
PLURAL IDENTITIES AMONG YOUTH OF IMMIGRANT BACKGROUND IN MONTREAL

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Abstract: *Our research concerns the ethnic identity of youth (18-22yrs) of immigrant parentage (Greek, Portuguese, Chilean, Vietnamese and Salvadoran, with a comparison group of French-speaking Québécois youth) in Montreal. Despite the questioning of notions of ethnicity and ethnic identity that has been going on for several decades, this area of research is still marked by essentialist perspectives that do not coincide with the results of our research. The young people interviewed express fluid ethnic identities that have changed over time and that are characterised by multiple forms of ethnic belonging. They present their ethnic identity as a source of enrichment rather than of conflict or feelings of inferiority. The oral accounts of youth of immigrant origin in Montreal give much evidence of transnationality, that is, ties with the cultural group of origin whether in the country of origin or elsewhere; and of transethnicity, solidarities with other ethnic groups in Montreal that are seen as culturally or structurally similar. Though these two orientations would seem to be somewhat contradictory, they are, we argue, in fact compatible. Both offer numerous advantages to immigrant groups and their members, particularly in the present-day context. We examine our research results in light of contextual factors related to the Montreal milieu as well as to the age group of those interviewed. We propose that, without minimising these factors, one must question the conceptualisation of ethnic identity especially as it concerns youth of immigrant origins.*

Keywords: *ethnic identity, transnationality, urban youth.*

Resumo: *Nossa investigação refere-se a identidade étnica de jovens (18-22 anos) de ascendência imigrante (gregos, portugueses, chilenos, vietnamitas e salvadorenhos, em comparação com grupos de jovens de fala francesa quebeçois) em Montreal. Apesar dos debates sobre noções de etnicidade e identidade étnica que tem sido feita por muitas décadas, esta área de pesquisa é ainda marcada por perspectivas essencialistas que não coincidem com os resultados de nossa investigação. Os jovens entrevistados expressam identidades étnicas fluidas que tem mudado*

extraordinariamente e que tem se caracterizado por múltiplas formas de pertencimento étnico. Eles apresentam sua identidade étnicas como uma fonte de enriquecimento ao invés de conflito ou sentimento de inferioridade. As considerações orais de jovens de origem migrante em Montreal oferecem muitas evidências de transnacionalidade, isto é, laços com o grupo cultural de origem, seja no país de origem ou outro lugar e a trans-eticidade, solidariedade com outros grupos étnicos em Montreal que são vistos como culturalmente ou estruturalmente similares. Embora estas duas orientações possam ser vistas como algo contraditório, elas são, nós sustentamos, de fato compatíveis. Ambas oferecem numerosas vantagens para grupos imigrantes e seus membros, particularmente no contexto atual. Nós examinaremos os resultados desta pesquisa à luz de fatores contextuais relativos ao meio de Montreal tanto quanto aos grupos de idade de nossos entrevistados. Nós propomos que, sem minimizar estes fatores, devemos questionar a conceitualização de identidade étnica especialmente no que diz respeito a jovens de origem migrante.

Palavras-chave: *identidade étnica, jovens urbanos, transnacionalidade.*

Our research concerns the ethnic identities of young adults (18-22years old) of immigrant parentage, focussing on those of Greek, Portuguese, Chilean, Vietnamese and Salvadoran background who were born in Montreal or at least spent most of their formative years there. Despite the questioning of notions of ethnicity and ethnic identity that has been going on for several decades, this area of research is still marked by assimilationist perspectives that do not coincide with the results of our research.

The young people we interviewed express fluid ethnic identities that change over time and are characterised by multiple forms of ethnic belonging which include strong identification with the parents' country of origin. Their identities are composed of an accumulation of affiliations; these are superimposed upon each other without one excluding the other that are articulated into a personal syncretic identity somewhat differently in each individual case. Plural identities are seen by our subjects as a source of enrichment rather than a source of inner conflict or feelings of inferiority. Indeed, for them, ethnic identity is not framed in a logic of closure, but rather becomes the basis for wider solidarities both in the local setting and across transnational space. Moreover, our subjects insist on the importance of their several affiliations, rather than accepting one alone. Research on other themes related to plural identities (i.e., international adoptions and mixed marriages) gives further support for the conclusion that

ethnocultural mixedness, be it derived genealogically, via mixed marriage, or socially, via adoption, immigration or other experiences, is widely valued in Montreal.

The data discussed here originate primarily from semi-structured interviews with young people and parents in various immigrant groups,¹ as well as with a comparison group of Québécois youth of French background. Our interpretations have been greatly enriched by participant-observation field work carried out by graduate students in the immigrant groups included in this study. We examine the research results in light of contextual factors related to the Montreal milieu as well as to the age group of those interviewed.

The Montreal multi-ethnic context

To speak of immigration to Quebec is inevitably to speak of Montreal, since almost 80% of new immigrants to the province settle on the Island of Montreal, in the St. Lawrence River, which includes the city proper and several other townships (Gouvernement du Québec, 2000a, p. 54). Still others settle in the greater Montreal metropolitan region, about 10% of the rest, by informal estimates. This despite increased efforts of late by the Quebec government to settle new arrivals in areas other than Montreal. Moreover, in recent years Quebec has received a disproportionate share of Canada's refugees, resulting in the presence of an ever larger, more diversified and more "visible" immigrant population in Montreal (Laperrière, 1989, p. 109).² In the 1990's the main source countries for new arrivals to Québec were, in order of importance, Lebanon, France, China, Haiti, Hong Kong and Algeria (Gouvernement du Québec, 2000a, p. 39). Immigrants make up 17.8% of the total Montreal metropolitan area population of nearly 3,393,700; on the Island of Montreal, the proportion rises to over 25%. After Toronto, Montreal has the second highest *number* (586,465) of immigrants living in her metropolitan area of all cities in Canada, a fact that

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² In the 1990's the main source countries for new arrivals to Québec were, in order of importance, Lebanon, France, China, Haiti, Hong Kong and Algeria (Gouvernement du Québec, 2000, p. 39).

can have important consequences for new arrivals. (Statistics Canada census data).

The uniqueness of the Montreal multi-ethnic context has attracted the attention of a number of researchers. Anctil (1984), speaks of Montreal's "double majority" as it contributes to greater retention of ethnic traits, such as language, religious practice and endogamy by immigrant groups than in other North American cities of comparable size. The «double majority» of which Anctil writes is, of course, composed of the descendants of the two founding peoples, the French and the British. Until the 1960's, interethnic relations in Montreal were generally seen and constructed in religious terms, the "Catholic" category corresponding approximately to the Franco-Québécois,³ and the "Protestant" to the Anglo-Québécois. Since the secularization and liberalization of Quebec society during the so-called "Quiet Revolution" of the 1960's, ethnic belonging has been expressed in linguistic terms, with religion relegated to the background.

Today "French" and "English" are commonly used as ethnic categories popular parlance, though inaccurately. Just as the earlier religion-based bipolarity was inexact, so is today's linguistic one. Jewish immigrants from Russia, the most numerous group arriving at the turn of the twentieth century, were shunted to "Protestant" schools and social services, and their English-speaking descendants are often referred to as "English". Irish immigrants of the mid-nineteenth century, on the other hand, generally shared religion and working-class status with Francophones such today, many Francophones have Irish names such as Ryan, O'Neill and so on.⁴

Also, it is important to realize that the linguistic categories commonly used in as a gloss for ethnic differences, namely "anglophone", "francophone" and "allophone" do not by any means correspond to discrete groupings even on a linguistic level. This has been officially recognized, at least implicitly, by the Office de la Langue Française (OLF), the public body charged with advancing the use of French in Québec. The most recent official definition of "Francophone" by the OLF is based the criterion of the language used on a regular

³ By "Franco-Québécois" we mean Québécois of French background whose roots are long-established in Quebec, since Québécois is meant to refer to all citizens of Canada who permanently reside in Québec.

⁴ The Irish accounted for 7.1% of British immigrants in 1844 (Linteau, 1982, p. 26, Table 1) and by 1871 made up nearly a fourth (23.7%) of the city's population (Linteau, 1982, p. 29).

basis in public, rather than “mother tongue” or ancestry or even language used at home.

The unique quality of the Montreal inter-ethnic context has also been shaped by lies in the fact that neither majority’s ethnic hegemony has been demographically or politically stable over the last century-and-a-half. Though the French have predominated since 1871, for a period in the 1830’s and 40’s the majority of the city’s residents were of British origins. The 20th century has been marked by the growth of the “other” category; i.e., those of neither French nor British origins. As of 1986, 15.5 per cent of Montrealers were monolingual speakers of a language other than French or English (Choinière, 1990, p. 44), while 27 per cent claimed an ethnic origin other than French or British (Choinière, 1990, p. 74). In certain neighborhoods, particularly in the younger age groups, being of «minority» origin is to form part of a multi-ethnic majority of backgrounds other than French nor British, such that certain of the city’s institutions such as neighborhood health care facilities, schools and day care centres have already been greatly affected (Blanc; Chicoine; Germain, 1989). Indeed, immigrants and the children of immigrants outnumber Franco-Québécois in many local institutions (schools, clinics, churches and so on.)

The change in ethnic and linguistic political hegemony that have marked the last 15 years have, if anything, further contributed to the maintenance of ethnic distinctiveness, most clearly in the area of language. The most important changes of this period were brought about by Bill 101, passed in 1977, under the first government of the sovereignist party, the Parti Québécois. This bill made French the sole official language of public life in Quebec and obliged children whose parents’ mother tongue was not English to go to French-language schools. Schools are still divided by religion; most publicly supported schools are officially Catholic (and French) or Protestant (and English), though efforts are underway to abolish the religious identification. Before Bill 101, immigrants were oriented to English-language social services and their children to English-language schools. In great part, this was the result of efforts by the Catholic clergy around the turn of the century to limit contacts between French-speaking Catholics and immigrants, many of whom were Jewish. In consequence, the descendants of immigrants came to identify as “Anglophones” in most cases; however, this has changed since 1977.

Painchaud and Poulin (1983) have noted that the changes in Quebec’s language laws in the 1970’s had the effect of contributing to the maintenance of

Italian as the common language of the Italian community in Montreal ; we have noticed the same among the Portuguese. Increasingly, the children of immigrants are trilingual, learning, their parents' mother tongue at home, French at school, and English via the mass media, social contacts and sometimes, special classes. According to studies of the last few years, Montrealers who have grown up in English are increasingly bilingual, especially in the younger age brackets, while younger French-speakers are increasingly fluent in English as well (Jedwab, 1998; Meintel, 1999).

Besides the "double majority", Montreal's special multi-ethnic character has also been shaped by her historical role as a springboard to the rest of Canada and even to the United States, such that new groups usually established their first ethnic institutions (e.g., churches) in the city. This has also contributed to ethnic retention by giving historical depth to immigrant groups that, in some cases, did not immigrate in large numbers until long after the arrival of the founding members of the community (Anctil, 1984, p. 447). And, as Breton (1964) long ago pointed out, "institutional completeness" may be much more important than sheer numbers in the maintenance of ethnic identity and distinctiveness over time.

In more subtle and profound ways, the Montreal context offers a hospitable environment for perpetuating immigrant ethnic identities. For decades public discourse centered on the ethnic specificity of the Québécois terms of language, culture and identity has dominated the mass media and political life in Quebec. The long struggle of the francophone Québécois for recognition of their group identity, language and culture has served as something of a paradigm for other ethnic groups. [Cf. Coulon's discussion (1994) of "mimetisme" by ethnic communities of the discourse and logic of the State].

Francophone Québécois have been so long a political and cultural minority that their political hegemony is still problematic and precarious even to themselves. Several of the young Greeks, Portuguese and Chileans interviewed in the research presented in following sections express an explicit sense of identification with the French-speaking Québécois, not as members of minorities wishing to identify with the majority, but rather as members of minorities relating to another minority whose successful struggle they admire. Indeed the very word "minority" has a peculiar resonance in Montreal at present, since virtually people of virtually any ethnic category, not only immigrants, can lay claim to minority status: the Franco-Québécois, because of French's linguistic isolation in Canada and North

America generally, Anglo-Québécois (those of British ancestry), because of declining numbers and the official hegemony of the French language in Quebec since 1977. Furthermore, individuals and groups often *claim* ethnic minority status, in order to make or justify claims to economic or political resources. (This is widely the case in Canada and the United States.) In Montreal, stigmatizing minorisation of immigrants occurs in particular contexts, notably in dealings with government agencies that control scarce resources and where the personnel includes few of immigrant background; *e.g.*, welfare and unemployment offices. In other contexts, interaction takes place without ethnic hierarchy coming into play (Le Gall; Meintel, 1997). Indeed, it is worth remembering that in Montreal, as elsewhere, “minority” and “majority” refer to a relational dynamic, not to innate characteristics of individuals.

Methods of research

The data on which most of our discussion is based are taken from 80 interviews with young adults between 18 and 22 years of age, including 20 Franco-Québécois youth, and 20 immigrant parents. The 70 young adults of immigrant background were of Portuguese, Greek, Salvadoran, Chilean. In addition we have used 10 interviews carried out in a parallel study using the same methods on youth of Vietnamese parentage (Méthot, 1995). The Greek and Portuguese youth were usually born in Montreal, whereas the others had arrived while still in primary school, except for the Salvadorans, who had arrived in early adolescence.

An initial period of three months of participant observation allowed the research assistants to construct an institutional topography of each group (churches, voluntary associations, newspapers, etc.), to establish contacts with various social networks in the group and to sketch out the social, demographic and economic characteristics of the group, as well as the history of its migration to Québec. At the same time they sought to learn as much as possible about the social and cultural life of the group, especially as related to the family. In some cases the assistants were of the same origin as those they studied, in some cases of a different origin, and in several cases, of Franco-Québécois background. In general, the interviews were held in the language of choice by the respondent, be it their mother tongue, French or English.

The interviewees were all bi- or tri-lingual, speaking their parents' mother tongue at home and in ethnic community contexts, and English or French in other situations.

The initial round of interviews were centered on issues related to how such youth participate in Québec society: employment, schooling, studies, social life and marriage choices. Largely inspired by the Life Course Analysis pioneered by social historians such as Elder (1977) et Hareven (1978), we sought to shed light on how decisions related to work, family and social life were negotiated by the young adult and the immediate family. Thus we decided to limit our study to youth between the ages of 18 and 22 who were not yet cohabiting or married, as they were likely to be engaged in making choices related to marriage, work and studies, yet still be in frequent interaction with the family of origin. In fact, we found that nearly all single young people of immigrant parentage were still living with their parents, something that is considerably less frequent among their peers of Québécois background.

Interviews with parents centered on the same themes as those with the youth, in order to verify whether the young people's representations of the perspectives of the parental generation corresponded in fact to how parents saw the same issues (Indeed, there was close correspondance between the two). The twenty interviews with young Franco-Québécois, evenly divided by sex, focussed on the same thèmes as the others (schooling, work, social life and marriage). The results of these last interveiws were unexpectedly revelatory and helped us better the similarities of young people of immigrant origin across ethnic lines.

Finally another series of interviews were carried out with 10 Greek and 10 Portuguese youth, on themes that had emerged from the preceding round of interviews, notably autonomy, respect, family oblication, and the importance of the parent's country of origin for the second generation, be it on the imaginary or concrete level. The master's theses and publications of the student researchers who carried out the interviews, some of which are cited here, have further enlarged our data base for each group.

Ethnicity, ethnic identity, plural identities

Though one often hears the terms "ethnicity" and "ethnic identity" used interchangeably, it is worth noting here that for our purposes, the latter term

refers to subjective dimension of ethnicity, to individuals' sense of belonging to a group that their real or symbolic ancestors belonged to, as well as the sense of uniqueness, unity, history and shared destiny shared with others in the same group (adapted from Isajiw, 1990, p. 35). For us, ethnicity refers to a wider phenomenon that encompasses ethnic identity, but that includes as well the cultural models that mark the group as distinctive; i.e., Barth's «ethnic markers» (1969), as well as the social networks, institution, organisations, shared activities, economic and political interest that can mobilize an ethnic group. Ethnic identity is often a focus of group ideology, and indeed, collective memory may be fashioned so as to support a particular kind of ethnic identity. However, just as social memory varies from one individual to another, unlike institutionalized collective memory (Connerton, 1989), so ethnic identity is somewhat different for each individual, even within the same ethnic group.

When we discuss plural, or composite, identities, we are referring to identities with several referents. Grosser (1996) invokes his own status as male, father, Jewish, historian, etc. to argue that individual's identities are always plural. We would go even further and suggest that even within the domain of ethnicity, identities are probably more often plural than not, save for the influence of homogenizing ideologies of identity promoted in many national contexts. At the same time, following Devereux (1972), we hold that identity is by *definition* singular (“unicité”) and unique. To imply that having a sense of belonging to several societies or ethnic group means having several identities contributes to an overly pathologizing view of those who identify with several ethnic categories.

Children of immigrants have often been described in schizophrenic terms, as being “torn” between different cultures and identities, as having a “double identity” and suffering from social pathology due to their plural origins and ethnic affiliations. Typically such youth (especially North Africans in France) are described as “in crisis”, torn between opposing values (Khelil, 1991; Malewska, 1982; Yahyaoui, 1989). We have argued elsewhere (Meintel, 1992) that the notion of a “double” identity is “oxymoronic”, to quote Giraud (1987). Though in rare cases, our subjects speak of themselves in such terms we interpret such discourse more in terms of what the same author terms a “strategic pluralism” (Giraud, 1987) rather than an a sign of crisis.

The notion that plural ethnic affiliations are by definition problematic is probably due in part to the pervasive influence of Robert Park's theory of race relations, where ghettoized immigrants eventually lose cultural particularities

and ethnic specificity, to eventually assimilate, mixed marriage being one indicator of that assimilation is nearly accomplished. Park's model was actually progressive for its day: he was in fact arguing for what today would be called the "integratability" of immigrants from southern Europe arriving around the turn of the twentieth century who were considered too different racially and culturally to ever become fully American. Though clearly inadequate to describe the complexities of identity and belonging in the present era, it nonetheless continues to inspire bipolar models whereby «traditional» migrants are expected inevitably to give up their culture and identities in the face of the "modernity" of the host society.

Park's model is not the only reason that plural identities, changes of identity and variations of identity within the group concerned are generally taken to be problematic. The fact that most academic social science has developed within powerful nation-states (England, the United States, France) during the period when the State itself was at its strongest has probably been a factor in leading researchers to think in terms of exclusive identities. Indeed our title is somewhat misleading, in that it presents plural identities as the "marked" case. Social scientists would probably do well to problematize the exclusive "citizenship" model so often applied to national, ethnic and even religious affiliations – i.e., unitary, homogeneous, static identities and their construction as such.

Immigrant youth: a social portrait

Overall, the parents of the Chilean and Vietnamese youth interviewed are better-educated and more often urban in origin than those of the others, who tend to work in manual occupations (often specialized ones in the case of the Greeks) or small family enterprises and come from peasant or working-class background in the home country. Most of the Greek and Portuguese youth were studying at the collegial level and working part-time at jobs obtained through ethnic networks, often via their parents. Some hope to go on to university or have already begun university studies. The others in these two groups are working for minimum wage and would like to learn a trade or specialized occupation in the service sector. The Vietnamese interviewed by Méthot were all engaged in studies and oriented to or already at the university, as was the case for most of the Chileans. The Salvadorans were mostly studying at the collegial level, though some of the young men were apprentices in semi-qualified occupations, such

as garage mechanics. None of the Vietnamese worked at a job, given their parents wish that they study full time so as to excell academically. Most are oriented to liberal professions, especially in the health field, such as medicine and dentistry.

Young Greeks tend to be English-speaking (though this is now changing), while the Portuguese, some of whose parents have arrived in Canada more recently, speak English and/or French; for the others we interviewed, French tended to be their second language and sometimes English their third. Most socialize with peers from their own group of origin or from other immigrant groups, and far less with other Québécois. Most Chileans and some Vietnamese young people have or have had close Franco-Québécois friends.

Virtually all live with their parents, and this for normative reasons rather than economic motivations, a theme to which we return at a later point. Most of the Salvadoran households included in the study are mother-headed, with the fathers often living in El Salvador; in several cases Chilean fathers were absent due to death or divorce. Most of the Portuguese youths contribute substantially to household income (Claudio, 1991), a pattern that is present in somewhat attenuated form among the Greeks. In the latter case, the young people feel they *ought* to help their parents either with money or by working in the family enterprise, but do so only irregularly, with the tacit assent of their parents (Xenocostas, 1991). The young Latin Americans help their parents financially on an informal, ad hoc basis, more substantially in certain Salvadoran cases. Young women more often than their male peers help with housework, but often do little because studying and holding a part-time job. Greek and Portuguese sons are sometimes obliged to help in renovations or in the family business, especially in the latter group.

Family and identity

As mentioned earlier our project was initially focussed on immigrant family relationships and young people's life choices that would have a long term effect on insertion in Quebec society; ethnic identity emerged so strongly as a theme from the initial interviews that it eventually became central to the analysis. It came as a surprise that our respondants expressed emphatically supportive of the values they claimed to share with their parents (and which were indeed those expressed by the parents interviewed), and this, even in cases where

there seemed to be considerable disagreement in the day-to-day. Most proclaim their adherence to the principle, transmitted by their parents, that family interests should prevail over individual ones. As we have discussed elsewhere, it is in the domain of family relationships and values that immigrants and their children seem to find a major distinction between themselves and “les Québécois”, and one that they value highly, the younger generation quite as vocally as the older (Meintel, 1989). In general, both generations, in all the immigrant groups included in the study, see their family lives as governed by notions of respect for elders and family obligation to a far greater degree than Franco-Quebecois. As a young Greek-Québécois puts it :

Young Québécois are independent, they think above all of themselves (not their family)... They are not like us, they don't have the same values, they are not as family-oriented as the Greeks, they are not as respectful of their parents... (Marcos, 20 years old, student, born in Quebec).

Among all the groups but the Chileans, youth of both sexes usually lived in the parental home until establishing a permanent couple relationship. While for the Salvadorans this might take the form of longterm cohabitation, for the others, it meant marriage. As for the Chileans, many of the parents are of leftist political orientations and correspondingly, are quite permissive about sexual relations before marriage – moreso than the parents of many of our young Québécois subjects. Many of the young people, especially among the describe marriage as the “real” beginning of adult life. Cohabitation without marriage is often rejected by the young women in these groups for moral or religious reasons, and also, some say, it is “less romantic” than marriage. Even admitting that they might enjoy the freedom of living elsewhere, youth of both sexes generally accept living in their parents home, if only not to hurt their parents or embarrass them in the ethnic community.

Young women often brought up the importance of chastity and virginity at marriage as an ideal; though this was less a focus than success in school work for the Vietnamese, and for the Chileans, notions of female chastity were a non-issue, given the liberal attitudes of both youth and parents. For the Greeks, Portuguese and Salvadorans, it was a question of morality and also of reputation for the girl and her family.

I have to watch myself, I can't do just anything with guys that might give rise to gossip. (Angela, 21 years old, student, born in Quebec of Greek parentage.)

The words of a young Salvadoran women make a clear connection between her identity and the issue of virginity:

I was fourteen when we came her, I know how my mother thinks and I know how Latino men think. And I'm Catholic. I have friends who have done it, but personally I prefer not to... For me it's a culture, a way of thinking... (Eva, 21 years old, student, born in El Salvador).

Nonetheless, like her Salvadorean peers of both sexes, and most of the mothers interviewed, Eva rejects machismo ; she abhors the idea of a man demanding virginity of a partner (“Who does he take himself for?”).

Among Greeks and Portuguese, the generations generally agree on the principle of ethnic endogamy. Nonetheless, young people reason somewhat differently from their parents ; their preference for marrying within the group (and its religion) is seen as contributing to good relations between the two families, but they admit to a somewhat extended notion of endogamy: ideally, someone of the same origin might be best, but failing that, “at least” someone of a Mediterranean background. A few claim that ethnic origin means nothing to them as regards the choice of a partner, but consider it important for the sake of their parents. In other words, both youth and parents see marriage as uniting two families, not just two individuals, and like their parents, most see value in cultural proximity. However cultural proximity is interpreted in more elastic fashion by the youth, and they put the emphasis on its benefits for parents and family more than for themselves.

Young Latin Americans seem to agree even more strongly with their parents than the others, at least in principle. Chilean parents are characterized as “open” by their children, as regards sexual mores, cohabitation, exogamy and so on. Salvadoran parents are much more conservative in regard to these questions, but the young people (most of whom spent their primary school years in El Salvador) agree with them. Moreover, in these two groups, respect for parents as parents is reinforced by the respect for them as heroes of a political struggle.

Space does not permit us to elaborate fully on how differences of opinion between the generations regarding concrete issues (e.g. acceptable hours for girls to be out) are expressed; however, it bears mentioning that each group is

somewhat different in how conflict is played out: the Vietnamese are unlikely to express any difference of opinion with their parents, but note that their parents tend to be permissive on other issues if their grades are high enough; Salvadoran youth are verbally open about differences opinion with their parents but usually conform “out of respect”; Greek and Portuguese of the same age group are likely to disagree openly and sometimes heatedly with parents, and often end up doing what they please, while keeping an appearance of conformity, even if lying is necessary, once again, “out of respect” (See Meintel; Le Gall, 1995 for further details). Among Salvadorans, Portuguese and Greeks, parents have difficulty accepting their children, especially the girls, dating more than one person before marriage. Typically, boyfriends and girlfriends are not introduced to until marriage or (for the Salvadorans) permanent cohabitation seemed likely, thus circumventing a potential problem.⁵

Generation/culture/immigration

While the attitudes our young subjects express may not correspond to their eventual choices in all cases, the strong consensus they express in relation to their parents would seem to contradict the numerous studies that emphasize generational conflict in immigrant families, and consider it “far more serious” than in other families (Malewska; Gachon, 1988). We do not seek to minimize the disagreements that may exist between immigrant parents and their young adult offspring. However, the supposition that conflict is a factor of cultural differences between parents and offspring is often erroneous.

In Portuguese households, for example, young men often are at odds with their fathers on the issue of contributing their weekends to doing renovations on rental property (typically the family lives on one floor of a duplex and pays the mortgage by renting the other). However, the same type of conflict is found in rural Portugal. There it used to be common for all to contribute their labor to the family agricultural enterprise, but now young people are more often involved in wage work than in the past and are loath to confide their earnings to their parents (Pina Cabral, 1986, p. 71).

⁵ We should mention that we did not ask questions about gay and lesbian relationships, nor was the subject ever brought up by any of our subjects.

Studies of immigrant families usually do not include a “control group”; i.e. a selection of respondents the native population; however we found this to be very useful for our analysis, notably in regard to the issue of “conflict” between the generations. Most of our interview subjects from immigrant backgrounds expressed a wish for “better communication” with their parents in regard to contentious issues such as dating patterns. However, the young Franco-Québécois spoke even more frequently of “lack of communication” with their parents. And for them, it was not a matter of disagreement about specific problems, but rather a more general lack of contact and affect that was at issue. Indeed, it seemed though there was often minimal interaction and communication between parents and offspring, even though living under the same roof (Meintel, 1989).⁶

The supposition that immigrant families are by definition more conflict-ridden than others is based on a set of questionable notions about culture, migration and modernity whereby “traditional” parents are thought to be at odds with “modern” children influenced by the host society, a very dubious premise. In the households concerned by our own study, Québécois parents were not, in general, as liberal-minded as Chilean parents, because some of the Franco-Québécois youth came from conservative Catholic backgrounds. As we will see later one, such notions as immigrants as “traditional” and “conservative” are less adequate than ever in light of today's migratory currents.

At this point, though, it is important to note that the consensus young adults claim to hold with their parents about fundamental family issues is so closely related to identity that it may with some justification be construed as an identity strategy. That is, family obligation, respect for elders and (in most of the immigrant groups) more conservative behavior on the part of women are contrasted favorably with the individualism, lack of respect and sexual looseness thought to characterize the native-born Québécois population (Meintel, 1989). And as we have mentioned, some of the same subjects who emphasize their agreement with parental values in the interviews are actually constantly at odds with their parents regarding specific issues, such as financial contribution to the household

⁶ We chose to interview Franco-Québécois who were currently living with their parents, for greater comparability to the youth of other groups. Their reasons for living with parents were economic rather than normative and in many cases, the young person had lived elsewhere for a time.

(as in the case of some Portuguese). This said, we cannot speak of this consensus as “only” a strategy, because where family ends and identity begins is impossible to discern: for our young subjects and their parents, the two are inseparable.

It should also be noted that for many of our subjects, notions of Québécois family life are based on partial and often second-hand information, as well as media images, since as they themselves report, they have few close friendships with majority Québécois. Some mention being shocked by how other students address teachers or how they talk about their parents. At the same time, the fact is, Québec society is markedly non-normative as compared to the rest of Canada: divorce rates are high, and serial cohabitation without marriage extremely common, such that 55% of all children are born out of wedlock (as compared to 27% in the rest of Canada), according to a recent study.⁷

Fluid affiliations

The importance of age for our findings cannot be minimized. Nearly all the young people in our immigrant-origin study group spoke of a change in their sense of identity around the age of sixteen or so; that is, until that point, they had hoped to simply to be like their peers. Somewhere between 15 and 17 years of age, they develop an awareness of ethnic origins and pride in the cultural heritage associated with them, a tendency that was particularly evident among young Chileans and Vietnamese (cf. Grmela, 1991; Méthot, 1995). The shift in identification was often associated with practical action: a change in patterns of sociability, taking language classes so as to speak better Vietnamese,⁸ plans to visit or continue studies in Chile:

When I was younger, I just wanted to be with the Québécois, I wasn't really friends with young Chileans, but after you start hanging out more with Chileans, you feel more Chilean, you say to yourself, ‘These are my roots’, and you want to go back there, you want to help. (Miguel, 18 years old, apprentice electrician.)

⁷ This information comes from a newspaper article (Derfel 2000) concerning ongoing research by Richard Tremblay, Nicole Marciel-Graton and other researchers at the Université de Montréal. The study was commissioned by the Quebec Health Department.

⁸ Young Vietnamese sometimes find that they are embarrassed to speak Vietnamese with their grandparents, as they don't know all the all the appropriate polite forms.

In a large-scale study of various American ethnic groups, Mary Waters finds that such changes are typical and appear regularly at certain moments of the life cycle (1990, p. 36-46). In other research in Montreal we have found that older immigrant women living alone (usually widowed) give more emphasis to ethnic identifications and ethnic-centered activities than was the case earlier in their adult life (Peressini; Meintel, 1993).

The young adults in our study make it clear that they feel a sense of belonging to several cultures, several national spaces, including Québec. They speak of their plural affiliations not as a problem or a source of feelings of inferiority, but if anything, as a source of enrichment. “Je suis Québécois plus”, several told us. While drawing contrasts between their own group of origin and Franco-Québécois in regard to family life they also see similarities; the Québécois are often described as “Latin” and thus, similar to say, Portuguese, or Chileans. At the same time, several comment that their identity is more secure than that of the Québécois: as one woman born of Portuguese parents puts it, “The French Québécois are not a people who are sure of themselves”.

Being “Québécois plus” means being fully Québécois, but with yet other sources of cultural richness and openness to the rest of the world:

I am Québécois but also Portuguese.

The Québécois culture and also the part of the Portuguese culture that we have, that makes us people who are richer and more open. (Ida, born in Portugal, 23 years old).

Others talked of how the experience of migration itself had enriched their lives. A young man who is thinking of returning to Chile with his parents nonetheless has no regrets about the migration experience:

When you come from another country, you have different ideas, you are exposed to different things... I think we are lucky to have come here, we have seen things that we would not have, otherwise. (Daniel, 18 years old, student, arrived in Quebec at 8 year of age).

These children of immigrants believe that they possess all that is Québécois, more: access to at least one, if not several other countries where they have close family, knowledge of several languages, proximity to various other cultures. Because of their multiple ways of situating themselves, they experience a critical

distance toward all the cultural milieus they are a part of; can be quite as critical of their own ethnic milieu and of the parents' milieu of origin as they are of "les Québécois". Young Latin Americans (and often, their mothers) are highly critical of machismo:

In El Salvador, machismo is everywhere... The woman is supposed to do everything in the house, and the macho, he hits the woman... I hate this stupidity. (Francisco, 18 years, student, arrived in Québec at 12 years of age).

At the same time, the ethnic milieu in Montreal is seen by the Greek and Portuguese especially to be more conservative, less "modern" than the home country is today.

As we mentioned earlier, the notion of "double identity" is not very helpful for characterising the multiple affiliations of our subjects. The "we" in their narratives is an elastic concept, revealing a wide range of identifications. "We Greeks in Québec" (as opposed to Greeks in Greece) gives place to "We Europeans" or "We Mediterraneans" or, to mention a term one hears very often in Montreal, "We ethnics" (i.e., to refer to those of recent immigrant origin). What is more, some of the young people evoke regional identifications, such as "Greeks from the Islands", "Azoreans", "continental Portuguese", etc. Ethnic identity is far from the "turning inward" or "ghetto mentality" in the way these young people relate themselves to others; rather, it is often a basis for connectedness with others in the local environment or across national boundaries.

Ethnicity as a base for connectedness

Perhaps in part because of the connection they make between family and ethnicity, most the young people born in Canada as well as those born elsewhere feel a strong connection with the parents' country of origin, something that we had not expected when we began the study. While the place of the other national space may be important primarily for imagining oneself in the world, there are many concrete connections with it as well. Most have visited the country (some were themselves born there), some would like to go there regularly; a few would like to actually live there. Not, it should be added, in the rural villages where their parents came from in many cases, but rather in Lisbon, Athens...

Somewhat paradoxically, such a project is sometimes seen as a means to have more personal freedom than in the local ethnic community.

I'd like to live alone or with someone before I get married, but I wouldn't do it while living here, with my family around... That is why I'd go to Greece. (Angela, 21 years, student, born in Québec).

Moreover, such transnational solidarities are not always limited to the parents' country of origin; a number of the Vietnamese and the Salvadorans have spent long periods in the United States and keep close contact with relatives there. The same is true of Haitians in Montreal, who circulate between New York and Florida. Among more recently-arrived groups such as the Shiite Lebanese nuclear families are commonly dispersed across several national spaces, including France, Quebec, Lebanon and others (Le Gall, forthcoming).

Transnational ties do not exclude solidarities that cross ethnic lines on the local Montreal level (Meintel, 1994); the young Vietnamese speak of the "Asiatic" category, including themselves along with Laotians, Cambodians, Chinese and others. Even if such a category is meaningless in outside the immigration context, they recognize that it is operative in Montreal. On the one hand they are often confused with Chinese (which some contest); on the other they remark on cultural convergences between "les "Asiatiques", including family mores, especially the respect for elders, religion, philosophy, while not disregarding the historically troubled relations between China and Vietnam. The Chileans and Salvadorans for their part feel part of a "community" that brings them together with other immigrant groups from Latin America (Guatemalans, Colombians, Mexicans, Uruguayans, etc.). Music, language, patterns of sociability, similar political concerns, and the Catholic religion are all cited as points of convergence; at the same time, voluntary associations, newspapers, churches, specialized grocery stores, bookstores and other institutions help give structure to the community. It should be noted, though, that class barriers seem to operate within this wider community, as Lopes and Espiritu (1990) have noted regarding Latin Americans in the United States; that is, Chileans, though taking prominent roles in some Latino associations, tend to frequent members of their own group far more than the Salvadorans, whose close friendships often include those from other Latin American countries.

Some of the identifications mentioned earlier ("we Mediterraneans", "we Latins") give an idea of other, less institutionalized transethnic solidarities that

are nonetheless real for our subjects. The appellation “ethnics” is exceedingly common in Montreal, and is used by others to refer to those descended from origins other than British or French and is also used by those concerned to refer to themselves. Indeed, while most of our respondents have close friendships outside their group of origin, those ties concern mainly other children or grandchildren of immigrants. Such solidarities are not without limits; some mention Blacks or Pakistanis as “too different” to envision close relations with them.

Identity in Montréal today

Though the children of immigrants we interviewed might be construed as “maintaining” ethnically specific identities, one has to keep in mind that, while they may evoke one or another identification in different discursive or social contexts, they insist on being able to claim all of them. In short, they affirm cumulative,⁹ plural identities (Québécois, Greek, Greek-from-the Islands, Mediterranean, “ethnic”) that may be expressed selectively according to context, yet without denying or negating any of the others. In fact our interlocutors are affirming their mixedness, a theme that recurs in our work with Françoise Romaine-Ouellette on the Québécois parents adopting internationally, who generally project and try to support plural (Québécois and Chinese, for example) identities for their children. Research currently underway by Annie LeBlanc on adult children of mixed marriages involving one Armenian parent as well as that of Marie-Nathalie Le Blanc (1991) lends further support to the conclusion that in ethnically mixed marriages, partners embrace a mixed identity for the family, leaning heavily toward that of the minority partner, and that offspring of such marriages also feel themselves to be, as our informants put it, “Québécois plus”. Mixedness that appears to be emerging as a widespread value in Montreal, if not in Québec generally, a theme that we are studying in collaboration with colleagues.¹⁰ This is not a homogenizing mixedness destined to obscure real differences of class or ethnicity,¹¹ but rather a diversified mixedness whereby individuals can claim several identities without denying any of them. In another

⁹ The notion of cumulative identities owes much to Fonseca (1995).

¹⁰ This is one of the themes of research presently being carried out by the Groupe de recherche Ethnicité et société, an interdisciplinary research group, at the Université de Montréal.

publication we hope to elaborate further on why Montreal is such a hospitable context for plural identities, not only in the ethnic domain, but in those of kinship/family and religion as well.

In recent years, since this study was carried out, trilingualism and international orientation appear to have become even more valued among Montreal youth of all origins, as the influences of globalisation make themselves felt. Those of French or English mother tongue are more bilingual than ever before, and trilingualism is extremely common among children of immigrants who are now in their early twenties. Multilingualism and connections with other cultural contexts have obvious value in the era of globalization. Moreover, present-day migration currents are bringing migrants to Quebec who are better educated than ever before, moreso than the general population (Gouvernement du Québec, 2000b, p. 11); they are educated, multilingual and often urban in background, such as to render obsolete the stereotype of immigrants as peasants for whom migration has brought their first direct contact with modern society.

We have emphasized the particular characteristics of the Montreal multi-ethnic setting in our approach to plural identities partly because we believe that identities are very much the product of cultural and political context. Indeed, as Levi-Strauss (1977) shows us, the very notion of identity is very much a cultural one. In our view, this emphasis on particularisms need not exclude comparison or even generalizations; rather, we hope that this excursion into the particularities of ethnic identities in Montreal may shed light on what might be less evident and more implicit in other contexts.

¹¹ Other research that we have carried out on Cape Verdeans in the U.S. and in Cabo Verde, supplemented by the more recent field work of Isabel Rodrigues, indicates that “mixedness” is often invoked in political discourse (*Somos todos mistos*) in such a way as to level or negate class and colour differences. We leave it to the reader to decide whether such is the case in Brazil.

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