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### Immigrant women's portraits: the socio-economic profile of the Greek Canadian women

*Efrosini Gavaki*

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*Efrosini Gavaki\**

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IMMIGRANT WOMEN'S PORTRAITS:  
THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROFILE  
OF THE GREEK CANADIAN WOMEN

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ABSTRACT

*The paper explores the socio-economic status of women of Hellenic ethnic origin in Canada (both single and multiple). Such status was mostly looked at through the indicators of income, education and occupation as reported in the 1991 census. Greek women who arrived in Canada before WWII and the 1950's-1970's heavy Greek migration did not really enter the labour force. When they did, they, and their daughters, worked mostly at family business. However, their community and charity work was unsurpassed. As the Greek immigrant women who arrived in Canada during the 1950's to 1970's dominate the portrait of the group, they have overshadowed whatever inroads the descendents of the early arrivals had achieved. This last wave entered the host society at the lowest socio-economic levels such as contract workers for factories, as domestics, and as hospital workers. Upward mobility has been slow and hard. The 1991 data indicate that they rank low at the social status indicators. However, this portrait is expected to radically have changed during the decade of the 90's. New immigration from Greece has come to an end; 1991 was the turning point when the Canadian born Greeks surpassed in numbers those born elsewhere, and; the 90's decade has seen the retirement of the immigrants women from the labour force and the entrance of their educated and skilled daughters.*

I. INTRODUCTION – THE IMMIGRANT WOMEN'S PORTRAIT

The purpose of this paper is to explore the relative socio-economic status of the Greek immigrant women in Canada, relative to that of the Greek men and to that of a selected number of other ethnic groups. Such a status will be

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\* Ph.D., Associate Professor-Sociology, Concordia University, Montreal, Quebec, Canada.

mostly looked at from the presentation and brief analysis of the socio-economic indicators, of education, occupation and income as reported in the 1991 census. As most of the Greeks (around 85%) are residing in Ontario and Quebec, the discussion will center primarily on these two provinces and on Canada as a whole. It should be understood, however, that the statistical portrait presented in this paper is, on the one hand, a picture at a slice of time and, on the other hand, a general, average picture where the exceptions are lost in the numbers. As the Census is ten years old (Census 2001 statistics not yet available) and the Greek group in 1991 was at a transitional point (for the first time the Canadian born Greek population equaled the foreign born), a most accurate picture will be presented in the near future.

The desire to explore this area stems from the fact that very few studies have been done on Canadian immigrant women in general, and on Greek women in particular. And whereas there is ample evidence in sociology, social psychology and psychology to make it common knowledge that men and women play different roles in society at large, in their particular community, in the family, in their interpersonal relations and in the workplace, it is also common knowledge that their emotional make-up, their goals, expectations and experiences are different –or at least perceived and interpreted differently– and should not be lumped in the immigrant total. There are major differences in the cultural and ethnic backgrounds of immigrant women, differences in work, education, social class and achievements. However, these differences and experiences of immigrant women have not yet found a strong voice in the scientific literature, and like their position in the receiving society, talking about them is still marginal. Their lifestyles –before and after immigration– have ranged from the most traditional to the most unconventional. Yet most works on immigrants tend to marginalize them, ignore them, or simply include them in the discussion of male immigrants.

## II. A. BRIEF LITERATURE PORTRAIT

During the decades of the 60's and the 70's, the North American sociological literature on immigrant women was at best marginal. More often, women were lost in the general discussion of immigrants as a group where the male experience and condition predominated. It was this lack of attention to the gender and ethnic factor that prompted Maxine Schwartz-Seller, in the first comprehensive work on immigrant women, to state that:

The immigrant woman's encounter with America, for better or for worse, was not the same as the immigrant man's. Like the men, the women faced poverty, loneliness, discrimination, and physical danger as they straggled to build new lives in a new land. But their identity as women shaped the roles, opportunities, and experiences available to them in the family, the workplace, the community, and the nation. Much of the voluminous literature on immigration has been male centered, taking men's experiences as the norm and assuming that women's experience was either identical to men's or not important enough to warrant separate and serious attention (Seller-Schwartz, 1981: 5).

However, the Civil Rights movement in the United States, and the Multiculturalism debate and policy in Canada, resulted in a significantly increased interest in research and publication on immigrant and ethnic gender studies, more so in the United States than in Canada.

Some of the earlier works in the States included Cecyle Neidle's (1975) excellent biographical sketches of immigrant women's social activities, science, religion and the arts; Edith Blicksilver's (1978) collection of ethnic women's problems and lifestyles; Jean Scarpaci's (1978) account of the urban experience of immigrant women. There are plenty of works on Chinese women (Loomis, 1969), Filipino, and other Asian women (Wagner, 1973); numerous works on Italian (Carole- Boyd et al., 1978) and Jewish women (Michael, 1976).

More recently, a number of studies on ethnic women appeared as chapters or articles in readers in both countries. Among others, Okihiro's (1994) *Margins and Mainstreams: Asians in American History and Culture* dedicates a chapter into the historical context and the immigrant experience of Asian women in the United States. Demos and Segal (1994) introduced «gender», «ethnicity» and «class» in *Ethnic Women* as integral factors of American life, factors that have an impact on the degrees of privilege and influence people have and that they do have significant meaning in people's lives as well. Whereas women's studies in general, and studies on ethnic women in particular, were marginal before the 70's, since the 80's a significant number of publications on ethnic women have been produced in both countries, publications dealing with the effects of immigration on ethnic women, the immigrant family and ethnic structures, as well as the impact and contribution of ethnic women on the receiving societies. As more and more women were trained in research in the social sciences and the humanities, more and more research and academic programs turned their

interest into gender studies in general, and ethnicity in particular. Gender became a basis for social differentiation in research in both industrialized and non-industrialized societies, as well as in urban and rural settings. Gender generalizations, as well as gender inequalities were socially and scientifically challenged. Gender, ethnicity and class are often intersected into what Gordon (1964) referred to as the *ethclass* which becomes of particular importance when one looks into interpersonal and social relations and their outcomes in immigrant and multi-ethnic societies. Finally, Burkin and Norton(1979) look into the Chinese and immigrant women and the workplace.

In the Demos-Segal reader (1994) on *Ethnic Women* their contributors look at the impact of gender and ethnic factors on the home, on the workplace, on interpersonal and social relations. The contributors explore a broad range of racial/ethnic and social class circumstances. Patterns of immigration and social mobility, communal institutions and maintenance of ethnic traditions and ethnic identity are among the topics included in this reader, topics that reflect the multiple status reality of ethnic women in the United States. Much of their experience, however, could easily be applicable to the Canadian ethnic reality as well.

In 1997, Espiritu continues with the sociological exploration of Asian American women from a comparative point of view between men and women. From the angle of the Demos and Segal perspective, Espiritu also looks into how race, gender and class simultaneously shape the relations between Asian American men and women by drawing from a wide range of research. The author recognizes gender as an organizing principle in the social system and provides the relationship between Asian American men and women in the home, communities, politics and the workplace. Finally, and in the same spirit, Higginbotham and Romero (1997) further explore race, ethnicity and class.

The early Canadian sociological works on women were mostly limited to native women and immigrant women of the rural west. However, most immigrant women settled in the urban, metropolitan cities in Canada, and their recorded experience has become of increasing interest in the last two decades.

To my own experience, the first book to give a significant voice to the life of an immigrant woman in Canada was the autobiographical publication of Laura Goodman Salverson's, *Confessions of an Immigrant's Daughter* (1939) which received the 1939 Governor General's Award. In that she narrates the agonies and the joys which shaped her life growing up an

immigrant's daughter in Canada and the United States. The few contemporary works concentrate on prejudice, discrimination and ethnicity retention (Ralston, 1988; Agnew, 1996). Burnet's collection (1986) of a conference papers on women's issues has become the single major contribution to the Canadian immigrant women with most of the papers included presenting pioneer works. Finally, among other important publications, the York University scholarly journal *Canadian Woman Studies* has given a forum for interesting works on ethnic women in Canada such as Bullock and Jafri (2000), «Media (Mis) Representation of Muslim Women in the Canadian Nation»; Aujla A., 2000, «Others in their Own Land: Second Generation of South Asian Canadian Nation»; Brock et al., 2000, «Migrant Sex Work: A Roundtable Analysis»; and Dua E., 2000, «The Hindu Women's Question» to mention a few.

Publications on the Greek immigrant women in North America are more limited, more so in Canada than in the United States. Scourby (1997) suggests that during the 70's a scattering of discussions on Greek women in the U.S. and Canada appeared within the context of a broader discussion of Greek immigrants or of the Greek family. Spinelli, Vassiliou and Vassiliou (1970), for example, examined the sex-role constraints placed upon Greek women and the superior role ascribed to the male, while psychologist John Papajohn (1975) investigated the dilemma faced by second-generation Greek American women in trying to reconcile the conflict between Greek and American value systems, male domination and equality. Further, in an article published in *Social Psychiatry* (1978), Dunkas and Nikely dealt with the phenomenon –they called– of the Greek «drop-out wife» women who suffered serious clinical symptoms of maladjustment. Gavaki (1979), explored sex-role changes and conflict in the Greek Canadian family structure in a broader discussion of the cultural continuity and change of the Greek immigrant family. Stella Coumandaros's article (1982) recounts the establishment and activities of the first official Greek Ladies Philoptochos Society in New York City in 1902, whose unofficial work had started as early as 1894. These Greek refugee women from Constantinople and Asia Minor were fleeing from the Turkish Holocaust of the 1920's. In the same article she accounts for the life-styles of these early Greek immigrant women whose life centered upon family, home and church. The loneliness of the new life –accentuated by their inability to speak English–, the separation from familiar surroundings, friends and family left behind in Greece brought them closer to the Church, which became an occasion for social gatherings and community work. Finally, Clamar (1988) focused on the important contri-

butions of the *kakomoires* (the unfortunate ones) in Greek life. She discusses women who, by some misfortune, found themselves unwittingly becoming heads of their households, their struggles and successes, and how they became role models for succeeding generations of Greek-American women.

Polyzoi's article in Burnet's (1986) *Looking into My Sister's Eyes* marks the first of the two major academic works on Greek women in Canada. She concentrates on the experience and community contribution of Greek immigrant women that came to Toronto from Asia Minor –most as refugees, some to join male relatives– before WWII. They were the first to experience the British-centric climate of the Canadian society at the turn of the century, were lumped as Turks (the majority had Turkish passports), and thus faced the prejudices aimed at refugees in general, and at Oriental and Levantines in particular. They were also among the first to work in the Greek schools, the charitable and social organizations of the community and thus played a vital role in the cultural survival and cohesion of the community.

More recently, Constance Callinicos (1990) has produced an outstanding narrative giving voice to the experience of four generations of women ranging from the immigrant picture brides who came before World War II, to the third generation American-born, educated, liberated from the cultural fetters, and successful women who are full participants in the American society. Such experiences could be generalized to the rest of the Greek immigrant women in North America as they are echoed in the latest narrative of Montreal immigrant Greek women by Sophia Florakas-Petsalis (2000). Petsalis finally gave a forum and a voice to women who came to Canada before WWII, as well as their Canadian born daughters and granddaughters. The works of Callinicos and Petsalis are similar in the style of the personal interviews and write up. Despite the geographical variations or origin and settlement, the experiences of the women in both works are –not surprisingly– very similar. Wherever they settled, most of these women came with similar social and cultural baggage; lived a life of loneliness and hardship; and became the center of the family, the church, and of the community; they maintained and transmitted the Greek language, culture and religion; and became the initiators and supporters of the social and charitable activities of their communities.

In 1994, in the conference on Greeks in English-speaking Countries organized by the Vryonis Centre for Hellenic Studies and held in Sacramento, California in the spring of 1994, a section with the title «Greek Diaspora Women in the 1990's» a number of interesting papers were discussed and published in the proceedings of the conference. In that

conference, Alice Scourby (1997) discussed the impact of «patriarchal hegemony» on Greek American women. Demos, in *Ethnic Women* (1994), looks into «Marital Choice, Gender and Reproduction of Greek Ethnicity» in which she explores the social/ethnic context of marital selection among the Greeks in the United States. She looks into the interrelationship among gender, type of marriage –endogamy or intermarriage– and ethnicity in two Greek American communities. She studies gender differences in intermarriage rates, examines the joint effects of marriage type and gender on various aspects of ethnicity, and considers the impact of generation in America on the interrelationships of gender, marriage type and ethnicity. In the same Demos-Segal reader, Vegleri (1994) looks into the differential occupational integration of recent Greek male and female immigrants in New York City.

Finally, Evie Tastsoglou's sociological work on four generations of immigrant women in Toronto (1997; 1997a) explores the relationship of gender, class and ethnicity, and their impact on «lived experiences» during their immigration and adaptation process. The generations in this study were defined by the time of their immigration to Canada spanning from since before WWII to the 1970's. This study pieces together the «how's» and the «why's» of their immigration decision and process, and the «how's» and «why's» of their lives as immigrant and minority women in Canada. The work is embedded in feminist and ethnic adaptation theories and presents insightful analysis and discussion of the findings.

### III. THE IMMIGRATION-SETTLEMENT PORTRAIT

From 1901 to 1990 123,621 Greeks immigrated to Canada. The deplorable conditions in Greece, a country just coming out of four centuries of Turkish occupation, and the deficient exploitation of the resources of the country, compounded by crop failures (currant crop failures in the Peloponnesos between 1882-1860), and government incompetence and conflicts, all resulted in a variety of push factors out of Greece. In addition, the unequal distribution of land at home, political and social instability, the heavy economic burden of the dowry system, and the centuries-old love of the seafaring Greek for adventure have all been mentioned as reasons of immigration. At the same time, literature, recruitment programs, advertisements and reports of fact and fiction on work opportunities, easy successes, and favorable immigration policies pulled the immigrants towards new lands. It is also important to note that during this period of overseas



migration, the demographic factors operating in Greece gave a major push out of the country. In the early years, after achieving independence from the Ottoman empire (1821-1830), the total population of Greece grew slowly. However, its growth was considerably accelerated as a result of territorial expansion and the large refugee influx after the exchange of populations between Greece and Turkey in 1922: War, political unrest and economic hardship remained until the 1980's the primary push factors for Greek migration. However, marriage and family ties were also to become strong factors after 1930 and, especially, in the post-WWII era. And whereas early immigrants were mostly young, single males –hoping to make their fortune and return to Greece– immigration in the later years would involve the movement of entire families and the importation of brides, and more often, of bridegrooms, to the new world. Of the total number of immigrants leaving Greece between 1955 and 1960, 36% were women; the percentage increased to 42% in the years between 1961 and 1970 and to 44% between 1971 and 1976. During the period from 1950 to 1970, 10,771 Greek women entered Canada as domestic servants and factory workers (mostly in the garment industry). Most of these women were single, and in time, offered the sponsorship of a husband-to-be in lieu of a dowry.

By 1991, according to Statistics Canada, there were 191,480 individuals reporting either Greek (single: 151, 150) or partly Greek (multiple: 40, 330) ethnic origin; women made up 49% of the group (Table 1).

**TABLE 1**  
*Greeks in Canada by Ethnic Origin and Gender*

| Gender       | Canada         |               | Ontario       |               | Quebec        |              |
|--------------|----------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|--------------|
|              | Single         | Multiple      | Single        | Multiple      | Single        | Multiple     |
| Male         | 78,125         | 20,295        | 43,165        | 10,790        | 25,530        | 3,385        |
| Female       | 73,020         | 20,035        | 40,615        | 10,760        | 24,360        | 3,260        |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>151,150</b> | <b>40,330</b> | <b>83,780</b> | <b>21,555</b> | <b>49,890</b> | <b>6,645</b> |

Source: Statistics Canada, Census 1991: 93-315.

The early arrival of Greek immigrants to Canada constituted a random and individual migration. They settled in scattered locations, married local women, and their offspring were rapidly absorbed into the mainstream of Canadian society. By 1900, however, the migration pattern seemed to have changed. They came in larger number; they settled in urban areas; and they started establishing families and community institutions.

The regional composition of immigrants included Greeks from all parts of Greece, with a predominance from Lakonia and Arcadia in the south, Florina and Kastoria in the north, Greater Athens and the islands. There were some Greeks from Turkey, Egypt and Cyprus. The majority of immigrants came from rural and semi-urban villages and towns, unskilled and illiterate. In Greece, they were part of a closely-knit community where their social life centered around the church, their extended families, and immediate friends and neighbors. They could be found working in the urban centers of Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver and Halifax, mostly in factories, the fur trade, restaurants, hospital services and domestics.

Despite the predominantly rural origin, Greeks tended to settle in the Canadian urban centers. Of the 154,360 Greeks in Canada in 1981, 151,150 were living in urban areas, 86% in cities with populations of 500,000 or more. In 1991, there were 56,850 Greeks in Quebec, 96% of whom are living in Montreal. In Ontario, of the 105,335, 72% were living in Metropolitan Toronto.

#### IV. THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC PORTRAIT

In a class structured society like Canada, social class intersects with ethnicity to produce what sociologists (Gordon, 1964) refer to as ethclass. When talking about immigrant groups, ethclass considers the factors that enter into and affect the immigrants' adjustment and assimilation, the interaction and outcomes between the immigrants' social, cultural and psychological systems and those of the larger society. Research has shown (Gordon, 1964; Gavaki, 2000) that the lower the socio-economic level of the group, the higher the ethnicity component. In the lower socioeconomic strata, individuals give greater emphasis to their ethnic culture and associate more with their own kind. However, the higher the socio-economic level, the more important the class characteristics of the group. Individuals of most ethnic origins will speak, associate and interact with others of similar class rather than ethnic background, they will belong to class-based associations rather than ethnic ones. Ethnicity in the existing literature has been measured by structural indicators, such as place of origin, knowledge of ethnic language, ethnic religion and participation in religious activities, community and organizational participation and membership, endogamy, friendships; cultural indicators such as observance of ethnic and religious customs, celebrations, values and symbols of the tribe; and psychological-symbolic feelings and attitudes towards mother country and ethnic heritage,

use and feeling towards ethnic symbols, people and ideas (Isajiw, 1980; Gavaki, 1991). Thus as Greek women progress socio-economically, one should expect that the importance of their ethnicity will most probably decline.

To visualize and understand the Greek women's socio-economic status in the Canadian social class structured society, it is imperative that we divide and look at the Greek immigrant women who came to Canada before the mass migration of the 1950's and of those who came during the 50's and 70's. The entrance status into the Canadian society of these two groups of women were significantly different.

By the turn of the century (1910), there were only 3,995 Greeks in Canada, most of whom lived in Montreal and Toronto. There were mostly young males with plans to stay a few years, make their fortune, and return to Greece to provide for their families, secure dowries for their sisters, and better their own future. The catastrophic war of Asia Minor (1915-1922) saw over 1,000,000 Greek and another 100,000 Armenian refugees arriving at Greece, a number representing approximately 25% of Greece's then population (Vlassis, 1953; Palyzoi, 1986). Many sought to immigrate to the United States and Canada. Thus the desire to return to their homeland was never materialized for the majority. For years the male immigrants lived in rooming houses, 4 to 8 in a room, working hard to save for their families back home and to establish themselves. They worked in any manual labor they could find, in restaurants, flower and fruit stands, ice cream and shoeshine parlors. They faced poverty, prejudice and discrimination, and mostly a harsh, cold climate that compounded their social and cultural isolation.

As the years passed and many Greek men realized that returning to their homeland was no longer an option, the decision to have their own families took hold. Many were now in their mid-thirties to early forties, and that decision brought some of them back to Greece, to their villages, presenting to their compatriots the image of the ones who made it. They came to seek a bride. These women did not necessarily come from destitute families. Some came from large families where parents were expected to provide dowries for their many daughters. Others were the daughters of the displaced merchant class from Asia Minor, the Ukraine and Russia. In the 50's and 60's a lot of Greeks were pushed out of Egypt and into Greece or the United States, Australia and Canada. Many of these women were educated and cultured, and almost all strangers to their future husbands (Florakas-Petsalis, 2000). Other women were simply chosen from photographs sent to men in Canada—hence the picture—brides.

The majority of these early women to Canada did not enter the labor force. Their husbands would consider it an insult to their manhood and their ability to provide for their family (Florakas-Petsalis, 2000). If some of them did, they worked in the backrooms of the family business, the restaurant, the bakery, the corner store. Their recognized accomplishments were to keep house, raise their children, stand by their husbands, and later on, work for their church, thus fulfilling their duty to «god and society». They were the ones who kept the Greek language and religion alive in their homes by insisting that their children –no matter what they faced at school and in the playgrounds for being different– went to church, and associated with other Greeks only. They transmitted to them Greek values and a pride in their heritage. During the hard times of the Depression, they provided food, clothing and comfort to the sick and hungry, visited hospitals, and offered assistance in the burial expenses of the destitute (Polyzoi, 1986). Thus, they became the catalyst in establishing the first community organizations, and the glue that kept the families and the community together. Some of these women became the teachers of the first Greek schools, established the Ladies Benevolent associations, took care of their church, raised funds for charity and the Greek War Relief Fund that significantly contributed to the survival of many devastated villages and communities of war-torn Greece during WWII and the Civil War period. Their Canadian-born daughters were also not allowed to work unless it was in the family business or in those of other Greeks of their acquaintance. These daughters, however, were also to become the backbone of the community charitable organizations that serve the community today.

Oral accounts and Florakas-Petsalis (2000) suggest that the lives of many of these women were frequently marred by loneliness, isolation and sadness. Taken away from their families, relatives and friends in Greece, they were forced to live with a virtual stranger who spent most of his time working. They did not speak the language of the country, and were not allowed to go out alone, rarely made friends as work, distance, family and customs kept them in isolation. The war years were the worst as news from families back home was cut off. They felt guilt and ambivalence about their ability to maintain their ethnic identity and culture, and especially about their ability to transmit them to their children. As many were married to older men, some found themselves young widows left to provide and care for their large families. They survived with occasional joy, and despite bitterness and loneliness as their constant companions. In a very moving, fictionalized narrative of such a Greek female character, Irene, who came to Canada at

sixteen, and having a farewell one-sided conversation with her dead husband at his funeral, Katherine Vlassie summarizes the experience and the feelings of this pre-war picture-bride:

You gave me many things, Costa, a nice house, there were no other women –at least I don't think so– and you never gambled or came home drunk, so I should be grateful. But you did other things I didn't like and I never spoke out. Well, I'm going to speak now...You kept me in darkness, Costa. Yes, in darkness. I came to you a young girl and it was your duty to teach me about this new country. When I'd tell you I wanted to learn English, you'd say we were Greek, what did I need to know English for? So I could speak properly to people at stores when I went shopping, or to the neighbours, or read about what was happening in the world, that was why, Costa. I do not know what's going on so much of the time, Costa, because you kept me in darkness. When the children were young, I didn't notice so much because we all spoke Greek, but once the boys grew up and went into business with you, it was different. After supper you'd sent me into the kitchen with Angela so you could talk with your sons, and it was always English, English, English! Why, Costa? So I wouldn't know what you were talking about? Costa, when you praised me to our daughter told her you wanted her to grow up to be as wonderful a woman as her mother.

Proud! That's how stupid I was. And what did Angela learn? All the things I knew, things any fool can do, cook and clean and sew. When she started growing up you said she mustn't go out with Canadian boys because they weren't like us and wouldn't respect her. I would have felt strange with a xeno son-in-law. ...Something else, Costa. Do you know how I feel when my little grandchildren come up to me, hold out an English book and say «giagia read» and I have to pretend I can't find my glasses, or they are broken, or my head hurts.... Did you never wonder how a delicate flower could carry loads of washing up and down stairs and go for days without sleep because of sick children? I was strong, Costa, couldn't you see how strong? But I was stupid, wasn't I? Yet you said you respected me. How could you respect a stupid woman who can't read and write like everyone else? And how can I respect you now, Costa, and keep your memory pure, when you've left me with this bitterness? (Vlassie, 1987: 117-8).

The socio-economic portrait of the Greek women today, however, is dominated by that of the immigrants who came in large waves after 1950. It

was after the devastation of Greece by WWII, and the Civil War (1946-1949) –both of which brought political instability and economic destruction in their wake– that the large waves of Greek immigrants arrived in Canada. By 1951 there were 13,866 Greeks. That number was to quadruple by 1961 (56, 475) and to be increased tenfold by 1971 (124, 474). In 1996, Statistics Canada reported 203,345 individuals claiming Greek ethnic origin.

World War II, the political and intellectual leadership of Europe, of the United States and of Canada succeeded in changing the international perceptions and attitudes towards Greece and the Greeks. In addition, the Greeks already in Canada, by their every day behavior and their war related actions, had developed a reputation of being hard-working, lawful, honest and respectable. The Classics, Greek history and culture and their influence in the development of the Western thought and Civilization were revered by the scholars and the intellectuals in the university teachings of ancient and Byzantine Greek philosophers and theologians. Further, WWII brought to the forefront of awareness the heroism of modern Greece and of the Greeks (Macdonald, 1954).

After WWII, the Canadian Government adopted a more liberal immigration policy, responding to the country's increasing population and labor needs and to pressures by ethnic groups and individuals to them to bring relatives out of the post-war destruction and economic devastation of Europe. Immigration regulations of the early 1950's emphasized the admission of agriculturalists, domestics, nurse's aides, and other workers specifically nominated by Canadian employers. In 1962 the Conservative Canadian government introduced a significant change in the immigration policy which was carried out by the Liberals in 1967 (Parai,1975). That policy affected the right of admission to Canada of relatives other than first degree by invitation of a permanent resident, and not only of a citizen, as had been the case before. Extended Greek families, and almost entire villages, were thus transplanted into Canada.

In the 1950's, immigration from the Netherlands, Germany, Austria, Greece and Finland was mainly confined to farmers, domestics, and hospital workers. It was during this period that approximately 40,000 Greeks arrived in Canada as contract workers in the factories, hospitals, and as domestics. Due to changes in the immigration laws in the 1960's, these landed immigrants could, and did, sponsor close relatives. It was during this time that over 10,000 Greek women will arrive as contract workers, their proportion reaching 25% of the Greek immigrants arriving between 1950 and 1959. It will be those women, who in subsequent years, will import

husbands –in addition to other relatives– using their new Canadian status in lieu of a dowry. In many instances, they will marry to illegal Greek immigrants, and thus legalize their status in Canada. This, and the easing of the restrictions of immigration policies, will contribute to the chain migration of Greek families to Canada that peaked during the 60's and 70's. Statistics Canada (1971) reports that by 1950 there were only 13,866 Greeks in Canada. That number was to quadruple by 1961 (56,475) as 39,832 new Greek immigrants arrived from Greece. Another 62,183 arrived during the following decade (1961-1970) to increase the number of Greeks to 124,475 by 1971 (until 1971 only single ethnicity was counted). And whereas the pre-WWII Greek immigrants were mainly males, by 1971, Greek women were making about half of the Greeks in Canada (1971: men 65,480; women, 59,000: Statistics, Canada, 1971).

### **A. Education**

Most of these women arriving after 1950 entered the work force in the factories, hospitals and as domestics. They were illiterate, unskilled and without knowledge of any of the official languages. Survival, not improvement and social mobility, was their first priority. In 1971, 94% of the Greek women had less than high school education. By 1981 this had slightly decreased to 91% (low educated new arrivals offsetting any Canadian high school graduates), while by 1991 this had dropped to 64%. Those with university degree were 1% for 1971; 3% for 1981; and 9% in 1991 (Table 2).

Although compared to the group itself there has been significant increase in education in the last decades, compared to other groups in Canada Greeks are ranked very low. For example, in Quebec in 1971, Greek, along with Italian and Portuguese women ranked the lowest when compared with ten other ethnic and racial groups with only 1% of them having a university degree while Japanese (10%), Jewish (8%), Black (7%) and Chinese (7%) women ranked among the highest. The same low ranking was held in 1981 when only 3% of Greek women had university degrees as compared to Jewish (14%), Japanese (12%), Dutch (12%) and Chinese (9%) women. It is a similar picture in Ontario and Canada as well.

It is clear then from the above data that Greek women (both immigrants and Canadian born-single and multiple ethnicity) came and still have a comparative low level of education with those outside Ontario and Quebec (such as Vancouver) faring a little better. As the numbers of new immigrants continued to inflate the group's size, major gains in education were offset by

**TABLE 2**  
*Education Distribution of Greek Women\* in Canada,  
 Ontario and Quebec  
 (Single and Multiple Ethnic Origin–1991)*

| School Level        | Canada<br>%   | Ontario<br>%  | Quebec<br>%   | Rest of Canada<br>% |
|---------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------------|
| <H.S./Training      | 51            | 53            | 53            | 39                  |
| High School         | 14            | 15            | 13            | 14                  |
| Bachelor's          | 6             | 6             | 7             | 8                   |
| Post Grad.          | 2             | 2             | 2             | 4                   |
| <b>Total Popul.</b> | <b>61,390</b> | <b>33,875</b> | <b>18,940</b> | <b>8,575</b>        |

\*15 years + not attending school full time.

Source: Statistics Canada, Census, 1991.

the larger number of low educated new arrivals. However, if we look at education by age categories, we can see the significant rise among those of 24 to 44 years of age, whose who came young enough or were born in Canada, to take advantage of the Canadian education system and opportunities. As new immigration has come to an end, and as most of the Greeks will be Canadian-born by the year 2000, Greek women are expected to show significant changes in the forthcoming decades. Greek culture values education highly, and Greek parents know that the way to the future achievement of their children comes through education. And whereas earlier Greeks gave priority to male children's education, the immigrants of the 50's-70's have shown an equal desire to have their daughters educated as well. Presently, the universities across Canada are seeing the tail-end of the high Greek student enrollment. Within five years, a significant number of the immigrants' children will be finishing university and entering the job market establishing themselves in the professions and drastically changing the general profile of the group. During the decade of the 1990's and 2000's Greek men and women will make inroads in science, commerce, finance, academia and the professions.

### **B. Occupation – Income**

Given such low levels of skill, education and language ability, it is not surprising that Greek women also rank low in occupation and income. Coming as contract workers or as family dependents, they found work in the



factories –mainly the textile industry– as machine operators, as domestics and hospital cleaning services at minimum wage. Most of these enterprises were non-unionized, with long working hours, poor working and security conditions and piece-work policies that were deplorable. Oral accounts of Greek women working in the factories frequently suggest that employers pitted women of different ethnic origins against each other, and cut-rates were the practice of the day. In 1981 approximately 55% of the Greek women in Canada worked in such factories and in service where in Quebec it was 62% with 57% in Ontario as we can see in Table 3.

**TABLE 3**  
*Occupational Distribution of Greek Women\* in Canada,  
Ontario and Quebec  
(Single and Multiple Ethnic Origin, 1991)*

| Occupation                    | Canada<br>%   | Ontario<br>%  | Quebec<br>%   | Rest of Canada<br>% |
|-------------------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------------|
| Manag./Admin                  | 11            | 12            | 8             | 11                  |
| Professional                  | 13            | 12            | 12            | 15                  |
| Cler./Sales/Serv.             | 58            | 60            | 50            | 67                  |
| Factory                       | 14            | 10            | 27            | 4                   |
| Transp./Constr.               | 1             | 1             | –             | –                   |
| Other                         | 3             | 4             | 2             | 1                   |
| <b>Total Labor.<br/>Force</b> | <b>41,175</b> | <b>23,105</b> | <b>11,880</b> | <b>6,190</b>        |

15 years + not attending school full time, who worked since 1/1/90.

Source: Statistics Canada, Census, 1991.

It is also to be expected that reported employment income of the Greek women is low and they rank among the lowest earners in comparison to other ethnic women, as can be seen in Tables 4 and 5. However, in 1991, due to time and education, there seems to be some upward mobility. The majority of Greek women seem to concentrate in sales and clerical occupations whereas the portion of those working in the factories has fallen across Canada (15% males; 14% females) and Ontario (16% males; 10% females) whereas Quebec still maintains a high percentage of women in factories (16% males; 27% females). At the higher levels of the occupational structure, however, Greeks have made considerable gains.

**TABLE 4**

*Reported Individual Employment Income of Greek Women\* in Canada,  
Ontario and Quebec  
(Single and Multiple Ethnic Origin-1991)*

| Income Categories<br>\$ | Canada<br>%     | Ontario<br>%    | Quebec<br>%     |
|-------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| 0.0 – 19,999            | 61              | 54              | 72              |
| 20,000 – 49,999         | 37              | 43              | 27              |
| 50,000 + Over           | 3               | 3               | 2               |
| Factory                 | 14              | 10              | 27              |
| <b>Total Population</b> | <b>39,460</b>   | <b>22,260</b>   | <b>11,200</b>   |
| <b>Mean Employ.</b>     |                 |                 |                 |
| <b>Income</b>           | <b>\$18,185</b> | <b>\$19,900</b> | <b>15,290</b>   |
| <b>Median Employ.</b>   |                 |                 |                 |
| <b>Income</b>           | <b>\$16,680</b> | <b>\$18,830</b> | <b>\$14,145</b> |

15 years + over with Employment Income.

Source: Statistics Canada, Census, 1991.

**TABLE 5**

*Comparative Ranking of Average and Median Employment Income  
Among Selected Ethnic Groups  
1991*

| Ethnic Group | Average Income Ranking |          | Median Employment Income Ranking |          |          |          |
|--------------|------------------------|----------|----------------------------------|----------|----------|----------|
|              | Can.                   | Ont.     | Que.                             | Can.     | Ont.     | Que.     |
| Jewish       | 1                      | 1        | 1                                | 1        | 1        | 1        |
| British      | 3                      | 2        | 3                                | 3        | 4        | 3        |
| French       | 5                      | 4        | 5                                | 5        | 5        | 6        |
| Italian      | 2                      | 3        | 4                                | 2        | 3        | 4        |
| Blacks       | 4                      | 5        | 2                                | 4        | 2        | 2        |
| Portuguese.  | 7                      | 7        | 7                                | 6        | 7        | 5        |
| <b>Greek</b> | <b>6</b>               | <b>6</b> | <b>6</b>                         | <b>7</b> | <b>6</b> | <b>7</b> |

Source: Statistics Canada, Census, 1991.

### SUMMARY- CONCLUSIONS

In summary then, we see that the entrance status of the Greek immigrant women into Canada can be easily divided into two periods: the pre-WWII and the 1950's-1970's. The first group was small in size, and it did not enter the labor market. If they did, they –and their Canadian-born daughters– would work at the family business or work for other Greek friends and relatives. Their work for their families and for the Hellenic community organizations, however, was unsurpassed and helped maintain the Greek language, religion, values and traditions.

The second wave of immigrant women that came in the 50's to 70's came as part of entire families, or soon after their arrival, they established new ones by bringing in «sponsored bridegrooms». They entered the host society at the lowest socio-economic levels and the upward mobility –to the present– has been slow and hard. Many brought their elderly parents to care for their new babies while they worked exhausting hours in factories and janitorial services. And because of their income-earning jobs, and their new socio-cultural environment, changes occurred in the gender roles relations within the family. The gender role changes that brought conflict, as well as their consequences, is a research topic that should be further explored. The male-father, as the undisputed and final authority was challenged, as was his domination over the rest of the family. Time, female education and income as well as the more egalitarian Canadian culture of the urban environment has changed –albeit slightly and slowly– the status of the women at home. They participate more in the family's major decisions, and the Canadian-born daughters are more educated –many professionals– who challenge and dispute the traditional authority and power of the father and of the male and integrate into the larger Canadian society.

Finally, it is important to note that the socio-economic indicators presented above are a decade old. Many important factors have occurred, in the meantime, that have had an impact and have significantly changed the portrait of the Greek women, as well as that of the entire ethnic group. First, new immigration from Greece is at end; second, since the middle of the 1990's, the Canadian-born Greeks have surpassed in number those born outside Canada; and third, a significantly great number of university graduates (both male and female) have finished, or will be finishing, within the next five years. These graduates will enter the labor market while the Greek-born, illiterate, unskilled immigrants will be retiring and dying off. Thus the 2001, and especially the 2010 censuses, will offer a drastically

different portrait than the one presented here. They should be showing a significantly higher socio-economic mobility and status for the Greeks in general, and for the women of Greek origin in particular. Hopefully, someone will explore this in the near future.

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