

## Toronto Counsellors and International Institute Social Work Theory and Practice

Two of the women hired by the International Institute of Metropolitan Toronto to staff its Department of Individual Services were Margarete Streeruwitz, a political refugee from Communist Czechoslovakia who arrived in Toronto in the early 1950s, and Effie Tsatsos, a Greek schoolteacher who immigrated to Canada towards the end of the decade.

Hired to carry out the Institute's pluralist-integration mandate by providing counselling and casework services meant to ensure individual and family adjustment, neither Streeruwitz nor Tsatsos was a professional social worker. (The job description called for a bachelor of social work degree or equivalent.) A one-time client of the Institute precursor, the New Canadians Service Association (NCSA), Streeruwitz evidently had some practical experience, however. Like other Europeans hired at the Institute in the 1950s, she may have worked for one of the many social welfare organizations serving refugees in Europe after the war. Before moving to Toronto, Tsatsos spent her first year in Canada employed as a dishwasher in a Vancouver restaurant owned by the relatives who had sponsored her. In Toronto, before joining the Institute, she taught Greek-language classes to (presumably tourism-bound) Canadians and, having learned English in Canada, English classes to Greek women looking for work. In keeping with the Institute's strategy to recruit educated and bilingual or multilingual staff from the communities being served, director Nell West and colleagues considered Tsatsos' teaching background sufficient qualification for the job.

As Institute recruits who trained on the job while carrying heavy caseloads, Streeruwitz and Tsatsos were expected to apply the casework method central to social work practice with the sensitivity and insight required by the social-cultural perspectives adopted by the affiliates of the American international institute movement. Besides West, there were a few, mostly male, professional social workers who initially carried out the training. As front-line workers who were themselves refugees and immigrants adjusting to life in

Canada, Streeruwitz, Tsatsos, and their co-workers sought to negotiate the contradictory imperatives imbedded in both the casework method and the social-cultural approach. While both women embraced their role as cultural intermediaries between the newly arrived and the host community, their relationship to the Institute differed. Five years after being hired in 1965, Tsatsos left the Institute to focus full-time on a daycare centre she had established for immigrant working mothers. As the daycare's initial Greek clientele expanded to include the children of South Asian, Caribbean, and other European immigrants, Tsatsos hired a Pakistani immigrant with nursery school experience as her second-in-command.<sup>1</sup> By contrast, Streeruwitz had a much longer career with the Institute. Hired in spring 1957, she moved quickly through the ranks from trainee to counsellor and later head of the Institute casework committee. She also did a stint as reception centre supervisor, which involved training and supervising the volunteers. Streeruwitz retired in 1971, her fifteen-year career making her the Institute's longest-serving paid counsellor.<sup>2</sup>

This chapter offers a profile of the Toronto Institute's counselling staff and examines the nature of International Institute social work theory and practise. Forgoing the polarized depictions of the Institutes as either integrationist or assimilationist institutions,<sup>3</sup> it argues that the theories and approaches that comprised the institute movement's liberal pluralist, or multicultural, approach towards the incorporation of immigrants contained contradictory elements. In addition to addressing the contradictory imperatives of the casework method, it highlights a central paradox that characterized the social-cultural approach. Like their US counterparts, Toronto's counsellors and caseworkers rejected the biological determinism that undergirded racialist ideologies and promoted instead a degree of cultural and moral relativism. Yet they viewed the integration process as completed only once the economically and otherwise adjusting immigrant had absorbed a common core of the hostland's values about work and personal ethics, democracy, and marital and family life. Veering onto the slippery terrain of assimilation, that stance created ambiguity and confusion over the meaning of such key terms as integration, assimilation, and Canadianization (or Americanization). Equally important, though, is that while administrators and departmental supervisors included professional Canadian social workers, the staff's heavily newcomer and "semi-professional" profile preclude reductionist portraits of the Institute as an Anglo-Canadian agent of Canadianization. Nor did the tensions within Institute social work practice necessarily render the workers incapable of providing clients with concrete support.<sup>4</sup>

### **Counsellors and Caseworkers**

Histories of social work practice (as opposed to theory or policy) usually feature middle-class women of the dominant majority and their working-class,

poor, and immigrant or racialized clients. By contrast, Toronto Institute counsellors were also immigrants and refugees and their clientele included both middle-class and working-class newcomers.<sup>5</sup> Having earlier recruited immigrant and first-generation women trained in social work, many of the post-1945 US Institute workers were second- and third-generation Americans of varied origins who had trained in the immigrant social service field, though some immigrants were also hired.<sup>6</sup> The social work encounters in Toronto instead involved counsellors and clients who were both “foreigners” adjusting to life in Canada, though their status and power differed. In subsequent chapters, both counsellors and clients are anonymized out of respect for their privacy and that of their families. But here I offer a brief profile of the heavily female but mixed-gender counselling staff.

Across two decades, the Toronto Institute, including its precursor, the NCSA, hired approximately two dozen counsellors, though the length of term and full- or part-time status varied. Apart from Nell West, the paid counsellors were immigrants or refugees. The reception centre volunteers who offered orientation services and conducted the occasional home visit or counselling session were mostly Anglo- and ethno-Canadian women of European origins. Altogether, women outnumbered men in the counselling department. A man usually (but not always) held the position of departmental supervisor while several female counsellors oversaw new staff and volunteers. Initially mainly Eastern European in composition, the counselling staff became more ethnically, and then racially, diverse in response to the changing composition of the clientele, but remained heavily European to the end.

By the early 1960s, there might be eight or nine counsellors filling the staff’s six full-time positions at a given time. Together, they provided services in more than two dozen, mostly European, languages. The Caribbean and South Asian counsellors hired in 1970 worked mainly in English. In many instances, so, too, did the bilingual and multilingual European workers, though they differed with respect to training and experience. The departmental supervisor and the members of the casework committee usually held professional social work credentials or had the “equivalent” in social work experience. In addition to training and supervising the counsellors and volunteers, casework committee members handled their own caseloads.<sup>7</sup>

The counselling staff shared a middle-class urban background as well as differing personal circumstances, including those based on gender. In occupational terms, the staff included, besides the few trained social workers, a former teacher and teaching program graduate, an engineer, a trade official, a lawyer, two self-identified business people, and some university graduates. Professional credentials or practical experience was important, but a linguistic and cultural fit also mattered. Institute efforts to hire front-line workers from within the immigrant communities represented in their clientele was not simply a pragmatic

response to the lack of “foreign-speaking” personnel in the mainstream agencies and government departments. It also reflected an inclusive, or multicultural, strategy meant to facilitate meaningful social work interactions. The impracticality of hiring counsellors from every ethnic group meant, however, that linguistic abilities, along with the “transferable skills” of well-educated or accomplished applicants, were often the deciding factors in hiring.

Institute administrators preferred educated applicants with a capacity for “sound” judgment and an ideological affinity with the values of liberal capitalist democracies and the North American “modern” way of life. Like their middle-class clients, most newcomer counsellors had experienced downward mobility before joining the Institute. Some file entries capture a counsellor’s own efforts to understand Canadian models, the grammatically imperfect writing a reminder that English was not their first or second or even, in some cases, their third or fourth language. Overall, however, the dynamics exhibited by the counsellor-client interactions reflected a variety of configurations with respect to class, gender, and ethnicity/race or culture.

Politics also mattered. Very few pro-Communists of any ethnic origin visited the anti-Communist Institute and no leftist of Eastern European origin joined the staff. In hiring Greek and Portuguese staff, senior staff chose candidates that they hoped would be viewed as neutral by the left and right factions within these groups. Political divisions among Greeks predated the Civil War (1946–7), the Cold War’s first hot spot, but the post-1945 immigrants were divided between the small but vocal pro-Communist Greeks, who were largely the children of the 1946 revolution, and the majority of non-Communists. The Portuguese included those sympathetic to the long-standing Salazar dictatorship and the smaller number of leftists who opposed it.<sup>8</sup>

The initial multilingual counselling staff of two women and one man comprised two workers, Streeruwitz and Serbian refugee N.S. Bojovic, and secretary Ida Mertz, a German immigrant who also conducted home visits. Together, they spoke a dozen European languages, including German, the largest group of independent immigrants to first use the department’s services being Germans, and the languages of the displaced persons, such as Polish and Ukrainian.

A professional social worker with a master’s degree in social work (MSW), Bojovic was hired in fall 1956 as departmental supervisor and head of the casework committee. A speaker of half a dozen Eastern European languages as well as Italian and English, he prepared reports, publicized the department’s work, held training and debriefing sessions, and handled some of the more complicated cases requiring more in-depth casework. Bojovic earned praise as a “very mature” caseworker who understood the social-cultural approach and as a fine trainer of staff.<sup>9</sup> Also multilingual, Streeruwitz spoke several Slavic languages as well as German. Her ability to speak Hungarian helped the Institute to face its first major challenge with the arrival of the Hungarian refugees of 1956. One of

four Eastern European female counsellors, Streeruwitz's reputation among colleagues as "a warm and understanding personality" and "a capable ... person" reportedly extended to many Institute clients.<sup>10</sup>

The Institute initially planned to focus on offering orientation services, such as translating documents, making referrals, and providing information about jobs and housing, along with periodic consultation for agencies needing help with non-English-speaking clients. In response to the mounting outside requests, however, it expanded its counselling and casework services.<sup>11</sup>

Subsequent counsellors included Hungarian Dr George Nagy, an early-fifties arrival active in the Hungarian Canadian community who was hired to assist with the many Hungarian "56ers" using the Institute, and Clara Tirkantis, a woman engineer.<sup>12</sup> Dutch-born John Henselmans, who supplemented his interrupted university training in sociology and psychology in The Netherlands with social work courses at the University of Toronto, was hired as a social worker in 1960. He, too, spoke several languages, including German, French, and Spanish. A few years later, when Bojovic left for a better-paid position with the Toronto Board of Education's Child Adjustment Service (a counselling department),<sup>13</sup> Henselmans became departmental supervisor. Ironically, given his role as a facilitator of immigrant integration, the "devoted" Henselmans, as a board member described him, later returned to Holland.<sup>14</sup> Irene Szebeny, a multilingual Hungarian refugee who came to Toronto via Brazil, juggled duties as bookkeeper, home visitor, and occasional counsellor. The long-serving staffer was considered a "dedicated" worker who "cheerfully worked overtime" without pay.<sup>15</sup>

The Southern Europeans hired in the 1960s handled many of the growing number of cases involving their compatriots, but, like other counsellors, they also dealt with many clients of other ethnic origins. The Italian-speaking staff increased with the hiring of additional multilingual counsellors. They included Yugoslavian-born Anton Justi, who spoke French, German, and Italian as well as five Eastern European languages. A former government official and businessman in the import-export trade, Justi had worked in Europe before coming to Toronto. He made a distinct impression with his accumulated "knowledge" of different European "culture[s] and customs."<sup>16</sup> An avid bridge player who later became president of the Canadian Yugoslavian Professional Association, Justi counts among the few counsellors who harboured ambitions as part of an ethnic elite. Maria Cosso was first hired as a fieldworker with the Institute's extension office, but the university-educated Genoese woman joined the main counselling staff in the late sixties. So did Vincent Castellano, a lawyer from Palermo who had worked in construction before landing the Institute job. Like a few other immigrant staffers, he eventually earned a bachelor of social work degree (University of Toronto). He later moved to the Catholic Welfare Bureau.<sup>17</sup>

The mainly female Greek counsellors included Tsatsos and some part-time workers. A former lawyer, the male Greek counsellor Thanos Panagiotis resigned a few years after joining the staff in the early 1970s because he was caught sharing his clients' confidential information with the Greek Consulate. If the plan had been to "out" Communists to the Greek government, he would surely have disappointed his superiors.<sup>18</sup>

The mostly female Portuguese counsellors also spoke Spanish, so they carried a caseload of Latin American clients (both Spanish-speakers and Portuguese-speaking Brazilians) in addition to those from Portugal and elsewhere. First recruited as a volunteer, Maria Mota reportedly became "a much sought-after" interpreter for the Family and Juvenile Court. University-educated and married to a businessman, she was praised for her "knowledge" of the North American way of life. She, too, was described as a "very conscientious" and "dependable" counsellor with "a pleasant and cheerful personality" who also worked long hours and sometimes received clients at home. Her correspondence with her female co-workers during her periodic trips to Portugal in order to give birth or accompany her husband on a business trip suggests warm relations: at one point, she thanks them for a Christmas cake and describes being "deeply moved" by the baby and holiday greetings.<sup>19</sup> But like Henselmans, Mota and family later returned to Portugal. We know little about Zia Taveres, who began as a maternity replacement for Mota and later joined her mother in the United States. A parish priest who retrained as a community worker, Ezequiel Pereira da Silva joined the staff in the early 1970s. The credentials of Javier San Martin, a Spanish-speaking counsellor assigned to new clients from Central and South America, remains a mystery.

Through a special arrangement with the federal Department of Manpower (formerly Labour), in 1970 the Institute hired Royston C. Jones as West Indian (Caribbean) counsellor and Murali Nair as South Asian (Indian) counsellor. Both professional social workers, each man combined social work duties within Toronto's Black and South Asian communities, respectively, with part-time counselling at the Institute. Originally from Guyana, Jones was educated in Britain and, before coming to Toronto, had worked with Black community groups in London, Ontario. During his three years with the Institute, he earned a reputation as an insightful counsellor, cooperative colleague, and fine administrator.<sup>20</sup> A social worker from India, Nair left the Institute not long before its demise in 1974. Hired mainly as a group worker, Catherine Lee, a Korean social worker who had trained in the United States, handled some Korean and Japanese clients.<sup>21</sup> The by now financially crippled Institute hired no new counsellors in response to the later clients arriving from Africa, Indonesia, and other new source locales.

The reception centre staff who also conducted home visits included recruits from such organizations as the Catholic Women's League (CWL), ethnic

organizations (such as the Greek Ladies Philanthropic Association and Italian Immigrant Aid Society Women's Auxiliary), the Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire (IODE), and the Toronto Junior League. The multilingual volunteers included Vera Peruklijevic (who spoke Greek, Arabic, and Macedonian) and Olga Spaajkovic (who spoke several Slavic languages), both likely CWL recruits. Anna Garcia spoke Portuguese and English. Some of the Anglo-Canadian volunteers also spoke a few different languages. The volunteer supervisor of the reception centre (who usually also had some counselling experience) familiarized her staff with the available services through tours of government and agency offices and explained the rules governing skills-training and professional accreditation programs.<sup>22</sup>

The criteria used in recruiting volunteers included evidence of "an interest in helping immigrants" and the absence of "prejudice to race or religion." As a precaution against "burn-out," they, too, attended debriefing sessions.<sup>23</sup> Supervisors generally thought the volunteers handled a difficult job with "patience and understanding."<sup>24</sup> Retention was a challenge, whether due to marriage, pregnancy, a husband's relocation, or burnout, but the repeated references to a second or third year of service suggest that some women found the work satisfying.

### **Casework, Social-Cultural Perspectives, and Cross-Border Conversations**

By the time the Toronto Institute, through its precursor, the NCSA, established an immigrant counselling service in 1952, the casework method so central to the professionalization of social work in the United States and Canada was established practice. This individualized approach to social problems and solutions, notes Karen Tice, ushered in "a textual revolution in social work," but plenty of debate occurred over how best to create a case file. Some casework leaders advocated a dispassionate, hence more objective or scientific, account of what front-line workers observed, while others urged them to preserve some of the "local colour" (by, for instance, quoting a client) so as to underscore the uniqueness of each situation. Still others called on workers to elevate the probative value of their work by organizing the details into typologies or client types. While social work's elder disciplines, such as psychology and sociology, called for the removal of undesirable "subjective" and "feminine" content, a minority of casework leaders encouraged front-line workers to include the clients' own stories through verbatim quotation.<sup>25</sup>

The casework method dominated by the fifties and sixties, but discussion over the most effective way to create a case file continued. As subsequent chapters show, case records differed among co-workers within the same agency. In practice, the Institute's newcomer counsellors – most of whom resembled the

professionalizing female social workers of an earlier era than the products of the latest professional social work schools – struggled to negotiate the contradictory imperatives between, on the one hand, offering (feminine) sympathy and nurturance, and, on the other, (masculine) objectivity and dispassion. We find a mix of specialized and colloquial language as well as objective and subjective evaluations.

As members of the international institute movement, Toronto Institute counsellors were expected as well to apply the social-cultural perspective with which the US affiliates had been experimenting for two decades. The approach drew on anthropological and psychological theories that emphasized the defining role played by group-defined culture – from attitudes and feelings to laws and institutions – in shaping behaviour. Pluralist social work assumed a progressive respect for diverse cultures yet also applied theories inflected with a degree of cultural determinism. US Institute instructional materials that informed the training in Toronto reveal, too, that the application of social work methods derived from a (modest) cultural relativist position often generated hypotheses of immigrant pathology. The theoretical and training materials that comprised the integrationists' repertoire also reveal a certain slippage between integrationist and more assimilationist goals.

Within the wider social work profession, the social-cultural approach represented a specialized but growing field of training. Professional social work in early-twentieth-century Canada, like academic sociology and anthropology, was underdeveloped compared with its counterpart in the United States, making it difficult to track emerging pluralist social work approaches. Leading Canadian social reformers such as J.S. Woodsworth, the liberal-intellectual-turned-socialist, came to endorse pluralism, but one in favour of eventual assimilation, or what social service personnel called "Canadianization." In other words, a liberal assimilationist position. As Susan Bellay shows, between the publication of *Strangers within Our Gates* (1909) – an early sociological tract that peddled a hardline assimilationist stance and indulged in racial typographies of European immigrants – and the First World War, Woodsworth's thinking evolved to include a more cosmopolitan view of ethnic relations and nation-building. Influenced by postwar liberal internationalism and the pluralist turn in the US settlement movement, he replaced a pro-British Canadian stance wherein "ethnic-mingling" with "others" led to social deterioration with a more pluralistic (and culturally relativist) one in which heterogeneity had a role to play in the "moral regeneration" of the Canadian community and nation. His more inclusive approach was decidedly Eurocentric, however, with respect to who was to be educated into Canada's lofty national ideals. The mix of progressive and regressive elements in Woodsworth's interwar pluralism resembles the tensions that existed between the integrationist and assimilationist elements in the US Institutes' Americanization efforts.<sup>26</sup>



By the early 1960s, Canadian advocates of social-cultural perspectives in social work with immigrants, most notably Benjamin Schlesinger, then an “up-and-coming and highly prolific sociologist of the family” with the University of Toronto’s School of Social Work,<sup>27</sup> argued that Canada lagged behind the United States. Already in the 1940s, he noted, even mainstream US social agencies facing a growing volume of “ethnic cases” were incorporating social-cultural factors in casework. Like West, Schlesinger urged greater adoption of these methods in Canada in light of renewed large-scale migration and the upsurge in immigrants and ethno-Canadians using the social services of the country’s expanded welfare state.<sup>28</sup>

Schlesinger was not officially linked to the Toronto Institute, but some of his students were surely placed with the agency. He attributed the increase in teaching social-cultural perspectives in social work programs in North America to renewed immigration and the lobbying efforts of the Council on Social Work Education of the United States and Canada.<sup>29</sup> The liberal-minded Schlesinger, notes John Graham, “optimistically claimed” that the rising rates in divorce and remarriage in North America as well as the growing number of working women and single-parent households were becoming a part of the fabric of modern society and ought not be stigmatized. His arguments in favour of paying closer attention to the social-cultural aspects of a case drew on those of US colleagues such as Hertha Kraus, a German American social worker who had worked for the Roosevelt New Deal administration before joining the faculty at Bryn Mawr College, and Katherine Newkirk Handley, who taught social welfare administration at the University of Illinois. Schlesinger’s publications on social-cultural casework with immigrants and minoritized Americans made use of (anonymized) US Institute cases.<sup>30</sup>

Prominent Canadian social work theorist Charles Fine argued instead for a distinctively Canadian pluralist approach even as he cited US advocates of social-cultural approaches. Fine acknowledged the contributions of US colleagues like Kraus, whose principles of orientation counselling were widely discussed. Kraus stressed the psychological importance of steering immigrants immediately towards the “community resources” that met basic needs like housing and employment because it gave them “a sense of achievement” early on that could help sustain them through the long spell before “material achievements may become possible.” Also citing Canadian authors, Fine attributed the similarities in social-cultural models in both countries to the shared values associated with liberal democracies, such as the worth of the individual and a society’s responsibility for its citizens’ welfare. He conceded that the integration model promoted by US figures such as Kraus and William Gioseffi, a caseworker in the Veterans’ Administration of the US government, had enjoyed some success in mediating the call for total conformity with American ways. But he claimed that Canadian efforts in this regard surpassed those in the

United States in the development of a model by which national unity would be achieved through a cross-pollination of heterogeneous cultures. A national strategy that prioritized the “harmonizing” of host and immigrant cultures, and that recognized the “unique contributions” of ethnic groups to the host society, he asserted, was gaining proportionally more adherents in Canada than south of the border, thereby laying a stronger basis for the spread and legitimacy of multicultural practices in social work.<sup>31</sup>

Canada’s adoption of official multiculturalism in 1971 no doubt bolstered Fine’s exaggerated nationalist claims, and many Canadians still know little about US pluralism or the cross-border conversations about pluralism that Fine himself acknowledged.<sup>32</sup> Such exchanges were of course quite direct in the case of the Toronto Institute, whose training sessions and consultations drew on US Institute materials developed by the central body in New York City. Toronto in turn supplied Institute headquarters with examples of cases and with summary reports for use in training materials that were produced and distributed to member affiliates.<sup>33</sup>

In the United States, liberal social work academics served as consultants and instructors for the Institutes. They included two New York City–based colleagues, Mary E. Hurlbutt of New York University’s School of Social Work and Morton Teicher, a former University of Toronto professor who became the founding chair of the Social Work School at Yeshiva University. Their social-cultural approach borrowed insights from influential anthropological texts such as E.B. Taylor’s *Primitive Culture* (1895). In it, Taylor defined culture as “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, customs, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” and into which individuals are socialized. Also influential was Ruth Benedict’s *Patterns of Culture* (1946), which issued the oft-quoted phrase in support of cultural relativism: “No man can thoroughly participate in any culture unless he has been brought up and has lived according to its forms, but he can grant to other cultures the same significance to their participants which he recognizes in his own.”<sup>34</sup>

In lectures and publications, social workers with links to the US Institutes outlined how individuals were socialized into the value systems, behavioural norms, traditions, institutions, and even “emotional structures” of their respective group in support of the progressive principle that all cultures were deserving of respect. Rejecting, at least theoretically, the notion that one culture was superior to another, they warned against issuing moral judgments about “other” cultures. They insisted that to be effective facilitators of integration, social workers with clients from different ethnic groups, and thus different “dominant behavior” patterns, had to solicit detailed life histories and other information that offered insight into a client’s socio-cultural heritage in order to determine the cultural adaptations required for a healthy adjustment to (North) American culture. An understanding that humans are shaped by their culture, they added,

allowed them to scrutinize dispassionately the values of their own culture without falling into a blind relativism that sanctioned any kind of behaviour, the result of which would be chaos.<sup>35</sup>

Some allowance was made for individual variation, as suggested by the insight, usually attributed to sociologist Lawrence Frank, that psychological factors or membership in a political or social “subculture” might account for differences in the behaviour of the members of a given cultural group. Even so, in the training-based demonstrations of how social-cultural approaches were to be applied to immigrant cases, the analysis could slip into a cultural determinism whereby ethnicity, often understood as a “nationality group” such as Poles and Italians, but with further distinctions drawn for subgroups such as Polish Jews and Southern Italians, dictated immigrant behaviour (see below). Another source of tension derived from the related idea that, as Kraus put it, the immigrant must undergo “drastic” change in order “to enter successfully into a cultural community substantially different from the one or several cultures in which the individual has lived before entering the new world.”<sup>36</sup> It begs the question whether cultural transformation as a requisite for positive adaptation trumped respect for “other” cultures.

Post-1945 social workers associated with the Institutes asserted as well that social science knowledge garnered from the study of the impact of class, religion, ethnicity, and other social phenomena on human behaviour would enrich the medical and psychological knowledge informing social work methods. Hurlbutt predicted that, having embraced psychiatric concepts in the early twentieth century, and then having experimented with public welfare concepts during the Great Depression, social work was now poised to more fully absorb cultural concepts. Teicher similarly argued that the profession’s understanding of “man in society” rooted so firmly in psychological and psychiatric knowledge was being “augmented, buttressed and fortified” by insights gained from “understanding man in cultural terms.” A common example used in support of such claims was that cultural awareness would prevent caseworkers from miscasting as socially deviant or psychologically ill a client whose seemingly volatile or emotional behaviour was normal within their cultural milieu. These knowledge-based claims did not imply dismissal of psychological approaches – Teicher himself warned against replacing “father psychiatrist” with “mother social scientist” – but stressed the value of combining approaches.<sup>37</sup> The advice meted out by the casework supervisor with the Milwaukee Institute, Frieda Heilberg – to focus first and foremost on people’s universal need for “understanding, acceptance, a feeling of belonging” – reflected the continuing importance of psychological approaches in social-cultural casework.<sup>38</sup> Indeed, many used the terms psychosocial and social-cultural interchangeably.

Beginning with institute movement founder Edith Terry Bremer, advocates of a social-cultural approach stressed that application of its insights allowed

workers to identify the cultural stresses that produce an individual's social pathology, which might present in any number of ways, from stomach troubles or self-harm to anti-social and violent behaviour. Such discussions involved frequent adoption of a psychological language of pathology. Senior Institute personnel such as Milwaukee's Heilberg and Cleveland's Boris Clarke offered common variants of this pathologizing discourse, warning that, without appropriate counselling, those who were plagued by "inner conflicts" or "bewildered" by strange new living patterns, and ignorant or suspicious of existing social services, would cling to old beliefs and customs and remain ill-adjusted.<sup>39</sup>

The observations could apply to everyone, from middle-class refugees exhibiting emotional problems caused by war and Communist repression to humble rural folk unfamiliar with the "cultural climate and code of ethics and behavior" of the big city, though the former were expected to adapt more quickly than the latter to modern urban life.<sup>40</sup> Southern European immigrants and racialized migrants from within the US empire, such as Puerto Ricans and Filipinos, fell into the designation of more backward rural groups requiring greater degrees of adjustment to American ways. The persistence of low socio-economic status in one's sending and one's adopted country was expected to contribute to mental distress.<sup>41</sup> A similar logic was evident in Toronto Institute reports written by veteran Canadian social worker Edith Ferguson regarding the challenges facing the city's rural Europeans.<sup>42</sup>

A related claim was that an awareness of the heavily symbolic nature of people's behaviour enabled the social worker, under certain circumstances, to predict behaviour, though the examples given mainly involved an immigrant's expected reactions to a situation. A typical example drawn from actual cases was that peasant parents invited to live in the upscale home of their Americanized (or Canadianized) adult children would experience discomfort. If told about the situation after the fact, the caseworker's strategy was to resolve such tensions by negotiating a compromise whereby the parents moved into modest accommodation without losing their children's support, and both couples worked to restore family relations.<sup>43</sup>

The training materials in the Toronto Institute archive are limited, but the available reports align with institute movement positions about, for instance, approaches to addressing the cultural stresses faced by clients in adjusting to the new conditions. Following Kraus' line of argument, Toronto counsellors noted that even the many employment cases required sensitivity to the social-cultural factors that might impede adjustment or cause conflict because an immigrant's experience of being misunderstood on account of language or cultural barriers could generate profound disappointment and threaten their sense of security. Senior social workers told public audiences that many clients suffered from "emotional problems" that resulted in "nervous breakdowns," and also that, with the "proper" help, many newcomers adjusted either quickly

or eventually. They taught as well that a social-cultural perspective offered the social worker “some detachment from the value of one’s own culture,” enabling the worker to avoid making judgmental assessments.<sup>44</sup>

The records of the central body of the International Institutes and a dozen city affiliates offer further insight into how front-line workers were being trained in social-cultural methods. Particularly helpful are the detailed hand-outs and notes related to a ten-day training session that Hurlbutt held at the San Francisco Institute in 1945 with staff and students invited from Institutes in Oakland, Fresno, Los Angeles, and Hawaii. In anticipation of the postwar work that lay ahead of them, Hurlbutt extolled the virtues of a social-cultural approach in helping to shape behaviour to facilitate “Americanization.” Citing the aforementioned anthropological texts attesting to the importance of group-generated “attitudes, folkways, mores, ways of behaving and feeling” in shaping society’s institutions, individual behaviour, and a sense of belonging, she also reaffirmed the Institutes’ belief in the “equal validity of difference in customs.” Viewed within the context of the era’s anti-immigrant and assimilationist discourses, the Institutes’ liberal position comes through clearly in Hurlbutt’s assertion that in the United States “there is a great deal of prejudice.” She attributed the discrimination experienced by even US-born groups such as Armenians in Fresno, California, and Italians in New Haven, Connecticut, at the hands of dominant-majority “Anglo-Americans” to both “the fear of loss of economic and political control” and a “lack of knowledge” about such groups.<sup>45</sup>

Turning to the social casework method, Hurlbutt stressed that it was necessary to first collect detailed information, including through life histories, that captured the cultural factors shaping a client’s life, and then to “break down” the client’s “nationality background into many differentiations: regional, class, religious, vocational, etc.” Even “a family unit,” she added, imparts certain cultural patterns of behaviour to its members. Rejecting assimilationist notions of immigrants “becoming” Americans “in a definite and static sense” on the grounds that immigration had made America a “multi-group society” and a “highly dynamic” culture, she explained the caseworker’s role in encouraging gradual integration. The process involved first determining the cause(s) of a client’s ill-adjustment, paying special though not exclusive attention to the social-cultural elements involved, whether related to language or religious beliefs, attitudes towards authority or family, or a deep-seated resentment over their circumstances. Next, offering the appropriate treatment, be it specific advice, in-depth counselling, or referral to a more specialized agency, to affect the desired change. In making the changes necessary to resolving the problem, which invariably included some modification in cultural attitudes or behaviour, the client advanced further along the path towards integration.<sup>46</sup>

The training materials demonstrate the challenges of implementing social-cultural methods and some of their ironic consequences. As a pluralist,

Hurlbutt stressed the importance of a gradual and voluntary process of integration but also insisted that newcomers adopt “a common core” of American values. She explained that “deciding” whether the Institutes advocated “integration or assimilation” was “partly a problem of terminology.” Insofar as integration “deals with putting together parts to make a whole” and assimilation “with absorbing and making a whole which is uniform,” the Institutes certainly advocated “integration.” She had no qualms, however, about using the term assimilation to apply to the newcomer’s “necessary absorption of American ideals.”<sup>47</sup> A desire to encourage integration so as to preserve “ethnic” cultures and promote a pluralist nation thus existed in tension with the perceived necessity to ensure newcomers’ compliance with the dominant codes of the host society.

The paradoxical character of Institute pluralism is most evident in such unresolved efforts to “balance” calls for integration and assimilation. On the one hand, Institute personnel conceived of integration as a “two-way street” where, to quote Heilberg, the aim was not “relinquishing” one’s national and cultural background, but instead “a gradual growing into the new surrounding” and “developing the ability of combining or amalgamating the old and the new to fit into the new environment.” Patient and understanding hosts offering early and effective assistance could help immigrants make a “positive, constructive” transition from being recipients of social services to “givers” who also contributed to American “civic, social, cultural, economic life.”<sup>48</sup> On the other hand, the immigrants, as Hurlbutt asserted, were required to adapt to a core of American values that, though “constantly changing and developing,” nevertheless encompassed a set of widely shared ideas “about child life, about civil liberties, about education, about freedom of the press, etc.” That core, she added, helped to define appropriate behaviour and thought regarding social and political values as well as marital and family relations and childrearing. Going further, she argued that the existence of this “tangible entity” meant that “mere integration is not sufficient” as it “would deny the acceptance of a “common core of ideas” and “just make for a pluralism which is incompatible with the existence of an American culture.” While acknowledging that the degree of transformation expected of immigrants would depend “on the meaning we want to give to the common core,” she made clear that experts like herself and the staff she trained would define the ideals and urge their adoption.<sup>49</sup>

Cases that offered post-1945 Institute staff textbook scenarios of migrant maladjustment included Milwaukee’s Puerto Ricans. According to Willette Pierce, head group worker at the Milwaukee Institute, her staff had encountered “quite a number of difficult marital situations” owing to “extremely and unreasonably” suspicious and jealous husbands who accused their wives of “having affairs with other men.” Consequently, the women, some of them wage-earning wives, were under tremendous stress. The explanation given for the tensions, namely that old cultural patterns based on the assumption that

“the man” is “ruler over the family” were being “threatened by the new environment which recognized and gave more freedom and rights to the women,” also supplied the treatment: individualized counselling aimed at modifying male behaviour through exposure to American ways. A well-intentioned aim thus, paradoxically, served to reinforce both the idea of immigrant pathology rooted in culturally deterministic models of behaviour and that of the superiority of American values.<sup>50</sup>

The US Institutes had a much longer history than the Toronto Institute of interacting with racialized clients, and their records provide far more evidence than do Toronto’s of how the application of progressive social work models could both reflect and reinforce processes of racialization. How Hurlbutt’s 1945 training session treated the insight that clients’ behaviour was also conditioned by their group’s unique emotional structure illustrates the paradoxical processes at play. The teaching cases used to demonstrate how such knowledge helped a caseworker determine which adaptations to advise offer striking examples of how, in its application, an insight ostensibly free of moral judgment highlighted pathology.

A teaching case file on a “White Russian émigré” who fled the Bolshevik Revolution with her family for Manchuria before later migrating to the United States concluded that she clearly exhibited the “cultural attitudes” associated with her group, none of them positive. They included “apathy” and “self-humiliation and self-pity” (this “being a teaching of the Greek Orthodox religion”) as well as a “deep concern over changes in social status” common in the “upper middle class in Russia.” Workshop discussion of an Italian American woman who, reverting to an Old World Sicilian custom, staged “a prearranged kidnapping” in order to obtain a church blessing for a second marriage concurred with the caseworker’s conclusion that the Sicilian emotional make-up “differs from that of a Northern Italian.” Both caseworker and trainees thus located the client’s cultural script (or ostensibly ingrained cultural predispositions) in a historically pathologized region. These examples, like the psychiatric reports regarding the mental deficiencies of Eastern and Southern Europeans, serve in turn as a caution against the tendency within current whiteness studies to subsume all “white ethnics” into a normative and monolithic category of “white.” Doing so can obscure the complicated identities and stigmatizing stereotypes that still applied to various groups of Europeans.<sup>51</sup>

Training cases involving racialized American clients suggest a resort to a more deeply pathologizing discourse. One of the Red Cross cases involving African American soldiers posted in wartime Europe featured a private who suspected his wife of cheating on him. The female caseworker interpreted his “ingratiating, almost servile” behaviour as typical of how Black Southerners interacted with whites, and his indirect way of issuing complaints as “a form of passive resistance” stemming from the “feeling” that being drafted into the



army was “as arbitrary and meaningless” as any other experience caused by white rules. She characterized his request for help in solving his marital problem as symptomatic of being “culturally conditioned to leave all major responsibilities to the whites.” Finally, she noted that, in evading responsibility for his family problems, he exhibited yet another African American cultural pattern, this one “directly connected with the essentially matriarchal structure of many negro families.” In short, the analysis drew on a theory about women’s dominant role in African American families sapping men’s capacity to compete in white society that Black feminists have long rejected as misogynist as well as racist.<sup>52</sup>

### Reading with and against the Grain

The heavily female and European counselling staff carrying out the Toronto Institute’s pluralist-integration agenda mirrored more the professionalizing social workers of earlier decades than the graduates of fifties- or sixties-era professional schools of social work.<sup>53</sup> (Even the few professionally trained refugee and immigrant social workers had to make some adjustments to Canadian paradigms.) As social work practitioners handling heavy caseloads and, in the women’s case, family responsibilities as well, they sought to identify the social-cultural (and other) elements of a case and convey to clients such lofty but vague Canadian ideals as democracy and the egalitarian family. They also used their own common sense and occasionally drew on their own experiences of loss, migration, and resettlement. Expanding caseloads and limited resources meant a greater focus on shorter-term counselling rather than in-depth casework requiring several visits and appointments with medical and other authorities, but plenty of case files indicate return visits to a counsellor over a lengthy period of time.

Case files were a primary site where heavily polarized debates over “representation” (the discursive) and “reality” (the material) occurred, but subsequent efforts to integrate key insights from materialist and post-structuralist approaches have produced a rich body of scholarship.<sup>54</sup> My database of 7,000 confidential files created by Toronto Institute counsellors – for which there is no equivalent in the US context – allows for a more in-depth analysis of front-line social work practice among newcomers than is possible for the US Institutes as well as other social agencies. My access in certain instances to the original case file as well as the circulated human interest story that staff constructed from it allows me to trace the various layers of mediation involved.<sup>55</sup>

Once again, investigation into what Mark Peel calls the “everyday world of welfare in case files” shows plenty of mismatch between prescription and practice. As social workers of an immigrant social agency, Institute counsellors were expected to be sympathetically disposed towards immigrants and, as previously



noted, certain female workers developed a reputation as a caring worker, though they, too, occasionally expressed annoyance with a non-compliant client. In their sessions with a client, however, counsellors were supposed to practise empathy (an ability to perceive and understand a client's feelings while possessing the self-awareness and emotional self-regulation needed to avoid experiencing the client's feelings of grief or loss) rather than sympathy (in the sense of sharing a client's feelings to the point of experiencing their grief or loss) or pity (feeling sorry for them). Instead, we find a mix of sympathy and pity as well as efforts at empathy, and a contradictory mix of objective and subjective assessments.<sup>56</sup> The encounters sometimes blurred the boundaries of public and private, as when workers gave a client money out of their own pocket for food or bus tickets or accepted an invitation to a family event. Female staff were more likely than their male counterparts to bring a woman client home for lunch but, occasionally, a male caseworker did the same with a male client.

All this has implications for how we interpret the case files. Certainly, front-line counsellors were the authors of these texts. They largely controlled the description of a client's appearance or the emotion(s) a client expressed – doing so with such signifiers as “pleasant,” “arrogant,” “confused,” or “upset” – as well as the social conditions they observed. Even when interacting with middle-class clients, they enjoyed the power that issued from their position as knowledge-based professionals. In relation to working-class or low-skilled clients, they enjoyed tremendous class privilege. Certain male caseworkers could be exceedingly heavy-handed in their negative assessment of a woman client. Reading the case files with the grain, then, offers us insight into how front-line workers used a professional narrative form like the case file to order evidence on a person and determine a diagnosis and solution.<sup>57</sup>

At the same time, as a wide range of social welfare scholars assert, possibilities arise for reading against the grain of these dominant accounts. One can look for the narrative traces of a client's subjectivities in the “openings provided by the conflictual interplay of professionals and clients.”<sup>58</sup> The case file constitutes a professional intervention, but the narrative practices of caseworkers also create opportunities for dialogue with the attentive historian.<sup>59</sup> The files penned by the Institute's immigrant counsellors generally lacked the conceptual tidiness, and turgid or specialized language, of the tightly organized case records produced by the male-dominated professionals, such as psychiatrists, with whom they sometimes interacted, and whose reports sometimes made it into their client's file. The counsellors' more colloquial or descriptive wording and frequently rambling style sometimes allow traces of clients' subjectivities to surface. The observation also applies to other contents in the file, including the personal statements or cover letters that clients had dictated to or had translated by a volunteer or counsellor. These narratives, too, were mediated by agency staff who may have coached a client on what to say or who in translating

the document altered some wording, but they contain traces of a client's mode of self-representation.

Similarly, the counsellors' training, however piecemeal, guided their selection of the relevant "facts" (and some were too quick to apply a medical label to a client), but entangled in the incongruous mix of differing or contradictory impressions, events, and judgments, a client's opinions and feelings occasionally surface in the story. As Tice notes, a client's subjectivity was "professionally transmuted," but it was "never completely erased." It is captured or hinted at in the recorded instances of a client's defiance or resistance to a worker's analysis or advice. In a worker's expression of approval or disapproval, we catch glimpses of an acquiescent or unruly client. That the files created by the female counsellors offer more possibilities than those produced by their male colleagues for reading against the grain confirms what feminist and gender scholars of social work practice have identified as a distinctive type of knowledge produced by the practitioners of a long female-dominated enterprise.<sup>60</sup>

The women counsellors' files are qualitatively different from the men's partially because they spent more time than male workers listening to female clients and thus felt a greater professional proximity to them. As workers who escorted women to a clinic or government office, or helped them place a child in temporary care, or dispatched a public health nurse to visit them, they knew better than their male colleagues the domestic side of poverty, prejudice, and marginalization.<sup>61</sup> But this did not preclude the possibility that, as Linda Gordon bluntly put it, some female workers were "worse" than their social agency.<sup>62</sup> Or that men occasionally really listened to a female, or male, client.

## Conclusion

The Toronto Institute's counselling offices, like its recreational and social spaces, constituted both an intercultural site where cross-cultural encounters occurred, and a contact zone where the interactions took place within a context of asymmetrical power relations. These offices, and the other places where counsellors met with clients, whether a local coffee shop, a street corner, or a counsellor's or client's home, constituted as well an intermediate space located somewhere along the spectrum between the public and private. Drawing on my database of case files, the subsequent chapters in part 2 probe the multicultural social welfare encounters that occurred within the ragged, even liminal or transitional, spaces between immigrant private life and the wider Canadian hostland.<sup>63</sup>

The files in my database are both rich and frustrating sources that contain an uneven and overlapping mix of difficult conversations as well as competing, confirming, and, if only rarely, entangled narratives as well as multiple negotiations. Many include a notable amount of detail but many others do not. Most cases end abruptly, making it difficult to assess outcomes, though such files are

revealing in other ways. The counselling staff wielded considerable power over clients in these local sites, though, in many cases, Foucault's putative "gaze" amounted to a "glance," or judgments hastily made on the basis of initial impressions, but never exercised full control.<sup>64</sup> A judicious use of the database enables in-depth analysis of the "theatre of encounter" captured, albeit unevenly, in the social worker's case file.<sup>65</sup>

The files scrutinized in subsequent chapters are the product of outside interventions into people's intimate lives, though a blurring of public and private also occurred.<sup>66</sup> Whether the result of invited or imposed intrusions, the highly mediated glimpses into the intimate realm offered by these texts reveal a social welfare encounter that was a far more uneven, messy, and emotional process than that suggested in social work teaching materials. We find plenty of negotiation and frustration on both sides, but there is evidence here, too, of the bonds of trust that occasionally developed, particularly when both counsellor and client were women. The files shed further light on social-cultural insights about emotional structures and also invite informed speculation about the emotional reactions of counsellors and clients. In the three chapters that follow, I explore the role of narrative and gendered subjectivities as well as emotions and affect in the social welfare encounter through an examination of case files (and other sources) that deal, respectively, with downwardly mobile professionals, marital conflict, and generational conflict within families.