

# Two Sides of the Fence: A Comparative Analysis Of Parc-Extension and Town of Mont-Royal

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*Choosing the topic for research is an expression of a person's fascination for the subject. This fascination is nothing more than the culmination of perceived peculiarities about someone or something that constantly intrigues the individual. In my case I was taken aback by the astounding differences found in the neighbouring districts of Parc-Extension and the Town of Mont-Royal. Call it fate or serendipity, but all it took was a wrong turn on l'Acadie Boulevard to prompt my curiosity about the differences in lifestyle between these two areas. The sight of the fence that separated the calm, quiet and spatially organized environment of the Town of Mont-Royal from the noisy and crowded setting of Parc-Extension was enough to offend me. I had never come across such a variation in land use within such a short distance. Intrigued by this phenomenon, I set out to investigate the reason for this spatial segregation. The study of the different lifestyles required that I go beyond a simple observation of the resident's daily activities and find a way to experience life as a fellow resident.*

*For this reason, I chose to live with a family in Town of Mont-Royal and another in Parc-Extension. While I was able to establish contact with a family in Town of Mont-Royal, and live in their house almost like a family member, I had problems getting sufficient information from the family in Parc-Extension. Without much hesitation, I chose Spiros, the owner of a Greek restaurant that my family usually frequents. Spending countless hours with this man in his restaurant, I was able to put my research back on track. Credited by my Greek ancestry, something that Spiros seemed to enjoy quite a lot, I was able to instil a sense of security, which allowed him to passionately speak about his view on Parc-Extension. However, it was one of my classmates that guided me*

*to Hajji – one of the most interesting persons I have ever encountered. I first met him in the basement of an Armenian Orthodox church during a Saturday version of Sunday school for some troubled Parc-Extension youth. The topic of the class that day was “sin and damnation.” My five years of Jewish high school were enough to impress Hajji, who only after a few hours became very fond of me. Being an immigrant myself, I was able to relate into many aspects of his acculturation. Hajji began to treat me as a friend rather than as a researcher, which allowed me to discuss many of his personal experiences in Parc-Extension.*

*When I began my work, I had very little training in ethnographic research. My experience in the field taught me the beauty of being an extrovert. Persistence in times of despair is one of the better lessons I learned. At times, all I could think was that people would only turn their backs and refuse to participate. At other times I was so nervous and there was so much going through my head that I did not know how to express myself. When that happened, I kept quiet, listened and waited for the perfect moment; that split second in a conversation where I could enter. What I did learn, though, is that people like to talk, some of them more than others, and some of them too much. For the ethnographer, however, there is no such thing as too much talk. For it is exactly in the times of incessant and sometimes tiresome blabbering that I was able to pick up true individual qualities.*

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Parc-Extension (Parc-X) and the Town of Mont-Royal (T.M.R.) are two neighbouring districts on the Island of Montreal with profound cultural and environmental differences. Divided by a fence, the inhabitants of these two districts lead separate and distinct ways of life. The purpose of this study is to examine, by comparative analysis, the impact of social economic status (SES) on the culture and urban environment of Parc-Extension and the Town of Mont-Royal.

This research focuses on culture as a socio-geographical process. Cultural Geography is the study of the way in which space and place shape culture at the same time that culture shapes space and place. Parc-X is characterized by low social economic status and a high turnover of immigrants while T.M.R. is composed of a heterogeneous group of people whose financial wealth is the common denominator. I argue that differences in class, power, status and environmental characteristics (or any combination of these) affect community life, household structure and family organization. Moreover, given an economic situation that is not completely favourable, such as in the case of Parc-X, there is a possibility that race, ethnicity and religion formulate interpersonal relationships that outstand economic difficulties. Conversely, in T.M.R., interpersonal relationships often take place in highly structured and organized situations.

Primary data were collected through interviewing, group discussions and

participant observation with families and inhabitants of Town of Mont-Royal and Parc-Extension. Detailed data regarding the daily activities of specific individuals were gathered through space and time diaries kept by selected residents of the two areas.<sup>1</sup> Secondary data consist of socio-economic profiles of the two areas and comparative case study work from the Chicago School of Sociology and Social Ecology.

### **Nelson and Orchids**

Joseph wakes up in the morning, paces down his new parquet stairway to the den. There he meets Nelson, who is anxiously gnawing on his leash waiting for his morning walk. Vivian, his wife, is already up and is sitting in the kitchen with her eyes half-open drinking her cup of Folgers Instant Coffee. This morning I accompany Joseph and Nelson for a short walk because Nelson was not able to hold himself for an entire night. It is snowing outside and Nelson's white fur and small body are covered in snow. When we make it back to the front entrance Vivian is on her way out to work. By now she is aware of the little gift Nelson left them in the den, and tells her husband that since the dog was his idea he should go and clean it. He chuckles, kisses his wife and tells her not to worry:

*Joseph:* You know, she is so busy, she probably forgot that today is Friday and Angela the cleaning lady is coming to clean the house. Actually, you might want to talk to Angela since she lives in Parc-Extension.

I nod as he makes his way up to the orchid room where he comes out with a water can and begins to make his orchid watering round. Joseph is an orchid lover and devotes much of his time caring for them, which involves regulating the airflow and temperature of the house to simulate the perfect environment. The house is empty and I run upstairs to Adriana's room (now my room) to grab a sweater. It is eight o'clock and I find myself looking at some of Adriana's pictures that are hanging on the wall. Adriana, their youngest daughter, is in Cuba teaching English. She left last June for a one-year trip driven by her obsession with Peace and Conflict Studies.<sup>2</sup> Her sister Lisa, who is just waking up in the room next door, quit her job two days ago. She was an assistant to a French movie director that, according to her, "thinks he should be treated like Spielberg, just because he produced a quasi-good movie." She still lives at home and studies theatre.

Joseph is now sitting down with his newspaper in the solarium. I pass by the kitchen, prepare two cups of coffee and sit next to him:

*Joseph:* I think I am going to take Vivian for a week in Cuba. The end of the year is always the same thing. The shelter where she works always organizes some New Year/Christmas activity that exhausts her. She comes home with just enough energy to eat dinner. Maybe we'll get Rebecca to come with us...[She's] been working really hard on her thesis and also deserves a break.

Vivian is the director of a shelter for battered women. Presently she stands as the only source of labour-earned income in the household. She comes from a wealthy family, principally from her mother's "old-money" side. Rebecca is the oldest daughter who moved out of Parc-Extension to live with her boyfriend Tim. She just finished her Master's degree in philosophy.

The doorbell rings; it is Angela. Joseph takes a peak at his watch, folds his newspaper and as he walks to the door on the new elegant oak floor of his living room, he turns and smiles at me:

Do you know what time it is?  
No? Why?  
It's 9:30 – *la bourse* [the stock exchange] is now open.  
Oh! I didn't know you took it so seriously.  
Nowadays you have to...

Joseph retired three years ago. He worked in the *shmata* business for over 25 years. Now, most of his mornings are spent in front of the computer trading stocks. Although his dialogue may have a *penchant* or arrogance, his attitude is better understood within the context of an educated and accomplished man. He left Egypt with his wife following the Suez Canal War of 1956.<sup>3</sup> Considering his wife's comfortable economic situation, Joseph was able to quickly establish himself in the Town of Mont-Royal and prosper with his textile company. The pedestal in which his work has placed him is by no means perceived with false pride and snobbery; it is the fruit of his labour, education and achievement.

My behaviour may resemble that of a king, principally if you are going to compare it to the father of a working-class family in Parc-Extension. In time, however, you will understand that it is more a reflection of pride than any other thing. I never wanted to be my wife's leech and depend on her family. It just so happened that I was successful in my own interest, and now all I want is for my family to enjoy. If my lifestyle resembles the one of a Porsche-driving-Westmount-nouveau-riche, then I guess you can call me that.

I hang around the house until 12:30 then I tell Joseph I have a meeting with someone in Parc-Extension. There is no reply for a few seconds then in a frantic tone he tells me to be home for *Shabbat* dinner since some family and guests are coming. I leave the T.M.R. house and walk until Jean-Talon Street and Rockland Boulevard. This is the intersection that divides the Town of Mont-Royal from Parc-Extension on the eastern side. I am going to Hermes Restaurant located two blocks east of the intersection inside the municipality of Parc-Extension.

### **The Big Empty**

It takes ten minutes to walk from the T.M.R. house to Hermes restaurant, and

yet I am drained upon my arrival. It is not the distance that fatigues me, but the complete change in landscape within such a short distance. Geographers analyze the landscape as a comprehensive product of human action. In this manner, the landscape is the stage where the manifestation of experiences, struggles and triumphs of daily human socio-spatial interaction takes place.<sup>4</sup> The “big empty” is my coinage of the dramatic change in space from the green, spacious and elegant Town of Mont-Royal, to the misused and disinvested Parc-Extension.

Parc-Extension is a narrow portion of land acquired by Montreal in 1910 from the old municipality of the Paroisse de Saint-Laurent. The Metropolitan Boulevard in the north, Outremont and train tracks in the south and east, and l’Acadie Boulevard and Town of Mont-Royal in the west form its boundaries. Between 1910 and 1930, Parc-Extension experienced its first wave of immigrants. Most initially arrived from England, Scotland and Ireland. Many followed from the south and east of Europe. By the 1950’s Parc-Extension had become the preferred location for newcomers. During this time, many immigrants arrived from Poland, Ukraine, Armenia and Italy. From 1960 to 1970, Greek immigrants came in great numbers and gave a particular character to the neighbourhood. Since the 1970’s, immigrants have arrived predominantly from Asia, Latin America, Africa and the Caribbean Islands.<sup>5</sup>

According to a report published by Le Service de l’Urbanisme de la Ville de Montréal, Parc Extension is the poorest municipality in Montreal. The residential and urban services (roads, sewers, lighting, etc.) infrastructure is, in great part, deficient and lacks funding.<sup>6</sup> The area is completely entrenched by highways and the railway. Old quarries in the northeast section take up about 20 percent of the region’s territory. About 500 trucks a day carry not-so-fragrant loads of rubbish to one quarry, Montreal’s main garbage dump. Noise and pollution from the Metropolitan boulevard and the train tracks further contribute to the problem. As many residents like to say, “they [the City of Montreal] think Parc-Extension is the armpit of the city.”

The metro stations that serve the area bring more traffic, noise and gang related crime to the residential area. A *brasserie* that went up next to the St. Michel metro station is a frequent site for fights and loitering. Green spaces are rare, inaccessible and home of illegal activities, principally with regard to a growing drug market.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, about 40 percent of the residents work in low paying jobs, in particular, the clothing industries where most of the newcomers find work. Finally, 62 percent of the residents in the district are below the level of property.<sup>8</sup>

In contrast to the history and development of Parc-Extension, the Town of Mont-Royal originated as a plan of the Canadian Northern Railway to build an “ideal city” on the north side of Mont Royal. The town was officially incorporated in 1912 and its design was based on that of Washington D.C., with two main boulevards cutting diagonally across a central green space.<sup>9</sup> Planned home building occurred concurrently with the construction of the tunnel under Mont Royal, which was eventually connected by rail

to the downtown area. Once this tunnel was built, property value in the Town raised significantly.<sup>10</sup> By 1920, the first schools, churches and shops opened. The Town entered its main growth phase in the 1950's with companies leaving the centre-city and investing in T.M.R.'s industrial park. Meticulously planned residential construction was separated from business activities, giving the city and its residents an unrivalled quality of life.

The Town of Mont-Royal stands as one of the wealthiest areas of the Montreal Urban Community. A stable tax base allowed the city to maintain and develop its infrastructure. The *cul-de-sac* street pattern in T.M.R. caters mainly to the residents and keeps traffic, noise, and pollution at bay. There are no metro stations inside the city's boundaries. However, proximity makes them very accessible for T.M.R. commuters. Recreation facilities and parks are numerous and constantly patrolled.

### **The Fence, the Street Corner, and the Void**

A fence that runs along l'Acadie Boulevard from Rockland Boulevard to Jean-Talon Street separates Parc-Extension and the Town of Mont-Royal. Prohibiting automobile and pedestrian traffic to travel from one side to the other, this fence physically delineates the limits of each area. Its presence, however, evokes certain psychological implications.

Walking along the Parc-Extension side of the fence, one cannot help but feel trapped inside a lower class neighbourhood. On that side of the fence, along the l'Acadie corridor, one notices a continuous row of worn down duplexes and triplexes, whose residents are always harassed by cars and trucks that race down the street. On the other side of fence, traffic is discouraged by a maze of *cul-de-sac*. Clean, green, low-density single-family dwellings characterize the area.

However beautiful T.M.R.'s design, its organization has a sterilizing effect. Strolling down through its empty residential streets, one feels almost as if walking into oblivion. The fervour of human interaction is inexistent as every activity is confined inside the residences or outside the area. Conversely, the organic design and cacophony of daily life in Parc-X give rise to two urban marvels: the street corner and the corner store. The street corner is where the exchange between people, residents and traffic takes place. It is the point of sociality; the place to go whenever a person wants to meet a friend, gossip and hear the latest news.

### **Hermes Restaurant**

I arrive at the restaurant and the owner, Spiros, aware of my project quickly sits me down at a table in the corner. I pick up the menu and as the waitress arrives to get my order I salute her with some of the Greek words in my vocabulary: "*Calimera tikanis.*" She smiles and before I can order, she tells me that my *pasticcio* will be ready in a few minutes. Spiros is sitting on the other side of the room with some friends. They are all drinking coffee and a cloud of smoke hangs over them. Upon their arrival, most

customers greet Spiros and the waitress by their first name. Almost everyone in the restaurant interacts in Greek. From the expression on their faces and the way they communicate, it seems that many of the customers frequent the restaurant on a regular basis. My *pasticcio* arrives and as I am about to sink my fork into the pasta dough, Spiros pulls up a chair and sits next to me. He is a white haired man of medium stature and a very approachable character. He immigrated to Canada over 40 years ago and has been in the restaurant business since:

You remind me of your father; whenever he comes here to eat lunch he sits down at this table and quietly eats his *pasticcio*. It makes me happy. Sometimes your father comes here and tells me to prepare him three or four *pasticcios* for take out, because he knows you will eat them during the week.

Spiros' place is not your typical Greek *souvlaki* restaurant. The time we spent together and the passionate tone of his voice was enough to convince me that this man enjoyed feeding his customers. I soon became a regular myself, spending many of my Friday afternoons sitting next to Spiros. Considering my Greek ancestry, Greek cuisine has always been part of my diet – something that pleased Spiros and allowed me to learn about him during our meals together:

Parc-Extension is the poorest area of Montreal. It's my opinion. Most of the population is on welfare. They don't work. All nationalities and they don't work. The government gives them the check every month, so why go to work? [Maybe] if they didn't receive the check they are gonna work. They are going to take responsibility. Now the government takes responsibility. They [family] make a couple of kids, 1500 bucks, why work? They can pay rent. Get their groceries.

Spiros' remark on the social condition of Parc-Extension residents coincides with a contemporary view of urban poverty. A recent work by Murray on poverty suggests that the structure of society is ultimately responsible for urban poverty. Murray builds his argument on the fact that despite increased expenditure on social welfare and improved economic conditions in the last 20 years, major cities in North America have experienced an increase in poverty. He goes on to say that the incentive to work has declined because of government policies that reward the lack of employment. This view is further argued by Spiros when I asked him about the spatial economic impact of the different ethnicities in Parc-Extension:

*Spiros:* There are too many [ethnic] groups.

*Vic:* And do you think this is the reason behind the area's poverty?

*Spiros:* No, the ethnic groups don't bring the welfare. The government gives the welfare to them.

Because when it gives the welfare, the government does not force them to go to work. Welfare is good for special reasons. Not for the healthy young people. They are 10-15 years in Canada welfare recipients and the government never asks.

However noble this theory may be, it tends to disregard the language and adaptation problems that immigrants face upon their arrival in a new country. It is likely that the ethnic groups in Parc-Extension establish community networks that function to help newcomers to adapt to the host country. That is, the clustering of ethnic groups provides a nurturing environment for recently arrived immigrants to “incubate” (mature) and develop the necessary skills to function in the new society. Once these skills are acquired, the immigrants tend to move to a more stabilized area, while new immigrants move into those incubation areas. It may be that while these immigrants are “incubating,” they are taking advantage of the welfare system. In this manner, what may seem to be an abuse of the welfare system by freeloaders may be the result of a continuous rotation of people using the welfare system to propel their opportunities and eventually leave the area. The fact that Parc-Extension has 40 community-based organizations and that in the past five years 51% of the Parc-Extension population has moved away from the area supports this view. It seems, therefore, that poverty is contingent upon location and maintained by a considerable amount of in-and-out immigrant rotation:

*Vic:* How was Parc-Extension before, when you arrived? Was it always like this?

*Spiros:* Before it was better, I think so. But because I have the business here I see all the system.

*Vic:* What about the people that come to your restaurant? Are they mainly from Parc-Extension?

*Spi:* They come from T.M.R. and other areas, West island, South Shore.

*Vic:* What about the other restaurants? Is their clientele from Parc-X?

*Spi:* Maybe some fast food, hot dog places. But if you expect to live from the customers of Parc-Extension, it will not work.

*Vic:* So how come you settled in Parc-Extension?

*Spi:* Oh, because this restaurant has existed for over 30 years. There were [fewer] ethnics. [Today] with the money they get, they can't afford to go out and spend. But they live.

*Vic:* What about the different communities that exist in Parc-X?

*Spi:* Look, it's like this. Look at the Greek community, before they used to be on Sherbrooke and these streets around there. Slowly, slowly they moved and got to Parc-Extension. The same thing with the Portuguese and Italian. But now, the Indian and Pakistani come

direct here in Parc-Extension. And Parc-Extension becomes very ethnic because there are always groups coming in and out of the area. Now you look at the Greek, there are some here, but there are a lot in the South Shore.

The movement of ethnic groups out of Parc-Extension is illustrated by the present location of Spiros' customers. Spiros came to Montreal in the late 60's during the third wave of migration, which comprised mainly of Greeks. He opened his restaurant in the early 70's and established a neighbourhood clientele. The influx of immigrants did not stop in the seventies, and Parc-Extension continued to be a zone in transition. In time, some older immigrants began to leave Parc-Extension. Spiros illustrates this by citing that many Greeks relocated to the South Shore.

### **Double Meal**

During the winter months, my Fridays came to be characterized by two long meals. The first, with Spiros in his restaurant, and the second celebrating *Shabbat* with the T.M.R. family. The T.M.R. guests were usually people that shared the same economic status and, most of the time, the same religion. Sometimes it was the neighbours or friends of the family; at other times it was their relatives from France, the aunt from Miami, or the grandparents. I was usually introduced presented as their daughter's friend, something which allowed me to mix and mingle.

The family is not religious, and I doubt that anyone at the table viewed the gathering as a religious festivity. It was dinner and company, something that seemed necessary to contrast their isolated lifestyle. On many occasions, the conversation on the table was about Cuba, considering their youngest daughter was studying there. After the "oh, how I miss her" or "why did she choose Cuba out of all places" remarks were exhausted, the conversation usually shifted to little Elian Gonzalez, the Cuban boy that was shipwrecked, lost his mother and at the time lived in Miami with his aunt, while his father and Fidel Castro were negotiating his return to Cuba. Inevitably the intellectual humanitarian affinity kept them talking for hours. The grandparents would harass the parents and beg them to rescue their daughter from that horrid communist country. The middle sister would hear the word "communism" and start arguing that it is not the Cuban system but the dictator in power who is the cause of the problem. Meanwhile, I would delight myself in the fava beans and wait for Joseph to get bored and decide it was time to walk Nelson.

### **The Cigar Incident**

After dinner, the men usually walk over to the living room and sit in front of the fireplace. Like in a British novel, they drink from small liqueur glasses and engage in some incomprehensible talk about the stock exchange. On one occasion, after the T.M.R.

parents had returned from their sojourn in a Cuban resort, the father inquired about his guests' taste for rum. It was a matter of minutes before Joseph opened a scrumptious bottle of dark Cuban rum. The women were still sitting in the kitchen discussing Lisa's latest project. She was working on a Racial Awareness seminar, which she described as a distraction from her "shitty" weeks with the French director. For some reason, I could not stop thinking of her mother's influential altruism.

Back to the gentlemen's room, the bottle of rum was half empty and Joseph was reading the label of a closed Cuban cigar box. I stood in a daze, hypnotized by the fireplace flames. He eventually opened the box and offered the cigars to his guests including myself. Now, I have smoked those, "Century Sam" \$2.99 Povi-Soir/Dépanneur cigars with the vanilla tip, but I had never held a smelly phallic \$75 U.S Cuban Cigar. In short, I did not know how to handle it. Carefully I imitated the father as he licked it, cut the tip and lit it. It was no long before the people in the kitchen began to complain that the house reeked and moved to the other side of the lounge. The men in the room smiled, and ignored the complaints. Joseph moved to the corner seat of the couch (a really comfortable leather couch) grabbed the latest issue of *The Economist* and started reading. I found myself next to Rebecca's boyfriend, Tim, talking about Jazz and a tune I love called "Anji." We had just smoked \$300 dollars worth of cigars – the equivalent of a week's salary for an ordinary Parc-Extension family.

### **The Mashaya Blanket**

The T.M.R. family suffered from schedule synchronization problems, which resulted in an empty house for most part of the day. Lisa would get up a few hours after her mother had left to work and eat breakfast by herself while her father played with stocks. Rebecca, the oldest daughter living in Parc-Extension, would drop by during the afternoon only to find Nelson, his tail flipping anxiously to go for a walk. In the evening, the father, unable to wait for his wife to return from her late shift at work, would eat dinner by himself. Lisa would show up a few hours later and heat up what was usually Chinese food that her father had ordered a few hours earlier. This way, it did not hit me as a surprise when I found that their get-togethers on Friday nights are used to compensate for the time they do not spend together during the week.

I had just finished an incredibly boring conversation with one of the guests about Israeli stamps and their possible liquid value, when I decided to walk over to the other side of the lounge. It was late, and most of the guests had already left. Vivian was laying down on the couch with her eyes half closed and her body rolled inside a Mashaya blanket. Rebecca, who had brought the blanket from Nepal during her two-year teaching trip, was balled up between her mother's legs. The room was silent and I did not dare intrude.

As Vivian caressed her daughter's hair, I remembered that these two women had been at variance for quite some time. Vivian was unhappy because her daughter was in a

serious relationship with a *goy*. Yet, that Friday night, the two ladies did not dare touch on that subject. They lay quietly, each taking advantage of the other's company. Lost for words, I interpreted the scene as an intrinsic understanding that this was their only chance to make up for their separate lives.

### **The Mentor**

I met Hajji on a Saturday night in the basement of an Armenian Orthodox church in Parc-Extension. He invited me to attend a Saturday night version of Sunday school. As an ex-resident of Parc-Extension, Hajji devoted his Saturday nights to its troubled youth. His experience as a refugee immigrant complemented my theory about the incubating aspect of cultural clustering and its impact on social organization:

*Hajji:* We came to Montreal from Beirut, Lebanon, in 1976 when the civil war started. We are a family of seven. My dad was a very successful jeweller and the opposition [Muslims] took all his money except for \$5000 that he used to fly us to Canada. When we arrived we were told that immigrants go to Parc-X. The first house we found was right next to Jarry Parc. Terrace St. Rock. We lived there for three years from 1976 to 1979. From there until 1984 we moved to another apartment in Parc-X which was at the corner of Liège and Stewart. It was exactly two minutes away from l'Acadie and fence that divides Parc-X from T.M.R.

When talking about the location of the poor, Peter Townsend quotes “birds of the same feather flock together.”<sup>11</sup> If we look at Hajji's first comment, he mentions that when his family arrived in Montreal “[they] were told” that immigrants go to Parc-Extension. In this manner, it follows that immigrants (especially those fleeing persecution) arrive at their destination with very little funds and tend to congregate in lower-income areas. Here, I use “congregation” as the territorial and residential clustering of specific groups or sub-groups of people which enables group identity to be consolidated.<sup>12</sup> This in turn provides several advantages. According to Paul Knox, it provides:

- a means of cultural preservation allowing religious and cultural practices to be maintained and strengthens group identity through daily involvement in particular routines and ways of life;
- a sense of belonging; and
- a place where mutual support can be established; this includes institutions, business, social networks and welfare organizations.<sup>13</sup>

Congregation is particularly interesting in situations where there is one of more distinctive minority groups. In Parc-Extension, there are over 6 different ethnic groups with population over 500. The different immigrant groups and the emphatic

understanding that develops in the micro (same ethnicity) and the macro (between all groups), further accentuates the benefits of clustering:

*Hajji:* A couple of things I noticed when I started living in Parc-X is that there is a bunch of little groups. Since my neighbour was also Armenian, we started to associate with the rest of the Armenians around the street. Slowly, we started also interacting with some of the Greek people. And sometimes it goes well but I also noticed that in Parc-X a lot of people associate with each other; but when push comes to shove nationalities come up. Like when we would play baseball all the kids would be in different teams but if there was a little fight because of the game you would see all the Italians against the Greeks or the Italians against the Armenians or the Greeks against the Armenians. They would stick together. Those were the main nationalities I had to deal with. There were a lot of Greeks, some Italians and Armenians and a lot of other immigrants. The funny thing was that the next day the same kids that were fighting against each other would join forces to fight against a gang from another area.

In fact, the advantages gained by congregation are what characterize the social organization of Parc-Extension and give each resident a sense of place:

*Hajji:* Other things I did notice is that people [in Parc-X] were more real than other people in other parts of town. There were some people who we knew who lived in other parts of town in the West Island who were the exact opposite. Little ideal families, little nice houses, very quiet neighbourhood. In Parc-X we had mothers screaming down the window to their children. It's very what you would call "lower class." And when we would visit the people [in the West Island] and the more I started seeing of Montreal I started to realize that "hey! We do live in a bad part of town!"

*Vic:* Bad or different?

*Hajji:* You know, the "bad" part of town. But the main problem I saw with Parc-X was people's image of it. I would tell people that I live in Parc-X and they would be a little shocked saying that it was a tough neighbourhood. I would tell them that it was just part of growing up. At least that is what I thought.

Human geographers agree that "the bonds established between people and places allow them to derive a pool of shared meanings from their everyday routines. People become familiar with each other's vocabulary, gestures, humour and so on."<sup>14</sup> This often carries over into people's attitudes and feelings about themselves and their locality. Paul Knox argues that when this happens, the result is a self-conscious sense of place, which

he describes as “the feelings evoked among people as a result of the experiences and memories that they associate with a given place.”<sup>15</sup> More importantly, as it has been the case with Hajji, sense of place can be the perceived character of a place as seen by outsiders, its actual unique and distinctive physical characteristics and/or its inhabitants. This sense of place and its impact on the social organization of space is also visible in the family structure and relationship between family members and friends:

*Hajji:* The first place we lived in was a duplex, but the second place was more like a community because we were living in an apartment with eight units. Right in back of us there was another apartment with another eight units and so in a little square of land there were about 20 families. Family life was pretty open. For instance in our apartment building there was another Armenian family two stories above from us, and an Arabic family right next door. It was very common for us to go to each other’s house. Almost every night the families would get together in one of the apartments. For me, my front door neighbour was a Greek boy and I used to spend a lot of time at his house and him at mine. So the houses were very open, nothing of calling in advance and book a family and friend get together. You would knock at the door or meet downstairs and just start talking and eventually you would end up inside an apartment. It was a lot more open than after when we moved to St. Laurent.

Parc-Extension is one of the most densely populated areas in Montreal. The influence of space on social organization is more than evident from Hajji’s words: “My perception of T.M.R. is that they have beautiful houses, beautiful streets, but no people!” Unlike their neighbours in T.M.R. whose social lives rely on contrived means of personal contact due to the low-density, single-family residences, social bonds in Parc-X thrive as a result of their clustering. This inevitably leads to a sense of territoriality:

*Hajji:* I noticed that in all my years living in Parc-X, especially at the second location that was just two minutes from the fence and T.M.R., only once did I cross that fence to go over to T.M.R. I remember that one of my friends told me he had found one park and that it was not at all like our parks... my friend, so excited, told me he found this park but that they couldn’t go in too many numbers because he heard that there are too many neighbours and they start looking and they call the police on you. When I think back now, what I remember is that as soon as I crossed over the fence I felt guilt. I was trespassing. Even though it was public property, I just did not feel that I belonged in T.M.R. But we still went in and we

found this park and the grass green and they had all kinds of things we had never seen in our parks. Probably we had the same things but they were all torn down and broken. And I really felt as if I was a stranger in the park. We played and it was great but we never went back. At least I never went back, I don't know if my friends ever did.

Territoriality in this sense is a product of culturally established meanings that certain individuals attach to a specific location or territory. In turn, these meanings make for “unwritten territorial rules that are seen in the micro-geography of people’s behaviour.”<sup>16</sup> Paul Knox identifies bubbles or areas of personal space that we try not to invade (or allow to be invaded by others).<sup>17</sup> Hajji’s territoriality is expressed through guilt upon entering an area (the park in T.M.R.) located beyond the limits of his social space. Hajji’s parents express this same sense of territoriality:

I remember when I came back from the park I told my parents we crossed over the fence and played in T.M.R. My parents’ reaction was the same. They said “no, no! You shouldn’t do that; they’ll call the cops on you. You know there are rich people who live there and you are just not supposed to go there!”

Varying in size and shape according to location and circumstances, these bubbles are larger among strangers and in situations involving members of a different social class, and are smaller or nonexistent in an environment in which people share the same lifestyle.<sup>18</sup> The difference in the social organization of space between the two areas is evident by the role congregation and territoriality have on place making. What remains to be addressed is the biotic dimension of social organization structured by the “invasion” of successive waves of migrants and immigrants. In this type of analysis, the city is seen as a living organism that changes in time and space.

### **Invasion and Succession**

As my relationship with the T.M.R. family grew stronger, I had the chance to hear their thoughts about life in Parc-Extension. One night during dinner, I found myself discussing the latest developments of my project with Joseph and Vivian:

*Vic:* I’m going to distort the idea of a culture of poverty to apply it to a place.

*Joseph:* Hold on, not all the people [in Parc-X] are poor.

*Vic:* Exactly, but the area is economically poor. The continuous rotation of immigrants does not allow for the area to develop, and throughout the years, the area continues to be economically poor.

In a study of Latin America, Oscar Lewis concluded that the poor become trapped

in a culture of poverty, which he defined as a lower-class subculture, transmitted across generations that inhibits personal achievement and fosters resignation to one's plight.<sup>19</sup> I like to argue that this extreme view of poverty only applies to severe levels of poverty, not when poverty is defined in terms of relative deprivation, as is the case between T.M.R. and Parc-Extension. However, the concept of a culture of poverty may be used when applied on an urban scale: residents of a particular area experience a sub-culturally lower level style of living throughout the period they reside in the area in question. When approached in this manner, poverty is viewed as a result of the history of the location. As we shall see, this view is supported by the concept of invasion and succession.

Robert Park, a journalist who eventually became chair of the Department of Sociology at the University of Chicago, labelled the spatial organization of the city as a "mosaic of little worlds that touch but do not interpenetrate."<sup>20</sup> For Park and his colleagues, each of these little worlds could be thought of as an ecological unit consisting of a particular mix of people that had come to dominate a particular position in the urban fabric. The city was viewed as a kind of social organism, with social interaction governed by a "struggle for existence."<sup>21</sup> They concluded that order and spatial arrangements in human population emerge through the operation of natural processes such as impersonal competition for territory and dominance. The result was a series of "natural areas"<sup>22</sup> within which different groups were dominant. These areas, however, were not seen as permanently fixed. As the relative attractiveness and suitability of different settings in the city changed, and the numerical strength and economic power of different groups altered, the ecological process of invasion and succession brought modifications to the pattern of natural areas.<sup>23</sup>

Ernest Burgess brought these concepts together in his famous model of residential differentiation and neighbourhood change in Chicago. The fact that the Chicago School studies were derived from a particular set of circumstances – the city of Chicago, with a dominant economic core and a metropolitan area that was growing rapidly through continuous streams of migration and immigration that produced a very heterogeneous population – allows for such a model to be applied to cities like Montreal where these circumstances also in great part hold true.<sup>24</sup>

I adapted the ecological model of urban structure to incorporate the location of Parc-Extension and T.M.R. The innermost zone, the central business district (CBD) is the city's nucleus of commercial land uses. It is the most accessible area of the city and contains the densest concentration of shops, offices, warehouses and non-residential buildings.<sup>25</sup> A zone of mixed uses, known as the zone in transition, surrounds the CBD and is characterized by an inner belt of factories and warehouses surrounded by deteriorating residential neighbourhoods. Parc-Extension is located in the zone of transition. When most immigrants first arrive in the city looking for work and a place to live, they have little choice but to cluster in the cheapest areas. The residential deterioration is largely a product of the invasion of factories and warehouses from a rapidly growing CBD. By exploiting the advantages of congregation, many of these

immigrants established a sense of security, which allowed for their development. Gradually, they improved their economic and social status to the point where they were able to successively invade the *zone of workingmen's homes*.<sup>26</sup> As the original immigrants and their families move out, their place in the zone of transition is taken by a new wave of immigrants. Those who made it into the middle class (or who were born into the middle class) moved to the *zone of better residences*. The Town of Mont-Royal is located at the zone of better residences. This zone is dominated by single-family, middle-to-upper income homes with spacious yards.

As identified earlier, Parc-Extension experienced three distinct immigration waves. Acting as a haven for these new arrivals, the area's infrastructure has been burdened by the lack of economic stability of the new arrivals. The process of invasion and succession directs these immigrants to enter other areas, and filter down their houses and the already run-down infrastructure to a successive migrating group. The fact that these immigrants leave the area once they gain a certain amount of economic wealth does not bind them to invest in the area's infrastructure. Thus, poverty in Parc-Extension can be viewed as the result of a continuous rotation of immigrants. It follows that T.M.R. becomes a probable host area for immigrants who prosper and are able to settle and contribute to its ongoing development.

## Conclusion

Residential space in the city is characterized by distinctive neighbourhoods that have their own social ecology. This social organization of space is a result of the ecological process of invasion and succession. The proximity between the Town of Mont-Royal and Parc-Extension offers an inspiring opportunity to study how an area's culture and urban environment is affected by the social economic status of its inhabitants.

The character of these different areas is related to their physical attributes, the "habitat" they offer, as well as to the attributes and ways of life of their inhabitants. Parc-Extension experienced a successive wave of immigrants. By exploiting the advantages of congregation, a large number of these immigrants were able to develop a sense of security, which gradually propelled their move toward better areas in the city. The word "better," however, carries its share of drawbacks for it ignores the benefits of organic development. Low-density, single-family planned communities such as T.M.R. have an interiorizing effect, which limit communal relationship. The jovial street corner life that is often seen in the streets of Parc-X during the summer months is unknown in T.M.R.

Nonetheless, the residents of these two areas establish a sense of place that allows them to socialize according to a set of protocols for social behaviour that varies according to location. In Parc-X, this sense of place is derived from an emphatic understanding of each other's plight. In T.M.R. it is mainly expressed through formal gatherings between people of the same social status. It is through this type of interaction that the cultural

dimension of social organization evolves, and complements the ecological process of invasion and succession.

What remains to be addressed is the impact of a new wave of gentrifiers that are beginning to establish themselves east of Parc Avenue in Parc-Extension. Gentrification changes the character of a low-income neighbourhood through an influx of middle-class and high-income residents. It is a form of urban renewal whereby restoring the properties and overall aspect of an area upgrades its socio-economic and land value. As result, the area attracts members of more privileged classes, whose sense of culture often clashes with that of the rest of the area. Finally, the validity of this report rests on the ability of further studies to explore the specific patterns of migration of the different ethnic groups that have resided in Parc-Extension. It would also be interesting to investigate their relocation process into T.M.R.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Space and time diaries produce a detailed description of day-to-day routines of the residents of a specific area. When these results are aggregated, patterns that differentiate groups of people usually stand out. Space and time diaries help to localize areas of activity, their patrons and the distinctive level of activity.

<sup>2</sup> After two years in Liberal Arts at Dawson College, Adriana went to Toronto to major in Peace and Conflict Studies.

<sup>3</sup> The end of the Suez Canal war triggered in Egypt an internal xenophobic reaction towards the English, French and the Jews. Angered by the outcome of the war, Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser ordered for the nationalization of foreign companies. His aim was to grant the Arab natives more privileges and improve their living standards. However noble his intentions, his means towards achieving them involved persecution, prison and expulsion of those who resisted. Being of Jewish origin, Joseph's family fell victim to this worrisome policy. Anticipating future oppression, he applied for a Canadian Visa.

<sup>4</sup> Paul Knox and Sallie Marston, *Places and Regions in Global Context: Human Geography* (New York: Prentice Hall Inc., 1998), 235.

<sup>5</sup> Monique Richer, "62% du quartier sous le seuil de la pauvreté, Parc-Extension réagit," in *Le Journal de Montréal* (27 mai 1999), B4.

<sup>6</sup> Lynn Moore, "Poverty, no jobs cloud future for Villeray St. Michel," in *The Gazette* (October, 23 1990), C7.

<sup>7</sup> Train tracks block the entrance to Jarry Parc, the area's largest green space. Residents are forced to leave the area and access the park from the east.

<sup>8</sup> Richer, B4

<sup>9</sup> Town of Mont-Royal, *Citizen's Guide 1998-1999*, 8-9.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Peter Townsend, *Concept of Poverty: Working Papers on Methods of Investigation and Life-Styles of the Poor in Different Countries* (London: Heinemann, 1970), 3.

<sup>12</sup> Knox and Marston, *Places and Regions in Global Context: Human Geography*, 444.

<sup>13</sup> Knox and Marston, 444.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 239.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 240.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 444.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 240.

<sup>19</sup> John J. Macionis, Cecilia M. Benoit & S. Mikael Janson, *Society: The Basics* (Toronto: Prentice Hall Allyn and Bacon Canada, 1999), 174.

<sup>20</sup> Paul Knox, *Urbanization: An Introduction to Urban Geography* (New York: Prentice Hall Inc., 1994), 211.

<sup>21</sup> Knox and Marston, 444.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 211.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> It is important to mention that these ideas were the product of an area when classical economic theory and Darwinism were relatively strong influences in the social sciences. Nowadays, such biotic analogies are viewed as dangerously simplistic.

<sup>25</sup> Knox and Marston, 240.

<sup>26</sup> See Harvey Warren Zorbaugh, *Gold Coast and Slum: A Sociological Study of Chicago's Near North Side* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1929).