Understanding intermarriage from the native's perspective: Spain and Italy compared

Joana Serret, Centre d'Estudis Demogràfics (CED)
jserret@ced.uab.es

Agnese Vitali, University of Southampton
A.Vitali@soton.ac.uk

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Abstract

In the past ten years, the number of immigrants has been substantially increasing in countries of the European South. In this context, intermarriage is also gaining importance. Of all marriages celebrated in Italy and Spain at the end of the 2000s, 10% and 15%, respectively, were mixed marriages. This paper analyzes intermarriage from the native's perspective in Spain and Italy, two countries of recent immigration which share many social and demographic characteristics. Our results show that intermarriage is becoming an option for men and women who may not be "attractive" partners in the natives' marriage market, on the basis of their educational attainment. We interpret the increase in intermarriage as a response to the difficulties to find a partner in the national marriage market.

Introduction

Historically, men have tended to marry women who had achieved a lower educational attainment than they did (Schwartz et al. 2005), and used to be the sole or main breadwinner for their families (Beker 1981). From the 1960s onwards, as women entered education and employment, educational homogamy among spouses increased (Qian et al. 1993) and dual-earner couples became widespread (Oppenheimer 1994). In the 2000s, wives were more likely to have achieved higher education than their husbands in the US (Schwartz and Mare, 2005). In spite of the prediction formulated by the Beckerian model of the family that women's increased economic autonomy would have led to a decrease in women's desirability of marrying and staying married, today high-educated working women in the US are more likely to marry with respect to lower-educated women (Oppenheimer, 1997; Goldstein and Kenney, 2001).

According to the Second Demographic Transition (Lesthaeghe, 1991) the couple formation have experimented some changes. In many industrialized countries, marriage has lost importance and the percentage of people marrying is declining, in particular among the younger cohorts. Marriage has lost importance concurrently the increasing of alternative ways to the marriage such as non-marital cohabitation (Perelli-Harris). However in South of Europe marriage is the main partnership choice and non-marital cohabitation is still rare. Marriage and leaving parental house is strongly connected in Italy and Spain (Cavalli and Galland, 1996).

Recent data show that women are outpacing men in terms of their educational outcomes. In 2005 there was 1.3 female graduates for each male graduate (Vincent-Lancrin 2008) on average across the OECD countries. The most recent data for 2011 show that the proportion of students who entered tertiary education and graduated with at least a first degree was 10% higher for women (71.9%) than it was for men (61.8%) (OECD 2013).

Most research on intermarriage focuses on the societal, structural and individual factors that make the immigrant population marry out of their group (Pagnini & Morgan 1990; Qian & Lichter 2001; Jacobs & Labov 2002) while limited attention has been devoted to the factors that make natives marry out of their group (Glowsky 2007). The overall question that we tackle in this paper is whether we can gain insights into the social and demographic dynamics driving couple formation by studying intermarriage from the native's perspective. We will be able to inspect whether e.g. native men with low educational achievement –who might be unattractive partners in the internal marriage market, or might seek for a spouse with a traditional gender-role vision on marriage, could turn to foreign brides from certain countries of origin to get married. On the other hand, native women with high level of education may struggle to find a potential husband in the internal marriage market because of a paucity of high educated potential partners, and may turn to foreign grooms from certain countries of origin to get married.

Our empirical analyses compare two Southern European countries, Italy and Spain, which experienced a similar increase in immigrant inflows at the beginning of the 2000s, while having for long been migrant-sending countries. Italy and Spain are also similar in other respects. Both are characterized by a Familialistic welfare state (Esping-Andersen 1990), strong family ties (Reher 1998), traditional gender roles (Esping-Andersen 2009) and late transition to adulthood (Billari 2002) which leads to a late partnership formation.

Theoretical Assumptions

Low educated men may have more problems to marry because they are not a desirable partner for the native women. Educational attainment is in fact related to occupation and

employment status. It means that men with low level of education will have lower salaries and be more exposed to the risk of experiencing unemployment, and because of that they will be less desirable in the national marriage market. On the other hand, low-educated men may have a more traditional gender-role vision on marriage with respect to men with higher education, and hence may be looking for a partner who is willing to accept a traditional male-breadwinner family model. They can overcome this obstacle marrying a foreign women who find them attractive and/or are share the same traditional views on marriage. Foreign women will differ on the basis of their countries of origin, hence we expect low-educated native men to intermarry with women from developing countries or from countries characterized from traditional gender roles. We formulate the following assumptions:

H1. Low-educated native men are likely to intermarry with foreign women from East of Europe and Latin America.

H2. High-educated native men are unlikely to intermarry. They will tend to marry native women.

For what concerns native women, we also expect a heterogeneous behaviour according their level of education. On the one hand, high-educated women may intermarry with foreign men because they cannot find native spouses with a high level of education and /or with more egalitarian views on marriage. On the other hand, low-educated women may intermarry with husbands from Africa or Latin America. We expect that these women have low education level and that they are not marrying these men for level of education or social class but for attraction. Table 2 confirms this hypothesis where we can observe the high values in primary education for grooms from East Europe, Africa, Latin America or Asia. In the other hand, we can notice the low values in primary education for grooms from Europe or North America.

H3. Low-educated native women are likely to intermarry with foreign men from Northern Africa or Latin America.

H4. High-educated native women are likely to intermarry with foreign men from North America or Northern Europe.

Data and Methods

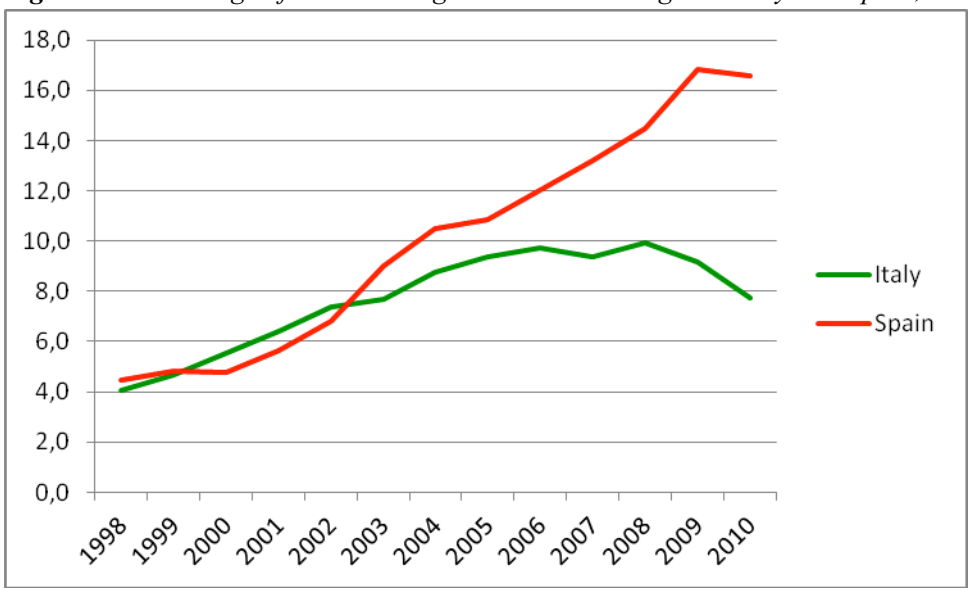
The data used in this paper come from the official registers of marriages provided by the Italian and Spanish National Statistical Institutes (ISTAT and INE, respectively). Our data registers all marriages celebrated in Spain and Italy during the period 1998-2010, and contains information on year of marriage, age at marriage, and origin, nationalities and level of education of both spouses. The main advantage of this source of data is the access to the whole population marrying in a given year.

Multinomial logistic models are employed to estimate the probability of marrying a spouse of a given origin. The dependent variable is constituted of 6 categories: a native man/woman can marry a native spouse –ref. –, or can intermarry with a spouse from Western Europe, Eastern Europe, Africa, North America and Latin America. As a robustness check, we also replicated the analysis considering as origins individual countries which represent the main immigrant groups in Italy and Spain (Albania, Rumania, etc. for Italy; Morocco, Colombia, etc. for Spain). As independent variables we consider: age of the native spouse (both linear and quadratic term), difference between husband's age and wife's age, education of native spouse (low –ref. –, medium, high), difference in education between spouses, and order of marriage of the native spouse (first –ref. –, second marriage). We ran separate models by gender of the native spouse for Italy and Spain separately.

Descriptive Results

Following the unprecedented increase in immigrant flows, intermarriages increased substantially in Italy and Spain over the past decade (Figure 1). The percentage of mixed marriages on the total marriages celebrated doubled from 4% in 1998 to 8% in 2010 in Italy, and more than tripled in Spain over the same period, passing from 5% to 17%. The percentages of mixed marriages in Italy peaked in 2008 and then declined slightly, following the national downward trend in marriages observed during the recession (Cottini et al. 2014). Albeit after 2008 the overall number of marriages declined also in Spain, the proportion of mixed marriages did not decline.

***Figure 1**: Percentage of intermarriages on total marriages in Italy and Spain, 1998-2008*



Source: Register of marriages, ISTAT & INE, 1998-2010

As shown in Table 1, the composition of mixed marriages is not equilibrated by sexes. In Italy, the vast majority of mixed marriages are celebrated between a native groom and a foreign bride (84% in 2010). In Spain mixed marriages with a native groom also represent the majority (60% in 2010), but mixed marriages involving a native bride are more widespread than in Italy. In both countries the most part of the mixed marriages are first unions accounting for about 90% and 85% of the total mixed marriages in Italy and Spain respectively. So when we consider mixed marriages we should mainly think about first unions.

[Table 1 about here]

Italy and Spain differ in terms of which are the main country of immigration (Table 2). The main sending countries in Spain are mainly Spanish-speaking countries from Latin America, because of the common language which simplifies the migration process. On the other hand, in Italy, most of the immigrant population comes from Eastern Europe.

[Table 2 about here]

It follows that intermarriages in Italy and Spain are characterized by different origins of the foreign spouses. Also, in both countries, native men and women intermarry with spouses of different foreign nationalities. In particular, as shown in Figure 2, Italian men mainly intermarry with women from Eastern Europe while Spanish men with Latin American. Native women in both Italy and Spain, instead, tend to intermarry with European men, followed by African. So the origins of the foreign spouses are different not only between the two countries but also by gender.

[Figure 2 about here]

In the remaining part of this section we provide a descriptive analysis of the main socio-demographic characteristics of natives who intermarry with foreign spouses. We start by describing the age at first marriage (Figure 3). Native men who intermarry, do it later than if they marry native wives. This intuitively supports the idea that men intermarry because they haven't found a spouse in the national marriage market. On the other hand, women who intermarry, do it at similar ages than if they marry native husbands. Interestingly, the percentage of women who marry before age 25 is higher for women who intermarry with respect to women who marry a native man.

[Figure 3 about here]

Another aspect that confirms the different behavior according to the origin of the foreign partner is the age difference between partners (Figure 4). For the native men, both Italian and Spaniards, the age gap is bigger at higher ages at first marriage when they marry a foreign wife. This age difference is bigger in mixed marriages where women came from East Europe, Latin America or Africa. On the other hand, from the

perspective of native women, this age difference decreases when they marry at later ages. The women who enter a union at advanced ages are younger than their husbands if the latter are from Asia, Latin America, Africa (in the case of Spain) or East Europe (in Italy).

[Figure 4 about here]

Multivariate Results

Results from the multinomial logistic regression indicate that native men who intermarry tend to be lower educated and older with respect to men who marry a native woman. The magnitude of the estimated coefficients changes depending on the origin of the foreign bride, but the signs of associations remain the same.

[Table 2 about here]

On the contrary, when we estimate the model for native women, we find different patterns of associations according to the origin of the foreign groom. Native women who intermarry with a foreign groom from North America or Europe, tend to be older, higher educated and with smaller age difference with respect to women who marry a native. On the other hand, native women tend to be younger, lower educated and with more age difference with respect to women who marry a native, when they marry partners from East Europe or Africa. Results for Spain and Italy are very similar.

[Table 3 about here]

Conclusions

The results in our analysis show that Italian and Spanish men with lower education, so with more difficulties to find a native partner, found in women from Eastern Europe, Africa, Asia or Latin America a solution to their problem. On the other hand, Italian and Spanish women with a high educational level, so with fewer facilities to find a native husband, can overcome this obstacle with men from Europe or North America. our results show that mixed marriages are not homogenous, but vary by gender and origin of the foreign spouse.

The key contribution of this paper is a new perspective on intermarriage, based on the characteristics of the native rather than the immigrant spouse. This perspective allows investigating to what extent intermarriage can be considered as a substitute to marrying someone from the own group by individuals who are less attractive in the marriage market due to their socio-demographic characteristics. Our results seem to point in this

direction, and we conclude that the foreign population could be a solution to the unbalanced marriage market preferences.

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Tables and Figures

Table 1. Distribution of mixed marriages by sex in Italy and Spain, 1998-2010

	Italy				Spain			
	Native Groom - Foreign Bride		Foreign Groom - Native Bride		Native Groom - Foreign Bride		Foreign Groom - Native Bride	
Year of Marriage	(%)	First Unions (%)	(%)	First Unions (%)	(%)	First Unions (%)	(%)	First Unions (%)
1998	76,0	78,1	24,0	91,0	48,5	77,0	51,5	88,7
1999	76,6	77,0	23,4	91,8	51,1	78,3	48,9	88,8
2000	77,6	76,6	22,4	92,5	51,6	77,8	48,4	88,7
2001	79,7	77,6	20,3	92,8	55,4	77,3	44,6	89,7
2002	78,2	77,6	21,8	93,5	58,0	77,1	42,0	89,1
2003	79,7	76,0	20,3	92,4	59,5	75,8	40,5	90,1
2004	80,4	76,0	19,6	91,7	59,9	74,4	40,1	85,9
2005	80,1	75,6	19,9	92,6	61,3	73,4	38,7	86,2
2006	80,0	75,3	20,0	92,4	61,4	72,8	38,6	84,8
2007	75,8	74,5	24,2	93,6	59,7	70,0	40,3	83,7
2008	75,0	75,1	25,0	93,9	59,9	68,7	40,1	82,4
2009	78,5	73,7	21,5	93,2	59,2	66,3	40,8	78,5
2010	84,2	73,2	15,8	90,2	59,7	65,5	40,3	77,7
Total	**78,6**	**75,7**	**21,4**	**92,6**	**58,6**	**71,8**	**41,4**	**84,6**

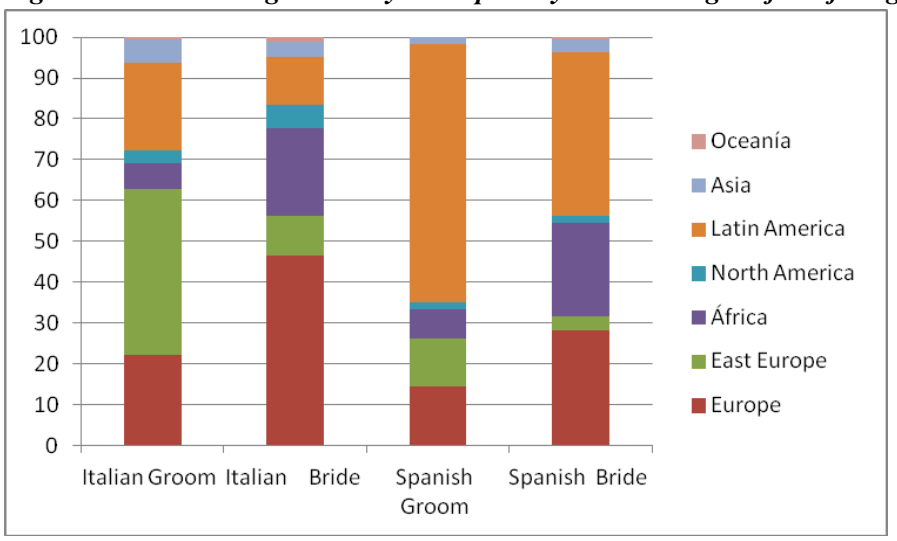
Source: Register of marriages, ISTAT & INE, 1998-2010

Table 2. Immigrant Population by sex and nationality in Italy and Spain, 2011

Origin of the Immigrant Population	Men in Italy	Women in Italy	Men in Spain	Women in Spain
Europe 15	67550	103801	643861	570791
Rest of Europe	989972	1280144	822030	830516
Africa	585628	400843	681785	403008
North America	8139	10060	14401	15231
Latin America	132182	222004	732994	926032
Asia	416230	350282	205771	137960
Oceanía	1049	1593	1333	1150
Total	**45738**	**20776**	**34331**	**26468**

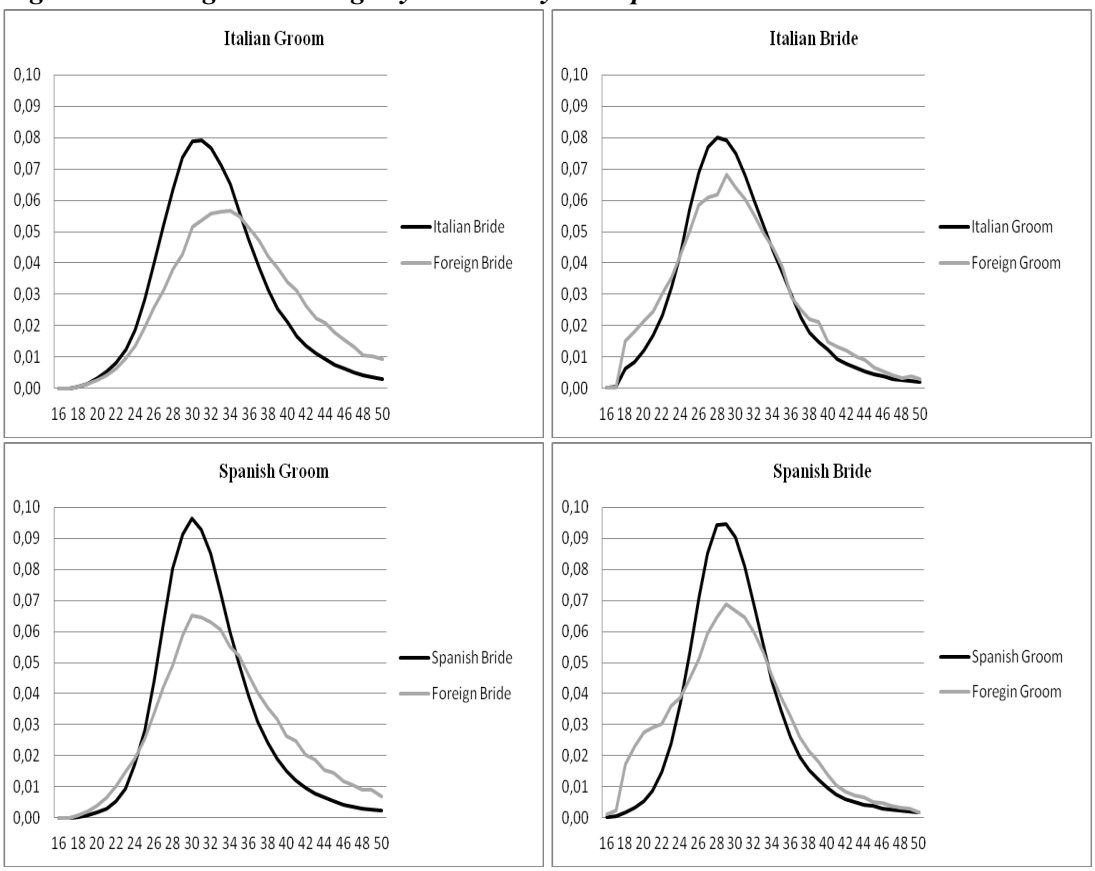
Source: Register of population, ISTAT & INE, 2011

Figure 2. Intermarriages in Italy and Spain by sex and origin of the foreign spouse



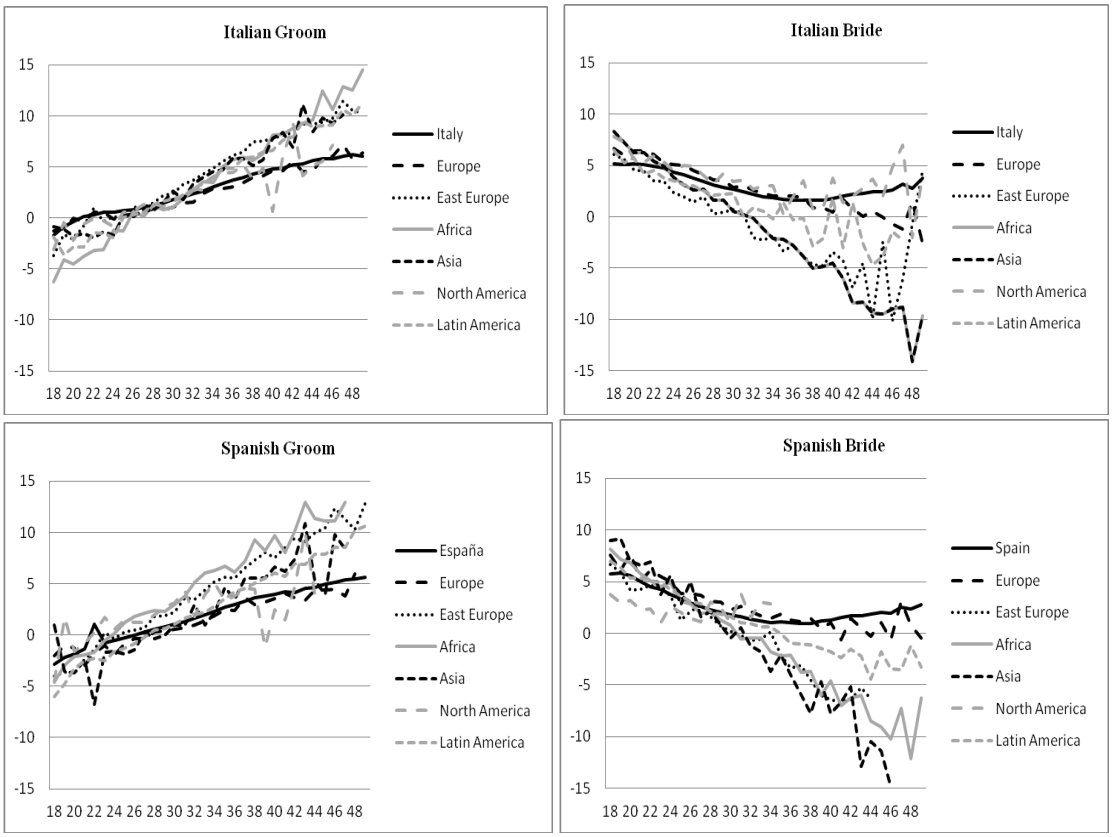
Source: Register of marriages, ISTAT & INE, 2008-2010

Figure 3. First age at marriage by sex in Italy and Spain



Source: Register of marriages, ISTAT & INE, 2008-2010

Figure 4. Age gap between partners by origin and age in Italy and Spain



Source: Register of marriages, ISTAT & INE, 2008-2010

Table 2. Multinomial Model for the Native Men

Origin of the Bride	RRR	Origin of the Bride	RRR
Italy	Ref.	Spain	Ref.
Europe		Europe	
Age	1.021***	Age	1.03***
Education (Primary Ref.)		Education (Primary Ref.)	
Secondary	0.918***	Secondary	1.100**
Tertiary	0.972	Tertiary	1.302***
Second Unions	1.000	Second Unions	1.047
Constant	0.010***	Constant	0.005***
East Europe		East Europe	
Age	1.068***	Age	1.040***
Education (Primary Ref.)		Education (Primary Ref.)	
Secondary	0.594***	Secondary	0.721***
Tertiary	0.409***	Tertiary	0.549***
Second Unions	1.373***	Second Unions	2.525***
Constant	0.005***	Constant	0.005***
Africa		Africa	
Age	1.069***	Age	1.047***
Education (Primary Ref.)		Education (Primary Ref.)	
Secondary	0.470***	Secondary	0.432***
Tertiary	0.319***	Tertiary	0.229***
Second Unions	1.309***	Second Unions	1.962***
Constant	0.000***	Constant	0.003***
Asia		Asia	
Age	1.056***	Age	1.042***
Education (Primary Ref.)		Education (Primary Ref.)	
Secondary	0.900**	Secondary	1.294*
Tertiary	1.076	Tertiary	1.581***
Second Unions	1.015	Second Unions	1.272*
Constant	0.000***	Constant	0.000***
North America		North America	
Age	1.007*	Age	0.995
Education (Primary Ref.)		Education (Primary Ref.)	
Secondary	1.394***	Secondary	2.107***
Tertiary	1.985***	Tertiary	3.895***
Second Unions	1.054	Second Unions	1.071
Constant	0.002***	Constant	0.000***
Latin America		Latin America	
Age	1.048***	Age	1.036***
Education (Primary Ref.)		Education (Primary Ref.)	
Secondary	0.742***	Secondary	0.685***
Tertiary	0.539***	Tertiary	0.432***
Second Unions	1.291***	Second Unions	2.078***
Constant	0.005***	Constant	0.029***

*<0.1 **<0.01 ***<0.001

Table 3. Multinomial Model for the Native Women

Origin of the Groom	RRR	Origin of the Groom	RRR
Italy	Ref.	Spain	Ref.
Europe		Europe	
Age	1.001	Age	1.029***
Education (Primary Ref.)		Education (Primary Ref.)	
Secondary	1.000	Secondary	1.203***
Tertiary	1.098***	Tertiary	1.823***
Second Unions	0.895*	Second Unions	0.887**
Constant	0.017***	Constant	0.007***
East Europe		East Europe	
Age	0.962***	Age	0.986**
Education (Primary Ref.)		Education (Primary Ref.)	
Secondary	0.569***	Secondary	0.707***
Tertiary	0.450***	Tertiary	0.523***
Second Unions	2.541***	Second Unions	1.974***
Constant	0.018***	Constant	0.006***
Africa		Africa	
Age	1.017***	Age	0.954***
Education (Primary Ref.)		Education (Primary Ref.)	
Secondary	0.374***	Secondary	0.326***
Tertiary	0.298***	Tertiary	0.159***
Second Unions	2.234***	Second Unions	3.078***
Constant	0.010***	Constant	0.173***
Asia		Asia	
Age	1.022***	Age	1.000
Education (Primary Ref.)		Education (Primary Ref.)	
Secondary	0.667***	Secondary	0.435***
Tertiary	0.835*	Tertiary	0.247***
Second Unions	1.600***	Second Unions	2.095***
Constant	0.001***	Constant	0.005***
North America		North America	
Age	0.995	Age	.0967***
Education (Primary Ref.)		Education (Primary Ref.)	
Secondary	1.13*	Secondary	1.782***
Tertiary	1.376***	Tertiary	3.927***
Second Unions	0.997	Second Unions	0.824
Constant	0.002***	Constant	0.000***
Latin America		Latin America	
Age	0.998	Age	0.967***
Education (Primary Ref.)		Education (Primary Ref.)	
Secondary	1.020	Secondary	0.729***
Tertiary	1.08	Tertiary	0.575***
Second Unions	1.610***	Second Unions	2.583***
Constant	0.005***	Constant	0.116***

*<0.1 **<0.01 ***<0.001