"Lollies in the streets": Life narratives of a group of first generation women of Italian (Campanian) origin residing in Adelaide, SA.

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Abstract

Before arriving to settle permanently in Adelaide in the post-WWII era, Italian migrants had many expectations about what they would find in the new country of settlement, not least of which was a bizarre vision of the Aussie streetscape covered in lollies. For many, who had witnessed the disintegration of their community after the war, there was excitement at the prospect of departure and the building of a new future in the antipodes. Certainly, for some, the journey to Australia proved a rich and rewarding experience, while for others, their arrival resulted in disillusionment and anguish: a profound sense of shock and alienation.

My paper will discuss issues evidenced from the life narratives of a group of women of Campanian origin, all of whom are first-generation Italian Australians residing permanently in Adelaide. The data is derived from a research project of mine that is examining issues related to cultural dislocation (as the result of a migration and settlement experience), involving, for example, the maintenance of socio-cultural and religious values, traditional matrimonial practices, rites of celebration and the preservation of linguistic codes. My informant group comprises a regional sampling of Italian women, with the findings drawing upon transcriptions of interviews conducted with informants in their homes. The women, who are now 60+ years old, were asked to respond to a questionnaire in Italian surveying life in Italy, the voyage to Australia and subsequent settlement in Adelaide.

The paper will look at the extraordinary capacity of these women (raised according to strict codes of silence and obedience) who, upon arrival in the new country in the 1950s and 1960s, set about renegotiating cultural boundaries in order to facilitate the successful integration of themselves and their families into an unfamiliar social fabric, where the political, legalistic, cultural, linguistic and religious framework was radically different.