Family alliances and "comparatico" among a group of Calabrian-Australian families living in Adelaide, South Australia

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The present study examines baptism godparenthood, the Italian spiritual kinship system (known as *comparatico*) among people originating from rural areas of Calabria, southern Italy, who migrated to Adelaide, South Australia, in the 1950s and 60s. The study specifically investigates the transmission of norms and the widespread observance of duties associated with the practice of *comparatico* among participants. Social relations among allied families produce social capital by generating high levels of obligations and expectations. Whilst the participants appear to be completely incorporated into the host society, they have maintained and reinforced spiritual kinship with non-kin people originating often from the same Calabrian village. The study reveals how the *comparatico* system evolves into an extended network influencing everyday life practices. It appears that non-consanguineous informants, after becoming compari (family allies), are bound by obligations and/or privileges involving both their private and socioeconomic lives.

Keywords: Godparenthood, compadrazgo, comparatico, Calabrian-Australians, family alliances, cultural transmission

FIELDNOTES (extract)

Sunday 8th of April.
I am invited by Family 6 for Easter Sunday lunch. Notwithstanding Family 6 is well aware of my research among Calabrians in Adelaide, I am introduced to guests as a Calabrian[1] musician (*u sonaturi*[2]), who has just migrated from Italy. I play traditional instruments like the Calabrian mandolin and bagpipe. I also originate from Calabria and since my arrival in Adelaide I have been invited to play these instruments at a number of community gatherings. This has its advantages as I am able to conduct a *quasi* covert participant observation (CPO) with the visitors and guests. Family 6 is composed of Giuseppe[3] (male, 78, migrated from Sinopoli, Reggio Calabria) and Rosa (female, 75, migrated from Sinopoli Vecchia). The couple has two sons, John (43, born in Adelaide, South Australia) and Connie (41, born in Adelaide, South Australia). John is married to Caterina (43, also born in Adelaide but whose parents originate from the same Calabrian village of Sinopoli). John and Caterina have two children (Joe, 9 and Pina, 7). Connie is married to Rocco (male, 44, born in Adelaide originating from Sant'Eufemia, circa 5 kilometres from Sinopoli). They have two children (Joe, 5 and Rosa, 3).

There are numerous cars parked in front of Giuseppe's house. The best park, under the carport, is reserved for Pietro and his wife Giovanna's car, the *compari,* who will come with their son Rocco (44, Giuseppe's godson) and his wife Maria (42) later in the evening since they are celebrating Easter with their own family. Giuseppe is already seated at the head of the table while his wife Rosa is in the kitchen. A row of children, Giuseppe's grandchildren, nieces and nephews, line up to greet their grandfather (*nonnu)* first, then their grandmother (*nonna*) with a kiss on each cheek. The children are all welcomed in Calabrian. Most of them reply to the greeting in Calabrian. Rosa, her daughter Connie, and her daughter-in-law, Caterina, scurry from kitchen to living room, collecting plates and preparing the food. John and his brother-in-law Rocco are in the garden talking about their work. John is a real estate agent and Rocco has an auto wrecker business. They start talking about Australian football.

There are now thirty-eight persons in Giuseppe and Rosa's house, mainly family, but also a few Calabrian friends. Caterina's mother Maria, a venerable widow, grabs me by the arm wondering about my relation with Family 6. She asks me: "*A cu apparteni*?" (Who do you belong to?). I make a mental note, that is an emblematic Calabrian question, the residue of traditional Calabrian networking, whereby elderly people address younger people in order to identify their social position in the village, or to discover potential relations of kinship or spiritual kinship. I am asked the same question three times by elderly guests. At lunchtime Giuseppe receives a call from his *compare* Pietro who is celebrating Easter with his family in his country house in Ashton, South Australia. The telephone is handed from person to person and is eventually returned to Giuseppe who finishes the conversation. Giuseppe is also Rocco's baptismal sponsor (Family 10, second generation, 44). Rocco and his wife, Maria, recently sponsored[4] Joe (9, Family 6) thereby reciprocating the *comparatico*. Giuseppe is the president of one of the seven religious Calabrian clubs of Adelaide. In the committee Rosa is the vice president, Rocco, their godchild of family 10, is the treasurer and Rocco's wife, Connie, is in charge for social events. When there are parties or events in the club, many other family members of the two kin are involved together with all their relatives. During these events, Pietro's wines are sold. Pietro is a wine producer and Giuseppe's *compare* (he was the baptismal sponsor of Giuseppe's son, John).

Giuseppe is the youngest of twelve children, who migrated to Australia in the 1950's from Sinopoli when he was 17 years old. He originated from a poor family. Giuseppe says that no one owned a pair of shoes. In spite of the poverty he has not lost his sense of humour. In recalling the old times, he tells me about his life and the Italian proverb *botte e panelle fanno i figli belli* (smacks and fritters improve children's education). He still remembers the blows (he points to a jagged scar over one eye) that his father used to give him. Sadly he says he never got to eat the fritters. His first job was in Mildura[5], where some *paisani* (people from the same village) had previously settled. He was a grape picker. Giuseppe was keen to relate his Mildura experience because the so-called *paisani* had exploited him. He says they had paid him only with grapes, and in return wanted him to pay real money for the cold stable he rented. Giuseppe ate grapes for lunch and dinner. In telling of his experience, Giuseppe cries. After three months he decided to move to Adelaide where he found a job at the General Motors Holden car plant where he worked for more than 30 years until his retirement. His Australian bosses used to call him and his Mediterranean mates "blackie", but at least, Giuseppe says, he was paid real money and could afford to eat properly[6]. Rosa also originates from Sinopoli where she shared a bed with three sisters. The night before migrating, she was bitten by one of her sisters who was dreaming she was eating meat. Her father had migrated first, and was followed 10 years later by the rest of the family. Rosa has always been an housekeeper. Giuseppe is a musician. He brought his *organettu* (small accordion) from Italy. He has already taught his nine years old grandson Joe (English equivalent of Giuseppe) how to play the *organettu*. Joe tells me that he really likes playing this instrument (an older cousin says that little Joe did not want to learn it and was pretty much forced to because of his "privileged" position as the first male grandson).

INTRODUCTION

Patterns of spiritual kinship have been investigated by an extensive anthropological literature. Among the pioneering studies were those conducted in North, Meso and Latin America (Mintz and Wolf 1950, 1967; Foster 1953; Pitt-Rivers 1971; Deshon 1963; Middleton 1975; Ossio 1984; Horstmann and Kurtz 1979; Gudeman 1975; Gudeman and Schartz 1984; Nutini 1980, 1996; Nutini and Bell 1984; Frishkopf 2003; Ebaugh and Curry 2000; Killick 2008) and Philippine (Hart 1977; Dizon 2011). Other studies focussed on Greek spiritual kinship (Boissevain 1979; Du Boulay 1984; Campbell 1964), whereas others on Spain, Corsica (Pitt-Rivers 1976, 1977; Fine 1987, 1994) and more recently on Romania (Vasile 2008). Studies among Northern Italians were conducted by Yanagisako (2002), who shed light on the relevance of *comparatico* as a business partnership strategy, and Sellan (1987) who conducted research in rural Trentino Alto Adige (North Eastern Italy). More recent studies have focussed on historical changes of godparenthood practices and its economic benefits, particularly on variation in number and gender of godparents before and after the Council of Trent (Alfani 2007, 2009; Alfani and Gourdon 2006, 2010, 2012; Alfani, Gourdon and Vitali 2012). Southern Italian godparenthood, in particular the exchange of material gifts and obligations, has been reasonably well investigated (Gallatin Anderson 1957; Moss and Cappannari 1960; Brögger 1971; Moss 1981; Miller and Miller 1978, 1987; and Gioielli 2002). Moreover, Teti (1978, 2004), Resta (1987), Palumbo (1987, 1991, 1997) and Piselli (1981, 1987) described *comparatico* as a social, economic and political resource, whereas Minicuci (1981, 1989), Signorini (1981, 1982, 1983), and

D'Onofrio (1987, 1997) investigated the roles and relationships of social actors within the kinship sphere.

The present study also follows in the tradition of Italian cultural anthropological studies which over the past 130 years has researched Southern Italian rural classes and their social and cultural practices (Pitrè 1882; Basile 1957; Gramsci 1975; De Martino 1961; Teti 2004; Lombardi Satriani 1997; Signorini 1981; Piselli 1981, 1987; Minicuci 1989; Lombardi Satriani and Meligrana 1982; Ricci 1996; Cirese 2005, 2010; Clemente and Mugnaini 2001; Dei 2002, 2010). Many of these studies viewed southern Italian peasants as a subaltern social and political class (Gramsci 1975; Cirese 2005). This view was based on the analysis of deep-seated social and class divisions, which existed in Italy until the 1960s. Calabria has always been one of the poorest regions of Italy, largely forgotten by central administrations (Teti, 2004). Many Calabrians responded to the crushing poverty by adopting a system of mutual support through networking, patron-client relations and family alliances among members of the same village, the *paisani* (Moss 1981; Minicuci 1989).

In rural and isolated areas of Calabria, scepticism and resentment towards government institutions was common among villagers (Movilia 2011). People learned not to rely on outside authorities for support or protection. Moreover, those outside a person's family were viewed with suspicion (Martinelli 1989). Values of honour, respect, morality and loyalty, many, as claimed by Moss (1981), with a feudal origin, were widely observed by inhabitants of the Aspromonte mountain region (Figure 1). Peasants, in such areas, conceived and interpreted their lifeworld in opposition to the official culture expressed by the Italian hegemonic class, the dominant group that maintained institutional power (Thomas 2009). In meeting social needs through family alliances and other folkloric cultural strategies such as magic, music and poetry, Calabrians applied their "view" of the world in opposition to the political and cultural power of the dominant society (Gramsci 1975). The *quasi* absence of State authorities in many aspects of life, including health and social welfare, increased the reliance on State-surrogates such as the Calabrian Mafia (*'Ndrangheta or onorata società*). This criminal association, which originated largely from the same rural villages of the participants of the present study, draws much of its strength from the closed system of family alliances (Minuti and Nicaso 1994; Dondoni *et al.* 2006). In this context, *comparatico* appears to be a key cultural mechanism which enables members to establish new ties, gain protection, and to receive and reciprocate favours.

In the present study *compratico*, like the *compadrazgo* of Central Mexico and the Philippines, is considered a system composed of relationships established in critical life periods such as baptisms, confirmations and marriages (Signorini 1981; and Horstman and Kurtz 1979)[7]. Such a fictive kinship is a family-type relationship based not on blood or marriage. Rather, it is seen as a tie consecrated by religion, involving a triadic relation among the child, his/her parents, and the godparents (Ebaugh and Curry 2000). In Italy, the godfather is generally called *padrino*[8] (*compare*, or *cumpari* in Calabrian) and the godmother *madrina* (*comare* or *cummari* in Calabrian). This person, during the Christening rite, promises to share the responsibility of the child's education with the child's parents. The godparents are said to be tied by the bond of San Giovanni (St. John, patron of Godparents) for nine generations (Moss 1981; Palumbo 1997). However, from the Middle Ages, and particularly in wealthier regions of Northern Italy and Europe, *comparatico* was also considered an *instrumentum regni* due its role of creating vertical alliances, related to practices of patronage and clientship, and strengthening the economic ties between families of differing social and economic standing (Yanagisako 2002; Alfani and Gourdon 2010). In the Philippines and in Central Mexico, on the other hand, *compadrazgo* was considered an adaptive mechanism used by indigenous people to cope with stressful conditions during the post-conquest period (Dizon 2011; Hortsman and Kurtz, 1979).

Similarly, in Calabria, due to the insecurity and instability of a region located in the "underdeveloped" periphery of Europe, rather than increasing families' social and economic status, *comparatico* played a strategic role in regulating the security and safety of rural communities by mediating hostilities among families. By establishing a reliable local ally for the welfare of the family, *comparatico* may be seen as a coping strategy in the absence of State authorities. In such an unprivileged environment, where jealousies and old resentments among families could last for generations, the institution of *comparatico* was also a social device which limited the number and extent of feuds. The key factor of this alliance is the irreversible amity among spiritual kinship allies, which is characterised by a "complete taboo to hostility" (Miller and Miller 1987). Once the alliance is established, amity is "frozen in time", regulating families' conduct and proscribing all arguments or vendettas (Palumbo 1997; Lévi-Strauss 1948).

In Calabria, the godfather becomes a family ally and the spiritual kinship involves not only the people directly concerned in the religious ceremony, but all members of the two families, leading to the creation of an extended and fictive family, or multiple family alliance. Notwithstanding previous studies of spiritual kinship which have emphasised the canonical function and emotional power of the rituality as one of the main factors that bond the two families, Calabrian *comparatico* also appears to play a significant socio-economic role.

In this light, it is useful to consider c*omparatico* as a form of social capital which is deployed in the reproduction of social class privilege and inequalities (Bourdieu 1986). Coleman (1990) argues that social relations produce social capital, firstly, by generating high levels of obligations and expectations, secondly, by providing what he calls information potential, and, thirdly, by generating norms and effective sanctions. He also stresses the importance of close social networks for the creation and maintenance of social capital which, in turn, allows the emergence of norms and increases the level of trust among the members of the network. According to Reynolds (2010), social capital has been instrumental in understanding how individuals belonging to subordinate groups might improve their socio-economic status by deploying and investing in a range of different capitals (economic, social, cultural and symbolic).

Social capital can be generated through three types of networks:. *bonding* capital refers to informal networks of families and friends (Gittell and Vidal 1998) generally considered as a means 'to get by' (Poortinga 2006); *bridging* capital refers to relations between heterogeneous group (usually in terms of social identity, economic status); and *linking* capital which refers to relationships between people across formal or institutionalised power in society (Szreter 2002). Bridging and linking capital have been defined as ways to 'get ahead' (Poortinga 2006). This theory has prompted scholars to explore the relationship between ethnicity and social capital (Cheong 2005; Dwyer 2006; Evergeti and Zontini 2006; Goulbourne and Solomos 2003; Portes 1998; Zontini 2007). The field work carried out for the present study over an extended period appears to suggest that an important component of the maintenance and strengthening of social relationships was the bonding role of godparenthood in the network systems of the participating Calabrian families living in South Australia.

In Australia, there have been relatively few studies that examine the social milieu of Italian immigrants from an anthropological perspective. Exceptions are Baldassar (1999, 2005, 2007) and Cronin (1970). The first worked in Western Australia, focussing on gender and sexuality among second generation Italo-Australian youth and more recently on the mobility of care (Baldassar and Pesman, 2005). The second is remembered for her seminal study, *The Sting of Change: Sicilians in Sicily and Australia*, presenting an analysis of the dynamics of cultural change. Her subject was Sicilian social organisation, both in its "native" surroundings and after transplantation to Australia. Cronin (1970: 49) claimed that in Southern Italy *comparatico* is not nearly so strong or so important as it is in Spain or in

Spanish Latin America. She also reported that in Sicily when the baptismal godparents are not relatives they are rarely seen afterwards unless they already happen to be good friends with the child's parents. Furthermore, she observed that none of her Australian participants had made a new *compare* through the bond of San Giovanni adding that this practice is never used among the second-generation children. One of the objectives of the present study will be to compare these results with those of the Calabrian-Australian participants.

In spite of the importance of social networks in the Australian immigrant context, the institution of fictive kinship has not been exhaustively examined. Little comparative and qualitative analysis among different groups has been done regarding the structure and function of *comparatico* and to what extent its norms are applied and transmitted within the Italian-Australian social network. In order to understand godparenthood, it is necessary to depict the specific contents of such ties: mapping, on the one hand, the actors that enter into that alliance, critically deconstructing participants' lives and, on the other hand, as suggested by Vasile (2008), mapping the social interactions of participants.

CALABRIANS IN AUSTRALIA

The "Economic miracle" which overturned the depression and the governmental crisis in the rest of Italy between the 1950's and 1970's, was slow to arrive in Calabria. While Central and Northern Italian cities experienced unprecedented growth, rural Southern villages became increasingly depopulated. During this period, first generation participants of the present study migrated to Australia. The Italian-born population in Australia reached its peak of approximately 290,000 persons in 1971, when it made up 2.3 per cent of the total Australian population. At the time, over 40 per cent of persons born in Italy were living in Victoria, 28 per cent in New South Wales, 11.4 per cent in South Australia, 10.5 per cent in Western Australia, 6.9 per cent in Queensland and almost 2 per cent in the Territories and Tasmania. In the 1970s Calabrians represented the largest percentage of any Italian regional group, with more than 47,400 migrants. According to Cosmini-Rose and O'Connor (2008), in 1976, Calabrians represented 24 % of the Italy born population in New South Wales. In Western Australia the Calabrians (20%) were as numerous as the Sicilians. In the Australian Capital Territory they represented 20% of the Italian born migrants and they were as numerous as the migrants from Campania. In Victoria, the Calabrians (25%) were the second largest group after the Sicilians (30%) and in South Australia they were the second largest group (24%) behind the migrants from Campania (28%). Currently, in South Australia, there are nearly 25,000 Italian-born persons and more than 80,000 person of Italian origin.

The great regional and social differences in their country of origin were a feature that Italians transferred to Australia (Castles *et al*. 1992). Calabrians continued to represent a subaltern class and found it difficult to assimilate to the Australian hegemonic culture (Castles and Vasta 1992). Some studies (De Fina 2005; O'Connor 2004) observed that many Southern Europeans were subjected to discrimination based on their skin colour and on their association with poverty, low education and organised crime. The practice of *comparatico* may be seen to respond to the concrete needs arising from the subaltern condition of many impoverished societies among the Mediterranean basin, including Calabria. *Comparatico* played, and continues to play, a role in mitigating hostilities within the immigrant community (Ebaugh and Curry 2000). This is in line with Zontini's (2004) studies among Moroccan and Filipino migrants in Italy and Spain and to Cavallaro's (1981) study with Calabrians in the United Kingdom. The subaltern position of these minority groups leads to the development and maintenance of a system of networking as a form of social capital in the "inhospitable immigration society" (Cavallaro 1981).

Fleeing the poverty and lack of opportunities in Italy and experiencing isolation and open hostility directed at non-British migrants in Australia, Calabrians continued to maintain many of the 1950s folkloric rural practices in the host society (Chiro and Marino 2012). Many Calabrians migrated during their teens and became the first generation of Calabrian migrants in Australia. As claimed by Lévi-Strauss (2011), when secular habits crumble, migrants in diasporic contexts, may experience an identity crisis. In De Martino's (1977) words, they suffer a *crisi di presenza* (crisis of non-being), which is overcome via strategic cultural practices. Like many other minority groups, in order to affirm their "presence" in the host society, Calabrians preserved their "traditional" sources of collective identity, within the micro domain of the family and the meso domain of the community (Huber 1977; McCrone and Bechhofer 2008; Crowley and Hickman 2008; Richmond 2002). The concentration of business, sporting, social and religious institutions together with the organization of cultural and religious festivals areas of high Italian concentration altered the urban and cultural ecology of many Australian capital cities and strengthened the Italian community's sense of identity (Chiro 2008).

The outcome of such identity affirming strategies is visible at the Italian Carnival held annually in Adelaide, South Australia and at the seven annual religious *feste* celebrating the patron saints of the villages from where the first generation migrants originated (O'Connor 2004). These celebrations played, and continue to play, an important role in connecting *paisani* and affirming their sense of belonging. Equally important is the institution of *comparatico* that appears to be related to cultural patterns inherited from the Aspromonte region of Calabria, culturally linked to other Southern Mediterranean societies (Lombardi Satriani and Meligrana 1982; Cirese 2005).

Participants of the present study settled in Adelaide in the period between 1950 and 1972, which marks the high point of post-war Italian migration to Australia. First generation members originate from two contiguous areas of Calabria: the Tyrrhenian side of the Calabrian peninsula, on the slopes of Mount Aspromonte, specifically the villages of Platì, Sinopoli, Taurianova, Sant'Eufemia, San Martino and Benestare, and the Ionian costal side including the villages of Caulonia Marina, Palizzi Marina and Bianco (Figure 1). The name Aspromonte, which literally means "harsh mountain", is a rural and relatively isolated area located at 840 metres above sea level, sixty kilometres from Reggio Calabria, the former capital of the region and largest city. Participating families reside mainly in the northern suburb of Salisbury and in the Western suburbs of Adelaide (West Lakes, Royal Park, Flinders Park, Kidman Park, Seaton and Glenelg). The relatively high concentration of groups of Italian migrants in specific suburbs of Australian cities has been noted in previous studies (Bertelli 1987; Hugo 1993; Chiro 1999; Cosmini-Rose and O'Connor 2008). The establishment of ethnic concentrations, if not entire neighbourhoods, has been interpreted as a means of protection for migrants against the exogenous influences of the dominant society (Gramsci 1975; McCrone and Bechhofer 2008; Castels and Miller 2009).

METHODOLOGY

The fieldwork among members of the Calabrian community of Adelaide covered a 14-month period, from September 2011 to November 2012. The study group comprised 14 families with a total of one hundred and fifty-one participants, seventy-eight males and seventy-three females, including twenty-eight first generation, sixty-eight second generation and fifty-five third generation participants (Table 1). Participants of the present study, mainly the first generation immigrants were recruited among the ones who attend the Saint Joseph club of Salisbury (SA) and some who volunteers annually at the Saint Hilarion Feast (Seaton, SA). These key informants expressed their will in participating the project, have given their informant consent and introduced the researcher to their family. The participating families are not consanguineously related to each other (their genealogy is illustrated in Figure 2). At the time of the study, the median age of the first generation was seventy-six years. The median ages of the second and third generations were forty-four and twenty years respectively. Participant observation was the key strategy used for gathering data. One of the researchers, who plays traditional Calabrian instruments, was originally introduced to the families as a musician rather than an anthropologist. In so doing, the researcher was able to conduct a *quasi* covert participant observation (CPO), witnessing and sharing intimate details of informants' family lives, such as their food preparation, conversations, gossiping, arguments and jokes. General personal data and collection of genealogies were gathered in a more structured way on subsequent visits. Research data were gathered through questionnaires, structured, semi-structured and unstructured interviews conducted in the participants' own homes. Formal and informal meetings and community social events, such as Calabrian festivals, religious feasts, and community fund raisers were attended on a regular basis. The researcher also accepted invitations for Christmas, Easter and other occasions, such as birthdays, engagements, weddings and funerals. Case studies, story

histories and informants' personal narratives were collected during follow-up visits. Although all the participating families are well known to each other through varies community activites, this is an additional layer of networking due to the godparenthood bonds.

PROXIMITY AND SOCIAL CONTROL AMONG *COMPARI*

Participants in the present study generally live in close proximity with each other and in specific suburbs of Adelaide, South Australia, where notable numbers of Calabrians have settled. As previously indicated, 85 per cent of the first generation, 80 per cent of the second and 65 per cent of the third reported living in these areas to the West and North of the Adelaide CBD. This is in line with previous research (Bertelli 1987; Chiro 1998; Cosmini-Rose and O'Connor 2008) on Italians in Australia and their distinctive metropolitan distribution.

Of the fourteen families who participated in the present study, eleven are tied by baptismal godparenthood (*comparatico*). There are cases of reciprocal godparenthood corroborating a previous alliance. According to Du Boulay (1984), such bonds, called *katamerìa* among Greek families, are established in order to strengthen relations among the allied groups, the *kombàros* and have the purpose of emphasising and reinforcing pre-existing economic relations (Killick 2008). Figure 3 illustrates the *comparatico* bonds among the participating families. Participants claimed a clear preference in having a Calabrian *compare*, with 76 per cent reporting having a Calabrian *compare* and the remaining 24 per cent having an Italian *compare* not of Calabrian background. The preference for intraregional, if not intra-village *comparatico* appears to be associated with the Calabrian practice requiring the establishment of "safe" links among "known families". These data differ markedly from other research (Nutini 1996; Frishkopf 2003; and Mintz and Wolf 1967) which claim that bonds between migrants families diminish with the inevitable contact with the host society and a de-territorialised migrants' culture. According to Mintz and Wolf (1967) "spiritual kinship has disappeared almost completely from areas which witnessed the development of industrial capitalism, the rise of a strong middle class, and the disappearance of feudal and neo-feudal tenures". In the present study, on the other hand, it appears the role of spiritual kinship as social capital continues to play a significant role for the participants.

As shown in Figure 3, the first generation spouses of Family 1 are the *compari* and *commari* of the second generation male participant of Family 2. The second generation female participant of Family 1 is the *commare* of the third generation female participant of Family 9. In Family 5, first generation spouses are the *compari* and *commari* of the second generation female participant of Family 4, who, together with her husband has become the *compari* and *commari* of a third generation male participant of Family 5 (return Godparenthood). The first generation male participant of Family 6 is the *compare* of the second generation male participant of Family 10 who is also *compare* of a third generation male participant of Family 6 (return Godparenthood). In Family 7, the first generation male participant is the *compare* of the second-generation male participant of Family 13. Family 8 does not have Calabrian *compari* among within the 14 participating families. The first generation female participant of Family 9 is the *commare* of the second generation female participant of Family 12. Family 11 has Calabrian and Campanian *compari* outside the study group. The second generation spouses of Family 13 are the *commari* and *compari* of the third generation female participant of Family 7 (return godparenthood). The second generation spouses of Family 14 are the *compari* and *commari* of the third generation male participant of Family 12.

Table 2 shows a number of *comparatico* alliances among families originating from the same village. Specifically, there are 6 godparenthoods among people originating exclusively from the Aspromonte hinterland (Platì, Sinopoli, Taurianova, Sant'Eufemia, San Martino and Benestare), 4 completely from Caulonia and one between a family from Caulonia and one from Platì. The geographical isolation of these mountain villages in Calabria, together with their socio-historical background and the key influence of elder members, may have influenced participants of the present study to choose their godparents from a small circle of non related families originating from contiguous areas, if not the very same village, in Italy. In addition to local parochialisms of empathy/hostility towards nearby villages, so and so suggests (Lomabrdi Satriani 1980), there are also ethno-historic motivations that may have led participating families to establish community based *comparatico* bonds.

The present results differ from Sellan's (1987) study of the rural community of Mòcheni, Trentino Alto Adige, a Northern region that borders with Austria, where the practice of *comparatico* calls for grandparents to act as godparents. In the present study, informants confirmed the more recent tendency among younger generations of the Italian-Australians to select as godparent a relative such as a parent's cousin. The preference of choosing a relative as godparent became more widespread in Northern Italy after War World II and in Southern Italy only after the 1980s (Palumbo 1991). However, this tendency has not taken hold in rural southern Italy due to the cultural residues of forming a bonding alliance outside the kin milieu in order to provide an additional social capital (Alfani, Gourdon and Vitali 2012; Lombardi Satriani 1980).

THE VERTICALITY OF COMPARATICO: A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

In the families participating in the present study, it appears that godparenthood ties families with roughly equal economic status. In the Calabrian milieu, godparenthood is structured vertically. Piselli (1987) claims this may reflect a desire to link with a "more powerful" (usually a non-kin) *compare* in order to overcome social, economic or political inequalities. The *compare* is usually older than the grandson/granddaughter, this also emphasises the verticality of the relationship which address the requirement of the respect, if not out right submission, derived by the needs of the Southern Italian family (Gambino 1974). Furthermore, the verticality is legitimated according the theological perspective, which imposes the supremacy of the spiritual dimension over the natural one (Gudeman 1975).

In the present study, however, verticality is expressed almost exclusively by the age differential between *compare* and godson/daughter. However, since the marginal role played by women in the Calabrian and in some Mediaterranenan societies, it appears that the *compare* is more respected than the *commare*.

The *comparatico* of participants presents the following hierarchical structure: the godfather occupies the apical position, followed by the godchild's parents and then the godchild. Such a hierarchy is identifiable by a number of every-day practices. For instance, when the godchild's family invites the godfather, he must be served first, he generally is given to sit at the head of the table, in place of the godchild's father. Special attention is paid to the godfather with home visits, telephone calls and presents, such as bottles of vintage wine, olive oil, and other homemade products. These are signifies of the respect due to the *compare*

The verticality of *comparatico* is also observed in linguistic expressions. The terms of address consist of variant forms of the word *compare* (or *commare* for females), they differ from referential terms by the use of diminutive forms and the choice of the appropriate pronoun. In Calabria, the godfather and the godchild's parents address each other with the term *compare*. However, the godchild, even as an adult, is called by the godfather with the diminutive terms: *cumparuzzu* (*or cumpareddhu*) if male and *cummaruzza* (*or*

cummareddha) if female. Furthermore, strategic use of different pronouns prescribes that the godchild and his (or her) parents must use a formal register when talking to the godfather. Specifically, they use the respect formal form of address *Voi* (second plural person, formal) instead of the (second singular person, informal) pronoun *tu,* to mean *you.* Consequently, the *compare*, from a dominant position, uses the informal pronoun *tu* when talking to the godchild or to his or her parents. These data are in line with *compadrazgo*'s studies among Latin American societies, where lifelong friends, or siblings, who have always spoken to each other informally (using the informal Spanish second-person, *tú*) address their godfather by using the formal pronoun (using the formal Spanish second-person, *usted*) as a form of respect (Forster 1953).

Even though 60 per cent of young participants normally use English in speaking with their *compare*, they are aware of the appropriate uses of the terms of respect in Calabrian to be used when addressing their godfather. This awareness clearly goes beyond the individual level of Calabrian language. All first generation participants stated they had never refused a favour to their *compari* who must be treated with deference and hospitality. Similarly, younger participants reported doing the same in order to maintain the family bonds, because "*that's what it is*" or because "*I do like my dad does*". A second generation male participant reported:

> "…I don't know…I guess it's our tradition, do not ask me why… I cannot say no to my *compari*. I do it for them, for my dad…that's what it is…"
> [Interview, Seaton (SA) December 2011]

COMPARATICO DUTIES AND RESPECT

The fact that participants are bound by obligations to persons who are not kinsmen, emphasises the significance of this cultural practice which ensures an indissoluble bond is created between two families. Like the *comparatico* investigated by Miller and Miller (1987) and the *compadrazgo* studied by Pitt-Rivers (1971), the spiritual kinship between the allied families is characterised by the proscription of conflicts and the prescription of amity. According to Palumbo (1997), tie of amity is irreversible, in other words, Calabrian *compari* should reciprocally show a pattern of harmony which is "frozen in time". Such displaying of amity does not necessarily coincide with friendship *per se*. Within the Calabrian institution of *comparatico* resentment is completely banned since they are free of the dependence of sentiment of mutual affection. Participants reported to have never argued with their *compari* and such eventuality is not even considered, as respect must be shown. Clearly, the imposition of such perpetual amity, made sacred by a Catholic rite, is a strong deterrent to arguments and interruptions of bonds.

All first generation participants reported to visit or telephone their *compari* weekly. Of the second generation, 75 per cent visits *compari* every month but telephone them weekly and on every special occasions such as birthdays, anniversary, name-day, etc. Of the third generation, 94 per cent visits their *compari* when they are with their grandparents; 40 per cent of adults participants visit *compari* every month (generally on a Sunday), while another 60 per cent keep in regular telephone contact. The present data contrast with Cronin's (1970) study among second and third generation Sicilians in Australia, who appear not to follow the practices, duties and obligations of godparenthood.

In the Calabrian *comparatico* system, the *compare* may not coincide with the "closer" family friend, since a precise, imposed and fictive pattern of behaviour, characterised by particular deference is required. Participants adhere to the archetypical model practiced in Calabria characterised by the rules of respect among families (Minicuci 1989). Such values of respect (*rispettu*) have been romanticised by previous studies among Southern Italians and compared simplistically to the values of Mob Mafia (Gambino 1977; Walker-Fields 2004). However, respect among families means practicing reciprocal social visits, telephone calls, writing greeting letters marked by the use of the formal polite register with no particular intimacy. Furthermore, at every rite of passage or crisis, such as marriage, christenings, confirmations, illness, or mourning, participation of the *compare* (with all his family) is requirement. These commitments must be strictly observed. Participants tied by *comparatico* reported a high number of social visits. During such meetings, individuals enquire about the wellbeing of their respective kin, totally avoiding any ambiguous or controversial topic. There is always a mutual exchange of gifts that have the function of binding families and predisposing further visits (Mauss 1925; Palumbo 1997). This practice (gift exchange) is highly regulated and the value of the gifts depends on the specific circumstances. A grave lack of respect, for instance, is to not reciprocate the visit (or sometimes the gift given).

Norms are transmitted across generations from observation of behaviour, due to the sharing of domestic space. Since early childhood, younger generations incorporate Calabrian patterns of *comparatico* into their habitus and generate that particular *counduit de vie* in terms of actions coherent to their specific social group (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). Individuals, from very early in life, acquire to show respect to their *compare* and learn to play a role as "one should". This set of acquired dispositions and expectations are concomitant with the ones brought to Australia by the first generation. The *modus operandi* of each participant might vary from individual to individual, however, younger participants,

particularly when they are with parents or grandparents, follow the *comparatico* duties and are well aware of their obligations, activating their ethnic competencies when required.

Furthermore, Calabrian *comparatico* creates an ideological system of shared behaviours able to regulate behaviours. In other words, a bond of *comparatico* between two Calabrian families can develop into a wider community, since each family can be related by blood, marital or fictive kinship to other kin (Nutini 1980; Ebough and Curry 2000). In linking people emotionally and socially, *comparatico* can evolve into an extended network, whose ramification can influence the conduct of people indirectly involved. Consequently, *comparatico* plays the key role of social controller, particularly through the practice of gossip. During social visits, the *commari* (female allies) gossip about the conduct of other Calabrian families. The "traditional" values of the community (the regional rural ones brought in Australia during the '50s) are conserved and transmitted by the first generation. This plays an important in "suggesting" the appropriate patterns of behaviour for Calabrians migrants and their descendants. Having a respectable reputation within the community is seen as vitally important for the participants. The credibility of one family must be maintained by the avoidance of shame underlying public actions of other family members. Since Calabrian families are tied one to another through a variety of different links, people greatest' asset is reputation and the loss of prestige is a concern that can compromise community equilibrium (Ebaugh and Curry 2000). Within the extended family and community network, bad news spreads quickly, encouraging the observance of standards and norms, since everyone can be subject to criticisms. The fear of being criticised by the community leads people to adhere, as much as possible, to the standard "Calabrian" model socially recognised by the group. Many participants reported having made drastic choices, against their will, to avoid their *compari's* (and related families) criticisms, because people talk (*i ggenti parranu*) and the news is spread (*a vuci passa*). Hence, the social order is maintained through the inculcation of shame and the complementary threat of ostracism from the group. In other words, people involved in the Calabrian *comparatico* are parts of a non-residential extended fictive family that imposes specific norms and duties.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN COMPARATICO AND WORKING LIVES

Godparenthood among Calabrians can involve the individual's social and economic life. Several business relations among the families tied by *comparatico* have been identified by the present study. Participants reported to be involved in a number of business relationships with their *compari*. For example, the first generation *compare* of Family 1 hired his godchild of Family 2 to work in his accountant practice. The first generation male of Family 6 is the president of one of the largest Calabrian religious clubs of Adelaide. He involved his godson and other members of Family 10 in the club committee. When there are parties or events organised by the club, many other members of Family 6 and Family 10 are involved and the wine produced by Family 10 is sold. Family 4 and Family 5 are *compari* and business partners in an import-export activity. The spouses of Family 14 hired their godson (Family 12) to work in their restaurant. Moreover, the first generation couple of Family 9 often frequents Family 14's restaurant since they have a spiritual relative in common (second generation female of Family 12).

The "management" of the spiritual kinship allows individuals to draw on an extra reliable source within the larger network of the Calabrian (and to a wider extent Italian) community, whose members seem to be involved in a robust number of face-to-face relationships and solidarity ties in order to sustain their transnational practices and activities. This additional social capital is a powerful cultural strategy able to procure benefits almost in every domain of life (Bourdieu 1986). C*omparatico* among Calabrians, in bonding trustworthy people, linked by an irreversible alliance of solidarity, which has fixed roles and

requires specific norms, can underpin the socioeconomic resources of its extended networks and influence the rest of the Calabrian community.

CONCLUSIONS

As the maintenance of Italian family values and norms has been used to explain the success of Italian immigrants and their descendants in many domains, it appears from the present study that spiritual kinship continues to be used as a strong bond for economic and political purposes by the Calabrian participating families. Such cultural resources are apparently more functional within those societies that were/are perceived "undesirable" by the dominant ones. Subaltern groups avail themselves of the bonding ties of godparenthood which acts as "buffer zone" between the individual and the "inhospitable" dominant society (Cavallaro 1981). In order to cope with what Martinelli (1989) calls their "historical uncertainty", the family alliances created through fictive kinship played a vital role, and Calabrians continued (as was the norm in their homeland) not to rely on outside authorities for any support or protection.

Despite previous studies that claim, in the present era of globalisation, "minorities" are breaking up fairly rapidly and Italian migrants and their descendants are completely "incorporated" into the Australian society (Parimal and Hamilton 2000; Price 1993), participants expressed their preference in having a spiritual kinship among people originating from the same Calabrian village they originate. A widespread observance of *comparatico* among Calabrian immigrants and their descendants has been found, together with its patterns, duties and obligations concomitant with the Aspromonte rural values of 1950's, period in which participants migrated to Australia. This is the result to the isolation and the position of subalternity experienced by the first generation, that lead Calabrians to respond by clustering together in "cohesive" networks, reinforcing and enlarging existing ties with non-kin people originating from the same village, the *paisani*, as a bulwark against the dominant culture. As a result, their cultural practices have been relatively well preserved. The practice of *comparatico,* characterised by the imposition of obligations and duties, is one of the key cultural resources integral to the maintenance of Calabrian identity. The *modus operandi* of Calabrian *comparatico* is an embodied knowledge intergenerationally transmitted as rules (what on "one should do"), to be followed by the younger participants. The cohesiveness of the community is maintained by such family alliances that reinforce the Calabrian-ness of the participants. Furthermore, the *comparatico* among Calabrians may evolve into an extended network that penetrates the entire life conduct of the individual involved. In Bourdieu's (1986) terms, the Calabrian spiritual kinship system can be seen to provide the social and economic capital for individuals who live and work within their family and spiritual networks unite and strengthen the ethno community in the new society. In fact, many participating families involved in godparenthood are tied socially and economically, especially in cases of small business, where *comparatico* plays a key role. Participants of the present study largely preserved their archetypical cultural strategies practiced in the underprivileged socio-economic environment of the 1950's. In Calabria, a "good" family alliance with a "known" and "respectable" family could help to overcome institutional, economic subalternity and to ensure the family socio-economic survival. The system is self-preserving and designed to the long lasting, by imposing a formal "friendship" among parties, never too close or to intimate, as in that case, it may lead to arguments or conflicts. The elevate number of people involved in this social network "must" be preserved over the years by such imposed formal friendship: the *comparatico*. Participants working relationship, involving a certain level of formality represent a concrete equilibrium reflecting the ideal model of *comparatico* whose relations found their "prefect expressions" precisely in their business relations.

APPENDIX

Fig.1

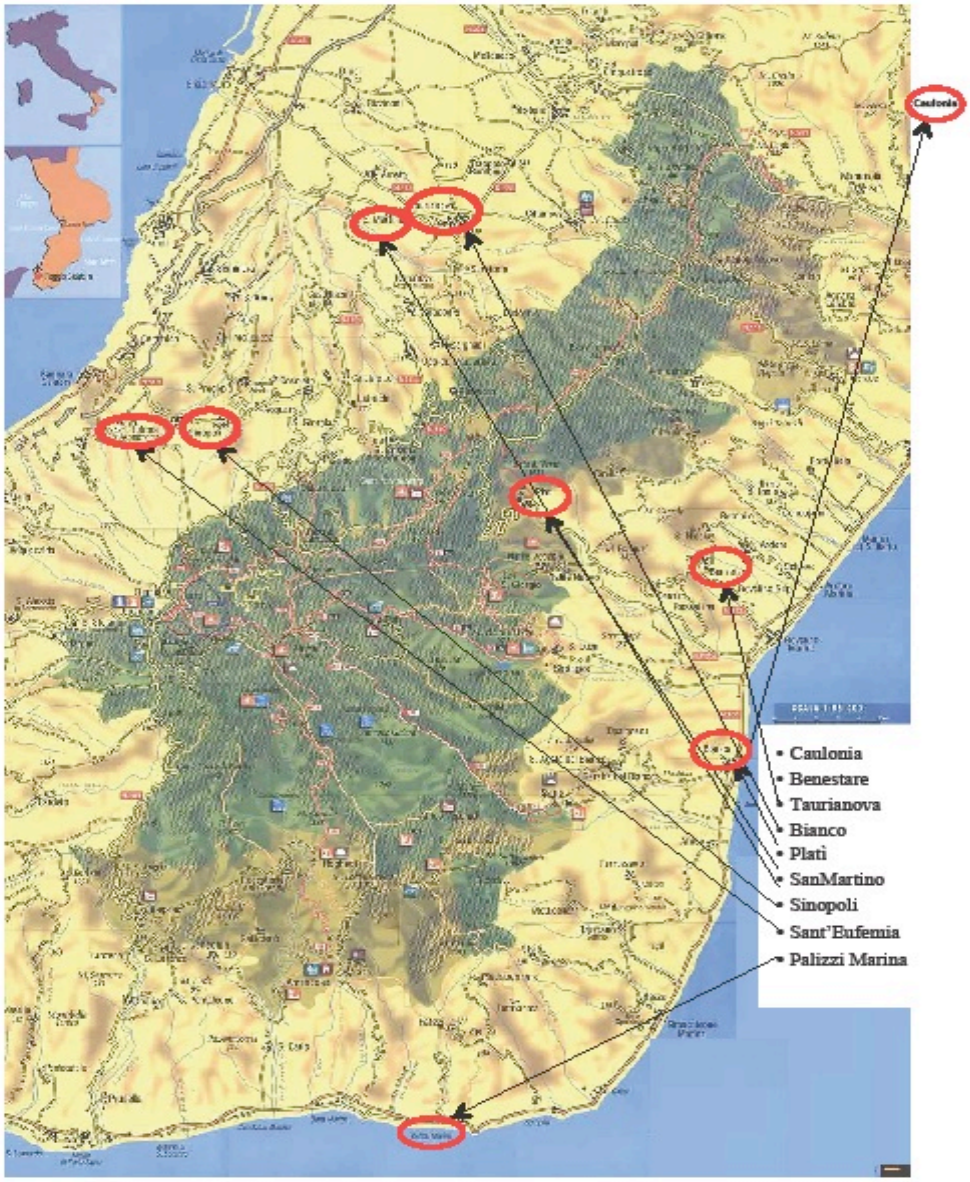

Fig. 2

Family 6

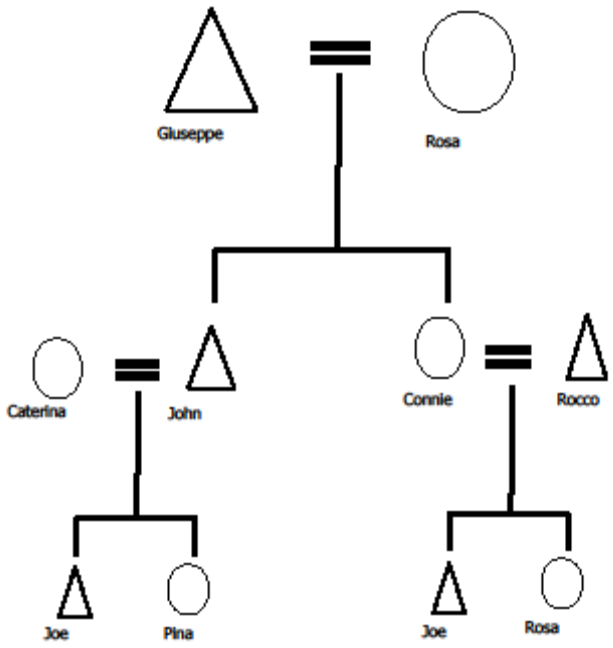

Figure 2

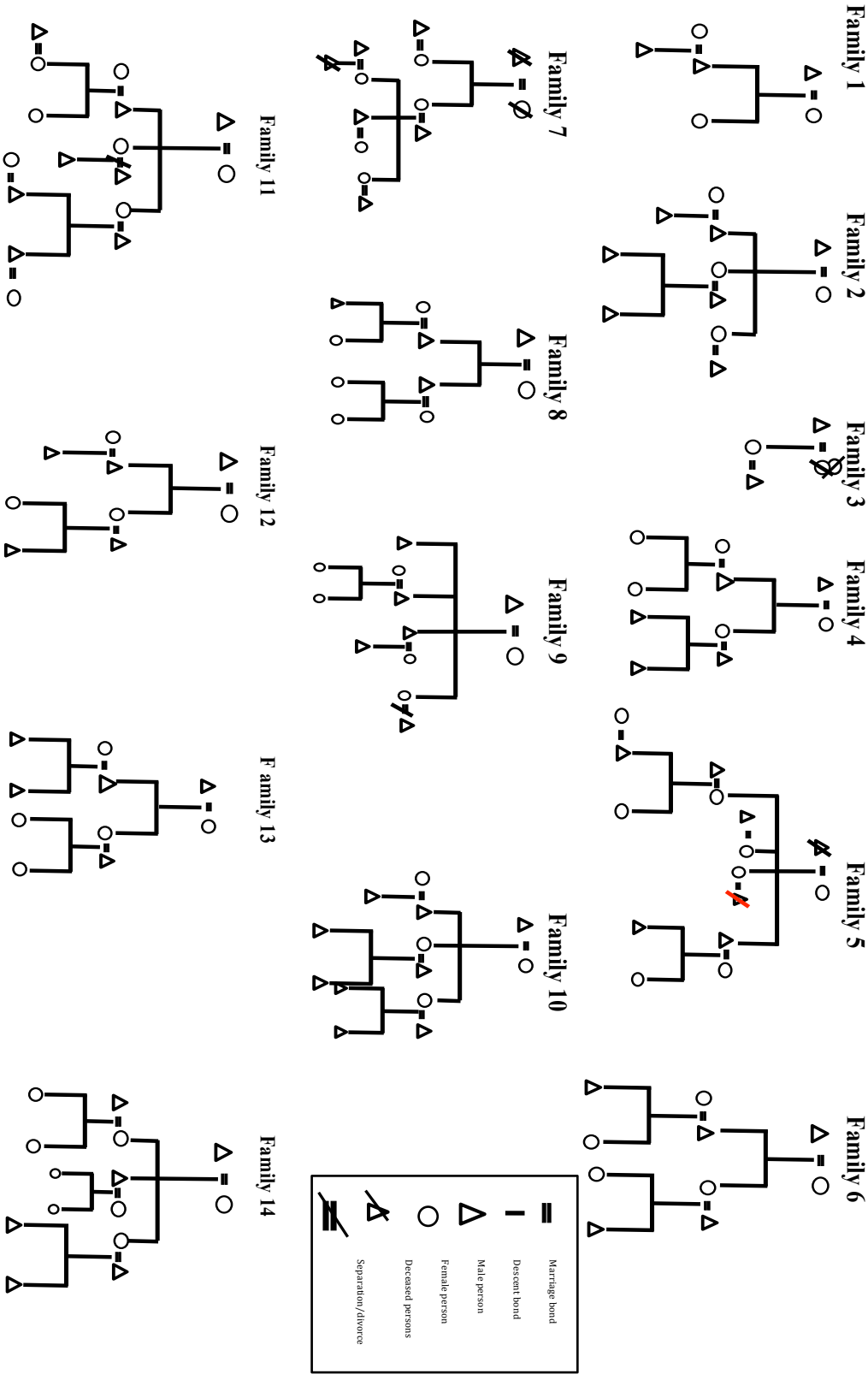
Family 1
Family 2
Family 3
Family 4
Family 5
Family 6
Family 7
Family 8
Family 9
Family 10
Family 11
Family 12
Family 13
Family 14
Marriage bond
Descent bond
Male person
Female person
Deceased persons
Separation/divorce

Figure 3

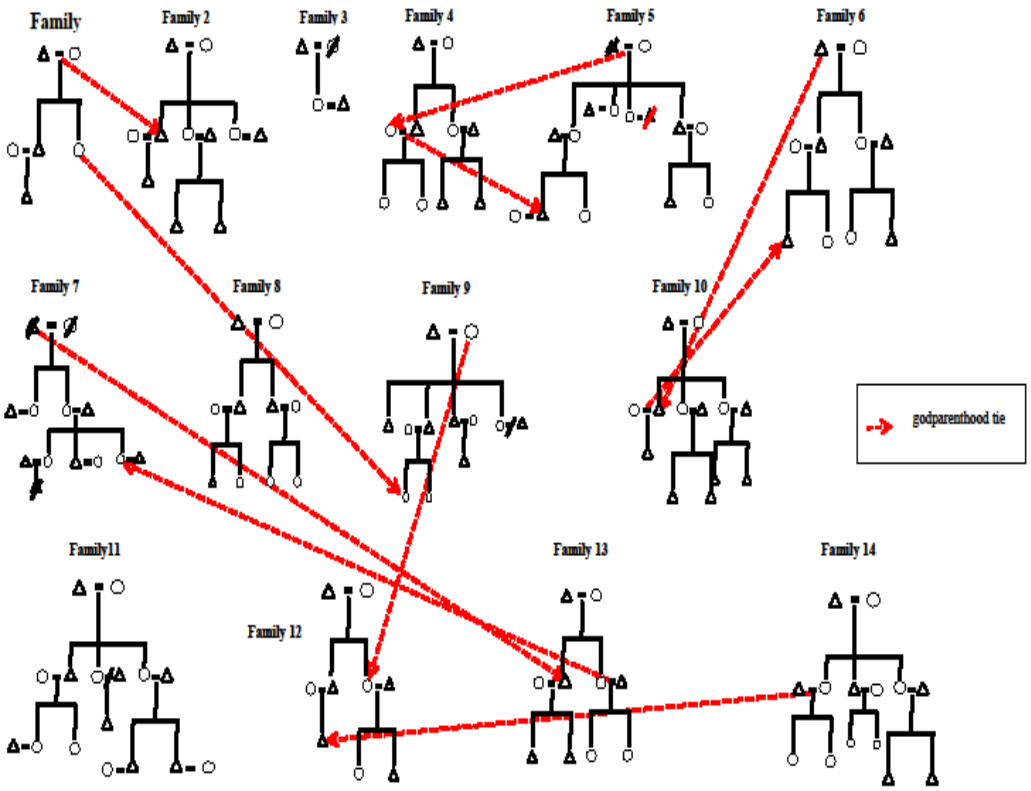
Family
Family 2
Family 3
Family 4
Family 5
Family 6
Family 7
Family 8
Family 9
Family 10
Family11
Family 12
Family 13
Family 14
godparenthood tie

Table 1—Generation, gender and median age of participants							
	Total		Males		Females		Median age
	N	%	N	%	N	%	
First generation	28	18.5	14	17.9	14	19.2	78.3
Second generation	68	45.0	34	43.6	34	46.6	44
Third generation	55	36.4	30	38.5	25	34.2	21
Total	151	100.0	78	100.0	73	100.0	

Table 2

Table 2 Proximity and reciprocal godparenthood participating family

Families	Village of origin	Allied by spiritual kinship to
Family 1	Caulonia	Family 2; Family 9
Family 2	Caulonia	Family 1
Family 3	Benestare	-
Family 4	Caulonia	Family 5
Family 5	Caulonia	Family 4
Family 6	Sinopoli	Family 10
Family 7	Taurianova	Family 13
Family 8	Palizzi	-
Family 9	Platì	Family 1; Family 12
Family 10	Sinopoli	Family 6
Family 11	Bianco	-
Family 12	Sant'Eufemia	Family 9; Family 14
Family 13	San Martino	Family 7
Family 14	Sant'Eufemia	Family 12

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[1] Calabria is a region in southern Italy, located at the "toe" of the Italian Peninsula. The capital city of Calabria is Catanzaro. The most populated city and the seat of the Calabrian Regional Council, however, is Reggio. All participants originate from a small area of the province of Reggio Calabria (Fig. 1).
[2] Words in Italian and Calabrian language are Italicised.
[3] All participants' names have been changed in order to maintain their anonymity.
[4] To sponsor someone, or to become a sponsor, means assuming the responsibility for the child's (religious) upbringing from the baptism, in other words to become a *compare*/*comare*.
[5] Mildura, in the State of Victoria, is a large grape growing region of Australia with a significant Southern European migrant population.
[6] This "first generation" narrative demystifies the well-worn romantic cliché of the Italian *paesano* who altruistically helps other *paesani* due to sense of belonging, their shared values and identity.
[7] Southern Italian rural culture, together with Sardinia and Corsica, also has other forms of *comparatico* which hark back to pre-Christian rites. These practices have various names and are usually practiced among teenage males and females who vow to become best friends on June 24, the day of Saint John the Baptist the patron saint of *godparents*. Such cultural practices are referred to by Palumbo (1997) as minor kinships (*comparatici minori)* and should not be confused with the practice of spiritual kinship that involves family alliances (Gallatin Anderson 1957; Palumbo 1997; Fine 1994).
[8] The godfather appears to be the dominant authority figure in the alliance between families. As such, the present paper, does not focus on the female godparent counterpart.