

## Challenging Canada's politics of commemoration through sites of (contested transnational) memory

In this article, I examine public art donation policies and strategies in Toronto, Vancouver, Montréal, and Ottawa<sup>1</sup> that seek to provide what these cities consider to be a suitable response to the ever-greater number of demands for commemoration stemming from citizen

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groups. Some of these demands propose to evince contested or controversial pasts, associated with particular ethno-cultural communities, through traditional *lieux de mémoire* (sites of memory), such as monuments and memorials. However, the representation of ethno-cultural groups' pasts (and presents) that fall outside Canada's imagined and physical national boundaries are perceived by some as a threat to the country's social cohesion and national unity. Commemoration of people and events that seems as though it might lead to controversy is considered especially challenging.

The perception that memorializing ethno-cultural groups' extra-national narratives might threaten Canadian identity and unity depends on a particular conception of Canada as a multicultural nation that tries to be inclusive but is also necessarily limiting. I argue from the point of ethnography and memory studies that current and proposed public art donation policies and practices informed by this fear circumscribe the ways in which identities and experiences are memoria-

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<sup>1</sup> I chose to conduct my research in these Canadian cities based mostly upon historical and demographic reasons. Other than being Canada's largest urban centres, Toronto, Vancouver, and Montréal are home to more than 60% of this country's immigrant population and also receive about the same percentage of all newcomers (see Statistics Canada, 2011, "Immigration and Ethno-Cultural Diversity in Canada." Catalogue no. 99-010-X2011001, available for consultation at this address : <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/>). Secondly, ethno-cultural communities have erected monuments and memorials in these three cities since the early twentieth century on a relatively regular basis. The inclusion of Montréal in this research's geographical frame entails a further reason. Although it is not this article's purpose to conduct a comparative study between Canada's and Quebec's integration and ethno-cultural diversity management models, that is between multiculturalism and interculturalism, I believe, and later on attempt to demonstrate that the latter might have impacted the work of Montréal's Bureau d'art public (BAP). Finally, the decision to bring into the discussion a case study from Ottawa lies in the particularities and conditions attached to the politics of commemoration in the national capital.

lized in this country. I expose through studying specific controversies surrounding actual and proposed “ethno-cultural monuments”<sup>2</sup> how the limits of Canadian multicultural nationalism appear clearly within this country’s official—and constantly shifting—politics of commemoration, which are further challenged by Quebec’s particular case as “a nation within a nation”. In order to support this line of argument, I offer insight into the ways in which *lieux de mémoire*, as defined by French historian Pierre NORA, continue, in spite of current transnational flows of populations and memories, to be deeply entwined with a monolithic and homogenized nineteenth-century ideal of national remembrance and identity—even in countries, such as Canada, that claim to find unity in diversity.

Although this article’s main aim is not to delve into the nature of the multicultural nationalism practised in Canada, it is nonetheless necessary to examine the dominant narrative of inclusion it promotes in order to understand the persistence of the national aura attached to *lieux de mémoire* in this country.

## Multicultural Nationalism and the Myth of National Unity in Canada

Finding unity in diversity seems to be the cornerstone of Canadian multiculturalism, but the desire for unity means that the incorporation of diversity must also be limited. That is to say that “the inclusion of difference must not challenge the unity, authority, or legitimacy of the nation, or the national state”<sup>3</sup>. The reality is that multiculturalism as an ideology, policy, and feature of society can be perceived as a threat to national unity<sup>4</sup>, which is based on and achieved through a shared (national) heritage and liberal civic values. Thus, what is considered

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2 I first coined the term in my Ph.D. dissertation as part of the study I conducted on controversies surrounding monuments dedicated to the Armenian genocide in France (ALVAREZ HERNANDEZ Analays, “La représentation du génocide arménien dans l’espace public français : le monument comme dispositif ethnoculturel d’appropriation et de légitimation”, Ph.D. dissertation, Montréal, Université du Québec à Montréal, 2015, 459 p.). The term serves to describe publicly placed works of art, with a deliberate commemorative value, erected by diasporic groups and occasionally supported by distinct levels of government. For a more complete definition of ethno-cultural monuments and their particularities in the Canadian context, see ALVAREZ HERNANDEZ Analays, “The Other (’s) Toronto Public Art : The Challenge of Displaying Canadians’ Narratives in a Multicultural/Diasporic City”, *RACAR : Revue d’art canadienne/Canadian Art Review*, vol. 44, n°2, 2019, pp. 42-53.

3 GORDON-WALKER Caitlin, *Exhibiting Nation : Multicultural Nationalism (and Its Limits) in Canada’s Museums*, Vancouver, UBC Press, 2016, p. 8.

4 See RYAN Phil, *Multicultiphobia*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2010, 279 p. ; BEAMAN Lori G., *Reasonable Accommodation : Managing Religious Diversity*, Vancouver, UBC Press, 2012, 248 p.

appropriate for inclusion is subject to constant renegotiation within the Canadian nation-state framework, and the heritages, memories, and values of minorities are accepted and integrated into the national narrative only as long as they do not create or promote disunity.

Canadian multicultural nationalism, which celebrates diversity, is frequently seen as distinct from more ethnic or cultural nationalisms. More tolerant and inclusive, it is understood as a specific kind of civic nationalism<sup>5</sup>. Canadian museum scholar Caitlin GORDON-WALKER explains that,

as a form of nationalism, multicultural nationalism implies the existence of three basic, underlying tenets: first, that the multicultural state can achieve unity in its diversity; second, that it can ensure equal and adequate recognition of every individual and every culture within it; and third, that the national idea provides an adequate model for understanding cultural difference on a national and global scale<sup>6</sup>.

Tolerance and inclusiveness have become in fact foundational myths in the construction of Canada<sup>7</sup>. Two critical questions are immediately prompted by this condition: Who (what group or entity) is entitled to practise tolerance or promote inclusiveness? Who decides which heritages and values are to be included or excluded from a shared national memory? These interrogations seem to lie at the core of Canada's national enterprise, since "multicultural nationalism is a site of polarization, driven by mutually exclusive understandings of which units of identity—which group(s), nation(s), or people(s)—should predominate in the collective understanding of the Canadian political community"<sup>8</sup>.

As posited by Eva MACKAY, "from early colonial times up to the Second World War, white Anglophone settlers in Canada mobilized representations of others and managed non-British cultural groups as part of the project to create a nation and a national identity"<sup>9</sup>. The adoption of a policy of multiculturalism in 1971, later consolidated in the Canadian Multiculturalism Act (1988), "was a response by the elites of Canada to a dangerous and ambiguous situation with regard to the cultural politics of difference in post-war Canada"<sup>10</sup>. Here MACKAY

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5 GORDON-WALKER Caitlin, *Exhibiting Nation*, op. cit.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 7.

7 MACKAY Eva, *House of Difference: Cultural Politics and National Identity in Canada*, London/New York, Routledge, 2005 [1999], 216 p.

8 KERNERMAN Gerard, *Multicultural Nationalism: Civilizing Difference, Constituting Community*, Vancouver, UBCUBC Press, 2005, p. 6.

9 MACKAY Eva, *House of Difference*, op. cit., p. 36.

10 *Ibid.*, p. 63.

refers “to the emergence of Quebec separatism and also the increased polarization of cultural minorities”<sup>11</sup>. With the adoption of multiculturalism, Quebec Francophones’ aspirations for Canada to be a two-nation state—or a bi-cultural nation—were undermined<sup>12</sup>. In response to this policy treating French Canadians as one minority among others in the Canadian mosaic, *interculturalism*, although not an official policy, became a central political orientation in Quebec. Quebec’s model of interculturalism<sup>13</sup> shares nonetheless with multiculturalism the concern of forging national unity from diversity, although through different paradigms. Thus, in spite of their differences, traditional nation-building efforts seem to lie at the core of both models.

In the end, the *Canadian conception of nationhood*, although celebrated as a success across the world, is not that different from earlier nationalisms<sup>14</sup>. In this sense, Canadian sites of memory and, for that matter, Quebec ones, are expected to fill the same function and play the same role as they did (and still do) within more traditional national states.

## **From *Lieux de Mémoire* to Sites of Transnational Memory in Canada — Whose Memories, Whose Lieux?**

NORA’s multivolume *Les Lieux de Mémoire* constitutes an outstanding contribution to the study of collective memory<sup>15</sup>. It is not surprising that his remembrance model has transcended France’s geographical borders to inspire scholars to reflect upon national memories in Germany, Italy, the United States, Canada, and Quebec, to name but a few<sup>16</sup>. In spite of its significance in the field of memory studies, *Les*

11 *Op. cit.*

12 BOUCHARD Gérard, “What is Interculturalism?”, *McGill Law Journal*, 2011, vol. 56, n° 2, pp. 435-470.

13 Two defining traits of Quebec’s intercultural political approach are the institution of the French language as a common good and the inclusion of a “duality paradigm” “where diversity is conceived and managed as a relationship between [immigrant] minorities [...] and a cultural majority that could be described as foundational”. in BOUCHARD Gérard, “What is Interculturalism”, *op. cit.*, p. 442.

14 *Ibid.*

15 NORA’s work draws on the notion of collective memory as outlined by French philosopher Maurice HALBWACHS, that is as a social construct. See HALBWACHS Maurice, *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1950 [1925], 296 p.

16 See FRANÇOIS Etienne and SCHULZE Hagen (eds), *Deutsche Erinnerungsorte*, 3 v., Beck, München, 2001; KOSHAR Rudy, *From Monuments to Traces. Artifacts of German Memory, 1870-1990*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2000, 368 p. ; ISNENGI Mario (ed.), *I luoghi della memoria: Simboli e miti dell’Italia unita*, Bari (Italy), Laterza, 1996, 637 p. ; WINTER Jay, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998, 321 p. ; BERGÈRE Marc et al. (eds), *Mémoires canadiennes*, Rennes, Presses de l’Université de Rennes, 2018, 270 p. ; NEATBY Nicole and HODGINS Peter (eds), *Settling and Unsettling Memories: Essays in Canadian Public History*, Toronto, University of Toronto

*Lieux de Mémoire* has also been widely slated<sup>17</sup>. In this article, I draw on the strand of criticism focused on the nationalist character that pervades this publication. NORA's catalog of French sites of memory has been understood as a tool to reconstruct French national memory<sup>18</sup>. This illustrates the persistent bonds between memory and (national) identity described by Michael ROTHBERG, whether the first is individual or collective<sup>19</sup>. Along the same line of thought, socio-cultural anthropologist Chiara DE CESARI explains how memory and heritage, which are considered to be crucial for identity formation, have been traditionally approached within a framework of methodological nationalism<sup>20</sup>.

*Lieux de mémoire*, as defined by NORA, convey a kind of nostalgia<sup>21</sup>: a sentiment that something has been lost— and thus has to be found. He writes in the introduction to the first volume, *La République*, that "There are *lieux de mémoire* [...] because there are no longer *milieux de mémoire*, real environments of memory."<sup>22</sup> This nostalgia for a unified France compels the reader to understand NORA's methodological frame as a response to a global phenomenon: that is the increase in human flows after the end of the First World War and the consequent pluralization of populations co-existing within the same geographical borders. This ongoing phenomenon, as perceived by many scholars,

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Press, 2012, 652 p.; OPP James and WALSH John C. (eds), *Placing Memory and Remembering Place in Canada*, Vancouver, UBC Press, 2010, 340 p. and CARINI Marie and BOULANGER Chantal (eds), *Des lieux de mémoire : identité et culture modernes au Québec, 1930-1960*, Ottawa, University of Ottawa Press, 1995, 239 p.

17 See LEGG Stephen, "Contesting and Surviving Memory: Space, Notion, and Nostalgia in *Les Lieux de Mémoire*", *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 2005, vol. 23, pp. 481-504; ROTHBERG Michel, "Between Memory and Memory: From *Lieux de mémoire* to *Noeuds de mémoire*", *French Yales Studies - Special Issue - Noeuds de mémoire: Multidirectional Memory in Postwar French and Francophone Culture*, ROTHBERG Michael, SANYAL Debarati, and SILVERMAN Maxim (eds), 2010, n° 118/119, pp. 3-12; HO TAI Hue-Tam, "Remembered Realms: Pierre NORA and French National Memory", *The American Historical Review*, 2001, vol. 106, n° 3, pp. 906-922 and ANDERSON Perry, *The New Old World*, New York, Verso Books, 2009, 592 p.

18 HO TAI Hue-Tam, "Remembered Realms", *op. cit.*; JUDT Tony, "À la recherche du temps perdu", *New York Review of Books*, December 1998, pp. 51-58; ERLI Astrid, "Regional Integration and (Trans)Cultural Memory", *Asia Europe Journal*, 2010, vol. 8, n° 3, pp. 305-315, and ERLI Astrid, "Travelling Memory", *Parallax*, 2011, vol. 17, n° 4, pp. 4-18.

19 ROTHBERG Michael, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization*, Stanford, CA, Stanford University Press, 2009, 379 p.

20 DE CESARI Chiara, "Memory voids and the New European Heritage: A proposal for Studying Transnational Memory", *Journal of Museum Ethnography*, 2012, n° 25, pp. 152-162.

21 TERDIMAN Richard, *Present Past: Modernity and the Memory Crisis*, Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 1993, 389 p.; BOYM Svetlana, *The Future of Nostalgia*, New York, Basic Books, 2001, 404 p. and HUYSSSEN Andreas, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory*, Stanford, CA, Stanford University Press, 2003, 177 p.; LEGG Stephen, "Contesting and Surviving Memory", *op. cit.*

22 This introduction was translated into English in 1989. See NORA Pierre, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire", *Representations - Special Issue - Memory and Counter-Memory*, n° 26, Spring 1989, p. 7.

threatens the nation-state political form and hastens its dissolution<sup>23</sup>. In the aftermath of the Cold War, there was a revival of nationalist movements across the world<sup>24</sup> as a response to the perceived dangers of globalization<sup>25</sup>. Therefore, as Stephen LEGG puts it, “in an age of European Union integration, US global hegemony, and threatened French linguistic influence, NORA appears to mourn an age of national cohesion and power”<sup>26</sup>.

If the notion of *lieux de mémoire* formulated by NORA, and since adopted by many other scholars, is deeply rooted in the traditional, nineteenth-century definition of the nation-state, how can it be possible to even think of its application in societies that seem to have organized themselves through the conjunction of a diversity of national groups? In settler contexts such as Canada, Australia, and the United States, how does this intrinsically nation-centered notion operate and to what extent is it useful?

I argue that using the idea of *lieux de mémoire* to reflect on the role played by monuments in Canada allows us to see the tension between the “national” and the “transnational”. Since the early twentieth century, ethno-cultural monuments publicly channel the memories of various groups and individuals that are not associated with Canada’s dominant immigrant groups from the so-called founding nations of Britain and France. However, the policies discussed below dictate that these monuments are also (or solely) expected to highlight ethno-cultural communities’ contributions to Canada, shared experiences and values, and this country’s role as a place of tolerance and inclusion. These recent policies aim in this way to minimize the potential for monuments to instigate conflict and thus threaten national unity. Still, the ever-growing interest of ethno-cultural groups to commemorate their non-Canadian and sometimes contested experiences in Canada demonstrates the point made by German scholar and champion of memory studies Aleida ASSMANN. She argues that today it is impossible to understand memory only in relation to the (old-fashioned ideal of) a nation-state and to ignore the global frame<sup>27</sup>. Thus, the plethora of (trans)national memories—a term that serves to describe or rather approach “mnemonic processes unfolding across

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23 FRANK HOLLIFIELD James, *L’immigration et l’État-nation à la recherche d’un modèle national*, Paris, L’Harmattan, 1997, 107 p. ; APPADURAI Arjun, *Après le colonialisme. Les conséquences culturelles de la globalisation*, Paris, Payot, 2005, 333 p.

24 FRANK HOLLIFIELD James, *L’immigration et l’État-nation*, op. cit.

25 WINTER Jay, “The Generation of Memory : Reflections on the ‘Memory Boom’ in Contemporary Historical Studies”, *Canadian Military History*, vol. 10, n° 3, Summer 2001, pp. 57-66.

26 LEGG Stephen, “Contesting and Surviving Memory”, op. cit., p. 490.

27 ASSMANN Aleida, “Transnational Memories”, *European Review*, 2014, vol. 22, n° 4, pp. 546-556.

and beyond cultures”<sup>28</sup> that dwell or aspire to dwell<sup>29</sup> in ethno-cultural monuments challenges and also expands the idea of what might become a Canadian national memory in a context of an increasing real, virtual, and imagined global connectedness.

## Canadian Sites of Transnational Memory as Potential Instigators of Conflict

In order to examine the importance and possible repercussions of ethno-cultural communities’ growing and relatively high interest in this country’s politics of commemoration, I look at monuments and memorials that celebrate national myths other than those constitutive of the Canadian national state, specifically ones that seek to commemorate instances of violence and genocide experience outside Canada. The paradox is that, in opposition to the usual historical role of such sites through which national states expect to create unity, these particular *lieux de mémoire* might create dissension.

Monuments, and notably statuary, have played an essential role in anchoring collective memory and, thus, in the rise and consolidation of nationalist movements since the nineteenth century<sup>30</sup>. In Europe and North America, they “were intended to serve as guarantors of national memory [...] [and] created the illusion of a stable, recognizable past and promised to serve as a bulwark against further social upheaval.”<sup>31</sup> In this sense, the monument can be perceived as a device of social control and hegemony for implementing a national history: as a tool for maintaining order<sup>32</sup> and for reiterating democratic values, colonial versions of the past, or totalitarian ideologies. For their affirmative character – historically a vehicle of “repressive ideology”<sup>33</sup> – they can also ignite controversy.

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28 ERLI Astrid, “Travelling Memory”, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

29 Stating that memory inhabits these sites constitutes a figure of speech. Memory does not actually “dwell” in monuments and memorials, but can be reenacted (and continually reconstructed) through public engagement in ritual of remembrances at or around the latter (gatherings, ceremonies, etc.).

30 JOHNSON Nuala, “Public Memory”, in JOHNSON Nuala, DUNCAN James S., and SCHEIN Richard H. (eds), *A Companion to Cultural Geography*, Oxford, Blackwell, 2004, pp. 316-327.

31 LANDSBERG Alison, *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture*, New York, Columbia UP, 2004, p. 6.

32 MILES Malcolm, *Art, Space and the City*, Florence (US), Routledge, 2005 [1997], 280 p.

33 LEFEBVRE Henri, *La Révolution urbaine*, Paris, Gallimard, 1970, 248 p.; BUSQUET Grégory, “Henri LEFEBVRE, les situationnistes et la dialectique monumentale: Du monument social au monument – spectacle”, *L’Homme et la société*, vol. 146, n° 4 (2002), pp. 41-60.

In a context of transnational connectedness, conflictual situations may arise when monuments and memorials, among the more traditional and established *lieux de mémoire*, become a cornerstone of mnemonic practices through which ethno-cultural groups engage in Canada with their past, in this country and abroad. In fact, many transnational memories—also termed traveling memories<sup>34</sup> or multidirectional memories<sup>35</sup>—are linked with tragic or contested episodes or figures. In this sense, the representation of the latter might become a source of public conflict in a constantly shifting Canadian context, as immigrants continue to come from far-flung corners of the world. Even in the cases considered in this article of a Canadian monument production resulting from initiatives driven by citizen groups rather than by government actors, the monument keeps its symbolic power, and its capacity to normalize claims and to generate polemical situations. Brian S. OSBORNE shrewdly argues that monuments are specially challenged in plural societies—such as Canada—where, “clearly intended to promote cohesion, they can be sites of conflict, [and] dissent [...]”<sup>36</sup>.

Although ethno-cultural monuments have inhabited Canadian cityscapes since the early twentieth century, my research indicates that the growing demand by immigrant groups for commemorative works of public art over the last forty years has been matched by a reticence from the Canadian administration to act on these demands. The inclination of Toronto, Vancouver, and Montréal’s municipal governments to regulate, even to limit, the public representation of traumatic, contested, and/or controversial events seems to be a direct effort to avoid the following lines of controversy often associated with such monuments. First, the representation of foreign traumas and figures in a multicultural country might exacerbate historical antagonisms between different ethno-cultural citizen groups. Second, controversy may also erupt when immigrant populations build commemorative works that denounce totalitarian regimes that are still in power or memorialize crimes or tragedies that haven’t been officially recognized by their new homeland’s governments or the perpetrators. These ethno-cultural monuments might potentially affect diplomatic and economic relations between Canada—in the role of the host society that accommodates them—and the nations and governments they target. Third, allowing a contested foreign traumatic event or controversial figure to find its way into Canada’s public realm, and even to take

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34 ERLI Astrid, “Travelling Memory”, *op. cit.*

35 ROTHBERG Michael, *Multidirectional Memory*, *op. cit.*

36 OSBORNE Brian S., “From Native Pines to Diasporic Geese: Placing Culture, Setting Our Sites, Locating Identity in a Transnational Canada”, *Canadian Journal of Communication*, 2006, vol. 31, n° 1, p. 159.

up a central position within this public arena, might create disagreements among citizens driven by antagonisms between members of ethno-cultural communities and between these members and other Canadians. Finally, controversy can be exacerbated by the fact that not all ethno-cultural monuments are, or are meant to be, situated in neighborhoods associated with specific communities. On the contrary, as some case studies discussed below show, they seek instead to insert the statements they bear into the larger public sphere – a sphere understood here as an arena of public discourse – by occupying visible and central sites in Canadian cities’ urban fabric.

All of this might explain why some Canadian municipalities seem to grant a great deal of importance to the so-called “Canadianness” of themes and subjects represented through commemorative public art and to the financial responsibility attached to donors or commissioners.

## **In Quest of Canadianess : Making Insiders of Outsiders**

The quest for Canadianess that seems to animate Canadian municipal public art policies is reminiscent of NORA’s quest for Frenchness through the cataloguing of French *lieux de mémoire* – the latter having a profound connection with the geographical limits of l’Hexagone. The quest for Canadianess, as analyzed below, also appears to encompass a territorial frame of rootedness.

In Toronto, recent policy changes reveal the City’s concern to limit the number of monuments and memorials recalling non-Canadian figures and events<sup>37</sup>, given the increase in the number of these demands<sup>38</sup>. According to the City’s officers, the new public art donation policy seeks to ensure that subjects of commemoration have relevance to a larger population<sup>39</sup> – and we will see that this is central to Vancouver and Montréal’s case studies discussed below. The 2017 policy document stresses that proposed works must commemorate important contributions from Canadians or events that have occurred in Canada, except for extra-national events that have been officially recognized by the Canadian federal government<sup>40</sup>.

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37 CITY OF TORONTO, “Report for Action : Public Art and Monuments Donation Policy”, December 21<sup>st</sup>, 2016, 7 p, to available for consultation at this address : <http://www.toronto.ca/> (see on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2019).

38 HAN Sally [Manager, Cultural Partnerships, Economic Development & Culture, City of Toronto], phone interview by the author, December 8, 2016.

39 *Ibid.*

40 CITY OF TORONTO, “Report for Action”, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

Shortly before the adoption of the new public art donation policy, two monument proposals commemorating (still contested) extra-national events were put forward. Both proposals would have been acceptable under the 2017 public donations policy as the events they intended to commemorate were already officially recognized by the federal government. But, significantly, only one was successful.

On July 28, 2016, a memorial proposal to commemorate the victims of the Holodomor, the genocide by famine carried out in Soviet Ukraine by Joseph STALIN's government from 1932 to 1933, was accepted by the City Council<sup>41</sup>. Except for the Irish Famine Memorial (2007)<sup>42</sup>, it is the sole commemorative public art donation of which the content is not directly connected to Canada's history that has been accepted by the City of Toronto in more than a decade<sup>43</sup>. The Holodomor Memorial constitutes a gift from the Toronto Branch of the Ukrainian Canadian Congress to the City of Toronto, and its cost was estimated at \$0.9M, all of which came from the donor<sup>44</sup>. Moreover, the Ukrainian Congress provided an additional sum to the City for future repairs and maintenance of the memorial, whose main element is a replica of the statue *Bitter Memories of Childhood* by Ukrainian artist Petro DROZDOWSKY. Two years before, Toronto's Armenian community had made a similar memorial proposal to the City of Toronto to commemorate the 1.5 million Ottoman Armenian victims of the 1915 genocide<sup>45</sup>. However, their proposal failed.

The unsuccessful outcome of the Armenian Genocide Memorial proposal raises the following interrogation: Why will the Holodomor and not the Armenian Genocide be memorialized in Toronto's civic space? This question becomes all the more relevant given the fact that both crimes, although officially recognized as genocides in Canada, remain sensitive topics for the current governments of Russia and

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41 CITY OF TORONTO, "Donation of Holodomor Memorial at Exhibition Place", 29 July 2016, 63 p., available for consultation at this address : <http://www.toronto.ca/> (see on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2019).

42 Although this ethno-cultural monument commemorates an Irish tragedy without a direct relation to Canada, it also recalls the arrival of an Irish contingent to Toronto in 1847 fleeing the so-called Potato Famine (1845-1851). The development, design, supply, installation, and construction of the park area where the sculptures by Irish artist Rowan GILLESPIE stand, were secured by the Irish Canadian community, which also donated a maintenance reserve fund. See CITY OF TORONTO, "Donation of Park to Commemorate the Victims of the Irish Famine (Downtown)", available for consultation at this address : <http://www.toronto.ca/> (see on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2019) .

43 The Monument to the Greek Genocide of 1914-1923 was installed on City land, in True Davidson Park, in 2000.

44 CITY OF TORONTO, "Donation of Holodomor Memorial", *op. cit.*

45 CITY OF TORONTO, Executive Committee, "Commemorating the 100th Anniversary of the Armenian Genocide." 23 Apr. 2014, available for consultation at this address : <http://app.toronto.ca/> (see on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2019).

Turkey respectively. According to the City's Cultural Partnerships Manager, Sally HAN, the Toronto Branch of the Ukrainian Canadian Congress provided the sum needed for the Holodomor Memorial's commission and maintenance<sup>46</sup>. In her opinion, the financial aspect played a significant role in this proposal's approval. In light of the Holodomor Memorial proposal's endorsement by the City, one could argue that based on the political and, more importantly, the economic clout of particular citizen groups, or even the efficacy of their lobbying or memorial activism, ethno-cultural monuments will have more or fewer chances to be materialized, whether or not they give spatial and temporal coordinates to contested transnational memories.

The City of Vancouver seems to share Toronto's concerns over commemorative public art donations. The Vancouver Park Board approved in 1997 the document *Review Guidelines of Proposed Donations of Public Art and/or Memorials*. This document states that no civic funds will be provided for production, siting, or installation expenses related to any donation<sup>47</sup>. Moreover, donation proposals will be evaluated for their "relevance to Vancouver, British Columbia and/or Canada."<sup>48</sup> In spite of this policy's restrictiveness, memorial proposals continue to be submitted to the municipality. Vancouver's senior cultural planner, Karen HENRY, explains that for several years her team has advocated for a clearer donation process as a credible way to make decisions, given the limited public space in Vancouver's downtown<sup>49</sup>. Furthermore, Vancouver's Public Art Committee recently recommended developing an exclusive policy and process to consider public art gifts to the City with a memorial purpose<sup>50</sup>.

The question of the themes and subjects to be commemorated also appears to be a central concern for Vancouver's municipal administration. A public art study commissioned by the City in 2008 recommended that its Public Art Committee evaluate proposed commemorative and memorial artworks in relation to the impact of the represented figures and events on the history and values of Vancouver :

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46 HAN Sally, interview by the author, *op. cit.*

47 CITY OF VANCOUVER, Vancouver Parks, "Review Guidelines for the Donation of Public Art or Memorials", available for consultation at this address : <http://vancouver.ca/> (see on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2019).

48 *Ibid.*

49 HENRY Karen [Senior Cultural Planner, City of Vancouver], e-mail communication with the author, October 17, 2016.

50 CITY OF VANCOUVER, Public Art Committee, "Minutes", February 29, 2016, 3 p., available for consultation at this address : <http://vancouver.ca/> (see on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2019)

In the case of ethnic contributions, for example, the individual or group must be seen to have had an impact on the city's history, which goes beyond the impact he or she may have had on his or her particular community. [...] A person, group, organization, idea, principle or event to be considered for commemoration in public space must have cultural significance for the city<sup>51</sup>.

Even before the adoption of the current policy, the *lieux de mémoire*'s national aura already dominated Vancouver's commemorative landscape. In 1985, the City of Vancouver received a request to install a monument commemorating the thirtieth anniversary of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 on public land, either in Queen Elizabeth Park or on the landscape triangle at Fraser and Kingsway. In a City council meeting, committee "members noted it would not be desirable to create a precedent in such matters, particularly respecting events which have occurred outside Canada."<sup>52</sup> The members suggested this monument could be installed instead on private land. The request to install the Hungarian Revolution monument on public land was thus refused, and the massive concrete pillar topped with a bronze dish and flame ended up in a cemetery in Burnaby, a city east of Vancouver in the Greater Vancouver Area. In support of the committee's opinion, Mayor Michael HARCOURT also expressed concerns "about the issue of setting a precedent for other groups with the monument."<sup>53</sup> Furthermore, the idea that *lieux de mémoire* should have relevance to a larger population – an argument brought up by the 2017 Toronto public art donation policy – was pointed out as well by then Vancouver Gift Program Coordinator Patricia FRENCH, who argued :

While this project is a worthy one for the Hungarian community to pursue, it is not an amenity to the City in the sense that many citizens will benefit from it in the same way as they will from most of the other items in the Gifts and Legacies Programs (such as benches, drinking fountains, etc.)<sup>54</sup>.

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51 BRESSI Todd W., MCKINLEY Meridith and VALERIE Otani, "Vancouver Public Art Program. Program Review and Design Framework for Public Art", April 17, 2008, pp. 67-68, available for consultation at this address : <http://vancouver.ca/> (see on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2019).

52 CITY OF VANCOUVER, City of Vancouver Archives, COV-S477-3-FO58, File FO58 - Hungarian Memorial (1985-1987), Regular Council Meeting, "2. Hungarian Revolution Monument", confidential document.

53 CITY OF VANCOUVER, City of Vancouver Archives, COV-S477-3-FO58, File FO58 - Hungarian Memorial (1985-1987), Letter from Patricia FRENCH, Vancouver Gifts Program Coordinator, to Fritz BOWERS, City Manager, November 5, 1985, p. 1.

54 CITY OF VANCOUVER, City of Vancouver Archives, COV-S477-3-FO58, File FO58 - Hungarian Memorial (1985-1987), Letter from Patricia FRENCH, Vancouver Gifts Program Coordinator, to Richard MAJOR, Hungarian Memorial Foundation's Executive Vice President, November 5, 1985, p. 1.

The majority of ethno-cultural monuments officially approved by the City of Vancouver's Park Board situated on public land celebrate or commemorate what are considered to be local histories associated with the citizen groups behind them<sup>55</sup>. Currently, two monument proposals have been accepted by the municipality, although the groups behind them are still struggling with financial matters since they have to defray all costs related to the projects, including a maintenance fund. The projects are the Ireland Canada Monument and a memorial to the Vietnamese Boat People, both expected to be erected in public parks<sup>56</sup>. In both cases, the emphasis of these artworks is on the associated groups' contribution to the city and, in a wider perspective, to the shaping of Canada<sup>57</sup>.

The nationalistic emphasis in Toronto and Vancouver's current and expected public art donation guidelines reveal a strong desire to achieve and maintain social cohesion. But should monuments and memorials erected on Canadian soil exclusively commemorate events and figures related to Canada? For some ethno-cultural groups, narratives attached to their homelands – sometimes contested and unsanctioned ones – constitute pillars of their collective identities and help to unify members living in diasporic contexts.

An alternative model for managing ethno-cultural monument proposals has been put to the test in Montréal since the mid-1990s, and has even been imitated by other Quebec cities<sup>58</sup>. Although Montréal, like Toronto and Vancouver, has been confronted with a growth of this type of proposal, the city seems to have embraced a different approach. Before the adoption of the 2012 public art donation policy, which does not make a distinction between memorials and public artworks having no commemorative purpose, the Ville de Montréal did

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55 For more details on ethno-cultural monuments located in Vancouver, visit [www.ethno-culturalmonuments.ca](http://www.ethno-culturalmonuments.ca)

56 See CITY OF VANCOUVER, Board of Parks and Recreation, "Ireland Canada Monument in George WAINBORN Park - Final Design", May 25, 2017, 5 p. available for consultation at this address : <http://parkboardmeetings.vancouver.ca/> (see on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2019) and Public Art Committee (Minutes), "1. Vietnamese Boat People Memorial", February 29, 2016, 3 p. available for consultation at this address : <http://vancouver.ca/> (see on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2019).

57 On the governmental interest in highlighting these communities' contribution to the shaping of Canada, see GORDON-WALKER Caitlin, ALVAREZ HERNANDEZ Analays and ASHLEY Susan, "Recognition and Repentance in Canadian Multicultural Heritage : The Community Historical Recognition Program and Italian Canadian Memorializing", *Journal of Canadian Studies/Revue d'études canadiennes - Thematic Issue - Critical Heritage Studies in Canada: What Does Heritage Do?*, ASHLEY Susan and TERRY Andrea, vol. 52, n° 1, Winter 2018, pp. 82-107.

58 A recent public art commission by the City of Laval, with the financial and logistic support of the World Lebanese Cultural Union, sought to celebrate Laval's immigration contribution through the example of citizen integration and implication provided by the local Lebanese community.

not generally accept public art donations, except for works presented as official gifts from foreign countries. To deal with the increase in donation proposals stemming from local communities, the Bureau d'art public (BAP), the division that administers this municipality's public art collection, commissioned commemorative works in collaboration with Montréal ethno-cultural communities, including the Armenian one, which focus less on communities' contribution to Canada or Quebec and instead highlight more widely shared experiences and universalist values.

One of the resulting public artworks, *La Réparation*, is a house-shaped marble structure featuring a gap-like wound that splits it, vertically, into two equal volumes. Dedicated to all victims of twentieth-century genocides, it has stood since 1998 in Park Marcelin-Wilson. This artwork's commission involved deep reflection and passionate exchanges between the local Armenian and Turkish communities, Turkish diplomats, and the Ville de Montréal's public art officers over the form it should take and, more importantly, over the subject to be commemorated<sup>59</sup>. In 1994, the Montréal branch of the Armenian National Committee (ANC) offered the municipality a bust intended to pay tribute to the victims of the Armenian Genocide<sup>60</sup>. The bust was rejected and the commemorative request, although it stayed alive, was repurposed. Because of serious political and economic pressures on the federal and municipal governments by the Turkish diplomatic corps<sup>61</sup>, the Ville de Montréal, through the BAP, decided to expand ANC's initial commemorative intentions to include the remembrance of all victims of twentieth-century genocides, to commission an artwork with no representational element, and to carefully word its inscription. The local Armenian community was left no

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59 Other than the extensive correspondence—which is kept in the BAP's archives—generated by this public art commission's concerned parties, further exchanges took place publicly in Montréal's local press (*La Presse*, *Le Devoir*, and *The Gazette*, 1996-2000) between members of the Armenian and Turkish communities. For an in-depth analysis of the media debate, see ALVAREZ HERNANDEZ Analays, "La commande publique dans un contexte de diversité ethnoculturelle : débat entourant l'érection du monument La réparation (1994-1998)", Masters' thesis, Montréal, Université du Québec à Montréal, 2010, 185 p. ; CHABOT Jocelyne, "Débats et controverses au sujet du monument commémoratif : La Réparation (Montréal 1995-1998)", *Questions de communication*, 5 (December 2008), pp. 303-315.

60 VILLE DE MONTRÉAL, Service du développement culturel de la Ville de Montréal, File 940388 - *La Réparation*, Letter of Stepan TCHAKMAKJIAN, president of the Armenian National Committee (ANC), to Jean DORÉ, Mayor of Montréal, August 10, 1994, 2 p.

61 On the number and nature of the Turkish threats, see ALVAREZ HERNANDEZ Analays, "La commande publique", *op. cit.*

choice but to accept the new conditions and financially support the subsequent commission of *La Réparation*, created by Quebec artist Francine LARIVÉE<sup>62</sup>.

In spite of the BAP's fair attempt to bring the language of contemporary art closer to local communities and to promote "inclusiveness", this new collaborative model might have in fact generated some exclusion, and encouraged historical generalizations. First, significant funds were provided by the groups involved in public art commissions like *La Réparation*<sup>63</sup>. This might have operated as an exclusion mechanism for communities with fewer financial resources. Second, the commissioned works do not actually display figurative motifs in spite of the fact that the groups making the proposals, like most ethno-cultural groups who propose monuments, wanted traditional busts or figurative sculptures of some sort<sup>64</sup>. Third, the goals of the groups involved in these projects were expanded to accommodate other ethno-cultural communities' narratives, and thus build "communities of interests."<sup>65</sup> According to the Ville de Montréal's former public art commissioner, Francyne LORD, the idea was to commission artworks conveying universal values in order to match the interests of a larger audience, beyond the solely ethno-cultural groups behind the commissions<sup>66</sup>.

I want to expand on the "*non-differentiation* approach" favored by the BAP and the influence of Quebec's model of interculturalism it seems to encompass. Interculturalism aims to promote interaction, negotiation, exchange, and sharing between cultures, and it is frequently contrasted with multiculturalism, and even celebrated for the type of interaction it fosters. That said, recent criticism of Quebec's interculturalist approach points to a shift towards "assimilationism." Gérard BOUCHARD, one of the most ardent advocates and main thinkers of the interculturalism philosophy, admits that "we are currently witnessing in Quebec some attempts to introduce elements of republican-style non-differentiation (against accommodation and expression of religion in state institutions)."<sup>67</sup> This leads me to a related point that interculturalism serves or supports, as Canadian political sciences scholar Daniel SALÉ puts it, the majority's nationalist aspi-

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62 *Op. cit.*

63 On this matter, see ALVAREZ HERNANDEZ Analays, "Art public et diversité ethnoculturelle à Montréal: (en) quête d'un modèle de représentation inclusif", *TicArtToc* 5, October 2015, pp. 32-35.

64 *Ibid.*

65 *Ibid.*

66 LORD Francyne [Ville de Montréal's former public art commissioner], interview by the author at the Ville de Montréal, September 8, 2008.

67 BOUCHARD, "What is Interculturalism?", *op. cit.*, pp. 443-444.

rations<sup>68</sup>. Rather than an integration model, it is more and more perceived as a “solution” to protect Quebec identity<sup>69</sup>. This interculturalism’s non-differentiation orientation or call to universal values might explain the BAP’s desire to build “communities of interests” through ethno-cultural monuments, such as La Réparation, which “houses” not one, but several (traumatic, some of them contested) transnational memories belonging to different ethno-cultural groups.

## **Sites of Transnational Memory : Never-Ending Negotiated Realms**

Toronto, Vancouver, and Montréal’s new, current, and future guidelines for public art donations seem to focus on limiting eventual episodes of controversy. On the one hand, the mandatory financial contribution requested from donors may be seen as a way to discourage them from pursuing their commemorative goals, or as an opportunity for municipalities to acquire new public artworks without using civic funds, which could definitely help them to avoid controversy in cases when donated artworks encounter a negative public reception. On the other hand, the tangible inclination of these municipal governments to regulate, negotiate, and even to limit the public representation of traumatic, contested, or controversial extra-national narratives seeks to shun lines of controversy normally associated with this monument production, as shown above.

In the end, despite multiple rejections, refusals, and constant negotiations and re-negotiations, ethno-cultural groups in Canada continue to look for state-approval as a way to legitimize and gain public support for their contested pasts. As some of these groups have increased their economic and political influence in this country over time, it is possible for transnational memories of contested events and figures to slip through a net of Canadian governmental policies and strategies. Occasionally, only amendments are required, such as finding the appropriate angle to render topics of commemoration “Canadian enough.” A last example, Ottawa’s forthcoming Victims of Communism memorial, supports this article’s main hypothesis about the nationalist aura attached to monuments and memorials as traditional *lieux de mémoire*.

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68 SALÉ Daniel, “Penser l’aménagement de la diversité ethnoculturelle au Québec : mythes, limites et possibles de l’interculturalisme”, *Politique et Sociétés*, vol. 29, n° 1, 2010, pp. 145-180.

69 *Ibid.*

In 2010, a tremendous turmoil broke out in Canadian media about the erection in Ottawa of a memorial commemorating victims of Communism. The project was attacked on different levels : the ambiguity of the theme, its expected location next to the Supreme Court of Canada, its design, its size, its seven-figure budget (a combination of private and federal funds), and its negative symbolism, making of it “the most contentious monument in Ottawa’s modern history.”<sup>70</sup>

The opposition between national (inside) and extra-national (outside) experiences became a focus in this affair. In February 2009, members of the National Capital Commission’s External Committee of Experts on Commemorations discussed the theme of the Memorial to Victims of Communism proposed by Tribute to Liberty, a Toronto-based non-profit organization whose principal mission is to fund and spearhead the memorial<sup>71</sup>. They noted that the proposal did not meet the National Capital Commission’s criteria, because commemorations expected to be of national significance “must derive directly from events or persons of ongoing significance to Canadian history and Canadian society.”<sup>72</sup> Concerning the crimes of Communist regimes, this committee’s members argued that “the primary events did not occur on Canadian soil and the subjects only became Canadians subsequent to these events. The topic is therefore not seen as a central theme in Canadian history.”<sup>73</sup>

In spite of this, the project’s development continued until 2014, when the federal government decided to put it on hold. Since then, the project has gone through a plethora of adjustments (for instance, new location and design)<sup>74</sup>, but it has kept the “Canadian perspective” it had been given in the aftermath of negotiations between the National Capital Commission and Tribute to Liberty in September 2009<sup>75</sup>. Today, this project’s latest version is referred to as *Memorial*

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70 WARD Olivia, “Monuments Controversy: Why ‘Victims of Communism’ Is the Most Contentious Memorial in Ottawa’s Modern History”, *Toronto Star*, June 20, 2015, p. D4.

71 See <http://tributetoliberty.ca/>.

72 BUTLER Don, “Memorial to Victims of Communism Didn’t Meet Criteria, NCC Panel Said”, *The Ottawa Citizen*, March 19, 2015, available for consultation at this address : <http://ottawacitizen.com/> (see on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2019).

73 *Ibid.*

74 In May 2017, the new design for the commemoration in Ottawa of victims of Communist regimes was announced. The winning design was Arc of Memory by Paul RAFF, Michael A. ORMSTON-HOLLOWAY, Brett HOORNAERT, and Luke KAIRYS. See SEYMOUR Andrew, “Arc of Memory ‘Living Calendar’ Chosen for Memorial to Victims of Communism”, *The Ottawa Citizen*, May 17, 2017, available for consultation at this address : <http://ottawacitizen.com/> (see on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2019).

75 BUTLER Don, “How John Baird Erased ‘Totalitarian’ from the Victims of Communism Memorial”, *The Ottawa Citizen*, March 24, 2015, available for consultation at this address : <http://ottawacitizen.com/> (see on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2019).

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to the *Victims of Communism- Canada, a Land of Refuge*, which is still expected to materialize in the Capital<sup>76</sup>. It will recognize and celebrate the role played by Canada as a host society for people who fled Communist regimes<sup>77</sup>.

Fully aware that this article offers more questions than answers, I believe nonetheless that the future of *lieux de mémoire*/sites of memory in multicultural countries constitute a critical and topical subject that must be immediately addressed. Adding to this urgency is the current “commemorative landscape crisis” in Canada. Monuments celebrating individuals mostly tied to this country’s colonial past and to the harms inflicted on Indigenous populations are the object of recurrent vandalism episodes (statues across Canada depicting first Prime Minister John A. MACDONALD), popular petitions for removals (Samuel DE CHAMPLAIN Monument in Orillia, Ontario), and effective removals (the statue of Edward CORNWALLIS in Halifax, Nova Scotia, in 2018). Thus, Canada’s politics of commemoration must deal, today more than ever, with Indigenous and ethno-cultural groups’ claims and processes of historical revisionism which are part of a larger, ongoing reexamination and de/reconstruction of collective pasts and (national) myths, particularly visible in Western societies. As shown above, the Ottawa memorial’s focus on Canada as a refuge of tolerance and freedom and the municipal policies’ focus on Canadianness reemphasize a dominant narrative of Canadian national identity. That said, the pressures of individuals and groups will continue to progressively challenge that narrative as the number of immigrants landing in Canada increases year after year, as transnational connections become stronger every day, and as ethno-cultural communities pursue their economic and political ascension in this country.

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76 GOVERNMENT OF CANADA’S website : <https://www.canada.ca/> (see on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2019)

77 *Ibid.*