“Columns of the House” and Proud Workers: Greek Immigrant Women in Vancouver, 1954-1975

by

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Abstract

In this thesis, I study the experiences of eight first-generation Greek immigrant women who moved to Vancouver between 1954 and 1975 by listening to and contextualizing their oral life histories. Looking at their lives before they immigrated, I explore how these women's gender experiences were very much shaped by religion, class, and rural vis-à-vis urban locations in Greece. I also demonstrate that many exercised agency in this patriarchal culture, and that they were part of the decision-making process that led to immigration in search of a better life. After they immigrated to Vancouver, these women played an active part in supporting their families' wellbeing, and some also contributed outside the household, offering their assistance to Greek communal organizations. Differences in class and working careers resulted in different narratives about immigration experiences, although the ideal of the *kali noikokyra* (good housewife) was consistent in their perceptions of proper Greek womanhood. Middle-class and working-class women also had different attitudes towards charitable work, religion, and the Greek community organizations. Both, however, actively contributed to the survival and settlement of Greek immigrant families in Canada. Overall, this thesis examines how gender, class, ethnicity, and religion affected Greek women's identities before and after they immigrated in postwar period, and how their experiences of immigration altered their perspectives on the place of women in Greek families.

Keywords: Greek women; immigrants; gender; class; ethnicity; religion

Dedication

To Renos for his love and support.

To Ilias and Niki for inspiring me.

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Preface

In 1976, when I was still in elementary school and lived with my family in a small city in southern Greece, two 18-year-old girls, Pota and Vasiliki, moved into the basement suite of our house. Pota and Vasiliki had left their village in Mani and come to the city to take tutoring classes in order to pass the introductory exam for the Teacher's Academy. Soon, as we shared our meals and leisure time, the newcomers became close friends with my older sisters and integral members of our home. Pota, however, never took the exam. A few days before the exam date, her parents arrived in the city with the news that she had to go back to her village and marry a 38-year old Greek American whom she had never seen before. Since the family could not afford to pay for all their children's studies, when a potential groom presented himself, her parents decided to accept the arranged marriage in order to give her male siblings a better chance at life. Pota, a dutiful daughter, complied. She left immediately after the wedding for Athens and subsequently moved to Chicago, where her husband had settled many years before. I could feel her frustration that, after working very hard to be a teacher, she had been pressured to abandon her unfulfilled dream and follow an unknown man to a strange, faraway place. As a child, I experienced the incident as a horrible injustice that made me feel both compassion and anger. Neither I nor my sisters ever heard from Pota again, but I have never stopped wondering what happened to her and what her new life in Chicago has been like.

Years later, I myself became an immigrant woman in Vancouver, Canada, and I had the chance to meet and socialize with a number of Greek immigrant women who had come earlier. As if I was tracking down Pota's experiences in the lives of others, one of my first questions was always, "How did you come here?" While their experiences were not identical to Pota's, there were common threads. Knowing that they had come from a patriarchal society, and being convinced that "relations of domination are, at the same time, relations of resistance," I also sought to discover how their lives had changed in the new land and how they had resisted patriarchy.[1]

[1] James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven and London: Yale University: 1990), 45.

Pota's fate was decided by a restrictive framework marked by both gender and class. In 1970s rural Greece, tight economic conditions and gender subordination left little space for young women to make independent decisions or take initiatives that could change their status. Marriage and career appeared to be a family strategy rather than a personal choice. Given these limitations set by gender and class, could young women resist and exercise some control over their own lives? How did shifting circumstances in both Greece and Canada affect their ability to re-negotiate gender relations? My research aims at exploring the options that were available for women in this shifting gender terrain and how they resisted patriarchy, both in Greece and as immigrants in postwar Vancouver.

Chapter 1.

Introduction

This thesis explores Greek women's experiences of migration to Vancouver, Canada, through the lens of life-stories of eight narrators interviewed by the author in 2012-13. These first-generation immigrant women had come to Canada from 1954 to 1975, when Greek immigration to Canada was increasing dramatically, only to decline sharply in the following decades. Economic and political developments in the aftermath of the Second World War and the Civil War motivated their move from Greece, while Canada, which was opening its borders to immigrants from southern Europe during that period, became a popular destination area. Two main questions serve as a starting point. The first deals with the ways that women's subordinate status in the country of origin affected their ability and decision to emigrate, while the second focuses on how immigration influenced power relations between Greek men and women after they settled in Vancouver. Considering that gender "is not immutable but also changes and, in this sense, is both socially constructed and reconstructed through time," I have attempted to compare Greek women's pre-immigration gender position to their post-immigration status.[1] In addition, this study explores how the dynamics of migration, combined with gender, class, and ethnicity, affected women's experiences in the host society and influenced the way that they and their communities understood Greek womanhood in their new environment. To explore these issues, I interviewed first-generation immigrant Greek women whose backgrounds were diverse. Five of them came from rural Greece, while three others were middle-class women from Athens and Thessaloniki.

[1] Monica Boyd and Elizabeth Grieco, "Women and Migration: Incorporating Gender into International Migration Theory," on the website of Migration Policy Institute, last modified March 1, 2003, accessed September 6, 2013, http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/women-and-migration-incorporating-gender-international-migration-theory.

The thesis I advance here is multipronged. First, focusing on their experiences before moving to Canada, I argue that the women I interviewed were active agents in the decision-making regarding emigration. Further, specific factors, such as work and involvement in Greek ethnic group politics, helped women to redefine their womanhood after they came to Canada. In addition, religion and ethnicity worked dialogically in creating gender in this immigrant community. On the one hand, religion and ethnicity became refuges for those Greek Canadians who felt alienated from and discriminated against by the dominant Canadian culture. Religion worked as a consolation for the dislocated women, and Greek communal organizations became spaces where middle-class women sought prominence. On the other hand, religion, through its moral code, had a regulatory effect on women's lives, restricting their options and thus contributing to their subordinate status. Similarly, the ethnic community organizations worked as enclaves that prevented women from being exposed to modern ideas. Still, increased employment and educational opportunities had some liberatory impact on these women's lives, although the outcomes were complex and uneven.

1.1. Literature Review

This study builds upon and contributes to an expanding historiography on the experiences of immigrant women in general as well as recent research dealing specifically with Greek immigrant women in Canada. As early as 1986, in a collection of essays titled *Looking into my Sister's* Eyes*: An Exploration in Women's History*, the authors explored the lives of immigrant women from various ethnic backgrounds and positioned them as important actors in Canadian history.[2] Revolving around diverse aspects of their lives, such as family, work, and charitable and community-building activities, these essays recognized that immigrant women had previously been doubly marginalized in the historiography: by gender in male-centered writings and by ethnicity in women's history. Moreover, the collection portrayed these women as active agents in their own lives, while also acknowledging the significant contribution these women had made to their families and communities. For instance, Franca Iacovetta's essay, "From *Contadina* to Woman

[2] Jean Burnet, ed., *Looking into my Sister's* Eyes*: an Exploration in Women's History* (Toronto: Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1986).

Worker: Southern Italian Immigrant Working Women in Toronto, 1947-62," notably went beyond the traditional model of male dominance and female submissiveness in Italian families, and shed light on how Italian peasant women transformed their lives through their experiences of immigration.[3]

Since 1986, when *Looking into my Sister's Eyes* was published, the history of immigrant women has attracted a great deal of attention, and new theoretical insights and paradigms have been introduced. A number of works have more profoundly emphasized the complexities of immigrant women's lives caused by the interplay of race, ethnicity, gender, class, and religion. For instance, a collection of essays published in 2004, *Sisters or Strangers? Immigrant, Ethnic, and Racialized Women in Canadian History*, stressed the differences and tensions among immigrant women, especially those related to class, race, and ethnicity.[4] This book came as a response to, and a critique of, *Looking into my Sister's Eyes*, which had emphasized the commonalities that immigrant women with diverse ethnic backgrounds shared because of their immigrant status and marginal position in Canadian society. The authors of *Sisters or Strangers* questioned the idea of sisterhood among women who "were 'othered' by virtue of race, ethnicity, and minority status."[5] As the editors queried in the introduction: "Can one really apply notions of sisterhood between women whose dominant racial and class experiences are antithetical?"[6]

Similarly, in this study I do not approach Greek women as an undifferentiated group. Although such women shared a common status as immigrants from Greece, differences in class, regional background, education, age, and personality led to a variety of different experiences. Moreover, to assume common experience on the basis of shared ethnicity is itself highly problematic because, although ethnicity is often understood as a fixed category, it is largely a social construction. Evangelia Tastsoglou, studying immigrant

[3] Franca Iacovetta, "From Contadina to Woman Worker: Southern Italian Immigrant Working Women in Toronto, 1947-62," in Burnet, *Looking into my Sister's* Eyes, 195-222.

[4] Marleen Epp, Franca Iacovetta, and Frances Swypira, *Sisters or Strangers? Immigrant, Ethnic, and Racialized Women in Canadian History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004).

[5] Epp, Iacovetta, and Swypira, "Introduction," *Sisters or Strangers?",* 6.

[6] Epp, Iacovetta, and Swypira, "Introduction," *Sisters or Strangers?",* 6.

women of distinct social classes, has argued that “ethnic identity is produced and reinforced upon coming into contact with various contexts in Canadian society.”[7] Moreover, women construct their own ethnic identities in interaction with other sites of subjective identity, such as class, education, gender, and religion.

In the 1970s through the 1990s, a number of studies of the Greek diaspora in Canada treated Greeks as an undifferentiated community, ignoring the parameters of gender and class. In *The Canadian Odyssey: The Greek Experience in Canada*, published in 1980, as well as in a 1999 article “The Greeks in Canada: a Historical and Sociological Perspective,” Peter Chimbos dealt with various topics, such as settlement, community organization, family, and ethnic identity, in his attempt to present a complete narrative of the Greek diaspora in Canada.[8] However, as George Vlassis had done before him, Chimbos treated the Greek immigrant as an un-gendered subject.[9] The women remained virtually invisible, perceived as passive and dependent on more active male historical agents. While the author elaborated on the cultural characteristics of Greeks in Canada, and examined their occupational status and social mobility, women appeared only in a discussion of the structure and role of the Greek family in integrating Greeks into Canadian society while preserving their ethnic identity. Similarly, although Effie Gavaki’s recent works demonstrate gender sensitivity, in her 1974 PhD dissertation, she addressed the issues of cultural continuity, cultural change, and assimilation of Greeks in Canada without acknowledging the role of gender in these processes. Moreover, in her 1979 article “The Greek Family in Canada: Continuity and Change and the Process of Adjustment,” she adopts Papajohn’s and Spiegel’s model of the Greek family, which portrays women as victims.

> The Greek family is male-dominated, patriarchal and a close-knit social unit. Psaltis (1967:131-132) has so graphically summarized the traditional

[7] Evangelia Tastsoglou, "Immigrant Women and the Social Construction of Ethnicity: Three Generations of Greek Immigrant Women in Ontario," in *Advances in Gender Research*, Vol. 2, edited by Marcia Texler-Segal and Vasilikie Demos (Greenwich, Conn: JAI Press , 1997), 229.

[8] Peter Chimbos, *A History of Canada’s People, the Canadian Odyssey: the Greek Experience in Canada* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1980), and “The Greeks in Canada: A Historical and Sociological Perspective,” in *The Greek Diaspora in the Twentieth Century*, edited by Richard Clogg (Oxford: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999), 87-102.

[9] George Vlassis, *The Greeks in Canada* (Ottawa: 1953).

> concept of husband/wife positions: "to woman, silence is virtue…the husband is the head of the family, the woman's lord and protector."
>
> 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. Vlachos (1968) characteristically sums up the philosophical position of the father over his family: "Fear breeds respect, respect breeds love."[10]

These representations of Greek woman's powerlessness and submissiveness are not questioned in the article. According to Gavaki's early work, although this model of the Greek patriarchal family would be eroded under the second generation of Canadian-born Greeks, it was carefully preserved by the first generation of Greek Canadians. Essentially, these earlier studies presented two distinctively gendered narratives of the Greek diaspora in Canada: a story of "struggle and success" revolving around the hardworking male Greek immigrant, who gave all his energy to succeeding in the hosting society; and a narrative of "obedience and sacrifice" focusing on the submissive Greek immigrant woman. According to this second narrative,

> The Greek wife and mother…[is] a woman constantly displaying the 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.[11]

Self-denial and self-sacrifice were the key qualities that completed this image of the submissive woman. Greek women willingly assumed secondary roles in patriarchal families, always obedient to men who were the decision makers.[12] For that reason they put all their energy into raising children, reinforcing traditional values, and preserving the essential "Greekness" of their families. Ensuring that the Greek language was spoken at home and that their children grew up with pride in their Greek ancestry, they became the "gatekeepers" who preserved the ethnicity of the family, even though their own special needs were ignored.

[10] Efi Gavaki, "The Greek Family in Canada: Continuity and Change and the Process of Adjustment," *International Journal of Sociology of the Family*, 9 (1979): 6-7.

[11] Gavaki, "The Greek Family," 7.

[12] Chimbos, *A History,* 105-111.

The model of patriarchy described above draws upon the vast literature on "honour and shame" that became the dominant analytic framework in Mediterranean anthropology. In the mid-1960s, anthropologists like John K. Campbell and Jean Peristiany used the concept of "honour and shame" to describe family roles and gender relations in various rural societies of Greece. According to this notion, a man deserved honour when he was successful in both providing for his family and protecting the reputations of the women of his house. Honour was thus understood as a masculine characteristic, while shame was a potential feminine quality, the avoidance of which depended largely on the maintenance of virginity and a good reputation.[13]

The "honour and shame" model has been seriously challenged in recent studies, and perhaps one of the most interesting critiques comes from the field of anthropology itself. In a 2009 study, Achilleas Hadjikyriakou argues that this mode of analysis "reproduced dichotomous models in the description of gender relations; the honourable male was always connected to power, authority, provision, and protection of female chastity while women were related to domesticity, motherhood, subordination and shame."[14] Furthermore, although Hadjikyriakou admits that the work of these earlier anthropologists is important for the understanding of social institutions and gender relations, he criticizes their research for neglecting the process of social change over time and the diversity of ways in which people experienced their gender roles.[15]

Modern historians of gender have also challenged analyses based on "honour and shame" by showing the period from 1950 to the 1970s as a time of radical social change and transformation in both urban and rural Greece. They argue that, in studying small, isolated rural societies, the anthropologists of "honour and shame" failed to acknowledge the dynamics of significant transformations that took place in the country during this period.

[13] On the "honour and shame" concept in Mediterranean societies, see John K. Campbell, *Honour, Family and Patronage: A Study of Institutions and Moral Values in a Greek Mountain Community* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1964); Ernestine. Friedl, *Vasilika: a Village in Modern Greece, Case Studies in Cultural Anthropology* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, Winston, 1962); and Jean G. Peristiany, ed., *Honour and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society*, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1965).

[14] Achilleas Hadjikyriakou, ""Exoticising Patriarchies": Rethinking the Anthropological Views on Gender in Post-WWII Greece,"*E-pisteme* 2, no. 2 (2009): 19.

[15] Hadjikyriakou, ""Exoticising Patriarchies," 19.

Greece, an agricultural country in the postwar period, gradually became much more urbanized in the following decades. This transition could not have left values and gender relations unaffected. Efi Avdela, a well-known historian of gender, studied "honour crimes" that happened in rural and urban Greece during the 1950s and 1960s. Her work, which deals with gender roles, sexuality, family, marriage, morality, values, and modernization, emphasizes the serious changes that Greek society underwent during this period. Honour crimes—acts of violence committed to avenge perceived insults to the honour of an individual or family, particularly those pertaining to sexual relationships with Greek women—continued to occur, but as Greece modernized, a new moral code arose that rendered traditional notions of gender and sexual conduct outdated and backward. Moreover, as discussed in other studies, modernization also led to the emergence of a new youth subculture that left its imprint on Greek gender relations.[16]

Beyond failing to acknowledge social change, anthropologists who based their analyses on the "honour and shame" narrative also ignored the complexity that exists in human relations and, as a result, collectively produced a rather monolithic account in which women were, stereotypically, presented as "mute objects."[17] Other, more recent anthropological studies, based on field research in rural Greece, have questioned these monolithic views of gender, revealing plurality in masculine and feminine identities and power relations.[18] Excessive emphasis on the "honour and shame" concept as an organizing principle of the Mediterranean patriarchy, these studies suggest, ignores the power that women exercised in daily life, portraying them as passive victims and overstating female submissiveness.

[16] On modernization and youth cultures, see: Kostas Katsapis*, Ihoi kai Apoihoi, I Koinoniki Istoria tou Rock and Roll Phenomenou stin Ellada, 1956-1967* [Sounds and Reverberations, A Social History of the Rock and Roll Phenomenon in Greece] (Athens: IAEN, 2007); Efi Avdela, "'Corrupting and Uncontrollable Activities': Moral Panic about Youth in Post-Civil-War Greece," *Journal of Contemporary History* 43, no.1 (2008): 25-44.

[17] Hadjikyriakou, ""Exoticising Patriarchies," 21.

[18] Modern anthropological studies that contribute to a more pluralistic analysis of gender in Greek society are: Michael Herzfeld, *The Poetics of Manhood: Contest and Identity in a Cretan Mountain Village* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1985); Peter Loizos and Euthymios Papataxiarchis, *Contested Identities: Gender and Kinship in Modern Greece* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1991); Susan Buck Sutton, "Family and Work: New Patterns for Village Women in Athens," *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 4, no 1 (1986): 33-49.

Influenced by anthropologists, the early historians of the Greek diaspora emphasized the idea that the "honour and shame" ideology was transplanted by Greek immigrants to Canada and contributed to the perpetuation of women's subordinate status and the "obedience and sacrifice" trope. While some women may have integrated this narrative into their identities, however, my interviewees helped me to realize that Greek womanhood was much more complex and that Greek immigrant women often had considerable power in their households. Although many women were deprived of formal public power, within the private sphere they could wield influence on decisions regarding family affairs, such as children's marriages or careers, investments, and even emigration. The purpose of this study is to challenge the image of submissive Greek women in Canada, shedding light on the various strategies that women of the first generation applied to resist patriarchy and take control of their own lives. The attitudes of the women I interviewed changed over the years as a result of their exposure to Canadian society or because of the altered conditions of their lives. To present such women as victims who were dragged unwillingly into the hard realities of immigration, completely sacrificing their own self-interests, is to offer a rather ahistorical perspective that ignores the multiple roles that women in urban and rural Greece performed before their arrival in Canada, and the huge contributions they made to their families after they immigrated. Franca Iacovetta's observation about Italian immigrant women is also true of their Greek counterparts: "The transition from *contandina* (peasant women) to worker did not require a fundamental break in values of women long accustomed to contributing many hours of labour to family."[19] This point is supported by Nicholas Glytsos's study of Kythira, a Greek island that experienced a huge emigration to Australia in the 1950s to 1970s.[20] His work deals with the roles and attitudes of the women who stayed behind, for a time at least, when the male members of the family emigrated. The male emigration would not have been possible if women had not taken over all responsibilities for the family and the household economy. More generally, Greek women, like many other women in rural Europe at that time, performed many different, demanding roles as farmers, mothers, unpaid workers in the

[19] Franca Iacovetta, "From Contadina to Woman Worker," in Burnet, *Looking into my Sister's* Eyes, 195-196.

[20] Nicholas Glytsos, "Changing Roles and Attitudes of Women Staying Behind in Split Households when Men Emigrate: The Story of the Secluded Greek Island of Kythera with Mass Emigration to Australia," *Women's Studies International Forum* 31, no.2 (2008):96–103..

household, and community volunteers. And after they arrived in Canada, such women continued to contribute immensely to the well-being of their families. Whether they worked inside or outside the household, Greek women played active roles in the integration of their families into Canadian society.

This thesis owes immensely to a growing body of recent scholarship that examines Greek female immigration to Canada. Evangelia Tastsoglou, in a 1997 case study, examined the interconnectedness of gender, ethnicity, and class within a migration narrative of four generations of Greek immigrant women in Ontario from the pre-World War II period to the late 1970s.[21] Tastsoglou saw the women's lived experiences of immigration within a web of power relations, based on gender, class, and ethnicity. In a more recent work, Tastsoglou studied Greek migrant women who arrived in Ontario in the 1960s as domestic workers after benefiting from assisted passage.[22] Again, she investigated in depth the complexity of power relations— the interplay of gender, ethnicity, and class—that shaped the immigration experiences of these women. Although they faced an ambiguous and incomplete citizenship status because they were required to remain in domestic service for a pre-defined period of time, they challenged their marginal status by abandoning their contracts and seeking jobs beyond domestic service. Similarly, Noula Mina's study of Greek female domestic servants in the 1950s and early 1960s contrasted bureaucratic portrayals of immigrant women as victims of a patriarchal society, in need of training in order to become models of modern Canadian domesticity, with the ways that these women negotiated the various challenges they encountered in Canada.[23] Focusing specifically on Greek women in Vancouver, this paper will also trace the various forms of

[21] Evangelia Tastsoglou, "The Margin at the Centre: Greek Immigrant Women in Ontario," *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 29, no. 1 (1997): 119-160.

[22] Evangelia Tastsoglou, "The Temptations of New Surroundings: Family, State and Transnational Gender Politics in the Movement of Greek Domestic Workers to Canada in the 1950s and 1960s," in *Women, Gender and Diasporic Lives: Labor, Community, and Identity in Greek Migrations*, edited by Evangelia Tastsoglou (New York, Toronto and Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2009): 81-114.

[23] Noula Mina, "Taming and Training Greek 'Peasant Girls' and the Gendered Politics of Whiteness in Postwar Canada: Canadian Bureaucrats and Immigrant Domestics, 1950s–1960s," *Canadian Historical Review* 94, no. 4 (2013): 514-539.

resistance with which such women responded to marginalizing discourses, and the actions they took to assert control over their own lives.

Another body of research on Greek immigrants focuses on generational conflict within Greek-Canadian communities, highlighting the various challenges that women experienced as a result of being caught between the cultural values of Canada and those of Greek immigrant culture. Maria Rouvalis interviewed second-generation Greek women from the Greek community of Halifax, concluding that these women experienced more pressure to conform to rigid gender norms than their Canadian friends and that they had far less freedom and fewer opportunities than their male counterparts.[24] Rouvalis argued that the cultural norms and values that Greek parents imposed upon their daughters were inappropriate for Canada and outdated for contemporary Greece. Second-generation Greek women admitted, in their interviews, that they faced immense pressure from their parents to remain virgins, to marry early, to abandon education, and to conform to traditional gender roles in general.[25] Although the scope of my study does not extend to second-generation women, I am interested in mother-and-daughter relationships and the ways Greek families and communities operated as enclaves that maintained village values as cultural baggage, even as their daughters sought greater freedom of choice.

My broader thinking on this project has also been deeply influenced by gender scholarship, particularly by debates among women's and gender historians who stressed women's lived experiences as opposed to those who embraced the poststructuralist turn. While women's historians strove to recover or reconstruct the experiences of women in the past, historians who embraced poststructuralist views sought to trace the process by which discourses about masculinities and femininities have been produced over time. Poststructuralists, indeed, have left deep, durable traces in historical research by positioning the analysis of discourses on the agenda and directing historians towards more cultural histories and the study of identities. They have been criticized, however, for

[24] Maria Rouvalis, "Women, Education, and Gender-Role Expectations: A Greek-Canadian Perspective," (MA Thesis, Dalhousie University, 1990).

[25] Maria Rouvalis, *Women, Education, and Gender-Role Expectations,* 39.

abandoning the critique of patriarchy and distracting our attention from "concepts of women's lived oppression in favour of endless deconstruction and apolitical theorizing."[26]

Other historians, taking a more neutral position on the debate over epistemological differences, have acknowledged that poststructuralist historians have exercised a powerful critique of historian's reliance on written sources of dominant groups and have demonstrated how social categories have been discursively constructed across time, place, and culture. However, as Laura Lee Downs suggests, "Without some way of linking discursive process to social experience, historians cannot account for the changing meanings of masculine and feminine."[27]Therefore, historians need to link discourse analysis and the study of women's lived experience in order to understand "that social and cultural forms of analysis are mutually constitutive of one another."[28]

Similarly, Karen Dubinsky and Lynne Marks insist that good feminist history can incorporate discourse analysis to better understand difference and power and still be sensitive towards women's oppression.[29] Furthermore, they suggest that, although gender, race and class are key axes of oppression and central to individual identity and group consciousness, "an understanding of identity requires a willingness to refrain from imposing one category on historical subjects and to recognize instead the complexity and diversity of the range of categories that can be part of identity or consciousness in particular historical contexts."[30]This idea became clearer to me as I realized through my study of Greek immigrant women that, in addition to the intersections of gender, class, and ethnicity, multiple other factors affected their lives and shaped their identities, such as religion, urban or rural background, and age.

Trying to understand how gendered identities were constructed, I analyzed discursive concepts such as the "honour and shame," but I also drew upon and grounded

[26] Joan Sangster, "Beyond Dichotomies: Re-Assessing Gender History and Women's History in Canada," *Left History* 3 no.1 (Spring/Summer 1995), 112.

[27] Laura Lee Downs, *Writing Gender History*, (Great Britain: Hodder Education, 2004), 100.

[28] Lee Downs, *Writing Gender History*, 101.

[29] Karen Dubinsky and Lynne Marks, "Beyond Purity: A response to Sangster," *Left History* 3, no. 2-4, no. 1 (1995-1996): 210.

[30] Dubinsky and Marks, "Beyond Purity," 211.

my findings on my narrators' lived experiences. I realized that I needed to connect discursive process to social experience in order to explain how the meanings of masculine and feminine have shifted over time. For in the end, as Laura Lee Downs suggests, "the problem - and the challenge – of gender is that is not merely a discursively constructed identity, but also a social and subjective one." In order to understand shifting meanings of masculinity and femininity, we must be able to grasp these three analytic levels simultaneously.[31] Moreover, beyond revealing the identity formation process, I was also interested in demonstrating my narrators' agency. For, while patriarchal discourse has been powerful in many cultures, real life is much more complicated and resistance is always possible. As Downs argues, "The subordinate might go as far as to challenge the dominant discourses" in particular contexts.[32]

Thus this thesis is indebted to the vast feminist literature that has been produced over the past several decades. Feminist historians, challenging inequalities between women and men, have offered many important insights on how concepts of gender have operated over time. Ground-breaking work in this area came from Denise Riley, who asserted that the category of "women is historically and discursively constructed," and Joan Wallach Scott, who argued that gender is a social and cultural construction that is always in negotiation and historically contingent.[33] Scott, in her emblematic article "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," defined gender as a "constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between sexes."[34] As Willeen G. Keough and Lara Campbell have more recently observed, gender is not about biological difference, but about meanings that societies have attached to different bodies.[35] In other words, all of us are gendered beings not because we have different biological features, but because we have learned to be women or men, adopting a gendered identity. Seeing social roles and gender identity not as immutable, eternal realities, but, rather, as

[31] Lee Downs, *Writing Gender History,* 83.

[32] Lee Downs, *Writing Gender History,* 94.

[33] Denise Riley, *'Am I That Name?' Feminism and the Category of 'Women' in History* (London: MacMillan, 1988), 1.and Joan Wallace Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," *American Historical Review* 91, no. 5 (1986):1069.

[34] Riley, *'Am I That Name?' ,* 1.

[35] Willeen G. Keough and Lara Campbell, *Gender History: Canadian Perspectives* (Ontario: Oxford University Press, 2014), 2.

ever-changing products of human cultures, and realizing that even within a particular place and time, concepts of masculinity and femininity are constantly being forged, contested, and redefined, helped me to more effectively trace the shifts in human relationships in postwar Greece and within the Greek ethnic group of Vancouver. Also helpful has been Riley's acknowledgement of women's diversity, and her refusal to define women based on commonalities. In her view, historians should not treat any group of women as a monolithic community, but should, rather, see the multiple identities forged by the parameters of race, class, and ethnicity. These ideas were fundamental to my realization that Greek immigrant women could not be conceived as a sisterhood; rather, their identities and experiences were differentiated by class, education, and regional background, among other factors. Finally, I am indebted to Joan Wallace Scott for her thoughts on the importance of treating gender relations as power relations and exploring the ways that these relations shape the form and function of families, work spaces, and even government policies.[36]

1.2. Oral History and Methodology

This study draws liberally on the rich scholarship of oral history. Alessandro Portelli's influential essay, "What Makes Oral History Different," for instance, responded to those who criticized oral sources for lack of objectivity, pointing out that memory, subjectivity, and the narrative form should be considered as the strengths of oral sources rather than their weaknesses. Oral historians are less concerned with collecting data and more with discovering meanings in people's life-story narratives. In Portelli's words, "Oral sources tell us not just what people did, but what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, and what they now think they did."[37]

More recently, oral historians have grappled with problems in the interpretation of oral sources, such as the interplay between past and present in remembering and forgetting. People always narrate their life stories and remember their past in present time,

[36] Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category," 1067.

[37] Alessandro Portelli, "What Makes Oral History Different," in *The Oral History Reader*, 2nd ed., edited by Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 32-42.

using the symbolic understandings given to them in that present. In other words, people "compose" their memories using the public language and meanings as well as the audiences of their present-day culture.[38] This process of making our memories serves to help us make sense of our past in the present and feel more comfortable with our lives. This is especially true when people have to deal with risky and painful memories that do not conform to accepted public versions of the past.[39] Alistair Thomson's article, "Anzac Memories: Putting Popular Memory Theory into Practice in Australia," alerted me to the necessity of considering the degree to which my narrators' life stories were informed by present-day collective expectations of Greek womanhood and by modern Canadian perspectives.

Often I had to deal with silences or discrepancies that were confusing and made it hard to reach final conclusions. Why did these women emphasize certain aspects of their lives while remaining silent about others, and how should I deal with these issues? Joan Sangster saw silences and omissions as opportunities for revelations.[40] Historians, indeed, have to read between the lines in order to discover how people attempt retrospectively to make sense of their pasts. Michelle Mouton and Helena Pohlandt-McCormick, in their studies of oral narratives of the Nazi period in Germany and the Apartheid era in South Africa, similarly noticed narrators' silences, discrepancies, or even subconscious attempts to manipulate their own interviews as they filtered their pasts through present experiences.[41] The authors also noticed moments of "boundary crossing," when "the normal narrative broke down, a boundary was crossed and the narrative ruptured into something atypical."[42] Alert to such moments, I realized that they were

[38] On "composure," a term used by the Popular Memory Group at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in Birmingham, see Alistair Thomson's article "Anzac Memories: Putting Popular Memory Theory into Practice in Australia," in Perks and Thompson, *The Oral History Reader*, 300-310.

[39] Thomson, "Anzac Memories," 301.

[40] Joan Sangster, "Telling Our Stories: Feminist Debates and the Use of Oral History," *Women's History Review* 3, no. 1 (1994): 7–8.

[41] Michelle Mouton and Helena Pohlandt-McCormick, "Boundary Crossings: Oral History of Nazi Germany and Apartheid South Africa: A Comparative Perspective," *History Workshop Journal* 48 (1999), 41-63.

Mouton and Pohlandt-McCormick, "Boundary Crossings," 41..

especially revealing of narrators' real experiences, defying pressures to conform to dominant narratives.

The oral interviews that comprise my primary source collection have helped me to understand the meanings that Greek women attached to their experiences, how they perceived themselves in given social conditions and cultural environments, and what strategies they applied to exercise control over their lives. Bearing in mind that history is made by people with a certain understanding of themselves and of the social conditions in which they act, and with certain emotions, plans, desires, and frustrations in play, I saw the use of interviews as a chance to understand what shaped women's thoughts and what dictated their decisions. Their perspectives were not stable but shifting as the conditions and circumstances of their lives changed, and these interviews helped me to see these adjustments in perspectives, lifestyles, and gender roles. The women viewed themselves as having been altered as a result of their transatlantic immigration experience. Dominant Greek models of womanhood were either abandoned or redefined after immigration. Examining how women viewed, narrated and, finally, shaped their own histories, I gained insight into the social and cultural settings in which they lived and acted, the options available to them, and the complexity of the various relationships in their lives.

My eight interviewees are all women who moved to Canada between the mid-1950s and the 1970s. All of them have spent most of their lives in British Columbia. They are women who came from different parts of Greece, with various class and educational backgrounds. Since a number of them did not wish to be identified, to protect their anonymity, I created different names for all my interviewees. Some felt uncomfortable with the audio-recorder, so I had to take notes of their interviews. In general, I asked open-ended questions and avoided interruptions in order to allow the narrators to structure their stories as they wished, keeping in mind that what they chose to highlight or to downplay was indicative of how they interpreted the events of their lives. However, often I had to come back to points that needed clarification. Finally, I would like to observe, gratefully, that all of the women were friendly and hospitable toward me, since they saw me as a fellow immigrant woman, who spoke their language and could share some of their experiences of the homeland. The fact that I too am Greek and most of the times

communicated with them in Greek also helped to build trust between us and to make our discussions more comfortable and fruitful.

1.3. Greek immigration to Canada

Although Canada was not the preferred destination for most Greek emigrants, since many headed for the US and, in most recent years, Australia and Germany, in 2001 there were 215,105 Greeks in Canada, most of them living in the Toronto and Montreal areas.[43] At that time, British Columbia hosted 17,700 individuals who declared Greek ethnic origin, most residing in the Greater Vancouver area.[44]

The first Greek immigrants arrived in Canada during the second half of the nineteenth century, forced out of their homeland by the harsh economic conditions that poverty and incessant wars had generated. A second wave of immigration occurred at the beginning of the twentieth century, and Greek immigrants continued to arrive sporadically in Canada until the outbreak of World War II. Canadian labour requirements for economic and industrial development in this period had allowed more Greeks who were devastated by unemployment and war to immigrate to Canada. With hard work, the first immigrants could send some money back home. However, by 1911 there were still only 3,594 Greeks in Canada, most of them in the Toronto and Montreal areas.[45] These settlers faced significant discrimination and, since they did not speak English and came from a non-preferred country, were often seen as undesirable “aliens.” Based on the notion of "Nordic superiority," Canadian immigration policies reflected a preference for settlers from northern Europe, Scandinavia, and Britain, while southern and eastern Europeans were considered less able to assimilate and thus less desirable.[46] In addition, anti-Greek sentiment ran high during World War I, culminating in events such as the anti-Greek riot

[43] Tastsoglou, *Women, Gender and Diasporic Lives,* 11.

[44] Gavaki, “The Greeks in Canada; Immigration, Socio-Economic Mobility and Ethnic Identity, ” in Tastsoglou, Women, Gender and Diasporic Lives, 120.

[45] Tastsoglou, *Women, Gender and Diasporic Lives,* 2009, 10.

[46] Eleoussa Polyzoi,*"*Greek Immigrant Women from Asia Minor in Prewar Toronto: the Formative Years,*”* in Burnet, *Looking into my Sister’s* Eyes, 111.

in 1918 Toronto, in which Canadian war veterans attacked and plundered Greek properties because Greeks had not enlisted during the war.[47] Notwithstanding the discrimination they faced, Greeks continued to arrive and soon formed communities in most Canadian cities. The majority of this population consisted of male migrants who saw their residence in Canada as temporary, striving to earn some money and go back to their homes in Greece.

The third wave of Greek immigration in Canada, which began immediately after the Greek Civil War, was the most significant. Greeks left their country en masse in the period between 1950 and 1975. The country had suffered four years of world war and occupation by the Axis powers (1940-1944) and a three-year civil war (1946-49) between nationalists and communists that left the country physically and economically devastated and deeply divided politically. Although the Greek economy experienced a relatively high growth rate during the 1950s and 1960s, the traditional socio-economic structure did not change significantly. Greek society remained a rural society with a low degree of industrialization and wide disparities in regional development and income. The per capita income remained lower than that in the pre-war period for at least three years after the war.[48] The displacement of many families during the war and the political persecutions that were part of its aftermath, along with low wages, inflation, unemployment, and slow economic and social development, were the decisive factors that drove thousands of Greeks out of the country. It is estimated that about 1,500,000 Greeks emigrated in the 30 years between 1945 and 1975, which was equivalent to 17 per cent of the country's population in 1971.[49]

A more liberal Canadian immigration policy, along with certain political developments in the period following World War II, allowed thousands of Greeks to immigrate to Canada in the 1950s and 1960s. In the aftermath of the war, Canadian immigration policies, shaped by Cold War fears, became more favourable toward Greeks,

[47] On the anti-Greek riots, see: Thomas W. Gallant, George Treheles, and Michael Vitopoulos, *The 1918 Anti-Greek Riot in Toronto* (Toronto: Thessalonikeans Society of Metro Toronto and the Canadian Hellenic Historical Society, 2005).

[48] Chimbos, *A History,* 11.

[49] Chimbos, *A History*, 14-19

whom Canadians now perceived as victims of war and refugees from encroaching communism.[50] Immigrants from impoverished countries were viewed as people needing assistance in adjusting to new situations, finding work, accessing social services, adapting to Canadian gender roles and family models, and absorbing Canadian democratic values. At the same time, the rapidly growing Canadian economy was in desperate need of labour. This rising demand, along with the systematic and energetic efforts of various individuals and communities to fill this need, helped change the Canadian perception of Greece.[51] A more positive picture of Greeks as hard workers became prevalent in Canadian society in the postwar period.[52] By the 1960s, Canadian immigration policy became more flexible and allowed the invitation and sponsorship of family members and other relatives, so that between 1945 and 1970, more than 100,000 Greeks arrived in Canada.[53] While the majority of those who came to the country before the 1970s were low-skilled individuals, this profile changed after the passage of the 1967 Canadian Immigration Act, which priortitized the entry of more highly skilled and literate individuals. Thus, the Greeks who arrived in the 1970s were more educated and ready to adjust to Canadian society.[54]

These waves of migration had gendered dynamics. The early Greek immigration to Canada consisted primarily of young males who sought to make a fortune and go back to Greece. Given their subordinate status in rural Greek society, women were expected to stay home and take care of parents, parents-in-law, or younger siblings. In addition, in the first half of the twentieth century, Greek law had set discriminatory restrictions on female migration. Women were not allowed to migrate unless they were accompanied by a husband, father, brother, or any other close male relative, or were invited by relatives or by a possible fiancé who had officially "declared his responsibility for the migrant

[50] Franca Iacovetta, *Gatekeepers: Reshaping Immigrant Lives in Cold War Canada* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2006), 13.

[51] Anastasios Tamis and Efrosini Gavaki, *From Migrants to Citizens: Greek Migration in Australia and Canada* (Melbourne: The National Centre for Hellenic Studies and Research, La Trobe University, 2002), 374.

[52] Tamis and Gavaki, *From Migrants to Citizens,* 374.

[53] Chimbos, "The Greeks in Canada," 91.

[54] Efrosini Gavaki, "The Greeks in Canada," 119.

woman."[55] The rationale behind the law was that women were extremely vulnerable and had to be accompanied due to the risks of the journey. Many of the early Greek immigrant women came to Canada as brides. When male immigrants realized that Canada would be their future home, they either went back to their home regions in Greece to get married, sought "mail-order" brides, or had their kin find brides for them among the single young women of their villages.

In the postwar period, the demographic balance of Greek immigration changed significantly. While first and second-wave Greek immigrants were predominantly men and viewed their stay in Canada as temporary, the postwar Greek immigration involved entire families who hoped to make a better living in Canada. Thus, a growing number of Greek women entered Canada. Women continued to arrive as dependents of their husbands or fathers, but growing numbers of women came on their own, having arranged employment prior to their arrival. From 1950 to 1963, some 10,500 Greek women entered Canada as domestic workers.[56] These women became primary applicants who sponsored fiancés and husbands, thereby reversing the usual gender pattern of independent men and dependent women in the migration stream.[57] Tastsoglou's and Mina's studies of domestic workers in Canada have shown that a great number of those women abandoned their contracts, usually for jobs in the service industries of Toronto's and Montreal's burgeoning Greek communities.

With this background in place, this thesis can now move forward to an exploration of the immigration experiences of Greek women in Vancouver. The thesis is structured thematically and chronologically and, in addition to this introduction and the conclusion, contains three chapters. Chapter 2 deals with Greek women's experiences prior to immigration, particularly their status in Greece within a patriarchal culture and their ability to challenge gender relations in urban and rural contexts. Emphasis is given to the

[55] Ioanna Laliotou, *Transatlantic Subjects: Acts of Migration and Cultures of Transnationalism Between Greece and America* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 60-61.

[56] Mina, "Taming and Training Greek 'Peasant Girls,'" 516.

[57] On Greek domestic workers, see also: Tastsoglou, "The Temptations," 81- 114; Mina, "Taming and Training," 514-539; and Marilyn Barber, *Immigrant Domestic Servants in Canada* (Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association, 1991), 22-23.

decision-making process regarding immigration. Chapter 3 centres on middle-class Greek women and the ways that gender, class, ethnicity, and religion shaped their identities. Chapter 4 studies the experiences of Greek women who performed paid work in Canada, and explores how the new challenges of immigration and work altered their perspectives and redefined understandings of their womanhood. Ultimately, this thesis seeks to reveal the complexities of Greek immigrant women's lives across changing contexts and to challenge, with women's own voices, the static and monoltithic interpretations of their experiences that have dominated the literature far too long.

Chapter 2.

Women's Status in Greece and Decision-Making about Immigration

Immigration to Canada resulted in both continuities in and disruptions to gender relations within Greek immigrant families and communities. To understand the nature of these processes, we must first examine Greek women's experiences prior to immigration. The life histories of my narrators cast doubts on common assumptions that Greek women were unwilling victims of the decision-making process regarding immigration. On the contrary, these narrators' stories convince us that Greek immigrant women had an active role in that process.

This chapter examines factors that contributed to the perpetuation of women's subordinate status in Greece, including a patriarchal culture, the notion of "honour and shame," nationalism, and the Orthodox Church; yet it also recognizes women's agency in questioning these forces in their lives. The concept of "honour and shame" was a powerful ethos that oppressed women, but it was also seriously questioned during the time period covered in this study. Furthermore, nationalism and the Orthodox Church were mechanisms that sustained and perpetuated the subordination of Greek women, but at the same time, the active participation of women in feminist and other social movements reinforced the cause of women's liberation.[1]

[1] About the relation of the Orthodox Church with women and feminism, see Rosita Dellios, "Institutions and Gender Empowerment in Greece," in *Institutions and Gender Empowerment in the Global Community,* edited by Kartik C. Roy, Hans C. Blomqvist, and Cal Clark (Singapore/London: World Scientific Publishing Co (WSP)/Imperial College Press, 2008), 275-290; Polykarpos Karamouzis, "Θρησκευτικές Νεολαίες και Κοινωνικοπολιτική Διεκδίκηση στη Νεοελληνική Κοινωνία του 20ου Αιώνα" [Religious Youths and Socio-Political Claim in Twentieth Century Modern Greek Society], in *Η Ελληνική Νεολαία στον 20ο Αιώνα: Πολιτικές Διαδρομές, Κοινωνικές Πρακτικές και Πολιτιστικές εκφράσεις* [Greek Youth in the Twentieth Century: Political Routes, Social Practices and Cultural Expressions], edited by Vaggelis Karamanolakis, Evi Olympitou and Ioanna Papathanasiou (Athens: Themelio, 2010), 117-133.

Additionally, the chapter explores the lives of Greek women within the context of social developments in transitional postwar Greek society, and attempts to analyze the circumstances under which decisions about immigration were made. Based on the lived experiences retold by my narrators, I examine peasant women's and urban women's circumstances separately, since rural, lower-class women were positioned, and positioned themselves, in society differently than those who lived in the city. The women from rural Greece, for example, contributed immensely to their families' welfare with activities that took them outside the household. They not only assumed roles as mothers and housewives, but also worked in the fields, as both paid labourers and parts of family production units, challenging the idea that rural women were firmly identified with passivity and domesticity. These women frequently had to make crucial decisions that affected their families' lives and wellbeing. On the other hand, middle-class women from urban backgrounds, while not necessarily integrated into the labour market, were more likely to be educated and to have been exposed to modernizing cultures.

Finally, after delineating the circumstances under which family decisions were made, I conclude that many Greek women, despite assumptions made in earlier literature that portrayed them as submissive, indeed played an active role in the life-altering decision to move to Canada.

2.1. Challenging Greek Patriarchy in Postwar Greece

Anthropologists who did field research in postwar Greece emphasized the concept of "honour and shame" as an organizing principle of Greek patriarchy and female subordination. Relying primarily on an agricultural economy during the first half of the twentieth century and even for the first few decades after World War II, Greek society was organized mainly around traditional, patriarchal village culture, in which male dominance over Greek women was a cardinal feature. Although the feminist movement had earlier, in the late nineteenth century and in the interwar period, challenged traditional views on

women's subordination, voicing claims for equality in education, earnings, and citizenship rights, the majority of Greek women remained unaware of this discussion.[2]

Defining the concept of "honour and shame" as a system of values that was linked to norms of behaviour for both sexes, anthropologists of Mediterranean societies have elaborated on the different roles assigned to men and women. Men claimed honour by maintaining reputation as good breadwinners and protectors of their families and kin, but men's honour could be lost through the "misbehaviour" of women in their families.[3] While honour was primarily understood as a masculine quality, linked to power, the potential for shame was associated with women's sexuality.[4]

Therefore, the dichotomous nature of "honour and shame" was highly gendered, reflecting the power structure of rural Greek society. According to the relevant literature, men's honour was synonymous with masculinity and was associated with their ability to maintain the family's honour.[5] In that sense, a man was honourable as long as the other members of his family were also honourable. Since women were thought to be morally vulnerable, a man was expected to defend and ultimately be held responsible for the honour of the women that were under his supervision, either as mothers, sisters, daughters, or other relatives. For an unmarried woman, honour was identified with chastity, and unchaste behaviour diminished not only her honour but that of her entire family, representing a failure in the masculine authority of her father and brothers. Essentially, all women, but especially unmarried women, were viewed as potential threats to male honour and the family's social status. On the other hand, shame was perceived as a primarily feminine failing, resulting from women's perceived inability to control their own sexuality; modesty and obedience to the male heads of the family served to prevent

[2] Eleni Stamiris, "The Women's Movement in Greece," *New Left Review* no. 158 (1986): 98-112; Efi Avdela, "Between Duties and Rights: Gender and Citizenship in Greece, 1864-1952," in *Citizenship and the Nation State: Greece and Turkey*, edited by Faruk Birtek and Thalia.Dragonas, (London: Frank Cass Publications, 2005), 117-143.

[3] Gabriella Lazaridis, "Sexuality and its Cultural Construction in Rural Greece," Journal of Gender Studies 4, no. 3 (1995), 283.

[4] Lazaridis, "Sexuality," 283.

[5] Lazaridis, "Sexuality," 281-295.

women from losing their chastity and thereby bringing shame upon themselves and dishonour to their families.

The "honour and shame" system was fundamental to an individual's standing in rural societies.[6] Personal or familial honour was also a public matter, as it depended greatly on recognition by a larger group, either the village or the society as a whole. All men and women were constantly exposed to social monitoring and judgment. Indifference to honour was perceived as insensitivity or disrespect for social values. Such conduct would draw harsh criticism and contempt, and could result in ostracism and isolation for the dishonoured family, a particularly painful form of censure for people in small, rural societies where lives were deeply intertwined.

The power relations that underwrote this system consolidated women's segregation and subordination. Women's subordinate status was chiefly associated with restrictions that circumscribed their lives and with the domestic roles that were assigned to them. Thus, in the societies described in the "honour and shame" literature, women were absent from the public sphere. Women's domesticity was a guarantee that their sexuality, which was perceived as a threat to the family's honour, would be under control. Constant monitoring ensured that young women would preserve their virginity until marriage, and this was the duty not only of male relatives, but also senior women, who were also expected to remain vigilant about younger women. The perceived need to control every aspect of women's sexuality imposed constraints on women's socializing and often resulted in confinement to the household. While young men and boys could enjoy public interaction with peers and join their fathers in the *kafeneio*, young women were expected to remain at home most of the time, or attend festivities only when accompanied by male members of their families.[7] Women were not banned altogether

[6] About the "Honour and Shame" concept, see: Efi Avdela, *Δια Λόγους Τιμής: Βία, Συναισθήματα και Αξίες στη Μετεμφυλιακή Ελλάδα* [For Honour's Sake: Violence, Emotions and Values in Post-Civil War Greece] (Athens: Nefeli, 2002); Jill Dubisch, ed., *Gender and Power in Rural Greece* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986)*;* Campbell, *Honour, Family, and Patronage,* 1964; Peristiany, ed., *Honour and Shame,* 1965.

[7] *Kafeneio* was the traditional coffee house that served as a meeting place for the male population. *Plateia* is an open space, sometimes associated with green area that exists in almost any village, town, and city in Greece and serves as a place for meetings or activities.

from coffee houses, but it was deemed inappropriate for them to visit there. The presence of a woman in such a place would draw attention and provoke gossip.

Although "honour and shame" was still in place in the period studied in this paper, the model described by the anthropologists does not entirely correspond to what is revealed in my narrators' stories. Challenging assumptions that Greek women's activities were tightly constrained and constantly monitored, my interviewees revealed that this was not a universal experience in rural Greece. Although all agreed that women had limited participation in public affairs, they made it clear that they were not confined to the house as long as they had an active role working in fields either on the family's property or elsewhere for wages. Eleni, for example, started working outside her home after she finished school at twelve. She, her sisters and cousins, along with other girls and young women from her village, travelled to other places, where they worked for wages.

> Most of the girls in my village went out for wages. We would go for one or two weeks to neighbouring villages, when hands were needed; we planted tobacco in spring and gathered it in fall. We lived with relatives or other families. The money went to support our families.[8]

Thus, the constraints on women's public appearances were discarded when their wages were needed to provide for struggling families. Similarly, Thalia, as soon as she completed primary school at the age of twelve, contributed to her family, working either in the family's fields or for wages in other villagers' fields. She did not feel confined at home, since a great part of her time was spent outside the household. She recalled, however, that she felt awkward about going to the *kafeneio*, which was considered to be a space exclusively used by men.[9] Moreover, after she was engaged, her parents warned her to stay at home and not socialize openly, so that her behavior would not provoke any gossip that might compromise her honour and threaten her prospects of marriage. Katerina, who grew up in a village not far from Athens in the late sixties, remembered that she longed to socialize with people of her own age in their village cafeteria or follow her peers to parties and dances, but she was only allowed to do so when accompanied by her older brothers.[10]

[8] Eleni, interview by Maria Kalogeropoulou, Vancouver, April 24, 2013.

[9] Thalia, interview by Maria Kalogeropoulou, Vancouver, December 2, 2013.

[10] Katerina, interview by Maria Kalogeropoulou, Vancouver, December 20, 2012.

The threat of gossip was a factor that made parents wary about their daughters' public appearances at social events and venues.

Despite such constraints, during this period, a significant number of young village women went to cities in order to work as nurses and domestic workers, or to be trained as seamstresses and hairdressers. Pothiti Hantzaroula's study of domestic workers in postwar Greece demonstrates that it was a family strategy to send young women to the cities to work as in-home-service workers.[11] These young women would provide themselves with dowries and at the same time support their families, who were often struggling to survive. Two of my narrators, Stephania and Despina, went to Athens to be trained as seamstresses.

Although such work took women out of the home and empowered them, social constraints such as the fear of gossip continued to limit their freedom. Gossip operated as a tool of social control for both families and women. The community members spread any available information or rumours about a woman's honour, and thus pressured her to conform to social norms while obliging other members of her family to keep their eyes on her. Parents might monitor their daughters, brothers might watch over their sisters, and so forth. Women who constantly felt the pressure of such informal surveillance networks tended, naturally enough, to become self-regulators.[12] While Despina was away from home, she was especially preoccupied with gossip, and acutely aware that rumours could reach her parents' village.[13]

> When I left our village and went to Athens to learn the craft of dressmaker, I lived in my uncle's house in Piraeus. I knew that any wrong step would hurt not only my family, but my uncle's family as well. So, I felt doubly responsible and I was very preoccupied with what people would say. I was very careful; what I would say, with whom I would talk. After all, it is what people say… "Even the walls have ears."[14]

[11] Pothiti Hantzaroula, "Έμφυλες Σχέσεις και Αντιλήψεις για τη Σεξουαλικότητα: Εργάτριες και Υπηρέτριες στη Μεταπολεμική Αθήνα" [Gender Relationships and Perceptions of Sexuality: Female Workers and Domestic Servants in Post-War Athens], in Karamanolakis, Olympitou and Papathanasiou, *Η Ελληνική Νεολαία*, 259.

[12] Michel Foucault discusses how constant surveillance can lead individuals to self-regulation in *Discipline and Punishment: the Birth of the Prison* (Canada: Penguin Books, 1986), 195-228.

[13] Despina, interview by Maria Kalogeropoulou, Vancouver, January16, 2013.

[14] Despina, interview.

Despina's usage of this well-known Greek proverb illustrates the level of her concern. She felt constantly monitored by her co-villagers and the broader community, believing that any deviation from the norm would be reported to her small community at home, reducing her chances in the marriage market. Therefore, along with the monitoring her relatives imposed on her, she self-censored in order to retain the good name of her family. Katerina, who was a teenager in the late 1960s, also felt the burden of preventing community gossip about her family.[15] Years later, she realized that the tight control her otherwise understanding father had exerted over her when they lived in Greece was due to the extreme pressure he felt to avert such gossip.[16] His attitude definitely changed when the family immigrated to Canada. Clearly, rumours concerning women's sexual immorality put the family's social status at risk and thus dictated compliance with communally approved attitudes.

Early marriages were also used to regulate women's sexuality and to prevent any behaviours that might put the reputation of the family at risk. Since an unmarried woman was viewed as a threat to the "good name" of the family, early marriage eliminated potential for shame to befall the woman and hence besmirch the family's honour. The average age of marriage of my narrators was 21, and most of them had been engaged earlier.

Forced marriages were used to restore a family's honour when it was deemed to have been tarnished. In the case of a woman who lost her virginity before marriage, for instance, she and her sexual partner might be expected to marry, even if one or both parties were unwilling to do so. My narrators had no such experiences, but in Efi Avdela's study of "honour crimes" in post-civil-war Greece, forced marriages were reported as a means to rectify the lost honour of a woman.[17] If this remedy was refused, the result could be tragic. Throughout that period, Athenian newspapers carried a significant number of reports on crimes (assaults, murders, and attempted murders) committed for reasons of

[15] Katerina, Interview.
[16] Katerina, interview.
[17] Avdela, "*Δια λόγους τιμής*," 2002, 38-39.

honour.[18] An honour crime was an act of violence committed in order to avenge an alleged insult by the victim against the perpetrator's individual or family honour.[19] In most cases, honour crimes occurred in response to matters revolving around marriage, family, and sexual morality. Avdela provides a classic scenario from a newspaper account of the period: the case of an aggrieved father to whom murder seemed the only viable option when the honour of his family could not be restored by a forced marriage:

> Όταν ο σαραντάχρονος κτηματίας στα Καλύβια Ελευσίνας κατάλαβε ότι ο νεαρός που είχε διαφθείρει την κόρη του δεν επρόκειτο να την «πάρει», γύρισε καταστεναχωρημένος στο σπίτι του, όπου η συζυγός του «προσεπάθησε να τον παρηγορήση, αλλ΄ εκείνος δεν ήθελε να ακούσει τίποτα απολύτως». Όλην τη νύχτα έμεινε άγρυπνος και έλεγε διαρκώς: - Είμαστε ντροπιασμένοι... Είμαστε ντροπιασμένοι. Τι θα γίνουμε;». Το πρωί τον σκότωσε στην πλατεία του Ασπρόπυργου.
>
> When the forty-year-old rancher in Kalyvia, Eleusis realized that the young man who corrupted his daughter was not going to marry her, he returned home, grief-stricken. When his wife tried to comfort him, he definitely did not want to hear anything. He stayed sleepless all night and kept saying: "We're ashamed ... We are disgraced. What will become of us?" In the morning he killed the victim in the square of Aspropyrgos.[20]

Even though such crimes were relatively rare, their occurrence shows that traditional notions of "honour and shame" were still strong during this period and continued to define the standards of moral conduct for both sexes among the rural population and recent migrants to the cities.

Whether or not violence or coercion were employed in marital arrangements, marriage was very much a family affair. According to my interviewees, parental consent to marriage was always important in both rural and urban Greece. Although parents had some input in young men's marriage choices, however, they were more likely to make full decisions about their daughters' futures. Eleni recalled that she learned about her engagement when her father came back from the *kafeneio* and announced that he had

[18] Avdela, "*Δια λόγους τιμής*," 38-39.

[19] Efi Avdela, "Emotions on Trial: Judging Crimes of Honour in Post-Civil-War Greece," *Crime, History and Societies* 10, no.2 (2006), 33-52.

[20] Efi Avdela, *«Δια λόγους τιμής», 52.*

arranged her engagement with a fellow villager.[21] While her mother had been consulted previously and had consented to that marriage, Eleni's opinion was not asked for.

Not infrequently, negotiations took place over the dowry, in the absence of the future bride, between her parents and the future groom or his family. Dowry has been discussed extensively in Greek historiography, where it is often characterized as an institution which devastated rural families and led fathers and brothers to immigrate in order to acquire the money to marry off their daughters or sisters.[22] Peter Chimbos has also argued that in the postwar period, the dowry system forced many young women to migrate to Canada as domestic servants.[23] Moreover, as discussed by the women interviewed for this study, the obligation of giving a dowry was also connected to the culture of "honour and shame." Eleni shared her understanding of how the practice of giving money and land as dowry had been initiated in her village:

> In the old times, no money dowry was expected and the land was always reserved for male children. Of course, there was always clothing, blankets, embroideries, but no money or land was given to girls. This all started when an engaged woman broke her engagement. Because she was spoilt and her name had been heard, nobody wanted to marry her and her parents gave extra money and five square kilometres of land to attract possible grooms.[24]

In effect, money and land had been offered to compensate for the loss of honour of the bride-to-be. Whether this transaction actually took place is less significant to us as scholars than the system it represents. Women who had premarital relations or broke their engagements thereby reduced their chances to get married. Once a bride was suspected of not following the standards of decency, the dowry given to the groom was increased in order to compensate for his own imperilled honour. At the same time, the dowry was also connected with men's attempts to assure more resources for their prospective families. "In my marriage, dowry was not an issue, but for others it was a major issue. People could cancel the wedding at the threshold of the church, if an agreement wasn't reached,"

[21] Eleni, interview.
[22] Eleni Stamiris, "The Women's Movement in Greece," 104.
[23] Chimbos, "The Greeks in Canada," 91.
[24] Eleni, interview.

reported Thalia.[25] It was not unusual for a series of bargaining sessions to take place between the groom's and the bride's families over the dowry. Despina, the oldest of my interviewees, reported such an experience. She was engaged at 16, but disagreements between her future husband and her father over the dowry kept postponing the wedding over four years.[26] While she retold her story, despite the 67 years that had passed, she could not hide her bitterness, although to a certain extent she excused her fiancé's attitude on the grounds that "he was broke, after having given dowries to his sisters."[27] His insistence on receiving a certain amount of money as a dowry, however, was perceived by Despina and her family as a form of extortion. The couple had already been engaged, and if either party broke the engagement, Despina might well have been hard pressed to find another fiancé; therefore her family was forced into meeting the groom's terms regarding the dowry amount.

Despina's life story is interesting since it reveals how marriages were arranged, and also how young women reacted when decisions were imposed upon them. Her future husband, an Athenian, had initially approached her relatives through a matchmaker, which was the appropriate way at that time of being introduced to an unmarried woman while preserving her honour. Despina's consent was not sought, and the engagement agreement was made between her father and the groom. Despina was not allowed to meet him alone while they were engaged; however, contrary to her father's wishes, she exchanged letters with her future husband and also arranged secret meetings with him. As she said in her interview, "I couldn't marry a stranger. I wanted to meet and get to know him better."[28] In spite of her youth and her lack of experience, she overcame the restrictions set by her family and demanded a part in the decision-making over her life.

Other interviewees also asserted some independence in choosing their future spouses. Even though their parents' approval in the choice of husbands was necessary, some of my interviewees made their own decisions about marriage. Thalia married at the

[25] Thalia, interview.
[26] Despina, interview.
[27] Despina, interview.
[28] Despina, interview.

age of 20 after having a brief romantic relationship with her future husband, against the wishes of her parents, who were not keen on the idea of a marriage between their daughter and somebody who was living in Canada.[29] Education was a factor that affected women's agency: the more educated the women were, the more likely they were to make decisions with a considerable degree of independence. As I will demonstrate later in this chapter, Stella and Aspasia, both university graduates, had much greater input in decisions about their marriages than did other interviewees with less education.

My narrators' experiences did not confirm the "honour and shame" narrative in its entirety. Although this concept continued to play a significant role in Greek rural societies, it was also challenged by the increasingly active roles that women played in family economies in both rural and urban Greece. The Greek postwar society was, slowly but steadily, departing from the strict, traditional culture of "honour and shame." Women's work, paid and unpaid, allowed for a shift in values and practices in regulating their sexuality. Some women had a greater say in decisions about their marriages and future lives.

2.2. From Mothers of the Nation to Full Citizens: a Nonlinear Development

The women who have informed this study took pride in the idea that they, as pillars of immigrant families and the Hellenic community, protected both ethnicity and Orthodoxy in their families and the community. Many admitted their role as guardians of national and Orthodox values in their new country. In order to understand their stake in maintaining the "Greekness" of the immigrant community in Vancouver, it is necessary to examine the role that ethnicity and religion played in shaping the perspectives of these women in their country of origin.

The history of Greek women in the twentieth century intersects with the history of Greek nationalism. Given that both nationalism and religion create certain cultures and define moral codes for all adherents, it is crucial to examine both in order to understand

[29] Thalia, interview.

how they shaped the perception of women's roles and reinforced gender relations in the period. As Michael Herzfeld suggests,

> the language of national identity is a language of morality, an encoded discourse about inclusion and exclusion of cultural definitions, of insiders who accepted the nation's norms, attitudes and behaviours, as compared to the outsiders, and it is from this list that not only a specific national identity derives but also sex-role stereotypes.[30]

In the nationalist discourse, Greek women were crucial for the survival and rejuvenation of the nation, but they had to be controlled and regulated to ensure that they were proper mothers of the nation. In that sense, nationalism and patriarchy functioned as mutually supportive mechanisms that sustained and perpetuated women's subordination in Greece. However, the active participation of women in feminist and social movements, including national liberating movements, demonstrated their ability to create gender-inclusive space and ultimately supported the cause of women's emancipation.

After the National Liberation Revolution of 1821 and the Declaration of Independence in 1830, the Greek state was established as a tiny kingdom at the southern end of the Balkan Peninsula.[31] Although the founders of the new state, inspired by Enlightenment ideals, declared their goal to establish a modern democratic state, the Great European Powers imposed an absolute monarchy and chose a Bavarian prince to be the king of Greece. The Greek revolutionaries had failed to create the large, modern republic they had desired, and this failure generated tension and fueled an ideology of irredentism that soon came to dominate both the domestic and foreign policies of the country. According to the idea of Greek expansionism, known as the *Megali Idea*, or "The Great Idea," the Greek state should expand to include all the areas of the Ottoman Empire where Greeks lived. The pursuit of the *Megali Idea* led the Greek state to undertake a

[30]Michael Herzfeld, quoted in Demetra Tzanaki, *Women and Nationalism in the Making of Modern Greece: The Founding of the Kingdom to the Greco-Turkish War* (Oxford: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 2.

[31] The Protocol of Greek Independence was signed on February 3rd, 1830, in London, by Britain, France, and Russia, and placed the Greek Kingdom *Under the Protection* of the three Great European Powers, thus putting limits on the independence of the newly established state.

nation-building project through continuous wars that ultimately led to territorial expansion, but also to devastation, bloodshed, and economic recessions.

This aggressive nationalism had a contradictory effect on women's status and on feminism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.[32] On the one hand, in the collective imagination, it created iconic images of heroic women who participated in the national struggles. Perhaps the most emblematic image was that of the proud and brave women of Souli, who preferred death to the dishonour of being captured and raped by the enemy. Even here, though, we can see that women were celebrated in a very gendered way: their honour came from maintaining their sexual morality[33] On the other hand, nationalism also spread the idea of female vulnerability. Women were twice vulnerable to the enemy: first as Greeks, and second as women who could be subjected to dishonour at the hands of the enemy. Nonetheless, the nationalist movement of the late nineteenth century "gave the opportunity to upper and middle-class women to claim their integration into the nation."[34] As Demetra Tzanaki argues, the first-wave Greek feminists

> did not simply follow, but they also participated actively in the process of reproducing, maintaining and modifying their roles in the production of national identities and political culture. This means that women, marginalized and denied the state's major resources, had to struggle not only against the perception that defined them as subhuman and deviant, but also to justify their inclusion in national rights and eventually citizenship.[35]

In particular, the women producing and contributing to the feminist periodical *Efimeris ton Kyrion*, or *Ladies' Journal*, and their leading figure Kallirroi Parren, became active in organizing patriotic events and other public activities in order to contribute to the national

[32] On Greek women's relationship with nationalism, see: Demetra Tzanaki, *Women and Nationalism,* 2009; Efi Avdela and Angelika Psarra, "Engendering 'Greekness': Women's Emancipation and Irredentist Politics in the Nineteenth-Century Greece," *Mediterranean Historical Review* 20, no, 1, (2005), 67-79; Eleni Varikas, "Gender and National Identity in *fin de siècle* Greece," *Gender &History* 5, no. 2 (1993), 281.

[33] According to the national mythology, in 1803, the women of Souli, while holding their babies and dancing, jumped off the cliff of Zaloggos in order to avoid the dishonor of captivity by the Turks. The incident is known as the Dance of Zaloggos.

[34] Avdela and Psarra, "Engendering 'Greekness,'" 67.

[35] Tzanaki, *Women and Nationalism*, 2-3.

mission. Through their participation, they gained greater access to the public sphere and thus "took the lead in voicing the more radical liberal demand for the vote as well as for the abolition of infamous laws prohibiting women from the professions, business and government."[36] Identifying with nationalism, feminists gained an unexpected audience and became an important part of the public political sphere. As active and prolific as this early Greek women's movement was, however, it was unable to visualize Turkish women as sisters and "stopped brutally at the frontiers of the 'Orient,'" thus failing to reconcile the potential universality of feminism with the exclusiveness of nationalism.[37]

Indeed, women's relationship to Greek nationalism was complex and not always empowering. Patrizia Albanese, studying women's relationship with nationalism in four other European nations (Germany, Italy, Russia, and Croatia), challenged the notion that nationalism was a modernizing and liberating force for women, concluding that while it may have been progressive with regard to economics and politics, it was often regressive with respect to women's family roles, and gender relations. Albanese argued that in all four nationalist regimes she studied, "a nationalist leader's rise to power was accompanied by changes to family policies, from relatively less to more traditional and patriarchal ones."[38] Although twentieth-century Greek nationalism did provide some space in which women could operate, it also reinforced patriarchy. Within nationalist discourse, Greek women were represented as modest mothers and guardians of tradition. Under nationalist regimes, gender policies became more restrictive, since nationalist leaders were aware that "controlling women was a way of protecting or reviving the patriarchal nation."[39]

Furthermore, nationalism coalesced with the conservative discourses of the Eastern Orthodox Church, which continued to emphasize the importance of women's roles as wives and mothers. Women's purpose in life, in the Church's view, revolved exclusively

[36] Eleni Stamiris, "The Women's Movement in Greece," 99.

[37] Eleni Varikas, "Gender and National Identity," 281.

[38] Patrizia Albanese, *Mothers of the Nation: Women, Families, and Nationalism in Twentieth-Century Europe* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 161.

[39] Konstantinos Kornetis, "Student Resistance to the Greek Military Dictatorship: Subjectivity, Memory, and Cultural Politics, 1967-1974," (PHD Dissertation, Florence: European University Institute, 2006), 267-268.

around family and the household, and divorce and abortion were therefore frowned upon.[40] In this regard, the principles of the twentieth-century Church were essentially the same as those taught today, as suggested by these words of Reverend Stanley Harakas, of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America: "Marriage is holy. The home is sacred. Birth is a miracle. In these we find the meaning of life itself."[41] Moreover, the feminine ideal that the Greek Orthodox Church celebrated in the mid-twentieth century was that of the "great female figures who sacrificed themselves for their family and homeland."[42] Despite this hagiographic language, the Church opposed gender equality. In 1956, the Bulletin of the Holy Synod, commenting on women's trend to depart from the traditions of Orthodox Christianity, wrote:

> Υπάρχει αναμφιβόλως ελευθερία και χειραφέτησις καλή. Όπως υπάρχει και τοιαύτη κακή, η οποία και διαστρέφει την γυναίκα με την εν παντί μίμησιν του ανδρός.
>
> There is undoubtedly a positive and good form of freedom and emancipation for women. And there is another, bad form, in which women are distorted by imitating men.[43]

Since the Church had been viewed as "the preserver of the Greek nation under the Ottoman rule, before the late-eighteenth century national awakening," in later nationalistic discourses, the Orthodox Church was thought to be the guardian of national identity.[44] Thus, nation and Orthodoxy were connected and functioned to define the national consciousness. This was emphasized especially in the period from 1936 to 1974, when dictators of right-wing regimes dominated Greece. The Metaxas dictatorship (1934-1941) and the Colonels' dictatorship (1967-1974), in particular, both promoted an "exclusionary, militaristic nationalism, and a repressive gender regime."[45] According to the ideologies of these dictatorial regimes, Greek people should serve the ideals of the

[40] Dellios, "Institutions and Gender Empowerment," 4.

[41] Harakas, S., quoted in Dellios, "Institutions and Gender Empowerment," 4.

[42] Katsapis*, Ihoi kai Apoihoi,* 200.

[43] Katsapis*, Ihoi kai Apoihoi,* 200.

[44] Dellios, "Institutions and Gender Empowerment," 4.

[45] Jill Vickers and Athanasia Vouloukos, "Changing Gender/Nation Relations: Women's Roles in Making and Restructuring the Greek Nation-State," *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 13, 2007, 502.

fatherland, the Greek Orthodox faith, and the patriarchal Greek family in order to serve and glorify the nation.[46] Moreover, the nationalist leaders used a range of measures to exert control over Greek women and to maintain masculine dominance. As Vickers and Vouloukos state:

> In 1940 the dictator Metaxas introduced the Family Law, which remained in force until the 1980s. It imposed rigid, authoritarian gender relations; declared men heads of the household to be obeyed by the law; denied women the right to work outside of the home without spousal permission; and withdrew political and most civil rights.[47]

The Metaxas dictatorship banned all feminist organizations and stifled the further development of second-wave feminism, which had pressured the government for women's enfranchisement during the interwar period.[48] Years later, in 1967, the Colonel's Dictatorship "revived the cult of family" by reintroducing the threefold concept of "Fatherland, Orthodoxy and Family" at the centre of the Greek state. This renewal of older cultures directed women to the "natural" female roles of home management and child rearing.[49]

Notwithstanding the periods when authoritarian regimes held power, Greek women contributed immensely to citizenship struggles by raising demands for equal rights with men or by participating in grassroots politics. Perhaps the most emblematic moment of female politicization was their participation in the anti-fascist resistance movement (1941-44). Women's involvement in the resistance and the Civil War that followed immediately after Axis forces evacuated the country in 1944 was immense. Women of all ages, but mainly young women, undertook different duties that took them out of the household and gave them an opportunity to demonstrate leadership. Women were engaged in resistance organizations, organized public meals for the starving populations in the cities, helped the imprisoned, undertook underground work, acted as liaisons within the armed forces of the resistance, and also participated as armed militants in the partisan

[46] Metaxas' ideology was a mixture of nationalism and nostalgia for ancient times. His regime aspired to establish the Third Hellenic Civilization, a restoration of the ideals of Ancient Greece and Byzantium.

[47] Vickers and Vouloukos, "Changing Gender/Nation Relations," 522.

[48] Stamiris, "The Women's Movement," 100.

[49] Vickers and Vouloukos, "Changing Gender/Nation Relations," 525.

army. Many women were captured and tortured or executed by the occupying forces. These contributions of individual women had a significant impact on the broader society, challenging the dominant model of womanhood as passive and vulnerable. Indeed, the participation in the resistance even changed the expectations that women and young girls had of themselves. Firstly, the participation of young women in the resistance organizations gave them the chance to enter the public sphere from which they had earlier been excluded. By taking an active role in the resistance, women thus worked towards their own emancipation. Secondly, the resistance movement worked as "citizenship training" for women.[50] Participation in resistance organizations and military life served as a training school, providing them with political and organizational experience. In addition, the resistance challenged gender roles. The economic and social changes that occurred during occupation shifted power relations in the family. As patriarchal control over young women weakened during the Second World War, women seized the opportunity created by unusual circumstances and broke with the past, ultimately changing both their own lives and broader gender relations.

Therefore, in the post-Civil War period, a large number of Greek women experienced an active role in the public sphere and made important steps towards female emancipation. While they were pressured to resume their usual roles when the Civil War was over, their participation in politics created role models for women, distinct from those in the prewar period. Women's new status could not be ignored by the state, which enacted female voting rights in 1952. And although, in everyday life, women were still thought to be best suited for household duties, circumstances were definitely starting to change for women in both rural and urban Greece as a result of changes in the economic structure of the country, education, and the modernizing influences that came from the West.

[50] Janet Hart, "Women in the Greek Resistance: National Crisis and Political Transformation," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 38 (1990), 52.

2.3. Women's Status in Rural Greece

Peasant families' survival relied mainly on small family farms and unpaid labour by members of the family.[51] Therefore, peasant women, far from being confined to their houses, played active roles working in the fields and elsewhere to support their families. Although they remained economically marginalized, this contribution empowered them in decision-making processes within the family and beyond the domestic realm. Moreover, in the postwar period, the need of peasant households for money led a number of young women and men to the cities, where they could work for wages and help their struggling families. Thus, as economic conditions changed in rural Greece, the lives of women were also affected. The culture of "honour and shame" started to decline, and patriarchal culture was seriously challenged.

Eleni was the seventh child of a village family that lived on agriculture and animal husbandry in the mountainous part of Thessalia. Like her siblings, she left school at the age of twelve, because there was no high school in her village and the family could not pay to send the children away to study. Thus, from an early age, she was busy either with household chores or working in the fields. Eleni's narrative vividly illustrates what it was like to live and work in such a village. Most families in rural Greece owned small landholdings and were engaged in agriculture and shepherding, which sustained their existence but garnered only small amounts of cash.[52] Generally, employment in agriculture and husbandry did not allow small farmers to produce surplus products for sale, and each family relied on work by all its members to make ends meet.

Although the household was considered women's realm and the fields that of men, women frequently performed farm work along with their household duties. According to my narrators, whether or not women worked in the fields depended on the amount of work that was required in particular parts of the agricultural cycle. When less work was needed, men managed farming alone, but when extra hands were needed, as happened many times during the year, women and also children rushed to the men's aid. Children

[51] On the history of Greek rural economy, see Kostas Vergopoulos, *Το Αγροτικό Ζήτημα στην Ελλάδα* [The Agrarian Issue in Greece], (Athens: Exantas, 1975).

[52] On female work in rural Greece, see: Buck Sutton, "Family and Work," and Gabriella Lazaridis, *Women's Work*.

performed significant duties along with the adults, such as shepherding, milking the livestock, or gathering the crops. Women were also hired by other families during the busy harvest season, enabling them to earn some extra income for their own families. Women of all ages worked hard to accommodate the various needs of the family in a society where survival relied on family production. Yet the household remained their primary workplace. In Greece, the idea that the primary duty of a woman was to be in charge of her home as a *kali noikokyra* [good housewife] was dominant.[53] A *kali noikokyra* was the one who took care of her home, her husband, and her children, cooked delicious meals, always had a tidy and clean house, and took care of guests, providing hospitality even to those who dropped by uninvited at any time. Although a middle-class ideal, the *kali noikokyra* was broadly adopted by working people and even by those with a rural background. As Eleni illustrated, she, her mother, and sisters were always busy with cooking, maintaining the house, and keeping the family's clothing clean. This last chore was extremely laborious, as they had to fetch water from the public spring to do the washing at home. They also provided food for the family by growing vegetables in their gardens, milking the sheep and goats, and making cheese. Along with the housekeeping and the production of food, women were often occupied with wool processing to prepare the family's clothes and contribute to girls' dowries. Eleni remembered:

> My sisters and I were always busy with dyeing, spinning, and weaving the wool on looms. We made almost everything we needed, blankets, carpets and tablecloths. Mom was working till late at night under the light of an oil lamp. She knitted socks and sweaters and made embroidery for our dowries.[54]

Notwithstanding women's inferior status, marriage and motherhood could elevate them in the eyes of the family, from obedient and powerless young women to respectable mothers, whose opinion counted in decisions made within the household. All of my interviewees reported that their mothers held respected positions in their families and that they were consulted on major family decisions, such as children's marriages, studies, and

[53] For the ideology of "kali noikolyra" see Anna Karpathakis, "From Noikokyra to Lady: Greek Immigrant Women, Assimilation and Race," in "Gender and International Migration: Focus on Greece," ed. Evangelia Tastsoglou and Laura Maratou-Alipranti, Special Issue*, Greek Review of Social Research* 110:23-53.

[54] Eleni, interview.

careers, or family investments. Katerina's mother held considerable authority, making all the family decisions on her own, since her sailor husband was away most of the time.[55] In addition to her housekeeping duties, her mother was also responsible for farming. Katerina describes her mother as a dynamic and stalwart figure who played a leading role in the family and made many crucial decisions on family investments or on children's studies and careers. Katerina expressed her admiration for this elderly woman, who still lives in Vancouver with her.

> Mom is a heroine. She didn't stop in front of any obstacle. Because Dad was travelling for months and rarely was home, she had to do everything. She took care of us all and the house...always busy… you know, we had also the fields, the goats, the chicken…. She arranged with workers to take care of the olive trees and to pick up the olives.[56]

Stephania and Thalia, who were also raised in rural areas, both contributed to their families livelihoods from the age of twelve. Besides housework, they also helped in the fields or worked for wages. Women from Thalia's village went to other villages to pick olives, apples, or beans, while, as Stephania recalled:

> Poor girls could leave home as early as eight years old. They often were sent to another family and do the chores for a little money. When they became thirteen, fourteen, their family sent them to houses in Athens, to work as servants for the rich families. Other girls became nurses. [57]

Stephania, as Despina had done a decade previously, left her home early, at eighteen, to become a seamstress. Although Greek families oriented their female children toward occupations deemed suitable for females, like needle working and hairdressing, the experiences of Stephania, who came in Athens in the mid-1960s, were much different from those of Despina, who left her village at 1948 and was placed in a relative's house. Stephania joined her two older sisters, who had been moved to Athens earlier, to work in a small textile factory. By the 1960s, families were less preoccupied with the honour of their female children. Instead, a number of families, struggling to survive in the villages, did not hesitate to send female children to Athens, where, besides earning some money

[55] Katerina, interview.

[56] Katerina interview.

[57] Stephania, interview.

for the family, they hoped to build a better future for themselves. Life in the city seemed to be much more promising for young people. Stephania, however, came back to her village to marry her older brother's friend in a marriage arranged by her brother, and a year later, in 1966, both she and her husband left for Canada.

In postwar Greece, economic necessity, along with the increasing urbanization of the country, had a large impact on the lives of peasant families. As parents became aware of increasing work opportunities in the cities, they oriented their children towards them. And while peasant women had always had an active role as they farmed along with men, the women of the new generation were more likely to find themselves living and working away from home, in the cities. At the same time, parents were less preoccupied with the honour of their female children. A large number of girls or young women moved to the cities, and any reservations regarding the family's honour yielded to the need for these young women to contribute to the family's income. Although traditional practices such as arranged marriages survived into the 1960s, as Stephania's example shows, the concept of "honour and shame" was seriously challenged within the rural population by this generation of young women.

2.4. Women's Status in the Cities

Urban women's experiences were very much different from peasant women's experiences and were noticeably affected by class. Middle-class women and working-class women were both oppressed by gender limitations, but they had different tools to fight against this oppression. While working women's power lay in their economic contribution to their families, middle-class women were more likely to find agency through a better education and the modernizing influences from the West during the 1960s and 1970s. Nevertheless, due to the structure of the economy in the cities, women were not integrated into the labour force at nearly the same rates as men.

Between 1955 and 1975, Greek cities grew immensely because large numbers of peasants saw internal migration as the way to a promising future. More than 1.5 million Greeks left their villages during that period in search of employment, and as a result, the population of Athens doubled from 1,378,500 inhabitants in 1951 to 2,540,200 residents

in 1972, dramatically changing the demographic character of the country.[58] Although economic growth and urbanization in the postwar period created many job opportunities for men in the cities, there was not sufficient growth in the industrializing workplace to generate a large demand for paid female labour; as men settled into petty commerce, crafts, and the service sector, women were marginalized, either in the urban household or in activities seen as extensions of housework.[59]

Studying Greek village women who migrated to Athens in the 1970s, Susan Buck Sutton concluded that the "economic structures in the city, reverse[d] major aspects of the village pattern."[60] While village women were expected to work throughout their lives beside the male members of their families, city women were expected to contribute economically to their families through their dowries and play a supportive role for their spouses and children inside the home. The altered conditions of their lives in cities deprived women of the strong roles in familial decision-making they had enjoyed in their villages. These women were more likely to identify with domesticity. As Sutton points "child, house and spouse care came to occupy [city] women more fully than in the village."[61] The nature of housework also changed, and what were weekly cleaning chores in the village became daily ones in the city's more elaborately furnished apartments.[62] Even more than in rural areas, the women cities were required to align themselves with the ideal of *kali noikokyra* — the good housewife, mother, and hostess. Like in postwar Canada, where the discourses of domesticity promoted the stay-at-home wife and mother as the norm, the ideology of *kali noikokyra* pressured Greek women to conform to certain standards.[63]

Although many city women in Greece were stay-at-home wives, a number of other women wanted and needed to work. The forms of employment that were available to them, such as domestic service or home-based manufacture, dressmaking, and hairdressing, offered a modest income for families, but since they were performed at home and

[58] Hadjikyriacou, "Exoticising Patriarchies," 23.
[59] Stamiris, "The Women's Movement in Greece," 103.
[60] Buck Sutton, "Family and Work," 33.
[61] Buck Sutton, "Family and Work," 43.
[62] Buck Sutton, "Family and Work," 44.
[63] Joan Sangster, *Transforming Labour: Women and Work in Post-War Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 17.

belonged to the informal economy, they did not provide women with opportunities for socialization or social recognition. Since those women had limited employment choices and no bargaining power in the labour market, employers could easily marginalize them further and pay them less. They were not proper workers in the eyes of society; defined as secondary and unskilled, they were relegated to dead-end jobs and were paid very little. Moreover, these women were not even counted in census figures on the labour force.[64] Indeed, only one-fifth of adult women were perceived as paid workers in 1971, which signifies an extensive marginalization of women in the cities.[65] Thus, the structure of the urban economy deprived women of the opportunities to integrate fully into the labour force. Indeed, while farming brought rural men and women together in the fields, work in urban settings was more gendered, separating men and women spatially and assigning completely different roles to them.

Furthermore, this gendering of the work force reinforced gendered ideas about women's employment, which was seen as a threat to the family's honour, since it involved unmonitored activity outside the household and was perceived as a sign of men's inability to provide for their families. In the 1960s and 1970s, the ideal of the male breadwinner, supporting the dependent members of his family, was dominant in urban Greece, especially among middle-class families. Thus, while women's employment in rural agriculture or the family's business was acceptable, women's work for wages in the city challenged the masculinity of middle-class husbands. Young women who worked for wages were expected to quit their jobs after they got married and to devote themselves to home and children. Thus, a large number of urban women, even if they worked outside household at an earlier life-stage, ceased working for wages after marriage.[66]

Middle-class women could more readily be stay-at-home mothers and wives, since their families could have a decent life relying on one income. Indeed, a number of middle-class women chose not to enter the paid workforce because of the low status of women's jobs and a reluctance to accept low-paying positions. Yet idealized gender relations also

[64] Stamiris, "The Women's Movement in Greece," 103.
[65] Stamiris, "The Women's Movement in Greece," 103.
[66] Hantzaroula, "Έμφυλες Σχέσεις και Αντιλήψεις για τη Σεξουαλικότητα," 260.

informed these women's decisions. Lena, a daughter of a middle-class Athenian family, describes her mother's status:

> We had everything we needed… a good house in Athens, travel, vacations in the countryside, even a lady who cleaned the house … everything. Mom didn't need to work. Her job was to raise and support us. It was like this in my family; dad was too proud to have his wife work.[67]

When Lena was asked to elaborate on her father's "pride," she explained, that "for him it was important what people would say… for his reputation, his name."[68] This statement suggests that for urban middle-class families, women's work outside the household could be viewed as evidence that their husbands were not good breadwinners.

However, middle-class families could have a positive attitude towards women's work in public-sector positions that were stable and highly prestigious at the time. In the postwar period, the public sector attracted a large number of female workers. In 1956, about 30 per cent of public-sector workers were women.[69] Aspasia's mother worked as a clerk for the army, and Aspasia herself also strove to find a public-sector job. Stella, another daughter of a middle-class family, became a teacher, an occupation that was increasingly feminizing at the time.[70] Women, as well as men, preferred to work in the public sector, because although these jobs did not guarantee a high income, they ensured stability and security. Paid work brought significant changes in the social status of these women. Despite the obstacles they encountered, for the first time, they had the opportunity to escape economic dependence on the family, earn their own living, and learn something about the world outside the walls of their homes.

Lower-class women were more likely to accept waged work. Although all my narrators with urban backgrounds came from middle-class families, a number of studies on work and gender in Greece attest that many women from the working class were

[67] Lena, interview by Maria Kalogeropoulou, Vancouver, 5 February 2013.

[68] Lena, interview.

[69] Efi Avdela, *Μισθωτές Σχέσεις και Φυλετικός Καταμερισμός της Εργασίας: Οι Γυνάικες Δημόσιοι Υπάλληλοι στην Ελλάδα, 1908- 1955* [Female civil servants. The sexual division of labour in the public sector, 1908-1955], *Mnimon,* vol. II (1990), 236.

[70] Efi Avdela, *Μισθωτές Σχέσεις*, 244.

employed in jobs considered suitable only for females, like domestic service, nursing, seamstressing, and hairdressing. Some women were also workers in factories, shop assistants in stores, and clerks in offices.[71] A number of these women moved from rural areas to cities in Greece throughout the period. Although women's paid work signalled a departure from the strict traditional norms of Greek rural society, this did not mean an automatic rejection of "honour and shame" culture. Historians have observed that much of the urban population in the postwar period consisted of people with small-town or rural backgrounds.[72] Although these people lived in cities, they retained strong relations with the countryside, travelling back and forth between the cities and their villages, transporting gender norms with them.[73] Still, the conditions of life were changing, providing opportunity to renegotiate gender relations.

2.5. Education and Modernizing Winds from the West

In addition to women's growing participation in the labour market, women's education and the modernization that came as a result of the encounter with Western cultures changed the gender dynamics of Greek society. In both rural and urban Greece, educational levels had risen substantially by the 1980s as more young people, male and female, enrolled in universities. The gender gap in education was also closing. In the 1960s and 1970s, women were more likely than earlier to complete their secondary education, and an increasing number were attending university. By 1968-69, there were 22,501 women enrolled in Greek universities, compared to 48,758 men.[74] University student numbers boomed after 1965 as a result of the "Education Reform" carried out by

[71] On women's work in Modern urban Greece see: Efi Avdela, *Δημόσιοι Υπάλληλοι Γένους Θηλυκού. Καταμερισμός της Εργασίας κατά Φύλα στον Δημόσιο Τομέα, 1908- 1955* [Female Civil Servants. The Sexual Division of Labour in the Public Sector, 1908-1955], (Athens: Emporiki Trapeza tis Ellados, 1990); "Contested Meanings: Protection and Resistance in Labor Inspectors' Reports in 20th Century Greece," *Gender & History* 9, no.2 (1997), 310-332, and Pothiti Hantzaroula, *The Making of Subordination: Domestic Servants in Greece 1920-1945* (PhD thesis, Florence: European University Institute, 2002).

[72] David H. Close, *Greece since 1945: Politics, Economy, and Society* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 61.

[73] Close, *Greece since 1945*, 62.

[74] Kornetis, "Student Resistance," 47-48.

the liberal Centre Party government. This program included measures that removed several constraints on the access to higher education, the most important of which was the abolition of tuition fees.[75] These reforms enabled many young people from working-class families to attend university, and an increasing number of women benefited from the measure, as poor families were less pressured to choose between their male or female children in making financial decisions about their studies. Education became a substitute for dowries, as educated young women would now be able to contribute to their future family incomes with well-paying jobs.[76] Moreover, education was a means of social advancement. Educated women were expected to get married to men who were either educated themselves or were well-to-do, and thus further enhance the status of their families. Education, and especially higher education, also changed the way that young women viewed themselves and their society.

The women among my interviewees who had earned university degrees took special pride in their educational accomplishments, and as a result, demanded more control over their lives. Both Aspasia, who held a degree in public administration, and Stella, who was already a teacher when she immigrated to Canada in 1961, were daughters of middle-class families that valued higher education. Their families viewed a university education as an investment that would help their daughters achieve higher positions in both the job and marriage markets.

> My parents were both high school graduates. They appreciated studies and invested in giving me and my sister a university education. "You have your degree. This is your dowry," my father used to say. Few people had a degree in those days and, of course, fewer women.[77]

Aspasia had lived in Athens and Stella in Thessaloniki—both cities with university campuses—so they did not need to move to attend school. Peasant families, on the other hand, rarely could afford to support their children studying in the cities. Moreover, in the case of young women, parents might also be concerned about their daughters' honour, especially if they had to go to the city alone and unsupervised. Katerina, who lived in a

[75] Kornetis, "Student Resistance," 47-48.

[76] Stamiris, "The Women's Movement," 104.

[77] Stella, interview by Maria Kalogeropoulou, Vancouver, February 6, 2013.

village, had the opportunity to complete high school, but her dream of becoming an architect was unrealized, as she was denied the opportunity to go to university. Her father rejected her request, saying, "Only prostitutes go to Athens alone."[78] According to Katerina's comments, her father feared the impact of gossip on his daughter's reputation if she chose to live away from home. He was also worried that a bad reputation could prevent her from finding a good match in marriage; meanwhile, the same family sent their son away to attend the Merchant Marine Academy without any concern about his, or the family's, reputation. Other young women also had to compromise on their ambitions; Eleni, Thalia, and Stephania, for instance, had to leave school right after they finished elementary school, since there was no secondary school in their village and their parents were unable to pay for their stay in the nearby village, where a secondary school was situated. Either a lack of resources or restrictions set by gender, therefore, clearly hindered a number of village women from completing secondary school and pursuing higher education to fulfill their career goals.

Unlike these village women, Stella and Aspasia, both middle-class interviewees, were much better equipped with tools for the future, and they both set higher standards for their careers and professional status. Women with high-school diplomas or university degrees, particularly those who came from the middle class, were far more ambitious than others, and they often pursued careers. Periods of high unemployment, however, set limitations on these women. When jobs were limited, men were more likely than women to be hired. Aspasia, for example, applied for a number of positions after graduating from university, but she was not successful in finding a job that matched her qualifications. Her decision to emigrate was partly taken with the hope that she could find a career in Canada. Stella, on the other hand, was already working as a teacher when she met her husband and migrated to Canada.

The period following the Civil War was characterized by conflicting trends. While certain factors contributed to the maintenance of traditional values in Greek society, there were others that pushed society to change. Over this period, a great number of internal migrants left their villages and found their way to the cities, "altering the cultural character

[78] Katerina, interview.

of the cities, but at the same time transferring modern ideas to the rural periphery."[79] Thus, significant shifts in social structure and culture occurred that affected both city and village women. In the cities, the flourishing and dynamic middle-class youth came in closer contact with Western customs and adopted foreign styles in entertainment and lifestyle.[80] With this invasion of Western cultural influences came a new youth culture, which challenged dominant patterns of femininity and masculinity.[81] The increasing standard of living during the 1960s made it possible for more young people, even from the working class, to enjoy the luxuries of Western civilization such as cinema, parties, and night clubs, where youth entertained themselves. Young people in Greece now adopted the dress code of young people in the Western world, listened to rock music, organized parties and field trips, and socialized with the opposite sex freely and broadly.[82] Although premarital sex and divorce were still taboo, socializing between single young men and women became increasingly acceptable in the Greek cities of the late '60s and early '70s. These new habits affected family values in a manner that created tension between young women and their parents.

> This was always a reason for disputes between us and our parents: what time we would be back home? My sister and I always wanted to stay out late. We were invited to parties and day trips. Our parents were especially concerned, and each time we came back home they used to cross-examine us: where did you go? What did you do? Who was with you? But, you know, we were young and wanted to live life to the fullest![83]

Aspasia remembers the tension between the old-fashioned morals of her parents and her desire to make her own choices about her appearance.

> I still remember my father…. Once he met me in the neighbourhood. I was in my pants. He sent me home to change and put on a skirt. Another time, I was in the balcony in a miniskirt. You know, we lived on the second floor. He started shouting anxiously: come in, come in. But this was only in the

[79] Hadjikyriacou, "Exoticising Patriarchies," 23.

[80] Katsapis*, Ihoi kai Apoihoi,* 208.

[81] Katsapis*, Ihoi kai Apoihoi,* 207-8

[82] Katsapis*, Ihoi kai Apoihoi,* 208.

[83] Aspasia, interview by Maria Kalogeropoulou, Vancouver, December 17, 2012.

> beginning. He soon got used to miniskirts and pants. People were changing.[84]

It was not only Apasia's father who changed attitudes; a whole society was transforming quickly in the 1960s and 1970s in Greek cities. This shift in values and lifestyles could be seen in Greek popular cinema of the period. While the 1950s films, in a moralistic way, overemphasized female chastity and submissiveness as requirements for finding a good husband, in the late 1960s and especially in the 1970s, girls were portrayed as being less concerned about parental restrictions and were more likely to manage their own lives and make their own decisions about relationships or marriage.[85] They also adopted more liberal lifestyles, dancing at parties, wearing jeans or miniskirts, smoking, and behaving in ways that would have shocked Greek society earlier but at that time and in an urban setting, somehow seemed more acceptable. This behaviour signalled an increasing tendency towards independence among young people, particularly young women. Although these changes began in the cities, mainly in Athens, rural Greece witnessed similar changes as a result of ongoing contact with the city and the invasion of cinema, television, and new forms of socialization in the 1970s. In Katerina's village, young people used to socialize in the cafeterias. Unlike the traditional *kafeneio,* which was a place frequented mostly by older men, the cafeterias that appeared in the early seventies in Greek villages were spaces friendlier to young people.

> You could eat pastries and souvlaki and drink coffee and lemonade and beer. But what we loved the most was the jukebox. It was magical! Just insert the coin and start dancing. We had no stereo at home. It was our only escape….[86]

Along with the cities, rural Greece was also changing, although village values and gender dynamics continued to define the lives of people in the countryside. Parents who were still concerned about their daughters' honour kept exercising control over and

[84] Aspasia, interview.

[85] Eliza- Aspasia Delveroudi, *Οι Νέοι στις Κωμωδίες του Ελληνικού Κινηματογράφου 1948–1974* [Young People in Greek Comedy 1948-1974] (Athens: Kentro Ellinikon Erevnon, 2004), 423-425.

[86] Katerina, intereview.

monitoring their public appearances. When Katerina was asked if she was free to socialize, she said:

> No, I wasn't going out alone, only with my brothers. My parents would never allow me to do so. Cafeteria was a place for men. On weekdays, you would find only young men, talking, drinking, and playing cards. At Saturday nights, these young men took their sisters and fiancées, and then it was like a big party that we all waited for.[87]

Thus, in both the cities and the countryside, some women continued to suffer constraints on their sexuality during the time period of this project. However, since this was a time of transition, the social changes that took place also affected and altered women's lives in urban and rural Greece. In particular, education, the influence of Western culture, and the active contribution of village women to the finances and wellbeing of their family were factors that empowered them and allowed them to exercise control in decisions over their lives. How did this shifting context affect decision-making about immigration?

2.6. Immigration: Sacrifice or Choice?

Whatever motives pushed Greek women to emigrate in the postwar period, these women appear to have had a say in a number of decision-making processes within their families. Assessing the degree to which women influenced family decisions to emigrate from Greece, however, is a rather complicated issue. Few Greek women immigrated to Canada without being sponsored by fathers, husbands, or fiancés.[88] The eight women I interviewed, like most Greek immigrant women, entered Canada as dependents of male immigrants, and one might therefore assume that they did not exercise any agency over the conditions that brought them to Canada. Moreover, a number of fictional works on Greek immigration to North America, or even non-academic literature based on interviews of women who immigrated earlier in the twentieth century, have overemphasized the feelings of bitterness and entrapment that young brides from Greece experienced and the

[87] Katerina, interview.

[88] 10,500 Greek women entered Canada from 1950 to 1970 as domestic workers. See Chimbos, The Greeks in Canada, 91, and Tastsoglou, "The Temptations of the New Surroundings," 2009, 81-116.

difficulty they had in adapting to their new countries.[89] These writings also present women as victims who were forced to immigrate by circumstances beyond their control—a marriage that they did not desire, for instance. However, although marriages could happen in postwar Greece without the brides' consent, this was not the norm. On the contrary, not only did young women have a say regarding their marriage partners, but their choices were sometimes quite adventurous—for example, marrying an emigrant as an opportunity to escape from a suffocating environment, in either a village or a city. For an educated woman like Aspasia or Stella, marrying an emigrant to Canada was a chance to seek a new career and improve her life in a land that gave more opportunities to women. Both made marriage decisions that were immigration decisions at the same time. Aspasia explicitly revealed that she had made that decision based on frustration about limited work opportunities at home and a desire to be independent of her parents. For some Greek women, Canada appeared to be the Promised Land, where all their dreams would come true.

Economic restriction was the main reason that pushed women out of the country. As Stephania presents it:

> What could we do in the village? There were no jobs. There was no space for us. That's why we left for Athens. When my older brother immigrated to Canada, he sponsored me and my husband to come to Vancouver. We didn't think about it much. It seemed scary to go to *xena* [a foreign land], but what could we do? My parents wanted us to stay. They wanted someone to take care of them… but how could we live in two rooms?[90]

Women with rural backgrounds longed to escape from the hardships of peasant life. Although Thalia's mother also discouraged her marriage in the *xenitia* [the foreign land], she insisted on moving, first, to unite with the man she liked, and second, because she

[89] This is the case in Sophia Florakas-Petsalis, *To Build a Dream*, *The Story of the Early Greek Immigrants in Montreal* (Montreal, 2000); and in Constance Callinicos, *American Aphrodite: Becoming Female in Greek America* (New York: Pella Publishing Company, 1990).

[90] Stephania, interview by Maria Kalogeropoulou, Vancouver, March 3, 2013. The Greek word *xena* [foreign place] was used extensively both in literature and in colloquial language to indicate a faraway, unknown place.

detested the idea of a future in farming. Thalia remembers the moment with a mixture of seriousness and amusement:

> I knew my husband because he was coming to the village every summer. He had emigrated to Germany with my brother. Then, they both applied to go to Canada. My brother was not accepted, but he, my husband, was. After some time, he sent a letter to his father, asking him to propose to me on his behalf. It was funny because his dad could not read and so he brought the letter to me to read it. I felt awkward, what a moment! … Everyone was sitting around, and I had to read that letter… but I accepted immediately. First, because I liked him, and second, because I wanted to leave. I had asked my brother to take me with him, but he didn't. I knew what my life would be like if I stayed in the village. I would work all my life in the field, and that's very hard to bear.[91]

Moreover, emigration was a solution for young women without dowries, as their chances of getting married in Greece were limited.[92] Providing a dowry was not automatically required when a woman got married to somebody who had emigrated to Canada, the United States, or elsewhere. Indeed, migrant men who went back to Greece to find a bride were less likely to ask for a dowry. Unemployment, poverty, lack of dowries, and the hardships of farming life pushed women to seek alternative futures outside the country, although many also embraced the opportunity for change.

While Despina was reluctant to follow her husband to Canada, all other interviewees shared a willingness to leave Greece, hoping that Canada would secure for them a better life. For Katerina, who came to Vancouver at the age of 21, the new country seemed to be a land of freedom. Entrapped in her small village in the mid-1970s, she dreamed of leaving, working, studying, and socializing freely. Her brother had married a Canadian girl and asked all his family to join him. While their father was reluctant to follow, their mother took the initiative and insisted on emigrating so that the family would be reunited. Reading her brother's and her Canadian sister-in-law's letters, Katerina was convinced that immigration would offer her the opportunity to escape from a suffocating village environment.

[91] Thalia, interview.

[92] Eleni Stamiris, "The Women's Movement," 103.

The stories told by my interviewees do not support assumptions that Greek women were forced to emigrate to America or Canada without their consent or that decisions on such matters were made by the male members of the family without consulting women. Although my interviewees' decisions to emigrate were made within the limited range of options that were available in a patriarchal culture, these women did make choices, and some were full participants in the decision-making process. Most of my interviewees immigrated with expectations that life would be better in Canada. Those who originated in rural Greece believed that life in a Canadian city would be easier than a life characterized by hard work in the fields. Educated women, more fully informed about life in Western cultures, believed that new opportunities awaited them in Canada. In many cases, the limited prospects available to women in Greece facilitated such decisions. Women left their homes and villages to escape oppressive families or harsh economic conditions, with their eyes on the future, enchanted by the Canadian dream. Thus, immigration decisions were among the strategies through which Greek women exercised agency and changed their lives.

Chapter 3.

Middle-Class Women: Columns of the House and Preservers of Ethnicity

In postwar Vancouver, class played a significant role in differentiating Greek women's experiences, intersecting with gender, ethnicity, and religion to inform women's perspectives on employment and community politics as well as their definitions of womanhood. While an increasing number of Greek immigrant women joined the labour force, others did not perform paid work.[1] Instead, they became stay-at-home mothers, although many among them had significant involvement in community activities. In this chapter, I focus on the experiences of middle-class women who remained outside the paid workforce, and I examine the ways in which their gender identities were affected by immigration. Class, gender ideology, and the concept of 'honour and shame' prevented these women from joining the labour market. In order to cope with oppression within the patriarchal family, alienation, and the discrimination they faced in Canada, these women found refuge in religion and community. Therefore, when recounting their stories, they stressed their central roles as mothers and volunteers in the community, creating an identity for themselves as "columns of their houses" and "preservers of Greekness and Orthodoxy." While these tropes were embedded in the nationalist and religious discourses that were dominant in Greek culture, they also created cultural spaces in which these women exercised agency upon immigration. Although we must bear in mind that these women's narratives have been constructed in part through the lens of present-day Canadian gender ideals, which value women's emancipation and empowerment, their

[1] Efrosini Gavaki, "Immigrant Women's Portraits: The Socio-Economic Profile of the Greek Canadian Women," *The Greek Review of Social Research* 110, (2003): 68.

memories also reveal that their perspectives changed significantly as a result of their earlier immigration experiences in Canada.

In this chapter, I first deal with the conflict these women experienced between their expectations before leaving Greece and the reality of their Vancouver lives within a patriarchal family. I also discuss what prevented them from working outside the home and the ways that class affected their decisions. Then I examine the various roles that middle-class women played in communal organizations and the strategies they employed to deal with patriarchy and the gender limitations they faced. Finally, I comment on how nationalist and religious perspectives continued to limit these women's choices, and I discuss boundary-crossing moments in their narratives.

3.1. Dreams Denied: Middle-Class, Stay-at-Home Women

Most Greek women who came to Canada from either rural or urban backgrounds struggled for survival and were forced to accept any job that was available in their new country. However, a small number of women, with middle-class backgrounds and better economic status, never entered the paid labour force. Their lack of English-language skills, their unfamiliarity with Canadian society, and an absence of a family network to care for their children during their working day kept them away from the workplace; we can thus see the intersection of gender, and ethnicity in limiting those women's work options. The middle-class women I interviewed were reluctant to accept jobs that did not match their qualifications or carried a low status, given that their family's high economic status allowed for a decent living on their spouses' earnings. Two of my middle-class, educated interviewees had come to Canada with specific expectations to further their education and build a career. They both conceded that they had made decisions to marry well-off Greek-Canadian men, hoping to fulfil their dreams of personal advancement in the new country. Stella, who had been a teacher in Greece, stated: "I wouldn't have come to Canada if I had to live in poverty."[2] She was eager to complete the studies required to further her career opportunities, but she was reluctant to accept a low-status job like other Greek immigrant women and even equated paid work to poverty. Others who had left a higher

[2] Stella, interview.

socio-economic status in Greece to become immigrants in Canada felt extremely disappointed by the new circumstances of their lives in Canada. Lena's family immigrated to Canada when she was twelve years old, after the family business in Athens had gone bankrupt. She described her first immigration experiences as follows:

> When you leave a village where you have been deprived of everything, you find life here enjoyable…. We arrived in Vancouver on Thursday, and on Saturday, dad said, "I will take you to meet Greek families." There, a woman asked my mom: "Do you like here?" and mom [replied], "No, I don't like it, not at all, not at all!" …My mom was fashionable and stylish. When we left Greece she had sewn new suits, bought new handbags and shoes. She was a Greek version of Jackie Kennedy and… when she came here, people were different. They could go shopping in pyjamas! When we went to the Church or to Greek houses, mom felt overdressed…. She was disappointed with Canada. "Why don't you like here?" a lady asked her. "Here I have my beautiful house, my fridge, and my washing machine." …"I had it all in Athens and I also had a servant that cleaned the house," said mom.[3]

Lena's mother, who had enjoyed an affluent lifestyle in Athens, found life in Vancouver dull and depressing. She also found it hard to bear living in an immigrant community and socializing with wage-earning families. In addition, according to her daughter, she considered home and child-caring her primary responsibility. This case suggests that some women were willing to accept the stay-at-home mother role as normal. Like elsewhere in the industrial world, and also in postwar Greece, many middle-class and upper-middle-class families were characterized by gendered understandings of men's breadwinning and women's domesticity. Those patterns persisted among first-generation, middle-class Greek immigrants in Canada and limited middle-class women's choices in participating in opportunities outside the household or Greek community.

Class-specific understandings of gender prevented most middle-class women from doing paid work. Aspasia and Stella, two of the most educated narrators, admitted that their husband's ideas about middle-class respectability did not allow them to achieve their dreams of pursuing academic studies and professional careers in Canada. Instead, each woman became a housewife and lived in isolation or under the scrutiny of her husband's kin, at least for the first years of her life in Canada. Middle-class Greek men, some with

[3] Lena, interview.

ambitions in community politics, paid special attention to building their reputations as wealthy and successful immigrants within the Greek-Canadian community. A wife's domesticity was a proof of her husband's wealth, which added to his respectability. From the perspective of middle-class Greek immigrant men, women's role was motherhood, and women's paid work jeopardized both the unity of the family and men's personal reputations as accomplished immigrants within their ethnic group.

Stella admitted that her husband opposed all her attempts to find a job or to further her studies in Vancouver. As a qualified Greek teacher, she had been offered work at the Greek language school. "Whenever I told him that I wanted to work, he would answer: 'Now we have a family, we have children!'"[4] Since the family owned a small but profitable business and her work as a teacher would not add much to the family's income, according to her husband, housework and childcare should be her priorities. Besides being concerned with his children's upbringing, Stella's husband was also concerned with his reputation. The question "what will the people say?" governed middle-class men who had a public role and were concerned with their public image.[5] Stella's husband claimed that his reputation as a well-to-do middle-class man would be at stake, and his fellow Greeks would look down on him "as if he was unable to feed his family."[6] Women's domesticity was viewed as a sign of male honour and middle-class respectability.

Furthermore, as indicated by my narrators, Greek-Canadian middle-class culture held that women should not just stay at home, but also be constantly monitored. Not only husbands but also close relatives kept an eye on newly arrived brides to secure their honour. Parents-in-law, brothers-in-law, and sisters-in-law, especially those who had been in Canada for years, had a strong say in the young immigrant couple's lives, and they could also play a role in preventing newly arrived brides from seeking paid work. Thus, in addition to struggling with alienation within Canadian society and the insecurity generated by their lack of language skills, these women also experienced oppression by their husbands and patriarchal extended families. Although those family members did not live under the same roof, they usually resided sufficiently close to the couple to exercise such

[4] Stella, interview.
[5] Stella, interview.
[6] Stella, interview.

control. Aspasia recalls that her husband's extended family was extremely critical of her and sought to control her decisions about work and studies. Her husband's brother, mother, and sisters opposed her attempts to find a job and to register at university, although she finally enrolled, against their wishes.

> Whenever I left home for a class, his sisters would pick on me. They would criticize everything, even my cooking. I was never a good cook. I didn't care to be a good one. "Do you know how to make *baclavas* [a Greek sweet]?" they asked me. No, I don't. Why should I know?[7]

In such patriarchal extended families, other women were likely to monitor the morals of the young immigrant brides and regulate their actions. They played that role because they believed that increasing independence on the part of a wife could compromise the stability of a marriage and would be the subject of gossip, putting the honour of the entire family at risk. In such a conservative extended family, Aspasia experienced more restrictions than she had expected, whereas in Greece she had at least been free to study and seek a career.

According to my narrators' information, those who had emigrated from Greece prior to World War II had carried the cultural baggage of prewar Greek society, and they had changed little since their contact with Canadian society.[8] These early immigrants had come from rural areas, and although they had achieved a higher social status since they arrived in Canada, their socializing was limited to the boundaries of the Greek ethnic group. Having experienced hostility as ethnic immigrants, they found comfort in spending time with fellow Greeks, eliminating any chance of interaction with the broader Canadian society and thus maintaining the ideals and values of prewar Greece. These families reacted with fear to the new mores that educated women from urban Greece brought with them. They functioned as enclaves of traditional values of prewar rural Greece. This attitude generated tension between older generations of Greek-Canadian families and the young, educated brides who came from an urbanizing Greece that had changed significantly since the war.[9]

[7] Aspasia, interview.

[8] Aspasia, interview.

[9] Aspasia, interview.

The gender constraints that had pressured women to stay in the household back in Greece remained dominant in middle-class families, even after they settled in Vancouver. A woman's paid work was viewed as diminishing the husband's manhood and a threat to the family's foundations. This was especially painful for recent immigrant women who had been exposed to higher education and modernization while they had lived in Greece. Those women expressed bitterness about their lost opportunities. Aspasia recalls:

> I was so jealous of the Canadian women, who went to their offices in Downtown, dressed in elegant suits. I was dying to be part of this! I felt that a whole world could be open to me, if I had a job. I imagined myself well dressed, going to my office every morning. I had the qualifications! I had the chances! It was my husband who hindered me from having a career. I still cannot forgive him.[10]

Stella felt similarly disappointed that her expectations clashed with the reality of her life in Canada. She had expected to further her studies, pursue a career, and be able to make decisions about her life. Both Stella and Aspasia had hoped that marriage and immigration would open new opportunities for them. Instead, they encountered extra restrictions and found their plans were compromised and their informal power much reduced from that which they had enjoyed in Greece. In addition, as immigrant women, they had to overcome additional barriers, such as language, in order to meet the demands required to join the paid workforce in Canada. For some, especially those who had enjoyed the freedom and economic independence that paid work had offered in Greece, adjusting to the new situation was very hard.[11]

Notwithstanding patriarchal oppression in these restrictive immigrant homes, these women developed strategies that helped them to improve their lives and empower themselves. Learning English, familiarizing themselves with Canadian society, furthering their education, and participating in community activities were some of the strategies that middle-class women deployed in order to fight against a restrictive household, to improve themselves, and, eventually, to feel creative and accomplished. Aspasia never realized her dreams of a new career, but she learned English and attended classes at the

[10] Aspasia, interview.

[11] Stella, interview.

university against the wishes of her husband and his family. Stella, on the other hand, had a distinct public role as a leader in various Greek ethnic group organizations.

3.2. Women and the Community: Preservers of Religion and Ethnicity

Although these women did not do paid work, they did not necessarily remain constrained in the home; many had considerable involvement in Greek community politics. They performed a significant amount of voluntary work as members or leaders in Greek community and charitable organizations. This involvement provided a means of challenging the gender oppression they experienced in their families. At the same time, the women's participation in community or charity organizations offered them opportunities to develop their social skills, take initiatives, and exercise influence outside the home. In that sense, by undertaking a public role, they empowered themselves.

These women made an enormous contribution to ethnic group's communal organizations. In postwar Vancouver, as elsewhere in North America, preserving Greek culture, language, and tradition was believed to be the responsibility of women.[12] They were expected to do a substantial amount of volunteer work in organizing national days and festivals in which Greek cuisine, traditional songs, dances, and folk customs were celebrated. They were also the main organizers of private events such as weddings, baptisms, and funerals. They raised funds for the community or charities, and as mothers assisted the Greek language school, an institution that relied heavily on volunteering by parents. Although they were not always welcomed to participate in leadership, a small number of women became members of the boards of the Hellenic Community and the Greek Orthodox Community of East Vancouver in the mid-1980s, and two of my interviewees became Chairs of these communities in the 1990s.

The women interviewed in this study took special pride in their active involvement in the Greek ethnic community and voluntary organizations, such as local associations

[12] Yiorgos Anagnostou, *Contours of Ethnicity: Popular Ethnography and the Making of Usable Pasts in Greek America* (Athens and Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2009), 126.

and charitable societies.[13] However, the kind of women's involvement was very much affected by class. Thalia and Despina, both working women with a rural background, put most of their efforts into charitable organizations, while Aspasia and Stella, both middle-class women, engaged in ethnic group politics as well as charity work. The ways in which these groups of women viewed their roles in ethnic Greek organisations, and the activities they pursued, were also different.

For middle-class women, involvement in communal organization added to their personal status and their family's respectability. The offices they held and the initiatives they undertook made them feel accomplished. Similarly, their husbands benefited from this participation. While a middle-class woman's paid work jeopardized her spouse's reputation within their ethnic group, a woman's active role in the Greek community added to his standing.[14] Consequently, Greek men like Stella's husband encouraged their wives to participate in voluntary work for the Greek community organizations.[15]

Whatever the reasons for those women to undertake voluntary work, community and charity organizations created a public space where these women could feel accomplished. They not only took special pride in their advancement to high offices in the ethnic group organizations, but also felt responsible for the survival of the Greek culture in Vancouver. In our interview, Stella gave a detailed account of her public appearances and speeches in national events, and she presented clippings from newspapers and photographs of herself in memorable celebrations. Apart from being a central figure in the leadership of the Hellenic community of Vancouver, she also served in the Macedonian Association, the Daughters of Penelope, and the Greek School Committee.

> I am a political person! I was always engaged in politics.... I felt that because I was educated, I had extra obligation to serve the Greek culture and keep Greekness alive among the Greeks of Vancouver. I don't know who can do it today… maybe the teachers. But they need to do more things.

[13] Local associations were groups formed by immigrants originating from the same area in Greece.

[14] "Hellenic community" refers to the older community, established in 1927. The Hellenic Community Centre is situated in West Vancouver, next to Saint George Church. A second community, known as the Greek Community of East Vancouver, was established in 1978 in East Vancouver. Both Greek communities are affiliated with an Orthodox Church and were initiated as parishes.

[15] Stella, interview.

> It is not like teaching Greek language. It is like teaching a whole culture. I became a member of the Hellenic community board because I was convinced that I could make a difference and transform the community from a group of tavern men into a cultural centre.

Similarly, Aspasia was proud of her volunteering as a teacher of folkdance in Greek school. Like Stella, she used the word 'serve' in order to emphasize that she viewed volunteering for the Greek community as a mission for the survival of Greekness.

> I was always serving the Greek Orthodox way of life, especially in Greek school. I did a lot for Greek school. This was the only way to keep the spirit up for immigrants and teach young children who they really are. After all, we have a great history. Our children should learn about the glorious past.

Stella and Aspasia claimed the roles of educator and cultural leader of the ethnic group for themselves. Evangelia Tastsoglou, studying Greek immigrant women in Toronto, has argued that social class and education affected the process of social construction of ethnicity.[16] While the ethnic identification of working-class women was "more pragmatic and daily constructed in the family, their workplace or in church and the festivals of Greek community, … educated middle-class women were more likely to claim cultural hegemony and leadership in the process of building community."[17] These women had a "much greater access to the symbolic universe of the Greek culture" and, like Aspasia, could draw from the "great history" or "glorious past" of Greece.[18] They were therefore challenging perceptions of Greek women's subordination and passivity.

As in other cities of Canada, Greek women in postwar Vancouver became the heart of charitable organizations and did voluntary work to relieve the poor, the sick, and the needy.[19] Charitable organizations were usually organized around the Orthodox Church and were led exclusively by women, although the priest was the spiritual leader. Their primary aim was to assist Greek families that had newly arrived in Canada, and they also

[16] Tastsoglou, "Immigrant Women and the Social Construction of Ethnicity," 243.

[17] Tastsoglou, "Immigrant Women and the Social Construction of Ethnicity," 245.

[18] Tastsoglou, "Immigrant Women and the Social Construction of Ethnicity,"244, and Aspasia, interview.

[19] Eleoussa Polyzoi, "Greek Immigrant Women from Asia Minor in Prewar Toronto: the Formative Years," in Burnet, *Looking into My Sister's Eyes,* 115.

offered assistance to the needy outside the Greek population. The organizations attracted a large number of women who offered their time, considering this service to be their Christian duty. The establishment of charitable organizations within the Hellenic communities in prewar Canada had served to "encourage community solidarity in the midst of a strange and often threatening Anglo-conformist environment, and to help also mitigate the harshness of entry into Canadian city life for Greek immigrants."[20] Similarly, during the postwar period, charitable organizations aimed to relieve the poor, the sick, and the disadvantaged and eventually to provide immigrants with a sense of security so that their feelings of alienation would be eased.

The Orthodox faith and the Orthodox Church played a significant role in how women defined their gender and ethic identities. Their faith and their relationship to the Church provided security and consolation to those who felt lonely and dislocated. The Church brought them together and eased their feelings of estrangement. Indeed, the nurturing mother has long been a central figure in Orthodox discourses, which stress the emotional and caring aspects of female nature, thus ascribing charity as one of the main duties of a pious woman. In Greek culture, women were associated with giving and assisting others. However, the way that middle-class narrators viewed their charitable responsibilities differed significantly from rural women's perspective.

While middle-class women had the luxury of time to be involved in community and charitable work, however, it was not their exclusive preserve. Thalia and Despina, both working women with a rural background, had been involved in charitable activity before they left Greece. Both have a strong faith in the Church and see charity as their religious duty. After they had raised their children and retired, they also played a more active role in the politics of the community, serving as members of the board of the trustees for the Hellenic Community. These women were familiar with the idea that people needed to work together and help each other. Thalia, recalls:

> Our home was always open to those who needed help. My mother would always reserve some food for the poor, and she would go even far away during the night to help the sick co-villagers. My grandma was the midwife

[20] Polyzoi, "Greek Immigrant Women," 115.

> and the nurse of the village. She had no special training, but that's how things were then. Helping others was part of a woman's job.[21]

Peasant Greek women were accustomed to offering help and assisting others outside the family. Their role as givers was dictated both by the way peasant societies were organized and by the influences of the Orthodox Church. Rural societies lacked any social services that would provide assistance to those in need. Thus, in addition to their familial duties, women had to take care of sick and poor people who had no family, as well as labourers who worked in their fields, and they would also offer help with social events such as weddings, baptisms, and other celebrations. They would lament the dead, prepare everything for funerals, and offer consolation to mourning families. They would provide the community with a variety of services, and the act of giving thus became an integral part of their identity.

Peasant women were more willing to offer assistance to the needy in a more local setting of the neighbourhood or a circle of relatives and acquaintances. Thalia's charitable engagement, however, moved beyond local networks, when she decided to take the initiative to feed the homeless of Vancouver. She then found support within her circle of personal acquaintances.

> We started to make sandwiches for the homeless of Vancouver. We went to the shelters and gave them out. Then, a social worker advised to raise funds and give them to their organization to buy food for those people, so that they could have a proper meal. So we did, for two, three years.[22]

Thus, Thalia took action out of pure compassion for the poor and the needy. Her action was very much dictated by her Christian faith. Later, she became involved in the Philoptohos society.

Yet middle-class women had an additional incentive for engaging with the community work. For them, charity was also a matter of politics, since their public role in Greek ethnic organizations was a marker of respectability that bolstered individual and family reputations. Indeed, a strong awareness of their social status deterred some of

[21] Thalia, interview.

[22] Thalia, interview.

them from getting involved in menial work such as preparing luncheons and bake sales in order to raise funds. When asked if she had helped with cooking and cleaning at Greek day festivals, Aspasia admitted that she had not participated in such duties. “No,” she said, “I am not good at that. I preferred to organize the dance performances.”[23] Being confident in their abilities, these women were willing to undertake managerial work whereby they were required to make decisions and play a leading role. Moreover, they were more likely to be active and to assume leadership within charitable or ethnic organizations.

One prominent philanthropic organization was Philoptohos, which was established in the 1930s as a women’s auxiliary to the Church and operated in Canada under the Archbishop of Toronto.[24] As an organization based exclusively on female membership, its main purpose was to assist the Church by raising funds through bazaars, cake teas, dances, and picnics. Despina and Thalia, who both have served as chair of Philoptohos in Vancouver, stressed that they viewed their participation as a moral obligation dictated by their Orthodox faith. They raised money for newcomers from Greece, sponsored school hot lunches for disadvantaged children in East Vancouver, and provided food for the homeless. Since Philoptohos acted as an auxiliary of the Church, it attracted a conservative membership. Although Despina and Thalia had paid jobs, most working women were not likely to have time for activities organized by Philoptohos. Moreover, some working-class women perceived Philoptohos as a “rich ladies association.”[25] Indeed, in 1972 Vancouver, there were 80 active members of Philoptohos, and the 12-member council of the organization was made up of upper-middle-class women.[26]

Notwithstanding its charitable function, Philoptohos became the vehicle that pushed some women upwards in the Hellenic community hierarchy. Thalia, who served as board member in the 1990s, initiated her public involvement in the community as a

[23] Aspasia, interview.
[24] Yianna Lambrou, “The Greek Community,” 119.
[25] Katerina, interview.
[26] Lambrou, “The Greek Community,” 120.

member and official of Philoptohos.[27] The Philoptohos attachment to the Church, however, alienated educated women that I interviewed. As Aspasia discussed:

> I have never been in Philoptohos. They are just the servants of the priest. They do whatever the priest will order them. I was only involved in the community. You know how religious and faithful I am, and I also have a friendly relationship with the Father, but I can't stand for whatever the priest asks.[28]

Women like Aspasia were more likely to be attracted to non-religious organizations whose objectives centred on promoting culture and education. She and Stella were active in the Daughters of Penelope, a non-sectarian auxiliary of the Order of Ahepa, which stressed the importance of classic Greek heritage and worked for the promotion of education, as did all Ahepa organizations.[29] The Order of Ahepa, a secular organization that "aimed to promote the ideals of Hellenism, democracy, citizenship and education," appealed to immigrants who wanted to succeed in Canada and had a positive attitude towards integration into Canadian society.[30] At the same time, it was very much a class-based organization. As Lambrou puts it:

> Ahepa and its auxiliaries are definitely middle-class. Ahepa is an organ for upward mobility for established business people, men with political aspirations, and unemployed bourgeois women. Its emphasis on assimilation into Canadian society attracts mainly individuals who "want to make it" or are seeking prestige or recognitions as leaders.[31]

Like all Ahepa organizations, the Daughters of Penelope were concerned with the preservation of aspects of Greek heritage that would not discourage the incorporation of Greeks into Canadian society, and they distanced themselves from religious matters. As an upper- and middle-class organization, the group was not inclusive. Aspasia reported

[27] Thalia, interview.

[28] Aspasia, interview.

[29] The Order of Ahepa (American Hellenic Educational Progressive Association) was founded in Atlanta, Georgia, in 1922 to combat discrimination against Greek Americans. The founding fathers of Ahepa wanted an organization that would promote the ideals of Hellenism, education, philanthropy, civic responsibility, and family and individual excellence. Eventually, Ahepa aimed to assist Greek immigrants to progess and adapt in the host society. The Order of Ahepa has three auxiliaries: the Daughters of Penelope for senior women, the Sons of Pericles for young men, and the Maids of Athena for young women.

[30] Lambrou, "The Greek Community," 122.

[31] Lambrou, "The Greek Community," 126.

that the members of the Daughters were to participate in various gatherings in formal dress, implying that working women who could not conform to those requirements were excluded.

Stella, also active in the Daughters of Penelope, felt that, as a leader of the Hellenic community, she had to distance herself from the Church and its auxiliary organizations. Even though she was pious and believed that the Church was important to keep Greeks together, she did not want to see the clergy involved in community politics.

> I believe in God and I raised my children as Christians. Religion makes them more respectful. But faith and politics is a different thing. Give back to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's.[32]

Here, Stella paraphrased from the New Testament to emphasize the idea that politics and religion should be separated. Women like her were more likely to participate in a secular organization or the Hellenic community than in charitable organizations that maintained strong bonds with the Church.

Nonetheless, participation in the Greek ethnic organizations or charities brought many women into the public sphere from which they had otherwise been excluded. They could escape from home and socialize in a well-known, safe environment where they felt free, useful, and accomplished. Women embraced communal activities, which gave them the opportunity to come together with other women, share their concerns and fears, and therefore achieve self-empowerment. The Hellenic community offered them a useful network of support. Moreover, community and charitable activities helped middle-class women to channel their aspirations to have a public role. Through participating in such activities they took initiatives, displayed responsibility, and developed a range of abilities and leadership experience.

The Hellenic community, however, remained the terrain of middle-class and affluent immigrants. While a large number of Greeks participated in festivals organized by the Hellenic community and held social events such as weddings and baptisms in the community hall, the Hellenic Community of Vancouver was not representative of all the

[32] Stella, interview.

Greeks of the city. In 1972, there were 6,500 individuals of Greek origin in Vancouver. Of that total, only 800 were members of the Hellenic community, and only 200 were active.[33] The majority became members out of necessity; they would pay their membership when they needed a religious service, such as a baptism or wedding, and would not renew it. Most working-class Greeks were more concerned with meeting their primary needs than with the communal organizations. As they had low-income occupations and worked long hours, they had no free time for communal affairs.[34] Generally, many "view[ed] the *kinotis* [Hellenic community] as monopolized by the wealthier and the older immigrants, allowing little room for newcomers."[35] Like working-class men, Greek women who worked for wages were less likely to be active in the Greek community organizations.

3.3. The "Column of the House," "Distinct and Equal Roles," and Boundary Crossings

Like other oral historians, I draw attention to the relationship between individual memories and collective myths. Oral history has shed light on how people compose their memories in order to "fit with what is publicly acceptable" and how they align their past with collective expectations.[36] The knowledge of those expectations, along with their present status, also had an impact on how my narrators retold past experiences. As mothers, grandmothers, and members of Greek ethnic group organizations, they might have felt pressure to align their stories with a dominant ethnic narrative requiring respectable women to be dedicated to their families and closely attached to the ethnic culture. Middle-class culture valued female domesticity and idealized motherhood. Indeed, the respectability of the immigrant family depended upon mothers, who were considered to have the main responsibility for the stability and the unity of the family.

In telling their stories, Greek immigrant middle-class women insisted that they served as the "column of their house," a Greek expression better translated in English as "pillar of the family." Characteristically, Lena, a middle-class daughter of immigrants whose

[33] Lambrou, "The Greek Community," 92.
[34] Lambrou, "The Greek Community," 97.
[35] Lambrou, "The Greek Community," 98.
[36] Thomson, "Anzac Memories," 301.

family came to Canada when she was twelve, talked extensively about the emblematic image of her deceased mother. Her perspective gives us a glimpse inside a middle-class Greek household and provides insight into the idea of the mother as "column of the house":

> Our mom was there to assist us in our everyday life. She was our mom! Whenever we needed her assistance, she was there 24/7… the hardest job! Our Canadian friends were jealous of Greek families. We went back from school, and the home smelled delicious, freshly cooked food! Our friends always asked to come over. "May I come over today? What does your mother have for supper?" Greek mothers were very close to their children and kept the family united.[37]

What Lena sketches here is a loving and affectionate mother who was there to support her children in everyday life. She remembers the good food and the safety she experienced as a child, knowing that a mother was present in the home to offer help and affection. Furthermore, Lena went beyond the affectionate mother image and portrayed her mother as a strong matriarch who was also manager of the household finances:

> Dad would bring the money home. It was mom in charge of home and family economic decisions. She was the investor! My parents left a quite decent property, thanks to my mom's wise home economics management. She had an agreement with dad. "I will stay home, but you will give me my cheque every two weeks." She was such a strong woman; the column of the house! "Women must be strong," she used to say…"and if they are, they will also make their daughters strong. Men might bring tons of money home, but it's a woman's job to take care of them and to manage the home properly."[38]

While Lena stressed her mother's role as a manager of home finances, Stella particularly emphasized her own contribution to parenting, stressing at the same time the "distinct but equal roles" that she and her husband had at home.

> We [she and her husband] had definitely distinct roles, but we were equal in making decisions about the family. He was working all the time. I was the one who was always there to support the family and give our children a good upbringing. I was especially concerned with their education. I wanted them to study and have a career and be proud of being Greeks, and I think I did it.[39]

[37] Lena, interview.

[38] Lena, interview.

[39] Stella, interview.

Similarly, Aspasia used the "column of the house" trope to highlight the significance of her role as mother and housewife in her household. I was told that mothers' roles were pivotal to the stability and welfare of the immigrant family. Their support and strength helped family members to face the innumerable challenges they encountered as immigrants. They maintained family unity, fostering strong bonds among its members, and they encouraged the preservation of Greek customs and language as a source of continuity for the dislocated family.

However, while conducting the interviews, I noticed some tensions in women's narratives. Aspasia, for example, emphasized that she "had kept the family united" and would never socialize with divorced women, even though she would later reveal that she had wanted to leave her own marriage.[40] Stella claimed that she and her husband had performed "equal, though distinct roles" in the family, but she also admitted that her husband had hindered her from furthering her studies and having a career because he had wanted her to stay in the home.[41] Lena claimed that her mother had been a strong woman who had ruled the house, but she also mentioned that her mother had never learned English, having had no time to do so. In order to understand those moments when the narrative is disrupted, I relied on Michelle Mouton and Helena Pohlandt-McCormick's writing on boundary crossings in oral narratives. While traditional historians tend to see these moments as lapses and distractions, Mouton and Pohlandt-McCormick urge us to take them seriously and not downplay their significance in oral history. The authors define boundary crossing as those moments when "the normal narrative [breaks] down, a boundary [is] crossed and the narrative rupture[s] into something atypical."[42] These are exceptional moments, when the narrators are no longer controlling their memories to align them with the collective memory or the historian's desire to use the evidence in order to support her initial assumptions. Being sensitive and receptive to boundary crossings enables us to gain insight into not only lived experiences of the individual, beyond any attempt at conforming to dominant narratives, but also how that experience is linked to the

[40] Aspasia, interview.

[41] Stella, interview.

[42] Mouton and Pohlandt-McCormick, "Boundary Crossings," 41.

changing collective memory. Boundary crossings thus demonstrate how personal experience and collective memory can also interact to create new narratives.

Intrigued by these thoughts, I arranged a second meeting with Aspasia in order to clarify what keeping the family "united" meant to her. This time, the meeting was not recorded, as Aspasia was concerned about her public image. "I don't want those words ever to reach my daughters," she said, and this was to be respected. In this second discussion, she felt free to talk about how suffocated she had felt in her marriage and her desire to seek a divorce:

> I called my parents in Athens and I told them that I was going back to Greece. My father told me that "the door was closed" for me and I had to stay with my husband. We were a moral, Christian family and, after all, how could I feed my children?[43]

Earlier, Aspasia had mentioned that she would never "hang out with a divorced woman."[44] Aspasia's interview reveals how the gender ideals of the time, along with religious morality and material limitations, created stress in women's private lives. Both the expectation that a woman would remain married for life and the stigmatization of divorce were embedded in Greek culture of the time. Moreover, Aspasia's ideas about morality were moulded by her Christian faith and, in our first interview, irrefutable. Yet she had obviously considered this option for herself.

Similarly, when I asked Aspasia if she knew any divorced first-generation immigrant women, she answered adamantly that there were no divorces among those women.[45] However, on the very same day, sitting around the coffee table, she remembered two or three examples of divorced Greek women. Intrigued by the straightforwardness and the security with which she had initially answered my question, I started wondering if, rather than a failing of memory, this was also a boundary crossing. Since a woman's respectability was defined by the stability of her family, these divorces did not fit the collective memory of the Greek ethnic group. The collective memory holds that first-generation immigrant Greek women were dedicated to their families, and

[43] Aspasia, interview.
[44] Aspasia, interview.
[45] Aspasia, interview.

therefore it was unlikely for them to break conjugal bonds. Aspasia's memories reflect the priority given to the maintenance of the marital bond as a Christian and moral duty. She had come to Canada with the promise of an affluent life and dreams of having a career. Instead, she was confined to a patriarchal household, always monitored by her husband's family. Recounting her past, she had initially drawn upon the narrative of the "column of the house," which permitted her to bear her oppression by aligning her narrative with the collective story of middle-class respectability. She had also felt comforted to know that she had given her daughters a united family, and thus she had silenced her frustration about her private life in her initial interview, considering it a personal matter. In her second narrative, however, she crossed the boundary of that dominant understanding of Greek femininity.

In another example of boundary crossing, Stella embraced the narrative of the mother-mentor of her children and preserver of ethnicity in the community, but she also claimed that she and her husband had "distinct but equal roles." One could easily question the equality of the roles within her marriage, as her dreams to study and have a career were suppressed by what she described as her husband's "old-time morals."[46] Stella embraced involvement in community politics as a liberating opportunity that would give meaning to her life. She took pride in having organized cultural activities and having occupied the higher offices in the Hellenic community of Vancouver. She was especially proud of having been the central lecturer in a number of events held in the Hellenic community and having organized Greek heritage nights along with the Vancouver School District in schools. When I arrived at her home, she was waiting for me with a folder filled with newspaper clippings. Stella had cut out and kept articles referring to all her memorable public appearances and the offices she had held. In our discussion, Stella particularly stressed her public achievements, avoiding talk of her private life. Her emphasis on her role of preserver of culture was a response to the alienation she felt as an educated woman otherwise confined to the household and supported her claim to making contributions that were different from but equivalent to her husband's.

Similarly, without questioning the tremendous contribution that her mother made to her family's well-being, Lena's narrative of an iconic matriarch invites some re-

[46] Stella, interview.

examination. Lena's perspective is that of a fond daughter. She claimed that her mother had been a strong woman but said nothing about her mother's concerns, anxieties, loneliness, and the isolation she possibly experienced as a dislocated immigrant woman. She also said nothing about her mother's possible embarrassment about her lack of English-language skills, but she did mention her mother's reliance on her daughters' translations for everyday communication with English-speaking people. "How could she do that [learn a new language] with the three of us to take care of?" Lena asked. "She had no time for English courses."[47] This final comment was possibly another moment of boundary crossing, when Lena veered away from the script about strong mothers who ruled the home in the Greek community of Vancouver.

Does Lena's memory reveal the real balance of power in her middle-class household or had it been idealized retrospectively? In order to deal with this dilemma, I had go back to oral history theory and rethink how memory works. Oral historians have discussed memory as fluid: "not a passive depository of facts, but an active process of creation of meanings."[48] As the members of the Personal Narrative Group have argued, "When people talk about their lives, people lie sometimes, forget a little, exaggerate, become confused, get things wrong. Yet they are revealing truths."[49] Memory can also be altered by events that happened later or by one's current attitude and emotions. Thus, I kept pondering if Lena's narrative was influenced by her love for her deceased mother and her nostalgia for her childhood. On the other hand, memory is often influenced by social practices and discourses. Does Lena's attempt to rescue the image of a strong mother tell us something about Lena herself? As a modern woman with a successful career and straightforward ideas about women's emancipation, she may have been projecting the image of a powerful matriarch back on her mother's life, silencing any gender oppression her mother might have faced. Consequently, through the narrative of the "column of the house," her mother's role came to be aligned with Lena's current ideas about female empowerment.

[47] Lena, interview.

[48] Portelli, "What Makes Oral History Different," 69.

[49] Personal Narratives Group, "Truths," in *Interpreting Women's Lives: Feminist Theory and Personal Narratives*, eds. Personal Narratives Group (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 261.

While listening to the women's stories and discussing their perspectives, I kept wondering how and when they had come to understand these narratives about Greek womanhood. Was the idea that women are central in a household already rooted in their cultural consciousness before they came to Canada, or it was formed later, after they had lived in Vancouver for a while? While the existence of dominant discourses about women and domesticity might have inculcated women with an awareness of their responsibility as mothers and housekeepers even before emigration, it is quite possible that asking women to think about and discuss their role as immigrant women might have pushed them to filter their thoughts through current feminist ideas about women's roles. Seeking to present themselves as more empowered, they may have exaggerated their household authority by applying the trope of the female matriarch.

Furthermore, trying to trace change and continuity in gender roles, I was especially interested in how these women raised their daughters and sons and whether their childrearing transcended the gender ideals of their times. Thus, I asked questions such as, "Did you treat your son and daughter equally?" or "Was your daughter allowed to make her own choices?" I was aware that these women had faced restrictions in patriarchal families, and I wanted to know in particular whether or not they had raised their daughters with similar constraints. All the informants stated that they had raised both girls and boys equally, but these memories were inadvertently challenged by the women themselves. Both Stella and Aspasia admitted that they had been concerned with their daughters' socializing when they were still unmarried and they had monitored their daughters' activities when they were outside the home. Aspasia similarly revealed that she and her husband tried to prevent their daughter from marrying her non-Greek and non-religious fiancé. Thus, while they presented themselves as modern and progressive, my narrators sometimes perpetuated older gender norms in their childrearing practices.

In this chapter I explored the lives and experiences of Greek middle-class women who immigrated to Canada from 1954 to 1976, the relations of power in their households, and how they attempted to deal with patriarchy. Both gender and class limited their choices in Canada. These women embraced Greek community involvement as liberating and were especially proud of having occupied positions within community and charitable organizations. Although they were influenced by nationalist and religious discourses that

assigned women the roles of modest mothers, nurturers, and preservers of tradition, these women fought against limitations of their choices and struggled to improve their lives. In recounting their lives, my interviewees created their stories by stressing some aspects while silencing others. By emphasizing their roles as mothers and supporters of their families and their public roles in the ethnic group organizations, they ascribed certain meanings to their experiences and mitigated the tension they felt between their expectations and the reality of their lives. Indeed, the Greek middle-class women I interviewed contributed extensively to family well-being and their children's upbringing, and they worked hard to preserve Greek culture. Though they remained subordinate to masculine power, they challenged gender roles by assuming a leading role in the family and the community. Their identities were largely defined by the cultural assumptions of the household; yet they were also changed by the circumstances they faced upon immigration to postwar Vancouver. Nationalist and religious discourses worked to maintain the image of modest mothers and submissive housewives, but involvement in communal politics created opportunities for women to redefine their womanhood. While reaffirming their roles as mothers, these women also negotiated a new identity as preservers of their ethnic group's values and strong supporters of their families.

Chapter 4.

Transforming Identities: Greek Immigrant Working-class Women's Experiences

Like middle-class Greek women, working-class women were profoundly affected by immigration to Canada. The new experiences of immigration and work, which were shaped by gender, ethnicity, and class, altered their perspectives and redefined understandings of their womanhood. Retelling her story, one of the women likened it to an odyssey, underlining the length and the transforming power of her life journey.[1] In order to search for changes and continuities in how they experienced their identities, one has to ask what it meant to be a woman in rural Greece and how different it was to be an immigrant working woman in postwar Vancouver. Most of my narrators had contributed to their families' livelihoods back in Greece, so their sense of responsibility for their families' wellbeing was not new to them. Having a permanent paid job, however, was a rather new experience. All the narrators came from villages where their families functioned as units of production, so they were used to working in the family's fields or even for wages at the busy times of the year in order to bring extra cash to household incomes. This chapter explores the continuities and shifts in these women's lives and argues that their identities were redefined in the Canadian context. While the primary "breadwinner" was defined as masculine both in Greece and in postwar Canada, these women also became full-time breadwinners and shared the responsibility of wage-earning equally with their spouses. These new roles empowered them and changed their views, although gender limitations were still a compelling force in their lives.

Men's and women's different roles, not only in the family and the community but also in workplaces, were structured by gender. Like Greek men, Greek immigrant women encountered poverty, discrimination, and loneliness as they struggled to build their lives

[1] Despina, interview.

in the new country. Their reactions to these challenges were shaped by their understandings of their identities as women. The working experiences altered the women's self-perception, enhanced their expectations, and, finally, empowered them within the Greek immigrant family.

Research on the working experiences of Greek immigrant women in Canada is limited.[2] Their experiences are either understudied or appear within the context of a broader discussion of Greek-Canadian women that mutes class differences. Although it cannot reach broad conclusions, the chapter aims to start filling the gap by studying the specific experiences of the working women I interviewed and reflecting on how these working experiences altered both the women's identities and the gender relations within their families. After I examine their first encounters with Canada and the pressing issues they faced, such as learning a new language and finding housing, I deal with the kind of jobs Greek women held in Vancouver in the study period, the ways in which they were recruited, and the networks they used in order to move from job to job and to improve their financial position. Second, I discuss the conditions they encountered in the workplace and their relationships with colleagues and supervisors. I raise questions about gender inequity in income and promotion and the discrimination they faced as ethnic women. I examine how women dealt with tremendous workloads, struggling to combine housework and paid work, and how they managed multiple roles as workers, mothers, wives, and volunteers in the Hellenic community. Further, I discuss these women's involvement in the ethnic group and religious activities and the social construction of their ethnic identity. I then explore questions about how the women perceived themselves as workers and immigrants and the meanings they attached to their work. Finally, I discuss how paid work affected the power balance between men and women in Greek working-class immigrant families.

[2] Joan M. Anderson's and M. Judith Lynam's "The Meaning of Work for Immigrant Women in the Lower Echelons of the Canadian Labour Force" in *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 19, no. 2 (1987): 67-90, is an exception. The article examines the experiences of Indo-Canadian and Greek women employed in the lower echelons of the Canadian labour force. The author interviewed Greek and Indian women who came to Canada from the 1950s to the 1970s. See also Mina, "Taming and Training," 514-539.

4.1. Toward the Unknown

Notwithstanding most women's initially positive attitude toward immigration, the transition to the new country was not always smooth. All the women who informed this thesis agreed that immigration was a turning point in their lives, although they had varying feelings about the moment. Most talked about the excitement over the new turns that they had expected their lives to take, but they also remembered fear of the unknown. Since their experience of travelling had been limited, the crossing of the ocean was a huge step and carried a substantial emotional burden.

Being young and travelling alone added more anxiety to the uncertainty that many women felt. "Am I doing the right thing? Will I ever come back?" Despina was wondering in the long day travelling from her village to Vancouver.[3] Despina, who had arrived in Halifax in 1954, recalled the loneliness and ambiguity she felt about immigrating. She had travelled with her baby daughter to meet her husband, who had arrived in Canada a year earlier. Since Despina was very young, inexperienced, and unwilling to leave the safety of her home, she had felt very insecure about the voyage from the very first moment. Contact with the new country increased Despina's fear. To her, the new land was intimidating, full of various hazards.

> I kept saying to myself, "Where are you going? You know nobody in this country." When I looked out of the train and saw the wooden houses, I remembered the movies with Indians and cowboys that I had watched inside the ship, and I was so scared, as if Indians would show up and kill us. I didn't even think of leaving the wagon and wandering around the train stations.[4]

Despina's terror over the unknown reflected in part her lack of sophistication. Moreover, having been physically separated from her husband for more than a year, she felt alienated from him, and she trembled about how he would receive her.

> When we finally met at Winnipeg, he was so anxious that he didn't even talk to me. He picked up the baby's basket and headed for home. He didn't

[3] Despina, inrterview.

[4] Despina, interview.

> even see what was in the basket. “Oh my God,” I said, “maybe he thinks that the baby is not his.”[5]

However, the most intimidating factor for Despina, as for other Greek immigrant women, was her lack of competence in English. Despina admitted,

> I couldn’t say a single word. Before I left Athens, I had learned to say “thank you very much” and “good morning,” but it was useless. How I would ask for hot water, for the baby’s milk? I had no idea. When I was on the train, I used the hot water from the washroom taps, until a Greek man took me to the kitchen and instructed me how to ask for hot water in English. [6]

Most of the women acknowledged that one of the most distressing aspects of coming to Canada was the language barrier. Stephania described the train ride from Halifax to Vancouver as one of the most pathetic experiences of her life. “We didn’t know how to order food. The only words we knew were eggs and soup. So we kept eating eggs day after day.”[7] Although she was excited to take the challenge of travelling so far away, she admitted that she and her husband might not have come if they had known “how hard their lives would have been with no knowledge of English.”[8]

4.2. First Encounters in Vancouver

The fear of the unknown, the loss of family and friends, the sudden deterioration in their living conditions, and the stress over finding a home and a job caused significant anxiety for new immigrant women. Those women who had children and had to settle down as quickly as possible remembered the period as especially stressful. The presence of family members or relatives who had come to Canada earlier was comforting, as the newcomers learned from those who had settled earlier. Sharing houses helped the newly-arrived to deal with the pressing economic problems and the cultural shock they experienced after their arrival. Earlier immigrants, who had faced the same challenges, were able to offer assistance and important information that helped new immigrant women to adjust faster. The women I interviewed were able to find support in such households.

[5] Despina, interview.
[6] Despina, interview.
[7] Stefania, interview.
[8] Stefania, interview.

They often found jobs through kinship networks and were able to get some help with childcare, support that could mitigate the anxiety that immigration had caused.

For Thalia, who was welcomed by her fiancé, housing was not an issue as he had already rented a house. She remembered the period as generally a happy one, aside from her homesickness and the loneliness she felt because of the absence of her family members from her wedding. Eleni and Katerina were both received by members of their immediate families. Eleni spent the first months after arrival at her brother's home and was amazed to realize that all the physical hardships she had suffered in her village were left behind. She and her family now lived in a warm house; she did not need to walk to a well to fetch water, weave the family's clothes, or make everything from scratch. The fridge, the washer, and the warm water promised a comfortable life. Similarly, Katerina, her parents, and her younger brother were accepted into the home of her older brother, who had married a Canadian woman and sponsored his family to join him in Canada. Soon, they rented their own big, comfortable house, and she started enjoying the Canadian way of life that she had imagined before she had left her Greek village. In Katerina's imagination, Canada had represented the land of freedom and personal potential. She was excited to meet new people and to have new experiences. She recalls her first encounters of Vancouver vividly:

> I was amazed! I found the city life much better than what I had expected. My father became a different person when we came in Canada. In Greece, he wouldn't let me out alone. Here, I was free. School, work, friends, parties, all. I went to school for eight months. Even my mom went to school. She was such a stubborn woman! "If I want to have a good life I get to know English," she said…. But the most help I got was from my Canadian sister-in-law. She was a nice girl. She taught me how to get dressed, to dance, to talk. She and her family made [it] all easier.[9]

Thus, Katerina received valuable assistance from her brother and his Canadian wife that helped her to adjust quickly to the new country. Canada had given her the opportunity to taste what she had dreamt of, before her departure from Greece: freedom to work and socialize freely, and a chance to make decisions over her life. Her strict father, who had always been so concerned about his daughter's honour, became more flexible after he

[9] Katerina, interview.

arrived in Canada.[10] Indeed, no longer pressured by the village culture, he consented to her taking classes, working as a server in a Greek tavern, and going to parties and dances.

Thalia, Eleni, and Katerina remembered this period as the beginning of a new, promising stage in their lives. As they had hoped before they left Greece, Canada appeared to give opportunities and a better life. Although they spent the first months in crowded houses, they received assistance and support from their kinship networks. However, for others, this first period was especially distressing. Living with other relatives could generate problems; tensions often flared and quarrels broke out among families that had to cohabitate. Despina recollects her first home in Winnipeg, where she spent her first year and a half in Canada:

> It was a tiny apartment that we shared with my brother-in-law's family: we, the couple, the baby, his brother [her husband's brother], and his sister-in-law. Instead of a kitchen there was a closet with a cooker inside. There was no sink. We had to wash the dishes in a bathroom that we shared with another family. All three families shared a bathroom.… Poverty. We had no money. It was such a hard, hard life. [My husband] worked for $1.05 an hour. Not much. His brother and his wife were better off. They had no children. She could work. I couldn't because of the baby.… When my dad [who lived in the US] came to visit, he found us living in misery! My husband had made a little bed with planks for the baby.… My sister-in-law played the boss.… She was such a bossy woman! She didn't even let me touch her frying pan or a fork…. There was so much fighting all the time.[11]

Living with her in-laws was an enormous source of anxiety that added to the problems Despina was facing as a newly-arrived immigrant. When she came to Vancouver, her anxiety over living arrangements remained. As she reports, the lack of houses available for rent was a distressing problem. She remembers the unwillingness of Vancouver homeowners to accept families with small children:

> From 1955 to 1963, we changed eleven houses. Nobody wanted a family with little kids as tenants. It was such a headache to send children early to bed, so that they did not make noise and disturb the landlords. When we finally bought our house, I said: "Despina, only dead I will leave this house!"[12]

[10] Katerina, interview.

[11] Despina, interview.

[12] Despina, interview.

Likewise, Stephania, her husband, and her little daughter had a hard time living for more than six months in her brother's unfinished basement. She recalls:

> The basement was used for hanging the laundry to dry. Anytime I wanted warm water for my baby's milk, I had to walk under the laundry to go to a small, improvised kitchen. It was cold and wet.[13]

For most, the tensions of multiple-family living arrangements were eventually resolved by the more recently arrived families moving to rental flats of their own or entering the housing market. However, these Greek immigrant women were to meet more challenges in the workplace.

4.3. Hard Work and Discrimination in Workplaces

Unlike the Greek women who arrived in Canada before the Second World War and rarely entered the labour force or were employed in family businesses, the postwar wave of Greek immigrant women entered the workforce en masse as factory workers, domestics, or cleaning workers.[14] The working women I interviewed came from rural Greece to Canada either as spouses of Greek men who immigrated with them, as brides of Greek Canadians, or as dependent members of their immigrant family, and they mostly worked in the restaurant industry and factories. Stephania worked for twenty-six years in the garment industry and twelve years as a server in a cafeteria before she retired. Despina worked for several years from home as a seamstress and a pieceworker. Thalia worked initially as a server and later as a manager in restaurants. Eleni worked in a restaurant, doing cleaning jobs, before she was hired by a seniors' centre as a cook. Katerina worked as a server and, after her marriage, started a pizzeria with her husband. Since her divorce, she has run her own restaurant.

Women's paid work was necessary for the well-being of newly-arrived working-class families. People did not always have money for their first living expenses and had even borrowed money to buy their tickets. Despina explains: "The ticket was provided by

[13] Stephania, interview.

[14] Efrosini Gavaki, "Immigrant Women's Portraits," 68

the World Council of Churches. We had no money to pay for my travel…. I paid it off three years after I came to Canada."[15] Eleni's comment perhaps better illustrates the pressing necessity for immigrant families to earn a living: "You could find everything you wished for in this land. Food, beautiful clothes, machines, houses…but all required money. It was not like that in the Old Country."[16] Thus, women's paid work was actually imperative to their families' survival. Even when the economic necessity was not so pressing, families were committed to hard work in order to fulfil their goals. They had left Greece with the dream of achieving a better life. High among their goals were purchasing a house and paying for their children's studies. Even those who viewed their stay as temporary needed to make as much money as possible to bring back to Greece. These goals could not be easily achieved without women's paid work.

My narrators indicated that contributing to their families was not new to Greek women from rural areas. Working was what they and their mothers and grandmothers had done before. Peasant women were used to working in the fields and combining household and paid work to make ends meet.[17] All the working-class women I interviewed had had previous working experiences before coming to Canada. In Greece, they had worked during the busy times of the agricultural year, either gathering crops in the family field or as field workers for wages. They had also provided enormous amounts of unpaid household labour, which kept families afloat. What was new was the permanence of women's paid work in Canada. Their new schedule included at least an eight-hour working day in addition to their household duties. The women welcomed their new working lives, especially when they compared their Vancouver lives to their lives as peasant women. The interviewees from farming families detested agricultural work, because it was hard—even intense during certain periods of time—and it offered low compensation. Most of my informants shared the hope that living and working in a city in Canada would be more desirable than the circumstances they would have faced by remaining in their villages. As Stephania explains:

[15] Despina, interview.

[16] Eleni, interview.

[17] On the subject of female work in rural Greece see Buck Sutton, "Family and Work," and Gabriella Lazaridis, *Women's work* .

> We decided to leave Greece. How could we continue living in these two rooms?... So many people! I knew that working in a factory would not be a piece of cake, but, after all, it couldn't be harder than working in the field.[18]

Similarly, Eleni had come with expectations but, as she attested, "I knew I had to work hard. I wasn't scared of work. Here everybody was working."[19]

Eleni, Katerina, and Stephania, based on feedback from their brothers who had immigrated earlier, shared the idea that they would easily find a job. Their optimism was due to the existing support network of Greek Canadians who resided in the city and were willing to help the newly-arrived immigrants to find work. They were not disappointed, although it was primarily the network of Greek women who more actively shared information about job opportunities. Women relatives, neighbours, and even acquaintances would put great effort into finding jobs for the newcomers, considering the support of the newly-arrived Greek women to be a moral obligation. Women would ask about openings in their workplaces and would use all means available to identify new opportunities for newcomers. Thus, many of the newly-arrived women were hired through the connections of other, more established women. Thalia, like Eleni, found her first restaurant job through the network of Greek women who worked there.

As discussed in the literature, Greek immigrant women in Canada most frequently found work in manufacturing, cleaning companies, restaurants, and domestic service.[20] Women preferred jobs that gave them a degree of autonomy and time to manage family work, but since peasant women were not literate in English and perceived as unskilled, their job choices were limited. According to my narrators, the bulk of Greek women in Vancouver were working in factories and the restaurant industry. The food industry was one of the largest employers of Greek immigrant women, given that a number of Greeks had developed food enterprises such as restaurants and taverns. Women were employed as servers, cooks, dishwashers, or additional personnel in the kitchen. Newcomers were more likely to seek work in a familiar environment among compatriots, especially when

[18] Stephania, interview.

[19] Eleni, interview.

[20] For further information on Greek women's work in Canada see Gavaki, "Immigrant Women's Portraits," Evangelia Tastsoglou, "The Temptations," and Mina, "Taming and Training."

they did not speak English, like Katerina and all her family, who started working in Greek restaurants immediately after they arrived in Canada.[21]

In contrast, some women immersed themselves in more challenging English-speaking environments. Six months after her arrival, Eleni started a night shift as a general kitchen worker in the non-Greek "Aristocratic Restaurant" in Vancouver. Unlike those who were employed in Greek restaurants, she learned English faster and was soon able to move on into a more desirable job as a cook in a seniors' centre. Similarly, Thalia started as a server in a large non-Greek restaurant in Downtown, and she ultimately retired as a manager in another restaurant. Along with women who worked for wages, there were others who worked either for family businesses or were co-owners. Katerina started a pizzeria with her husband that enjoyed great success, and within ten years, they had a chain of pizzerias all over the city. Although a professional, she was still seen by the community as under the control and leadership of her husband until her divorce; thereafter, she thrived as a businesswoman, managing her own restaurant in New Westminster.

Another large employer of Greek immigrant women in Vancouver was the manufacturing industry, especially garment making. Stephania, who had received training as a seamstress in Greece, easily found a job in a garment factory. Despina, however, chose to work at home as a pieceworker, paid by the item for finishing work, while also establishing herself as a dressmaker, taking orders from her Greek acquaintances.

The conditions in workplaces were much different from those that women had experienced as working members of their farming families. Although farming had been hard, it was demanding for only a few periods in the year, especially during harvesting. Women could work at their own pace for the rest of the year. In contrast, working in a restaurant or factory in a large city like Vancouver felt more pressing, as employees needed to match their hard work with the routine and discipline of a modern workplace. Women had to face long hours of work, extensive overtime, and often night shifts, especially those who worked in restaurants and taverns.

[21] Katerina, interview.

The circumstances in Canadian workplaces shaped Greek women's working experiences in challenging ways. The women who informed this thesis, like other working women in postwar Canada, faced additional gender barriers, since many jobs remained highly sex-segregated.[22] Men were supposed to be the primary breadwinners and their jobs were defined as high-skilled, while women remained segregated in "low-skilled" and low-paying jobs. Because their jobs were constructed as "women's work" and thereby less productive, they received less remuneration than men employed in the same workplaces. "I made 80 cents per hour and the men carriers earned more than one dollar. It wasn't fair. I had been trained as a seamstress. They had nothing."[23] While employers benefited from inexpensive female labour, women had to work longer hours to compensate for the loss in wages. Men also achieved higher job status in workplaces since they were preferred in supervising positions, while women more frequently hit the glass ceiling. Their jobs were viewed as low-skilled, even when they involved a significant amount of training.

Most of my working-class narrators complained about their low rates of pay. "Anytime I asked for a rise, they wouldn't say no, but they would not give the rise either. They kept on promising and procrastinating," stated Stephania, who spent twenty-six years in the garment industry.[24] Often, she had to accept overtime work in order to make a decent income. She, like her colleagues, might work up to twelve hours when they had to prepare a new order, only to be laid off when the industry was short of business. Despina's work as a pieceworker fluctuated even more with the shifting needs of the industry. "I could work for sixteen hours a day, and then stay without work for weeks. This could mess up my life," she explained.[25]

Unlike the garment industry where Stephania worked and where women could be supervisors, in restaurants and cleaning jobs, supervisors were almost always men, who were seen to have better skills and were better paid. Greek immigrant women working in the restaurant sector also encountered discrimination compared with their Canadian-born colleagues or their male supervisors. As my informants revealed, often, women

[22] Keough and Campbell, *Gender History,* 234.
[23] Stephania, interview.
[24] Stephania, interview.
[25] Despina, interview.

employees would be given the most boring, tiresome, and undesirable jobs, in contrast to their male counterparts, who would do more complicated but interesting work. They might be laid off when the employers sought to reduce staff or be threatened with being fired when they refused to work overtime or took sick leave. Job insecurity meant that immigrants were more likely to accept employers' infringements of employment law in order to hold onto their positions; and among immigrant workers, women were the most vulnerable.

A significant reason for their ill-treatment during their first years in Canada was their lack of English language skills and a strong perception of their cultural difference by the host society. In the workplace, Greek-Canadian women felt discriminated against not only as women, but also as ethnic immigrants. Their inability to speak English was a marker of their otherness that kept them stuck in their low-paying positions. The lack of language skills made them vulnerable, since they could barely negotiate with their employers and stand up for their rights. Moreover, they felt frustrated when less-qualified people were promoted while they were put aside because they were not fluent in English. "After twenty-six years in the factory, I knew the job better than anyone. I should have been a forewoman or at least a right hand, but I didn't," complained Stephania. My narrators told me that those in the food industry who lacked language skills remained longer in the kitchen, doing cleaning work, where they earned half the wages of a server; and, unlike servers, the kitchen workers could not benefit from tips.

Free English classes were offered by the government to immigrants in Vancouver, but not all working women benefited from that measure. Many working mothers who dealt with a two- or three-shift day were unable to attend classes. Paid work, housework, and child care did not leave much time for language training. This situation perpetuated their lower status in the workplace. However, all my narrators understood that learning English could empower them and improve their position in both the workplace and the home, so they all invested in learning English, although not all of them attended classes.

Those who did attend classes had positive memories of increasing their English skills. Katerina was soon able to learn basic English, which allowed her to work as a server and to be independent of her family. Eleni, motivated by sponsored learning programs that

offered remuneration for attendance, went to school for six months and acquired her first knowledge of English:

> I went to school because I was paid to go. At school, I earned forty dollars a week, and when I started working, I made only thirty-seven. School was good for me! Then, I couldn't understand anything…. The teacher said: "This is a ceiling," and I was looking like dumb! But it seems I got the basics. When I went to work, I could understand and speak a little, but it took me some years to feel confident.[26]

Eleni had positive experiences from her English classes. The training was not, however, sufficient to make her a fluent speaker. Beyond these good memories, her interview revealed black moments of distress that she and her family suffered as new immigrants in Canada.

> We had hard times. My husband found it hard to adjust here. He didn't speak English and he didn't like the work at construction. It was such a back-breaking job. He became depressed…. We said… ok let's stay for a while to earn the money for the tickets and then will go back…. But two years after, things had become better.[27]

Like Eleni, Stephania learned English primarily in the workplace. Still, her lack of language skills hindered her from improving her working conditions and made her feel discriminated against.

> The owner was a tough Dutch lady. She was very demanding, but at least she was fair. The forewomen were such a headache! They looked down on me and yelled all the time… because I did not speak English. The first days? Oh my god! I was terrified when somebody addressed me. At break time, people were laughing and joking and made fun. I was sitting aside and had lunch alone. It was so humiliating! If we [she and her husband] knew in advance how hard it would be with the language, we wouldn't have come.[28]

Stephania's lack of English-language skills made her a target of her co-workers' ridicule. The discriminatory behaviour of her supervisors intimidated her and made her feel humiliated. Furthermore, unable to communicate, she suffered loneliness and isolation in

[26] Eleni, interview.

[27] Eleni, interview.

[28] Stephania, interview.

the workplace. Outside the workplace, she was also exploited and victimized because of her lack of fluency in English.

> When I was pregnant, I looked for a family doctor who could understand and speak Greek. I finally found one, but I wasn't covered by a medical plan yet. He made me give him a visit every two weeks, and I had to give all my paycheques to pay those visits. He was such a crook!… I was so young then…. I didn't know how often I should go to the doctor.[29]

Thalia learned English at work and by watching television along with her children. It took her a few years, but since she was working in restaurants, where communication was important, she learned more easily than others who worked in factories, where interactions with colleagues on the job were rare. A great lover of books, she worked hard and learned English on her own.

Still, most women learned at least basic English at work. Despina worked at home and had limited opportunities of interaction with other workers. Besides, as a mother of three she was unable to attend classes. However, her desire to learn was so strong that she managed with poor resources to learn English at home.

> We, then, had bought a television for the kids. It was on all day. I watched all the kids' programs and, from time to time, I would look up a word or two in the dictionary. I read everything that came into my hands: newspapers, commercial leaflets, everything.[30]

Having taught herself English from an English-Greek dictionary, the newspapers, and the TV, Despina felt especially proud of having acquired such language skills that she could effectively manage her husband's business affairs.

> He was organizing the production, I did all the rest. I received the orders, I wrote the invoices, I purchased the materials, everything… and all from home. I just talked with customers and suppliers over the phone. At the same time, I cooked, cleaned the house, changed diapers, and worked as a seamstress. He was just working. He couldn't speak any English.[31]

[29] Stephania, interview.

[30] Despina, interview.

[31] Despina, interview.

Despina's fluency in English was her ticket to respectability and self-esteem. Her spouse relied on her for the smooth operation of his business, which eventually made her feel more accomplished and improved her position within the family.

The working women I interviewed were discriminated against both as women and as members of an ethnic minority. Their lack of fluency in English was a marker of their otherness that set additional barriers to those they had to face as women. They encountered contempt and other abusive behaviours, and they fought back. Learning the English language was understood as empowering, and all strove to improve their language skills and their position in the workplace.

Another factor that contributed greatly to improving Greek women's job conditions, giving them security and self-respect, was their affiliation with unions. Certainly, not all Greek women had the opportunity to work in a unionized workplace, but where a union existed, the Greek women I interviewed greatly valued its contribution to the improvement of their working conditions and remuneration. Eleni, Stephania, and Thalia embraced unionism not only because organizing helped to increase their wages, but also because unions could improve their working conditions and provide health benefits. In addition, unionization offered them job security and protection against employers' mistreatment. My informants spoke with special appreciation for unions. Eleni admitted that she was skeptical in the beginning, but she soon embraced the union like everyone else in her workplace and acknowledged that "what we have now is because of the union."[32]

Beyond enlisting the support of unions, and notwithstanding their pressing economic predicaments, the women I interviewed were ambitious and strived to improve their employment positions. They seized any opportunity to increase their incomes or move to more desirable jobs. After twenty-six years in the garment industry, Stephania became a server in a cafeteria.

> Why should I stay in the factory? It was such a boring job, all day bending over the sewing machine! I could hardly speak to my colleagues, and even when I did, the supervisor was complaining. I used to go to the Hudson Bay cafeteria with colleagues during lunch time. My English was much better by

[32] Eleni, interview.

> then. I thought, "Why don't you ask for work here?" I loved being in a place where I could speak to people. I grabbed the opportunity and worked for another twelve years there since I retired.[33]

The tenacity that some women demonstrated in improving their conditions is exemplified in Katerina's life story. For her, work and family life were interwoven, since she worked for more than twenty years with her husband in the family business. Her narrative is a story of both abuse and resistance:

> We worked hard. There was no Christmas and Easter for us. The children were left with my mother. We worked from dawn to dusk. I was the worker. I made pizzas. He was the boss…. Once he asked me to make a happy birthday pizza, you know, to decorate it accordingly. He didn't like what I made and asked me to do it again, and again. I was pregnant and stood there for I don't know how much time. "Why don't you do it yourself?" I said. He then became furious and pushed me back. I opened the door and left. As I was, with the apron…. I went to my parents. They did understand… but I went back. I was always coming back… until the divorce.[34]

Katerina's story of abuse is not representative of the experiences of the other women whom I interviewed, but it was a common enough experience in working-class women's lives generally, and also tells us something about the difficult situation of women working in family businesses. Determined to succeed, Katerina and her husband put all their efforts into making the pizzeria success. However, her husband's power as both a boss and a patriarch left his working wife vulnerable to abuse until she decided to leave both the job and the marriage.

4.4. The Discourses of Domesticity and the National Ideal of *Kali Noikokyra*

Although increasing numbers of married women with children worked outside the home in postwar Canada, as Joan Sangster has argued, popular culture and scientific discourses continued to exalt the connection between domesticity and femininity and promoted the stay-at-home wife and mother as the norm.[35] Indeed, the media and experts

[33] Stephania, interview.

[34] Katerina, interview.

[35] Joan Sangster, *Transforming Labour,* 17.

such as child psychologists discussed women's waged work as a problem that could lead to the disintegration of the Canadian family. A number of radio soap operas and television shows, in addition to offering "women escape from isolation and loneliness in dreams of consumption, romance and improved family life," also "made it clear that good wives and mothers stayed properly at home far from the temptations of employment."[36] These discourses were used to justify women's lower wages, portraying them as "temporary sojourners in the workforce" that earned merely a supplementary income for their families. However, the existence of a powerful ideology that emphasized feminine, domestic, and maternal roles and was in dissonance with the reality of the double day that working women experienced, can perhaps "explain why a working mother might feel conflicted about her dual, overlapping work roles."[37] This kind of pressure pushed many women to leave the workforce when they had children.

Working-class immigrant mothers were less likely to retreat from paid labour because they worked for the financial stability of their families. The Greek women I interviewed explained that their wages were needed to pay the costs of bills, mortgages, and children's studies, but they nonetheless felt the same pressure that other Canadian women were experiencing as a result of the persisting ideology of feminine domesticity. Furthermore, my narrators felt a consistent pressure to conform to certain standards of womanhood defined by the ethnic culture of *kali noikokyra*. In Vancouver, Greek women were expected, above all, to take care of the home and children, and the expectation to conform to this standard was especially distressing for working-class women. Women who were on their feet in restaurants or bending over sewing machines eight to ten hours a day had little, if any, resting time at the end of the workday, because they were responsible for housework and child care. Even when they shared some responsibility for childrearing with their husbands, mothers were still perceived as the primary carers; therefore, the main pressure of childrearing fell on them, and they constantly struggled to conform to the standard of a good housekeeper and mother.

[36] Veronica Strong-Boag, "Home Dreams: Canadian Women and the Suburban Experience in Canada, 1945-60," *Canadian Historical Review* 72, no. 4 (Dec.1991), 479.

[37] Sangster, *Transforming Labour,* 273.

These women were less likely to spend time outside home socializing or taking English courses, even though they realized that improved language skills would secure them better wages. As Stephania observed: "I couldn't steal time from the caring of my family."[38] Similarly, Thalia, who attended English classes before she gave birth to her son, felt too guilty to continue classes after she became a mother. Moreover, the burden of housekeeping was physically demanding, since Canadian houses in the 1960s were not always well equipped with electrical appliances, and the amount of work the women had to accomplish was exhausting. Most Greek men had few household responsibilities. Some of my informants resented that, no matter how hard both spouses had worked in their jobs, their husbands would come home and take a nap and afterwards head for the *kafeneio*, while the women had to clean, do the laundry, cook for the next day, and take care of the children. As Stephania put it:

> I had no time for naps or even talk to a neighbour. Working in the factory eight hours a day and after cleaning, cooking, taking care of the children; that was too much for me. I had no help at all…. He should have helped [but he did not]. After all, we did the same thing. We woke up at 5:30 and left for the work. It wasn't fair. What could I do?[39]

Other working mothers reported that they were always stressed about insufficient time to accomplish all their household tasks and their husbands did nothing to alleviate this anxiety. On the contrary, some men put extra pressure to their wives by blaming them for family problems, like Katerina's husband, who accused her of their son's drug problems. She reported:

> I worked side by side with him for more than twenty years making pizzas, and yet he blamed me. I repent for having left my kids with my mom. She is a loving grandma, but the children needed their parents. We made a great property, but we lost the family life. Yet he shouldn't blame me. It was also his responsibility.[40]

Blaming the faults of children on bad mothering was quite common, not only within the Greek community, but also in the scientific discourses of the period. As discussed in Mona

[38] Stephania, interview.

[39] Stephania, interview.

[40] Katerina, interview.

Gleason's article, "Psychology and the construction of the 'normal' family in postwar Canada, 1945-60," psychologists and other predominately male, Anglo-Saxon and middle-class professionals in this period undertook the task to train Canadian parents for childrearing.[41] Psychologists, attempting to establish the standards of normality for Canadian families, defined separate roles for mothers and fathers. William Blatz, a psychologist, in a series of Chatelaine articles on the state of marriage in postwar Canada, suggested that "the husband will dominate in certain fields such as the handling of the family's finances while the wife will dominate in the handling of children."[42] Since the children were supposed to develop their "basic personality patterns" during their early years, mothers were thus to blame if something went wrong with their behaviour.[43] Similarly, Katerina was blamed by her husband for their son's drug addiction because, ironically, she could not, as a mother working to improve the family's lot, give him more time at home. Other women, as well, reported that although they worked hard in paid employment, their husband considered the children's upbringing to be the wife's responsibility and were critical of them as mothers. These critiques made women feel guilty, incompetent, and helpless as mothers, and they were constantly torn between their need to work for wages and their doubts about being away from their children. They initially viewed their work as temporary but, year after year, as children grew and needed money for their studies, these women realized that working for wages was becoming a permanent situation.

The sexual division of labour within the Greek immigrant family favoured men, while women struggled with a double and triple work-load. However, although their paid work was initially viewed as temporary and supplementary to their husband's income-earning capacity, these women became breadwinners and shared with their husbands the responsibility of keeping the family afloat. In this context, gender ideals did not remain unchallenged.

[41] Mona Gleason, "Psychology and the construction of the 'normal' family in postwar Canada, 1945-60," in *Canadian Historical Review* 78, no. 3 (Sept. 1997):442-77.

[42] Gleason, "Psychology," 458.

[43] Gleason, "Psychology," 470.

4.5. Transforming Gender Roles in the Greek Immigrant Family in Vancouver

Immigration and women's working experiences transformed gender roles, and the changes were visible in the first-generation immigrants. Wage labour was the catalyst for change. Women's employment disrupted traditional, long-established family patterns. Women in the urban setting of Vancouver were deprived of the benefits that kinship networks might have offered them in managing their multiple duties over the longer term. Back in their villages, their mothers, sisters, or other female relatives had aided with household work and child care, giving them the opportunity to be away from home for long periods of time. In Vancouver, however, couples had to be self-reliant in caring for their children. Some women had flexible hours at certain points in their working careers, but others had to resort to a babysitter or shared child care with their husbands. Thus, some couples arranged alternative shifts to deal with child care. Eleni described her first years in Vancouver as extremely stressful because she had to juggle multiple duties as a night-shift worker, a housekeeper, and the mother of a toddler. Eleni remembers:

> I worked night and my husband worked day in construction. We needed a person for an hour, but there wasn't anyone we could trust to leave our baby with…. So we used to meet each other every day at the bus stop. I took the kid from home and went to 4th and Macdonald, waiting at the bus stop. He was coming back from work. So he was taking the baby back home, and I got on the bus and left. I was coming back at one in the morning. It was too hard![44]

The reality of opposite shifts for immigrant couples created new tasks for both spouses. Babysitting was a new responsibility that some Greek immigrant men assumed in the absence of affordable daycare, especially as they came to recognize that their wives were sharing the financial responsibility of providing for the family. However, most Greek men were not likely to do any cleaning or cooking at home, leaving these tasks for their wives who struggled to manage the double-shift workload. Because these men were not the sole providers, their own identities were also redefined in postwar Vancouver. While women remained subordinate in marriage, the image of the patriarch who supports the family and in return enjoys power over its members was challenged in multiple ways.

[44] Eleni, interview.

The women, on the other hand, appear to have been empowered by their paid work. “I wouldn’t ever stand to ask for money like other women did. I had my own wallet,” said Thalia. Her statement reflects the sense of independence that working women experienced because they had their own income. All of my working interviewees were positive that they had a strong say in decisions over household finances and family investments. Since they were earning money, they wanted to make sure that they were part of determining how that money would be used. However, not all Greek men tolerated female independence. Some women reported that their spouses persisted in making decisions on their own, and this was a cause of conflict in some marriages. For instance, Katerina, after years of conflict with her authoritarian husband, finally decided to proceed to divorce. The couple shared considerable wealth that they had created working together in the family business. She made the decision to divorce when she felt that his risky management of their finances would put the future of their children at risk.

> He was behaving like an *agha* [tyrannical patriarch] and I was always trying to keep peace for the children’s sake. I didn’t want to break the family. I made up my mind only when he started gambling. I said no more! He is going to leave nothing for our children.[45]

Katerina admitted that she had been thinking about divorce for years. Despite her efforts to appease him, her husband had been reacting with anger, treating her in an abusive way. What kept her from divorcing him was the fear that she would be stigmatized as a divorced woman and her desire to keep the family together. Although she had a supportive extended family, she admitted that it took strength to break with the idea that a divorce was a “disgrace for women.”[46] However, her husband’s poor management of their money enabled her to justify her decision to divorce for the children’s sake. It is significant that she understands her decision to divorce in terms of being a good mother and not in terms of her own happiness. She decided to get a divorce only after her children had grown up and had left their parents’ house. As she explained, she “didn’t want to dissolve the family when her children needed it the most,”[47] revealing the tension between her

[45] Agha is a Turkish word used in the Greek language. Originally agha was the title of an Ottoman military officer. However, the word as used in Greek means the male patriarch with tyrannical behaviour.

[46] Katerina, interview.

[47] Katerina, interview.

desire to leave an abusive situation and her sense of responsibility to her family. Despite the many reservations she had for divorcing, her decision was finally facilitated by the independence that her hard-earned wealth had given her and the conviction that she and her husband had created this fortune together and should share it equally.

Another key factor that influenced Greek-Canadian understandings of gender was the interaction these women had with other women outside the Greek ethnic community. The women who were employed outside the household had the chance to come in closer contact with other members of Canadian society, to make acquaintances and friendships with non-Greek women, and to be thus influenced by more liberal gender practices. In our discussions on how they viewed intermarriages, divorces, or their daughters' emancipation, narrators realized that they had been broadly affected by less rigid standards in Canadian society. Thus, one of my informants confessed that when she was younger, she would not have made friends with divorced women because of the stigma that was attached to women in failed marriages, but admitted that she now urges her daughter to dissolve her strained marriage. In response to my question on how she had changed her mind so dramatically, she said, "We were all raised like that. We could not get free of what people would think. Things have changed for young people."[48] This statement indicates that these women adapted to social change and embraced modern ideas over time.

Similarly, they learned to accept their children's marrying non-Greeks, although not so enthusiastically. "It was tough for us to accept that she wouldn't marry a Greek. But what could we do? At least I am trying to teach my grandchildren some Greek," admitted Thalia, expressing ambivalent feelings towards mixed marriages that other narrators shared.[49] It is interesting, however, that eight out of nineteen sons and daughters of the informants of this thesis have been in a marriage with a non-Greek person, and two are married to non-Christians.

Like middle-class women, working women of the Greek community were subject to similar pressures. They were similarly concerned for the honour of their daughters and

[48] Aspasia, interview.

[49] Thalia, interview.

always monitored their activities, whereas sons were permitted to socialize freely. They were especially pressured by the watchful eye of other Greeks. Since many Greek families lived in Kitsilano in close proximity with other Greek families in the 1960s and 1970s, immigrant women felt they were being constantly scrutinized and criticized by their fellow Greeks. They kept on viewing the maintenance of honour and good reputation as an essential condition for their daughters' good marriage. Similarly, these women tried to teach their daughters dominant gender norms. They sought to transmit their cooking skills to their daughters, so that they would align themselves with the Greek ideal of *kali noikokyra.* Further, because these women were busy at work, and their time for housework was limited, a portion of the housework was assigned to daughters. Stephania revealed that she regretted not having prompted her daughter to study as she had done with her son.[50] Certainly, many second-generation Greek women did study and had successful careers, but Stephania's statement reveals that while some women undertook the role of second breadwinner, they continued to reinforce unequal gender roles for their children, maintaining different expectations for male and female children, preparing their daughters for housekeeping and their sons for studies and careers.

As was the case with middle-class Greek women, working-class women also viewed ethnicity as an important marker of identity. Ethnicity and culture are neither static nor monolithic. On the contrary, they are very much shaped by class and gender within particular contexts. Thus, unlike middle-class women who had plenty of time for communal activities, working-class women, because they had limited time to spend out of the home, were less likely to be active in Greek ethnic community organizations, and they viewed communal activities as a "pastime for rich ladies."[51] However, they shared with middle-class women the idea that family was a core structure for preservation of Greekness, in conjunction with the Orthodox religion and practices. Greek identity and values were associated with children's upbringing. All mothers enrolled their children in Greek school, and they took pride in their children's performances during national days, committed to transmitting their ethnic heritage to the next generation.

[50] Stephania, interview.

[51] Stephania, interview.

4.6. Taking Pride in Waged Work

A central issue in this chapter is the satisfaction that Greek women in Vancouver received from their work and the meaning they attached to that work. The women who reported that they liked their work either had jobs that involved some creativity or paid good wages and provided contact with people. Women who worked as cooks or seamstresses and dressmakers were more satisfied than those who worked on assembly lines, where they carried out small, repetitive, and boring tasks. However, working Greek women still took pride in having worked. As Joan Anderson and Judith Lynam claim in their study of Greek and Indian working women:

> …work took on meaning in relation to the outcomes – that is, the positive aspects of work outside the home were evaluated in terms of the benefits to women's families. Work was seen as a means to an end, not an end in itself, and so the nature of the work was secondary to the benefits, especially economics, that could derive from work.[52]

Indeed, whatever the nature of their work, all my working narrators declared their satisfaction because they had contributed to their family's finances through their hard work. The women I interviewed took special pride in being industrious workers. They often identified themselves with hard work and responsibility in meeting the expectations that supervisors and employers had set for them. They strived to improve their performances so that they would secure their positions. "I was laid off when the company run out of business, but they always took me back, because I was working hard," explained Stephania.[53] They all realized that their work was critical in protecting the family from financial worries. "We worked very hard, but we had all what we needed," said Thalia.[54]

As a result, the women I interviewed had strong self-esteem because of the crucial contribution they had made to their family's welfare. "I worked hard but I and my husband did help our son to study, and we bought two houses. We wouldn't have done so if I wasn't working," said Stephania.[55] Pride in being a homebuyer was common among Greek

[52] Anderson and Lynam, "The Meaning of Work for Immigrant Women in the Lower Echelons of the Canadian Labour Force," 74

[53] Stephania, interview.

[54] Thalia, interview.

[55] Stephania, interview.

women, who knew that the purchase of their homes and paying off their mortgages would have been impossible without their paid work. Their success as immigrants was measured in the amount of property they had been able to obtain and the success of their children's studies. The cult of home buying was especially widespread among Greek people, since they felt that a second house would give them security, while children's studies added prestige to the family and secured a better future for their children.

Additionally, they all acknowledged that the long road they had traveled had led them towards positive change. They realized that their participation in the labour force had changed the way they viewed themselves and the world. They developed social skills that would not likely have been developed had they stayed at home. They had learned English, many acquiring English-language skills in the workplace. From there, they had negotiated with employers and they developed self-confidence. For example, Eleni reflected on how her self-assurance had grown significantly from tentative beginnings: "I was a frightened little thing. I would blush when the supervisor talked to me," she said. "But I had to stand for myself and my family. I didn't want to work for crumbs," she said, justifying her decision to move from her cleaning job to the more challenging position of a cook.[56] In addition, the women who participated in the labour market, especially those who had worked in unionized workplaces, developed a spirit of collegiality because they felt they were connected to a social support network. Moreover, friendships made in the workplace were strong and would last even after retirement.

As they were telling their stories, the narrators in this chapter made it clear that they felt proud of having been breadwinners for their families. Their hard work had made it possible for them and the members of their family to achieve their goals. They also realized that the experience of immigration had changed them enormously. Their paid work had pushed them to undertake new roles and explore new challenges. When they compared their present selves to those girls who had left Greece many decades ago, they found that their perspectives had altered and their expectations of themselves had increased. Although these women struggled with discrimination and other adversities, such as their lack of language skills and the gender expectations of a patriarchal culture,

[56] Eleni, interview.

their paid work empowered them to combat gender barriers and to claim a higher position within their family.

Chapter 5.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I have argued that the Greek-Canadian women I interviewed exercised agency in their lives, albeit within the gender constraints of Greek culture and the broader Canadian society. Significantly, they had a strong say in decisions made about immigration. Furthermore, after they had immigrated to Canada, they played active roles in their families and in the larger Greek community. The process of immigration, along with factors related to gender, class, ethnicity, and religion, affected their identities and altered their perspectives.

The 1950s, 60s, and 70s comprised a period of great transformation, since Greece, an agrarian society, was slowly but steadily becoming an urban society that was very much characterised by conflicting trends. While traditional values survived, there were also factors that pushed society towards change. The interviews revealed complexity in gender roles during the period. The lives of city women were very different from those of village women, but differences in class, age, and education were also decisive factors that led to different experiences for Greek women. While rural Greece women made a significant contribution to their family's finances, the middle-class daughters could receive better education and were more affected by western modernity. However, the culture of "honour and shame" continued to influence gender relations in both villages and cities, and rationalized the continuing exercise of control over women's sexuality. Nationalism and the Greek Orthodox Church often worked powerfully together to glorify and perpetuate the subordination of women by promoting iconic images of heroic but submissive mothers and daughters. Many women, however, challenged their subordinate status. Their work and contributions to their families' income, their education, and their contact with modern ideas empowered them and created many opportunities for them to claim higher status. Mothers in peasant families played active roles in the decision-making of their families,

while their daughters were often empowered either by education or by their paid work. Thus, most of these women made their own decisions regarding marriage or immigration.

This study has also dealt with the experiences of middle-class immigrant women who remained outside the paid workforce, and examined the ways in which their gender identities changed upon immigration. Middle-class women who were university-educated experienced conflict between their expectations of starting careers in Canada and the middle-class norm of female domesticity—an ideal that many of them came to accept. Constraints associated with class and gender therefore hindered them from fulfilling their dreams to some extent. However, they made enormous contributions to Greek ethnic group organizations, such as the Greek communities, local associations, and charitable organizations. Women's involvement in ethnic community organizations and charitable activities was very much affected by class. An active role in community politics added to the respectability of middle-class women and their families. Their participation was in keeping with feminine norms, as many women from all walks of life saw charity as their Christian duty. Although the communal organizations remained primarily the realm of men during the period covered here, a number of women held high offices in them, and they were empowered by these new tasks. Finally, these women claimed in their interviews that they had been the "columns of their houses" and had "distinct but equal" roles with their husbands. After all, they had helped their families to cope with the difficulties of relocation and settlement in a new land. They had managed household needs and resources with prudence, and they had encouraged their children to seek successful careers. However, their tendency to downplay the ongoing masculine dominance in middle-class Greek immigrant households led me to understand the use of such tropes as a way for women to deal with their ambiguous and sometimes difficult position in patriarchal families. The contradiction these women experienced between the expectations with which they had come to Canada and the realities of their lives as housewives, without professional careers or individual status, created a rather uncomfortable situation for them. By emphasizing their roles as mothers and supporters of their families and their public roles in ethnic group organizations, these women found a way to cope with this disconnect. Furthermore, boundary-crossing moments, when the narratives went beyond dominant narratives, revealed how these women dealt with these power inequities or with difficult situations in their past. Finally, these women, as a result

of their experience of immigration, which was in turn very much affected by class, ethnicity, and religion, redefined their identities, stressing their roles as preservers of Greek values and supporters of their families.

The third part of this study dealt with working-class Greek women. After these women with village backgrounds had settled in Vancouver, they took jobs primarily in factories or restaurants. Notwithstanding the ethnic and gender discrimination these women experienced in the workplace due to the inadequacy of their English language skills, and the difficulties of juggling the responsibilities of their multiple roles as mothers, housewives, and workers, at the end of the day they were especially proud of having helped their families and children to accomplish their goals. These women stressed the transformations they underwent as they became second breadwinners in their homes. They took special pride and satisfaction in their role as providers for their families. Their work outside of the household empowered them and brought significant changes in gender relations within these Greek immigrant families.

Appendix

The Narrators

Aspasia was born in 1951 to a middle-class Athenian family. She studied Public Administration in Athens and immigrated to Vancouver in 1975, when she married a Greek-Canadian. She had a very active role in communal organizations and devoted a large amount of time and effort in organizing Greek schools.

Despina, my oldest narrator, was born in 1933 in a village in Chania, Crete. At the age of 15, she moved to Athens, where she lived in a relative's house and attended seamstress school. She was engaged at 16 and married four years later. She was the only one of my narrators who had been reluctant to migrate to Canada. In 1954, she followed her husband, who had immigrated to Winnipeg the previous year, and several years later, they moved to Prince Rupert, where they spent a few months before moving to Vancouver. They then moved to the United States and finally came back to Vancouver. She worked at home as a seamstress and dressmaker, and as a piece worker for the garment industry. She is currently very active in *Philoptohos*.

Eleni and her husband left their village in Thessalia in 1968 when she was 22, two years after the couple had married. She had left school at 12 and for ten years had worked for her family or for wages. She was keen to migrate to Canada. She worked initially as a server and cleaner in restaurants and later as a cook in a seniors' residence.

*Katerin*a was born in 1950 in a village in Evoia, where she completed secondary school. She was very keen to come to Canada, where her elder brother had earlier migrated. Finally, in 1971, upon her mother's insistence, the entire family remaining in Greece immigrated to Canada. She was 21 at that time. She attended English classes and started working as a server in Greek restaurants. Three years later, she met the man she would marry. They worked together and created their own restaurants and pizzarias. She divorced him at the age of 50 and, since then, has successfully run her own business.

Lena is the youngest of my narrators. A child of a middle-class family, she came to Canada in 1967, when she was 12 years old. She studied interior design and works currently as

an interior designer. She has served as Chair of the Boards of Trustees in the Greek Orthodox Community of East Vancouver.

Stella was born in Thessaloniki to a middle-class family. In Greece, she worked as a teacher. At the age of 23, she married a Greek-Canadian man and followed him to Canada. She did not perform paid work after she came to Canada in 1962, but she was always active in communal organizations, such as The Daughters of Penelope and the Macedonian Association. She has served as Chair of the Hellenic Community of Vancouver.

Stephania was born and raised in a small village in southern Evoia. She was the youngest of five children in her family. At age 18, she joined her sisters who were working in Athens, and she received training as a seamstress. She married through an arranged marriage at age 19, and a year later, in 1966, she immigrated to Canada sponsored by her eldest brother. In Canada, she worked for twenty-six years in a garment factory and twelve years as a server in a cafeteria.

Thalia was also born and raised in a village in Crete. She stopped attending school at the age of 12 and started working either at home and in the family fields or as a field worker for wages. She married the man of her choice, contrary to her parents will, at the age of 20. She came to Canada in 1964. She worked as a server and manager in restaurants. She became very active in *Philoptohos*, and after she retired, also became active in the Hellenic Community of Vancouver as a member of the Board of the Trustees.

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