



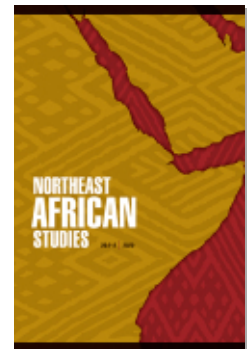
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Between Legacy and Agency: Italo-Eritreans Raised in Orphanages and Their Access to Italian Citizenship

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ABSTRACT

In Eritrea, Italian colonialism introduced and regulated the opportunity for mixed-race individuals with Italian ancestry to obtain Italian citizenship. This opportunity was modified over time depending on changes in Italian and Eritrean citizenship laws. Moreover, laws and socialization shaped Italo-Eritreans as a minority and a “different” group that reproduced itself even after colonialism. Over time, the number of Italo-Eritreans varied as did their sense of belonging to a real or imagined community. The case of mixed-race children abandoned during Italian colonialism provides an insight into the importance of social institutions in building legal and social identities through socialization. Using an interdisciplinary, qualitative-quantitative approach, I focus on the convergence between the processes of inclusion within legal (citizenship) and social (identity) categories, as well as on the agency of Italo-Eritreans raised in orphanages in transforming a stigma into a resource to gain the Italian citizenship.

Introduction

In Africa, the population of European ancestry is the outcome of several migratory waves that resulted in numerous contacts—differing both in time and space—between Europeans and the indigenous peoples. Despite the fact that the color bar has always been one of the organizing features of the colonial society, racial and social boundaries have frequently been crossed, mainly because of sentimental and sexual relationships resulting in (un)official families or transactional sex.¹ According to Stoler, in the colonies, Europeans did not make up a community of common interests, and the boundaries separating colonizer from colonized were easily crossed in spite of asymmetries in race, class, and gender; the resulting mixed-race population became a focal point in the political, legal, and social debate.²

In this scenario, citizenship represented a legal instrument to regulate the relationship between the state and the colony that essentialized certain categories.³ Indeed, restrictive naturalization policies and citizenship eligibility affected the representation and acceptance of people of mixed race. They were portrayed as a “social problem” and a “foreign body” within the well-defined colonial categories funded on and shaped by whiteness and blackness, despite being the encapsulation of the colonial encounter. They were marginalized one side because of the “Blackening” of the European population; on the other side because their “relatedness” with the colonizer. Thus, abandoning mixed-race children became a problem-solving social device to the “problem of *meticciato*”⁴; however, the increasing number of orphaned or abandoned mixed-race children possibly turning into a delinquent class soon became a threat to the colonial order. This situation was common throughout the African colonies: in Belgian Congo, Ruanda-Urundi, and French West and Equatorial Africa authorities resorted to assimilation; South Africa instead ushered in the apartheid policy. In the Italian colonies, the Catholic Church acted as an “entrepreneur of charity” and developed a network of homes for abandoned and orphan children, some specifically suited for mixed-race childhood, where religious personnel, especially nuns, were in charge of their care and remained so even in postcolonial times.

This article is a case study of Italo-Eritreans abandoned in orphanages

by parents belonging to different “racial” and social groups and willing to terminate their care and relinquish all interests and claims over their offspring. In particular, the article analyzes if and how the inclusion in the protection system organized by Europeans has favored or hampered children’s access to Italian citizenship over time as well as their marriage and labor paths.

Thus, I outline the profile of mixed-race children entering institutes run by missionaries all around Eritrea to highlight their eligibility in terms of access to Italian citizenship and their agency to overcome the boundaries of political and social rules. Indeed, in this regard, Italo-Eritreans still deserve attention as a social group that emerged during Italian colonialism and played a crucial role in Eritrean society despite their steady marginalization.

After mentioning the methodological framework about the definition of the group, the sources used for its identification, and the preferred approach for its study, I outline the sociodemographic profile of children hosted in institutes, paying attention to how they capitalized on this experience to access Italian citizenship or to improve their social and geographical mobility. Finally, the concluding remarks attempt to identify further research gaps and to insert this case within broader current debates.

Defining and Counting

Italo-Eritreans are here defined not *de jure* (i.e., by law), meaning the possession of Italian citizenship, but *de facto*, as “quiescent Italians”⁵ and potential citizenship claimants able to mobilize their (genealogical) resources. Biological, legal, and social categories do not always overlap. The resulting mismatch determined different subgroups with porous boundaries within the mixed-race community, each differing with respect to Italian citizenship eligibility, socialization with the Italian culture, and degree of vulnerability. The interest lies in the tactics implemented by mixed-race people to adjust to such a mismatch by navigating legal and social categories through their individual or collective resources.

At this stage there are no reliable estimates for the size of the mixed-race population. I resort to quantitative sources (censuses, baptismal registers,

population registers, and fragmented registrations in missionary archives) combined with qualitative ones (genealogies, life histories, interviews, and diaries) to identify and guesstimate the subjects for my case study.⁶ Stock and flow data are useful to understand mixed-race populations' prevalence and incidence, respectively. Censuses, despite their bias, allow me to guesstimate the number of Italo-Eritreans and to map children homes. Baptismal registers and religious congregations' private archives convey a sense, albeit partial, of the incidence of the mixed-race population. In addition, the Italian Consular Archive stores interesting typewritten documents about Italo-Eritrean households. Finally, the registers of admission in children homes are the most interesting source, although often inaccessible or poorly inventoried.

Official quantitative sources counted Italo-Eritreans on the basis of their *status civitatis*, providing aggregate data about the recognized (namely, having Italian citizenship) and unrecognized mixed-race (colonial subject) people, without any reference to children born to Italo-Eritrean parents or their descendants. Moreover, postcolonial demographic surveys did not include detailed information about mixed-race population. Only following the 1905 census were population registers placed in every location inhabited by Europeans. This census, however, does not provide specific data; it accounts for the legitimization of Italo-Eritreans as Italians, but scatters them among the 966 "Europeans and assimilated" in the under-20 age group, and among the 19.16 percent of "Italians born in Eritrea or abroad."⁷

Until World War I, colonial authorities did not interfere in the relationship between fathers and their mixed-race children; later, however, it became up to the state (not the parents) to decide whether and how Italo-Eritreans would be made subjects or citizens.⁸ During the Liberal and early Fascist eras, the idea prevailed that children of Italian fathers were Italian; indeed almost 50.0 percent of Italian men recognized their mixed-race offspring, and the Italian government allowed missionary homes to foster abandoned and orphaned mixed-race childhood.⁹ Furthermore, in order to guarantee mixed-race children the citizenship they were entitled to, in 1917 the colonial government invited colonials to register their mixed-race offspring in Italian birth records without providing paternal recognition by listing them as "children of unknown Italian father" or using an invented surname. Nevertheless,

in the mid-1920s, there were about 1,000 unrecognized children of Italian and assimilated fathers.¹⁰ Unfortunately, the 1921 census does not provide data about indigenous and mixed-race populations, but taking charitable facilities and convents into account allows us to draw some inferences.

Indeed, as a result of previous policies, mixed-race abandoned children were accommodated in facilities run by Catholic missionaries, although the only official orphanage was in Asmāra.¹¹ In this regard, Italo-Eritreans' memories and missionaries' diaries disclose an interesting reality. Missionaries (e.g., Daughters of Saint Anne and the Capuchins) used to accommodate the *colpe colorate*, namely (il)legitimate mixed-race children, and allowed them to attend elementary and vocational schools.¹² The orphanage and the convent in Asmāra, the three convents in Keren, and the three convents in Barentu as well as in other smaller missionary facilities, also hosted abandoned and orphaned mixed-race children. Thus, all around Eritrea, missionary homes provided the "social maternage" to mixed-race children despite their *status civitatis*.

The 1921 census counted 1,121 Italians (531 males and 590 females) born in Eritrea, mostly in the under-sixteen age group.¹³ It may be assumed that some of them were recognized mixed-race children living in mixed households or in missionary homes.

Since 1928, the colonial government systematically provided for the placement of abandoned Italo-Eritrean children in missionary homes, paying their boarding fees and pursuing the children's fathers to cover the costs.¹⁴ In these years, the Fascist pro-natality policies pushed for a reconsideration of paternal responsibilities, as did a 1933 law that blended somatic and cultural criteria to grant Italian citizenship to Italo-Eritreans of unknown fathers.¹⁵ This law opened a window of opportunity for mixed-race people born in the early decades of the twentieth century, raised and socialized in orphanages run by Italian missionaries. Indeed, thanks to the education and socialization they received during their stay, some of them managed to access Italian citizenship.

In the 1930s, despite the introduction of racial laws and efforts to defend racial prestige by regulating the relationship between female colonial subjects and Italian citizens, mixed-race births increased.¹⁶ However, mixed liaisons never gained the legal protection they deserved.¹⁷ This situation

avored men's neglect of their family responsibilities and the separation of men's economic and affective responsibility from their offspring's legal recognition, resulting in an increase in abandonment.

The 1931 census, for the first time, lists the Italian population (2,333 civilians and 1,855 soldiers) together with the foreign population (372 people) and the indigenous population (596,013 people). Moreover, the *Commissione Centrale di Censimento della Colonia* decided that the survey should count Italo-Eritreans as per the provisions of the forthcoming organic law of the colony, although not yet approved at the time of the census. Therefore, only mixed-race people recognized by their Italian fathers would be counted in the metropolitan population, whereas all the others would be colonial subjects.¹⁸ However, resorting only to the *status civitatis* led to underestimating the size of the mixed-race population, which became a "hidden population," given that most illegitimate children had never been registered in the Italian birth records.¹⁹ Therefore, only 515 Italo-Eritreans were counted, mainly females (272 females and 243 males), mostly residing in the *Commissariato Regionale dello Hamasien* (340), followed by the *Commissariato Regionale del Bassopiano Orientale e della Dancalia* (65), the *Commissariato Regionale del Confine Meridionale* (55), and by the *Commissariato Regionale di Cheren* (45). Age distribution of Italo-Eritreans with Italian citizenship shows an increasing *meticciato*, a trend that was presumably also mirrored among unrecognized Italo-Eritreans, leading to the opening of care institutes for mixed-race children in the 1930s.²⁰

The increasing Italian male population in the colony and the promotion of demographic colonialism led to high numbers in Liberal times (172 in the twenty to thirty-nine age group) and early Fascist times (177 in the newborn to nine age group and 160 in the ten to nineteen age group). The *Censimento dei meticci in A.O.I.*, which took place between October 1 and 20, 1938, enumerates mixed-race people by their mothers' nationality or ethnicity, and by their age and sex. Only aggregate data were made public: there were 2,518 mixed-race people in *Africa Orientale Italiana* and more than half were Italian citizens.²¹ Since 1938, Eritrea has played a pivotal role in the demographic growth of the *Africa Orientale Italiana*. It appealed to Italian workers and families; their arrival normalized the distribution by age and sex in the Italian population, resulting in a rather high marriage rate²² and

a steady increase of the mixed-race population, and by 1939 there was one Italo-Eritrean out of every three Italians.²³ Nevertheless, when Italians lost their *colonia primigenia*, only a small number of Italo-Eritreans had accessed Italian citizenship. According to official sources, 800 Italo-Eritreans were born before 1935, and at least 5,000 were born between 1937 and 1952, but a more detailed guesstimate allows for around 15,000 births during Italian colonialism, with fewer than 3,000 legitimate.²⁴

The British Military Administration revoked the racial laws, but it had to wait for the Italian provisional head of state to rule (through a legislative decree of August 3, 1947) on Italo-Eritreans' eligibility to Italian citizenship. Then, in an attempt to repair the damage of racial laws, the British Civilian Administration implemented the Italian decree with its own legislative proclamation in 1952.²⁵ Moreover, under the British rule, the Italian government tried to politicize people of Italian ancestry by supporting their cause. However, this position vanished as soon as the United Nations chose to support a federation between Eritrea and Ethiopia, and the Eritrean authorities proposed for the first time a definition of national citizenship.²⁶

Once the colony was lost, repatriations during the 1940s and 1970s resulted in the shrinkage of the Italian community from 40,000 people in 1944 to 25,000 in 1947, and around 11,000 in 1950.²⁷ The gaps left by repatriations and deaths, which also involved Italo-Eritreans with Italian citizenship, were never offset by new Italian immigration or by high birth rates, nor did the Italian government ease access to Italian citizenship to those entitled to it.

Categorizing and Approaching

Over time, a stratified and discretionary access to Italian citizenship legally differentiated people with the same *status de facto*, making socialization, namely the childhood process of acquiring a society's values and attitudes, a discriminating device associated with the color bar. The interplay between the *status civitatis* and formal or informal socialization, as well as genealogical manipulation, produced categories with porous boundaries within the Italo-Eritrean community.

Such categories concerned also mixed-race people raised in children homes and diversified in the gradient of stigma, vulnerability, and opportunities²⁸; in particular we can distinguish: (1) Italo-Eritreans with Italian citizenship because they have been recognized (at birth or later) and inscribed in the civil register, and usually socialized as Italians; (2) Italo-Eritreans who accessed Italian citizenship by *favor filiations*²⁹, marriage, and naturalization through social solidarity or economic transactions, regardless of their cultural requirements; (3) Italo-Eritreans born from fathers identifying themselves as Italians, socialized as Italians but who gave up their Italian citizenship; they were not eligible for Italian citizenship; (4) Italo-Eritreans with the right to Italian citizenship by blood and socialized as Italians, but who lacked the necessary resources to begin the preliminary assessment; (5) Italo-Eritreans possessing both the genealogical and socioeconomic resources to begin the preliminary assessment or with pending applications to Italian citizenship. Nevertheless, in Eritrea a systematic registration of mixed-race people never emerged, despite the political effort to “other” this category.³⁰

Thus, shifting from the “objective” and etic perspective to the “subjective” and emic one, shaped by the process of selection, remembering, and forgetting, it is possible to understand the fluidity of the above-mentioned categories and Italo-Eritreans’ agency from a grassroots perspective. Indeed, I interviewed Italo-Eritreans, some of whom grew up in orphanages, as well as their descendants, during my fieldwork in Eritrea (2009–2010 and 2013–2014), in Italy (2016–2019), and in Ethiopia (2018). Through interviews, I collected information about their memories concerning their family background, household, Italian ancestor(s), and about their life in and out of the children homes. Life stories and interviews collected during fieldwork both in Eritrea and in Italy underline the navigation through categories to acquire Italian citizenship, considered an exploitable resource that can be renegotiated for other purposes. Indeed, the collection of genealogical information and biographical insights allowed to bridge the knowledge gap about socially silenced subjects, above all in case of limited, scattered, and incomplete archival sources.

Therefore, to combine the quantitative and qualitative sources described so far, I resorted to demographic anthropology, “a devilish difficult

but uncommonly interesting³¹ specialty within anthropology, that uses a qualitative-quantitative approach to provide an emic understanding of human phenomena in past and current populations.³² Demographic anthropology provides an integrated analytical framework to intertwine socialization process, (de)construction of categories, and kinship systems with a population's structure and dynamics, to manage fragmented or biased data, also accounting for miscegenation and social identity of mixed-race people. Furthermore, when knowledge was mobilized to define and enact new forms of population policies, anthropology and demography articulated the discourse about racial essentialization for administrative purposes, affecting eligibility to Italian citizenship.

From Motherhood to Social Mothering

Despite some well-known Italo-Eritreans' life and success stories,³³ several factors (privacy concerns, stigma, mobility, and death) made it difficult to identify mixed-race people raised in children homes. Since their appearance, mixed-race children had been perceived as possible source of social unrest. The Catholic Church played an extensive role in socializing and keeping them under control in institutes run by missionaries.³⁴ Indeed, these children were widely despised by both the Italian and Eritrean communities, and Italian colonial authorities asserted—but never demonstrated—their biological and cultural inferiority. As a result, the politics of compassion and charity were aimed at raising mixed-race children into proper colonial subjects. In Eritrea, children homes run by missionaries appeared in 1869, when a group of French Daughters of Charity opened an orphanage in the Kärän area, where Monsignor Touvier, a French priest, granted them a piece of land to plant orchards: there, they also hosted thirty to thirty-five abandoned children, including some mixed-raced. Taking care of abandoned children allowed missionaries to evangelize them and proselytize among vulnerable groups. Moreover, Catholic missionaries were not the only ones taking care of abandoned children, so did Lutherans until their expulsion. In the 1930s, many institutes opened, some in particular for mixed-race children. For example, in 1933, the *Istituto San Giuseppe* opened in Asmara

to manage, according to the segregationist policy,³⁵ this growing group, which worried the colonial order on the eve of the empire. Thanks to philanthropic support,³⁶ other similar institutes opened in Kärän and Sägänäyti—the latter was the most important for a number of children—and hosted around 300 children, providing education and professional training.³⁷ In 1934, the Comboni Missionary Sisters opened the orphanage *Casa Comboni* in Asmära, occupied by the Air Force Command on the eve of the Italo-Ethiopian war and returned only in 1938, when it became a gathering point for single mothers with their children.³⁸ Although the Holy See directly supported racial legislation to prevent the increase of mixed-race population, the missionaries in the field openly criticized racial politics, especially for what concerned the mixed-race group whose ties with the Italians made them worthy of assistance and of a place in civil society.³⁹

Care activities outlived Italian colonialism and were emulated by other missionaries, such as the Faith Mission Church with whom Mary Boyer arrived in Eritrea in 1950 and opened a new orphanage in Kärän. These initiatives increased the human and social capital of the mixed-race group, which acquired specific skills (e.g., bookbinding, sewing, gardening, and cooking), broadening their opportunities by capitalizing on their experience and increasing social and economic resources in order to access Italian citizenship through other paths.

Sex workers and migrants from Eritrean rural areas or from Ethiopian Tigray used to abandon their mixed-race children in churches squares or in gutters⁴⁰ shortly after delivery because they had no family network to support them in caring for their offspring.⁴¹ In other cases, because of maternal death, it was the biological father who sent the baby to children's homes.

If the child's personal information was unknown when they were entered in the register, a name and surname were assigned. For centuries, the last name assigned to abandoned children marked their experience and was conceived as a family bond because the institute, namely the "putative father," provided the surname. However, this transparency ceased in the early nineteenth century to avoid stigma and social marginalization.⁴² Therefore, in Eritrea, missionaries did not use surnames related to their children homes or to the condition of abandonment, but opted for invented names or baptized the babies with Italian names and surnames mirroring the ones of

Italian dead soldiers.⁴³ This practice recalls the Italian tradition of celebrating colonialism by naming children with “overseas names” inside and outside the orphanages.⁴⁴ Over time, in some cases, people challenged the Eritrean name system to preserve the genealogical memory: on the one hand, some managed to use the Italian surname system despite being denied access to citizenship; on the other hand, some continued to name their children with the Italian ancestor’s name. This was a sign to identify privileged informants, although it progressively weakened because of mortality, extinction of female surnames for marriages, and surname change following posthumous recognition or adoption.

When abandonment coincided with the death or departure of the Italian father, children from different family backgrounds entered orphanages, usually between three and nine years old and regardless of their *status civitatis*.⁴⁵ These abandonments may reveal women’s agency to cover child rearing and education costs. Indeed, because in both customary law(s) and the Italian civil code paternity defined the offspring’s social identity, Eritrean mothers—mainly of Tigrinya ethnicity—pushed their mixed-race children to embrace their fathers’ culture in terms of language and religion, regardless of their *status civitatis* and on the sole basis of patrilineal lineage.⁴⁶ At the same time, mothers tried to avoid the stigma of attaching themselves to a white foreigner by abandoning the outcome of “their guilt.” Some children knew their parents and managed to stay in contact with their mothers; a few in adulthood tried to trace their Italian father on the basis of their own and community memories.⁴⁷ This practice sounds very different from the Belgian case, in which mothers were forced to abandon their mixed-race children, who were gathered in institutions and, just before decolonization, sent to Belgium where they obtained Belgian citizenship through custody or adoption.⁴⁸

In general, Italo-Eritrean children were subject to a triple stigma (mixed-race, illegitimate, and abandoned). Therefore, inclusion in children homes had a double meaning: on the one hand, it isolated and reduced the visibility of *meticciano*; on the other hand, despite restricted access to primary education promoted by Ferdinando Martini (1897–1907) and tightened under Fascism, children underwent an “Italian acculturation.” Thus, they resorted to their cultural background and managed to exploit the window

of opportunity opened with law 999/1933 and later closed again following organic law 1019/1936-XIV.⁴⁹ Because mixed-race people over thirteen had to pass an “anthropological test” and demonstrated their Italian education and good civic, moral, and political behavior, the human capital built in children homes represented a distinct privilege for them. Nevertheless, law 822/1940 abolished institutions and boarding schools for mixed-race children and assimilated them as colonial subjects, hiding them even further.

The end of Italian colonialism was accompanied by a boom in mixed-race births and abandonments also attributable to Italian fathers’ death, repatriation, or imprisonment. The idea that the abandoning fathers were mainly soldiers is fairly widespread. For example, Sr. Bianca, a mixed-race nun abandoned and raised in an Ursuline missionary home in the mid-1940s, believed—without having any proof—that the Italian soldier Giuseppe D., buried at the Italian cemetery in Asmāra, was her father. She showed conflicting feelings towards her father. Indeed, she went regularly to her father’s grave, sometimes accusing him of abandoning her, other times thanking him because abandonment and life in the missionary home spared her a more difficult fate.⁵⁰ This attitude suggests a psychological need: many mixed-race people tried to fill their genealogical and emotional gaps with “reimagined genealogies.” However, going through interviews, reimagining seem stereotyped in relation to the encounter between the parents, the causes and dynamics of abandonment, and the Italian ancestor’s background, even though information about the father is rare or ignored.

Money for Surname

During Italian colonialism, some Italo-Eritreans obtained Italian citizenship through legitimacy based on solidarity between friends. Some children managed to leave the institutions because they were adopted by unmarried or widowed fellow compatriots of their fathers. In other cases, soldiers adopted previously unrecognized children of dead fellow soldiers. Such cases are interesting because adopted boys and girls usually had an Italian name and surname, and despite the change of surname sometimes they continued to use their previous one in everyday life.⁵¹ Nevertheless, adoption emerged as

a gimmick to adjust the abandoned Italo-Eritreans' *status de facto* and *status civitatis*, granting them the citizenship they deserved. I found no evidence of payment or advantage: solidarity was usually assumed to be the reason behind these legitimacies.

With the Ethiopian empire's unilateral annexation of Eritrea as its fourteenth province (1962), Ethiopian imperial civil and criminal codes came into effect, and Eritreans became Ethiopian citizens. Italy greeted the annexation with a cautious reaction to secure Emperor Haile Selassie's protection of the Italian community in Eritrea (about 12,000 people), which held key roles in local administration and economy. The turning point was the rise of the Derg (1974). Nationalization of the economy and Africanization of the state administration affected Italian properties and positions, leading some Italians to repatriate as refugees; those who remained applied for Ethiopian citizenship to continue their business, thus, also their children became Ethiopian citizens. Access to Ethiopian citizenship was regulated by the patrilineal Ethiopian Nationality Law of 1930, which established that foreign citizens would renounce their previous nationality upon becoming Ethiopian citizens.⁵² This passage was paramount for Italo-Eritreans (now Italo-Ethiopians) born while the law was in force and claiming Italian citizenship later on. In such a situation, abandoned mixed-race people raised in orphanages that had the chance to accumulate economic and social capital started to resort to other tactics to gain Italian citizenship. As a result, during the Ethiopian Red Terror, the "citizenship trade" made inroads through fake and fraudulent legitimacies, partly due to the extreme poverty of some households within the Italian community.

The *reconnaissances frauduleuses*, which Saada shows in the cases of French Indochina and sub-Saharan Africa, as a practice by French men to make subjects into citizens, highlighted the importance of the *status civitatis* and the existence of an alternative to the administrative procedure that alarmed the colonial authorities.⁵³ In Eritrea, it appeared frequently in the 1970s and has continued—although reduced—till recently, but it is difficult to quantify its scope because the Italian Consular Archive vital registers provide only information concerning the legitimacy of natural children, even years after their birth. However, the narratives of those directly involved, namely Italian citizens and consular officers, shed light on this type

of negotiation and transaction, which partly allowed an alignment between their *status de facto* and *status civitatis*.⁵⁴ On the other hand, this practice clearly demonstrates the greater power of economic and social capital to manipulate genealogies in order to enjoy the “privileges of whiteness,” because some Italo-Eritreans applied for Italian citizenship to benefit from repatriation through the Italian Consulate in time of crisis.⁵⁵

Although it is difficult to find someone who will admit to having gained Italian citizenship through money or to identify the amount of the transaction, the documentation in the Italian Consular Archive reveals genealogical manipulations, which clearly emerged in at least three families who ended up distinguishing themselves—over some generations—as “privileged sellers.” In other isolated cases, the most evident sign of “buying and selling” was the family status of those men—elderly, alone—who recognized teenagers as their children after years, hence positioning their paternity between fifty-five and seventy years old. In terms of a maternal lineage perspective, since the 1980s special cases have been observed when Italo-Eritrean mothers with Italian citizenship transferred it to their children. Usually they recognized babies in their infancy, but some genealogical manipulations are suggested by the duration of their intergenetic intervals and by the high number of recognitions in times marked by political tensions or by the intensification in fighting during the liberation struggle and the border conflict between Eritrea and Ethiopia (1998–2000).

The practice consisted in the payment of a sum agreed upon by an Italian who recognized the would-be Italian even years after his/her birth. Nevertheless, this tactic ended up making genealogies traceable from written sources less reliable than from oral ones, and Italian citizenship emerged as an expendable and purchasable capital. Although “paid naturalizations” and arranged marriages sometimes forcibly tried to align Italo-Eritreans’ *status de facto* and *status civitatis*, they also introduced a further discrepancy between social identity and access to Italian citizenship, thus complicating the panorama of the Italian and Italo-Eritrean community.⁵⁶

Mixed-Race Marriage and Labor Markets

From a gender perspective, children's homes provided mixed-race girls with all the skills to become "perfect Italian wives" and mediated a specific marriage market. Indeed, mixed-race girls' marriageability was considered a discriminating factor: "mixed-race good girls" raised by missionaries or living in Italian households used to get married with reputable Italian men, whereas "mixed-race bad girls" grown up in underprivileged environments ended up as sex workers, and more precisely as Americans' "favorite prostitutes" at Kagnev Station (1943–77). As a result, marriages between Italo-Eritrean girls raised in orphanages and Italian men were common and have been reported as a positive "win-win outcome": men avoided celibacy and Italo-Eritrean women entered safe situations that allowed them to avoid prostitution as a means of subsistence.⁵⁷ This exogamous marriage market allowed a number of Italo-Eritrean women who were unable to demonstrate their Italian ancestry to gain Italian citizenship. Encounters translated into marriages happened during religious services or in the clubs that animated the social and sporting life of the Italian and Italo-Eritrean communities (e.g., Gruppo Sportivo Stella Asmarina then Circolo Sportivo Junior; Gruppo Sportivo Gaggiret, and Gruppo Sportivo Asmāra).

Moving now to Italo-Eritreans' occupations, it emerged that some born and recognized by their Italian fathers in the Liberal and early Fascist years followed in their fathers' footsteps by joining the army. Some narratives—despite their vagueness due to generational distance and death rate—reported that also mixed-race boys raised in children homes made the same professional choice.⁵⁸ In this case, however, there was no emulation, rather they exploited their human capital (e.g., the Italian language) in the growing wage labor market by joining indigenous troops. Nevertheless, this occupational path provided no access to the Italian citizenship. In contrast, other mixed-race people managed to capitalize on skills and networks built in children homes to accumulate enough economic and social resources to negotiate access to the Italian citizenship in the long term.

Mixed-race men and women entered the Catholic Church and never applied for Italian citizenship, thus interrupting their lineage because of their occupational choice, which often coincided with higher degrees of education

and mobility. Some travelled abroad to complete their religious studies or do their missionary work, so much so that some died in retirement homes in Italy. Other cases, like the stories of Gerardina Maffetti, Lucilla Capelli, and Agnese Dorsi—all mixed-race born in the mid-1940s and abandoned and raised at the Kärän orphanage—demonstrate the possibility of maintaining a strong tie with the hosting institution without undertaking an ecclesiastic career. They never left the orphanage, lived there, and helped out with all chores.⁵⁹ Likewise, Francesco Gritti and other members of his family had the opportunity to work at the Asmära Italian School as service staff thanks to the intercession of the Daughters of Saint Anne, who taught there and managed the children homes where he grew up. Instead, Yemane Mario “inherited” the work of his father, a mixed-race orphan grown up at *Casa Comboni*, where he was a gardener.

A different occupational path, more common since the 1950s, was the mixed-race boys’ apprenticeships with Italian entrepreneurs. This opportunity allowed some to take over their employers’ activities when they repatriated or moved to Australia, South Africa, and the Gulf states. In some cases, as the political situation under the Derg escalated, some former Italian employers helped former mixed-race employees to leave the country or obtain the Italian citizenship.⁶⁰ From a female perspective, it is worth mentioning domestic work in religious institutes and Italian families, facilitated by the home economics taught at girls in children homes. This resource was also the basis of the Eritrean migration to Italy. Indeed, since the early 1940s, domestic workers—thanks to the mediation of the Agenzia Maria—reunited with the families who employed them in Eritrea.⁶¹

Finally, the tie with the institutes was also strong for abandoned Italo-Eritreans who joined the Eritrean People’s Liberation Front and who perceived the liberation struggle as the recognition of their “Eritreanness.” They used to return to their “mothers”—including mixed-race nuns, who constantly provided food and care to *tägadaläti* during the liberation struggle.⁶²

Suspended and Suspected Identities: Colonial Legacy and Postcolonial Agency

Following the liberation in 1991 and the referendum of 1993 the Eritrean government defined the issue of citizenship, passing an inclusive law that guaranteed Eritrean citizenship to the unrecognized Italo-Eritreans and introduced a discretionary recognition of dual citizenship.⁶³ At the end of the 1990s, the Italo-Eritrean community, now having the right to apply for the Italian citizenship, was estimated around 22,000 people, including people raised in orphanages and their descendants. They used their unclear position as a claim-making concept,⁶⁴ asking the Italian government to recognize a compensatory citizenship.⁶⁵ In 1997, during an official meeting in Asmara, Isaias Afewerki, president of the State of Eritrea, and Oscar Luigi Scalfaro, president of Italy, found a possible solution to put an end to the commodification of legitimacies and naturalizations as per Eritrean Nationality Proclamation No. 21/1992 and the Reform of the Italian System of Private International Law No. 218/1995 governing the efficacy of foreign judgments and legal acts. This circumstance opened a favorable window of opportunity for those Italo-Eritreans who still had trouble obtaining Italian citizenship.⁶⁶

Indeed, the judgments about the recognition of paternity granted by the High Court of Asmara allowed adults to make the declaration of acquisition of Italian citizenship at the Italian consulate, as required by the Italian law n. 91/1992 “Nuove norme sulla cittadinanza.” In consequence, the consular authority, which had issued the positive assessment about the requirements of the declaration made by would-be Italians, forwarded the sentences and acts of citizenship to the Italian municipalities, requesting their transcription in the civil status registry in application of the provisions of the law n. 218/1995 “Riforma del sistema italiano di diritto internazionale privato.”⁶⁷ This opportunity, however, for orphaned or abandoned Italo-Eritreans and their descendants was actually discriminatory. Indeed, providing personal information about the Italian ancestor (surname, name, date, and place of birth) was mandatory when applying for Italian citizenship. Therefore, orphans and abandoned mixed-race people were at a disadvantage in terms of access to genealogical memory, and thus to genealogical resources to be activated for obtaining Italian citizenship. As a result, they partly continued

to use the marriage and surname market to secure access to the citizenship of the unknown ancestor.

These practices became even more evident following Proclamation No. 82/1995 that introduced forced recruitment for all Eritrean adults in the National Service regardless of family responsibility or gender, with the sole exclusion of the veterans of the independence struggle and the physically or mentally impaired. Moreover, in May 2002, in the aftermath of the border conflict against Ethiopia, the Eritrean government introduced the Warsai Ykealo Development Campaign, requiring Eritreans in the National Service to serve indefinitely due to the “no war no peace” situation with Ethiopia.⁶⁸ Thus, conscripts were assigned to the Eritrean Defense Forces, allocated to ministries or to private firms, and participated in productive activities to ease the national socioeconomic development, but were paid uniform pocket money. At this stage, the real or perceived threat of a new war led the Eritrean government to postpone the demand for democratic change, resulting in a mobilized society. The outcome of such sociopolitical and economic environment was the increase of forced migration through irregular and dangerous routes: in this context, gaining Italian citizenship would have granted greater legal mobility as suggested by the Henley Passport Index,⁶⁹ pushing Italian descendants into a new wave of applications for the Italian citizenship, thus increasing the risk of late fraudulent legitimacies and generating discriminations by the Italian authorities.⁷⁰

Over time, the Italian community in Eritrea decreased and Italo-Eritreans’ identity, built through socialization and life experience, became weaker and weaker, despite a growing interest in obtaining Italian citizenship. Indeed, recently Italo-Eritrean narratives suggested the self-representation of an emerging “suspended identity” that tried to take advantage of the postcolonial reflection. Nowadays, the right to obtain Italian citizenship or its possession does not convey any sense of identity, but rather it is part of the mobility project, regardless of its realization.⁷¹ Furthermore, it is a means to get access to education at the Italian school of Asmāra or to financial support—especially for elderly—to survive in such a difficult environment. Like in the past, wealthy Italo-Eritreans managed to buy Italian citizenship as a result of their initiative, skills, and network; today, collections or monetary help by third parties—including foreigners—are the main sources

to guarantee the necessary amount. The “citizenship trade,” however, is undergoing changes in the face of a new Eritrean civil code introduced in 2015, which provides for the recognition and registration of children in the population registers within two years of their birth.

These actions, based on a win–win relationship that sees Italian citizenship as a capital, bring out relationships and practices that characterize the agency of the Italo-Eritrean community in the face of the opportunities opened up by the interaction between Eritrean and Italian laws.

Concluding Remarks

Italo-Eritreans—regardless of their *status civitatis*—were and are dynamic actors in changing contexts. Looking at them not only as the result of colonial gender violence or as a monolithic social group allows us to understand their agency in shaping and navigating social and legal categories over time.⁷² Indeed, the case of orphaned and abandoned Italo-Eritreans raised in children homes shows how subalternity can be navigated formalizing new belonging(s).

Thus, life histories of Italo-Eritreans raised in orphanage and of their descendants allow to glimpse—through an emic lens—that alongside stigma and isolation, the experience of abandonment has granted access to resources useful to redeem their subaltern position, with particular regard to Italian citizenship, above all if compared to Italo-Eritreans who grew up in maternal households. Indeed, Catholic children’s homes figured prominently in managing mixed-race childhood and played an important role as agents of Italian acculturation. Therefore, they proved to be crucial in building human and social capital that the mixed-race people used to obtain Italian citizenship. Although demographics about this hidden population are limited, documents stored in the archives of religious congregations that housed abandoned children in Eritrea are largely unexplored and unpublished and might give voice to socially silenced subjects.

Despite the fact that the Italian authorities considered educating and training colonial subjects to serve them, in postcolonial times vocational training and professional skills facilitated social and geographical mobility

of some abandoned Italo-Eritreans. Nevertheless, mixed-race people played a significant role in the socioeconomic arena but they have never been an *élite* in the Eritrean political scene, unlike in other colonial and postcolonial contexts.⁷³ At the same time, their increasing economic capital as well as support from within and outside the community helped them to align their *status de facto* and *status civitatis* through specific tactics. Indeed, Italian citizenship, once perceived as the gateway to increased opportunities for political, social, and cultural rights, gradually came to be seen merely as a mobility resource without any identity relevance. It became a claim-making concept to navigate between the inclusion and exclusion strategies implemented by authorities and the tactics gradually developed by Italo-Eritreans exploiting their genealogical, economic, and social resources. From this perspective, Italo-Eritreans are not the only “aspirational category” mobilizing their resources on the basis of the so-called “Hansen law”⁷⁴; Greek, Turkish, Albanian, Ethiopian, Sudanese, and Indian ancestors⁷⁵ have also been restored because of their *status civitatis* and despite their social condition.⁷⁶ Furthermore, over time Italo-Eritreans became an ever-decreasing minority in the face of the emergence of a new *métissage*. Indeed, contacts between the Eritrean population and new foreign groups keep happening, as demonstrated by Indo-Eritreans and Sino-Eritreans, who in some respects are reliving the difficulties of acceptance and access to dual citizenship that have characterized the Italo-Eritreans’ experience.

In conclusion, issues germane to the analysis of abandoned mixed-race people emerged during the research, and suggested further avenues for exploration. For example, mixed unions and their offspring in a colony are critical to the emergence and management of new groups in the metropole. Indeed, the Second World War transferred the mixed-race subjects from the colony to the nation, presenting the resolution of racial ambiguity as central to the nation-building process. The management of “Black occupation children” born out of wedlock during and after the Second World War in Italy mirrored the marginalization and stigmatization of mixed-race children in colony.⁷⁷ Thus, “brown babies” are a good example of “transnational demographics” because they point to the interconnections between the local and the global dimension of miscegenation and interracial issues.⁷⁸ In the same way, the treatment received by war widows and “single widows”

deserves an exploration in comparative terms to highlight the discretion of the Italian authorities in protecting these women and their offspring in Italy and in Eritrea.

From an in-depth and qualitative-quantitative study about the care system for abandoned mixed-race children, other interesting sociodemographic aspects could emerge. For example, differential infant and child mortality within colonial society as well as the wet nursing system or wet nurses' wages, speculating about a peculiar and limited female job. Moreover, as demonstrated by Wolff and colleagues,⁷⁹ abandoned children and orphans characterized Eritrea's history from the colonial past to the present, showing continuity and discontinuity in causes (e.g., liberation struggle, border conflict, migration, HIV/AIDS), consequences (e.g., vulnerability), and management (e.g., orphanages, family homes, and long-distance adoptions).

Finally, examining European citizenship, historical memory, and the role played by formal and informal socialization may offer significant insights that would assist in the formulation of inclusive policies for people born and raised in European countries by foreign parents. Thus, the experience of mixed-race people deserves more attention, not only to outline their role(s) in colonial and postcolonial societies, but also to make use of such studies in current debates.

NOTES

I thank my anonymous referees for their insightful comments, together with all the interviewees who kindly shared their memories and experiences.

Pseudonyms conceal their identities for confidentiality.

1. Ruth Iyob, "Madamismo and Beyond: The Construction of Eritrean Women," in *Italian Colonialism*, ed. R. Ben-Ghiat and M. Fuller (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), 233–44; Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Context* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Chiara Volpato, "La violenza contro le donne nelle colonie italiane. Prospettive psicosociali di analisi," *Deportate, Esuli, Profughe* 10 (2009): 110–31; Michele Strazza, "Faccetta nera dell'Abissinia. Madame e meticci dopo la conquista dell'Etiopia," *Humanities* 1, no. 2 (2012): 116–33.
2. Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate*

- in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010); Ann Laura Stoler, "Making Empire Respectable: The Politics of Race and Sexual Morality in 20th-Century Colonial Cultures," *American Ethnologist* 16, no. 4 (1989): 634–60; Ann Laura Stoler, "Rethinking Colonial Categories: European Communities and the Boundaries of Rule," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 31, no. 1 (1989): 134–61.
3. Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler, "Introduction: Tensions of Empire: Colonial Control and Visions of Rule," *American Ethnologist* 16, no. 4 (1989): 609–21; Owen White, *Children of the French Empire: Miscegenation and Colonial Society in French West Africa* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000); Giulia Barrera, "Patrilinearità, razza e identità: l'educazione degli italoeritrei durante il colonialismo italiano (1885–1934)," *Quaderni Storici* 109 (2002): 21–53; Emmanuelle Saada, *Les enfants de la colonie. Les métis de l'Empire français entre sujétion et citoyenneté* (Paris: La Découverte, 2007); Sarah Heynssens, "Entre deux mondes," *Revue d'histoire de l'enfance «irrégulière»* 14 (2012): 94–122; Mohamed Adhikari, ed., *Burned by Race: Coloured Identities in Southern Africa* (Cape Town, South Africa: University of Cape Town Press, 2013); Dana Hennes, "L'identité des métis belges. Entre post-colonisation africaine et globalisation européenne," *Anthropologie et Sociétés* 38, no. 2 (2014): 211–27.
 4. *Meticciano* was a factual reality since the beginning of Italian presence in Eritrea. It was the direct outcome of mixed relationships, mainly between (white) Italian men and (black) Eritrean or Ethiopian women, namely between the male colonizers and the female colonial subjects. It clashed with the race policy of Italian colonialism, which had the dual function of maintaining Italian purity and avoiding promiscuity.
 5. Worldwide, there are tens of millions of quiescent Italians. They are descendants of Italian emigrants who, although not having retained any effective link with the homeland of their ancestors, are entitled to Italian citizenship by blood.
 6. I deduced interesting methodological hints about African historical demography from Dennis D. Cordell and Joel W. Gregory, "Historical Demography and Demographic History in Africa: Theoretical and Methodological Considerations," *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 14, no. 3 (1980): 389–416; Michel Poulain, "Les sources de la démographie historique africaine : introduction," *Annales de démographie historique* (1987): 11–13;

- Raymond R. Gervais, "Statistiques, langage et pouvoir dans la société coloniale," *Annales de démographie historique* (1987): 57–65; Gilles Pison, "Le recueil de généalogies orales : intérêt et limites pour l'histoire démographique de l'Afrique," *Annales de démographie historique* (1987): 67–83; Dennis D. Cordell, "African Historical Demography in the Years since Edinburgh," *History in Africa* 27 (2000): 61–89; Bouda Etamad, "Pour une approche démographique de l'expansion coloniale de l'Europe," *Annales de démographie historique* 1, no. 113 (2007): 13–32; Raymond R. Gervais and Issiaka Mandé, "Comment compter les sujets de l'Empire? Les étapes d'une démographie impériale en AOF avant 1946," *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'histoire* 3, no. 95 (2007): 63–74.
7. Ferdinando Martini, *Relazione sulla Colonia Eritrea del R. Commissario Civile Deputato Ferdinando Martini per gli esercizi 1902–1907 presentata dal Ministro delle Colonie (Bertolini) nella seduta del 14 gennaio 1913, Vol. I* (Rome, Italy: Tipografia della Camera dei Deputati, 1913), 46.
 8. Stoler, "Making Empire Respectable."
 9. In those years, some Italian demographers, observing the decline of fertility and vitality of the metropolitan population ascribed to biological causes, wished for a population policy that favored mixed unions to give positive results from a quantitative and qualitative point of view, and to guarantee demographic capital for the nation. See Corrado Gini, *I fattori demografici dell'evoluzione delle nazioni* (Turin, Italy: Fratelli Bocca, 1912). At the same time, other social scientists supported the expansionist thesis, arguing that colonial conquests and migration to the occupied territories could lower the demographic pressure in the motherland. Furthermore, if the state eased voluntary white mass migration it could Italianize the African domains while limiting sexual contacts to ensure the "demographic harmony." See Nora Federici, "Le correnti migratorie e le correnti commerciali fra colonia e madrepatria," *Gli Annali dell'Africa Italiana* 1 (1938): 37–51.
 10. Gabriele Ciampi, "La popolazione dell'Eritrea," *Bollettino della Società Geografica Italiana* 11, no. 12 (1995): 487–524.
 11. Also, the Swedish Lutheran Mission ran two orphanages for boys and two for girls, and provided elementary schools. See Jonathan Miran, "Missionaries, Education, and the State in the Italian Colony of Eritrea," in *Christian Missionaries & the State in the Third World*, ed. H.B. Hansen and M. Twaddle (Oxford: James Currey, 2002), 126.

12. Sr. Marianna Soave, interview by author, Kärän and Habi Mantel, February 20, 2013; Fr. Gervasio Cavalli, interview by author, Massawa, January 14, 2014.
13. Istituto Centrale di Statistica del Regno d'Italia, *Censimento della Popolazione delle Colonie Italiane al 1° Dicembre 1921 e Rilevazione degli Abitanti del Possedimento delle Isole Egee al 20 Agosto 1922* (Rome, Italy: Istituto Poligrafico dello Stato, 1930), 97–138.
14. This practice, which had solely economic aims, is connected to the thorny debate about the search for paternity that developed in Europe at that time. For a more in-depth view, see Stefania Bartoloni, “Il movimento delle donne e la filiazione naturale nell'Italia liberale,” *Genesis* 17, no. 1 (2018): 81–103; Barbara Montesi, “Il diritto famigliare ai tempi della Grande Guerra,” *Genesis* 17, no. 1 (2018): 105–22. On the same topic, for the French colonies, see Saada, *Les enfants de la colonie*, chs. 2, 3; Mamadou Badji, “Le statut juridique des enfants métis nés en Afrique Occidentale Française de parents inconnus: entre idéalisme républicain et turpitudes coloniales,” *Droit et Cultures* 61, no. 1 (2011): 257–83.
15. Luigi Goglia, “Una diversa politica razziale coloniale in un documento inedito di Alberto Pollera del 1937,” *Storia contemporanea* 16 (1985): 1071–91; Olindo De Napoli, *La prova della razza. Cultura giuridica e razzismo in Italia negli anni Trenta* (Florence, Italy: Le Monnier, 2009).
16. For a complete list of the laws regulating Italo-Eritreans' access to Italian and Eritrean citizenship in the long run, see Valentina Fusari, “Mobilità umana e acquisizione della cittadinanza italiana nel caso degli italo-eritrei,” in *La fine del colonialismo italiano. Politica, società e memorie*, ed. A. M. Morone (Florence, Italy: Le Monnier, 2018), 230–37.
17. Adelgiso Ravizza, “Matrimoni misti e meticci nella Colonia Eritrea,” *Rivista d'Italia* 2, no. 9 (1916): 334–62; Carla Ghezzi, “Famiglia, patria e impero: per una storia della donna italiana in colonia,” *Studi Piacentini* 30 (2001): 207–45.
18. Istituto Centrale di Statistica del Regno d'Italia, *VII Censimento Generale della Popolazione. 21 Aprile 1931-IX. Volume 5—Colonie e Possedimenti* (Rome, Italy: Tipografia I. Failli, 1935).
19. Douglas D. Heckathorn, “Respondent-Driven Sampling: A New Approach to the Study of Hidden Populations,” *Social Problems* 44 (1997): 174–99.
20. Paolo Borruso, “Le missioni cattoliche italiane nella politica imperiale del fascismo,” *Africa. Rivista trimestrale di studi e documentazione dell'Istituto*

Italo-Africano 1 (1989): 50–78.

21. ASDMAE, ASMAI/IV, b. 54, Meticci secondo la nazionalità o la razza della madre ed il sesso, 1 ottobre 1938; ivi, Censimento dei meticci in A.O.I. eseguito dal 1 al 20 ottobre 1938.
22. In 1939, when World War II caused repatriations of women and children, 65.8 percent of the Italian population was male and only 34.2 percent female. Despite the habitus to move back to Italy to marry or marry by proxy, the marriage rate in the colony was 3.6 per 1,000 in 1937, 4.0 per 1,000 in 1938 and the early months of 1939. In addition, birth rates were rising within the Italian population: 27.8 per 1,000 in 1937, 28.8 per 1,000 in 1938, and 20.4 per 1,000 in the early months of 1939. Actually, the birth rate in Asmara was even higher because only 46.8 percent of the population was married. Therefore, the provisions of the regime against celibacy and in favor of female and family settlement seem to have gotten some results. By contrast, Italian mortality rates were contained because the population was young and healthy. Because of such trends, in Eritrea, the Italian community's growth rate was 1,489.9 percent, namely from 4,560 units in 1934 to about 72,500 in 1939. See Cinzia Buccianti and Valentina Fusari, "Dalle colonie all'impero: la popolazione italiana d'oltremare fra età liberale e regime fascista," in *Percorsi africani. Saggi storico-demografici e antropologici a sud del Mediterraneo*, ed. C. Buccianti and V. Fusari (Siena, Italy: Libreria Scientifica, 2013), 115–38.
23. Vittorio Zincone, "Il meticciato in AOI," *Rassegna sociale dell'Africa Italiana* 2 (1939): 115.
24. Giulia Barrera, "Sex, Citizenship and the State: The Construction of the Public and Private Spheres in Colonial Eritrea," in *Gender, Family and Sexuality: The Private Sphere in Italy, 1860–1945*, ed. P. Willson (Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan, 2004), 157–72.
25. Giulia Barrera, "Wrestling with Race on the Eve of Human Rights: The British Management of the Color Line in Post-Fascist Eritrea," in *Africa and World War II*, ed. C. Brown, J. Byfield, T. Parsons, and A. Sikainga (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 259–75; Valeria Deplano, *La Madrepatria è una terra straniera. Libici, eritrei e somali nell'Italia del dopoguerra (1945–1960)* (Florence, Italy: Le Monnier, 2017), 115–17.
26. Frederick Cooper, "Decolonization and Citizenship: Africa between Empires and a World of Nations," in *The Decolonization of African and Asian Societies*,

- 1930s–1960s, ed. E. Bogaerts and R. Raben (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2012), 39–67.
27. It remained below 1,000 units in the 1990s, and around 600–700 in the last decade. See Ministero degli Affari Esteri, *Annuario Statistico. Il Ministero degli Affari Esteri in cifre*, (Rome, Italy: Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale, 1999–2018).
 28. These categories were created on the basis of interviews with Italo-Eritreans, consular officers, and missionaries in Asmāra. I refer mainly to interviews with Maria Zanardelli, interview by author, Asmāra, April 10, 2010; Giuseppe Kidane Rossi, interview by author, Asmāra, February 2, 2014; Luisa Verzichelli, interview by author, Asmāra, February 9, 2014; Biniam Tewolde Amanuel, interview by author, Asmāra, January 12, 2014.
 29. Process by which the formal assessment of the filiation relationship is promoted.
 30. In contrast, in Portuguese colonies in Latin America and Africa, mixed-race people (*pardos*) have been accounted for in censuses since the second half of the nineteenth century.
 31. Nancy Howell, “Demographic Anthropology,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 15 (1986): 219.
 32. Pier Giorgio Solinas, *Popolazioni e sistemi sociali. Linee di ricerca in etnodemografia* (Rome, Italy: Carocci, 1992); David I. Kertzer and Tom Fricke, eds., *Anthropological Demography: Towards a New Synthesis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997); Cinzia Buccianti and Valentina Fusari, *Lineamenti di etnodemografia* (Padua, Italy: Cedam, 2008); Samuël Coghe and Alexandra Widmer, “Colonial Demography. Discourses, Rationalities, Methods,” in *Twentieth Century Population Thinking: A Critical Reader of Primary Sources*, ed. The Population Knowledge Network (New York: Routledge, 2015), 37–64; Sharon N. DeWitte, “Demographic Anthropology,” *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* 165 (2018): 893–903.
 33. Memoir, docufilms, and biographical encyclopedias bring to light the life paths of many Italo-Eritreans, legitimate or not, although biased toward success stories. See Gabriella D’Agostino, *Altre storie. Memoria dell’Italia in Eritrea* (Bologna, Italy: Archetipo Libri, 2012); the documentary “Italiani d’Eritrea- I Meticci” (Eritrea/Italy, 2017), directed by Giampaolo Montesanto; Jonathan Miran, “Biography and History in Giuseppe Puglisi’s Chi è? Dell’Eritrea

- 1952,” *Pount. Cahiers d’Études sur la Corne de l’Afrique et l’Arabie du Sud* 12 (2018): 47–71. However, above all, for those who have not obtained a legal or professional recognition, it is hard to identify the role played in the colonial and postcolonial society, and they are usually studied as an “aggregate group” in which individual experiences vanish.
34. Giacomo Buonomo, “Eugenetica coloniale,” *L’Africa Italiana* 37 (1918): 219–24.
 35. Despite the diffusion of colonial photography, photos with mixed-race children are available mainly in private archives, hinting to the existence of an “iconographic censorship.”
 36. Rosalia Pianavia Vivaldi, *Tre anni in Eritrea* (Milan, Italy: L.F. Cogliati, 1901); Carla Ghezzi, *Colonie, coloniali. Storie di donne, uomini e istituti fra Italia e Africa* (Roma: Istituto Italiano per l’Africa e l’Oriente, 2003).
 37. Metodio da Nembro, *La missione dei Minori cappuccini in Eritrea (1894–1952)* (Rome, Italy: Institutum Historicum Ord. Fr. Min. Cap., 1953), 141–42, 166–68; Borruso, “Le missioni cattoliche italiane . . .,” 73–76.
 38. Valentina Fusari, “Femminile, plurale: Pie Madri della Nigrizia in Eritrea (1914–2014),” in *Per una storia della popolazione italiana nel Novecento*, ed. A. Fornasin, C. Lorenzini (Udine, Italy: Forum, 2017), 235–46.
 39. Mauro da Leonessa, *Pro infanzia africana: per la tutela dei meticci* (Rome, Italy: Società Antischivistica d’Italia, 1932); Gabriele Da Maggiora, *Eritrea 1937–1947* (Rome, Italy: n.p., 1949), 155–61.
 40. Several witnesses report the possibility of identifying children abandoned in gutters because of their lobes gnawed by mice. Sr. Nigisti, interview by author, Asmara, April 15, 2014; Sr. Maria Calzi, interview by author, Erba, May 20, 2016.
 41. Valentina Fusari, “Problematizing Prostitution in Eritrea,” paper presented at the ASAI Conference: “Africa in fermento. Conflitti, modernità, religioni,” Catania, September 22–24, 2016.
 42. Carlo Alberto Corsini, “‘Era piovuto dal cielo e la terra lo aveva raccolto’: il destino del trovatello,” in *Enfance abandonnée et société en Europe XIV^e–XX^e siècles. Actes du colloque international, Rome 30–31 janvier 1987* (Rome, Italy: Ecole française de Rome, 1991), 80–119.
 43. Sr. Abrehet, interview by author, Bergamo, December 1, 2018.
 44. Marco Lenci, “Rinominarsi nell’Ottocento e nel Novecento,” in *L’Italia dei cognomi: l’antroponimia italiana nel quadro mediterraneo*, ed. A. Addobbati, R. Bizzocchi, and G. Salinero (Pisa, Italy: Pisa University Press, 2012), 567–83;

- Luisa Revelli, "Onomastica del contatto italo-eritreo," *Africa. Rivista semestrale di studi e ricerche* NS 1, no. 1 (2019): 107–22.
45. In Italy, at the turn of World War I, an interesting debate about the so-called "single widows" and the recognition of their children developed and, in my opinion, it could be extended—at least in theory—even to part of the relationships between Italian men and Eritrean women. See Montesi, "Il diritto familiare."
 46. Barrera, "Patrilinearità, razza e identità."
 47. Fr. Gervasio Cavalli, interview.
 48. Lissia Jeurissen, *Quand le métis s'appelait «mulâtre». Société, droit et pouvoir coloniaux face à la descendance des anciens couples euroafricains dans l'ancien Congo belge* (Louvain-La-Neuve, Belgium: Academia Bruylant, 2003).
 49. Art. 30 II. "nato nel territorio dell'Africa Orientale Italiana da genitori ignoti, quando i caratteri somatici ed altri eventuali indizi facciano fondatamente ritenere che *entrambi* i genitori siano di razza bianca, è dichiarato cittadino italiano." [Those born in Africa Orientale Italiana from unknown parents and whose facial features and other possible evidence provide sound reason to believe that *both* parents are Caucasian, are thereby declared Italian citizens.] (translation by the author) R. Decreto-Legge, 10 giugno 1936-XIV, n. 1019 in *Oriente Moderno* 16, no. 7 (1936): 379.
 50. Sr. Abrehet, interview.
 51. Beppe Sasso, interview by author, Addis Ababa, September 29, 2018.
 52. This Proclamation was promulgated before the Italian invasion of Ethiopia and published in *Berhanena Selam* (newspaper) 6, no. 30, July 24, 1930. Over time, it was replaced by Article 6 of the Proclamation of the Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia No. 1/1995 and by the Ethiopian Nationality Proclamation No. 378/2003, which was consistent with the provisions of the previous proclamation, both published in the *Federal Negarit Gazeta*.
 53. Emmanuelle Saada, "Paternité et citoyennité en situation coloniale. Le débat sur les 'reconnaisances frauduleuses' et la construction d'un droit impérial," *Politix* 17, no. 66 (2004): 107–36; Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power*, 91–96.
 54. Gebremeskel Yohannes Mehari, interview by author, Asmāra, March 26, 2010; Meron Samuel Berhe, interview by author, Asmāra, December 22, 2012; Francesco Giardina, interview by author, Asmāra, February 10, 2013.

55. Valentina Fusari, "La cittadinanza come lascito coloniale: gli italoeritrei," *Altretalia* 57 (2018): 34–49.
56. Mauro Cavalli, interview by author, Milan, June 10, 2014; Saba Yemane Goitom, interview by author, Milan, July 4, 2019.
57. Mauro Cavalli, interview; Sr. Abrehet, interview.
58. This interpretation relies on memories about the great-grandparents of the interviewees. Mario Daniel Mario, interview by author, Kärän, April 22, 2013; Fiori Daniel Mario, interview by author, Kärän, April 22, 2013; Fr. Marco, interview by author, Asmära, February 10, 2014.
59. Gerardina Maffetti, interview by author, handwritten record, Kärän, February 20, 2013 and Asmära, May 7, 2013; Sr. Marianna Soave, interview.
60. Beppe Sasso, interview.
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