

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Greek Culture Project

Impact on Campbell, Ohio

O. H. 688

KATHERINE SIATRAS

Interviewed

by

Wilfredo Rivera

on

November 18, 1980

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

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INTERVIEWEE: KATHERINE SIATRAS

INTERVIEWER: Wilfredo Rivera

SUBJECT: alienation, dowry, prearranged marriages,  
cohesiveness

DATE: November 18, 1980

R: This is an interview with Mrs. Katherine Siatras for the Youngstown State University Greek Impact of Campbell Project by Wilfredo Rivera, at 28 Jeanette Drive, Boardman, Ohio, on November 18, 1980, at approximately 8:30 p.m.

Mrs. Siatras, could you tell me something about your background starting with your childhood and working up to your present status?

S: I was born in Cyprus, Greece, which is a port city of Greece. My family at that time, which consisted of my father and mother and myself, left Greece when I was four years old. That was back in 1950. We came to New York and from New York we came to Campbell, Ohio, which is where my family established itself at that point. We came to Campbell because we had relatives, which is the basic reason why people navigate to Campbell I'm sure. They either went because they had family there or because of the steel mills, which provided work for non-English speaking people or unskilled laborers. When we first came to Campbell we lived with my relatives, which consisted of my aunt, uncle, and two cousins. We lived together for approximately eight years and then at that point we bought a home of our own.

I went to Campbell Memorial High School, went through grade school. I started school at age five. I graduated from Campbell Memorial and went on to Youngstown State University to get a B.S. in Education. I am presently teaching school in Campbell. I do not live in Campbell any longer, but I reach school there.

R: Can you tell me a little bit more about your family background, exactly how many kids are in your family, and if learning the Greek language and culture was emphasized?

S: Very definitely. Presently my family consists of my parents and a brother and sister. Speaking Greek was a very integral part of my family background. When I speak Greek I think in Greek. I went to a Greek school. It was a natural part of my upbringing because my parents spoke Greek and not the English language. We learned to speak Greek out of necessity, although now I find with myself that although I speak the English I do want my son to learn the Greek language just as I did. It will make sure that he has close ties with his grandparents and we interact quite a bit within the Greek culture. I did not speak Greek to him myself because he was exposed to enough Greek people. Now that he is in school I will be speaking Greek to him at home much more so than I've done in the past because I feel he is in an English speaking environment the total day and that will give us some time at home to work on the Greek.

I attended Archangel Michael Orthodox Church as a child and I attend the same church now. I think that too was very cultural. It was very much a part of my upbringing. Many of the social functions evolved around the church. I went to Sunday school and belonged to the church choir. I belonged to the social groups within the church. In fact, I had very little to do outside of the scholarship types of clubs at the high school. I had very little social life that was affiliated with the high school after 2:30. After 2:30 the social aspects of my life evolved around the church and Greek cultural types of things, going to Greek dances, going to affairs that evolved from the church or other Greek social clubs.

R: Was this emphasized by your family or was this something that you wanted to do on your own or was this because your peer group consisted of mostly Greeks?

S: It was emphasized by my family very much so. In addition to that, what was emphasized by my family, I was never taught that other people were not good people. It was never from that angle, but I was always taught that I was Greek and that I should associate with the Greek kids, that I should go to a Greek church and enjoy Greek dances. If I asked permission to go to a Greek dance that was okay, I was permitted. If I asked permission to go to a school dance I was not permitted, not because it was a school dance, but because I was going to interact with a lot of non-Greek people. At the very back of my parents mind was the idea that if I interacted with non-Greek boys and girls the chances that I could become involved with and possibly marry somebody that

was non-Greek were greater than if I was not allowed to be a part of that social group. That is something that I had a very difficult time understanding when I was a child, but I recognize it now as an adult. I see the social force that still exists. I was taught that I was Greek and because of my cultural background I should marry somebody of like cultural background because of the types of problems that they felt come about when you don't marry somebody from your own cultural group.

- R: Do you feel that this attitude your parents had back then was one of a prejudice attitude? What are your feelings about the way they felt about it? It looks to me like it was a prejudice attitude established by your parents.
- S: It's difficult for me to answer that in that my conception of prejudice is a negative. When I think of someone as being prejudice towards other people I attach a negativism to that. My parents were never negative about other people. I was told to be nice to all my friends in school. I had a lot of friends. My social group in school did not consist of just Greek people. In fact, I had very few Greek friends in school, but there was a very definite line of demarcation. Those were my friends in school from 9:00 to 3:00, and as long as I behaved myself and did not get into trouble my parents never said, "Don't talk to so-and-so; don't associate with so-and-so." After 3:00 it was like there was a distant line of demarcation. After 3:00 I was within my family and my family's social life consisted of Greek people visiting Greek friends, going to choir practice, going to Greek school, going to some sort of party with the GOYA Greek Orthodox Youth Association. I grew up in two distinct worlds. I was able to handle both of those worlds at the same time, so when you ask me the question about my parents being prejudice it's a difficult question for me to answer. I was taught that I shouldn't marry anybody who isn't Greek and Greek-Orthodox. That has a lot to do with religious cultural prejudices.
- R: Could you tell me if the Greek people in Campbell today still emphasize the importance of learning their native tongue, and if so, are there special services that are available to the community?
- S: I would have to say yes. The Greek language is still a very dominant aspect of the culture in Campbell, probably because we have such a continuous influx of new Greek people, again because of relatives being there. You continue to have the dominance of the Greek language within the Greek culture. In addition to that the Greek-Orthodox church is still very strongly pro-maintaining the church services in the Greek language. We have very few parts of the service in English. We now have the "Our Father", but we say it in Greek first and then repeat it in English. Some of the responses are

first said in Greek and then are repeated in English. Our priest has just now very recently started to . . . Portions of our marriage ceremony are first said in Greek and then repeated in English, particularly when there is an intermarriage of somebody who is Greek with a non-Greek. Primarily because the church services are still in the original language it has become more or less the church's responsibility to provide the service of teaching the language also. What we generally do is attend a Greek school, which now consists of our priest and one Greek school teachers. Children attend classes after school for one hour on a weekly basis. We actually learn to read, write, and speak Greek. Speaking takes place within the home. I think this does a lot to maintain the emphasis.

R: It seems to me the Greek church doesn't place that much emphasis being there is one priest and one Greek teacher implementing the Greek to the community itself. Do you feel something can be done in order to enhance the progress of the learning institution in the Greek church?

S: What you're saying is that the program that is available is not a very extensive program.

R: Exactly.

S: I know there are other areas in the United States where they have parochial type Greek schools. I don't know that we have a large enough community to put together a school in Campbell. There are still such strong cultural ties within the family unit and then affiliated with the church that the one hour of Greek study could not give children more than one hour of concentrated study in the Greek language itself. You would have to deal with the academics first and then give them the language. What your having in the community of Campbell is children attending school from 9:00 to 3:00 where they get the academics in English and then they attend the Greek school where they get the one hour of Greek. Then they go into their Greek speaking homes where they use the language. You get all of that except that is sort of departmentalized into two different areas. It's amazing to hear the Greek children of Campbell speak Greek as compared to the Greek children from St. John's Church. The children in Campbell speak the language fluently.

R: What do the older generation Greeks do in order to communicate among their own cultural setting?

S: They talk Greek.

R: Are there any specific places these older Greeks go in order to communicate? Can you elaborate on that slightly?

- S: Socially I would have to say that probably a very dominant social gathering type of place exists; we still have coffeehouses in Campbell, which is a carry-over from Greece. In Greece the men spend a great part of their social time in a coffeehouse, which is a place where men gather, play cards, and the card games are of a light type of nature. The coffeehouse concept is someplace where they go and spend time, have coffee, talk politics, talk education, and talk about what they would like their children to become some day. I think we have three or four coffeehouses. The women get together through the church social clubs. There is such a strong cultural tie that if my mother is visiting tonight you can be 99% sure that she is visiting a Greek home. They will be talking in Greek and not interacting in English, even though my mother can speak English.
- R: In regards to the coffeehouse, that is a custom brought over from Greece?
- S: Yes.
- R: Are there any other customs that carry over from Greece that are practiced today in Campbell? I would like to touch on intermarriages and the dowry system that exists in Greece today.
- S: With your second and third generation Greeks the dowry is not a dominant force. First generation Greeks or Greek people coming from Greece to Campbell, yes, it is a dominant force. In Greece today, even though there are many, many more marriages that are not prearranged the dowry is still a very dominant force. Before an engagement or anything the parents of the two sides will come together and discuss things like the home, furniture, any property that might exist-- the so-called dowry. It is still a dominant force that there are very few young women who marry who do not have their home as at least the very least that they must have. Sometimes the dowry ties in with the social and educational background of the people involved in the marriage.
- R: In regard to interracial marriages I understand that it does exist in Campbell today where they frown upon them. What are your own personal views on that concept?
- S: They frown on interracial marriages; they frown on marriages outside of the Greek community. Having married a person of Greek background but not from the same cultural environment, my husband was an outsider. My husband was not Greek Orthodox, and his services would take place in an Episcopal church. His background, therefore, is very different from mine. If my son grows up within the same type of cultural environment that I grew up in I am going to find myself stressing to him

when he becomes an adult that he meet and marry somebody like himself. You can only relate to what you were exposed to; you can't relate to something that never happened to you. I find myself repeating to my son what my parents did with me; I think about it after I've done it and I laugh at myself. My husband and I have to compromise together in going to church and other things. My own personal feeling is that if you marry someone from your own background it alleviates many problems.

R: I understand the Kalymnians in Campbell happen to be a dominant people. Can you explain why their dominance has overtaken other Greeks?

S: There are more Kalymnians than any other type. They navigate to Campbell because of relatives. There are more people coming from the island of Kalymnos than any other. I can't say I know too much about subcultures in the Greek community to attribute that to some other force in there.

R: Within the subcultures are the customs the same as the other groups of Greeks?

S: Basically.

R: I understand the Kalymnians decided to immigrate to Campbell because they were more business oriented than the other groups of Greek people and they came to Campbell because they were offered the opportunity to paint. Do you think that is one of the factors why they came in or are there other reasons?

S: There are a large number of Greek contractors within Campbell, painting contractors, and because they speak the Greek language they feel more comfortable about approaching somebody who speaks Greek for a job versus going out and finding a job in an environment that they're insecure about. I would have to say that as a group they are much more education oriented than business. In fact, the island is noted for the number of doctors that they produce.

R: The present crisis situation in regards to the laying off of people from steel mills, what effect has that had on the Greek people of Campbell?

S: It has affected a lot of people, kind of in the same way that it has affected the non-Greek people. Because of the construction painting that exists most of the people that worked in the mill who are young enough to do construction painting have navigated in that direction. The older people who are ready for retirement are probably going back to Greece. They come to Campbell and the United States and although they establish roots the roots never grow

very, very deep. I'm talking about first generation people. They come with the intention that they will work and return to the motherland. Ties with the motherland are very, very strong. Unskilled labor is the predominant group living there producing a lot of educated children who filter out of Campbell. They are replenished with a new group of people coming from Greece.

R: What were the years from 1970 through 1980 like for you? What kind of transitional phase occurred in Campbell in regards to innovation?

S: For me personally 1970 was when I graduated from the university and began teaching in Campbell. Also within that decade I met and married my husband. I would have to say that within those ten years we acquired a lot of new Greek people. I say this because I sometimes go to church now and see faces that are unfamiliar to me, probably because in the last ten years I've become involved less with my social group in Campbell as I had been prior to my marriage. I think Campbell has experienced similar kinds of things that other communities have experienced. Changes within the subculture of the ethnic backgrounds of Campbell have been a lot slower. They retain a lot of the old cultural kinds of things.

R: In regards to the future, where do you see the people headed? Do you see them staying in Campbell or going back to the old land?

S: The older people will probably go back, which is what generally happens. The young people, I think it depends on what happens to Campbell, the idea of the mill not being here any longer. I don't see people moving out in masses. There will still be that new group coming in again. They will have to find new employment and it will cause them to move into areas they never dreamt they were capable of moving into. I know within the Greek church the community is getting larger rather than smaller. We are going to find ourselves having to expand the church because we don't have enough room.

R: Are there any other areas we haven't touched on that you feel would be relevant to this interview?

S: Not really. The only thing I would like to stress is that within the culture of Campbell there is very definitely a subculture that is Greek. They still maintain most of the cultural aspects that they brought from Greece. I think that the church is the dominant force in that direction; it is also a dominant force in keeping the Greek community together. Everything seems to radiate from that.