

Migration of Culture(s) symposium

ABSTRACT

Endogamy and exogamy among post-war Calabria-born women in South Australia

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Calabria-born women have always had a significant presence within South Australia's Italian community. Between 1927 and 1940, of the estimated 2,493 Italian arrivals, 512 (20.5%) were from Calabria, of whom 123 (24%) were females.¹ The women either migrated with a male or they waited in Calabria until their husband, father, relative or male *paesano* had saved enough money to sponsor them out. Upon arrival in South Australia the women most commonly performed domestic duties or looked after the children.

In the decades following the end of World War Two, Italian migration to Australia, including South Australia, rose dramatically² and there was a considerable increase in the arrival of Italian women.³ Between 1948 and 1971, of the 36,357 Italians who settled in South Australia, 8,549 (23.5%) were from Calabria, of whom 3,485 (40%) were females.⁴ If married, the Calabria-born woman either migrated to Australia with her husband or, more commonly, was sponsored out by the husband who often had been living in South Australia for a number of years. Some brides arrived to join their husband to whom they had been married by proxy in Italy. Other brides migrated with their new husband, who had been able to return to his hometown from South Australia in order to achieve 'sistemazione',⁵ then the newly weds would migrate together to Australia. Others arrived as single women.

In this paper I analyse the results of my study of single Calabria-born women who married after their arrival in South Australia. In order to look at their marriage patterns I sifted through the marriage registers of four Catholic Parishes in

Adelaide covering the period 1961 to 2005 and I identified all the marriages in which there was a Calabria-born bride. I chose the parishes of Newton, Salisbury, Seaton and Virginia as they are located in areas where there is a high proportion of Italians. These parishes are frequented by a large number of Italy-born people. By examining the bride's choice of spouse I was thus able to determine whether these Calabria-born brides married endogamously or exogamously and, when the latter, the spouse's place of origin. Marriages were classified as endogamous when the Calabria-born bride married a man born in either Calabria or in another region of Italy or when she married a man of Italian origin. Marriages were considered exogamous when the Calabria-born bride chose a spouse who was not born in Italy and was not of Italian origin.

In addition, in order to learn of the women's personal experiences of marriage I conducted face-to-face, one-on-one interviews with a sample of Calabria-born women who had married in South Australia. I met women to interview by attending Calabria club meetings and South Australian Calabrian festivals. My paper provides evidence to show Calabria-born brides in South Australia married predominantly endogamously. It was most common for the bride to marry a man from Calabria, often from her own hometown or from the same province, or a man born in Southern Italy, in particular Campania or Sicily. In some marriages the woman chose a groom who was born in Central or Northern Italy. There were a significant number of marriages in which the bride chose to marry a man who was born in Australia of Italian origin. Calabria-born women rarely married exogamously.

Through the interviews conducted I was able to examine the impact of the Calabria-born woman's choice to marry endogamously or exogamously and the extent to which culture and traditions were maintained, modified or abandoned by the woman as a result of this choice. I found that the majority of the women who married endogamously felt that it was easier to maintain their culture and traditions by marrying a man who had the same cultural background as their

own. On the other hand, I found that women who married exogamously were less likely to continue their Calabrian traditions, beliefs and language.

¹ O'Connor, D, *No need to be afraid*, Wakefield Press, South Australia, 1996, p. 121

² Between 1951 and 1972 an estimated 338, 624 Italians migrated to Australia. Randazzo, N & Cigler, M, *The Italians in Australia*, AE Press, Melbourne, 1987, p. 150. According to the census of 1947 there were 2,438 Italy-born in South Australia. At the census of 1971 there were 32,428 Italy-born residing in South Australia.

³ At the time of the last pre-war census (1933) Italy-born women made up 25% of Australia's Italy-born population. According to the first post-war census (1947), there were 11,126 Italy-born women in Australia (33% of Australia's Italy-born population). By 1961 this number had increased to 93,672 (41% of Australia's Italians) and by the census of 1971 Italy-born women numbered 129,984 (45%).

⁴ O'Connor, D, 'The post-war settlement of Italians in South Australia' in O'Connor, D (ed), *Memories and identities. Proceedings of the Second Conference on the Impact of Italians in South Australia*, Australian Humanities Press, Adelaide, South Australia, 2004, p. 62.

⁵ 'set-up', 'settling down.' See Baldassar, L, *Visits Home*, Melbourne University Press, Victoria, 2001, p. 360.