

## Introduction

Robert F. Harney et Harold Troper

Numéro 2-78, octobre 1978

Immigrants in the City

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1019422ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1019422ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine

ISSN

0703-0428 (imprimé)

1918-5138 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce document

Harney, R. F. & Troper, H. (1978). Introduction. *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine*, (2-78), 3-7. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1019422ar>

## INTRODUCTION

*Robert F. Harney*  
*Harold Troper*

Although the growing number of local studies has enhanced our understanding of the history of the North American city, unnecessary dispute over interpretation and about the legitimacy of various methodologies often surrounds urban studies. A tendency to missionary zeal and certainty among historians who have used new tools and methods, whether they be computers, tape recorders, or photographic analyses, has brought an equally sectarian response from those who practiced more traditional ways of doing history. Thus, both in defining valid content and in methodology--and consequently in preserving sources--much time and energy has been lost.

The history of a great North American city can only rarely be a true social history unless it is also ethnic and immigrant history. The simple truth is that most of our urban areas depended on mass migration from overseas to reach and complete their "take-off" to positions as modern metropolises. Studying a labour union, a street railway system, housing patterns, or the generation and consumption of popular culture without reference to the ethnicity of the population and to the mobility dynamic, part of which in this case is immigration, is obviously unsound. It is also unsound to believe that the history of immigration should be exclusively a history of federal public policy and not include the story of the immigrants, most of whom became urban people. Ethnic history too would be richer if ethnicity were understood as the result of a functional relationship between old world nationality, North American economic opportunity, and the ecology and receptiveness of the receiving country, rather than as some lurking metaphor for a "genetic pool" of innate traits.

The essays in this issue suggest a number of approaches to studying ethnicity in the city and to understanding the way in which mobility and then settlement affect the life and institutions of portions of the city's populace, and, eventually, of the city itself. The essays

try to penetrate the hard surfaces of neighbourhood and class through a variety of avenues, all derived from the belief that city people interact, not just as members of a given social class or as neighbours, but also through networks of culture that derive from their origins and bridge generations. The institutions and networks of association that grow from this organic view of a city's population should be at once a subject of ethnic, immigrant, and urban studies.

Most of the articles in this issue also try to show the value of seeing a continuum from migration to sojourning to permanent settlement. A newcomer's pace along that continuum had something to do with how he reacted to and partook of the city's environment. For example, it is not enough to see the statistical significance of the fact that while Italian males outnumbered females in Toronto by 4 to 1 in the 1911 census, there were almost even numbers of men, women, and children among the Jews in the city. That the latter were clearly settlers and the former sojourners, and that each of these conditions of living produced different states of mind, affected every pattern of city life for the two groups, from occupational choice to resistance to acculturation to use of city parks. Urban history that takes no account of this would be operating in the same broad and stereotypical categories of racial determinism that produced the images of Bohunks, Wops, Kikes and "birds of passage." In fact, the inability of much urban study to move from stereotyping to actually explaining the causes of occupational and geographical mobility lies mainly in the failure to see ethnicity as a changing historical fabric, a changing willingness to participate or to take chances according to one's position on the migration continuum.

The majority of the Italians, Macedonians, and Greeks who first came to Toronto probably did not intend to stay. They were "target migrants" here to earn a good wage and apply their earnings to the needs and aspirations of their old world family. That meant that they did not see the city as an urban whole but on a smaller scale, in the sense that it was chiefly a domicile and a work site, and on a larger scale, in the sense that it was part of a psychic network which stretched across the sea to a hometown. The Jews, on the other hand, by their occupations and

contacts with the host society and by their commitment to immigration, possibly saw the city and its services more in the manner of its older stock. Paradoxically, although each sojourner or settler possessed a detailed mind map of their hometown, their route, their extended kin throughout the world, and their neighbourhood in the city, they often had no knowledge of adjoining neighbourhoods. Routes to work, friendly diners, entertainment spots which did not cut too heavily into funds earmarked for dowries or prepaid tickets dotted their larger city maps, but the unexplored areas remained many and were assumed to be hostile. So a proper study of choices about occupations and neighbourhoods would produce a series of ethnic maps of Toronto, rarely coinciding from one group to another, and differing fundamentally from the integral view of the city that the more acculturated and middle class groups held. In that sense, more concern for the ethnic and sojourning aspects of the city dwellers would save urban historians, not just from an ethnocentric view, but also from an almost inadvertent elitism when discussing group's participation in city life and politics.

To explore patterns of settlement and social networks, and to glimpse occasionally the underlying alternative cityscapes of the mind which the newcomers possessed, these essays try to look at different stages on the continuum from migration to settlement. To do so, they concentrate on different units of study and the sources and methodologies which best elucidate each stage.

The first article, "Boarding and Belonging," tries to suggest ways to fill in several gaps in our knowledge of the migration process--between attitudes on arrival and self-conscious settling in, and between the socio-economic structuring of immigrant life and the defining of ethnic group boundaries. Moreover, it implies that the socio-economic condition of sojourning made certain institutions inevitably appear in every ethnic group. If that is true, then the variations in institutions such as boarding or "immigrant banking" or benevolent societies might be extracted and shown to be drawn directly from aspects of old country culture and mores. For example, can the different role of women as proprietresses for each ethnic group be traced back to differences in

sexual mores or marital attitudes in the countries of origin? If so, a true definition of ethnic persistence and its impact on institutions, enterprise, and adjustment to the city could be developed.

Franc Sturino, in his study of a Calabrian immigrant family in Toronto, attempts something obvious but virtually unstudied. He wishes to isolate and study a single migration chain across space from an old world village not only into but through the class and neighbourhood structure of an immigrant city. The study is through time and mind-frame as well, from early family probers of opportunity to the arrival of dependents and committed settlers. The use of both easily accessible city records and oral testimony enables him to begin an interior social history of an ethnic family and to suggest much about the career of the whole ethnic group in the city.

Moving from the family as a unit of study to the neighbourhood, Lillian Petroff explores the interplay of the sense of shared ethnicity, physical location, and echoes of old world events among Macedonians in Toronto. From studies such as hers, the sort of psychic city map, spoken of earlier, emerges. Macedonians lived not in Toronto but in a set of separated neighbourhoods around their church, stores and boarding-houses. They moved between them with little awareness of the larger city. A man who lived near the abattoirs travelled every Sunday across the city to St. Cyril and Methody Church. For many years, the space between the two neighbourhoods interested him less than news of a rising in Macedonia or even of a choice piece of land in the home village coming up for sale. Significantly, the growth of a larger view of the city coincided with the move from thinking like a sojourner to thinking like a settler, often with moving from bachelorhood to marriage and from factory work to shopkeeping outside the ethnic neighbourhood. One would think that urban historians would have spent some time trying to figure out the causation in this drama of occupational and geographical mobility, but, in fact, except for risky inferences from quantification, little attempt has been made.

Eleoussa Polyzoi shifts from the study of the household, family, and neighbourhood to the investigation of a visibly ethnocultural

institution. It is the sort of institution which marks the boundary clearly between the sojourning period and settlement. Carrying on a tradition begun during the long night of Turkish domination, the Greeks of Toronto, even before their urban density gave them a neighbourhood base, gathered to create a community school where Greek language and culture could be taught. Such concern with ethnic maintenance comes to those who know they are settling in for a long stay away from the homeland, who have children who may forget their culture and be deracinated. In the Greek effort, as in many others, conflict over who were the true guardians of the ethnic tradition vitiated that tradition. Nationalist, lay initiative and clerical influences struggled to control the process of cultural maintenance. Both groups looked to the Old World for support and models; it is difficult to believe that preoccupation with the issue of guardianship had no impact on their views and performance as Torontonians for good and for ill.

So from boarding-houses to community schools, that is from informal sojourning institutions to the overt effort to maintain Greek culture, our articles talk about the settings and preoccupations of people who formed much of the working and lower middle classes of the urban core. Through oral testimony and the rapidly increasing awareness of the need to collect and preserve ethnocultural sources, we can come a little closer to depicting and understanding what men and women in Toronto thought and how their thought and socio-cultural networks affected their behaviour as city dwellers.