

# Intra-Ethnic Conflict and its Consequences with Special Reference to Greek Canadian Communities\*

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## RESUMÉ

Basé sur des informations provenant de rapports publics et non publics, d'interviews de leaders de la Communauté grecque et de participation-observation, cet article analyse les facteurs qui contribuent aux conflits intra-ethniques dans les différentes communautés grecques du Canada. La lutte de pouvoir entre clergé et laïcs visant le contrôle administratif des communautés ethnoreligieuses, la compétition demandée pour le statut et les intérêts personnels, les expériences culturelles d'immigrants grecs dans la mère patrie et une forte cohésion ethnique sont considérées comme des facteurs contribuant aux conflits intra-ethniques.

Ceux-ci ont des aspects négatifs dans la mesure où ils entravent l'adaptation des nouveaux arrivants à la structure socio-économique et politique déjà installée, et dans la mesure où ils épuisent l'énergie des participants, affectant défavorablement les réseaux de parenté et créant parfois une perception négative de la part de la population locale. Cependant, les conflits intra-ethniques ont aussi des conséquences positives comme le changement des structures communautaires autoritaires, l'amélioration de la communication entre les divers groupes de la communauté ethnique et enfin la facilitation de l'adaptation de ce groupe ethnique à la société d'accueil.

## ABSTRACT

Based on information obtained from published and unpublished reports, personal interviews with Greek community leaders and participant observation, this paper examines the factors which contribute to intra-ethnic conflict in Greek Canadian communities. Power struggle between clergy and laymen for the administrative control of the ethnoreligious communities, old country politics competition for status and personal interests, cultural experiences of Greek immigrants in the homeland and strong ethnic cohesion are viewed as factors contributing to intra-ethnic conflict and friction.

Intra-ethnic conflict has negative aspects insofar as it impedes the adaptation of newcomers to the established socio-economic and political structure, drains energy from participants in the conflict, adversely affects kinship networks, and, sometimes, creates an adverse perception by outsiders. On the other hand, however, intra-ethnic conflict has positive consequences such as changing authoritarian community structures, enhancing communication between various groups within the ethnic community, and facilitating the ethnic group's adaptation to the host society.

## INTRODUCTION

A look at Canadian history indicates that since the early 1900s Greek Canadians established ethnocultural communities to (a) maintain their cultural

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heritage, (b) cope with problems of discrimination in the host society and (c) contribute to the social and economic welfare of the motherland Greece<sup>1</sup>. An ethnocultural community (e.g. a Greek Canadian community) refers to "a group of people within a Canadian city who share the Hellenic language and culture, have some form of ethnic organization through which they carry on activities for maintaining their cultural identity and maintain cultural contact with the homeland."<sup>2</sup> From the beginning the Greek Canadian communities were organized around the Greek Orthodox Church, an offshoot of the Greek Orthodox Church in the United States, for at least two reasons:

1. The insecurities and anxieties the immigrants experienced because of cultural shock and discrimination in the host society. The church, for example, reminded the newcomers of their homeland and gave them a sense of belonging in a foreign land.

2. The Greek Orthodox Church's previous experience in leadership of the oppressed and powerless Greeks during the Turkish occupation 1453-1821. During this period the Greek Orthodox Church became the center of social organization, especially in rural areas of Greece. These organizational experiences of the church were later carried over to the Greek communities in North America.

The Greek Canadian communities have been perceived, at least by outsiders, as organizations characterized by solidarity, even clanishness, and internal cooperation. This perception, however, is far from the truth. A closer look at the history of Greek Canadians suggests that since the early 1900s intra-ethnic conflict has been a common feature of Greek community life. Intra-ethnic conflict refers to dissociative forms of interaction within an ethnic community characterized by hostilities, clashes and cleavages which affect the sociocultural life of the ethnic group. Directly or indirectly intra-ethnic conflict touches the lives of all ethnic group members.

The objective of this paper then is to answer two questions: (1) what factors have contributed to conflict within the Greek Canadian communities over the years and (2) what are the negative as well as the positive consequences of such conflicts. The analysis is based on information obtained from the National Archives of Canada, unpublished reports from Greek Canadian organizations, the Greek Canadian press, personal interviews with leaders of Greek communities and organizations and the author's participant observation in Greek community life for more than twenty years.

Prior to World War II conflicts within the relatively small Greek Canadian communities were limited. However, with the influx of more than 110,000 Greek immigrants to Canada after 1950 conflict within the Greek Canadian communities increased significantly. The post World War II immigrants came from more diverse educational, political and occupational backgrounds. Thus,

as the diversity of the Greek community population increased, the potential for conflict also increased. Most of the conflicts occurred in cities with relatively large numbers of Greek Canadians<sup>3</sup> including Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver, Hamilton and London, Ontario.

### **Factors Contributing to Intra-ethnic Conflict**

A major factor which contributes to conflicts and divisions within the Greek Canadian communities is the power struggle between clergy and secular leaders over the administration of the community's cultural and economic affairs. Although conflicts between clergy and laymen had occurred since the establishment of the first parish communities in the early 1900s they became more intensified after 1964 when the priest became the head of the parish community and played a supervisory role in all parish organizations. According to Uniform Parish Regulations of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North and South America, "the priest as head of the Parish, by virtue of the ecclesiastical authority vested in him, shall guide and oversee the total parish program, and is ultimately responsible for the whole life and activities of the Parish."<sup>4</sup> This authoritarian parish community structure was challenged primarily by influential Greek Canadians, including intellectuals, educators and members of the new middle class. Such a response was inevitable in Greek Canadian communities where a large number of individuals had the resources to challenge the administrative power of the clergy over cultural affairs.

After many confrontations and court battles the civic leaders of the Greek communities of Toronto and Montreal were able to curb the administrative power of the clergy by making legal changes in the parish community by-laws. Under the modified by-laws the elected boards of trustees have substantial powers and do not recognize the administrative power of the clergy particularly in cultural and social affairs, including the Greek school, buying and selling property, social services, hiring of staff, etc. Apparently in retaliation and to circumvent this development, the Greek Orthodox Diocese of Canada established churches outside the administrative auspices of the Greek communities in Toronto and Montreal.<sup>5</sup>

Another alternative to the traditional parish community model was the establishment of secular community structures<sup>6</sup> in various Canadian cities, including London and Sarnia, Ontario and Edmonton, Alberta. These organizations which appeared in the early 1980s constitute an ethnocultural community without church affiliation where the power rests in the general assembly and its elected board of directors who have the authority to establish schools, cultural centers and auxiliary organizations. This secular model usually co-exists with the parish community model in the same city and consequently there is competition, conflict and duplication of Greek cultural activities and ethnic celebrations. The secular communities have been viewed by the church establishment with suspi-

cion and distrust because (a) they present a threat to the political leverage of the church leaders who claim to be the religious as well as the ethnocultural leaders of the Greek minority, (b) the clergy have a fear of secularization and secular leaders and (c) the income of the parish community decreases with the establishment of organizations outside the parish.

Politics of the home society is another important factor contributing to conflicts within the Greek Canadian communities. Since World War I political conflicts and upheavals in Greece have often been reflected in Greek Canadian communities. And the more serious the political conflict in the home society, the higher the probability for conflict and social movements within the Greek Canadian communities.

During World War I Greek Canadians were divided into two rival factions. The supporters of Prime Minister Eleftherios Venizelos believed that the interests of Greece were with her allies (Britain and France), whereas the Royalists believed that Greece should remain neutral. The two factions did not only support two different political policies of the homeland, but fought over the administrative control of Greek Canadian communities. Many conflicts between Venizelists and Royalists took the form of heated arguments in coffee houses (Kafenias) and Greek community cultural centers<sup>7</sup>. The conflict between these two political factions diminished as the struggle between Royalists and Venizelists began subsiding in Greece.

The defense of Greece against Italian and German fascist forces (1940-41) and later the National Resistance Movement against Nazi occupation (1941-45) united Greek Canadians in an effort to assist the motherland. Greek Canadians put their political quarrels aside and united to help Greece resist foreign aggression. Assistance in the form of food, clothing and medical supplies were sent to Greece through the Greek Relief Fund in Canada.

During the Civil War (1946-49) between communist and nationalist forces in Greece, there was no evidence of conflicting Greek political groups in Canada. Most of the Greek Canadians had been in Canada for too many years to identify with the new communist struggle for power in Greece, and those few Greek Canadians with left wing leanings could not organize any significant political movements.

The political situation which had the most significant impact on post World War II Greek communities in Canada was the right wing military takeover of Greece on April 21, 1967. The dictatorship divided Greek Canadians into two major political camps. The liberals expressed strong opposition to the military takeover of Greece while the conservatives—many with right wing leanings—offered their moral and economic support to the military junta. Many of the Greek Orthodox parish community administrators and clergy were sympathetic to the military dictators who claimed that the coup d'état was necessary to pre-

vent a socialist takeover in Greece. Conflicts between anti-junta and pro-junta Greek Canadians took the form of intimidation, heated arguments in coffee houses and community centers and violent confrontations during demonstrations. With the collapse of the Greek dictatorship in 1974 conflicts between the two factions in Canada also subsided.

Struggle for power between and among various interest groups or cliques can also contribute to conflicts and cleavages within the Greek Canadian community. Neither the parish nor secular organizations are immune from such conflicts. The power struggles take the form of general ideological disputes, conflicting personal ambitions (e.g., desire for status), and economic interests. Ambitious Greek Canadians, whose accessibility to political and social positions of power in the host society is limited, or is perceived as being blocked, choose the ethnic community's structure as an arena to act out achievement motives and strive for upward social mobility. Possibly one of the reasons for the relatively high degree of ethnic community involvement of middle-class Greek immigrants may be their perceived inaccessibility to positions of power in the host society combined with the fact that the ethnic community is large enough to provide a viable alternative.<sup>8</sup>

It can also be argued that conflicts within the Greek Canadian communities are deeply rooted in the cultural experiences of Greek immigrants. In other words, Greek immigrants who had been influenced by authoritarian institutions (e.g., family, school, church, government) in the home society are unable to coordinate their resources or solve differences and conflicts in a cooperative and compromising way. In Greek community meetings, heated arguments and insulting confrontations are thus not uncommon.

Strong ethnic cohesion, as indicated by an intense involvement and participation in ethnic community institutions, with noninvolvement in non-ethnic organizations, is another factor that may contribute to intra-ethnic conflict. Coser has argued that the fewer the groups people belong to, the more likely they are to become involved in the ones they have<sup>9</sup>. Thus, the higher degree of ethnic group cohesion the higher the chances of intra-ethnic conflict. Preliminary research by this author in a northern Ontario Greek Canadian community has shown, for example, that only 14.7% of Greek immigrants were active members of at least one Canadian voluntary association<sup>10</sup>. Internal conflicts in this Greek Orthodox community were very common in the late 1960s and 1970s.

### **Adverse Consequences of Intra-Ethnic Conflict**

The conflicts and divisions within the Greek Canadian communities and organizations have adverse consequences for the Greek Canadian ethnic culture and identity. There are at least four theoretical positions regarding the effects of intra-ethnic minority conflict:

1. Intra-ethnic conflict facilitates the assimilation process. According to this position, the higher the degree of conflict and friction within the ethnic community the more alienated the youth become from ethnic values and institutions and the greater the chances for assimilation (including loss of Greek identity). One mechanism by which this occurs is exogamy. For example, identification with one ethnic organization (e.g., parish community) and isolation from another ethnic organization (e.g., secular community) limits the number of ethnic eligibles in the mate selection process and increases the likelihood of marrying outside the ethnic group. According to Reitz, exogamy reflects a significant loss of group loyalty, leads to the dilution of the ethnic culture, and creates obstacles to intergenerational ethnic cultural transmission.<sup>11</sup>

2. Intra-ethnic conflict drains off the energy of minority group members, especially ethnic group leaders, and distracts them from other important issues such as (a) cooperating with other ethnic groups to cope with government policies and programs on ethnic minorities in Canada and (b) organizing a strong lobby at the municipal, provincial and federal levels of government. Greek Canadians, for example, do not constitute an effective lobby because of lack of unity.

3. Intra-ethnic conflict provides outsiders (i.e., non-Greeks) with a blurred or negative perception of the Greek minority in Canada. Some conflicts within the Greek Canadian community are reported by the Canadian mass media, and this may influence public opinion and politicians. An observable consequence is the reluctance by governments to provide Greek Canadians with grants for cultural and educational functions and a tendency of politicians to minimize contact with Greek Canadians for fear of becoming involved in conflict or perceived as siding with one side of a dispute. In other words, politicians of all parties and government officials do not want to risk getting embroiled in rivalries, which is likely to happen when one faction claims to represent the Greek community in a particular Canadian city. It is interesting to note here that reluctance to associate with rival Greek Canadian factions has also been observed among Greek members of parliament and other Greek representatives who have visited Greek Canadian communities.

4. Intra-ethnic conflict adversely affects kinship networks among Greek Canadians. It is not uncommon to find families being internally divided or estranged from each other because of Greek community politics. This situation is problematic because kinship networks have been important support systems for the immigration, social adjustment and occupational mobility of Greek Canadians. Many Greek immigrants, for example, have improved their social and economic positions in Canada by participating in kin networks that involve mutual obligations and support.<sup>12</sup> In business matters, for example, the Greek immigrant looked to his relatives for economic assistance (e.g., jobs, loans) and advice.

### **Positive Consequences of Intra-ethnic Conflict**

Intra-ethnic conflict is not always dysfunctional (negative) for the ethnic group. It may also have functional (positive) consequences which are usually unanticipated<sup>13</sup> and unrecognized by ethnic group members. Coser argues that conflict often leads to social change<sup>14</sup> such as innovation. Thus, intra-ethnic conflict may alter the administrative structure of the Greek Canadian community. As indicated earlier, the challenge to the traditional conservative parish-community structure and especially to the administrative power of the clergy, by liberal and influential Greek Canadians, has resulted in the democratization of the Greek Canadian communities in Toronto and Montreal.<sup>15</sup> These changes have also challenged the popular myth that Greek organizations cannot function effectively without authoritarian leadership and structure.

Intra-ethnic conflict also enhances communication between and among the various sub-groups of the ethnic community by bringing problems and issues into the open. It is through conflict, then, that interest groups understand the strengths and weaknesses of each other and establish their identity within the ethnic community. Many of the issues and problems of Greek Canadian communities and the views of different interest groups are presented in community meetings, forums and the Greek media, including newspapers, radio and television. The most publicized conflicts have been those between clergy and laymen for the control of the administration of the Greek communities of Metropolitan Toronto and Montreal during the 1970s.

Finally, intra-ethnic conflict facilitates the ethnic groups' social adaptation to the host society. Through conflict Greek Canadians examine the problems they encounter and make the necessary changes. Without conflict the ethnic community could become static and maladaptive. For example, as previously noted, the conflict between clergy and laymen in the 1960s and 1970s contributed to the establishment of many Greek organizations—academic, cultural and athletic—outside the Greek Orthodox parish community. The appearance of these secular organizations was very functional as the Greek Orthodox parish communities were not ideologically and structurally capable of helping the flow of new immigrants adjust to the host society.<sup>16</sup>

### **Summary and Conclusion**

Intra-ethnic conflict is an important aspect of Greek community life in Canada and results from (a) power struggle for the administrative control of the ethnoreligious communities and ethnocultural organizations, (b) ideological differences often related to old country politics, (c) competition for social status and personal interests, (d) cultural experiences of Greek immigrants in the homeland, and (e) strong ethnic group cohesion. Such a conflict increased with the diversity of the Greek population in Canada after 1950 and had both positive and negative

consequences for the ethnic community. To what extent similar patterns of intra-ethnic conflict exists in Greek communities of other countries (e.g., United States and Australia) will have to be demonstrated in future sociological inquiries.

Friction and overt conflict within the Greek Canadian communities will continue to exist as long as the clergy demand to exercise their administrative authority over the sociocultural life of Greek Canadians and as long as there are groups or outspoken individuals with different interests, political ideologies and organizational philosophies. It is not unrealistic, however, for Greek Canadians to have a united voice at the provincial and federal levels, especially as a lobby group. The Hellenic Canadian Congress, which consists of several Greek provincial organizations is in a strategic position to represent Greek Canadian regardless of their administrative philosophies. It is through the cooperation of both religious and secular Greek organizations and the coordination of their resources that Greek Canadians will become stronger and more dynamic as an ethnic minority in a multicultural society.

#### NOTES

1. Peter D. Chimbos, "The Changing Organization of Greek Canadian Communities". *International Journal of Comparative Sociology* (Vol. 27, Numbers 3-4, 1986): p.209.
2. Peter D. Chimbos, *op. cit.* p. 209.
3. *ibid.*, p. 210.
4. For more information on the power of the clergy see Uniform Parish Regulations of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North and South America, 1973, pp. 13-14.
5. Peter Chimbos, *op. cit.* p. 212.
6. Greek secular communities are incorporated under the Ministry of Consumer and Commercial Relations of their respective provinces and are empowered to form auxiliary organizations which are clearly under their jurisdiction.
7. Peter D. Chimbos, *The Canadian Odyssey*. (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1980)pp. 120-21
8. Peter D. Chimbos, "Historical Development, Conflict and Social change of Greek Communities in Canada" in *Greeks in English Speaking Countries*. (Melbourne, Hellenic Studies Forum Inc., 1992)p. 48.
9. Lewis Coser, *The Functions of Social conflict*. (New York: the Free Press, 1956)p.267.
10. Peter D. Chimbos, "A Comparison of the Social Adaptation of Dutch, Greek and Slovak Immigrants in a canadian Community", *International Migration Review* (Vol. 6, fall 1972)p.243.



11. Jeffrey Reitz, **The Survival of Ethnic Groups**.(Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1980)p.114.
12. See Peter D. Chimbos and Carol Agocs, "Kin and Hometown Networks as Support Systems for the Immigration and Settlement of Greek Canadians", **Canadian Ethnic Studies** (Vol. 14, No.2, 1983)pp. 43-56.
13. For detailed discussion on positive and negative consequences of any given system see Robert K. Merton, **Social Theory and Social Structure**. (New York: the Free Press of Glencoe, 1957) pp.50-54.
14. Lewis Coser, **op. cit.** 1956.
15. Peter D. Chimbos, **op.cit.** p.212.
16. Some of these organizations included the Hellenic Federation of Parents and Guardians of Montreal, The Greek Canadian Labour Association of Montreal, The Hellenic Canadian Cultural Society in Toronto, The Pan-Macedonian Association of Ontario and The Greek Writers Association of Montreal.

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George Vlassis, **The Greeks in Canada**. Ottawa: Leclerc Printers Limited, 1953.

## DOCUMENT

### RESOLUTION 939 (1994) ADOPTÉE PAR LE CONSEIL DE SECURITE A SA 3412<sup>e</sup> SEANCE, LE 29 JUILLET 1994

**Le Conseil de Sécurité,**

**Rappelant** ses résolutions sur Chypre,

**Accueillant avec satisfaction** le rapport du Secrétaire général en date du 30 mai 1994 (S/1994/629) et sa lettre du 28 juin 1994 (S/1994/785) concernant de bons offices,

**Réaffirmant** dans ce contexte que les mesures de confiance, sans être une fin en soi, et sans se substituer à un processus politique plus large, offriraient des avantages importants aux deux communautés et faciliteraient le processus politique conduisant à un règlement d'ensemble,

**Rappelant** que les deux parties ont accepté les mesures de confiance dans leur principe et se félicitant que le dirigeant de la communauté chypriote grecque ait accepté le "Projet d'idées pour la mise en oeuvre de l'ensemble des mesures de confiance" (S/1994/785, annexe) en date du 21 mars 1994, et se félicitant également des progrès considérables accomplis sur la voie d'un accord par le dirigeant de la communauté chypriote turque, qui sont décrits dans la lettre du Secrétaire général datée du 28 juin 1994,

**Notant** qu'il existe maintenant une large convergence de vues sur la teneur des mesures de confiance et sur les modalités de leur application, mais **notant** aussi avec **préoccupation** qu'aucun des deux dirigeants n'est pour le moment disposé à les appliquer selon les termes énoncés dans la lettre du Secrétaire général datée du 28 juin 1994,

**Ayant étudié** les options et les idées envisagées pour l'avenir aux paragraphes 57 à 62 du rapport du Secrétaire général en date du 30 mai 1994,

1) **Réaffirme** que le maintien du statu quo est inacceptable.

2) **Réaffirme** sa position selon laquelle le règlement du problème de Chypre doit être fondé sur un Etat de Chypre doté d'une souveraineté, d'une personnalité internationale et d'une citoyenneté uniques, son indépendance et son intégrité territoriale étant garanties, et composé de deux communautés politiquement égales, telles qu'elles sont décrites dans les résolutions pertinentes du Conseil de Sécurité, au sein d'une fédération bicommunautaire et bizonale, et selon laquelle un tel règlement doit exclure l'union, en totalité ou en partie, avec un autre pays, ou toute autre forme de partition ou de sécession,

3) **Prie** le Secrétaire général d'entamer des consultations avec les membres du Conseil, avec les puissances garantes et avec les deux dirigeants chypriotes, afin d'entreprendre une réflexion approfondie et de grande portée sur les moyens d'aborder le problème chypriote d'une façon qui produise des résultats, et **demande à nouveau** aux parties de faire preuve de leur engagement en coopérant pleinement à cette fin,

4) **Demande instamment**, dans ce contexte aux parties de coopérer pleinement avec le Secrétaire général et son Représentant spécial afin de parvenir à s'entendre au plus tôt sur les modalités d'application des mesures de confiance,

5) **Prie également** le Secrétaire général de lui soumettre, à la fin d'octobre 1994 au plus tard, à l'issue des consultations visées au paragraphe 3 ci-dessus et compte tenu des progrès accomplis dans l'application des mesures de confiance, un rapport qui comprenne un programme devant permettre de trouver une solution globale à toutes les questions que soulève le problème chypriote,

6) **Décide** de rester activement saisi de la question.