

Identity and Relations within Society: The Greek Experience in Australia*

Patricia Riak

This paper is both introduction to and review of sociological insights that have contributed to understanding social dynamics that give definition to the social modeling of the Greek family in Australia. The paper concentrates on first generation Greek-born migrants and their children. It will explain the use of network analysis that has been researched for the Greek community in Australia. Network analysis will then be compared to systems theory. The comparison favours the relevance of network analysis in making social sense of migrant family structure in Australia.

In their respective studies of the Greek-Australian family, Bottomley (1975) and Mackie (1975) have used network analysis to describe either tight- or loose-knit networks that form from the relationship between the family and its social environment. As a conceptual approach for the Greek family in Australia, network analysis recognises the relationship of conjugal roles and how these roles can be affected by the social environment.

Bottomley (1975) uses network analysis to evaluate how sex roles determine gender distinctions within the family. The formation of tight-knit family networks characterises the maintenance of traditional kinship networks which preserve traditional beliefs about sex roles. The formation of loose-knit family networks weakens traditional elements of the family concerning sex roles, making conjugal roles between genders less distinct. Bottomley believes that the formation of a loose-knit family network is evident when the Greek wife, like the husband, works outside the family home and receives a working wage. She argues that traditional sex role attitudes for Greek women have changed in Australia as participation in the work force has offered Greek women the opportunity to engage in both domestic and wage labor. The formation of the loose-knit family network creates a shift in the traditional belief about the domination of the Greek male as the only breadwinner. Loose-knit family networks have allowed Greek women to attain formal monetary

* I wish to acknowledge the encouragement given to me by Dr Fiona Mackie at La Trobe University when I was setting out on my postgraduate studies. I owe more than I can say to her support.

power. Bottomley's observations of Greek women in Sydney suggest that female working patterns achieve a level of interdependence between gender and work. The role of the Greek woman in Australia has not remained that of domestic householder; she has achieved what Bottomley terms "economic leverage" in decision making because of her working position in individualised wage labor and in attaining shares in the family business (Bottomley, 1983:193). However, traditional beliefs have preserved the husband's "ideal" of male authority but at the same time have shifted traditional beliefs by strengthening the idea of the wife's control of economic resources.

Mackie (1975) also employs network analysis in the area of value changes for the Greek-Australian family by explaining how cultural change, through Greek offspring, affects the family. The Greek-Australian family is viewed in terms of a group of individuals who are able to change their value systems. She believes the individual creates informal contacts to strengthen the social networks created by them rather than the family. Individuals are able to adopt new values from the informal contacts incorporated into their social network. The degree of cultural change, she believes, will not vary because of the way tight- or loose-knit networks utilise their value systems but according to how the individual manages to create the social network (Mackie, 1975:88) Unlike Bottomley, who concentrates on the role of adults/parents and the workplace, Mackie concentrates on the role of children/offspring and the education system.

Mackie and Bottomley both provide a sociological framework for understanding these aspirations toward both change and conservation. They remove the focus from experience of the individual migrant and locate it in networks. Greek networks are typically dominated by kin, and it is in these networks that what Mackie terms "a dialogue of values" takes place. Children are normally the catalysts in this dialogue, in which the individual may be free to move towards cultural change.

Rosenthal (1985 and 1989) has conducted attitudinal studies of Greek parents and adolescents in Melbourne regarding differences in family values, and finds that the degree of conflict between parents and children is related to family values and the adaptive behavior of youth:

The special case of immigrant families is a special one. It has been argued that in these families conflict is heightened, since, typically, these adolescents are subject to the conflicting demands of two cultures: the old most forcefully represented by parents and the new characterized by peers, school and the receiving society (Rosenthal, 1989:26).

Firstly, Rosenthal claims that youth are often at variance with parental values, as conflict is evident when adolescents desire their own sense of independence and identity (Rosenthal, 1985:239). The different beliefs and attitudes of Greek parents and youth may lead to disagreements about particular activities such as choice of friends (Rosenthal, 1989:26). It emerged from her results that mothers held to the criticism that their children were generally uncommunicative, especially where

discussion concerned school (Rosenthal, 1989:28). However, adolescents disclosed their concerns to their mothers rather than their fathers (Rosenthal, 1989:38). Rosenthal believes that this may be the case because Greek parents, especially the father figure, may lack understanding as values developed from the close-knit traditional Greek family structure emphasise the centrality of parent-child relationships and parental authority as the dominant factor in this relationship.

Secondly, Rosenthal asserts that the generation gap may lead to higher levels of inter-generational conflict. Rosenthal believes that Greek-Australian adolescents show lower levels of self-disclosure to their parents compared to Australian resident groups because it is their way of dealing with two value systems. Greek-Australian adolescents integrate two cultural worlds and reveal less to their parents so as to minimise any potential conflict arising within the family (Rosenthal, 1989: 57). Greek adolescents who feel that their parents have little confidence in them will turn to their peers for advice. Like Bottomley, Rosenthal argues that two value systems to which Greek-Australian adolescents are exposed are “positional” and “personal” and are related to different types of cultures. A positional family system is based on authority, age and status seniority, e.g. the father figure, whereas a personal family system takes into consideration every individual member, including the adolescent. In the personal family system, personal goals are encouraged rather than the family honour fundamental to Greek culture. Because Greek immigrant parents come from a society where the positional family system was well entrenched, and migrate to a country where emphasis is placed upon the individual and not their goals, stress may be heightened between parents and offspring. By being less communicative with parents, Greek-Australian adolescents are seeking personal success and happiness by learning to take responsibility for their own actions (Rosenthal, Moore and Taylor, 1983:119; Giannopoulos, 1978:37-39; and Koutsounadis, 1979). Both Bottomley and Mackie have formulated “layered networks” to depict the situation described by Rosenthal. Layered networks are ordered along generational lines. Kin networks are ordered along horizontal lines where relatives interact with their own generation. Layering networks offer flexibility and support when age groups are at variance with one another. However, in general, role obligations for females seem to be less flexible (Bottomley, 1979:121).

The network analysis employed in the studies of both Bottomley and Mackie was developed from Bott’s discussion of the family as a social group (Bott:1971). Bott combines conjugal role and personality as a result of role expectations. Thus, husband and wife relate to one another according to what is typical of their social circle. Close-knit networks are characterised by the association of the family with its informal social networks, which then create a pattern of social relationships. Bott stresses the importance of the family as a network of relationships:

Each family is treated as a social system of independent roles. Behavior is a function of a person in a situation. But the form of the immediate social environment and the norms of conjugal roles depend on the personal needs and preferences of the members

of the family and partly on a very complex combination of forces in the total social environment (Bott, 1971:4-5).

Bottomley and Mackie also develop their studies from the theoretical position of Mitchell (1969), stressing that the family is an important institution responsible for a variety of social situations as well as conjugal relationships. The association of people with networks is by comparison more significant (Mitchell, 1969:67). Mitchell defines morphological criteria describing a process of interaction where the point of anchorage to a network is usually taken to be some specified individual. Through contacts "reachability" is achieved for the transition of information that determines pressure and influence for change to occur (Mitchell, 1969:17). Action or communication sets then determine the kinds of obligations that develop from contacts (Mitchell, 1969:27).

For the Greek-Australian family, I shall address two important issues which arise from network analysis. Firstly, the importance of a family member as an individual, and secondly, family changes which are linked to changing relations and roles for the Greek family in Australia. The use of network theory is favored over the world-systems approach in explaining these issues because systems theory creates difficulties in accommodating definitions for the individual, for gender and gender relations, and for social environment and family change.

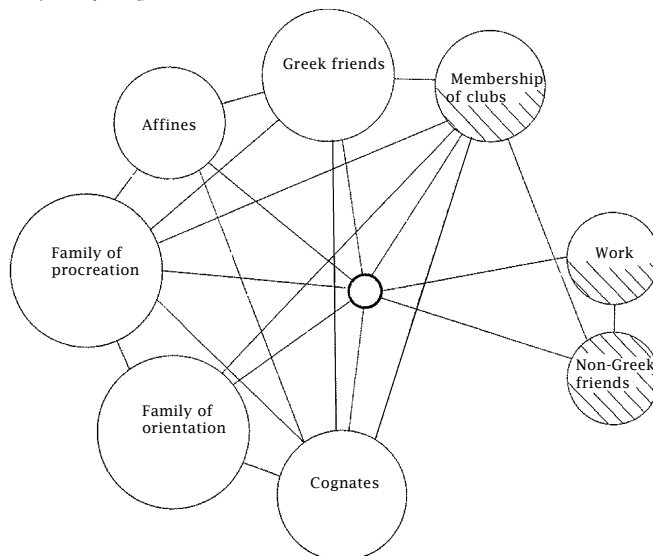
Firstly, systems theory fails to define the family as a group of individuals. Instead, according to this theory, family members form together and derive their commonality from shared activity within the family. Individuals interrelate with one another and acquire no sense of an individual role or status. Thus, individuals represent a set of systematic interrelations, that is, in diads or triads, and acquire no sense of individual role-playing outside the family group. The family, as a "whole," will only recognise the individual from their position of interrelation within the family. The individual is not recognised as a unit of analysis on his/her own.

Bottomley (1976) compiled case study material that explores ego-centred group associations (Figures 1 and 2). The involvement of the individual with their respective groups is expressed through "life-space" diagrams and identifies the relative importance of individual choices that affiliate the individual to different Greek and non-Greek group combinations. Bottomley defines individual "role playing" and "situational selection" as individual-specific elements that acknowledge that individual behaviour is modified according to "group type" requirements and expectations. For Bottomley, the "life-space" variations between individuals are primarily related to how individuals perceive themselves in achieving successful coping mechanisms for living in two cultural worlds. It follows that individuals will have varied Greek and Australian aspects to their identities because similar "group types" may not be shared at all. Values may in turn differ which will affect patterns of interaction.

The construction of life-space diagrams indicates that the sole existence of ethnic identity will not overwhelmingly affect the individual's life-space. Ethnic identity is only able to define primary group relationships such as kin structure.

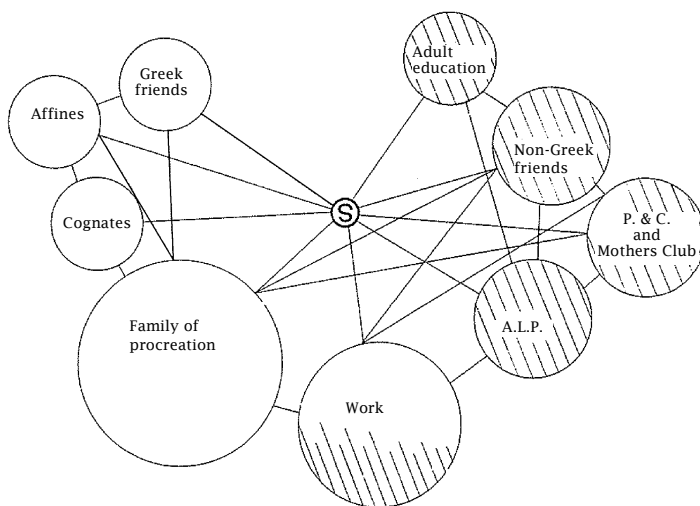
Life-Space Diagrams

Figure 1. *Anthony's Life-Space.*



Source: Bottomley, 1976:120

Figure 2. *Stella's Life-Space.*



Source: Bottomley, 1976:121

- Key:
- (a) Relative size of spheres indicates importance to individual according to time allocation and subjective assessment.
 - (b) Shaded areas are non-Greek i.e. involving no contact with Greeks and no Greek cultural residue.
 - (c) Lines indicate contact between spheres, either shared membership or acquaintance.

Figures draw comparisons between two individual life-spaces. They differentiate significantly between individual activity and subjectivity.

Identity is a composite of significant self-identifications and identifications by others, primarily those of childhood but also those of the social groups in which one participates later on in life. Identity is formed by social processes; crystallised during the early years of life and maintained and modified by social relations. Its maintenance depends upon recognition accorded by the various people with whom one interacts, particularly significant others. An exploration of identity demands knowledge of a person's patterns of interaction as well as some understanding of what interaction means to him or her (Bottomley, 1976:119).

Stella's life-space (Figure 2) incorporates higher values associated to non-Greek group affiliations. Patterns of interaction are concentrated amongst these groups. Anthony's life-space (Figure 1) incorporates higher values directed to his affiliation with Greek groups. Interaction is better concentrated within these groups. Stella's association with Greek groups is minimal, as is Anthony's affiliation to non-Greek groups. Thus, life-space diagrams show reverse activity. In order to understand contrasting activities, Bottomley believes that subjective components take precedence.

The life-space diagram for Stella shows that her values towards Greek group affiliation are less important. Her subjective circumstance displays displeasure and ambivalence because of expectations and restrictions placed upon her through close kin and affinal relationships. The anxiety felt due to conflicting notions encourages Stella to develop looser associations with these groups.

The life-space diagram for Anthony's subjective components shows that he places increasing value upon Greek group affiliation. His subjective experience was one of comparatively higher levels of ease and comfort because kin and affinal relationships offered him flexibility and freedom, leading him to develop tighter associations with these groups.

It is thus clear that life-space diagrams indicate how different life patterns can be between Greek-Australians in a diverse society that enables them to identify either strongly or more loosely with their Greek heritage in Australia. Life-space diagrams are then able to evaluate the social dynamics of identity and disclose personal preferences of the social actors for either Greek or non-Greek aspects of their lives.

Secondly, systems theory fails to acknowledge the role of gender distinctions. Social and biological organisms are broadly defined as being one entity in systems theory. The feature attributed to the family is the biological relationship shared by all family members. The biological emphasis hinders any understanding of social features. The conjugal roles of husband and wife do not recognise the social value attributed to man and woman separately. Thus, gender is not an important theoretical category. This fails to bring to light issues pertaining to gender inequalities which can be predominant.

Bottomley (1977) examines the role of the woman and inequality. Her focus is immigrant women of southern European background and the difficulties they face in, for example, understanding their role in Australian society. For Greek immigrant mothers,

in a village setting economic, social, educational, religious and domestic activities are interrelated and mutually reinforcing. There is a centripetal tendency that strengthens the domestic unit. In Australian cities these activities are dispersed and perhaps contradictory; our social and economic conditions create centripetal forces that fragment the family (Bottomley, 1977:309).

In a later study, Bottomley (1983) examines the Greek-Australian mother in the urban context and how she feels responsible for the loosening of family relationships due to what she calls “negative fragmentation”. This arises from a mother’s feeling of isolation and loneliness due to geographically separated social networks, for example, going to work in one suburb, to church in another and seeing family and kin in yet another suburb. Bottomley also argues that the Greek Orthodox Church oppresses Greek mothers, especially those who work, because it advocates that the female form should conform to a traditional religious definition of femininity (Bottomley, 1983:195).

Bottomley (1983) also discusses the “fortress model” in relation to the role of Greek daughters and how they are taught to behave as their mothers and grandmothers did before them, and find a Greek husband. As for daughters who want to educate themselves, they are told by their parents that they would “never make the grade” and even if they did, they would not be able to find a job. Daughters are thus taught to follow the maternal example of marriage and motherhood (Bottomley, 1983:196). Consequently, daughters resent brothers for the freedom they enjoy and hate the father for his greater authority (Bottomley, 1989:197). The fortress model is best exemplified for Greek girls in Melbourne by Tsolidis (1986), who conducted an education project with girls from Non-English Speaking Backgrounds (NESB) showing a marked difference between aspirations of girls and parental values. Tsolidis, like Cosmopodiotis (1975) and Margiolis (1980), also discusses gender and schooling and how girls may experience difficulties at school because of their sex. These issues are crucial for understanding sex roles in the Greek-Australian family. Thus, world systems theory creates further problems in that the family model is a standard type of family — this will create difficulties understanding the varied family structures, especially those found in this multicultural society. As families who live in Australia come from different ethnic backgrounds, world systems theory is unable to explain such varying social constructions within diversified family units in Australia.

Finally, systems theory fails to explain how social environment changes the family. The definition of “boundary” is a problematic one in systems theory. World systems approach is not able to measure any external influences that help to change

the value systems of a family. For example, Moriatis (1975), Cox (1974) and Buckland (1977) give separate accounts of the effect of social and demographic change for the Greek family and neighbourhood. Both the social and physical environments are discussed as an important theme in seeking to explain how Greek family relations change in Australia. They all compare the social and physical environment of the Greek village and the Australian city, discussing both the working patterns of parents and patterns of education for children. Buckland describes the total village environment as being “a close-knit network” (Buckland, 1977: 99), which in Australia develops into a “tight-knit community” through the process of chain migration that created a network of relatives and friends previously known in the Greek village (Buckland, 1977:103). The Greek-Australian family is considered to be an open rather than closed cultural system; consequently, the variable known to systems theory as the environment will affect the family’s value structure. As an open socio-cultural system, the Greek-Australian family is not in equilibrium with the environment but is able to adapt to social change. Bottomley and Mackie recognise this and offer an alternative theoretical approach through the use of network. This approach is able to recognise the individual and locate his/her contacts within the social environment. Further, network analysis is able to recognise points of change and redefine the roles and values within the Greek-Australian family structure.

Bibliography

Bott, 1971

E. Bott, *Family and the Social Network: Roles, Norms and External Relationships in Ordinary Urban Families*. London: Tavistock Publications.

Bottomley, 1974

G. Bottomley, “Some Greek sex roles: ideals, expectations and action in Australia and Greece”, *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Sociology* 10, 1:8–16.

Bottomley, 1975

G. Bottomley, “Community and Network in a City”. In *Greeks in Australia*, ed. C. Price: 110–25. Canberra: Australian National University Press.

Bottomley, 1976

G. Bottomley, “Ethnicity and Ethnic Identity Among Greek Australians”, *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Sociology* 12, 2:118–24.

- Bottomley, 1977
 G. Bottomley, "Women, the Family and Social Change". In *Australia 2000: The Ethnic Impact*, ed. M. Bowen: 306–12. Sydney: University of New England Publishing Unit.
- Bottomley, 1979
 G. Bottomley, *After the Odyssey. A Study of Greek Australians*. St. Lucia (Qld): University of Queensland Press.
- Bottomley, 1981
 G. Bottomley, "Social Class, Ethnicity and Health". Talk given at a seminar in cross-cultural therapy, N.S.W. Institute of Psychiatry. Richmond (Vic): Clearing House in Migration Issues.
- Bottomley, 1987
 G. Bottomley, "Cultures, Multiculturalism and the Politics of Representation", *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 8, 2:1–10.
- Bottomley, Burns and Jools, 1983
 G. Bottomley, A Burns, and P. Jools, eds., *Family in the Modern World*. Sydney: Allen and Unwin.
- Buckland, 1976
 D. Buckland, "The Effect of Social Change on the Immigrant Family and Neighbourhood (A Greek Case Study)". In *Australia 2000: The Ethnic Impact*, ed. M. Bowen: 187–217. Sydney: The University of New England Publishing Unit.
- Cosmopodiotis, 1975
 T. C. Cosmopodiotis, *The Adolescent Greek Schoolgirl*. Richmond (Vic): Clearing House on Migration Issues.
- Cox, 1974
 D. Cox, *Towards Understanding the Greek Migrant*. Richmond (Vic): Ecumenical Migration Centre.
- Giannopoulos, 1978
 G. Giannopoulos, "Beyond the Generation Gap: A Greek Perspective", *Australian Journal of Early Childhood* 3, 4:37–46.
- Koutsounadis, 1979
 V. Koutsounadis, "Cross Cultural Conflict between Greek Children and their Parents", *Greek Action Bulletin* 4, 4:12–18.
- Mackie, 1975
 F. Mackie, "Networks, Values and Cultural Change". In *Greeks in Australia*, ed. C. Price: 72–109. Canberra: Australian National University Press.
- Margiolis, 1980
 E. Margiolis, "The Education and Career Aspiration of Greek girls". In *Teacher Education in and for a Multicultural Society: Young Teachers Reflect and Act*, ed. R. Burns: 57–61. La Trobe University (Vic): Centre for Comparative and International Studies in Education.
- Mitchell, 1969
 J. C. Mitchell, ed., *Social Network in the Urban Situation*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Moriatis, 1975
 S. Moriatis, *By the Way: A Series of Talks on the Background and Problems of Greek Migrants in Victoria*. Richmond (Vic): Clearing House on Migration Issues.

Rosenthal, 1985

D. Rosenthal, "The Influences of Ethnicity on Parent-Adolescent Conflict". In *Issues and Research in Child Development*: 234-39. Carlton (Vic): Melbourne College of Advanced Education.

Rosenthal, 1989

D. Rosenthal, "A Cross National Study of the Influence of Culture on Conflict Between Parents and Adolescents", *International Journal of Behavioral Development* 12, 2:207-19.

Rosenthal, Moore and Taylor, 1983

D. Rosenthal, S. M. Moore and M. J. Taylor, "Ethnicity and Adjustment: A Study of the Self-Image of Anglo-Greek and Italian-Australian Working Class Adolescents", *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 12, No 2, 2:117-35.

Tsolidis, 1985

G. Tsolidis, *Educating Voula: The Report of the MACMME NESB Girls and Education Project 1984-1985*. Victoria: Ministry of Education.