

Philippe Garigue
Sociologue, doyen de la Faculté des sciences sociales,
Université de Montréal

(1960)

"The French Canadian Family"

Un document produit en version numérique par Jacques Courville, bénévole,
Médecin et chercheur en neurosciences à la retraite
Courriel: courvilj@videotron.ca
[Page web](#) dans Les Classiques des sciences sociales

Dans le cadre de: "Les classiques des sciences sociales"
Une bibliothèque numérique fondée et dirigée par Jean-Marie Tremblay,
professeur de sociologie au Cégep de Chicoutimi
Site web: <http://classiques.uqac.ca/>

Une collection développée en collaboration avec la Bibliothèque
Paul-Émile-Boulet de l'Université du Québec à Chicoutimi
Site web: <http://bibliotheque.uqac.ca/>

Politique d'utilisation de la bibliothèque des Classiques

Toute reproduction et rediffusion de nos fichiers est interdite, même avec la mention de leur provenance, sans l'autorisation formelle, écrite, du fondateur des Classiques des sciences sociales, Jean-Marie Tremblay, sociologue.

Les fichiers des Classiques des sciences sociales ne peuvent sans autorisation formelle:

- être hébergés (en fichier ou page web, en totalité ou en partie) sur un serveur autre que celui des Classiques.
- servir de base de travail à un autre fichier modifié ensuite par tout autre moyen (couleur, police, mise en page, extraits, support, etc...),

Les fichiers (.html, .doc, .pdf, .rtf, .jpg, .gif) disponibles sur le site Les Classiques des sciences sociales sont la propriété des **Classiques des sciences sociales**, un organisme à but non lucratif composé exclusivement de bénévoles.

Ils sont disponibles pour une utilisation intellectuelle et personnelle et, en aucun cas, commerciale. Toute utilisation à des fins commerciales des fichiers sur ce site est strictement interdite et toute rediffusion est également strictement interdite.

L'accès à notre travail est libre et gratuit à tous les utilisateurs. C'est notre mission.

Jean-Marie Tremblay, sociologue
Fondateur et Président-directeur général,
LES CLASSIQUES DES SCIENCES SOCIALES.

Cette édition électronique a été réalisée par Jacques Courville, bénévole, médecin et chercheur en neurosciences à la retraite, Montréal, Québec,
Courriel : courvilj@videotron.ca

à partir de :

Philippe Garigue,

"The French Canadian Family."

Un article publié dans l'ouvrage réalisé par Mason WADE, en collaboration avec un Comité du Conseil de Recherche en Sciences sociales du Canada sous la direction de Jean-Charles FALARDEAU, **La dualité canadienne. Essais sur les relations entre Canadiens français et Canadiens anglais. / Canadian Dualism. Studies of French-English Relations**, pp. 181-200. Québec : Les Presses de l'Université Laval, University of Toronto Press, 1960, 427 pp.

[Autorisation formelle accordée le 1^{er} août 2011, par le directeur général des Presses de l'Université Laval, M. Denis DION, de diffuser ce livre dans Les Classiques des sciences sociales.]



Courriel : denis.dion@pul.ulaval.ca
PUL : <http://www.pulaval.com/>

Police de caractères utilisée : Comic Sans, 10 points.

Édition électronique réalisée avec le traitement de textes Microsoft Word 2008 pour Macintosh.

Mise en page sur papier format : LETTRE (US letter), 8.5" x 11")

Édition numérique réalisée le 24 novembre 2011 à Chicoutimi, Ville de Saguenay, Québec.



REMERCIEMENTS



Nous sommes infiniment reconnaissants à la direction des **Presses de l'Université Laval**, notamment à M. **Denis DION**, directeur général, pour la confiance qu'on nous accorde en nous ayant autorisé, le 1^{er} août 2011, la diffusion de ce livre dans Les Classiques des sciences sociales.



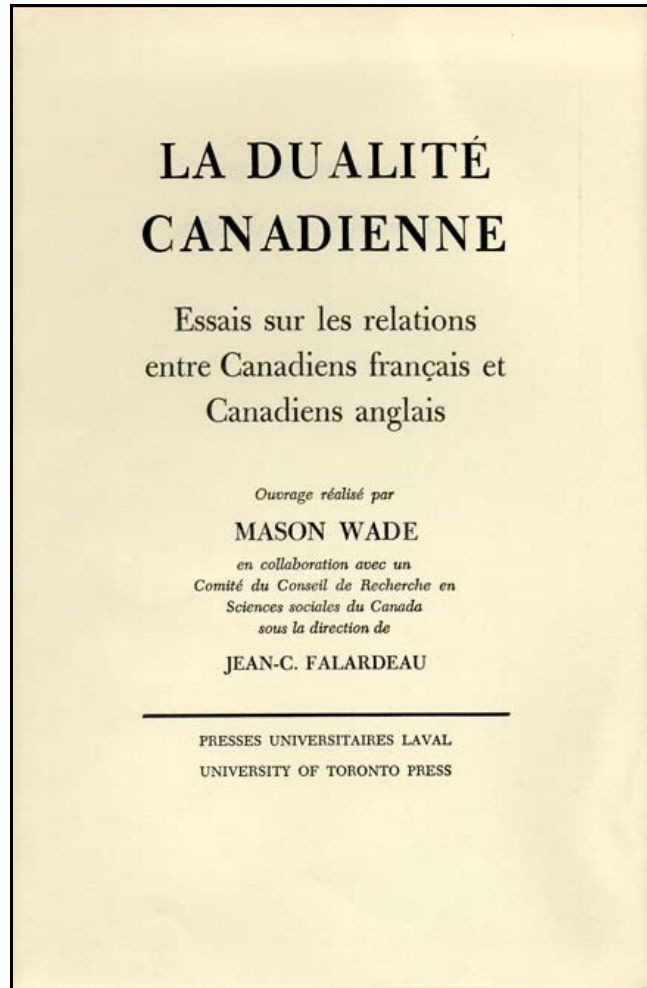
Courriel : denis.dion@pul.ulaval.ca

PUL : <http://www.pulaval.com/>

Jean-Marie Tremblay,
Sociologue,
Fondateur, Les Classiques des sciences sociales.
20 novembre 2011.

Philippe Garigue

"The French Canadian Family."



Un article publié dans l'ouvrage réalisé par Mason WADE, en collaboration avec un Comité du Conseil de Recherche en Sciences sociales du Canada sous la direction de Jean-Charles FALARDEAU, **La dualité canadienne. Essais sur les relations entre Canadiens français et Canadiens anglais.** / **Canadian Dualism. Studies of French-English Relations**, pp. 181-200. Québec : Les Presses de l'Université Laval, University of Toronto Press, 1960, 427 pp.

[181]

Deuxième partie

Material factors / Population et économie

A. Demographic considerations

Facteurs démographiques

"The French-Canadian Family." *

Philippe Garigue

Dean, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Montreal
1955

[Retour à la table des matières](#)

THERE IS NO LACK OF THEORIES about the French-Canadian family. Practically all writers on the French Canadians have said something about their family organization. Most have seen it as the institution through which the survival of the French Canadians was achieved. The "battle of the cradles," as their high birth rate has been called, has either been applauded or vilified. To explain it has taxed the ingenuity of all who have written about it. Some have seen it as the survival of an older society, some as the expression of a manifest destiny, and others as the result of environmental conditioning. In this paper we shall deal only with those hypotheses which are thought to be so-

* The author wishes to acknowledge the award of a grant from the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research of McGill University, which enabled him to collect the data upon which this paper is based. He also wishes to acknowledge his debt to Prof. Father Norbert Lacoste, who in discussions with him helped him to clarify a number of points.

biologically relevant. As a rough and ready classification of these hypotheses at least two extreme types can be separated: first, those which stress origin, and second, those which stress environment. Most of the sociological explanations are of the second type. However, the few authors who have used the first have had so much influence that it is thought worth while to begin with them.

Among these authors it has been the practice to identify the French-Canadian family with the French family of the seventeenth century. Sometimes it is also generally classified as the equivalent of the French peasant family. These can also be called the oldest theories about the French-Canadian family, for one of the first courses of lectures on the family ever taught in Montreal, in 1880, and given to the students of the Jacques Cartier School of Teachers, identified the French with the French-Canadian family.¹ Half a century later, Miner, in his study of [182] St. Denis, made the statement that the French-Canadian family system is one which was brought over from France in the seventeenth century, and has remained unchanged.² This identification of French Canadian and French is at the core of a number of propositions about the traditional nature of French-Canadian society and family organization. Its acceptance can be seen in all the theories which have a tendency to overstress what are thought to be the French characteristics of the French Canadians.

However, an examination of the traditional French family and of the early French-Canadian family will show that although certain traits show close similarities, the total organization is different. The first French settlers who arrived in Canada left a rural France in which life was still mainly regulated according to custom.³ The enclosure of land, which was to revolutionize rural life, had not yet had any

¹ L. A. Brunet, *La Famille et ses traditions* (Montréal, 1881).

² Horace Miner, *St. Denis: A French Canadian Parish* (Chicago, 1939), p. 72. [Livre disponible, en version française, dans *Les Classiques des sciences sociales*, sous le titre : [Saint-Denis: un village québécois](#). JMT.]

³ A. Esmein, *Cours élémentaire d'histoire du droit français* (14th ed., Paris: Recueil Sirey, 1921), p. 114.

influence on family organization.⁴ What existed was a customary mode of life in which land tenure, ties of kinship, and other social relationships maintained a highly specific form of family organization to which the name of *communauté taisible* has been given. This type of family unit has been traced back to the tribal structure of early France, and recent research has shown that it was in existence, in some rural areas, as late as the beginning of the twentieth century. These *communautés taisibles* were based on the practice, among commoners, of a father keeping with him his married sons, and of married brothers often remaining together after the death of their father as a joint family living under the same roof.⁵ Property, and especially land, was held for the benefit of all the members of the household, who pooled their resources. More than two generations thus lived together, and the household could be composed of anything up to seventy persons.⁶ At marriage, a woman came to live with her husband's family, and so came under the authority of her father-in-law, who appropriated the product of the couple's labour as well as the marriage dowry.⁷

The *communauté taisible* was never introduced as an institution into New France. There were a number of reasons. First of all, the migration from France was very slow and relatively limited. Altogether, [183] about 10,000 persons, most of them single, are said to have made the crossing in the 150 years of New France. At the time of the conquest, in 1760, the population of 60,000 persons was overwhelmingly Canadian-born. Rather than migration it was the high birth rate which had peopled New France, since in that period over 25,000 wed-

⁴ Marc Bloch, *Les Caractères originaux de l'histoire rurale française* (Oslo : Inst. for Samm. Kulturforskning, 1931), p. 210. [Le [tome I](#) et le [tome II](#) sont disponibles dans Les Classiques des sciences sociales. JMT.]

⁵ Esmein, *Cours élémentaire*, p. 223.

⁶ Bloch, *Les Caractères originaux*, p. 170.

⁷ G. Fagniez, *La Femme et la société française dans la première moitié du XVII^e siècle* (Paris, 1929), pp. 144-145.

dings, and 138,000 births, had taken place ⁸, or an average of about nine births for every mother who lived through her normal child-bearing life. ⁹ Furthermore, the migrants did not come as organized communities, but as small groups from practically all the regions of France, many of them from the growing urban centres. ¹⁰ It is not surprising, therefore, if the special family structure of rural France was never transplanted. Instead, the family organization which came to be had features which had not existed in France.

The organization of the French-Canadian family of that period can be described as that of a conjugal household with strong ties of kinship with other households, but with a high degree of autonomy. For instance, married brothers would take adjoining lots, and not work together on the same property. The economic difficulties, the dangers, the scarcity of women in the early days, resulted in a different type of family relationship. It was very early remarked that women had a higher status there than in France. ¹¹ Peter Kahn, who visited New France in 1749, reported that they had a tendency to assume an equal, if not a superior, status to that of their husbands. ¹² Much of the law of France was set aside in the new situation. ¹³ For instance, in France, both law and custom had discouraged remarriage, but in New France the law was ignored and the custom changed, so that even the usual year of mourning was not observed. Most widows remarried within three months, and one instance is recorded of a widow who remarried before her husband was in his grave. ¹⁴ Many women and men married

⁸ G. Langlois, *Histoire de la population canadienne-française* (Montréal, 1935), p. 258.

⁹ G. Sabagh, "The Fertility of French Canadian Women during the 17th Century," *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. XLVII, no. 5, pp. 680-689.

¹⁰ A. Godbout, *Origine des familles canadiennes-françaises* (Lille, 1925).

¹¹ I. Foulché-Delbose, "Women of New France (Three-Rivers ; 1651-63)," *Canadian Historical Review*, vol. XXI, no. 2 (June 1940), pp. 132-49.

¹² *Travels into North America* (London, 1771), vol. III, p. 82.

¹³ L. Baudouin, *Le Droit civil dans la province de Québec* (Montréal, 1953), pp. 67-79.

¹⁴ Foulché-Delbose, "Women of New France," p. 141.

twice, or three times, thus making for an extreme complexity of kinship, as well as extending the child-bearing life of the women. Because of the high frequency of death among the men, as well as their frequent [184] and long absences in either the fur trade or the wars, the women were often left in complete control of family affairs, and they thus built for themselves a tradition of independence, better education than their menfolk, and self-reliance. It was they who looked after the family property, and assumed custodial rights in their husband's absence. The only type of discrimination which seems to have been practised against them only underlines their new status. In France the practice has developed, according to the Law Code of the Kings of France, which also became the Law Code of New France, of redistributing property equally among all the children of a commoner, irrespective of sex. In New France the law was often set aside, and property was often inherited by the sons only, to the detriment of the daughters.¹⁵ The reason was that sons needed the inheritance to set up a new household, whereas the poorest girl was certain of a husband. But women could, and often did, inherit property, many of them acquiring real wealth with the corresponding high social status.¹⁶

The relationship between parents and children was also different from that in France. The inhabitants of New France were in a situation in which great advantages were to be had from having many children. This was different from the situation in France for the same period.¹⁷ In New France there was a close relation between social security, wealth, status, government policy, and large families.¹⁸ Children were regarded as a most welcome addition and this attitude was reflected in the way they were treated. Writing in 1709 a Jesuit missionary remarked that "it was here different than in France, they love their children too well to make them do anything against their will, and the children have so little respect for their parents that they leave

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 143.

¹⁶ A. Tessier, *Canadiennes* (Montréal, 1946), pp. 88-91.

¹⁷ Langlois, *Histoire*, pp. 5-14.

¹⁸ G. Frégault, *La Civilisation de la Nouvelle France* (Montréal, 1944).

them when they want." ¹⁹ The economic opportunity of being able to live independent of their parents, as well as the frontier mentality, gave French-Canadian youth a status unknown in the France of that period.

While the lack of data about the period prevents a more thorough analysis, there is no doubt that by the middle of the eighteenth century the French-Canadian family had become a special form of family, different from that of the French. As a type it had many similarities with the description given by Cahoun of the families of New England in the same period. ²⁰ The French-Canadian family is more North [185] American than European. Furthermore, it is not a variation of another national family form, but a specific form by itself. The characteristics which the French-Canadian family had acquired by the end of the eighteenth century were not to remain static, but to change further. The conquest of 1760, the end of the fur trade, the agricultural, commercial, and early industrial developments, and the gradual change from a predominantly rural to a predominantly urban society created situations which were peculiar to French Canada and which further heightened its characteristics as a special type. It is beyond the scope of this paper to trace in detail the historical changes which took place, and how these influenced the structure of the French-Canadian family. It is enough if it is stressed that these historical changes were correlated with a demographic and geographic expansion, as well as with an intensification of social differentiation. While it has been repeated before and after Lord Durham that French-Canadian society was remarkable for its equality of status and wealth ²¹, there are indications that important social differentiations came to exist among its various communities, as well as within each community.

¹⁹ A. Silvie, *Relations par lettres de l'Amérique septentrionale (années 1709 et 1710)* (Paris, 1904), p. 4.

²⁰ A. W. Cahoun, *A Social History of the American Family* (Cleveland, 1918), vol. 11, pp. 11-26.

²¹ Lord Durham, *Report on the Affairs of North America* (London, 1839), p. 13.

It is this background of extensive social differentiation which clashes with a number of "Situational" theories which have been advanced about the French-Canadian family. Practically all these theories analyse the French-Canadian family according to a simple logical model. A number of indices are selected and said to be the elements of a homogeneous, traditional, French-Canadian rural culture and society. In opposition to these, other elements are also selected and said to be caused by the development of an Anglo-Saxon industrial and urban culture. As far as the family is concerned, these assumptions are based on the belief that what is traditional French-Canadian is rural. This rural culture is held to have remained unchanged for some two centuries, and it is only now, under the pressure of an industrial urbanization brought about by English-speaking persons, that a new type of family structure is emerging. What is interesting about these theories is that they are found among such different authors as the French-Canadian Catholic reformers of the *Semaines sociales du Canada*²², and the anthropologists and sociologists trained at the University of Chicago. Not only do these authors stress the supposed traditional rural characteristics of the French-Canadian family, but they also present the change from rural to urban as implying the development of "instabilities" unknown in the rural areas.

[186]

The theories which have been used to explain these traditional characteristics do, however, differ widely in their stress. A classification of them would place at one end those which use the folk society frame of reference as a method of analysis, and those which stress that the urban-rural continuum in the province of Quebec rests on an important social difference. The folk society concept is now so well known that there is little need here to do more than outline its premises. According to Redfield's latest formulation, it is a small communi-

²² *Semaines sociales du Canada, La Famille* (Montréal, 1923) ; *Le Chrétien dans la famille* (Montréal, 1940) ; *La Jeunesse* (Montréal, 1946) ; *Le Foyer* (Montréal, 1950).

ty, isolated, illiterate, and with strong solidarity, in which the sacred prevails over the secular. Behaviour is traditional, spontaneous, acritical, and personal. Kinship, its relationships and institutions, are the typical categories of experience, and the family group is the unit of action.²³ In its totality the folk society concept obviously does not apply to French Canada at the present day, or at any moment of its history. However, even Redfield's statement, in his Introduction to Miner's book on St. Denis, that rural French Canada was half way along the continuum between the fold and the urban type of societies, is not a valid generalization. Redfield's argument rests on Miner's presentation of the data he collected at St. Denis. According to Miner this community had remained untouched, since its foundation, by industrialization and urbanization, and the traditional customs of the French Canadians had remained unchanged. The information which he reports does not, however, support this "survival" theory. By 1936, when Miner did his field research, St. Denis had known fifty years of decline in population. The birth rate for that year was given by Miner as 25 per thousand, which is below the average of 27.1 per thousand for the whole of Kamouraska County.²⁴ Furthermore, two demographic trends have been observed for this county : a high birth rate and an increase in population for a number of rural parishes situated in the interior ; and a low birth rate and a decrease in population for a number of rural parishes situated on the shore of the St. Lawrence. According to this report St. Denis had the second-lowest birth rate among the parishes of this county.²⁵ The decrease in population is noticeable in St. Denis in the abandonment of farms : not only do sons not follow their fathers as farmers, but whole families migrate from the parish.²⁶ Miner's study was of a community which was withdrawing into itself, with all the social and [187] psychological effects of

²³ R. Redfield, "The Folk Society," *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. XLII (1947), pp. 292-308.

²⁴ Quebec Statistical Year Book, 1937, p. 94.

²⁵ R. Blanchard, *L'Est du Canada français*, vol. I (Montréal, 1935), p. 190.

²⁶ Miner, *St. Denis*, p. 27.

such a trend. It cannot, therefore, be a suitable example on which to base generalizations about rural French Canada. There are a number of other reasons why the folk society concept cannot be used in analysing the French-Canadian family. Social institutions of the sort which exist in rural French Canada are the product of complex social change, whose complexity demands a different analysis from the one carried out in the logical model which has been described. There are a large number of institutions within each community whose nature is contrary to the basic assumptions of the folk society. Among these are the *rang* and the parish organization. The *rang* is the peculiar long-lot system of land tenure developed by the early settlers along the shores of the St. Lawrence, a system which is specific to French Canada. All the farms are at one end of the long lot and they are connected by a road, the length of the road being called the *rang*. Its use throughout Quebec has given to that province its peculiar appearance of rural urbanism, reminiscent of ribbon development. Each *rang* is to a point a social unit, and the ties between immediate neighbours become very important through the daily exchange of services. These ties are of greater importance than certain ties of kinship. Gérin, in his study of St. Justin in the 1890's, reported a farmer as saying to him that his daughter was having a quiet wedding as he had only invited his brothers and his two neighbours in the *rang*. The *rang* is thus a secular institution, whose size varies with the number of farms on the road, and whose social cohesion is due to propinquity. While ties of kinship may develop between members of the same *rang* through marriage, or through the settlement of kin in farms along the same road, its social function does not arise from familistic conceptions, but from an administrative and general preference for this form of land tenure. ²⁷

The other social institution whose presence prevents the development of anything like a folk society is the parish organization. Miner's presentation of the function of the Catholic religion in St. Denis

²⁷ P. Deffontaines, *Le Rang : type de peuplement rural du Canada français* (Québec : Presses Universitaires Laval, 1953), pp. 23-25.

stressed its integrative and traditionalistic role within the parish. ²⁸ However, the parish organization must also be seen as part of the organization of the Catholic Church in Quebec, and, for that matter, of the Catholic Church everywhere. The parish organization is not an autonomous unit, resulting from the functional operations of the communal life of the members of the parish. This organization is imposed [188] upon the community, and its structure is based on the acceptance, by the members of that community, of directives formulated elsewhere. The implication of this for an understanding of French Canada is that the parish, a religious unit found in rural and urban areas, is not only, or mainly, determined by the social characteristics of a community, but by an ideology involving the whole history of the Catholic Church. ²⁹ The life cycle of the people of St. Denis as described by Miner, or the yearly cycle of ceremonies in Cantonville listed by Hughes, could be used, with only slight modifications, for describing the life cycle, or the yearly ceremonials, of all the communities that use the Roman ritual. These are not the product of the special social life of a community, but the result of pronouncements and discussions which have taken place in the intellectual life of the Catholic Church, and which must be accepted by anyone who wants to be a Catholic. The French Canadians do not have a religion which is derived from the communal life of their rural communities, or directed at maintaining a rural society in the province of Quebec, or at perpetuating the type of behaviour described by Miner. While it can be shown that, for a long time, there was a tendency among some of the Catholic hierarchy of Quebec to present the rural way of life and the rural family as superior to urban life and the urban family, the development of a new Catholic "spirituality" in urban centres, and recent pronouncements of the Catholic hierarchy, show that they are convinced that there is nothing incompatible between urban life and the Catholic family. ³⁰

²⁸ *St. Denis*, pp. 91-105.

²⁹ *Semaines sociales du Canada, La Paroisse* (Montréal, 1953)

³⁰ *Lettre Pastorale Collective, Le Problème ouvrier* (Montréal, 1950).

The folk society concept sees the integrative and traditionalistic character of religion, but it ignores religion as the cause of change or minimizes its ability to reformulate some of its teachings. This concept also ignores religion as a factor breaking down the isolation of separate communities, seemingly because it has no criteria within itself for differentiating between a tribal cult and a universal church. There can be no doubt that even a watered version of the folk society concept cannot be used in the formulation of a research hypothesis about the French-Canadian family. There are rural communities in Quebec, but they are not folk societies.

There are equally good reasons why the theory advanced by a number of authors that the French-Canadian family is essentially rural is not a satisfactory explanation. The weakness of this generalization is that it reduces itself to one major proposition, and that is that French [189] Canada was formed as a peasant community and can only retain its characteristics by remaining a peasant community. The historical evidence does not support this. New France was for long a "frontier", society, whose main activity was the fur trade. As late as the eighteenth century agriculture was still a secondary occupation. Furthermore, the dominant activities of the period were located in the towns. In the middle of the eighteenth century, one-quarter of the population lived in three towns, while the other three-quarters lived in a continuous settlement along the shores of the St. Lawrence.³¹ The economic life of the period was diversified, and commercial as well as industrial enterprises were active. After the conquest of 1760 many of these fields of activity were no longer open to the French Canadians, and it was then that agriculture became the dominant activity. But a considerable proportion of the French Canadians continued to live in the towns, and many had non-agricultural occupations. One author remarked on the existence of a proletariat in the

³¹ Frégault, *La Civilisation de la Nouvelle France*, pp. 100, 217.

Province of Quebec in the first decade of the nineteenth century ³², and urbanization spread rapidly during that century.

While the classification of what is rural and urban in Quebec was long far from clear, one author has commented that by 1941 only a very small number of communities in Quebec could be called rural. The overwhelming majority of communities, if the criterion of density is taken, were semi-urban. ³³ Since 1951 the Canadian census has classified any community larger than 1,000 inhabitants as urban. According to this there were 212 rural communities in Quebec in 1951, of which 75 had come into existence since 1921 and had remained below the 1,000 inhabitant mark. ³⁴ However, density alone is not a safe criterion for assessing rural life. The greatest majority of these rural communities are within the belt of territory, 200 miles by 50, through which the St. Lawrence passes, and which forms the centre of French Canada. There is a complex system of communication which links rural and urban, and an easy diffusion of ideas among all these communities.

A clearer idea of the relation between rural and urban can be had by following the fluctuation in farms. In the period between 1841 and 1951, there was a total decrease of about 10,000 farms in the province of Quebec. There were, however, many periods of rapid fluctuation. [190] Between 1844 and 1861, for instance, nearly 40,000 farms were abandoned, or over a third of the 1861 figure. Similarly, since 1891, about 40,000 farms have also been abandoned, or under a third of the 1951 figure. By 1931, when the first count of persons living on farms was taken, the proportion was 27 per cent. By 1951 it had decreased to 18.9 per cent of the population of Quebec, irrespective of their occupation. ³⁵ The impression which remains from a study of the

³² E. Rarneau, *La France aux colonies* (Paris, 1859).

³³ E. Charles, *The Changing Size of the Family in Canada* (Ottawa : King's Printer, 1948), p. 141.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ *Quebec Statistical Year Book*, 1953, pp. 309, 311 ; and F.A. Angers, "Documentation statistique" in A. Minville, éd., *L'Agriculture* (Montréal, 1943), pp. 486, 483.

statistics of farming in Quebec is of recurring cycles of migration and colonization, not of an over-all stable agricultural population. It seems, therefore, that many qualifications must be made about what is called the traditional rural character of French Canada.

Criticism can, in fact, be directed against a very high number of generalizations about the supposed traditional characteristics of the French-Canadian society. For instance, one of Miner's statements, which has been repeated by a large number of other social scientists, was that one of the characteristics of rural French Canada is that the farm is handed over to one son, and that the other children leave home to make their living elsewhere. This statement does not take into account the fact that there were periods in the history of Quebec when a large proportion of farmers did not hand over their farms, but migrated with their whole families. Furthermore, it is to be recalled that since 1865, with the coming into force of the Civil Code of Quebec, a person can leave his property to whom he chooses, and cut off his relatives from inheritance.³⁶ If Miner's report is taken to be purely a description of a rural custom, it is found that it does not describe the historically oldest, or the only way of rural inheritance. Writing in 1832, Bouchette remarked that a very minute subdivision of land had taken place because of the equal division of property by inheritance.³⁷ Another author has pointed out that in certain areas, by 1820, the size of farms differed according to the subdivision practised at inheritance, and also according to the number the land could support.³⁸ Another author has remarked that in the parish of St. Justin, in the last decade of the nineteenth century, there were two systems of inheritance, varying according to the size of the farms and the wealth [191] of the families concerned: the farm was either equally divided between a number of sons, or handed over to one son.

³⁶ Baudouin, *Le Droit civil dans la province de Québec*, pp. 1129-1131.

³⁷ J. Bouchette, *The British Dominion of North America* (London, 1832), p. 379.

³⁸ W.S. Reid, "The Habitant's Standard of Living on the Seigneurie des Mille Isles, 1820-50," *Canadian Historical Review*, XXVIII, no. 3 (Sept. 1947), pp. 266-278.

At St. Dominique, at the turn of the century, the same author found that inheritance was equally divided between all siblings, irrespective of sex.³⁹

There are indications that other variations in inheritance procedure can be found in rural Quebec, and that they are not limited to a single item. For instance, Miner reported that, at St. Denis, it was the father who decided which one of the sons was best suited for taking over the farm. However, Gérin has also reported that there was a period, at St. Justin, when the position was reversed, and the father had to convince one of his sons to stay and take over the farm, and that a son would impose his own conditions regarding his obligations to his parents and other relatives, if he agreed to stay.⁴⁰ Furthermore, a farm is not always handed down from father to son. Gérin described an instance at St. Dominique, at the beginning of the century, in which a wife inherited the farm and administered it with complete rights of disposal.⁴¹ It can be seen that far from having become traditional behaviour, the handing over of a farm shows many variations. Hughes's remark that around Cantonville the practice of handing over a farm to a son had fallen into desuetude is, therefore, not to be taken as an indication of critical changes, but simply of the application of a mode of behaviour which existed in French Canada before the development of industrialization. Another instance of generalization on the basis of limited evidence is Hughes's hypothesis that there is friction among siblings as the result of competition over the farm.⁴² There is no

³⁹ L. Gérin, "L'Habitant de St. Justin" in *Proceedings and Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada*, 2nd series, vol. V, pp. 139-216 ; and *Le Type économique et social des Canadiens* (Montréal, 1937), p. 119. [Livre disponible dans [Les Classiques des sciences sociales](#). JMT.]

⁴⁰ "L'habitant de St. Justin," p. 195.

⁴¹ *Le Type économique et social des Canadiens*, p. 121. [Livre disponible dans [Les Classiques des sciences sociales](#). JMT.]

⁴² E. C. Hughes, *French Canada in Transition* (Chicago, 1943), pp. 184-188. [Livre disponible dans *Les Classiques des sciences sociales*, en version française, sous le titre : [Rencontre de deux mondes. La crise de l'industrialisation du Canada français](#). JMT.]

doubt that instances of competition for a farm can be found, but there are also indications that conditions in Quebec have always tended to minimize friction between siblings over a farm.

Far from showing homogeneity, the French-Canadian family has many variations within the same general form. This diversity is not simply a question of a difference in the stress given to certain items, but of important variations in the relationship of family members. For instance, *Gérin*, in his study in 1898 of an area on the north shore of the St. Lawrence, was able to point to the differences which existed in the modes of relationship of family members in the three communities of Maskinongé, St. Justin, and St. Didace, all within a few [192] miles of each other.⁴³ At Maskinongé and St. Didace, he found family relationships which he labelled "instable" for two different sets of reasons: at Maskinongé, the extensive social differentiation which existed in the community was said by him to have weakened family cohesion; and at St. Didace, economic hardships had caused friction between family members. Only the families of St. Justin were classified by him as having a "stable" relationship.

This high degree of variation in family relationships in a small geographical area was shown by *Gérin* to exist also in the various regional subdivisions of Quebec. In a later analysis of four more rural families, spread between 1900 and 1930, he was able to show quite clearly the differences to be found between the families of: (1) the farmer of the lower St. Lawrence, who also colonized the Saguenay; (2) the stay-at-home farmer of the middle reaches of the St. Lawrence; (3) the progressive farmer situated at the junction of the main roads of the St. Lawrence Valley; (4) the uprooted farmer on the sandy soils of southern Quebec; (5) the emancipated farmer of the St. François Valley.⁴⁴

From *Gérin's* evidence it seems that, cutting across similarities, there are extensive variations in family behaviour in rural French Ca-

⁴³ "L'Habitant de St. Justin," p. 215.

⁴⁴ *Le Type économique et social des Canadiens*, p. 9.

nada. Neither the word "traditional" nor the word "rural" means "homogeneous" in the province of Quebec. In fact, considering that the urban way of life has always been a part of French-Canadian society, the theories which have been advanced about the "essentially" rural nature of the French-Canadian family, or its uniformity, could be considered as the "myths of origin" of the French-Canadian family, with no more empirical foundation in them than most myths.

According to Gérin all these variations in family behaviour were caused by geographical, economic, and historical differences, which influenced the various communities of Quebec.⁴⁵ It would seem possible, simply by extending his classification, to cover all the communities to be found in Quebec. Each of these community types could then be duplicated by a family type, whose range would form a classification of the French-Canadian family types. The present situation, for instance, could be analysed, if this suggestion is taken over, according to the classification of communities suggested by Hughes. According to him the following types of communities could be distinguished in Quebec : (1) the old settled agricultural parishes ; (2) the [193] new agricultural fishing communities ; (3) the old French-Canadian towns which have recently become industrialized ; (4) the frontier towns where industry came first ; (5) the former English towns where French Canadians have moved in ; (6) the cities of Montreal and Quebec as special instances.⁴⁶

Falardeau has offered a revised version of this classification, according to an economic continuum of at least ten subdivisions, which even more clearly points out the variety of communities in Quebec.⁴⁷ It can readily be expected that variations in family behaviour are to be found in such a wide-ranging typology. The problem, however, is

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ J.-C. Falardeau, "The Changing Social Structures" in Falardeau, éd., *Essais sur le Québec contemporain* (Québec : Presses Universitaires Laval, 1953), p. 104. [Article disponible dans Les Classiques des sciences sociales en version française sous le titre : "[L'évolution de nos structures sociales](#)". JMT.]

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 120.

whether these classifications cover all the important differences in family behaviour, and whether there is a constant relationship between community organization and family organization. The problem here is whether the major determinant of Hughes's and Falardeau's classification—the economic organization of the community—is the major determinant of family organization in Quebec. This stress on the economic determinant is hinged on the proposition that industrialization is the criterion of differentiation, not only between rural and urban, but also between all communities. Underlining this are the personal criteria of the authors of these classifications who see in industrialization the disintegrating cause of a previously integrated society. The industrialization of Quebec is blamed for having "abruptly disturbed a pastoral symphony," as Falardeau states it. The theoretical implication of this attitude has been the drawing of too sharp a distinction between rural and urban, so that at least one author was led to make the puzzling remark that "the transitional character of the family behaviour is seen in the wide and rather inexplicable variations in urban fertility of French Catholic towns." ⁴⁸

While it is apparent that urbanization and industrialization have exercised a powerful influence on the fertility rate of the French Canadians, this influence has been modified by other, more complex, social and cultural conditions, which are as valid in urban as in rural areas. The argument which is here presented is based on three main generalizations: (1) the French Canadians have always had an urban life; (2) the social and cultural differences in Quebec have never been as wide apart as the use of an extreme rural-urban dichotomy tends to present them; (3) the French Canadians have always possessed [194] numerous institutions which have tended to maintain their cohesion as a separate ethnic group.

French Canada has neither a completely homogeneous family type nor variations in family behaviour so extensive as to necessitate their being classified as separate autonomous forms. For instance, Lamonta-

⁴⁸ Charles, *The Changing Size of the Family in Canada*, p. 98.

gne and Falardeau have reported that the urban working-class families they studied in Quebec City were similar in size to those of rural communities. This similarity in size has, they explain, been caused by the retention of a "rural" culture in urban surroundings.⁴⁹ The authors also imply that French-Canadian culture is paradoxical in as far as it does not seem to be aware of the industrial revolution which has taken place in Quebec. This theoretical conclusion seems to be caused by their expectancy that major differences should exist between rural and urban families.

That such a differentiation is not as sharp as an extreme urban-rural dichotomy would present it was seen in a recent study of families in Montreal. In comparing the range of kinship knowledge of informants born in Montreal with that of informants recently migrated from other parts of Quebec, it was found that there was only a limited adjustment in the second generation. Furthermore, informants reported few or no difficulties in the adaptation of their family members to city life. One of the characteristics of kinship organization in Quebec is that all the informants so far interviewed have been able to name relatives in both rural and urban areas. This is not to say that persons cannot be found in Quebec whose relatives are all in a rural or all in an urban area, but simply that a type of family organization exists in Quebec which maintains a high degree of contact among relatives who reside in different communities. This high degree of contact is kept, even though each sibling group of each generation scatters itself in all directions. The fact that the sibling group is large means that through this scattering a person has relatives in practically every major centre of French Canada.⁵⁰ One of the peculiarities of the French-Canadian family is the great strength of sibling and lineal recognition, which is correlated to a high degree of family identity and reciprocity of services. Links among persons who recognize ties of

⁴⁹ M. Lamontagne and J.-C. Falardeau, "The Life Cycle of French-Canadian Urban Families," *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, vol. XIII, no. 2 (May 1947), pp. 233-470.

⁵⁰ P. Garigue, "Kinship and Urban Life," unpublished MS, 1955.

kinship are maintained even though migration may separate them for the rest of their lives.

[195]

The cultural background of French-Canadian family life can be shown to have two major characteristics : a strong sense of grouping and integration, superimposed on an extensive pattern of migration. Furthermore, this problem of migration cannot be reduced to a simple, one-dimensional proposition, like Miner's statement, repeated by others, that it is caused by population pressure which in turn is caused by the large birth rate. This, of course, does not explain the tradition of the *coureur de bois*, which constantly drained the population of New France. Neither does it face the problem, mentioned by Blanchard, that the agricultural land of Quebec could support a much greater density of population.⁵¹ Furthermore, it does not account for the cycle in migration, for the frequent moves of families from one parish into the next.⁵² This migratory practice of the French Canadian can, in fact, become pathological, as in the instance of one household that moved twenty times in fifty years across the Quebec-United States frontier⁵³, or in the instance of the family of *Maria Chapdelaine*, whose head was only happy when he was opening up new land. The migration of the French Canadians seems to be as much a cultural trait as the geographical mobility of the population of the United States. To refer to this migration as land hunger, or land pressure, is to forget that the French Canadians were forced, at one stage of their history-after the conquest-to turn to the land to survive.⁵⁴ It seems that as soon as they could they left their farms for other places and other occupations : witness the fact that by the 1930's it

⁵¹ R. Blanchard, *L'Ouest du Canada français*, vol. I (Montréal, 1953), p. 86.

⁵² Gérin, *Le Type économique et social des Canadiens*, pp. 17-18.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 174.

⁵⁴ Minville, éd., *L'Agriculture*, p. 285.

is reported that there were two million French Canadians in the United States, and three million in Canada. ⁵⁵

But this migration took place without the complete loss of the cultural characteristics of family unity and obligation. One instance of this can be seen in the practice of the family reunion, which rural and urban French Canadians have maintained. It is also found in the development of anniversary meetings attended by those having the same family name. Notices can be found in French-Canadian newspapers asking persons having the same family name to come together at certain dates. These gatherings vary in size from a few hundred to thousands of persons. In 1939, for instance, the descendants of nine Frenchmen named Poulin, who had come over in the seventeenth century but who [196] were not related, gathered together for the third centenary of the arrival of the first Poulin. It is estimated that about 7,000 Poulins attended Mass at Ste-Anne-de-Beaupré on that day. In 1940, a smaller reunion brought together 836 Gagnons in an anniversary ceremony in Quebec City. One hundred and eighty-six of these Gagnons were from Quebec City, 81 from Montreal, 509 from other communities in the province of Quebec, 29 from other provinces in Canada, and 37 from the United States. ⁵⁶ Some of these had travelled over a week to come to this family gathering. The range of status among them varied, from a member of Parliament, priests, university professors, farmers, working men, shopkeepers, and so on, through practically every possible occupation. The fact that one of the organizers of this reunion was born and brought up in the United States, and that a number came from there, shows that this practice is no rural "survival" limited to the province of Quebec.

The mechanism of social change in the French-Canadian family is then more complex than it has usually been presented as being in the theoretical model which assumes a transition from a rural to an urban

⁵⁵ G. Lanctôt, *Les Canadiens-français et leurs voisins du sud* (Montréal, 1941), p. 294.

⁵⁶ *Compte-rendu des fêtes du troisième centenaire de la famille Poulin* (Québec, 1939) ; *Livre-souvenir des fêtes du troisième centenaire des Gagnon* (n.d.).

type of family. The functions of the French-Canadian family cannot, furthermore, be limited to a direct correlation with the community in which the members of the household are living. In order to understand the family, the analysis must be transferred to the totality of French-Canadian society, and the role of the family as an institution peculiar to French Canada. Furthermore, any theories which assume that it is the English-speaking persons who are the dynamic cause of change only present a limited side of the problem. To say, as Keyfitz does, that the influence of the English-speaking world is transmitted to French Canada through the towns⁵⁷ is to assume that the social changes within French-Canadian society are the after-effects of changes in the English-speaking groups. This is to ignore the vitality of French Canada's institutions. Besides schools and universities, its own press, and the radio and television stations, all of which provide for the diffusion of French-Canadian ideas about the family, the church organization is one of the most important means of spreading new ideas about the family.

A recent study of Catholic literature on the family has shown that it has changed from interpreting the family as a hierarchical structure [197] involving a scale of duties for its members to presenting it as reciprocal love among persons who have different, but not subordinated roles.⁵⁸ The spreading of these ideas is helping to change family relationships in Quebec. A recent study of French-Canadian rural youth has shown that they are conscious that their own level of expectation with regard to the family relationship is changing as the result of their coming into contact with this new interpretation.⁵⁹ Although the total influence of this change for the whole of the province cannot be assessed for lack of data, it has been estimated that 30

⁵⁷ N. Keyfitz, "Population Problems" in Falardeau, éd., *Essais sur le Québec contemporain*, p. 95. [Article disponible dans [Les Classiques des sciences sociales](#). JMT.]

⁵⁸ S. de Lestapis, "Evolution de la pensée exprimée de l'Eglise catholique" in *Renouveau des idées sur la famille* (Paris, 1954), pp. 254-258.

⁵⁹ G. Lemieux, *Vu et vécu : La Vie familiale des jeunes ruraux* (Montréal, 1955).

per cent of all Catholic weddings in Montreal in 1954 were between persons who had followed the ten weeks' course of lectures on preparation for marriage given by the Jeunesse ouvrière catholique.⁶⁰ In 1947, another Catholic association had over 200 groups throughout the province of Quebec making a study of problems facing the French-Canadian family.⁶¹ In 1954, 5,925 persons attended the course of lectures on the family given by another association in Montreal. The number of these associations interested in the family includes practically every major Catholic association in Quebec. Other associations, directly interested in family affairs, have also been started, such as the Ecole des parents, the Ecoles ménagères, and so on.

In this examination, the following basic facts seem to have been established about the French-Canadian family. (1) It is North American, rather than European. (2) It has gone through a number of changes since the first settlement of New France, but these changes have not been uniform, and they have created variations in types of family behaviour. (3) These variations do not, however, result in different kinds of family organization, but in degrees of variation within the same general family form. (4) At the same time, a number of factors are operating to maintain similarities. (5) Changes in family organization have a complex origin, in which the influence of the English-speaking world is only one element. (6) The main characteristics of the French-Canadian family can be said to be an extensive kinship recognition only partially weakened by geographical scattering, an extensive exchange of services among recognized kin, a strong sense of household unity, and a large sibling group.

These characteristics have been reported as existing to a greater or [198] smaller degree in all French-Canadian communities, even outside the province of Quebec. A hypothesis which explains these characteristics as peculiar to French Canadians cannot, moreover, be cor-

⁶⁰ Rapport de l'Action catholique ouvrière (1954), "Service de préparation au mariage".

⁶¹ *Le Mouvement ouvrier* (Montréal, 1955), p. 117.

related with the origin of the French Canadians in France, or with the supposed folk character of rural French Canada, or with the "survival" of an inherent rural culture and family form. Neither can present-day French-Canadian society be compared to that of underdeveloped countries, for the history and scale of industrialization in the province of Quebec is closely similar to that of other areas of Canada.

Arising out of these findings are a number of postulates which can be isolated, and from which a hypothesis can be built. In the historical dimension it can be offered, as one of the postulates, that although there have been important social changes in a number of social institutions, such as the political and economic organizations, as well as a shift from a predominantly rural to a predominantly urban society, no particular period can be pointed out as the breaking-up of a traditional family structure. In the functional dimension it can also be stated, as another postulate, that important supports have always been provided by other institutions, such as religion, law, education, and so on, to the maintenance of the characteristics of the French-Canadian family.

Presented as statements, these postulates can be correlated in the following manner, which as a totality could provide the main structure of a hypothesis for further empirical research. The characteristics of the French-Canadian family are the results of : (1) an early history within a society whose survival demanded a rapid growth of population as well as a strongly integrated society ; (2) the acceptance, when New France was founded, of a family ideal based on extensive reciprocal rights and duties which merged into religious obligations, and the need for the survival of French-Canadian society as its members fought the climate, the forest, the Indians, and the British ; (3) the development, after the conquest of 1760, of a society in which the religion, the language, and the family were the main social institutions left over from the period of New France, and in which these institutions were highly valued because they were the links with the previous society, as well as because they became the accepted characteristics of the French Canadians as a separate ethnic group ; (4) the mainte-

nance, to the present, of a strong ethnic consciousness, with its accompanying refusal of social and cultural assimilation.

A sociological analysis of the French-Canadian family must, therefore, emphasize the fact that, besides its normal functions of fitting [199] its members into the various communities composing French Canada, it has been the instrument of survival of the French Canadians as a special group. This need to survive, both in the period of New France and after, has been so important that the other social determinants, which normally have important bearings on family behaviour, have taken second place. Survival needed both numbers and a well integrated society. The most efficient sociological instrument for achieving those aims is the family. For that reason it can be stated that, as long as a feeling of ethnic difference exists among the French Canadians, then the special characteristics of the French-Canadian family will continue to exist.

The research hypothesis presented here as a conclusion is that the family has been and is even now the major instrument of cultural continuity of the French Canadians. Because, after 1760, the political and economic as well as other institutions became English in character, and because gradually the Catholic Church, with an ever increasing proportion of non-French Canadians among its members, ceased to identify the survival of Catholicism with the survival of French Canada, the family has been the means of cultural continuity.

Even today, family life does not, for French Canadians, mean only the socialization of children, and the providing of economic and psychological security. It is for the overwhelming majority of them the centre of their cultural and social activities, the centre of what they hold to be French-Canadian values. It is therefore possible to suggest that the maintenance of over-all cultural similarities between the various rural and urban communities, the strength of kinship ties, the central position of the family in the behaviour of French Canadians, are the results of a compensatory attitude resulting from loss of control over the other institutions. Because the conquest decreased their participation, as well as their identification, with the political,

legal, and economic, as well as other institutions developed by the English, French Canadians withdraw into their families, creating for themselves the only social and cultural world over which they were masters. Against a mainly Anglo-Saxon continent they found in their family the needed social and cultural security.

This hypothesis would also explain another cultural characteristic of French Canada: the identification between the general cultural values and the family values of French Canadians. Without underestimating the role and importance of other values in the history of French Canada, it can be said that the general cultural world view of French Canadians has been familistic. The reason why urbanism has not had [200] the same disintegrating consequences on the French-Canadian family as it has on other societies is that, on the one hand, French Canada was not a folk society or a peasant society, and, on the other hand, there was an over-all familistic culture which minimized the impact of the urban way of life. These familistic values are not the result of a rural way of life, or of a folk survival, but seem to have resulted from, first, an adaptation to certain conditions, and, second, a compensatory reaction against a minority status in a dominant Anglo-Saxon world.

The importance of familistic values in the cultural world view of French Canadians can be seen in the dominant role played by these values in the development of nationalistic values. A number of the most famous slogans used by the nationalists, such as "la langue, la paroisse, la famille," "la terre de nos ancêtres," "la revanche des berceaux," and so on, are to be seen as an identification of familistic and nationalistic values. The French-Canadian national anthem, *O Canada*, carries two verses which epitomize this identification: "O Canada, terre de nos aïeux," and "protégera nos foyers et nos droits." Poets like Fréchette speak of the respect French Canadians have for those who started New France: "Ces hommes qui furent nos pères." Henri Bourassa, speaking in 1920, identified the society and the family: "Toute loi civile, toute mesure administrative qui porte atteinte directe ou indirecte à la famille, est anti-sociale." The thread which links all

the various aspects of French-Canadian culture and social life seems to be, in all instances, the family.

1955

Fin du texte