

*Highlighting Child Poverty: within and beyond the Italian Inquiry into Destitution in the 1950s*

The ultimate goal of my research is to reconstruct and analyse, on the one hand, the dynamics of child poverty and, on the other, the social welfare policies implemented to tackle it from the second post-war period to the early 70s, with particular focus on the Inquiry into destitution in the Fifties. I decided to dedicate a large attention to the Inquiry because for historians, this investigation (and the debate that stemmed from) represent a unique and largely unexplored tool to study the situation in Italy in the years that preceded the economic boom. Regarding the life condition of the children, it offers questions that have not lost its topicality, as clearly shown by contemporary researches on material deprivation and child poverty in the industrialised Western world.

My research investigates on two inseparably interlaced fronts. In the first place, it aims at analysing how infancy and child poverty in Italy were depicted in the light of the inquiry and the reactions to it through the various political and ideological stances. The issue of childhood, moreover, revolves around different policies which focussed on the crucial features of the relation between State and society, thus inevitably entailing a struggle for power. The various meanings of poverty were confronted with a concept of childhood which had to mediate between different welfare models and the heavy burden of the fascist social State. Moreover, in a field such as that of childhood, the influence of international models cannot be ignored. The research pays particular attention to the transmission and circulation of knowledge, models and transnational experiences in the field of welfare, considering in this context the impact of the transnational dimension of the cold war. The increasing role acquired by sociology, political science, social and child psychology (whose exponents, in many cases, belonged to American culture) played a key role in shaping social policies, in particular social services and family assistance policies.

My assumption is that the elements of innovation within a society which was still struggling with opposing ideologies, laid in the occasional synergy among reformist left-wing trends, progressive fringes of the Christian Democracy, and the technical and scientific communities; although these elements were not powerful enough to overthrow the establishment, they provided a fertile subsoil for aspirations and their development starting with the centre-left governments. The recognition of these slight "openings" implies a revision of the judgment of immobility applied at the Italian welfare of the Fifties, in order to seize the elements of continuity and discontinuity and to establish a stronger connection with international debates.