

**“We are Promoting an Up-to-date Image of Italy”: The Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Italian Ethnicity in Vancouver, Canada, 1973-1998.<sup>1</sup>**

By Stephen A. Fielding

In the spring of 1998, the Royal BC Museum sponsored an exhibit to mark the contributions of Italians to the province of British Columbia. The Museum loaned photos and artifacts from its own archives, but local Italians contributed the majority of pieces. This celebration, titled ‘Festa Italiana’ and held in the city of Vancouver, conveyed a complex, even paradoxical, local Italian identity. Guests witnessed Sicilian and Furlan folk dancing, attended pasta-making and traditional handicraft clinics, and were treated to regional food specialties. At the same time, prominent scholars lectured on archaeological breakthroughs in Italy; a large exhibit testified to Italian architectural contributions to the city of Vancouver; and a celebrated violinmaker demonstrated his craft. Those in attendance saw the virtues of food, family and folklore expressed alongside those of the high arts, liberalism and progress in a seamlessly woven production. ‘Festa Italiana’ conveyed an Italian immigrant community that was national and regional, “Old World,” and high culture.

‘Festa Italiana’ followed a twenty-five-year process of ethnic symbolism among Italians in Vancouver, Canada. The multifarious expressions of Italianness at this juncture, however, did not originate within the local Italian community itself. They were set in motion two decades earlier by officials of two states. This paper examines the role played by the Canadian Government and, more importantly, the Italian Ministry of

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Foreign Affairs, in shaping expressions of ethnicity in Vancouver. During the first half of the 1970s, the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs embarked upon a political project to better integrate the affairs of its citizens *nel mondo* into state objectives. In Vancouver, the Ministry altered this project to suit the city's Italian population. The Ministry, through its Western Canadian Consulate, confronted a diverse and disconnected Italian population, devoid of a single "representative" institution. In order to incorporate the Italian population of Vancouver into its project, the Ministry made the Italian state present in both material and symbolic form. It provided the financial and logistical impetus for a single pan-Italian cultural center that brought together Italians of diverse regional and generational backgrounds. At the same time, it fostered a sense of national ethnic community through a series of festive events. The festivals, like the new cultural centre, were guided by a new ethnic ethos, specifically engineered for the local Italian population and the new political climate of Canadian multiculturalism. The Ministry did not impose its own nationalist symbols and expressions on the local population *per se*. Instead, "official" Italian culture was promoted alongside pre-existing and predominantly regional and village-based "Old World" varieties. Local expressions of Italian ethnicity were recast in geographically and culturally complex terms. In the new festival ethos, Vancouver's Italians were part of a Canadian cultural mosaic, but *theirs* was also a multi-culture—a federation of pan-Italian, regional and *paesani* organizations.

There now appears to be a consensus among scholars that ethnicity is an unstable category, historically contingent and non-conducive to definitive markers.<sup>2</sup> Benedict Anderson and Kathleen Neils Conzen have each made significant theoretical

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<sup>2</sup> The vast majority of scholars since the 1960s have abandoned the categories of race and ethnicity as concrete entities.

contributions in this regard.<sup>3</sup> Starting with the assumption that ethnicity is never a given but rather a historical process, these and other scholars now attach great significance to the ways that ethnic groups express themselves through ritual. Cultural events, particularly festivals—here understood as *festive* events coordinated by Italian individuals or committees—have loomed large in these discourses. There are, however, multiple perspectives on what festivals can tell us about ethnicity. The more skeptical of these situate ethnic celebrations along an assimilation trajectory or challenge the “authenticity” of the expressions themselves. Richard D. Alba, for example, claims that cultural events are all that remain of ethnicity by the third generation in a modern capitalist society.<sup>4</sup> These vestiges include a few surviving traditions based on food consumption, formal events such as weddings and funerals, and most relevant to our discussion, festivals.<sup>5</sup> In this trajectory, an “Italian” only distinguishes himself from mainstream society during moments of leisure. Comparatively, Cynthia Thoroski and Audrey Kobayashi, respectively, concluded that ethnic “heightened events” are merely superficial, feel-good endeavors in which the ethnic group expresses itself in garb that is

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<sup>3</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Revised Edition (New York: Verso, 1991); and Kathleen Neils Conzen et al., “The Invention of Ethnicity: A Perspective from the U.S.A.,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 12 no. 1 (Fall, 1992): 3-41. These authors demonstrate that ethnicity, and nationalism for that matter, are not concrete or cosmic, but are constructed to fit the present aspirations of the “group.”

<sup>4</sup> Richard D. Alba bases his assessment of ethnic survival among Italian Americans on certain gauges of “assimilation” into the dominant group—namely, intermarriage with non-Italian partners, loss of fluency in Italian, and movement from traditional “Little Italy” spaces to less ethnically structured middle-class neighborhoods. See also Herbert J. Gans, “Symbolic Ethnicity: The Future of Ethnic Groups and Cultures in America,” in Herbert J. Gans et al., *On the Making of Americans: Essays in Honor of David Riesman* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1979), 193-220. Richard D. Alba, “The Twilight of Ethnicity among Americans of European Ancestry: The Case of Italians,” in *The Review of Italian American Studies*, eds. Frank M. Sorrentino and Jerome Kruse (New York: Lexington Books, 2000), 57-8.

<sup>5</sup> Rudolph J. Vecoli’s “dynamic” view of ethnicity is antithetical to that of Alba. Although he concedes that Italian Americans became “white” during the 1960s (largely in response to positioning themselves alongside whites in relation to “colored” immigrants and the black civil rights movement), he claims that they did not vanish or assimilate but maintained important markers of ethnic distinction. See Rudolph J. Vecoli, “Are Italian Americans Just White Folks?” in *The Review of Italian American Studies*, ed. Frank M. Sorrentino and Jerome Kruse (Boulder, CO: Lexington Books, 2000), 78.

apolitical, nostalgic and innocent—what Thoroski calls “mcmulticulturalism.”<sup>6</sup>

Expressions bear little relevance to the everyday because the ethnic festival is a virtual Disneyland, where *here* is the happiest place on earth.

Another contingent considers ethnic festivals integral to the formation of social bonds and critical to the articulation of “group” interests. In their studies of nineteenth-century white ethnics in America, April R. Schultz and Kathleen Neils Conzen found the so-called ‘innocent filiopietism and nostalgia’ of ethnic festivals to be the public face of sophisticated political discourses. Symbolism and pageantry were vehicles to mobilize formal ethnic bonds and smooth the integration process into American society. To borrow the words of James Clifford, these ethnic groups “drew selectively on remembered pasts.”<sup>7</sup> When ethnic groups championed historical “giants” and presented symbols and traditions palatable to both co-ethnics and an American audience, they constructed a cosmic ethnic community, challenged negative stereotypes, and claimed a place for themselves among the nation’s founding peoples. In the words of Carmela Patrias, the past celebrated by immigrants and their kin “influenced the type of adaptation advocated in the new world.”<sup>8</sup>

Ritual theorists have described festivals as central to the formation of both real and imagined social bonds. Anthropologist Victor Turner calls such events *communitas*—meaning, social relationships in which the taxonomic orders of everyday

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<sup>6</sup> Cynthia Thoroski, “Adventures in Ethnicity: Consuming Cultural Identity at Winnipeg’s Folklorama,” *Canadian Folklore* 19, no. 2 (1997): 111; and Audrey Kobayashi, “Multiculturalism: Representing a Canadian Institution,” in *Place/Culture/Representation*, ed. James Duncan and David Ley (New York: Routledge, 1993), 215.

<sup>7</sup> James Clifford, “Indigenous Articulations,” *The Contemporary Pacific* 13, no. 2 (Fall, 2001): 480; April R. Schultz, *Ethnicity on Parade: Inventing the Norwegian American through Celebration* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994), 3, 74-76; and Conzen et al., “The Invention of Ethnicity: passim.

<sup>8</sup> Carmela Patrias, *Patriots and Proletarians: Politicizing Hungarian Immigrants in Interwar Canada* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1994), 7.

life are temporarily suspended.<sup>9</sup> In this sense, notwithstanding its political contours, the Italian festival in Vancouver was an “alternative economy of status.”<sup>10</sup> It provided a physical opportunity for participants to see themselves not as individuals from various social and economic backgrounds, but as members of a group linked by ethnic or regional bonds. In this respect, festivals were ethnicity in practice—moments in which ethnicity *mattered* because it took on a spatial and social structure.<sup>11</sup>

The markers of ethnicity and criterion for inclusion into the “group” are not only drawn to strategically appropriate a suitable past or to affect contemporary politics: they are, in part, the outcomes of political pressures. James Clifford argues that ethnic bonds emerge out of shifting political alliances. Borrowing a concept from cultural theorist Stuart Hall, he uses the term “articulation lorry” to describe how an ethnic group maneuvers itself by forging new alliances and redrawing its parameters. The lorry ‘hooks and unhooks’ through various coalitions, *ex hypothesi*.<sup>12</sup> Hall is right to identify the political nature of ethnic bonds; however, as Rogers Brubaker shows, it is necessary to “step back” even further and destabilize the very notion of an ethnic group, which is loaded because it implies *belonging*.<sup>13</sup> Brubaker explains that ethnic “groups” do not act by their own devices because they are themselves constructed: they exist and are formed through complex, inherently political, dialogues among multiple parties.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1969), 94-134.

<sup>10</sup> Paul Bramadat, “Toward a New Politics of Authenticity: Ethno-Cultural Representation in Theory and Practice,” *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 37, no. 1 (2005): 1-20.

<sup>11</sup> Jordan Stanger-Ross, “An Inviting Parish: Community without Locality in Postwar Italian Toronto,” *The Canadian Historical Review* 87, no. 3 (Sept., 2006): 383.

<sup>12</sup> See James Clifford’s critique of Hall’s theory in “Indigenous Articulations,” *The Contemporary Pacific* 13, no. 2 (Fall, 2001): 477-8.

<sup>13</sup> Brubaker advocates the more neutral term *category*. Rogers Brubaker, “Ethnicity without Groups,” *European Journal of Sociology* 43 no. 2 (2002): 166.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 170-1

The Italian festival in Vancouver linked the local construction of ethnicity to national and transnational political projects. Recent studies have shown that even within the same “group,” ethnicity takes on diverse practices and meanings from one location to the next.<sup>15</sup> However, few scholars of migration have considered the role of outside political players in the local ethnic context. As Michael Rosenberg and Jack Jedwab argue, ethnic categories forge social contracts with states, which actively shape local levels of “institutional completeness.”<sup>16</sup> Rarely considered in the influence of foreign governments in this process. Foreign governments cultivate new relationships with emigrant communities when the latter are viewed as strategically important.<sup>17</sup> Consulates reach out to these populations by creating a “transnational sphere,”<sup>18</sup> the manifestations of which differ from one place to another. In the mid-eighties, Barbara Schmitter opined that too many studies saw emigrant-sending nations as powerless. In perhaps one of the earliest examples of transnational literature, she observed that the Italian government has interacted differently with its citizens abroad, depending on the policies of the host country.<sup>19</sup> Literature on this subject has been both uneven and sparse. Fascist activities in the United States are well documented, and Mark I. Choate recently published an insightful monograph on the Italian state’s interactions with its citizens abroad before the

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<sup>15</sup> A good recent example is Jordan Stanger-Ross, “Italian Markets: Real Estate and Ethnic Community in Toronto and Philadelphia, 1940-1990,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 25 no. 3 (Mar., 2007): 45.

<sup>16</sup> Michael Rosenberg and Jack Jedwab, “Institutional Completeness, Ethnic Organizational Style, and the Role of the State: The Jewish, Italian, and Greek Communities of Montreal,” *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* 29 no. 3 (1992): 266-287.

<sup>17</sup> See Carmela Patrias’ study on Hungarian Immigrants in Interwar Canada, *Patriots and Proletarians*.

<sup>18</sup> Robert C. Smith, “Diasporic Memberships in Historical Perspective: Comparative Insights from the Mexican, Italian and Polish Cases,” *International Migration Review* 37 no. 3 (Fall, 2003): 727. See also Rainier Bauböck, “Toward a Political Theory of Transnationalism,” *International Migration Review* 37 no. 3 (Fall, 2003): 709.

<sup>19</sup> Barbara Schmitter, “Sending States and Immigrant Minorities: The Case of Italy,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 26 no. 2 (Apr., 1984): 327-332.

First World War.<sup>20</sup> However, scholars of migration continue to overlook the remarkable overseas activities of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs during the last sixty years.

There were two major waves of Italian immigration to Canada: the first took place between 1896 and 1914, followed by the much larger influx from 1947 to 1973. Unlike the first wave of Italian migration to the United States, that in Canada was small and consisted mainly of sojourners intent on returning to Italy. The 1911 Canada Census put the Italian population of Vancouver at 2,535, most of which lived in multicultural neighborhoods immediately east of downtown Vancouver.<sup>21</sup> By 1931, the permanent population had only increased to 3,469.<sup>22</sup> The postwar period tells a very different story. Between 1947 and 1973, Canada received 415,177 arrivals.<sup>23</sup> The vast majority of these settled in the three largest metropolitan areas of Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver, respectively. In Vancouver, between the census years 1951 and 1971, the Italian population swelled from 7,328 to 28,510,<sup>24</sup> mostly due to migration from the poor Italian countryside. A very high proportion of those destined for the city consisted of relatively poor semi-skilled laborers. Initially, males highly outnumbered females in the Italian

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<sup>20</sup> A couple notable examples are John P. Diggins, *Mussolini and Fascism: The View from America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972); and Pellegrino Nazzaro, *Fascist and Anti-Fascist Propaganda in America: The Dispatches of Italian Ambassador Gelasio Caetani* (Youngstown: Cambria Press, 2008). Mark I. Choate, *Emigrant Nation: The Making of Italy Abroad* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).

<sup>21</sup> Canada Census (1911), *Origins of the People by Sub-districts*, Vol. 2, Table 7, pp. 168-173. One estimate is that three quarters of the early Italian population of Vancouver were single men. Gabriele Scardellato, "Beyond the Frozen Wastes: Italian Sojourners and Settlers in British Columbia," in *Arrangiarsi: The Italian Immigration Experience in Canada*, ed. Roberto Perin and Franc Sturino (Toronto: Guernica, 1989), 148-9.

<sup>22</sup> Number includes Vancouver (3,330) and Burnaby (139). Canada Census (1931), *Population Classified by Principle Origins for Municipalities*, Vol. 2, Table 33, pp. 482-493.

<sup>23</sup> 36,061 migrants returned to Italy during the same period. Table 1, "Postwar Emigration to Italy and Return Migration from Italy," compiled in Franca Iacovetta, *Such Hardworking People: Italian Immigrants in Postwar Toronto* (Kingston, ON: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992), 204.

<sup>24</sup> Canada Census (1951), *Population by Origin and Sex for Counties and Census Divisions*, Vol. 1, Table 34, pp. 21-22; and Canada Census (1971), *Catalogue 92-723, Population by Ethnic Group and Sex, for Canada and Provinces, Urban Size Groups, Rural non-farm and Rural farm*, Vol. 1, Part 3, pp. 11-12.

“community” because young men sought to secure work and establish themselves before arranging for the arrival of a spouse or fiancée. By 1996 the number of Vancouverites claiming Italian descent reached 64,285.<sup>25</sup>

Despite the significant postwar growth of the community, Vancouver’s Italians did not congregate or publicly express as a national ethnic in large numbers before the 1970s. Certain local conditions accounted for this situation. First, Italians did not work together in large numbers. The economy of Vancouver was never driven by manufacturing, the sector to which Italian migrants gravitated en masse to Eastern Canadian cities such as Toronto and Montreal. Although 43 percent of Italian males in Vancouver were semi-skilled laborers, according to the 1971 Canada Census, most worked for small private firms and therefore did not find solidarity in labor unions. Spatially, Italians did not compose a majority of the population in any part of the city, but were rather spread out over a ten-kilometer trajectory east of the central business district.<sup>26</sup> Their highest historical concentration in a census tract was 26 percent, a figure recorded in 1971.<sup>27</sup> This relatively low rate of Italian urban segregation resists a general forty-year trend of greater ethnic spatial cohesion in Vancouver.<sup>28</sup> The likely reason for

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<sup>25</sup> It should be noted that after 1981 census respondents were allowed to claim more than one ethnic origin, thus making the increase appear larger than it was. Statistics Canada (1999), Profile of Census Tracts in Abbotsford and Vancouver, Ministry of Industry, Table 1, p. 60. Of these 18,680 claimed Italian as mother tongue (based on 20 % sample). Ibid., Table 1, pp. 58.

<sup>26</sup> This region extends from Burrard Inlet in the north, south to Broadway St., Main Street in the west to the eastern extremities of the suburb Burnaby. Clifford J. Jansen, *The Italians of Vancouver: A Case Study of Internal Differentiation of an Ethnic Group* (Toronto: York University Institute for Behavioural Research, 1981), 35-39.

<sup>27</sup> Canada Census (1971), Census Tracts, Series B, Category 95-758, Population and Housing Characteristics by Census Tracts, Table 1, Population Characteristics by Census Tracts, 1971, pp. 3-17. By 1996, Italians constituted the third largest ethnic group in this district. Chinese and English were first and second, respectively. *Statistics Canada* (1999), Profile of Census Tracts in Abbotsford and Vancouver, Ministry of Industry Table 1, pp. 151.

<sup>28</sup> Interestingly, the recent East and South Asian arrivals were significantly more spatially segregated than the much smaller European cohorts. The factors leading to this distinction should be

their spatial dispersion is that the Vancouver economy was booming at the time most second wave migrants arrived. Many found work in the burgeoning construction industries and moved to ethnically diverse suburbs rather quickly. Lastly, despite numerous efforts to construct a local *casa d'Italia*, Italian mutual aid societies functioned independent of one another, coordinating their own banquets, picnics and services.<sup>29</sup> At no point in the hundred years of Italian settlement in Vancouver did Italian migrants and their kin mix with one another on a large scale in residential, institutional or industrial spaces.

The postwar second wave of Italian migration to Canada brought an explosion of new Italian clubs and societies to the city's cultural landscape. In contrast to the much smaller first wave cohort, the postwar Italian population was large enough to sustain a great number of regional and village-based clubs, comprised of emigrants from Trentino-Alto Adige in the north to Sicily in the south. Italian government registers show that between the years 1962 and 1971 the geographic breakdown of emigrants destined for Vancouver was 38.9 percent northern, 1.6 percent central, and 59.5 percent southern.<sup>30</sup> Without occupational or living spaces to interact with those from other regions in large numbers, migrants gravitated toward those from the same region or *paese*, a pattern widely acknowledged by historians of Italian migration.<sup>31</sup> Within a short period, the

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explored. Michael Hiebert, "Immigration and the Changing Social Geography of Greater Vancouver," *BC Studies* 121 (Spring, 1999): 68.

<sup>29</sup> The pre-World War II period saw the founding of a few mutual aid societies, including a southerner-dominated Sons of Italy lodge (1905), La Società Veneta di Mutuo Soccorso Inc. (1911), and the Vancouver Italian-Canadian and Christopher Columbus societies (c. 1930s). Ray Culos, *Vancouver's Society of Italians*, vol. 1 (Madeira Park, BC: Harvest, 1998), 19-64; and Scardellato, "Beyond the Frozen Wastes," 149-151.

<sup>30</sup> Istituto Centrale di Statistica, *Popolazione e Movimento Anagrafico dei Comuni*, Roma, 1963-1972, Compiled in Jansen, *The Italians of Vancouver*, 46.

<sup>31</sup> See, eg., Donna R. Gabaccia, *From Sicily to Elizabeth Street, Housing and Social Change Among Italian Immigrants, 1880-1930* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1984); Virginia Yans-

Italian population was further divided into a constellation of new groups, most representing a small area in the Old Country. The societies accentuated the social distance among Italians from different locales. A few notable societies were open to pan-Italian membership, but these were pre-war institutions, consisting of second and third generation Italian Canadians for whom regional identities were no longer significant.

The emphasis on region and town did not preclude any conception of “Italy” in Vancouver. All clubs valorized the “Old World.”—what was imagined as a rural way of life characterized by strong familial bonds, the maintenance of older labor-intensive food and cultivation practices, traditional values, and an emphasis on the collective over the individual. Celebrants praised the virtues of food, family, folklore and fraternity. However, each group commemorated the “Italy” with which they were familiar. Since the vast majority of clubs were regional or town-based, most Italians in Vancouver celebrated the dialects, cuisine, dances, symbols, and images of one small part of Italy. Each celebrated *its* version of Italy. There was no shared concept of Italian national identity in Vancouver, or institutional bonds through which such a notion could be nurtured, until the early 1970s.

Two state projects during the 1970s interrupted this pattern. First, in 1971 the Canadian Government under Pierre Trudeau declared Canada to be a “multicultural” society. Ottawa committed to “promoting creative encounters and interchange among all Canadian cultural groups in the interest of national unity.”<sup>32</sup> What appeared on the

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McLaughlin, *Family and Community: Italian Immigrants in Buffalo, 1880-1930* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977); and Robert F. Harney, *From the Shores of Hardship: Italians in Canada*, ed. Nicholas DeMaria Harney (Welland, ON: Soleil, 1993), ch. 4.

<sup>32</sup> A key section from Trudeau’s speech reads: “The government will support and encourage the various cultures and ethnic groups that give structure and vitality to our society.” Canada, *House of Commons Debates*, Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau Responding to Volume 4 of the report of the Royal

surface to be a benevolent policy was actually a practical measure. Multiculturalism undercut Quebec separatist claims of the province's own distinct culture by reconfiguring the nation as a polity suffused with many ethnocultures, rather than a condominium of two or three distinct and often disharmonious peoples. The bill also helped to temper English Canadian reactions to the recent institutionalization of French as an official language. For Vancouver's Italians, the changes meant the government was willing to contribute public funds for Italian cultural events.<sup>33</sup> Archival records indicate strong financial support for pan-Italian cultural initiatives until the mid-1980s.<sup>34</sup> The most important contributions were \$333,333 from the province to build the Italian Cultural Centre in 1977 and an annual stipend of \$1,000 from the City of Vancouver to host "Italian Days" on Commercial Drive between 1977 and 1984.<sup>35</sup> On an abstract nationalist level, Canadian multiculturalism simultaneously meant official recognition of the cultural distinctiveness of Italians and helped to diminish perceived contradictions between being "Italian" and "Canadian." By expressing and emphasizing their Italianness, Italians were acting in a way now declared to be quintessentially *Canadian*.<sup>36</sup> In terms of local ethnic

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Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, Commissioners André Laurendeau and Davidson Dunton, 8 October 1971, pp. 8545-8.

<sup>33</sup> Funding was allocated by the newly minted Multiculturalism Directorate operated by the Department of the Secretary of State.

<sup>34</sup> The one exception after the mid-1980s was federal support for "literary evenings" of Italian Canadian writers between 1987 and 1994. *Italian Cultural Centre Archives*, Italian Cultural Centre Annual Reports 1987-1994, Vancouver, BC.

<sup>35</sup> There was also a 500 dollar grant from the BC Government Cultural Services Branch for a commemorative plaque of Giuseppe Garibaldi. See Giovanni Germano, *The Italians of Western Canada: How a Community Centre is Born* (Florence, Italy: Giunti Marzocco, 1977), 160; *City of Vancouver Archives*, Office of the City Clerk, 33-G-2, file 4, Vancouver, BC; *Ibid.*, 83-D-1, File 6; *Ibid.*, 239-G-4, File 6; and *BC Archives*, GR-1789 Ministry of Provincial Secretary and Government Services – Cultural Services Branch, Grants Files 1982/3 – 1983/4, Box 18, File 24, Victoria, BC. In March 1974, the Premier of BC personally asked Consul-General Germano to spearhead the project to build an Italian Cultural Centre. Germano, *The Italians of Western Canada*, 160.

<sup>36</sup> For a similar argument see Donna Gabaccia, *Italy's Many Diasporas* (London: UCL Press, 2000), 184.

construction, public funds helped create formal spaces for Italians of multiple regional backgrounds to come together in unprecedented ways.

Canadian multiculturalism set the stage for the second and more rigorous state project interacting with Vancouver's Italians. Beginning in the late 1960s, the Italian Government began to take a keen interest in the cultural affairs of Italians *nel mondo*. In 1967 a committee was formed within the *Direzione dell'Emigrazione* to coordinate the activities of organization within consular districts abroad.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, in an effort to increase communication and support with Italian citizens abroad, the Italian Parliament passed a law that let consulates fund cultural and educational projects. It subsequently increased appropriations to this purpose between 1973 and 1976.<sup>38</sup> Barbara Schmitter describes these policies as a centripetal force aimed at increasing ties with homeland and decreasing those with the host country. This explanation fits the circumstances of postwar Italian migrants in Western Germany and Switzerland—where citizenship and residency have been highly restricted—but it does not account for the situation in postwar Canada, which boasted a high rate of Italian naturalization and low rate of return migration to Italy.<sup>39</sup> Before 1970, repatriation from Canada was never higher than eight percent of the annual influx.<sup>40</sup> By the late 1970s, 90 percent of postwar Italian migrants had remained in Canada.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, Vancouver's population of Italian descent was increasingly composed of the Canadian born, who were even less likely to settle in Italy.

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<sup>37</sup> Schmitter, "Sending States and Immigrant Minorities," 331.

<sup>38</sup> An additional 5.5 million Canadian dollars were granted for the salaries of Italian language instructors. The institution was also central to the creation of Italian language programs for both non-Italians and the offspring of Italian immigrants. Germano, *The Italians of Western Canada*, 78-9.

<sup>39</sup> Such policies were also practiced to varying degrees in both turn-of-century and Fascist Italy. See, respectively, Choate, *Emigrant Nation*, p. 6; and Zucchi, *Italians in Toronto*, ch. 7.

<sup>40</sup> This pattern began to reverse in 1977, when 2,764 Italians returned to Italy and 2,677 migrated to Canada. Iacovetta, *Such Hardworking People*, 204.

<sup>41</sup> Germano, *The Italians of Western Canada*, 24.

The Italians of Vancouver presented a unique theatre of activity for the Italian government. Giovanni Germano, the first Consul, explained that the Western Canadian Consulate was guided by four general objectives: 1. to educate the modest number of tourists and repatriates traveling to Italy to which they were returning; 2. to inculcate this culture into the minds of second and third generation Italian Canadians; 3. to encourage greater Italian participation in Canadian society; and 4. to promote cultural exchanges with non-Italians as a means of securing greater interest, and therefore revenue, for the Italian culture and tourism industries.<sup>42</sup> Germano perceived the current state of affairs in Italian Vancouver as both threat and opportunity. Italy risked losing contact with its increasingly settled emigrant population—which meant decreased remittances to the underdeveloped *mezzogiorno* and reduced investment from the diaspora—and it also feared that the “anachronistic” cultural forms practiced in Vancouver were compromising Canadian business interest in Italian cultural goods. Alternatively, the new political climate of Canadian multiculturalism was fertile ground for the consulate to inculcate new modes of Italian culture in the city. The primary obstacle to this mandate was the fact that a formal Italian ethnic community did not exist. To this end the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs turned to culture. Germano’s successor, Gianfranco Manigrassi neatly summarized the Consulate’s cultural agenda: “We are promoting an updated image of Italy in the minds of those who left the country 30 or more years ago.”<sup>43</sup> In other words, the consulate sought to expand the current state of being Italian beyond forms considered to be Old World—the very bases of the celebrations that persisted among most clubs and associations in Vancouver.

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>43</sup> Quoted in Ian Street, “Little Italy Goes Big,” *Beautiful British Columbia* 31, no. 4 (Winter, 1989): 21.

“Up-to-date” Italian culture took two forms in Vancouver: the officially sanctioned version of the Italian state aimed primarily at a Canadian audience; and a compromise between the national and the existing forms of Italian expression engineered for the local Italian community. The former took shape in limited contexts, most notably at the Italian Cultural Institute, established in 1980. The Institute, funded by the Italian government, was designed to familiarize non-Italians with the language, culture and customs of Italy, which, it was believed, would result in increased tourist revenue and interest in Italian imported goods.<sup>44</sup> Since its inception, it has featured, among other activities, lectures by prominent academics on historical, archaeological and literary themes related to Italy, operatic performances, and regular film screenings. The Institute was a distinctly government initiative, staffed by Italian officials and independent of activities within the local Italian community.<sup>45</sup>

Consular officials promoted an Italian nationalism specifically designed to fit Italian Vancouver. To this end, it was cut from the fabric of Canadian multicultural policy. Local Italianness was recast as *Italian multiculturalism*—a mosaic of primarily regional bonds united under a national Italian banner. Vancouver’s Italians were part of a Canadian cultural mosaic, but *theirs* was also a multi-culture—a federation of pan-Italian, regional and *paesani* organizations. In an effort to fit the “up-to-date” version of Italy into the local context, the Consulate procured the assistance of a new cadre of Italian migrants who ascribed to “official” notions of Italian culture. Many of these individuals arrived at the tail end of the second wave of Italian migration. They also came after the introduction of Canada’s 1967 “Point System” immigration policy, which gave

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<sup>44</sup> Luigi Sarno of Italian Cultural Institute, interviewed by author, 30 January 2006, Vancouver, BC.

<sup>45</sup> The first Italian Cultural Institute in Canada was founded in Toronto in 1976. Nicholas De Maria Harney, *Eh, Paesan! Being Italian in Toronto* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 184.

precedence to applicants with higher education and greater proficiency in either of the country's two official languages. These Italian newcomers were primarily from the north, learned, and well heeled. In short, they were a different *class* from the roughly 90 percent of postwar migrants who had arrived through the family sponsorship program.<sup>46</sup> Anna Terrana—a key figure in the founding of Italian-language newspaper *Il Marco Polo*, future president of Vancouver's Italian Cultural Centre, and Member of Canada's Parliament—was characteristic of this group.<sup>47</sup> The new corps also included second-generation Italian Canadians who for certain reasons had abstained from activities taking place at ethnic Italian institutions. Together this coalition provided a valuable reservoir of volunteers for Consul-led cultural initiatives.

Tension emerged between consular activities with Vancouver's Italian associations and those intended for a larger audience. A correspondence between the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Planning Department for the 1986 World Exposition, to be held in Vancouver, indicated the importance of Italian symbolism and the perceptions it evokes. In this exchange, the Expo Programming Department asked the government in Rome to display a nineteenth-century Sicilian horse cart. The Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs balked, affirming that "Italy does not wish to be stereotyped with items such as gondolas, Sicilian carts, etc."<sup>48</sup> In the end the Sicilian cart was provided, but on the condition that it be placed beside a 1954 Fiat Turbo, the inspiration for the "Batmobile." Both items were later exhibited at the Italian Cultural Centre in

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<sup>46</sup> Iacovetta, *Such Hardworking People*, 48.

<sup>47</sup> The founder of *Il Marco Polo* was Rino Vultaggio. Culos, *Vancouver's Society of Italians*, Vol. II, 36-9, 50-2, 201-3, 225-233; L.S., interviewed by author, 9 March 2007; and Germano, *The Italians of Western Canada*, 53-6.

<sup>48</sup> Christopher Wooten, Dir. to Dott. Turchi, 14 June 1985, *BC Archives*, GR-1986, Box 6, File 3, Victoria, BC.; and Ileana Bertelli to L. Stanick, 20 June 1985, *Ibid.*,

Vancouver. Although Expo 86 took place in their city, local Italians were not involved in organizing the Pavilion of Italy or the performances it sponsored: all Italian events were the exclusive progeny of the Italian government. The Italian Pavilion featured a weeklong concert series by the Milan-based *La Scala* theatre troupe and an exhibit titled *Una nazione che si muove*, replete with displays of advanced fibre optics and military technology. One a memorable evening *La Scala* converted Pacific Coliseum, a hockey arena, into a makeshift opera house for more than 6,000 guests. The *Vancouver Sun* marveled at the 4,500 square meters of floor to ceiling fabric, gold valances and red doors. “Instead of [hockey pictures, beer and dogs],” it observed, “patrons lined up to buy antipasto and were in a concourse transformed by banners, fabric-swathed lights and a piazza with trees.”<sup>49</sup> Italy, in an effect to recast its image to the Canadian and international audience at Expo ’86 in a modern and high cultured light, tried to disassociate itself from symbols of pre-modern Italy more likely to be employed by the local Italian population.

The Consulate and its cadre of volunteers organized a series of festive events that put Italian multiculturalism into a national and high culture framework. In each case, forms of Italian high culture did not replace those of the Old World, but were presented as contiguous, even complimentary, components of a broader national culture. In fact, the Consulate’s very first incursion into the local Italian community was a festival. In 1973 the coalition established the Italian Folk Society of B.C., (which later became the Italian Cultural Centre Society).<sup>50</sup> Together, they staged the first showcase of Italian multiculturalism in Vancouver, a special gala evening of Italian cuisine and folkloric

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<sup>49</sup> “No beer and hot dogs as opera takes over rink,” *Vancouver Sun*, 25 August 1986, 1.

<sup>50</sup> Germano, *The Italians of Western Canada*, 52-3.

displays at Queen Elizabeth Theatre in June of 1974 to mark the *Festa della Repubblica* or Birth of the Italian Republic.<sup>51</sup> More than 3,000 people attended.<sup>52</sup> The ceremony continued annually until the year 1977, but was later revived in 1984 to great fanfare.<sup>53</sup>

*Festa della Repubblica* made the Italian polity *present* in Vancouver. National allegiance was expressed through various acts and displays: young boys donned uniforms of Giuseppe Garibaldi, the revolutionary hero of the *Risorgimento*; attendants sang both Italian and Canadian national anthems; and the *Alpini* or mountain corps veterans marched in unison to the rhythm of their own instruments. The later inclusions of the *Bersaglieri* and *Carabinieri* veterans—also agents of the Italian state and symbols of national strength—were fitting additions to the patriotic atmosphere. At the same time, the *Festa* was a *pubblicità* of Italian multiculturalism. The Sicilian Folk and FAMEE Furlane folkloric dance groups performed each year. Around the edges of the hall these and other groups set up booths and served delicacies from their own regions. Volunteers adorned their kiosks with signifiers of their region such as flags, pictures of famous cathedrals and castles, and unique handicrafts.<sup>54</sup> Performers and servers wore traditional costumes to make their regions physiognomically present. The Consulate supplied decorations to fit the image of Italian multiculturalism: regional maps, drapes, flags, posters of tourist hotspots, and peasant attires from an earlier age.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 125-130.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 127.

<sup>53</sup> *Italian Cultural Centre Archives*, Italian Cultural Centre Society of Vancouver, 1983 Annual Report, Vancouver, BC.

<sup>54</sup> The FAMEE Furlane was particularly active in the demonstration of embroidery and handicrafts. *Il Centro*, the magazine issue published by the Centre, praised them for this skill in 1977. *Vancouver (BC) Il Centro* 1, no. 8 (Aug/Sept 1977): 2.

<sup>55</sup> The undertaking was coordinated by the Club Femminile Italiano, a pan-Italian women's group formed in 1978 to support cultural activities at the new Centre. T.M., interviewed by author, Burnaby, BC, 8 December 2007.

Two years after the first *Festa della Repubblica*, Italian multiculturalism took on a material form. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs provided the impetus for the construction of the city's first Italian Cultural Centre. Through cash infusions, social networking, and the efforts of local volunteers, it created a space for Italians of all regions. The *communitas* of the Centre was a greater fragmentation of the "Italian" tile in the Canadian mosaic. Well-established and upstart Italian societies maintained their independence as partners in the new federation, keeping alive their own celebrations such as banquets and picnics. Many set up offices at the Centre, paid rent, and used the building for their events. Other organizations, such as the FAMEE Furlane (est. 1958) joined the federation but continued to meet in their own buildings. By 1984, every Italian club and society in the city (more than fifty) was a member—a remarkable feat, considering the longstanding struggles to establish a "representative" Italian institution in larger Canadian cities.<sup>56</sup> The Italian Cultural Centre was the Vancouver's first *casa Italia*—the first secular space shared by the local Italian population.<sup>57</sup> Accommodating Italians of various regional origins, it became the institutional adhesive for the Italian *multicultures* of Vancouver.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Nicholas De Maria Harney shows that the massive pan-Italian Columbus Centre in Toronto has struggled with regional institutions over the right to speak for Toronto's Italian community (*Eh, Paesan!* 65-7).

<sup>57</sup> After 1934, Italian language services took place at Sacred Heart Roman Catholic Parish, but an Italian national parish (Our Lady of Sorrows) did not exist until 1960. By this time two other Catholic churches had Italian-speaking priests. Archival records do not indicate regular social activities for Italians at these institutions outside of mass. Excerpt from "A Triumph of the Italian Colony in Vancouver, BC, for the Concession of a Parish of their Own," *The Voice of Italy* (New York: 1936), Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Vancouver, Sacred Heart Parish Fonds, GR 2, Box 194, File 7 1929-1939, Vancouver, BC; and Memorandum from Archbishop Duke to Fr. Della-Torre, Re: Matter of a National Parish, 30 June 1960, *Ibid.*, GR 2, Box 194, Folder 8 1940-1960, Vancouver, BC.

<sup>58</sup> The Italian Folk Society of BC was established in 1973 to coordinate cultural activities, and more importantly, to quarterback the campaign to build the Italian Cultural Centre in 1976. Germano, *The Italians of Western Canada*, 52-3

The effort of the consulate and local elites to unite local Italians both materially and symbolically was for a short time hotly contested from both inside and outside the “community.” In 1976, when the City of Vancouver formally rezoned a parcel of land along Grandview Highway for the construction of the Italian Cultural Centre, over two hundred residents from the neighborhood signed a petition demanding that City Hall abate the plan. The draft warned of “noisy festivals” and a “trattoria atmosphere,”<sup>59</sup> the implication being that Italians were less than ideal citizens and prone to social disorder. Though unsuccessful, the appeal demonstrated that not all Canadians embraced the “inclusiveness” mantra of Canadian multiculturalism. More importantly, another effort to unite local Italians was underway in the city. Ray Culos, author of *Vancouver’s Society of Italians*, explains that 1966 saw the formation of the *Confratellenza Italo-Canadese*—the culmination of fifty-four years of attempts by three societies to create a “brotherhood.”<sup>60</sup> Upon its inauguration, the *Confratellenza* became the largest and most influential Italian institution in the city. Led by Supreme Court of British Columbia justice Angelo Branca, its membership consisted primarily of second and third generation Italian Canadians who had a different ethnic self-perception from postwar Italian immigrants.<sup>61</sup> For this group, regional differences were antithetical to pan-Italian cooperation. Their version of *communitas* was an Italian Canadian melting pot, not an Italian multicultural mosaic.<sup>62</sup> Branca, a strident anti-fascist during the Mussolini years, saw in the sudden re-entrance of the Italian Government into local affairs a renewed threat to community

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<sup>59</sup> *Vancouver Sun*, 27 February 1976, Sec. A, p. 8.

<sup>60</sup> The pan-Italian Sons of Italy, Veneto Society (northern Italian), and later, the Meridionale Club (southern Italian). See Culos, *Vancouver’s Society of Italians*, Vol. II, 26-33.

<sup>61</sup> Kenneth Bagnell, *Canadese: A Portrait of the Italian Canadians* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1989), 134.

<sup>62</sup> The failure of the *Confratellenza* to build a *casa d’Italia* was also due in part to the inability of its president and other clubs to agree upon a plan. Culos, *Vancouver’s Society of Italians*, Vol. II (Madeira Park, BC: Harbour House Publishing Co. Ltd., 2002), 26-7.

independence.<sup>63</sup> The Italian “community” divided into two camps based on competing versions of Italian ethnicity: one identified itself with both regional and pan-Italian ties and was open to formal exchanges with the Italian government; the another was strictly pan-Italian in composition and opposed to Italian political intervention in local affairs.<sup>64</sup> The dispute frequently erupted into vitriolic language in local Italian newspapers *Il Marco Polo* and *L'Eco d'Italia*. However, the Consulate and its cadre of volunteers were more successful than the *Confratellenza* at gauging the climate of opinion in Italian Vancouver. Most clubs and societies were regional or *paesani* in composition, and therefore unwilling to shed their respective *communitas*' of regional bonds for membership into an institution solely predicated on pan-Italian unity. By the late seventies, the *Confratellenza* was the only local Italian institution outside of the Italian Cultural Centre Society.

Italian multiculturalism re-emerged in various complementary forms at the newly minted Italian Cultural Centre. First, it extended into the realm of religion. In 1982, the Centre hosted the first annual mass to honor the birthday of St. Francis of Assisi. As patron saint of Italy, St. Francis was the ideal choice to unite Italians along national lines. Capacity crowds testified to the event's enduring success.<sup>65</sup> After 1982, it became an

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<sup>63</sup> In some respects, a case for historical continuity between these periods can be made. During the 1930s, Italian consulates in the United States and Canada, in response to strong nativist movements, simultaneously sponsored Italian language and culture classes for second and third-generation Italians and encouraged the naturalization of its emigrants with the hope that such individuals could influence American foreign relations to Italy's benefit. Robert C. Smith, “Diasporic Memberships in Historical Perspective,” 742; and Zucchi, *Italians in Toronto*, ch 7. See also Luigi Bruti Liberati, *Il Canada, l'Italia e il fascismo, 1919-1945* (Rome:Bonacci, 1984), esp. 73-89. For the promotion of the Italian language and culture by the Fascist regime to indoctrinate Italians abroad, Matteo Pretelli, “Il fascismo e l'immagine dell'Italia all'estero,” *Contemporanea* 11, no. 2 (April 2008): 226-30, 236-39.

<sup>64</sup> For more discussion on the personal attacks and media battles during this period see Culos, *Vancouver's Society of Italians*, Vol. II., 90-94; Bagnell, *Canadese*, 131-140, and Germano, *The Italians of Western Canada*, 53-4.

<sup>65</sup> Previously, a much smaller celebration took place at the parish of his namesake.

annual event.<sup>66</sup> By extending the celebration from inside church walls to this secular space and incorporating religious forms, the Centre executive and its consular sponsor tacitly acknowledged the central position of Roman Catholicism in the Italian *communitas*. Regional Italian societies did not consider honoring the country's patron saint a threat because it did not replace, but rather went alongside, their own commemorations. The Trentino Alto-Adige Cultural Society, for example, continued to pay tribute to San Giuseppe; the FAMEE Furlane celebrated San Martino; and the Associazione Culturale Pugliese della BC carried on with a banquet for the Madonna of Bitritto.<sup>67</sup> The co-existence of regional saint celebrations and the grand mass for St. Francis of Assisi illustrates the extent to which local Italians first, perceived national and regional religious symbols as compatible, and second, ascribed to Italian multiculturalism.

The significance of introducing St. Francis to the local pantheon of religious celebrations went beyond the accommodation of national and regional religious identities. To a certain degree, St. Anthony of Padua already served as the unofficial patron saint for Italian Canadian immigrants. As patron saint of shipwrecks and travelers, many migrants identified with him, giving him greater significance than back in Italy. The largest annual Italian religious procession in Toronto, for example, bears his name. So too does the Italian language parish in Trail, British Columbia. The selection of Anthony by these emigrant communities may have been guided by practical considerations. Italian migrants came from a plethora of towns and cities, each with its

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<sup>66</sup> There were other important but infrequent religious services; for example, one to mark the visit of the Italian President in 1986. *Vancouver (BC) L'Eco d'Italia* 31, no. 24, 19 June 1986, p. 10-11.

<sup>67</sup> Sources for these events are, in order of appearance: Culos, *Vancouver's Society of Italians*, Vol. II, 153; B.T., interviewed by author, 25 January 2007, Vancouver, BC; and S.B., interviewed by author, 5 March 2007, Vancouver, BC.

own saint and festival. It may have been easier for parishes, pan-Italian and regional clubs to take the path of least resistance and abandon these celebrations to create a new one. The Circolo Abruzzese Society in Vancouver chose this option, naming their annual banquet in honor of St. Anthony.<sup>68</sup> That the Consulate and new generation of volunteers selected the canonical patron saint of Italy—rather than the one adopted by many Italians abroad—to communicate Italian unity demonstrated the extent to which the new multicultural Italianness was a local phenomenon with real and perceived links to the Italian state.

Forms of Italian high culture within the local Italian community were first visible at “Venice Lives,” an eight-day exhibition at the Italian Cultural Centre in October 1978. The event was funded and endorsed by the Italian regional government of Veneto, but was carried out by the corps of local Italian volunteers.<sup>69</sup> Vancouver Mayor Jack Volrich gave the festivities official sanction by declaring “Venice Week.”<sup>70</sup> The stated purpose of “Venice Lives” was to advance publicity about the recent restoration of Venice’s historical buildings and art treasures. On one level, the event presented “up-to-date” Italianness to the larger community. Much of this was conveyed through a high-brow lens: art historians lectured on the city’s architectural beauty; a Venetian glass maker demonstrated his craft at the downtown Eaton’s department store; visitors were able to visualize recent restorations through slide shows and art displays; and a local Italian theatre company, “I Commedianti of Vancouver,” performed *Anonimo Veneziano* in English for the first time.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> G.A., interviewed by author, 19 December 2006, Vancouver, BC.

<sup>69</sup> *Ray Culos’ Personal Archive*, “Venice Lives,” Program of Events, p. 2, 1978, Burnaby, BC.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

It was not the intended purpose of the organizing committee to replace “Old World” forms of Italianness with high culture. Rather, it sought to demonstrate their compatibility. In one case, the committee asked the Trevisani Nel Mondo di Vancouver, a society representing descendants from a province close to Venice, to host an evening of Venetian cuisine and folk entertainment.<sup>72</sup> The most outlandish “folk” event was a *gondolieri* race at Britannia Public Pool.<sup>73</sup> Presidents of various Italian institutions and local celebrities each commandeered a “gondolog” to mimic, in a humorous and palpably awkward fashion, the famous mode of transportation through the canals of Venice. Whereas the Italian government balked at providing a gondola for Expo ’86, the gondologs at “Venice Lives” were part of a larger event that blended pre-modern and high cultured Italianness to the tune of Italian multiculturalism. The boat races carried a utilitarian function: they were an entertaining way for local Italians of various regional institutions to come together.

Finally, the Italian Week *fiesta*, held each June since 1977, was the premiere space where the cultural strengths of the Italian state and high culture were expressed alongside those of its regions. The largest and most labor intensive celebration of the year, it was also the signature event where Vancouver’s Italians showcased their culture to “outsiders.” Its popularity is evident from the strong financial support it received from non-Italian sources.<sup>74</sup> Italian Week communicated the ethos of national and regional

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<sup>72</sup> The Trevisani Nel Mondo di Vancouver is the local chapter of an international federation of societies of the same name and provincial origin.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid. The gondola re-emerged at numerous festive events. The Comitato Culturale Veneto—a group of Italian Canadians of Venetian descent—re-used it as a symbol of their region. At the 1988 Pacific National Exhibition parade a man dressed up as a *gondoliere* while “Miss Veneto” waved to onlookers from the bow. Twelve years later, the gondola and its bearers competed in a parade in Victoria. *Vancouver (BC) L'Eco d'Italia* 33, no. 37, 22 September 1988, p. 9; and Ibid., 44, no. 35, 14 September 2000, p.10.

<sup>74</sup> Donors included: the Italian Cultural Institute, local Italian newspaper *Il Marco Polo*, local Italian businesses, major banks, member societies, and for some years, the City of Vancouver. The City of

symbiosis within Italian multiculturalism. Sunday evenings featured *Cantasud*, or songs in southern Italian dialects, and regional folkloristic dance groups performed throughout the week.<sup>75</sup> The main highlight each year was Market Day, when the parking lot was transformed into a makeshift Italian bazaar. Regional societies set up booths and served their own gastronomic fare. In 1989 the tourism magazine *Beautiful British Columbia* described vendors serving polenta, pork sausages, cornmeal patties brushed with olive oil and sprinkled with parmesan cheese, pizza ovens, and panzerotti—a repertoire that reflected some of Italy’s regional culinary diversity.<sup>76</sup> Demonstrably, guests to the *festa* were presented with a layered multicultural version of Italianness. Certain activities belonged to the entire “Italian” group while others were the custody of regional segments.

The program was also interspersed with a series of highbrow events. The 1989 Italian Week festival, for example, featured an exhibit of a local craftsman’s stringed instruments. Members of the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra performed a concert, each playing one of his creations. Earlier years featured demonstrations by master ballroom dancers; live theatre in the piazza; lectures on opera composer Giuseppe Verdi and the *Risorgimento*; poetry reading; and live opera.<sup>77</sup> Exhibits at the 1983 and 1987 anniversary banquets included paintings and sculptures by local Italians, and in 1989 a “literary evening” featured seventeen writers representing three generations of Italian Canadians.

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Vancouver funded the festival from 1987 to 1992. The *Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce* supported it 1992, followed by *VanCity Bank* in 1994. The absence of donor lists after 1999 makes it unclear if support from these institutions continued. See *Italian Cultural Centre Archives*, Italian Cultural Centre Society, Annual Reports, 1987-92, Vancouver, BC; L.S., interviewed by author, Vancouver, BC, 9 March 2007.

<sup>75</sup> The participants were, respectively, the FAMEE Furlane, Circolo Abruzzese, Veneto Folkloristic Group, and Sicilian Folkloristic Club. *Italian Cultural Centre Archives*, Italian Cultural Centre Society, Annual Reports, 1986, Vancouver, BC.

<sup>76</sup> Street, “Little Italy Goes Big,” 20. During the 1980s the Circolo Abruzzese added the more esoteric porchette or roast pig to the fare. Polenta and other corn-based dishes are native to the north; parmesan cheese is made in the north-central city of Parma; and panzerotti is a southern invention also popular in Calabria and Puglia.

<sup>77</sup> *Italian Cultural Centre Archives*, Italian Cultural Centre Society, Annual Report 1987, Vancouver, BC.

Interestingly, regional groups, formerly the bastions of Old World Italianness, began to embrace high culture forms. The Literary Evening in 1987, for example, was sponsored in part by the Circolo Abruzzese and FAMEE Furlane.<sup>78</sup> Following the lead of their umbrella organization, the Italian Cultural Centre Society, these regional groups associated themselves with both Old World and high culture expressions of Italianness.

Charles Taylor once stated: “I can define my identity only against the background of things that matter.”<sup>79</sup> The state *mattered* in the making of Italian culture in Vancouver, Canada. The *Festa Italiana* celebration of 1998 described at the beginning of this paper capped a two-and-a-half decade process of local Italian identity formation. Interestingly, the Italian Government and the Italian Cultural Centre were not directly involved in the exhibition. Local Italians expressed themselves independent of the political institutions that set in motion twenty-five years earlier what was now the current state of Italian social bonds and symbolism.<sup>80</sup> As such, the event indicated the extent to which changes in symbolic ethnicity, initiated by Canadian multiculturalism and the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, had taken root within the Italian population itself. *Festa Italiana*, because it weaved together Old World, highbrow, regional, and national forms of Italian culture, illuminated two important processes. The Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs provided the financial and logistical impetus for new Italian spaces and designed a network of festivals at which pan-Italian social bonds and a broader sense of shared

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<sup>78</sup> An unrelated “Literary Week” in 1986 attracted large crowds to the Centre for screenings of Italian cinematic legends Federico Fellini, Marco Ferreri and Franco Zeffirelli. *Italian Cultural Centre Archives*, Italian Cultural Centre Society, Annual Reports, 1983-1989, Vancouver, BC; *Vancouver (BC) L'Eco d'Italia* 33, no. 37, 22 September 1988, p. 3. The 1986 celebration featured an exhibit on contributions by Italian Canadian architects to the city of Vancouver. *Vancouver (BC), L'Eco d'Italia* 31, no. 26, 3 July 1986, p. 13.

<sup>79</sup> Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, ed. Amy Guttmann (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 66.

<sup>80</sup> C.D., interviewed by author, Vancouver, BC, 18 December, 2006.

Italianness first emerged. In an effort to increase its influence among Italian emigrants in Vancouver, the Ministry, through the local consulate, tore a page out of the script of Canadian multiculturalism. Old World practices and regional identities survived, but were recast within the context of a national Italian *multiculture*. At the same time, *Festa Italiana* revealed the limits of Consular efforts to manage the local population through culture and space. Italian multiculturalism in Vancouver showed the strength and flexibility of the Ministry's cultural project, which was a compromise from its inception. *Festa della Repubblica*, the birthday mass for St. Francis of Assisi, "Venice Lives" and Italian Days were formative events in this respect. Through them participants were able to see themselves as a single community—diverse in dialect, landmarks, tradition, material culture and culinary practice, but bonded by national ethnic origin. In contrast to the modern and highbrow image of Italy displayed for a wider audience at Expo 86 or events at the Italian Cultural Institute, "up-to-date" forms of Italian culture within the Italian community itself shared space with "Old World" practices—an arrangement that Vancouver's Italians continued to explore at the dawn of the new millennium.

In a new wave of budget cuts, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Italy has announced the upcoming closure of the Italian Cultural Institute in Vancouver (1286 signatures on petition). That Institute is the only cultural office of the Italian Government in western Canada and it promotes the Italian language and culture through hundreds of cultural events and dozens of language courses. Budget constraints at national level can be satisfied by reducing the Institute's premises or even by merging its offices with the Vancouver Consulate General's, which would still enable the Institute to continue to be active and to effectively fulfill its mandate. Closing it down is NOT the only solution. Once it is closed, it will not reopen again. Sign this petition to say NO to Chapter Two Promoting Italy's image and relationships with Italian Americans. The relevance of the subject today: We are currently undertaking a great re-discovery: that of "Italians abroad". It is essential to be clear on these points if we are to move from mere intentions to a real project, and if we are to avoid falling into hopeless contradictions, such as taking Italians abroad as votes for the Italian parliament, yet at the same time, hoping Italian Americans will exercise pressure within the American Congress on those who define themselves as Italian. Italian-ness is a choice - a complex construction of identity which often does not involve any direct link with Italy and its culture.