Connected by a Thread: Stories of Migration and Labour in Sara Angelucci's *Piece Work*

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Abstract

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This thesis is a critical analysis of the multimedia project *Piece Work* (2017) by Toronto-based, Italian Canadian artist Sara Angelucci (b. 1962). Focusing on Coppley Apparel, a garment factory in Hamilton, Ontario, the project explores the process of making business suits through the digital collage *Coppley Patterns* and the photographic series *Mano d'Oro*. The sound installation *A Sewers' Chorus* features the voices of the garment workers who recall positive and negative memories of their work experiences and personal histories, while the video installation *Suit Elevator* depicts the business suit in its final form. The majority of Coppley Apparel's employees are women from non-white racialized groups. Deploying an intersectional feminist approach, this thesis argues that *Piece Work* reveals the complex lives of these factory workers from immigrant backgrounds in ways that speak against persisting discourses and practices of racialized and gendered labour in the garment industry. It begins by providing an overview of the history of the Coppley Apparel factory in relation to the history of migrant garment factory workers in Hamilton, and the broader history of racialized and gendered factory labour in the city. This thesis also acts as a record of the migration story of Nina Acciaroli, the artist's mother, whose first job in Canada was at Coppley Apparel. It then examines *A Sewers' Chorus* and its use of oral history, providing a discussion of the different stories shared by the interviewees, which range from happy childhood memories and nostalgic flashbacks to accounts of traumatic experiences. The thesis provides a comprehensive discussion of the process of making *Piece Work*, contextualizing it within Angelucci's larger artistic practice of incorporating voices in the exploration of her family's immigrant experience. Ultimately, *Piece Work* recognizes the

employees of Coppley Apparel as people with singular voices and unique experiences and highlights their agency by including the complexity of their voices and identities as women, garment workers, racialized minorities, and contributing members of Canadian society.

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I would also like to thank Alana Traficante and Tobi Bruce from the Art Gallery of Hamilton who shared with me their insights on exhibiting *Piece Work*. My trip also included a visit to the Workers Arts Heritage Centre, where I met the Collections Manager Kat Williams, who very generously shared with me her time and useful resources on the history of labour in Hamilton. I also had the chance to visit Coppley Apparel's factory, one of the highlights of my research. I give my thanks and gratitude to Donalda Pelletier from Marketing who thoroughly showed me the facilities, explaining the daily routine of the factory and introducing me to the staff. Thank you to Laura Lamb from the archives of Hamilton Public Library who kindly helped me locate clippings for my research.

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Introduction

This thesis provides a critical analysis and documentation of Toronto-based, second-generation Italian Canadian artist Sara Angelucci's (b. 1962) multimedia project, *Piece Work* (2017), which explores the lives of first-generation immigrant garment workers at the Coppley Apparel factory in Hamilton, Ontario.[1] First exhibited at the Art Gallery of Hamilton (AGH) in 2017*, Piece Work* consists of five components: two photographic series, a video, and two installations. The title refers to a specific form of labour called "piecework" whereby workers are compensated according to the number of pieces they can sew on a daily basis. Depicting aspects of the assembly line workflow at Coppley Apparel, renowned for its production of ready-to-wear business suits for men, *Piece Work* tells the story of the making of the garments. The two photographic components, *Mano D'Oro* and *Coppley Patterns,* depict the processes of cutting and sewing the fabric and patterns, while the video *Suit Elevator* shows the finished product along the factory's electrical rack, ready to be worn. In the photographic series *Mano D'Oro*, meaning "hand of gold" in Italian, hands are seen sewing the typical components of business suits: conservative dark grey, navy, and brown linen and wool cloth, and brightly coloured silk linings. This thesis argues that *Piece Work* brings awareness to the complex lives of factory workers from immigrant backgrounds in ways that challenge persisting discourses and practices of racialized and gendered labour in the garment industry. Specifically, it focuses on employees of Coppley Apparel, the majority of who are women from non-white racialized groups. It thus

[1] Following scholar Svetlana Boym, I use the term "first-generation immigrants" to describe migrants who have left their homeland to live in another country and "second-generation immigrants" to describe the children of immigrants who are born in their parent's host country. Svetlana Boym, "Immigrant Art, Diasporic Intimacy, and Alternative Solidarity," *Where do We Migrate To?* ed. Niels Van Tomme (Baltimore: Center for Art, Design and Visual Culture, 2011), 25-32.

also increases awareness of Hamilton's immigration history from the arrival of the first Anglophone settlers from the United Kingdom, followed by the strong presence of Italian immigrants, to the more culturally-diverse make-up of its residents in present-day. In these divided times today, projects like *Piece Work* become more urgent and gain further political importance as platforms for the silenced and the invisible.

The title of this thesis comes from the central component of Angelucci's project: the sound installation *A Sewer's Chorus*. Upon entering the exhibition space, audiences immediately hear the soundtrack of the piece located inside a room containing eight speakers on white pillars of different heights encircling a leather bench. Audiences are invited to take a seat to hear a recording edited from a series of interviews the artist conducted with seventeen Coppley employees who emigrated to Canada and Hamilton at different times. The soundtrack begins with the sound of sewing machines. After a short while, different voices introduce themselves as sewers. What then follows is a collage of individual accounts, organized by different themes. The poignant chorus line, "We are connected by a thread, a thread connects us," spoken repeatedly in unison by the sewers, is woven throughout the piece.

The chorus line serves as a powerful metaphor, not only for the solidarity of shared labour, but for the importance of sharing one's unique story. A thread is resistant, until it reaches its breaking point. A single strand is also fragile. Layering multiple strands together strengthens the seams of a garment. The stories from *A Sewers Chorus* are powerful because of the multiplicity of stories told which represent a community united by their labour and their experiences with immigration. Inviting workers to share who they are outside of the confining categories of "immigrant" and "garment worker," *Piece Work* recognizes the employees of Coppley as people with singular voices and unique experiences and highlights their agency by

including the complexity of their individuality as women, garment workers, and immigrants, among many other identities.

Set in Coppley Apparel's business suit factory, *Piece Work* presents an ironic observation of the masculine garment and the crucial, albeit rarely discussed, role of women in its making. The suit, a symbol of wealth, white-collar jobs, offices, and Eurocentric masculine ideals is made by the piece, mainly by women from various immigrant backgrounds. Fashion historian Anne Hollander considers men's tailoring as an unchangeable marker of modernity. Stemming from Neoclassical ideas and aesthetics, the suit has historically set the standard for both women and men's dress.[2] The modern suit appeared in the late 1600s and reflected the rise of a new upper class in Western Europe. Instead of armour-like military garments or elaborated frills, the men dressed in a more casual and utilitarian way, distancing themselves as far as possible from frivolous women's fashion.[3]

The history of men and women's clothing is also linked to the history of the gendered divide in dressmaking. In the Middle Ages and through the Renaissance, men designed and crafted both female and male clothing. Women were able to participate in dressmaking, however their talent and labour were used in needlework since it was thought that they were not "technologically imaginative," unlike men.[4] By the sixteenth century, with the founding of guilds, garment making was further divided by gender. Female dressmakers made clothes for women, while male tailors exclusively dressed men[5] until the late 1800s, before contributing to women's clothing by focusing on the female form.[6] This gendered division of labour is still

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[2] Anne Hollander, *Sex and Suits: The Evolution of Modern Dress*, (London, Oxford, New York, New Delhi, Sydney: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), 3.
[3] Hollander, 45-46.
[4] Hollander, 47.
[5] Hollander, 47.
[6] Hollander, 59.

present today, as *Piece Work* documents. As the first section of this thesis demonstrates, working women in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were relegated to what were considered "less physical" tasks, such as domestic work, while men held managerial and leadership positions in the industry. The history of the suit and its making is thus linked to traditional gender roles, but also, as we see in the case of Hamilton, to cultural identity.

Hamilton's largest ethnocultural community had been Italian from 1921 to the 1980s.[7] However, with the different immigration waves of the last two decades and the aging of the Italian community, today the city's current most spoken languages after English are Arabic and Chinese dialects.[8] This changing demographic is reflected at Coppley, with over thirty languages spoken between 300 employees.[9] The catalyst for the creation of *Piece Work* stems from Angelucci's family history. Her mother held her first job at Coppley after emigrating from Italy to Canada in 1954, joining the established Italian community of Hamilton at the time. In addition to being a tribute to the artist's mother, the project helps to understand the conditions of workers at Coppley today as it encompasses the lives of many more of Hamilton's current diverse immigrant population. According to the federal 2016 population census, the three most common countries of birth for the city's immigrant population after the United Kingdom and Italy are India, the Philippines, and China.[10] Immigrants from these countries and others have affected the cultural landscape of Coppley: *Piece Work* represents the diversity of the factory's employees,

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[7] Eugenio Perri, "The Italian-Canadian Experience in a Changing Hamilton" (MA thesis, McMaster University, 1990), 41.

[8] "Arabic overtakes Italian as top language spoken in Hamilton homes, after English," *CBC News*, last modified August 2 2017, https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/hamilton/foreign-language-hamilton-1.4232089.

[9] Laurence Butet-Roch, "Family Business / Sara Angelucci," *BlackFlash* (2017): 56.

[10] The 25% sample data from Statistics Canada states that 23 930 people were born in the United Kingdom; 12 010 in Italy; 9 885 from India; 7 835 in the Philippines, and 5 600 in China. For more information, see "Census Profile, 2016 Census," *Statistics Canada*, last modified August 9 2019, https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&Geo1=CMACA&Code1=537&Geo2=PR&Code2=35&Data=Count&SearchText=Hamilton&SearchType=Begins&SearchPR=01&B1=Immigration%20and%20citizenship&TABID=1.

and by extension, Hamilton. Typical negative stereotypes depict "the immigrant"[11] as a terrorist or a criminal, while the opposite discourse of the "model minority" portrays immigrants as valuable contributors to their host country's economy and "cultural flavour."[12] Stemming from Asian American stereotypes, the model minority myth promotes the expectation that Asians are economically successful in certain sectors because of their academic diligence and hard work.[13] Such "positive" stereotypes can also be applied to other ethnocultural groups with harmful universalized standards to attain. These stereotypes often categorize and generalize individuals without taking into account their full and unique experiences and histories. They tend to compare different races and measure their success in assimilating to North American socio-economic values. For the State, successful racialized communities enrich the overall urban landscape with ethnic restaurants and family-owned local businesses adding to the cultural "flair"[14] of cities. However, cultural minorities and differences are tolerated by the multicultural project only if they respect what is expected of them. As social anthropologist Eva Mackey explains, Canada constructs its cultural hegemony without cultural heterogeneity: the model of multiculturalism on which the nation prides itself is in fact a thinly-veiled manipulated hybrid system that undergirds its power and control.[15] By considering postcolonial, anthropological and cultural studies, the author states that the Canadian nation and its multiculturalism are built on strategies of "managing, appropriating, controlling, subsuming, and highlighting" cultural differences in order

[11] In this case "the immigrant" refers to immigrants of colour.
[12] This term is taken from Burnaby's Intercultural Planning Table, "Benefits of Multiculturalism," *Burnaby Intercultural Planning Table*, http://bipt.ca/benefits-multiculturalism/. Being only an hour drive from one another, Burnaby and Hamilton share similar views on multiculturalism.
[13] Eleanor Ty, "Asianfail in the City: Michael Cho's *Shoplifter*," *Asian Diasporic Visual Cultures and the Americas* 4, vol. 1-2 (2018): 47-48.
[14] Burnaby's Intercultural Planning Table.
[15] Eva Mackey, *The House of Difference: Cultural Politics and National Identity in Canada* (London, New York: Routledge, 1999), 167.

to assert the State's liberal hegemony over minorities.[16] The figure of the immigrant is thus othered by a host country like Canada which defines itself by its multicultural policy while in fact managing newcomers through a fabricated "welcoming" façade. According to postcolonial and feminist thinker Sara Ahmed, the State constructs all migrants as strangers to maintain a culturally-coherent nation. Based on the public policy of multiculturalism in Australia and her own experience as a queer racialized British-Australian woman of Pakistani descent, Ahmed's theoretical formulation demonstrates that the State relies on the "stranger" to validate itself, by making the newcomer feel estranged from the dominant cultural system.[17] Multiculturalism aims to include diversity in its dominant culture - namely white male Eurocentric ideals for Canada and Australia - making the ideology a core part of the Nations' values through legislation. As Ahmed explains, multiculturalism exists as an outcome of national identity and the typical white male citizen, while centering the latter in the origin of the Nation: "ordinary values of the typical Australian have allowed 'us' to become a 'multicultural nation.'"[18] On the other hand, monocultural narratives within the multicultural Nation center the "ordinary bloke," or what Mackey calls the "Canadian-Canadian," as the victim of multiculturalism.[19] Such clash of ideals affects the diverse population of Hamilton, a city with a long-standing history of racism. In 2017, police reported hate crimes in Hamilton surged by 30%, mostly targeting Black and Jewish communities. By 2018, Hamilton had the highest rate per 100 000 population of reported hate crimes in Canada.[20] Recent hate incidents include the 2019 Pride celebration, which took a sour

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[16] Mackey, 162-163.
[17] Sara Ahmed, *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 100-101.
[18] Sara Ahmed, *Strange Encounters,* 111.
[19] Mackey identifies the 'Canadian-Canadian' as a white person with European ancestry, someone defined as non-ethnic. Mackey, 20.
[20] Emerald Bensadoun, "Steeltown or Hatetown? Hamilton Tops Country in Hate Crime Reports," *CTV News*, July 25 2019, https://www.ctvnews.ca/canada/steeltown-or-hatetown-hamilton-tops-country-in-hate-crime-reports-1.4523537.

turn when groups of evangelical protesters were joined by so-called "yellow vesters" to violently crash the peaceful public event.[21] This extreme right-wing group has rallied in the past in front of Hamilton City Hall to protest against government policies on immigration, the carbon tax, and the United Nations Global Pact on Migration.[22] The yellow vesters disguise racist and homophobic slurs as free speech and are often described as fascists or white supremacists by the press. With over eighty percent of Coppley Apparel employees born outside of Canada,[23] the personal accounts and representation of immigrants in *Piece Work* speak to Ahmed's notion of the migrant stranger. More importantly, I argue that audiences also grow closer to, and gain a more in-depth understanding of, the employees' lived experiences by listening to the stories being told in *A Sewers' Chorus*. This nuanced representation—which is almost erased by the State through the simplified representation of the "other" as a threat to its stability—leads to an understanding and a sense of solidarity with the immigrant subjects: in Angelucci's work, the dangerous "stranger" is no more. In this way, *Piece Work* allows for more complex dimensions of the lives of these employees, particularly the racialized workers who are historically often relegated to the most menial and labour-intensive tasks, as Section One of this thesis demonstrates.

Established in 1846, the city of so-called Hamilton is located on the traditional territory of the Mississauga and Haudenosaunee nations. Local institutions, such as McMaster University, the Art Gallery of Hamilton and the Workers Art and Heritage Center, specify that Hamilton is

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[21] Teviah Moro, "Calls for Crackdown of Hate Groups after Violent Rally Targets Pride Hamilton Celebration," *The Hamilton Spectator*, June 18 2019, https://www.thespec.com/news-story/9440409-calls-for-crackdown-of-hate-groups-after-violent-rally-targets-pride-hamilton-celebration/.

[22] Adam Carter, "Councillors Investigating Putting a Stop to Yellow Vest Protests," *CBC News*, June 18 2019, https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/hamilton/yellow-vest-protests-1.5180307.

[23] "Coppley: Where Skills from around the World Come Together," *The Hamilton Spectator*, November 21 2016, https://www.thespec.com/news-story/6975870-coppley-where-skills-from-around-the-world-come-together/.

situated on the unceded Dish with One Spoon territory, a territory established by peace treaties in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries between the League of Five Nations, including the Anishinaabe, Mississauga and Haudenosaunee.[24] Over time, the treaty included other First Nations and non-Indigenous settlers who settled on the land that surrounds the Great Lakes and includes Southern Ontario and the American states of New York, Ohio, Michigan, and Wisconsin.[25] The Dish with One Spoon evokes a peaceful imagery of communion and sharing. The dish represents the territory that is shared between the people, with its land and living beings protected and cared for by all, while the spoon, a smooth object, symbolizes the peace that must be kept within.[26]

Today, Hamilton is home to a diverse population of Indigenous peoples (albeit relatively low at 2% of the population,)[27] Anglo-Saxon settlers, and many different generations of immigrants hailing from different parts of the world. On a larger scale, but in a subtle manner, *Piece Work* also asks us to reflect on Canadian nationhood, including how immigrants fit into the Canadian narrative as settlers on Indigenous lands. In her ground-breaking reflection "Are People of Colour Settlers Too?," scholar Malissa Phung considers the term "settler" as a politicized identification which at once recognizes a non-Indigenous person's complicity in the Canadian colonial project, while acting in solidarity towards decolonization.[28] As Phung explains in her

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[24] "Land Acknowledgement," *Ryerson School of Journalism*, June 3 2016, http://trc.journalism.ryerson.ca/land-acknowledgement/.
[25] "The Two Row Times: A Paper Serving the Dish with One Spoon Territory - Great Lakes Region," *Two Row Times*, November 18 2013, https://tworowtimes.com/editorial/the-two-row-times-a-paper-serving-the-dish-with-one-spoon-territory-great-lakes-region/.
[26] "The Two Row Times."
[27] "Focus on Geography Series, 2016 Census," *Statistics Canada*, last modified July 18 2019, https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/as-sa/fogs-spg/Facts-cma-eng.cfm?LANG=Eng&GK=CMA&GC=537&TOPIC=9.
[28] Malissa Phung, "Are People of Colour Settlers Too?," in *Cultivating Canada: Reconciliation through the Lens of Cultural Diversity*, edited by Ashok Mathur, Jonathan Dewar and Mike DeGagné, (Ottawa: Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2011), 296.

essay, the colonial status of the settler and their privilege benefited from stolen Indigenous land is different according to the level of linguistic, cultural, physical and beliefs of the dominant white and Eurocentric system they are able to assimilate.[29] Focusing on the history of Chinese settlers in western Canada, Phung highlights how more recent generations and newcomers of people of Chinese descent benefit from stolen Indigenous lands through achieving social acceptance and conforming to the model minority myth of being hard workers and gifted students, compared to negative stereotypes of Indigenous peoples.[30] At the same time, however, Chinese people settling in Canada continue to be considered as foreigners, or "unsettled settlers," and to be perceived as a threat to white Anglophone and Francophone settlers.[31] The description of this conflicting experience can be extended to other people of colour and immigrants living on unceded Indigenous lands, such as the Dish with One Spoon territory, on which the city of so-called Hamilton is established. *Piece Work* is not about Hamilton's Indigenous community, however, I propose that it nevertheless implicitly acknowledges the region's colonial past in how it brings forward for consideration how different non-Indigenous, non-white settler identities have been and continue to be instrumentalized within oppressive colonial structures in Canada in complex, problematic ways. Despite being exhibited in two art galleries in Ontario, and featured at the Canadian Cultural Centre in Paris, existing literature on *Piece Work* remains scarce in art publications and in academia.[32] Because of its local specificity, the project was featured in Hamilton's newspapers and the artist had a radio segment on CBC.[33] These journalistic sources

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[29] Phung, 293.
[30] Phung, 293-294.
[31] Phung, 295.
[32] *Piece Work* was shown at the AGH from February 11 to May 14, 2017. The project was exhibited at the Canadian Cultural Centre in Paris from September 21 to November 12, 2017 as part of the exhibition *Piece by Piece* with works by Sanaz Mazinani. It was shown at the Stephen Bulger Gallery in Toronto from June 2 to July 14, 2018.
[33] Nathalie Atkinson, "Fabric of a City," *The Globe and Mail*, May 30 2017, https://www.theglobeandmail.com/life/fashion-and-beauty/fashion/the-fabric-of-a-city-hamilton-exhibit-explored-coppleys-impact-on-menswear/article35157065/; Kelly Bennett, "Hamilton Art Exhibit Weaves the Immigrant

bring attention to the breadth of the multimedia project, but they largely center on the history of labour in Hamilton and Coppley Apparel's business or focus on Angelucci's mother's experience as a garment worker. Artistic discussions of *Piece Work* were featured only a handful of times through small promotional articles explaining the process of making *Piece Work*, sometimes featuring insights from Angelucci.[34] The most notable aesthetic exploration of this project is featured in a feature article in *BlackFlash* magazine, which discusses Angelucci's three decades of work contextualized within her family's working-class background.[35] This thesis is thus the first piece of scholarly writing dedicated to *Piece Work*, and the sole graduate thesis on Angelucci's work. The artist's project resonates with many realities beyond the city of Hamilton. It speaks to the history of garment making and migration in Canada and features stories of people hailing from different parts of the world. This thesis aims to expand *Piece Work*'s reach as a critical aesthetic discourse by contextualizing it within the intersecting histories of labour and immigration in Hamilton and Canada at large. It describes in great depth the process behind the making of *Piece Work*, the artist's family history, and includes a dialogue with other works of art which use sound and oral history in their aesthetics. My research sources local newspaper articles and archival material from Hamilton's Public Library. Oral history is one of the main axes of research in this thesis; primary materials were retrieved through in-person interviews with the

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Stories Behind the Sewing of Men's Suits," *CBC News*, March 31 2017, https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/hamilton/hamilton-art-exhibit-weaves-the-immigrant-stories-behind-the-sewing-of-men-s-suits-1.4049655; Graham Rockingham, "Behind the Stone Walls of Coppley," *The Hamilton Spectator*, March 9 2017, https://www.thespec.com/whatson-story/7179661-behind-the-stone-walls-of-coppley-lives-connected-by-threads/; Alisa Siegel, "My Mother's Threads: Daughter Weaves Garment Factory Stories Into Art," *CBC Radio*, August 15 2018, https://www.cbc.ca/radio/thesundayedition/the-sunday-edition-may-13-2018-1.4658483/my-mother-s-threads-daughter-weaves-garment-factory-stories-into-art-1.4658532.

[34] Taylor Dafoe, "Sara Angelucci's Poignant Portraits of Factory Laborers Are Now on View at Toronto's Stephen Bulger Gallery," *Artnet*, June 7 2018, https://news.artnet.com/partner-content/revisiting-sara-angeluccis-portraits-of-factory-laborers-on-view-now-at-stephen-bulger-gallery; Elena Martinique, "Sara Angelucci's Relationship to Canada, Expressed through Art at Stephen Bulger Gallery," *Widewalls*, June 1 2018, https://www.widewalls.ch/sara-angelucci-stephen-bulger-gallery/.

[35] Laurence Butet-Roch, "Family Business / Sara Angelucci," *BlackFlash* (2017): 52-58.

artist Sara Angelucci, the curator Alana Traficante[36] who oversaw the first iteration of *Piece Work* at the Art Gallery of Hamilton, and Tobi Bruce, the Art Gallery's Director, Exhibitions and Collections & Senior Curator. I also toured Coppley Apparel's factory with Donalda Pelletier from Coppley Apparel's Marketing and Communications Department. As I learned from discussions with the artist and Pelletier, little archival material or employee records have been saved since Coppley's beginnings in 1883, which is typical of factories. For this study, oral history as a research method thus gains further importance as it fills the gap in areas where there is a lack of written documentation. In addition to the scarce information about Coppley's history and its employees, there is a shortage of platforms for Hamilton's history which the AGH is trying to fill through projects such as *Piece Work.*[37] Projects such as Angelucci's heighten the importance of documenting a part of the city's past and present history of labour and immigration.

Outline of Sections

This thesis is divided into three sections to provide an in-depth critical analysis of *Piece Work*. With Section One, I provide an overview of the history of the Coppley Apparel factory in relation to the history of the immigrant garment factory workers in Hamilton and the broader history of racialized and gendered factory labour. The photographic series *Coppley Patterns* is a visual representation of the changing labour norms and technology which influenced the production of the business suit at the factory.

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[36] At the time of planning and exhibiting *Piece Work* at the AGH, Traficante was adjunct curator of contemporary art of the gallery. She is currently the Executive Director of Gallery 44 in Toronto. Like Angelucci, the curator also holds personal ties with Coppley since her *nonna*, Nicolina Traficante, was an employee of the factory. Traficante, Interview with author, May 14 2019.

[37] Despite the nonexistence of an official "Museum of Hamilton", there are initiatives in place to share the history of the city, such as the Workers Arts and Heritage Centre, which preserves and celebrates the history of labour in Hamilton through research-based and creative projects for the local community.

Section Two surveys the history of Italian immigration to Hamilton in the twentieth century in the area and in which fields women and men were employed. It includes Angelucci's parents' history of migration as an example of these divergent experiences. This section opens with the emigration journey of Nina Acciaroli, the artist's mother. It then discusses the photographic series *Mano D'Oro* which depicts the current changing cultural and social landscape of the city.

Section Three focuses on *A Sewers' Chorus* in order to discuss the use of oral history and the different accounts shared with the public. These range from happy childhood memories, to nostalgic retellings and tales of trauma. This work is contextualised within Angelucci's body of work over the years which has experimented with the inclusion of voices and focused on the photographic medium to explore the immigration experience of the artist's Italian Canadian family. *A Sewers' Chorus* reflects on the diverse experiences of immigration and factory labour in Hamilton. I argue that such complex portraiture of each immigrant in the audio installation addresses the often conflicting emotions of their experiences as mainly female immigrant garment workers on their own terms.

SECTION ONE
A History of Hamilton and Coppley Apparel

This section provides an overview of the history of the Coppley Apparel factory in relation to the general histories of the immigrant garment factory workers in Hamilton, and by extension, of racialized and gendered factory labour. The photographic series *Coppley Patterns* provides a visual representation of the history of garment making during the twentieth century. Upon entering the exhibition *Piece Work* at the Art Gallery of Hamilton or at the Stephen Bulger gallery, the viewer is instantly transported into the factory realm of Coppley. The colourful photographic series *Coppley Patterns* provide clear visual clues documenting the production of the business suits and the history of the factory. In order to provide an in-depth analysis of this series of works, the following provides a history of Hamilton within the context of industrialization and immigration, highlighting the role of women in the city's garment industry.

In 1793, Upper Canada organised lot arrangements to lay out new communities.[38] Following this model, Canadian-born George Hamilton (1788−1836), the son of Robert Hamilton (1753−1809),[39] bought the land neighbouring Head of the Lake, known today as Hamilton Harbour,[40] located on the Dish with One Spoon territory. As part of the land purchase in 1815, Hamilton agreed to grant two blocks to the British Crown, on which a courthouse and jail were

[38] Michael Doucet and John C. Weaver, "Town Fathers and Urban Continuity: The Roots of Community Power and Physical Form in Hamilton, Upper Canada in the 1830s," in *Historical Essays in Upper Canada: New Perspectives*, eds. J.K. Johnson and Bruce G. Wilson, (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1989), 425.
[39] Robert Hamilton was a wealthy and influential Scottish merchant with connections to the colonial administration. Doucet and Weaver, 426.
[40] Doucet and Weaver, 426.

erected.[41] He had an open view on migration, mainly from Great Britain, and encouraged developments by businessmen, as he considered settlements and a growing population valuable assets to his property's value.[42] In fact, Hamilton, a "prototype of the urban land developer" according to historians Michael Doucet and John C. Weaver, invested in housing and commercial structures, while businessmen purchased from him smaller land parcels.[43] Not unlike other settlements in Upper Canada, the development of Hamilton relied heavily on wealthy men from English backgrounds whose families constituted the elite of the town, with ownership of the land and businesses passed down through generations. From the 1810s until the 1840s, Hamilton - named for its founder - developed rapidly from a small mercantile village into an important commercial centre for Upper Canada. By the 1820s, along the grid layout of the newly established streets, the town had its own marketplace and banks, with its population divided into neighborhoods according to class.[44] Its strategic position along the lake and the construction of the Burlingtown Canal attracted merchants and traders, and recruited immigrants for labour and settling purposes, hailing mainly from the British Isles.[45] Enterprises included small artisanal shops specializing in manufacturing goods for settlers, such as furniture, stoves, and farming tools.[46] Artisans also included tailors and shoemakers.[47] With the expansion of the lake port, these decades also saw the growth of the local metal industry: Hamilton imported raw materials such as pig iron from Scotland and the United States as well as male labourers and artisans.[48] By

[41] Doucet and Weaver, 426.
[42] Doucet and Weaver, 426.
[43] Doucet and Weaver, 426.
[44] Doucet and Weaver, 427, 449.
[45] Doucet and Weaver, 427.
[46] Robert B Kristofferson, *Craft Capitalism: Craftworkers and Early Industrialization in Hamilton, Ontario 1840-1872*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 22.
[47] Kristofferson, 22.
[48] Exhibition panel "Frontier Boom Town," *Workers Art and Heritage Centre*, Hamilton, Ontario; Kristofferson, 22.

the 1840s, foundries, as well as other establishments producing goods, were still relatively small. Hamilton's manufactures relied on the skill of the proprietor, helped only by a few artisans and apprentices to employ traditional handicraft methods, skills that took years to hone.[49] As with most townships in Southern Ontario, Hamilton's population was predominantly white and Anglophone. Between 1827 and 1850, the town was a settlement for thousands of migrants from the British Isles, the United States, and a smaller percentage of Germans in search of work and escaping poverty from their homeland.[50] Most migrants worked as labourers, farmers, craftworkers, although a few were elite entrepreneurs and merchants.[51]

In the 1800s, women from working class families also contributed to the family's and city's economy. Unlike their male counterparts, women were hired in sectors that were an extension of their unpaid labour at home. As such, they worked in the clothing, textile, or food processing industries. Their jobs were detail-oriented labour, which was considered to require minimal physical or manual strength.[52] As such, women dominated the dressmaking and millinery industries as the main craft workers.[53] Working women were mostly single in their teens and early twenties, since employers followed the sexist notion that they would eventually get married and start a family, with household duties impeding them from working in industries.

As Hamilton welcomed more British settlers and became a bustling centre of importation in Upper Canada, the township gained the official title of city in 1846. The beginning of Hamilton's first industrialization is symbolized by the opening of the Great Western Railway (GWR) in 1854 in the newly minted city, which facilitated both the importation of raw materials

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[49] Kristofferson, 22-23.
[50] Kristofferson, 62; Exhibition panel "A New Life," *Workers Art and Heritage Centre*, Hamilton, Ontario.
[51] Kristofferson, 62; Exhibition panel "A New Life," *Workers Art and Heritage Centre*, Hamilton, Ontario.
[52] Craig Heron, *Lunch-Bucket Lives: Remaking the Workers' City*, (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2015), 80. Thank you to Kat Williams from the Workers Art and Heritage Centre for this recommendation.
[53] Heron, *Lunch-Bucket Lives*, 81.

and the exportation of manufactured goods across the country and to the United States. The arrival of the railroad confirmed the importance of the foundries for the city's economy as metal shops became factories equipped with new machinery to make cars and locomotives for the GWR. However, the city's economic revolution truly began in the 1890s, when the civil engineer Robert Hobson (1861−1926) led the city's Canadian bourgeoisie through the second industrial revolution. Accompanied by other industrial agents, Hobson introduced the notion of private corporations to the city, pushing it into the realm of capitalism for the sake of progressive modernity.[54] Known at the time as the Ambitious City, factories boomed in Hamilton, producing various consumer goods. By the turn of the twentieth century, major industries included a ready-made clothing company, two cotton mills, a shoe factory, and a tobacco plant, in addition to various iron and steel foundries.[55] The variety of factories and workshops in the city earned Hamilton many comparisons with Birmingham.[56] In 1910, the various metal producing plants in Hamilton and in other towns on the west side of southern Ontario and Quebec merged to form the Steel Company of Canada, eventually known as Stelco, leading the steel production in the area.[57] Although the textile industry grew through the decades marked by this industrial revolution, it was the foundries that took over in importance and defined Hamilton's industrial and cultural image. In fact, as American companies opened steel production plants in Hamilton, the city was named "The Pittsburgh of Canada,"[58] eventually gaining the long-standing title "Steeltown."

[54] Heron, *Lunch-Bucket Lives*, 13-14.
[55] Heron, *Lunch-Bucket Lives*, 15.
[56] Kristofferson, 57.
[57] Heron, *Lunch-Bucket Lives,* 18.
[58] Heron, *Lunch-Bucket Lives,* 16.

The Emergence of Piecework and Gendered Labour

It was during the bustling capitalist period of the late 1800s that Coppley's factory developed. The classical-style stonewall building was designed by the English architect Frederick Rastrick in 1856, and still stands today at the north corner of York Boulevard and MacNab Street, in the core of the city's downtown (fig. 1). This building is Rastrick's first major project after his move to Canada in 1853.[59] The architect was commissioned by the retail business Young, Law and Co. to build a grocery warehouse in the downtown core.[60] In 1883, the John Calder & Company bought the building and transformed the warehouse into a clothing factory. The business was renamed Coppley Noyes & Randall Ltd, after three former employees took over the factory in 1900.[61]

Figure 1. View of Coppley Apparel's classical-style facade from the corner of McNab Street North and York Boulevard.

[59] Stephen A. Otto, "Rastrick, Frederick James," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 12, University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003, http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/rastrick_frederick_james_12E.html.
[60] Otto.
[61] Atkinson, "Fabric of a City."

As its title suggests, *Piece Work* is a direct reference to the chain production system, which is documented in Angelucci's photographic series *Mano D'Oro* and spoken about in *A Sewers' Chorus*. Pieceworking was introduced to Hamilton in the early twentieth century. The American mechanical engineer Frederick Winslow Taylor championed this system in his influential essay *A Piece-Rate System* (1895) - its model eventually becoming the basis of today's modern factories and sweatshops. Coppley, like many factories of the city, adopted the piecework model to boost their production first in 1910, and then in 1911. It took the company two attempts to implement the system since it was heavily criticized by labour unions who considered pieceworking as "the basis of the sweating system"[62] and the exploitation of workers. Unions fought against the production system to protect their rights. The few journal articles and history book chapters covering this local standoff claim that the men of the factory led the strike, while female employees "played anything more than a passively supportive role."[63] Although this statement is hard to believe, it is quite possible that "smaller" subversive actions by women went unnoticed by the local press, which took delight in surveying lively labour strikes. As the women worked tirelessly behind their sewing machines while hearing their male colleagues organizing a revolt, wouldn't they express between themselves the desire to stand up to the boss? Perhaps the chance to be a female picketer first came a couple years after Coppley adopted the controversial pieceworking system. Influenced and inspired by labour uprisings in American garment districts such as in Chicago and New York, a United Garment Workers' association became popular in the winter of 1912−1913 with Hamilton labourers, especially women.[64] In April 1913, cutters, pressers, and tailors went on strike, closing down the menswear production in the city for two

[62] Heron, *Lunch-Bucket Lives*, 620, n38.
[63] Heron, *Lunch-Bucket Lives*, 620, n38.
[64] Heron, *Lunch-Bucket Lives*, 278.

weeks.[65] Nearly 3,000 strikers held their ground, with women being almost half of the participants.[66] During this short-lived period of labour revolt, a militant feminism emerged with the establishments of female-led organizations bringing up gendered concerns, such as sexual harassment in the workplace and unfair low wages. Women-only meetings were organised, and even a fundraising concert was set up. This female solidarity also included some of Hamilton's ethnic minorities. Stories of resistance by Jews and women against the communist regimes in Poland and Russia were great sources of inspiration for Hamilton's female militancy.[67] Although unnamed by the press, these groups had their own spokeswomen who participated in the general strike committee of the United Garment Workers' Union.[68] The latter was dominated by men who were uncomfortable with female activism. Still anchored in traditional gendered values, they did not find women suitable for the workplace.[69] The strike ended with an agreement between the UGWU and the manufacturers, which unfortunately disappointed the workers, especially the female strikers who fought for their rights. The arrangement created wider wage gaps between genders and classes.[70] Worker's wages did not improve significantly, as salaries hardly increased. After such deceit, the UGWU lost influence and popularity, enabling factories to ignore local unions.[71]

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[65] Heron, *Lunch-Bucket Lives*, 278.
[66] Heron, *Lunch-Bucket Lives*, 279.
[67] Heron, *Lunch-Bucket Lives*, 279.
[68] Heron, *Lunch-Bucket Lives,* 279.
[69] Heron, *Lunch-Bucket Lives*, 279.
[70] Heron, *Lunch-Bucket Lives*, 280.
[71] Heron, *Lunch-Bucket Lives*, 280.

Racialized European Immigrant Workers, Unions and the Tailor Project

In addition to rapid industrialization, Hamilton also witnessed a major population boom at the turn of the century, its size tripling from 1901 to 1913.[72] Various reasons are attributed for this rapid growth, including an increasing birth rate, annexations of rural lands and, most importantly, an influx of immigration.[73] The greater number of factories created a higher number of jobs, which required special skills and experience.[74] However, in order to maintain ethnic cohesion and uphold traditional Anglo-Saxon values, employers in key sectors accepted temporary workers. During the early twentieth century, many single male migrants from Southern and Eastern Europe, such as Poland, Ukraine, and Italy, were sojourners.[75] Their temporary status made them seem "docile"[76] to the wealthy businessmen, making them more vulnerable than other British or Canadian-born workers to being exploited and not integrating the dominant workplace dynamics. Southern Italians were racialized since the late eighteen-century, and particularly after the Second World War. During the Second World War, the national scare of fascism and existing derogatory and racially based judgements led to the establishment of internment camps and the imprisonment of approximately 600 Italian Canadians, 837 German Canadians, 2 300 Canadian Jews, and 12 000 Japanese Canadians[77] who were deemed "enemy aliens" regardless of their citizenship. As most of the internees were men, often separated from their wives and children,

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[72] Heron, *Lunch-Bucket Lives*, 36.
[73] Heron, *Lunch-Bucket Lives*, 36.
[74] Heron, *Lunch-Bucket Lives*, 36-37.
[75] Ruth A. Frager, "Labour History and the Interlocking Hierarchies of Class, Ethnicity, and Gender: A Canadian Perspective," *International Review of Social History,* 44(2), 240.
[76] Frager, 240.
[77] "Italian Canadians as Enemy Aliens: Memories of WWII," *Colombus Centre*, http://www.italiancanadianww2.ca/theme/detail/italian_canadians_as_enemy_aliens_memories_of_wwII; Gerhard P. Bassler, "German Canadians," *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, July 30 2013, https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/german-canadians; "History of Canada and the Holocaust," *Government of Canada*, September 10, 2018, https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/services/canada-holocaust/history.html; Matthew McRae, "Japanese Canadian internment and the struggle for redress," Canadian Museum for Human Rights, https://humanrights.ca/story/japanese-canadian-internment-and-the-struggle-for-redress.

many Italian women turned towards working in the textile industry to support their family.[78] Although Italy joined the Allies in 1943, the aftermath of the war in Canada saw a rise in racist attitudes towards Italians. As social historian Franca Iacovetta explains, Southern Italians were especially targeted, since the Canadian government based its immigration policies on the erroneous assumption that hot climates equated with cultural backwardness.[79] Canada, particularly in the English-speaking provinces, thus favoured immigration from northwestern European countries and the north of Italy, believing that they all shared a similar set of values close to the dominating Anglophone culture of the country. However, as labour shortages in critical industries began to appear and with pro-immigration groups pressuring the government to welcome war-torn populations, Canada adopted a more open-door policy in 1947, the same year as the Canadian Citizenship Act, which codified the naturalization process in Canada. The updated immigration guidelines enabled the increase of admission of Europeans from the Mediterranean into Canada, while still imposing strict quotas on southern Italian immigration. Thus, the country still relied on what Iacovetta describes as "an ethnic preference ladder," especially when it came to job delegation.[80] According to the Canadian government, the preferred newcomers were British, American, French, Dutch, Swiss and Scandinavian. However, in the aftermath of the war, Eastern European refugees were accepted, as were immigrants from Southern Europe, such as Italians.[81] Although the 1923 Chinese Immigration Act was repealed in 1946, the strict quotas on Asian migration reflected the racist anti-Asian sentiment of the time,

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[78] William Guyatt, "The Day They Came for the Italians," *The Hamilton Spectator*, July 25 1981.
[79] Franca Iacovetta, *Such Hardworking People: Italian Immigrants in Post-war Toronto* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992), 22
[80] Franca Iacovetta, "Ordering in Bulk: Canada's Postwar Immigration Policy and the Recruitment of Contract Workers from Italy," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 11, no. 1 (1991): 55.
[81] Iacovetta, "Ordering in Bulk," 55.

relegating them at the bottom of the preference ladder,[82] along with applicants from the Caribbean, Africa and Latin America.[83] Italians, especially healthy strong young men, were recruited in what the Canadian government officials called "bulk-orders" for physical labour in fields, farms, mines and factories, while a much smaller number of women were hired as domestic servants, eventually working in other industries, such as garment making.[84]

Although earlier I described solidarity between racialized and white women during union strikes, such interethnic camaraderie was not always present in Hamilton, especially in male-dominated workplaces. In addition to legislation and racist work ethics, racialized men were often ostracized by their white colleagues. For example, one of the issues which led to a group of iron moulders to go on strike in 1910 was their refusal to work with Italians. As labour historian Bryan Palmer explains, "skilled workers often refused to work with foreign-speaking labourers, striking to preserve specific jobs as the exclusive terrain of the English-speaking."[85] Regular "Canadians-Canadians"[86] in the working class have long reinforced a racially-based hierarchy for their benefit, their attacks spurred by bigotry and the fear of competition, not unlike what we can witness today. In addition to language differences, Polish and Italian migrants were also subjected to Anti-Catholic sentiment rooted in the long-standing rift between Irish Catholics and British Protestants in the local working class.[87] Although instances of strikes in which racialized

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[82] Iacovetta, "Ordering in Bulk," 55.
[83] Triadafilos Triadafilopoulos, "Dismantling White Canada: Race, Rights, and the Origins of the Points System," in *Wanted and Welcome? Policies for Highly Skilled Immigrants in Comparative Perspective*, ed. Triadafilos Triadafilopoulos, (New York; London: Springer, 2013),16.
[84] Iacovetta, *Such Hardworking People*, 29-35; 92.
[85] Bryan D. Palmer, *A Culture in Conflict: Skilled Workers and Industrial Capitalism in Hamilton, Ontario, 1860-1914* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1979), 231.
[86] Term borrowed from Eva Mackey, Mackey, 20.
[87] Craig Heron, *Working in Steel: The Early Years in Canada, 1883-1935*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), 85.

and white men participated side by side do exist, the workplace was a tense environment for racialized people who faced more barriers than their white Anglo-Saxon peers.

Coppley Noyes & Randall Ltd was involved with the Garment Worker Scheme of 1948, also known as the Tailor Project.[88] Setup by the Canadian government, this plan integrated over 2,000 tailors from refugee camps in post-war Europe to alleviate skilled labour shortages. The cities and the smaller towns near Toronto, Vancouver, Winnipeg, and Montreal welcomed immigrants, with half of them being Jewish Holocaust survivors.[89] Hamilton was particularly important for this project since Max Enkin, a Jewish businessman who eventually took over Coppley's business, was a key player in the Tailor Project.[90] While the city welcomed a growing Jewish population following the Tailor Project, the largest ethnocultural community from 1921 to the 1980s was Italian.[91] The importance of the Italian presence in Hamilton was also reflected in Coppley's hierarchy since the head tailors at the time were Italian men.[92] Since tailoring is a specific trade, which centers on men's garments, and usually done by men, *Piece Work* further highlights the importance of the sewers' work, which is traditionally done by women, but also the gendered division and designation of labour. Following the end of the Tailor Project, the year 1950 marked a low point in the factory's production. With fewer than sixty employees and the diminishing demand for military uniforms, the factory was not equipped to adapt to the post-war era and respond to a consumer-driven economy. At this time, Enkin made the decision to buy Coppley Noyes & Randal Ltd and focus its production on fashionable civilian wear, otherwise

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[88] This story will be traced in the forthcoming book *The Tailor Project: How 2,500 Holocaust Survivors Found a New Life in Canada* by Nicole Bryck, Paula Draper, and Andrea Knight, published by Second Story Press in October 2020.

[89] Anti-Semetic ideas prevailed in Canada at the time, which influenced governmental decisions to limit the number of Jewish refugees to half of the total of accepted migrants.

[90] Atkinson, "Fabric of a City."

[91] Perri, 41.

[92] The tailor Danny Mascio and his apprentice-turned chief in-house tailor Santo Gallo were skilled Italian migrants. Atkinson, "Fabric of a City."

known as men's ready-to-wear fashion. It was during this decade that the factory became synonymous with the business suit, while the city saw an influx of newcomers from various countries, especially from Italy, Portugal and Eastern Europe. The series *Coppley Patterns* in *Piece Work* documents the factory's production following the era of the Tailor Project and features sewing patterns from business suits dating back to the mid-twentieth century. My conversations with Angelucci and staff from Coppley revealed that the factory does not have an archive and holds very little documentation about its history and past employees.[93] When Angelucci started research for the project, she wasn't able to find any documents, such as workers' time sheets or personnel files from previous decades. The only historical documentation that she was able to find were old suit patterns from the mid-twentieth century, forgotten in a damp basement and in dire condition, which she featured in the digital collage *Coppley Patterns*.[94] Each of the seven photographs of this series features patterns of a business suit model, their subtitles reflecting fashion's history, such as *Morning Coat 2* (fig. 2), *Dude 3* (fig. 3) and *Klondike* (fig. 4).

[93] One of the oldest documents kept by the business is a photograph dating from the 1920s, in which the entire staff of Coppley at the time poses in front of the building. This photograph is displayed in the offices at Coppley Apparel, on the ground floor of the building.

[94] Even Warwick Jones, the Chairman of Coppley who has worked for the company for over fifty years, did not know the patterns were still in the factory. A garment worker showed Angelucci where they were during one of her visits. Angelucci, Interview.

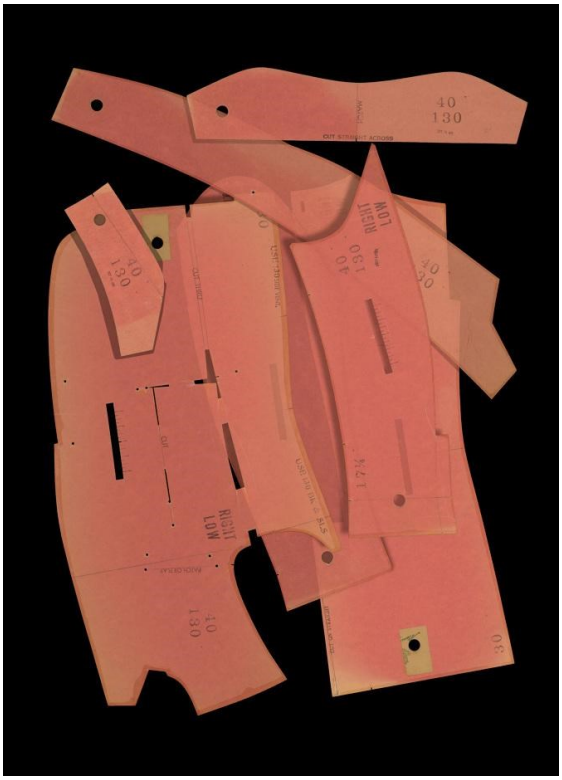

Figure 2. Sara Angelucci, *Coppley Patterns (Morning Coat 2)*, 2017, chromogenic print, 36 x 50 inches.

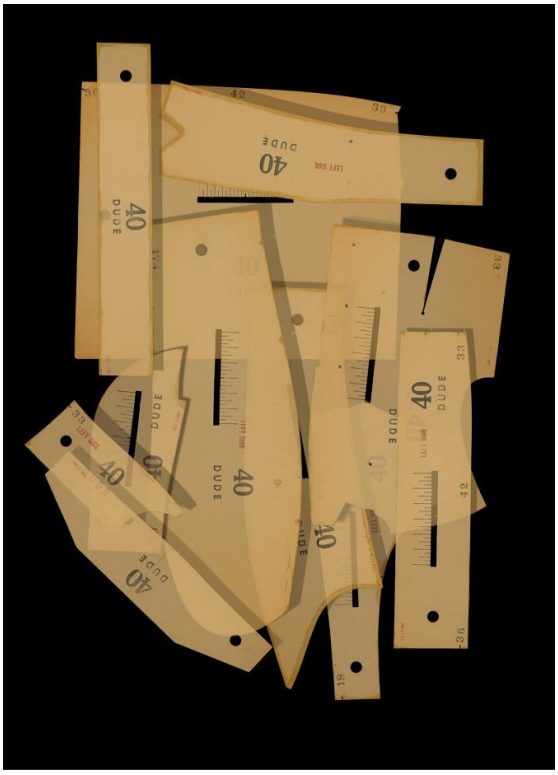

Figure 3. Sara Angelucci, *Coppley Patterns (Dude 3)*, 2017, chromogenic print, 36 x 50 inches.

Figure 4. Sara Angelucci, *Coppley Patterns (Klondike 2)*, 2017, chromogenic print, 36 x 50 inches.

With its black background and brightly coloured patterns placed in an artfully fashion, this series recalls Kurt Schwitters' Dadaist collages, one of Angelucci's main inspirations for the work (fig. 5).

Figure 5. Kurt Schwitters, *Merz Drawing 75 (Merzzeichnung 75)*, 1920, paper and fabric collage, tempera, ink and graphite on paper, 14.6 x 10 cm.

The dynamic compositions of the collages, the stamps describing measurements and the printed labelling of each part of the suit seem to reflect the mechanical aspect of pattern making. However, Angelucci considers *Coppley Patterns* to be examples of the employees' artistry. Historically, patterns were measured, traced, and cut by hand, tasks that have since been replaced by machines. Upon closer inspection, each picture of the series reveals the human touch on the paper - some patterns feature handwritten notes, while others have irregular punch holes. Digitally unretouched, the magenta, orange and yellow cardboards reveal their age: corners are discoloured and slight stains are noticeable. Visible upon entering the exhibition, *Coppley*

Patterns introduces visitors to the history of the factory. This initiation to Coppley's past is achieved without any didactic explanation in the exhibition - the only clues are those gathered from the life-size mid-century patterns. Although visually rich in details, the images of *Coppley Patterns* do not directly convey the intricacies of their use nor the historic events that led to their idleness. During my interview with the artist, Angelucci revealed that the photograph *Ascot* (fig. 6) features parts of a woman's suit from the 1950s, a short-lived design for the factory.

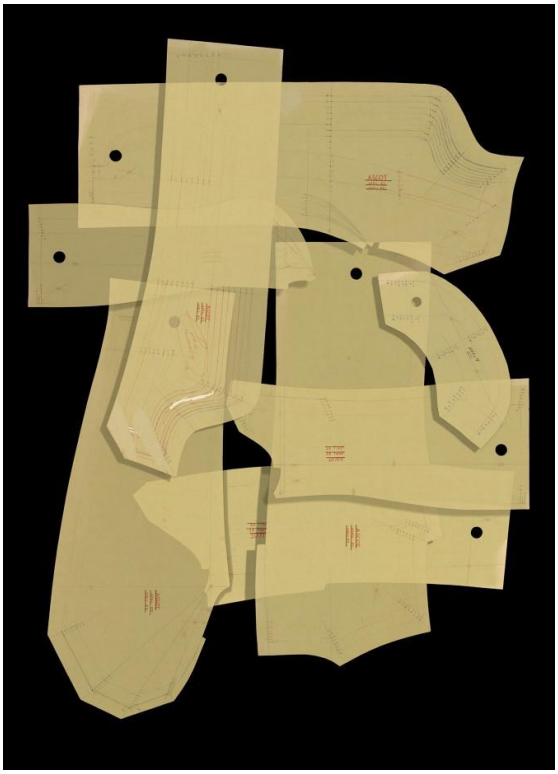

Figure 6. Sara Angelucci, *Coppley Patterns (Ascot)*, 2017, chromogenic print, 36 x 50 inches.

Cut on yellow paper, the pattern of this feminine garment is one of the only vestiges remaining from Coppley's difficult post-war year and acts as a material trace of an important event in women's history. The 1950s represent the shift from women's encouraged contributions in the nation's workforce during the Second World War, to a return to the conflicted era of the stay-at-home housewife. As the demand for women's suits decreased after the war, Coppley

discontinued the model to focus instead on menswear, discarding the feminine patterns to the factory's damp basement.

As this section demonstrated, Hamilton has a long-standing history of immigration, privileging white Anglophones from Great Britain in the 1800s, then widening its scope to include Eastern Europeans in the early 1900s, and eventually offering employment to European refugees in search of better living conditions after the Second World War. Although little documented, the role of women in Hamiltonian factories challenged gendered conceptions of work as they actively pushed for higher wages and better working conditions, which led to temporary solidarity between racialized groups. Coppley's business was a key player in the city's industrialization by implementing pieceworking to boost production and employing many women of immigrant background. While upholding men in managerial positions, a power relation that can still be witnessed today, Coppley's factory employed a multicultural community of mainly female employees.

SECTION TWO
A Family Story of Italian Migration in the 1950s

This section begins with an explanation of *Piece Work*'s initial conception for the Art Gallery of Hamilton. It then focuses on the immigration story of Nina Acciaroli,[95] the artist's mother and the catalyst for Angelucci's interest in Coppley. This family account provides examples not only of the specific history of Italian immigration in Hamilton but also the type of gendered labour in which these immigrants were typically employed.

The initial *Piece Work* exhibit at the Art Gallery of Hamilton (AGH) was shown during the 150th anniversary of the Canadian Confederation in 2017. The official theme of the sesquicentennial announced by the Department of Canadian Heritage was "Strong, Proud, and Free," and defined Canadian society as "open, diverse, and pluralistic."[96] *Piece Work*'s reflection on the theme of immigration seemed to align with the celebration of Canadian multiculturalism. During the early stages of research for this thesis, I assumed that the initial *Piece Work* exhibition at the Art Gallery of Hamilton (AGH) was funded by the government's cultural programming of Canada 150. However, upon meeting Tobi Bruce, the Director, Exhibitions and Collections & Senior Curator of the AGH, it was quickly revealed that *Piece Work* was not funded by the government.[97] In 2016, Angelucci was initially part of a tentative group exhibition at the AGH for a project that aimed to criticize the museum's permanent collection for Canada 150. The artist had also been thinking of making a project on Coppley for a decade, and pitched her idea for *Piece Work* to Bruce.[98] During our meeting, the curator explained the initial group for the Canada

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[95] Acciaroli is her maiden name.
[96] "Canada 150 Fund: Applicant's Guide 2015–2016," *Canadian Heritage, Government of Canada*, last modified 18 August 2015, http://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2015/pc-ch/ CH24-45-2015-eng.pdf.
[97] Like most of the contemporary projects presented at the AGH, *Piece Work* was supported by the Canada Council for the Arts and municipal funding. Bruce, Interview.
[98] Angelucci, Interview.

150 exhibition fell through because the project's application for funding from the Canada 150 program was denied.[99] This misfortune ended up as a positive outcome since the gallery was able to make decisions regarding upcoming exhibitions independent of the anniversary. As the Canadian nation prepared to celebrate its anniversary, and the majority of art institutions planning to showcase Canadian issues on different critical levels, the AGH also wanted to reflect on the anniversary of the Canadian Confederation and its celebration.[100] Since Angelucci's *Piece Work* proved to be too large to be part of a group project, the AGH invited her to produce her concept as a solo exhibition,[101] alongside the *1779* exhibition by Indigenous artist Shelley Niro [Kanien'kehá:ka/Turtle Clan], who was also part of the initial group show.[102] For Bruce, the AGH's 2017 programming presented important stories that critically reflected on the past 150 years in Canada rather than simply in celebration.[103]

The laborious process of making *Piece Work* was accelerated as Angelucci was limited to a nine-month time frame, including the initial research and the final installation of the exhibition at the AGH. After being approached by the gallery, the artist wrote a formal letter to Warwick Jones, the executive chairman of Coppley Apparel. Upon meeting and explaining the project she had in mind, Angelucci was given carte blanche and gained the support of Jones and the team at Coppley to pursue the project. As the unofficial "historian" of the factory, a title he acquired by being at the head of the company for over fifty years, Jones personally toured Angelucci through the facility many times for her research. It was during those visits that the artist met Rose

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[99] Bruce, Interview.
[100] Bruce, Interview.
[101] Bruce, Interview.
[102] For this multimedia project, Niro looked back at the year 1779, which marks the historical migration of 5000 Haudenausonees who fled to Fort Niagara, escaping deadly persecution in the so-called state of New York. "Shelley Niro: 1779," *The Art Gallery of Hamilton,* https://www.artgalleryofhamilton.com/exhibition/shelley-niro-1779/.
[103] Bruce, Interview.

Vartanian, an Armenian immigrant who came to Canada via Greece and who worked three machines away from her mother on the factory floor.[104] This moment was crucial for Angelucci: she could visualize her mother working in the factory,[105] her labour and her experience as an immigrant reflected in today's factory employees.

Nina's Story

As it was for many families who immigrated from the Mediterranean, the personal history of Angelucci's parents is intricately linked to the historical events that influenced changes to Canada's immigration policy at the time. Although not directly broached in *Piece Work*, the reasons and the story behind the family's journey from Italy to Canada serve as a model to understand the various experiences of migration shared in the sound installation *A Sewers' Chorus*. As mentioned in the exhibition's curatorial statement, Angelucci's parents were both employed in Hamilton's industrial sectors upon their arrival in the country during the mid-fifties, which shaped the artist's own artistic practice.[106] The following account of the family's migration story was generously shared with me during my interview with the artist.

Nina Acciaroli lived on her family's farm with her five brothers and two sisters in the small rural village of Force, in the Marche region in Central Italy.[107] Following the war, life in the hills of central Italy was difficult. Like many people in the area, Nina's parents were *contadini*, and followed the traditional feudal system of tenant farming. A wealthy *signore* owned

[104] Siegel, "My Mother's Threads."
[105] Siegel, "My Mother's Threads."
[106] Alana Traficante, Curatorial Statement, *Piece Work*, Art Gallery of Hamilton, 2017.
[107] All references to Nina Acciaroli's migration story are from my interview conducted with the artist. Angelucci, Interview.

the land while the farmers were remunerated a certain percentage of their own harvest. Although everyone in the household contributed to the farm, the labour was divided according to gender. Alongside her mother, Nina's contribution was of a domestic nature, such as making and cleaning clothes, cleaning the house, and bringing food out to her brothers working in the fields. Dexterous sewing skills ran in the family: her older sister Pompilia, was a gifted seamstress. At the young age of fourteen, Pompilia started her apprenticeship and had the honour to dress her first bride four years later. Admiring the nimble fingers of the teenage seamstress, her father-in-law described her as having *mani d'oro*, hands of gold. Pompilia was quite proud of her gifted sewing skills.[108]The small amount of money Nina's family would make in Force would automatically be pooled for the farm, which relied on the communal effort and the unity of the family. Of a spirited nature, Nina dreamed of a new, better life and longed to become independent. She thought about her brothers who eventually moved for work to Canada - a distant, strange land she probably knew mainly from descriptions she read in family letters. As she got older, Nina got engaged to Orfeo Angelucci, whose family were also tenant farmers in Force. By the mid-fifties, both families were struggling to make ends meet and had to make important decisions for their future. Through chain migration, Nina's family journeyed to Hamilton, while Orfeo's moved to Rome, as the capital was rapidly recovering from the war and offered more job prospects. It was during this whirlwind period that Nina and Orfeo got married by proxy, a practice whereby family members would stand in for the bride and the groom for the official union.[109]

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[108] Sara Angelucci, "Piece Work," *Sara Angelucci*, https://sara-angelucci.ca/filter/Projects/Piece-Work2017.

[109] Proxy weddings were quite common in Italy for young couples who decided to migrate, and this phenomenon was the subject of an article in the Hamilton Spectator in the 1960s. Linde Howe, "Despite Numerous Problems of Proxy Wedding Some Italians Seek It As Guarantee," *The Hamilton Spectator*, July 9, 1964.

Nina didn’t hesitate to make the transatlantic journey to join her brothers in 1954. She was quite adamant and fearless about starting a new life. The artist recalls how her mother said she pressured her brothers, declaring “if you don't bring me over there, I'll never speak to you again”. Finally, in 1954, Nina embarked on the ship the Conte Biancamano, setting sail across the Atlantic from Genoa and leaving her rural Italian life behind. A black and white photograph of this historic moment captures Nina on the vessel, facing the camera defiantly, wind blowing her dress and dark hair off her face (fig. 7).

Figure 7. Nina Acciaroli on the Conte Biancamano, 1954.

After the long journey, the ship arrived at Pier 21 in Halifax, and Nina took the train to join her family in Hamilton. The young woman stayed in her brother’s house with other family members. As Angelucci explains, this strong family unit is typical of migrant families as they stay together not only for financial reasons, but also to keep strong family ties, with everyone supporting one another through the hardships faced by a newly arrived immigrant family. For the

first couple of years, Nina's family rented a house big enough to accommodate the extended family. As the artist recalls, the neighbourhood was in the east end of Hamilton. Although situated in the rugged part of the town, its location was practical and familiar as it was near the Stelco steel factory, where Nina's brothers worked and in a predominantly Italian district. During the 1950s, the Italian community was one of the largest ethnic communities in Hamilton, comprised mainly of a mix of immigrants from southern Italy, with very few from the northern and central regions.[110]

Nina was joined by her husband Orfeo in 1956. Although Rome offered work in its growing industries, Italy was still in great difficulty in the 1950s. In love with Nina who had courageously moved to a foreign land, two years later Orfeo decided to undertake the same journey for a chance at a better life. Although the couple had been legally married for the past two years, adapting to married life was another challenge once Orfeo arrived in Canada, in addition to living in a new country with different customs and languages. The artist remembers her mother telling her about this transition: "previously I was always chaperoned in his presence and then suddenly, we have our own bedroom." Nonetheless, Nina persevered to reach her goal of becoming financially independent, despite the traditional cultural expectations of her role as a passive wife relegated to the confines of the household. The year of Orfeo's arrival also coincides with Nina's employment at Coppley Noyes and Randall Ltd. The artist suspects that her mother was able to find the job through the local community of Italian women she was part of. This informal way of finding employment was typical of newly arrived immigrants, whose ethnocultural community was the main source of support and shared resources, much like an extension of one's family. Through other Italian female employees of the factory, Nina was able

[110] Perri, 37.

to work as a sewer in Coppley's pants department, where she stayed until 1968. Although she was able to continue working after having two children, Nina decided to end her factory-working days to give birth to twins. She later changed career path to work in a restaurant. The young Italian woman relished making financial decisions: for the first time in her life, she had money that belonged to her.

In 1969, with Orfeo's savings from his work as a steelworker at Stelco combined with her own, the married couple bought a small family farm in Waterdown outside of Hamilton. Nina was able to balance work, raising children, taking care of the household and of her husband.[111] She had a positive outlook, which allowed her to integrate with other Anglo-Saxon Canadians with ease as she persevered at learning English, especially at work, where it was the common language spoken. In addition to her courage, Nina's diverse entourage helped her feel at ease in different environments. Nina moved easily from one community to another. From the family farm in the hills of Force, to the family household in Hamilton, to the local Italian community, and Coppley's immigrant sewers from different backgrounds, Nina was able to carve a space for herself.

Votive Threads

Although what initially sparked Angelucci's interest in Coppley was her mother's immigration story and her job as a garment worker, *Piece Work* is decisively focused on the factory's current employees. However, Angelucci still wanted to pay homage to her mother's sewing skills and her dedication to her work in the exhibition. During one of her visits at the factory, the artist noticed

[111] Nina's family support greatly contributed to managing the different aspects of her life. Her parents lived with her, and her mother helped with taking care of the children.

the icon of the Virgin Mary placed over the thread holder in one of the employee's workstations,[112] reminding her of her mother's faith. In a quiet corner of Angelucci's exhibition is *Votive Threads*, an installation made with a Coppley sewing table with different coloured spools of thread, activated by electrical flickering lights, placed as if they were candles on a votive altar in a Catholic church (fig. 8).

Figure 8. Installation view of *Piece Work* at the Stephen Bulger Gallery in Toronto, June 2018. Left: *Votive Threads*, 2017, sewing table, spools of thread, electrical lights, dimensions unknown. Right: *Coppley Patterns (Dude 3)*, 2017, chromogenic print, 36 x 50 inches.

Many of the spools of thread belonged to her mother, which were kept in a box by Angelucci for over thirty years (fig. 9).[113] Her daughter, via the sculptural artwork, commemorates Nina's work in the factory, her sewing skills and her Catholicism, the religion central to Italian culture.

[112] During my visit at Coppley, I also saw two stickers of the Virgin Mary icons and an image of Jesus at one of the employee's sewing station. Atkinson, "Fabric of a City."
[113] Atkinson, "Fabric of a City."

Figure 9. A box of threads that belonged to Sara Angelucci's mother.

Mano D'Oro

The photographic series *Mano D'Oro* acts as a testament of the ethnocultural landscape of Coppley's employees, which can be extended to reflect the racial diversity of Hamilton's population. With subtitles such as *Measuring tape and remove staples* (fig. 10), *Trim and turn edges* (fig. 11), *Pick stitching* (fig.12), *Collar sewing* (fig. 13) and *Tack buttonhole* (fig. 14), the twenty-four photographs depict the laborious process of making a business jacket - with a complete suit taking up to 123 steps to complete.[114]

[114] Atkinson, "Fabric of a City."

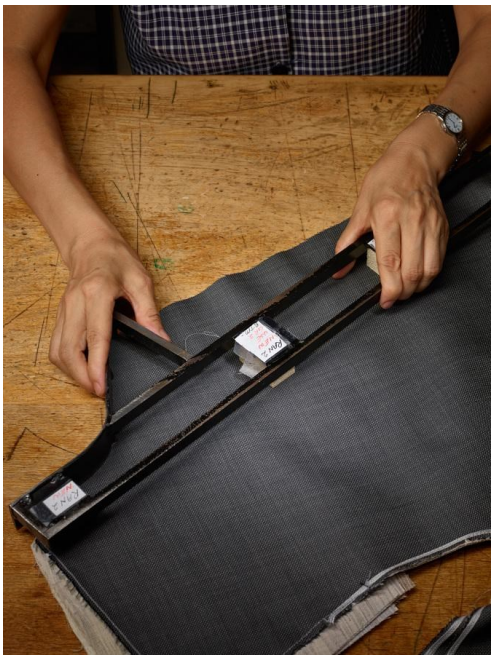

Figure 10. Sara Angelucci, *Mano D'Oro. Measuring tape and remove staples*, 2017, inkjet print, 15 x 19 inches.

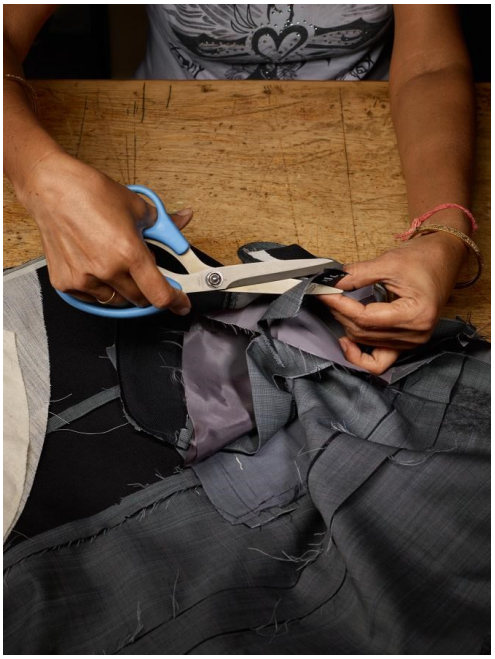

Figure 11. Sara Angelucci, *Mano D'Oro. Trim and turn edges*, 2017, inkjet print, 15 x 19 inches.

Figure 12. Sara Angelucci, *Mano D'Oro. Pick stitching*, 2017, inkjet print, 15 x 19 inches.

Figure 13. Sara Angelucci, *Mano D'Oro. Collar sewing*, 2017, inkjet print, 15 x 19 inches.

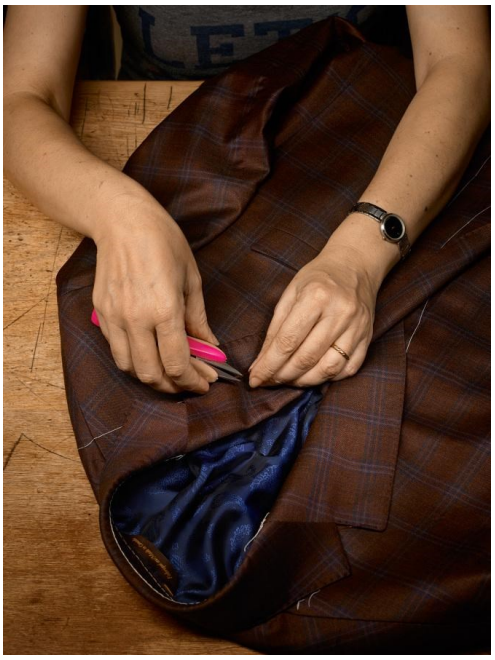

Figure 14. Sara Angelucci, *Mano D'Oro. Tack buttonhole*, 2017, inkjet print, 15 x 19 inches.

Each photograph frames the employee at work, the lens focused on the hands manipulating fabric and various tools. Hung in a row and following the order of the suit-making process, each photo represents the breadth of current styles produced by Coppley, with fabrics of dark grey wool, blue tweed and pinstripe linen superimposed over colourful and shiny paisley, striped and richly coloured solid silky linings (figs. 15 and 16).

Figure 15. Installation view of *Mano D'Oro* in the *Piece Work* exhibition at the Art Gallery of Hamilton, 2017.

Figure 16. Installation view of *Mano D'Oro* in the *Piece Work* exhibition at the Art Gallery of Hamilton, 2017

The protagonists of this storyline, however, are the people making the suit. Angelucci wanted to elevate the labour of the sewers of Coppley, which she achieved through the vibrant photographs and the title of the series. The latter is taken from the anecdote about her aunt Pompilia, a gifted seamstress who had "hands of gold." The photos from *Mano D'Oro* are alternative portraits of the employees since each pair of hands reveal the individuality of the suit maker. The various skin tones, signs of aging, nail polishes, wedding bands, bracelets and watches provide clues about the person's ethnicity, age, and gender, as well as other personal aspects. For example, the striking photograph *Pick stitching* (fig. 12) depicts a woman who is carefully smoothing the seams uniting the paisley lining with the dark fabric of a jacket. Gold bangles on both her wrists and a big round ring on her left middle finger highlight her brown skin tone. It is possible that the sewer chose to wear her prettiest jewellery and her favourite shirt for the photo session since the employees were given advance notice of Angelucci's photoshoot schedule.

As it was explained earlier, sewing is a gendered task, a detailed labour traditionally taken up by women. Although the majority of Coppley's employees are female, the photographic series *Mano D'Oro* include the hands of men who sew for a living, their unique stories making a remarkable appearance later on in the sound installation *A Sewers' Chorus*. *Measure waist* (fig. 17) features masculine hands with short nails sewing a turquoise tweed jacket with a thimble. The man is wearing a digital watch on his left wrist, while around his neck is a measuring tape draped over his graphic t-shirt.

Figure 17. Sara Angelucci, *Mano D'Oro. Measure waist*, 2017, inkjet print, 15 x 19 inches.

The last photograph of the series *External alterations* (fig. 18) captures the finishing touches made to a dark blue plaid jacket, its sleek interior lining facing the camera. Coppley's iconic black and white label is visible over the inside pocket, and is partially covered by a man's hands manipulating white thread. His tools, a thimble and a pair of metal thread cutters, are laid out on the wooden table, its well-worn surface marred by scratches and its varnish faded by the years. Delicately, the man holds the thread taut, as if he is deliberately demonstrating his skills to the viewer.

Figure 18. Sara Angelucci, *Mano D'Oro*. *External alterations*, 2017, inkjet print, 15 x 19 inches.

Agency was given to the employees during the process of making *Mano D'Oro*. Angelucci set up an iPad connected to her digital camera so that the subject of the photo could see how they appeared.[115] As such, the sewers could perform their work for the camera on their own terms. The artist was careful in making the participants at ease in front of the lenses, which is why the full bodies of the sewers are not part of the composition. Akin to a temporary studio, the photographs were taken in a spare room of the factory as to not disturb the surrounding employees. This setting adds to the intimate capture of the suit-making process, which is executed in front of the artist and her two assistants.[116] Angelucci was also respectful of the participants' work since she requested that each employee would not be penalized in their paycheck for their contribution to

[115] Dafoe, "Sara Angelucci's Poignant Portraits."
[116] Angelucci, Interview.

Piece Work.[117] Additionally, the pieces sewn in front of the camera were part of the person's daily workday. The unconventional "portraits" also serve as a response to the exploitative history of photographing the body of women, migrants, and racialized people, who are often anonymous and reduced to racist or sexist stereotypes. The sitters of *Mano D'Oro*, or in this case, the performers, are not anonymous subjects, since on the wall next to the artworks, a list of each photograph's title features the name of the employee at work and the description of their labour. (fig. 19). Respect for the subjects' agency and the relationship Angelucci built with the participants foreshadows the next part of the exhibition: the sound installation *A Sewers' Chorus* which serves as a powerful platform for the garment workers to share their stories on their own terms.

[117] Angelucci, Interview.

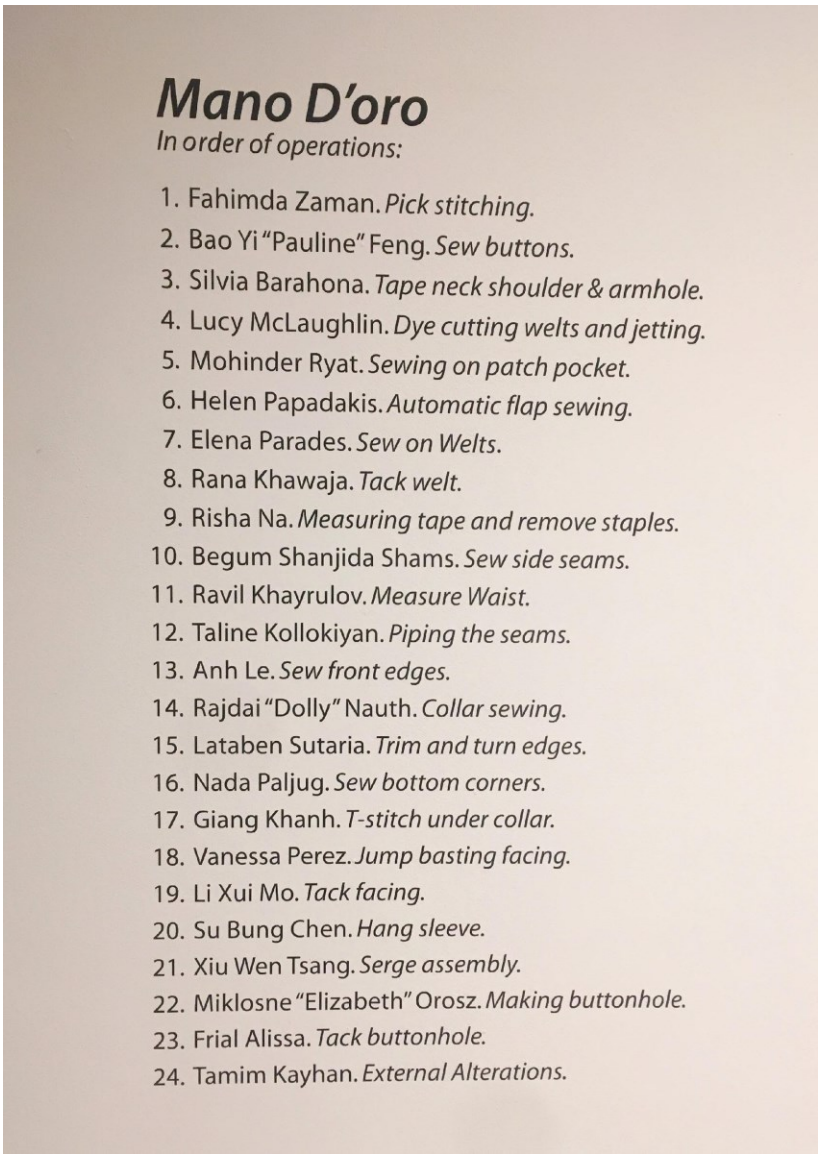

Figure 19. Detail from the exhibition *Piece Work* at the Stephen Bulger Gallery, June 2018.

SECTION THREE
A Sewers' Chorus: Oral History as a Sound Installation

In this section, I advance that the social relations described in the stories that make up *A Sewers' Chorus* reveal the oppressive aspects of the social distinctions among female immigrant garment workers, but also reveal positive aspects of their lives and relationships both within and beyond the walls of the Coppley factory. In *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics*, Lisa Lowe uses oral histories as a methodology, arguing testimonies are a "genre" of cultural production. The term "immigrant acts" refers to the history of Asian migration to the United States, as well as the agency that Asian Americans and Asian migrants are able to exercise as "subjects of" migration.[118] Lowe argues these acts reveal the contradictory aspects of American immigration policies and history, which regard Asians as part of the United States while denoting them as "foreign" to the state, thus excluding them from being "true" Americans.[119] Canadian authors have also criticized the nation state's exclusion of immigrants from its national narrative, even though Canada prides itself on its multicultural policy. Asian Canadian scholar Christine Kim defines the policy and ideology of multiculturalism as a flawed social fantasy despite its claim of including all ethnicities within the nation.[120] As she explains, multiculturalism defines identity as a legislation, which benefits and disadvantages different ethnic groups unevenly.[121] According to Kim, "approaching the identity politics of visibly racialized groups as if they are analogous to national identity obscures how whiteness, neutrality,

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[118] Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 6-9.
[119] Lowe, 8-9.
[120] Christine Kim, "National Incompletion: Awkward Multiculturalisms and Denaturalizing Whiteness," in *The Minor Intimacies of Race*, 32.
[121] Kim, 32.

and normativity are conventionally equated and generate forms of identity typically unrecognized within discourses of multiculturalism."[122] I argue *A Sewers' Chorus* challenges identity assumptions in its inclusion of both positive and negative stories that reflect the conflicting experiences of the predominantly female immigrant sewers. The stories of *A Sewers' Chorus* can be read as acts of resistance against the Canadian nation-building project as the stories told are nuanced: the subjects sometimes highlight their negative experiences as racialized others in their workplace, while also expressing positive reactions to their life in Canada. Although *Piece Work* was exhibited during Canada's 150th anniversary year, the work goes beyond a simple iteration of the country's cultural mosaic through the multidimensional portrayal of immigrant workers and their agency over their own stories. This opportunity for self-definition can be considered an act of migrant resistance born from the underbelly of a nation-building celebration, which makes *Piece Work* subtle in its subversion and critique of Canada's cultural tolerance. In her work, Lowe analyzed an excerpt of a testimony[123] from a female Chinese garment worker in San Francisco as a "genre" of cultural production since it is an expression that links the subject to social relations. This testimony can be compared to the accounts featured in *A Sewers' Chorus* as gender, class, and race are intersected in the different stories. Borrowing from Lowe's analytical tool to study oral accounts as a genre of cultural production, I suggest the sound installation articulates the negative effects of social stratification, such as gendered and racially based discrimination, stories of war and isolation, and at times dangerous work conditions, but also reveal positive relationships in the descriptions of friendships, romance, family, and workplace dynamics.

[122] Kim, 32-33.
[123] In this thesis, I define the term "testimony" as a legal statement used for evidence.

Writing a Chorus

Oral and art historian Laura Sandino states that oral history, like the arts, is a diverse, co-constructed practice that challenges conventional, singular production and identities.[124] Studies in oral history stress the importance of the relationship between the interviewer and the participant. In explaining the process of research for her work, Angelucci recalls the suspicion of some of the garment workers as she was photographing the factory during the research process.[125] It was only upon explaining that her mother worked in the factory that the employees opened up and wanted to participate in her project. The artist's family connection to the factory was the key to establishing a bond with the employees on a personal level. Before producing *Piece Work* (fig. 20), the artist spent six months in the factory getting to know the workers, assembling a visual documentation of Coppley's history, and sketching ideas for her project. [126] Although Angelucci considers this amount of time quite short to conclude such a large-scale project and successfully involve a community she is not part of, the three-part exhibition reflects the level of trust the artist was able to earn from the employees.

[124] Laura Sandino and Matthew Partington. *Oral History in the Visual Arts*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 2.
[125] I also encountered wariness during my visit at Coppley: many employees would quickly glance at my camera with suspicion as they were working, which highlighted my position as an intruder in their workspace.
[126] Angelucci, Interview.

Figure 20. Inside Coppley Apparel in Hamilton, 2018.

This sense of community is reflected in *A Sewers' Chorus* not only through the subject of the accounts, such as the retelling of moments of friendships between coworkers, but also through the poetic verse Angelucci composed for the employees who repeat it together, much like a choir. The expressive act of singing and choirs has been a continuous fascination for her. In fact, Angelucci worked at the Canadian Opera Company for several years before becoming an established artist. Her association with the opera led her to create artworks that include sound, voice and song to form choruses that activate photographs and objects. The video installation *The Anonymous Chorus* (2013) (fig. 21) superposes a photograph from the early 1900s found on eBay with a soundtrack of possible ambient sounds and music by the American composer Charles Ives. Created during a residency at the Art Gallery of Ontario, *A Mourning Chorus* (2014) (fig. 22) is a vocal improvisation by seven female singers trained in different musical backgrounds, inspired by the sounds of different extinct North American bird species.

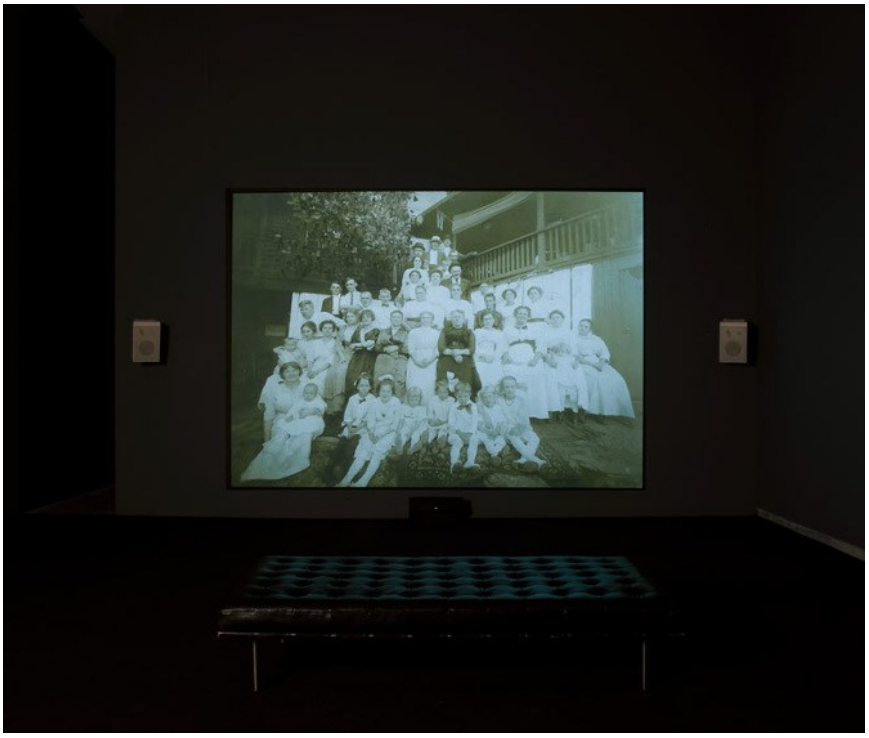

Figure 21. Sara Angelucci, *The Anonymous Choir*, 2013, video installation with 5.1 surround sound, dimensions variable, duration 10 minutes, 30 seconds. Installation view from the Art Gallery of York University, Toronto, Ontario, part of the *Provenance Unknown* exhibition, 2013.

Figure 22. Sara Angelucci, *The Mourning Chorus*, 2014, performance. View of performance from the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, September 26, 2014.

Because of the compelling nature of the choir, Angelucci found a way to have the sewers "sing" through spoken words. The line "We are connected by a thread," is recited in unison by the seventeen workers, while one person answers the chorus with "A thread connects us." This call and answer is repeated throughout *A Sewers' Chorus*, connecting and situating the different individual accounts within Coppley's community of garment workers. The second refrain repeated by the participants is more haunting. The verse "And we sew, and we sew, and we sew, and we sew" represents the tedious labour that unites the garment workers, who sew the same pieces over and over again during an eight-hour workday. As the artist explained, this structure was inspired by the Greek chorus, in which the group speaks together, while each individual has their own story to tell.[127] In addition to its structural qualities, the chorus also provides an immersive experience for the viewer. Angelucci recalls being deeply moved the first time she heard Janet Cardiff's and George Bures Miller's installation *The Forty Part Motet* (2001)[128], in which forty speakers are placed in a circle, each of them reproducing the recording of a different voice singing the 16th century sacred piece *Spem in Alium* (fig. 23).

Figure 23. Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller, *The Forty-Part Motet*, 2001, forty speakers, dimensions variable. Installation view in the Richmond Chapel, Tolver Place, Penzance, England, 2018.

[127] Angelucci, Interview.
[128] Angelucci, Interview.

Much like *The Forty Part Motet*, Angelucci's installation provides an immersive experience through surround sound, although on a smaller scale which contributes to the intimacy of the installation. Entering a dark room, the visitor is invited to sit on a bench, circled by eight speakers on plinths, their different heights evoking the physical presence of the sewers (fig. 24). For the artist, surround sound and the choir are unique for their capacity to not only create an enthralling experience, but also to capture the viewer's attention and inviting them to listen to the voices coming from different directions in the small room.

Figure 24. Sara Angelucci, *A Sewers' Chorus*, 2017, eight speakers on plinths, leather bench, dimensions variable. Installation view from the *Piece Work* exhibition at the Art Gallery of Hamilton, 2017.

Oral Histories, Art-Making, and Methodology

From her early beginnings as an artist in the 1990s, Angelucci's artistic corpus can be analyzed using oral history as a methodology through the gradual inclusion of sound and voice in her lens-based practice. The outcome of oral history can serve to reconstruct the past and provide an alternative to national narratives. This methodology empowers the interviewees: they become the historians of their own life and of the events that shaped them. Angelucci's body of work focuses on memory, both individual and collective. Her early creations center on her own family and the history of immigration that marked different generations: her grandmother, parents, and herself, as first-generation Canadian born.[129] The limits of written history and the potential of oral history to document the experiences of migration are explored in the early video work *America il Paradiso* (1997) (figs. 25, 26, 27). As Angelucci was living in Halifax, studying at NSCAD for her MFA, her parents' history of migration became a central focus as they had to come through Pier 21 before settling in Hamilton.[130] Although extraordinary, Nina and Orfeo's journey to Canada is shared by thousands of other Italians who immigrated from their birth country to Ontario during the 1950s and 1960s. In order to gather answers about her parents' migration story, Angelucci reached out to Italians immigrants of their generation. The artist ran an advertisement in an Italian newspaper in Toronto about her project describing what she wanted to

[129] The video installation *Questions She'll Never Answer* (1997) presents the stunning black and white photograph of her mother taken as she is preparing to emigrate in the 1950s (fig. 7). Longing, nostalgia and desire are evoked in both the title and the other accompanying images, such as a recreation of the dress Nina wore on the photograph. In the video, questions are also asked by the artist, which will remain unanswered as her mother passed away in the 1990s. "Sara Angelucci: Mining the Family Archive," *Elora Centre for the Arts*, https://eloracentreforthearts.ca/mining-the-family-archive-sara-angelucci/.

[130] Before entering the MFA program at NSCAD, Angelucci studied studio arts at Queen's University, where she was mentored by American-Canadian conceptual artist Suzy Lake. She encouraged Angelucci to tackle her family's history of migration in her practice when she approached her with this idea. Angelucci, Interview.

know about the migration experience. Five people answered through letters in their native tongue, each of them sharing their unique story.[131]

Figure 25. Sara Angelucci, still from *America il Paradiso*, 1997, video, colour, with original soundtrack, variable dimensions. 12 minutes, 31 seconds. Image taken at 1 minute, 10 seconds.

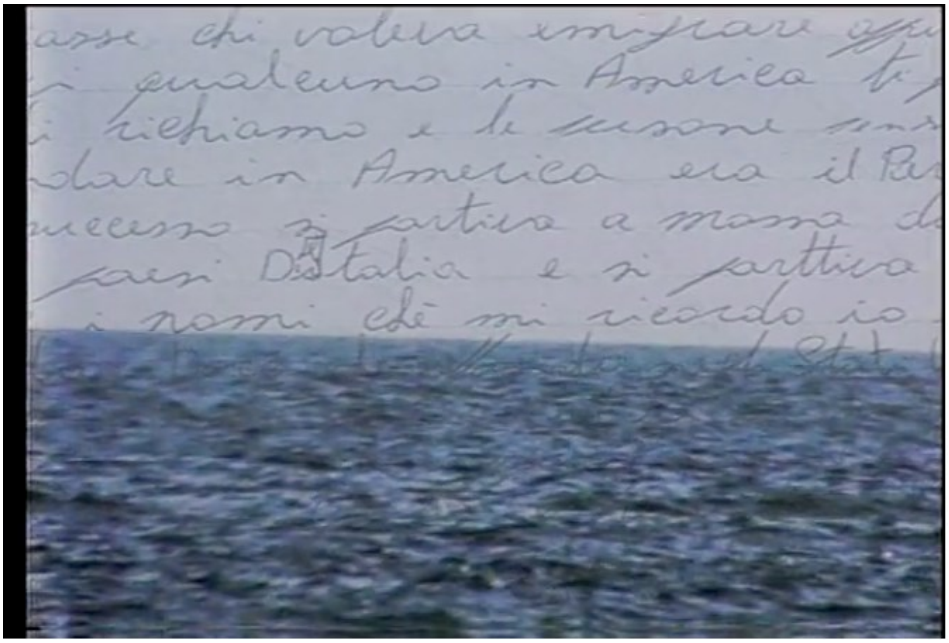

Figure 26. Sara Angelucci, still from *America il Paradiso*, 1997, video, colour, with original soundtrack, variable dimensions. 12 minutes, 31 seconds. Image taken at 2 minute, 10 seconds.

[131] Angelucci, Interview.

Figure 27. Sara Angelucci, still from *America il Paradiso*, 1997, video, colour, with original soundtrack, variable dimensions. 12 minutes, 31 seconds. Image taken at 2 minute, 10 seconds.

Featuring sequences of family home videos, stills of the participants' letters and the 1957 Italian pop song *La Casetta in Canada*, Angelucci's *America il Paradiso* opens with the voice of Romolo Paiano, who responded to her advertisement with an eight-page letter. He speaks in Italian, before translating what he said into English. He declares: "I don't know if you will be able to understand what I have written; I only went to the fifth grade. But I wrote as well as I could remember in my mind."[132] This quote reflects the limits of written history's accessibility as the stories recorded on paper are written by and for those who have the privilege to be formally educated.[133] Furthermore, the artist questions how official history is formulated and who is able to participate in its formation. The artist states: "This work also questions how official history is written: who can speak and who cannot be heard. Stories found in everyday life are an important

[132] Own transcription from the video *America il Paradiso,* https://vimeo.com/111300639.
[133] Angelucci parents' writing and reading skills were also limited since Nina completed the third grade, while Orfeo had grade five. Angelucci, interview.

vehicle of re-inscription for those who have been overlooked."[134] *America il Paradiso* is an early exploration of the place of oral histories in the artist's practice. Not only does she include the voices of an older generation, but also their life stories as shared on paper and through their own personal archives.

Life stories can take different forms. As explained by the Italian scholar Alessandro Portelli, a pioneer of oral history, "the life story as a full, coherent oral narrative does not exist in nature,"[135] because anecdotes provide snippets into the person's life, and because of the impossibility of telling one's entire life with all its intricacies. Thus, interviews - the basis of oral history - need a direction to uncover particularities of one's life story in relation to a theme or an event. For *A Sewers' Chorus*, Angelucci's interview questions tackled head-on the history of immigration to Canada and labour at Coppley. The artist was careful and pragmatic during the interviews she conducted for the sound installation. Angelucci submitted the questionnaire to the participants in advance of the recorded interview. The participants gave the artist permission to use their answers for her project. The narrators of *A Sewers' Chorus* entrusted their stories to the artist. Addressing the participants' immigrant experiences as immigrants and employees at Coppley, the questions range from the specific to the open-ended. For example, short questions simply asked "How many pieces do you sew per day?" or "What do you sew?" Open-ended questions included asking interviewees about descriptions of their homeland, a story about a memorable day at work, and explaining how the employee learned how to sew. During the twenty to thirty-minute interviews, each speaker began introducing themselves by stating their

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[134] Angelucci, "America il Paradiso," *Sara Angelucci*, https://sara-angelucci.ca/filter/Projects/American-il-Paradiso1997.

[135] Alessandro Portelli, "Oral History as a Genre," in *Narrative and Genre*, eds Mary Chamberlain and Paul Thompson, (London; New York: Routledge, 1998), 24.

name and country of origin before repeating the verses Angelucci composed for the chorus and answering her questions.

As Angelucci sifted through the audio footage, she noticed recurring themes through the multiplicity of answers and the stories told (figs. 28 and 29). Similar to filmmaking, the artist used a paper edit to visualize *A Sewers' Chorus*.[136] Using different coloured cue cards, Angelucci designed a colour-coded system for the sentences and stories to make connections between the experiences of the garment workers of immigrant backgrounds.[137] Themes include descriptions of hobbies, numbers of pieces sewed every day, thoughts while at work, their reasons for coming to Canada, stories of war, and fun memories from work. The chorus is woven throughout the edited sound piece, uniting and connecting the narrators to the shared labour of sewing.

[136] In addition to photography and installation, Angelucci's artistic practice extends to filmmaking. Her short film *Cirkut/Canadettes* was screened at the 36th Kassel Documentary Film and Video Festival in November 2019.
[137] Angelucci, Interview.

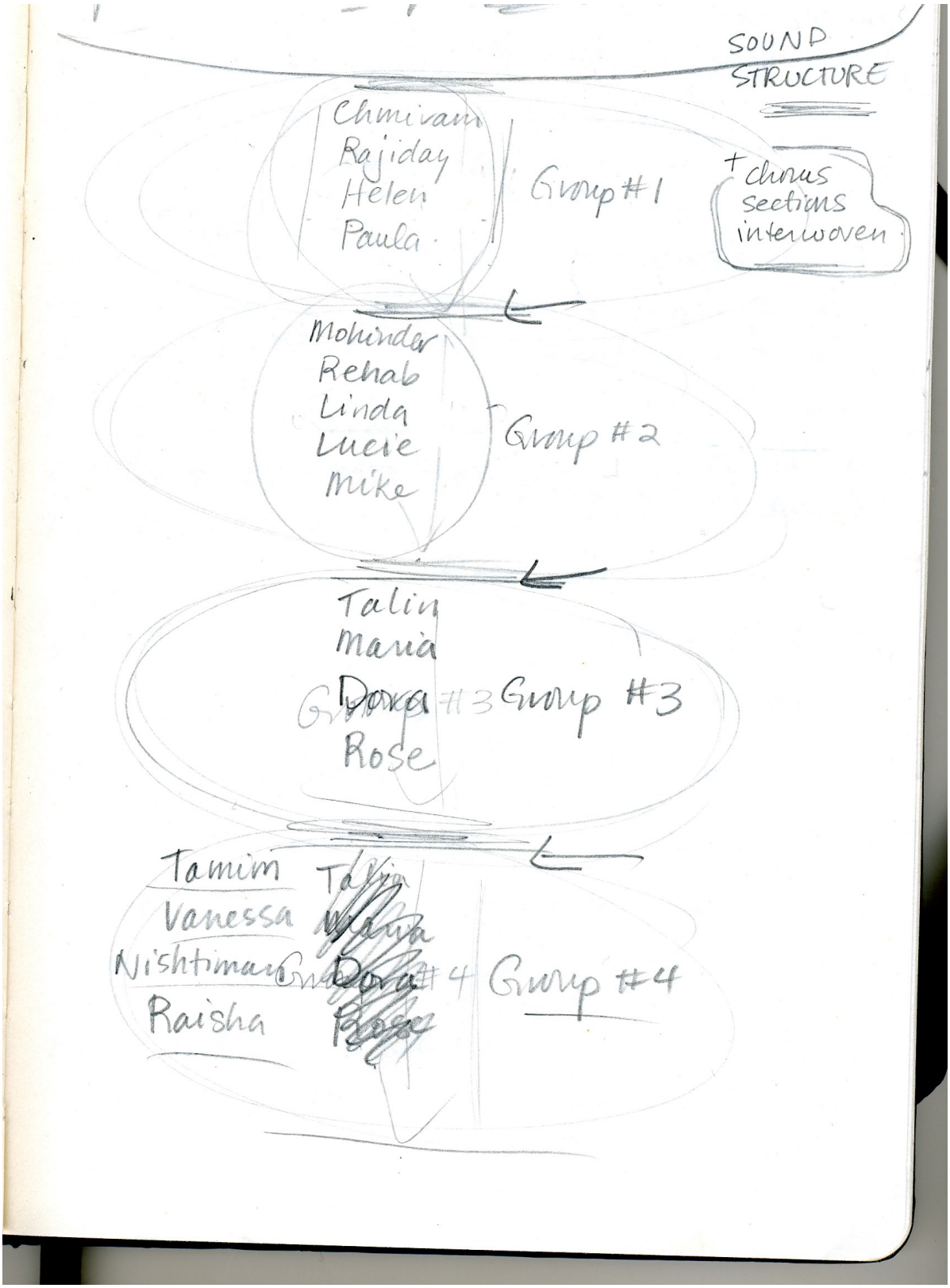

Figure 28. Excerpt from Sara Angelucci's notebook for the project *Piece Work*. This image shows how Angelucci grouped the participants and inserted the chorus in the sound installation *A Sewers' Chorus.*

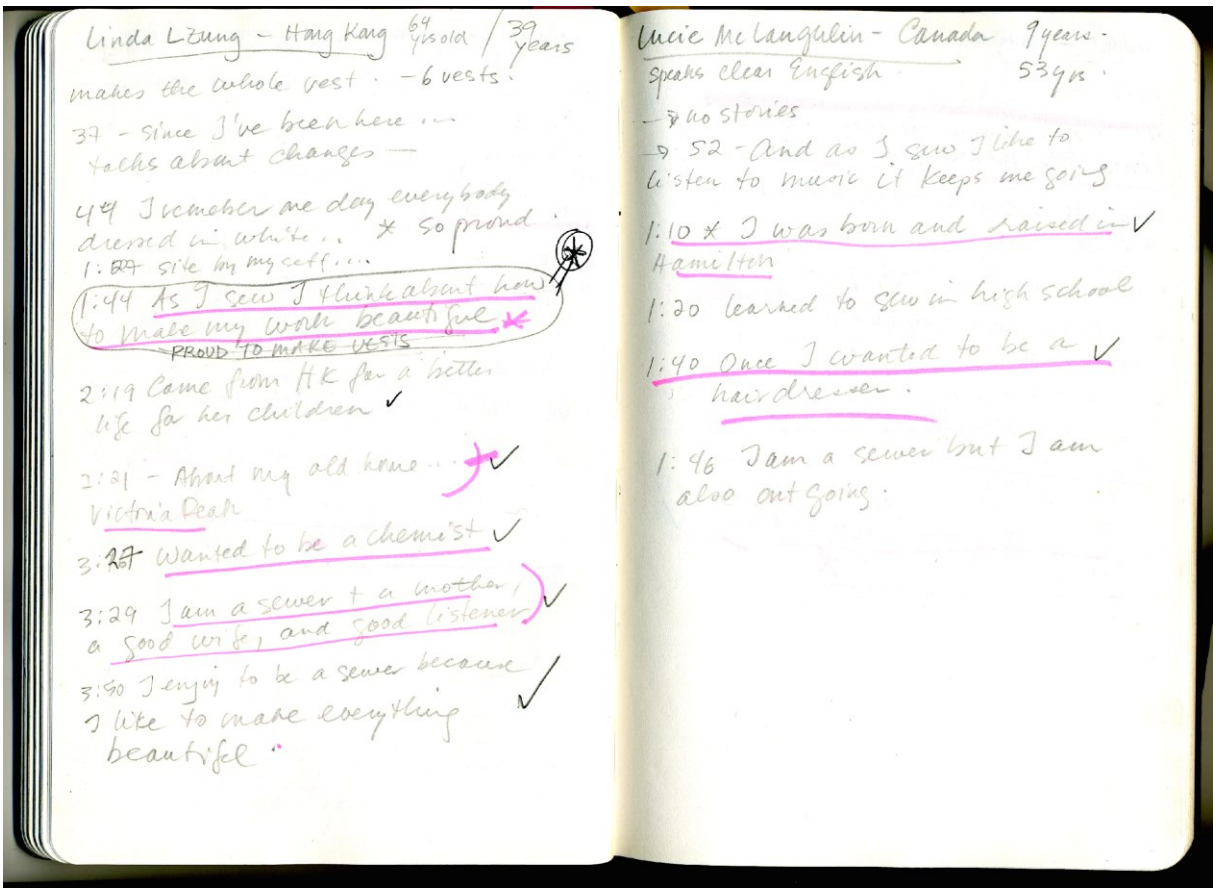

Figure 29. Excerpt from Sara Angelucci's notebook for the project *Piece Work*. This image shows written transcriptions from the interviews the artist conducted with Linda Leung and Lucie McLaughlin, garment workers of Coppley.

Voices and Affect: Stories of a Community

All seventeen garment workers interviewed, except for one, were born outside of Canada. As a result, each person's voice is recognizable because of their non-native English accents, giving the audience clues about their first language, and their country of origin before it is revealed in *A Sewers' Chorus*.[138] Accents and levels of fluency in English are markers of difference, which affect one's social interactions and how one is perceived by different groups of people. As

[138] One of the garment workers interviewed described herself as a Hamilton native in *A Sewers' Chorus*.

explained by Angelucci, a culture treats a migrant differently if they are not fluent in the dominant language.[139] The thicker the accent, the more "foreign" the person may sound to the listener. A person who adapts their speech to the "official" accent is perceived as a well-adapted, "assimilated migrant". As I previously mentioned in the introduction in reference to the decolonizing work of Malissa Phung, an immigrant settler is afforded more privileges the more they share the dominant characteristics of the "typical" Canadian settler, such as physical features of whiteness (lightness of skin colour). Shared common values,[140] and the ability to fluently speak one of the country's official languages are also other forms of privilege.[141] Because of the artist's family history, she is conscious of the first generation immigrants who are learning English and the daily communication difficulties they face.[142] Angelucci defines language adaptation as "the migrant condition."[143] As Angelucci was looking for employees who wanted to participate in the sound installation, a Chinese woman, described by Angelucci as "one of Coppley's best sewers," volunteered. Although her English was limited, she wanted to share her stories. During our interview, Angelucci brought up the question, "How do you listen to someone with limited language?"[144] I suggest language limitation forces the listener to pay attention to clues behind the words being used. In *A Sewers' Chorus*, a woman recalls a question on an application she filled out at work: "When you die, who takes your money?" To which she answers in a voice choked by tears: "I have nobody." As Angelucci explained to me during our

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[139] Angelucci, Interview.

[140] This systematic oppression is especially visible in current politics in Quebec: since January 1, 2020, all incoming economic immigrants to the province have to pass a Quebec "values test" in French, which is highly focused on the government's imposed secularism, before obtaining a selection certificate for permanent residency in Quebec. For more information, see Benjamin Shingler, "Quebec will make immigrants pass 'values' test," CBC News, October 30 2019, https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/quebec-values-test-immigration-1.5340652.

[141] Phung, 293.

[142] Angelucci describes her father's English as especially limited since he was able to speak his native Italian on a daily basis with his coworkers, his family, and in his Italian neighborhood. Angelucci, Interview.

[143] Angelucci, Interview.

[144] Angelucci, Interview.

interview, this statement means that this woman either came to Canada by herself, or her family members have since passed away. Her loneliness is clearly perceived in her emotional retelling of the memory, in addition to highlighting that she likely has no known next of kin. The affective quality of the voice is thus another important component on how to listen to stories, no matter the language fluency. *A Sewers' Chorus* makes the personal stories shared by the migrant female workers even more poignant through the positive and negative emotions expressed. British oral historian Margaretta Jolly has looked at the representation of family relationships from a feminist standpoint, and compares the function of oral history and sound installation in storytelling. Jolly also suggests that the recorded voice offers verbal and non-verbal traces of outside connections which can be applied to *A Sewers' Chorus*. Not only can the audience hear the voices of the sewers, the sounds of sewing and pressing machines at work are also part of the piece. As Jolly states, the recording of the interview's environment acts as a soundscape, which becomes a historical record.[145] As Coppley kept very little historical documentation, *Piece Work* acts as a living archive with its inclusion of visual records as well as recorded stories of employees that depict not only the work being done at the factory, but also the context of the sewers' various backgrounds. Through the study of Lizzie Thynne's sound installation *Voices in Movement* (2014), Jolly analyses the representation of women and considers the affective quality of the voice. *Voices in Movement* is a sound and video installation that experiments with interviews recorded from the Women's Liberation Oral History project in Great Britain and archival images (fig. 30).

[145] Margaretta Jolly, "Voices in Movement: Feminist Family Stories in Oral History and Sound Art," *Life Writing*, 12 no. 2 (2015): 148.

Figure 30. Lizzie Thynne, *Voices in Movement*, video installation, 2014. Installation view at the Peltz Gallery, London, England, in July 2014.

Discussing one of the excerpts of *Voices in Movement*, Jolly qualifies one woman's description of her work as a builder as "testimony in their own right" since her story is shared "from someone who probably would not have written it".[146] Jolly describes her voice as captivating, it is her aurality that takes space instead of her physical body. The act of listening to her voice adds a political significance to her story, which tackles family and sexual trauma.[147] The author insists that hearing her story of survival is different from reading about it because of the "magical" quality of the voice, which becomes a powerful tool in sharing painful secrets.[148]

[146] Jolly, 145.
[147] Jolly, 145.
[148] Jolly, 146.

This "magic" is also present in *A Sewer' Chorus*: the aural quality of the sound component of the project highlights the diversity of the personal stories shared by the mainly female garment workers through the different emotions expressed, both negative and positive. Postcolonial feminist philosopher Sara Ahmed has studied the ways words convey emotions and affect audiences through writing. According to her, certain figures of speech expressing feelings "stick" on the reader, which can align collectives.[149] The ways some stories "stick" on the audience of *A Sewers' Chorus* depends not only on the use of particular words, but also on the way these words are expressed through voice.

The aurality of the installation is thus of crucial importance as sounds express emotions, which affects the viewer. Jolly describes the inflections of the voice, the pauses during speech, and the sounds that act as traces of the interview's environment as "magic" since these qualities envelop the viewer. Combined, the verbal, sound and emotive components of *A Sewers' Chorus* contribute to the affective quality of Angelucci's installation, creating a lasting impression on the audience. The emotions expressed by the sewers reflect back to the audience, which leads to an affective understanding of the storytellers and the immigrant communities in Canada. Portelli is aware of the limits of translating the verbal into a written format: "the tone and volume range and the rhythm of popular speech carry implicit meaning and social connotations which are not reproducible in writing—unless, and then in inadequate and hardly accessible form, as musical notation."[150] I am conscious that the written word is not a perfect translation of the original oral accounts featured in *A Sewers' Chorus*. The spoken words, with their inflections, pace, and pauses are not translatable on paper. However, for this thesis, I decided to feature descriptions of

[149] Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 14.
[150] Alessandro Portelli, "What Makes Oral History Different," in *The Oral History Reader*, eds. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, (London: Routledge, 2016), 65.

the way the stories were told. I use punctuation that reflects the flow of the narrator's speech, rather than punctuation that follows grammatical rules. I also decided to not include grammatical "corrections" in the transcriptions since these "errors" are part of the original speech and reflect the speaker's fluency in English, which affects their relationships with others both in and out of the workplace.

Some stories describe happy moments. For example, a woman recalls the day she received a new sewing machine at work, another worker describes how while she is sewing, she thinks about the English lessons after her shift and how she enjoys them. A segment of the installation features a collage of different words the workers use to describe themselves. Starting with the phrase "I am a sewer" recited in unison, singular voices answer "I am a student", while another answers "I love to sing," "I am a woodworker, a gardener, outgoing, a musician, a woman, a mother, a good listener," and so on. These positive self-definitions are acts of resistance from the cultural and political centre, which was defined earlier by Lowe. The positive stories shared with the public subvert heavily mediatized stereotypes or oversimplified representations that tend to vilify immigrants. They also shatter the model minority myth, which posits that some ethno-cultural groups are more successful than others in certain sectors. When these positive stories are woven with more critical moments of the female immigrant experience, they also go beyond the mediatized idea that immigrants are simply "happy" in Canada.

In the sound installation, people laugh upon retelling good memories. A woman describes a typical day at work, and shares that she sings "all the time." She sings so much, she says, that her chest hurts. Her story concludes with hearty laughter. A Guyanese man explains that he came to Canada to join his girlfriend, who was already living here. "It was a good move!" he said laughing. In some other instances, a laugh does not express a burst of happiness, but expresses

irony. For example, describing a memorable day at work, a woman tells the story of an incident. She states, matter-of-factly, "One day, I sew a button on my finger. I tried to pull the thread and I put my finger under the machine." After describing how it happened at a fast pace, she continues to tell the story: "So I went to the hospital and the doctor laughed at me." She chuckles before continuing: "It was funny I guess because that never happened." This story can be described as bittersweet since the work incident, which reflects the dangerous conditions of factory labour, is both horrifying, and funny. The humour of the story is itself expressed in a conflicted way: the storyteller laughs, but says "it was funny *I guess*."[151] This story spurs inquiry within the audience to think about the normalization of workplace accidents and the potential danger of the working conditions at Coppley. Although safety regulations have improved over decades and centuries, the risks of working with cutters, pressers and sewing machines, as well as the fast-paced nature of pieceworking, are imminent, a fact that is acknowledged by the factory management. On each floor of Coppley's factory are posters with safety instructions in case of an accident, a constant reminder of the risk garment workers are exposed to on a daily basis. In another story, a woman recalls a dear friend working next to her. As she says her name with tenderness and endearment, the listener understands how much the person is important to the storyteller. What follows is even more disconcerting: "She was making jokes, and then she got sick, then she died." In a soft, quiet voice, she explains: "She had cancer. Me and her used to work together, and I can never get her off my mind."

Although most of the questions were open-ended, Angelucci encountered the limitations of the short interviews she led with the employees. Angelucci recalls her interview with Tamim Kayhan from Afghanistan, one of the few men sewing at Coppley:

[151] Italics added by author for emphasis.

> He was this cheerful, sweet young man that came in and he sort of answered all my questions in this very nice way, and then at the end I said, well, "Tamim was there anything else you would like to tell us that you haven't said or that aren't in the question?" So then he got very serious and very sad, his demeanour changed entirely, and he said, well, there's a lot of things I've been through that I haven't told you, you know?"[152]

Featured in *A Sewers' Chorus*, Tamin's story reveals that he learned how to sew growing up in Afghanistan. This skill became especially useful as Tamin was able to find work as he migrated to different countries in the Middle East and East Asia with his family, escaping the war in his homeland. Childhood memories of bombings and finding refuge are featured throughout his recording.

The stories from *A Sewers' Chorus* are punctuated with not only audible markers of expressions, but also pauses of silence. Pauses in speech reveal just as much as words. The depths of silence can translate painful feelings and traumatic memories. One of the most troubling stories from the sound installation does not include graphic details of violence, but is told in a slow, careful way. A Syrian woman shares an episode from the civil war in her homeland. "I remember… oh my gosh. Everything. [sharp exhale] Syria, before the war, very nice. After the war, I remember, when we stay home… Boom. It was very terrible." This onomatopoeia preceded by a pause tells of traumatic images, sounds of explosions, and bombings.

Some of the stories from *A Sewers' Chorus* act as historical testaments of how employees are treated by their superiors, and how dressmaking as an occupation is anchored in traditional

[152] Angelucci, Interview.

gender roles. Rose Vartanian's story, who has spent 55 years working at Coppley, illustrates those connections in a particularly poignant way. In a calm voice, she recounts a moment when her boss Larry Enkin[153] summoned everyone working on the same floor of the factory. She recalls: "He holds the pants to us and he says: Have respect for these pants. Do a good job because these pants give you bread, house, everything to live." Although set in the past, Rose's memorable day at work reflects the pressures of daily performance as a pieceworker, and how her survival depends on the numbers of pieces she is able to make daily. The story is also emblematic of patriarchal power present in the factory since the pair of pants held by the employer act as a metaphor for hegemonic masculinity's authority over the workers of the factory. Like the threads and pieces of fabric sewn together to make a suit, the different stories from *A Sewers' Chorus* are woven together to make a complex portrait of the diverse employees of Coppley, a narrative that is hidden behind the business suit produced within the factory. Through its different components, *A Sewers' Chorus* activates the stories of the female immigrant sewers for generations to come since they are now public records. Combined with the photographic series *Coppley Patterns* and *Mano D'Oro*, the sound installation is a celebration of their work. The stories shared and given voice to come alive not only for the community but visitors to the exhibition. A special opening and luncheon were organized by Coppley for its three hundred employees at the Art Gallery of Hamilton (figs. 31, 32). During this visit, Angelucci recalls the reactions of the garment workers: they felt recognized and celebrated. They were proud, gleeful, and excited to see themselves in the photographs and hearing their stories. As the garment workers behind Coppley's stone walls are unseen by the general public, to hear their stories for the first time is a powerful and historically empowering act.

[153] Son of Max Enkin, who was one of the leading men of the Tailor Project. Larry Enkin is currently the owner of Coppley's building.

Figure 31. Sara Angelucci (left) and Rose Vartanian (right) at the *Piece Work* private opening at the Art Gallery of Hamilton.

Figure 32. Sara Angelucci (fourth from left) with the employees Xiu Wen Tsang, Nham Shao, Jian Zhu Ye (former employee), Linda Leung and Bao Yi Feng at the *Piece Work* private opening at the Art Gallery of Hamilton.

Empathic Aesthetics

The palpable range of emotions featured in *A Sewers' Chorus* can also be felt by the listeners of the sound installation. The audiences go through a range of emotions according to the order of the storytelling, resulting in empathy for the garment workers from different cultural backgrounds. According to the art theoretician Jill Bennett, empathy is the most appropriate way to engage with difficult imagery that depicts post-traumatic memories because it is an emotional response, and not a way to project oneself onto the other's experience as if to "live" the trauma.[154] Thus,

[154] Jill Bennett, *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 8.

with empathy, one "feels" for the other while at the same time recognizing the distance between one's perception and the other's experience. Building on Bennett's theory which deals only with visual images, I suggest that empathic aesthetics is also an appropriate way to engage with oral histories such as those in Angelucci's project which do not necessarily depict difficult imagery. Through the personal anecdotes shared by Coppley's employees in the sound installation, as well as the other visual components of the multimedia project, the project shines a light on both the negative and positive aspects of Canada's history of immigration and factory labour. As oral historian Steven High argues, putting life stories and the individual at the forefront of history writing is a way to understand the importance of nuance and listening to difficult testimonies of mass violence and refugee experience.[155] In *A Sewers' Chorus*, it is clear that sharing life stories also reveals other positive aspects of immigration and labour, which are also nuanced once collaged with the remembrance of negative memories.

One of the most positive themes in the multitude of stories is the connection uniting the employees, which can be perceived through the stories depicting friendships and activities with coworkers. The act of cutting, sewing and assembling the pieces of a single business suit through pieceworking is aesthetically symbolized in the sound installation, as each single voice contributes to the chorus and individual stories are woven in a single sound piece. Hearing the personal stories and the affects of the voices is an intimate experience. *Piece Work* resonated not only with Hamiltonians but also with other people in Canada. In the guest book of the Stephen Bulger Gallery in Toronto where *Piece Work* was exhibited in 2017, a visitor shared a story of her Italian-born mother who was also a sewer in the 1950s in the area (fig. 33).

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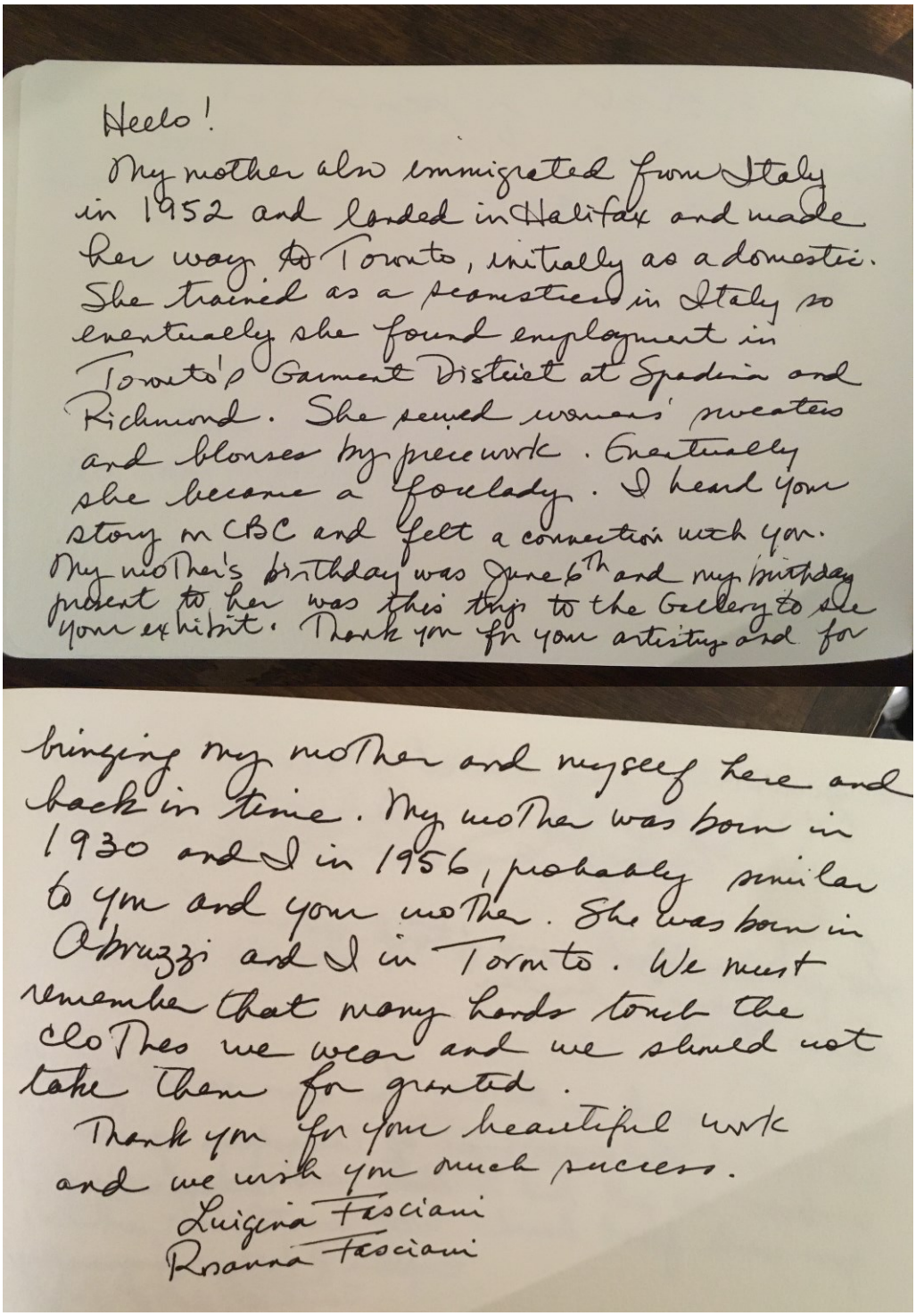
[155] Steven High, *Oral History at the Crossroads: Sharing Life Stories of Survival and Displacement* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2014), 39-40.



Hello!

My mother also immigrated from Italy in 1952 and landed in Halifax and made her way to Toronto, initially as a domestic. She trained as a seamstress in Italy so eventually she found employment in Toronto's Garment District at Spadina and Richmond. She sewed women's sweaters and blouses by piecework. Eventually she became a forelady. I heard your story on CBC and felt a connection with you. My mother's birthday was June 6th and my birthday present to her was this trip to the Gallery to see your exhibit. Thank you for your artistry and for bringing my mother and myself here and back in time. My mother was born in 1930 and I in 1956, probably similar to you and your mother. She was born in Abruzzi and I in Toronto. We must remember that many hands touch the clothes we wear and we should not take them for granted.

Thank you for your beautiful work and we wish you much success.

Luigina Fasciani
Roanna Fasciani

Figure 33. A comment from Luigina and Roanna Fasciani taken from the guest book of *the Piece Work* exhibition at the Stephen Bulger Gallery in Toronto.

This personal and touching comment is a testament to the impact *Piece Work* has had on viewers who share with Angelucci a similar family immigration and employment history. The project also resonates with those who do not necessarily hold personal ties to family migration or garment making. Listening to the different stories from *A Sewers' Chorus*, I followed the emotions that could be felt through the voices and their inflections, while my body responded with chills, laughter, and teary eyes. However, I am conscious that not everyone who will experience *Piece Work* will be moved on the same level I was. People have different standpoints, experiences, and relationships to a feeling. Empathy is thus a deeply personal emotional response to oral histories in aesthetics. Through the complexity of the different storytelling, *A Sewers' Chorus* is able to spur empathy. The viewer grows closer to Coppley's employees upon hearing their stories. Empathy, therefore, is not only a response but it can also be a tool to mobilize and confront anti-immigration sentiment and prejudices against factory workers.

Conclusion

This thesis has argued that Sara Angelucci's multimedia project *Piece Work* brings awareness to Hamilton's and Canada's story of immigration by challenging gender, class, and racial stereotypes, as well as preconceived ideas of the "immigrant factory worker". In the first section, I demonstrated how Hamilton's history of immigration intersects with the industrialization of the city, the use of pieceworking in the garment industry, and the role of women in labour movements. I also traced the evolution of Coppley's garment production, tied to Canada's changing immigration laws and the gendered attributes of garment making. The second section presented the story of the artist's mother, Nina Acciaroli, which shaped Angelucci's creation of *Piece Work*. Nina was not only part of Hamilton's Italian community, she was also a proud member of Coppley's own community, whose employees continue to be united to this day by their labour at the factory and by their shared experiences of immigration and settlement in Canada. Branching out from her usual exploration of her Italian Canadian family in her artistic corpus, Angelucci's *Piece Work* is an homage to Coppley's current employees, translating their daily output, labour, and lives into a multimedia art project. The third and final section focused on the sound installation *A Sewers' Chorus* and showcased the careful artistic process of its making and the use of oral histories as an artistic methodology. I also demonstrated how the use of sound and the affective component of the voices ultimately compelled visitors of the exhibition to empathize with the storytellers. With the news media saturated by shocking images of the global refugee crisis and stories of politicians using migration as an economic tool or state leaders lobbying to erect barriers to repel people deemed unwanted, the opportunity to hear the voices of immigrants is too rare in these polarizing debates. These voices bring a crucial, and more nuanced perspective on these issues. In this thesis, I have argued that, through oral histories

and community engagement, Angelucci's *Piece Work* connects the global issue of migration to Hamilton's local context and brings forward overlapping issues of race, gender and class in the garment industry.

The multi-sensorial quality of the project offers a bridge across different living experiences of recent and second-generation immigrants or naturalized citizens in particular those who are members of racialized, visible minority, or otherwise ethnicized communities. As previously discussed, although many of Coppley's garment workers hold Canadian citizenship and have been living in the country for decades, they are still perceived as immigrants, as "others". As Angelucci invites audiences to view and then listen to the lived stories of the immigrant garment workers, I conclude that the public's interaction with the work prompts empathic aesthetics, which can ultimately create solidarity between people from different backgrounds.

Ultimately this thesis challenges the misconception of non-European settlers as "perpetual migrants,"[156] as described by Lowe, by listening to, and learning from, stories told by the individuals working at the factory today. Following Lowe's description of the Asian American as the symbolic "foreigner-within" the modern American society, racialized settlers are also othered in the Canadian context by being continually situated outside of national narratives. Projects like *Piece Work* powerfully dismantle this idea.

In March 2020, Coppley's factory was slated to be relocated to a three-storey purpose-built building blocks away from the original York and McNab Street North location.[157] Angelucci's *Piece Work* is thus an homage to the thousands of pairs of hands that have measured,

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[156] Lowe, 5-6.

[157] Mark McNeil, "A last glimpse at an historic workplace," *The Hamilton Spectator*, February 24 2020, https://www.thespec.com/news-story/9863513-a-last-glimpse-at-an-historic-workplace/.

traced, cut, sewed and assembled countless business suits in the original location. Up until the 2017 exhibition of *Piece Work*, the garment workers who have passed through the stone walls of the factory since its early beginnings in 1883 - their names, their presence – have been largely anonymous. Not only will the purpose-built factory be more suitable to modern garment making, but the working conditions of the employees will also improve drastically. During the research of this thesis, suit making was done within the bare stone walls of a four-storey building with no elevators; its original load-bearing columns erected in 1856 still clearly visible. The wooden spiral staircase has lost its varnish, worn out by the feet of thousands of employees who have climbed up and down its steps for over a century. The rooms, where hundreds of people sew for eight hours a day, did not have air-conditioning or wide windows. During my visit to the factory with Donalda Pelletier, I asked if there were any break rooms where employees could take time off their meticulous and repetitive labour, as well as the bustling environment of the factory. She answered that there were no official break rooms (except for a space on the ground floor where all employees can take their lunch), and that they make their own space. Such "unofficial" areas are present throughout the different floors of the factory: some sewing stations have portable ventilators, water bottles, and snacks. An empty room with an unused fireplace had a metal chair by a window with a view on the parking lot, with a celebrity gossip magazine, a roll of paper towels and a salt shaker resting on the sill. At Coppley, traces of the sewers are everywhere, even in empty sewing stations. Similar to the hands in *Mano D'Oro*, each workspace gives clues about the individual who "inhabits" the area on a daily basis. Placed next to sewing machines, spools of thread and pincushions, calendars of the Chinese year, icons of the Virgin Mary, national flags, photos of loved ones, cookie tins, and pots of instant noodles act as markers of the individual's cultural heritage and of their daily use of their space. Although employees are allowed to have

personal belongings at their work stations, the anticipated improved working conditions of the new modern factory will enhance their livelihood and well-being. At the moment of concluding this thesis, Coppley's historic building is up for sale,[158] leaving the future of the 1883 classical-style building uncertain. As Hamilton becomes a hub for middle-class Torontonians and young families in search of affordable real estate, Steeltown is rapidly gentrifying. As my meetings with Angelucci and Traficante concluded with discussions of the Coppley factory and the current state of Hamilton, I was reminded that Rastrick's design might be demolished and replaced with modern condominiums.[159] Since 1979, long before plans for a purpose-built facility were announced, Larry Enkin, the owner of the building, has fought against a heritage designation for his factory. As the son of Max Enkin, one of the leaders of the Tailor Project and one of the many owners of the Coppley business since its beginning, Larry Enkin has witnessed the hustle and bustle inside the classical façade and is conscious of the importance of the work done by the employees. In an interview with the local newspaper, the owner explains the reasons behind his opposition to the heritage designation: "There are numerous employees working in that building and the environment needs to change to suit business needs. It's not an idle factory building. It's not a quiet building … It's a dynamic, active environment."[160] The owner and his family have opposed the heritage designation for almost forty years since such classification could pose a threat for the business, even putting people out of work. The nineteenth-century building would be protected by the designation, and any major structural improvement on the factory would not be possible.

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[158] McNeil, "A last glimpse at an historic workplace."
[159] Angelucci, Interview; Alana Traficante, Interview, May 14, 2019.
[160] Meredith Macleod, "Coppley Building Owner Opposes Heritage Designation Dating Back to 1979," *The Hamilton Spectator*, March 19 2015, https://www.thespec.com/news-story/5513274-coppley-building-owner-opposes-heritage-designation-dating-back-to-1979/.

On the other hand, if the owner agreed to a designation by-law, it could make the building eligible for subsidies and grants, and a designation plaque could be installed on its façade.[161] This plaque would act as a testament not only to the architect's influence over Hamilton's cityscape, but would also recognize the people of different cultural backgrounds who have contributed their precious skills and arduous labour to the factory, and who make up Hamilton's local population. Alas, such designation seems unlikely at the moment as the future of Coppley's historical building remains precarious. Angelucci's artistic creation is the sole project which holds the memory of the factory and its employees for the wider public and community.

Piece Work is a model for future exhibitions at the Art Gallery of Hamilton because of its ability to incorporate the city's local history within the global issues of labour and migration. Bruce calls this exhibition as "the ideal Art Gallery of Hamilton project" because of Angelucci's connection to the city, her national reputation, and her work which directly tackles the history of Hamilton while referencing the broader subjects of migration and industry - all of which resulted in an exhibition defining the history of Hamilton and telling a piece of national history.[162] *Piece Work* is a testament not only to the artist's practical ability to execute a project in record-time, but also of the emotional content that goes into making a project that involves a community. The artist was able to build relationships based on trust with Coppley's employees, and her project had a lasting and positive impression on the garment workers. Although most of the participants of the project have since retired or left Coppley,[163] the factory has retained special memories

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[161] Steve Robichaud, Director of Planning and Chief Planner to Chair and Members, Hamilton Municipal Heritage Committee, March 19 2015, Planning Division, Planning and Economic Development, Designation Status of 56 York Boulevard, also 63-76 MacNab Street North, Hamilton (Coppley Building/Commercial Block), *The Public Record*, https://www.thepublicrecord.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/March-2015-City-of-Hamilton-Memorandum-respecting-Designation-Status-of-Coppley-Building.pdf.

[162] Bruce, Interview.

[163] As stated by Pelletier during the tour of Coppley.

from *Piece Work*. On a bulletin board of one of the sewing floors, next to photos of coworkers posing for Canada Day, lottery tickets, and a print-out of stretching exercises, are photographs of the private opening organized at the AGH, with employees smiling proudly at the camera and hugging the artist. Special photographs like these give meaning to being “connected by a thread.”

Afterword

As I am finalizing this thesis, the world has been hit by the COVID-19 pandemic, affecting every single individual on a global scale. In addition to health and sanitary issues, the impact of this pandemic is exacerbating gender, class, and racial inequalities. Women are disproportionally affected by this crisis as 70% of the global health and social sector are women.[164] There is also a rise in reported domestic abuse as households are forced to isolate and practice social distancing to slow down the curve of virus propagation.[165] In addition to these factors, women are also often the main caregivers and unpaid labour in their household. Women are undertaking even more responsibilities for their families during this pandemic since schools are closed and children are staying home. Women also make up the majority of frontline workers, putting them and their families more at risk of contracting the virus. Additionally, essential workers are undervalued and underpaid. 2016 census data reveals that employees of essential industries earn between 26% and 50% of the annual income average in Canada, in addition to not being unionized.[166] There is also a high percentage of racialized essential workers in the warehouse, grocery, and meat product manufacturing industries in Canada.[167] This pandemic has also seen a rise of racism against East-Asian communities, especially in Canada and the United States. Because COVID-19 originated in the province of Wuhan in China, East Asians have been unfairly blamed for the global

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164 Department of Global Communications, "Gender equality in the time of COVID-19," *United Nations*, March 2020, https://www.un.org/en/un-coronavirus-communications-team/gender-equality-time-covid-19.

165 Scott Neuman, "Global Lockdowns Resulting In 'Horrifying Surge' In Domestic Violence, U.N. Warns," *NPR*, April 6, 2020, https://www.npr.org/sections/coronavirus-live-updates/2020/04/06/827908402/global-lockdowns-resulting-in-horrifying-surge-in-domestic-violence-u-n-warns.

166 Sara Mojtehedzad, "Their work is keeping Canada safe. But they earn a fraction of the national average," *The Star*, March 31, 2020, https://www.thestar.com/business/2020/03/31/these-workers-are-keeping-canada-safe-but-they-earn-a-fraction-of-the-national-average.html.

167 Sheila Block and Simran Dhunna, "COVID-19: It's time to protect frontline workers," *Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives,* March 31, 2020, http://behindthenumbers.ca/2020/03/31/covid-19-its-time-to-protect-frontline-workers/.

propagation of the virus, leading to discrimination and hate crimes against individuals and Asian-owned businesses.[168] The global garment making industry has been particularly affected by the crisis. Retail stores have been forced to close, with companies laying off their staff. Suppliers and factories in developing countries in Asia, such as India, Bangladesh and Myanmar, are facing massive order cancellations from retail brands, allowing them in turn to not pay garment workers for their labour.[169] Many factories are forced to close down, leaving thousands of people jobless and without severance pay. On the other hand, some garment-making industries, ranging from high-fashion brands to smaller companies, have come forward to produce medical protective equipment. Coppley announced that its factory is joining two other local cut and sew factories in producing face masks and gowns.[170] Since many industries, including Niko, a protective sports equipment maker in Hamilton, reported that they had to layoff staff, it is quite possible that Coppley is also in this situation, as the demand for business suits has dropped.

Contributing to the production of protective medical equipment – a commodity that has been notoriously scarce during this pandemic – is not only honourable, but also a way for Coppley to financially survive through this economic downturn. Since most of Coppley's suits are made of wool and linen sourced in Italy, a country that has been particularly affected by COVID-19, receiving the materials must have been very difficult, if not impossible since March 2020. As the business must continue to survive, redirecting the tasks of the garment workers to produce face masks and hospital gowns is an economic imperative as much as a patriotic gesture. As it was

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168 Olivia Bowden, "These Asian Canadians are concerned as hate crimes spike in the coronavirus pandemic," *Global News*, April 25, 2020, https://globalnews.ca/news/6858850/these-asian-canadians-are-concerned-as-hate-crimes-spike-in-the-coronavirus-pandemic/.

169 "Brands Abandon Asia Workers in Pandemic," *Human Rights Watch*, April 1, 2020, https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/04/01/brands-abandon-asia-workers-pandemic.

170 John Wells, "Hamilton manufacturers answer call in COVID-19 battle," *The Hamilton Spectator*, March 24, 2020, https://www.thespec.com/news/hamilton-region/2020/03/24/hamilton-manufacturers-answer-call-in-covid-19-battle.html.

mentioned earlier, it is not the first time Coppley has had to change its production line during a time of crisis: the factory produced military wear for the Canadian army during the Second World War. Although most garment workers in Canada are protected by unions, I wonder how Coppley Apparel is taking measures to ensure the health and safety of their employees. Many questions arise: are they able to practice social distancing at work? Are employees remunerated the same amount, considering that making a face mask requires many less steps than a business suit? As this global pandemic widens the cracks in the systems we previously relied on, we can only work towards dismantling the structures that are no longer sustainable, and which are harmful to those on the margins of society. Although completed three years before this unforeseen crisis, projects like *Piece Work* bring awareness and recognition of the skills and labour of undervalued workers, especially women, immigrant and members of other vulnerable populations, and affirm their important contribution to Canadian society.

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