From Rebellions to Confederation at the Canadian Museum of Civilizations: Tension Narratives through the Lens of Jocelyn Létourneau

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ABSTRACT
The condition of tension and ambivalence has been essential to Quebec identity, and the tension inextricable from this is invariably related to a narrative of survival and fear of assimilation into an Anglophone majority. The 1837-38 rebellions of Lower Canada are paramount in this Quebecois narrative. This paper undertakes a case study of the From Rebellions to Confederation module at the Canadian Museum of Civilization (CMC) in Gatineau, Quebec, and puts forth the argument that while the module invokes conflict and tension, the rebellions are framed as a political struggle for democracy within a wider national narrative of Canadian national development, where the genius of confederation is expressed as the climatic achievement of a compromise following three decades of political upheaval. Democratic reform and national partnership are celebrated, while the Lower and Upper Canadian rebellions are equated, obscuring the cultural legacy and specificity of the Lower Canadian rebellions thereby excluding the tensions fundamental to Quebec Identity. The module also disconnects confederation from its many other controversies. The CMC thus confirms itself as a function of nation-state power as it fails to represent a fundamental conflict in favour of a homogenizing narrative.

RÉSUMÉ
Selon Jocelyn Létourneau, afin de comprendre l'identité québécoise dans toute sa complexité, il faut accepter ses composantes essentielles : tension et ambivalence. La tension inextricable de cette condition est invariablement liée à une histoire de survie et de peur de l'assimilation par la majorité anglophone et à des solidarités émergentes. Les rébellions de 1837-38 prédominent dans ce récit national québécois. Cet article effectue une analyse du module Des rébellions à la confédération au Musée canadien des civilisations (MCC) à Gatineau, Québec. Nourri aux réflexions de Jocelyn Létourneau, cet article montre que tout en évoquant des conflits et des tensions, le module du MCC présente les rébellions comme une lutte politique pour la démocratie à l'intérieur d'un plus grand récit national canadien, dont la Confédération canadienne serait l'apogée, après de trois décennies de bouleversements politiques. La négation d’une spécificité historique bas-canadienne constitue une exclusion de la notion de tensions fondamentales à l'identité canadienne. En dissociant la Confédération des multiples controverses qui l’ont précédée, le MCC choisit de représenter les rébellions comme faisant partie d’un récit historique homogène et pacifiant.

KEYWORDS
Jocelyn Létourneau; Canadian Museum of Civilizations; Rebellions
Introduction

In October of 2010, the Canadian Museum of Civilization (CMC) opened the From Rebellions to Confederation exhibition, a module that weaves into the chronological narrative of the Canada Hall the highly political history of the period between the 1837-38 Rebellions and Confederation in 1867. This period of political tension is considered by the exhibition’s curator, Xavier Gélinas, to be integral to the understanding of Canadian history. This paper examines the From Rebellions to Confederation module through the lens of Jocelyn Létourneau. Specifically, it deals with how the 1837-38 Rebellions can be represented in the space of a national museum as markers of Létourneau’s concept of creative tension-space. It advances the argument that the CMC’s representation of the 1837-38 Rebellions marks the penetration of Jocelyn Létourneau’s project into Canada’s national history museum. Namely, analysis of the CMC’s module reveals unfixed narratives which leave room for each visitor to negotiate their individual identification with the Rebellions history, a history layered with intersecting narratives that penetrate both Quebec and Canadian nationalisms.

Following an overview of the CMC’s recent shift towards the inclusion of political, cultural and national tensions, this paper outlines Létourneau’s approach to Quebec history and identity, and in particular his concept of tension-space, which speaks to the productive capacity of tensions between cultural and political groups. It then examines the relationship of the 1837-38 Rebellions to this concept of creative tension-space, and considers how Létourneau’s project of revising Quebec’s historical consciousness relates to public history in the space of Quebec’s national museum. With the relevance of Létourneau’s project to the public treatment of history established, this paper turns to the CMC’s From Rebellions to Confederation module, advancing the argument that Létourneau’s project resonates throughout it.

Weaving Conflict and Tension into the Museum of Civilization

The CMC roots the authenticity and legitimacy of the Rebellions to Confederation narrative in the exhibit’s open treatment of tension. President and CEO of the Museum, Victor Rabinovitch, describes the exhibit as reflective of the complexity and struggle inextricable from Canada’s national development:

We aim to reflect the complex history of Canada’s people, to reveal the hopes shared by generations of immigrants, and the
From Rebellions to Confederation

political, social and economic struggles that led to our development as a nation (CMC Oct.2010).

By emphasizing its unmitigated revelation of conflict, the CMC invokes an ethos of honesty in order to legitimize its narrative of the rebellions to Confederation period. It succeeds at the same time in establishing a discursive connection between struggle and Canadian identity.

This connection was particularly pronounced in July of 2010, when Rabinovitch announced the *Rebellions to Confederation* exhibition, heralding its creation as an innovative museological achievement:

It took 30 years, from 1837 to 1867, for the British colonies in North America to reach the monumental political compromise that led to Canada’s creation. It has taken nearly as long — some 22 years — for the Museum of Civilization to develop and produce a highly original way of presenting the genius of Confederation within a single exhibition (Rabinovitch 2010, July e-newsletter).

The innovation of the museum’s approach is apparently rooted in its revelation of the political struggle connected to Confederation. Rabinovitch notes that “the road to Confederation was rough and gritty, strewn with conflicts” (ibid.). To tell this political and “ultimately very Canadian” story of Confederation is, according to Rabinovitch, “very different from how Confederation is usually discussed,” in that it disrupts the usual “emphasis on the peaceable — even boring — debates of the 1860s” (ibid.). Thus, the CMC promotes and frames the *Rebellions to Confederation* exhibit within a topos of revelation, its trustworthiness or ethos as the revealer apparently inherent to its open treatment of an undeniably ‘Canadian’ tension and conflict.

As the CMC’s curator of Canadian political history and curator of the *From Rebellions to Confederation* module, Xavier Gélinas is familiar with the challenge of incorporating contentious and contested history into the space of a national museum of history. Located on the border of Quebec, and directly across the Ottawa river from the Canadian Parliament buildings, the CMC is in constant view of tourists and public servants, and has become a showcase of prestige for the government of Canada (Gélinas 2010, 2). While the Museum’s fundamental mission remains research, Gélinas remarks that the process of reconciling a scientific commitment to historical truth with popular and State obligations has been, at times, tumultuous (ibid: 3).

It is in this balancing act that the Museum has succumbed for so long to the “temptation of silence” with respect to treatment of the political crises and
differences that have invariably shaped the history of Canada (ibid: 4). In the face of its obligation to and reliance on a paying public, as well as the State subsidies accounting for nearly 80% of its budget, the CMC has traditionally avoided the treatment of any potentially offending or alienating history, favoring instead the “refuge of objectivity” that is the strictly benign collection and conservation of artifacts (ibid: 3, translation by author).

The move to incorporate tension is in response to the wealth of commentary received from visitors, journalists and historians throughout the 1990s regarding the Museum’s most visited exhibition, the Canada Hall, which represents 1000 years of Canadian history from East to West, treating the diverse linguistic, national and regional communities that compose the country (ibid: 6). It was not the integrity or accuracy of the historical representations composing the Canada Hall that came into question, according to Gélinas; rather, the commentary pointed relentlessly to the Canada Hall’s negation of all that makes “the soul of a population”, namely, the “ideas, politics, religion, literature” of its peoples (ibid, translation by author). In response to a public call, then, the CMC has woven the highly political history of the 1837-38 Rebellions into the chronological narrative of Canada Hall with the intention of speaking to the series of political conflicts between Anglophones and Francophones, Quebec and Canada, which according to Gélinas, are integral to an understanding of Canadian history (ibid.). The recent erection of the Rebellions to Confederation module was explicitly intended as an integration into the Museum of a historical conflict between Quebec and Canada. The remainder of this paper examines how the work of Jocelyn Létourneau can inform a reading of this shift by the CMC.

Jocelyn Létourneau: Tension-Space and Ambivalence

Jocelyn Létourneau holds the Canada Research Chair in History and Political Economy of Contemporary Quebec at Université Laval, and is renowned for his extensive work on historical consciousness, narrative and collective identity formation in Quebec. He is a central intellectual figure in the debate amongst scholars of contemporary Quebec and Quebecois history over the place of ambivalence and ambiguity in the formation of collective identity in Quebec (Socqué 2009, 50; translation by author). Létourneau conceives of Quebec and Canada as sociopolitical spaces wherein “cultures meet one another and negotiate their different ways of being”, and argues that inherent to this interaction and negotiation is a sense of ambivalence (2000, 76-7). By his account, an ambiguous collective identity and an ambivalent sense of self is inevitable in spaces wherein
cultures meet and grow together, and the lines of Other and Self become blurry and inextricable (ibid.). This tension-space and condition of ambivalence, he argues, is essential to Quebecois identity. It is an “agreed tension space”, which has allowed Quebeckers “to preserve a useful tension between the interfaces of their identity” (ibid: 77).

Létourneau conceives of this tension-space as useful insofar as, arguably, francophone Quebec’s emergence as a self-conscious and unified entity is inextricable from the historical intermingling of French in Canada and Canada in Quebec:

It is in the political space created by the perpetual tension between the anglophone majority’s desire to marginalize the French fact in North America… and the necessity and opportunity to converse with francophones in order to address their thirst to endure and their willingness to assert themselves…that francophones, from their hearth in Quebec, became a major political community in Canada (ibid: 78).

To be sure, Létourneau posits that francophone Quebec, as a self-conscious group unified in struggle, emerged and evolved in relation to the threat of assimilation. It is thus around intercultural tension that a political forum for negotiating linguistic and cultural survival congealed. The following section describes how the Rebellions of 1837-38 relate to this concept of creative tension-space.

The Rebellions of 1837-38: Markers of Creative Tension-Space

Before turning to an examination of how the theory of Jocelyn Létourneau can inform the reading of the CMC’s exhibition, it is worth providing a very brief review of the 1837-38 Rebellions and their relationship to Quebec nationalist narratives. It should be noted that this paper is not an attempt to discern what the Rebellions were; such an endeavor would prove impossible. Rather, this paper is concerned with interpretations and representations of the Rebellions, and their use in the construction of Canadian and Quebecois national identity. This brief review, then, serves as a very basic, and inevitably incomplete, outline of the historical context to which the paper’s larger question around the representation of historical tension refers.

With respect to the Rebellions as a period of tension, the beginning of 1837 in Lower Canada (which is present-day Quebec) saw an acute conflict escalating between the elected Assembly of Lower Canada, led by the Patriote Party, and the executive, the appointed English-speaking elite. Despite a demographic French-Canadian majority and a popularly elected legislative Assembly composed of
primarily French-speaking Lower-Canadians, the appointed English-speaking elite maintained corrupt control of public funds (Greer 1995, 11). Nearly a year before the eruption of armed conflict, the political tension in Lower Canada had reached the point of legislative gridlock (ibid.). City councils and school boards were inoperable as budgets and statutes could not be approved, and “funds for routine state operations had to be raised by extraordinary means” (ibid: 12).

Exacerbating the political discord, which had evidently penetrated quotidienn life in Lower Canada, was the British government’s rejection of the legislative Assembly’s 92 resolutions, a fervent call for democratic reform submitted three years prior (Létourneau 2004, 29-30). This rejection marked, for many Canadiens in Lower Canada, the end of any hope for democratic reform of the colonial order; Patriotes protest escalated and spread throughout Lower Canada, and their grievance took root in the hearts and minds of the populace (ibid: 30).

Widespread and organized popular dissent in Lower Canada evidently posed a threat to the sovereignty of the British Empire, and by late October of 1837, British soldiers were brought to Montreal in droves, indicating an obvious intention to deploy force against the Patriotes (Greer 1995, 14). The fortification of Montreal actually left not a single soldier in Upper Canada (what is now Ontario), providing an opening for the Upper Canada reformers to carry out a parallel protest against government corruption (ibid.). For the sake of brevity, it can be noted that protests escalated to armed struggle, most acutely in Lower Canada. The period of 1837 to 1838 saw an abandonment of the rule of law, and the particular seriousness of the Rebellions in Lower Canada is evidenced by not only the massive British military initiative to quash the uprising, but by the “extraordinary measures taken to preserve British rule”, namely, the imposition of martial law, the suspension of habeas corpus, the massive-scale arrests and detentions without charge of Patriote rebels (ibid: 16). As the exhibitions text itself notes, “the Lower Canada Rebellion was a bloody affair, with about 300 Patriotes and 27 government soldiers killed. Twelve rebels were hanged and 58 transported to penal colonies in Australia” (CMC *A Heavy Price*, secondary text panel in Lower Canada zone).

By this very brief account of the traumatic elements of the Lower Canada Rebellions, of note is how the memory of this period may relate to Quebecois nationalist narratives, particularly those of survival. Consider the following:

In the collective memory of Quebecois of French-Canadian heritage, the rebellions of 1837 and 1838 have the status of traumatic and crushing events. According to the established narrative, their brutal repression cuts short the masterful course of a nation in search of freedom, emancipation and democratic fulfillment… (Létourneau 2004, 30; translation by author).
According to Daniel Vaillancourt and Marilyn Randall, this trauma is the imperative for the Quebecois narrative of survival (2001, 454). The quashing of the rebellions marks a mythic moment deeply entrenched in a Quebecois imaginary, an imaginary pervaded by the will to remember and revisit the crushing cultural blow (ibid.). Arguably, the Rebellions in Lower Canada and their aftermath mark the birth of a nationalized and democratic Quebecois self-consciousness. As recently as 2001, Prime Minister of Quebec, Bernard Landry, spoke to this, tabling a motion calling for the national Assembly to officially acknowledge the importance of the Patriote struggle of 1837-1838 to the recognition of the Quebec nation, its political liberty, and its establishment of a democratic government (Trépanier 2009, 270).

In this sense, the 1837-38 rebellions relate closely to the creative tension-space described by Létourneau. Not only do they mark the seeds of a pervasive will to remember and survive, but their relationship to a unifying Quebecois cultural imaginary is parallel to the relationship between the threat of assimilation and the emergence of a major francophone political community. Thus, the Lower Canada rebellions, and in particular their memory, can serve as a marker of creative tension-space, the dialectic poles of which include, according to Létourneau, “the desire to rebuild and the willingness to carry on with one’s heritage” (Létourneau 2000, 77).

Representing Creative Tension-Space

Létourneau’s theory of tension-space is particularly intriguing when enmeshed with the process of representing complex and contested history in the space of a national museum. In 2004, Le Musée de la Civilisation à Québec undertook such a project with its creation of a new permanent exhibition entitled *Le Temps des Québécois*. The Museum’s director general, Claire Simard, describes the Musée as at the heart of a contemporary preoccupation with an unfixed sense of the past, where interpretation of historical facts, truths and memories are considered fluid (2004, 3). Jocelyn Létourneau was commissioned as one of the primary contributors to this new exhibition, and tasked with writing an accompanying manuscript which would synthesize more than 400 years of Quebec history in a way accessible to today’s average reader (Simard 2004, 4). His approach to representing the collective historical trajectory of Quebeckers in the space of a national museum would be, unsurprisingly, anything but unidirectional, “where everything evolves towards the better or the worse” (Létourneau 2004, 5). Rather, he and the Musée chose to expose:
the intermingled, ambivalent, dissonant and divergent, singular and universal processes by which Quebecois society and collectivities formed over time, and how, by a sort of enviable indetermination, past and present, the future of the Quebecois remains open to the plurivocal projects of its inhabitants (ibid; translation by author).

Le Musée de la Civilisation à Québec thus explicitly attempts to represent, within the public forum of a national museum, the creative tension-space theorized by Létourneau.

This approach is worth noting insofar as it speaks to a shifting public treatment of Quebec’s history. Létourneau’s project has been described as one of redefinition and revision of Quebec’s historical consciousness so as to exonerate ambiguous and ambivalent self-conceptions (Socqué 2009, 64-5). It has been described by museum professionals as a project which attempts to overcome a melancholic vision of Quebec’s trajectory, one of an abandoned people, unable to overcome the process of recovery (Simard 2004, 3). Létourneau’s project has clearly penetrated the cloister of academia, as it is in full force in the national public space of Le Musée de la Civilisation à Québec. That said, the CMC’s treatment of a distinct pillar of Quebec’s history, the 1837-38 Rebellions, begs the question of whether the project advanced by Létourneau resonates within Canada’s national history museum.

Analyzing the CMC’s Representation of Rebellions to Confederation

Turning to an analysis of the From Rebellions to Confederation exhibition module, the introductory text for the module reads:

In 1837 “Canada” consisted of five separate colonies ruled by governors appointed from Britain. Many colonists wanted democracy and were against the local elites who had special financial, political and religious privileges. The Rebellions in Upper and Lower Canada in 1837-1838 were part of this fight for democratic reform… they played a role in a reform movement which laid the basis for Confederation, and ultimately for a new country – Canada (CMC, Introductory Text Panel).

The framework of the exhibit is captured by this introductory text. The module consists of four zones which together narrate the period of 1837 to 1867 in the Canada Hall1. The first zone, entitled Trouble Brewing in Upper Canada, December 4,

1 It should be noted that the module contains a fourth zone entitled A British Officer’s Quarters. It is currently located as an offshoot of the Lower Canada zone, and it is remnant of the module that From Rebellions to Confederation
1837, is devoted to the three-dimensional exhibition of the political struggle in Upper Canada, channeled in the immersive replication of Montgomery’s Tavern, north of Toronto, wherein mannequin rebels gather and plot. The second zone, *Rebellion Crushed in Lower Canada, November, 1837*, consists of a three-dimensional exhibition of the Lower Canada Rebellions via an immersive replication of the interior of Pied-du-courant Prison in Montreal, site of the imprisonment of hundreds of *Patriotes* between 1837 and 1839, and the public hanging of twelve. Finally, the module ends with *The Path to Confederation, 1839-1867*, a two-dimensional multi-media presentation along a large wall, featuring primarily text panels, as well as comics and an audio recording, which together represent the thrust for democratic reform that came of the Rebellions.

An abstracted consideration of the structure and order of the exhibition zones may provoke initial criticism. It has been argued that “the Canadian Museum of Civilizations is a hierarchically organised space designed to draw people and control movements in specific ways” (MacDonald and Alsford in Mackey 1999, 77). With respect to the equal weight assigned the Upper and Lower Rebellions in this exhibition, then, it could be argued that the exhibit’s structure obscures the specificity of the Lower Canada Rebellions, which were by any account “far deeper, and by any standard, much more significant” (Greer 1995, 8). The discontent in Upper Canada was “unclouded by the issue of national oppression” (Conway 1992, 23), and thus the rebellion and its afterword “much less bloody and bitter” (ibid.). With this in mind, the CMC’s affording Upper and Lower Canada equal weight is a spatial affirmation of a narrative emphasis of the exhibit; namely, the 1837-38 rebellions as a period of democratic and political struggle, wherein the rebels of Upper and Lower Canada were united in their struggle for democratic reform. The argument could be made that this emphasis on the democratic struggle uniting the rebellions of Upper and Lower Canada has the effect of obscuring the legacy of the distinctly nationalist vein of the movement in Lower Canada.

The spatial arrangement of the module could also be interpreted as an unmistakable narrative emphasis on the celebration of Confederation, particularly given the module’s conclusion with Confederation as the realization of the rebellions’ democratic initiaive. The narrative connection of Confederation to the rebellions preceding it is reiterated varyingly throughout this zone. It is this zone, and not the rebellions zone, for example, that features the Rebellion Losses Bill of 1849, which compensated those, mainly French Canadians, that lost property

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replaced in 2010. The exhibition space currently occupied by the three primary zones was formerly devoted to representing the sociocultural life and contributions of the British military in Canada. This paper neglects an analysis of this remnant zone, focusing instead on the primary and newly included spaces devoted to the Rebellions and Confederation.
during the Lower Canada rebellions (CMC, Rebellion Losses Bill panel). Perhaps most poignantly, the introductory panel to the Confederation zone notes that “most goals for which the rebels fought in 1837-1838 were realized, notably greater democracy and a strengthening of French language rights (CMC, Confederation Panel). While this zone of the exhibition does refer to discontent over Confederation, this discontent is minimized. The panel notes that “as Canada became a nation, most of the original Reformers embraced Confederation, but some saw it as a betrayal” (ibid.). Allusion to controversy over Confederation is vague, with perhaps the most explicit reference to a contested version of Confederation being a cartoon depicting the mainly Francophone Canada East as a sacrificial lamb. From Rebellions to Confederation thus ends with a celebratory emphasis on Confederation as the unifying realization of democratic reform.

The positioning of Confederation as the climactic realization of democratic unity may be interpreted as a hegemonic cooption of the Rebellions story into a narrative serving the celebratory memory of Canada’s federal foundation. The narrative of Canadian nationhood affirmed in the CMC’s rebellion module does not explicitly erase Quebecois nationalism from history; rather, inclusion of the Lower Canada rebellions is central to the module’s narrative of a unifying democracy. However one could anticipate the argument that From Rebellions to Confederation constitutes a Canadian nationalist representation wherein Quebecois “cultural difference has been reconfigured and appropriated to strengthen national identity—to create a unified (although hybrid) narrative of national progress” (Mackey 1999, 88). While this may be the case, the section that follows offers an alternate reading, positing that the exhibition can be read as a manifestation of Létourneau’s notion of tension-space. By this conception, the subsuming of the Rebellions into a celebratory narrative of Confederation is not hegemonic. Rather, Létourneau’s concept of tension-space, we will see, helps to identify complex and intersecting narrative layers of the exhibition.

**Locating Létourneau: Tension-Space Manifested**

This paper began by outlining Jocelyn Létourneau’s proposition that francophone Quebec’s self-consciousness emerged and evolved in relation to the threat of assimilation (2000, 77). In this sense, according to Létourneau, Quebec collective identity manifested, both culturally and politically, in a productive “tension space” somewhere between the threat of cultural extinction, the thrust to survive and remember, and the desire to evolve (ibid.). Arguably, From Rebellions to Confederation
From Rebellions to Confederation

at the CMC speaks to this notion. The final zone, The Path to Confederation: 1839-1867, features a main text panel which reads:

The failed Rebellions of Upper and Lower Canada sowed the seeds for political change, contributing to Confederation and the birth of Canada as a country (CMC, The Path to Confederation Main Text panel).

It also houses an audio recording of a debate over Confederation between George-Étienne Cartier and Joseph Howe, speaking to the Anglophone/Francophone point of tension in the negotiations. Another text panel highlights that “Confederation was achieved through negotiation and compromise” and that “most goals for which the rebels fought in 1837-1838 were realized, notably greater democracy and the strengthening of French language rights” (CMC, The Path to Confederation secondary text panel). In consideration of Létourneau’s concept of tension-space, then, the CMC’s exhibition can be interpreted as an emphasis of the Rebellions to Confederation period as the birth of creative tension-space, and the Lower Canada Rebellions as the ‘seeds’ of a self-conscious democratic thrust that has ensured the cultural and linguistic survival of French Canada via a series of unending negotiations.

Within this over-arching narrative of 1837 to 1867 as tension-space, analysis of the Lower Canada Rebellion zone in isolation reveals a harkening to Quebecois nationalist narratives of trauma, which actually speaks to the specificity of the Rebellions in Lower Canada. While the Upper Canada Rebellions are represented in a space of plotting, planning and brewing, the visitor navigates the history of the Lower Canada Rebellions in a three dimensional space of trauma, namely, the prison. The visitor can enter the cell and look through a barred window to see artist Henri Julien’s sketch of the Execution of insurgents in front of the Montreal jail. The prisoner perspective of the Lower Canada Rebellions is emphasized as well by audio stations featuring readings of letters written by Patriote prisoners to their loved ones. The panel texts emphasize the hardships of life in Pied-du-courant prison, noting that “1,367 Patriotes were imprisoned… four men to a cell with only one blanket to share, and no furnishings” (CMC, Life in Prison text panel), and the display case features handcuffs, and drawings by prisoners. In this zone, then, the visitor can navigate the Lower Canada Rebellions from the subject position of a prisoner, thus clearly offering a depiction of the Lower Canada Rebellions as traumatic and unique from the experience of plotting and planning depicted in the Upper Canada representation.

The Lower Canada zone also features a large and illuminated display case housing Patriotes artifacts and imagery that inevitably relate to the place of the
Lower Canada Rebellions in Quebecois nationalist narratives. A Lower Canada Rebellion flag hangs in view of Henri Julien's infamous piece, *An 1837 Insurgent*. Julien’s *Patriote* image of a habitant-soldier, a member of the people taking arms, is a figure deeply embedded in the “Grand Récit national” of Quebec, providing the narrative a figural protagonist (Vaillancourt and Randall 2001, 78). The militant in Henri Julien’s famous image wears both a sash and a toque, and both are featured objects of the display. The display case houses a tricolor *Patriote* toque, and the “ceinture fléchée” worn by *Patriote* leader Jean-Olivier Chénier, a sash worn by many *Patriotes* as symbol of patriotism and the struggle for equality (CMC, Ceinture Fléchée text panel).

The Rebellions as a *Patriote* struggle is further expressed by the display’s inclusion of weapons made of farming tools, such as a pole arm, a pitchfork and scythe. It speaks to the Lower Canada Rebellions as a story of the people, habitants of the land, realizing a common cause and uniting in struggle. Moreover, the display includes door handle pieces from the Saint-Eustache Church, where nearly 70 *Patriotes* were trapped and killed by British troops who set the church on fire in December of 1837. In the text panel for these pieces, the burning is referred to as “a brutal act leaving bitter memories” (CMC, Door handle pieces text panel). An audio station offers recordings of songs that were popular in the 19th century after the Rebellion; these ballads recount “the plight of the *Patriotes*” (CMC, Lower Canada Rebellion audio station text panel). The Lower Canada Rebellion zone thus expresses the traumatic and popular nature of a *Patriote* struggle unique to Lower Canada, and alludes to the pertinence of this traumatic struggle in Quebecois nationalist narratives.

In sum, in the combined zones of the *From Rebellions to Confederation* exhibition, 1837-38 Rebellions are subsumed into the story of Confederation, highlighting the parallel quest for democratic reform in Upper and Lower Canada as a quest realized with Confederation. The Confederation zone also expresses how Confederation marked the realization of a democratic channel for the negotiation of French Canada’s linguistic and cultural survival. Considering the Lower Canada zone in isolation, the particularity of the Rebellions of Lower Canada finds expression. It is channeled through the trauma space of a prison, and the legacy of this trauma within Quebecois nationalist narratives is alluded to throughout. Thus, there are several overlapping and intersecting narratives that can be discerned from the *From Rebellions to Confederation* exhibition.
Conclusion

In the theory of Létourneau, envisioning Quebec, its past, present and future, is not a matter of achieving a clearly demarcated definition of the nation, the nature of its inhabitants and their trajectory; rather, it is a matter of embracing the creative and “indissoluble tensions” that have shaped its course, and accepting “the ambivalences of the group” (2000, 77). The “Canadian fact in the Quebec identity,” as well as the “central role of the French fact in the Canadian identity” is, by his account, undeniable (ibid: 78). The CMC’s representation of the Rebellions speaks largely to this approach.

A reading of From Rebellions to Confederation through the theory of Jocelyn Létourneau reveals a layered and nuanced approach to the representation of the 1837-1838 Rebellions. We have seen that Létourneau’s project attempts to overcome a melancholic vision of Quebec’s trajectory, so as to transcend a Quebecois self-concept inhibited by the process of remembering trauma in order to survive. The CMC’s recent treatment of the 1837-1838 Rebellions was a delicate task, particularly in consideration Létourneau’s project and the significance of the Rebellions to Quebecois narratives of trauma. The From Rebellions to Confederation curator, Xavier Gélinas, was met with the difficult challenge of representing the Rebellions so as to at once, depict their relevance to the development of Canada; treat honestly the specifically traumatic and nationalist legacy of the Rebellions in Lower Canada; air the culturally specific trauma in a way non-alienating to a sensitive public; and perhaps most importantly, represent the trauma of the Rebellions without falling prey to the entrapment of a trauma narrative. In so doing, he constructed a framework that blurs, without eradicating, the dividing lines of Quebec’s and Canada’s historical trajectories, so as to leave open to negotiation the overlap of Quebecois and Canadian in a creative tension-space.

Through the lens of tension-space, the exhibition’s structural obscuring of the Quebecois nationalist dimension occurs not hegemonically, but rather, in service of exonerating ambivalent self-conceptions. The Rebellions’ place in the Quebecois narrative of trauma and survival finds expression in the CMC, but not trenchantly or definitively, thus leaving room for each visitor to negotiate their individual identification with layered and intersecting historical narratives that penetrate both Quebec and Canadian nationalisms. That said, the CMC’s treatment of a distinct pillar of Quebec’s history, the 1837-38 Rebellions, speaks to how the project advanced by Jocelyn Létourneau has penetrated Canada’s national history museum.
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