



"It's Strange, We're Not Italian But We're Not Canadian Either": The Performance of
Ethnic Identity Among Young Montreal Italians

by

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Abstract

This thesis examines the ethnic and cultural identity markers of some Montreal Italians under the age of 35. The ethnography upon which this study rests was collected through personal, e-mail and phone interviews during the summer of 2008. This study focuses on how members of the Italian community in Montreal choose to shape and inform their ethnic identity through fluid and dynamic identity markers. First, the thesis introduces the reader to the Montreal Italian community and the main informants who were interviewed for this study. As well, the concepts of identity and ethnicity are examined within a folkloric framework. Next, the thesis delineates three case studies. Chapter Three examines the issue of fragmented identity and the change in intergenerational identity markers, using Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church as an example of a constantly evolving and complex marker of Italian identity. Visits to Italy by members of the younger generation of Montreal Italians are the focus of the fourth chapter as a way in which my informants reinforce their Italian identity. Finally, in Chapter Five, traditional food preparation such as tomato-canning is explored as a performance of identity and a way to shape and negotiate ethnic association.

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Introduction

The newness and complexity of this whole ethnic process is possibly more apparent in Canada where a bilingual, multicultural society has been officially recognized and where the time between mass migration and consolidation has been so brief (the immigrant generation still dominates) that the "Canadian" identity for the total population has not yet been established (Dégh 1975: 116).

Canada is a country largely built by immigrants. Their stories have become an integral part of what it means to be Canadian. Canada prides itself on being a multicultural country where one is encouraged to maintain an ethnic identity (Porter 1965). My interest is in discovering how ethnic identity is expressed by young Montrealers of Italian descent. This thesis explores the identity markers of Montreal Italians and some of the multiple ways in which they perform their cultural identity.

Montreal, as a multi-ethnic Canadian metropolis, is home to a multitude of cultures, languages and ethnicities. After the two official founding linguistic groups, the largest ethnic group and the one that holds my research interest is the Italian community living in Montreal's East End. This group has well over 200,000¹ members living in the city. Though it has been a thriving community in Montreal since the late 19th century, it saw its numbers soar after WW II essentially destroyed most of Central and Southern Italy's economy. Due to the lack of jobs, land, and resources, thousands of hopeful

¹ This information is from the 2001 Canadian census from Statistics Canada. (<http://www.statcan.gc.ca/start-debut-eng.html>) and excludes the Canadian-born children and grandchildren of the immigrants.

Italians immigrated to Canada (Gabori 1993, Harney 1993). Half a century later, their immigrant narratives echo strongly within the cultural heritage of Montreal.

In the first half of the 21st century, the third generation of immigrants is coming into adulthood and negotiating what it means to be Italian in a Canadian context. They have embraced certain identity markers (Oring 1994) such as trips to Italy, Italian fashions, the Italian language and traditional foodways which set them apart from other Canadians of their generation. I wish to explore why these methods of identification have been adopted. For this thesis, my main research questions focused on issues of ethnicity and the performance of identity. How did my informants choose to identify themselves? For instance, did they consider themselves Italian Canadians or Canadians of Italian descent²? When did they feel most Italian? What role did visiting Italy play in their cultural identity? Further, I was concerned with how they performed their cultural identity. Their performance of identity, through such activities as visiting Italy and participation in traditional food preparation, is the heart of this study.

My methods for this thesis are steeped in qualitative research and while my research does not draw upon a statistically representational sample of Montreal Italians, I believe that what “such approaches lack in breadth, they make up in depth and, as such, provide a necessary counterpoint to survey-oriented research” (Del Negro 25). To this end, from April to July 2008 I interviewed over twenty Montrealers under the age of 35 about their experiences as members of the Italian community. I began by interviewing acquaintances of mine who grew up in Italian families and who then referred me to

² Italian Canadian refers to those who identify most with their Italian heritage, while Canadian of Italian descent denotes a stronger identification with Canada over Italy.

friends of theirs. Thus I was able to interview a rather homogenous group of Montreal Italians. As a young Montreal Italian, my upbringing was comparable to most of my informants and I believe this allowed me better access to their anecdotes and narratives as they could explain their traditions and customs without worry of judgment.

The first chapter introduces my main informants and their family narratives. I chose to introduce my informants through their family narratives and immigrant sagas because I was surprised at how attuned they were to their family history. I believe that this allows the reader a glimpse into how close my informants are to their immigrant family members and how this has shaped their identity as young Montreal Italians.

Chapter Two discusses previous scholarly works on ethnicity and identity. It outlines the various shifts in beliefs about ethnic folklore and identity studies in folkloristics. I delineate the major scholars in these fields and their contributions to this study. In addition, I discuss recent work in various academic fields on the Italian community in Montreal and how my research builds upon it.

Chapter Three explores the question of fragmented identity. Following Elliott Oring's three-pronged typology of individual identity, personal identity and collective identity, I discuss how my informants choose to identify themselves, as Italian Canadians or as Canadians of Italian descent. I explore the various ways they differentiate themselves from other Italian groups, be they European Italians or fellow Canadian Italians. Identity markers of previous generations play an important role in how my informants chose to identify with their culture and have been replaced by new methods of cultural identification. Dominant markers of the older generations such as church

involvement and the layout of the traditional Italian home, are not as common among Montreal Italians under the age of 35. To illustrate this point, I discuss the changing role of the church across three generations. While certain identity markers may have changed, shifted and been replaced, younger members of the Italian community choose to embrace markers such as regularly visiting Italy to identify themselves as Italian.

Chapter Four focuses on visits to the homeland by young Montreal Italians. I have divided these trips into three separate categories: the School Trip, the Extended Stay and the Family Visit. I delineate what each trip type offered my informants and why they undertook each visit. The trips range from short, tourist-centered, superficial vacations to lengthy stays in the homes of previously unknown relatives. These trips were important to my informants' identity and helped shape cultural awareness. One aspect of the trip are the narratives my informants brought home with them. These narratives are further typologized according to common themes such as Belonging in Italy and Inaccurate Expectations.

Chapter Five focuses on food culture among contemporary young Montreal Italians. Traditional food customs in Montreal tend to be divided by gender. The making of wine and the curing of meats is largely male-centered, while preparing cheese, "making tomatoes" and handmade pasta are a female domain. However, most of these traditions – male or female – are practiced only by grandparents or no longer practiced at all. This is especially true for the male-centered traditions. Wine-making and curing meats were mentioned as either practiced by an uncle or an ailing grandfather but the younger males I spoke to expressed no interest in continuing these traditions. The same

was true for most of the female dominant traditions, except for tomato-making³, a traditional foodway practice among Montreal Italians where families preserve diced tomatoes or boil tomato juice for tomato sauce. It was the most “living” foodway tradition among young Montreal Italians. According to oral history, before the Second World War, tomato-making was almost non-existent in Southern Italy. People would buy tomato concentrate when they wanted sauce and dilute it. It was only post-war that canning tomatoes became popular; thus for many of the post-war immigrants in Canada, tomato-making was a fairly new tradition. In this chapter I focus on the oral history of making tomatoes in Italy and its roots in post-war Canada. I also explore the ways in which it is practiced in present-day Montreal by young Italians, the reasons they continue this tradition and how it bolsters their Italian identity. This chapter is supported by a short DVD (Appendix A) that offers video footage I took in 2008 of the tomato-making process. It shows the various tomato-making processes and provides readers unfamiliar with the tradition a visual aid.

Though the Italians in Montreal have been previously studied (Del Negro 1997, Pascali 2004) this thesis is the first to focus solely on the younger members of the community as well as their involvement in traditional foodways. This work offers a valuable qualitative narrative to the expanding field of ethnic identity. This research adds to the small but growing folkloric literature on Italian communities in Canada. I hope this

³ Tomato-making or “making tomatoes” can be paralleled to “making fish” in Newfoundland. It is not the process of actually making a tomato or a fish, but the process of canning and making preserves of the product.

research expands on the emergent collection of immigrant narratives and supplements our understanding of Canada's rich and varied immigrant experiences.

Chapter 1

The Montreal Italian Community

As mentioned in my introduction, Montreal is home to some 200,000 Italian immigrants and their descendants.⁴ I chose my informants from this large pool of potential participants, drawing them from similar backgrounds and life experiences. To that end, most of my informants are in their twenties or early thirties, and most hold at least undergraduate degrees. There are many common threads running through most of the immigrant narratives of the Montreal Italian community. However, my focus here is not to analyze the narratives but to introduce the community through the family narratives of my informants.

I come from an immigrant family myself. There was some emigration from Italy to Canada, in particular Montreal, dating back to the late 19th century. Most of my father's side was part of this wave of immigration. On the other hand, my mother came over from the Abruzzo region in Italy in the 1950s when she was seven years old. My maternal grandfather had come four years earlier to work as a farm hand. However, once he arrived in Halifax, a fellow immigrant convinced him to remove the armband identifying him as a farmhand headed for St. Paul Hermite because he argued that working on a farm would never allow my grandfather the financial stability and independence he had come for. Instead he told him to take the train to Montreal and look for a job in the city. My grandfather did as he was told and stayed in Montreal with no

⁴ This figure varies hugely because of the "descendant factor." Community folklore states that almost a million Montrealers can trace their roots to Italy.

job secured or place to live. Nonetheless he quickly found a home and a job in construction and lived alone in Montreal, sending back letters and money to his wife and children in Italy. Four years later, my mother, Paola, her brother, Mario, and her mother, Pierina, along with my great-uncle, Vincenzo, undertook the long sea voyage from Italy to Halifax where they then boarded a train to Montreal. Once they arrived in Montreal, my grandfather was reunited with his wife and daughter, and he finally met the son he had left behind four years earlier when his wife had been pregnant. Both my grandparents learned very limited French and virtually no English but managed to live a comfortable life within a growing and self-supporting Italian community in Montreal.

The informants for this thesis have similar family histories. Sabrina Pianese is a 25-year-old Education student from McGill who also holds a Bachelor of Arts degree from the same university. Both her parents came from Southern Italy in the late 1950s. Her mother is from Montorio in Campobasso and came to Canada when she was eight years old in 1956 with her father, a prisoner of war during World War II, and her own mother. Once she came to Canada she was held back a year in school for not knowing the language until she picked up sufficient English to be integrated with her proper grade level. Sabrina's father also came to Canada when he was eight. He arrived with his father, leaving his mother back home in Italy for a few years. Owning a home was very important to Sabrina's grandfather and thus when he had enough disposable income to buy a house, he designed and built it himself. The family could not afford to live in the home straight away, so they rented it out and lived in the backyard shed for a few years (Sabrina Pianese 2008).



Figure 1: Sabrina Pianese during the 2006 World Cup of Soccer (Used with permission – Tania Zampini Collection). All the photographs in this chapter were taken during the 2006 World Cup competition and conveniently show their performance of Italianess.

Alexander Scalia is an eighteen-year-old Liberal Arts student at Marianopolis CEGEP⁵ and has a younger brother Steven and sister Christina. His mother is my great-uncle's daughter, making Alex my second cousin. His father Dominic, is from Cattolica Ereclea in the province of Agrigento, in the region of Sicily and came over when he was six in the 1950s. His mother was born in Canada to immigrant parents from Barisciano in the province of Abruzzo:

It all started with my Zio⁶ Emidio, who came here first, him being the first of five children. So he gave himself a mission. This is a story he tells us every time we have big family reunions. You know exactly what I'm talking about – at

⁵ In Quebec, high school ends at Grade Eleven and students attend CEGEP for either a two-year pre-university program or a three-year professional diploma.

⁶ Zio means uncle in Italian. Other Italian kinship terminology used in this thesis include: Zia (aunt), Nonna (grandmother), Nonno (grandfather). My family does not use to the standard Italian pro-Zio or pro-Zia to refer to great-uncle or great-aunt.

Christmas, Easter and New Year's he'll always tell this story about when he came to Canada and he says it with such passion. I never get tired of hearing it. I love to hear that story. I really consider it part of my heritage. And I'm proud of it. This is a man who left everything to immigrate over here; it's not easy to leave your country because you know that for the future generation you're actually giving up your roots and making new ones. It's very difficult to leave; there's the whole thing about having to adapt to a new language, new lifestyle all that stuff. He came here with nothing, the clichés, came here with nothing and built himself up and he brought the rest of his family here including his younger brother Vincenzo Di Paolo, my nonno. And that way they made their family, brought their wives here and lived in the same house. You have to be very gutsy to leave your country; you don't do that for no reason. I'm starting to understand why. Now they are very successful people, I mean my Zio Emidio, he worked in construction, as a foreman, he owns apartment buildings and my nonno worked in the kitchen for most of his life. A hardworker, my mother tells me he'd always get to work half an hour early and start working half an hour before. Really hardworker. My nonna went into sewing (Alexander Scalia 2008).

Alexander's younger brother Steven was also a helpful informant. He is the youngest of my informants at fifteen but offered me some essential insights. He attends a private French high school and is very sports-oriented. He feels a strong connection to Italy as he speaks Italian and visits Italy with his family every couple of summers. He considers himself a member of the Italian town his father is from:

My father comes from Sicily, the island next to the boot. He was born in the province of Agrigento, in Cattolica Ereclea which is also known for the mob and the mobsters that come from there. Which gives us a bad reputation. Notice I said 'us' because I feel included in the community (Steven Scalia 2008).

Tania Zampini is currently a Ph.D. student at Johns Hopkins University who attended McGill for both her B.A and M.A degrees in Italian Studies. She has an older

sister who is a doctor and a younger brother currently attending Marianopolis CEGEP. Her mother Carmela still works while her father Felice is now retired. All of her grandparents are deceased. Her maternal grandfather came to Canada after World War I in 1924 to marry her grandmother, whose family had been living in Canada since before World War I. Her father came over with his parents and brother in 1955 when he was four:

He talked about how difficult growing up in Montreal was in the beginning because they didn't really have their own house. They were sharing housing with a number of families. They didn't have a lot of space. He was trying to learn English and French at the same time. It was harder for his brother, though, who was already thirteen at that point. He told me about how his parents had a hard time finding work. His mother had to do factory work in textiles and such. My grandfather was in construction, of course, as they all were (Tania Zampini 2008).



Figure 2: Tania Zampini during the 2006 World Cup of Soccer (Used with permission – Tania Zampini Collection)

Celia D'Andréa is completing a law degree from Université de Montréal and has previously graduated from McGill with a Bachelor of Arts. Her mother came over from Campobasso, in the region of Molise, in 1964 when she was a baby. Her father, from San Bartolomeo in Galdo near Naples, left Italy in 1963 when he was ten. Her father is president of his regional Italian association in Montreal and is very proud of being Italian. In fact, when he heard I was interviewing his daughter about her experiences as an Italian Canadian he offered himself as an informant for my research.



Figure 3: Celia D'Andrea during the 2006 World Cup of Soccer (Used with permission – Tania Zampini Collection)

Karim Rahim, who is 24, is of both Indian and Italian descent. He holds a Bachelor of Science degree from McGill and is working on an M.D. from Université de Montréal. His father was born to Indian parents in Uganda and came to Canada in 1973 when Idi Amin forcibly evicted the Indian population. His mother is Italian from

Agnone in the Campobasso region and came to Canada sometime in the 1950s. Though Karim is an Ismaili Muslim, he is “not really practicing. I’ve been to church as many times as I’ve been to mosque” (Karim Rahim 2008).

Michael Di Paolo, now eighteen, is the son of my uncle and thus my first cousin. He is half-Italian and half-Hungarian Canadian but “I consider myself more Italian than Hungarian” (Michael Di Paolo 2008). His mother was born in Canada, as was his maternal grandmother but his maternal grandfather was born in Hungary and came over when he was 24. Michael’s father was born in Italy and immigrated when he was four. Our common grandfather is a fantastic storyteller and often tells us about his experience:

My grandfather, before every family reunion mentions ‘It’s been 52 years since I came over with just a suitcase, and I’ve made a living for our family and we have a wonderful family now’ and he just speaks to how he made something out of nothing. My nonna says that they left Italy for the land of opportunity, to find a better way to support a family and to start a new life and to not live on a farm anymore. My aunt talks about being dirt poor in Italy (Michael Di Paolo 2008).

Lucia Silvestri, 24, lives with her parents around the corner from my grandparents’ house and a block away from the neighborhood Italian church. Living near the neighborhood Italian church is significant because of the close ties many of the older members of the community have with the Catholic Church. Many older women attend church services daily, are members of various prayer church groups and take part in the social aspect of the church community. For many years Lucia was a member of the youth choir, the church youth group, a liturgical dancer and a catechist.

She is studying to become a Chartered Accountant at McGill where she also completed her Bachelor's degree. Both her parents were born in Italy and came over as teenagers in the 1960s. Her mother is a seamstress and Italian-school⁷ teacher while her father works in auto repair. Her only living grandparent, her maternal grandmother, lives in the upstairs apartment of her parents' duplex and Lucia points out that they have a very close relationship, seeing each other almost every day. Lucia's mother Michelina came to Canada in 1965 when she was fifteen from Campobasso:

She came here with her younger brother and it was hard for her to integrate. She had no one she knew, she didn't speak English so she didn't really go to school. She spent a lot of time alone or helping my grandmother work. She didn't pursue school. My uncle, the boy, went to school. She got married at nineteen. My father on the other hand, came when he was twenty. He was working in Italy. They are both from Campobasso. From the same town actually! He had most of his family here. His parents were still in Italy. He came with his sister. His cousins were here already (Lucia Silvestri 2008).

Her mother's first memories of Canada were not all pleasant:

My mother always talks about the first day she went to school. The teacher put her in a group with the non-Italian kids. She probably did it for her own good but she felt so cornered. She didn't know a word of English. She hated it. The teacher told her that she needed to forget Italian and to forget Italy, which isn't the best thing to tell an immigrant (Lucia Silvestri 2008).

Michelle De Vincenzo, 23, is a student at Concordia University in Italian Studies and has two older sisters; she lives with her parents in Anjou, a quiet East End suburb of Montreal. Michelle's mother came to Canada when she was five from Campobasso with

⁷ A Saturday morning language school for children.

her mother. While his family immigrated to Canada, Michelle's maternal grandfather went to work in the United States with his brothers. Michelle's father came over when he was nine from San Bartolomeo in Galdo. He came with his mother and aunts because his father had come to Canada two years earlier to work and save money for his family.

Michelle explained that her father does not like to talk about coming here:

He is reluctant to talk about it. Most of the time he focuses on the boat, on the conditions they were forced to endure. What sticks with me is the number of people on the boat and that they were all underneath in steerage. It wasn't a very good situation to be in. I think the thing he found the hardest was that in Italy they owned a bakery and would deliver food. Here they had to start from scratch. They eventually owned a meat company (Michelle De Vincenzo 2008).



Figure 4: Michelle De Vincenzo (left) and Jackie De Stefano during the 2006 World Cup of Soccer (Used with permission – Elizabeth Cotignola Collection)

Jackie De Stefano, who is 23, recently finished her Bachelor of Commerce from McGill and currently works in a marketing firm in downtown Montreal and hopes to start her M.B.A. within a few years. During her undergraduate career, she lived in Turin for six months studying business and soaking up the Italian lifestyle. She has played soccer competitively for years and is also an accomplished musician (as well as a former bandmate of mine). Her father, Jack, is the Director of Counseling Psychology at McGill, while her mother is a former teacher turned financial planner. She has a younger sister, Jessica, who is an English Literature student at Concordia University. Her father left Campobasso when he was seven with his parents and “his only memory from the trip is eating his first banana on the boat. He came with his parents. He already had an uncle who was here who was the family’s sponsor” (Jackie De Stefano 2008). Her mother, on the other hand, was conceived in Italy but born in Montreal. Louise, Jackie’s mother, left Italy with her mother and came to Montreal “through Ellis Island⁸, whereas my father came in through Halifax. My grandmother came here alone with her sister. Her husband, after the war, went down to Venezuela and was a barber in Venezuela for two years. Then he made some money and came up to Montreal” (Jackie De Stefano 2008).

Pina Ippolito is 33 years old and works as a secretary for the English Montreal School Board. She lives in Boucherville, in the South Shore area of Montreal, with her husband Mauro and two young children. She comes from a large, female-dominated Sicilian family. She has three sisters, her father has seven sisters, and her mother has three. Both her parents are from Cattolica Eraclea in the Sicilian province of

⁸ No explanation is given in the family’s oral history of the move from the USA to Canada.

Agrigento. Her father came over with his parents when he was fifteen years old. Some of his sisters ended up living in Montreal, while others married and were scattered all over Europe. His mother worked in textile factories, as did his sisters. Pina's mother also worked in textiles, as a seamstress and in factories, as did most of the women in Pina's family.

Elizabeth Cotignola was born to Michael and Nicolina Cotignola in 1984. She has two younger siblings, Annie and Anthony. She completed her B.A. from McGill and is now working on a Law degree from Loyola University in Chicago. She considers family an essential part of the Montreal Italian experience: "We're Italian with all that it implies. I still live at home with my parents and siblings and my mother's mother lives next door and we're a very close-knit family. I love my family; they are one of my blessings" (Elizabeth Cotignola 2008). Her mother is from Salerno in Campagnia and met her husband in Canada who, by coincidence, was also from the same village. Her father came with both his parents when he was eight years old. Her mother, Nicolina, came to Canada when she was two years old in 1957. She came with her parents who worked as "farmers"⁹ in Italy. In Canada, Elizabeth's grandmother worked in textile factories for most of her working years:

My mother has really fond memories of always being surrounded by family. Her cousins all lived on the same street. The only negative thing they alluded to about being an immigrant is that the French kids would make fun of them. My parents grew up with the idea that Italy was a land of desperation, so I think they are very happy to be in Canada. They are proud Canadians (Elizabeth Cotignola 2008).

⁹ Probably *contadini*, peasant farmers.



Figure 5: Elizabeth Cotignola (left) and author during the 2006 World Cup of Soccer (Used with permission – Jackie De Stefano Collection)

Angie and Clorinda Antonacci, both in their early thirties, are teachers at the same high school in Montreal's East End. Angie is married with a young daughter and lives in the upstairs apartment of her parents' duplex. Clorinda lives with her parents and brother Johnny. Both sisters feel strongly that their university degrees are a reflection of their mother's respect for education and her wish to have received a university education herself. Their father came over in 1967 from Abruzzo because Expo '67 needed welders. He came by himself to live with some relatives while he worked at the world famous exposition. He intended to go to the United States afterwards but he was not able to obtain a work visa, so he stayed in Canada and

worked many different jobs to make a living. For years he worked in a candy factory making chocolates and finally worked as a mechanic until he retired. Their mother came from Cattolica Ereclea in Sicily in 1963 with her parents. Living arrangements were not easy in those first few years. As a family ultimately of six, they were often crammed into small apartments with one or two other families (Angie and Clorinda Antonacci 2008).

This capsule history of my informants' families shows more than a few commonalities among the immigrant narratives. Firstly, most of the men who came over found jobs in physically demanding fields such as construction after having previously been *contadini* or blue-collar workers in Italy. Women, on the other hand, most often found work in textile factories as seamstresses. Also, many of them became members of the bourgeoisie or the middle-class once in Canada. Secondly, all of the Sicilian informants I spoke to were from the tiny village of Cattolica Ereclea in the province of Agrigento in Sicily. This is a trend that expands beyond my informants, as I have never met a Sicilian in Montreal who was not from Cattolica Ereclea.¹⁰ Moreover, it was common for my informants' grandparents to have come over separately, with the grandfather coming over a few years early. Cultural duality is a common theme within immigrant discourses.

While my informants may seem on the outside, as perfectly assimilated, English-speaking Canadians, they have not severed their ties to their Italian heritage.

¹⁰ This "chain" migration is discussed further in Leslie Bella's book *Newfoundlanders: Home and Away*, in which she describes how immigrants follow one another to the same region or community. See also, John and Leatrice MacDonald. 1964. for a wider discussion of this phenomenon.

They foster their cultural identity in various ways – their families' immigration narratives, perpetuating existing foodways customs, and through heritage pilgrimages to Italy. They are very connected with their families and are also narratologically aware of their familial immigrant sagas. They are upwardly mobile, educated, travelers and are well integrated in the French/English milieu of Montreal. They are also working on defining themselves as adult members of the Italian community in Montreal and embracing and maintaining identity markers that shape and inform their group identity.

Chapter 2

The Concept of Identity

Elliott Oring has pointed out that identity is at the core of what folklorists have been doing for generations (Oring 1994: 216). Ethnicity and identity are fields that many folklorists have sought to research and document ethnographically. Oring defines an ethnic group as people identifying with:

A historically derived cultural tradition or style, which may be composed of both explicit behavioral features as well as implicit ideas, values and attitudes. Furthermore, membership in an ethnic group is acquired primarily by descent (Oring 1986: 24).

This thesis examines such a group. The Italians in Montreal adapted their behaviors, values and traditions from the immigrant culture they grew up in. In addition, an ethnic group exists as part of a larger mainstream society rather than as an independent and self-supporting entity. In keeping with this, the Italian community in Montreal has spent years intermingling with the various ethnic and cultural groups in the city while maintaining a distinct ethnic identity. According to Oring, an ethnic identity would be the sum of the “intellectual and the emotional sense that an individual has of his relationship to the behaviors, ideas and values of an ethnic group” (Oring 1986:24). As such, ethnicity would be defined as the thoughts or action based on this identity. As will be seen in this thesis, the behaviors, values and ideas of my informants reflect their fluid concept of identity and their complex roles as the younger members of an ethnic group.

As Stephen Stern has noted, many have argued that ethnic folklore is “a significant indicator of a group’s traditional values” (Stern 7). As such, the study of

ethnicity and identity represents two sides of the same coin. In this chapter I will review the main scholarly and folkloric works on Italian Canadians, ethnicity, ethnic folklore and identity. In addition, I will introduce the community of young Montreal Italians I grew up in and spent the summer of 2008 interviewing.

Two recent master's theses on Montreal Italians explore the community in very different ways. Lara Pascali takes a qualitative approach to documenting the two-kitchen phenomenon among Italians in North America, while Lucio De Martinis takes a quantitative look at intergenerational ethnic retention. The two-kitchen home is a North American Italian tradition that has many Italian families building kitchens in their basement as well as on the main floor. This set-up is especially common in multiple dwelling homes such as duplexes or triplexes. The kitchen in the basement tends to be made of cheaper materials and is used more frequently than the upstairs kitchen. The upstairs kitchen, generally created of finer materials, is rarely used. Pascali does not specifically focus on Montreal Italian families, but a significant portion of her fieldwork was done with Montreal families. For her master's thesis in Architecture at McGill University, she spoke to Italian families in Montreal, Toronto and New York about the dual kitchens in their homes. She uses the Italians in North America as a case study to examine how, "socio-economic factors and cultural values have shaped the design of kitchens, and in turn, how kitchens create an identity for their users" (Pascali 4). She argues that the two kitchens are linked to the creation of an ethnic identity in North America (Pascali 4). As will be seen below, a temporary second or third kitchen is created in the garage during the annual custom of tomato-making by Montreal Italians.

Pascali defines "culture" in much the same way globalization scholar Anthony King suggests, as a dynamic term that is the "active construction of meaning, or the process and codes through which meanings are constructed, negotiated, conveyed and understood" (King 138). She states that, as shown too by Gerald Pocius' work in Calvert, Newfoundland, tradition and modernity can exist symbiotically, and that the introduction of modernization does not spell the end of traditional societies. The power of ethnicity is that it is not a static notion but rather a mutable one, adaptable to changing surroundings and new environments (Pascali 12).

Pascali's views on ethnicity and culture stand in contrast to the master's thesis written by geographer Lucio De Martinis at McGill University in 2005. His main argument is that young Montreal Italians reflect a pattern of symbolic ethnicity rather than an ethnicity based on cultural values. What is meant by "values" in contrast to "symbols" is not made clear, but I can surmise that he defines cultural values as synonymous with cultural identity and attacks symbols as lacking both the depth and meaning of values. His thesis is focused on the question, "How much of the old has survived" (De Martinis 2)? Such a question brings to mind older folklore works dealing with ethnicity as survival such as Richard Dorson and Kenneth Thigpen (who will be discussed later in this chapter). De Martinis states that an ethnic identity is defined as "a set of efforts to maintain a certain level of attachment with people of similar ethnicity Keeping an ethnic identity therefore means preserving the core values associated with the ethnic group" (De Martinis 5). To prove that young Montreal Italians are in the

process of losing their culture De Martinis conducts “ethnographic”¹¹ interviews with sixty Italian families.

He asks a series of questions about language and traditions to three generations and offers them as statistics representing the Italian community living in Montreal. This type of study is problematic. Firstly, it is risky to treat culture as static and to view the unstoppable evolution of ethnicity as treacherous to an immigrant group. It is also old-fashioned to include, in an academic work on culture, sentences such as, “Through generations, Italians have undergone what I call ‘ethnic weathering,’ defined here as a loss of ethnic authenticity” (De Martinis 74) or “Symbolic identity, however, lacks the cultural genuineness of Italians” (De Martinis 75). “Authenticity” and “genuine,” as Regina Bendix has pointed out, are very loaded concepts that can be easily misconstrued as offensive and patronizing (Bendix 1997).

When I first began research for my thesis in 2008, I had many similar beliefs to De Martinis. On the surface, it does seem that, indeed, young Montreal Italians are not as “traditionally Italian” as their parents and grandparents. Most do not speak Italian fluently, nor do they know much about Italy’s history. Many do not attend church regularly, or live on the same street as the rest of their family. Most are not interested in making homemade pasta or wine and many do not name their children after relatives. These were all factors De Martinis used in concluding that young Montreal Italians were

¹¹ I am using quotation marks around the term ethnographic because though he repeatedly describes his interviews as ethnographic they were not. He read a questionnaire aloud to his informants who then answered the questions while being taped. To me, this is a quantitative, questionnaire-based study and not an ethnographic one.

losing their cultural identity. However, once I began speaking to my informants, I quickly realized that both ongoing changes in identity markers and emerging traditions showed that young Montreal Italians still consider themselves very much Italian, but within a Canadian context. It would be unfair to expect them to be viewed otherwise, as they have been born and raised simultaneously Italian and Canadian, a duality the immigrant grandparents and parents did not always have to grapple with.

Earlier work on the Montreal Italian community is found in Giovanna Del Negro's book, *Looking Through My Mother's Eyes* based on her master's thesis. In this study, she collects and explores the life stories of nine immigrant women and focuses on how knowledge and meaning grow out of everyday experiences. In telling their stories, the women "expressed resentment and ambivalence towards the repressive cultural values and practices that limited and dictated their choice of husbands and activities" (Del Negro 12). Her informants speak of simultaneous attachment to and detachment from Italy while being both grateful for and disappointed with Canada. She also discusses the forced seclusion many Italian women lived through back in Italy. Since these women, even after immigration, were forced to live and work in primarily female-dominated environments, they developed strong bonds with female neighbors and family members. While her book is not on the Montreal Italian community as a whole, but a small segment of it, it is nonetheless an important study of immigrant women who have to navigate both a patriarchal Italian culture and a modern, feminist Canadian context. The present thesis deals with some of these contradictions as aspects of contemporary identity construction.

Early research on ethnicity and ethnic folklore tended to focus on what folk traditions and customs were retained from the homeland. Richard Dorson, in his 1959 book *American Folklore*, develops a set of questions to guide further research on ethnic folklore. He asked, "What happens to the inherited traditions of European and Asiatic folk after they settle in the United States and learn a new language and new ways? How much of the old lore is retained and transmitted to their children" (Dorson 135)? These questions are focused on the distinction between the "pure" immigrant lore and the intruding influences of the new home country. The prevailing belief, for the survivalist school, was that all meaningful folklore ("Old World Lore") occurred in the past.

Dorson argues that "the few students of immigrant folklore tend to agree that imported folk customs and ideas wither rapidly under the merciless glare of American life" (Dorson 148). Dorson also proposes a three-way classification of immigrant folklore: retention, recession and elimination. Retention occurs when traditions persist in the new home country. Recession is described as the withdrawal of active portions of folk traditions. Elimination happens when these elements do not survive the migration (Dorson 44).

Dorson's work was elaborated on by Kenneth Thigpen in the early 1970s. In his book *Folklore and the Ethnicity Factor in The Lives of Romanian-Americans* based on his earlier Ph.D. dissertation, Thigpen devises a typology that classifies acculturation¹² according to various sub-processes. He describes:

¹² Acculturation is best defined by the anthropologists Redfield, Linton and Herskovits as the "phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come

- 1) Ethnic Survival: folk traditions that are retained but have little to do with specific cultural concerns.
 - a) Detached Survival: folk customs that are seen as only relevant to the homeland.
 - b) Adapted Survivals: folk traditions that are upheld and modified in the country of immigration.
- 2) Retention: customs that are sustained as a means to articulate a particular ethnicity.
- 3) Ethnic Revival: practices that became popular only after immigration.
- 4) Ethnic Reintensification: folkways that are no longer practiced by the immigrants but by their children or grand-children (Thigpen 1973).

At Stephen Stern notes in his 1977 article on ethnic folklore, this typology is laden with survivalist ideology. Thigpen, much like Dorson, gives “readers the impression that folklore consists of superorganic ‘items’ which are bravely struggling against the forces of ‘decay’” (Stern 19). Thigpen’s ideas are further elucidated in works by Frank Paulsen and Elli Köngäs-Maranda, who conclude that “Old World Lore” is dying in the Danish and Finnish Americans immigrant communities (Paulsen 1967, Köngäs-Maranda 1963).

Linda Dégh’s work on acculturation and cultural adjustment are also valuable assets when dealing with ethnicity and immigrant groups. She argues that acculturation is a two-step process that, “dissolves the ethnic enclaves in a very short period of time, usually within two generations” (Dégh 1975: 115). In the first phase, immigrants must adjust to living in a new country. In order to do so, the immigrant must learn a new language and give up certain habits that are no longer viable in this new country. In the

into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups” (Redfield *et al.* 1936: 150).

second phase, the "immigrant's identification with the majority of the population arose as an inevitable internal change of values resulting from adherence to the new society" (Dégh 1975: 115). She contends that Old Country traditions and values must be replaced by new experiences in a new country.

In her article "Uses of Folklore as Expressions of Identity by Hungarians in the Old and New Country," Dégh argues that there were two opposing forces that influenced the identity of Hungarian Americans. Firstly, was the assimilationist policies of the government that "discouraged and suppressed manifestations of ethnic loyalty" (Dégh 1984:194). Secondly, was the North American civil rights movement in the 1960s and its consequence of reawakening of white ethnic pride. The acculturating first step for the immigrants was to create pan-Hungarian ethnic symbols and thus, "Gypsy music . . . Hungarian dress, the stuffed cabbage, chicken paprikàs and strudel became the most popular and lasting Hungarian identity symbols" (Dégh 1984:195). Dégh shows a clear change in attitudes towards ethnic identity among the two waves of Hungarian immigration to North America. The first wave, prior to World War I, was characterized by immigrants who suppressed "peasant tradition and introduced elements of a provincial middle-class Hungarian prototype" (Dégh 1984:195). The second wave of Hungarian immigrants, who came after the Second World War, played an important role in a renewal of the Hungarian ethnic arts. However, Dégh argues that it is those Hungarian immigrants who came after the failed Hungarian Uprising of 1956 who are the biggest disseminators of Hungarian folklore. She asserts that maintaining an ethnic identity is a matter of individual choice for members of an immigrant community and that those who

opt for an ethnic identity must choose a few select symbols for creative cultivation. This is usually in the form of holidays, foodways, religion, folk arts or language (Dégh 1984: 196). Alan Dundes developed the concept of devolutionary ethnic behavior (Dundes 1969) and Linda Dégh later elucidated it by delineating three major steps in this process. The immigrant first arrives with a set of cultural values. The second generation breaks away from these values while the third generation smoothly integrates with the dominant society.

Robert Klymasz's studies in the 1970s of Ukrainian Canadians and cultural integration provide a valuable framework for the study of immigrant groups in Canada. He singles out the most important factor in the development of Ukrainian folklore as the loss of the Ukrainian language. Thus, without language to communicate:

folk heritage comes to be disseminated more or less in sensory terms alone – acoustic, optical, and tactile manifestations devoted, for instance, to the 'sound' of Ukrainian country music, the 'art' of traditional crafts . . . and the 'taste' of Old Country foods (Klymasz 1973: 134).

Klymasz boils down the evolution of immigrant folklore into three stages. The first stage is characterized by resistance to change, the second to the breakdown due to change and finally the reconstitution and adjustment to change (Klymasz 1973: 134). He is careful to assert that this sequence of stages is not meant to show that old and new folk traditions are unable to exist together, although they were often portrayed as mutually exclusive concepts by earlier scholars. He adds that we "encounter the immigrant folklore complex in a dynamic state of flux replete with the various tensions, seeming contradictions, and ambivalence that reflect the conditioning impact of the acculturation process in the New

World" (Klymasz 1973: 138). Klymasz argues that while many of the immigrant folk traditions are abandoned, many hold on and are adapted to suit the community's changing sense of ethnic loyalty and identity (Klymasz 1971).

Elliott Oring's 1994 article "The Arts, Artifacts and Artifices of Identity" is a more recent look at the concept of identity in folklore. In this work he outlines various types of identities. He breaks identity down into three related concepts. Individual identity refers to understanding and recognizing the self. Personal identity is composed of memories, identifications, ideas and experiences that come to "constitute a perhaps shifting, but nevertheless discernible configuration" (Oring 212). Finally, a collective identity refers to the experiences, expressions and ideas common to a group. He argues that for generations, folklore was considered an artifact of identity because through folklore one could "establish and ascertain the underlying common qualities of those who were fundamentally *unlike* oneself" and that oral communication would preserve such artifacts (Oring 216). Oring's typology will be discussed at greater length in the third chapter of this thesis.

Chapter 3

Folklore and Fragmented Identities

"I feel like a mutt. Like I'm torn between two cultures" (Clorinda Antonacci 2008).

Identity is a fluid concept that is both complex and multi-faceted. Elliott Oring devised a typology for folklorists to be better equipped to study issues of identity. As discussed in the previous chapter, Oring breaks identity down into three sections. Individual identity is described as a person's factual self such as birthplace and citizenship. On the other hand, personal identity falls within the constructed definition of identity, and is concerned with beliefs, thoughts and ethnic association. Collective identity is a cross-section of shared personal beliefs and identity within a group. As Oring shows, identity is not easily compartmentalized or defined. He demonstrates that we can only study identity through people's actions and performances and thus we are limited in our ability to concretely define an individual or a group identity (Oring 1994). This chapter will focus on the application of Oring's typology to my informants' views of identity and will demonstrate the fluid nature of their ethnic identification. Further, I also examine identity markers of the younger generation of Montreal Italians and how they differ from the markers of previous generations. To illustrate this point, I use the change in church involvement at Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church as a case study.

Identity goes beyond the language one speaks or the ethnicity of one's parents. Identity is shown outwardly through expressive performance; however, identity itself is in an inner association. Therefore the performance is simply a means for us to examine

identity. Thus, coming to a fully developed and concrete definition of an individual or group is difficult as we are limited to studying the expression and performance of such. In addition, though Oring has separated identity into three manageable areas of study, one's identity can be considered the sum total of these three categories. Oring defines individual identity as "the space-time connection with states, thoughts and actions from the past" (Oring 212). I interpret this to mean the set of factual and objective details that construct the framework of an individual. This category of identity comprises one's biographical information: for instance, all of my informants are Canadian citizens and are the children of Italian immigrants. At the time of the interview, they were all between the ages of fifteen and 33 and they were all residents of Montreal. All of my informants are at least conversationally trilingual in English, French and Italian.

Although these statements are facts, they all hold different meanings on a personal level in how my informants construct their concept of self. As quoted below, for some, being considered Italian is of utmost importance, while others emphasize their Canadian identity. The majority, on the other hand, refused to be exclusive about such labels. This variety of what is stressed as important is part of the personal identity defined by Oring. Every informant may be a Canadian citizen, but whether they choose to personally identify with a Canadian identity is a different matter altogether. The complexity of this issue is highlighted by the findings of Statistics Canada that report an increase in people asserting multiple ethnic ancestries over the past three nation-wide

censuses. The figures have been on the rise since 1996 when, 7.8 million¹³ Canadians reported multiple ethnicities, while in 2001 the numbers rose to 11.3 million. The 2001 census reported 1,270,369 (4.3%) people counting themselves as Italian, up from 1,207,475 (4.2%) in 1996. In Montreal, the 2001 census reported that 224,460 Montrealers declared themselves to be of Italian origin. Of this number, 70,405 (31%) reported multiple ancestries and 154,005 (69%) declared a single ancestry. In the most recent 2006 census, 260,345 Montrealers declared themselves Italian, and among them 98,440 (38%) asserted multiple ethnicities. These findings are echoed in a recent article written by Joshua Lalor. He explores the surge in multiple ancestry responses by Newfoundlanders in the 2006 census. He writes that, "this may be part of a trend of people seeing themselves in multiple terms. In any event, this variation in people's responses alludes to the fluidity of ethnicity" (Lalor 30).

At first glance it can be easy to assume that the number of people asserting themselves as Italian is growing simply because the community is expanding. However, the number of Italian immigrants entering Canada since the late 1960s is almost negligible. When Statistics Canada's website states the top ten recent immigrant ethnicities in Montreal in their 2001 census, they are mostly from Africa or the Middle East. Italy is not one of them. Statistics Canada Online conjectures that a reason for the increase in responses of multiple ancestries is intermarriage. Statistics Canada argues that intermarriage would likely cause the offspring of these unions to list multiple ancestries. This is a likely factor for many immigrant groups that have been in Canada for

¹³ Every statistic I cite can be found online at Statistics Canada's website: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/start-debut-eng.html> (Accessed on June 8th, 2009).

generations. I argue that this is not yet likely to be a cause for Montreal Italians. By and large, my grandparents' generation came to Canada married or engaged. Their children generally married Italians and, while some married members of other ethnic groups, this was likely the exception and not the rule. This may very well change as the younger generation begins to marry. This generation is very much plugged into Montreal's multiculturalism as demonstrated by my informants' willingness to date and marry non-Italians, of having close non-Italian friends and in attending ethnically diverse post-secondary institutions. In fact, the number of people declaring an Italian ethnicity in Montreal grew 35,885, from 2001 to 2006 and 78% of that increase was in multiple ancestries. This means that either people are now asserting themselves as Italians when they had previously given a single ancestry response, or that the younger people being questioned are more likely to list several ethnicities.

These findings are echoed by the views of my informants who often classified themselves as both Canadian and Italian. During each interview, I asked what my informants considered themselves to be, an Italian Canadian or Canadian of Italian descent with the first indicated to be a stronger identification with Italy. It was the rare occasion when an informant answered right away. They tended to generally be undecided on this matter or felt strongly towards a multiple ethnic attachment. Alexander Scalia felt strongly that he was a Canadian first:

I am a Canadian of Italian descent. I was born here. I am a Canadian and I like it here. I'm proud of my Italian roots. I strongly believe that my ancestors helped build this country. This is why when people talk about Quebec sovereignty it pisses me off. My ancestors helped build it; I want it to stay in Canada. You know there is that saying

that it takes three generations to assimilate? I'm inclined to believe that. I see that it's happened to me and to other third generation people in the family. I realize that even if we wanted to control it, we wouldn't be able to (Alexander Scalia 2008).

André Di Pietro was also steadfast in his identification with Canada before Italy:

In my opinion there are no Italian Canadians in my generation. We are Canadian with an Italian heritage but you are first of all a Canadian. Unless you're born in Italy, but even then, if you're living here, you're Canadian. I would even say Quebecois! I'm not a *séparatiste* but still, it's true (André Di Pietro 2008).

Karim Rahim, who is both of Italian and Indian descent declared, without hesitation, his identity as Canadian as soon as I asked the question:

I'm a Canadian of Italian descent. An Italian Canadian is someone who considers themselves first and foremost Italian who happens to be living in Canada. So that's a newly arrived immigrant who just landed here. I mean my Italian roots go back two generations, my mom was born here. It would be ridiculous of me to think anything else. I'm a Canadian of Italian descent because I was born here. I'm not Italian (Karim Rahim 2008).

Of my female informants, only two seemed to associate themselves strongly as Canadians of Italian descent. Tania Zampini stated that:

I'm a Canadian of Italian descent because I think an Italian Canadian is a *false*¹⁴ for someone like me. It might be right for someone like for my dad or more so my grandparents. People who are Italian by birth and live in Canada. Anytime someone asks me what my heritage is I say I'm a Canadian of Italian descent because I was born here. I know how Canadian society works, I know how Italian society works because I study it not because I've lived it or am experiencing it. To me, both being Canadian

¹⁴ From the Italian adjective *falso*, or "wrong." Used here as a diminutive noun perhaps like the English "little white lie."

and of Italian decent are equally important but if I had to put one first that would be Canada (Tania Zampini 2008).

Timia Di Pietro had a similar response:

I'm a Canadian of Italian descent. I feel 100% Canadian but my heritage, my origins, my roots are Italian. It's very important that I keep it up because they say you don't know where you're going if you don't know where you've been. Well it's where you come from, your parents, your grandparents, your upbringing and your values (Timia Di Pietro 2008).

Those who strongly declared an association with Canada did not ignore their Italian heritage, instead they all acknowledge the importance of this ancestry in the shaping of their identity (Del Negro 1997).

A few of my informants felt strongly in their attachment to Italy and declared their main identity as Italian Canadian. Clorinda Antonacci asserted:

I'm an Italian Canadian. Canadian of Italian descent is those people who are Italian in name only where they don't have the traditions anymore. Because of how my mother and father spoke of their lives, because of how they encouraged us to learn the language. We made the tomatoes. I think that because I do that and want to pass it on to my own kids [that] makes me an Italian Canadian. I associate myself more to my Italian culture than to my Canadian culture. I don't even know what Canadian culture is. I feel like a hypocrite saying I'm a Canadian because I'm not. I don't know what a Canadian tradition is (Clorinda Antonacci 2008).

Steven Scalia is a very proud Italian Canadian. As soon as I inquired about his ethnic identity he responded:

I'm Italian Canadian, as in I feel part of Italy and I'm living in an Italian community in Canada. I feel more Italian than Canadian. My blood, the blood that goes through me is Italian. I have Italian culture. I participate in Italian

traditions. I'm part of an Italian Church. I'm part of the Italian community with my parents, my brother. We all participate. It's not that I don't feel Canadian. I do because I was born here and everything but I feel more proud to say I'm Italian than to say I'm Canadian. When people ask me where I'm from I don't say I come from Canada, I would say I come from Italy. I don't really know why I put Italy before Canada, but not that it's more unique to be Italian than just plain Canadian, but the traditions are there, the culture. I was raised by Italian parents. I'm raised like an Italian (Steven Scalia 2008).

It is important to note that while these informants may assert themselves as Italian, they are not denying their Canadian identity. They simply place their affinity towards Italy and the Italian culture above what they consider to be a Canadian ethnicity. Elizabeth Cotignola was one of those informants who asserted her Italian identity straight away. She calls herself an Italian Canadian and explained that while she loves Italy and considers herself Italian she is also a proud Canadian:

Logistically speaking I don't see a difference between Italian Canadian and Canadian of Italian descent. However, when I'm asked to identify myself, I say that I'm Italian because my parents were born in Italy. Because how I grew up, I have an Italian last name, and growing up, our culture and our traditions were Italian. I am a very proud Canadian. It's odd, in Canada I'm Italian but when I'm outside Canada I say I'm Canadian but I always make sure to say 'but my parents were Italian' especially now that I'm getting ready to leave and move to a foreign country, well yeah the United States is pretty foreign.¹⁵ My identity is going to be Canadian but I make sure to say Italian too (Elizabeth Cotignola 2008).

¹⁵ At the time of the interview, Elizabeth was preparing to move to Chicago for Law School.

Most of my informants waffled when answering the question, and were unsure of which identity they felt best described them. Long pauses, sighs and interrupted sentences were the norm. Celia D'Andrea exemplifies this:

That's a tough question. I don't know how to answer that!
[pause] No, I'm Canadian of Italian descent [pause]
definitely. I would never say I'm only Canadian, I would
always say I'm of Italian descent. Always, always, always!
I think it's because I've lived here all my life and I feel that
only if I was born in Italy and lived in Italy can I say that
I'm Italian only (Celia D'Andrea 2008).

Jackie De Stefano repeated the question a few times before tentatively answering that she was Italian:

Do I consider myself Italian Canadian or Canadian of
Italian descent? It depends on the day. There's moments
when you couldn't be prouder to be Italian, when the
World Cup is going on or the Olympics in Turin, I
associate myself as Italian more then. There are times when
I don't like introducing myself as a Montreal Italian
because there are certain stereotypes associated with it. I
tell people all the time 'I'm Italian but I've lived in Italy'
which I think is a big difference. I would never call myself
Canadian though. There is a big identity crisis in Canada
and I don't know what it means to be Canadian (Jackie De
Stefano 2008).

Another informant whose pauses were significant in answering the questions was Lucia Silvestri:

[Long Pause] I think [pause] I think Canadian of Italian
descent. I do share most of the values that Italians have. I do
however feel like, I'm really, I don't know how to put this
but I'm Canadian in some sense. I have integrated with
Canadians so, it's weird. I wouldn't say I'm Canadian right
away (Lucia Silvestri 2008).

Michelle De Vincenzo's answer was likewise punctuated by pauses and stammers, almost as though she felt her response was to be judged incorrect. She told me, "I think I'm an [pause] Italian Canadian? [pause] Even though I didn't grow up in Italy I just associate myself more with Italian than with Canadian traditions. Family is the most important thing" (Michelle De Vincenzo 2008). Sabrina Pianese did not even answer the question directly and instead simply stated that she felt very comfortable spending time in Italy. She asserted, "[long pause] I don't know! When I was in Italy because, I felt such ease with the community and with the culture, I was proud of the fact that this was part of my heritage" (Sabrina Pianese 2008).

While their answers about ethnic identification tend to fall along the same lines of tentative confusion, the moments in which they feel most Canadian or Italian vary greatly. Generally both the men and women cited sports as main reasons for ethnic pride. Sports then serve as an identity marker for younger Montreal Italians. André told me that for him:

Obviously when I watch hockey, I really feel big time Canadian, or let's say I go out of Canada, I feel really Canadian. I feel most Italian during the World Cup. Any soccer events, obviously. When I'm amongst other cultures, speaking to people here when they ask me what I am, I'm Italian (André Di Pietro 2008).

Michelle explained to me that while she is not a sports fan, athletic competition does stir feelings of pride as both an Italian and a Canadian:

The only time I really feel Canadian or pay attention to feeling Canadian is when we're involved in activities that represent Canada like the Olympics or hockey. I think that's when I feel most Canadian. At any other time I'm not presenting to anybody that I am Canadian. I'm most proud

of being Italian when we do something that marks our spot, like the World Cup. I don't feel Canadian then (Michelle De Vincenzo 2008).



Figure 6: Author (left) with Jackie De Stefano (second from left), Michelle De Vincenzo (third from right) and Elizabeth Cotignola (right) during the 2006 World Cup of Soccer (Used with permission – Jackie De Stefano Collection)

Michael plays both hockey and soccer competitively so it was no surprise that he listed watching those sports as times he feels closest to Italy and Canada. What is a surprise is that he offers a few more times when he feels most Italian and they revolve around spending time with his paternal grandparents:

It's the same feeling for me whether the *Canadiens* are in the playoffs or if Italy is in the World Cup. It's the same sense of pride. As if I'm a part of something. Playing hockey makes me feel more Canadian than grass. The World Cup and soccer events make me feel Italian. Visiting grandparents makes me feel Italian. I think having two identities is an advantage because you get to take the best from both worlds. It's like being part of two communities

that are totally different but everyone around you is in the same boat (Michael Di Paolo 2008).

While sports were mentioned as being markers of identity, soccer was by far the most important and influential. The World Cup of Soccer is an event that most of my informants named as when they feel most Italian. Italy is a powerhouse in the competition and has won four World Cups, making it the most successful country in the competition after Brazil. If there had been a World Cup competition during my fieldwork, it would have played a significant role in my thesis, but since the World Cup occurred over a year before I even began my Master's degree it has a limited function in this study. Nevertheless, its importance as an identity marker for the young Montreal Italian community must be addressed. After a soccer game in which Italy ties or wins, hundreds of Italians take to the streets waving Italian flags and honking their car horns.



Figure 7: Montreal Italians celebrating in Little Italy after Italy won the 2006 World Cup of Soccer (Used with permission – Jackie De Stefano Collection)

This impromptu outpouring of ethnic pride and affiliation is usually centered in three Montreal locations: St. Laurent Street in Montreal's Little Italy, Jean Talon Street in Saint Leonard and Maurice Duplessis Boulevard in Rivière des Prairies. All three streets are in the heart of Italian neighborhoods in Montreal. When Italy is playing, it is customary for many of these young people to go either to an Italian sports bar to watch the game or to have family and friends over and watch it together. While watching the game, it is routine to either wear a shirt in *Azzurri*¹⁶ blue or the team jersey. Once the game is over and Italy has won, it is habitual to leave the house straight away, get into your car and drive down to one of the three streets mentioned above to join the parade of cars honking their horns, playing the Italian national

¹⁶ Azure blue. The *Azzurri* is the nickname given to the Italian national soccer team, as its uniform has traditionally always been royal blue.

anthem over megaphones and waving Italian flags. During the 2006 World Cup, Italy won the final game against France and took the cup for the fourth time. Pandemonium broke loose in Montreal with thousands of Italians streaming into Little Italy to celebrate until the early morning. It is important to note that the focus here is not on place but on ethnicity. This type of behavior is common in other sports. When the Montreal *Canadiens* win the Stanley Cup many fans would take to the streets in celebration, but the revelers would not be waving Canadian flags, they would be celebrating their city's victory. Those involved in the celebration would come from a cross-section of ethnic and socio-economic groups bound together by geography. This is not the case with the Italian revelers in Montreal after a World Cup win for Italy. Though they all live in Montreal, their celebration is a reflection of a personal and long-standing relationship with the Italian soccer team and their Italian ethnicity.



Figure 8: Cars parading down Maurice Duplessis Boulevard in 2006 after Italy won the World Cup (Used with permission – Tania Zampini Collection)

Many of my informants have pictures from the 2006 World Cup victory on their Facebook accounts. These pictures show them decked out in full Italian regalia: Italian soccer jerseys, Italian flags draped across their shoulders, Italian flag pins and any other item with the word *Italia* on it. Under any other circumstances, many would never be caught dead wearing these items of clothing for fear of looking like wops (a term which will be dealt with in greater detail later in this chapter). However, during World Cup season this attire is acceptable and indeed expected.



Figure 9: Young Montreal Italian men celebrating Italy's World Cup victory in 2006 (Used with permission – Celia D'Andrea Collection)

I am much like my informants in this way. I would never dream of walking around in my Italian soccer jersey or wearing my Italian flag pin or my Italian flag handkerchief in public unless I were celebrating a soccer victory. I normally find these items of clothing outlandish and unnecessary. However, as reserved as I am about wearing such loud markers of my ethnicity, during the 2006 World Cup I wore my Italian flag pin to work at a clothing store for the duration of the competition. When Italy won the final game I was in a sports bar in Little Italy with a few friends and we joined the throngs of proud young Montreal Italians who paraded up and down the streets of Little Italy, sang the Italian national anthem as loudly as we could and partied to Italian dance music all night. The World Cup of Soccer offers Montreal

Italians the opportunity to celebrate and perform their Italian ethnic identity in loud, boisterous and showy ways that they would never dream of doing otherwise.



Figure 10: A decorated car in Little Italy during the 2006 World Cup (Used with Permission – Celia D'Andrea Collection)

Although the World Cup is a very obvious and demonstrative way in which my informants felt most Italian it was not the only answer. Pina and Timia both told me they feel most Italian at work but for different reasons. Pina works in a high school that has a large Italian student population while Timia works in a law firm where there are

not many Italians. For Pina, being surrounded by Italian students and their parents is a constant reminder of her heritage:

Do I feel Canadian? When I leave the country, maybe. Where we live everybody associates with being Italian; where we work, the school is ninety percent from Italian backgrounds. It's hard to ever be out of the Italian community. I feel most Italian at work. Because parents are working more now, the grandparents are taking care of the kids a lot and the calls we get at work are from Italian grandparents. You're always speaking Italian, there is never a day when you're not speaking Italian (Pina Ippolito 2008)!

Timia, on the other hand, expressed a cultural barrier between herself and her coworkers because of her strong Italian background. She finds herself having differing views on dating and relationships and believes this is because of her traditional Italian upbringing. I was not certain whether her feeling "most Italian" during these moments stemmed from a sense of pride for not following mainstream dating trends or if it was based on slight embarrassment for not being able to share in her coworkers' experiences.

This sense of defining one's personal cultural identity in opposition to another was not limited to Timia. Whether they were contrasting themselves to other "types" of Italians or another ethnic group, several of my informants discussed this theme. The main "other" my informants contrasted themselves against was the idea of the "woppy Italian." Woppy is a derogatory slang term derived from "wop," which was long used to insultingly refer to Italian immigrants. The meaning of wop is unclear but has a few folk etymologies, such as "Workers on Pavement" referring to the fact that many Italian immigrants worked in construction. Another folk etymology is "Without Papers" which erroneously suggests that many Italians immigrated illegally. While these suggestions

are interesting and portray a history of discrimination against Italian immigrants, the Merriam-Webster's Dictionary defines wop as a derivative of "guappo" which means "swaggerer" in Italian.¹⁷ I surmise that "swaggerer" was a term bestowed upon certain members of the community who displayed the proud machismo of a traditional Italian male. In its current Montreal context, a woppy person is someone who exemplifies the North American Italian stereotype, and is described as ignorant, loud and embarrassing to the community by my informants. These woppy Italians speak an Italianized version of English¹⁸ and go out of their way to "dress Italian" as a way of defining their identity and cementing their belonging to a certain group. Celia described her experience visiting Italy with her high school class, which was apparently full of wops:

Here we are in Rome with a bunch of woppy kids who are like 'Go Italia!' meanwhile half of them don't know how to speak Italian at all. Wearing Kappa head to toe, ready to go to their motherland to which they know nothing about (Celia D'Andrea 2008).

It is important to note that Celia lives in Rivière de Prairies, an area of Montreal widely recognized or perhaps stigmatized, as having the largest wop population. She also attended a high school where the majority of the student body was of Italian descent. This caused her to generally avoid these types of people in favour of the less woppy Italians. The wearing of Kappa is a strong fashion statement many Montreal Italians choose to

¹⁷ This definition was found at the Merriam-Webster online dictionary.
<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/wop>

¹⁸ Though these Montreal Italians were born in Canada and have attended English schools, they pride themselves in being able to speak English with a heavy Italian accent and interspersed with words of Italian dialect. Gianrenzo Clivio's works on *Itagliese* (Italian-English) should be consulted for further research on this topic. The study of *Itagliese* linguistic patterns could have played a larger role in this thesis, however my lack of background in linguistics hampered this.

make. Kappa is an Italian fashion line that focuses on athletic wear. Its popularity soared among young Montreal Italians when it designed the jersey of the Italian National soccer team and since that time, wearing Kappa clothing has become the equivalent of wearing the Italian flag draped across your body.

Another informant declared that he strongly disliked wops as they took proper Italian fashions and ruined them in Montreal:

A lot of Italians here dress Italian head to toe. Like here people wear Kappa Italia clothes. Italy jackets, bracelets. Italians like to wear designer clothes, like, the Mohawk [the faux-hawk], before it got faggotised here, let me tell you [laughs] the Mohawk was hip in Italy before here and it wasn't gay. They all screw it up here (Anonymous 2008).

This comment is focused on the differences between Italians and those who mimic their style. It is dripping with machismo and homophobia and shows an utter disdain for the ruination of a supposedly Italian hairstyle. Though not present in most of my informants' rhetoric, homophobia and machismo can nonetheless be a part of a traditional Italian male identity.

Part of this personal identity is clearly focused on the physical presentation of the self. Dress and costume are an important way for people to define themselves as members of a specific group. Giovanna Del Negro, in her book about ritual promenade in Italy, focuses on the ways in which members of that community choose to dress when undertaking their daily walk. She writes that "through the act of seeing, Sassani¹⁹ attach meaning to the clothing, posture, gait, gesture and glances of others" (Del Negro 2004:123). Through dress, my informants are able to distance themselves from the woppy

¹⁹ The pseudonym for members of the community she studied in her book, *La Passegiata*.

Italians they scorn. The informant above often mentioned his disdain for those Italian and non-Italian people in Montreal who walk around foolishly ruining Italian fashions and also derided them for wearing Italian soccer jerseys. On this topic, Tania explained to me that:

I don't like it when people play 'stereotypical Italian.' Like the stereotype that Italian girls are beautiful and easy and I really didn't like that. I didn't like the way they behaved in front of people and with boys especially. They dressed slutty and the guys have the open shirts with the cross and the chest hair sticking out. Now they have the headband²⁰ and Oh My God . . . how they speak English! and attempt to speak Italian and fail because they know nothing about it.

Those stereotypical Italians who think wearing Kappa and Adidas and whatever and they speak like '*Eh Oh Bro, me I like da World Cup anda I watcha soccer every Sadurday with my nonno.*' You know? They think they're Italian. No. When you ask them anything about Italian culture, when you ask them anything about Italian history, they can't give you a straight answer they can only talk about their experience here in Montreal (Tania Zampini 2008).

Oring defines collective identity as "those aspects of personal identity that are derived from experiences and expressions common to a group. It is recognition of this collective aspect of personal identity that produces the deep sense of identification with others – the consciousness of kind" (Oring 212). These common trends among my informants are what they believe are important to their group identity. First was the idea that they all belonged to two countries. Even those who expressed feeling Canadian always stated that they could not negate the importance of Italy on their identity and vice

²⁰ A few years ago, the Italian national soccer team began wearing thin headbands, fashioned out of bra straps, to keep their long hair out of their faces during games. This caught on as a fashion trend among young Italian men in Montreal.

versa. There is a definite sense that being part of two countries is a very important part of being a young Montreal Italian. Their ties to sports-related nationalism is another facet of their collective identity. The feeling of national pride for Italy during soccer season and Canada during the Olympics and hockey season is simply another way for my informants to express an affiliation to both Canada and Italy. The importance of the Italian language is another aspect of collective identity. Speaking Italian was often described by my informants as the most important tradition to uphold even though many expressed frustration that they could not speak the language fluently. Language is also important to older members of the community but in a very different way. They are not concerned with how they speak the language as it is their mother tongue. They are, however, concerned about the transmission of Italian to their children and grandchildren. After living in Newfoundland for a few years, my maternal grandmother likes to tell me I am losing my Italian language and becoming English even though I now make my own pasta, sauce and cured meats²¹. The importance of visiting Italy plays a huge role in the collective identity of Montreal Italians. The passion with which my informants spoke about visiting Italy made me feel that, much like the *Hajj* for Muslims, visiting Italy is a pilgrimage members of the Italian community must undertake at least once in their lifetime. As an Italian who has never traveled to Italy, I am very aware of this pressure and have been told by a number of people that I am not a "real" Italian until I have been to the homeland.

²¹ This difference between my grandmother is in some way a microcosm of this thesis in that we both share an enthusiasm for performing Italianess but we choose different cultural expressions.

Part of my informants' ethnic identity is giving up and changing certain identity markers followed by their parents and grandparents in favour of new ones that label them not only as Montreal Italians, but as members of the younger generation as well. Members of the Montreal Italian community over 35 have a certain set of characteristics. They are often active members in Italian regional associations. These are associations formed in Montreal based on a specific region in Italy, village or patron saint. They hold meetings, dinners, feasts and parties throughout the year. None of my informants, all under 35, expressed an affiliation with a regional association, though a few of their parents were members. There are also architectural markers of identity that members of the community over the age of 35 follow. The two-kitchen homes mentioned in the previous chapter is an example of this. In her research, Lara Pascali found that the practice of having a two-kitchen home was not a tradition that was being kept alive by younger Italian families (Pascali 2004).

Certain identity markers such as affiliation with regional associations or the two-kitchen home, that are significant to older generations, are not identity markers for my generation of Montreal Italians. There are nonetheless a few identity markers that have been retained. These markers, such as having a first-hand narrative of Italy and food customs may be similar across generational lines, nevertheless, they are given different meaning by the younger generation. My grandparents' stories about Italy are a very important part of their identity. As we were growing up, they often told us about Italy as a way to reinforce their relationship with their homeland and to help us forge a connection with a country we had no experience with. For my generation, visiting Italy

and having a first-hand narrative plays an equally important function in the construction of a cultural identity. Traveling to Italy and being able to undertake such a visit implies that you are not simply a Canadian with an Italian last name but someone who has an active and dynamic relationship with your ancestral homeland. The marker of having this close relationship and experience with Italy has remained; however, the purpose and meaning have shifted.

Similarly, with food culture, the tradition of tomato-making may still be present in my generation but for different purposes than for my grandparents. My maternal grandparents preserve tomatoes for many reasons; as retirees, they have the means to undertake such a time-consuming activity and they find that making tomatoes at home is the cheapest way to amass a large quantity of tomato sauce for the year. My generation, as an educated and upwardly mobile group, is not concerned with the cost of sauce nor does it have the time to devote to home-based food preparation. The tradition remains because they have infused this identity marker with new meanings. Tomato-making, as will be shown in Chapter Five, serves to inform a cultural identity that is fluid and ever-changing. Those informants who undertake the process of making tomatoes do it for various reasons, each of which is supported by the idea that making tomatoes is an integral part of the Montreal Italian experience. Though it may be time-consuming, somewhat dangerous and labour-intensive, my informants stated that it also serves to maintain and strengthen family bonds, creates a healthy food product and upholds a tradition that they wish to continue. As with the identity marker of first-hand experience

with Italy, making tomatoes has remained as a marker for my generation, although the reasons for its continuation are unique.

The Catholic Church is probably the most important method of identification for previous generations of Montreal Italians. Attending an Italian church was a necessity for them because Italian was their mother tongue, and for many years, the only language they spoke. Thus, the church served both a religious function and an ethnic one. For younger members of the community, religious beliefs and practices are generally no longer central to their lives. An example of this is the role of church involvement throughout the generations at Our Lady of Mount Carmel, an Italian church in Montreal's East End burrough of Saint Leonard. As the oldest Italian parish in Canada it has played an integral part in the life of the thriving Italian community of Saint Leonard. Since it has such a long history within the Italian community, the church, like the community itself, now stands at a crossroads between generations of Italians who have different views on the role of church and religion as part of their identity as Montreal Italians.

I have always considered Italian Catholicism as being its very own sect of Catholicism because of the many rituals and traditions I grew up with none of my non-Italian friends could ever understand. Devotion to statues, relic dust being used as a cure for illness, processions around the church, and balconies decorated with linens and flags were all part and parcel of having been brought up Italian and Catholic in Montreal. As a child I had no choice but to take part in these traditions that I barely understood. As a young adult, I found myself questioning the religion and yet I was still going to church on Sundays, was an altar server and an active member of the youth group. To many

Catholics, religion without faith is impossible. However, I found myself part of a small group of young people who attended Mass and were involved within the church but who, for the most part, found themselves attracted to the church for reasons other than religion.

The *Madonna Del Monte Carmelo* parish in Montreal was established when the first Italians immigrated Canada in the late nineteenth century. In 1905, the church was built as a small, wooden structure in downtown Montreal where most of the Italian community lived. It was the first, and for a long period of time, the only Italian church in Montreal. The priests who ran the church in its earliest years were the Servites of Mary and they “were doing it for the Italian immigrants. They wanted to make sure the Italians continued to uphold their Catholic faith” (Paola Sanchini 2008). By 1968, most of the Italian community had moved out of the poor downtown area and into Montreal’s East End. To keep their parish going strong, Our Lady of Mount Carmel followed her immigrant parishioners to a new home in Saint Leonard. With a history so entrenched in the Italian community, it was no surprise to me to find out my family has been involved with this parish since its infancy. On my paternal side of the family, my great-grandfather was a Church Warden for Our Lady of Mount Carmel when it was still a small, wooden church in downtown Montreal. While on my maternal side, in a small village in central Italy, my great-grandfather was very involved with the society of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, as was my great-grandmother. Both my paternal grandparents and parents were married at Mount Carmel and it is the church I was baptized and confirmed in. My family is not alone in having such a long involvement with Our Lady of Mount Carmel. Though

there are presently seven churches serving Italians in Montreal, none have had such a longstanding relationship with the community.

The changes in the identity marker of religion and church involvement can best be seen by a study of the three generations within the church. For my grandparents' generation the church and religion are central aspects of their identity. Pierina Di Paolo is my maternal grandmother. She is in her early eighties and lives at home with her husband of over sixty years. She is very involved with Our Lady of Mount Carmel as a reader during Mass. She also sews clothes for the Christmas and Easter pageants and is an active member of *Le Donne dell'Azione Cattolica* (The Catholic Women's Action).²² Her religious life began in a small village in the Abruzzo region of Italy when her aunt came to live with her family after her father died of pneumonia. According to my grandmother, this aunt was "super religious, so I picked up a lot of my religious beliefs from her" (Pierina Di Paolo 2008). This included regular attendance at Mass, belonging to the Daughters of Mary (*Figlie di Maria*) association and regular pilgrimages to visit the shrine of *San Gabriele dell'Addolorata* (Saint Gabriel of the Sorrowful Virgin). Saint Gabriel is the patron saint of Abruzzo who died in his early twenties back in 1862. He is also seen as the protector of the youth and is a favorite among the Abruzzesi of my grandmother's generation. Walking for days to his shrine in central Abruzzo was something de rigeur; "everybody had to go on a pilgrimage to *l'Oratorio di San Gabriele* at least once in their lifetime in Italy. It was by walking, none of this car thing. It's days of walking" (Paola Sanchini 2008). This early devotion to Saint Gabriel in Abruzzo

²² Unless otherwise noted, all translations from the original Italian are my own.

crossed over when she came to Canada with a yearly pilgrimage to Saint Gabriel's Oratory in Sainte Julienne in late August to celebrate his feast day. Saint Gabriel's dust is also something that my grandmother regularly uses as part of her devotion to him. This dust is

"probably a piece of earth where he was originally buried" (Paola Sanchini 2008) and is sent to her regularly by Saint Gabriel's Sanctuary in Italy. She believes it has healing properties and that "we believe that this dust can alleviate your symptoms" (Pierina Di Paolo 2008). Though she does believe in the dust's miraculous powers she has never received a miracle from its use. Her daughter (my mother) however, told me her uncle regularly rubbed the dust on my god-daughter's back because she was born with spina-bifida and was then cured of the debilitating disease. My grandmother's fervent devotion to Saint Gabriel is something I have often encountered with Italians of her generation. In many houses belonging to members of my grandmother's generation, statues, paintings, relics and saint cards of Padre Pio, Saint Francis and Saint Gabriel decorating living rooms and bedrooms are common.

When Pierina moved to Canada with her two young children to join her husband, she found herself at Our Lady of Mount Carmel's doorstep. "When I got to Canada, my daughter had to make her First Communion. I asked around and kept being told that I needed to attend Our Lady of Mount Carmel" (Pierina Di Paolo 2008). Since 1956, save for a period of ten years when she was a member of another church, my grandmother has been attending Mount Carmel regularly. She told me that since the language spoken at Mount Carmel is her mother tongue, she feels comfortable there. Though she did attend a

French church for a little while, she never felt accepted or welcome. Her husband does not attend Mass regularly. This is something that I have been told was common in Italian villages. Though the men might have been religious, it was not considered “macho to actually show you were religious” (Paola Sanchini 2008). My maternal grandparents live a few blocks away from Our Lady of Mount Carmel, as do many of the elderly parishioners, so the church is within walking distance and many wives, who do not drive, can attend without having to rely on their husbands.

Many of the rituals and traditions that she practices have deep roots in village life and are central to how she identifies herself as an Italian living in Montreal. Processions are one of these traditions that have been carried over to Canada. During the summer months it is not uncommon to see a procession if you happen to live near an Italian church. Though every Italian regional association has a feast for its patron saint, the most important feast day for this church is Our Lady of Mount Carmel's on July 16th. Rituals that are practiced during the feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel specific to my grandmother's generation of parishioners are the transportation of the statue of Our Lady and the decoration of balconies where the procession would pass. The statue of Our Lady of Mount Carmel is carried out of the church by a pre-selected group of parishioners. Some years it has been exclusively males or females, other times a specific group such as the *Donne dell'Azione Cattolica* or a certain prayer group would be given the honor of carrying the statue on their shoulders.

The decorating of balconies and homes is another aspect of the identity marker of church involvement that my grandmother learned in the village. Any time a saint was

taken out on procession, it was customary for people to drape linens, ornate rugs and Italian and Papal flags on the front balcony, along with portraits of the saint, Jesus and Mary:

In a village, when a saint passed in front of your house, you had to decorate your house. It was a sign of respect. So the Italians continue to do that here. They will put out their most beautiful bedspreads on the balcony. They will put out flags. It is really to show respect and to thank the saint for actually walking up and down the streets of the area. People will also give donations as thanks, pinning money on the saint (Paola Sanchini 2008).

There are certain processions that included more ornate furnishings. My grandmother stressed that the Corpus Christi procession was especially important when it came to decorating your home front. In this instance, not only were the usual dressings draped over the balcony but a few selected homes also created mini-altars on the sidewalk or driveway in front of their homes. This was done so the priest holding the Blessed Sacrament would come over, kneel at the altar and bless the home. The making of the mini-altar was a way of "showing that this particular family that put out this special altar, that particular family, is super devoted" (Paola Sanchini 2008). Another common way for the older generation to show devotion to a particular saint is to throw flower petals in front of the statue of the saint as it is carried through the streets of the neighborhood. While young girls are sometimes asked to throw petals at the foot of the statue, the spontaneous throwing of flower petals taken without permission from random neighborhood gardens is a job reserved for the elderly women of the church who will not get in trouble for ruining someone's flower beds.

My grandmother and her generation of parishioners at Our Lady of Mount Carmel have taken many of the rituals they practiced in their respective villages and transplanted them to Montreal. These rituals have become entrenched in how members of her generation identify with their community. These markers of identity began to shift with my parents' generation and were then further altered by my peers.

Paola, my mother, is a recently retired teacher who has been a member of Our Lady of Mount Carmel since she came to Canada when she was seven. She holds many of the same beliefs as my grandmother, though she admits that her faith falters from time to time. Unlike her mother, who spoke of having a steadfast belief in her religious faith, my mother is more open to expressing herself as being "super religious when I am going through a tough time. I guess I turn to my religious beliefs when I need extra strength" (Paola Sanchini 2008). I wanted to know if her generation of parishioners, growing up in a modern city and as children of immigrants, would find themselves at odds with the rituals and traditions the previous generation so embraced. It would seem that though much of what my grandmother had discussed is no longer embraced with such vehemence, my mother understands where they come from but selects which traditions to continue to follow. She attends Mass most Sundays and used to be very involved with parish life, first as a young adult, which I will be discussing shortly, and second when she followed my involvement in various activities, such as pageants and liturgical committees. My mother has moved to another part of Montreal and thus does not take part in balcony-dressing or altar-making during processions, though she does still attend Our Lady of Mount Carmel's feast day. Like her mother, she regularly prays to Saint

Gabriel because “he is the patron saint of Abruzzo and for any Abruzzese he is the saint to pray to” (Paola Sanchini 2008) but her favorite saint is Francis of Assisi. When her newborn son was rushed to the hospital, his prayer became a mantra for her during that difficult time.

Paola was most involved with Our Lady of Mount Carmel during her youth. She was a member of the youth group and was in charge of the altar boys. The youth group was very active at that time both in the religious and social aspects of church life. Whether it was “fundraisers for the parish, helping people, having dances and the Carnival” (Paola Sanchini 2008), she and the fellow members of the youth group had a hand in the running of the church. For my mother, though being a member of the youth group did entail many social events, the focus was always religious:

We used to have a lot of fun together but we did go to Mass, so it's not like one was more important than the other. We would go to Mass, we would help the priests any way that they needed help even going up to the Oratory with the altar boys. I would be really involved with the religious aspect but yes it did also become a place where I would be involved with other young adults in preparing other things besides religious ceremonies (Paola Sanchini 2008).

She expressly stated that Our Lady of Mount Carmel became much more of a strictly religious community for her as she grew older and the social aspect of church life became less important to her. One reason young parishioners of her generation would have been so involved in church life as members of the youth group was simply because they came from strict immigrant families where much socializing would not have been permitted were it not church related. It would have provided a safe environment for young Italian

adults to become friends in a non-threatening situation that also fostered their culture, religion and language.

The current or recent members of Our Lady of Mount Carmel's youth group did not grow up in the same strict immigrant families their parents did, where a church-run social life would be the only acceptable type of social life to have and yet when I was an active member of the youth group, we were a core of around twenty teenagers and young adults who chose to spend some of our time in church. I remember discussing faith and belief with many of them and we were all questioning our religion or rejecting it in some way. However, we were still present at church pageants, social events and feasts. We acted as altar servers, ministers of the Eucharist and catechists, and participated as liturgical dancers and choir directors. For those whom I spoke to, the church seemed to have taken on less of a religious role but had become a place for community and Italian culture to flourish. In this sense, the identity marker of religious involvement may still be present among small groups of Montreal Italians under the age of 35, but, much like spending time in Italy and making tomatoes, the reasons for it have shifted dramatically.

Angelo D'Addario, a law student of 22, has been a member of the parish since he was very young. He was very active in the church until a few years ago. Currently he cites his religious beliefs as "extremely apathetic agnosticism. I have equally developed a deep antipathy for institutionalized religion in general" (Angelo D'Addario 2008). He grew up in a home that he described as comparable to any second generation Italian Canadian in Montreal. His family is religious and also attends Our Lady of Mount

Carmel. Though he used to go to Mass regularly he never saw the church as simply a place to pray. Attending Mass and religious centered services was,

Lip service to family and other members of the church. In actuality my approach was more social and community oriented. I believed that the church's role was justified as it kept a community together. However I always regarded it personally devoid of anything theistic (Angelo D'Addario 2008).

Angelo made it very clear that though the church was once a staple of his life, it was more of a place to gather with friends and a way to contribute to an aging community. Up until he decided to abstain from church-related activities, he "remained an active member for my belief in its role as a foundation for a community. Another factor was so that my grandparents' generation would not have to see more and more empty pews as they grew older" (Angelo D'Addario 2008).

This sentiment is echoed by James Nardi, also 22, who also strongly believes in the community-building aspect of Our Lady of Mount Carmel. He no longer attends Mass regularly, nor does he consider himself an active member of the youth group, though he does still take part in some activities such as outings and plays. His attachment to Our Lady of Mount Carmel is inextricably linked to the fact that it is an Italian parish.

According to James:

Monte Carmelo plays a huge role for Italians in Montreal. For the elders it becomes for them a place where they can be sure to meet people who spoke their language and share similar beliefs. It does play a role in my 'Italianness' because there aren't many places where the younger generation can get together and away from the multi cultural environment of Montreal. Not that multiculturalism is bad, but I think younger adults also need time to express themselves as Italians and Monte Carmelo can do this for

them (James Nardi 2008).

John Peretti, another longtime member of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, also views the church as very important to his sense of Italian identity. He wrote that the simple fact of having to practice his Italian anytime he steps foot into the church reinforces his cultural and linguistic attachment to his ethnic heritage.

While it does seem that the younger generation of Mount Carmel has lost much of the religious sense that would draw one to a church, this does not by any means show that the youth of the church are devoid of religious beliefs. Francis Tallarico, an altar server, Warden and catechist, views the church as a primarily religious setting. However, he does acknowledge the huge role it plays in shaping the cultural and communal identity of its parishioners. He believes that Monte Carmelo is a parish and as such a place where the community comes together. "Although the primary reason is to pray, we do have social events also. It is definitely a community, a group of people with the same beliefs, helping each other out and helping the rest of the Montreal community" (Francis Tallarico 2008).

Francis also explained to me that:

Monte Carmelo plays a strong role in me being a young Italian in Montreal because it retains and carries on many of the Italian traditions from a cultural perspective. The Italian culture is deeply rooted in Catholicism and hence religion plays a strong role in an Italian's life. It does play a role in my 'Italianness,' it is an ethnic parish, hence most services are in Italian, and hence helps keep the Italian culture and language alive (Francis Tallarico 2008).

Noticeably lacking in my interviews with the younger members of Our Lady of Mount Carmel were many of the rituals, traditions and folk beliefs both Pierina and Paola had discussed. Whenever saints and specific traditions associated with saints were

brought up, I was often told by my informants that either their families had no special saint that was prayed to or if they did, the traditions had not been passed down to them. One informant told me of a Maryan prayer group her mother participated in and Angelo explained that his family had a certain affinity for Saint Roch and Saint Francis. However, there was a clear detachment with the practices and rituals involved with the usual devotion to these saints.

Our Lady of Mount Carmel has had a long and complex relationship with many generations of the Italian community in Montreal. As an example of how identity markers change through generations of Montreal Italians it shows that though an identity marker may remain important for the younger generation, the reasons for its importance are quite different from those of previous generations. Though a study of the earliest members of the church is impossible due to the fact that the parishioners would all be well over one hundred years old, speaking with members of three generations has painted a clear picture of the changing role of church involvement in relation to Italian identity. For Pierina and Paola, religion is central to their ethnicity. Attending an Italian church was a necessity for them. For younger members of the community, belief and religious practice are optional and even though they may still be involved with church-related activities, religiosity is often not the most important reason. For these young Italians, attending an Italian church as adults is a conscious decision they all make, since they speak English and could easily attend non-ethnic churches should they choose to. Thus, the church becomes a way for this generation to maintain both a secular and cultural relationship

with the Italian community and also to retain a sense of Italian identity within the multi-cultural context of living in Montreal.

Through an examination of Oring's typology of identity and an exploration of identity markers within the young Montreal Italian community, it becomes clear that aspects of identity can be chosen, changed and prescribed. Among these markers of identity is one's relationship to Italy and the narrative of visiting the homeland. An analysis of these trips and their accompanying narratives is the focus of the next chapter.

Chapter 4

Visits to the Homeland

I never felt stupid or rejected in Barisciano, even though we didn't dress the same way, we weren't the same. They were dressed like farmers. No one was dressed up in . . . tighter jeans, shoes, perfume and all that. But how could you be rejected? This is where you come from. This is where we would be living if it weren't for my grandfather; this is where my grandfather lived (Steven Scalia 2008).

Due to the fact that the influx of Italian immigrants virtually ended in the late 1960s, my generation of Montreal Italians, born in the 1970s and 1980s, were not born or raised in Italy. We were brought up on stories of our homeland told to us by our immigrant family members. Many of my informants have been to Italy several times and consider it a necessary experience for the cultural identity of young Canadians of Italian descent. In this chapter I explore the narratives of these young Montreal Italians visiting Italy, why they undertake such visits, what they gain and the identity folklore generated by them.

Their narratives fall into three categories that reflect the main types of visits my informants experienced and their identifying characteristics. The first type of trip I have identified is the School Trip, which was commonly offered at high schools where most of the student body is of Italian ancestry. The second trip type is the Extended Stay. The focus of this kind of visit is living as a resident of Italy, which contrasts sharply to a short, tourist-centered trip. The final category is the Family Trip, which focuses on both

the tourist experience and on rediscovering personal/familial history by spending time in the family's ancestral village and visiting remaining family members.

"Roots tourism" is a return movement by members of a diasporic community to a shared homeland. In his research, Paul Basu notes that roots tourism is a journey "made by people of Scottish Highland descent (or part-Highland descent) ordinarily living in the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and in other regions where Scots have historically settled to places associated with their ancestors in the 'old country'"(Basu 131). I choose to utilize the parameters of roots tourism when dealing with my informants' stories instead of the terms "return migration" or "return movement." Though I acknowledge that the visits my informants undertake are part of the roots tourism movement described by Paul Basu, I prefer Celeste Ray's term "heritage pilgrimage" (Ray 2001).

Basu notes that while "return migration" and "return movement" have been used interchangeably in academia, there are significant differences between them and neither term applies to the type of heritage pilgrimage I am investigating. "Migration" would assume that my informants were returning to Italy to live, much as many Jews fled to Israel after its inception (Basu 131), while the term "movement" implies that these trips to the homeland are a collective undertaking by the Italian community in Montreal. Roots tourism comes with a certain amount of group organization. For example, travel agencies regularly book tours to Scottish towns, and community groups send members back to the homeland for genealogical research. One event that pertains to this is the Orkney Homecoming of 1999, where over 150 Canadians of Orcadian heritage went to their

homeland for a week of lectures and historical tours (Basu 133). This was not the case with my informants. They all undertook family or individually-based trips with no formal tourist organization assisting them. I am not aware of any travel agencies in Montreal offering group trips to Italy with the purpose of rediscovering one's history and heritage. For these reasons, the term "heritage pilgrimage" will be used in place of roots tourism, though I acknowledge their many similarities. A heritage pilgrimage may involve journeys to sites that recall pieces of history but also to sites that fit into the personal narratives of the family (Basu 133). This was often the case with my informants, who would visit the Fountain of Trevi one day and the family plot in the village cemetery the next.

Dean MacCannell asserts that tourists search for authenticity. They seek to see how the locals live their lives and to "authentically" experience another culture as if they were community members (MacCannell 94). The boundaries between insiders and outsiders are not easily overcome and to experience a culture "authentically" is nearly impossible for a foreigner. Richard Sharpley writes, "It is probably true to say that at some time or another, most people have tried to distance or disassociate themselves from other tourists, convincing themselves that they are somehow better or enjoying a more meaningful experience" (Sharpley 1994: 63-64). Most important to my research was the fact that the word "tourist" was absent from my informants' narratives. Whether they went on a school trip to Rome, or a family vacation to Sicily, they all felt that Italy was their home as soon as they got off the plane. This is echoed by many of Paul Basu's informants who undertook trips to their ancestral homeland of the Scotland Highlands.

One of Basu's informants perfectly encapsulates the feeling of belonging to the homeland. In *Emigrant Homecomings*, she writes that:

I am not, and never will be, a tourist in Scotland. I felt Scotland many years before I was there. I paid tribute to Scotland on purpose and continue my quest to learn all that I can about it and how Scotland, and especially the Highlander, evolved. It's only through their world, through their eyes, and through their pains and joys that I want to understand Scotland. I owe Scotland that, because I feel that Scotland invites me home, to be me (Basu 133).

The main issues I am addressing in this chapter are that of identity. Why do members of a community feel the need to return to their ancestral homeland? What do they hope to find once there? Does the heritage pilgrimage have any bearing on their cultural identities? Finally, as Basu writes, why do generally integrated middle-class citizens want to effectively unassimilate themselves in order to discover a more distinct, ethnic identity (Basu 145)?

As Jane Dunsiger states in her 1982 master's thesis, "for some individuals a sense of identity is associated with a given geographical location. This place is viewed as 'home' because that individual identifies most clearly with that set of attitudes, values and customs" (Dunsiger 20). She focused her thesis on the narratives of eight immigrants in St. John's Newfoundland who returned to their homeland to visit. She explores the construction of "home" as both a cultural symbol and physical place in their narratives and how symbols are "manipulated by different individuals to suit the needs of changing situations" (Dunsiger 31). She investigates the themes of adaptation and how the immigrant viewed his homeland after spending years away from it. Though the narratives I worked with were of a very different nature as my informants were not immigrants

themselves but rather their children or grandchildren, I could not use Dunsiger's main approaches. However, the themes brought up by Dunsiger brought to mind many questions for my research. As my informants have spent most of their lives in Canada, living in the multicultural and pluralistic environment of Montreal, how would they identify with the attitudes, values and customs of Italy? Also, what role did Italy play in the construction of my informants' identity as Italians?

Aside from the experience of these visits, the narratives my informants bring home with them are a constantly evolving performance. The narratives of these trips serve as counterpoints to the stories of their parents and grandparents and as reverse immigrant narratives for my generation. These narratives uphold or contradict the stories of their immigrant relatives and cement, for the community, a continuing, inter-generational relationship with Italy. These narratives can be typologized according to experiences common to my informants' stories. Part of the experience of visiting Italy is coming home with all these stories and anecdotes to tell about one's time there. I will focus on the delineation between the actual trips and the ways in which my informants spoke about them. To do so, I have devised a two-pronged typology to better classify the commonalities of these narratives as *Belonging in Italy* and *Inaccurate Expectations*. *Belonging in Italy* encompasses the sub-categories of *Familial Hospitality*, *Societal Acceptance* and *Historical/Nostalgic Attachment*. The second type, *Inaccurate Expectations*, focuses on comparing and contrasting the Italian and Canadian lifestyles, and also the differences between parental stories (past) about Italy and the reality of the informants' experiences (present).

Belonging in Italy	Inaccurate Expectations
Familial Hospitality	Italian vs. Canadian Lifestyles
Societal Acceptance	Past vs. Present
Historic/Nostalgic Attachment	

Figure 11: The Typological Breakdown for Visits to the Homeland Narratives

Under the general theme of Belonging in Italy falls the sub-category of Familial Hospitality. This theme occurs most often in the narratives of those who undertook Family Visits and is focused on how the generosity and acceptance of Italian family members affected my informants' feelings of attachment to Italy. This Familial Hospitality is clearly seen through the sibling duality of Alexander and Steven Scalia. Both brothers went to Italy on numerous occasions together and both spoke of the overwhelming hospitality shown to them by the family members they were visiting. However, each was affected in a different way. While one brother describes Familial Hospitality as a way for him to feel connected to Italy, the other, who has been on the very same trips, does not. Alexander's narrative, though he often speaks of feeling welcomed by his family, never asserts a deep feeling of attachment to Italy. His younger brother Steven, who repeatedly speaks of the affability of his Italian family members, often expresses a feeling of being part of the communities he visited. They both speak of the accommodating and hospitable nature of their grandmother in Sicily and how they were constantly fed large meals by every member of the family. The difference in their narratives is noticeable; Alexander asserts, "They were very hospitable, it was nice to see

them. I could finally put a face to the voice I heard on the phone. For me, this trip to Italy was to attach with roots that I didn't know about, with family members I don't know existed" (Alexander Scalia 2008). Steven's narrative, on the other hand, places much more importance on being loved and accepted by his family. He explained in the journal he kept on his first visit to Italy, "I really don't miss Montreal at all. I feel comfortable in the village. Our family members in Cattolica are such nice hosts and they all love us so as if we were their own children" (Steven Scalia 2004). He continued,

It was a real amazing experience to finally meet these people that we call every weekend. She [Nonna] really loves us. They were great hosts, from their love, to their entertainment, to their cooking. They made us feel at home and loved . . . I can't ever explain it. These people are just tremendous (Steven Scalia 2004).

Societal Acceptance was a second sub-category under the general theme of Belonging in Italy. This theme was found in the narratives of informants who undertook the various trip types and was focused on fitting in with Italian society. Informants such as Michelle De Vincenzo, Tania Zampini and Sabrina Pianese spoke of how comfortable they were living as part of Italian society for their Extended Stays. They addressed the issues of adapting to life in Italy, making friends and being accepted by non-family members. Clorinda and Angie Antonacci, sisters who undertook many Family Visits, also present a sibling duality in their narratives. They have taken the same trips to Italy since they were children and yet have very different narratives when discussing their visits. Clorinda talked about her love of Italy and how much she treasures going back every summer to spend time with her grandmother in a small village. Angie, who also goes to visit her grandmother, limits her stays in the village to a few weeks because she does not

enjoy the rural lifestyle. When Clorinda discussed her friends and the social life she has in Italy, she says, "The friends that we made, I still have those friends. They have always been there for me. I went last year when my dearest friend got married and I was able to attend her wedding. We had a huge feast, lots of food" (Clorinda Antonacci 2008). Her sister retorted, "Yeah but it's a hole. My grandmother is there. I go see her, max three weeks, or take a gun and shoot me" (Angie Antonacci 2008). While most of my informants discussed being part of society in Italy, it had varying degrees of importance in their narratives.

The Historical/Nostalgic Attachment is centered on discussions about landmarks such as tours of family villages or visiting the Sistine Chapel. A major theme in my informants' narratives was the Historical/Nostalgic category. This theme is focused on visiting both architectural and familial landmarks, such as the Fountain of Trevi and a village cemetery. Alexander's narrative is full of these Historical/Nostalgic references. He writes about going on walking tours of his ancestral village with his grandmother as a tour guide and how this helped him discover a sense of place in a foreign country. He also repeatedly made reference to tourist landmarks in his narratives. He discusses churches in Europe, the houses he visited in Italy and the fountain in his father's village. He explained why he liked Rome:

I remember going to Rome and I had great expectations of Rome. I found it a little bit dirty, the Coliseum was more black than anything else. But still a spectacular city, very antique, very old. It made me realize how Italians/Western Europeans have influenced Montreal. Big churches in Europe, Montreal is the only city in North America with the same type of beautiful churches (Alexander Scalia 2008).

He also talked about his cousin's home in Abruzzo:

Abruzzo was a very different, just natural environment. You have beautiful mountains, not many houses. Very luxurious condos there now. My mom kept commenting on the doors saying 'oh they have doors here we don't have in Canada,' So my Zio Vincenzo is quite well off, lives in a nice house in L'Aquila (Alexander Scalia 2008).

This sub-category also encompasses the various landmarks my informants discussed in their narratives. Visits to touristic or historical locations were interspersed with familial and nostalgic places. They talked about visiting the Sistine Chapel, and the houses their parents grew up in, both places playing different yet important roles in their visits. While visiting family is personally meaningful, having a funny tale to tell about going to a famous landmark is equally important. In his journal, Steven Scalia makes recurrent references to visiting the places where his family comes from, while also interspersing his narrative with funny stories about his experiences at various tourist spots. He wrote about his visit to the Vatican:

Yesterday, we woke up all around 7 o'clock [sic.] and hurried up to get ready to go see the Vatican. But our morning wasn't normal at all. So Mom and Dad left to buy some groceries, of course, leaving us four with Nonna wasn't the smartest of moves. Jason was skipping up the stairs and was singing. We were screaming at Alex, who was taking a shower and he screamed back. Of course Christina was whining because of the noise. Top that up with Nonna telling everybody to shut up. Eventually, the door bell rings. Alex, being the Alex that he is, just had to open the door and who else but a fat geezer screaming: *Non Gridate! Chiamo la polizia!* [Stop screaming! I will call the police!]. Anyways, at the Vatican we went to see the Basilica, more corruption. Once arrived we found out that women and children under twelve can go into the Basilica wearing what they wanted but men had to wear pants. We

were obviously wearing shorts, it was forty degrees! So me, Christina and Mom were able to have access to it but Alex, Jason and Dad didn't. Of course, Jason being the Jason that he is, tried screwing the system by putting his shorts nice and low. However he was denied by the intelligence of the security guard (Steven Scalia 2004).

Elizabeth Cotignola expressed similar narrative elements. She describes visiting Milan and subsequently visiting the "house my grandfather built, the market, the church where my mother was baptized" (Elizabeth 2008). This same theme was echoed by the narrative of Lucia Silvestri, who discussed visiting major tourist destinations while also spending time where her mother was born and raised.

The narratives of my informants also reflected their Inaccurate Expectations. There were two sub-categories to this type: the contrast between Italian and Canadian lifestyles and the comparison between the reality of my informants' visits and what their parents had told them about Italy. The narratives I collected reflect the differences between the lifestyles of Canada and Italy. In general, Italy, even in the major cities, is portrayed as the slower, calmer and healthier lifestyle, while Canada, more specifically Montreal, is seen as a fast-paced metropolis. This was a major theme in the narratives of my informants. Though many reported feeling comfortable in Italy as soon as they landed, they definitely encountered various situations that reminded them of the differences between Italy and Canada. Celia D'Andrea focused on the differences in worldview that she perceived between herself and her Italian family. Even in the cities, she found them to have rather old-fashioned ideas about clothing, appropriate conduct for women and dating. For her, this was a marked contrast to Canadian views on these issues.

For Clorinda and Angie Antonacci, the main lifestyle issue is the Italians' unique eating schedule. They explained:

Angie: What gets me is these four-hour breaks during the day. Everyone goes home to sleep!

Clorinda: To prepare meals for the night.

Angie: By the time you get home it's eight, you don't have time to prepare food. Everyone eats at nine! We would eat at six-thirty and all of our friends were playing so when we come out [to play] they all go eat (Angie and Clorinda Antonacci 2008).

Jackie De Stefano's narrative was full of references to the differences between Italy and Canada. She cites corrupt politics, weak social infrastructure and lack of jobs as the main reasons Italy differs from Canada. Sabrina Pianese spent a fair bit of time describing the differences between Florence and Montreal. For her, Florence harkens back to a time when businesses were closed on Sundays:

The fast paced craziness that we have here [Montreal], where we are running against time, you don't have there [Florence]. It's so nice that people actually enjoy their time. Even in the big city! Even in Florence. Everything is closed on Sundays. Restaurants are opened though. You have the luxury to take time for yourself. Doesn't matter if tourists want you to stay open, you're closed. You have your siesta in the afternoon. People enjoy their lives. Money or business doesn't run their lives for them (Sabrina Pianese 2008).

Another contrast described by my informants was that they were permitted to do things in Italy they would otherwise not have been allowed to do. Lucia Silvestri talked about her grandmother, who was visiting Italy with her, allowing her to wander around the town unsupervised. Lucia's grandmother would never have allowed her to wander around her Montreal neighborhood alone. Lucia and I spent a lot of time together before we began

Kindergarten and we were rarely allowed to play outside unsupervised. Clorinda Antonacci had her first boyfriend in Italy when she was still in high school. "I got away with a lot of stuff there [in Italy], I had a boyfriend for the first time. He was from Abruzzo, much older. He was a jackass. I don't like Italians from here [Montreal]. I like Europeans. Here they have no traditions" (Clorinda Antonacci 2008). Steven's narrative also expressed this unprecedented freedom when visiting Italy. His cousins, who were all much older, came to visit Steven, his brother Alex and their cousin Jason, with some beer. He explained:

That night we went to celebrate 'Peppino' [my uncle Joseph] and his wife, Christine's 25th anniversary at a really fancy restaurant. We later returned to our hotel to sleep. Sandro, Tony [Steven's European cousins] and us three guys have really gotten along well. Actually, later on that night, they invaded our hotel room so that we could watch a movie. They came with their share of beer. I didn't drink a lot but Jason lived up to expectations and was asleep [passed out] ten minutes later. The next morning I woke up to puke and pieces of partly digested chicken on the floor. I later found out that Jason had puked loads and he and Alex cleaned up. Well, Alex did his best. He pulled a towel out of the bathroom to clean up as much vomit as possible. That was smart. What wasn't [smart] was the fact that he threw it out of the window and it landed at the footstep of the back entrance of the hotel, which probably traumatized some of the hotel's clients. Oh well, it was worth the fun (Steven Scalia 2008).

The last sub-category under the Inaccurate Expectations theme is the differences between the past and present. By this, I mean how the stories told to my informants about Italy by their parents contrast with their actual experiences in Italy. Many parents spoke to their children about Italy in extreme terms: either Italy was this wonderful dreamland or it was a land of poor farmers with no hope for the future. The reality of

modern day Italy is very different from both these caricaturizations. Lucia Silvestri described feeling surprised by visiting her parents' hometown because it was a lot more civilized than she had anticipated. From what her parents had told her, she believed she was going to visit a town reminiscent of a refugee camp. Much to her surprise, this was not the case. Elizabeth had the same experience. She was shocked at how wealthy her family was, since her parents had repeatedly told her that their village was a poor farming village. Alexander Scalia had the opposite experience. His father had long told him about the small village where he was born and about the fountain that stands at the entrance to the town. When Alexander arrived at the village gate he realized his father had possibly exaggerated the grandeur of the fountain and the town itself. The fountain was a small trickle and the village was nearly empty.

While Lucia, Elizabeth and Alexander were shocked at how different Italy actually was compared to what they had been told by their parents, other informants such as Jackie De Stefano and Steven Scalia were surprised by the population in Italy. Italy is home to many immigrants from Europe, Asia and North Africa. These immigrants are not ethnically Italian though they live, work and raise families in Italy. Steven recounts:

In Rome, I felt more Italian actually. To be honest, there's a lot of Chinese people in Rome! I heard some Chinese speaking Italian [Italian-speaking Chinese people], my eyes popped out. I didn't say anything to them but . . . *[laughing]*, you see people like that. Chinese people living in Italy. I don't know why (Steven Scalia 2008).

Jackie wished that there were a smaller immigrant population in Italy because "the fact that there is a big immigration crisis in Italy makes it a lot harder to meet genuinely

Italian people. Most of the people living in Italy are Albanians or Croatian or from Turkey. Oh the Albanians!" (Jackie De Stefano 2008).

In regard to heritage pilgrimages to Italy, three of my informants had been on a School Trip visit. Typically, this type of trip is offered in senior high school at a school with a large Italian population. Celia D'Andrea, now a 24-year-old law student, explained that her first trip to Italy was with her high school classmates, most of whom were of Italian descent. Her excitement about being in her family's ancestral homeland was tempered by several factors:

I was so excited to go to Italy. I was like 'Wow, I'm gonna go, I know the language. This is amazing!' It was with my school we were in Rome. It was a disappointment. We saw Rome at night! (Celia D'Andrea 2008).

This sentiment of disappointment was also expressed by Jackie De Stefano. Although she did not take part in a School Trip to Italy, she was dismissive of the many Montreal Italians' ignorance of the realities of Italy. She comments, "Montreal Italians, there are many who haven't been to Italy, nor will they ever go to Italy. Nor do they understand Italian culture or politics, but they have this great notion of Italy as being this motherland" (Jackie De Stefano 2008). This is a theme common to many of my informants when speaking of School Trips to Italy. Abstract pride in Italy is insufficient; one should understand the social and political situations in Italy before pride and identity can be justifiably claimed.

One could easily assume that School Trips to Italy would be an easy and educational way to reconnect with one's heritage. This was not the case, however. Not one of my informants discussed rediscovering a sense of identity or personal history on

this type of trip. They spoke of arguments among classmates and flights delays, not of family sagas or hometowns:

The first time [I went to Italy]²³ I was in grade eleven, but I can't say it was a monumental occasion or awakening. It was with my class and we had such problems with our flights! The majority of the stay was in Greece. It was supposed to be in Italy and Greece, but we were still supposed to stay a good three days in Italy, but that turned into a day and a night in Rome. I would have liked to spend more time there, but we were on a tour bus at night seeing all these amazing places, at night! The Coliseum, everything was done so quickly that I don't remember anything. All I remember is the Fountain of Trevi because we stepped out of the bus to throw our coins in so we could come back again.²⁴ What a rip off-of a trip! We went to Pompei. I didn't experience Italy like I should have. I liked what I saw though. I loved the history behind Rome (Sabrina Pianese 2008).

²³ Square parentheses [] indicate my personal additions to the quotation while rounded parentheses () indicate my informants' own.

²⁴ Until I spoke to Sabrina I was not aware of this tradition. Throwing coins into the Fountain of Trevi ensures your return. The movie *Three Coins in The Fountain* (Jean Negulesco) in 1954 popularized the idea, as did its subsequent remakes, the 1964 *The Pleasure Seekers* (Jean Negulesco) and *Coins in The Fountain* (Tony Wharmby) in 1990.



Figure 12: Tania Zampini eating gelato in Florence (Used with permission – Tania Zampini Collection)

When I asked for the reasons for partaking in the School Trip to Italy, the overwhelming response was that it was a cheap way to experience Italy as a teenager with no parents around. When each informant spoke of the School Trip to Italy, they told me their experiences rather ambivalently. It would seem that the main reason for the disappointment of my informants was that this type of trip did not allow for anything other than obvious tourist attractions. The School Trip is characterized by a short stay in Italy and follows a tourist-centered pattern. These trips were generally focused on Rome and its main attractions such as the Coliseum and the Fountain of Trevi. The informants I spoke to who experienced this type of visit did not express enjoying the tourist

experience in Italy. They felt this type of trip robbed them of visiting family, their hometowns and of feeling properly "Italian" since they were seen as foreign Canadians everywhere they went. To them, this type of trip was not the proper way for anyone of Italian descent to experience their homeland. This brings to mind a joke discussed by Elliott Oring in his book *Folk Groups and Folklore Genres* about a Romanian Jew living in Israel. The Romanian Jew insists on being buried in Romania and not in his current home country because "at least in Romania I can die as a Jew. Here in Israel I will die as a Romanian" (Oring 1986: 30).

The second category of trip is the Extended Stay. A number of my informants had chosen to spend a considerable amount of time living in Italy when they were young adults. Such stays were usually connected to work or university exchange programs and typically lasted one to six months. This type of visit was not centered around the informant's hometown or family, nor was it focused on re-discovering cultural history, but my informants all spoke of cementing their Italian identity through these Extended Stays. Five of my informants undertook such a trip at a somewhat later age than the School Trip. Four of them, Michelle de Vincenzo, Elizabeth Cotignola, Celia D'Andrea and Sabrina Pianese went separately for a month to live in Florence. The Florence Trip, as it is known among Montreal Italians, is a four-to six-week-long stay in Florence, Italy, offered by language schools in Italy. Italian language or literature classes are offered at the school during the day while weekends are left free to travel around the country. This type of trip was different in several ways. For many of them, it was the first time my informants had been living on their own. This in itself was a life-changing experience.

Since they were in Italy long enough to have to deal with the mundane tasks of everyday life such as buying groceries and paying electrical bills, the young women who undertook this trip were able to truly come to understand Italy as a country, not simply as a vacation site or as some romanticized homeland. Elizabeth explained:

I always had an affinity for Florence since I went that first time. This was very special to me because it was the first time I was on my own and I was there long enough [a month and a half] to feel like I was living there. I wasn't in a hotel; I had a little apartment and had to go buy my groceries in the little Italian grocery stores. I was there long enough for it to become familiar to me so that was so wonderful (Elizabeth Cotignola 2008).

Sabrina Pianese expressed the same sentiment:

I didn't get to visit any family. I was with friends and we only had the weekends, so we couldn't exactly visit family. I loved that we had our own apartments. I felt like I was living there. I was cooking meals and planning trips and just doing everyday kind of nuisance kind of things that you do when you live somewhere. It was amazing to do that in Florence. Expectations were just that I would get a different perspective, I would see life through different eyes and experience a way of life that is different than what I am used to. I guess the fact that we were living in apartments, I felt like I was attending university like a regular student. I never felt like I was Florentine but I loved the fact that I could go grocery shopping or to the market and knew what time it was open. I knew where everything was. Florence is amazing because it has the perfect balance of country and city life. And so yeah by the end of the month I was just so, I feel like I was more comfortable there than in Montreal. Montreal is so much more of a metropolis, there are many places here I know nothing about. But in Florence I had a sense of direction I never have had here [in Montreal] (Sabrina Pianese 2008).

Michelle De Vincenzo had a very similar experience when she lived in Florence for five weeks in 2004.

I have been to Italy once. I went in 2004 for about five weeks. I took an Italian class in Florence to improve my Italian. It didn't really work. I was surprised at how much I like, felt at home when I was there. I thought I would go and have different outlooks, but I was surprised at how well I fit in. I was not able to visit where my parents were from. I have no family left there; they are in other parts of Italy or other countries. I did consider moving there. I had a depression after I left, I just wanted to go back and stay. I still want to go but I don't know about permanently; maybe I need to go and live there for a little bit and get it out of my system. I liked it, felt like home (Michelle De Vincenzo 2008).



Figure 13: The apartment Michelle De Vincenzo stayed in during her Extended Stay in Florence (Used with permission – Michelle De Vincenzo Collection)

Though all four who undertook an Extended Stay in Italy could have found the time to visit their families, none did, even if they had done so on previous family vacations. I believe this was the case because the Extended Stay is not a trip taken to meet previously unknown family members. Nor did anyone feel the need to reconnect with an ancestral hometown. This trip was focused on the individual discovering Italy on their own terms for themselves. Jackie De Stefano spent six months living in Turin as part of a business school exchange program. She described her time in Italy as a culture shock for the most part:

Growing up Italian [in Montreal], I thought would help me fit in but it didn't. I was like a fish out of water. A lot of it had to do with the fact that I wasn't used to things you never learn from in a tour book: how things shut down in the afternoon, it can be really frustrating. Traveling though Italy and living in Italy are two different things. Living in Italy was when I learned about the problems about Italy, whereas traveling depicts it as a picturesque society where everyone is in love and happy, gondola rides, and it's just not that way. That was a big shock for me. But eventually I got used to it and what it boiled down to after six months was that I didn't want to come back. But there were other factors involved. I liked being independent. I liked the people I was meeting. I have never been to my parent's hometown; in fact on my mom's side, we're seven grandchildren and I am one of the only ones who haven't been to the hometown of Prezza. My dad's side I haven't been either. I would like to but as a visit. I had the opportunity to go while I was in Italy. I haven't taken the opportunity (Jackie De Stefano 2008).

A significant part of the Extended Stay was learning Italian. While most of my informants spoke some Italian before heading to Italy, learning the language was the main reason for such a long stay. They all felt that living in Montreal hindered their

ability to speak “proper”²⁵ Italian since many dialects from the 1950s immigrants are still floating around Montreal’s Italian community. The Extended Stay allowed them to fully immerse themselves in a language they wanted so deeply to become fluent in. Some spoke of feeling embarrassed for not speaking Italian as well as they should. Sabrina, as an example, refused to speak until her Italian improved. She explained that “people were speaking proper Italian and I’m self-conscious of my Italian right away. Just saying an address and I’m uneasy” (Sabrina Pianese 2008).

The third category of trip my informants experienced is the Family Visit. My informants spoke of reconnecting with a history that had been only an imagined past until their visit to Italy. Six of my informants took such trips with their families. The pattern of this type of trip is fairly consistent. Typically, the parents take their young children or teenagers to Italy for a few weeks during the summer months. They spend some time visiting large cities and tourist destinations before heading to their native towns to live with what remaining family still resides in the ancestral village. What really stood out during my interviews was the level of description and emotion my informants expressed when talking about this type of trip. There were many comments about the beauty of the buildings and the history, but the language used was rather passive and unemotional. When they began talking about visiting their family, they began padding their narratives with stories and anecdotes that were not present when describing tourist attractions. I will discuss these themes later in the chapter.

²⁵ Many of my informants expressed their frustration at only speaking the Italian dialect of their grandparents. Proper Italian or *Italiano pulito* (clean Italian) is the Italian spoken by contemporary, educated Italians.

Having lived many years in Canada and having no real contact with Italy (apart from phone calls to family), it is not surprising that many of my informants had no idea what to expect and that many of them expressed anxiety about returning to their ancestral homeland. Most of their ideas about Italy were centered on what immigrant family members had told them. Alexander Scalia, an eighteen-year-old CEGEP student, told me, "I was quite anxious the first time we went. This is where it all started for the Scalias and the Di Paolos. I wanted to see what it was like and mostly how it differed from Montreal, from Quebec, from the Montreal community" (Alexander Scalia 2008). His younger brother Steven, eleven at the time of his trip, kept a journal of his first visit to Italy at his mother's request. His pre-visit entry reads:

I'm so excited! I can't wait to see all of the family that I've never met before! I'm going to have so much fun in Italy! I'm going to Italy with Nonna Pia (grandmother), Jason, Alex, Chrissy, Mom and Dad. We are going to land in Rome, then my uncle Vincenzo will pick us up and we will go meet his family in Aquila, the capital of Abruzzo. We'll stay there for a while and then go to Sicily, the island where my dad is from! I can't wait! I hope everything goes well. Mom has been stressed these days but I hope she calms down once we've arrived. Nonna is excited and so are Jason, Alex and Christina. I don't know what to expect, so I'll just have to wait (Steven Scalia 2004).

The first time my informants arrived in their families' villages always seemed to elicit a shock, usually positive, but surprising nonetheless. Alexander Scalia explained that his first view of Sicily was startling to him as his father had built up his hometown to epic proportions. The reason for this was two-fold. On his Family Visit to Italy, he went to both his maternal grandparents' hometown of Barisciano in Abruzzo and to Cattolica Ereclea in Sicily where his father was from. He laughingly recalled:

Then we got to Sicily. I could not wait to see the donkeys! I only saw one. My dad said when my nonno moved here he got rid of the donkey. My dad spoke of Cattolica Ereclea as the center of the world. I was expecting something grandiose, He said that at the entrance of the village is a fountain, a famous fountain where the water never stops. What is this fountain? It's a stick in the rocks! Ok?! Let's just say my dad put my hopes up a bit too high. The Scalias are fond of Cattolica. (Alexander Scalia 2008).

About Barisciano Alexander told me, "The difference is huge [between Montreal and Barisciano]. This is a village where people kept animals in their homes. It kind of shows. My zio Mario (Nonna Pia has a sister there), he still raises his own rabbits and his rooster and chickens over there" (Alexander Scalia 2008). Sometimes the shock is simply because of the reception given to the visitors. Steven's journal describes the family's arrival in Cattolica as the biggest event that town had seen in quite a while:

When we arrived, it seemed like the whole village surrounded us because a Canadian family had arrived, as if they've never seen Canadians before! After kissing and meeting everyone we spent time with Nonna Carmela. She cooked us her fresh vegetables, which grow everywhere here. The family is very nice. Zia Nicolina is always offering us food, but then again who doesn't? Everything in the village is walking distance, that's how small it is! Ah Cattolica, so relaxing. Too relaxing? It's always the same, family come in and out to visit and so do many people in the village (Steven Scalia 2004).

During our interview, Steven described how strong his emotions were when meeting family members for the first time:

I was very excited to go to Italy the first time because like not only to see my family that I've never seen but you see people who are part of you who have lived with your grandfather, that your father knew that I never got to know. I never got to know these people! These people are related to me, I love family and it's crazy that these people

are part of you, their blood is in your blood and . . . you hear about them non-stop, Nonna gets off the phone, so and so just had a baby, who the hell is so and so? Who is this person? What does she look like? I have no idea (Steven Scalia 2008).

Sometimes the initial reaction to arriving in Italy is the realization that your relatives are no longer the subsistence farmers your grandparents always described them as. Elizabeth Cotignola was taken aback when she visited her dad's hometown and realized her family was, in fact, quite well off:

I'd heard so much about my town and how it was a little farming village and you know, it was a farming village back then, but I was surprised with how modern and quaint it was. I was surprised by how wealthy my family was. They weren't farmers! (Elizabeth Cotignola 2008).



Figure 14: Elizabeth Cotignola in her family's garden in Teggiano during her Family Visit (Used with permission – Elizabeth Cotignola Collection)

This was a recurring theme among my informants. Being presented an image of Italy by their parents paints a caricaturized version of their homeland, either as a picture-perfect Motherland or a downtrodden country of poor farmers. Family Visits allowed for my informants to create an image of Italy for themselves, separate from what they had previously believed. Lucia Silvestri had a similar experience when she first visited Italy at age nine:

The first time, I went with my sister and grandmother. That was a weird trip! Because you know how your parents are always saying, 'back in *my* day!' Now when you're a kid living in a city you hear these poverty stories, you kind of picture them living in a teepee or something. I was nine when I went. When we got there someone picked us up near our town to drive us. He was showing us mountains and villages and then all I see is this line of fire!! I said to my sister, 'Did you not notice the fire around the town?' What it is, is they burn their fields once the wheat has grown. They are not allowed to do that anymore, thank God. They burn it before they replant or something. Apparently this was very, very common. It was like a wall of fire around the town! We got to the house and I was like, 'Oh it's a house with a fridge and everything. This is cool. All the old ladies were waiting for me telling me I look like my father, pinching my cheeks. I was there a month. It was really fun. As a kid it was so great to be allowed to have freedom to wander the town (Lucia Silvestri 2008).

Many of my informants were shocked by the differences in attitudes found amongst their Italian family. They had assumed that simply because they were of Italian descent, their world-views would match those of their Italian counterparts. This, however, was rarely the case. At these moments my informants realized how much Canada had influenced the Italians living there. Perhaps it came from living in a major city with a wide variety of religions and cultures, but many of my informants expressed

frustration at the seemingly old-fashioned mentality of their Italian family. The main concern was the lack of privacy. In Cattolica, Steven noted that no one had actual doors, just beaded curtains so people were constantly streaming into each other's houses. It was only the day the family left that doors (which had never been noticed before) were closed to give the family privacy for the painful goodbyes. Clorinda and Angela Antonacci had different ways to deal with the prying eyes of small town life. Angela chose not to spend much time in villages, while Clorinda ignored them:

There are eyes everywhere! You step outside your door with a short skirt and everybody looks at you. It's like 'Can you leave me alone!?' I do it on purpose, I walk around with an apple in my hand, my grandmother says 'Where are you going with the food? Eat it inside!' I'm like, 'No!' (Clorinda Antonacci 2008).

Celia's experience with her Italian family's old-fashioned mentality served as a reminder of her Canadian heritage, which is often easy to forget when spending time in the homeland:

When I went back the second time to visit the towns, I didn't think they would be that backwards. It's not about money, it's the mentality. It's so old. Even my younger cousins have this old mentality. Like take for example, boyfriends. You go out with a guy twice and you have to bring him home to meet the parents. And it's like, 'No that's not the way things work in Quebec!' And that's in the city! I was nineteen and people kept asking me if I had a boyfriend because I should be settling down! Nineteen years old! The small town mentality, I don't know if it's like that in big cities. Oh no. My cousins from Rome, they came here for a wedding and I remember the daughter was pretty old-fashioned. She was maybe eighteen and was like, 'Oh you can't wear heels, not a lot of makeup.' I don't know if it's just my family! That's when you realize you're definitely Canadian – it's a clash of civilization. Because they come and . . . so blunt, and they just say what they

think. You're gonna offend people! I find when we go to Italy, we conform to what they want. So Canadian. When in Rome . . . [laughs] I find that we do that but when they come here they don't do that. They won't do something if it's not what they do back home. Maybe it's because when we go to Italy, we're just so proud to be there and be Italian. They come here and well, they take off their pants in public like they do back home²⁶ and all the Canadians look at them completely offended (Celia D'Andrea 2008)!

Celia was also very surprised by her mother's village when she stayed with her great-grandmother for two weeks. After living in Montreal for most of her life, a city where modern conveniences are just part of daily life, spending time in a very small farming town was a cultural learning experience such as visiting a foreign country. She recounts:

My great grandmother is there. We stayed with her. We're very close even though I've only met her a few times. We talk on the phone all the time. So I stayed with her, she lives in this little house. No heating, really, it's a 2x4. It's tough, super small! Showers? No! I had to go to my aunt's house for that. But you do it because you love them and you're there. And the food! It's constant eating, and they get upset if you don't finish your food. And you go to church with them, the neighborhood church down the street. And everybody asks, 'Who is that? Who is that?' They've never seen you, so you have to make sure you dress properly. My great-grandmother was so proud that we were there. She was so proud! She is 96 but she sounds eighteen. She is young at heart (Celia D'Andrea 2008).

This sense of pride is something most of my informants spoke of. Both the visitors and those visiting expressed pride for differing reasons. The Italians were proud

²⁶ This refers to an anecdote I told my informant about my family from Italy visiting Meech Lake in Ontario with us and taking off their clothes on the beach while the other sunbathers looked on, horrified.

because they were showing off their long-lost Canadian family; the visitors on the other hand, were proud to be in Italy, speaking the language and walking the streets their families built. Alexander explained that one day while he was staying in Barisciano, his maternal grandmother, who was on the trip with his family, took them on a walking tour of the town where she laid out his family's history in the village:

Nonna was our tour guide. She would tell us 'This is where your auntie Paola and uncle Mario were born. This is where I lived when I was a girl. This is where my grandma lived.' So I was able to retrace all of these ancestors that I never knew and just imagined the way they had lived their lives in that area (Alexander Scalia 2008).

Steven often wrote in his journal that when they arrived in the village, they would be taken to the town cemetery to visit the graves of dead relatives. This happened to him both in Barisciano and in Cattolica Ereclia. Both times he went without a second thought to visit the grave of dead relatives he had never even met. In each situation, he wrote of going to the cemetery to "visit the graves of our beloved family members no longer with us" (Steven Scalia 2004). Steven also noted that his visits to the tiny villages his parents come from brought about a deep sense of pride in his grandparents who made the difficult decision to leave:

Barisciano was a lot like Cattolica. They were both falling apart. Both small towns. You still see the farmers, you have the hens, you walk awhile and see eggs on the floor, you see plants growing everywhere. People eating them off the ground! That's their lunch!

Barisciano is . . . My mom wasn't born there, but she had already been [to visit Barisciano]. She knew people but she hasn't been since 1982. She knew her way around. It was nice. I got to see where Zio and Nonno were born. I'm family-wise, I like seeing where they come from. Where they were actually born. When you compare their house to

my house you say 'Goddamn! They did a really good job coming to Canada, you know? You're like Wow! I could be living in a shack like this. Instead I have four floors in my house.' Then you feel like 'Thank-you Nonno, this is the best'(Steven Scalia 2008).

Another consequence of my informants' Family Visit seems to have been a renewed sense of cultural identity. This did not occur with the School Trip or the Extended Stay. As Paul Basu writes, "return movements are steeped with meaning and to visit the homeland is often an extremely powerful, emotional and life-changing experience" (Basu 134). This belief was often echoed by my informants who were overwhelmed by family history and Italian pride in their hometowns. Elizabeth explained that:

The most moving experience for me in Italy was when I graduated from McGill, [and] as a gift, my parents took me to Italy for three weeks. It was the first time I went to my hometown. I'd never seen it. We still did the tour, we landed in Milan and went around. But part of the trip was spending time in my hometown and it was the first time I'd ever been [there]. I met all the family I'd never met, all the cousins. It was really nice. I saw the houses my grandfathers built, the market, the church where my mother was baptized. You know? So moving. I'd heard so much about my town and how it was a little farming village and you know it was a farming village back then but I was surprised with how modern and quaint it was. Contrary to expectations I liked it more than I thought I would. I saw where my parents were from; so moving I can't describe – you hear things as a kid – you think 'I'm Italian,' but when you go you understand. This is what they had, what they left behind. There is a feeling of, [knowing] I can always come back here because this is where I come from (Elizabeth Cotignola 2008).



Figure 15: Elizabeth Cotignola and her mother walking out of the home where her mother was born in Campania (Used with permission – Elizabeth Cotignola Collection)

I asked my informants why they undertook such Family Trips as young adults. I understood that when they were children, their parents wanted them to see where they came from but wondered about those who took Family Trips as older teenagers or adults. Elizabeth best summed up my informants' answers when she told me that she has:

... longing for Italy when I'm not there. Which is funny because I wasn't born there and my parents don't even have this longing, but I do. Italy has always felt like home. When you get off the plane and you hear people speaking Italian it's a feeling of belonging and these are my people and this is where we come from (Elizabeth Cotignola 2008).

For Tania Zampini, who has been to Italy four times, the feeling of belonging in Italy is one that hits her every time she sets foot on Italian soil.

It's very bizarre, like last year when I went, we landed in Milan and instantly, and you know I'm from nowhere near Milan, it's way up North and my family is from down South, and there was something about the aura. I felt like 'Okay this is where I should be right now.' I don't feel pressured, I don't feel strange. I don't feel like an alien in this place, or a tourist. I spoke to the bus driver like I'd been doing it forever. As we were driving through the mountains and the farms, I was looking out the window and it felt like I had always been here. It was as if I had left, come to Canada for a little while and then gone back. It was very strange. I get that feeling every time I'm there. I feel like I belong in Italy. When I got to Verona, I think the day after I went to an internet café to e-mail my mom and tell her I was fine. Then I wrote to my supervisor who is from Bologna . . . One of the things I told him was, 'You know it's very strange as we were driving into Verona I thought to myself, what is keeping me from being here? Like, why don't I come back more often? It feels like I'm just meant to be here.' And that was a very sincere reaction. It wasn't artifice, this is actually how I felt (Tania Zampini 2008).



Figure 16: Tania Zampini sitting in a courtyard in Verona (Used with permission – Tania Zampini Collection)

Clorinda and Angela Antonacci were very clear in their answers, although their views on Italy are very different. They believe that in order to truly understand yourself, you must understand your culture and family history. For the sisters, understanding their culture takes on various forms. For Angela, it entailed many short visits to Italy to visit family and tour the cities to keep in touch with her Italian heritage. However, she is mostly concerned with sharing the language and traditions with her young daughter, now aged two, in Montreal than with visiting Italy. Clorinda, on the other hand, believes that to truly discover her heritage she must spend vast amounts of time in Italy. A teacher in her early thirties, she leaves Montreal each June when she is finished teaching at Pearson High School and heads off to Italy until she must return home to Montreal for the new school year. These visits are, for her, the antithesis of her time in Montreal. She has a small garden in Abruzzo to tend to and she likes “the little towns because I have solitude there. [It’s] so peaceful. My grandmother is there [in Italy]. It’s about finding a connection to this other side of who I am. It’s tranquil” (Clorinda Antonacci 2008).

Montreal Italians visit Italy for many different reasons and in many ways. Each trip type offers a way for Canadians of Italian descent to interact with their home country. School Trips offer a tourist-centered taste of Italy while Extended Stays allow young adults to immerse themselves in Italian culture on their own terms without parents coloring their images of Italy. Family Visits offer young Montrealers of Italian descent a way to reconnect with a history that is largely unknown to them. It offers them a sense of place and of family history that is lacking in Montreal for immigrant Italian families. These trips also serve to encourage young Canadian Italians to keep speaking Italian, to

maintain ties with Italy and to bolster cultural identity. These narratives reinforce their connection to Italy and are outward performances of their changing relationship to Italy and their own complex and dynamic identities as Canadian Italians. As will be seen in the next chapter, another way my informants use to inform their identity is through the home-based food preparation of tomato-making.

Chapter 5

Making Tomatoes and Traditional Food Culture

The women and men of the immigrant groups had choices in America about what to eat, when to eat it and how. But their preferences were deeply affected by the experiences they endured well before they left for America. When they emerged from steerage and wandered through the vast American marketplace, they acted out the legacies of their past hungers, yet were not passive in this process. They themselves shaped the creation of new practices that in turn became traditional (Diner 230).

Forty years ago, Don Yoder defined foodways as “the total cookery complex, including attitudes, taboos and meal systems – the whole range of cookery and food habits in a society” (Yoder 325). Recent folkloristic work on food, by scholars such as Lucy Long and Holly Everett, focus on the construction of the “other” through culinary experiences. They explore notions of culinary tourism through exploratory eating and the construction of identity through food. As Long notes, food touches every aspect of our lives and includes a “wide range of behaviors connected to thinking and talking about food” (Long 23). Ethnic foodways are a way for immigrants to retain part of their culture through gustatory and sensory experience. They are often “most meaningful to the family members who make and partake of them. Their symbolic value lies in their ties to the immigrants’ past” (Shortridge 149). While it is clear that foodways play an important role for immigrants, the younger generation of Italian Montrealers under the age of 35 also regards their traditional foods and traditional food preparation as a meaningful part of their cultural identity. In this chapter I explore the construction of self through traditional foodways among young Montreal Italians.

Food is central to Italian culture. Its main role is not simply that of providing caloric needs or a pleasurable taste; food is also utilized as an expression of culture, regional affiliation and pride. The way Italians view and approach food has changed drastically over the course of the twentieth century. Many of these ideas have been shaped by immigration, and an increased availability of food. Pre-World War II Italy was a stratified country with one's social group dictating what foods could be eaten. After the war, the Italians who chose to immigrate to Canada and the United States found themselves in a very different food situation than they had had back home. In North America, they could eat the foods they were scarcely able to enjoy in Italy. Thus foods such as pasta, tomato sauce and meat became staples of the Italian American diet.²⁷ Home-based food preparation was common among immigrants and many began to make their own tomato sauces, homemade pastas and cured meats. A couple of generations later, many of these practices have come to be considered traditional foodways. While some of these customs are not actively practiced by the younger generation of Montreal Italians, tomato-making is a living tradition still central to the Montreal Italian cultural experience.

Appreciating the role of food and the importance of tomatoes in contemporary Montreal Italian culture requires an understanding of the social history of food in Italy. As Diner points out, today's Italian food is often associated with the abundance of rich tomato sauces, fresh pastas, fine olive oils and delectable cheeses but, historically, this was not often the case with most Italians. The unification of Italy played a significant role

²⁷ My use of the term "Italian American" denotes Italians living in the whole of North America.

in moulding Italian food culture. The Unification or *Risorgimento*, set out to destroy Italy's feudal past, further complicated the lower class's already difficult relationship to land and food. Conversely, financially well-to-do Italians had access to the bountiful yield of Italian agriculture. They ate a variety of carefully prepared, complicated dishes that eventually became synonymous with Italian cuisine (Diner 27). The poor did not have this same access to a varied diet; the only times they were given a feast was on religious holy days when the rich families would feed the poor in a gesture of charity and compassion. Class distinctions, and their relationship to food were seen in everyday interactions between rich and poor. Most notable would have been the public outdoor restaurants in cities such as Naples where rich and poor ate together. The *maccaronaro*²⁸ would

set up shop outside, with two tall stoves on which stand two ample pots forming the front of his booth. He wears an apron and holds a long handled ladle. On his right is a bench with a platter of grated cheese, a large pan of tomato sauce, a pile of bowls. His customers eat on the spot, the richest take cheese and sauce, others only cheese while the poor content themselves with a little water from the pot (Diner 41).

Though most Italians would have to content themselves with hard bread and soup, in the late nineteenth century, Italian food was slowly becoming synonymous with high-class cuisine in Europe. The cookbook *La Scienza in Cucina e L'Arte di Mangiar Bene*, published in 1891 by Pellegrino Artusi was the first cookbook accessible to untrained cooks who did not speak French. It was geared toward the women of the growing merchant class and contained a compilation of dishes from around the Italian peninsula:

²⁸ The pasta vendor.

[Artusi] helped plan and unify the various regional cuisines and sanctioned, for example, the official entrance of potato gnocchi into the daily menu and the introduction of tomato sauce as a condiment for pasta dishes (until then, tomatoes were mainly eaten raw or used on meat, eggs, fish and chicken) (Scorcinelli 83).

In his book, which popularized the use of sauce made from tomatoes, Artusi explains the process of making tomato sauce:

Prepare a battutto²⁹ with a quarter of an onion, a clove of garlic, and a finger-length stalk of celery, a few basil leaves and a sufficient amount of parsley. Season with a little olive oil, salt and pepper. Mash seven or eight tomatoes and put everything on the fire, stirring occasionally. Once you see the sauce thickening to the consistency of a runny cream, pass it through a sieve and it is ready to use. This sauce lends itself to innumerable uses, as I shall indicate in due course. It is good with boiled meat, and excellent when served with cheese and butter on pasta as well as when used to make risotto (Artusi 121).

Though Artusi can be credited with bringing the idea of a tomato sauce for pasta to the literate public, he was not the first chef to combine tomato sauce and pasta dishes. In fact, he gives credit to a chef of the previous century, "Francesco Leonardi was possibly the first chef who thought of seasoning pasta with tomato sauce. He was once employed by Catherine II of Russia, and was 'fluent' in Polish, Turkish, French and German gastronomy as well"³⁰ (Artusi lxxv).

When tomato sauce was first being introduced as a proper condiment to pasta, it was clearly reserved for the richest families. Only they could afford to eat sauce at the pasta vendor's stand, and only the richest would have been the literate audience for

²⁹ A beaten or chopped base.

³⁰ Francesco Leonardi's *Apicio Moderno Ossia L'Arte di Apprestare Ogni Sorta di Vivande* published in 1807 is often seen as the first historical profile of Italian cuisine.

Artusi's cookbook. The rest of the Italian population was eating a very different diet. Even in the middle of the twentieth century, tomatoes had yet to become ubiquitous with Italian food for many of the lower classes. My mother was born in 1948 and spent her early childhood in the farming village of Barisciano in the Abruzzo region of South-Central Italy. She explained in an e-mail interview that the food her family ate was very different from the foods many people associate with Italian cuisine. She writes:

If memory serves me right breakfast consisted of warm milk and some bread. There was no cake/sweets unless it was a special day like Easter or Christmas. Nonna would give me a fruit as a snack for school, a pear or apricot or whatever was homegrown. Once Nonno came to Canada and there was some money she would even buy me bananas. I loved bananas. Lunch was usually some soup with bread: pasta and lentils, pasta and beans etc. It was always home made pasta. You were lucky to get a piece of sausage or a piece of cheese with it. Supper was soup again or once Nonno was here (in Canada) spaghetti with oil and garlic. Meat was very rare. As Nonna says, you ate meat when a chicken died, maybe a little meat when the pig was killed in mid-winter. Remember, they used every part of the pig. Sausages, prosciutto, blood pudding, even the fat/brains were used to make *coppa*.³¹ You ate lamb at Easter, that was a treat. Lots of fruits and vegetables because that's what they grew in the fields. Things like corn, potatoes, apricots, pears etc. . . . and nuts especially almonds and walnuts because there were many almond/walnut trees in Barisciano. You would eat these nuts with dark (black) home made bread. It was a treat to eat white bread. I only got to eat white crusty Italian bread when Nonna would go to L'Aquila.³² The diet consisted of whatever was home grown and homemade bread and pasta. Nuts (lentils, beans, peas etc . . . grown there). Potatoes (imagine potato/pasta soups). Walnuts and almonds and lots of fruits and veggies. Corn was used a lot especially for

³¹ The cured or raw collar/neck of a pig.

³² L'Aquila is the capital of the province of Abruzzo and about nineteen kilometers from Barisciano.

polenta. Meat was extremely rare. Exotic foods like bananas came only after Nonno came to Canada (Paola Sanchini 2009).

As family lore would have it, my grandmother likes to tell the story that once my mom came to Canada, she was so enthralled with the abundance of bananas that she ate them non-stop and became a proper “*piccola grassetta*.”³³

Notably absent in my mother’s description of what she ate while living in Italy is tomato sauce. She explained that this was for two reasons. Firstly, until her father came to Canada her family could not afford to buy spaghetti and would make pasta by hand and the only pasta her mom would make was short soup pasta. Secondly, though they did grow some tomatoes in their fields, they were not used for sauce. Their tomato sauce came from store-bought tomato concentrate until the canning process began to take hold in her village, sometime in the early 1950s (Paola Sanchini 2009).

The question of how tomato-canning became so popular among Montreal Italians is one that can only be answered by the older generation of Italian immigrants in Montreal since it is not written in any history book or cookbook. What I could glean from speaking with various older Italian immigrants was a shaky oral history of a fruit that was not commonly used as a condiment for pasta until well after World War II. None of my informants knew when the tomato-making³⁴ tradition started in their families. They knew that it had been practiced in Italy, but nothing more. My grandmother and great-aunt

³³ Little fat girl.

³⁴ The term “tomato-making” was used by all my informants and seems to be simply direct translation from the dialect Italian “*Fare gli pommodori*” (standard Italian: *Fare i pomodori*).

contend that the process of making tomatoes came to our village of Barisciano only after World War II. Until that time, if they needed tomato sauce, which was rarely since they were very poor farmers, they would buy tomato concentrate, dilute, and season it. Both women have told me repeatedly that they only made tomatoes a few times before they came to Canada in the 1950s. When I have asked them how long they have been canning tomatoes, they usually answer with the number of years they have been in Canada.

The father of one of my informants told me that while he is fairly sure his family made tomatoes in Italy, he can only remember them ever being made when he was already in Montreal (Frank De Vincenzo 2008). It seems that it was only in Canada that the tradition really took hold for them, though it was undoubtedly practiced by some and to some extent in Italy before emigration. Not only were the prices of tomatoes cheaper in Canada, they were also readily available in grocery stores to be purchased, and in farms to be picked.

Prior to emigration, Italian women played an important role in dictating what the family ate. As Diner notes, “despite separate eating, men recognized the importance of women in the universe of food. In recalling their childhoods, they [the men] lovingly recalled their mothers as good cooks, able to transform meager raw products into tasty dishes” (Diner 32). Women’s culinary culture blended private and public spheres. Though meals were generally consumed at home, many towns had communal ovens that enabled women to bake their bread in the company of others:

Women’s culinary skills reflected on their family. Husbands earned the flour or oil but wives stood on the front lines, changing raw products into the edible, something which

satisfied the body's need for calories and produced the pleasure of taste (Diner 36).

Though women tried their best to satisfy their families' hunger pangs, for "the most part in Italy a poor diet had been characteristic during the largest part of the nineteenth and twentieth century" (Sorcinelli 81).

When the family left Italy and immigrated to Canada, it was up to the women to take control of their food culture. While food is generally a female stronghold in Italian households, some of the food traditions are male-centered practices. In fact, most of the food-based customs I spoke to my informants about were gender-specific. Traditions such as making wine and the curing of various meats were undertaken by the men of the family, while making pasta and cheese, and tomato-canning were the domain of the women. The making of wine among Italians seems to have followed the same path as tomato-making. Luisa Del Giudice notes in her study on wine culture among Toronto Italians that her father did not particularly enjoy wine in Italy. He only began consuming and producing wine when he immigrated to Canada in the 1950s (Del Giudice 2001: 210). She further elucidates on this point and notes that, "for immigrants, good table wine was not readily available at reasonable cost so they had to make their own. Many in fact acquired direct wine-making skills only in Canada" (Del Giudice 2001: 220). When talking about the male-dominated field of wine-making, she notes that "red wine, life's blood was closely associated with manhood and virility. Further, wine figured at the center of a male cosmology, creating and cementing male bonds across generations, in a sort of brotherhood of the grape" (Del Giudice 216).



Figure 17: My nonno and father pressing grapes. (Photo by L.S.)

The process of wine-making differs between families and since none of my informants actively or regularly participated in making wine, I can only describe how my family makes wine. As early as I can remember my grandfather offered his grandchildren wine mixed with ginger-ale at the dinner table, and often encouraged us to drink his wine, saying that it would make us stronger. As Del Giudice notes, “daily wine consumption was encouraged in children as well to make healthy and strong bodies” (Del Giudice 213).

In the early fall, my grandfather buys both red and white grapes. He changes the type of grapes every year. After we have assembled his grape press we wash the grapes and begin squishing them with a grape press such as the one depicted in the picture above. We usually start with the white grapes and add the red ones last so our red wine is

never very dark and usually more of a rosé. We re-press the grapes a few more times to ensure that all the juice has been removed. My father explained the process he follows, once the grapes have been pressed:

You bring the juice buckets into your cold room and open the lids to expose the juice to the air. There are yeasts in the air which will promote the fermentation process. You let the juice ferment – you will notice a fizzing action in the juice, which usually continues for about fifteen days or so, depending on the weather, temperature of the room and so on. When the fermentation decreases, you place the lids on, but very loosely. When you notice that the fermentation, the fizzing, has stopped, you pour the juice into the demi-johns. Do not cork the demi-johns for at least a month, because if there is further fermentation, the demi-john will burst. Once there is no more fermentation visible, you cork the demi-john. Let it age for another month and then you can decant it into gallon containers. Remember, whenever you transfer wine from one container to another, you must not disturb the sediment at the bottom. Use a siphon. You can now drink the wine, but its taste will improve with some aging (Richard Sanchini 2009).

Since my grandfather's mild stroke in 2004, we have slowly convinced him to stop using his mechanical press to make wine. Instead he and my father now buy the grape juice and ferment it in their respective cold rooms.³⁵ Buying pre-pressed grape juice has slowly taken over from pressing the grapes at home as the population of wine-makers ages. Thus, as Luisa Del Giudice notes, "the trend to purchase juice ready for vinification has made the wine press obsolete in Toronto, except for the diehards who refuse to give up old ways" (Del Giudice 225).

³⁵ The "cold room" or *cantina*, is an air-conditioned root cellar-type room, usually on the ground floor or in the basement of a house that stores all the preserves, cured meats and wine.

Male-dominated customs were practiced by fathers, grandfathers and uncles but not by my male informants themselves. Alexander Scalia, born in 1990, explained to me:

My Zio Emidio takes care of that – the sausages. I've helped him out when I was younger. With my nonno too, when my nonno was still alive. They would always do that together. Most of the time at my nonno's house, I remember the meat-grinding machine. I liked to turn it. I also learned that they actually wrapped the sausages in pig intestines! For some reason I still ate the sausage after that. Personally, maybe it's something that I would do later on in life. I don't think I have time to do it. I do things in life that they don't do. It's not something I would necessarily think of continuing (Alexander Scalia 2008).

André Di Pietro, a 24-year-old living in the St. Laurent area of Montreal, echoed this sentiment when he told me that since his father and grandfather died, neither sausages nor wine are made anymore. He was open about his lack of interest in any of the food traditions I asked him about. His answer was:

I don't get involved. I'm not interested. No one makes sausages anymore. My father and grandfather did when they were alive. The men used to do it. Same thing with the wine, it was the men. My father and grandfather are deceased but they used to take care of that (André Di Pietro 2008).

Though André and Alexander expressed little interest in continuing the traditions their grandparents brought over from Italy, this was not always the case. Karim Rahim was never involved in certain food traditions as a child but explained that he is interested in learning some of them to keep the traditions going. He described his experiences with the traditions:

My grandfather made the wine. He's stopped now that he's sick but that's just these few years. Now I think my uncles took it up. I went once to observe and help out but never regularly. The

sausages were very limited. A few years they experimented with it. But cheese, they did. My grandfather made the cheese until his health got worse. I didn't help out. Every year he slaughters a goat, no a baby sheep, a lamb and twice I've been to help him. It's for Easter dinner. He goes with his friend every year. It's like a ritual thing. I'm most interested in keeping up the wine-making tradition. We make red and rosé wine (Karim Rahim 2008).

I surmise that the reason my male informants were less than enthusiastic about keeping up food traditions, despite their more general enthusiasm for their Italian heritage, was that they find other ways to express their Italian identity. Many of them wear Italian soccer jerseys regularly, watch Italian soccer, speak the language, and have visited Italy. A perfect example of this happened when I interviewed Steven Scalia. On the day of our interview we had an interesting exchange on Italian fashions in Montreal:

Steven: A lot of Italians here dress Italian head to toe. Like here people wear Kappa Italia clothes. Italy soccer team jackets, bracelets . . .

Laura: Would you be an example? Just today, your braces, shirt, belt and bracelet are all Italian flags or Italy-related!
(laughs)

Steven: I'm proud of being Italian. I want people to know I'm Italian (Steven Scalia 2008).

My female informants on the other hand, did not wear their "Italianness" on their sleeve. Though they may watch soccer, visit Italy and speak Italian, there is a sense that food is an integral way to experience Italian culture. Also, many of them grew up with their grandparents as their main caretakers and being around an Italian nonna guarantees a fair share of kitchen time.

Many of my female informants expressed the desire to have been taught some of the various male-dominated food customs, but this was rarely allowed. Due to the fact that I come from a relatively small family, our food traditions could not be gender-specific and so I have participated in the making of wine and sausages and meat-curing. Though Lucia Silvestri wants to take part in the wine-making tradition, she admits knowing frustratingly little about it:

Wine, we don't make every year. I don't help out very much. I'm confused by it. My father and my uncle make it. My grandmother gives orders, but doesn't really help. We don't make very much wine, mostly red. I don't even know if we have a press! Wine, I would like to get into it. I don't know much about it but I would like to. I think wine is more interesting (Lucia Silvestri 2008)!

Tania Zampini mentioned on a few occasions that she repeatedly asked her father to take part in the wine-making process, but to no avail:

My dad makes his own wine in the garage. I've never been around for that. We're not allowed. I keep asking and he never invites me. I wish he would let me but he has weird superstitions. For the wine he insists this is a phallic-centric activity, it's a male thing. He does it with his brother-in-law and his son. He only makes red wine (Tania Zampini 2008).

This sentiment is again expressed by Michelle De Vincenzo who also wishes to learn the process of making wine but is often excluded from this generally male-centered custom:

My dad makes wine. He still makes it. Occasionally he brings me down to help. He used to buy the grapes and I was lucky enough to squish them with my feet, but now he buys the juice. He usually makes red wine; very seldom does he make white. He makes it every year with my uncle. It's a man thing; they get together in the fall and spend the day together. They make prosciutto and sausages. I think I'd like to do the wine. I've been asking my dad to show me how to

do the wine; he said the next batch he would teach me
(Michelle De Vincenzo 2008).

For Timia Di Pietro, the death of her father and grandfather when she was young spelled the end of every food tradition but the tomato-making. Until their deaths, the family made wine, sausages and cheese, but after they passed away, almost as though out of respect for the father and grandfather, the traditions were discontinued:

When my father and grandfather were alive they made wine. They made a mixture of white and red. I ate the grapes as a kid. I remember the press but I never helped. It was like a guy thing. The sausages, my mom and grandmother helped my father. When he passed away we stopped doing those things. My grandmother used to make cheese. That was good. Delicious ricotta. That has stopped since my father passed away (Timia Di Pietro 2008).

My informants had various reasons for keeping up traditional foodway practices. These reasons fall under three fluid groupings. Some keep the traditions because they see them as a link to their culture and family. A number also undertake these customs because they see them as healthier and more natural alternatives to their grocery store counterparts. Others take part in them because they are not given much choice in the matter; either they live at home or their parents refuse to share the finished products with them unless they help. As Pina Ippolito told me, "When we come in, the grand-daughters, it's mostly like, if you want bottles, you have to come help. They bribe you!" (Pina Ippolito 2008).

As with many folk traditions, there are alternate ways to make tomatoes, all of which produce similar results. The beginning of the process is simple; one must acquire a suitable number of tomatoes for canning. The tomatoes are either bought in bushels from grocery stores catering to the Italian community, from an outdoor farmers' market, or

they are picked by hand at a farm. In late August, when the tomatoes are ready to be picked, many Italians drive out to various U-Pick farms across Quebec and either pick the tomatoes themselves or buy them in bulk. Once the tomatoes have been purchased, they are left to ripen on blankets in the garage.



Figure 18: My nonna and mother with ripening tomatoes. (photo by L.S.)



Figure 19: Marcella De Vincenzo gathering tomatoes for blanching. (Photo by L.S)

On the day chosen to make tomatoes in my family, we assemble in my grandparents' garage and open the garage door enough to let air in and prepare the propane tanks. The large pots, spoons, juice extractor and colanders are taken out of storage. Then the tomato-making process can begin.



Figure 20: My Nonna and Zia Pia making tomatoes while Diana Di Paolo and a neighbor watch (photo by L.S.)

Angela Antonacci has made tomatoes with her family since she was a little girl and described this pre-process to me:

We lay them on the floor on an old blanket and let them ripen. That usually takes a couple of days. After that, we choose the good ones that are really ripe and ready to go. . . . It takes about six hours . . . We usually do it on the weekend. My dad goes to fill up the propane tank! Everything comes out, from the big pot to the big stirring spoon. The aprons, the hairnets, my mom used to put a *fazzolett*³⁶ in her hair to make sure it didn't go into the sauce (Angela Antonacci 2008).

³⁶ Dialect Italian for a kerchief (standard Italian: *uno fazzoletto*).

Figure 21: Tomato-Making Processes: A Comparison

Bagnomaria (Bottle Boiling)	Bolire Il Succo (Open Boiling)
Raw, whole tomatoes	Raw, whole tomatoes
Cut or crush/blend tomatoes *	Blanche whole tomatoes
Bottle with fresh basil (close bottle)	Crush/separate with juice extractor
Boil/seal in bottles **	Boil juice in large pot
Allow to cool in water	Ladle boiling juice into jars ***
Cover jars with blankets	Cover jars with blankets

Legend

Raw Tomato
Blanche (Blanched) Tomatoes
Boiled Tomato
Finished Product

* There are two main ways of Bottle Boiling: a *pezzetti* (in pieces), or crushed and blended tomatoes.

** If the bottles are not wrapped in cloth, they will hit each other or the pot and crack.

*** If the jars have not been warmed properly, they will explode due to a sudden, extreme change in temperature.

Two main processes were followed by my informants, the seemingly older *Bagnomaria*³⁷ (Bottle Boiling) and the newer *Bolire il Succo*³⁸ (Open Boiling). Once the tomatoes have sufficiently matured they are ready to be canned. The Bottle Boiling method calls for the raw tomatoes to be cut, crushed or blended before being bottled in Mason jars with fresh basil leaves. Then the jars are placed in a large steel tub and boiled over a propane-heated burner. This boils the tomato pieces and seals the jars shut. Generally, two types of tomatoes are used, the Roma and the San Marzano. The San Marzano, the plum tomato, is ideal for tomato sauce as it is not too watery and has plenty of pulp. My family buys a combination of Roma and San Marzano, though many of my informants use only San Marzano. To ensure that the jars do not touch each other and break, many informants wrap them in cloths before boiling. Once boiled, the jars are left to cool in the water for a few hours before being taken out. Finally they are placed under blankets in the garage and there they remain until the jars are to be divided up among family members and placed in their respective cold rooms.

³⁷ *Bagnomaria* refers to a process of cooking where you boil the jar containing the food.

³⁸ This method was not given a name by my informants. My grandmother, who uses this method of canning called it as such. *Succo* refers to the liquid that comes out of fruit or meat. This is not to be confused with the term *sugo*, the Italian word for sauce.



Figure 22: A family making tomatoes following the Bottle Boiling method.
(Photo by L.S.)

Lucia declared that Bottle Boiling is the best method for preserving the freshness of the tomato, “When you cook the sauce, the tomatoes are juicy from being boiled. You pass them through the blender and then you start your sauce. It’s a fresher taste than the other way. Or you can leave them in pieces and make a light fresh sauce” (Lucia Silvestri 2008). Frank was skeptical while watching his daughter Marcella make tomatoes using the Open Boiling method. He turned to me and said:

I do it differently than Marcella. I boil them, crush them, peel them, and put them in jars with basil and parsley and then boil the jars gently in water to seal the jar and then they’re good for years and years. This is the best method I think. For tomato pizza or pasta, this is the best way. This is the first time I see my daughter do these types of tomatoes and I’m anxious to see how they will turn out. It’s an art, like making

beer or wine. It's the art of making tomatoes (Frank De Vincenzo 2008).

Sabrina Pianese, whose family adheres to the Bottle Boiling method, explained the process to me in detail, as I was relatively unfamiliar with it. Though her family puts the Mason jars in socks before they are boiled to cut down on broken jars:

In the earlier years [in Canada], my grandparents went to the farm, to pick their tomatoes, but quickly stopped. We used to go to my father's cousin who owns a store/restaurant but he sells tomatoes. We would order a few bushels. We do it old-school so it's a good two days of pure torture, I have no life for those two days. I'm still living at home so I'm still doing the tomatoes. My mom and I do it. My grandmother will do it sometimes but maybe only one bushel. So we put the tomatoes on tables in the basement away from sunlight, we let them mature. We wash the tomatoes, next we boil them, then peel them and then we have to take out the seeds and quarter them and then put them in colanders and put them in jars. [Then she] mulches them, and closes them up with basil leaves. The jars are put into socks and then, the socks are to protect them so they don't crack or explode. They boil them for half an hour and we remove them from heat and take them out of the water the next day. Making it the other way, making the sauce itself doesn't last as long and is not as fresh as when you keep the tomatoes in their pure state. And we do that every year. It's a very simple but long process (Sabrina Pianese 2008).

The Open Boiling process is a longer and more dangerous method of canning tomatoes that a few of my informants practiced. My family has been practicing this form of tomato-making for over thirty years now, because the Bottle Boiling method broke too many mason jars for my grandmother's liking. This method calls for the raw tomatoes to be blanched whole in boiling water for a few minutes. Once removed from the boiling water, the tomatoes are passed through a juice extractor to crush them for their juice and

to separate the skin and core from the rest of the pulpy tomato. These machines can vary greatly. My grandfather fashioned a homemade device from a clothes dryer motor, and a light switch. It is old and worn down but works very well. He also uses this machine when he makes sausages to pump the meat into the casing. It is also now possible in Montreal to buy such a motorized machine at an Italian cooking store.



Figure 23: My nonno and his homemade Juice Extractor/Sausage Maker. The bucket on the right is collecting the skin and core of the tomatoes. A bucket facing him (not visible in photo) is collecting the juice. (Photo by L.S.)

Once the tomatoes have been crushed and juiced, the juice is placed in a large cauldron over a propane-heated burner and boiled for forty to fifty minutes. The boiled juice is then ladled carefully into the Mason jars and the lids closed tight; the heat from the sauce ensures that the lid is sealed. The danger with this method lies in the ladling of

the boiling juice. If the jars are not sufficiently warm when the hot liquid is poured in, they will crack and leak boiling juice all over your arms and legs. This happened once to my grandmother's good friend and she received a painful burn and a lengthy stay in the hospital.



Figure 24: Pia Di Paolo pouring boiling tomato juice into jars. (Photo by L.S.)

Once the jars are sealed, they are placed under blankets to cool down until they are given away or put in the family cold room. Though this method is more dangerous and not as popular as the Bottle Boiling method, it is slowly gaining in popularity as a local celebrity chef, Stefano Faita, recently released a DVD on canning tomatoes in which he follows the Open Boiling method. Pina Ippolito's family follows a variant of Open Boiling, which she described to me as follows:

My mom makes roughly 300 bottles of sauce. My mom makes a lot of tomatoes! They get their bushels, they

usually choose my aunt's house because she has a garage. Let me tell you, you need a garage! You need a sink, a hose, everything. The day they come in they wash all the tomatoes late at night. My mom and my aunt wash the tomatoes and lay them out on the floor to make sure they are clean and dry.

The next day they start at like 4:30 AM; it's a big ordeal. Usually it takes two days. 4:30 to seven at night. They start out slowly because not everyone is there at 4:30. They have two big furnaces going, they put the burners, the propane, keep the garage door open, gotta get some air in there. They have those massive pots and big spoons. They cut the tomatoes up and boil them. It takes a while to get it all started, for the water to boil.

The first batch is slow. After that they have the big recycling bins, my grandmother and other aunt come in and start filling the bins with cut tomatoes. They cut some while others are boiling. It becomes an assembly line. I do the cutting, that's my job. I hate tomatoes. Fresh tomatoes, I don't like. I will eat the sauce but the fresh ripe tomato? I'm not into that.

Once the cutting is done, we can leave and the older women finish up the boiling process. Once it's boiled, they have a separator machine that splits the tomato's insides and skins away from the rest of the tomato and the sauce just drains out and that gets poured into bottles with bay leaves. Jars are closed and put under blankets to keep them warm for a few weeks until they have settled and none have exploded and then people come and pick them up and they divide the bottles up (Pina Ippolito 2008).

While these are the two main methods of making tomatoes among my informants, there are a few, less typical alternatives. Luisa Del Giudice notes that some of her family's tomatoes are now being frozen whole instead of undergoing any canning process (Del Giudice 219). This is believed to fully retain the tomato's freshness and flavour while also having the added bonus of being a lot less work to prepare. However, she does not explain how her family prepares the frozen tomatoes as sauce. My family does freeze a few tomatoes each year and so I can surmise that her family might prepare

the same type of sauce that we do from frozen whole tomatoes. Since the frozen tomatoes are whole, we simply run them frozen under hot water and then remove the skin. Then we cut or crush them up and add them to a hot skillet with olive oil, garlic, parsley and basil and cook it quickly. This makes a light, fresh sauce that my family affectionately calls a “summer sauce” as opposed to the heavier, less chunky sauce you make from canned tomato juice. Another option for those who have smaller families or are living alone is to buy canned plum tomatoes and use them as the base of your tomato sauce. If you have a large family this can get quite expensive as each can of tomatoes can cost up to four dollars depending on the size.

Some of my informants were interested in continuing the tomato-making tradition because they believe it to be an integral part of their cultural identity, much like speaking Italian or visiting Italy, not necessarily because they found it to be an enjoyable process. As Angie said, she makes tomatoes because “it’s because it’s a tradition, just like our language. We want to hold on to it” (Angie Antonacci 2008). Making tomatoes is a physically demanding custom. Getting up early and spending the day in a propane-heated garage while boiling, peeling and grinding pounds of tomatoes is not how many young people would define enjoyment. Also, once the tomatoes are finished being made, the finished product is not as immediately pleasing as say, cheese, sausages and pasta. The end result in this case is bottled tomato juice/pieces. As Angela and her sister Clorinda explained to me, they do not find it to be a pleasant tradition to follow:

Angie: Every year, we’re looking at about ten to fifteen bushels. Last year we did eighteen because I did five of my own. My mom did thirteen. It’s a lot of work! . . . Every time September comes around it’s like a fever. Tomato

Fever! . . . When you're making eighteen bushels, you're looking at, a week and a half of this?! [*laughs*]

Clorinda: Tomato-making season! Seriously when I was in Italy I would always hope that the plane would be delayed and I couldn't come back in time (Angela and Clorinda Antonacci 2008).

In addition, Angela elaborates that their younger brother, "Johnny gets away with not doing it. What I hate about the tomatoes the most is that your fingers turn orange. I itch from the acid" (Angela Antonacci 2008). Thus, to undertake this tradition is a substantial commitment. Tomato-making provides a delayed gratification for those involved in the process.

Tomato-making can be contrasted with other traditions such as learning Italian, or visiting Italy with one's family. These traditions can be thought of as passive because they can be undertaken as part of everyday life: most third generation Italians in Montreal learn Italian as children and visiting Italy serves as a family vacation as well as a rediscovery of ancestry. However, the tomato-making tradition demands a conscious decision to place oneself in a temporarily unpleasant environment with no possibility of an immediate reward. As children, many of my informants came to despise tomato-making season and actively tried to avoid it. Elizabeth enthusiastically exclaimed that "I've never ever had to do tomatoes, I've gotten out of it every year" (Elizabeth Cotignola 2008)! Lucia told me, "My parents still pick their tomatoes, they go to the farm. They like to go pick them, they actually enjoy it. I'm still trying to understand that. I always tell them I can't go because I've got homework. I avoid that experience" (Lucia Silvestri 2008)!

While it is a generally unpleasant experience for young people, it is a necessary evil in most families. Tomato-making is also family time for many. Due to the fact that it is a large-scale undertaking, you need a large number of people for it to be manageable work. Thus, it becomes a social event of sorts with family and neighbors popping in to lend a hand and share gossip.

Even when it is not a huge undertaking there is an important social component. Marcella only makes a few bushels of tomatoes a year and she is usually helped by her husband and sister. Though the work gets done properly, there were many laughs about trying to figure out the kinks of her new juice extractor and how not to burn our hands handling the boiled tomatoes. As Marcella's husband, Abraham, explained:

I married an Italian and I do whatever my wife wants me to do. I've been making tomatoes for the past three years though it was mostly a spectator sport at the beginning for me. It was great. We did it with the [Marcella's] grandparents the first time. Working in the garage, I was told not to touch anything. Then I was fed a big plate of pasta. And then was presented with a ton of tomato jars. It was great. It worked out well for me now but it seems like it gets to be more and more work each year. I would like to keep it up, it's a lot of fun but it always seems like such a great idea until you actually get started (Abraham G. 2008).

After we finished canning, Marcella's mom invited us all outside for lunch in the sun. Since my family is small, our tomato-canning experience is similar to hers. Though the main purpose of the day is to can hundreds of tomatoes, there is plenty of socializing. We start the day early, around six, so mid-morning, my maternal grandmother brings a pot of espresso and cookies into the garage for us to enjoy while we work and a few hours later, a large pasta lunch is served before going back to can the remaining juice. My

grandmother and great-aunt have been making tomatoes for decades, and talking while making tomatoes usually has nothing to do with the task at hand but is centered around church stories and filling me in on the family gossip I have missed while living in Newfoundland. Tania has had similar experiences of the whole family getting together for tomato-making:

My dad's side makes the tomatoes. I always took part in this. I had to. My dad was responsible for buying the bushels and choosing the tomatoes. He would go to the farm by himself. He didn't pick them though! He would get twelve to fifteen bushels depending on the year. We would have sheets down on the floor in the garage and we would lay the tomatoes down one next to the other. Labour Day weekend we would set up an assembly line. We used to use a hand-cranked machine, now it has an engine or something. Us, the kids, would have to collect the tomatoes and bring them to a basin and wash them (Tania Zampini 2008).

The same happens when dealing with larger undertakings. Larger families require massive amounts of tomato sauce, upwards of a hundred jars or so, for the year and making it can take days and many family members to accomplish. Angela and Clorinda pointed out that their aunt usually comes by to help the family when they make tomatoes and the favour is reciprocated when she makes hers:

Clorinda: My aunt and uncle used to come help us and then we would go over to help them because they helped us.

Angie: I have a friend of mine that at six in the morning the parents are downstairs! The aunts and uncles go and they all do it together. We just do our own stuff on our own.

Clorinda: We do it as we go so it takes us a long time. We do it at our leisure whereas them (the friend) it's a huge production line and by noon it's done, and the next weekend it's at someone else's house. With us, it's just my

mom and my aunt who do them, my mom is the most amount. My aunt is starting to do them more again now, because her kids are married and they want it. But I've been to Italy and they don't do this! It's very rare, people that have farms will do some of this but here it caught on. (Angela and Clorinda Antonacci 2008).

For some, especially those informants who are mothers, tomato-making creates both a social and provider function. Since mothers are often busy with their children, having a weekend to sit around with female family members is a social event while also creating food that their children will benefit from. Pina explained to me that for the women in her family, making tomatoes is a chance for them to get together and catch up. Since many of them have children and do not get to see each other very often, it allows them to have some bonding time while also providing tomato sauce for their families for the year. Interestingly enough this female-dominated event takes place in the garage and not the kitchen. Kitchens are usually seen as female space while the garage tends to be the male locale of a house. In this case, women are actively taking over a male-dominated space for a tradition that generally excludes men from taking part. Thus, the tomato-making process creates a counter-hegemonic social element, along with its culinary objectives:

There's my mom Mimma, her sister Nina, my grandma Rose, my dad's sister Santina, his sister Rose, his sister Carmela. Then there's the cousins, so me, Antoinette, Rosie, Antonella and Carmy. The men don't take part. My dad might come and read his newspaper and drink coffee. He just watches, makes sure the propane tanks are full. It's all gossiping with us, family gossip, who is arguing with who, who is dating who. We wouldn't even want the men there, it's a woman's day but we get the work done. I enjoy doing it now. The system has changed over the years; before we used to cut everything in the kitchen and then move into the

garage but then my uncle put a sink in the garage. I look forward to it more now. Things started to change for me maybe in my late twenties when I became more family-oriented and wanted to settle down. It became more important to me than going clubbing and needing to sleep (Pina Ippolito 2008).

Among those who expressed an interest in keeping the tradition alive, a few also explained that they continue their family's home-based foodways because they view the products as healthier than commercially available options. Making tomatoes gave them the power to create and control what they are consuming and gave them a chance to remove themselves from the current mainstream culture of tomato sauce.



Figure 25: Boiling tomato juice. (Photo by L.S.)

Lucia and Marcella take part in the tomato-making process and are supporters of the custom for reasons other than continuing the tradition. Marcella, who is in her early thirties and also makes her own pasta, was clear about the fact that she was not interested

in making tomatoes while she was growing up. However, health concerns and a desire to eat more naturally led her back to making tomatoes and asserting some control over what she consumed:

I've been making tomatoes with my family for five years, I've been interested in this for about five years. The past two years I've made them on my own. Growing up, I stayed away from making tomatoes. I was just never interested in it; I thought it was tedious and wanted to do other things with my summer. What changed for me was the realization that finding something organic and grounded was much more important than something bottled and also, continuing tradition is very, very important (Marcella De Vincenzo 2008).



Figure 26: Michelle De Vincenzo crushing tomatoes (Photo by L.S.)

Lucia agreed with this point of view. As someone who has many dietary concerns and pays very close attention to what she puts into her body, preparing and canning tomatoes at home is an ideal way to consume what is natural and without additives:

You know what? The thing with the tomato sauce, I think that's great. It's fresh and natural as you can get. The sauce you buy, you don't know what you're getting, I mean, sure you don't know what's on the tomato but you're not getting all that other stuff, right? I would like to continue. It's a lot of work but it's worth it for the whole year (Lucia Silvestri 2008).

As with many canning processes, tomato-making is not without its beliefs and dities. The main dite/belief I came across was the belief that a menstruating woman would ruin the tomatoes³⁹. I use both dite and belief when discussing because the terminology depends on the generation. My informants told me the dite, but did not believe it, while their parents and grandparents, who enforced these ideas, clearly believed in them. Two informants, Tania and Pina expressed a family belief in this belief. Pina explained that:

Supposedly, if you're young and you have your period you're not allowed to make tomatoes. Because for some reason they say you ruin the sauce or something; I'm not sure where that comes from. When we were younger that was our excuse! I remember always saying I had my period. It's an old wives' tale (Pina Ippolito 2008).

Tania's experience with this belief was rather different. Instead of menstruating acting as a tool for exclusion in the tomato-making process, it simply relegated you to a job where touching the actual tomatoes was not an option. She told me that

My dad has weird superstitions. Like for instance, if we're making the sauce and any of the girls have their periods we are not allowed to touch the tomatoes because apparently

³⁹ For a wider discussion on menstrual beliefs, see Penelope Shuttle, 1978.

the whole batch goes bad. So in that case we were stuck boiling the jars (Tania Zampini 2008).

After speaking to several informants about these foodway traditions an important question was always on my mind. Why are certain traditions, such as making tomatoes, actively kept up by members of the younger generation of Italians in Montreal while others, such as making cheese, pasta, wine and cured meats slowly fading? I believe that there are several reasons contributing to this. First is the availability of reasonable substitutions. As Michael Di Paolo states "It's just not something I can see myself enjoy doing, buying grapes and squishing them. I guess you can say I'm lazy but I'd just rather go buy wine at the store" (Michael Di Paolo 2008). From what I have gleaned from my informants, making homemade cheeses and pasta were the first traditions to be stopped because one could easily import or buy Italian cheeses and pastas that were tasty and relatively inexpensive. The same can happen with many cured meats such as prosciutto, salami and pancetta. These meats are time-consuming to cure and can easily go bad, so if one can find a delicious substitution at the local Italian butcher or corner pastry store, it makes sense to buy it. When it comes to wine and sausages though, replacing the homemade variety becomes trickier. If one consumes wine regularly, it becomes rather expensive to buy several bottles of wine a week when making it is a rather inexpensive venture. This is especially true if you buy the ready-made juice and simply have to ferment and bottle it yourself. Sausages can be bought commercially, but as my family discovered after trying several varieties, none come close to my grandfather's. This is why I believe, that although these traditions are not always being actively continued by my generation of Italians, they are still being kept alive by pockets of people who find

uses for them. Another reason for losing certain traditions is the division of labour. In Italy, as many of my informants' families were subsistence farmers, the only way for them to get many prepared foods was to make them themselves. In the Canadian capitalist environment, labour is clearly divided. When you needed cheese or meat in Montreal, there was an expert cheese maker or butcher for you to buy from. This way, you could get quality food products without having to create them yourself. The tomato-canning is a different story altogether. No matter how expensive it is, the sauce you buy in grocery stores bears little to no resemblance to the sauce found in an Italian kitchen. Also, since an Italian family eats pasta quite regularly, buying pre-made sauce is very expensive for the quality of sauce that you are buying.

Traditional foodways are "one of the most important symbols through which ethnic groups in America have maintained their individual identities and communicated them to the world around them. Food is, in fact, the most common form of symbolic identity" (Shortridge 145). Food production is an important part of Montreal Italian culture. The making of wine, cheese, pasta, cured meats and tomatoes are all expressions of an Italian ethnicity and identity. Though many of my informants no longer participate in the production of many of these foods, tomato-making is still a vibrant and dynamic foodway custom that is evolving with my generation's involvement. Taking part in this custom allows my informants to perform their Italian identity in a semi-private sphere. Through this tradition they can assert control over their food consumption, provide food for their families, spend time with their parents and grandparents and actively participate

in their culture while developing identity markers, products and processes for the performance of their cultural identity.

Chapter Six

Conclusion

Prior to the beginning of this study, I did not believe it was possible for me to think about Italian identity more than I already did. Leaving multicultural Montreal, where I was one of 200,000 other Italians, and moving to the predominantly white and Irish city of St. John's heightened the awareness I had about my own Italian identity. Suddenly, I was the token ethnic in my group of friends. My foodways, trilingualism and olive complexion were exotic markers of my place as an outsider. I had never felt more Italian.

At the outset of this thesis, I had hypothesized that the young Montreal Italians I interviewed would demonstrate a superficial relationship to Italy, their Italianness and any traditional customs their families had brought over. I assumed that since they were born and lived in a multicultural city they would have distanced themselves from the traditional culture of their grandparents. However, after a few interviews, I realized I had been mistaken. My informants consistently demonstrated a steadfast passion for their Italian background. They have learned to navigate a hybrid culture; not quite Italian and not yet Canadian, and have altered the identity markers of previous generations to suit this hybridity.

A significant aspect of this study is focused on changing identity markers and the performance of such. To this end, three case studies detailed three changing identity markers of Montreal Italians under the age of 35. Church involvement is an identity marker that was central to my grandparents' generation. In Italy village life was often

centered around the neighbourhood church, and the traditions, rituals and customs that grew out of these rural church communities were then brought over to Canada. Attending an Italian church was a necessity for these immigrants as it allowed them to pray in their native language. For my generation of Montreal Italians, the necessity of an Italian language church is waning, as English has replaced Italian as our mother tongue. Since many young Italians in Montreal are questioning their religious beliefs, the rituals and church festivals that were so important to previous generations are no longer valued the same way. However, my informants still viewed the church as an important part of their identity because of its cultural impact on them. It has become a gateway to their culture. Though the marker of church involvement has remained, it has been infused with new meaning by young Montreal Italians.

Trips to Italy are another way for Montreal Italians to foster a close relationship to their culture and to their ancestral homeland. It is very common for young Montreal Italians to undertake several trips to Italy. These trips, broken down into three types (School Trip, Extended Stay and Family Visit), allowed my informants to access Italy on three different levels. The School Trip gave them the opportunity to experience the touristic elements Italy has to offer, while the Extended Stay allowed them to understand the realities of living in Italy. The Family Visit was a chance for my informants to trace their family history and spend time in their parents' hometowns. These trips and the narratives that accompanied them have become identity markers for my generation of Montreal Italians as well as a way for them to express their attachment to their culture.

Tomato-making is an iconic identity marker for Montreal Italians and is one that has been embraced by the younger generation. The motives for keeping this tradition vary greatly and differ from the reasons previous generations had for canning tomatoes. While my grandparents' and parents' generations focused on the frugality of tomato-making, my generation of Montreal Italians view it as a healthy alternative to store-bought sauce, a way to spend time with family and a tradition that must be kept because of its centrality to the Montreal Italian experience.

Church involvement, trips to Italy and traditional foodways are all ways in which young Montreal Italians perform their cultural identity. However, these are not the only identity markers of their generation. Other markers, such as fashion, involvement in World Cup of Soccer celebrations and language would be compelling areas for future research into this community. My informants, as young adults, were the perfect candidates for the study of identity as they are at the age when one begins asserting an independent identity.

This thesis demonstrates that not only are identity markers fluid, dynamic and complex, they are also constantly being negotiated and altered by the community. As my informants age, what they consider to be significant markers of their culture will develop and change as their priorities shift. An important part of their identity is that they have yet to fully develop a sense of being Canadian. Their ideas of Canadianness were one-dimensional and limited to hockey and the Olympic Games, yet when they visited Italy, several realized how living in Canada had deeply influenced them. In this sense, their Canadian identity is defined as non-European. Since Canada is a country of immigrants, I

believe the issue of creating a Canadian identity for their children and grandchildren is one that will be at the forefront of identity and ethnicity studies for years to come.

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