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## Daughters of the Diaspora: Using Autoethnography to Interrogate Impositions of Cultural Conformity

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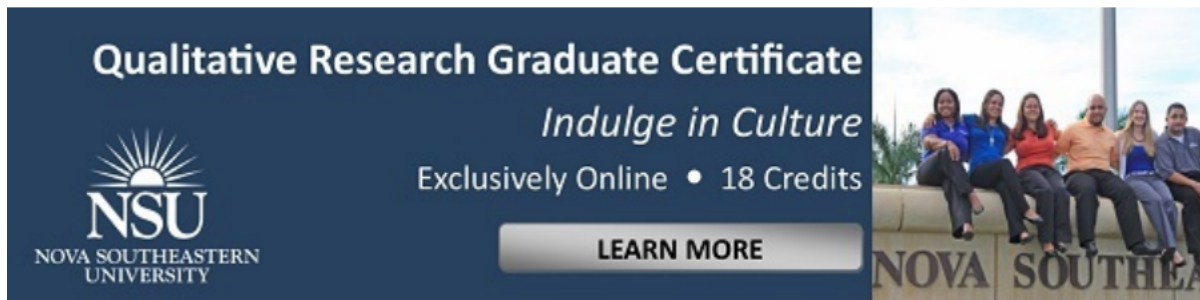
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### Abstract

In this collaborative autoethnography, I (Rose) discuss my personal experience with cultural transmission as cultural conformity. As a cultural hybrid and a daughter of a southern Italian proxy bride I share my narratives with a daughter of a Greek proxy bride (Maria). We find confluences in our experiences and understandings that suggest we are Daughters of the Diaspora. We may not be unique. Using a shared autoethnographical approach between ourselves and a collaborator (Jane), we construct and critique vignettes that capture and interrogate our understandings. This study offers a potential model for further inquiry by women who are daughters of migrant parents and who may have had similar experiences of the impositions of cultural conformity. This study is situated in Australia, but as global citizens, it behoves us in terms of social inclusion and social equity to recognise who our people are, the different way which people came to new countries and how that impacts the generations that follow them.

### Keywords

diaspora, daughters of proxy brides, cultural identity, autoethnography

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## **Daughters of the Diaspora: Using Autoethnography to Interrogate Impositions of Cultural Conformity**

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In this collaborative autoethnography, I (Rose) discuss my personal experience with cultural transmission as cultural conformity. As a cultural hybrid and a daughter of a southern Italian proxy bride I share my narratives with a daughter of a Greek proxy bride (Maria). We find confluences in our experiences and understandings that suggest we are Daughters of the Diaspora. We may not be unique. Using a shared autoethnographical approach between ourselves and a collaborator (Jane), we construct and critique vignettes that capture and interrogate our understandings. This study offers a potential model for further inquiry by women who are daughters of migrant parents and who may have had similar experiences of the impositions of cultural conformity. This study is situated in Australia, but as global citizens, it behoves us in terms of social inclusion and social equity to recognise who our people are, the different way which people came to new countries and how that impacts the generations that follow them.

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### **Introduction**

As an avid reader of accounts of post-World War II (WWII) migration, I (Rose) have been endeavoring to make sense of my own cultural identity as an Italian-Australian woman, born in Australia to Calabrian migrants (Wake, 2018), trying to unpack the impact of migration on daughters of migrants born in Australia like me. I (Rose) have explored and chronicled (in personal journals and in autoethnographical writing) the cultural practices of religion, language, and patriarchal customs as dominant influencers in my life as a cultural hybrid. This article began with my (Rose's) focusing on the influence of my southern Italian diasporic mother who was a proxy bride (a proxy marriage ceremony is one in which one party is represented by a substitute, in this case the proxy stand-in was for the husband), and who experienced the trepidation of leaving her country newly married to a man whom she had not met until her arrival in Melbourne, Australia. I (Rose) developed a compelling interest to research and write about proxy marriages to highlight the sanctioned role of the female gender and understanding what signified a woman's "place" in traditional Italian and Greek families. I (Rose) shared memories with another daughter of a proxy bride (Maria), using collaborative autoethnography as methodology which allows the interconnected perspectives of both of us through narratives (Chang et al., 2013). The experiences highlight our dissimilar yet in some ways similar upbringings, capturing via memories important events that inform both happy and traumatic times. This research provides us with the ability to discuss cultural hybridity inherent tensions of two young women from different backgrounds, which undergirds our thinking in relation to the concepts of culture, cultural practices, and cultural identity (Lovitts, 2005). In

this exploration, we were joined by Jane who responds to our stories. We find ourselves in this in a tangle of pronouns. We (Rose and Maria) use first person pronouns in our own stories. Jane similarly uses first person in her responses. We have tried to be clear, but we realize that three entwining voices might overlap. When we use plural pronouns, we are referring to our shared tripartite understandings and interpretations. To understand our stories of (two of us) being the daughters of proxy brides, a little historical and cultural background is necessary.

### **Migration in post WWII Australia**

The conceptualisation of Australia becoming a multi-ethnic society became a vague possibility as post WWII Australia recognised a need to “populate or perish.” Between 1945 and 1949, the Australian federal government’s Immigration Minister, Arthur Calwell was responsible for affecting change to increase the population by two per cent per year to achieve economic growth for the country (Appleyard, 1971; Jupp, 2007; Zubrzycki, 1994). Although British migrants were preferred, the Australian government recognised the imperative for their economy to grow meant attracting Europeans to populate the country (Collins, 1988) so that “by the 1950s and 1960s an increasing proportion of migrants came from southern Europe and countries such as Italy and Greece” (Grimshaw et al., 1994, p. 272). Many Italians embarked on diasporic migration during this time, a significant number coming to Australia; for context and significance I focus specifically on southern Italians.

### **The Italian Diaspora**

After WWII a significant diasporic wave of Italian immigrants came from southern Italy (Baldassar, 2004). Italy was a country experiencing extreme poverty and hardship. Australia provided a solution for Italians seeking to migrate to a country that promised a more abundant life. The 1947 Australian census reported that “the Italian born population in Australia consisted of 22,506 males and 11,126 females. Between 1947 and 1950 a further 33,280 Italians arrived” (Wardrop, 1996, p. 5). The mobility of post WWII southern Italian migrants between the 1950s and 60s was through chain migration (Baldassar & Pyke, 2014). Chain migration attracted and enticed people who lived in the same village or surrounding regions to immigrate. A sense of security of living in a close-knit Italian community in a new country was also another incentive that appealed to these new immigrants (Wardrop, 1996).

Some southern Italians (including Rose’s parents) migrated from the region known as Calabria in the south of Italy and lived in the villages of Dasa and Sant’Angelo, both located in the province of Vibo Valentia. This region was socially and economically depressed during and after WWII and became the catalyst for the highest number of Italian persons migrating to overseas countries (Cosmini-Rose, 2005). Cultural heterogeneity of the southern Italian chain migration could be debated as the beginning of the establishment for further Italian diasporas to Australia (Gabaccia, 2000; Mascitelli, 2015). Italy was not the only source of southern European post WWII diasporic migrants—some came from Greece where proxy marriage was also promoted.

### **The Greek Diaspora**

The signing of a Migration Agreement among Greece, Australia, and the Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration (ICEM) in 1952 prompted the subsequent mass and chain migration from Greece to Australia. This Migration Agreement and ICEM appeared to offer a resolution to Greek socio-political and economic problems of high unemployment, poverty, and political instability (Dimitreas, 1995). The Agreement was

instrumental in funding the journey for many (Palaktsoglou, 2013). The migration of Greek people to Australia followed a similar path to that followed by Italians. As in Italy, Greek migration, in its early stages, was male dominated. The number of Greek women remained low until 1952 (Palaktsoglou, 2013).

### **Marriage by Proxy in Both Italy and Greece**

As migration increased from both Italy and Greece the imbalance of the sexes became obvious. Concerning migration from Italy, the Australian government and the Catholic church implemented a formalised understanding to undertake proxy marriages as a legal constitution of marriage (Australian Archives, 1958a). This facilitated the migration of many brides to Australia from Italy (Scaparo, 2009). A proxy marriage constitutes that a marriage can be held with a person standing in as proxy (namely for the groom) to enable a marriage to be sanctioned overseas (for example, in Italy) that was then valid in Australia. This was common practice during the 1950s where many young women from southern Italy placed their marital futures in the hands of family, village friends, and acquaintances to provide a viable spouse who was often a stranger (Cronin, 1970; Kertzer & Seller, 1991).

The ritual of being married by proxy was a popular choice of betrothal for many wishing to embark on a diasporic journey as new migrants to Australia. What was not envisaged by some young women who had never met their spouse, was the daunting prospect of landing in Australia and meeting their husband. Sometimes the husband in Australia looked nothing like the photo that was provided to the bride in Italy. Commonly, the man would migrate first to the new country, usually accompanied by a male sibling whilst the rest of the family remained behind (Baldassar & Pyke, 2014; Iuliano, 1999, Scarparo, 2009). Of the “300,000 Italians who undertook the diasporic journey to Australia who were married by proxy, 12,000 were new brides” (Iuliano, 1999, p. 321). It usually “took about one year, from the date of the marriage, for the paperwork to be finalized and for the bride to make the long journey to Australia to be united with her husband” (Scaparo, 2009, p. 84).

Proxy marriages became the norm with many male Italian immigrants of single status wanting only to marry an Italian girl from their regions. The preference for an Italian girl from their homeland was because they spoke the same language, practised the same religion, adhered to the same cultural practices and traditions, and it was expected that the women were virgins (Simic, 2014). This cultural programming was a result of the long-established matrimonial cultural conventions in southern Italy, which Hyndman-Rizk, (2016) noted that “marriage systems are perceived to me immutable and inevitable” (p. 306). The allure of a new life and a new family in a new country became the motivation to marry someone from their place of birth, and many undertook the arduous journey by ship for 6 weeks to Australia. It was not unusual for proxy brides from Europe to travel accompanied by a trunk filled with a dowry, photos and markers of identity which was classified as “movable cultural heritage” (Agutter et al., 2013, p. 307).

There are few explicit research studies conducted on Greek immigrant women (particularly brides or female “unaccompanied”) in Australia (Nazou, 2013). For two decades (1952-1972) and under the auspices of the ICEM Agreement, the migration of Greek women to Australia exceeded 8,763 to be employed either in industry as factory workers or as domestic workers (Palaktsoglou, 2013). In migration discourse, Greek women were considered the invisible immigrants, whose individual migration experience is included in the male-dominated migration discourse (Palaktsoglou, 2013). Women immigrants comprised nearly half of all Greek migration to Australia, yet despite this, their history remains subsidiary with peripheral reporting in relation to diasporic marriages (Gavaki, 2003, p. 56). Greek female unaccompanied brides were predominantly from poor agricultural backgrounds, with little or

no dowry and with fewer prospects of marrying and having their own family in Greece (Palaktsoglou, 2013).

We rigorously searched the research literature to find other scholarly inquiries that focused on the experiences of women as proxy brides or as the daughters (and even granddaughters) of proxy brides. Focusing on Australian research we found several publications that included personal stories from women who had come to Australia as proxy brides (Palaktsoglou et al., 2013-14; Tao, 2019). Simic (2014) identified that the focus on Australian migrant men did not attend to the reality that “migrant women were particularly vulnerable to isolation” (p. 171). More broadly, both geographically and historically, forms of proxy marriage have existed in many cultures. For example, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Japanese women were able to marry Japanese men living in the USA by proxy (Lee, 200; Vaggalis, 2021). International marriage (including marriage by proxy) has existed in different forms at different times and situated in different cultural practices (Robinson, 2007). We found no research that captured the perspectives of the daughters of proxy brides, including from an autoethnographical perspective.

### **Positioning of Self**

The connection of culture, religion, and kinship was essential for the success of a proxy marriage, a held cultural identity, and a base for negotiation in a new country. Across generations of descendants of proxy brides, daughters inherit understandings that frame how they comprehend the complexities of enacted migrations and cultures throughout their life trajectory. Being in receipt of inheritances and yet another in a chain of descent (Hyndman-Rizk, 2016), I (Rose), am the daughter of a proxy bride and I position myself in this space. I descend from a line of strong women who have had various experiences of marriage, they have observed the marriages of others, they have been in proxy marriages, and I am myself on receipt of this descent line. I (Maria) am also a daughter of a Greek proxy bride, and my narratives contribute to our discussion of the phenomena of proxy marriages, albeit from a different culture. Our (Rose and Maria) lived experiences are not the same, but we both acknowledge the constant yearning to transcend our parent’s cultural dispositions and remove or modify the ethnic identity marker that we were bound by (Marino, 2020). Jane is not a daughter of a proxy bride; she is an Anglo-Celtic Australian who does not judge or presume the experiences ascribed in the narratives. Jane has long written with and about cultural and linguistically diverse groups. She offers considered responses for each narrative and asks challenging questions from an etic stance. Sometimes, the outside view can provoke different ways of thinking from those inside the bubble of experience.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions that drive our study were

- How can daughters of migrant proxy brides navigate the cultural transmission of a proxy life?
- How can the generational memories of lived experiences for daughters of proxy brides be interpreted as an opportunity for emancipation?

### **Methodology**

The primary focus of Collaborative Autoethnography (CA) is to employ a shared autoethnographical process that uses narrative vignettes as a way of writing about individual

experience within its cultural context (Chang et al., 2013). The creative process of collaborative autoethnography allowed both Maria and Rose to write their stories, making it possible for them to recognize and accept the risks of being vulnerable when sharing memories that evoked emotions (Adams et al., 2015). To do this, Maria and Rose independently wrote their own narratives from an emic position. They then shared their stories with each other and wrote a response based on their understandings of resonances and divergences. Jane then wrote from an emic perspective, suggesting insights and interpretations that reflect her more distant view. Together we entered a productive process that gave meaning and allowed sense-making (Denzin, 2009). As collaborative autoethnographers, we did not “analyze” each other, rather we read and reflected and then responded from our own personal and cultural frame.

Our collaboration of autoethnographical stories focused on the memories of individual lived experiences as daughters of proxy brides. The meaning of our (Maria and Rose) hybrid identity construction or lack of, is apparent within the shared stories that we position against a backdrop of a hegemonic culture and society. Our personal accounts are experiences that we use to “illuminate, interrogate cultural beliefs, practices and identities” (Adams & Herman, 2020, p. 1). Our combined narratives highlighted differences in nationality and culture whilst sharing similarities of perceived subjugation due to gender.

Our collaborative autoethnography began with Rose’s narrative *Changing Channels*. Maria responded in a reflection to how she felt after reading Rose’s narrative. This triggered her memory of an event that she felt compelled to write *The Gold Bracelet* in which she brings different cultural perspectives. Rose’s narrative *Repressive Tolerance* and Maria’s *Ice-cream castles in the air ... Tears and Fears – the Accordion* continued our collaborative writing. Rose’s stories evoked emic responses from Maria. In sharing stories, memories triggered more memories, allowing Rose and Maria to recognize parallel experiences. From a different perspective Jane wrote her responses. We three have a long standing and strong working relationship. We know and respect each other, but writing these stories and responses allowed us to recount our truth to each other and then subject it to inspection, like a prism turning in the light. We were nostalgic and emotional, we then stepped back and thought about what this collaborative autoethnography could offer us in understandings and perspectives. Memories are integral and crucial to the integrity of this study. Memory is a gift to “chart our lives by from the mundane moment to the majestic” (hooks, 2008, p. 5).

### Stories and Responses

We layer our stories and responses, alternating emic with emic, and emic with etic. We begin with Rose’s first story.

#### Changing Channels – Rose’s story

The art of conversation in my home when I was a young girl transitioning into a teenager was always around my future as a wife and mother. This was an important facet of my life from my parent’s perspective. It was from an early age that I enjoyed watching television and observing the dialogue that was exchanged between characters in a family scene and comparing it to mine. I remember asking my mother as a 10-year-old girl, why we did not live and speak to each other like the families on television. Her answer was clear and direct, we are not the same, we do not come from the same background, and I had to travel to Australia not even knowing what your father looked like, that is why we are not like them. Before I could ask my next question, she said “change channel.” What my mother meant by this phrase was that she no longer wanted to engage in this conversation. This proxy bride learned how to hide the past by learning an English phrase that allowed her to move on to a new moment in time

without having to immerse herself into an uncomfortable conversation. My mother had a knack for using Italian and English phrases or words that were intrinsic to the situation or circumstance she aligned them to. “Change channel” was a perfect metaphor for her, using a click of the dial or a press of the remote button to change channels on the television. This provided her respite from answering any questions that would require recollection of her past or justification for her present.

I soon learned this trait and found that it had its benefits when not wanting to deal with conversations that also brought about feelings of doubt or inadequacy. As a daughter of a proxy bride a common theme that was embedded around the history of my mother’s migration, was that I had better get used to being “second best.” The fact that she did not marry in a conventional manner had significant meaning for her, marrying this way made her feel second best. I was the second child in a family with four other siblings which ensured that I too felt second best. My marriage at the age of 17 was a traditional Italian marriage, heavily embedded with the prerequisites of the southern Italian culture (Wake, 2018). The festivities were all designed and chosen by my mother. From that moment on I learned to deal with anyone imposing change or control over my life by changing channels.

### **Maria’s Emic Response – Changing Channels**

The most powerful message I (Maria) had from Rose’s story was a sense of repressed anger and grief. “We are not the same” reverberated in my mind not from a position of humility or pride on the part of her mother but from a place of logic and inevitability. Rose’s mother’s ability to compartmentalize her life into accepting the differences of family life without reflecting, discussing, or expressing emotion brought forth an indescribable sadness. “Change channels” was the cry for a stubborn acceptance of a life that was “second best.” There was a futility borne from a sense that one had no power to change their life or what life gave them—Rose was destined like her mother to accept the inevitable consequences of a proxy wife’s future which was then passed on to her daughter(s). As a reader I felt it hard to resign myself to the depth of repressed anger and grief expressed by Rose’s mother’s resolute inability to watch the “channel” and not want to build a different future for her children. As a reader and mother of daughters I always dreamt of more opportunities and empowerment for my daughters beyond what I as a woman was able to achieve. I kept thinking I would want them to create their own “television show” as a metaphor for not changing channels but creating a channel that was different and as exciting as the one that did not represent the life and circumstances, they were living in due to choices I as a mother may have made or had made for me. I felt great empathy for what I perceived as the deep, hidden, and repressed anger of a young woman, now an older mother, who had been “forced” to marry as a proxy bride, abandoning the dreams of her own youth. What I could not reconcile was the act of “sacrificing” your offspring to that same future. I was left with “why?” why ignore the innocent question of a 10-year-old young girl, without offering hope? Why did Rose’s mother envisage a life for her own daughter that was “second best”? I was left saddened with a sense of my own anger towards a mother who could not or did not want to empower her own child and create a destiny that was more positive.

### **Jane’s Etic Response – Changing Channels**

Rose’s story and Maria’s response to it speak of a life of proxy—living someone else’s dreams. Destiny looms large—there is no argument, no possibility of change, just an inevitability of what will happen. Questioning is not permitted and if attempted met with “change channel,” reinforcing that there is nothing to discuss, all is ordained and deviation impossible. The mother’s life circumscribes the daughters—Rose’s mother had no options, no



possibility of personal preference, just marriage to a stranger, a world away. Rose had no options, just marriage to an almost stranger, within her social circle but largely unknown. Not only destiny/fate, but the notion of settling for the lesser, the second option, the “second best.” Individuality is not accepted, but Rose must accord with her mother’s plan, in some ways, having the wedding with pomp and ceremony that her mother was denied. Rose becomes a proxy herself, standing in for her mother’s aspirations and performing a proxy life.

### **The Gold Bracelet – Maria’s Story**

My mother as a proxy bride raised her two daughters in Australia with the metaphor of a gold bracelet. Growing up as teenagers she never failed to remind us that our life was like a gold bracelet worn as a piece of jewelry to be admired or worn as a reminder of being manacled to a man, a hard life, and a lack of opportunities. Leaving her village and poverty behind her at the age of 19 and travelling to a country so far to marry a man she had never seen, was for her a chance of liberation. As younger girls she told us stories of her life in the village and these romanticized visions of the freedom of outdoors and her own mother who she clearly loved very much, would often create questions of why? Why did she leave her mother? Why did she not fall in love and marry someone in her village like her sister and brother?

As we watched her favorite show “Bonanza,” a cheesy American western series one Friday evening on our black and white television, during one particular scene she stood up visibly upset and left the room. Following her into our small kitchen I found her slumped against the sink crying. Mum ... ? She looked at me and dabbing at her tears with the apron she always wore slowly she straightened up and with deliberation and a pleading tone said, “Promise me you will wear a gold bracelet one day.” I was so confused, what did that have to do with what happened? What gold bracelet?

The scene that had caused her distress was one of a cowboy dragging a native American Indian behind him, tied by his hands to the horse. She explained that she remembered as a young girl her father doing exactly the same thing to her mother, parading her past the village square and “kafeneio” where men congregated in the afternoon to share their day’s stories and have a drink. My grandmother had upset her mother-in-law and to show his mother that his wife was a chattel, a woman who had to serve her husband and his parents, he decided that this humiliation would appease his own mother and send a message to his wife that he dominated every part of her life. Women came out to watch and some quickly turned away sharing the pain and humiliation. My mother with tears explained her mother instead of walking and stumbling with her head down, stood tall and straight-backed looking straight ahead. “Nothing would break her spirit,” explained my mother with pride in her voice and a tear-stained face.

My mother was 10 years old when she witnessed this. When her father had finished and untied her mother back at their small home, my grandmother went inside and continued to cook. Throwing herself at her mother in a show of love and support, my grandmother knelt, stared her in the eyes and said, “I am too poor to give you a gold bangle so I will help you make one and then for all the women that will follow me, your daughters and their daughters. I want you to be brave and grow up remembering what you saw today and promise that this will never happen to you. Promise me!” My mother remembered every word and repeated it to me as part of my inheritance.

My mother said her “gold bracelet” was becoming a proxy bride. She came to a country where she worked and had power over her life, no man would humiliate her like her father had done. To her mother, “Your gold bracelet is to go to school, finish high school one day and become someone important, a teacher, a doctor, someone who did not have to work only in a factory as she did, you then must promise me you will help your sister do the same.” As a young child I just wanted to see my young mother happy, so I promised and the “gold bracelet”

was passed to the next generation. It was at this point crafted from the uncertainty, courage and fears of a journey of a proxy bride—my mother. My job was to craft it differently.

### **Rose's Emic Response – Gold Bracelet**

It is apparent to me from the first paragraph that cultural customs around gender were a dominant and an influential factor in the life of Maria's mother. The notion of conformity and adhering to her place within the hierarchy of her marriage was graphically expressed leaving me as a reader feeling a strong sense of sadness for this woman's ordeal. The overwhelming and quintessential essence of this vignette is the awareness and unwavering motivation of a mother who promotes the meaningful value of the gold bracelet.

The metaphor of the gold bracelet that being made of gold, is lauded as having and owning wealth and prestige by many cultures. The bracelet also symbolizes an infinite cycle and this was a clear message by Maria's mother to always remember that the gold bracelet was a reminder of hope, choice, and freedom. The symbolism and message offer a strong reminder for her daughters, granddaughters, and future generations of daughters to always have a strong sense and resolve of what is important in their life and to live it with purpose.

### **Jane's Etic Response – Gold Bracelet**

Maria's mother, another proxy bride, also carried memories of her own mother's belittlement and exhibited ownership dragged in public view for all to see. Carrying generational memories and her own of being destined to exist in particular ways, Maria's mother found resilience in holding on to her memory of her mother unbroken by public shaming. This resilience she gifted to her daughter, speaking of the imaged gold bracelet given from mother to daughter. This virtual manumission saw mother give daughter the right to defy, at least in thought and possibly in action. The large gold bracelet could also stand for the gold ring of marriage, in effect, a woman telling her daughter to form her own freedom in marriage and in life. These stories toll destiny unquestioned by one generation may be questioned by the next. Within cultural confines there are possibilities of realized aspirations and other ways of being.

### **Repressive Tolerance – Rose's Story**

From a very early age I knew that I loved singing. Singing and music were a source of bliss that I tapped into at every given moment. No one paid too much attention to me as a 5-year-old in the family backyard swinging as high as I could on the wooden swing set. I loved the momentum of the swing allowing me to reach exhilarating crescendos of height and notes. This ritual was my time and I enjoyed immersing myself in song and play until one particular day. As I sang a Beatles song with great gusto "she loves you yeah, yeah, yeah" my maternal grandfather walked past me, then stopped and looked at me. He groaned and said, "Go inside, go *lava* the plates and stop singing." The word *lava* in dialect meant wash. What he really was saying you should not be singing of love; your place is in the kitchen washing the dishes. This admonishment of my singing whilst playing as a child was the first incident that I experienced as a female in which I was suppressed and controlled by the patriarchy in my family.

As I grew older my parents became aware of my mature singing voice and encouraged me to sing at family events and even at weddings. The flaunting of a daughter with talent was also a ploy to attract a future husband. At the age of 13 my parents agreed to send me to singing lessons to learn more Italian songs for upcoming weddings. The Italian female singing teacher they chose was impressed with my voice and stated to my parents that I would indeed have a

career in the music industry. My parents refused this notion as they did not deem music and singing an honorable profession for a young woman. It was made quite clear that no daughter of theirs would have a career in music. I was devastated as I knew that this was my calling.

I continued to sing at weddings and large events with one particular wedding where I made a vow to my mother to never to sing again. This was as a result of her chastising me for dancing and moving to the beat as I sang a popular song. I was referred to as moving like a loose woman and I was to only stand still when singing. I kept my vow until the age of 14 when my uncle asked me to sing at his wedding which was being held in a small and conservative hall. I sang for him and his new wife and then only sang in private for myself and nobody else.

Like the gold bracelet from the previous vignette my experience of singing for my parents was an act of manumission. Shackled by cultural rules and emancipated when wishing to promote the singing prowess of their daughter.

### **Maria's Emic Response – Repressive Tolerance**

I loved the title of this vignette; both words juxtaposed in meaning offered the tension that lay deep in the words and emotions of this memory. Contemporary Australian society has resulted in the presence of bicultural children from many nations, Rose is one of these children who brought with her multiple possibilities for musical engagement within both her home and Australian or Western culture. This is evocatively described when she remembers herself singing a Beatles song. The young Rose in this vignette expresses real and experienced notions of issues of social integration, identity construction, and cultural maintenance being negotiated on a continual basis. She was made to feel guilty when she sang the Beatles song and duly sent by her grandfather to do more appropriately gender prescribed cultural activities such as washing dishes. I became emotional at the thought that a 5-year-old was not encouraged to play and express herself freely, instead her young mind was burdened with confusing messages—it seemed she was perplexed at the thoughts had she done something wrong in the eyes of her grandfather?

If only Rose's family understood the importance that her singing was for her at a deeply personal level—it allowed her to express herself and show the talent she had for what even at a young age was evident. The words: "I was devastated ... as I knew it was my calling" frame the enormity of this memory and vignette. Rose was not only bilingual and bicultural but now hid in a duality of identity; she created a liminal space referred to as a space occupying a position at, or on both sides of, a boundary. Rose sang without moving like a "loose woman" at family events yet "sang in private for myself and nobody else." Rose calls singing for her parents an "act of manumission." I had to look up the word; manumission and abolition are words both used to mean "freeing slaves" or "a release from slavery." More specifically though, manumission is the act of a slave owner setting slaves free, her parents freed her when they allowed her to sing. Rose says she was "shackled by cultural rules" the expression certainly for me brings forth the image of a slave. Rose states that her parents "emancipated" her when they promoted her singing talents at family events, emancipation unlike manumission involves government action—her family was in essence the authority and powers to be in her life. The question that was left with me after reading this vignette was, was Rose emancipated? Was living in that liminal space created by Rose to understand the conflict of converging cultural worlds "emancipation"? I was left with that question as it weighed into my feelings of sadness and profound loss at the end of the vignette. I kept thinking emancipation and manumission would in many circumstances bring a relief and joy of freedom. Yet, for Rose it did not feel like this and I was left with the image of a beautiful singing bird caught up in a huge complex sticky spider's web unable to move or sing freely.

### **Jane's Etic Response – Repressive Tolerance**

Rose loved to sing, holding it close within her when forced to stop by narrow cultural bounds. Singing was joy, obedience an absence of joy, a negation of self rather to be subsumed in proscribed behaviors—do the dishes, do not move like a *puttana*. Not only was voice denied, but music outside culture not permitted. Taking her voice was devastation, years later to be reclaimed by Rose who permitted herself to sing songs beyond culture that offered other ways of being, a performance of emancipation from mother, family, and cultural strictures.

### **Ice-cream castles in the air ... Tears and Fears – the Accordion – Maria**

The year was 1968 and I was 11 years old. We lived at the back of a Milk Bar where every day after school from 6 pm – 7 pm I had to “serve” customers allowing my mother a break to cook and prepare dinner. Our shop was open from 7 am in the morning till 8 pm seven days a week. When a customer entered the store a ringing sound was made from the attached silver bell on the hinges of the shop door. I came to hate that sound and still shudder when I hear the distinct sound of a tinkling bell. I stood behind the counter on a raised platform plank my father had made to assist my younger sister and I serve customers at eye level. As it was a quieter period for the store, I listened with abandon to a small transistor I had hidden behind the cigarette stand. I sang softly to my favorite song so happy it was playing.

*Rows and flows of angel hair  
And ice cream castles in the air  
And feather canyons everywhere  
Looked at clouds that way...*

The song was “Both Sides Now” (Mitchell, 2000). Joni Mitchell the long haired blonde folk singer that filled my heart with yearning and who from the very first time I saw her on television I dreamt of learning to play a guitar. I begged, cajoled, and repeated my wish to play a guitar every day to my parents. “I will serve in the shop every day and weekends for 3 hours and promise to get all As on my report card,” I earnestly told my Mum. My father smiled and would always say that if my mother agreed we could buy a guitar and find a teacher to teach me. Today, however, I was lost in my thoughts of singing holding a guitar like Joni Mitchell.

*But now they only block the sun  
They rain and snow on everyone  
So many things I would have done  
But clouds got in my way*

My dreams had been shattered when a week ago my mother brought an elderly Greek man to our home who was selling a piano accordion. My parents excitedly touched the instrument sharing memories of how this musical instrument was played in their village. Our visitor played a number of Greek folksongs that both my parents sang to, my father at one point twirling my mother to the beat. They both looked at me and said, “this is the instrument you will play ... not that Australian guitar”! I looked at this portable hideous half piano with bellows that opened and closed and the ugly leather strap that was positioned over the shoulder. This was NOT what Joni Mitchell would ever play! “What do you think”? asked my mother as she requested our visitor place the strap over my shoulder. “No!” I called out in Greek as I took three steps back. “I don’t want to play that ... it’s so ethnic ... it’s so uncool ... it’s a squeeze box not a guitar”!

My parents were angry, I had embarrassed them in front of their visitor. No sale was made, and they ensured that the visitor stayed for dinner and a formal apology was made by me, their “Australian” influenced badly behaved offspring.

*I've looked at clouds from both sides now  
From up and down and still somehow  
It's cloud's illusions I recall  
I really don't know clouds at all*

Joni Mitchell’s soulful words enveloped my heart ... why did my life have two sides? Why did my Greek world as a daughter of migrant parents disagree with my Australian visions of life and dreams? My mother believed that any woman who sang with a guitar was “Not honorable.” An accordion for her was a more serious instrument. I could be hidden behind the squeeze box not on show for an audience in the same way as the elegant Joni Mitchell held her guitar as if she was caressing it—an extension of her body, face, and voice. I had visions of trying to pump the bellows whilst finding the right keys on the piano accordion, lost to the needs of the instrument. I never learnt to play any musical instrument ... as a daughter of a migrant proxy bride, I had been held hostage, an unwilling slave to the customs and values of her Greek heritage and the music and instruments that were valued in her world. My second world, my Australian world, was “second best” like the gold bracelet in my earlier vignette, my “guitar” was not gold, it was not precious, it had no worth.

*And if you care, don't let them know  
Don't give yourself away  
I've looked at love from both sides now  
From give and take and still somehow  
It's love's illusions that I recall...*

### **Rose’s Emic Response – Ice-cream castles in the air ... Tears and Fears – the Accordion**

Maria’s use of Joni Mitchell’s song was profound and evoked emotional triggers for me when reading her vignette. The first verse of the song allowed the melodic life of an 11-year-old to flow during the course of her life in the milk bar and her adolescence. A dream of floating in life accompanied by her guitar being short lived by a parental decision and culture was indeed something I could relate to. The second verse of the song delivered the message of no agency and lack of identity for Maria. The Greek folksongs and instrument were important to Maria’s parents and provided them with much happiness which they also wanted to share with their daughter. However, Maria could only equate the piano accordion with being old and ethnic instead of the guitar which had symbolism of freedom and unconventionality. It had no ethnicity, no culture, just freedom.

Maria states in her story, why did my life have two sides? Her hybridity impacted on her dream of being the singer with her guitar which was an extension of herself. The music inside of Maria could not be unleashed whilst it was deemed as “not being honorable” to be a woman who played a guitar. Maria was thwarted by her parents’ choice of cultural music and traditions with no consideration for the musical choices that their hybrid daughter wished to follow. This only highlighted the lyrics in Joni Mitchell’s last verse as uncomfortable, sad, and a fluid numbness for Maria to experience.

## **Jane's Etic Response – Ice-cream castles in the air ... Tears and Fears – the Accordion**

Maria relished the broad, popular culture of wider Australia, hankering for music making that was evocative, sensual, and as expected, not to be tolerated in her family's notion of good Greek traditions. Maria strained against the "ethnic" wanting freedom of choice—the guitar not the accordion. Like Rose, the child Maria was captured in culture, and although permitted refusal of the Greek, she was not allowed freedom to choose. For both, singing and playing popular songs was not to be tolerated, seen as behavior unbecoming a young girl being readied for marriage. For hybrid children, a choice is made either by self or others; depending on the choice, something dies or at least sleeps until resilience becomes resistance and ultimately some degrees of freedom to choose. No one ever escapes their past completely—we carry it with us as a turtle carries a carapace. Even if we choose to ignore it, it is always there.

### **Discussion**

Understanding the impact that cultural customs and practices had on the second-generation daughters of proxy brides must be underpinned by literature that captures ancestral and social traditions. Drawing on Werner Sollors' theory of Consent over Descent (Sollors, 1988), we are increasingly aware of the correlation of the relationship between heredity and agency. Hemingway (1987) supports Sollors' theory stating that "consent relations describe relations of law or marriage, and consent language stresses the free agency of marital choice, personal destiny, and political fate" (p. 436). Descent was the inherited relationship to culture and family. The concept of being married by proxy can be attributed to arranged marriages which has been a long-standing tradition in the Italian culture with Hyndman-Rizk (2016) espousing this as an "endogamous arranged marriage within the patrilineage, the village community and sect" (p. 303). For both Rose and Maria their respective Italian and Greek heritages influenced their understandings of experience including both being the daughter of a proxy bride, which at times feels like navigating through the churning waters between the legendary Scylla and Charybdis.

Descent is imbued within traditional ideologies of culture whether it be Italian or Greek and it plays an integral part within the cultural conflict that was transferred to second generation daughters of migrant parents. Cultural transmission and the stereotypical expectations of migrant parents for their daughters to be a "good Italian girl" created issues of identity for many young women living in Australia as cultural hybrids (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1989, p. 49). There was a concomitant expectation for Greek daughters to be "good Greek girls" (Zam, 2023).

Both sets of narratives highlight the thwarted opportunities for Maria and Rose to carve and create their own unique expressions of their lives as young cultural hybrid women. Parental, societal, and cultural conservations and transmissions were dictated as they were of female gender and needed to fit the cultural criteria of being honorable and chaste (Baldassar, 1999; Pallotto-Chiarolli, 1989; Simic, 2014). The historical events that contributed to the diasporic experiences for our parents and many others, attributed to the fear of assimilation and racism which perpetuated a stronghold on cultural, religious, and family conventions and in turn did not and could not allow the welcoming of a hybrid cultural identity for any member of the family. It was not an unusual occurrence that diasporic movement impacted on relationships in families, individuals, group identity, everyday life, and home (McDowell, 1998).

### **Conclusion**

Merging past and present, the cultural traditions, practices, the good, the bad, the ugly, that the narratives expressed, now need to be deconstructed. The stories do not stop, there are

many and hearing the stories makes them impossible to forget. The importance of allowing one's identity to be manifest in tune with lived experiences and not be dictated by patriarchy, society, or culture. The narratives demonstrate that the life trajectory of creating a unique identity was thwarted for the two daughters based on the categorization, stereo typification within cultural/traditional/societal cages that they were locked into. Identity constructs do not promote the architecting of a sense of self, worth or purpose; they serve as labels to identify with and in turn creates a carapace of burden.

Our research serves our need to identify and name the signposts for a transformative life whilst acknowledging the past lived experiences of Rose and Maria as hybrid daughters of a proxy bride. Our research aims to inform the daughters of migrants that cultural and societal values do not have to determine how the trajectory of their life is determined in terms of marriage and identity, a true sense and respect of self will be the catalyst for women to have greater agency in the negotiation of marriage and over their own lives (Hyndman-Rizk, 2016).

Matters of cultural identity for daughters of proxy brides is under researched and important for this cohort, given the number of generations of migrant populations and given the impact of the 1950s until the 1970s of Greek, Italian, and other European migrants in Australia. The importance of shared narratives will assist to inform a wider demographic of how generations of mothers and daughters were an integral part of the historical fabric in building this country. We realize that our stories are not unique. They are not generalizable *per se* but as we stated earlier, 12,000 Italian women came to Australia post WWII as proxy brides (Iuliano, 1999) and it is possible that a similar number of Greek women came under the same arrangements. We surmise that the majority of those migrant women had families, including second generation daughters who would have been impacted by the imposition of cultural norms, choosing to acquiesce or resist or negotiate a path between. With each generation, more daughters are born, adding up to a sizable cohort within the wider population who balance hybrid identities. When we add other nationalities that had other forms of international marriages, we realize that we are talking about many women past and present. This did not just happen in Australia. Many countries at times built or rebuilt population by migration and all migrants carry culture with them like a carapace. We were surprised how little research has been undertaken about the understandings of lived experience of generations of women who straddle and negotiate culture. We hope that sharing our stories demonstrates the power of autoethnographical research, offering immediacy, inviting engagement, and illuminating a largely unconsidered aspect of women's migration.

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