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Résumé de l'article

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(Re-)Shaping Italian-Canadian and Indigenous Connections through Naming Practices

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Summary: Long before the formation of the first Italian communities in Canada, notable Italian navigators played a key role in the so-called "discovery of the Americas." Suffice it to think of names like Cristoforo Colombo and Giovanni Caboto, who sailed to North America in 1492 and 1497 as part of European exploration journeys to the "new world." The history of colonization in Canada and North America in general is therefore inextricably linked to these names, although Italian responsibilities in the occupation of Canada are not always acknowledged as such. On the contrary, celebratory traces of this history are still visible in the names of streets, squares, lakes, rivers, mountains, etc., as well as in public holidays and commemorative monuments. The present article aims at addressing the power of names in the creation of cultural memory. More specifically, the article explores the role that place-names and other commemorative practices linked to the Italian presence in Canada play in the commemoration of the colonial past and in the production of a narrative that celebrates the Italian contribution to its colonial occupation. Naming places, people, or holidays is not just a matter of choosing one name over another, but it reveals ideological stances and narratives. Similarly, the presence of celebratory monuments turning Caboto and Colombo into national myths and symbols of Italian Canadians ends up affecting the relationships between local Italian-Canadian communities and Indigenous peoples. Possible alternatives may change attitudes towards Indigenous peoples, thus promoting a new solidarity with the Italian-Canadian communities across the country.

The Power of Names

The present article aims at addressing the power of names in the creation of cultural memory. It provides an exploration of the role that place-names and other commemorative practices linked to the Italian presence in Canada have played in the commemoration of the colonial past and in the production

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of a narrative that celebrates the Italian contribution to its colonial occupation. Because of its attention to how ideology, power, and memory interact through the practices of place-naming, the critical framework herein adopted is grounded in the areas of sociolinguistics and discourse analysis.

Names do not just describe places, objects, and people. In the wider field of sociolinguistics, much research has focused on the importance of names and on naming practices with a focus on how names define and represent people, events, and places. As Kathy Charmaz highlights, "names carry weight, whether light or heavy. Names provide ways of knowing – and being. Names construct and reify human bonds and social divisions."[1] In this sense, names have a productive power in that they produce meaning. At the same time, naming is a powerful act per se. For this reason, the power to name has not been granted to everyone indistinctly. There is a co-productive power in naming, that is, having the power to name reinforces the power of those who name and, at the same time, only those who are in power have the right to name. We could, therefore, see names as being deeply embedded in power dynamics. Therefore, names are paramount resources for the implementation of institutional power and dominant ideology.

When naming a person or a place, a representation is also provided that is filtered through the name-producer's point of view. This is because language itself, as Roger Fowler explained, "is not a clear window but a refracting, structuring medium."[2] Since language does not allow a transparent communication, any linguistic item can be loaded with ideological meaning. This perspective cannot but be greatly influenced by the Foucauldian understanding of language as an ideologically loaded site and a tool for the creation of "truths" and the production of reality. Such a perspective exposes the link between everyday language, representations, and public discourse.

The notion of discourse, conceived by Michel Foucault[3] as a system that constructs objects by categorizing them through a set of images and statements and as a form of knowledge, is crucial for understanding the social and political impact of names. Names have a discursive potential in that they produce and shape realities to promote narratives that classify, forge, and alter identities and histories. As "a socially embedded act" that

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[1] Charmaz, "The Power of Names," 396.

[2] Fowler, *Language in the News*, 5.

[3] Foucault, *Surveiller et punir.*

most certainly involves uneven relations of power,[4] naming was used as a means of cultural incorporation that would reinforce ownership over people and places. For instance, when George Vancouver explored Burrard Inlet in northwestern Lower Mainland, British Columbia, in 1792 and called the people whom he found there "Indians," he was placing them into "a category already familiar to Europeans."[5] It was Cristoforo Colombo, in the first place, who misunderstood the land he had sailed to in 1492. Assuming that he had reached the Indies, he called the Indigenous peoples he found at his arrival "Indians." Naming practices were enacted as part of imperialist strategies, so as to include the "newly born" domesticated "Indian" right into powerful colonial narratives. In European explorers' journals, Indigenous peoples were represented as wild, uncivilized, and indolent, which justified a series of normative actions to control them. The category of the "Indian" was invented in order to satisfy and justify European needs of conquest and domination. As Daniel Francis remarks, the image of "the Indian" at this point was purely imaginary, as "through the prism of white hopes, fears and prejudices, indigenous Americans would be seen to have lost contact with reality and to have become 'Indians' that is anything non-Natives wanted them to be."[6] Western ethnography and anthropology with their narratives played a significant role in the consolidation of stereotypes.

In Canada, the name "Indian" stuck around for years and was officially introduced as part of the language of the law with the 1876 Indian Act. The legislation, initially proposed as a way to protect "the Indian," soon enough ended up controlling numerous aspects of Indigenous life, such as Indian status, education, healthcare, band administration, land rights, resource access and management, etc. Most of all, it introduced a series of new names to call and categorize "the Indian." According to Anishinaabe scholar Gerald Vizenor, who investigated colonial naming practices, "Indian" is a nominal simulation transposing what is real, "a colonial coalescence of thousands of distinct native cultures and communities in one misnomer."[7] It took almost 200 years to subvert and get rid of the violence of this name, when terms like Indigenous, Aboriginal, First Nations, Inuit, and Métis were claimed by Indigenous peoples who fought for self-determination and to defeat the hegemonic representations of "the Indian." During the 1960s and 1970s,

[4] Vuolteenaho and Berg, *Critical Toponymies*, 10.

[5] Lutz, *Makùk*, 31.

[6] Francis, *The Imaginary Indian*, 27.

[7] Vizenor, *Literary Chance*, 12.

the American Indian Movement and the National Alliance for Red Power attempted to overwrite the discursive representations of "the Indian" and transform those representations into post-Indian narratives, marking a shift from "the Indian" to Indigenous peoples. Such movements got the attention of young Indigenous peoples in Canada. As an effect of the protests, the linguistic categorization of Indigenous people in Canadian law was challenged. "Indian" was, in fact, gradually replaced by several other names like "Aboriginal," used in the 1982 Constitution Act and introduced as an antonym for registered Indian, Inuit, and Métis; such a change "rhetorically asserts the freedom of indigenous cultures from the historical mistakes of European definition."[8]

In 1981, the term "First Nations" was coined by Sol Sanderson, chief of Saskatchewan Indigenous peoples, and it is now used to identify Indigenous Peoples in Canada who are neither Inuit nor Métis. This was an important step towards self-affirmation as "the adoption of the new self-naming labels entailed the embodiment of a self-conscious resistance to the White invention of the Indians, and to the roles traditionally tailored for them."[9] The adjective "First" is a historical marker designating the presence of Indigenous peoples in the North American continent long before the first Europeans stepped onto it. In this sense, the new, reclaimed names symbolize the counter-discursive resistance to hegemonic representations, the post-Indian agency aiming at going beyond "the Indian" towards new self-affirmed identities and political sovereignty.

Many traditional nation names in ancestral languages were also recovered as part of this decolonizing process, which Edgar Schneider would probably classify as "self-designation,"[10] symbolizing the refusal of forced translations of peoples and nations into English. An example of this decolonizing intent is the 1970s reclaiming of the name "Inuit" by Indigenous peoples of Northern Canada, in place of the negatively connoted "Eskimo" in English or "Esquimau" in French.

Place-Naming and Land Occupation

Another problematic area of inquiry when discussing the power of names is that of place-names. Place-names, in fact, are not just arbitrary linguistic

[8] New, *A History of Canadian Literature*, 5.
[9] Palusci, *English but Not Quite*, 63.
[10] Schneider, *Postcolonial English*, 248.

signs. On the contrary, place-names are socially embedded acts that reveal and shape relationships with the land particular to the people who come to name it.[11] In colonized settings, the practice of naming places was a violent act because place-names imposed a symbolic order that legitimized colonial ideologies. As language is deeply political, place-names are embedded in the social, cultural, and political dynamics of creating worlds and realities and, at the same time, establishing power relations. In fact, place-names seem to have a quintessential discursive quality due to the fact that they reflect and circulate ideologies. Place-names enforced by British and French colonizers in Canada, for example, imposed a symbolic order that legitimized the dominant colonial ideology and went hand in hand with land occupation as a transition was made to a new regime of ownership.[12] Those names still bear witness to British and French cultures and histories. In so doing, a "linguistic settlement"[13] was erected that extended ownership to Indigenous lands and gradually erased Indigenous ancestral languages.

Indigenous place-names were very different from the new place-names given by the colonizers. As narrative devices meant to remember the land, ancestral place-names recall stories of past events and preserve Indigenous traditional knowledge and Indigenous languages. Indigenous toponyms have been used as situating devices for orientation purposes or "conventionalized verbal instruments for locating narrated events at and in the physical settings where the events have occurred."[14] This is the reason why the recognition of Indigenous place-names and their re-introduction into official maps is a complex issue, both political and cultural. Names given to sacred places by Indigenous peoples, for instance, have incorporated places into traditional cultural memories and inscribed Indigenous footprints onto the landscape. Erasing Indigenous traditional names equates to getting rid of Indigenous cultural memories.

On the other hand, non-Indigenous, hegemonic place-naming systems worked as commemoration vehicles of people and events that signed the colonial history of the occupied space. The purpose of these place-names was to "recognize and celebrate the achievements and failures of individuals deemed worthy of being remembered."[15] In this sense, they introduced and

[11] Pongérard, "Nuna: Naming the Inuit Land."

[12] Mongibello, "Place-Names and Self-Determination," 113.

[13] Berg and Kearns, "Naming as Norming," 19.

[14] Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Place*, 47.

[15] Beck, "Euro-Settler Place Naming Practices," 8.

enforced the ruling socio-political order of European colonization, thus also inscribing a particular version of history onto the landscape. That version of history was inevitably officialized and celebrated as it entered the official map of Canada through the nomenclature of places inspired, for instance, by important figures in the history of Catholicism or colonial personalities like Edward Cornwallis and John A. Macdonald: the latter is considered one of the founders of modern Canada, although responsible for drafting the residential school system that caused the deaths of hundreds of Indigenous children; the former was a British military officer who placed a bounty on the heads of the Mi'kmaq people of Nova Scotia.

Street Names, Commemorative Monuments, and National Holidays

An interconnected issue is that of commemorative street names, monuments, and national holidays. If renaming places in the language of the colonizers allowed the occupation of "discovered" lands, commemorating the history of colonialism through street names, monuments, and national holidays validates and perpetuates that narrative.

According to Maoz Azaryahu,[16] commemorative street naming inscribes a particular vision of the past into the streetscape. While some squares and streets may commemorate values and abstractions (the President, the Revolution), many perpetuate the memory of historical figures, thus celebrating them. In this sense, commemorative street names arrest the potentially continuous interpretation of the past by offering a political reading of it that aims to establish this interpretive framing as a dominant and durable one.[17] Commemoration is a key tool of symbolic power in city spaces,[18] where monuments commemorate national struggles, heroes, and experiences. According to Malcolm Miles,[19] public monuments construct collective and other forms of memory. In this sense, commemorative monuments can be seen as "material devices for social control,"[20] as they enforce hegemonical readings of the national past. In other words, commemorative monuments represent an attempt to control how events and historic figures are represented.[21] As instances of

[16] Azaryahu, "The Power of Commemorative Street Names."

[17] Palonen, "Building a New City."

[18] Krzyżanowska, "The Discourse of Counter-Monuments."

[19] Miles, *Art, Space and the City*.

[20] Molyneux, "A Modest Proposal for Portsmouth," 18.

[21] Merewether, "The Rise and Fall of Monuments."

material commemoration in urban spaces, the power of commemorative monuments is such that it can produce memorable events and turn personalities of the past and present into heroes.

In general, remembering significant events and people that are relevant to the national identity instills a sense of collective belonging, even though the events and the people celebrated are controversial. National holidays serve this function. Usually, national holidays refer to historical persons functioning as national heroes[22] or recall historical events that represent the foundation of the nation. In this sense, they not only reflect but also construct national cohesion around certain narratives of the past and for this reason they may be contested as well. National holidays are deeply connected with the construction of a collective memory that is, the selection and arrangement of certain historical elements such that they fit within a pre-set narrative. Holidays that celebrate personalities and events influence the way people make sense of the past in that they contribute to the construction of a collective memory about that past that is consistent with, and the result of, an ideological agenda. Colonialism, for instance, is celebrated through a number of national holidays that reinforce the colonial idea that the history of a country started with its colonial occupation, thus erasing whatever came before.

Overall, in post-colonial settings, street names, place-names, and geographical names, together with commemorative monuments and national holidays, legitimate a particular version of history that is discursively produced for the purpose of circulating a celebratory ideology of the colonial past. Therefore, a perspective that is embraced in this article is one that foregrounds the intersection of naming and power, as well as re-naming and resistance to power.

The Celebration of Italian Explorers

Italian explorers are still celebrated through place-names, geographical names, street names, and statues in Canada and North America in general. Giovanni Caboto (then anglicized as John Cabot), for instance, stands among the most celebrated colonizers, navigators, and explorers that contributed to the occupation of Canada. Caboto was a Venetian navigator, commissioned by Henry VII of England, who supposedly landed in Newfoundland in 1497 (although the place where the explorer actually made landfall remains under

[22] Saric, Gammelgaard, and Kjetil, *Transforming National Holidays*.

debate). After thinking he had reached Asia, he soon realized he had "discovered a new world." The notion of discovery, however, embeds the colonial project of land occupation. A discovered land equated to a free-to-be-taken land. Discovery is therefore a colonial invention that backed up the myth of the virgin land or *terra nullius*. Far from being the first "discoverer" of Canada, Caboto was possibly (and apparently) the first European to land there. Nevertheless, his "discovery" played a dramatic role in generating conflicts between European colonizers and the Indigenous peoples living there. Although there are no official records attesting to the encounter between Caboto, the Beothuk, and the Mi'kmaq (the Indigenous peoples living at the time in Newfoundland), his landing was used by the English to claim ownership of North America. Caboto's assumptions were not different from those of the Spanish colonizers occupying the southern part of the continent. Based on the king's instructions to "conquer, occupy and possess whatsoever towns, castles, cities and islands by them thus discovered […] acquiring for us the dominion, title and jurisdiction of the same,"[23] he had to seize the lands and populations so as to prevent other Europeans from doing the same.

The Canadian Geographical Names Database, a freely available online tool offered by the Government of Canada, encompasses geographical names data provided by the federal, provincial, and territorial naming authorities of the Geographical Names Board of Canada. A search through the database revealed that the name "Cabot" occurs in thirty-four geographical names, mostly including straits (e.g., Cabot Strait in Victoria, Nova Scotia), heads (e.g. Cabot Head in Bruce, Ontario), parks (e.g., Cabot Provincial Park in Prince Edward Island), islands (e.g., Cabot Islands in Newfoundland and Labrador) and lakes (e.g., Cabot Lake in Sudbury, Ontario). A content disclaimer advises the users that "the Canadian Geographical Names Database contains historical terminology that is considered racist, offensive and derogatory. Geographical naming authorities are in the process of addressing many offensive place names, but the work is still ongoing."[24] However, renaming places that still bear the traces of colonization in their names is not an easy task: the restoration of Indigenous place-names erased by colonialist names is a work in progress. On 21 June 2017, on Canada's National Aboriginal Day, Google added 3,000 Indigenous land-names to Google Maps and Google

[23] "Letter Patent Granted to John Cabot by Henry VII."

[24] See the Canadian Geographical Names Database at https://toponymes.rncan.gc.ca/search-place-names/search.

Earth platforms. This addition was the result of a seven-year collaborative project between Indigenous communities in Canada, mapping experts, and Google Canada. Yet, acknowledging that explorers of Italian descent like Giovanni Caboto and Cristoforo Colombo have controversial direct and indirect implications in the genocide of Indigenous peoples and the occupation of their sacred lands seems a still-to-be-commenced project. Surprisingly, there seems to be an opposite trend aiming at re-instating and reinforcing the memory of the Italian contributions to the establishment of European colonies in North America.

The origins of this trend may lie in the Multiculturalism Act enshrined in law in 1988 by Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau. The policy rejected the idea of the British and French being the two founding souls of Canada. Instead, it embraced cultural pluralism, thus encouraging ethnic groups to preserve and develop their own cultures, which could be through place-names. For instance, in the 1980s, the City Council of Toronto decided that the names in important locations and urban regions should reflect the recent (and evolving) multiethnic situation in the city.[25] Interestingly enough, in a document signed by the Geographical Names Board of Canada, "Principles and Procedures for Geographical Naming," Canadian geographical names and toponyms are said to "describe our landscape, highlight our multicultural and multilingual heritage, record the history that shapes our value."[26]

As Italian immigrants to Canada went from 1950s/1960s labour migrants working in manufacturing, construction, and resource extraction[27] to a financially stable community reaching remarkable economic success by the 1990s, access to political power within national, provincial, and local institutions was also gained. This translated into the possibility of naming city areas, streets, buildings, and places in general after Italian heritage symbols so as to "reassert a belonging to a collectivity overseas through materializing [the] lived realities of Italians in Canada."[28] In the 1970s and 1980s, the Italian Canadian Benevolent Corporation (ICBC) raised millions of dollars and received financial support from the Ontario provincial government to build Villa Colombo (in 1975) and the Columbus Centre (in 1980).[29] In a similar fashion, Giovanni Caboto Park, in the McCauley neighbourhood of Edmonton, Alberta, had its

[25] Eriksen, "Place Names in Multicultural Societies."

[26] Geographical Names Board of Canada, "Principles and Procedures."

[27] Harney, "Building Italian Regional Identity."

[28] Harney, "Building Italian Regional Identity," 52.

[29] Harney, "Building Italian Regional Identity."

name changed in 1981 in response to a request coming from the local Italian community, represented by the Viva Italia Association, to choose a name that best represented its neighbourhood and culture. The park, originally called Patricia Square Park, was changed into Giovanni Caboto Park, whose name symbolizes "the contribution of all immigrants to Canada."[30] A few years later, in Nova Scotia, a petition launched in 2011 requested another name change, from Cabot Trail to Caboto Trail (referring to the 298-kilometre-long trail on Cape Breton Island) to better reflect the Italian contribution to the making of Canada.[31] In both cases, the requests for renaming places so that the new names may reflect the contribution of Caboto to the formation of Canada came from the local Italian-Canadian communities through cultural associations; both suggest that Giovanni Caboto is still perceived as a symbol by Italian Canadians, celebrated through place-names and statues across Canada, despite his associations with colonialism. Interestingly enough, according to the information reported on the official website of the Cabot Trail, "the name also celebrates the meeting of Cabot and the Mi'kmaq people, the original inhabitants of Cape Breton Island, at Aspy Bay over 500 years ago."[32] However, no official references are provided in this regard, as no official acknowledgment of Caboto's responsibility in what could be seen as the beginning of the British and French assault on the land and Indigenous peoples of North America is included. Regardless, the description of the trail and its history may be seen as an attempt to reshape the figure of Caboto by foregrounding an imaginary encounter with the Mi'kmaq, although no record confirms that it actually happened.

Caboto is therefore celebrated by Italian-Canadian communities as a symbol of the Italian presence in Canada and the Italian contribution to the making of the country. However, Italian Canadians are not the only ones perpetuating his fame. Caboto is often still thought of as the discoverer of Canada. Even if nowadays Indigenous presence and land sovereignty is constantly being recognized and publicly acknowledged, across Canada there are still statues reminding us of the role of Caboto as a symbol of national and cultural unity. It is not a coincidence that a statue of Caboto staring out to sea was erected at the foot of the steps of the Confederation Building in St. John's,

[30] The statement is by Teresa Spinelli, president of the Italian Center Shops in Edmonton. See Brownoff, "#Landmarks."

[31] Boesveld, "Q&A."

[32] "A Rich History."

Newfoundland, the home of Newfoundland and Labrador's legislation, hosting the House of Assembly. Another statue of the Italian explorer dominates Cabot Square, one of downtown Montreal's emblematic public spaces. This is a symbolically dense location and a dramatically curious coincidence as the area has recently become an informal gathering space for homeless people of Indigenous descent, dwelling there under Caboto's eyes. So much so that, in 2014, the Cabot Square Program was developed by the Native Women's Shelter and the YMCA to counteract the displacement of Indigenous people in the downtown area of Montreal.[33] The statue, unveiled in 1931, was commissioned to Italian artist Guido Casini, who immigrated to Montreal in 1924, as a symbol of the Italian diaspora, wanting to solidify the relations between Italy and Canada. Unfortunately, the solidification of such relations ended up drawing from colonial history.[34]

Caboto is not the only Italian navigator that Canada remembers. Another recurrent name is that of Cristoforo Colombo (Christopher Columbus), the Italian explorer from Genoa who sailed for the Spanish crown in search of a new water route to India but landed in the Bahamas in 1492. Colombo has become a legend associated with the "discovery of the new world." In one of the first recounts of American history, *The History of America* by William Robertson, Colombo is celebrated for his enthusiasm and adventurous spirit in the "discovery of the new world." The book was published in 1777, in the wake of the American Revolution, when colonists were looking for a national hero whom they apparently found in the legendary figure of Cristoforo Colombo. Once incorporated in the historical narrative of America, his name came to be inextricably linked to the colonial enterprise. As an American icon, his name often occurs in the rhetoric of nationalists, pro-colonialists, Eurocentrists, and white supremacists. At the same time, Colombo can be seen as the quintessential symbol of colonialism in North America. Among all the atrocities committed by European explorers, he enacted policies of forced labour based on which the Indigenous people were put to work for the sake of profits.[35] His arrival in the Americas marked the beginning of colonialism, genocide, rape, slavery, expropriation, and displacement. In this sense, Colombo stands at the beginning of a deadly era.[36] The devastating

[33] "Cabot Square Program."

[34] "Monument à Giovanni Caboto."

[35] Paul, "Christopher Columbus and the Myth of 'Discovery.'"

[36] Paul, "Christopher Columbus and the Myth of 'Discovery,'" 79.

impact of his "discovery" on Indigenous peoples throughout the Americas has led many to decry Colombo as "a terrorist."[37]

Regardless of this narrative, the name of Colombo is still remembered through place-names and geographical names. Again, the results retrieved from the Canadian Geographical Names Database showed that "Columbus" occurs in seven geographical names in Canada. For instance, in the Yukon there is a glacier named after Colombo, while in Cochrane, Ontario, there is a river. Still in Ontario, two lakes, a point, a compact rural community, and a hill are named after the Italian explorer. While twenty towns and cities in the United States feature "Columbus" in their names, there are seventeen streets named after him in Quebec alone, although Colombo had never set foot on Canadian soil. However, British Columbia seems to present a connection with Colombo as, experts say, its name derives from the Columbia River, allegedly named after Colombo himself.

Colombo, as Caboto, is a problematic and controversial figure. Celebrated and taught in school as the explorer who "discovered" America, despite the fact that Indigenous peoples had lived on what was later called United States for more than 15,000 years before his arrival, Colombo is looked up to by some Italian communities overseas. His myth, for example, was instrumental to Italian immigrants to North America fitting into the American society that saw them as outcasts.[38] Since 1920, a Colombo Club has existed in Oakland, California, as one of the largest social clubs in America founded by Italian pioneers for the purpose of providing a social center for themselves, their families, and their guests. The myth of Colombo as a symbolic figure also stretches beyond the communities of Italians abroad. The Order of the Knights of Columbus, for instance, is the world's largest Catholic fraternal service organization. Founded in the United States in 1882 by Michael J. McGivney, a twenty-nine-year-old assistant pastor of St. Mary's Church in New Haven, Connecticut, he proposed establishing a lay organization to unite Catholic men. As explained on their website, in order "to demonstrate their loyalty to their country as well as their faith, these men took Christopher Columbus – recognized as a Catholic and celebrated as the discoverer of America – as their patron."[39] The order is widely diffused, as it comprises more than 16,000 local Knights of Columbus councils around the world.

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[37] Sim, "Columbus Day: Protesters Call Christopher Columbus a 'Terrorist.'"
[38] Koning, "The Legacy of Columbus."
[39] See "Knights of Columbus Founded."

In Canada, there are five statues celebrating the historical relevance of Cristoforo Colombo, the oldest being at the Italian Gardens in Hastings Park, Vancouver. The statue, called *Colombo Giovinetto*, or *The Dreamer*, created by Italian sculptor Giulio Monteverde, depicts Colombo as a child, sitting atop of a boat tie on a dock, gazing out to sea. It was donated to the City of Vancouver by Colombo's birthplace, Genoa, for Expo 86. The statue was never displayed at the exhibition. Initially located at the entrance to the SkyTrain station, it was then chosen to be the centrepiece of the never-accomplished Piazza Italia by the local Confratellanza, a group promoting Italian heritage. However, it never got there either. Its final location was identified as the Italian Gardens at Hastings Park.[40] Inaugurated in September 2000, the gardens in Hastings Park were created by the Vancouver Parks Board and the Italian immigrant community together to honour the contributions Italian Canadians have made to Canadian culture. The presence of the statue in the gardens is greatly symbolic as it reinforces the link between Colombo and the local Italian-Canadian community. Overall, Colombo is still recognized, perceived, and celebrated as a symbol of the Italian presence abroad.

Italian explorers are not only celebrated through place-names and statues but also through national and provincial holidays. Holidays, as mentioned earlier, do not simply celebrate but also discursively create a shared collective memory of the past. Public memory and national identity on the one hand, and holidays on the other, are deeply intertwined, since holidays are important pointers of public memory and discursive tools for sedimenting particular meanings and ideologies. For example, they can be a manifestation of applied nationalism. In Newfoundland, for instance, the closest Monday to 24 June used to be celebrated as "Discovery Day," also known as "Cabot Day," coinciding with the date Caboto "discovered" the province in 1497. The 500th anniversary of the discovery of Newfoundland and Labrador was also widely celebrated in 1997, when Queen Elizabeth II herself travelled to Canada to participate in "Cabot 500." In 2020, the provincial government of Newfoundland finally decided to dismiss the traditional holiday name, replacing it with "June Day," after numerous protests by the local First Nations communities.

To be fair, Canada's calendar has a long history of holidays celebrating the colonial past of the country. Many of Canada's current statutory holidays,

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[40] The statue has been temporarily removed from its location after the Italian Cultural Centre received an anonymous message from somebody who threatened to behead it. See Mackie, "Columbus Statue at Hastings Park Given Refuge."

in fact, are problematic for Indigenous peoples. Think of Empire Day (so named ca. 1899–1957 and then renamed Commonwealth Day, Citizenship Day) and Victoria Day (established in 1845). These holidays were, as the premier of Ontario, George Drew, famously said, "to remember with gratitude and with hope all that the British Empire stands for in the world today." Some holidays can also complicate the relationships between different communities, e.g., Italian Canadians and the Indigenous peoples across Canada. The celebration of Discovery Day and Giovanni Caboto potentially complicates the relationship between Italian Canadians and the Indigenous communities in Newfoundland and Labrador, as it promotes a narrative of the province that relies on colonialism and aligns with some Italian-Canadian communities for whom historical figures like Caboto still have a special resonance. Another relevant case is that of Canada's 150th birthday celebrations in 2017. The occasion was presented to the public as a celebration of Canada's values, achievements, and independence, of everything Canadian, overall providing a positive representation of Canada. However, for Indigenous leaders it was "a celebration of colonialism." The celebration was harshly contested within and outside the Indigenous communities of Canada, as well as on social media platforms like Twitter where hashtags like #Resist150 and #Unsettle150 gained momentum.

An infamous case is that of Columbus Day in the United States, established in 1892 by President Benjamin Harrison as a national holiday to mark the 400th anniversary of the "discovery." Recently, the White House, following increasing protests, has renamed the holiday "Indigenous Peoples' Day," in recognition of the pain and harm caused by Colombo and other explorers to the Indigenous peoples of the Americas. However, Italian communities have not always accepted the revision of colonial pasts. To many Italian Americans, for instance, Columbus Day was a day of celebration of Colombo's accomplishments as an explorer who successfully completed his voyages across the Atlantic Ocean, as well as their Italian history and culture. The website of the Italian Sons and Daughters of America, an organization founded in 1930 by a small community of Italian immigrants in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, reports on a campaigned launched in October 2022 by Judge Russo, president of the Conference of Presidents of Major Italian American Organizations. Judge Russo urged all Italian Americans to contact the White House by email, text, and phone demanding that the 2022 proclamation be about Colombo only.[41]

[41] Chiaviello, "Victory Lap."

Concluding Remarks

This article has shown how both names and commemorative practices in general can be problematic when they evoke colonialism and perpetuate the myth of the colonial past. They can have an impact on people's attitudes and behaviours in that they promote visions of the nation and national identity that reflect specific ideological standpoints. Place-names, holidays, and statues that celebrate Italian explorers may harm the relationship between Italian Canadians and Indigenous peoples.

In the last few years, people have begun to look more critically at names and commemoration practices in general. Across the world, statues, place-names, street names, and holidays commemorating colonial characters and celebrating colonialism have been removed, the statues often violently beheaded and the colonial narratives subverted. Problematic names are being gradually erased from schools, parks, and holidays as well. In Canada, a number of monuments and memorials connected to systemic racism were removed between 2020 and 2022, as a result of the protests following the killing of George Floyd and the Black Lives Matter Movement. These include sculptures of John A. Macdonald, Egerton Ryerson, Queen Victoria, and James Cook.

A project run by artists and activists Hayden King and Susan Blight called Ogimaa Mikana back in 2013 camouflaged street signs in Toronto in official blue and white, with stickers showing Indigenous translations of Toronto street names. The Anishinaabe name Ishpadinaa, for instance, covered the official street name Spadina Avenue. The project meant to remind the city that it stands on Indigenous land, and that it still has a vibrant Indigenous community. In 2016, the City of Toronto decided to officially restore traditional place-names through a makeover of its street signs.[42] Recently, Coast Salish/Okanagan artist Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun in his exhibition *Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun: Unceded Territories* suggested that British Columbia should be renamed, as most of the province is unceded.[43] Among his suggestions were Northwest Coast Territory or Traditional Native Territories. The struggle of the Wet'suwet'en people in BC renewed discussions over who has the right to name and claim the land known as British Columbia. Kwantlen

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[42] "New Street Signs."

[43] Yuxweluptun's works could be seen at the Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia in October 2016. Some pictures can still be seen online at https://moa.ubc.ca/exhibition/lawrence-paul/.

and Nooksack writer Robert Jago[44] suggested a better name would be "S'ólh Téméxw," which means "our land" in Halkomelem, the language spoken by the Kwantlen people, who attended the ceremony at Fort Langley when British Columbia was declared a colony in 1858 by Governor James Douglas.[45]

In 2018, the president of the National Association of Friendship Centres in St. John's, Newfoundland, requested that a statue of Shanawdithit, the last descendent of the Beothuk nation who died of tuberculosis in 1829, replace that of Caboto at the entrance to the Confederation Building. The Beothuk vanished beneath the colonization of their land, when the British settled on the northeast coast of Newfoundland as a direct result of Caboto's first arrival.[46] Unknown diseases brought by the Europeans decimated them and other Indigenous populations through a number of epidemics, including tuberculosis.

As of 2022, Caboto is still overlooking Signal Hill and the Narrows in St. John's, as Colombo's traces are still visible in plain sight, both in street names and commemorative monuments. Questions arise about the reasons why such powerful symbols of colonialism, bearing witness to the Italian contribution to the colonial enterprise, are still in place. Are Italian Canadians still sticking to what these "heroes of the new world" represent? Should Italian Canadians be associated with colonialism? How can Indigenous peoples connect with the Italian-Canadian communities if Caboto and Colombo are still looked up to? A change in perspective starting from name-changing and the removal of monuments is surely not simple to achieve, but it is the inevitable step in an ongoing struggle to rework power asymmetries, contest assimilationist policies, and also reshape the connections between Italian Canadians and Indigenous Nations. It is important, though, to unveil the link between nations, ideologies, and names on the one hand, and work on the reconstruction of interpersonal relationships on the other.

To conclude, the act of rewriting offers potential for a wider change in this sense. Names can be contested, argued, claimed, and fought over. Renaming holidays and places and taking down the statues that praise Canada's colonial past through figures like Caboto and Colombo may be a new starting point for reworking and reshaping the relationship between Indigenous peoples and Italian Canadians. While changing names does not mean that

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[44] Jago, "Renaming Places."

[45] Barman, *The West Beyond the West.*

[46] Cadigan, "The Moral Economy of the Commons."

reconciliation has been achieved, new names as well as new symbols may be helpful in producing new narratives of the nation and new attitudes. They may also encourage the creation of new solidarities between cultural groups whose co-existence cannot but rely on reconciliation, mutual recognition, and respect.

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