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Dark-skinned foreign origin young people, adopted by Italian parents

STEREOTYPES, PREJUDICES AND PROBLEMS IN IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION

Stefania Lorenzini*

Riassunto

Italy is the second country with the world highest level of international adoptions, preceded only by the United States. This paper focuses on interethnic adoption's children identity development. The identity construction process can be complex for adopted children who was born and has lived in very different geographical, human, social and cultural contexts for some years. Both the daily news and the results of the present qualitative research shows different discrimination episodes related to somatic traits, particularly dark skin. The research results which I present in this paper are part of a wider research project in which I interviewed adopted young people in Italy. The research results highlight both an identity construction process difficulty, but also the possibility to build an "intercultural identity".

Parole-chiave: *international adoption; dark skin color; discrimination; identity; intercultural education.*

INTRODUCTION

International adoption is a "melting pot of differences" (Lorenzini, 2004: 106). Children who have experienced very different cultural situations, meet other unknown people who become their parents. This process might be not easy, because the child has to face a different cultural context with a high number of new stimuli and changes. It is important not to forget the origin of the child and the presence of a different cultural system of references, especially if the child has lived in the country of origin for some years. What does "culture" mean to a child? It is a very complex set of mixed experiential elements which create a unique form for the child (Ibid.: 108-109). We must consider these elements when we are referring to adopted children. An intercultural pedagogical approach to welcoming children being adopted from abroad helps to recognise and give value to their features, personal history, past experiences and skills acquired in a

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human and cultural context that is different from that which they find themselves in after the adoption.

In Italy, the phenomenon of international adoption has been significant: indeed, it started to increase in the 1960s, and today, despite a decrease in the number of international adoptions, Italy remains the second country in the world after the United States, for the number of adoptions per year.

Overall, since the 60's, the number of international adoptions throughout the world has increased. It is possible to define it as an important phenomenon of “offspring mobility in the world” (Lorenzini, 2005), which is itself an effect of the globalization process that created connections and interactions between different countries. However, the growth trend has come to stop since 2004, when a gradual reduction in the number of adoptions has been observed. According to data from the International Adoption Commission for Italy (CAI), this trend concerned all the main host countries producing a 73.5% reduction in adoptions worldwide in the last 10 years. In fact, we moved from 45.383 adopted children in 2004 to 12.001 adopted children in 2015. The top ten host countries data, between 2004 and 2015, shows how the international adoptions reduction has involved everyone in different measure: it was 85.6% for Spain, 81.6% for Denmark, 80% for France, 75.3% for the United States, 73.3% for Germany, 72.9% for the Netherlands, 68.9% for Sweden, 65.2% for Switzerland, 53.6% for Canada and 34.9% for Italy¹.

The adoption reduction concerned less Italy than other countries. In fact, in 2010 and 2011 the maximum number of adoptions was achieved. The numbers reached respectively 4.130 and 4.022 of foreign children who became Italians through international adoption. The decline started in 2012, but the reduction in Italy has lower percentages compared to other main host countries. On the basis of the data processed by the CAI, with the technical assistance of the Istituto degli Innocenti of Florence, and those developed by the Secretariat of The Hague, Italy confirms to be the first host country in Europe for the number of minors adopted and second in the world after the United States, with 2.206 minors adopted in 2014, 2.216 in 2015, 1.872 in 2016 and 1.439 in 2017 (*Ibidem*). The continents of origin of adopted children in Italy, in order of relevance, are: Europe, Asia, Central and South America, Africa (a total of 44 foreign countries of origin in 2016 and 41 in 2017). The distribution of interethnic adoptive families covers the entire national territory, but the largest number of adoptions is concentrated in the Italian Northern regions. In recent years, the percentages in the South and in the Islands have been increasing. The arrival average age is increasing. In 2000 (which is the year in which CAI started to systematically detect the age variable) the arrival average age was between 1 to 4 years, while in the recent years we observe an arrival average age between 5 to 9 years. In 2016-2017 the average years has

1 Cfr. <http://www.commissioneadozioni.it/it/per-una-famiglia-adottiva/rapporto-statistico.aspx>, consulted on 10 november 2018.

been consolidated between 5 to 9 years old (slightly less than a half of the children can be included in this age group, 44% in 2016 and 47% in 2017). This data need to be related to the international adoption subsidiary function, which is increasingly considered as a valid solution when ineligible conditions are identified in the country origin.

Regarding the Italian context, we can also recognize the growth and evolution of the adoption culture, gradually centred on the aim to find families for children, not children for families; on the primary protection of children; on the respect for their origins, adoption's previous experiences and belongings. However, we must also recognize problematic aspects in the adoption experience and in the development of children's identities in international and interethnic adoption. Construction identity processes can be complex in adopted children who was born and has lived in very different geographical, human, social and cultural contexts for some years. Indeed, they often experiment discriminatory episodes related to their dark skin color and because of "visible" somatic features which are connected to a "foreign origin". In this paper I will focus on this topic in different ways, thanks to the words of some international adopted Italian young people, emerged from structured and in-depth interviews. The interviews were conducted in 2000, 2011 and 2015 with the same questions.

I. THE FOREIGN ORIGIN VISIBILITY

The foreign origins of internationally adopted children is a fact even if they left their country of origin in early childhood. A foreign origin may involve a different cultural, experiential and linguistical background and different somatic features than the ones still prevalent in the adoption country. Even if invisible, this root is present.

Among the many peculiarities that characterize inter-ethnic and multicultural adoptive families, there are two that brings them together: the adoptive origin of the family and the reciprocally foreign origin of its members. Although each family has its own specificities, characteristics and experiences, but the possible different somatic features, starting from skin colour, are elements which make visible (Enfance & Familles d'Adoption, 2011) not only the adoption (different genetic patrimony and intergenerational discontinuity) but also different ethnic origins between children and parents.

Especially dark-skinned (or very dark-skinned) children experience this "diversity" in every social and scholastic context, where are still prevalent lighter skin colours and different somatic traits (Lorenzini, 2013, 2017, 2018). This element could become a source of problems when these children bump into negative stereotypes and prejudices which are still widespread in these social contexts. That is why, young adopted people (or, in general) people with different origins, although they are Italians in every

other aspect, they are still experiencing forms of closure and hostility because they are considered “foreigners”.

The qualitative research project focus to the personal and family experiences of young people internationally adopted in Italy, documented through structured qualitative interviews in 2000 (47 interviews), in 2011 (5 interviews) and in 2015 (5 interviews). The respondents come from different extra European countries and they were adopted at an age ranging from a few months to 14 years. At the moment of the interview, they were living in central-northern Italy and they were aged between 18 and 34 years old (prevalently between 19 and 23 years old). They lived with their adoptive family and they attended high school or university, while in some cases they had already gained a diploma or they were workers or student/workers. Among the distinctive features of each of their biographies, their stories substantially highlight positive life paths, both for adoptive family relationships and for school experiences and results.

The interviews and the subsequent analysis aim to give free voice to these young people who have lived the experience of an international adoption and they had autonomously agreed to take part, under the guarantee of anonymity, in an exhaustive survey of their present, past and future life. The topics included relations with the family, school and friends, as well as sentimental, recreational, work and social aspects in general, with respect to their adoptive belonging, and to their origins and somatic characteristics that differ from those of the majority in Italy.

Among the many issues emerged during the interviews, in this paper, I focus on some critical episodes experienced by these young people because of people reaction in front of their skin colour and their somatic features, which are still “different from...” those of most of the Italian people. The majority of interviews report episodes – which are in some cases experienced more than one time – in which, for example: they have been addressed with disrespectful words (*dirty nigger, fucking nigger...*); they have been stopped by police to check residence permits and not identity cards; they have been viewed with suspicion as if they were about to steal a scooter or a handbag; they have been spoken in a slow and simple Italian, taking for granted they speak another language; they have been refused the request to rent an apartment for students. In particular, for the young females (gender is, here, a central issue), they have been identified as the domestic helper of their mother; they have been identified as wives of Italians men out of economic interest; they have been approached as prostitutes, people from whom to expect easy sexual favours (Lorenzini, 2013, 2018).

Being Italian does not include the possibility to have dark skin or almond eyes; it still believed that for being “true Italians” white skin is one of the most important characteristics (Chistolini, 2010). The black Italians still an “impossible subject”, even unthinkable (Lorenzini, 2004, 2018). Until some somatic features will be related to some behaviours or cultural aspects (often negatively described) these people groups will continue to perceive themselves and to be perceived as not part of the major group. In

some cases, this origins devaluation came from the same adoptive parents. In fact, some parents might experience a certain grade of difficulty to find common elements among immigrant people and internationally adopted children. This is often caused by a fear that people could compare their children to foreign children, experiencing negative judgments. However, the public place outside of the protected and friendly family environment, could be particularly risky (Lorenzini, 2013).

In other cases, not very frequent, it is the parents themselves who denounce episodes of discrimination suffered by their dark-skinned children.

In the respondent's words, the school seems the context in which they said they experienced the most painful experiences of discrimination. They often describe episodes which happened in front of their friends, when they were very young (so, in a lifetime where it is even more difficult to understand what and why it happens). These episodes start from the derision, insulting, refusal since persecutory behaviours.

Some respondents refer to discrimination episodes calling them "unavoidable facts from the social context". Negative opinions circulating in the social context are so notoriously frequent that they seem acceptable. In several interviews, young adopted people refer some familiar adults behaviours (i.e. parents, brothers and sisters) which minimize the relevance of the verbal abuses against their dark skin color. It is not possible to support this approach, nor the one of the people who said "these kinds of behaviours have always existed, and they always will be. We cannot do anything".

In November 2018, Paola Crestani (CIAI² President) denounced a very serious discrimination episode against her Indian adopted daughter. In a Facebook post (which has been removed due to offensive comments) she tells about her daughter experience. While she was sitting in the train, a woman doubted she had her ticket and she affirmed "I don't want to sit next to a Nigger" and she moves away from her. In April 2019 another article with the headline: Racism, the mobilisation of adoptive mothers: "insulted and teated like drug dealers. This is how our children's lives have changed³. Since 1999/2000, my research has shown recurring incidence of racism suffered by young adopted children from foreign backgrounds, especially those of colour. But unfortunately, similar episodes are gradually increased due, also, to an intolerant and discriminating political climate. Indeed, mass-media seem influenced by this climate too and they do not offer a plural point of view (Lorenzini, 2017, 2018).

On the whole, from the interviews it seems very difficult for young adopted people to share these events with their parents because of several reasons.

2 Centro Italiano Aiuti all'Infanzia: <http://www.ciai.it/chi-siamo/> consulted on 10 november 2018.

3 The whole article can be found at <https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2019/04/05/razismo-la-mobilizzazione-delle-madri-adoptive-insultati-e-trattati-da-spacciatori-cosi-e-cambiata-la-vita-nei-nostri-figli/5071073/> consulted on 6 april 2019.

In some cases, they are afraid not to be understood. In other cases, what they experience is so humiliating that they prefer not to talk about. Some of them are concerned to worry their parents. From the parent's point of view, it is important not to devalue or victimize. It is important to share the message that these episodes are not impossible to eliminate, they are not part of the "normal" human behaviour or even intended for being part of their all life. It would be appropriate to engage personally, to try to understand prejudices and reasons for stereotypes. It is only with this informed attitude that it is possible to support the children when they need to share these episodes.

No child should live in loneliness these critical events. Prejudices and stereotypes might negatively influence internationally adopted children identity construction which is connected to their own origins perception and to the connected meanings attributed by social and familiar context. Because of these reasons, parents are called to think to their own prejudices related to their children origin country because they will implicitly or explicitly transmit to them and they will contribute to their identity construction process (Lorenzini, 2004). If the child perceives that differences are truly appreciated, it is probably that he will develop positive feelings related to his own foreign origin. He/she might develop a greater sense of self-confident which might protect him/her from external attacks (Chistolini, 2010).

2. IDENTITY AND SENSE OF BELONGING IN THE WORDS OF THE ADOPTED INTERVIEWED. ARE THERE ANY PROBLEMS?

The identity development of adopted foreign origin children is a complex process for several reasons as, for example, their adoptive origin, their personal biographies, the discontinuity caused by the adoption itself, but also because their somatic traits that can make them feel distant and extraneous from the "others", both in the family and extra-family context. What do respondents express about their identity and their sense of belonging? What do they say about defining themselves Italians and, at the same time, to belong to other origins (i.e. Brazil, India, Colombia, Madagascar, etc.)? A significant proportion of the younger interviewed (both male and female) simply and univocally declare to feel "Italians" because they have arrived in Italy when they were kids, so they do not know the culture of their country of origin: "Obviously, I feel more Italian than Indian because I have lived here since I was little, then..."⁴ (42, f, India, one year). (Lorenzini, 2013: 303); "I feel Italian. I have no experiences from Ecuador"⁵ (44, f, Ecuador, 5 months) (*Ibidem*).

Others explain that the only aspects that remind them of their origin are their somatic traits, especially skin colour. Their mirror shows them an

4 Original version: "Mi sento più italiana, ovviamente, che indiana, perché ho vissuto qui da piccola e quindi ormai...".

5 Original version: "Italiana..., dell'Ecuador proprio non ho nessuna esperienza...".

image of diversity often considered the sign of strangeness, distance and non-belonging.

In few cases, peculiarities related to their foreign origins – such as dark skin – are accepted and positively valued only when these bring them some advantages. For example, it happens when dark complexion is compared to “being tanned”, which is one of the few positive meanings attributed to black skin in the Italian context, because “you don’t have to go to tanning salons”:

I would say I feel Italian. However, at the end and for convenience, I feel more Indian because of my features. It’s for convenience because of the eyes, because of my complexion – which is envied by many – because I don’t have to go to the tanning saloons. I feel Indian from that point of view. However, I prefer... we can say ‘for convenience’... I feel Italian or Indian for convenience⁶ (33, f, India, 2 years) (Ibid.: 304).

The theme of the “advantageous”, in the definition of oneself, shows the importance of the judgment of the people who live in the adoptive context. The judgment of the others seems to strongly influence the possibility for the youth to see and conciliate personal aspects linked to their origins. These are more easily accepted when they are positively evaluated (i.e.: “you look tanned”). On the contrary, these are more easily rejected when they are linked to a stereotyped identification (i.e.: “dirty Negro, go back to your country”).

The possibility to be and feel Italian and to feel a sense of belonging to other origins at the same time, is often expressed as a rift and not in terms of a joint presence of heterogeneous elements, harmoniously mixed and interacting with each other: “I don’t feel... either of them. I feel very... divided”⁷ (27, f, Tanzania, 5 years) (Ibid.: 306).

The biggest contrast is to have somatic traits and... let’s say, a typically Italian... European personality. Sometimes I feel weird. When you look yourself in the mirror you notice that you are made by two different realities, isn’t it? Even if I did know that and I still don’t know... there must be something inside⁸ (31, f, Korea, 2 years) (Ibid.: 317).

- 6 Original version: “Io diciamo che mi sento italiana, però, in fondo... per quanto riguarda i lineamenti, per comodità mia a volte mi sento più indiana. Per comodità mia nel senso... comunque per il fatto degli occhi, per la carnagione che molti mi invidiano, perché non mi faccio lampade, da quel punto di vista mi sento indiana. Però per il resto preferisco... diciamo a convenienza, indiana o italiana: a convenienza”.
- 7 Original version: “Io mi sento... nessuno dei due, mi sento molto... a metà. Cioè, è vero la mia mentalità è chiaramente italiana, son cresciuta qui... Anni fa avrei detto che mi sentivo più italiana, ma adesso... no, non lo so”.
- 8 Original version: “Il contrasto più grosso è avere questi tratti somatici e... una personalità tipicamente italiana, europea diciamo. A volte mi sento strana, guardandoti allo specchio ti accorgi che sei fatta con due realtà diverse, come dicevo prima, no? C’è sempre, anche se non l’ho conosciuta e non la conosco tanto, però qualcosa dev’essere rimasto dentro”.

Another respondent's way to define oneself could be expressed by the words "half-and-half": "Half Italian and half Brazilian, Indian etc.". While on the one hand, this expression seems to give equal importance to different aspects, on the other hand, it seems to define a split between the parts:

Half and half! I feel African physically... when you look yourself in the mirror... I just forget about it during the day, but when you come back at home you saw it. I feel Italian because of my culture... half and half... I feel in one way because of my physical characteristics and I feel in another way because of my culture⁹ (29, f, Tanzania, 4 years) (*Ibid.*: 307).

I thought about it many times, especially during adolescence... because of an identity's reason, because I don't feel Italian at all. After I matured the division between physical and cultural...¹⁰ (29, f, Tanzania, 4 years) (*Ibidem*).

Several respondents also use the words "at the bottom", "in my heart" or "inside", to refer to the part of them that is linked to their origins. This part seems to reside deep in their identity, somewhere hidden from others.

I feel Colombian in my heart, profoundly Colombian. Instead, I feel Italian in my everyday life. However, I'm Colombian in my heart and I want to remain Colombian. I want to come back to Colombia, but not to live there. There is a part of me which is in Colombia, I left that part there and I must go back to pick it up¹¹ (34, f, Colombia, 10 years) (*Ibid.*: 306).

Others show even a greater problem in defining themselves and the strong need to define themselves as the "one hundred percent of the Italians", while they still feel the desire to link to their origins:

I recently rediscovered my origin... well, now I can talk about it, I can see it in a positive way. When I was little I saw the fact I had to talk about it as a trauma: I was afraid about it because I would have like to feel Italian, so the only idea that they ask themselves: "Are you Indian?" it meant I was different and it didn't like that. When I realized it was useless and that I didn't have to necessarily feel 100 per cent Italian and that it was useless to

- 9 Original version: "Metà e metà (ride)! Fisicamente mi sento africana... quando ti guardi allo specchio..., durante la giornata te lo scordi, però quando a sera rientri, lo vedi... Per cultura mi sento italiana... metà e metà... fisicamente mi sento in un modo e culturalmente in un altro".
- 10 Original version: "Molte volte ci ho pensato, soprattutto durante l'adolescenza... per un fatto d'identità, perché proprio non mi sentivo italiana... Dopo ho maturato la divisione tra fisico e cultura... Poi l'adolescenza è un periodo di crisi, di passaggio...".
- 11 Original version: "Nel cuore mi sento colombiana, profondamente colombiana. Invece, nella vita mi sento italiana. Però, nel cuore io sono colombiana e voglio rimanere colombiana e voglio tornare in Colombia, ma non a viverci. Ma perché parte di me è in Colombia, io ho lasciato quella parte lì che poi devo andare a riprenderla".

look in front of the mirror saying “I’m 100% Italian”...it was useless, it was a lie. I was able to open my mind, looking me at the mirror saying “I’m... 50 per cent... well, even 90 per cent Italian because of my culture, my education, but because of my physical aspect and maybe for some unconscious reasons” (she laughs). I can have something Indian that is part of me, that is part of my personality, I absolutely cannot refuse it. It’s something it can more open me to others...¹² (38, f, India, one year) (Ibid.: 311).

Some interviewees show difficulty to recognize their origins as part of themselves. Indeed, this difficulty seems consequent to the necessity of adaptation in the adoption context. Often, in these statements, there are no traces of the possibility to mix different aspects of their identity, which are instead presented as separate and not communicating: “I feel Indian inside. However, I’ve adapted because of living in Italy. I learn to adapt to live here” (47, f, India, 8 years)¹³ (Ibid.: 306).

This is the difficulty in reconciling different identity aspects, which are presented as separate and non-communicating. In summary, there is a general tendency of a polarization, distinguishing between some identity aspects from the others. Some of them are made more visible, while others are kept secret. However, from the words of some respondents, there is seems to be a general and more or less intense difficulty to recognize themselves in their origin.

3. IS IT POSSIBLE TO DEVELOP AN INTERCULTURAL IDENTITY IN THE ADOPTED CHILDREN?

It is interesting and important to highlight how some respondents use other formulations to explicit their sense of belonging not in terms of duality, “half-and-half”, but for example, “one and the other together”:

I feel both... I feel Maya because I come from there and I like that. I like to belong to an important civilization which has made history in the Latin

- 12 Original version: “Però l’ho riscoperta ora questa cosa... cioè ora ne posso parlare... vederla positivamente, ora perché ho date esperienze...quand’ero piccola la vedevo come un trauma l’idea di dover parlare di queste cose: a me dispiaceva perché volevo sentirmi italiana al massimo (ride) e quindi l’idea che mi si chiedesse “Ah ma tu sei indiana...?” voleva dire che mi vedevano diversa e mi dava noia... Quando ho capito che era inutile che io mi dovessi per forza sentire italiana al 100% e che vedermi allo specchio e dirmi “Io sono italiana al 100%” era inutile, era una bugia... forse riaprirmi, riaffacciarmi all’India, alla sua cultura e così via e forse anche al guardarmi allo specchio e dire “Io sono... posso dire 50%, anche 90% italiana, perché ho una cultura, un’educazione, però di aspetto fisico e forse in qualcosa, come l’inconscio collettivo (ride) posso avere qualcosa d’indiano che è mio e fa parte della mia personalità, io non lo posso assolutamente rifiutare”... è una cosa che mi può aprire maggiormente agli altri... (38, f, India, un anno).
- 13 Original version: “Mi sento tutta indiana dentro, però vivendo in Italia mi sono adattata, cioè ho imparato ad adattarmi a vivere qua...”.

American countries and then I also like to be European [...]”¹⁴ (30, m, El Salvador, 6 years) (Ibid.: 307).

In other cases, there is a plural presence of elements awareness, mixed together in an integrated form. Indeed, these young adopted also highlights some positive elements in belonging to different origins.

Some of them do not only speak about aspects related to their origins, but also the sense of belonging into a European dimension, defining them “citizens of the world”. In these cases, it remains the doubt whether the feeling of an extended identity (i.e.: European or citizens of the world) is linked to the perception of a multiple memberships related to their adoption story or to their life experiences (i.e: study, awareness to live in a multicultural and globalized world, etc.). Other respondents use the “harmonious” adjective to define their sense of belonging to different experiences and cultural references. They claim multiple memberships and, even if in a few cases, they explain that they have maintained relations with their country of origin (and, as we see later, in one case also the citizenship).

Here, it is important to highlight how is possible the evolution of an “intercultural identity” during adoption. For “intercultural identity” in adoption we can mean an open identity in which it is possible to integrate different and harmonious elements. The point is the possibility to be and feel Italian including his own different origin. This could happen, without perceiving a sense of fracture in his own identity, mixing identity elements which could harmonically interact with each other.

It is possible to exemplify what it is just explained through the words of a young woman of Brazilian origin, arrived in Italy when she was 3 months old. She describes herself affirming plural features and memberships:

I feel Brazilian not only because I have retained my dual nationality, but also because I feel I was born in Brazil and I am happy to have been born there. I’m also happy because – even I know it could seem stupid – when it’s summer I feel Brazilian more than ever because I have something... some features, my physiognomy, my dark-skin. I’m never in the shadow and this means something. I feel I have a thick skin like a Sud-American. I feel all the same characteristics of someone who was born and has lived there. I feel I belong to that country, even physically. I feel like I’m maintaining some characteristics¹⁵ (51, f, Brazil, 3 months, 2011) (Ibid.: 309).

14 Original version: “Mi sento tutte due... mi sento Maya perché vengo da là e mi piace esserlo, mi piace appartenere a una civiltà che ha fatto storia nei paesi latino americani e poi mi piace essere anche europeo...”.

15 Original version: “Mi sento brasiliana non solo perché ho mantenuto la doppia nazionalità, ma anche perché sento che sono nata in Brasile e sono contenta di essere nata là. Sono anche contenta perché, sembra stupido è vero che io a livello somatico non ho niente che riconduca al Brasile, però quando è estate io mi sento più brasiliana che mai, perché qualcosa ce l’ho, qualche caratteristica, la fisionomia, la pelle scura, non sto un secondo all’ombra, questo vorrà dire qualcosa sento di avere la pelle grossa come una

The young woman also talks about her Brazilian journey made together with her parents. It has been a very important experience to answer questions about her pre-adoptive past. Indeed, it has helped her to reinforce awareness and respect for her country of origin:

After we went to Brazil... I was 17 years old... I change gear [...]. The city where I was born it was a magnet. Lots of crisis before, then you are there and all disappear all of a sudden. Maybe I had simply the need to see, understand, give me some answers, even answers which are not possible. What I felt close when we have arrived in Brazil it was seeing people similar to me. This made me laugh. Over there they are all different, like here. I simply satisfied my curiosity. Then, when we return to Italy, I understood that I would like to have the double passport and I decided to maintain the double nationality. I think that it's an honor to have two passport. I vote for Brazil every 4 year in Milan. They made me a sort of consulate's identity card this year and I'm very glad of that. There were moments of my journey which visually helped me to delete fear and anxieties and to experience the desire to come back home¹⁶ (51, f, Brazil, 3 months, 2011) (Ibid.: 283).

As we can see the respondents describes their relationship with their origins with ample details, forms and levels:

I feel Italian because of my expectations and the ways I think in my everyday life. I grow up here. I feel Brazilian in the way I am with others, in a more "wild" part of me, because I bring with me something of my country with my double nationality, because of my physical features. But I'm aware of it, with memories...¹⁷ (51, f, Brazil, 3 months, 2011) (Ibid.: 309).

persona sudamericana, sento di avere tutte le caratteristiche di una persona che è nata là e vissuta qua. Mi sento appartenente, anche proprio fisicamente appartenente a quel paese, mi sembra di conservare delle caratteristiche”.

16 Original version: “Dopo che siamo andati in Brasile, avevo 17 anni, io da lì ho cambiato proprio registro. [...] Anche la città dove sono nata io, cioè ho visto e... come se fosse stata una dose di calmante, tante crisi per sapere, poi arrivi lì e ti sparisce d'un tratto tutto. Forse dovevo semplicemente vedere, capire, darmi risposte, anche se poi risposte non ci sono, in fin dei conti. Però una cosa che mi ha accompagnato da quando siamo arrivati in Brasile era vedere se c'era gente che mi assomigliava, questo mi ha fatto molto ridere. Ma là poi sono tutti diversi, come qua, io semplicemente stavo soddisfacendo delle mie curiosità. Poi quando siamo tornati in Italia, in quell'anno, ho maturato la consapevolezza di volere il doppio passaporto, ho deciso di mantenere la nazionalità brasiliana, perché penso che avere due passaporti sia un lusso e poi mi fa piacere. Io voto per il Brasile, ogni 4 anni vado a Milano per votare, quest'anno mi hanno fatto una specie di carta d'identità per il consolato, a me fa molto piacere. Ci sono stati momenti del mio viaggio che mi hanno proprio aiutato visivamente a cancellare paure e ansie e ad avere voglia di tornare a casa mia”.

17 Original version: “Mi sento italiana in tutto quello che è la mia vita quotidiana, aspettative, modo di pensare. Sono cresciuta qui. Mi sento brasiliana nel modo di rapportarmi, in una parte di me un pochino più “selvaggia”, nel portare qualcosa al mio paese

I know about Brazil through Internet. My parents went to the Tourism Fair in Rimini and they bring me lots of things about Brazil. Everybody likes Brazil, so them too. I know about political aspects because if I have to vote I would have some good reasons. I read Brazilian newspapers, like “La Repubblica” in Italy. I see photos. If there is the opportunity, I’m interested also in the tourist aspect. Brazil is a very big country... it’s very messed up. I search for information on internet and newspapers. I think that it’s a quite rich but very fragmented country. It is now developing... but it’s too fragmented from a social point of view. There are too many differences... too many poor and too few riches. There are too many problems which are not taken into account even if it’s a full resources country. Mum and dad..., mum would like to go to live there because she enjoyed her stay. Beyond the first orientation moment, she said that people were smiling, not like here. She expresses lots of positive opinions and maybe she misses the country. There is something left inside her...¹⁸ (51, f, Brazil, 3 months, 2011) (Ibid.: 301).

From these girls’ words, we can see that the possibility to recognize herself in a complex and unitary identity is strictly related to the need to question herself and to search for some answer related to her origins and history, sharing emotions and contents with her family. She needs to listen and to be scaffolded in an unconditionally way. She needs to be “home” and to feel Brazilian at the same time. She also decided to maintain her Brazilian nationality, the double passport and voting in Brazil, as well as Italy. She shows that she cherishes her biography through a continuative, active and responsible relation with her country of origin.

Adopted young people can build a strong identity, integrated and enhanced by their Italian citizenship, their somatic origins and cultural background. They show that they have found a meaning in their own history and a continuity between their past and present. This allows them to view their future in a confident way (Ferrari, *et al.*, 2014; Lorenzini, 2013, 2012).

con la doppia nazionalità, per le caratteristiche fisiche anche se non si vedono, però io ne sono consapevole, con i ricordi e...”.

- 18 Original version: “Mi informo attraverso internet. I miei genitori sono andati alla fiera del turismo a Rimini e mi hanno portato di tutto sul Brasile, piace a tutti anche a loro, mi hanno comprato biscottini e altre cose brasiliane. Mi informo sugli aspetti politici perché se devo votare devo farlo con motivi fondati, leggo un giornale di là che è come la Repubblica da noi. Guardo foto. L’aspetto turistico se c’è qualche occasione. Il Brasile è un paese... enorme... molto incasinato. Io mi informo, leggo da internet, dai giornali. L’idea che ho è che è un paese molto ricco, ma molto frammentato, adesso è in sviluppo... ma dal punto di vista sociale è troppo frammentato, troppe differenze... troppi poveri e pochi ricchi, troppi problemi che non vengono affrontati, nonostante sia un paese ricco di risorse. Mamma e papà..., mamma vorrebbe andare a vivere là perché si è trovata bene, al di là dell’assestamento quando è arrivata, dice che la gente è solare non come qua. Fa molte considerazioni positive, poi forse ha nostalgia del paese, di là... a lei è rimasto qualcosa...”.

Therefore, it is important to support the importance of an open attitude in the family, social and scholastic context. Only if we start from these points it will be possible to achieve integration, which is an interactive process able to mix different elements to create a “new and only mix” (Edelstein, 2008: 23).

CONCLUSIONS

This paper has been structured thinking about the children’s right to develop a plural identity and to grow up respecting their cultural origins, their experiential references and their somatics characteristics, also skin colour. At the same time, it has been structured thinking about the adults which have an educative responsibility towards these children. They should be able to create well-being and positive relations, trying to valorize the common elements of each of us. Skin colour and culture’s prejudices and stereotypes could become relational and self-esteem problems and they could affect personal well-being.

Skin colour is strictly related to our identity and so is the value or disvalue related to this physical element. The pigmentation of our skin is part of us, regardless of the origin. It should be possible to experience, that identities are something always in the process since childhood. Identities are created on multiples and even conflicting aspects. Everybody should have the possibility to feel to belong to different and plural elements which could interact and mix with to each other in an original way. From an educative and intercultural point of view, families and schools should offer the possibility to express, maintain, find and/or even remove parts of his own biography. The awareness to give continuity to his own life paths is something possible and important, even with some fractures and losses. Indeed, the results of this research project show how important could be an open educative parental approach dealing with the “origin question” of their own adoptive children.

Well-being signals seem to be related to all the identity elements’ conciliation. It is important to facilitate the cohabitation of different and plural cultural and experiential references. We should not think about this as a sort of “obligation”, but as a possibility. This possibility should guarantee the right to be appreciated and accepted with our own somatic features, especially skin colour.

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