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FOLKWAYS AND MORES IN A GREEK-AMERICAN COMMUNITY

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The primary purpose of this paper is to demonstrate a method of research introduced into social science by Wilhelm Dilthey and his coworker, Georg Simmel. The study covers a community designated as "American City," which is located about fifty miles north of Chicago. The group selected is made up of Greek immigrants who came to the United States during the early decades of the 20th century.

The publication of Dilthey's "Einleitung in die Geisteswissenschaften" represents a milestone on the long road which has led to the "sociology that seeks to understand." This "*verstehende Soziologie,*" as Dilthey called it, is a far cry from the grandiose systems of Auguste Comte, Herbert Spencer, or Vilfredo Pareto. The type of research sponsored by Dilthey and Simmel may, however, be regarded as complementary to the method which Znaniecki calls "analytical induction."

Dilthey steadfastly maintained that there must be a distinction between the methodology applicable in the social sciences and the methodological approach proper to the purely natural sciences. The *Geisteswissenschaften,* in Dilthey's definition, included all the social sciences—those sciences which study human beings as they actually are.[1] Thus we are compelled to take into account not only behavior, both social and individual, but also the *Geist*—the mental, volitional, and emotional aspects of the total personality. Nor can the factor of motivation be overlooked, although the "behaviorist" may find it convenient for scientific purposes merely to observe and describe the various forms of social behavior.

The proper work of the research sociologist, as Dilthey and Simmel see it, is the investigation of the psychic life of individuals who live in the everyday world of normal social relationships.[2] It can be effected through a process sometimes called *Einfühlung* or empathy. As Dilthey points out, will, as well as thought, must function in this type of sociological research.

While analytical induction aims at detecting "a set of conditions which *always* accompany"[3] certain social phenomena, for example drug

[1] Social scientists who have been influenced by Dilthey's concept of "*Geisteswissenschaften,*" for example: Simmel, Windelband, Rickert, Troeltsch in Germany, and F. A. Christie in the United States, have always insisted that the human personality is "an individual structure, never repeated, to be accepted as offered." *See* F. A. Christie, Analysis No. 28, Methods in Social Science: Univ. of Chicago Press, p. 416, 1931.

[2] Wilhelm Dilthey, *Gesammelte Schriften, I. Band, Einleitung in die Geisteswissenschaften,* Leipsig und Berlin, 1922, p. 420.

[3] W. S. Robinson, The logical structure of analytic induction: Am. Soc. Rev., vol. 16, Dec. 1951, p. 815.

addiction[4] or embezzlement,[5] the Dilthey method lends itself better to the study of social organization than to that of social disorganization. Though the investigation of conflicting folkways and mores will not lead to "universal statements of the form 'All S are P,'" it results in the understanding of the cultural pattern characteristic of American industrial communities. It also leads to the conclusion that, in matters of normal or ordinary social behavior (as contrasted with socially pathological phenomena like drug addiction or embezzlement), the actions of individuals living under "the conditions represented by social relations" are not predictable. One girl brought up along strictly Greek Orthodox lines will docilely follow the endogamous traditions of the group, while another, similarly "conditioned" will reject the older folkways and mores in relation to marriage.

In *The Method of Sociology,* Znaniecki does not overlook or decry the Dilthey-Simmel approach to the study of social reality, as might be deduced from Robinson's statement that the co-author of *The Polish Peasant* "holds that analytic induction is the true method of the physical and biological sciences, and that it ought to be the method of the social sciences too."[6] The following passage[7] from Znaniecki's *Method of Sociology* not only indicates his appreciation of Dilthey's approach to social reality but also summarizes the method he calls "mental identification":

> Vicarious experience has always been used by sociologists. Certain schools of sociology have even extolled it as the main, if not the unique source of sociological knowledge. Thus, according to the principle promulgated by Dilthey, the proper method of all cultural sciences is internal synthetic *understanding* as contrasted with external observation and analytical explanation used by the sciences of nature; we live inside the cultural world and mental identification with other cultural agents gives us the only adequate knowledge of their cultural life.

"American City" is a happy hunting ground for the cultural anthropologist and the sociological investigator. A highly industrialized community, it has attracted immigrants from almost every European nation and also a large number of Negro families from the South. Here, in close proximity, live Poles, Italians, Croatians, Slovenes, Jews, Mexicans, and Greeks, as well as "Americans of African descent."[8] There are also numerous representatives of the "old immigration": those of French, Irish, English, and Dutch descent who constitute a sort of political and social in-group in American City.

The present study[9] had its inception in a student-professor study of the Mexicans living in American City. Two years later, the writer was told by a Greek-American: "If you really want to study the Greeks, the only way to do it is to work in a Greek restaurant." This advice was followed, and in the course of her activities as coffeemaker, unofficial secretary and even "literary" adviser to the proprietor of the restaurant we shall call "The My-

[4] D. R. Cressey, Opiate addiction: Bloomington, Indiana, 1947.
[5] D. R. Cressey, Criminal Violation of Financial Trust: Am. Soc. Rev., vol. 15, Dec. 1950.
[6] W. S. Robinson, *op. cit.* p. 812.
[7] Florian Znaniecki, *The method of sociology*: Farrar and Rinehart, 1934, p. 169.
[8] This term was found to be the one preferred by a highly educated Negro doctor living in American City.
[9] The present article forms part of the general project which covers the various ethnic groups enumerated above.

cenia," the writer became part and parcel, *pro tem.*, of Greek-American life in an industrial community.

The restaurant is owned by a man who will be called "Thorius" in this article, and the fancy French-looking chef in the kitchen was his older brother. One of the Greek waitresses, who will be designated as "Venus" on account of her unusual pulchritude, and the writer became excellent friends from the very start. The life story of Venus proved of unusual sociological interest, and the *Einfühlung* process was very easy in this particular instance.

A methodological device used by Warner, namely, to compress the "lives of several individuals" into "that of one fictive person"[10] was not adopted in the present study. Since the Greek-Americans of American City were found to be not only law abiding citizens but as normal a group as could be found anywhere it was not considered necessary to do more than change the names of actual persons. Nor does the present study seek to demonstrate what Warner calls "the magnificent history of the adjustment of the ethnic groups to American life." The findings, in general, substantiate Simmel's hypothesis that the impulse to preserve the integrity of the social group is one of the strongest drives in the total human personality.

Like the Armenians and the Jews, the Greek-Americans in the community tend to preserve their cultural pattern. The two social institutions which help the Greeks maintain their cultural identity are the Greek Orthodox Church and the "Greek School." For example, one is not really married unless the ritual is performed in the traditional Greek style. Thus a system of modified endogamy, reinforced by religious sanctions, still prevails to some extent.

The Greek School is also an important agency in the cultural group. The proprietor of the Mycenia, who had married the Greek-American daughter of a Greek mother whose marriage had been arranged in the old-world fashion, became the proud father of a baby boy during the period covered by the investigation. Almost as soon as his son was born, Thorius announced his intention of sending Christos to a Greek School, as well as to public school. His older brothers, however, had, on coming to the United States, married outside the group. The marriages were not altogether successful; one had ended in divorce, the others were average in compatibility.

Whereas the Greek male immigrant may or may not follow the endogamous tradition, as his fancy dictates, considerable pressure has been, and still is, put on the women to conform to the Orthodox traditions. A girl brought up in a Greek-American family is expected to obey her father's wishes in respect to marriage, and many girls in American City do conform. There is, in this area, a definite cultural conflict, as the following findings indicate.

Venus's father came to the United States from Greece at the age of fourteen. He married a Polish-American girl, but proceeded to bring up his family along completely

[10] See W. L. Warner and L. Srole, The Social Systems of American Ethnic Groups: Yale Univ. Press, 1945, p. 3.

Greek Orthodox lines. At the age of four Venus was sent to the local Greek School which, she said, was operated by the Greek Orthodox Church. At home she always spoke Greek with her father, but English with her mother. In Venus' own words:

> I learned to read Greek at school, and learned quickly, or else I got tanned. In that school there were usually old teachers who were kicked out of the Church. That's the truth. Was I happy at school? Well, at home everything was nice, and I was kind of proud of myself. When I was six, I went to regular school, but kept on going to the Greek School three times a week. I did not go to high school. My father could not afford it and girls came out pregnant, he said, if they went to high school in American City. But he let my brothers go.

Venus began her career as a wage earner at the age of thirteen. Like many other immigrants' children interviewed, she worked first in private homes, washing and ironing, and doing household chores.

> I earned twenty-five cents an hour and worked six days a week. I was heart-broken because I had been made to leave school. When I was fifteen I went to work in a dime store. Yes, I *was* under age, legally, but a kind man lied about my age.

In accordance with the accepted folkways and mores,[11] Venus (who was promoted to assistant manager of the lunch counter as soon as she was sixteen) always brought home her pay check, which was promptly spent on things for the home. These included, she said, a refrigerator and clothes for her baby brother. "We refurnished the whole house."

At this point it should be stressed that the father's right to the money earned by his children is one of the most salient characteristics of the customs prevalent in the Greece known to the older generation of immigrants. In one instance, the unquestioned right of the father to his son's earnings extended to the payment by one of the interviewees of a debt of honor owed by his father. This young man was sent to the United States at the age of eighteen to earn sufficient money in American City to pay a debt his father owed to a Greek monastery. In his own words:

> The head of the monastery was my father's cousin, and one of my father's friends had leased some land from the monastery at three thousand drachmas for three years, about a hundred acres in all. This man defaulted, and my father had signed the bond for him, and so my father owed the money to the monastery and he had to pay it. So he sent me to the United States to earn the money. I landed in New York and came to work in one of the factories near American City, as a cord maker, at $1.50 a day. We worked ten hours a day, six days a week. In 1912 we were getting $32 a week . . . In September, 1912, I went back to Greece and gave my father the money to pay the debt on the land to the monks.

He returned to American City in 1917, after several years of service as a sergeant in the Greek army, which he joined as soon as he had repaid his father's debt of honor. He set up for himself in his father's trade of shoemaking and became an American citizen in 1925. Partly as a result of his first-hand knowledge of the writings of Karl Marx, and partly on account of his boyhood grudge against the monks, he has left the Greek Orthodox Church and has discarded the traditions of his childhood, except so far as the Greek language is concerned. His children were brought up in the American way of life, whereas Venus and her brothers were educated, as we have indicated, in strictly Greek style. It

[11] Cf. the findings of Warner, *op. cit.*, p. 129.

was only when Venus lost her heart to an American service man during the Second World War, that she finally cut loose from the folkways and mores of her ethnic group.

Venus was summoned home to work in her father's restaurant (purchased largely out of her dime store earnings) shortly before her eighteenth birthday. During her adolescence she had been constantly escorted wherever she went, by her father, her Greek uncles, and even by the erstwhile baby brother. Several attempts had been made to marry her off in the old-fashioned way. One of the men who aspired to an arranged marriage with Venus was, she said, "sixty, if he was a day. That time I put my hair in pigtails, and came into the room looking about fifteen, sucking a lollipop." Her father and his male relatives had thwarted her every attempt to become part of the American community. Finally, the high-spirited Greek girl eloped with an American service man she had met while waiting on him in the restaurant. By that time she was nearly nineteen. She had never had a date.

An Italian boy with whom she had fallen secretly in love had been fired from the restaurant because she had walked down the street with him. The climax came when Venus accepted an invitation to go dancing in Chicago with the man who is now her husband. She informed her family of her intention.

> My father raised quite a ruckus. He picked up a knife and grabbed me by the throat. He was going to cut my throat. 'Father,' I said, 'Unless you let me really live a life, you might just as well kill me.' My mother grabbed the knife. The knife cut her hand. My father saw the blood. I pushed him so hard, he lit up against the refrigerator. I figured if I gave in then I would be doomed. Mother finally made him see that, if we went on like this, I wouldn't be any good to any one.

This melodramatic but authentic incident occurred at midnight, on the day before Venus' first date. The year was 1943. To continue in her own words:

> I went to bed at one and got up for work at five-thirty. I worked until about six o'clock that evening. I didn't work too late. Then I walked to my date with (Jo) at the railroad station, and went to Chicago with him. I had never danced with a man. I had never been to Chicago before except with my parents. . . . Jo had a ring in his hand that I had admired at the restaurant. It was an old Swiss ring. . . . He proposed marriage to me. I cried. I didn't only cry; I accepted the proposal. Seventeen days later we were married. We eloped to X city, and were married in a little chapel. That was in August, 1943. Jo was twenty-one and I was nineteen.

Venus's family, when confronted with a *fait accompli,* accepted the situation. When Jo was sent overseas, the Greek-American girl, now married to the man whose ethnic origin she described as "Duke's mixture" (Pennsylvania Dutch, Irish, and English), returned to work in her father's restaurant. Her Greek friends and relatives assumed, quite erroneously, that Jo "had" to marry her. In point of fact, Venus had lived more like a convent novice than a typical American adolescent prior to her marriage. When Jo came out of the armed services, he worked for a while in the restaurant; but Venus, as she said, "fired him. I knew the ropes, and he didn't and it was spoiling our relationship."

One of the reasons why "Venus" appears as a sort of "bright particular star" in this article is that the authenticity of her story was vouched

for by reliable witnesses, whereas some of the other material collected turned out to be of doubtful factual value. This was especially the case in respect to what might be called a "Greek myth" that had been published *as fact* in a popular magazine.

Although it is not wholly accurate to regard the "tall story" as part of the Greek folkways and mores, the hypothesis that the literature handed down by way of the Homeric tradition exercises a definite influence on the social life of the group deserves consideration.

According to the "True Saga," which had appeared in print a few years before the present writer embarked upon her sociological career in the Mycenia, there was once a valiant young Greek called Thorius who journeyed across the Atlantic Ocean by means of a simple device: stowing away in a lifeboat. After a goodly number of heroic adventures which made an excellent news story he reached his destination and ultimately achieved fame and fortune in a manner well befitting the Greek literary tradition.

The True Saga was written up by an American journalist, and the magazine was presented to the writer by Thorius upon the occasion of her first visit to the Mycenia. Soon after she began to work in the Greek restaurant her sociological skepticism was aroused by the casual remarks of her co-workers. One of the non-Greeks, who had known Thorius for nearly twenty years (having married into the Greek-American group) remarked forcefully: "Ananias has nothing on *him.*" Another employee said: "He has told that story so often that he has almost come to believe it himself." The "empathizing" sociologist was somewhat baffled. And it must be added that she had "empathized" herself so fully into the social situation that she had a sense of loyalty to the Greek employer who had proved unexpectedly co-operative and hospitable.

Sociological conscience, however, prevailed. A prolonged, rather painstaking enquiry led to the conclusion that the owner of the Mycenia had arrived in the United States in the ordinary, law-abiding way, mainly as a result of the efforts of his older brothers, who had paid his passage. After his arrival in American City, one of these brothers had taken the young Thorius into business with him. When the business was threatened with complete shipwreck during the Depression, the youngest brother began to take over, partly on account of his stronger physique and less exhausted physical and mental condition. (The life of the early Greek immigrants was almost unbelievably strenuous, and the older brothers showed unmistakable signs of excessive fatigue.)

The youngest brother had succeeded in weathering the storms of the depression era, and, by 1952, had become not only a successful entrepreneur but also the leading representative of the Greek-American community. The sensational story of his early adventures, which read like a typical Horatio Alger publication, was a mixture of American journalism and what might be called Greek myth. After having worked for a few weeks in the Mycenia, the investigator began to take it as a matter of course that, after the replete customers had departed, the

Greek-American clan would sit drinking coffee and discuss the fictional aspects of the True Saga. Frequently these discussions were carried on within earshot of Thorius himself, who appeared to be quite complacent about the whole matter.

In some respects the Mycenia resembled the traditional Greek coffee houses described by Warner in *The Social Systems of American Ethnic Groups.*[12] These are referred to, by one of Warner's Greek interviewees, as "joking places."

In an authentic Greek coffee house, the males of the group "sit around, joke with each other, call each other names, all in good fun. It is all understood. But when one goes into a Greek's house, he won't joke with the husband or anything like that. He keeps the jokes for the joking places. In the home they are dignified."[13]

The truth of this statement became apparent to the present writer at the time of the birth of Christos, the son of the hero of the mythical "True Saga." All the traditional ritual was observed with impressive formality, including the custom of insisting that the mother of the newborn baby refrain from visiting any family or going to church until the period of seclusion had terminated. This period lasts forty days, after which the baby is taken to church to be baptized. When questioned as to the reason for this rule, the parents were unable to explain it; they only knew that it had to be observed in the Greek Church community. Nor could any other of the Greeks interviewed shed any light on the question. In point of fact, the rule derives from the Mosaic law, as the present writer discovered through the ecclesiastics consulted.[14]

The observance of these and other traditional rules, enforced by the Greek Church, tends to preserve the cultural identity of the ethnic group. As Warner shows, the Greek Orthodox Church was, for centuries, the focal point of Greek national life, up to the time of the liberation from the Turkish empire in 1823.

Another significant aspect of Greek traditions and one which stimulates the impulse to defend the social group living in America and to preserve its cultural identity, is a proud sense of close relationship to the classical culture of ancient Greece. While the language of modern Greece is very different from that used by Plato and Aristotle, it must not be forgotten that many of the Greek lads who came to the United States during the first decades of the present century had studied classical Greek at school. Plato's *Republic* stands on the book shelves of Thorius' comfortable home in American City, and sections of this immortal classic were read together by Thorius and the writer one rainy afternoon when the Mycenia was closed for the day. He read the Greek text aloud and she followed in the Jowett translation.

The justifiable cultural pride of the Greeks who settle in America should be taken into account when estimating the conflict, at times very acute, between the Greek folkways and mores and the American way of life.

[12] Warner, *op. cit.*, p. 130.
[13] Warner and Srole, *op. cit.*, pp. 259-260.
[14] Leviticus, Chapter XII. "And in the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised. And she shall then continue in the blood of her purifying three and thirty days."