The «orphans program» and the children diaspora. From contemporary media interest to present deafening silence.

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Italy (1946-1967) «Reserve of Children»

- After WWII:
- Many poor families unable to take care for their children
- Thousands of «orphans» sheltered in institutions

- Italy met the demand of prospecting adoptive parents, especially from USA
Inter Country Adoption
American «Orphans Program»

- Good intentions: give a better chance to those who had very few opportunities in Italy

- Abandoned children – in Cold War age – one of many propaganda tools: Poor children were more exposed to Communism

- Adoption in USA could be a solution
Italian Children «Diaspora» (per year)

- More than 3,700 children adopted in USA
First Media Coverage in Italy (1951)

- 1951 – Adoption of Italian children in the United States starts to be an important and growing event.
- Francesca from “Regina Elena” Orphanage, Rome
  - «The only important thing is the girl is blond, 3 years old and beautiful»
- Adoption = «end of sorrow»
- Epoca, March 10, 1951
First group of Italian Children arriving to USA (1951)

- *Oggi*, July 12, 1951

- Princess Pacelli and Monsignor Andrew Landi (Crs) arrival in New York with the first group of Italian «orphans».

- Since 1951 the majority of adoption cases was handled by the Catholic Committee for Refugee (Ccr), in cooperation with the Catholic Relief Service (Crs)
Same event (children arrival) on US media

- *Il Progresso Italoamericano*, June 30, 1951
Adoption Coverage in USA

• It was a matter concerning local press especially

• The Catholic Advance (Wichita – Kansas) Dec. 14, 1956
Adoption Coverage in USA (2)
The «Giambalvo Case»

- Peter Giambalvo, Brooklyn attorney born in Italy.
- In Fifties he «helped to immigrate» to US nearly 200 Italian children.
- Collected children from Italian orphanages.
- He had a «children catalog» with pictures to show to prospective parents.
- His fee was $ 750 or more
- 1959 – He was arrested for illegal children trade
- 1961 The Kings County Court of New York discharged him
The «Big Scandal» - July, 1959

- *Oggi*, July 23, 1959
- *La Stampa*, July 25, 1959
«Il Giudizio Universale» (1961)

- Gianbalvo case was so well known that Vittorio De Sica was inspired by it.
- Alberto Sordi character is a «children broker» buying and selling minors to sent to USA
- 1961, Vittorio De Sica (Director) and Cesare Zavattini (story, adaptation and screenplay)
- Alberto Sordi is a «children broker»
- «Instant Movie»: Italian cinema is still able – as during Neorealism – to tell Italian society
From interest to silence. Why?

• In the 60s Italy was no more a poor Country.

• - 1967 Italian adoption law changed. Adopting a child in Italy became easier.

• - The Cold War progressively lost its intensity. Pleasing the American institutions was less and less important.

• - From the 80s Italy became one of the leading Country in international adoptions.
Ex children - Now Adults

• As the years passed, as these adopted children grew up and integrated into the American culture and society, media progressively stopped talking about them and their stories.

• Nevertheless, those directly involved cannot forget: they started fighting to obtain the “right to birth origins”.

• Adults able to carry out practical steps
• New awareness
• Easier and cheaper mobility
• Better and faster means of communication
• New tools for researching their origins
  - media (papers – television - internet)
A new Interest in 90s

- **10,000 Children Deported to USA**

- **Between 1951 and 1961, American Catholic organizations gathered thousands of minors in South Italy to send them to USA for adoption. The parental consent was often obtained through deception: “We will make your children study, then they will come back to you”.

- Andrea Purgatori, *Corriere della Sera*, 12 ottobre 1992
• John Battersby Campitelli (Piero Davi) has had a good adoption experience.
• His a-family loved him and gave him opportunities he wouldn’t have had as illigitemate child in Italy in the 60s.
• Anyway, discovering his origins was «a necessity»

• In 1991 he was able to find his b-mother

• To overcome the trauma and sublimate the pain, he decided to turn his experience into a positive action.

• John created Italiadoption, a mutual aid association for children adopted in the United States and biological parents who remained in Italy.
1998 - Basile Sallustio’s Documentary

- Pia Di Lisa’s story
- Very poor family from Molise.
- Director’s relatives (family story orally transmitted)

- Explanations of Agents involved in adoptions were not always so clear...
- Very often natural parents had a very poor education and deference for the “authorities” (priests, well educated people, who was from a big city...)
- Someone signed documents without fully understanding of their real meaning.
La vendetta dello ius soli ha i volti e i nomi degli italiani di ritorno, centinaia di uomini e donne con passaporto americano ma sangue e luogo di nascita tra la Val d’Aosta e la Sicilia. Dopo anni hanno deciso di riconquistare a ogni costo un pezzo del loro passato e rivendicare il diritto di essere italiani come sono nati, e molti di loro anche cresciuti.

Il ministero degli Esteri si è limitato a rispondere ufficialmente che: ‘L’Ambasciata d’Italia a Washington, in stretto coordinamento con i Consolati interessati e con le competenti istanze italiane, sta seguendo alcuni casi segnalati dall’Associazione Italiadoption. Ogni caso presenta profili diversi ed è diverso dagli altri’.

La Stampa, Nov. 8, 2017
Italian Television: Real interest or simply «audience»?

- **Chi l’ha visto?** - Since 1989 – a very popular television program dedicated to searching “missing” people and “solving” mysterious cases.

  **Dove sei?** (Where are you?)

  Special column - sometimes dedicated to Italian “orphans” researches

- Other Format (or TV shows “random interest”) – not so serious...

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![Chi l’ha visto?](image)
Web Resources

- Millions of families around the world use MyHeritage to explore their history.
- Huge international records database
- 3.5 Billion profiles
- 105 Million users
- 46 Million family trees

- Help everyone be as successful as possible when trying to find their biological roots through DNA testing.
- Provide everyone information they can use to learn more about their biological roots.
Conclusion

• At the beginning of «Orphans Project» (50s-60s), there was a great media coverage: it was (also) a matter of good relationships between Italy and USA. There was also a sort of «national proud» (A. Petacco, 1961: «Italian children in particular are very wanted for adoption because [prospective parents] believe that, if grown up in the right environment, they can give parents more satisfaction than American ones: they are very good at school, are smarter and know how to make their way in life): now it sounds like a simplified eugenic subject.

• Unpleasant past relegated to oblivion

• Over the years, the attention has passed from “mass phenomenon” to “individual cases”

• Who was directly involved cannot forget the past and fights for his/her rights, but attention on them is generally a random matter of interest.