

Icons and Rosaries in my Suitcase: A Study of Religious Objects and Practices of Ageing Italian and Greek Migrants in South Australia

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ABSTRACT

In diasporic contexts, objects brought by migrants to the host country play a significant role in helping overcome the often traumatic experience of dislocation. They can be highly evocative and symbolic of the relationship between culture and identity and between places of origin and places of resettlement. This study examines objects related to religious practices. Furthermore, it investigates the ways in which personal objects brought to South Australia by post-Second World War Italian and Greek migrants convey cultural meaning as well as a sense of identity and belonging in the transnational space. The study, based on an oral history approach, draws on qualitative in-depth interviews with migrants and on secondary sources such as archival material. The study's results suggest that the home functions as a repository for practices and traditions embodied by personal material artefacts. Especially in the early years of settlement, private homes were sites for family-based practices and worship. Later, as Italian and Greek communities and parish groups began to establish and consolidate themselves, religious rituals and festivities began to be celebrated in more public ways. Religious objects play an important role in the construction of migrants' cultural identity and sense of belonging. They highlight the complexity of the reconnection, not only with familial practices and customs, but also with the regional, social and cultural realities of the migrants' experiences before emigration to a new land.

INTRODUCTION

The study of material culture and the focus on objects connected to specific transnational practices, such as religious artefacts and personal belongings, help our understanding of the need by migrants for the re-enactment and re-purposing of age-old family and community traditions in the place of settlement. Personal objects brought to the country of destination by first-generation migrants are meaningful in helping to deal with the impact of cultural

displacement and geographic dislocation. The objects represent the creation of figurative links between the place of origin and the new home in a foreign setting, where the cherished objects and their associated rituals may be completely unfamiliar and strange to the mainstream culture. Our study of cultural practices and objects has found evidence that within the Italian and Greek family homes, Greek icons, statuettes, pictures of local Italian saints, rosary beads and items worn by individuals served as a binding force to maintain and recreate religious practices, some of which were later transferred and adapted to wider community practices. For example, in some Italian communities such as the *Cauloniesi* and *Molfettesi*, the veneration of small statues of local saints later developed into public expressions of their faith in the form of processions and public feasts. Other religious objects worn by migrants such as gold crosses and medallions were considered identifiers of religious difference in the dominant paradigm, as reported by our informants whose children growing up in the 1950s and 1960s in Australia may have kept their crosses and medallions hidden while attending school so as not to attract undue attention. In this way, on one level, objects function as bridging elements between the culture and identity of home and the transnational settlement point. On another level, they can be seen as markers of difference outside the home as the second generation negotiates its place in a bilingual and bicultural reality. As time goes on, for the subsequent generations, the objects become narrative tools and signifiers of cultural meaning for intergenerational sharing of knowledges, practices, interconnectedness, and the language of cultural belonging and difference.

In this article, we explore our findings about practices related to personal religious objects and family-based religious rituals that post-Second World War Italian and Greek migrants, who settled in South Australia, brought with them. Our investigation reveals the significant role that these religious objects, and the cultural practices associated with them in the home played in the shaping of cultural identity and the sense of belonging experienced by these post-war first-generation migrants. Aspects of their home-based activity and worship eventually transformed into religious practices organised and carried out by migrant communities in the public domain in the form of prayer groups, processions and religious festivities connected to a religious ritual or regional saint. Our research aims to inform and analyse aspects related to the use of religious objects in the domestic and familial spheres which have received less scholarly attention compared to the study of traditional religious practices occurring in the public and institutional domains. This study is part of a larger investigation, the *Migrants' Belongings Project*, which seeks to explore what motivates the selection of particular objects in the context of cultural practices; how the chosen objects function as markers of identities, values and rituals; and how the meaning of these objects has changed over time as a result of migration (Levin and Fincher 2010; Agutter et al. 2013; Palaktsoglou et al. 2014; Bartoloni 2016).

Methodology

The present project aims to gather personal narratives of Italian and Greek migrants' experiences, providing qualitative information on the private and community-based practices of individuals that may be difficult to bring to light through other traditional research methodologies. As Portelli (1997: 6) has observed, "oral history expresses the awareness of the historicity of personal experience and of the individual's role in the history of society". As noted by oral historian Thompson (2000), oral history fulfils an important social purpose as it

allows the voice of ordinary people to be heard.

Oral history as a methodology, and personal interviews as a tool for data collection, are particularly suited to the study of everyday objects and belongings. Indeed, the exploration of personal objects through the use of personal narratives provides researchers with a rich understanding of the ways in which individuals construct a sense of their own history (Georgevits 2000) and of how these objects have meaning in their life narratives. Belongings are essential to people's lives. Even the most mundane possessions, such as suitcases used by migrants, may become decommodified to acquire symbolic status and be incorporated into people's identities (Sutton and Hernandez 2007). Material culture, and objects in particular, play a key role in stimulating and preserving memories as they have the capacity to mark significant moments in individual migration experiences (Wilton 2008; 2009).

The objects identified in our study through oral history interviews highlight aspects of pre- and post-migration religious practices, thus enhancing particular facets of the migrant experience in the private and community spheres. In relation to our project, we have carried out in-depth interviews of first-generation Italian and Greek informants in their seventies and eighties who settled in the Adelaide metropolitan area in the 1950s and 1960s. Fifty Italian participants (originating from the two most represented Southern Italian groups in South Australia, from the regions of Campania and Calabria) and thirty Greek interviewees from a variety of regions (with the majority drawn from the Peloponnese) took part in the study. The interviews were conducted at the informants' homes and were recorded and transcribed. They were based on a set of open-ended questions that aimed to capture life narratives from the pre- and post-migration stages. This approach enabled an understanding of the meaning of the objects they brought to Australia in the context of their personal migration experience, providing insights on how the objects were used and the practical, cultural, and symbolic roles they played in the informants' lives.

The informants usually had primary-level education, were mostly farmers and labourers, and migrated from villages or provincial towns in Italy and Greece to join relatives already established in South Australia. Their objective was to improve their own social and economic circumstances in the wake of the Second World War that had increased their hardship in the home country, whereas Australia offered hope and stability.

Religion and migration

As a set of codified practices, religion fulfils essential functions at individual and communal levels. To the individual, it offers spiritual, emotional and cultural stability. At a community level, it provides social cohesion, a sense of purpose in life, as well as a sense of belonging to a wider group beyond the private sphere. Transcending regional and national allegiances, religious practice helps to develop a strong sense of cultural belonging, identity and membership (Levitt 2003). As argued by Hirschman (2004), religion constitutes a 'refuge' for migrants. It creates a sense of moral and spiritual support in times of need and crisis. Indeed, faith (and religious participation as a whole) has been fundamental as a coping mechanism in relation to geographical, cultural and social dislocation, forced or voluntary, personal or collective, to alleviate the stress of transition (Mazumdar and Mazumdar 2009), improve mental health outcomes (Connor 2010), fight anxiety and fear of alienation (Schiffauer 2005), and relieve the grief or bereavement borne out of the loss of familiar social structures (Bhugra and Becker 2005) and social, cultural, affective reference points, at personal and communal

levels. For migrants, religion provides meaning and purpose in an environment in which points of reference are blurred. Faith may assist in restoring them and establishing new ones. In the context of transnational migration, religion may constitute a bridge between the old and the new (Handlin 1973) and helps migrants (re-)imagine their homelands (Vasquez 2008). Through their faith, migrants carry with them cultural capital, and when most possessions are left behind, this capital remains (Dupré 2008). It may be called upon to find strength and build up resilience in the country of adoption and is the catalyst for participating in religious community life (Dupré 2008).

Migrants may have moved to a country which represents a new socio-cultural order to them. Although their worlds have been turned upside down, religion remains one of the few constant features in their lives. On a collective level, religion provides a context for the development of communities and support networks which in turn provide opportunities for migrants' personal growth, social mobility and adaptation (Connor 2010).

Much research in the field of religion and migration has focused on the public aspects of the establishment of faith in new environments. However, according to Mazumdar and Mazumdar (2009), less attention has been given to the private and personal aspect of religious practices of immigrants. As well as the public affirmation of faith and formal practices carried out in community settings, religion is also about informal, invisible domestic practices carried out in the realm of the private sphere (Levitt 2003).

Religion may be best practised where the familiar is, that is to say, in a context of close proximity, where people share the same cultural values, practices, customs, and often the same language. Our study identifies religious domestic practices and personal objects of significance centred in the home environment or worn under garments that remained invisible to the outside community in the early years of settlement, but which provided a strong connection to faith identity and family bonding. As the Italian and Greek communities developed confidence over time and began to establish themselves more openly in the dominant cultural environment, they began to express their religious beliefs and practices in more public and community-based ways.

Prior to the collective expression of religious faith by our project informants, the home remains at the centre of their everyday lives. The home embodies a private and familiar space. It is a refuge, and a place of intimacy at the very centre of one's existence. It is a physical place as well as being a symbolic place that "transcends the domestic physical structure, encompassing cultural, symbolic and psychological significance" (Thompson 2007). Therefore, it comes as no surprise that for migrants, the home, even when temporary, can become an important place of religious practice (Mazumdar and Mazumdar 2009), where familiar religious objects are imbued with particular emotional significance, regardless of their commercial value, and where private devotional shrines are set up. Symbolising continuity, religious objects are literally and metaphorically objects of survival. They may facilitate the transitional phase experienced by migrants settling in a new country and reaffirm their cultural identity which may no longer be assumed in the post-migration environment (Belk 1992).

In the context of ageing, objects and, in particular, religious ones, are highly significant in older migrants' lives. As is the case with special belongings, religious items accompany migrants through their life journey and, with the passing of time, create a deep link to lifetime memories by providing reassurance, comfort and a sense of continuity (Jarrett 2013).

Brief numerical overview of post-Second World War Italian and Greek migration to Australia

Following the large-scale immigration program launched by the Australian government, and the Assisted Migration Agreement signed in 1951 between Italy and Australia,¹ between 1947 and 1976 Australia experienced a total net gain of 271,570 Italian migrants, the second largest group of settlers after those born in the United Kingdom. Only twenty percent of the Italian migrants arrived under the Assisted Migration Agreement between Italy and Australia, while the majority were sponsored by relatives and *compaesani* (countrymen) already settled in Australia.² Chain migration had the effect of creating throughout Australia and South Australia local settlements of Italians who had migrated from specific regions and towns (O'Connor 2004). In less than twenty-five years, the number of Italians in South Australia increased significantly from 2,428 in 1947 to 32,428 in 1971.

Post-Second World War Greek immigration to Australia began in small numbers in the late Forties, and escalated after 1952 with the signing of the ICEM (Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration) agreement between Greece and Australia. Between 1952 and 1972, there were 71,221 Greek immigrants who arrived in Australia with an assisted passage, while the overall number (assisted and self-funded passage) exceeded 180,000 arrivals (Palaktoglou 2013: 294). The majority of the Greek migrants settled in Victoria and New South Wales; South Australia received a significantly smaller cohort (approximately 12,000).

Italian and Greek migration in relation to religious faith and ritual

The Italian presence in Australia caused tensions not only in government circles, but also in the Australian Catholic Church with its strong Irish foundations. As had been the case in the interwar years, the Italian Catholics were distinctively different in their form of worship and their religious practices often proved incomprehensible to the majority of Catholic Australians. They were perceived as a 'problem' because of their strong sense of anti-clericalism and their defiance towards church worship and regular attendance at Mass, which was quite confronting to the Irish parish priests. True faith for the Italians was not entirely dependent on Church services or authority but was rather experienced in many other ways in diverse private dimensions of their lives. After arrival in Australia the immigrants' isolation was heightened when they found themselves pushed to conform to practices and behaviours of the Irish enclave of Catholicism.³ They had brought with them to Australia their own distinctive religious rituals such as the veneration of their patron saints, symbols and myths and reciting the Rosary with the family at home, as one informant recalled: "We would recite the rosary together every night".⁴ At the same time, they had a natural curiosity about the supernatural and keeping maleficent spirits away that could not be fully understood by the Irish Catholic community. One such example was the Southern Italian tradition of the *malocchio* (evil eye). This combination of traditional religious belief and adherence to rituals associated with popular religion and superstition was an accepted feature of everyday life among some of our informants.

As found in several studies on the religious practices and rituals of Italian migrants (Pittarello 1993; Paganoni and O'Connor 1999), before migration, going to Mass on Sunday in the hometown and attending religious processions and functions were often the only public

outings that people had for the entire week, and a number of Italian informants noted that the Church played a central role in their daily lives. Attending Sunday Mass was also an occasion for social interaction that continued after Mass, in the square, at the bar, and it was often the only time when the young men could meet, or rather see, the young women. Far from their town with its square and the church, in their new country the family became the most important focal area where its members perceived a sense of connectedness and belonging. Thus, the home became the place for devotion where religious symbols, images of the Virgin Mary, and sacred images of patron saints could be openly displayed. As argued by Barbaro (2000: 95), homes became shrines and substitutes for Australian church buildings in the early years after arrival, and this centredness of cultural and faith-based activity that was more accessible and personal in its expression helped migrants to make sense of their new environment and overcome feelings of cultural dislocation.

These private spaces were particularly important given that in the 1950s there were few outlets for community-based worship until Italian communal religious celebrations such as the *feste* began to emerge in the Australian suburbs. It is important to note that, as observed by Paganoni (2015), most of the *feste* in South Australia were organised only between the 1970s and the 1990s, a period when a more tolerant attitude, initiated by Gough Whitlam at the Federal level and by Don Dunstan in South Australia, was perceived to be favourable and conducive to 'Italian-style' public celebrations. In the Australian Church, the acceptance of such 'extravagant' celebrations would only mature slowly over time (Lewins 1982).

In Italy, public displays of faith in the form of religious feasts and processions were a regular occurrence and our informants told us that people from local districts would gather to celebrate together. In Australia, the *feste* were a large-scale development and a public expression of religious practices already carried out within the domestic walls of many Italian migrants' homes.⁵ Our informants have maintained the tradition of *feste* in Adelaide and they eagerly affirmed their attendance at numerous local processions which, however, also involves participation at the festivals of other regional communities, e.g. *Sant'Antonio*, *Montevergine*, *San Pellegrino*, *San Gabriele*.

In the Greek context, during the late 1940s and early 1950s Greeks arriving in South Australia had very few places of worship. Adelaide had only one Orthodox Church, the Church of Taxiarches,⁶ founded in 1937 and formally opened in 1938, which was attended by all Greek migrants. In regional South Australia, at places such as Ceduna, Port Pirie, Port Augusta or the Riverland, worship was very difficult as there were no resident priests or Greek Orthodox churches. Most Greek immigrants were Orthodox Christians who observed religious services and specific rituals which were associated with the Church. A substitute for the lack of Greek Orthodox churches had to be found, therefore the home, private venues⁷ or even churches of other denominations, became the place where religious rituals and practices were performed. As was the case for the Italians, the home in particular was considered as one of the central places of worship by many Greeks. Many religious objects – icons, crosses and incense burners mainly – were kept in a special area of the house where the members of the household prayed. A Greek informant claimed:

We prayed at home. The church was very far. Sundays, saints' days, sometimes Christmas and Easter, we celebrated them at home. We prayed alone at home. Some people even christened their children at home when a priest was coming from Adelaide. What could we do?⁸

It is interesting to note that in the absence of Greek Orthodox churches some important religious practices such as christenings or weddings were conducted in private homes. One such example is found in a newspaper article (1954) where the christenings of three Greek children were conducted in their parents' home in regional Broken Hill by an Adelaide priest. Prior to his departure, the priest conducted a service for all Greeks who were residing in Broken Hill.⁹

For the Greek migrants, the near-absence of places of worship interfered with the development of their sense of belonging to a community with familial structure and purpose and, at the same time, obstructed social and religious expressions of their individual and collective identity. Many Greek informants – more specifically women – remarked that before migration attendance at church services, religious rituals and celebrations was an expression of faith; for the majority of them though it was an opportunity for social interaction, personal growth and well-being. Especially during important religious festivities, which were connected to the worship of local saints, men and women would meet at church and then in the village or town square, participate in feasts with dancing and celebration, and also trade or buy essentials for themselves or their household. These important religious events held specific social and economic meaning for the community, for example, Saint George's Day celebrated on 23 April. One of the Greek informants claimed:

Saint George's Day was a special time for us. It was always celebrated after Easter. It was during Spring and everything was so nice after a long winter. The girls were meeting the boys and many weddings were arranged during that time. During the *πανηγύρι* (*panigyri* – feast day) we used to buy things for the house and some clothes.¹⁰

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, with the establishment of a number of Greek Orthodox churches (Prophet Elias, Saint George, etc.), the religious needs of Greek migrants were fulfilled. Moreover, the establishment of communities and parishes gave Greek immigrants the opportunity to form social connections, dispel feelings of isolation and re-establish the sense of belonging which had been shattered through the process of their migration experience. Nonetheless, the home remained the place where many religious objects were kept and venerated, and within its walls the religious traditions to be passed on to the next generation were preserved and cherished.

Religious practices

Religious practices were fundamental to the Italian and Greek migrants' identity formation and well-being. By providing a sense of ritualistic continuity, objects and practices brought from the home country alleviated the trauma of dislocation and facilitated the acceptance of the new environment. Family-based practices were observed among the Italian and Greek cohort under investigation. In the 1950s, the majority of Italian migrants arriving in Australia were Roman Catholics who venerated the Madonna and local saints, and observed the rituals connected with the liturgical calendar. For Campanians, for example, there were a host of Madonnas to worship according to local practice in their home-town, such as, *la Madonna di Montevergine*, *la Madonna delle Grazie*; all of whom had a designated time of celebration and pilgrimage. Padre Pio (now San Pio) was also a figure of widespread veneration and was a major figure of

veneration for migrants arriving in Adelaide in the post-Second World War decades, as he is today. The majority of the Greek migrants arriving in Australia followed Greek Orthodox practices and traditions. Most were practising Orthodox Christians who had been christened, married in a church or were intending to marry in a church, and were observing the religious practices of their faith. Coming from a country with different beliefs, values, and traditions, they felt the need to continue their religious practices in their new place of settlement.

In South Australia, in the 1950s and 1960s, Italian and Greek migrants were observing the celebration of significant religious festivities such as Christmas, Easter, the Dormition and the Annunciation of the Virgin. They were also celebrating many saints who were mostly connected with specific regions of Italy and Greece. For all our informants, Easter was the most significant and celebrated of the religious festivals and continues to be so. For Greek migrants, the main religious Easter festivities lasted for a week (Holy Week), with the most important days being Good Friday and Easter Saturday. Our informants confirmed that Easter celebrations in the early 1950s were vital to their sense of tradition and identity. As most migrants were young and energetic, they were actively involved in the celebrations and observances. In the late 1950s and 1960s, with the establishment of other churches, migrants were dispersed, though attendance at significant celebrations such as Easter continued.

Marriage and christenings were considered celebrations of fundamental importance to family life. Both ceremonies were lived according to traditional religious observances. For the marriage service, apart from the wedding dress and the veil, which some brides brought from the home country, significant items for the Italians were the rings and the *bomboniere* (symbolising fertility), while for the Greeks the crowns, the rings and the *μπομπονιέρες* (*bobonieres*) were required. Most of these items were purchased from local shops and emporia, while, in some cases, the gold wedding rings were brought to Australia by migrants.

Christenings followed a strict etiquette. Babies to be christened in the Catholic faith were adorned in white long lace, satin or silk baptismal gowns, often with a matching cap with ribbons and satin booties. They wore their gold chains and the family would dress up in their finery. Greek children were usually christened before the age of two and during this ceremony they were officially given their first name (or names on very few occasions). The christening outfit comprised a dress for girls and a suit for boys. For the Greek migrants, the oil cloth, and most importantly the gold cross, were considered necessities for the ceremony. Due to the special needs of the Greek Orthodox christenings, some items were pre-ordered and brought by relatives and friends who were migrating to Australia. By the mid-1950s, there were specific shops importing christening items, outfits and crosses for Italians and Greeks. Since the 1970s, many specialised shops have appeared, and many Italian and Greek families buy the items needed from these establishments. Second and third generations are now buying these items online, even directly from Europe.

In both Italian and Greek traditions, godparents were very important as they were considered the spiritual parents of the child and were to be a guiding influence throughout their lives. According to Greek Orthodox customs, they also initially introduced the children to the religious community by taking them to church for their first three communions immediately after the christening. For Greek migrants, who were away from their place of birth and their parents, relatives and friends, the godparents of their children, οι *κουμπάροι* (*koumbari*), became their extended family with whom they socialised and formed special bonds. Greek informants stress the importance of their *κουμπάροι* in their life and in the life of their children. Most importantly for women, who were young mothers and in most cases isolated from Australian society, they became their close friends and relatives. As one informant stressed:

“They were like family to me and my family. They were always invited to our celebrations and parties and were ready to help when we needed it. We were always there for them too”.¹¹

For Greek migrants, the rite of First Communion takes place straight after the christening, whereas in the Italian community it would occur at the age of ten or so. For the Italian migrants it was important to dress young girls in fine white lace in the style of miniature bridal gowns symbolising their union with Christ. In Italy they were also dressed as nuns on Communion Day. They would receive a gold chain which had to be visible over their gowns.

As time went on, some of our Italian informants reported that other forms of religious practice emerged involving worship in a church aligned to activity in the home. In Adelaide, prayer gatherings emanated from the devotion of Catholics from the town of Pietrelcina in the province of Benevento in Southern Italy to the venerated figure, Padre Pio, born in Pietrelcina, and lately canonised as San Pio. His last resting place is in the town of San Giovanni Rotondo in Foggia, and the Padre Pio Shrine located there is a frequently-visited Catholic shrine. Under the auspices of the church of San Giovanni Rotondo, the tradition of the Padre Pio prayer groups was begun in Adelaide in the 1970s with membership open to devotees of Padre Pio. There was a committee for fund-raising for charitable purposes and a prayer group formed in the Parish of San Francesco d’Assisi in the suburb of Newton in Adelaide’s east. Aside from prayers conducted in the church in the presence of a priest, the prayer group members would also meet at one another’s homes for more sociable gatherings where prayers were recited followed by an informal buffet-style sharing of food and drink and discussion about fund-raising initiatives. Eventually, a group of members formed a second prayer group (Padre Pio Prayer Group) located at Mater Christi Parish in Seaton on the west side of Adelaide. This prayer group meets monthly according to a rotation basis at the homes of members. The hosts provide food and beverages and the group prays and discusses fund-raising activities.

Religious objects

Religious objects brought by our informants from the place of origin included gold crosses, medallions and chains, rosary beads, amulets, scapulars, statuettes, images of local saints, incense-burners and icons. All our Italian informants reported that in the 1950s everyone, regardless of age, gender or circumstances, wore a gold chain with either a cross or a small medallion that had been blessed by a priest. The medallions bore the image of the Virgin Mary or a saint. The chains (known as *catenine*) were presented at the time of Baptism and Holy Communion by the god-parents (*compari*). For the Italian baptism ceremony, they would present a gold religious chain and medallion or cross that the child would wear as a sacred talisman and evidence of their lifelong faith in the Catholic community and thereafter never remove.

Greek migrants brought many religious objects which can be divided into the ones for personal use and the ones for their aesthetic appeal, used as decorative items in their house. Nearly all migrants had a gold or silver cross with them upon arrival to Australia. In most instances, this cross was their christening one. Others had amulets (*φυλακτά*), which were attached to their singlet or undergarments. Most informants claimed that the amulets were to protect them from evil and went on to recite incidents that proved their power. The cross was regarded as the most important christening item for both cultural groups because it would be worn by the child throughout their life. It was crucial that it be of good quality gold – eighteen carat preferably (twenty-four carat was considered far too soft to last and fourteen or nine carat

were considered of inferior quality). For the Greek migrants, the designs of the cross differed according to gender; boys' crosses were a crucifix while girls' crosses were decorated with stones or bore dainty designs. As has been observed, the gold chain was to be worn at all times by Italians and Greeks. Like an amulet, it offered protection to the wearer. A similar sanction applied to the gold wedding rings exchanged by the married couple on their wedding day. Once given, the wedding band blessed by the priest at the marriage ceremony remained on the ring-finger forever. Informants reported that gold chains and medallions were given as parting gifts to migrants embarking on their journey to the Antipodes with a small collection of chains to be distributed to relatives in Australia. When Italian migrants arrived in Adelaide in the post-Second World War period, the only Italian jewellers in the city were Mazzone Jewellers. Therefore, many families relied upon the waves of arrivals who would bring pre-ordered items with them and distribute them soon after their settlement in Adelaide. Gold objects for personal use were a common feature of the inventory of travel items and were highly treasured.

Personal object like amulets and rosary beads are also cherished. In the images below (Image 1) we see a 'Brown Scapular' that one of the informants has been wearing inconspicuously under his clothing for 57 years since he received it while attending primary school in Italy.

Image 1: Brown Scapular



The word 'scapular' comes from the Latin *scapula* which means 'shoulder blade'. It is a kind of neckpiece with two small, flat rectangular brown woolen cloth pendants at each end connected by two narrow brown cords that hang down to the front and back. The Brown Scapular is a symbol of Marian devotion which originated at about the same time as the Rosary. On one pendant an image of Our Lady of Mount Carmel holds the Infant Jesus and on the other there is an image of Saint Simon Stock. According to tradition, Our Lady of Mount Carmel appeared to Saint Simon Stock during the time of the Crusades and gave him the brown scapular as a sign of Mary's unceasing pledge of protection upon the Order of Carmel. The informant has later sewn on the back side of the scapular a little medallion of Saint Christopher, the protector of travellers, and a crucifix.

For the informant the Brown Scapular holds a very special meaning because he was holding it when at the age of eleven he was involved in a fireworks explosion and suffered severe burns to his body. He stated:

The reason why I still carry the Brown Scapular with me is because I was wearing it when I got burned in the explosion while I was helping my cousin to prepare fireworks. In that moment of panic or terror, whatever you want to call it, I was holding it and could see the silhouette of the Madonna and said in Calabrese, “Mary, you are the only one who could save me”, and here I am after all these years although the doctor gave me only three days to live.¹²

Although the migrant is a devout Catholic, he does not like to externalise his faith publicly and the amulet gives him the opportunity to express his religious devotion in a more private manner. Similarly, another informant told us how he carried Rosary beads within an inner pocket of clothing. Like the Brown Scapular, the beads are invested with personal meaning and provide private comfort and an intimate connection with religious faith and religious identity.

It is common to find images of traditional worship in the homes of our informants in the form of statuettes, printed leaflets, small devotional objects and souvenirs from places of veneration in Europe. These religious objects are sometimes placed where they will provide a function of blessing or safe-keeping. A small hand-sized leaflet with devotional prayers for daily worship at home is found on a bedside cabinet of one project informant alongside images of the Holy Family and San Pio (see Image 2 below). The leaflet offers practical tips for reciting the Rosary and its cover bears an image of the Virgin Mary.

Image 2: Devotional Material



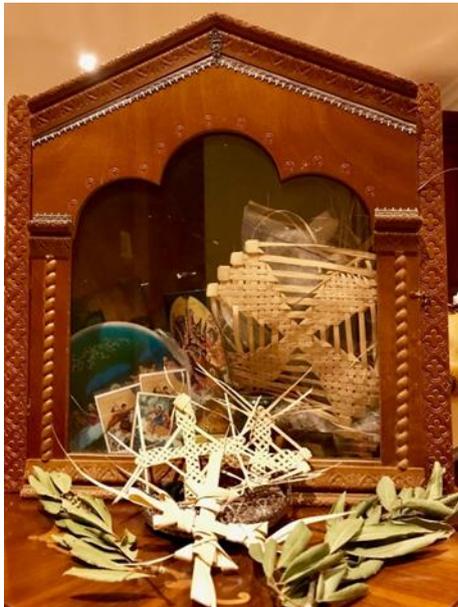
Greek migrants also brought with them many religious items which were to be used inside the home. Icons were the most common objects which were included either in their suitcases or their trunks. The icons were mainly of Christ or the Virgin Mary or icons of saints after whom the migrants were named, and local saints were also common. For example, some migrants originating from the Peloponnesian city of Pyrgos claimed that they kept the icon of St Charalambos in their homes and venerated the saint on the 10 February every year. During that day in their home-town in Greece they held a church service and a special procession of the

icon of the saint followed by a feast. In Adelaide, some Greek migrants collected money to import a large icon of St Charalambos and donated it to the church of St George, Thebarton. The saint is celebrated yearly with a special service held at St George and a procession around the church followed by a generous lunch.

Greek migrants kept their icons in a special cabinet which was on display in the master bedroom (see Image 3 below). The cabinet, called *εικονοστάσι* (*iconostasi*), also had an oil lantern which was later replaced by an electric or battery operated one. Some informants claimed that the lantern was lit daily and people prayed in front of it morning and night:

We had our icons in a display cabinet in the bedroom where we had the oil lantern as well. I would light up the oil lantern every day. I prayed some mornings but mostly nights in front of the icons. It was not a long prayer because I was always too busy. I was also burning incense every evening for my household to be blessed.¹³

Image 3: Devotional Cabinet



Our Italian informants also spoke about the importance of statues in the practice of home worship. The most common depiction of the Madonna in statue form was of a smiling young woman wearing a light blue mantle with both arms outstretched to receive and intercede for those who prayed to her (see Image 4 below). At the same time, she could be seen crushing underfoot a serpent representing evil in the world.

Image 4: Statuette of the Madonna



This statuette of the Madonna was brought out to South Australia by one of the Italian project informants in 1954 and has watched over the family for over sixty years from her vantage point of the wardrobe located in the main bedroom. A highly-venerated object, the statue provides a reassuring presence and grants a sense of protection to all the family. Her outstretched hands symbolise her protective influence over those who venerate her image. The couple who brought this statuette to Adelaide are devout Catholics who pray the Rosary together every evening. She is now sheathed in a plastic cover to protect her from further ageing and the ill effects of household dust.

One informant tells the story of a statue of the Madonna from the seminary of the Collegio della Sale where her brother had been enrolled as a pupil. This statue was encased in a wooden box and was regularly taken to the home of friends or relatives, whereupon it was unpacked, placed on a table with lit candles and the Rosary was then recited by the small gathering. When the informant migrated to Australia, the statue was sent by sea voyage in a travel trunk, together with other household belongings. The informant reports that the statue arrived safely and intact but the household articles surrounding it were cracked and irreparably damaged.

Another tale with a similar ending involves a large statue of the figure of Christ that was venerated and cherished by a young man in Italy. When he decided to emigrate to Australia, he asked his father's permission to be given the statue in lieu of his inheritance of family property. His father was appalled by his son's devotion to the statue and mocked him, referring to the statue in a derogatory way. That night the father had a nightmare and imagined that he was suffocating. In his dream a voice was heard upbraiding him for mocking and insulting the statue of Christ. When he awoke, the father was seriously frightened and repented of his behaviour. As a result, the son was permitted to transport the statue to Australia. It was reported that in the container where the statue was placed among household items, all the crockery arrived damaged or destroyed but the statue alone arrived unharmed and intact. Such stories that have been circulating among family members for over fifty years reinforce the special protective properties of the statues which proved to be unbreakable and enduring as they made the transition to the new world.

With the passing of years since the time of settlement in the 1950s and 1960s some of the religious objects used in the domestic sphere began to transition to public places of worship, and collective community forms of worship became more common.

Religious rituals and the inevitability of cultural change in the new Australian setting

The importance of family gatherings in the home to pray together, recite the Rosary, celebrate Easter and Christmas and other rites such as Baptism, Holy Communion and Confirmation constituted fundamental and unifying aspects of domestic family life for our informants, ensuring the maintenance of identity, faith and cultural connection. However, the places and manner of worship and ritual in South Australia presented a radically different setting from the family and small-town community cultures of their homeland. Therefore, our project informants, who were preserving age-old rituals and domestic customs in order to pass them down intact to the next generation were, of necessity, enacting transnational replicas and adaptations of the original rituals. Adapting traditional regional-specific ways to the new Australian environment was a fraught initiative because the influences of the Australian way of life on the second generation gradually eroded the authority and steadfastness of the first generation's preservation of cultural codes and religious traditions.

Today technology has enabled forms of public religious worship to be broadcast and disseminated via television and radio into private homes, and this new technology has brought changes to the religious practices of first-generation Italian and Greek migrants. As many of them are now in their late seventies and beyond, attending church services may be difficult. With satellite television, first-generation migrants can view mass gatherings of pilgrims and worshippers as seen in the image below (Image 5) depicting worshippers who are attending an outdoor mass celebrated by the Pope in Turin and broadcast by *Rai Italia*.

Image 5: Broadcast of Outdoor Mass Celebrated by the Pope



Many of our informants opt to watch the mass from the comfort of their own home through satellite TV or listen to the liturgy broadcast from local churches on the local Italian and Greek

community radio station. Aged care facilities run by migrant associations regularly broadcast mass from Europe or from local sites.

Conclusion

Our study explores how the cultural, religious and personal connections and deep meaning associated with the objects selected for the journey to Australia play a significant part in the transnational migration experience. These material objects imbued with cultural significance help to assuage feelings of cultural dislocation and loss and at the same time have a stabilising influence and help to make connections with customs and practices from the place of origin, offering a sense of identity maintenance, belonging and purpose in the creation of the new transnational home.

Our interviews have shown that the rituals enacted in both the Italian and Greek migrant homes in the 1950s and 1960s in South Australia came to represent a focal point of religious practice and that there are similarities and differences between both migrant groups as regards objects brought to the place of settlement. For many, in the early years after migration, the home represented a central place of worship and bore aspects of a shrine with specific objects functioning as mediators for certain religious practices and beliefs. Our findings suggest that as the two migrant groups gained confidence and a stronger sense of their identity in the dominant culture, there was a 'migration' of some of these objects and practices from the domestic and private sphere to a wider community-based expression of faith. Objects such as statues of madonnas and local saints that had been transported for private family-based worship in the new environment later became symbols of the maturation of these communities as they and their offspring developed community-based activities and public expressions of faith in the wider collectivity.

Today, for many migrant families, the home continues to function as a repository for religious traditions. The domestic sphere in which religious objects are displayed can be seen as a dynamic and fertile place for the cultural identification of Italian and Greek migrants where artefacts become part of diasporic sites of religious heritage, regional and local practices, and personal narratives of belonging. The objects act as a bridge between the present and the past, the country of origin and the place of settlement. Material culture presents one means by which these first-generation migrants have been active custodians of cultural values and traditions as a result of the migration experience. Our study also suggests how the meaning of these objects has changed and developed over time with the growth of community-based religious practices.

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¹ Between 1951 and 1968 this scheme brought 42,000 Italy-born migrants to Australia, but it is worth noting that in the three decades following WWII, the assisted Italian migrants were outnumbered by those without assistance (Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, (2001). *Immigration: Federation to Century's End 1901-2000*. Canberra).

² See Idini, F. 2012.

³ Barbaro, A. M., 2000: 595. See also Tolcvay, M., 2007.

⁴ Interview with an Italian participant G. C., 2016. This was also a feature of the Australian Catholic Church. See Campion, E., 1987: 146, “Many families said the rosary together in the evening”.

⁵ For the religious *feste* in South Australia see: Paganoni, T. (2007). The Italian Community in Australia:

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⁶ Prior to 1938, Greek immigrants to South Australia attended services in 'make-shift' churches; in Adelaide a resident priest, Archimandrite Germanos, conducted services at the Anglican Holy Trinity Hall near the Morphett Street Bridge and in Port Pirie a visiting priest attended St George Church which was a small wooden building acquired from the local Anglican Church (Tsounis 1990: 1-3).

⁷ One example of a wedding which was conducted in a private venue in Thevenard, South Australia, can be found in the newspaper *The West Coast Sentinel*. *The West Coast Sentinel*. Streaky Bay, SA: 1912 – 1954. Wednesday 22 January 1947: 3. [online, 15 December 2017]

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⁸ Interview with a Greek informant, F. S. 2016.

⁹ *Barrier Miner*. Broken Hill, NSW: 1888 – 1954. Saturday 2 October 1954: 2. [online, 15 December 2017] <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article49967786>].

¹⁰ Interview with a Greek informant, G. K., 2016.

¹¹ Interview with a Greek informant, F. S., 2016.

¹² Interview with an Italian informant, N.F., 2016.

¹³ Interview with a Greek informant, L.K., 2016.

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