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Tales of glory boxes, suitcases and dreams: An investigation of cultural and social changes in the dowry practices of Greek and Italian post-war migrants in South Australia

Abstract

In traditional societies the dowry was seen as the principal material representation of a bride's worth and of the patrimony of her family. Dowry and virtue were the most important 'commodities' sought by prospective grooms in the selection of a bride. This paper aims to explore material culture that relates to the practice of the dowry and the glory box (trousseau; Ital: *corredo*; Greek: *προικιά*¹) among Italian and Greek migrants who settled in South Australia in the post-Second World War period, representing the largest non-Anglo post-war migration cohort in South Australia. This study seeks to investigate the meaning and symbolic significance of the dowry and the glory box, as well as examining the cultural practices of each cohort in relation to dowries. The study considers cultural practices, and also aims to situate the discussion within the wider literature of post-Second World War Italian and Greek migration to Australia. It will provide a focus on women's migration to Australia, and will look at the use of migrant belongings and objects within these disciplines. Data informing this study is drawn from sources such as in-depth interviews with migrants, archival materials, newspaper and magazine articles. This study is part of a larger investigation: the Migrants' Belongings Project, which explores what motivates the choice of particular objects that constitute these cultural practices; how the chosen objects function as markers of identities, values and rituals; and how the meaning of these objects have changed over time as a result of migration.

The Migrants' Belongings Project

This study is part of a broader project which examines the significance of migrants' belongings. In its first stage, the project seeks to investigate the significance of belongings included in the 'trunks' of Second World War Greek and Italian migrants to South Australia. The 'trunk' heralds the intention of settling in a new place, as it usually accompanied single and married women or proxy brides, after migrant men had found work and established themselves in the new country. The 'trunk' often carried everyday objects such as household items, clothing, books, photographs, toys. It also contained textiles (such as traditional costumes, wedding dresses, fabrics, embroideries, white linen, etc.), family heirlooms and religious objects. Most of these items were also part of the trousseau of women migrants both married and unmarried.

The chief objective of the project is to investigate cultural practices in terms of identity formation and transformation. Through the investigation of migrants' belongings, the researchers are particularly interested in finding out what the objects that migrants brought with them tell us and how objects function as markers of identities, ethnicities, values and customs. More particularly, the project seeks to understand how objects function in connecting the country of birth with the new environment, socially and culturally. In other words, it explores what motivates the selection of particular objects in the process of migration; how the meaning of objects changes over time, as they move from one country to another, from one person to another, and from one generation to the next; and whether there are differences and similarities in material practices among different ethnic groups. From a methodological perspective, this project aims to collect qualitative data through oral testimonies gathered through interviews, focusing on the objects that a cohort of Greek and Italian migrants who settled in and around Adelaide (South Australia) brought with them when they migrated in the 1950s and 1960s.

In this article, we take one aspect of the Migrants' Belongings Project, the dowry, and investigate its historical and social significance in traditional societies in Italy and Greece. This is followed by a discussion on how dowry customs changed and evolved in the context of Italian and Greek women's post-war migration to Australia. Of particular focus is the dowry's maintenance and transformation in this migration context.

Overview of Italian and Greek women's post-war migration to Australia

Post-Second World War migration of Italian and Greek women followed a similar path. In the context of Italian migration to Australia, women were few in the early stages. In 1901, they only represented 14% of the Italy-born population, by 1933, they only accounted for one quarter, and for one third in 1947 (Borrie, 1954:51). In the 1920s and 1930s, the imbalance was even greater in some areas such as South Australia and Western Australia where respectively only one every nine and one every eight Italian was a woman. This divergence can be explained by the fact that some states such as Queensland, for example, offered better opportunities for remunerative labour, which in turn, provided the financial means for the purchase of a farm and the establishment of a family (Borrie, 1954:53). The reason for the prevalence of Italian men in the pre-Second World War period was that Italian men saw themselves not as permanent settlers but as temporary migrants. They intended to remain in Australia only until they had acquired sufficient wealth and then they would return home (Ware, 1981:12). Thus there was little point in bringing out wives, families and fiancées (Pesman Cooper, 1993:59).

Women rarely, if ever, began a migration chain. They either migrated with a male or waited in Italy until their father, husband, fiancé or other relatives had saved enough money to sponsor them out. In 1947 almost 70% of the Italy-born population in Australia was male and this imbalance persisted until the early 1960s when the percentage of female migrants started to increase and, in 1961, represented 41% of the total Italian migration flow (see table below).



Source: ABS Censuses, Statistics Section, Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, Immigration Federation to Century's End 1901-2000, October 2001, p. 38. Retrieved August 6, 2014. <http://www.immi.gov.au/media/publications/statistics/federation/body2.pdf>

In 1951 a bilateral agreement was signed between Italy and Australia, which provided assisted passage to Italian migrants.² Even if only 20% of the Italians to reach Australia came under this scheme, between 1951 and 1972 a staggering 338,624 Italians migrated to Australia. The 1950s was the decade that saw the largest-ever Italian influx into Australia and in the post-Second World War period the majority of migrants came from the South of Italy. Italian migration of the late 1950s and 1960s differed from that of the past not only in the scale and origin of the migrants but also in gender distribution, as the presence of women in these decades increased considerably. Between 1947 and 1954, the percentage of Italian women increased fourfold and doubled between 1954 and 1961. By 1971, women accounted for nearly 45% of the Italy-born component of the Australian population as can be seen in the table above (Borrie, 1954:51).

The reasons for this gender adjustment may be found in the goals and strategies of the Australian government as well as those of the migrants themselves, which did not always coincide (Pesman Cooper, 1992:191). The equality was due in part to the fact that the majority of the post-war Italian men, who originally came to Australia thinking that their migration would be only temporary and lasting a couple of years, subsequently decided that they would settle down permanently. The other factor that contributed to the increase in the number of migrant women was a change in government policy partly as a response to some Anglo-Australian perceptions that “immigrant men would become an unruly force without the tempering influence of women” (Vasta, 1992:144). The immigration of women would redress the gender imbalance and create family units for the reproduction of workers and consumers in response to the recession of the early 1950s (Martin, 1984:112), as well as promote family oriented Italian immigrant communities which would contribute to the goal of population and nation building (Iuliano, 1999:319). Historians have widely recognised the position and status of Italian women as varying not only across Italy, but also across regions, provinces and towns (*paesi*) and as dependent on local economies and agricultural systems.

The migration of Greek women to Australia follows a similar path to the Italian one. Greek migration, in its early stages, was male-dominated. The number of Greek women was marginal prior to 1901 and remained low until 1952, when a Migration Agreement was signed between Greece,

Australia and the Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration (ICEM).

The first Greek woman to arrive in Australia was Katherine Crummer (née Aikaterini Georgia Plessa), wife of a British army officer, Captain James Henry Crummer, who was appointed Magistrate of Newcastle (Janiszewski, Alexakis, 2006:155).³ In 1911, the Census shows that 105 Greece-born females were living in Australia, with the majority of them (58) residing in New South Wales (Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census 1911:113). In the 1947 Census, women born in Greece had risen to 3,176; however, the ratio to Greece-born males (12,291) remained low (Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census 1947). The marginal number of Greek women in Australia reflects the pattern of Greek migration prior to the Second World War. Women mostly stayed in Greece waiting for their husbands, fathers, brothers or fiancés to return home and were rarely invited or brought to Australia to settle. Most male immigrants came to the country with the intention of finding work for a brief period, acquiring wealth and then returning to Greece.

After the Second World War, the pattern of Greek migration altered. The economic devastation of Greece, and the crisis that followed, resulted in a wave of emigration to different countries including Australia. During the twenty-year period 1952–1972, the number of Greek immigrants who arrived in Australia with assisted passage was 71,221 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1973:156). The overall number of Greek immigrants (assisted and self-funded) was approximately 180,000 (Δαφιατόγλου, 2009:99). Greek immigration to Australia waned after 1972 and, by the late 1970s, with the economic and political circumstances in Greece improving, came to a standstill.

During the 1950s, the number of Greek women arriving in Australia was considerably smaller than male arrivals. The numerical dominance of men in the Greek immigrant population was evident. The gender imbalance was improved gradually with the increase of the female immigrant intake either through nominations and family reunion schemes or through immigration programmes for female workers (Palaktsoglou, 2013:295). According to ICEM's Migration Agreement and the Australian Migration Policy, Greek immigrants were encouraged to nominate and sponsor other Greeks as migrants, with a preference for "wives, fiancées, sisters, nieces, cousins

and single unrelated females" (Pennay, 2011:13). Unmarried sisters, fiancées, wives and children, who were considered as "dependent", were preferred. The "proxy-brides" were the most important of all "dependent" immigrants because they were destined to change the gender imbalance of the Greek population (Δαφιατόγλου, 2009:66).

Following a nomination from male immigrants, potential "proxy-brides"⁴ migrated to Australia under the guise of being "dependents". In most cases, ICEM subsidised their fare, thus making their journey possible. At the same time, another group of women immigrated as "unaccompanied" (non-dependent) workers and later married and settled in the country (Kunek, 1993:100). These women were the domestic servants or the factory workers who migrated to Australia under ICEM's "Domestics and Male Workers" or "Male Workers and Women Trainees" programmes. Greek female "unaccompanied" workers were mainly from a low socio-economic rural or semi-rural background with little or no dowry and with fewer prospects of marrying and having their own family in Greece. Through migration, the "unaccompanied" female Greek migrants were encouraged to work and build their personal wealth in order to improve their socio-economic future (*The Australian Women's Weekly*, 21/10/1959). The post-Second World War migration of Greek women ended the gender imbalance and by the late 1960s the ratio of men to women was 55% to 45%. This gender ratio is reported in the following graph:



Source: ABS Censuses, Statistics Section, Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, Immigration Federation to Century's End 1901-2000, October 2001, p. 47. Retrieved August 6, 2014. <http://www.immi.gov.au/media/publications/statistics/federation/body2.pdf>

As the discussion has shown, the initial settlement of Italian and Greek women prior to the Second World War was slow and migration settlement was largely dominated by men who were not necessarily seeking permanent settlement. After the change in government policy in the 1950s, there was a concerted effort to address the gender imbalance by introducing family reunion schemes and, as a result, women from Italy and Greece began to arrive in larger cohorts.

The changing role of the dowry

Marriage was originally a secular custom. In Ancient Greece, and in particular in the City State of Athens, “marriage was a contract between the bride’s father and the groom” (Schaps, 1979:74). Upon marriage, the bride was given a dowry⁵ by her family consisting of property and/or personal possessions (trousseau), which formed part of the groom’s household assets. The husband was legally obliged to care for the property and, in the case of divorce, return it to the bride’s family. Already in Roman times, a marital agreement was entered into when there was mutual consent and, while the marital process was a less formal affair than the rituals later observed by the Christian Church, for the Romans the provision of a dowry (*dotis datio*) was considered important. The dowry comprised a contribution from the bride’s family to the expenses of the household of the groom and usually involved a transfer of actual property.⁶ The dowry tradition had a precise function of transmission and protection of family patrimony and safeguarding of the new family by providing an economic start. The late Middle Ages witnessed a revival of the dowry custom in Western Europe and many parts of the Byzantine Empire,⁷ which, it has been asserted, was “related to the twelfth-century rediscovery of Roman law” whereby the bride’s family “bore the brunt of the burden of constituting the dowry” (Klaspisch-Zuber, 1992: 164).

In the centuries that followed, the dowry was a pre-nuptial agreement in which the intending couple signed a receipt of goods, which might have consisted of a trousseau (*il corredo*, προικιά), money or properties. Such a ‘contract’ also protected the family wealth from further subdivisions by excluding the woman from further claims on the family estate (Levi, 1990: 570), and favouring the first-born son over daughters. At the same time the dowry at least ensured that daughters did receive a portion of the family’s

patrimony.⁸ While this practice has deep historical roots in both Italy and Greece, its practice varied significantly from region to region according to diverse systems of land tenure and family structures, which have changed over different time periods.

In the Italian Northern region of Piedmont, a major portion of the dowry consisted of ploughing equipment. The cost of the dowry to the household was such that families with more than one daughter were obliged to incur massive debts or to allow considerable periods of time to elapse between marriages in the family (Levi, 1976:1095-1121). In other regions of Italy, land or a house were part of a woman's dowry or it consisted of cash, furniture, movable goods such as jewellery or a trousseau of linen. In the Calabrian town of Caulonia, for example, the bride's dowry represented a potent symbol of a woman's marriageability. In Caulonia, the dowry consisted of houses and linen ware (*il corredo*) for daughters and land and furniture for sons. In order to increase marriage prospects for daughters, Cauloniese mothers were usually responsible for the provision of the *corredo*, which included beautifully hand-crafted and embroidered linen, and fathers and brothers were responsible for the provision of a house. While inheritance practices varied, and a woman was still able to marry without a dowry comprised of money or property, a glory box or trousseau, with its provision of linen and white-wear, however modest, was essential (Schneider, 1980:323-353).

In Greece the dowry depended on the customary tradition of the region and consisted of the glory box or trousseau, furniture and property, such as land or a small house.⁹ In the island of Mykonos, for example, nearly all women received a small house as a dowry as well as land and a trousseau (Hionidou, 1995:79). In other regions, the dowry was property (land), olive trees, gold coins, jewellery and a trousseau whose items were handmade by the bride and her mother (Ψυχγιώτης, 1986:196 and 202). The family home and the most economically viable lands were kept in the family for the first son or sons and occasionally secondary land was passed on to women (Caftanzoglou, 1998:184-5). In Mani (Southern Peloponnese), for example, women were mostly given the trousseau only, as property had to remain in the family and could only be passed on to males. There were also some extreme cases of dowry giving, especially in some islands of the Aegean,

as well as the Northern regions of Greece where the first born —girl or boy— was receiving all the family property. In these cases, the rest of the siblings or even the parents became destitute and were driven to migration (Σκουτέρη-Διδασκάλου, 1991:172-3).

The size of the dowry was proportionate to the wealth of the family, and the dowry became the currency which measured the suitability of the marriage between two families. The more generous the dowry, the greater the status of the daughter's family, and the higher the status of the family from which the husband would be chosen (Kertzer and Bretell, 1987:100). In traditional pre-industrial communities in Italy and Greece, celebrating the sacrament of marriage was seen as the primary social goal for young women. From an early age, girls were inducted into a mindset as future wives and mothers, and those who did not marry faced a lifetime of lowly status in the family structure as the childless future carers of their parents. Over time, the dowry became a strong indication of a woman's worth and also a sign of the respectability of the family, and it became a mark of dishonour to marry a daughter without a dowry. As noted by Pitrè in his early study of Italian customs of the island of Sicily, because of his wage-earning potential, a man did not need a dowry and in Pitrè's words "could marry with no more than the pants he wore." However, the provision of a dowry for unmarried sisters could represent a cause of delay in the age of the Italian and Greek grooms tying the knot and it was a common practice for fathers and brothers who had migrated to send back remittances that were used to fund dowries. Sometimes the migration of single female family members was seen as a way of relieving the burden of providing a dowry for daughters in Italy, especially in families with many daughters (Iuliano, 2010: 92-93).

In Greece dowry-giving, however modest, was regarded as an essential part of a successful marriage and was to be provided by the bride's father or brothers. Families with limited or no economic resources faced difficulties in finding a suitable husband for their daughters and had little or no alternative other than to turn to migration either national or international. From the beginning of the twentieth century, many Greek men migrated in order to improve their financial prospects and provide dowries for the dependent female family members (Dimitreas, 1995:174). Women's emigration, on the other hand, was infrequent and occurred only under extreme financial

or social strain associated with the family's inability to provide adequate support for the future, if the local community's economic conditions were bleak. Women were more likely to emigrate if the local community and its economy were shattered and the male members of the family could not sustain a basic way of life. Under these circumstances, young women found themselves trapped in poor or destitute conditions. With their marriage prospects diminishing dramatically and without any support from male family members, they were usually coerced to seek employment outside the family home or migrate and create their own modest dowry.

In the past in Italy, *il corredo* was a necessary component of the dowry. It comprised a set of household objects and one of personal items. The set for the future household generally varied between 6 and 24 double sheets, 12 towels and 12 tea towels. The personal set instead included laundry items, nightgowns, silk and linen shirts. In provincial centres in Campania, the number of items for each set of embroidered bed linen and tableware varied from 6 to 24 and could also consist of objects such as mattresses, crockery, cutlery, kitchenware and gardening implements (Pallotta, 2013:189-191). According to the Calabrian proverb *Figlia in fascia la dote in cascìa* (daughter in nappies, dowry in the glory box), for a daughter to be considered eligible to marry, Italian families had to start collecting items for her dowry from a young age. The *corredo* in particular was an important part of a young woman's training for her future role as wife and mother in order to gain respect as an accomplished seamstress and specialist in needlecraft (Tence and Triarico, 1999:6).

Within Greek society, in both rural and urban areas, girls were also brought up to think of their future marriage and work towards the acquisition of a trousseau and skills in homemaking.¹¹ Girls were taught to embroider, knit and/or weave and spent most of their free time making what was needed for their trousseau. They mainly prepared all the white linen (sheets, pillow cases, blankets, and decorative pieces for the home), as well as clothing items for themselves and their future husbands.¹² A special part of the trousseau was the bed linen and the quilt or the blankets. The Greek trousseau bore a strong resemblance to the Italian one. It consisted of either 6, 12 or 24 sheets (mainly double) and the equivalent pairs of pillowcases, 6 or 12 towels, a few tablecloths and napkins, tea-towels, blankets for summer

and winter, and 1 or 2 quilts. Embroidered items for the household were crafted in rich and exquisite patterns, either by the girls or by professional embroiderers. As some of the fabrics or items for the trousseau had to be purchased, a certain level of family wealth was essential. All these items were kept in a wooden (later tin) chest (μπαούλο) which was easily transported. The chest was an essential part of the household furniture and was used to store white linen and blankets or quilts and family heirlooms.

Usually home-crafted in the past, from the 1950s, it became more common to buy the items for the *corredo* or the *προικιά*. In Italy and Greece families were mainly buying the items for the trousseau. In both countries, there were specialty shops which sold white linen and household items.¹³

In Australia too, Italian and Greek migrants followed the tradition of dowry giving. Second-generation Italian and Greek women still had cultural expectations of marriage and a glory box exerted upon them by their families in the 1970s and 1980s. Those parents, who had the possibility of making return visits to Italy or Greece, would purchase fine drapery from retailers and have the items packed in trunks and sent by ship to Australia. Other Italian and Greek families purchased items from specialist retailers that imported linen ware and household items, or from big department stores, such as John Martins in Adelaide. The most priced items were crockery, cutlery and fine linen ware for the bridal bed.

Since the abolition of the dowry (in 1968 in Italy and 1983 in Greece), this tradition has been progressively declining. Today, the only part of the dowry custom still practised by some families in Adelaide and in both Italy and Greece is the provision of some linen ware and a wedding reception. However, in the countries of origin and in Australia, parents still try to give their children a start towards establishing their own families by providing the down payment on a house or an apartment, or by buying a block of land.

Oral testimonies

Life narratives of first-generation migrant women from Southern Italy (50) and Greece (30) were collected via in-depth interviews conducted in the native language of the informants. The interviews explored the life of the informants in the country of origin prior to migration, the migration experience, reasons for migration to Australia, and settlement in the new country. There was a focus in the interviews on courtship practices and the

significance of marriage. Questions were raised about the objects that these migrants took with them to South Australia and in particular about the dowries and the cultural practices associated with them.

The 50 Italian informants originated from the two most represented southern Italian regions (Campania and Calabria) who settled in SA in the post-Second World War period. The 30 Greek informants originated from a variety of regions with the majority drawn from the Peloponnese. The interviews lasted approximately 2 hours, were conducted in the home of the informants and were digitally recorded and transcribed. Ethics approval was obtained for these interviews. In addition to the interviews, information for this study is derived from archival sources such as the National Archives of Australia, data from local council departure records, international digital repositories, government sources and other published sources (e.g. newspaper articles).

There was general consensus among the project informants that whatever the economic status of the family, the provision of a dowry and, most importantly, the preparation of a suitable trousseau were necessities that the bride's family was obliged to meet, with no choice in the matter. Families would sometimes incur substantial debts in order to fulfil their obligations involving the provision and settlement of a dowry for their children. It was a question of honour, and families would part with other possessions, such as farm animals or precious land, in order to accumulate the means for dotal assets. Most importantly, the absence of a dowry resulted in the migration of either the male members or even the daughters of the family. One of the Italian migrants interviewed, for example, remembers that his uncle, who was already in his late twenties, was unable to marry because his sisters had to marry first while he was helping the family with his labour so as to provide them with a dowry. He remembers that migrants used to send money home to buy houses for daughters and sisters.¹⁴ Another participant, who migrated in the 1950s, said that her husband had incurred massive debts in Australia in order to send money home to his family in Caulonia to buy houses for the dowry of his sisters at the expense of his own nuclear family.¹⁵

Italian and Greek informants reported that young women did not enjoy the freedom of movement that was accorded to males in the family and that their future was closely tied to the goals of marriage and domesticity.

Informants from Campania, Italy, reported that many girls were brought up to sew and embroider from a tender age. After the evening meal, when all other chores had been completed, hands were not left idle and, in families with unmarried daughters, women were kept busy with the handcrafting of trousseau items in the form of bed linen (sheets and pillow cases), linen towels, table-ware and personal items such as nightgowns. An individual and pristine trousseau was to be provided for each daughter; in other words, there were no hand-me-downs or used items to be included. While it is clear that this custom was part of an economic investment for securing a future suitable match, there was more at stake. Culturally, the qualities of the trousseau closely matched the symbolic qualities expected of an exemplary bride, that is, like her purity and virtue, the trousseau should be newly made and unblemished, crafted from durable, good quality material that would last a lifetime and, in the skilled artisanry and decoration of its individual and multiple items, be representative of the family's reputation in the community.

Oral testimonies from the Campanian participants reveal that in addition to drapery items, a *corredo* could also include kitchen items such as copper pots and pans, wooden spindles and wicker baskets in assorted sizes. Mattresses were sewn with woollen padding that could be removed whenever the outside cover needed washing. Fabrics commonly used included cottons, linens and wool. Silk, muslin, lace and satin were used for items in the glory boxes of daughters from more affluent families. The latter would order the trousseau items to be created and handmade by skilled seamstresses according to the family's specifications. Italian participants recalled the creation of drapery in the finest fabrics. Often working under the guidance of her mother or other women in the family, the handcrafted items in a young women's trousseau reflected her personal worth and skill and, in order to personalise the items, she often embroidered her initials discreetly on a number of them.

Participants from Calabria reported that the trousseau also included a beautiful bedspread of chenille or damask fabric used on the wedding night and one set of blue and pink sheets to be used when a baby boy or girl was born. Similarly to the Campanian tradition, in Calabria, too, the trousseau comprised kitchen items such as pots and pans as well as a set of cutlery.¹⁶

Greek participants reported that the most highly-priced item of the trousseau was the quilt. It was hand crafted by professionals and was made out of fine satin in rich gold and red colours.¹⁷ The fine linen sheets, too, were heavily embroidered with traditional or modern patterns. If the family was wealthy, then most of the white linen embroideries were made by professional embroiderers and the material used was of high quality (fine linen or imported cotton). Embroidered doilies and sets of tablecloths and napkins were essential. The trousseau also included underwear, nighties and nightgowns. In some occasions, the trousseau included useful cooking utensils and equipment such as pots, coffee grinders or mortar and pestle. Baking pans (ταψιά) were essential as they were used for sweets or pie-making. In most cases all the items of the trousseau were evidence of the skills of the bride in homemaking in general and the economic worth of her family.

For the families of the intended couple, the settlement over a suitable dowry would involve a protracted negotiation whose terms were rigidly adhered to by both parties. No matter how much the couple might long to be engaged, the matter of the dowry had to be agreed upon in order for the engagement to be confirmed by the families.¹⁸ In the time leading up to the marriage, the couple were strictly chaperoned, never left alone, and visits by the fiancé were often restricted to certain times of the week. In Italy, the appraisal (l'apprezzo) of the dowry items a few days prior to the Church wedding (for example, on the Thursday prior to a Sunday ceremony) involved a meticulous display and inventory of the items and was held at the home of the bride's parents. In Greece, the dowry items were washed, ironed and starched two weeks prior to the wedding ceremony. They were then displayed either the Sunday or the Thursday prior to the ceremony for all guests to inspect. In some regions of Greece the mother-in-law inspected the dowry first. In Italy and Greece, the display of the *corredo*/προικιά was a major social event during which friends and well-wishers would be invited to view the items. The event symbolised a display of family wealth and standing in the community, as well as an 'assessment' of the bride.

In preparation for this milestone event, Italian families who could afford to do so did not hesitate to employ the services of women trained in professional ironing so as to ensure a polished look to the trousseau items. Not only did the display constitute a communal verification of the bride's

dotal worth but it also served to signal the economic worth of other eligible daughters in the family. Once the groom's family was satisfied with the quality and quantity of the items in the trousseau, a pre-prepared itemised list was endorsed and co-signed by the groom and a close relative of his. On this occasion the opinion of the groom's mother held sway and stories abound of the tensions generated in families over the outcome of the formal economic appraisal of the dowry, since a negative assessment at the time of the formal display could have dire repercussions on the future nuptials going ahead. And woe betide the family who attempted to hoodwink a future mother-in-law by falsely augmenting the display with items from another daughter's trousseau. As one informant reported,¹⁹ a suspecting mother-in-law could perform her own inventory after the marriage when the daughter-in-law was not at home. If the accountability proved false, there would be hell to pay!

When the endorsement of the trousseau had taken place, the next ritual was the transportation of the *corredo* to the groom's house. This was reportedly undertaken by women only (excluding the future bride who was not permitted to enter the groom's home close to the wedding) and was witnessed by the wider community who observed the procession of women leaving the bride's home laden with the items to be transported. The most precious items were carried by a convoy of senior women in the family who were then followed by others bearing the items of lesser value. In some communities, the items were carried in wicker chests skilfully balanced on heads. Other families might have the items transported in a cart.

In Italy, the ceremony of the preparation of the marital bed for the couple's first evening together (*il primo letto*, made up using the best linen from the trousseau) marked the next stage in the pre-nuptial preparation for the bride's official transfer from her natal home to the new marital home prior to the declaration of mutual consent in the Church's presence, *in facie ecclesiae*. Although the Church played a major part in people's lives, the rituals and transactions involved in the acquisition, affirmation and transport of the dowry did not come under the Church's purview and the custom was strictly monitored in economic terms by the families of the betrothed couple. Women informants reported that at home the obligations of the dowry were discussed openly and the preparation of the trousseau with other women in the family was followed according to strict criteria and

enumeration, with obvious emphasis placed on the bride's duty in preparing material items for the marital bed. By contrast, a complete silence reigned in the family about the intimate nature of the bride's marital duties. As one informant declared: "Married women didn't tell you anything. Everything was hidden".²⁰ On the wedding night and for the duration of her married life, a wife was expected to obey her husband. Proof of her virginity as a bride was expected in some communities by means of a formal inspection of the bed linen by the two mothers on the morning after the nuptials. In Greek families, the display of the dowry usually coincided with the "making of the bridal bed". During that ceremony, which is still observed in Greece and Australia today, family and friends gathered at the house of the couple to marry. At a given time young maidens made the bridal bed, using the finest bed linen from the bride's dowry, and then covered it with the quilt of the bridal bed-spread, while other women sung traditional songs relating to the wedding ceremony. When the bed was ready, a male child was placed on it (so the couple would have male children), and all the guests threw rice, rose petals and money. On that occasion guests inspected the dowry of the bride, which was on display for everyone's perusal.

In the context of migration, the concept of the appraisal of the trousseau or the display of the dowry gradually underwent modifications. In Australia, it was no longer the number of sheets and the embroidery that delineated the standing of the family, as this function shifted to the show and the expense incurred for the wedding celebration itself. While for the first-generation migrants the traditional wedding feast had been held at the home of the groom or the bride's parents, in Australia, a lavish celebration represented the achievement of material success on the part of the family in the eyes of their community. In the 1960s, in Adelaide, more than one wealthy family staged elaborate wedding feasts with up to one thousand invited guests. Greek families, who had settled in Australia for some years, were also holding big weddings for their daughters. These weddings were usually reported in local newspapers where detailed information about the guests, the location of the reception and an itemised list of the "wedding presents" from the parents to their daughter was included. One such example is a wedding which was featured in *The Australian Women's Weekly* (22/7/1970). Mr and Mrs Nicholas Platis married their daughter Despina to Manuel Lucas. The parents of the bride, apart from a lavish reception for

500 people, gave their daughter a mink evening coat, three diamond rings and gold sovereigns.

In contemporary Australia, the trousseau has ceased to be a central concern, especially with third-generation couples who often set up households independently before marriage and move fluidly in the employment sector as trained professionals at ease in a multicultural setting. Increasingly, however, with the effects of compulsory education in an Anglo-Australian context, broader career options and access to tertiary education, a clash of norms and expectations took place resulting in a radically different cultural outlook on the part of second- and third-generation offspring. In a short space of time, transnational migration altered the parameters of the trousseau tradition; a tradition that had been so strongly held and preserved for generations. The fate of the glory box reflected rapid changes in the identity, sense of belonging, dreams and social goals of offspring raised in an Australian setting.

Conclusion

Our study has highlighted the changing nature of dowry practices tracing their origins in Italy and Greece and outlining their development to contemporary Australian society. For centuries, a powerful element in courtship practices, the tradition of the dowry has undergone significant changes in the contemporary transnational migration context. Insofar as the maintenance of the tradition in the home country, the tradition has been declining, particularly since the change of legislature enacted in Italy and Greece. In Australia, there have been cultural changes to the dowry custom brought about through the effects of transnational immigration, mixed marriages, generational change and globalisation. Today, among post-war Greek and Italian migrants and their offspring, the only part of the dowry custom still practised is the provision of the trousseau, which in itself has changed in both the selection and quantity of the items that it includes, as well as the qualitative aspect, since the commercially acquired items are not necessarily meant to last a lifetime. Families now have the ability to access items for the wedding and the trousseau from a variety of commercial retailers from all over the world, where previously there was often a long-standing connection in the hometown with trusted artisans and retailers who were well-versed in the customs and expectations of courtship practic-

es and rituals. Today the emphasis has also switched to items that are more functional for the young household and that match individual preferences. The ritual of the formal display of the dowry has altered and the standing of the family is no longer represented by the dowry but rather is most emphatically represented by the wedding ceremony itself, which in comparison to the past has become more lavish, is attended by a large number of guests, and has become a symbol of the family's wealth and of their successful integration within Australian society. Migrants who still use, or rather keep, the embroidered items of the trousseau, treasure them as family heirlooms and the items are regarded as symbols of yesteryear skills and reminders of family history

Notes

- 1 In Modern Greek *προικιά* is the trousseau. The word *προίκα* is mainly used for the dowry which incorporates money, landed or movable property and/or the trousseau.
- 2 The Italian and Australian governments would each pay one quarter of the cost of the fare by ship and the other half could be borrowed by the migrants at reasonable rates.
- 3 Appleyard and Yiannakis claim that another Greek woman, Maria Barvides, together with her family arrived in the Swan River colony as servants in 1830 but departed the following year (Janiszewski, Alexakis, 2006:155).
- 4 Panayota Nazou has researched the topic of the "proxy-brides" and has published a book in Modern Greek which is currently translated in English (Nazou, Panayota, *Proxy Brides-Experiences and Testimonies of Greek Women in Australia (1950-1975)*, Athens: Periplus, 2013).
- 5 In Ancient Greek the dowry was called «φερνή».
- 6 See Gardner, Jane F. *Women in Roman Law and Society*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1986, 97-100.
- 7 Anderson claims that "since a dowry was required under Roman Law, dowries were also transferred in many parts of the Byzantine Empire until its fall to the Ottomans in the fifteenth century" (Anderson, 2007:153).
- 8 See Kertzer David and Bretell Caroline. "Advances in Italian and Iberian Family History", *Journal of Family History*, 12, numbers 1-3 (1987): 99; Tence M., and Triarico E. "La dote: preparing for a family. The importance of the dowry in the Australian Italian family." *Italian Historical Society Journal*, Carlton VIC, Italian Historical Society, Co.As.It. 7, no.1, January-July 1999:5; Bretell, Caroline. "Property, Kinship and Gender: A Mediterranean Perspective" in *The family in Italy: from antiquity to the present*, edited by D. Kertzer and R. Saller, 340-353. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991; Σκουτέρη-Διδασκάλου Νόρα, *Ανθρωπολογικά για το γυναικείο ζήτημα*, (2η έκδοση). Αθήνα:Πολιτης, 1991.
- 9 In a Greek newspaper article, we can find the "expected" dowry for a woman and its value: one small house, furniture, kitchen ware and all linen ware, which are modestly prices at 450 gold sovereigns (*Εμπρός*, 20/7/1952).
- 10 On dowering customs see Pitre, Giuseppe. *La famiglia, la casa, la vita del popolo siciliano*, Palermo: Il Vespro, 1978: 34, 89 (first ed. 1913); Pitre Giuseppe, *Usi e costume, credenze e pregiudizi del popolo siciliano*, Palermo: Il Vespro, 1978 (first ed. 1889).

- 11 According to the Greek tradition girls, unlike boys, had to be provided with a dowry when they were to marry. For example, a Greek lullaby says: «Έχω γιο, έχω χαρά που θα γίνω πεθερά, έχω κόρη, έχω πίκρα γιατί θα της δώσω προίκα (I have a son, I rejoice because I'll be a mother-in-law, I have a daughter I am sad because I'll provide her with a dowry).
- 12 There were also professional embroiderers who were commissioned to prepare the white linen and the embroideries for house decoration (Greek interviewee, C.P., 2013).
- 13 We can find many advertisements in Greek newspapers of the late Forties and Fifties which advertise the selling of items for the trousseau. One such advertisement for example claims that buyers can find everything for the trousseau at a store called «Δραγώνας» (*Ελευθερία*, 5/10/1958).
- 14 Italian interviewee C.D.L. 2005.
- 15 Italian interviewee N.T. 2005
- 16 Italian interviewee L.G., 2005.
- 17 Greek interviewee H. C. 2013. H.C, who was born and raised in Athens also reported that she was given two quilts in her trousseau, one for every day and one for special occasions. Other interviewees from Pyrgos (Peloponnese) and Rhodes also reported the importance of the quilt which was described as the basis of the trousseau. These quilts were brought to Australia in the chest which was used for the keeping of their *προικιά*.
- 18 There are many copies of Greek marriage contracts kept in museums and private collections. They show the precise description of the items included in the dowries.
- 19 Italian interviewee C.M., 2003.
- 20 Italian interviewee F. F., 2003.

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