

# Montreal's Italians and the Socio-Economy of Settlement, 1900-1930: Some Historical Hypotheses

Bruno Ramirez

Volume 10, Number 1, June 1981

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1019155ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1019155ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine

ISSN

0703-0428 (print)

1918-5138 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

Ramirez, B. (1981). Montreal's Italians and the Socio-Economy of Settlement, 1900-1930: Some Historical Hypotheses. *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine*, 10(1), 39–48. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1019155ar>

Article abstract

As the pattern of Italian immigration to Montreal changed from one made up predominantly of sojourners to one of permanent settlement, important changes occurred both in the composition of that immigrant population (sex ratio, age structure, etc.) and in its internal organization (residential patterns, kinship and *paese*-based network).

These changes made possible the enactment of familial economic strategies characterised by the use of extra-market resources to complement the means of life deriving from earnings. Though the magnitude of this practice escapes precise quantification, its occurrence seems to have been so widespread among Italian immigrants as to constitute a socio-economic subsystem existing alongside the official market system. Moreover, in this sphere of economic behavior, Italian immigrants enjoyed a greater autonomy in their use of time and space and thus could more freely resort to their cultural values as an important resource for their adaptive strategies. More detailed analysis of the socio-economy of settlement may throw important light on the specificity of the ethnic cohesion characterising Italian immigrant communities in Montreal during those years.

# Montreal's Italians and the Socio-Economy of Settlement, 1900-1930: Some Historical Hypotheses\*

Bruno Ramirez

## Résumé/Abstract

*Les schèmes d'immigration italienne à Montréal, d'abord composés principalement de séjours passagers, favorisent désormais l'établissement permanent. Cette population a donc changé d'aspect, tant dans sa composition (répartition des sexes, nature des groupes d'âge, etc.) que dans son organisation (préférences domiciliaires, liens de parenté, d'alliance et de paese ou petite patrie).*

*Cette transformation a suscité l'apparition d'une économie familiale caractérisée par le recours à des ressources extérieures au marché pour suppléer aux revenus d'emploi. Cet usage, qu'on n'a pas encore mesuré à cause de son ampleur, semble s'être répandu à tel point parmi les immigrants italiens qu'il constituerait un sous-système socio-économique parallèle au marché officiel. En outre, ce comportement économique accorde aux immigrants italiens plus de latitude dans l'emploi de leur temps et de leur espace et, partant, dans le recours à des valeurs culturelles propres qui constituent une ressource précieuse dans le choix de leurs modes d'adaptation. Une analyse plus précise des aspects socio-économiques de l'établissement permettra de mieux connaître la nature caractéristique de la cohésion ethnique des communautés montréalaises d'immigrants italiens au cours de cette période.*

*As the pattern of Italian immigration to Montreal changed from one made up predominantly of sojourners to one of permanent settlement, important changes occurred both in the composition of that immigrant population (sex ratio, age structure, etc.) and in its internal organization (residential patterns, kinship and paese-based network).*

*These changes made possible the enactment of familial economic strategies characterised by the use of extra-market resources to complement the means of life deriving from earnings. Though the magnitude of this practice escapes precise quantification, its occurrence seems to have been so widespread among Italian immigrants as to constitute a socio-economic subsystem existing alongside the official market system. Moreover, in this sphere of economic behavior, Italian immigrants enjoyed a greater autonomy in their use of time and space and thus could more freely resort to their cultural values as an important resource for their adaptive strategies. More detailed analysis of the socio-economy of settlement may throw important light on the specificity of the ethnic cohesion characterising Italian immigrant communities in Montreal during those years.*

In recent years the convergence of several new avenues of social analysis has had a major impact on the understanding of the immigration phenomenon. While conclusions flowing from these analyses are still premature, they have certainly made historians more aware of the complexity of the immigration process and of the necessity to go beyond traditional interpretative schemes. Studies on family history, on the socio-cultural values that the immigrants brought with them, on the occupational dynamics and composition in both the sending and the receiving societies, and on the different patterns of migration,<sup>1</sup> have shown that migration and adaptation – far from being a spontaneous process or one unilaterally imposed on the immigrant by reasons of necessity – involved a much more complex set of factors. The study of these factors allows the immigrant to be viewed in the role of historical protagonist. What for the economic historian, for instance, has been a physical movement of workers, or of potential workers, in response to the exigencies of international and inter-regional labour markets, the social historian views as the result of decisions influenced not only by economic factors but also by factors such as age, sex, mores, family structure and cycle, expectations, and a sense of awareness of the stakes involved in the move to emigrate. The degree of planning

that such a move presupposed (a consideration of all the factors affecting one's present situation and how the move to emigrate would improve it) indicates the extent to which emigration involved a strategy; a strategy that the emigrant would sometimes enact as an individual, but more often as member of a family or more extended kinship and community network.

Different strategies were put into effect depending on whether one emigrated temporarily or permanently. The distinction between the sojourner who left his hometown with the idea of returning at the end of a work period, and the emigrant who left thinking of settling permanently in a new country, is perhaps the one that best permits an insight into how subjective and objective factors were translated into different emigration strategies. While historians can seldom penetrate the decision-making process occurring in the emigrant's mind or within his family, they can study the constraints affecting the realm of choices in the context of the material possibility existing at the time, thus reconstructing certain patterns of collective behaviour shared by a given emigrant and ethnic population.

The history of Italian immigration to Montreal (1900-1930) provides a good illustration of how operative these distinctions were. This paper builds on a previous study which was a preliminary analysis of the transition from sojourning to settlement

\* The assistance of several persons with research for this article is appreciated. They include Michael Del Balso, Sylvie Tashereau, Robert Harney, and Harry Cleaver.

among Montreal's Italians.<sup>4</sup> Here the focus will be on the early settlement phase of this process. An attempt will be made to see what elements informed individual and family strategies in the context of a settlement and adaptation process, and the extent to which Italian immigrants in Montreal became agents of a peculiar socio-economic dynamic resulting from the encounter of a particular rural population with a particular industrial and urban society.

Before analysing some of the major characteristics of the "socioeconomy of settlement," two preliminary historical considerations are of crucial importance. The first is the change occurring in the pattern of Italian immigration to Montreal from the first to the second decade of the century. The second (closely related to the first) is the changing composition of the Italian population settling in Montreal.

Despite the existence of a small Italian colony in Montreal made up of permanent settlers,<sup>3</sup> the predominant pattern at the turn of the century was one of a seasonal migration. Sojourners – mostly single men – would come to Montreal attracted by the demand for labourers existing in various construction and mining projects, and at the end of the work-season would return to their hometowns. Others might choose wintering in Montreal, living off some of their savings or from occasional work they might find in the city, swelling the ranks of single men which made up Montreal's Italian colony. According to a count made in February 1905 by the priest of the parish serving the Italian colony, of a total Italian population of 4,000, half were "workers without family."<sup>4</sup>

The monetary rewards that such a pattern yielded to both the sojourners and to the small army of agents (*padroni*, *banchieri*, innkeepers, etc.) who kept the "commerce of migration" running have been the subject of several studies by historian Robert Harney.<sup>5</sup> In one of these studies Harney probes very skillfully into the frame of mind of these sojourners to discover all the elements (economic, social and cultural) which entered into play whenever a migrant took that route to improve his lot. What emerges clearly from this study is that very few migrants could sustain for a very long time the physical and psychological stress typical of a transatlantic migrant life. As he puts it, "a migrant's search was ended when he had fulfilled his target, but his target was almost always to live a normal, i.e., married life, among his own kind, somewhere in the psychical world of his *paesani* where he could make a living."<sup>6</sup>

One way through which former Italian migrants or new immigrants sought this normality of life was to settle permanently in Montreal in the hope to re-create for themselves a life which would be less insecure, both psychologically and economically, than the one they and their kin had lived hitherto. The available statistical data on Italian immigration to Montreal does indicate that as one moves from the first to the second decade of the century the sojourning phenomenon gives place to a new immigration movement made up of people coming to Montreal to settle permanently. The inadequacy of the available statistical data renders an exact measurement of this transition difficult (if not impossible). This situation is, however, compensated by a number of factors the analysis of which allows this thesis to be confirmed.

Firstly, the mechanisms which had mediated between the

migrant's willingness to try his chance in the New World and the actual demand of immigrant labour power in Canada entered into crisis. Migrants whose ignorance of the language and of general conditions had made them easy prey of travel agents and *padroni's* entrepreneurial ambitions began to find means to bypass what had seemed to be the necessary "narrow gate" to a Canadian wage. Montreal, with its excesses of *padronismo* and the fierce struggle among its Italian commercial elite to monopolize the "commerce of migration," helped in this process.<sup>7</sup> The mechanisms of attraction and recruitment typical of a sojourning pattern were gradually replaced by informal networks extending from the Italian *paesi* to the centres of Italian settlement in the New World through which money, promises of assistance, and information on working and living conditions circulated among immigrants, their families and their fellow townsmen giving rise to an alternative system of attraction and recruitment. That this system could be more effective than the one offered by immigration operators – both private and public – is attested by the declaration made in 1909 by an Italian parliamentarian who had travelled extensively to study the phenomenon:

Experience is already showing that governments do not have influence over migratory currents, that the strongest agent of emigration is the stamp, the letter coming from North or South America, and this is the only thing our emigrants believe. The Bulletins (*Circolari*) of the *Commissariato di Emigrazione* or of the *Ministero d'Emigrazione* or of the Consuls are looked upon with mistrust by emigrants. Our fellow citizens, when on Sunday they come out of the church in their villages - especially in Southern Italy (I have seen this typical scene) - they crowd around the friend who happened to have just received a letter from America and they read it as if it were the Gospel. And if that letter says: "do not come for here the situation is bad," no governmental action can send a migratory current to that place. If instead the letter says: "Come, for here one can make good money," there is no prohibition, no decree *Prinetti* that can prevent people from emigrating to those places...<sup>8</sup>

In the case of Canada, and more specifically of Montreal, the immigrants refusal of *padronism* as a system of labour recruitment coupled with a series of statutory measures the Government enacted from 1905 to try to prevent fraudulent practices by employment agents, seems to have contributed to the change in the pattern of immigration. These measures, in fact, aimed at restricting the flow of immigrants who did not have the resources necessary to permit their insertion in the Canadian economy and who could easily end up at the mercy of employment agents, especially if they did not have anyone else to rely upon at their arrival.<sup>9</sup> How effective these measures were in checking these recruitment practices is not entirely certain, but a study done by Italian emigration authorities around that time imputes to these restrictive laws the temporary decline in Italian immigration to Canada that marked the post-1906 years.<sup>10</sup> When a few years later the Italian immigration flow to Montreal revived, its composition was markedly different from the previous one. Very conspicuous in this new current was the presence of women coming either to reunite themselves with their families or to help form new ones. The stricter immigration requirements enacted by the Canadian government may have had the effect of forcing potential emigrants to better mobilize their resources in view of a more long-term emigration strategy. One such resource was the gradual forming in Montreal of immi-

grant kin and *paesani* networks which could serve as bases of support and assistance for the new arrivals.<sup>11</sup>

This new current of immigration, though short-lived on account of the outbreak of World War I, resulted in a rapid increase of the Italian population in Montreal (see Maps I, II, and III). More importantly, this current exhibits the features of a chain migration process, especially when the regional and village composition of the new arrivals is considered. It thus seems to confirm the thesis put forth by some immigration historians who have seen a direct relationship (temporal and strategic) between the pattern of seasonal migration and that of chain migration.<sup>12</sup> In this sense one may view the migrant as a sort of explorer/pioneer who in his travellings back and forth brings to his village not only his nest egg but also information on the living and working conditions of the places he had been; he becomes the crucial agent in the circulation of information, and his experience and know-how a key resource in the elaboration of subsequent emigration strategies at the family, kinship network, and *paese* level.

In addition to the regional and village affiliations of Italian newcomers to Montreal, another element suggesting the occurrence of a chain-migration phenomenon is the remarkable increase in the proportion of Italian women emigrating to Montreal. Between 1911 and 1921 the sex ratio in the Italian immigrant population in Montreal changed from 45 for every 100 men to 65 women for every 100 men.<sup>13</sup> This change clearly indicates the tendency toward family reunion and at the same time created the conditions which favoured the propensity to marriage. From 1911 on, the rate of Italian marriages and christenings performed in Montreal increased rapidly<sup>14</sup>(see Table I). The increase of the propensity of marriage characterizing the new pattern of immigration emerges also from a comparison in

the ages of Italian brides marrying in 1915 with those marrying in 1925 (when the sex ratio of the Montreal Italian population had already stabilized). A greater proportion of brides marrying in 1915 were younger (51.5 per cent were 19 years old and below), compared to those marrying in 1925 (35 per cent were 19 years old and below).<sup>15</sup>

If thus far the emphasis has been on the changing pattern of Italian immigration to Montreal and on the changing composition of the Italian population settling there, it is because the main hypothesis suggested here is that the "socioeconomy of settlement" presupposed a population structure characterized by kinship and hometown-based networks and relationships. A reunited or a newly constituted family (or kinship network) facilitated the enactment of an economic strategy, and the latter was further enhanced by the existence of a wider network of *paesani* relationships. To put it differently, kinship and *paesani* relationships became potential resources to be maximized in the pursuit of those economic goals designed to make adaptation less arduous and less alienating.

One methodological point needs to be raised here. Recent historical studies on the condition of the working class in Canadian cities have proved inadequate to account for the kind of economic behaviour which was practiced by Italian settlers in Montreal.<sup>16</sup> In these studies the authors make use of standard economic measurements (indicators) such as wage movements, cost-of-living levels, family budgets, etc., so as to be able to *deduce* from them working-class conditions at a given point in time. Of course, the use of these data is not only important but often indispensable to reconstruct the economic contours within which a given working-class population is to be studied. The limits of this approach, however, are those typical of any analysis which seeks to impose an "ideal type" on a socio-economic reality characterized by both uniformity and diversity. The economic measurements referred to above imply in fact an ideal type of "wage-earner/consumer," and at the same time impute to the market an all-encompassing rationality exerted, among other things, through the imposition of certain norms of economic behaviour to which all participants must respond in similar ways (by either internalizing them, or by simply complying to avoid starvation).

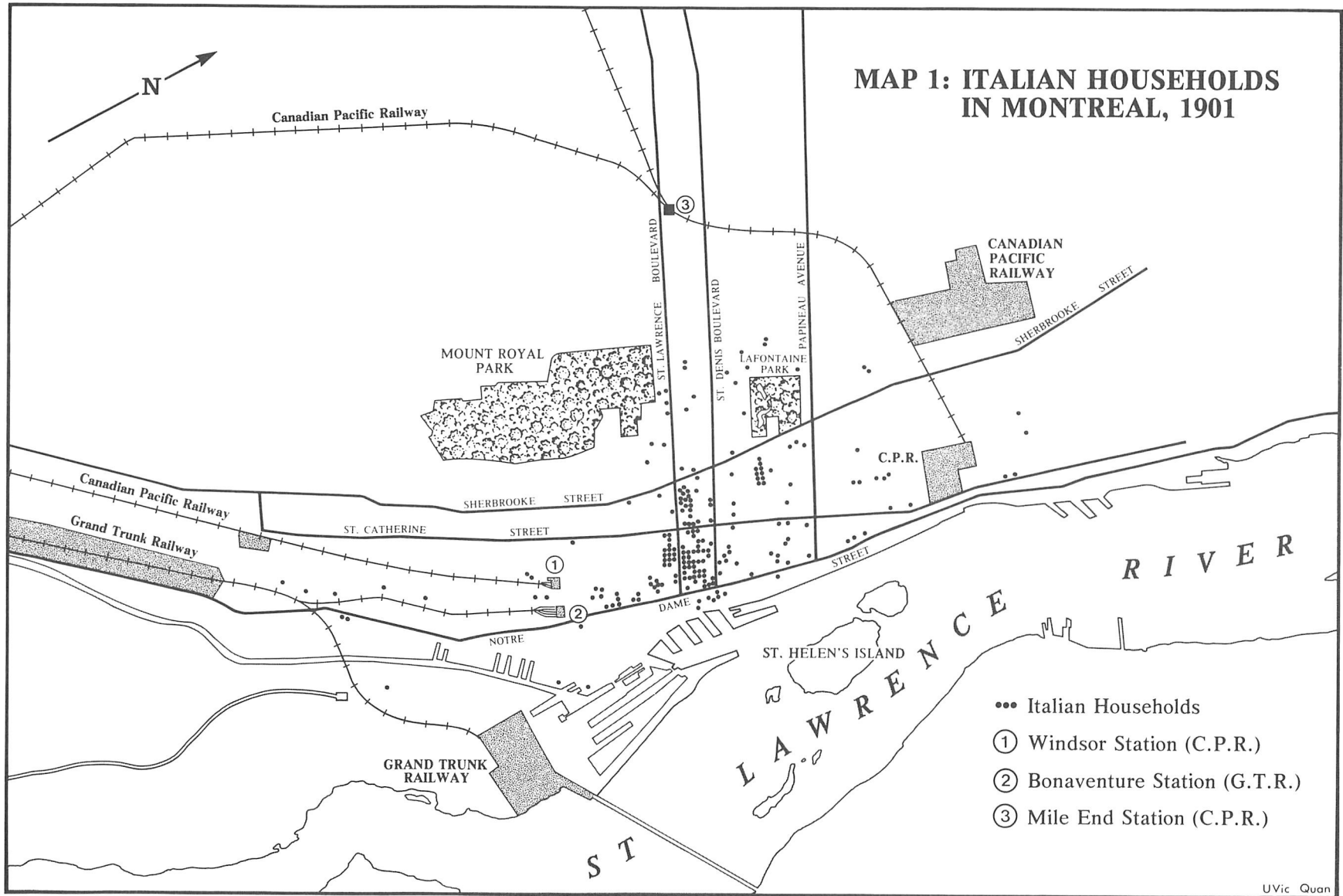
Obviously, this ideal-type approach produces a conceptual levelling - important socio-cultural categories are subsumed into the two basic categories of wage-earner and consumer. The functionality of this model is evident: at one point of the analysis the economic actor is viewed as a wage-earner of so many dollars per week, month, or year; at another moment he is viewed as a consumer of that revenue, using that money in the market to make ends meet. A correlation of these two moments (roles) allows the analysis to establish the conditions of life of the actor in question (whether he and his family are above or below the poverty line, etc.). However, it should become apparent that correlating econometrically different roles that a historical actor may have played at different moments is insufficient to provide a synthesis (both conceptual and empirical) of the daily productive and re-productive activities of a society's working population. Nor does this approach leave room for the socio-cultural diversity which may have existed within the given population studied; diversity which helps to explain why different groups may have responded differently to the existing forces and hence adopted different economic strategies in their search for their means of life.

TABLE I

Marriages and Christenings Performed in the Italian Churches of Mont Carmel and Notre Dame de la Défense, 1906 to 1923

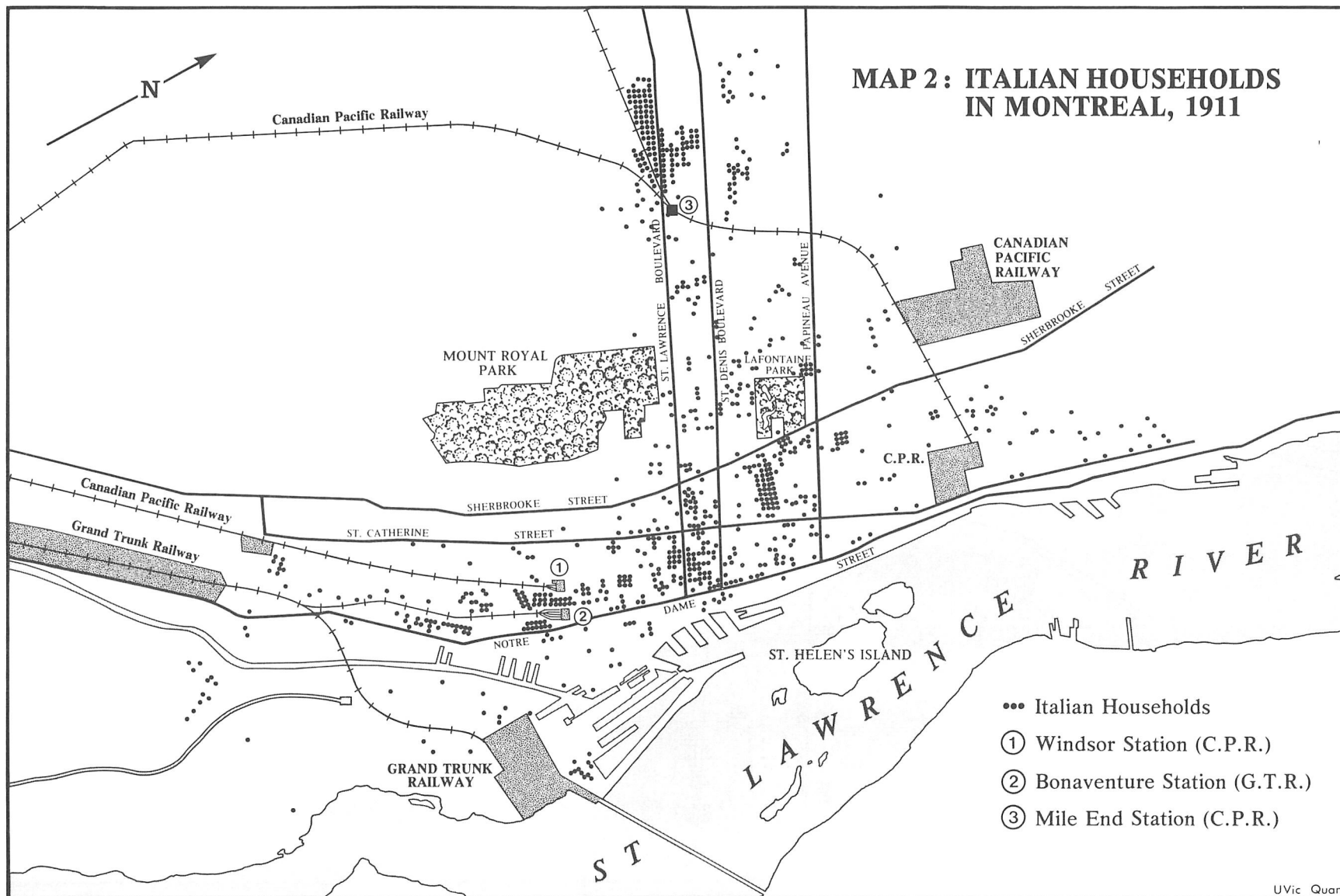
Year	MARRIAGES			CHRISTENINGS		
	N.D.	M.C.	Total	N.D.	M.C.	Total
1906	-	55	55	-	179	179
1907	-	35	55	-	159	159
1908	-	37	37	-	195	195
1909	-	29	29	-	229	229
1910	-	29	29	5	219	224
1911	13	62	75	109	263	372
1912	21	71	92	141	288	429
1913	36	87	123	202	349	551
1914	47	54	101	261	411	672
1915	29	62	91	264	153	417
1916	45	59	104	281	327	608
1917	49	61	110	275	313	588
1918	51	54	105	274	316	590
1919	55	59	114	276	291	557
1920	73	62	135	289	281	570
1921	53	54	107	283	315	598
1922	55	43	98	319	268	587
1923	65	50	115	282	249	531

SOURCE: Charles M. Bayley, "The Social Structure of the Italian and Ukrainian Immigrant Communities in Montreal, 1935-1937," M.A. Thesis (Sociology), McGill University, 1939.



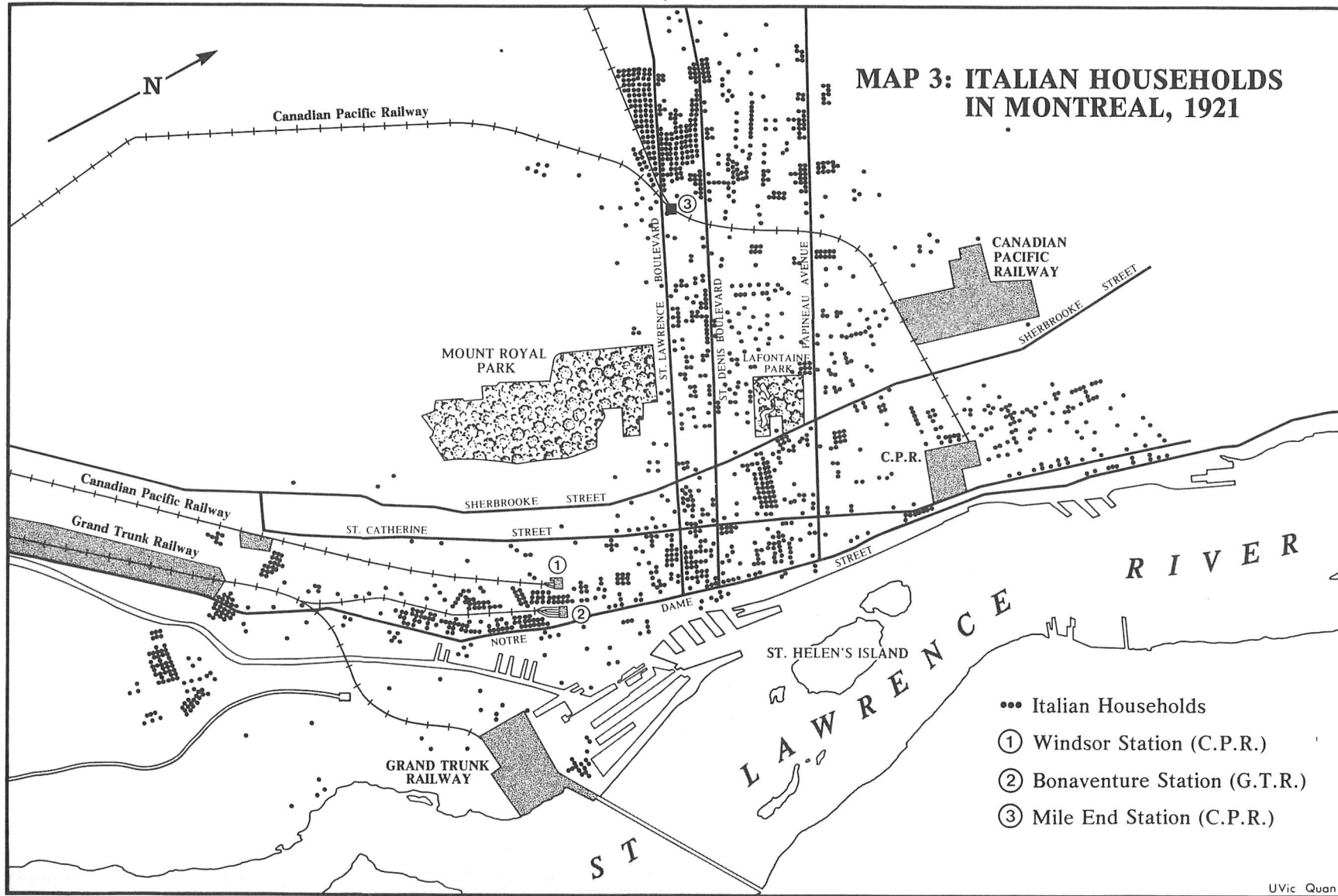
Source: Montreal City Directory (Lovell), 1901.

UVic Quan



Source: Montreal City Directory (Lovell), 1911.

UVic Quan



Source: Montreal City Directory (Lovell), 1921.

UVic Quan

To be more specific, a rigid utilization of the “wage-earner/consumer” ideal type hides a whole sphere of socio-economic activity in which the participants made use of *their* time and of extra-market resources to supplement their means of existence. One thinks of all those activities by which persons produced goods and services for their own consumption, or for exchange with goods and services of friends, but without the direct mediation of money and outside the market circuit. In this sphere, actions – both individual and collective – were oriented toward the production and consumption of values whose magnitude and circulation were not directly determined by the laws of the market, but rather by the participants’ direct sense of needs and by their estimation of the resources at their disposal.

Recent studies on women and family history, and in particular of the role of housework for the daily reproduction of the family, have shown the importance of such a non-moneyed activity, both in terms of its impact on the household economy, as well as for its effects on the socialization process among household members.<sup>17</sup> These studies have encouraged a more careful analysis of the whole gamut of activities involved in one’s daily reproduction and, more importantly, of the relationship existing among them. This has led to a recognition that beside being earners of wages and consumers of market goods and services, members of the working class were in a position to use their time and their available resources to produce and consume goods and services which qualitatively were as important and necessary as those available in the market.

A close analysis of these activities, of the magnitude of the value produced by them, and of their importance in the cycle of daily reproduction, has revealed the existence of an alternative socio-economic system, functioning alongside the official market system. One may call it a “system” because it had a rationality of its own and because it involved norms of behaviour practiced by its participants.

If the rationality characterizing a market socio-economy is rigid and is imposed on its participants in time and space, the rationality of a sub-system based on the extra-market production and exchange of goods and services involves a higher degree of subjectivity on the part of its participants, and its flexibility allows for a more autonomous utilization of one’s time and space available. Such rationality is reflected in actions oriented toward the solution of material problems; it becomes concretized in the degree of planning and strategic considerations necessary to mobilize the available resources in order to achieve the desired ends.<sup>18</sup>

To the extent that these activities involve social interaction and that this interaction occurs among participants responding to similar needs, the socialization dynamics flowing from them rests on two norms which serve to regulate the collective behaviour of the actors involved and actually give this socio-economic system its peculiar characteristics.<sup>19</sup> Co-operation is one such norm. Co-operation is necessary both because the magnitude and the nature of the product or service produced call for the pooling of the resources (and talents) of different people, but also because the values produced are destined to the benefit of the different participants involved.

The widespread use of vegetable gardens as Italian families moved into the new area of Italian settlement of Mile End, and

the common practice of processing food at home, are two important examples of maximization of co-operation efforts in the pursuit of a family’s economic strategy.<sup>20</sup> Another economic practice which seems to have been widespread among Italian settlers was raising animals in the yards of their living quarters. Chickens and rabbits were the animals most commonly raised as they could be easily kept in cages, and also because attending them required very little effort and minimal cost. Moreover, beside providing meat for special occasions and celebrations, the egg-yield contributed a food item of daily consumption. Goats were also frequently kept in small shacks built in backyards. To their owners, goats were a source of milk, a basic food item which many Italians considered to be superior to cow’s milk. Of course, looking after a goat required much more time and effort than raising chickens or rabbits; but Mr. V. Monaco – who for three years delivered bread in Italian neighbourhoods – recalls the familiar scene of kids watching their parents’ goats pasturing in nearby empty lots, thus performing a useful task while playing. In these activities all the members of a family participated, following a division of labour based on family’s cultural values and norms of behaviour, and in response to the need of supplementing the means of life provided by waged-labour by resorting to this kind of productive activity.

Although it is difficult to quantify exactly the amount of value produced by these efforts, the available evidence suggests that these practices were a very important part of the family’s daily economic activities, that they required a mobilization of the time and resources of the people involved, and that they called forth the enactment of a family’s economic strategy.

Besides food, shelter was a need which often led Italians to resort to extra-market resources. For many early Italian settlers of the Mile End area, for instance, the erection of living quarters would go through several stages, owing both to their lack of cash to buy a ready-made dwelling, but also to their evaluation of the resources available and of the strategy needed to reach that objective. Thus, for many of them the first stage involved making free use of discarded material to be found, for instance, in the C.P.R. scrap-yard or in work-sites, items such as pieces of lumber (used also as fuel), tin-sheets, and bricks. These items, supplemented by other indispensable ones, were used in the erection of the bare dwelling structure, which then – as means permitted it – would be strengthened by the addition of brick walls and other durable construction structures.<sup>21</sup>

The production and the exchange of services among members of a kinship or *paesani* network is perhaps the domain which best renders visible the interaction of co-operation with the second norm; i.e., reciprocity. By “service,” it is meant not merely cases in which help was provided by older settlers to newcomers (in finding a job, logement, etc.) – services that in the context of a sojourning economy involved money expenditures – but also cases where such exchange of services involved more careful calculation and planning by the participants. Perhaps the best example here is the services provided by relatives or *paesani* in the construction of a family dwelling, where specialized tasks or phases of the construction (carpentering, painting, electrical work, etc.) would be performed by people having those skills, who “loaned” them to the project, and who in turn would expect from the beneficiary a similar or equivalent “favour.”

These kinds of co-operative practices permitted the pooling



of “technical” resources existing within a kinship or *paesani* network. Here were the basic elements of an informal mutual aid system, binding its participants by a shared sense of mutual obligation. While no formal sanction existed, forcing participants to absolve their obligation, mutuality, and reciprocity add a very important dimension in that they insure a continuity in the interaction among participants which does not have an equivalent in the market-place where a service is purchased (despite the continuity that one may find in supplier/customer relations).

The existence of these productive practices, their role in the reproductive cycle of a family or group, and their insertion within the wider economic context of a city like Montreal establishes the existence of a socio-economic sub-system. What still is not clear, however, is the extent to which Italian immigrant settlers would make more extensive use of such extra-market resources than, for example, native Quebecers, many of whom were equally undergoing a process of adaptation from a rural to an urban-industrial context. Although a full answer cannot yet be provided, it is suggested that part of the answer lies in the relationship between market forces and the particular socio-cultural values of a given group.

If one considers a dynamic market not only as a system making available the greatest possible variety of goods and services to the largest number of people, but also as a system whose key principle is that of inducing the greatest number of consumers to consume the commodities it provides, then the question to explore is how different groups of consumers responded differently to the inducement mechanisms of the market. Were some of them more or less vulnerable to such inducements? How would socio-cultural values intervene to favour or retard such inducements? While these questions require a thorough comparative analysis, the available knowledge of the early history of Italian settlement in Montreal does suggest that socio-cultural factors intervened to reduce their vulnerability *vis-à-vis* the inducement mechanisms of the market.

Language is one factor making it more difficult for the average Italian consumer to interact within the communicative network characterizing a dynamic and expanding market. A reduced communicative functionality limits the consumer’s perception of what is available on the market (commensurate to his means) and orients the person to seek alternative (extra-market) means to satisfy his needs, or orients him toward a “submarket” made of ethnic commercial actors, where the gamut of commodities and services is reduced, but where the communicative functionality of the consumer is unimpeded. This is particularly true in the case of services, where the transaction involves a greater degree of communicative interaction than it is the case with the purchase of commodities.

Another factor is the eating habits and traditions which Italian immigrants brought along with them. Here again, the inducements of the market are reduced if food items of their preference are either unavailable in the market or, if available, are considered to be beyond their means. At a time when fresh vegetables could be prohibitive for people with modest revenues, and their variety very limited, the garden permitted the Italians to make a productive use of their leisure time by yielding at an insignificant cost food items which were basic to their culinary tastes and habits. Moreover, this practice may have resulted from the adaptation of a custom, existing in many Italian rural

regions, whereby peasant populations would make use of public land (even where this was forbidden) to extract from it vegetables and other important subsistence items. The ample availability of free land in Montreal’s outskirts (particularly in the new area of Italian settlement; i.e., Mile-End) facilitated this process, making this practice one of the leading examples of adaptation from a rural to an urban context, as well as a significant illustration of the use of extra-market resources.

When Monaco bought his first lot of land in the Montcalm area, hoping in the future to build a house for himself and the family, the area around was full of vegetable gardens – “gardens that we Italians made; nobody would forbid us; everybody would do this on his own... Canadians did not grow gardens; only us, poor Italians, cultivated them. Many of us did this because it was our only hope to cultivate – our tradition, you know These Canadians did not know the stuff we grew. ‘What is all this stuff?’ they would ask us. And we, through all kinds of gestures, would explain it – and they remained with their mouth open.”<sup>22</sup>

An early resident of the Clark-Beaubien area, in the Mile-End district, has similar recollections. “Many came in this area because they would make themselves a garden – for nobody would forbid them. Behind here was full of gardens; the land did not belong to any one...” This informant made a very ingenious use of time and space by making himself a garden near where he worked. “I worked here, and nearby I had a large garden because the land was free for whoever wanted to work it, and nobody would tell us not to.” What did he grow in his garden? “Everything, I had everything! I didn’t have to buy anything. Every evening I came home from the garden loaded with vegetables. I had everything.”<sup>23</sup>

A third consideration is the extent to which the immigration experience and the decision to settle acted on the socio-cultural values by leading the actors to arrange their needs according to an order of priorities serving to orient the family in the pursuit of its economic strategies. The desire to own a dwelling represents a leading case of priority need, the satisfaction of which translated itself in a higher propensity to minimize dependence on market goods and services, and to maximize extra-market resources. What made the possession of a dwelling a priority in the settlers’ economic strategy was not merely the sense of security that went along with it, but also the fact that it provided the physical space making possible the enactment of more autonomous and varied household-based economic practices. Boarding is a major example. Although, unlike the practices mentioned above, boarding involved monetary transactions, the available data indicates that it was a widespread practice among Italian immigrants, particularly in the new areas of settlement characterized by single family housing.

Potentially any single house unit which had enough space to accommodate more than two persons was available for a boarding arrangement. For the family, the \$3 a month it received from each *bordante* (1912-16) could be a significant addition to the household budget. Beside providing a roof, the other basic services provided in the boarding arrangement were cleaning and washing, and the preparation of meals. If one considers that these services were qualitatively the same as those provided by the *padrona* to the other members of her own family, one realizes to what extent the practice of boarding was integrated into the

family's basic function as unit of social reproduction, as well as the centrality of the woman's domestic labour in this socio-economic process.

Italian immigrant men who were participants in that phase of settlement in some of Montreal's neighbourhoods recollect with some pride that their women did not have to go to work outside the home. And in fact the available evidence does show that Italian women's participation in the Montreal labour market was minimal. Yet it would be interesting to multiply the \$3-a-month by the number of *bordanti* in any given month or year in order to see what volume of business was generated by the boarding arrangement. One can speculate that the cumulative money value was considerable, so much so as to make the practice of boarding one of the major service industries in the economy of settlement, and certainly the major (if not the only) Montreal industry "employing" Italian immigrant woman labour.

Thus far this paper has attempted to outline some of the major characteristics of what one may call a "socioeconomy of settlement," pointing at the same time to those factors that led Italian settlers in Montreal to become agents of that system. Of course, more detailed study is needed of the daily practices and strategies enacted by settlers in order to establish more precisely the magnitude of this process of autonomous value creation. The other reason justifying the pursuit of this line of analysis derives from the concern among some historians to look for the persistence of transplanted cultural values and how they affected the adaptation process of immigrant communities. Traditional studies of this phenomenon which focus on the experience of immigrants associations and ethnic mutual aid societies may prove inadequate to yield a complete picture of the day-to-day mechanisms of ethnic interaction, especially in the context of a settling and adaptation process (such as was the case of Montreal Italians in the 1910s and 1920s) where kinship and *paesani* informal networks seem to have been the main channels to mobilize resources. More recent studies have moved away from the terrain of formal, organized activities and folkloristic behaviour

and have focused on the immigrants' adaptive behaviour in the context of the work place, thus adding a very important dimension to our knowledge of that phenomenon.<sup>24</sup>

The analysis put forth here argues that besides the two above-mentioned terrains of immigrant adaptive behaviour there is another one constituted by socio-economic activity designed to mobilize extra-market resources for the attainment of economic ends.<sup>25</sup> Although the extent to which market forces affected this domain of activity should not be minimized, the productive, instrumental interaction occurring among participants of this sub-system deserves much more attention than it has been given. Analysis of this domain of activity would add to our knowledge of the mechanisms of adjustment, particularly in the case of an early settlement stage when dependence on autonomous resources seems to have been most pronounced. For one thing, it would shed more light on the multiple material elements taken into consideration in the enactment of a family strategy. Equally important, it would help to uncover the socio-cultural expressions of a given immigrant group as it seeks to adjust to new institutions and conditions of life.

Unlike the context of formal ethnic organizations, where participation may be limited and "ceremonial," or the work-place context where the margins of autonomous adaptive behaviour were restricted (by the imperatives of profit maximization and managerial prerogatives), interaction oriented toward the production and the exchange of use-values seems to have been more diffused and enjoyed a greater flexibility in the use of time and space. It is, therefore, possible to argue that it was in this sphere that Italian immigrant settlers in Montreal made more free and more autonomous use of their culture as a resource in their pursuit of adjustment and in the shaping of their particular brand of ethnicity. At the same time, the dynamics of co-operation and reciprocity informing the socio-economy of settlement may have had the crucial effect of intensifying intra-ethnic instrumental and communicative interaction, thus favouring the cultural cohesion that marked the Italian ethnic experience of the 1920s in Montreal.

#### NOTES

1. See especially Tamnara Hareven, "The Family as Process: The Historical Study of the Family Cycle," *Journal of Social History*, VIII (Spring 1974), pp. 322-329; T. Hareven, "Family and Work Patterns of Immigrant Laborers in a Planned Industrial Town, 1900-1930," in Richard L. Ehrlich, ed., *Immigrants in Industrial America, 1850-1920* (Richmond: University of Virginia Press, 1977), pp. 47-66; John Modell and Tamara Hareven, "Urbanization and the Malleable Household: An Examination of Boarding and Lodging in American Families," in T. Hareven, ed., *Family and Kin in Urban Communities, 1700-1930* (New York and London: Franklin Watts, 1977), pp. 164-186; Mararosa Dalla Costa, "Emigrazione e Riproduzione," in A. Serafini, et. al., eds., *L'operaio multinazionale in Europa* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1975), pp. 207-241; Herbert G. Gutman, "Work, Culture and Society in Industrializing America, 1815-1919," *American Historical Review*, Vol. 78 (1973), pp. 531-588; Bruce Laurie, Theodore Hershberg, and George Alter, "Immigrants and Industry: The Philadelphia Experience, 1850-1880," in Ehrlich, *Immigrants in Industrial America*, pp. 123-150; John W. Briggs, "Return the Immigrant to Immigration Studies: A New Appeal for an Old Approach," mimeo. (University of Rochester, 1972); and Josef Barton, *Peasants and Strangers; Italians, Rumanians, and Slovaks in an American City, 1890-1950* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975). For Canada, see especially Robert F. Harney, "Boarding and Belonging: Thoughts on Sojourner Institutions," *Urban History Review*, No. 2-78 (October 1978), pp. 8-37; Bettina Bradbury, "The Family Eco-

nomy and Work in an Industrializing City: Montreal in the 1870s," *CHA Historical Papers* (1979), pp. 71-96; John Zucchi, "The Italian Immigrants of the St. John's Ward, 1875-1915: Patterns of Settlement and Neighbourhood Formation," *Occasional Papers*, The Multicultural History Society of Ontario (forthcoming).

2. Bruno Ramirez and Michael Del Balso, *The Italians of Montreal: From Sojourning to Settlement, 1900-1921* (Montreal: Les Éditions du Courant, 1980).

3. Fragmentary informations on some prominent members of the early Montreal Italian colony are contained in G. Vangelisti, *Gli Italiani in Canada* (Montreal: Chiesa italiana di N.S. Della Difesa, 1956).

4. "Rapport Pastoral de l'Église du Mont Carmel, 1905," Archives de la Chancellerie de l'Archevêché de Montréal, file 350.102. For a discussion on the residential pattern of Italian sojourners in Montreal, see Ramirez and Del Balso, *Italians of Montreal*, pp. 3-7.

5. See in particular, "The Commerce of Migration," *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, Vol. 9 (1977), pp. 42-53; and "Montreal's King of Italian Labour: A Case Study of Padronism," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, Vol. 4 (1979), pp. 57-84.

6. Robert Harney, "Men Without Women: Italian Migrants in Canada, 1885-1930," in B. Caroli, R.F. Harney, L. Tomasi, eds., *The Italian Immigrant Woman in North America* (Toronto: The Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1978), p. 94.

7. See Ramirez and Del Balso, *Italians of Montreal*, pp. 15-22, for a detailed

- discussion of the decline of "padronismo" in Montreal. See also the important documentation contained in *Royal Commission Appointed to Inquire into the Immigration of Italian Labourers to Montreal and the Alleged Fraudulent Practices of Employment Agencies* (Ottawa: Department of Labour, 1905), and Harney's excellent analysis in "Montreal's King of Italian Labour."
8. Emilio Franzuina, *Merica! Merica!; Emigrazione e Colonizzazione nelle Lettere dei Contadini Veneti in America Latina, 1876-1902* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1979), p. 67.
  9. See *The Labour Gazette*, January 1905, p. 754; September 1906, pp. 316-319; March 1907, pp. 1101-1102.
  10. *Bollettino dell'Emigrazione*, Vol. 13 (1910), p. 2580. See also *Bollettino dell'Emigrazione*, Vol. 18 (1910), p. 3312.
  11. Preliminary analysis of the forming of these urban networks is provided in Ramirez and Del Balso, *Italians of Montreal*.
  12. See especially the comments by Josef Barton, *Peasants and Strangers; Italians, Rumanians, and Slovaks in an American City, 1890-1950* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975), pp. 6, ff.
  13. Compiled from *Census of Canada 1911*, Vol. II, Tables 14 and 16; *Census of Canada 1921*, Vol. I, Table 27; Vol. II, Table 54.
  14. Data compiled from the Church Registers of the two Montreal Italian Parishes - Notre Dame du Mont Carmel and Notre Dame de la Défense.
  15. Charles M. Bailey, "The Social Structure in the Italian and Ukrainian Communities in Montreal, 1935-1937," M.A. Thesis (Sociology), McGill University, 1939, p. 59.
  16. See the study by Michael Piva, *The Condition of the Working Class in Toronto, 1900-1921* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1979), and more particularly that by Terry Copp, *The Anatomy of Poverty; The Condition of the Working Class in Montreal, 1897-1929* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974).
  17. The leading theoretical articulation is Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James, *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community* (Bristol: Falling Wall Press, 1973). A useful review of some of the recent historical literature dealing with the dual role of women is Elizabeth Pleck, "Two Worlds in One - Work and Family," *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 10 (Winter 1976), pp. 178-95.
  18. This theoretical point has been particularly informed by the following philosophical sources: Lucien Goldmann, *L'Illuminismo e la Societa' Moderna* (Turin: G. Einaudi Spa, 1967) (original title, *Die Aufklarung und die moderne Gesellschaft*); Jurgen Habermas, "Technology and Science as 'Ideology'," in J. Habermas, *Toward A Rational Society* Boston: Beacon Press, 1970) pp. 81-122; and Pier Aldo Rovatti, "La Razionalita' del Valore d'Uso," *Aut Aut*, Vol. 161 (September-October 1977), pp. 3-11.
  19. One methodological point is in order here. Most of the information allowing this reconstruction of the daily economic practices of Italian settlers in Montreal comes from oral history interviews conducted with Italian immigrants residing in Montreal during the period (or parts of it) covered by this study. Although this method may be considered debatable by some historians (hence the subtitle given to this paper), one can argue that these daily economic activities practiced by Italian settlers rarely surfaced in written documentation. Until such written documentation (if it indeed exists) becomes available, oral history may be the only technique allowing access to this dimension of the socio-economic experience of Italian settlers in Montreal. Of particular value were the taped interviews conducted with Mr. V. Monaco; Mr. N. Manzo; Mr. C. D'Amico; Mrs. C. D'Amico; Mrs. A. Pozza. These interviews are in Italian and are available to interested researchers upon written request to this author.
  20. For a more detailed discussion of the use of vegetable gardens see Ramirez and Del Balso, *Italians of Montreal*, pp. 23-24.
  21. Beside the information obtained from oral history interviews, the only study of which this author is aware of confirming the use of this practice among Montreal's Italians is Harold A. Gibbard, "The Means and Modes of Living of European Immigrants in Montreal," M.A. Thesis (Sociology), McGill University, 1934, especially chapter II.
  22. Taped interview with Mr. Vincenzo Monaco, 31 March, 1979; Department of History, University of Montreal. (Interviewer: Bruno Ramirez).
  23. Taped interview with Mr. Costanzo D'Amico, 30 April, 1979; Department of History, University of Montreal. (Interviewer: Bruno Ramirez).
  24. See especially Virginia Yans McLaughlin, "A Flexible Tradition: South Italian Immigrants Confront a New York Experience," *Journal of Social History*, VII (Summer 1976), pp. 429-445; Herbert Gutman, "Work, Culture and Society;" Tamara Hareven, "Family and Work Patterns."
  25. The only historical study of which this author is aware of accounting for this activity is Tamara Hareven, "The Dynamics of Kin in an Industrial Community," *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 84 Supplement (1978), pp. 151-182.