***Recognition and Repentance in Canadian Multicultural Heritage:***

***The Community Historical Recognition Program and Italian Canadian Memorializing***

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*Abstract: We examine the multiculturalization of Canadian heritage, and, in particular, the shift to a politics of repentance which has emerged in the past few decades, recognizing specific instances of violence and exclusion that occurred in the nation’s past. Understood in relation to a duty to remember (devoir de mémoire) and a growing global discourse of reconciliation, as well as locally specific demands for redress, this shift has occurred through a convergence of institutional and grassroots activities, and is exemplified by the Community Historical Recognition Program (CHRP). To explore the implications of this shift, we analyze heritage projects, including both CHRP-funded and independently developed exhibitions and memorials, created in recognition of the discrimination and internment experienced by Italian Canadians during the Second World War. While these can be read as institutionalizing traumatic memories and promoting a legitimizing narrative of the Canadian settler nation-state, they also serve to enable communities to inscribe their own narratives in Canadian history.*

In this article, we examine the limits inscribed within a national discourse of recognition and repentance as it is evident within the realm of Canadian heritage. We understand *heritage* in this context to be a cultural production, the signification of tangible and intangible aspects of the past by people and institutions. Until fairly recently, Canadian heritage – or the cultural production of a seemingly shared national past – has been dominated by the perspectives and experiences of White European settlers from Britain and France, and particular narratives about Indigenous peoples. Over the past few decades, however, the production of a national Canadian heritage has incorporated an increasingly diverse range of traditions, histories, and material sites and objects to produce an understanding of Canada’s past as always having been multicultural. Largely influenced by contemporary multiculturalism policy, the multiculturalization of Canadian heritage has focused especially on recognizing the diversity of cultural traditions within Canada and the contributions cultural minorities have made to the nation. More recently, it has also foregrounded the acknowledgement of violence and exclusion within Canada’s multicultural past, often framing these within a narrative of progress, apology, and repentance. In both instances, these seemingly inclusionary moves have relied on perpetuating the legitimacy of the settler colonial nation-state, incorporating Indigenous people into a national narrative while continuing to dispossess them of territory and deny their sovereignty claims, equivocating these with claims for recognition akin to those made by minority immigrant groups (Mackey 2016; Coulthard 2014; Wrightson 2017; Tuck and Yang 2012; Caldwell and Leroux 2017). They have also been selective, incorporating cultural traditions that are harmonious within a larger national opus, and recognizing and apologizing for acts of violence and exclusion that can be placed firmly in the past, often in ways that do not require substantial monetary or physical investment.

The shift to a politics of repentance in Canadian heritage discourses can be seen in relation to a number of more widespread trends, including a growing acknowledgement of a duty to remember (*devoir de mémoire)* and a growing global discourse of reconciliation. It is also tied to locally specific demands for redress for particular grievances or past wrongs. In both regards, the shift to a politics of repentance in Canadian heritage can be seen to have occurred through a convergence of institutional and grassroots activities.

Heritage is produced through a number of public duty to remember policies and practices. Although the term duty to remember gained mass media attention by the mid-1990s, it was already used since the 1980s in relation to the Holocaust and the deportation of Jewish people from Europe during the Second World War (Lalieu 2001; Clifford 2013; Simon 2016). Today, the term describes institutional apologies and reparation actions for historical injustices and crimes. Yet the duty to remember is also deeply entwined with the work driven by memory activists: citizens, frequently organized into associations, who apply pressure on authorities to obtain public recognition and reparation for past harms (Winter 2006; Clifford 2013). In Canada, clusters of ethnocultural groups have worked for decades on monument-building and memorializing activities to remember and commemorate heroes, victims, events, or values attached to their homeland or to Canada. Often invisible in urban landscapes, these forms of cultural expression not only contribute to the “production of locality” (Appadurai 1995), but also disseminate and legitimize ethnocultural communities’ marginalized, untold, or told but unheard, extra-national and local narratives, and thereby challenge mainstream Canadian narratives of a shared national heritage.

Paralleling t increased recognition of a duty to remember is the increased expression of a need for reconciliation. A growing global discourse of reconciliation can be traced to the end of the First and Second World Wars when Europe’s internal violence forced a greater reflexivity and eventually required European, and European settler-colonial powers, to consider their violence against those outside Europe as well (Henderson and Wakeham 2013). In the twenty-first century, the United Nations declared 2009 to be the International Year of Reconciliation. As with a duty to remember, appeasement strategies have been taken up by official institutional forms, often through the recognition of past wrongs. The goals of reconciliation are also furthered, however, through ongoing calls for more engaged, less tokenistic, forms of reconciliation “from below.”

In Canada, at the institutional level, both a duty to remember and a discourse of reconciliation are evident in the politics of repentance emergent within the production of Canadian heritage, articulated primarily through a politics of recognition. This is especially evident in relation to Canada’s colonial past (Wrightson 2017). Canada’s repentance for colonialism has focused on – and largely been limited to – the expression of a sense of regret over the state’s role in the operation of residential schools, conveyed through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and through various media aimed at recognizing and remembering the experiences of residential school survivors. A duty to remember and discourse of reconciliation are also clear in recent national heritage policy, exemplified by the Community Historical Recognition Program (CHRP). The limitations of the idea of reconciliation in the context of residential schools, the TRC, and settler colonialism more broadly is outside the scope of this article, as is a wider discussion of the politics of repentance in relation to ongoing settler colonial projects (for more on these, see, for example, Younging, Dewar, and DeGagné 2009; Alfred 2005; Coulthard 2014; Tuck and Yang 2012; Simpson 2011; Maddison, Clark, and da Costa 2016). We focus here on the case of the CHRP.

The CHRP was established in 2006 to support projects designed to recognize the “hardships placed on certain groups of people as a result of immigration restrictions and wartime measures previously imposed by the Government of Canada” (CIC Evaluation Division 2013, *vii*). Its creation was spurred by demand for remembrance, reconciliation, and redress among several ethnocultural communities. It funded books, theatre productions, exhibitions, online learning tools, and other heritage projects focused on historical hardships encountered by Ukrainian, Chinese, South Asian, Italian, Jewish, and other ethnocultural minority groups in Canada. Alongside the primary aim of recognizing, and thereby repenting, past wrongs, the program also perpetuated a longer tradition in Canadian heritage of recognizing the contribution that these communities were nevertheless able to make to the nation.

We examine here the effects of the CHRP and the projects it funded on both institutional and grassroots levels, situated in a broader scope of Canadian heritage production. We seek to understand the multiple ways of carrying on the duty to remember, especially through the analysis of specific commemorative projects emanating from the CHRP – high commemoration – in relation to the more grassroots initiatives – low or “community commemoration,” an expression used by scholar Emily Mark-FitzGerald (2013, 2014) to describe public monuments to the Great Famine (1845–1852) erected by national and diasporic Irish communities. The CHRP projects provide much-needed remembrance of the violent events they address. But in so doing, they also contribute to the production of a Canadian heritage that helps to legitimize the Canadian settler nation-state by selectively recognizing some of the more explicit instances of violence and exclusion in the country’s past and using these to tell a story of how inclusive Canada has become in the present. They also situate the particular recognized minority communities within a well-defined multicultural Canadian heritage specifically through the recognition of past exclusion as a community-defining narrative. A politics of repentance within Canadian heritage is thus limited and limiting by its emphasis on recognition framed within a settler national discourse. Yet, at the same time, grassroots efforts both within and outside the scope of the CHRP projects have articulated with the official objectives of the CHRP to both complicate and produce new sites of remembrance and memorialization. Particular projects funded by the CHRP, and enthusiastically supported by some ethnocultural community members, work to challenge the limits of the program by contesting the dominant narrative of progress it promotes, as well as implicit claims that Canada has become inclusive enough. Thus, despite the institutionalization of practices “from above” expressing national guilt and attempting to turn the page on past injustices, communities work to assert agency and make changes “from below.”

  To illustrate the contradictory articulation of influences and actions from above and below, we analyze heritage projects created in recognition of the Italian Canadian community in Ottawa, Toronto, and Vancouver, including both CHRP-funded and independently developed exhibitions and memorials. While these can be read as institutionalizing traumatic memories, they also serve to enable communities to inscribe their own narratives in Canadian history. While we begin with a critique of the ways in which a politics of public repentance is promoted as a way to achieve national social unity, we conclude by giving attention to community self-empowerment and the legitimation of counter-narratives within Canadian heritage.

**The Multiculturalization of Canadian Heritage**

The production of Canadian heritage has been deeply influenced by the development of the country’s official multiculturalism policy and its ongoing interpretation. When the policy was first introduced in 1971, policy objectives – along with associated programs and funding – focused on the preservation of heritage languages and cultures (Abu-Laban and Gabriel 2002; Haque 2011). In this context, recognition was accorded to particular cultural identities and heritage was understood to denote the languages and traditions of diverse cultural groups. In the 1980s, in response to criticisms levelled against the limited nature of this kind of multiculturalism, the focus of programs shifted gradually towards antiracism and the promotion of participation and equality for visible minorities (Abu-Laban and Gabriel 2002). During this time, activist groups used Canada’s stated commitment to multiculturalism to advocate a corresponding commitment to practices and programs intended to improve equality and respect. This shift in turn drew criticism from a different quarter. Right-wing Anglo-Canadian nationalists felt that the accommodation of what they saw as political correctness and the demands of special interest groups threatened national unity and impeded good governance (James 2013). Such criticisms were made in a wider context in which Quebec’s secession from the rest of Canada was a renewed threat and conflicts between Indigenous groups and the Canadian state were particularly antagonistic, as illustrated in such conflicts as those at Oka and Gustafsen Lake. Not surprisingly, implementation of multiculturalism policy thus increasingly focused on social cohesion and the promotion of a sense of national belonging, a move which itself was criticized for perpetuating White-centric views of Canadian identity (Bannerji 2000; Mackey 1999). At this time, multiculturalism was increasingly seen as part of a *Canadian* heritage. Recognition continued to be accorded on the basis of certain cultural identities, but heritage came to be understood as a *multicultural* heritage shared by all Canadians (Leung 2006). This new understanding was cemented in the transfer of the multiculturalism ministry to the newly created Department of Canadian Heritage in 1994.

These shifting trends in the multiculturalization of Canadian heritage can be seen in the representational practices of heritage institutions. Since the 1970s, the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada has expanded its commemorative focus beyond the nation’s celebrated political, economic, and military figures to also include more every-day heroes, events, and individuals associated with a more diverse array of ethnocultural communities (Bos 2013; Ashley 2007, 2011). Long-term exhibitions created or modified since the 1970s, as well as temporary exhibitions at the national and provincial museums, show a similar trend in addressing ethnocultural minority traditions and the experiences of ethnocultural communities.

At the same time, as the focus of multiculturalism policy shifted towards national cohesion, funding for programs related to multiculturalism was both dramatically decreased and restructured (James 2013). Money was no longer given directly to organizations formed on the basis of particular ethnic, or multi-ethnic, affiliations but instead was allotted on a project by project basis. This financially weakened organizations actively pursuing agendas of antiracism and equality, and forced them to compete for increasingly limited resources (James 2013). It also strengthened governmental oversight and influence on decisions about which projects would be supported, but overall furthered a broader goal of achieving greater autonomy for the state from the demands of such so-called special interest groups.

This increasingly neoliberal approach to Canadian multiculturalism has continued, but, influenced by a growing global interest in remembrance and reconciliation and needing to address ongoing pressures from within the country to deal with the legacies of past exclusions and violence, Canada has altered its strategies for achieving national cohesion (McElhinny 2016). Its new approach, which Matt James (2013) calls “neoliberal heritage redress,” links earlier policies of recognition with ideas of reconciliation. Canada can no longer forget or gloss over its previously exclusionary immigration policies and other violent aspects of its past, such as the operation of a mandatory residential schooling system for Indigenous children or, during the First and Second World Wars, the internment of those labelled as “enemy aliens.” In 1988, the country was forced to apologize for the internment of Japanese Canadians during the Second World War, in 2006 for the Chinese Head Tax, and in 2008 for the part it played in the development and administration of residential schools.

While we do not want to detract from the positive effects of these first steps in addressing past wrongs, as James writes, “Neoliberal heritage redress builds directly on the turn from antiracism to sanitized discourses of heritage and cohesion that Abu-Laban and Gabriel link to the 1990s neoliberalization of multiculturalism under the Heritage ministry” (2013, 11).  Like earlier articulations of multiculturalism policy, it uses a politics of recognition to legitimize the Canadian settler nation-state. Within this neoliberal model, recognition is given to past wrongs and previous exclusions and to select communities defined in relation to these pasts. Heritage continues to be framed as a shared heritage, but rather than a shared heritage of multiple cultures joining together into a colourful mosaic or tossed salad (Ashworth et al. 2007), this is understood to be a shared heritage of experience and participation in a linear model of national progress and growth. This discourse implies the underlying assumption that everyone’s experience has not been equal, but each has contributed to make Canada what it is today, or that mistakes have been made, but the traumas they have caused have been a necessary part of the nation’s growth. The duty to remember this past is framed in such a way that we are encouraged not only to learn from our past mistakes, but also to congratulate ourselves on how far we have come so we can move on, together, in harmony.

Yet, although these policies have shaped the construction of Canadian heritage from above, the multiculturalization of Canadian heritage and recognition of past violence and exclusion have also been spurred, and challenged, by the work of activists from below. The politics of inclusiveness practised by the Canadian government and mainstream institutions are, in part, the result of immigrant and minority activism for cultural recognition, particularly prevalent since the 1970s. Although Canadian multiculturalism is closely interwoven with the designation of the British and French as Canada’s founding groups, its embedded exclusion of other ethnic groups has been denounced since before Canada first adopted an official multiculturalism policy, the introduction of which was followed by rigorous lobbying, especially by Ukrainian and Jewish Canadian communities (Ley and Hiebert 2001). This minority activism can be understood as a sort of “politics of demand,” which Richard J.F. Day defines as a “mode of social action [that] assumes the existence of a dominant nation attached to a monopolistic state, which must be persuaded to give the gifts of recognition and integration to subordinate identities and communities” (2005, 14–15). Such a politics of demand not only shaped calls for cultural recognition, but also structured efforts of particular community members seeking recognition for historical injustices and violence perpetrated by the Canadian state against immigrant communities.

However, a politics of demand is inherently limited, in that it maintains the state’s right to decide what constitutes Canadian heritage – what is included and what is not – and, as discussed above, enables it even to transform violence and injustice into a shared heritage of national progress. Because of this limitation of a politics of demand leading to a paradigm of neoliberal recognition, immigrant and minority groups in Canada have increasingly moved towards cultural forms of “direct action” (Coulthard 2009, 2014) or a “politics of the act” (Day 2005), undertaking “acts of citizenship” (Isin 2008) where citizenship is enacted in the everyday, not merely in structural forms of the nation-state (Isin 2008; Ashley 2016) without relying on governmental support or direction. Although Day developed the term *politics of the act* to describe the emergence of new forms of radical activism practised as a response to the rise of neoliberal hegemony across the world, the expression provides us with a lens and theoretical framework through which to examine the production of different forms of public heritage produced by Canadian citizens with an immigration background.

One of these forms of cultural expression is the creation of permanent and tangible commemorative public heritage. For more than a century, and especially in the last forty years, ethnocultural minorities have erected their own sculptural or architectural constructions commemorating certain heroes, victims, events, and values, because “the impersonal and totalizing commemorative patterns of the national period no longer appeal to citizens who shape their public identity through collectivities (racial, ethnic, religious) other than the nation” (Clifford 2013, 16). While certain groups continue to insist on representing stories belonging to their homeland (for example, the Armenian Genocide, Katyn Forest Massacre, Holodomor, and Tiananmen Massacre), others, such as citizens of Italian descent, focus more on their history within Canada, and therefore use the production of cultural heritage as a tool of inclusiveness. As Canadian scholars Annie Gérin and James S. McLean point out:

In “Little Italies” and “Chinatowns,” in vibrant neighbourhoods where Russian or Hindi, Spanish or Arabic, Jamaican English and Haïtian Creole forms the language of daily use, another whisper began to shape a thought, and a thought to pose a question: “Are we not part of this nation?” “Does our history with this land not deserve to be remembered, recognized, celebrated with our own symbols, within the spaces we all share?” (2009, 96)

The objects of cultural expression developed by and within minority communities and inserted into Canadian public spaces work in dialogue with more formal museums, monuments, and commemorations aimed at recognizing both the contribution and increasing inclusion of ethnocultural communities within the Canadian nation-state, including those produced through the CHRP. At times, they add to and support the dominant narrative of the nation constructed in official heritage discourse, and they inherently maintain the legitimacy of the settler colonial nation-state. But they also assert alternative narratives that elide more straightforward readings of a seemingly singular shared Canadian heritage.

**The Politics of Repentance in the Community Historical Recognition Program**

A politics of repentance intended not only to recognize past wrongs but also to assume forgiveness and present an image of a harmonious nation is clear in the Community Historical Recognition Program. Matt James (2013) examines the origins of this program, the impetus for which began with calls for reparation and redress from community activists. James argues that “racialized and minoritized immigrant groups exploited the official emphasis on multiculturalism […] as a tool of civic voice for historically excluded and oppressed people” (2013, 33). In 1988, official apologies and a compensation package were offered by the Canadian federal government to Japanese Canadians for the treatment they received during the Second World War, which opened the door to compensation demands from other ethnocultural groups. In response, aware of the financial obligations that might arise from this, the federal government started adopting by the mid-1990s a politics of recognition where commemoration was understood as symbolic reparation and as an instrument to create consensus about the past. This approach was accepted by some community organizations and is evident in the CHRP and its immediate forerunners. As James points out, the idea behind the CHRP and similar earlier programs was

first broached in the late 1990s by the Ukrainian Canadian Congress and Ukrainian Canadian Civil Liberties Association. Responding to the Chrétien government’s insistence that offering apologies and compensation for historical injustices was backward-looking and divisive, Ukrainian-Canadian redress activists formulated a new appeal. Dropping earlier demands for apology and compensation for the First World War internment, they requested official “acknowledgment” and financial assistance for commemorative projects instead. (2013, 35)

Meanwhile, James (2013) locates the institutional origins of the CHRP in several private member’s bills proposed by then Conservative Member of Parliament Inky Mark between 2002 and 2004 intended to respond to contemporary calls for redress. Stephen Harper, then leader of the Conservative Opposition, adopted the sentiment of these bills as part of party policy in order to garner support from members of minority ethnocultural communities (James 2013). In the 2004 election, the Liberal Government, which maintained a policy *against* redress, was reduced to a minority (James 2013). Following this, in their 2005 budget, the Liberals announced the creation of the Acknowledgement, Commemoration, and Education (ACE) program, intended to be administered through the multiculturalism directorate of the Department of Canadian Heritage. The goals of this program are clear: as James puts it “‘acknowledgement’ but not ‘apology’; ‘commemoration’ and ‘education,’ but never ‘compensation’” (2013, 14). In other words, the ACE program sought to fulfil a duty to remember and achieve reconciliation without significant material detriment to the Canadian state, satisfying demands such as those presented by Ukrainian Canadian redress activists, but not claims for more substantial forms of redress forwarded by other communities. It was in line with an approach of neoliberal heritage redress, which, as James points out, “was from the outset a deliberate and quite explicit departure from more activist and reparatory approaches” (2013, 36).

In 2006, the Conservatives took power and replaced the ACE program with the CHRP, along with the National Historical Recognition Program (NHRP). Responsibility for redress through these programs was transferred from Canadian Heritage to Citizenship and Immigration as part of the broader transfer of the Multiculturalism and Human Rights Branch. Despite this move, the historical recognition programs maintained an emphasis on heritage, as well as a focus on acknowledgement, commemoration, and education, rather than apology or compensation. Thus, the CHRP retained many of the essential elements of the ACE program (James 2013).

The purpose of the Historical Recognition Programs, as stated in the official evaluation report, was to “fund projects that would help to acknowledge, commemorate, and educate Canadians about the hardships placed on certain groups of people as a result of immigration restrictions and wartime measures previously imposed by the Government of Canada” (CIC Evaluation Division 2013, 1). Here we focus on the community-level program, which puts the burden of explaining certain parts of Canadian history to the wider public on specific community organizations, as well as requiring them to demonstrate their continuing contribution to Canadian society.

The CHRP was originally intended to be a five-year program, from 2008 to 2012, but it was extended until 2013. It initially made $24 million available for “community-level projects that educated and raised awareness among Canadians about historical events and promoted the contributions of participating communities in the shaping of Canada” (CIC Evaluation Division 2013, 2). In 2008, funding was restructured, providing a $10 million conditional grant to the Ukrainian Canadian Foundation of Taras Shevchenko for the First World War Internment Recognition Fund, $5 million to the Italian Canadian community, $5 million to the Chinese Canadian community, and $2.5 million to other communities affected by immigration restrictions and wartime measures (CIC Evaluation Division 2013).

Rather than seeking to recognize certain heritage cultures, the CHRP seeks to recognize specific experiences of culturally defined communities within a particular Canadian heritage. Its goal is to recognize past wrongs in a way that situates them as both exceptional and in the past, legitimizing the settler state – and thereby its current exclusions – and emphasizing the cohesiveness of current national society. The fact that these events are meant to be remembered as *exceptional* is evident in the very specific nature of the program objectives – with a mandate focused only on violence and exclusion caused as a result of “immigration restrictions and wartime measures.”

The limitation of the program to immigration restrictions and wartime measures promotes the appearance of repentance and reconciliation without undermining the settler colonial framework on which Canada’s national narrative rests or accounting for the numerous other histories of violence that constitute Canada’s past, such as slavery, the razing of Africville, forced sterilization legislation, and so on. More broadly, this clause effectively limits recognition to events in the past – despite ongoing limitations in current immigration policy and ongoing racism in Canadian society. Acknowledgement of violence and exclusion is also placed firmly in the past by language explaining that the program is “designed to address previous actions of the federal government, which are *no longer consistent with Canadian values*” (CIC Evaluation Division 2013, 9, emphasis added). The emphasis on social cohesion is also clear: in a stated desire to bring closure to affected communities and in a focus on the need for integration. The official evaluation report for the program states that the CHRP is in alignment with Citizenship and Immigration Canada’s “Strategic Objective 3, which aims to ensure that newcomers and citizens fully participate in fostering an integrated society” (CIC Evaluation Division 2013, 11). The report also states that the Government of Canada recognized the need for greater knowledge of these parts of Canadian history “to help create an inclusive and diverse society,” and that “for full integration to occur in a diverse society, all Canadians needed to feel like they had a stake in their communities and in their country, and that their contributions mattered” (CIC Evaluation Division 2013, 9). Where an official apology has been given, the message is that Canada has said sorry, the community should forgive and get over it, and, together, we should move on. Where an apology has not been given, the message is that Canada acknowledges previous hardship, but feels justified in doing what it had to do – and, what is more, the community succeeded in any case, and should thus get over it and, together, we should move on.

**Commemorating the Italian Canadian Community through the Community Historical Recognition Program**

In relation to the program’s objectives, the CHRP appears to have been largely successful. Besides the projects focused on recognizing Ukrainian Canadian experiences of internment during the First World War, which are not listed on the CHRP website or well documented in the evaluation report, the CHRP funded thirty-one projects focused on the Chinese Canadian community, twelve projects focused on the Italian Canadian community, eight focused on the Jewish Canadian community, seven focused on the Indo-Canadian community, and three others, one looking at the experiences of Croatian immigrants between 1896 and 1960, one looking at Asian immigrant workers in BC in the early 1900s, and one providing information for teachers and students about the events for which the Canadian Government has given official apologies. The projects include oral histories, books, graphic novels, plays, educational programs, memorials, and exhibitions, which clearly reflect the program objectives. The Italian Canadian community projects provide an example.

Following Mussolini’s declaration of war on Great Britain and France on June 10, 1940, over 30,000 Italian Canadians were immediately labelled as “enemy aliens” as the result of the Defence of Canada Regulations (DOCR) release by Prime Minister MacKenzie King (Filoso et al. 2011). This wartime measure led to the arrest of hundreds of Italian Canadians and to the eventual imprisonment of 619 men and 13 women in internment camps across Canada (Filoso et al. 2011), with the majority held at Camp Petawawa in Ontario. None were formally charged, yet some were held as long as five years (Zucchero 2012).

In an interview for this article, Villa Charities President Emeritus Palmacchio Di Iulio described how the Italian Canadian community remembered the episode:

Many were born in Canada and were British citizens or subjects. So all of sudden the government of Canada through the RCMP … decided that they were going to round up some of the “leaders” – someone said that these guys are Fascists or … these people are going to be dangerous or these people are the third forces within Canada in the war.

In the process (many of these people had been somehow leaders, in business or in other activities), they lost their business, they lost their family, they lost their status, they became somehow tainted. They eventually came back to their town, mostly Toronto, Hamilton, and Montreal, and they had to start over again. … It was one of those kinda sins or dark points in Canadian history … that nobody knew or cared to know. (Interview, September 21, 2016)

Licia Canton and Joseph Pivato (2012) write that, in the decades following the war, there was a silence in historiography and within the community about the internments and their effects. Italian immigrants in the post-war period did not know about this history because of the shame and secrecy within the local community. Di Iulio recounted about his childhood, “I remember sitting around the kitchen table, ah for a number of years, as we been to visit some friends and friends … People were talking about ‘did you hear about those Italians who changed their names. What, are they embarrassed and ashamed?’ We didn’t know what that meant” (Interview, September 21, 2016). Canton and Pivato point out that it was not until the 1980s that a new generation of writers within the Italian Canadian community began to produce works about this period of history. According to Di Iulio, spurred by the Japanese Canadian efforts at redress, there were debates among Italians across Canada whether to ask for an apology or for compensation.

Fifty years after the internments began, on November 4, 1990, the Italian Canadian redress campaign for the internment of individuals of Italian origin in Canada met its first goal: that day, in front of members of the National Congress of Italian Canadians, Prime Minister Brian Mulroney apologized to all Canadians of Italian descent for the injustices committed by the Government of Canada against this ethnocultural group during the Second World War. However, for many Italian Canadian supporters of the campaign, the apologies offered by Mulroney did not put an end to the echo of this tragic episode. First, some considered the apologies as unofficial because they took placed outside the House of Commons (Filoso et al. 2011). Second, issues regarding financial compensation that further diminished the effect of the apology soon surfaced (Iacovetta and Ventrusca 2000). Some Italian Canadians had hoped to access the same kind of financial retribution that had been provided to Japanese Canadians in 1988 for their experiences of internment during the Second World War, but, though compensation was initially discussed, it became apparent by 1993 that such compensation would not be forthcoming, as the government reviewed its wider policy for negotiating compensation, presumably to avoid the cost (James 2008). The gap between the nature of the compensation granted to Japanese Canadians and the mere (unofficial) apology addressed to Italian Canadians, was considered by the latter as a political insult (Iacovetta and Ventrusca 2000).

Today, symbolic reparations remain the only compensation given. This took the form of money provided for projects within the CHRP, intended to recognize and improve education about the historical violence. Providing a definition of symbolic reparations, Kris Brown posits that these “take a variety of forms and can comprise the renaming of public spaces, the construction of museums, processes of physical memorialisation, public apology and atonement, the rededication of places of detention transforming them into sites of memory and the establishment of commemorative events” (2013, 275). The Italian Canadian projects funded by the CHRP focus primarily on narrating the history of the internment, situating it as an exceptional moment located firmly in Canada’s past. Broadly speaking, they reflect the CHRP objectives. They commemorate and make an archive of survivors and their testimonials, and they highlight the contributionof Italian Canadians to Canadiansociety and culture. The current prominence of these narratives promotes the story of internment as the defining story of Italian Canadians in Canada, and remembrance, reconciliation, and repentance as the defining story of Canada.

**Remembering Through Naming: The Italian Memorial Wall, Piazza Dante, Ottawa**

In September 2008, the Italian Canadian Community Centre of the National Capital Region (ICCC) submitted a proposal under the CHRP to erect a monument commemorating the Second World War internment of Italian Canadians from Ottawa. A sum of $81,000 was granted for the construction of the memorial. The Italian Canadian wall memorial has stood since October 23, 2011, in Piazza Dante Park, in the national capital. The black granite plaques bear the names of five Ottawa men of Italian descent who were interned in camps in Petawawa, Ontario, and Gagetown, New Brunswick. The memorial also pays tribute to the sacrifice of Italian Canadian soldiers during the war, including another six names of those who died fighting in Canada’s armed forces to acknowledge that Italian Canadians largely supported Canada’s war effort despite the internment and surveillance of this community (Filoso et al. 2011).

Connected to the emergence at the end of the eighteenth century of a new understanding of individual identity (Taylor 1994), the practice of listing the dead’s names in war memorials was fostered by the extraordinary monument-building phenomenon observed in the aftermath of the First World War. This practice has continued and is exemplified by American architect Maya Lin’s Vietnam Veterans Memorial (VVM), unveiled in 1982 in Washington, DC. One of the greatest achievements of Lin’s memorial, which has become a sort of prototype of postmodern memorializing (Blair et al. 1991; Senie 2016), is that of having “turned numbers into names” (Hawkins 1993, 755), with a special emphasis on social and collective healing. The VVM’s two walls of black polished granite function as mirrors which reflect the image of the living and force them to interrogate themselves on the Vietnam War’s outcome (Griswold 1986). This spectator’s engaging mechanism is also present in the Ottawa wall memorial, as its black granite plaques put the readers, by means of a mirror effect, at the dead’s place, confronting them with history.

Still, in spite of the insertion of this memorial, and thus the commemoration of those Italian Canadians harmed by *their own* government, into a long tradition of naming the dead as a therapeutic approach by the living, as with other official commemorations of ethnocultural communities in Canada, the focus here is once again on the group’s contribution to the nation. At the unveiling of the memorial, installed next to a bust of Italian poet Dante Alighieri, then Minister for Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism Jason Kenney noted: “As we reflect on this unfortunate time in our past, we should remember that the communities affected by these actions overcame such burdens and went on to make great contributions to Canada” (Government of Canada 2011). Public discourse turned the initial symbolic reparation for past wrongs, into a matter of reconciliation and cultural, social, and historical contribution. According to a report produced by the City of Ottawa, “The purpose of the monument is to increase the knowledge and understanding of the impact of the internment during the Second World War on the Italian Canadian community and of their contributions to building a strong Canada during the Post War period, and to contribute to healing and reconciliation amongst internee descendants” (2011, n.p.). Naming the victims and tragic events, and fixing them in the stone in three languages (Italian, English, and French), seems to be not only a means to conjure contemporary panic of oblivion (Huyssen 2003) and to heal from past traumas, but also a tool to officially rewrite Canadian history.

**Remembering through History and Experience: Beyond the Barbed Wire, Italian Cultural Centre, Vancouver**

The exhibition Beyond the Barbed Wire: Experiences of Italian Canadians in WWII, created as part of a CHRP-funded project called A Question of Loyalty, which also included the production of a play and a book, ran from March 8 to August 31, 2012, at the Italian Cultural Centre in Vancouver. Like the Ottawa memorial wall, this exhibition also included a list of names of internees, in this case printed on a large panel over a photographic image of one of the camps. It also provided a historical account, including large panels with information about events leading up to and during the war in both Italy and Canada. A separate panel provided a timeline of June 10, 1940. The timeline, organized vertically and running from 7 am to 8 pm, listed the day’s events on the right-hand side and a number of newspaper headlines from the day on the left-hand side, giving a sense of how these events were reported at the time. The focus of this panel is on the declaration of war on Italy, the triggering event, and the last headline assures the viewer that “Canadian Italians Here Attest Loyalty to Allied Cause.” Other panels explain in more detail the “New Roundup of City Aliens” and the history of the internment itself, while objects such as annual reports of the RCMP illustrated the strict surveillance of the Italian Canadian community during this time.

Alongside the commemorative and historical accounts, Beyond the Barbed Wire, as its subtitle suggests, also served to remember the experiences of internees, a goal largely facilitated through the display of personal objects. One exhibit included a mannequin with a uniform worn by a prisoner of war at Camp Kananaskis, accompanied by a photograph of a man wearing such a uniform and having it adjusted to fit. Other objects included letters and postcards that prisoners had sent home and objects they had made while in the camps. The letters and postcards showed evidence of censorship, as well as giving insight into how much the prisoners must have missed their families. Longing for their loved ones was also shown in the objects they made, such as a relief carving made by Federico Ghisleri of his wife and a belt which he carved for her. Such objects allowed visitors to get a sense of the personal experiences of the men separated from their lives and families. Yet, from the perspective of a distanced observer, the objects can also be read as a sign that life in the camps wasn’t really that bad. The men were able to make friends and hone skills, encouraged to spend time on art and craft. Their beautiful creations further illustrate the contribution that Italian Canadians can make to the nation through their artistic ability.

**Remembering through Political Discourse: Italian Canadians as Enemy Aliens: Memories of World War II, Columbus Centre, Toronto**

The Columbus Centre in Toronto, under then CEO Palmacchio Di Iulio, oversaw a series of interrelated projects from 2010 to 2013, including historical research, oral histories, a website, a monument, and an edited book, which culminated in a permanent exhibition, Italian Canadians as Enemy Aliens: Memories of World War II, as well as a travelling exhibition sent to small communities across Canada. Together, these projects were intended to raise awareness about the experiences of Italian Canadians during the war.

The monument, Riflessi: Italian Canadian Internment Memorial, was unveiled in 2013. Artist Harley Valentine was commissioned to create this polished steel sculpture integrating in a single volume different family members’ profiles. Like the memorial wall in Piazza Dante, Riflessi incorporates the mirror concept. Yet Valentine pushes further the metaphor of putting the spectator at the dead’s place, inviting them to stand where they cannot help but see themselves in the sculpture’s mirror-like surface while contemplating the artwork.

The exhibitions confront the issue of the vilification of Italian Canadians – as captured in the traveling exhibit’s title, “We Were the Enemy” – addressing an Italian Canadian audience but also aiming broader questions at Canadian society about the tension between individual rights and public safety. The exhibits emphasize the personal impact of the war measures on many in the Toronto Italian Canadian community: the fingerprinting, monthly reporting by families to the RCMP, and family businesses destroyed. Di Iulio stressed the importance of bringing these stories into the public eye, saying, “My motivation was – long before I got involved here – was that this is something people should know, and nobody knew. And still the majority may not know” (Interview, September 21, 2016). He recounted his desire to take this history to the broader national level, and approached the Canadian Museum for Human Rights in Winnipeg. He said to the museum “that along with all kinds of other issues, make sure you have a page, a corner, a room a floor or whatever reserved for this [story]” (Ibid). But at present, this part of the Italian Canadian experience has not yet been represented there.

The permanent exhibition at the Columbus Centre clearly addresses difficult history, relying on photographs of individuals and Toronto locations, testimonials by survivors and their children, a few prized objects, and documents from the period, to foreground the personal and localized effects of the measures taken to incarcerate or intimidate local Italian Canadians. It questions issues of identity and ethnicity, the necessity of war, and the challenges of the rights of citizenship. The online version of the exhibition, which also provides learning materials for school groups, states: “In a democratic society there is room for multiple political beliefs, opinions and religions. Holding views in favour of fascism, communism or religious fundamentalism is not specific to certain communities; nor does this necessarily make a person or group of people a security risk.” It also asks, “Can it happen again?” claiming that, “In trying to answer this question honestly, we begin the work of ensuring it does not.” While acknowledging the work necessary to achieve this goal, the goal itself is in line with the desire for a cohesive Canadian society.

**Italian Canadian Community-Driven Memorial Projects: Remembrance “From Below”**

Commemorative practices led by immigrant and diasporic groups separate from the more official commemorations discussed above tie in with narratives of national cohesion and Italian Canadian contributions to the nation, but they also challenge the Canadian national enterprise evident in simple narratives of a politics of repentance. For a start, these projects can breach the scope of official heritage directives, such as the CHRP’s limited mandate to address “only injustices qualifying as ‘wartime measures or immigration restrictions’” (James 2013, 37). Facing the embedded limits of any official recognition program or policy in a country encompassing more than two hundred nationalities, some ethnocultural minorities carry on the work of remembrance with their own logistic and funding resources, performing a sort of duty to remember from below.

The Italian Canadian community has elided the thematic limits of the Canadian recognition and reconciliation program through community commemoration projects. In doing so, this group has moved away from practicing a politics of demand for official recognition toward direct action strategies or a politics of the act. The Italian Fallen Workers Memorial (2016) discussed below resulted from, and enacted, a strategy of self-recognition, rather than lobbying or putting pressure on authorities to achieve recognition of past traumatic experiences. Discussing Indigenous anti-colonialism in Canada as a transformative set of practices, Glen Coulthard (2009) uses the term politics of self-recognition, drawing mainly upon the ideas of theorist and psychiatrist Frantz Fanon (2008 [1952]), who reflected upon how colonized populations engaged in collective or individual cultural practices to obtain cultural self-empowerment. The Italian Fallen Workers Memorial illustrates a displacement of those memory activists who pressure the government for official commemoration, as a way of obtaining official recognition, by those involved in a politics of the act through erecting memorials on private lands, with community resources, that offer free and public access.

The salient motivation of Italian Canadians engaging in such memorializing practices seems to be one of historical legitimation: this ethnocultural group even considers itself as an ethnic patriarchal pioneer (Fortier 1998). Efforts for highlighting the Italian contribution to Canada through different public heritage forms have been going on for decades. Standing in a Montreal public park, the Monument to Giovanni Caboto(John Cabot), by Italian sculptor Guido Casini, constitutes an early example of a claim of belonging to Canadian land and of grassroots efforts for celebrating an ethnocultural community contribution to the nation. It also starkly illustrates the reliance of such assertions of belonging on the appropriation of Indigenous land for the settler nation, an appropriation more subtly but not less significantly articulated the CHRP-funded and independent commemorations. The monument, funded and spearheaded by the local Italian community, and depicting the Venetian navigator and explorer John Cabot, was unveiled on May 25, 1935, in Cabot Square. As noted by Nicholas DeMaria Harney, this monument illustrates a “need to assert the enduring presence of Italians in Canada since ‘its discovery’” (2007, 192). The work’s declaration of an early Italian presence in Canada, engaging in a quest for a sort of “historical pedigree,” became polemical notably because it appeared to challenge Canadian foundation myths. French Montrealers saw an assertion that Cabot, under the command of England, was the “discoverer of Canada,” threatening the claim of this title for the French Jacques Cartier. Argument arose “centred on which national linguistic group could assert a claim to be the first in Canada – Cabot and the English, or Cartier and the French” (Carlevaris 2009, 99–100).

More recently, a memorial erected by Toronto’s Columbus Centre continues to articulate a place for Italians within Canada in ways that both conform to and extend beyond a nationalist story of inclusion and contribution. The Italian Fallen Workers Memorial seems not to have a relation with the CHRP: whether on purpose or not, its scope highlights the limits of this kind of program and the blatant desire of some minority groups to bring their sacrifice for this nation onto the public stage. The memorial pays tribute to the thousand Italian Canadian workers who have died in workplace accidents in Ontario since 1900. The publication of a commemorative book and the creation of a website [http://www.monumentoaicaduti.com] accompanied and sought to symbolically reinforce the artwork commission. While the Ottawa wall memorial stands on public land and was financed by a government grant, the workers memorial was erected on private land, with private resources. That said, and even if aesthetic values are not the most salient characteristics of this memorial production, the Italian Fallen Workers Memorial’s quality design makes of it an exception in the realm of the community commemoration practices. Based on the commission process and visual aspect of this specific artwork, community-led commemoration projects, which generally rely on limited logistic and financing networks, and call on community artists, appears to become more elaborated. Official requests for proposals and art competitions are launched, professional artists and architects get involved, and contemporary art trends are taken into account as the groups behind grow logistically and financially. Made out of aluminium and concrete, eleven pillars constitute the main elements of the Italian Fallen Workers Memorial, a contemporary architectural structure designed and executed by Giannone Petricone Associates and Dominus Construction Group. Each column bears the names of Italian Canadian workers killed on the job. This memorial engages therefore in a dynamic of remembering through naming. However, while remembering the Italian Canadian victims of work accidents in Ontario seems a genuine and much needed moral obligation, the political dimension of this act cannot be disregarded. According to an executive summary produced by Villa Charities, “The contribution of Italian Canadians has had a vast impact on the building of this great nation, but sadly, the losses have become an unrecognized part of the fabric of that positive impact. This is a story of Canadian and Italian-Canadian history which has not yet ever been told” (2006). The word *contribution* is essential to understand what is at stake here.

Italian Canadian community commemoration, which historically has contributed to unify (and sometimes to divide) this ethnocultural group, far from being a new phenomenon, has nevertheless consolidated its mechanisms opening the door to a new generation of monuments better anchored in contemporary artistic practices. That said, the Italian Fallen Workers Memorial is located on private land, far from Toronto’s downtown. Thus, the path of commemoration will continue to be a disputed domain since prominently visible places are still amongst memorial activists’ goals in their quest for historical legitimation and inclusiveness.

**Beyond Recognition and Repentance: Italian Canadian Responses to the CHRP-Funded Projects**

On the surface, the CHRP-funded projects can be seen to reinforce a politics of repentance, providing recognition for past exclusion in order to support a narrative of symbolic reparation and reconciliation. By narrating this chapter in Canadian history in this manner, ending in success and reconciliation, the CHRP-funded projects appear to play down the contested character of this history, an outcome that can be seen to be beneficial to Canada and, in some ways, to the Italian Canadian community. That being said, it is important not to ignore the ways in which participants and visitors to these sites can articulate their own interpretations and meanings within, or even against, these official interpretations. At certain points, these projects refuse to relegate the history of Italian Canadian internment to the past, refuse the possibility of closure, and make clear that this history remains a site of contestation.

The response of the local Italian Canadian community to the Piazza Dante wall memorial reveals the beginning or continuance of a recognition process rather than a definitive ending or chapter closure. During the wall dedication, while Gloria Constantini, whose father was held for almost a year as an internee, declared her satisfaction getting, at last, some kind of recognition of the Italian Canadian internment episode, a member of the team responsible for this memorial’s design, Ariella Dal Farra Hostetter, expressed a message foregrounding historical contribution and even interethnic rivalry: “I hope that this will help give us little more of a presence and show that we worked as hard as anybody else to make this country” (Thompson 2011, B1). It is relevant to highlight that this community has given another type of response to the CHRP-funded projects: a response that partially enlarges its original commemorative content. In October 2015, the community added new memory layers to this wall. At its foot, the community paid homage to Corporal Nathan Cirillo, a soldier killed while guarding the National War Memorial a year earlier (Seymour 2015). All this speaks about the monument’s polysemy, as a form of cultural expression, and how this memorial functions as a physical and permanent Italian Canadian site where this community can perform and enact commemorative and memorializing activities in a never-ending spiral as history continues to be written, and rewritten, in Canada.

Some of the testimonials recorded through the various oral history projects point out that historical injustices were never remedied, or else highlight their ongoing effects. Some projects, like the Columbus Centre’s online exhibit, however subtly, seek to raise questions about the possibility for similar kinds of injustice today and to stimulate discussion about how to balance national security and individual freedom or about whether the Canadian government should offer an official apology for the internment of Italian Canadians during the Second World War. There is significant disagreement within the Italian Canadian community as to whether an official apology should be made. According to Di Iulio,

there was always this debate. There were some people who lost things; people who wanted to be compensated. Most people said, “You know I am just happy – just apologize and turn the page. Canada is still a great country; I have done well. We got back on our feet – screw it.”  (Interview, September 21, 2016)

While some want an official apology, others feel that it is too late, since most of the internees have passed away. Still others feel that no apology is better than one that is coerced, and others simply do not feel connected to this part of Italian Canadian history: the majority of Italian Canadians immigrated after the Second World War and, as stated in the online exhibition, the “Italian Canadian community has not embraced the internment as part of its collective history” (Columbus Centre 2017). The ambivalence toward this history is evident among community members for whom the social aspects of the projects – donating objects, bringing together the community, attending openings and events – were more important than the memorialization.

Di Iulio highlighted the importance of the social and personal aspects of the Columbus Centre exhibition. Despite its fairly strong political message, Di Iulio stated that he did not think the collective Italian Canadian CHRP projects had much impact: “I don’t think collectively we’ve done as good … a job as … the Ukrainian community, the Chinese community, the Japanese community, and even the Indian community” (Interview, September 21, 2016). Rather than large numbers of people visiting the exhibit, with any broader national raising of awareness, he felt the Italian Canadian CHRP projects impacted more on personal and family levels: “the impact can be measured and felt more on the individual level with the people who said ‘I want to do MY research, I like this, what other books can you recommend?’ We had many of those. We had many people who came out of the closet and wanted to tell their stories” (Ibid).

The engagement of community members in both the production and interpretation of the CHRP-funded projects disrupts the general tendency toward minimizing the potential for histories of violence and exclusion to act as sites of contestation. Rather than allowing traumatic points in Canada’s past to be incorporated into a national myth of ever-increasing inclusiveness these elements provoke an ongoing engagement with the past in, and for, the present, as well as articulating alternative narratives of identity and belonging. This ongoing engagement with the past in, and for, the present and for the future, is also evident through the continuous search for names after the dedication of the Toronto’s Italian Fallen Workers Memorial. For members of the Ontario Italian community positively responded to this artwork and to the call of the memorial’s committee to perpetuate the quest of workplace tragedies and related diseases’ victims, on April 28, 2017, a new dedication ceremony took place at the Columbus Centre (Villa Charities 2017). That day, new columns bearing hundreds of Italian Canadian names were unveiled. All this speaks about this group’s agency to publicly tell *its* stories in Canada, with its own logistics and resources, and thereby to contribute to the production of an ever-expandable multicultural, settler Canadian heritage.

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