As a first-generation Canadian, my home is filled with performances that gesture “back home” — or what my father calls the “old country,” a place that is only alluded to in the smells of the kitchen or when my mom forgets the English word and tells me to grab her a bunjak. As Dad sits in a sunny kitchen window, he reminisces about being back home in Croatia. “It’s like being home in Krk,” he says, referring to the home that he left almost fifty years ago, only returning for a few visits since then. Dad replays his memories for a very particular audience: his children and grandchildren. Although I’ve only been to Krk twice, Dad’s performances, albeit nostalgic and ideal, act as a touchstone for my perception of self and family history. By watching his performance, I become a part of a larger community and feel connected to a place and a people outside of Canada. At the same time, however, Dad’s performances also carry the hardships of immigration. The process of learning English was slow, and his accent remains an auditory reminder of the elements that refuse to assimilate to his new home, marking him as different, symbolically reflective of the ways he clings to the “old country” or rather, how the “old country” clings to him. Yet the idealized home Dad longs for does not actually exist except in his performances. Performing what I call the “homeland imaginary” signifies an incomplete relationship or communion with the “new country” as well as the “old country,” for both actor and audience. Dad’s performances are always marked by his partial assimilation to his new home, and I, in attending to his performance, am only partially connected to another place.

Traces of “the homeland” are performed, in some manner, on a micro level in family homes like mine and in community cultural associations and are also replayed on
a macro level in public civic festivals in the city of Toronto, in the provincial legislature and in the national political arena. This paper examines the intersections between the official institutional script of Canadian multiculturalism and the social performance of multicultural identities in Toronto’s International Festival Caravan, a festival that ran for nearly forty years under the mandate of showcasing the traditions of the city’s ethnic communities. Caravan celebrated and re-inscribed the concept of multiculturalism as cultural mosaic that (although in a positive light) established cultures as existing side-by-side with one another rather than describing their complex interrelationship, which is not necessarily peaceful or without conflict. Moreover, Caravan commodified cultural identities for public consumption, implicating the audience in the practice and performance of multiculturalism. Thus, audiences were not passive observers; they actively participated in the complex and problematic identity-formation process of the self and of the “other.”

With the mass immigration that occurred after World War II, in the 1960s, the Canadian government began to rethink the evolving dynamic of Canadian society and move towards policies reflective of cultural heterogeneity. In 1969, the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism published Book Four of its report, recognizing the contributions of other ethnic groups to Canada’s cultural enrichment. It is not surprising that, at this same time, public displays of cultural difference were beginning to be celebrated in Toronto’s International Festival Caravan. Leon and Zena Kossar founded Caravan in 1969 to open up the cultural gatherings taking place in church basements and community centres across Toronto to a larger audience. The assertions in the political arena that a new, more inclusive model of citizen participation in larger society had to be adopted were being mirrored by the active celebration of ethno-cultural groups in Toronto’s public spaces. These performances claimed space and recognition and asserted difference in the presumed monocultural Toronto of the 1970s. In June 1974, Toronto Star reporter Trent Frayne wrote, “Toronto was once a mausoleum where nothing moved on Sunday but clergymen’s lips,” but, with the waves of immigrants, “all of a sudden the town’s drab monotone was overlaid by a merge of color and tone and style and language that produced a whole new ambiance.” Although minorities were becoming more visible and actively asserting their differences in the seventies, University of Toronto sociologist Merrijoy Kelner, quoted in Frayne’s article, emphasized that the power structure had not really changed: “[F]ew newcomers have cracked the WASP establishment, the White Anglo Saxon Protestant domination of banking, insurance, the stock exchange and the social ladder.” Frayne further argued that the WASP majority was tolerant of Toronto’s colourful glow of multiculturalism because its position had never been threatened by immigration: “People are tolerant of ethnic diversity as long as this diversity does not pose a threat.”

Caravan existed as an important event for the articulation and celebration of difference in Toronto, opening up community engagement and involvement and resulting in social cohesion of particular groups and the city as a whole. As Kossar asserted, “Caravan has portrayed in a very positive way that there’s nothing wrong with upholding your cultural traditions that have been passed on from generation to generation” (qtd. in Thompson). Cultural pavilions were named after major cities of the world, and visitors were welcomed by mayors and princesses and could experience the food, songs, dances and folk art of other cultures. From the time its inauguration in 1969 to the height of its popularity, Caravan’s audiences grew from 100,000 visitors to two million visitors (Small B4). Visitors, or tourists as they were often called in the media, purchased a passport ($2 in 1969 and more recently $15–$20) that gave them access to pavilions. Tourists could then watch the cultural displays and, for an additional cost, sample the “local” fare, sip on drinks and shop for souvenirs. Caravan tourists, due to cost, were predominantly middle-class individuals who, in addition to celebrating their heritages, were in search of experiences different from what they knew. The proceeds raised at Caravan pavilions directly funded cultural programming for the community, making the transmission of cultural knowledge possible and sustainable.
Throughout its history, Caravan celebrated diversity in Toronto alongside changes in official multicultural policy, specifically Trudeau’s 1971 policy of multiculturalism within a bilingual framework, the entrenchment of multiculturalism in the 1982 Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the Canadian Multiculturalism Act, ratified by the federal government in 1988. Establishing a framework for supporting creative encounters and interchanges among Canadian cultural groups is a key tenet of multicultural policy. Caravan opened up the possibility of building bridges among the numerous cultural communities that cohabit in Toronto. An example from Caravan 1970 illustrates this potential to create cross-cultural understanding. That year, Joseph Roll, mayor of the Polish pavilion, took the time to tour the Austrian pavilion. The relationship between the two countries rests on over 150 years of bitter history, culminating with the Nazi occupation during World War II. However, this history was set aside as Roll waltzed with the pavilion’s Miss Vienna, while an Austrian dancer partnered the Polish princess. As Roll noted about his visit, “We may still have our political differences (Austria is an Allied nation, Poland is a member of the Communist bloc), but relations between the two countries are good. Anyway, in Canada we are Canadians” (qtd. in Gobden 29).

Rather than suggest that multicultural policy is drafted and then written onto performing bodies, I argue that it is a more complex and interconnected process. Multiculturalism is a physical style, an act that performs and is performed by individuals. As my example of Caravan illustrates, the performance of multicultural identities and multicultural policy have certainly grown together and affected each other. The body is not a fixed or stable entity but one that requires iteration, the repetition of cultural norms that constitutes the very beings that we are. This reiteration is not chosen or performed by a subject who pre-exists the performance of multicultural identities and multicultural policy have certainly grown together and affected each other. The body is not a fixed or stable entity but one that requires iteration, the repetition of cultural norms that constitutes the very beings that we are. This reiteration is not chosen or performed by a subject who pre-exists the performance; instead, it is the constraint and regularization that forms us as subjects. The affirmation and performance of culturally defined bodies in public spaces requires recognition and protection. Once institutionalized, the principles and rules of recognition become prescriptive and defining through repetition. Caravan participants performed folkloric, multicultural identities that emphasized particularly recognizable elements of their ethnicity. Witnessing the performance and repetition of these recognizable images and practices, the audience engaged in a performative act of identity formation through their tourist gaze. The tourist gaze fetishizes the exotic and different in order to create images of both self and others. Caravan tourists engaged in their own process of identity formation either by identifying with their cultural community’s performances or by visiting exotic pavilions and performatively demarcating others as different. In its encounter with the exotic, the tourist gaze is hierarchically defined in a single-directional flow from tourist to object of consumption. For example, at the Ukrainian pavilion, an audience could always count on watching spectacular dancing, admiring examples of the intricate art of pysanky (the traditional Easter eggs) and buying a bowl of borsch to enjoy. They were confronted with popular, commodified images and objects and may have conflated Ukrainian-Canadian ethnicity with red boots, Cossack pants, folk art and perohy. Indeed, Caravan tourists might visited a number of pavilions over the course of an evening, receiving only a tourist snapshot of the most popular elements rather than a larger, more complex understanding of what it meant to identify with these cultural communities.

“The relationship between the Caravan tourist and the performance was complex and showed the potential for tourist dollars to shape cultural representations through the economy of supply and demand.”

Postmodern and postcolonial theory reveal how identity fractures as an individual positions her- or himself in a number of different categories. Identification becomes problematic as our subject positioning is increasingly hyphenated or hybridized but hybridization opens up the potential for a new negotiation of meanings and representations that resist and subvert dominant and static discourses of identity formation. Both Caravan and the Multiculturalism Act have become problematic with regards to protecting and recreating historical cultural representations: while the commitment in both initiatives to preserving multicultural heritage is positive, they often fail to recognize the continuous and complex nature of identity formation, essentially freezing ethnic identities in time and space. And, while it is important and perhaps even vital to assert cultural difference to combat monoculturalism in Toronto, as one critic of Caravan noted, “[S]ome wonder about Caravan’s relevance in an era when multiculturalism has more to do with issues like employment equity, racism and rights than the predominant 1970s notions of cultural retention epitomized by church basement dances and spicy ’exotic’ food” (Thompson). As Kelner argued in 1974, the right to perform historical cultural representations does not necessarily facilitate or guarantee full social and political participation and equality. This problematic occurred with Caravan, in part, because the festival was imbued with commercial and consumer appeal. Participants could experience diverse cultures without leaving Toronto, by visiting neighbourhoods in their city that they recognized as unique, mingling with people from different places and then returning home to admire their souvenirs.

Certainly, performances at Caravan gave their audiences the sense that they were supporting multiculturalism. In 2002,
Mayor Mel Lastman signed a City of Toronto Proclamation promoting Caravan as “a celebration of Toronto’s exceptional quality of life, energy, creativity and unique diversity” and as “a remarkable portrait of our City’s and our country’s heritage.” Ironically, Lastman’s celebratory proclamation of cultural diversity followed derogatory comments made the year prior, alluding to his concerns about cannibals before a trip to Mombasa, Kenya. Audience members at Caravan took pride in the city’s diversity and showed tolerance by taking an interest in other cultures, but their participation did not necessitate any further engagement with the political and social issues that underlie multiculturalism. Caravan’s oversimplified conceptions of cultural minorities and audiences’ reception of them sustained barriers to full participation and equality by not challenging the public’s complicity in their creation or their passivity with regards to issues like racism.

The cultural mosaic is a powerful metaphor to describe the Canadian style or brand of cultural-diversity management. Contrary to melting pot multiculturalism or assimilation, where minorities are expected to conform to a set standard or understanding established by the dominant culture, the cultural mosaic allows for the maintaining of distinct cultures, beliefs, traditions and religions. What are the implications and meanings of using this metaphor? The cultural mosaic is often associated with group identification and identity politics, which allow for collective pooling of resources – economic and social – for an articulation and defence of interests that individuals cannot accomplish on their own. However, this leads to divisive battles between groups for scant resources. Neil Bissoondath took official multiculturalism to task for encouraging ethnic differentiation and a “psychology of separation” from mainstream culture, which results in separation into ethnic enclaves (42). Unity and cohesion are sacrificed in the struggle and competition between groups for resources. Similarly, Norman Mohamid, executive director of the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants noted, about Caravan, “There are dangers to emphasizing differences, it can represent a hiving off and a separateness. And yet this notion of differentiation underlies the festival itself, even though the backdrop against which Caravan was first staged has changed” (qtd. in Thompson).

Bissoondath’s assertion strikes at the cultural mosaic for the lack of unity and cohesion, but we must ask who defines unity, under what terms and to what end. Unity and national identity are complex and problematic terms that can maintain hegemonic and suppressive powers over those who fall outside of the accepted identities. The Multiculturalism Act is not as inclusive or as ideal as we may imagine, and debates over which cultural practices fit within official policy frequently occur. Examining Bissoondath’s argument more closely, it becomes apparent that the foundation of divisiveness is not an issue that groups bring about themselves but rather is a product of discrimination in the operation of economic and social institutions. Thus, the mosaic is ill equipped to deal with social and institutional barriers that facilitate divisiveness but not the ultimate cause for them. Also, the mosaic metaphor is
problematic for inaccurately reflecting the lived experience of Torontonians. While the mosaic implies a peaceful separation between cultures, living in Toronto comes with the realities of interrelationships between people, a variety of social, economical and political relations that are not necessarily free from friction or tension.

Cultural tourism and commodification complicate the agency of multicultural actors and the process of the multicultural agenda. Watson and Kopachevsky revisit Marx to define tourism commodification as the "process by which objects and activities come to be evaluated primarily in terms of their exchange value in the context of trade ... in addition to any use-value that such commodities might have" (645). Thus, ways of life, traditions and the complex symbolism which support these are imagined and transformed into saleable products for tourists and are produced and performed for touristic consumption. In Caravan's publicity articles, the consumption model of cultural tourism was at play: "For nine days, wannabe world travelers can fantasize by experiencing the cultures, crafts, music and food of the four corners of the earth. You can return to some of your old favourite international cities as well as enter exotic and exciting new worlds" ("A Taste for Everyone" A6). The relationship between the Caravan tourist and the performance was complex and showed the potential for tourist dollars to shape cultural representations through the economy of supply and demand.

"At Caravan, tourists saw a "staged authenticity," produced for consumption."

Commodification is inherently linked with authenticity. Erik Cohen, in "Authenticity and Commoditization in Tourism," defines the cultural tourist as one who seeks in theinauthentic and exoticism an authenticity that contrasts with the inauthentic and alienating nature of contemporary life (373). Tourists visiting places already have pre-formed images and expectations that can be frustrated or disappointed by "inauthentic" performances. At Caravan, tourists saw a "staged authenticity," produced for consumption, as pavilions imported performers and dance troupes from the countries they were representing and performed to tourist expectations and for tourist dollars. This was problematic for three reasons, which I have discussed elsewhere: commercializing ethnic identities reflects entertainment standards but does not accurately represent the culture of a community; cultural representations are de-politicized and offer selective, positive and happy portraits, in which the difficult aspects of a given culture are usually omitted and essentialized representations and shallow cultural stereotypes are reproduced. Cultural beliefs and practices are rarely static entities packed away in luggage and transported in total to be recreated in the new home but are often changed and adapted to suit the new context. Thus, performances at Caravan revealed a disjunction between the lived experience of the people residing in the countries and cultures being represented on the one hand, and the lived experiences of those given the official job of representing the cultures on the other hand ... (For some singers and dancers, the festival is the only context in which they participate in "ethnic" dancing or singing (Bramadat 4).

Rather than placing authenticity on a true/false continuum, N. Wang proposes a model that is critically aware of the social, economic and political forces underscoring authenticity. Wang asserts that "[t]hings appear authentic not because they are inherently authentic but because they are constructed in terms of point of view, beliefs, perspectives, or powers," and as such, they are negotiable and contextually determined (351). This complex negotiation occurs in performances of the "homeland imaginary" that exist not only in the particular community’s memories, idealizations and imaginations of the homeland (which can be deemed inauthentic for their selective exclusions or inclusions of the actual homeland) but also in “touristic” imaginations of that community, which, as I mentioned earlier, can fixate on highly reductive aspects of ethnicity. Commodification risks having cultural practices alienated from the embodied acts of performers so that, for these performers, transformative social or spiritual significances have been emptied out. Their acts are no longer performative but enter into representation, manufactured and oversimplified, to fit and be contained within a socially ordered and systematized tourist gaze.

In a letter to the founder of Caravan, a girl wrote, "Now that we have Caravan, I won’t have to think of changing my name anymore" (Linton). Certainly, as the quotation suggests, Caravan and the Canadian Multiculturalism Act have affirmed cultural difference as a cornerstone of Canadian society. However, change is necessary in the conception of multiculturalism to shift towards substantive issues such as accessibility to services and resources as well as the removal of barriers to equality, something that mere historical/folkloric performances of culture cannot affect. Perhaps declining participation in Caravan over its last few years reflects the change inevitable in any culture, the importance of substantive concerns, and the realities of the intercultural lived experience of Toronto. The last Caravan festival occurred in 2005, three years short of its fortieth anniversary. Toronto mayor from 1972 to 1978, David Crombie, commented, "What really happened to Caravan, was that the city became Caravan. The real sweetness of the story is that you don’t have to organize a 10-day celebration to enjoy cuisine, culture and language differences, you just have to
get on the subway” (qtd. in Javed). How differently, then, would we see Toronto’s communities, if presentations of their complicated and interconnected lived experiences of being in the city had been performed at Caravan? Moreover, since Caravan’s conclusion, has the distinction between audience and performer dissolved, or at least blurred, as many Torontonians experience cultural diversity in their everyday lives?

Notes
1 For a detailed explanation of iteration and the identity-formation process please refer to Judith Butler’s seminal work, Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex,” 94–5.
2 Recent tensions surrounding what constitutes “reasonable accommodation” of minority rights in Quebec and the creation of an Afrocentric school in Toronto gesture at underlying uneasiness concerning cultural difference.

Works Cited
Cohen, Erik. “Authenticity and Commoditization in Tourism.”

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