying firm geared toward First Nation reserve clients in Toronto, are likewise invested in Jewish-First Nations dialogue.

**54**

"Frank Dimant Looks Back," *Canadian Jewish News*. August 26, 2014

**55**

Avrum Rosensweig, "The Elegant Aboriginal Peoples," *Canadian Jewish News*. June 17, 2015.

**56**

The author was in personal attendance at the meeting.

**57**

See, for example, the "Cree: Language and Culture" exhibition at the Miles Nadal JCC's Gallery at the J., June 20 – July 12, 2017. <http://mnjcc.org/browse-by-interest/arts-culture/visual-arts/gallery/872-current-exhibit-cree-language-and-culture>

**58**

"Jewish and First Nations Teens Join Force on Environment," *Canadian Jewish News*. March 16, 2011. <http://www.cjnews.com/news/canada/jewish-first-nations-teens-join-force-environment>

**59**

"Jewish and First Nations Teens Join force on Environment," *Canadian Jewish News*. March 16, 2011.

**60**

Promotional Flyer. The Toronto Jewish Teen Experience Midtown, Beth Sholom Synagogue, Beth Tzedec's Jewish Education Experience program, and Holy Blossom Temple banded

together to offer an alternative March Break Jewish Service trip to North Bay in 2016 to "focus on encounters with Canada's First Nations,... learn about Indigenous issues and cultures, [and] share our Jewish stories with First Nations teens," as the promotional flyer for the trip read.

**61**

Paul Penna Downtown Jewish Day School Newsletter, *Kesher*, December 5, 2016.

**62**

The grandson of Holocaust survivors, Danny Richmond, alongside the CIJA and the CCRJ are working to create a Canadian Jewish Indigenous reconciliation network, seeing the responsibility of reconciliation work as both Canadians and as Jews, and justified largely in terms of shared values between Jews and First Nations, namely, the importance and transmission of language, family as a cornerstone, and land, recovering from genocides. Jody Shupac, "Jews have a duty to native peoples," *Canadian Jewish News*, September 15, 2016, p.50. See also "24 Jews Who are Changing the World," *Canadian Jewish News*. April 1, 2015.

**63**

Cosponsored by Beth Tzedec, Holy Blossom, Temple Sinai, and CIJA, Cantor, along with Rabbis Daniel Mikelberg of Temple Sinai and Adam Cutler of Beth Tzedec, and a dozen or so members of the Jewish community toured some of Toronto's significant Indigenous sites, led by Jon Johnson, a representative from the Native Canadian Centre of Toronto. The programs provided "Jewish perspectives on land and the ways that land is crucial to choose sense of rootedness" and incorporated learning about treaties, colonial impacts, exposure to Indigenous rituals and ceremonial participation from First Nations elders. Jodie Shupac, "Hyde Park tour part of Jewish – native bridge building," *Canadian Jewish News*, September 15, 2016, p.15

**64**

Facing History initiated a series of programs and talks on First Nations suffering and resilience for Jewish audiences with explicit conjunction to Jewish historical trauma and recovery during Toronto's annual Holocaust Education week for several years running, and has made considerable efforts to engage First Nations intellectuals and activists in this work. *Stolen Lives, The Indigenous Peoples of*

*Canada and the Indian Residential School.* Toronto: Facing History and Ourselves. 2016, and Phyllis Goldstein, *A Convenient Hatred: The History of Antisemitism*, Brookline, MA.: Facing History and Ourselves, 2012.

**65**

Temple Har Zion, Beit Rayim Synagogue, Beth Tikvah Synagogue, Shaar Shalom Synagogue and Kehillat Shaarei Torah together organized thirty representatives to attend the event, to which they brought gifts, and at which they were honoured by a dance. Frances Kraft, "Toronto congregations connect with First Nations at powwow." *Canadian Jewish News*. August 27, 2012. Frances Kraft, Toronto Congregations Connect with First Nations At Powwow, URJ Camp George Blog. August 27, 2012 <https://campgeorge.org/2012/08/29/toronto-congregations-connect-with-first-nations-at-powwow/>. Emanu-el hosted Kim Weatley to perform at an awareness-raising event, to speak to the Jewish group, and to participate in the Reform movement's Camp George for Shabbat dinner.

**66**

"Seeking Understanding: Jewish and Aboriginal Communities in Canada. An evening of awareness-building, learning and truth." The panel featured the Ontario MPP and Indigenous Affairs & Northern Development Minister Carolyn Bennett, the well-known Jewish educator Seymour Epstein, the artist Tamara Podemski (who has one Israeli one Ojibwe parent), and Dr. Dawn Lavell-Harvard president of Native Women's Association of Canada. September 6, 2016. Program Flyer.

**67**

"Shaarey Zedek 53<sup>rd</sup> Annual Interfaith Luncheon" May 12, 2015. Jewish Federation of Winnipeg: <https://www.jewishwinnipeg.org/calendar/shaarey-zedek-53rd-annual-sisterhood-interfaith-luncheon>.

**68**

"Our Manitoba Heroes, Compassion in Action" [http://ourmanitobaheroes.ca/jordan\\_bighorn/](http://ourmanitobaheroes.ca/jordan_bighorn/)

**69**

"Annual Interfaith Luncheon." *Winnipeg Jewish Review*. April 17, 2015; Rhonda Spivak, "NCJW Winnipeg Section Puts on Successful Program to Increase Awareness Re: Human Trafficking and Missing Indigenous Women," *Winnipeg Jewish Review*. March 26, 2015.

**70**

Koffler, an entrepreneur and philanthropist with deep roots in Canadian Jewish life, established the Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business in 1982 to "improve economic self-reliance of Aboriginal communities while assisting corporate businesses," according to its website. <https://www.ccab.com/about-ccab/our-history/>.

**71**

Janice Arnold, "Jews, First Nations Share Concerns for Mother Earth," *Canadian Jewish News*. June 18, 2008.

**72**

Shtetl, "Aboriginal Rewrite of the 10 Plagues," March 27, 2013, <http://shtetlmontreal.com/2013/03/27/aboriginal-rewrite-of-the-10-plagues/>. The "plagues" indexed water rights, the reserve system, legislation, drugs and alcohol, stereotypes, justice, broken treaties, religion, and residential schools. The seder also featured Melissa Mollen Dupuis, an Innu artist and co-organizer of Idle No More in Quebec.

**73**

Program Flyer. Beth Tzedec. 5777. Supplied by Rabbi Cutler to the author.

**74**

Adam Cutler, "Hearing Their Stories," *Beth Tzedec Newsletter*, October 2016, p.13.

**75**

Stephen Harper. "Statement of apology – To former students of Indian Residential Schools." *Canada. Parliament: House of Commons. House of Commons Debates (Hansard)* 142.110 (2008): 1515-1525. For a scholarly discussion of the apology, see Matthew Dorrell, "From reconciliation to reconciling: Reading what "we now recognize" in the government of Canada's 2008 residential schools apology." *ESC: English Studies in Canada* 35.1 (2009): 27-45.

**76**

There is a great deal of literature on the BDS movement, which I cannot summarize or fully index here. See, for a taste of this discussion, Omar Barghouti, *BDS: Boycott, divestment, sanctions: The global struggle for Palestinian rights*. Haymarket Books, 2011, or Sean F. McMahon, "The Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions campaign: contradictions and challenges." *Race & Class*. 55.4 (2014): 65-81.

**77**

BDS Movement Homepage: <https://bdsmovement.net/>.

**78**

See, for example, the nine editorial essays in Nathan Elberg and Machla Abramovitz (eds.) "Zionism, An Indigenous Struggle: Aboriginal Americans and the Jewish State," *Israzine*. Canadian Institute for Jewish Research. No. 4 Vol. 49, November 2014.

**79**

The boundary between "right" and "left" is, of course, porous and ambiguous on many issues. It is used here for heuristic purposes to illustrate a wider point about the ubiquitous use of the language of indigenoussness.

**80**

See, for example Cheryl L'Hirondelle, Joseph Naytowhow, and b.h. Yael, "Land Project: A Conversation between Canada and Israel/Palestine," in Mike DeGagné, Jonathan Dewar and Ashok Mathur (eds.) Cultivating Canada: Reconciliation Through the Lens of Cultural Diversity. Aboriginal Healing Foundation. Vol.3, No.5, 2011 pp.38-51

**81**

See, for instance, Hilary Leika Krieger, "Native Lands," *The Jerusalem Post*. May 3, 2006.

**82**

"Hanukah in Conversation." December 15, 2014: <http://www.cija.ca/resource/a-year-in-conversations/chanukah-in-conversation/>

**83**

Dafna Strauss, "The Enduring bond between Nationhood and Language," *Canadian Jewish News*. July 5, 2016 p. 7

**84**

"Aboriginal Rights of the Jewish People," *Winnipeg Jewish Review*. May 6, 2011 by Allen Z. Hertz

**85**

House of Commons Debates (Hansard). Vol.147. No.081. 2<sup>nd</sup> Session. 41<sup>st</sup> Parliament. Tuesday May 6, 2014, p. 4999. Interestingly, Cotler also spoke that same day in Parliament urging the government to establish a non-partisan national inquiry into murdered and missing Indigenous women. P.4962.

**86**

It is worth noting that an elaborate discussion among activists and scholars has emerged that analogizes, analyzes, explores, differentiates, and builds solidarities between First Nations (and Native Americans in the United States) with Palestinians. See, for example Mike Krebs and Dana M. Olwan, "'From Jerusalem to the Grand River, Our Struggles are One': Challenging Canadian and Israeli Settler Colonialism," *Settler Colonial Studies*. Vol. 2, Issue 2, 2012, pp.138-164; Eric Ritskes, "Beyond and Against White Settler Colonialism in Palestine." *Cultural Studies Critical Methodologies* 17:1, 2017, pp. 78-86; and Rachel Busbridge, "Israel-Palestine and the Settler Colonial 'Turn': From Interpretation to Decolonization." *Theory, Culture & Society*, January 23, 2017.

**87**

Ryan Bellerose, "Native, Jewish bond thicker than water," *The Toronto Sun*. June 16, 2013; Barbara Kay, "The Indigenous tribes of Israel," *National Post*. June 28, 2016.

**88**

Ron Csallag, "Aboriginal leaders from Canada to visit Israel," *Jewish Telegraph Agency*. April 25, 2012.

**89**

Myron Love, "Aboriginal Leader looks to Israel as Role Model," *Canadian Jewish News*. May 18, 2012.

**90**

Oakland Ross, "Different Worlds, Similar Problems," *The Toronto Star*. February 4, 2008.

**91**

Evans has in fact travelled to Israel several times since 2010, when he "was inspired like never before. I saw the similarity between our two peoples, the struggles and the successes. I saw that with a dream – all things are possible, no matter the obstacle. I deeply want to share this experience with the young people of my home community." "Chief of Canadian Cree Nation Returns to Israel for Second Annual Youth Leadership Trip." *Winnipeg Jewish Review*. May 18, 2013. See also Myron Love "Aboriginal trip to focus on Israeli innovation" *Canadian Jewish News*. February 18, 2016, p.17; Myron Love, "Aboriginal leader looks to Israel as a role model," *Canadian Jewish News*. May 18, 2012.

92

Rhonda Spivak, "First Nations Group Supports Israel," *Canadian Jewish News*. June 11, 2008.

93

One of his congregants Dale Jack, an aboriginal woman, reputedly sings Hatikvah at church. Rhonda Spivak "First Nations group supports Israel," *Canadian Jewish News*, June 11, 2008.

94

Noam Bedein, "Canadian First Nations To Stand with Israel Against IAW," *Winnipeg Jewish Review*. March 1, 2012.

95

Ibid.

96

There is, of course, a rich and highly contentious literature about this question in the scholarly and popular literatures. I have found the framing in this article to be particularly helpful: Derek J. Penslar, "Is Zionism a Colonial Movement?" in *Israel in History: the Jewish State in Comparative Perspective*. NY: Routledge, 2006.

97

Sheri Shefa, "Israel advocacy training workshop is Canada's largest," *Canadian Jewish News*. February 23, 2017, p.15.

98

B'nai Brith Canada Job Listings, March 14, 2017: [http://www.bnaibrith.ca/jobs?utm\\_campaign=internship&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_source=bnaibrithcanada](http://www.bnaibrith.ca/jobs?utm_campaign=internship&utm_medium=email&utm_source=bnaibrithcanada)

99

Mira Sucharov, "Canada 150 and 50 years of Israel's occupation need sober reflection," *Canadian Jewish News*. May 3, 2017

100

Mira Sucharov, "Why I'm resigning my CJN column," *Canadian Jewish News*. June 2, 2017

101

Jacob Rader Marcus, *The Colonial American Jew: 1492-1776*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1970; Jacob Rader Marcus, *Early American Jewry*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1951; Dennis Vaugeois, *The First Jews of North America: The Extraordinary Story of the Hart Family, 1760-1860*. Montreal: Baraka Books, 2012;

George Colpitts, "Itinerant Jewish and Arabic Trading in the Dene's North, 1916-1930," *Érudit: Journal of the Canadian Historical Association*, Vol. 24, no.1, 2013, p. 163-213.

102

Hasia R. Diner. *Roads Taken: The Great Jewish Migrations to the New World and the Peddlers who Forged the Way*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015; on Jewish Indian curio traders in Victoria, B.C., see David S. Koffman, "Jews, Indian Curios, and the Westward Expansion of American Capitalism" in Rebecca Kobrin (ed.) *Chosen Capital: The Jewish Encounter with American Capitalism*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2011, p.168-186.

103

James Daschuk, *Clearing the Plains: Diseases, Politics of Starvation and the Loss of Aboriginal Life*. Regina: University of Regina Press, 2013.

104

Letter to the Editor, Jennifer Wyman, *Canadian Jewish News*, Aug.25, 2016, p. 3

105

Adam Cutler and Rachel Kohl Finegold, "Is Native reconciliation a mitzvah?" *Canadian Jewish News*. August 12, 2016. P.4

106

Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, "Decolonization is Not a Metaphor," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*. Vol. 1, No. 1., 2012, pp. 1-40.

107

See, for example, Barker, A.J. and Battell Lowman, E. *Settler: Identity and Colonialism in 21st Century Canada*. Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2015; Grace Li Xiu Woo, *Ghost Dancing with Colonialism: Decolonization and Indigenous Rights at the Supreme Court of Canada*. Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia Press, 2011; and Glen Sean Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2014.

108

See Mark Aquash, "Relations with First Nations: Decolonization in the Canadian Context," *Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences*. May 10, 2011; Gabrielle Slowey, "Confederation comes at a Cost: Indigenous

Peoples and the Ongoing Reality of Colonialism in Canada," *Canada Watch: Debating the Confederation Debates of 1865*. Spring 2016, 33-36.

**109**

This generally holds for Jewish histories of Argentina, Australia, Brazil, South Africa, etc. as well. The path breaking essay on frontier Jews fails to even mention Indigenous people, see Daniel J. Elazar, "Jewish Frontier Experiences in the Southern Hemisphere: The Cases of Argentina, Australia, and South Africa," *Modern Judaism*. Vol.3, No.2, May 1983, pp.129-146.