Psychological implications of the 'Back to the Origins' journey for intercountry adoptees

Alessandra Santona
University of Milano-Bicocca, Milan, Italy

Giacomo Tognasso
University of Milano-Bicocca, Milan, Italy

Cristiana Carella
Italian Centre for Childhood Aid (CIAI), Italy

Laura Gorla
University of Milano-Bicocca, Milan, Italy

Marina Raymondi
Italian Centre for Childhood Aid (CIAI), Italy

Marco Chistolini
Italian Centre for Childhood Aid (CIAI), Italy

Abstract

One way in which intercountry adoptees can elaborate on their past history is through travelling to their country of birth. This article explores the memories and experiences recalled by a group of adoptees who visited their homeland after being adopted as children by Italian families. The sample comprised 34 participants aged between 12 and 40 years who visited their birth country between 2000 and 2013. In 2017–2018, they were asked to complete a questionnaire designed to obtain retrospective recall of their experiences and feelings on return to Italy, and how their ethnic identity and psychological well-being had been affected by the trip. The results revealed

Corresponding author:
Giacomo Tognasso, Piazza dell'Ateneo Nuovo 1, 20126 Milan, Italy.
Email: g.tognasso@campus.unimib.it

that the adoptees' emotional experiences during the return visit significantly affected their feelings towards adoption itself and that it changed their sense of belonging both to Italy and the country where they were born. Most also perceived their return travel as a momentous occasion which increased their overall knowledge about their birth country and its culture. The results are significant for providing new information about how international adoptees incorporate their homeland culture into their lives.

Introduction

The lives of intercountry adoptees are marked by loss, acquisitions and adjustment. They may well have experienced the trauma of abandonment, suffered significant harm to the attachment process (Marci, et al., 2020; Santona, et al., 2019) and faced identity problems as they adjust to living with their new family. It is these psychological and social pressures that make adoption such a complex field of study (Boivin and Hassan, 2015; Greco and Comelli, 2017; Grotevant and Von Korff, 2011; Maaskant, et al., 2016; Suter, 2008).

This adaptation process can develop in many ways, with positive integration between past and present at one extreme and/or with a loss of the child's original culture and language at the other (Mazeaud, Harf and Baubet, 2015; Yngvesson, 2003). But most common is a mixture of the two where adoptees and families look for continuity between past and present and seek to integrate their biological and historical past in their current lives in order to establish a consolidated personal identity (Chang, Chen and Chatham-Carpenter, 2016).

Ethnic identity and well-being

An important aspect of intercountry adoption is the development of *ethnic identity* in the sense of a feeling of belonging to a specific ethnic group and the acceptance of the beliefs, behaviours and values associated with it (Phinney, 1996; Phinney and Ong, 2007).

The significance of this for the children's well-being, self-esteem and mental health has been highlighted in several studies, together with its longer-term effects on academic attainments, work achievements and fulfilling personal relationships (Basow, et al., 2008; Boivin and Hassan, 2015; Ferrari, et al., 2015; Mohanty, Keokse, and Sales, 2007).

A recent study by Ferrari and colleagues (2017) explored how transracial adoptees living in Italy construct their ethnic identities and stressed the importance of the socialisation strategies used by mothers (inculturation or reculturation and preparation for prejudice) in addition to the ethnic identity of the adoptees and their level of self-esteem. It showed that the process of maternal inculturation promoted the adoptees' exploration of their ethnic identity which, if integrated, could increase their self-esteem.

Return travels

One way for children to explore their original culture is through heritage travels, sometimes called return travels, homeland travels and adoption return trips (Gustafsson, 2020;

Wilson and Summerhill-Coleman, 2013). These experiences offer an occasion to visit places like orphanages, which are significant for their connection with personal history, and to discover their cultural origins in an attempt to elaborate on their past abandonment and understand their roots (Ahluwalia, 2007; Gustafsson, Lind and Sparrman, 2020). For these reasons, adoption return trips have become a growing tourism industry, with some travel agencies offering tailor-made packages (Gustafsson, 2020).

Although there are several motives that drive adoptees to undertake such a journey, previous studies have largely focused on reconnection with birth parents rather than contact with their native country. Also, they tend to adopt a qualitative approach to the event, resulting in a significant lack of quantitative evidence on this experience. This makes it difficult to gain a deep insight into the psychological effects of homeland trips, so a different approach is called for.

Although returning to their country of origin is likely to be an intense experience for all adoptees, one specific factor influencing its psychological effect is the child's age at the time of the visit (Wilson and Summerhill-Coleman, 2013). Older children are obviously more capable of expressing their thoughts, beliefs, worries and emotions and better cope with the intense feelings and stressors generated by the trip. Young children are more likely to find the experience confusing and find it difficult to adapt to a new routine, new foods and new places. They may even misunderstand the aims of the trip and think they will be 'returned' to their orphanage (Wilson and Summerhill-Coleman, 2013). However, if the visit is well conducted, it could equally strengthen their memories and help integrate past and present identities. In contrast, adolescents are more likely to understand all the aspects related to their adoption and to manage complex emotions. They may also be more willing to search for detailed information about themselves and reveal their feelings to friends as well as parents (Mazzonis, 2010; Vadilonga, 2010)

Whatever the ages of the children, homeland trips are always likely to make them more aware of their native culture and comprehend the traditions, cultural memories, values and heritages that characterise their birth country. As a result, some adoptees develop a heightened sense of belonging in the sense of personal involvement in an environment or system of which they consider themselves an essential part (Hagerty, et al., 1996). This is manifest in a sense of pride in one's origins and a strong feeling of close affiliation with an ethnic or cultural group. For others, their sense of belonging is more ambiguous; they can identify with two different cultures but without a true sense of belonging to either, a feature noted in several studies of transracial adoptees (Goss, Byrd and Hughey, 2017; Meyers, 2020).

Return travels are also a challenge for adoptive families (Powers, 2011). Planning such trips involves compromise and co-operation between children and parents, with the result that the 'return' is not necessarily experienced in the same way by both parties. For families, past, present and future issues are intertwined, creating a situation with strong emotional connotations (Gustafsson, et al., 2020). Adoptees are more likely to be curious about what they will find in their birth country and worried about what they might discover about their past (Miller, 2013). They seek answers but also have to face hidden memories and new emotions.

The overall picture of the effects of home visits on children and families is therefore varied and the influential factors need further analysis.

The current study

The study in question was designed to record the memories of a group of internationally adopted people about their return trip to their homeland and to explore the link between their perception of the experience and their identity structuring and psychological well-being. The dearth of research focusing on the specific relationship between these factors, coupled with the tendency for most studies in this area to focus on domestic adoptees and avoid quantitative methodologies, make this investigation particularly significant.

The research was conducted between October 2017 and April 2018 in collaboration with the Italian Centre for Childhood Aid (CIAI), an association founded in 1968 to provide families for abandoned children in different countries. Its primary aim has been to offer support and care to help these children move into the future. This article focuses on one particular CIAI activity: the 'Back to the Origins' journey available to adopted children, parents and other family members and friends with the aim of helping adoptees to face their personal history. It comprises three phases: the *preparatory* phase in which participants are selected; the *journey* itself; and the *post-journey* adjustment. It was after the last stage that participants in this study were asked to complete an online questionnaire.

Aims and methods

The research sought to investigate adoptees' personal memories surrounding their trip. To do this, information was gathered about the emotions felt before, during and after the journey. As this occurred well after the experience, the study is based on retrospective recall data.

Study sample

The sample comprised 34 adopted people (14 females and 20 males) who took the return trip to their homeland with their companions (parents, siblings, friends). Given the retrospective methodology, both their age at the time of the return trip and at the time of completing the questionnaire could have affected the findings. Thus, participants' ages were divided into the main life-cycle phases to better understand the sample's distribution.

Nearly half the participants returned to their native countries when they were young adults (aged 19–27 years; $N = 15$; 44%), followed by adolescents (14–18 years; $N = 8$; 24%), pre-adolescents (11–12 years; $N = 5$; 15%), children (6–10 years; $N = 3$; 9%) and older adults (28–30 years; $N = 3$; 9%). The mean age at the return trip was 18.7 years ($SD = 6.4$).

At the time when the participants completed the questionnaire, their ages varied between 12 and 40 years ($M = 24$ years; $SD = 7.3$). Most were therefore adults (28–40 years; $N = 12$; 35%), followed by young adults (19–27 years; $N = 11$; 32%), adolescents (14–18 years; $N = 9$; 26%), and pre-adolescents (12–13 years; $N = 2$; 6%).

In terms of education, 38% ($N = 13$) had a high school diploma, 35% ($N = 12$) had a middle school diploma, 21% ($N = 7$) had a bachelor's degree and 6% ($N = 2$) had a primary school diploma. Eighteen (53%) were students, 32% ($N = 11$) reported working full-time and 15% ($N = 5$) reported being unemployed. In terms of personal circumstances, most ($N = 26$; 77%) were not in a relationship and only six (19%) were married.

Return travels were made between 2000 and 2017 and the countries to which adoptees returned were Brazil, Cambodia, Chile, Colombia, Ethiopia, India, Spain, Thailand and Ukraine.

Measures used

A customised questionnaire was constructed to gather each adoptee's memories of their return journey. It covered the practical organisation of the trip, its utility, their companions' behaviour while there, the meaning that each individual gave to the experience, the emotional impact of the visit and other effects that respondents wished to describe. The questionnaire was divided into four parts: the first investigated sensations and emotions *before* the return trip (e.g. 'Am I taking this journey because I feel incomplete?'; 'Will I feel joy when I visit the places of my childhood?'); the second sought to chart the experience *during* the journey (e.g. 'Did I feel joy visiting my birth country?'), and the third explored the *thoughts and feelings afterwards* ('Was I happy to have taken this journey?'). The last part of the questionnaire focused on respondents' perceptions of the *perceived consequences* that the return trip had for them and the *meaning* they gave to the whole experience.

Two particular effects highlighted in the literature, namely ethnic identity and psychological well-being, were specifically investigated, although the retrospective nature of the evidence limits its value. But given the huge significance of the visit in the lives of the participants, their perceptions of its long-term effects are important as they may have real consequences.

To assess ethnic identity, the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure – Revised (MEIM-R) was used (Phinney, 1992). This has two subscales: *ethnic identity exploration* and *ethnic identity commitment*. The *exploration* section reveals how much the adoptee has searched for knowledge about his or her homeland culture whereas the *ethnic identity commitment* shows the cognitive and emotional resources used for ethnic identity construction. The Italian version of this instrument, validated by Musso, Moscardino and Inguglia (2017), was used and the level of internal consistency of MEIM-R was $\alpha = .853$ ($N = 34$).

Participants' psychological well-being after the return trip was measured by using the Psychological Well-Being Scale (PWB) (Ryff and Keyes, 1995). This is a self-report questionnaire with six dimensions. It includes 84 items, each rated using a 6-point Likert-type scale. These are *Autonomy, Environmental Mastery*, *Personal Growth*, *Positive Relations with Others*, *Purpose in life* and *Self-Acceptance*. Again, the Italian version of the instrument, validated by Ruini and colleagues (2003), was used. The level of internal consistency of PWB was $\alpha = .904$ ($N = 34$).

Procedure

The journey of adoptees to their birth country represents a delicate event that requires careful preparation and two operators accompanied the group – one with specific knowledge of such trips and a psychologist and adoption specialist. The criteria for acceptance were: (a) adoption completed within at least five years; (b) aged over nine years; (c) a real desire to visit the country of origin; and (d) the absence of psychological problems and difficulties in family and personal life.

Study participants were selected from the CIAI database which lists everyone who has undertaken the return trip in the past 35 years. Candidates were contacted via an email that

explained the research and asked for their consent to take part. The provisions of Italian law 196/2003 covering consent were followed and the Ethics Committee of the University's psychology department granted ethical approval.

Results

All the questionnaires were digitally codified and scored based on the instructions provided by the author of each scale. The data were analysed using the statistical software IBM SPSS 27 for Windows.

Background characteristics of the participants

Birth countries of the adoptees. The majority of participants came from India ($N = 10$; 29%) and Ethiopia ($N = 10$; 29%), followed by Colombia ($N = 6$; 18%), Peru ($N = 2$; 6%), Thailand ($N = 2$; 6%), Cambodia ($N = 2$; 6%), Brazil ($N = 1$; 3%) and Sri Lanka ($N = 1$; 3%).

Age at the time of adoption. The participants were adopted between 0 and 12 years ($M = 3.79$ years; $SD = 2.9$ years), most when preschool age between two and five years ($N = 18$; 55%). Eight were adopted in their first year of life (24%), six during school age between six and nine years (18%) and only one after the age of nine (3%).

Motivations for undertaking the homeland trip. An innovative aspect of this study was the exploration of the motives that moved the adoptees to undertake a homeland trip. To assess their level of motivation participants were asked, 'How much did you want to make this return trip?' to which they answered using a Likert-type scale (*1 = not desired; 5 = strongly desired*). The results showed that the overall motivation within the sample was high ($M = 3.81$; $SD = 1.02$) with only 8% of participants saying that they were indifferent.

Participants were then asked about their motivation before the homeland trip, again using a Likert-type scale (*1 = strongly disagree; 4 = strongly agree*). The answers fell into two categories as seen in Table 1. The first expresses the adopted people's need to have some information about their past, while the second states their desire to understand more about who they are.

These results show that the participants mostly wished to revisit the places where they had spent their childhood ($M = 4.16$; $SD = 1.11$), and to gather more information about their personal history ($M = 3.97$; $SD = 1.3$). They also wanted to meet and see again people who had been influential in their past ($M = 3.31$; $SD = 1.37$).

Regarding the second category, two motivations were dominant: their need to understand who they are ($M = 3.19$; $SD = 1.17$) and to overcome a feeling of being incomplete ($M = 3.03$; $SD = 1.4$).

Emotions experienced during the trip

In order to explore their emotional experience during the homeland trip, the adoptees were asked to indicate how much they experienced specific emotions such as 'anger', 'fear', 'joy', 'confusion', 'disdain', 'sadness', 'surprise', 'regret' and 'nostalgia', again using a 5-point Likert-type scale (*1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree*). The two most common emotions were 'joy' ($M = 3.89$; $SD = .93$) and 'surprise' ($M = 3.56$; $SD = 0.84$), while the two

Table 1. Motivations toward homeland trip.*

Motivations	Mean	SD
I needed to understand who I really am	3.19	1.17
I felt incomplete	3.03	1.40
I had doubts about myself	2.78	1.43
I have always been proud of myself, but I wanted to reinforce this pride	3.03	1.20
I always felt not only Italian, but as if I belonged also to another culture	3.50	1.34
I loved my birth land before the trip, and I felt connected to it	3.03	1.20
I was curious to understand what I had in common with people who live in my birth land	3.69	1.20
I was curious to understand what I would feel in meeting people who live in my birth country	3.66	1.15
I wanted to see the places of my infancy	4.16	1.11
I wanted to have more information about my history	3.97	1.30
I just wanted to go on holiday	1.84	1.24

*These figures are based on the 1–4 Lickert scale described.

least common were 'regret' ($M = 1.94$; $SD = 1.09$) and 'disdain' ($M = 1.43$; $SD = .85$). To facilitate further analysis, all the negative emotions scores were summed to produce a single value.

Exploring the links between the various factors

To investigate the links between these factors, a multiple linear analytic model was applied to the data and nine different analyses of statistical association were undertaken. These sought to illuminate the impact of the adoptees' background characteristics on their desire to embark on the homeland visit, the emotions it raised, changes in their ethnic identity and the effect of the visit on their sense of belonging to Italy and home country.

The results of these investigations are summarised in Table 2.

Discussion

This study explored the memories of a group of intercountry adoptees who visited their birth country in later life. It has charted their feelings at various stages in the process and clarified the link between their perception of the trip, any subsequent restructuring of their ethnic identity and psychological well-being. The research was innovative in that it used a quantitative methodology, initiating a different approach to the evaluation of homeland trips.

The analysis of all the emotions that could arise during a return trip revealed that 'joy' was the most significant, followed by a high level of 'surprise' and, slightly less, 'confusion and sadness'. There were differences by gender and age with adopted girls more likely to express higher levels of negative emotions than boys, and older people expressing more negative feelings than younger ones.

But, despite these variations, the overall research results show that return travel mostly generates positive feelings toward adoptees' past history and birth cultures. They reported

Table 2. Analysis of statistical association.

Independent variables	Dependent variables	Findings
Gender Age at time of visit	Desire to undertake the trip	No significant results
Gender Age at time of visit	Negative emotions summary score	Women** and older participants** likely to experience more negative emotions than men and younger participants
Gender Age at time of visit Negative emotions score	Positive change in feelings about adoption	Those with negative feelings about adoption are more likely to change their feelings**
Gender Age at time of visit Sense of belonging to birth country *before* the trip	Sense of belonging to Italy	Participants felt they belonged more to Italy than their birth country**
Gender Age at time of visit Sense of belonging to birth country *after* the trip	Sense of belonging to Italy	Participants considered themselves more Italian than emotionally committed to their birth country*
Gender Age at time of visit Sense of belonging to birth country *after* the trip	Sense of belonging to birth country	Participants felt more belonging to their birth country after their trip
Gender Age at time of visit Extent of belonging to birth country *after* the trip	The three dimensions of MEIM (commitment, exploration, total score)	*Commitment* and *Total Score:* sense of belonging to birth country, the greatest influence on their sense of belonging to birth country and increase in commitment to ethnic identity** *Exploration:* no significant findings
Gender Age at adoption Present age	Total MEIM score	No significant results: identity does not change depending on the individual's age at the time of adoption.
Gender Age at adoption Present age	Seven dimensions of the PWB	No significant results: psychological well-being does not influence ethnic identity

*p < 0.05 but >0.01; **p < 0.01.
MEIM = Multi-Ethnic Identity Measure.
PWB = Psychological Well-being scale.

that returning to significant places and meeting people they knew during their childhood produced a feeling of fulfilment and well-being.

There was also a connection between the negative emotions that emerged during the journey and positive feelings about adoption. This echoes previous studies that have underlined the significant effect that return travels can have on views about adoption (Chistolini, 2017; Mazeaud, Harf and Baubet, 2015; Wilson and Summerhill-Coleman, 2013) and how homeland trips help people to create a new identity through the integration of past and

present, and to develop a sense of belonging and continuity in terms of their personal history (Day, 2018; Duval, 2003; Lee, et al., 2007). Participants also believed that their return travel was an occasion to increase their overall knowledge of their birth country and its culture, again supporting findings that it allows people to discover more about their past (Marschall, 2014; Powers, 2011).

One new area investigated in this study concerned specific motivations for undertaking return travel. The participants gave several reasons: the desire to go back to their native country and see it again; the need to find information about their personal history and birth family; and the wish to meet relatives or people who were influential in their childhood. This motivation applied across the board.

In addition, two specific effects were investigated in the research: identity construction and psychological well-being. With regard to the former, it was found that after the journey, the adoptees considered themselves more emotionally connected to Italy than to their birth countries, indicating that the high levels of belonging to Italian culture expressed before the trip were unaffected. In addition, despite the powerful emotions raised by the return, the experience only partially affected the relationship between adoptees and their homeland. It did cause some changes in their sense of self but these were not extensive. These findings echo those of Ferrari and Rosnati (2013) that internationally adopted people identify more with the culture of the host country than with that of their homeland, but commitment to their country of origin also increases, suggesting that the return journey strengthens the sense of belonging to both.

This growing commitment to the culture of the home country is important because it facilitates the construction of a person's ethnic identity (Greco and Rosnati, 2008). However, the study found a weaker connection between adoptees' sense of belonging and the exploration of ethnic identity. A possible explanation for this is that through return travels, they can discover their past culture and explore their ethnic identity (Wilson and Summerhill-Coleman, 2013; Yngvesson, 2003) in a way that enables them to successfully integrate their past and present and, subsequently, build an identity with which they are comfortable. Significant for this was the finding that those who were more involved with the culture of their homeland also had a higher score for ethnic identity commitment, suggesting that however momentous they found the return experience, it was unlikely to be a central theme in their lives.

Two interesting findings were that there was no correlation between ethnic identity and age at adoption, or between ethnic identity and psychological well-being. It seems that adoptees can reach a sufficient level of well-being through different kinds of relationships and different levels of adhesion to their homeland (Greco and Rosnati, 2008).

Conclusion

The results of this study show that return visits have a positive effect on adoptees' identity, self-integrity and perception of their relationship with the birth country. For an adopted child, a back to origins trip means 'closing the circle'. In general, it seems that visiting the country of origin is a valuable step in the process of exploration of the past and adjustment to the new. The experience itself does not help people to fully understand their past history, but it can make a significant contribution.

Implications for policy and practice

These results are useful in providing information to adoptive parents and professionals who work in intercountry adoption about how they can best help children deal with their homeland culture. The findings suggest the benefits of a programme that contains two equally important components. In the first, it is necessary to promote adoptees' integration in the new context of their birth country and help them to assimilate the values, practices and habits of the new reality, such as language, food, clothes and social behaviour. In the second, adoptees could be helped to maintain or reacquire knowledge of their homeland through different projects, among which would be a return to their birth country. The core of this suggestion is to initially help adoptees build a strong sense of belonging and identification (a secure identification base), and then to lead them towards the exploration of their roots. Obviously, both of these have to be matched with each individual's personal characteristics and circumstances and desires, taking care not to upset their psychological stability.

Limitations and future studies

This study has limitations that should be considered when planning future research. First, the sample size is small and was recruited from one adoption agency. Second is the cross-sectional nature of the study. Some significant correlations between variables were found, but this required decisions about which were independent and which dependent. A different choice might have affected the results.

A third limitation is that the study used only two standardised instruments, MEIM-R and PWB, to analyse ethnic identity and psychological well-being, but customised questionnaires had to be used to study motivations and emotions connected to return travel. The fact that these were not validated instruments could have affected the findings.

In terms of strengths, however, to the best of our knowledge this is the first study to use a quantitative method to measure participants' emotions and ethnic identity linked to return travels.

Future research suggested by the study includes a need to explore the strategies used by parents to encourage adoptive children to build their ethnic identity. The effects of these strategies on the different aspects of this identity, such as belonging and exploration, could be examined in greater depth by investigating both parents' and children's perspectives. This would make it possible to identify elements that facilitate the process of integrating the two cultures of adoptees, with a view to developing a bicultural identity.

Declaration of conflicting interests

Funding

References

Ahluwalia P (2007) Negotiating identity: Post-colonial ethics and transnational adoption. *Journal of Global Ethics* 3(1): 55–67. doi.org/10.1080/17449620701219881

Basow SA, Lilley E, Bookwala J and McGillicuddy-DeLisi A (2008) Identity development and psychological well-being in Korean-born adoptees in the U.S. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 78(4): 473–480. doi.org/10.1037/a0014450

Boivin M and Hassan G (2015) Ethnic identity and psychological adjustment in transracial adoptees: A review of the literature. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 38(7): 1084–1103. doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2014.992922

Chang C, Chen ZJ and Chatham-Carpenter A (2016) Constructing and negotiating identity in 'birth culture': An intercultural communication approach. *China Media Research* 12(1): 2–13.

Chistolini M (2017) L'adozione: modelli teorici ed esperienze cliniche a confronto. In: Andolfi M, Chistolini M and D'andrea A (a cura di), *La famiglia adottiva tra crisi e sviluppo*. Milan: FrancoAngeli.

Day C (2018) *Experiences of Korean Adoptees and Birth Family Reunion*. Doctoral dissertation, Alliant International University. Available at: www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/experiences-korean-adoptees-birth-family-reunion/docview/2093638331/se-2?accountid = 16562

Duval DT (2003) When hosts become guests: Return visits and diasporic identities in a Commonwealth Eastern Caribbean community. *Current Issues in Tourism* 6(4): 267–308. doi.org/10.1080/13683500308667957

Ferrari L and Rosnati R (2013) Internationally adopted adolescents: How do they integrate ethnic and national identity? *Italian Journal of Sociology of Education* 5(3): 45–61. doi.10.14658/pupj-ijse-2013-3-4

Ferrari L, Rosnati R, Canzi E, Ballerini A, et al. (2017) How international transracial adoptees and immigrants cope with discrimination: The moderating role of ethnic identity in the relation between perceived discrimination and psychological well-being. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology* 27(6): 437–449. doi.org/10.1002/casp.2325

Ferrari L, Rosnati R, Manzi C and Bent-Martìnez V (2015) Ethnic identity, bicultural identity integration, and psychological well-being among transracial adoptees: A longitudinal study. *New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development* 150: 63–76. doi.10.1002/cad.20122

Goss DR, Byrd WC and Hughey MW (2017) Racial authenticity and familial acceptance among transracial adoptees: A bothersome bargain of belonging. *Symbolic Interaction* 40(2): 147–168. doi.org/10.org/10.1002/symb.282h

Greco O and Comelli I (2017) Protagonists' and adoptive process representations in Italian children's books about international adoption: A qualitative study. *Adoption Quarterly* 20(4): 267–290.

Greco O and Rosnati R (2008) Quale identità etnica? Appartenenze, implicazioni, significati. In: *Il post-adozione tra progettazione e azione, studi e ricerche Collana della Commissione per le Adozioni Internazionali*. Florence: Istituto degli Innocenti, pp. 171–193. Available at: https://sociale.regione.emilia-romagna.it/adozioni/temi/post-adozione/documenti-postadozione/il-post-adozione-fra-progettazione-ed-azione-istituto-degli-innocenti-cai-anno-2006-2007-pdf-2-7-mb

Grotevant HD and Von Korff L (2011) Adoptive identity. In: Schwartz SJ, Luyckx K and Vignoles VL (eds), *Handbook of Identity: Theory and research*. New York: Springer, pp. 585–601.

Gustafsson J (2020) Adoption return trips: Family tourism and the social meanings of money. *Tourist Studies* 21(2): 219–234. doi.org/10.1177/1468797620977543

Gustafsson J, Lind J and Sparrman A (2020) Family memory trips: Children's and parents' planning of adoption return trips. *Journal of Heritage Tourism* 15(5): 554–566. doi.10.1080/1743873X.2019.1702666

Hagerty BM, Williams RA, Coyne JC and Early MR (1996) Sense of belonging and indicators of social and psychological functioning. *Archives of Psychiatric Nursing* 10(4): 235–244. doi.org/10.1016/S0883-9417(96)80029-X

Lee RM, Grotevant HD, Hellerstedt WL and Gunnar MR (2007) Cultural socialization in families with internationally adopted children. *Journal of Family Psychology* 20(4): 571–580. doi.org/10.1037/0893-3200.20.4.571

Maaskant AM, van Rooij FB, Bos HM and Hermanns JM (2016) The well-being of foster children and their relationship with foster parents and biological parents: A child's perspective. *Journal of Social Work Practice* 30(4): 379–395. doi.org/10.1080/02650533.2015.1092952

Marci T, Moscardino U, Lionetti F, et al. (2020) Using Harter and Likert response formats in middle childhood: A comparison of attachment measures. *Assessment* 28(8): 1821–1835. doi.org/10.1177/1073191119836497

Marschall S (2014) Tourism and remembrance: The journey into the self and its past. *Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change* 12(4): 335–348. doi.org/10.1080/14766825.2014.890208

Mazeaud E, Harf A and Baubet T (2015) Return voyage of the adopted person to their country of birth: A singular experience. *L'Information Psychiatrique* 91(3): 231–241. doi.10.1684/ipe.2015.1322

Mazzonis G (2010) Il confronto con la propria storia in adolescenza. In: Chistolini M and Raymondi M (a cura di) *Figli adottivi crescono: Adolescenza ed età adulta: esperienze e proposte per operatori, genitori e figli*. Milan: FrancoAngeli, pp. 85–103.

Meyers L (2020) A quest for identity and connection. *Counseling Today*, 25 June: 24–26. Available at: https://ct.counseling.org/2020/06/a-quest-for-identity-and-connection/

Miller P (2013) Heritage tourism and return journeys: Place and identity construction in Korean adoptees. Available at: http://hdl.handle.net/1794/13271

Mohanty J, Keokse G and Sales E (2007) Family cultural socialization, ethnic identity, and self-esteem: Web-based survey of international adult adoptees. *Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Diversity in Social Work* 15(3–4): 153–172. doi:10.1300/J051v15n03_07

Musso P, Moscardino U and Inguglia C (2017) The Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure – Revised (MEIM-R): Psychometric evaluation with adolescents from diverse ethnocultural groups in Italy. *European Journal of Developmental Psychology* 15(4): 395–410. doi.org/10.1080/17405629.2016.1278363

Phinney JS (1992) The Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure: A new scale for use with adolescents and young adults from diverse groups. *Journal of Adolescent Research* 7: 156–176.

Phinney JS (1996) Understanding ethnic diversity: The role of ethnic identity. *American Behavioral Scientist* 40(2): 143–152. doi.org/10.1177/0002764296040002005

Phinney JS and Ong AD (2007) Conceptualization and measurement of ethnic identity: Current status and future directions. *Journal of Counseling Psychology* 54(3): 271–281. doi.10.1037/0022-0167.54.3.271

Powers J (2011) Chasing China: Adoption tourism, images of China, and the negotiation of Asian American identity. *Chinese America: History and Perspectives* 25: 67–74. https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A295551138/AONE?u=anon~c34b93c7&sid=bookmark-AONE&xid=59ed04f3

Ruini C, Ottolini F, Rafanelli C, et al. (2003) La validazione italiana delle Psychological Well-being Scales (PWB). *Rivista di Psichiatria* 38(3): 117–130. doi.1159/000095438

Ryff CD and Keyes CLM (1995) The structure of psychological well-being revisited. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 69: 719–727. doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.69.4.719

Santona A, De Cesare P, Tognasso G, et al. (2019) The mediating role of romantic attachment in the relationship between attachment to parents and aggression. *Frontiers in Psychology* 10: 1824. doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.01824

Suter E (2008) Discursive negotiation of family identity: A study of U.S. families with adopted children from China. *Journal of Family Communication* 8: 126–147. doi.org/10.1080/15267430701857406

Vadilonga F (2010) La narrazione emotiva. In: Vadilonga F (a cura di), *Curare l'adozione: Modelli di sostegno e presa in carico della crisi adottiva*. Milan: Raffaello Cortina, pp. 159–186. https://www.raffaellocortina.it/scheda-libro/autori-vari/curare-ladozione-9788860303080-1254.html

Wilson SL and Summerhill-Coleman L (2013) Exploring birth countries: The mental health implications of heritage travel for children/adolescents adopted internationally. *Adoption Quarterly* 16(3–4): 262–278. doi.org/10.1080/10926755.2013.790865

Yngvesson B (2003) Going 'home': Adoption, loss of bearings, and the mythology of roots. *Social Text* 21(1): 7–27. doi.org/10.1515/9780822386926-003

Alessandra Santona is Associate Professor in the Department of Psychology, University of Milano-Bicocca, Milan, Italy.

Giacomo Tognasso and **Laura Gorla** are PhD students in the same Department.

Cristiana Carella is Manager at the Italian Centre for Childhood Aid (CIAI), Italy.

Marina Raymondi is a specialist in international adoption and **Marco Chistolini** a Psychologist/Psychotherapist at the same centre.