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**[THE CONDITION OF THE REFUGEE
MINORS IN ITALY AND IN THE WORLD AND
THE ROUTS OF THE MIGRATIONS
JUVENILE]**

Conference Proceeding

The Condition Of the Refugee
Minors
in Italy and in the World and the
Routs Of the Migrations Juvenile

In by of

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Some people might wonder what a Social Circus has to do with the unaccompanied minors that are currently migrating and that arrive on our coasts or die between Libya and Italy, Turkey and Greece or have been caught on barbed wire in Hungary, but it does and very much so. From the word go Circomondo wanted to represent the world of the minors that live and survive without basic rights in order to make it known to the world, struck by harassment and violence of which the Street Children are the first messengers. In this context the social circus represents a concrete effort that goes beyond simple discussion and analysis and not least represents a message of hope. Starting from these considerations, we had no choice but to take it upon ourselves to deal with the phenomenon of unaccompanied migrant minors, their escape from violence, war, hunger, harassment and to whom us in the "west" often deny a better future, without worrying if they are clinging to a boat, if they end up in the hands of people or organ traffickers, or if they simply disappear into nothing as if they had never existed. In all of this we use the smile of the Clown who makes fun of racism instead, of the intolerance and barbarities of a civilization that can't see the wood for the trees. The acts that follow are a brief account of the work done during the 2015 edition of the Festival of Social Circus "Circomondo", on behalf of all those people who put their skills and heart on the table to discuss and to look into the phenomenon of underage fugitives and migrants and to try to analyse what are the most common routes of these juvenile migrations. An idea surfaced following this discussion; the "Charter of San Gimignano for the unaccompanied migrant minors." We are sure that this is only the beginning of the path that we will walk together and that the ambitious objectives that we have set ourselves are the right ones to keep on the right track for a "better world."

Adiano Scarpelli
President of Carretera Central

To look for the right way to talk about the themes that we will be facing today is not easy. Whether to try to recount, to understand, what is right and what not goes far beyond the simple concept of nations. For quite a few years I have been writing for Left, a weekly magazine, that has an important goal for anyone that works in the world of information: to go beyond the simplicity of publishing and to participate in the world that we speak of. For such matters, like immigration, it means taking part in a journey that unites journalists, operators and local corporate bodies: the international campaign "LasciaCI Entrare"¹ (LetUS in).

Getting back to the case in hand. When president Adriano Scarpelli asked me what point of view I wanted to bring to the table for this lecture, I was so happy to hear that his suggestions coincided with my intentions, and to be able to choose not to give a local measure to today's meeting because indeed on these matters a "local measure" doesn't exist. Some common grounds can sometimes lead us to believe that speaking about international cooperation is an abstract, distant, elusive or incomprehensible matter. But today, listening to the testimonies of those present, we can learn that it is not, that the dimension in which they will be conducted is anything but abstract, it is much more real than what we may choose to believe. Today our focus is on minors; both Italian and foreign. In 2014 there was an increase in entries underage migrant in our Country, and there are at least two phenomena recorded to be taken into account: the first one is that of the disappearances of many of these minors from the receiving centers in which they were living, the second is represented by the fact that the majority of these youths are, in fact, "smaller adults", since they have an inclusive age between the 16 and the 18 years. To discuss these figures I would like to introduce the interventions of those specialized who

¹ The campaign *lasciateci entrare* was founded in 2011 to contest a circular of the Department of the home affairs that forbade the access to the organs of press in the centers of identification and expulsion and in the centers of reception: invoking the right to practice the article 21 of the constitution or the liberty of press, the campaign obtained the abrogation of the circular. And today it fights for the closing of the centers of identification and expulsion and for the abolition of the administrative detention.

will surely know how to translate in more tangible and realistic recounts all of the information that often gets to us in an almost "smoky" and unclear way.

Over the last five years the percentage of juvenile prostitution has quadrupled so as to now reach a rate of 14-15%. The immigration office gives unreliable answers and data: in fact according to the data on 8000 underage arrivals only two have been signaled as potential victims of abuse. In comparison to the Italian system of reception what is the situation of the underage migrants?"

An important figure is that of the applications for political asylum from the immigrants. Of the 40.000 Eritreans and Syrians that came to Italy in 2014, only 1000 applied for asylum. Therefore all of the others moved on. Another figure is that of their ages: the unaccompanied minors have an average age of between 16 and 18 years, but these figures aside there is some new data that worries us: it has been noticed that from countries like Eritrea there are much younger migrants, some only nine years old. These children move alone without family and with very few contacts. The juridical categories that we create produce, in some cases, situations of violence, since they grew further apart and divide family nuclei instead of conciliating them. This happens above all because our "concept of family" doesn't often coincide with the concept of family in other countries (since it is not as tightly bound to the relationships of mothers and fathers with their offspring). The system surrounding centers of reception and their relative procedures is very complex and produces only an increase in bureaucratic complexity for the management of the same. Above all, among the countries of the European union the differences between the rights reserved to police creates situations of abuse of human rights and the abandonment of underage migrants to themselves.

Another serious problem is constituted by the incompetence of administrations where often the political conditions of the refugees are not well known or there are not the means to guarantee adequate translations of their statements. In recent years, in fact there has been a series of receiving structures where immigrants are not guaranteed sufficient protection. The figure of the mediator therefore is often difficult to accept for the refugee and above all underestimated by our institutions. In Brennero over the past year there have been agreements between Italy and Austria which are being continually renewed just like

the accords between the police forces of the two countries that collaborate in a "mixed way " to control the frontiers and the means of transport.

Another problem concerns the formal / informal admissions: an enormous number of people are moved from Austria to Italy to determine if it is possible continue with admission into our country. Those who cannot be admitted are not brought back to Austria but on the contrary are "unloaded" on the border. As we have already seen the problem of being underage or an adult is of the utmost importance; and the stories we could tell are never-ending. An example of this is the time to complete the trip: an Afghan boy takes five years to reach Italy. In this case he is treated as an adult even if the violence he suffered before arriving happened while he was still a minor.

Another example that shows how sometimes the organization of our receiving structures can produce violence, is given by the story of an Afghan family that could not reside near a proper structure for family nuclei, since they unjustly been forced to leave following episodes of violence suffered in the previous center from which they had escaped. Perhaps we should be discussing the legitimacy of the accords of readmission and the procedures of approval initiated by the European countries.

I would like to start by reflecting on what we believe memory to be. We often refer to memory as something connected to history, but there is another form of memory: personal memory which is heavily influenced by our life experiences. Often we don't think about how quickly this type of memory can be consumed.

His mother had gone to Buenos Aires two years before to offer her services to a rich household and lift the fate of her family that had fallen into poverty due to various misfortunes. A year after her departure the family began to receive less and less news from the mother, until one day, following a brief letter in which she said to have fallen ill. The father and the children were dismayed because months later they had still to receive news from her. What to do? Work?

The father's first idea had been to depart himself to go in search of his wife in America, but who would have been able to maintain the children? The eldest child would not even have been able to leave considering that he had just started to earn something and the family needed him. One evening the smallest child said – "I will go to America to look for my mother!". His father bent his head with sadness in front of the reality of the facts. It was an impossible thing to do, a one month trip, alone, in America, only 13 years old. But the boy patiently insisted, repeating his question every day and, reasoning with the good sense of a man finally stated "Others have gone before!"

For 145 million years men have been hunter-gatherers, it is only over the last 20.000 years that agriculture has been discovered and cities only over the last 5000: people therefore have always moved, there has never been anybody that has remained completely static. Movement is continuous. Italy, as we know, has produced the greatest number of migrations in world history and children have always been an integral part of these mass migrations. It is for this reason that within the migratory phenomenon there is another important phenomenon and that is the movement of children, "Children on the move."

To better understand what we are trying to say I will try to make a more concrete example. Author Edmondo De Amicis, in his book "Heart"², speaks to us about a lot of misfortunes that the protagonist has witnessed. However in the novel there are no considerations related to visas, to permissions, due to the fact that the protagonist was a minor that traveled alone: this is because it was not a problem. The problem was born not so long ago has been created by nation States: the nation, in fact, is the last shelter for scoundrels. Besides this there is also another problem of distorted perspectives based on which we tend to think that our country is best for the simple reason that we were born there while if you were born on the other hand in another part of the world everything would be different.

I believe that there was a moment, when I was young, in which we all wanted to participate in this collective hallucinatory dream of the elimination of borders because our country is the whole world! Nations and borders in fact are concepts that we could define "old school" while now we are more and more used to thinking about being able to move freely while meeting new people and learning other languages. It seems however that something has turned back the hands of time. If we speak of juvenile immigration we must remember various events. One of these happened in England in the 1600's: many young orphans were picked up and "deported" to the English colonies in a systematic way. All of this continued up to the 1900's. Only many years after prime minister Gordon Brown was the first to apologize to all "the forgotten Australians": for hundreds of years, hundreds of children had literally been sent to Australia to colonize the new English cities and we have never known what happened to them.

Another important case happened in Finland during the war with the Soviet Union where there was the greatest ever child migration. The Finns in fact sent around 70000 children to

² HEART is a novel for boys written by Edmondo de Amicis in Turin, structured in separate episodes and published, for the first time, from the Milanese publishing house Treves in the 1886. The general setting is the Turin of the unity of Italy in the historical period among 1878 (year of crowning of the King Umberto I) and 1886 (year of the publication of the book); the reported events have been more precisely since October 17 1881 to July 10 1882. The text has the clear purpose to teach to the young citizens of the Kingdom the civil virtues or rather the love for the country, the respect for the authorities and for the parents, the spirit of sacrifice, the heroism, the charity, the pity, the obedience and the patience of the misfortunes.

Sweden in order not to leave them in the hands of the poverty brought around by the Second World war. Still another case is that which happened between 1937-1939 in Spain where 3000 children, children of activists of the Spanish popular front, were sent to the Soviet Union during the civil war: of these children very few returned. The very officials of the communist party were opposed to the return of these children.

Finally, in relation to organized migrations wanted by the State, the most recent was that of the Operation Peter Pan which happened in Cuba between 1960 -62. The project, better known as "Pedro Pan", secretly brought around 800 children of Catholic families to Miami. When they realized after '62 that the children would not have returned anymore and that they were not even useful as political hostages, they were again deported to orphanages from which they would have never returned. Behind the operation Peter Pan there was something more (maybe the CIA); this allows us to understand how in this historical moment the labels that we assigned to those that we define "street children / emigrants / fugitive" have in common only one aspect: poverty. When you work with street kids or child workers that have interrupted their contacts with their families we realize that among these the "orphans" are only 3%, while all the other have evidently broken all contact with their families because of the awful violence they have suffered. These children or kids, live in small self-organized groups, their only space being the road. When you look past the surface you realize that an "abandoned child" is essentially the child of a mother abandoned by her husband, by society etc. and that has not found any type of support finding himself living in an abandoned society, in an abandoned district. Between 1984 and 1989 I worked in an international (Unicef³) organization but nevertheless it didn't allow me to work with street children because they, in reality are a political problem. If we think that a state like India up to four or five years ago had denied to have a problem with street children, we realize that in front of such a position, it was the very government that didn't want to have this problem, not even recognizing it as such.

Working in the organization I could only walk on the streets at night and during the weekends. I needed to do this at night because them – the street children - in the daytime

³ Fund of the United Nations for infancy, the subsidiary organ of ONU that has the order to protect and to promote all over the world children's rights, children and teen-agers (0-18 years), as well as to contribute to the improvement of their conditions of life.

slept while in the night they went out in search of items, to work, to meet each other, or to take drugs: on one of these nights, while I was walking with my camera around my neck, escorted by a group of children of 7-8 or 13 years, I saw the most beautiful photo I could have ever taken. The photo I never took. Why? I am not a photographer and I don't have that coldness that must be commonplace to professionals. We arrived in a place difficult to describe, it was a porch of a house, where sat in the center was a child. She had a white dress made of cotton, long down to the knees and a rag doll in her hand. The children greeted her and spoke to her for some time, then we left. As we returned back I asked the little boys that accompanied me "But what is that little girl doing alone there?" and they answered me that she was a prostitute. She was 10 years old, perhaps 11. She was waiting for a client. Here I could have taken the most beautiful photo of my life, but I didn't take it. I didn't take it; I didn't take it.

After two years it was time to leave, leaving them there. There was a 14 year-old little boy to which I had grown very fond and I wanted to leave him a gift. I asked him what he would have liked if it had been Christmas, and he answered me with a word that I didn't know: I would like an "Uzi"⁴ I believed it to be a slang word from the streets so I asked him to be more precise and he answered me: "it is a machine gun that shoots 600 shots per minute". When you think about a good child sentences like that can tend to upset us. I asked him why he needed one and he told that if he had one he would have been able to work for the drug traffickers. Many children that are arriving on our shores, are similar to these children. We all want to speak about children rights but it is not simple. Regarding this aspect I would like to return to the example of distant memory. As children many of us grow up listening to fables, one friend of mine for example, despite being illiterate, knew all the fables from Esopo and Fedro to the Brothers Grimm; we can say therefore that we have all grown up with of the stories of cannibalism and stories of children who are lost or whose parents become lost. I believe that these examples are part of our history and not to other people's history. We have a world of real stories in which children of past generations were convicted and killed, with little or no difference between those younger and older, just as

⁴ The first Uzi was projected in the second halves the forties from Uziel Gal, captain of the Israeli army, to participate in an inside contest for the production of a new gun. The first unities were produced in 1950 by the Israel Military Industries (IMI), and, beginning from 1960, from the Belgian Fabrique Nationale de Herstal.

adolescence didn't exist, that is to say that it is a pretty recent "invention": today we have decided that who is less than 18 years old is a child and he who is older is not.

There is perhaps a Europe that pretends to see the violations of human rights by EU members in relation to Schengen⁵. Taking this into consideration, what type of immigration arrives in our countries?

For the last 15 years or so, Arci has been working with the network of Peruvian worker children that is part of the NATS movement: this experience has constituted a fundamental archetype for the task of cultural change that we want to bring about in Italy; this is bringing us to radically change our concept of active political participation towards minors to which we have become accustomed. For instance in countries such as Lebanon and Palestine we have tried to show different models and archetypes favouring the relationship south-south.

Migration can start mainly from two elements: economic situations or political conflicts. It is evident that the casualness that can be found, about which we before spoke before, is traceable both at international level and also "on our doorsteps." It often escapes us that migrants are people that don't want to leave their countries have very little choice in the battle for survival. What happens here is the last phase of a path, a trip, a story, and we must all have this very clear in our minds if we want to build an alternative strategy that can change the system of reception.

The routes of the minors are not different from those of the adults as one might imagine, since they are supported by same structures created by the traffickers. For the moment the most critical situation is in Syria. This situation is totally ignored by the media and by the bodies of the European civil society that speak of it only in a very superficial manner and only what is relative to the "monster Isis". From when the war started in Syria all Syria's children were no longer able to go to school, this also meant that a fundamental right as

⁵ with the Schengen convention there is reference made to an essay (the operations for the preparation of which developed in the years 1985 -96) that involves both State members of the European union and third parties. Object of the essay is the control of the people, that must not be confused with the customs controls on commodities, even if you bring on people (customs controls). Customs controls have been abolished among States Members of the UE from January 1^o th 1993 (fall of the frontiers).

education is denied. The only services are disbursed by the associations and by the organizations: this is the true actual humanitarian emergency.

The European system doesn't protect the political rights of migrants and doesn't guarantee the correctness of the translations in the declarations of refugees, besides this it doesn't allow them to freely move in Europe to be able to reach the personal network of contacts that they all have.

Another sad problem still present is that of the "desaparecidos", that is all the emigrants that literally "disappear" during the trip. There are some points where the greatest number is verified of disappeared and they are those through difficult zones to cross like the Lebanese desert and the Mediterranean Sea.

With Arci we have come into contact with an association of Tunisian mothers of "Desaparecidos": these women meet each other every day in the main plaza in Tunis with photos of their own children trying to understand if they are still alive or if someone has news. This is another story that who makes political speculation over immigration doesn't tell us.

Another zone where we are active is in the Philippines, an area that unfortunately doesn't enjoy much international of interest but that leads to situations of strong uneasiness especially among the younger part of the population. Another important problem concerns the situation of international visas. Also within the humble world of the Circomondo festival we found ourselves face to face with such problems despite us having the possibility to be supported by international organizations: the reality therefore it is that there are people that do not have the right to leave their country.

I would like to conclude with a reflection on my personal history. I come from a family of strong immigration, where many at the beginning of the century moved to another continent. Through researche I have discovered that the "oldest" emigrant " was only 19 years old and all the others were even younger.

The current situation with underage migrants must be seen through a lens which is anthropological, cultural and economic. This is because the question that I am facing, and that is that the 18° year of age is what makes a human being mature, this is at the base of the construction of a new strategy of intervention. The set questions are important and I believe serve to understand the actual condition that we have of minors in the west; they also constitute the main dominant motive for a new strategy of intervention.

Why do minors escape? Probably because the models that we are creating are not valid, and don't have sense for them. In a book by Gérard De Lutte⁶, which I had the pleasure to discover in Guatemala, clarifies that the concept of adolescence is in reality an invention, showing in a simple way that in developing societies the civil responsibilities connected to jobs and to rights, are taken upon themselves very often by the population whatever their age. Some years ago I had a very important experience in Italy with some youths from the Rom community in a reception structure. The older ones would always take care of the smallest in a very natural way.

These minors very often assume social roles that bring them to take care of each other: in this perspective the theme of the smaller age (or adolescence) radically changes in comparison to our western vision, also, bringing with itself the concept of juvenile jobs. An example is represented by the juvenile labour union of Nicaragua NATS: incredibly in the document produced by the boys the greatest application that was made was that to be able to work despite their age, and to do it according to the rights and the anticipated norms for the adult workers.

The teenagers' tendency to give support to each other also has some darker sides that can seep into organized gangs, but these too are to be considered important for reflection.

⁶ Biographical profile: of Belgian origin, from many years in Italy, university teacher of psychology of the evolutionary age, has participated in Rome to the life and the struggles of the inhabitants of a village of baraccati and a popular district and to a social job with the most marginalized young people; it collaborates with movements of solidarity and experiences of reception; he has promoted contemplated initiatives and concrete of international solidarity from the lower part, with particular reference to the situation Central America. "To suppress the adolescence?", Editions Group Abele, Turin 1984.

Returning to the migrations, we need to make a brief consideration about the fact that teenagers or minors, in reality have always moved during mass migrations.

In 2005 there was been a great change in immigration since we were greeted with a new datum and that is women's migration: in this perspective the minors result to be even more vulnerable. The woman in fact manages the elderly members, the children; she is the soul of the community. When the woman departs the local communities become deprived of many guarantees that they take with themselves. These questions lead us to others such as those of migratory routes.

Lately it is not only the Mediterranean sea the greatest rout, but also east Europe through countries such as Greece and the Balkans. The problem that derives from this situation is that the fugitives are found in conditions to cross over countries that don't have the same infrastructures of reception, for which their trip results even more difficult and dangerous. How can we protect the minors that arrive? We should perhaps consider them from a different point of view in comparison to the models that we have inherited from our culture that prevents us from seeing the "adult side".

Working for many years on the frontiers, I realized that in these places we can make some realistic reflections and modify the concept of the center of reception that we have imposed on refugees. These places often escape authorities as they cannot be administered as normal provinces of a State, accordingly numerous problems happen such as slavery or bad treatment of human beings. Some years ago a study was conducted on the seven most problematic harbors of Central America: drug trafficking and the exploitation of minors constitute in these places an impossible reality to control for authorities. My proposal is therefore to begin our foundations in these very places to be able to make concrete and real reflections on what the new models to adopt can be.

In this vast world of people that depart from north to south, we cannot reason with casualness but with cause starting by discovering what their culture and their traditions are. A proposal could be to build models of "street" intervention: in Coast Rica, for example, we have done a great job with the street girls and with the small street sellers, but this has been possible only by working there; it is not possible in fact to sympathize at such great distances and understand what are the real problems in these areas. All of this constitutes for a major contradiction that has invaded our system of reception and our organizations.

I would like to start by saying that today there is a true "war between the poor" among the emigrants, as for instance the one between Syrian and Egyptians. Many of them are well aware that the length of their stay in the guest country won't be very long because of the deportations, so they try to earn as much money possible during their stay, doing very humble jobs but above all very dangerous ones that are usually tied up with drug-trafficking or prostitution. A clear example of this is given by the condition of the Moroccan boys in Spain that move with the awareness that their deportation is imminent. Besides them there are the Syrians and the Afghanis that try to arrive from the northeast.

In 2013-2014 I have made two documentaries looking into the situation. The first one on board the ship St. George during the operation "Mare Nostrum" The spine-chilling datum was that at least half the population that we saved was made up of unaccompanied minors; in that period I started to hear stories of underage abuse by organized crime networks.

The second documentary is set on a self-managed building in Rome that welcomes migrants coming from the whole of Africa.

The start of this squatting occupation goes back to 2006 and at the moment there are around 1200 people living there, almost all political refugees. This place is a sextant microcosm where neither police nor Asls (Italian public healthcare) have the permission to enter. They have basically created a sort of "government" inside. In this situation there are around 50 minor who every day hang around in this building often leading to serious health risks.

The disappearance of minors is a serious problem that should be faced on a European level. Many of them don't have enough strength to accumulate the few savings that would allow them to move on to their own network of acquaintances, accordingly many of them stay jammed in the outskirts of Rome or in Sicily, at the mercy of organized crimes. For the civil society they basically don't exist and their disappearance doesn't produce any type of interest in the police. What society surrenders children to their own destiny in this way?

In Florence April 13 2015 a new project of reception was founded, one that has the aim of guaranteeing a true possibility of insertion in to Italian social life. This structure of reception had been thought of to constitute a sort of "second level" in which the boys could mature projects for themselves. The idea of leaving has been however difficult to discuss since we are confronted with a harsher reality to sustain, because we deal with unaccompanied migrant minors coming from Albania and Kosovo between the ages of 17 and 18 years. The boys that reach the center are of two types: the first ones are often illiterate boys who wants to learn the language to understand how to protect their rights to be; the seconds have a precise migratory project, probably delineated by the family. The problem that can present itself from the second typology is that once they are 18 they have no choice but to obey their family's wishes. Finding valid solutions for the unaccompanied migrant minors is a very difficult challenge to bring forward in Italy today.

I would like to go back to the models of reception that warrant immediate change for a whole series of motives among which the most important are: the malfunction of the structures, the lack of guardianship towards the unaccompanied minors, and still, the difficulty in comparing cultural archetypes and migrant ones. In comparison to the matter of the minors there are further elements to put again into action, above all because the normative on the guardianship of the minors has a whole other system in comparison to that of the adults.

An important problem is given by the cold fact that a lot of the structures destined to reception are not adapted for such an assignment or they are total surprises like gyms of schools or football stadiums. Also the personnel destined to work in such structures should be revisited, because we often find that those who interpret this role are people that haven't the sensitivity or cultural ability to relate to other people coming from different countries.

Often behind a migrant (both adult and minor) there is a "migratory project", family or social, of a whole village. The reality that they are faced with is obviously very disappointing because the projects done in the native country are founded on false convictions.

We have to find a new mentality in the ways of our reception, one that doesn't look at the micro-casuistic aspects but one that manages to get past the wrong ideas on immigration that in these years, unfortunately, have been strengthened.

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