

## CULTURAL CHANGES IN THE GREEK FAMILY IN MONTREAL: AN INTRA- AND INTER-GENERATIONAL ANALYSIS

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### RÉSUMÉ

Le présent article a pour but d'esquisser une brève analyse, de caractère sociologique, de la famille grecque de Montréal et de suivre son évolution à travers les changements culturels et structurels qu'elle a subis dans ses efforts pour s'adapter à une nouvelle culture et survivre dans une société urbaine industrialisée. L'exposé comprend des données historiques sur le groupe immigrant, identifie les caractéristiques socio-économiques de celui-ci, souligne les structures traditionnelles de la famille grecque et analyse les changements qui surviennent pendant le processus d'adaptation.

L'étude se fonde sur les données du Recensement du Canada ainsi que sur les résultats d'une enquête récente menée dans la région de Montréal auprès de 179 étudiants célibataires, de niveaux secondaire, collégial et universitaire, vivant avec leurs parents, et auprès de 115 parents ayant des enfants célibataires à la maison.

### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to attempt to give a brief sociological description and analysis of the Greek family in Montreal as it is currently going through cultural and structural changes in its struggle to adapt and survive in a new culture and in a demanding urban-industrial society. Such description and analysis will include discussion of the historical trends of migration and the socio-economic characteristics of the immigrant group; of the traditional family structures; and of the changes that occur in the process of adaptation.

This discussion is based on Canada Census data and on a recently completed survey study carried out in the Montreal Area among 179 High School, College and University students, single and living with their parents; and among 115 parents having single children at home.

## I. THE GREEKS IN MONTREAL: A BRIEF HISTORICAL AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROFILE

### 1. The Historical Profile

Immigration to Canada from Greece began as an offshoot of the larger migration to the United States in the 19th century. The first to come were seamen and they settled in British Columbia and Nova Scotia.

After the Greek War of Independence from the Turks in 1821 and by the end of the century, almost 20,000 individuals left for overseas. All but five were destined for the United States. During the first two decades of the 20th century (1900-1920) almost 370,000 Greeks, mostly young, and mostly males, left Greece with their main destination the U.S. Such an influx of rural, unskilled and uneducated labour potential created concerns for the American authorities who imposed restrictions to curb their entrance to the States. Thus, many of those intended for the U.S. found an outlet to Canada hoping to be able to join friends and relatives in the States later on.

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During 1870-1880 there were about 39 Greeks in Canada. In 1901 approximately 300 Greeks had settled in Quebec (66), Ontario (65), Nova Scotia (15), Manitoba (27), British Columbia (96) and other places. In 1911 the Greek population rose to 3,600 mainly concentrating in the metropolitan cities of Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver. As they became established, they sponsored the immigration of relatives and friends from their native towns and villages in Greece.

In Montreal, oral accounts suggest that some Greeks arrived during 1880-1885. Others, however, suggest that a few Greeks had settled in the port of Old Montreal as early as 1864 (Petritis, 1972:2). Finally, Vlassis (1953:137-8) claims that Greek immigrants resided in Montreal as early as 1839. It was, however, after the devastation of Greece by the end of World War II and the Civil War (1950) that large waves of Greeks arrived in Canada. By 1981, the official Census set the number of Greeks in Canada at 154,365 of whom 49,420 lived in Quebec. And although Greek immigrants are rural in origin, they tend to settle in urban areas with Montreal and Toronto receiving the bulk of them.

Today, about 98% of the Greeks in Quebec reside in the Greater Montreal Area. Thus when one speaks about Greeks in Quebec, one is generally referring to Greeks in Montreal. The Majority of them initially settled — and still live — in the low rent, low income area of the immigrant corridor between St. Laurence Boulevard and Park Avenue reaching to the north of Park Extension. In the last decade, however, and in descending order of concentration, they have moved to Laval, South Shore, Montreal North and South West. Most recently, they have been moving to the West Island. They follow the same pattern of family migration, that is, a member of the family moves out into a new residential area to be soon followed by other relatives and compatriots whenever it becomes financially feasible.

The Greeks in Montreal are institutionally complete, with more than sixty organizations to serve the cultural, educational, religious, communications, occupational, financial-economic and social needs of the group. These organizations aim at the maintenance and transmission of the Hellenic culture, the Greek Orthodox religion, the Greek language, traditions and values. And at the centre of both immigration process and institutional development and its functions stands the Greek family.

## 2. The Socio-economic Profile

The overall picture of Greeks in Montreal is that of H. Gans' (1962) characterization of "Urban Villagers". They are the rural European immigrants, who attempt to live in an urban city, establish ethnic and urban institutions to enable them to maintain their ethnic identity, culture and structures with rural and traditional values and attitudes. They have some or no skills, low education and end up in factory and service occupations with no prospects of occupational advancement.

According to a 1981 Census special report, of the 35,000 Greeks in Montreal of 15 years of age and older who are not attending full time school only 4% had a university degree while another 8% had some university education. Another 50% had completed High School, whereas 33% had only completed Elementary Education. Compared to the 1971 figures, there has only been a slight improvement in the educational picture of the group, as can be seen from Table 1. However, this improvement is not sufficient to change the overall picture of the Greeks or their position relative to the other ethnic groups in Montreal.

Of the 21,230 Greeks in the 1981 labour force in Montreal 3% were to be found in the managerial and administrative positions, with another 6% comprising a variety of professional occupations such as lawyers, doctors, teachers, writers, artists, etc. The bulk of them, about 62%, has remained in the production and service occupations, working as unskilled and semiskilled laborers in factories, hospitals and restaurants, cleaners and janitors where there is rarely a possibility of social mobility and advancement. A comparative occupational picture for the years of 1971 and 1981 can be seen in Table 2.

**Table 1**  
**Per Cent Distribution of Greeks in Montreal by**  
**Educational Level 1971-1981**

Education (15 yrs and over excluding those attending full-time)	1971			1981		
	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	Total
Total Number	14,075 %	12,875 %	26,955 %	18,130 %	16,875 %	35,000 %
1. With degree	4	1	3	5	3	4
2. One or more University yrs.	7	4	5	9	6	8
3. Grades 7-13	45	36	36	54	47	50
4. Grades 1-6	41	52	46	29	37	33
5. No schooling	2	6	5	3	7	5

Source: Statistics Canada Special Reports Nos: 8917-1359A and 6451-1300-2B-1981.

**Table 2**  
**Per Cent Distribution of Occupational Categories**  
**Among Greeks in Montreal 1971-1981**

Occupational Categories	1971			1981		
	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	Total
Total in labour force	12,835 %	6,865 %	19,700 %	13,565 %	7,665 %	21,230 %
1. Mgr./Adm.	2	1	1	4	2	3
2. Other Profes.	3	2	5	6	6	6
3. Clerical	4	10	6	4	16	8
4. Sales	7	3	12	9	5	6
5. Service	38	12	29	40	16	32
6. Farms	—	—	—	—	—	—
7. Proc./Mach.	7	5	7	7	3	5
8. Prod./Fabr.	14	41	24	15	43	25
9. Constr./Trans.	7	—	6	9	—	6
10. Other - not stated	18	26	10	6	9	6

Source: Statistics Canada Special Reports Nos. 8917-139A and 6451-1300-2B-1981.

Furthermore, in 1981 35,005 Greeks in Montreal, 15 years and over, were earning some income. Of those, 71% were reporting earnings of less than \$21,699 whereas 2% were reporting earnings of \$32,505 and over. Compared to 1971 figures the Greeks do not seem to have made any significant improvement as can be seen in Table 3. They still rank second from the bottom (second to the Chinese) in average income earnings among twelve ethnic groups in Montreal and the lowest among the females in the same twelve ethnic group categories.

In 1981 on the average, Greeks earned \$8,511 (males, \$11,779; females, \$4,999) compared to \$11,126 average for all twelve ethnic groups in Montreal (males, \$15,737; females, \$6,908), and \$16,290 average for the Jewish group earning the highest income in Montreal (males, \$22,859; females, \$9,839).

Thus, the Greeks in Montreal still present the general picture of a rural Greek, living in an urban city, with no or some occupational skills, low in income and education. They are a more rather than less culturally homogeneous group; have no class structure differentiation; share a common rural background upon immigration to Canada and hold on to family structures and networks as shock absorbers to the demands of a strange culture and an urban-industrialized society.

**Table 3**  
**Comparative Income Distribution Among**  
**Greeks in Montreal 1971-1981**  
**(per cent)**

Income Categories		Females		Males		Total	
		1971	1981	1971	1981	1971	1981
		Total Number Earning Income					
1971	1981*	13,775	16,870	15,230	18,130	29,005	35,005
\$0.00 - 9,999	0.00 - 21,699	59	66	82	76	71	71
10,000 - 14,999	21,670 - 32,504	—	1	6	8	3	5
15,000 - Over	32,505 - Over	—	—	3	4	2	2
Not Reporting		41	33	9	12	24	22

\* 1971 categories adjusted for the Consumer Price Index factor of 2.167.

As the number of new immigrants has been considerably reduced in the last five years, the maintenance and transmission of Hellenism and Greek identity rest with the group already here and especially with the Greek family and Church. However, both the structure as well as the function of those two institutions seem to be challenged by the younger generations of Greeks. Today, the Church is gradually reducing its hold over the immigrants to such events of the life-cycle as births, baptisms, weddings, religious and national holidays. The family on the other hand, although still conservative in its cultural functions, is undoubtedly undergoing a gradual transition. Time, education and exposure to new structures, values and practices are imprinting their influences on the Greek family. And along with the demands of the urban-industrial society and economic structures, the demands of the Canadian family structures and social values are instigating changes in the immigrant family. It is these structures and changes that the rest of this paper will deal with.

## II. THE GREEK FAMILY: STRUCTURES AND CHANGES

The dominant family structure and values used as a model in this research were the traditional ones which characterize the rural, less educated family into which the Greek immigrants, arriving in big waves after 1952 and constituting the parents of today's families in Montreal, were raised and socialized.

A well-presented model of such family structure and values has been offered by Papa-john and Spiegel (1975) and accepted by the author (1979). In that the model the Greek family has been stated to hold a primarily "Lineal" structure, with a predominance of male authority, followed by emphasis on the "Individual" values and achievement orientation of the members of the family — especially the males — and with less considerations and emphasis on "Collateral" patterns and values or the primacy of the family as a group. The authors compare the Greek family to that of the Italian and North American; the former is characterized by Collateral > Lineal > Individual patterns whereas the latter is characterized best by Individual > Lineal > Collateral pattern.

In the Greek family, the Lineal pattern preference (male lineage authority) characterizes its structure. However, such a structure may vary depending on many factors among which the most significant ones are those of urbanization, social class, female occupation and education. The father first, and after him, the eldest son is next in line for authority, with the younger sons holding positions in their order of birth (Sanders, 1962). The father is the

undisputable and final authority. He is responsible for and provides for the welfare of his family, while wife and children are subordinate to him. Decision-making authority rests in him, unless the son (if any) is of age to be consulted. The approval of the father must be maintained at all costs in whatever is going on in the family.

The Greek father has been depicted as a figure of authority to be feared and respected. His domination over the rest of the family members, especially wife and daughters, was absolute. Achievement of the whole family reflects back on the father, hence success becomes a source of male pride. His economic position may be marginal, but not appreciably different from the position of others in the same area, thus he does not have to prove his value to re-enforce his authority as he will have to do so in the North American society.

The Greek wife and mother on the other hand has been depicted as a woman constantly displaying an attitude of tenderness, spontaneous self-denial, and self-sacrifice. Her husband and children are her life and happiness. She is modest and is expected to behave in a submissive manner in public places especially when her husband is present.

Formality and distance is maintained in the relationships — especially in the presence of others — between father and children, husband and wife. The wife must respectfully represent her husband in the community, and family weaknesses are kept a family matter (Papajohn and Spiegel, 1975).

Time, education, and a new culture and urban environment have brought about changes in the immigrant family structure. And whereas changes are experienced by both generations and both sexes, it is the second generation — as to be expected — that shows dramatic changes, and especially the women. They are questioning the traditional, rural structure of the family, and are challenging male authority and dominance. They are gradually adapting to the Canadian family structure where individual values are more dominant, followed by Lineal structures; whereas Collateral preferences are still receiving last consideration (Individual > Lineal > Collateral).

In a just completed survey, 115 Greek parents (males, 65; females, 50) in the Greater Montreal Area were asked about husband-wife relations. A significant number, more men than women, still hold on to traditional attitudes as can be seen in Table 4.

However, when the same questions were posed to 179 students (males, 69; females, 110), the change from traditional structures is dramatic as can be seen in Table 5.

Children and wives are challenging the father's (male's) traditional authority. His culturally ascriptive power is under dispute. Achievement characteristics are demanded by the children who are more educated than their parents, have more skills and linguistic abilities, and mediate between parents and the host society. In addition, many wives were or are now earning income and have been exposed to the mass media, mass consumption and experiences of an urban society characterized by more egalitarian sex relations than those of rural Greece.

**Table 4**  
**Parents Responses to Attitudes Towards the Family**

Items	Males (N=65)		Females (N=50)		Total (N=115)	
	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree
	%	%	%	%	%	%
1. Husband should be stricter with wives.	39	52	20	74	31	62
2. Husband's time his own business	34	62	16	78	18	69
3. Marriage is woman's best career	40	43	54	34	46	39
4. Woman should fit life to husband's	80	14	70	22	46	39

5. Husband should decide most things	49	48	34	64	43	54
6. Husband should decide money matters	39	55	24	74	32	63

**Table 5**  
**Children's Responses to Attitudes Towards the Family**

Items	Males (N=69)		Females (N=110)		Total (N=179)	
	Agree %	Disagree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Agree %	Disagree %
1. Husband should be stricter with wives	14	68	1	91	8	85
2. Husband's time his own business	24	55	2	90	11	7
3. Marriage is woman's best career	17	61	3	95	8	77
4. Woman should fit life to husband's	41	36	14	72	24	58
5. Husband should decide most things	30	56	9	89	17	76
6. Husband should decide money matters	22	78	7	90	13	81

### III. DISCUSSIONS - CONCLUSIONS

The Greeks in Montreal are a closely knit ethnic group. The adults have intermarried (91%); have established ethnic institutions; are maintaining close ethnic ties; their friends are Greeks and their social lives are centered around Greeks exclusively. They attend mostly Greek affairs; eat Greek food; listen to Greek radio; expect their children to marry Greeks; expect non-Greek spouses to convert, and wish their children to learn Greek.

As strong as they are in their intention to maintain their ethnicity and cultural values and traditions, however, they cannot remain static in the currents and forces of the acculturation process. From the above presentation it is becoming evident that cultural changes are taking place. And whereas the majority of children learn to speak Greek, go to Greek school, are in favour of maintaining the Greek language, and maintain close Greek friends and ethnic ties, they nonetheless consider themselves Greek-Canadians rather than Greeks — which was the case in 1971 — and would like their children to be identified as such also. In addition, they use mostly English at home, and almost exclusively with their friends, although those friends are Greeks.

Increasingly, parents use English with their children and include English words in their Greek discussion. Statistics Canada reports that in 1981, 75% of the Greeks in Montreal reported Greek as the language spoken at home with another 22% reporting English and 3% French. In addition, parents allow more freedoms to their children than they themselves used to have, or consider it "culturally proper", and feel they do not really "fit" when they visit their villages in Greece. They have become "Greek-Canadians". Such a change has created feelings of ambivalence and guilt in the parents. The children, on the other hand, have given a different meaning to "Greekness". They acknowledge it in themselves; feel proud of it; will want to maintain the cultural aspect of it; but do not feel they have to behave in the "Greek way". They are very comfortable with their dual identity and Canadian manners.

Changes in the family structure are more evident than those of ethnicity. The industrialized, urban Canadian society challenges the culturally transmitted authority of the Greek male and parent. Educated children and working wives challenge the undisputed domi-

nance of the father. And whereas in Greece proper, the power position of the father enjoys cultural and social support, in Montreal, both society and the family challenge him and expect him to achieve that position.

Such challenges inevitably lead to conflict in the immigrant family. And although one could argue that conflict of cultural origin may neither be the only source of friction in the family nor its major cause, it is certainly to be found and it is affecting the family relations.

The position that is mostly threatened is that of the adult male. The larger society demands of him urban skills and abilities, knowledge and information which, because of historical, social and cultural reasons, he never acquired. On the other hand, the family challenges his ascriptive authority and demands achievement. He becomes a negative role model which he, himself, reinforces by urging his children "not to become like him but to make something better of themselves". As a reaction to these challenges and pressures, the Greek father becomes authoritarian, aggressive, absolute and sometimes illogical. He feels constantly threatened and frequently resorts to his only source of power, that of ethnicity and cultural ascriptions, which neither wives nor children accept any longer. This might explain to some degree — other factors must also be taken into consideration — why a significant proportion of men in this research (32%), of women (24%), and of children (25%) find it hard to maintain a pleasant atmosphere at home, and they report that the pleasures of the family have been overstated (men, 39%; women, 52%; children, 46%). In addition, one fifth (20%) of the children are constantly under stress at home, report that their parents expect too much of them (75%), that they cannot find enough understanding at home (34%), and that parents and children live in a different world (parents, 69%; children 56%).

To conclude then, the Greek family in Montreal is evidently undergoing cultural and structural changes. Such changes, however, are normal in the life of immigrants adapting to a "theoretically open" society wherever or whoever those immigrants might be. The Greek community in Montreal has the motivation and has established a strong community institutional network to support the cultural goals of the family. Education, one of the major factors to change, will also become a means for understanding and appreciation of the physical, social and psychological hardships that the immigrant parents went through to provide for their children and offer them a better opportunity than they themselves ever had. Such an awareness will gradually enable the Greek family to deal with changes and conflict and bring about cultural understanding and pride in the ethnic group.

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