ERITREA, A DIASPORA IN TWO PARTS:

Memory, Political Organizing, and Refugee Experiences in Italy

By

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Fiori Berhane is a socio-cultural anthropologist whose work has been supported by the Wenner Gren foundation, the Fulbright IIE and the American Academy in Rome. Her work has been featured on *Anthropology Now, Allegra Laboratory,* and *Africa is a Country*. At Brown she was awarded a Presidential fellowship, a T32 fellowship from the Population Studies Training Center and the Cogut fellowship for summer research. Fiori earned her Master's in Secondary Education at City College, City University in New York and her Bachelor of Arts in Middle Eastern, South Asian and African Studies and Anthropology from Columbia College, Columbia University in the City of New York.

Abstract of "Eritrea, A Diaspora in Two Parts: Memory, Political Organizing and Refugee Experiences in Italy" by Fiori Sara Berhane, Ph.D., Brown University, May 2021

This study charts the affective and performative dimensions of intergenerational rupture between members of Eritrea's diaspora in Bologna, Italy. This study locates political struggles around meaning both within intimate social spaces—weddings, bars, and local festivals—and within official spaces, toward a phenomenological and granular perspective that charts processes of social change and contestation within stratified diasporas marked by serial waves of displacement. It is dissertation is based on 19 months of ethnographic and archival research in Emilia-Romagna, the heart of what in the decades following the Second World War was Italy's communist "Red Belt." Bologna was chosen as a site for this dissertation because of its hitherto unexamined role as the "capital of Eritreans in exile". The *Introduction* examines the imbrication of border regimes and humanitarianism in the Euro-Saharan Mediterranean and sets the historical and political context for the dissertation. *Chapter 1* looks at the process of engendering the nationalist past through the perspectives of Eritrean nationalist women, whose refusal to stand as research subjects indexes the freighted nature of multiple unassimilated pasts. *Chapter 2* examines efforts of recent Eritrean refugees to memorialize the Lampedusa sinking as part of a strategy to make what I term discursive space—to challenge dominant humanitarian and nationalist discourses that render recent refugees unintelligible as political subjects. *Chapter 3* examines the work of Eritrean care workers within Italy's *SPRAR* system—its refugee and asylum-seeker reception system—it argues that homosocial practices of care seek to reconstitute communal bonds from the ephemeral sociopolitical realities of transit migration. *Chapter 4* explores the phenomenology of violence and the narrative strategies that Eritreans use to remember violence that is denied, minimized or veiled. *Chapter 5* defines the state of refugee reception and integration in Italy as a racially stratified policy practice that has significant material consequences in the lives of African refugees, in particular, and for the future of Eritreans in Italy, more specifically. I conclude the dissertation by drawing attention to the paradoxes of humanitarian recognition.

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INTRODUCTION

Scenes of Arrival

I began my fieldwork in the summer of 2015. I landed in Bologna during one of the hottest months on record; it was also the summer that the European Migration Crisis became a topic of hotly contested debate, a field of political action, and a potent imaginary for what it means to be European in a world of deep and lasting inequities. It was, as Victor Turner (1969) defined it, a "threshold moment" in which society enacts itself in the "subjunctive mood," a moment of possibility not necessarily delimited by existing social structures. When I arrived in Bologna, I felt a palpable sense of the upturned and upside down. Ordered European cities, long contrasted to their more chaotic American counterparts, were dotted with makeshift encampments. Train stations throughout much of Northern Italy were appropriated as both shelters and transit stations by refugees sleeping, praying, and organizing themselves in small groups in their journeys across the continent. In my first week of fieldwork, I remember Milan's central station was completely occupied by Eritrean refugees pressing northwards. Young Eritrean women with their sleeping newborns laid their bodies to rest on little patches of grass that provided minimal shade in the 95-degree weather outside of the train station. I remember being approached outside the station by a young Eritrean man who had recently made the Mediterranean crossing. He asked me if he could use my cell phone to call Sudan. I had never seen someone so emaciated in my life, and the shock on my face felt like an affront to him. It was as though we were refracted mirrors to ourselves and to the contingency of where life can lead. I tried to explain that I did not have an international plan that could call Sudan. He looked utterly betrayed and broken and said to me in Tigrinya, "But you are also *Habesha*"—the term that many highland Christians in Eritrea and Ethiopia use to identify themselves—implicating

me in the violence that structured his journey. This small act of betrayal on my part has seared itself into my own memory and signified all of the entanglements, contradictions, and unease that framed my fieldwork. It also put into stark relief what it means to belong within a diasporic community framed by significant material and ideological conflicts and inequalities.

The seed of this project began when I won the Kluge summer fellowship at Columbia University as an undergraduate student. Deeply naïve and idealistic, I went to Eritrea to study women guerilla fighters and their daughters raised in revolutionary schools in the Sahel. These revolutionary schools, I came to learn, were schools in which the children of the revolution, the children of guerilla fighters, were disciplined into revolutionary subjects much like their parents. Children born to fighters could not live with their parents; they were sometimes informally adopted within kin networks or were raised in these revolutionary schools with the children of other fighters. This was integral to the ideological project of the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF)—the Maoist guerilla group, which would liberate the country—and to its current ruling party (Party for Democracy and Justice, or PFDJ), which sought to radically transform individual subjectivities and fashion the nation from the ruins of 30 years of war (Bernal 2006, 2014; Redeker-Hepner 2008; Riggan 2016). Children who came out of these schools struggled to understand what the Christian cross signified—in a country with millennia of Orthodox Christian history—had minimal grasp of the honorifics that were part of the Tigrinya language—the language that is spoken by the majority of Eritrea's inhabitants—and found life after the war's end deeply disorienting. To understand the sacrifices of *tegadeliti*, the guerilla fighters who liberated the nation, I spoke to the women who sacrificed their lives in multiple dimensions, as I came to learn in the course of that project.

My research took place in Asmara, the capital city; I did not travel to cities like Keren or Massawa, as my family feared what could happen to a young woman traveling alone. Asmara has been recently recognized as a UNESCO world heritage site because of the modernist architecture that frames the large boulevards, like *Harinet* or Independence avenue. The cityscape is often described as a gem or time capsule of Italian colonial architecture, innovation, and invention; most of the futurist buildings there were erected in the lead-up to the Fascist invasion of Ethiopia in 1935. When UNESCO awarded the designation in 2017, Eritrean dissident activist groups were incensed that "buildings mattered more than the people of Eritrea," interpreting any honor bestowed on Eritrea as a legitimation of the regime of Isaias Afwerki. *Piccola Roma*, the name given to Asmara by Mussolini, was, for me, part of an imaginary of nationhood that was founded on the circulation of images, ideologies, people, and money. Injured ex-guerilla fighters would come and stay at our home in Los Angeles; we would attend diasporan festivals and fundraisers in support of the Eritrean People's Liberation Front in Long Beach, California; my mother would reminisce about watching *Pinocchio* at *Cinema Impero* in her own prism of post-colonial nostalgia (Carter 2010); my cousin, whose parents were guerilla fighters, was fostered by an extended network of kin that included my small nuclear family. Even far away in Los Angeles, our lives were framed by the 30-year long war between Eritrea and Ethiopia. My mother lost two brothers, who were guerilla fighters, in that conflict.

What stood out most for me when I went to Asmara as an adult was not the postcard-perfect aerial images of its large boulevards but rather the material wreckage of war. As the site of one of Africa's longest Cold War proxy wars, Asmara was crisscrossed by the scars of serial wars and warring ambitions. Kagnew, the CIA's largest spy base during the Cold War (Wrong 2005), was two blocks away from my grandparents' home in *Tiravolo*, the wealthy neighborhood

in Asmara, in which, my interlocutors emphasized, the lights never went out even with the mass blackouts that affected the country. Nearby was also the tank cemetery, left intact as a reminder of the toll the nationalist war took and of the David versus Goliath–like fight between Eritrea's scrappy guerillas and Ethiopia's military supported not only by the United States first but later by the Soviet Union. Moreover, the large statue of the *shida,* the sandals worn by fighters made from repurposed tank tires, stood as an emblem of the ingenuity and creativity of the EPLF, of its triumph "against all odds." Murals lined with the iconic image of fighters—lithe, afro haired, and in light and practical military uniform—memorialized the war and were a significant part of the urban landscape. Women guerilla fighters especially were lionized in these depictions, akin to their male counterparts, with bulging muscles sculpted from the difficulty of military service, which had transformed these women into what Victoria Bernal (2001) called "male replacements."

At the end of that five weeks of my first fieldwork, I wrote a paper on how women in a deeply patriarchal society like that of Eritrea represented the ethos of sacrifice that the revolutionary project depended on. Women sacrificed their embodied gender roles, their affective attachments to their children and their families—all fighters did—but this sacrifice was especially difficult, I argued, as it ran counter to gendered scripts and embodied gender experience. At the end of this project, I felt a deep sadness and a sense of betrayal as well. I felt powerless and disillusioned when the young people I befriended in Asmara over the course of that fieldwork spoke of their experiences of political violence and wanton abuse in *Sawa*, the military educational camp in which Eritreans finish their secondary educations. In the silences that framed my interviews, I found a well of distrust and fear. It was in Asmara that I first began my own journey as an anthropologist and understanding of how violence left wounds that were

difficult to heal, how it rent the fabric of society, and how the task of making sense of loss cannot be subsumed by nationalist discourse (Bernal 2017). Nevertheless, it was precisely this sense of connection to young Eritreans far from my own life that made it possible for me to imagine that my fate was connected to theirs. This nationalist imagination connected people like me, born in exile, to my counterparts in Eritrea. It was a nationalist imaginary born in exile, in places like Bologna, the site of this dissertation project.

Bologna was the capital of Eritreans in exile; this is what the letter from Isaias Afwerki written in 1992 to Bologna's mayor Walter Vitali reads. I found this letter in the *Archivio storico comunale*—the City of Bologna's archive. The archivists, who had no idea that these materials existed, would speak of my work with enthusiasm to any passerby who wondered what the *straniera,* or foreigner, was doing alone in the empty rooms of the archive. Isaias Afwerki, then the leader of the EPLF, thanks the city's mayor for Bologna's unwavering support for the guerilla movement in that letter. In 1993, after the UN-backed referendum that decided Eritrea's fate, Italy was the only European country to send representatives to Asmara to inaugurate the birth of the new nation. Representatives from the Red Belt of Italy came to witness this momentous occasion, with *L'Unità*, the newspaper of the Communist Party, writing *Eritrea: Il Primo Anno;* the article celebrated the achievements of the nationalist movement that was for that moment in time part of an "African Renaissance." For many Eritreans abroad, video cassettes of *Festival Eritrea*, which had its home in Bologna for 25 years, circulated through the same transnational networks that bind people in diaspora. Each year, at the end of August, my parents would receive a videocassette and watch these festivals, feeling themselves connected to the *tegadeliti*, many of whose whereabouts were unknown, and imagining what the future would hold once our country was "free."

The kinds of entanglements that make diasporas, though, are not so euphoric nor free of the corrosive forces of war, geopolitics, colonial histories, and the multiple generations of dispossession and displacement that result from these phenomena. Forty years ago, parts of the Italian Left supported the Eritrean guerillas and their anti-colonial counterparts in Africa, like Mozambique's *Frente de Libertação de Moçambique* (FRELIMO). That era of decolonization and the "international" is long past and never completed (Getachew 2016). Socialism and decolonization as utopic emancipatory projects were soon overtaken by the hegemony of human rights, as the betrayals and the bodies piled up in nationalist wars in the decolonizing world made it difficult to make sense of who was friend and who was foe (Redfield 2013). Yet we are now again in the midst of another twilight, one in which the hegemony of human rights is being overtaken by militarized humanitarianism and growing authoritarianism, a humanitarianism that is deployed to hurt those whom it seeks to protect (Ticktin 2011; 2017). This is the historical context that frames this dissertation and makes sense of the lives propelled to European shores in this "crisis."

My fieldwork, though, began with a casual stroll through *Bolognina*; *Bolognina*, the heart of the working class, the heart of Italy's Communist Party, was far different from the city center, cocooned by Medieval gates and walls, lined with shops, trendy restaurants, and flocks of university students. I came to Italy after one year of intensive Italian training and had minimal contacts in the field before I arrived. There, I met Girmay (pseudonym), whose life was connected to my own in ways that only make sense within the ambit of diaspora. He would show me grace[1] (Pitt Rivers 2011) and, against the protestations of other Eritreans, would declare that I

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[1] Here, I refer to Julian Pitt Rivers's 1992 essay *The Place of Grace in Anthropology*, which understands grace through the idiom of gratuity, rather than its more common theological uses. Gratuity involves those forms of social exchange that cannot be reciprocated. Locating reciprocity as the basis of sociality, Pitt Rivers argues that grace extends our understanding of exchange, which exceeds transactionalism in which value is not pre-determined in

was a person worthy of trust. I was in many ways, like many of the refugees I met who survived their journeys and established lives in Italy, lucky. Italy is not a country of well-functioning institutions for migrants, and for many newcomers, adapting to Italian life is a daunting undertaking that takes skill, flexibility, and meeting the right people at the right time (Muehlbach 2013; Tuckett 2018). My afternoon stroll through *Bolognina* would be a portent of a similar kind of luck, one that would chart the course of the following five years in which I have come to know and admire many of the people who have shared their lives, desires, pain, hopes, and dreams with me in the course of the writing of this dissertation. I am grateful to them for trusting a stranger with some of the most intimate details of their lives, and like the great trope of Mediterraneanist anthropology, for showing hospitality to me, the stranger.

Description of Problem

This dissertation is an ethnographic study of the politics of collective memory for diasporan Eritrean subjects in Bologna, Italy. I focus on the experiences of recent Eritrean refugees, in relation to the established Eritrean diaspora, to examine national history, identity, and politics as they are experienced and practiced within this critical juncture. I argue that the migration crisis is a fluid field of social meaning that Eritreans of disparate political positions employ to rework and reimagine shared conceptions around Eritrean identity, Blackness, and refugeehood in Italy. In particular, I look toward the "memory work" that Eritrean Italians employ to make sense of their present and to chart a path in the future in the midst of a charged and politically polarized present. I argue that by remembering sedimented histories and personal

contractual relations. Citing Beneveniste (1969) "the Latin word [grace] shows that, in origin, the procedure consists in giving service for nothing, without reimbursement; this literally gracious or gratuitous services provokes in return the manifestation of 'acknowledgement.'" (430). Here, I acknowledge the fact that relationships developed in fieldwork largely benefit the fieldworker in material and affective terms.

experiences of violence, Eritreans of the Mediterranean generation work to forge a common identity out of the experiences of transit migration[2] while using individual and collective memory to make discursive interventions—representational and legal-juridical—that allow them to construct livable futures. This dissertation explores the role of Eritrean dissident activists in shaping alternative discourses and imaginaries around refugeehood by engaging with historical memory, transnational activism around European border externalization schemes in Africa, and hegemonic Eritrean nationalism. In particular, I situate this activism within the history of the Eritrean community in Bologna as the site of diasporan organizing for an Eritrean nation-state. Moreover, I trace the flows of affective and material resources across borders in time, space, and generation between Eritrean guerilla groups, members of the Bologna chapter of the Italian Communist Party, and disparate waves of Eritrean refugees and humanitarian groups, and how these flows continue to constitute place, belonging, and social stratification within the Eritrean diasporic community in Bologna and in Italy more widely. Eritreans are a small minority in Italy with a peak number at 8,035 people as of December 31, 2019 (ISTAT 2021). In Bologna, figures from 2019 indicate that in the Metropolitan city of Bologna, Eritreans numbered 421 persons; in Emilia Romagna, Eritreans total 849 persons (ISTAT 2021).[3] Figures from 2013 onwards show a steady yearly decline, from 572 persons in the Metropolitan city of Bologna in 2013, to 421 in December of 2019 (ISTAT 2021).

Broadly, I argue that refugees' political mobilizations and subjectivities are structured vis-à-vis longstanding communal concerns and encounters with various institutions—from asylum to the politics of sending and receiving states to detention and transnational smuggling syndicates—across time and space.

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[2] Transit migration refers to mixed flows of temporary migration and mobility strategies.

[3] It is unclear as to whether or not these figures include those Eritreans who are naturalized Italian citizens.

I explore how Eritrean dissident activists employ and contest Eritrean nationalist memory, the discursive space of the "migration crisis," and the legacy of leftist politics in Italy to reimagine a counter-hegemonic Eritrean-ness. Based on 19 months of ethnographic fieldwork in the Emilia-Romagna region of Italy, the dissertation also investigates the changing contours of Italy's migration regime (Van Hear 1998) through the experiences of the first and second generations of the Eritrean diaspora there. Tricia Redeker-Hepner (2013) refers to these as generation "Nationalism" and generation "Asylum," respectively, to describe the disparate historical and political circumstances that have constituted the political subjectivities of Eritrean nationals in exile.

Significance

This dissertation engages with the life worlds of refugees and exiles as they struggle for visibility and recognition. Moreover, it involves fundamental concerns in anthropology on the reconstitution of communal bonds following experiences of protracted political violence (Theidon 2012), with an understanding that violence has reverberations across time, space, and generation (Bourgois 2001; Feldman 1997), and that the work of memory has political ramifications (Gross 2002; McGranahan 2005). By studying the experiences of recent Eritrean refugees in relation to the established diaspora, this dissertation traces the complex relationship between displacement, political activism, and collective memory. Firstly, it contributes to anthropological studies of Eritrea and its diaspora by looking at the experiences of the second-generation diaspora to understand the changes in global migration orders (Vertovec 2001) and their impacts on individuals, communities, and collectives (Agier 2016). My claim in this ethnographic study rests on the notion that this tertiary wave of refugees represents a second diasporan generation. By focusing on intergenerational dynamics and political practices, I argue

that diasporas are not solely defined by displacement and attachment to a territorial home (Axel 2004; Clifford 1994), but are constructed in exile (Thiranagama 2014), based on divergent memories of what "home" and exile mean.

Secondly, my attention to the notion of crisis here is not to cast the European Migration Crisis as an exceptional event, nor to say that displacement, which has characterized modern Eritrea's historical trajectory, is exceptional, but to argue instead that crisis itself is a persistent fluid field of meaning and material flux subject to constant reinterpretation by social actors themselves (Vigh 2006). Therefore, the attention to conflict and social change here comes from an understanding that the intensification in the numbers of Eritreans claiming asylum in the European Union represents a moment in which, after 15 years of government repression both in territorial Eritrea and in its diaspora (Hepner 2014), we can begin to chart emergent transnational opposition movements (Hepner 2013). Moreover, my attention to the intra-communal dynamics of this diasporan group is based on how encounters, not with alterity, but with what constitutes sameness, have the potential to spur radical re-imaginings of self, identity, and community (Baumann & Gingrich 2004). Therefore, the attention to memory in this project considers the complex dynamics between generations, modes of migration, and political alliances.

This study contributes to studies of migrant assimilation in the Italian context by locating struggles over recognition, rights, and survival within migrant communities stratified by class, generational differences, and competing political allegiances. Much of the anthropological literature on migration in the Italian context (Carter 1997; Giordana 2014; Lucht 2011) has studied the uneasy incorporation of migrants within Italian society. My dissertation furthers this literature by looking at how new migrants are incorporated within existing migrant networks,

with added attention to the particular post-colonial dynamics between Eritrea's liberation movement and the Italian left.

Political and Historical Context

Since the mid-2000s, young Eritreans have been fleeing an increasingly authoritarian regime; 90% of these migrants are under the age of 24, and a significant number of them are unaccompanied minors.[4] Figures from 2017, published by UNHCR, indicate that 61% of arrivals are male. They are currently the second-largest refugee group to arrive by boat in the European Union[5] (Laub 2015). Eritrea is a small country in the Horn of Africa that has had a long history of political conflict and protracted warfare. From 1890 to 1941, it was an Italian colony. After the defeat of the Axis Powers, it became a British protectorate and then federated to Ethiopia. In 1961, Emperor Haile Selassie forcibly annexed the territory; this resulted in Africa's longest war—the EPLF, the Maoist insurgency, waged a 30-year war against successive Ethiopian regimes.

During that 30-year war, almost one quarter of Eritrea's total population was dispersed in exile (Matsuoka & Sorensen 2001). In 1993, after an UN-mandated referendum, Eritrea became an independent state. Eritrea's modern trajectory has been marked by serial waves of displacement, starting in the 1960s with the outbreak of the nationalist war and continuing into the present. The EPLF mobilized this earlier diasporan generation for the nationalist cause, with

[4] See Mirjam Van Reisen's 2016 report for Tilburg University entitled "The Involvement of Unaccompanied Minors from Eritrea in Human Trafficking." See also UN Special Rapporteur's 2016 report on Eritrea, which cited the fact that Eritreans account for the largest number of unaccompanied minors arriving in Italy. Some causes cited for the youth exodus include military conscription, which officially begins at the age of 17 when students finish high school at *Sawa*, the military-cum-educational camp. Yet, practices like *gifa*—in which recruits are rounded up en masse from urban areas—mean that conscripts into military services are sometimes younger than the official stipulated age of 18 years old. Moreover, *Africa Monitor* notes that indefinite military service in Eritrea has led to widespread family fragmentation, which it points to as one of the complex reasons behind this contemporary youth exodus.

[5] These numbers are based on the years 2013–2015. UNHCR's 2019 report on Eritrean, Guinean, and Sudanese Refugees and Migrants in Italy shows that Eritrean sea arrivals declined by 66% from 2016 to 2017.

concerts and festivals materially and symbolically linking refugees and exiles in Europe, North America, and the Middle East These, the largest of which took place in Bologna under the administration of successive communist mayors, provided much-needed funds for the nationalist movement. For Eritreans of the earlier generation, national identity was created in exile through participation in a network of community centers and festivals dispersed throughout North America, Europe, and the Middle East (Redecker-Hepner 2009). Concerts, films, and a network of diasporan festivals materially and symbolically linked Eritreans in exile; these efforts raised much-needed funds for the revolutionary movement, provided ideological support, and made the question of Eritrea visible to European and North American governments. Not only was the EPLF successful in instantiating a "synthetic and homogenizing" national identity (Redecker-Hepner 2009), but the guerilla group was instrumental in fashioning a notion of citizenship premised on sacrifice to the nation (Bernal 2014) as the basis of collective identity and personhood. Moreover, the guerilla movement made the diaspora major stakeholders in the process of state-building and has incorporated its diaspora in defining legal citizenship (Woldemikael 2011). In what Woldemikael (2013) terms a graduated system of citizenship, diasporan Eritreans occupy a liminal space (Redecker-Hepner 2009:104) between their allegiance to a revolutionary movement that was successful in uniting Eritreans through a synthetic and homogenizing national identity (Redecker-Hepner 2009:43) and their sympathies and kinship ties to family members living within Eritrea, beholden to the reality of poverty, famine, and an increasingly authoritarian regime. Finally, the Eritrean diaspora is an important constituency in Eritrean politics, and its financial contributions constitute upward of one third of

GNP through a combination of remittances and the two-percent tax levied on diasporan subjects and collected in Eritrean embassies.[6]

The *Partito Comunista Italiano* aided the EPLF and the Bologna Commune, the city government, sponsored Festival Eritrea from 1974 to 1991, the first and largest diasporan festival in Europe. For many Eritreans of this earlier generation, their sense of self and relation to their community are based on this generative moment (Conrad 2006), in which they organized and made real their aspirations for statehood. Nonetheless, the burgeoning numbers of Eritrean refugees entering the European Union via the clandestine Saharan migrant circuit (Andersson 2014) is a visible reminder that the nationalist project is still contested, with the current exodus of young people symbolizing a repudiation of nationalism and Eritrean-ness itself (Woldemikael 2013). But because political speech and assembly are banned in Eritrea, political debate and contestation happen solely in diasporan spaces (Bernal 2013). This is a result of the country's current circumstances, in which human and political rights are heavily curtailed in the pursuit of development and mass militarization (Riggan 2016, O'Kane and Redeker-Hepner 2008). This has resulted in significant depopulation, as young people evade military conscription and instead choose an exit strategy (Poole 2013, Woldemikael 2013) to express their dissatisfaction with ruling elites.

Eritrea is characterized by scholars as a "bio-political state" (Woldemikael 2011), one which mobilizes certain forms of disciplinary technologies to forge national subjects who "will

[6] See Hirt and Saleh Mohammed's 2018 article "By Way of Patriotism, Coercion or Instrumentalization: How the Eritrean Regime Makes Use of the Diaspora to Stabilize Its Rule" in *Globalizations.* My interlocutors often cited that the collection of taxes and the need to engage with the embassy as holders of subsidiary protection, a status that protects recipients from refoulement but does not entitle them to full refugee status, as one of the major difficulties Eritrean asylum seekers face as they have to engage with state agents to send remittances, or have documents attested to by Eritrean authorities. According to figures from UNHCR's 2019 report on Eritrean, Guinean, and Sudanese Refugees and Migrants in Italy, 26% of Eritreans in Italy have subsidiary protection; these figures reflect protection figures from 2017.

obey, follow its [PFDJ] programs, and respect its authority and disciplinary power" (39). From indefinite military conscription for both men and women, to a network of underground secret prisons that Amnesty International likens to an "infrastructure of repression," to a faltering economy that places Eritrea on the lower scale of the human development index, a combination of perceived and actual hopelessness for Eritrea's young has forced an unprecedented exodus of young people from a peacetime country. Eritrea currently experiences an out-migration of 25% to 30% of its population (Redecker-Hepner 2009) since the early 2000s; it has become one of the highest per capita producers of refugees in the world .[7]

As Tricia Redeker Hepner has shown in her ethnography *Soldiers, Martyrs Traitors and Exiles* (2009) the Eritrean People's Liberation Front, the guerilla movement that would eventually take power and transform into the People's Front for Democracy and Justice, the ruling party of the state, was instrumental in constituting an Eritrean national identity that would subsume all regional, linguistic, ethnic, and religious difference under a common national identity forged through the revolutionary movement itself. The Eritrean People's Liberation Front's goal was not only to establish a sovereign state but to instantiate a total restructuring of society, mobilizing its diaspora in this effort. In this way, Eritrea's revolution can be classified as a developmental one,

> "characterized by the establishment of political control over social and economic affairs, the obliteration of distinctions between state and society, and the conception of state power as something to be mobilized at will for the purpose of changing societal relations" (Muller 2011:112).

Life on what was euphemistically called the "Front" in Eastern Sahel entailed major personal sacrifices for *tegadelti*, the fighters who would later capture the state. This ethos of sacrifice,

[7] See Dan Connell "Eritrea's Refugees at Risk" in *Post-Liberation Eritrea* which cites OHCHR figures from 2015. This situation has dramatically altered since the re-introduction of the Memorandum of Understanding Between Libya and Italy which has dramatically reduced arrivals who transit through the Central Mediterranean route, the major route through which Eritreans transit into the EU. See figures from the 2019 UN Report on Eritrean, Guinean and Sudanese Refugees and Migrants in Italy. The question of Eritrean refugee flows is also complicated by the recent conflict in Tigray which has seen the systematic destruction of the *Hitsas* and *Adi Harush* refugee camps and third-party mechanisms like the Khartoum process which have dramatically reduced refugees' mobility.

something Bernal (2014) terms "sacrificial citizenship," would come to permeate all aspects of social and political life in Eritrea and within its diaspora and has become the structuring logic of the Eritrean state. From mandated military conscription to summer work camps for students, the PFDJ mandates that service to the state constitutes political subjectivity and personhood (Hepner 2009; Woldemikael 2014; Muller 2011). The EPLF was successful in constituting the transnational social field, and in assuming the form of a de-territorialized state "with strong territorial fixations" (Hepner 2008:482), that has had a major stake in the subjectivities of its dispersed populations. The EPLF and now the PFDJ's have been able to constitute "spontaneous loyalty" through their management of exile associations, and cultural festivals that made its diasporic communities' major stakeholders in the process of nation building.

The aftermath of the 1998–2001 border war with Ethiopia inaugurated the state of exception that currently afflicts the country. In September 2001, 15 government ministers signed a letter calling for more open and democratic deliberation in the country and criticizing Isaias Afwerki for the handling of the war. Known colloquially as the G-15, these government ministers were disappeared; newspapers were shuttered; and finally, a state of no war, no peace was declared shortly after the conflict. In September 2018, Eritrea and Ethiopia finally signed the Algiers agreement, effectively ending the conflict that began in 1998. As a result of the border war, large numbers of refugees were internally displaced; the border between Eritrea and Ethiopia was closed; and indefinite military service and mass mobilization came to characterize ordinary Eritreans' lives (Riggan 2016). Moreover, as the most technologically sophisticated war in Africa's history, the border war was extremely costly, both financially and in human lives (Plaut 2016). It was the catalyst for the human and political rights crisis that currently afflicts the country; it has also

exacerbated the looming ecological crisis that countries in the Sahel face, which is characterized by deforestation, food insecurity, and drought (DeWaal 2015).

The majority of adults in Eritrea are conscripted in the military or as laborers in the government's developmental programs known as *Warsaw ykäa lo*. In the post-independence context, the program was meant to spur "self-sufficient development," (O'Connell 2001) as the country faced the daunting task of reconstruction after the devastation of the nationalist war. It captured the spirit of voluntary contributions and the loyalties of national subjects in waiting that had successfully united exile groups, guerillas, and civilians during the 30-year war. National Service, or *hagärawi a gälglot* in Tigrinya, involves the conscription of men and women "for military and civil purposes by the state" (Bozzini 2011:93). Since the end of the border war in 2000, there have been no plans set in place to demobilize conscripts. Further, the program has been credited as the main driver of out migration from Eritrea by the UN Rapporteur (2016). Conscripts find themselves laboring with little to no pay in government owned parastatals (DeWaal 2015; Plaut 2016). Once they have finished their high school educations at *Sawa*, the military camp in which there have been documented allegations of systemic abuse, young Eritreans are then graduated into a system of enforced labor and encampment in which they have little say over the course of their lives. Jennifer Riggans (2016) likens this to a permanent situation of liminality, in which the life course of conscripts is dramatically circumscribed by the power of the Eritrean state. After the signing of the Algiers agreement in 2018, human rights organizations urged the Eritrean government to suspend the program and engage in mass demobilization. There are no current indications that this will happen.[8]

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[8] The latest UN Rapporteur's statement (Daniella Kravitz) on Eritrea published on October 26, 2020, states that "it has been two years since Eritrea's peace agreement with Ethiopia and the lifting the UN sanctions on Eritrea. In this period, Eritrea has strengthened its cooperation with neighboring countries. Yet, Eritrea's increased engagement at the regional level has not translated into reforms in the country. In my May 2020 report, I set out five benchmarks for progress in human rights and noted the lack of meaningful and substantive improvement in relation to these areas. Since the publication of my report, there have been limited signs of progress." Some of those benchmarks

The power of the de-territorialized Eritrean state also exerts itself in the diaspora (Redecker-Hepner 2013; Redecker-Hepner & O'Kane 2008), not only symbolically by defining who belongs and who counts as Eritrean but materially through its imbrication with European asylum regimes and transnational smuggling and trafficking syndicates (DeWaal 2015; Van Reisen & Mawere eds. 2017; Hirt & Saleh Mohammed 2018). State repression in Eritrea functions through secrecy, the circulation of migrants and remittances, and certain affective registers like fear, suspicion, and paranoia (Bozzini 2011; Hepner 2008; Poole 2013; and Muller 2013). Most profoundly, the apparatus of state repression in Eritrea functions through the criminalization of movement, both within and outside the country, and through the punishment and repression of family members of those who leave the country (Bozzini 2011; Van Reisen 2016). As the UK *Guardian* has continued documenting the list of Eritrea's human rights abuses, including detention incommunicado and the wholesale punishment of families of those who have left Eritrea, the family has become the locus of maintaining social control in Eritrea. As Redecker-Hepner (2008), Poole (2013) and Muller (2012) have illustrated, Eritrea's governance structure functions through two registers, through its ability to channel certain affective states like loyalty, into a mechanism of state governance that harnesses the comparative financial resources of the diaspora into maintaining increasing centralization of state power and repression within Eritrea proper. The act of emigration[9], hitherto a central part of state formation in the Eritrean context, has now been criminalized by the PFDJ, in which families are fined upwards of

included demobilization of conscripts and release of political prisoners. https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=26439&LangID=E

[9] This also includes a shoot to kill policy on the Eritrean border, managed by an institution known as the Border Control Authority. From interviews gathered, the 650 km border with Sudan is often porous, but requires significant coordination and pay offs to various entities to enable out-migration. As Van Reisen writes "The 605 km border between Eritrea and Sudan is a more open border, but is also controlled on the Eritrean side by the Border Control Authority. This border provides a challenging route, given the many internal check points in Eritrea and the fact that free travel is not allowed within Eritrea and citizens are assigned to the specific locations where they live and are authorised to be" (2016:8).

$3300 per family member who leaves the state. These fines are considerable a context in which 2011 World Bank statistics indicate that per capita income averages $1611 per year.

Scholarship regarding Eritrean emigration has often cast it as potentially subversive to the totalizing system that the PFDJ has instituted within Eritrea. But there stands also a paradox, as increasing numbers of young people have chosen the "exit strategy" (Muller 2012) the state has instead found a steady revenue source amongst new emigrants, who have entered into an already existing transnational sphere heavily influenced by the PFDJ's mass organizations (Hepner 2008). The transnational civil society, which was critical in birthing the nation, has also acted as another mechanism to further entrench state power. As Redeker-Hepner writes,

> "Eritrea initially seemed an exciting example, as the nation-state was literally forged over three decades of transnational activity between guerilla fighters, local people, exiles and refugees (Compton 1998; Hepner 2004). But, unlike cases where transnational policies and practices have expanded socio-political and economic participation, Eritrean transnationalism has forged a heavily circumscribed field in which one participates on the state's terms or risks retribution. State centralization via transnational strategies *requires* that Eritreans participate economically and politically if they wish to remain Eritrean at all: a phenomenon Al-Ali, Black and Koser (2001a) describe as 'enforced transnationalism'" (2008:483).

Under these conditions civil society networks that align themselves even as potentially subversive to state-mandated definitions of what constitutes Eritrean-ness, at best, risk marginalization and de-legitimization, or at worst, official censure and punishment. Even amongst recent refugees as Müller (2012) writes of in Israel, punishment of families, rather than weakening recent arrivals' attachment to the state, reinforces it, as emigrants often have to support family members who have been left impoverished by this policy. In the Italian context (Arnone 2008), recent arrivals are most often branded as traitors, resulting in certain forms of social exclusion.

Relevant Literatures

Memory and Violence

Anthropological studies of memory were influenced by the insights of Maurice Halbwachs (1980) who understood memory as an elastic phenomenon shared amongst members of a collectivity that serves present political and social needs. Moreover, memory projects are co-constitutive of individual and group identities (Gillis 1994). In this formulation, memory is a present-oriented and contentious activity as disparate social groups remember ‘events’ differently, especially within the modern nation-state. Thus, ethnographic studies of collective memory have privileged the notion of the “past in the present,” as a structuring principle, locating struggles over the meanings of the past and its dogged presence and persistence in the present across various domains and practices within social life—in ritual and embodied practice (Connerton 1989), in narrative, in the commemorative practices of the state (Anderson 1983; Gillis 1994) and in emotion (Cole 2001; 2010). More specifically, the memory boom[10] developed a significant body of literature around the memory struggles of marginalized groups towards struggles for recognition and redistributive justice (Bonilla 2011; Trask 1999; Warren & Jackson 2002).

The very elasticity of the concept of ‘cultural,’ ‘social’ or ‘collective’ memory is likely a key contributor for its uptake across disciplines in what characterized the ‘memory boom’ of the 1980’s and 1990’s in the humanities and social sciences (Erll 2011). Memory itself is enacted through a range of flexible practices, involving social agents remembering at different scales and produced vis-à-vis relations to objects, places, and bodies. Nevertheless, David Berliner (2005) argues that memory as an analytic lacks conceptual clarity, raising epistemological questions as to what constitutes our anthropological object, culture itself.

[10] The ‘memory boom’ refers to the emergence of humanities and social sciences text devoted to ‘memory studies,’ from the 1980’s to the early 2000’s. These studies variously focused on the bases of national identities, commemorative practices of the state, memory and place (see Basso 1994), memory and embodiment, memory and emotion/affect, and ritual.

More broadly, anthropological interest in memory coincided with anthropology's serious engagement with state violence, war and structural violence (Das & Kleinman 2000; Warren 1993; Scheper-Hughes 1992). For anthropologists working with what once were perceived to be relatively isolated communities, violence upended simplistic understandings of cultural boundedness, continuity and inter-generational transmission of culture (Warren 1993) and presented significant challenges for fieldworkers. Anthropologists' interest in memory followed from an understanding that violence had an irruptive effect on social life, disrupting the ways in which memory was theorized as constitutive of cultural continuity and inter-generational transmission (Argenti & Schramm 2010). For example, Robben (2005) writing on the Argentinian dirty wars of the 1980's described mass violence as such

> More than the sum total of individual suffering because it ruptures social bonds, destroys group identities, and undermines the sense of community, and entails cultural disorientation when taken for granted meanings become obsolete. A social trauma is thus a wound to the social body and its cultural frame. (Robben 2005: 125; Sanabaria 2015: 351).

Violence, much like memory itself, is experienced collectively as well as individually. Unofficial projects to remember those who have died or experienced violence at the hands of state violence work to re-member, put back together or re-constitute this wounded social body. Consequentially, this act of remembering violence can also spur the birth of new collectivities and identities in places in which no such collectivities existed before the violent or irruptive 'event' (Shaw 2011; Feuchtwang 2011), as my ethnographic examples show.

A 2013 collection of short essays published in *Cultural Anthropology* on the memory boom of the 1980's reflects on what it enabled anthropologists to think. In particular, the authors of that series grapple with a series of interrelated phenomena and concepts that mark memory projects: temporality, violence, narrative, war, trauma and citizenship. In particular, Rosalind Shaw's intervention, which is introduced as a provocation, rests on the need to futurize memory,

looking towards how expectations for futures cannot be divorced from remembrance of pasts. In particular, she locates Sierra Leone's Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) as part of a project that enabled its participants to return to a painful past so as to re-set temporalities into a progressive trajectory that allowed the participants of the truth and reconciliation commission to imagine a time after violence. Futurizing memory, as Shaw contends, looks at how communities remember in the service of imagining and enacting alternate futures, futures marked by traces of the past but not bound by them. In this formulation, returning to a violent and painful past is not bound by the experience of trauma-- in which trauma signifies the endless repetition of an intrusive past into a suspended present (Caruth 1995)-- but returning to this past instantiates a temporal frame for communities to construct a present and a future 'after' violence. Beyond Shaw's provocation, the goal of the collection of essays was to recoup memory studies from declining from anthropological interest at a time marked by the end of political time[11] (Scott 2013), a time which indexes the failure of utopic political projects.

Secondly, the interdisciplinary memory boom takes place within the zeitgeist of human rights discourse and practice in the 1990's and its attendant uptake by communities marked by state and extra-state violence in their quests for redress[12] which Shaw's ethnographic examples

[11] Here Scott (2013) refers to "the temporality of the aftermaths of political catastrophe, the temporal disjunctures involved in living *on* in the wake of past political time, amid the ruins, more specifically of post-socialist and postcolonial futures past" (2). Moreover, Scott argues that the fall of grand internationalist progressive projects that anticipated revolutionary futures has been followed by a market based, speculative 'futures,' that is short term in thinking and apolitical, oriented towards configuring social and political life on the basis of market values. *See also* Guyer (2007) on the convergences between market time temporalizations and evangelical prophecy in Nigeria and Piot (2010) for a discussion of the failures of the modernist state in Togo, neoliberal desires for newness amongst young Togolese and the transformations of social imagination that prefigure anomie, or social breakdown in the neoliberalization of the African state. Nevertheless, Piot's implicit move from 'memory,' memories of elders and post-colonial states, towards 'affect' is a paradigmatic shift in our disciplinary thinking towards what constitutes the collective under global neoliberal governance.

[12] See Samuel Moyn's (2010) *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History* which argued that human rights were included in post-war legal structures to avoid more politically contentious demands for self-determination and decolonization. In the 1970's 'human rights' made a resurgence with the fall of global Marxism and de-colonization as an individualist form of ethics grounded in the relationship between the individual and the state. While human

reference. Within this research strand, anthropology has a well-developed scholarly corpus around formal, internationally sponsored truth and reconciliation commissions (TRC) on post-violence societies in disparate contexts like South Africa (Moon 2009; Ross 2003; Wilson 2001), Guatemala (French 2009; Sanford 2003), Peru (Coxshall 2005), Argentina (Jelin 2002; Kaiser 2005; Robben 2005) and the United States (Magarell & Wesley 2008). The aims of truth and reconciliation commissions are to document the abuses of repressive regimes, to uncover the covert violence of state and non-state actors, and make public the testimonies of survivors in the hopes of ensuring peaceful liberal democratic transitions. While these TRC mechanisms privileged the standpoint of victims of violence and aim to offer programmatic institutional reforms to prevent future violence, they, nevertheless, serve as legitimizing transitional governments and in relegating such structural violence, like that of apartheid South Africa, as a feature of the past (Meister 2013). Specifically, in cases in which violence cannot be contained within a singular historical event, TRC has been critiqued as inadequate to meet the needs of communities that continue to face violence in a *longue durée* that is co-terminus with the present.[13] Broadly, these ethnographies have interrogated the truth regimes through which individual narratives of experiential violence circulate and become legible within transnational human rights discourses (Briggs 2007; French 2009; Ross 2003).

Put simply, the memory projects that anthropologists studied can be considered part of social and historical process through which victims of state violence make sense of the past and construct livable futures from the wreckage of violent disruption[14]-- whether those projects are

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rights have a depoliticized within international structures of governance, how communities and individuals deploy human rights is deeply contextual and mediated by particular histories situated in time and place.

[13] See Niezen (2017) on Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission for the survivors of residential schools.

[14] Paul Connerton (1989) argues that the emergence of memory studies should be interpreted as related to the intensification in state violence and mass killings in the late 20th century.

informal or formally mediated through TRC mechanisms discussed above. Moreover, a dialectic of active remembering and forgetting (Connerton 2008) characterizes mass violence for its social agents—victims and perpetrators alike.[15] State repression also works to construct alternate futures by actively prohibiting violence from being remembered, which TRC mechanisms work to uncover. Robben (2005) in describing the violence of the junta regime in Argentina writes "the military had had a head start in the politics of memory by obliterating the bodies of the assassinated disappeared, thus attempting to confine the traces of their repression purely to the discursive domain" (131). Memory projects of the state predicated on structural deniability and forgetting work to instantiate an aporia through which perpetrators of violence cannot be held accountable. Nevertheless, disappearances are not only a pragmatic means of erasing violent legacies in which perpetrators of violence can live lives of impunity, they are also symbolic in that they work on existing cultural idioms through which people understand death (DeLeon 2015; Green 2004), making the task of closure for the families and communities imbricated in state violence difficult if not impossible[16]. The logic of disappearance, perversely then, also imagines a future after violence, in which state authorities as perpetrators of violence or complicit in its enactment, understand that the bodies of the disappeared, the testimonies of survivors and their families stand as incriminating evidence, as special knowledge that communities affected by violence can mobilize to find accountability and redress.

I am, nevertheless, reminded of a quote from a recent edition (February 2021) of the *London Review of Books,* which, in describing the assassination of Lokman Slim, the Lebanese political activist, Stefan Tarnowski writes:

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[15] In both totalizing regimes and the structural violence that characterizes liberal democratic regimes it is difficult to make clear distinctions between victims and perpetrators. TRC mechanisms have been variously criticized for their typologizing of victims, which erases forms of violence that TRC mechanisms render illegible.

[16] See Butler's (2004) *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* For a discussion on the politics of grief.

> "what we now know is that knowledge isn't enough, that power here is immune to knowledge. These regimes are indifferent to the fact that we know every forensic detail of their crimes, their negligence, their histories of violence. They carry on regardless. How can authorities immune or indifferent to knowledge of their crimes be confronted?"

Yet, I puzzle to myself, and in this dissertation, that in a context of rising global authoritarianism and increasing right-wing hegemony worldwide, where does the political work of memory fit in? This is a sincere query in a time in which state violence is increasingly recorded in real time, in which visual, textual and witness testimony is not actively suppressed by powerful actors, but is simply denied or ignored with the hopes that publics will quickly forget or simply not care, too fatigued by mounting and unremitting crises[17] to hold governments or authorities accountable. Anthropology's engagement with memory was based on a paradigm of subaltern resistance to power, but my query also reflects fundamental epistemological questions around how anthropologists understand the temporality of violence and its relationship to questions around social and political conflict, cultural continuity and the nature of the state.

In writing about Eritreans who understand themselves as part of a 'Mediterranean' generation, I struggled to write and represent violence that is multi-causal, multi-modal, that has its roots and takes place within disparate temporal and spatial scales. Eritreans within their 'communicative' memory acts[18] (Assman & Czaplika 1995), daily conversations that occurred in bars, restaurants and in homes, spoke of experiences of violence—their own and others'—as a way to counter powerful discourses predicated on forgetting; I admit, though, that these private memories were ambiguous in their political effects (Bernal 2017). However, instead of evacuating the political work of memory in a present of rising global authoritarianisms and the

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[17] See Roitman (2013) *Anti-Crisis* on the representational and discursive work that crisis engenders.

[18] Assman & Czapilka (1995) define 'communicative memory' as memory which is not transmitted or mediated vis-à-vis institutions; communicative memory is informal and dependent on everyday social interaction which maintains affective ties between members of a group. Communicative memory sustains social bonds within lived in spaces.

erosion of liberal-democratic norms in the West, I argue that memory projects take on a particular urgency in which political violence has no clear end for social actors, and in which present violence is actively denied. This is a tragic world, according to David Scott (2013), in which revolutionary socialism, post-colonial nationalisms, and futures characterized by human rights or transitions to liberal democracy have lost their potential to imagine and enact a world that is bound less by systems of domination (Getachew 2016). For social actors, like my interlocutors, who live under complex individual and collective experiences of political violence in which there is no clear path forward for when or if violence ends, daily communicative acts (Assman & Czpalika 1995), forms of public commemoration and individual testimony work to create and shore up communal life out of atomizing social and political structures.

From Transnationalism to Transit: From Migrant Sociality to State Power in the Lives of Refugees

In the 1990's, spurred on by post-colonial studies which emphasized hybridity, mimesis, and movement (Bhaba 1994; Hall; Gilroy 1987), coupled with the insights of historical-structuralists Marxists (Wallerstein 1974, 1980, 1989), anthropologists began to theorize migration differently in the era of globalization. Arjun Appadurai (1990) first celebrated the rise of transnational linkages and flows and the concomitant waning power of the nation-state in his seminal essay *Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Culture Economy*. Expanding upon Anderson's work on imagined communities (1983), Appadurai argued that the work of imagination, and different "global cultural flows" constituted as '*scapes*' make up individuals' agentive capacities in the contemporary moment. In Appadurai's work, the flexibility and fluidity of capital, alongside with the cultural work of diaspora would weaken the power of nation-states to police their cultural boundaries and physical borders. Appadurai's dialectics between the state's capacity to control meaning and the democratic potential of imagination,

coupled with emergent technologies, has irrevocably influenced anthropological studies of diaspora and migration (Balibar 1998; Bernal 2004; Thiranagama 2014).

In their path-breaking work Glick-Schiller, Basch and Blanc-Szanton (1992) defined transnational migration as "the process by which immigrants forge and sustain multiple simultaneous multi-stranded social relations that link their societies of origin and settlement" (1995: 48). Further in *Nations Unbound: Transnational Projects and the De-territorialized Nation State,* (Glick- Schiller et al. 1995) the authors write "transmigrants are immigrants whose daily lives depend on multiple and constant interconnections across international border and whose public identities are configured in relationship to more than one nation-state" (48). The term was quickly picked up in migration studies. For example, Alejandro Portes et al. expanded upon (1999) this definition by writing that transnational social fields (Glick-Schiller, Basch, Szanton 1992) are "dense networks across political borders created by immigrants in their quest for economic advancement and social recognition," emphasizing the ability of migrants to live not only across political borders, but also across social and linguistic boundaries. Portes further emphasizes that transmigrants are often rooted to two places, i.e., both their sending and receiving contexts, because "they [transmigrants] are often bilingual, move easily between different cultures." (812, Kearney 1995: 574). These definitions of transnationalism emphasized simultaneity, ease of movement, and hybrid rather than dual and opposing identities. In this formulation, nation is not necessarily bounded by state, the activities of nationals stretch across political borders, and identity is shifting.

Since the 1990's, transnationalism has been the dominant paradigm in the study of migration across disciplines. However, Glick-Schiller (2016) has recently critiqued the over-emphasis on migrants' agentive capacities that has attended the paradigm's predominance in

migration studies. She urges anthropologists to pay attention to the social and political structures that enable/disable movement across borders in order to move beyond descriptive analyses of transnationalism. In effect, the era of transnationalism spawned a host of studies that understood the emergence of transnational practices as an alternative force to territorially bounded states and as imbricated in democratization from afar for sending contexts (Guarnizo, Portes, Haller 2003: 1214). Present political realities in terms of the resurgence of bordering practices in liberal democracies of the global North, endemic violence and state breakdown in sending contexts, and the emergence of 'transit' spaces, complicate the earlier theoretical insights of studies of transnationalism as a people led process in which migrants are able to maintain relationships and attachments simultaneously across territorial borders.

Moreover, early studies of transnationalism have emphasized the agentive capacity of migrants to the detriment of theorizing changes in the configuration of state power. While transnational practices allow us to see that "sovereign nation states are crisscrossed and undermined by transnational actors with varying prospects of power, orientations and identities" and alert us to the importance of locating "the growth of social and political spaces and cultural practices that go beyond the boundaries of the nation-state," (Glick-Schiller 1995:57) these political spaces are still marked by the political projects of both sending and receiving contexts. Victoria Bernal's work (2004), particularly, shows how nations capture the political loyalties and financial resources of their transnational communities in their nation and state building practices. In her study of Eritrean diasporan websites, she shows how the Eritrean government has managed to promote "transnational nationalist networks," (for further elaboration *see* Redecker-Hepner (2009) monograph on the EPLF's constitution of the transnational social field in the 1970's) in the creation of a de-territorialized Eritrean national identity. Further, she argues

that “the activities of the Eritrean diaspora and the Eritrean state point to the ways nations not only continue to matter, but how nations can be constructed and strengthened through transnational flows and the technologies of globalization” (20). Redecker-Hepner (2013, 2014, 2015) and Mueller (2011) have further explored the dynamics between the secondary wave of Eritrean migrants, the established diaspora and the Eritrean state in shoring up state-power in the midst of the migration crisis. These works point us to the changing dynamics of transnational social fields, the political divisions and rancor within diasporan communities (Van Hear 1998), and changing configurations of state power within both sending and receiving contexts. Most importantly, they alert us to the importance of the circumstances that drive migration in situating transnational practices, and to the resilience of the nation-state, even poor states, in questions of cultural belonging.

Since Glick-Schiller et al. (1992) published their first essay on transnationalism, the structures that enable people to move and build lives across borders have changed dramatically (Copeland et al. 2016). Recent changes in the “migration order”-- “the specific migration orders [that] comprise individual and household decision making, economic and political disparities between countries, the development of migrant networks and institutions, national and international legal and policy institutions as well as macro-political economic developments. A ‘migration transition’ refers to a fundamental change in a given migration order […].” (Van Hear 1998: 201)-- towards one of deportation, criminalization of migrants (Palidda 2011) and migration, and migrant illegality as a lived social condition have fundamentally altered the structures that enabled people to live lives transnationally. This is most acutely seen in the resurgence of bordering regimes, their securitization, detention and in the legal production of illegality (DeGenova 2001). Global migration regimes have changed dramatically since the

1980’s in global North nations when transnational phenomena were first noted in migration studies.

Deportation and detention are structural elements in the governmentality of immigration (Fassin 2011). Paying attention to the structures that delimit migrants’ political participation across social fields, Al-Ali et al. (2001) observed that “the sense of security or anxiety, which arises in relation to the question of legal status of refugees, plays a major role in creating or hindering the space from which transnational practices can occur” (582). While theories of transnationalism have emphasized the role of transmigrants in reconfiguring notions of territory, belonging, and citizenship, the anthropological engagement with illegality emphasizes the structural vulnerability of migrants to the caprices of state power. Even for refugees, who represent a privileged category vis-à-vis ‘economic’ migrants[19], the criminalization of unauthorized border crossing has inadvertently criminalized refugeehood itself[20]. Criminalization of all categories of migrants is in turn reinforced by a moral and representational economy that reinforces suspicion against stigmatized categories of migrants who are variously depicted as ‘asylum seekers’ or ‘economic migrants.’ These representations construct people who move as wily, deceitful, calculating and self-interested actors who do not represent the vulnerability associated with refugeehood (Ticktin 2016). As Milena Belloni

[19] Belloni (2019) discusses some of the ethical dimensions behind categorizing some migrants as economic and others as political refugees: “however, when stating the continuity between forced and voluntary migration and the space for choice in migration dynamics, researchers may face a major ethical dilemma. On the one hand, we are afraid to undermine the system of categories that protect research participants. On the other hand, we feel the need, as Thomas Faist puts it, “to challenge the power of categorization which oppresses the subjects we talk about.”42 The more the distinction between economic migrants and refugees gets blurred; the higher the risk of moral and political claims for international protection losing momentum and cogency…. For me, rejecting the dichotomy between forced and voluntary migration means contesting the exclusion and illegalization that inevitably derives from a stereotyped understanding of reality.”

[20] A growing number of scholars have written on the criminalization of refugeehood as distinct from the criminalization of ‘asylum seekers.’ These recent and forthcoming interventions of the ‘anti-refugee’ machine describe the diffuse and contradictory policies that attenuate the risks associated with seeking refuge. See also Catherine Besteman (2019) *Militarized Global Apartheid.*

(2019) reminds us in writing about Eritrean transnational mobility, the existence of refugee agency and mobility across borders does not evacuate the role of vulnerability to violence in structuring refugee experiences. Her insight counters depictions of refugees that emphasize the lack of refugee agency (and their immobility in refugee camps in the global South) as innocent victims, an image that undergirds humanitarian imaginaries (Malkki 1995;1996; Ticktin 2016) and in turn circumscribes political futures for those rendered as depoliticized objects of care (Agier 2005, 2011; Fassin 2012; Ticktin 2011).

The experiences of the first and second generations of Eritrean migrants, moreover, attest to transformations in the global migration regime (Redecker-Hepner 2009). As Tricia Redecker-Hepner (2009) defines them: Generation Nationalism, the political generation constituted vis-à-vis total war that characterized the thirty-year war between Eritrea and Ethiopia, and Generation Asylum, the post-nationalist generation that has lived through mass militarization and repression, face distinct circumstances in their migratory experiences as a result of global changes in the migration regime. Many of the first generation of Eritrean refugees were resettled during the Cold War under policies that were more amenable to refugees from the global South that discursively represented Eritreans as refugees fleeing the depredations of Ethiopia's Marxist Derg regime (Redecker-Hepner 2009).

This current generation, though, faces increasing illegalization, the securitization of migration regimes, and the generalized suspicion with which migrants are treated globally as a result of the post-9/11 global securitarian context. Therefore, the disparate experiences of these two generations complicate earlier theories on transnationalism which have looked to the phenomenon as a bottoms-up and democratizing process (Glick-Schiller & Basch & Blanc-Szanton 1995; Smith & Guarnizo 1998). Moreover, transnational processes in the Eritrean

context take place within a transnational social field heavily dominated by the EPLF/PFDJ's form of long-distance nationalism (Koser, Al-Ali et al 2001; O'Kane & Redecker-Hepner 2008) and in the service of further entrenching surveillance and authoritarianism of the Eritrean state (Bozzini 2012).

That young Eritreans traverse one of the most dangerous migrant routes in the world-- the Saharan circuit and the Central Mediterranean (Andersson 2013)—is a result of the changing configurations of state power in the governance of migration. Recent anthropological research on migration that focuses on the politics of borders has emphasized the politics of transit (Andersson 2013a, 2013b; Vogt 2018), the effects of bordering regimes on transnational families (DeLeon 2015), and the production of illegality in the complex of detention that characterizes the Euro-African Mediterranean (Andersson 2013b). Borders as "a composite geographic, legal, institutional and sociocultural structure and process" (Vertovec 2011: 246 [Kearney 2004: 131]) are integral to sovereignty; they delineate the bounds of political community, order territories in the matrix of nation-states, and 'encode a moral economy situated in a specific political order within the border itself' (Vertovec 2011: 245). Jason DeLeon's *The Land of Open Graves* (2015) best exemplifies this shift towards the cultural politics of border regimes and their imbrication with transnational processes. While DeLeon begins with DeGenova's observation (2011) that border enforcement represents a spectacle that reaffirms racialized notions of national and cultural belonging (in effect that the border acts as a site of migrant racialization), DeLeon looks to the processual nature of border crossing and how it effects racialized communities across time and space. This shift looks towards the cultural politics of migrant death that attends clandestine border crossing and the assemblages of diverse agents—transnational smuggling and trafficking syndicates, the Sonoran Desert and US border enforcement agents—in structuring the violence

that clandestine migrants face in crossing terrestrial borders. While the geographic, historical and political context that DeLeon describes in his ethnography is different, the experiences of violence in transit and in border crossing are similar for Eritreans of the post-nationalist generation, which should alert us that violence in transit is an increasingly global and routine phenomenon.

Nevertheless, hardening border regimes have not necessarily circumscribed transmigrants imagination and forms of relationality, affinity and belonging; Eritreans have responded to political repression in their home country, their rejection in their countries of settlement[21] and the entrapment of their compatriots in transit spaces by variously engaging and appropriating human rights discourse (Redecker-Hepner 2013), enabling the movements of co-nationals across international borders as imbricated in kinship and as a kin making practice (Belloni 2019; Hung 2019b) and by petitioning international institutions for redress[22]. Most importantly, Eritreans remember experiences of transiting across the Central Mediterranean to imagine alternate ways of being Eritrean, to make discursive interventions on how refugees are imagined in Italy (see Chapter two) and to maintain communal life by caring for those in transit in a context of hyper-mobility (Belloni 2019).

Political Anthropology of Eritrea and Its Diaspora

In this context of political violence, scholars on Eritrea have written extensively on political polarization in diaspora (Bernal 2014; Hepner 2009, 2013), dynamics of secrecy and

[21] From the 2013 Lampedusa sinking Italy declared war on people smuggling, using the same anti-mafia tactics it had deployed to combat Southern Italian mafias. The war on people smuggling had deleterious effects on the communities it was meant to protect. Eritrean farmer, Medhanie Berhe, spent four years in prison in a case of mistaken identity as the people smuggler Medhanie Yehdego Mered.

[22] See the 2011 Hirsi Jamaa v. Italy court case in which Eritrean and Somali refugees sued Italy under the jurisdiction of the European Court for Human Rights against interdictions at sea by Libyan authorities. The petitioners argued that push backs violated principles of humanitarian law based on principles of non-refoulement. See also

surveillance (Bozzini 2011), and mass militarization and nationalism (Riggan 2016) and its gendered effects (Bernal 2001; Muller 2005). Victoria Bernal's work has looked at political participation and debate on Eritrean diasporan websites. She argues that the 'nation is networked,' (2014) looking at how Eritreans' debates on diasporan website creatively reimagine nationhood, subvert or support state power, and create new political subjectivities. More broadly, she argues that 'Info politics,' the control and management of information, will make the 21st century unique. Tricia Redeker-Hepner (2008) charts the nationalist movement under the EPLF and how it fashioned the nation through the actions of refugees and exile in diaspora and guerilla fighters in the Sahelian Front. Hers is a well written and moving historical account that centers the voices of various participants in the "Struggle," the 30-year nationalist war. Jennifer Riggan (2016) explores how the Eritrean state endeavors to mold docile, disciplined young people through its education system. She looks at the role of teachers as embodiments of state power and of the role of physical punishment in the constitution of citizen soldiers. David Bozzini (2011) focuses on the role of National Service in instantiating the 'despotic state,' which uses simple technology to surveil its subjects and create suspicion and paranoia amongst Eritreans which further entrenches state power in the lives of its subjects. These ethnographies focus on the dynamics of nationalism, political violence, migration, and diaspora that characterize Eritrea's contemporary situation.

More recent work has looked at this recent generation of Eritrean migrants that survive dramatic circumstances to reach European shores. Carla Hung (2019) writes on the neglect of the Italian state towards refugees and how Eritrean refugees occupy squat spaces[23] as a form of

[23] Squat houses, or *casa occupati,* refers to housing occupations of abandoned municipal buildings. The 2017 eviction of Casa Selam in Piazza Indipendenza in Rome made the question of refugee squat occupations visible to a wider public. Hung (2019) writes that these occupations took place within a housing shortage in Rome within the context of gentrification and inadequate refugee integration services. The building was occupied by Eritreans and

radical sanctuary which contests the politics of 'structural abandonment' that characterizes many refugees' lives in Italy. Milena Belloni's (2019) sensitively written account of young Eritreans' migration to Europe is a multi-sited ethnography that spans geographic and temporal locations. She follows young Eritreans from camps in Ethiopia, Sudan, to their final resettlement to Italy. She likens the decisions that drive out-migration from Eritrea to a 'big gamble' in which Eritrean refugees manage the expectations of family, the matrix of international smuggling and trafficking, and the legal-juridical regimes that govern asylum in their decision-making process. Most noteworthy, this newer generation of ethnographic research on Eritrea's diaspora finds its geographic focus in Italy. Belloni (2019) in particular situates young Eritreans' migration within the dynamics of inter-generational mobility, looking towards how the Italian state has incorporated the earlier generation of Eritrean refugees that Redecker-Hepner (2008) and Bernal (2005) have assiduously studied.

My own dissertation situates itself at a crossroads between these two strands that predominate in anthropological research on Eritrea- that of the role of nationalism and political violence and of migratory dynamics and the politics of settlement in host societies, but especially Italy. By focusing on the history of the EPLF in places like Bologna in relationship to current political mobilizations around the migration crisis, I interrogate multiple layers of history in the constitution of political subjectivities for Eritrean diasporan subjects. Moreover, little anthropological work has located these inter-generational conflicts and dynamics within a post-colonial Italy which has had a greater impact on the trajectories of its former colonies than

Ethiopians for four years, beginning in 2013. Municipal authorities had ordered an eviction in 2016 without providing adequate alternative housing. In 2017, Human Rights Watch reported that the eviction occurred without due warning. My interlocutors went to Rome to show solidarity for those who had been recently evicted.

scholars have theorized. This new generation of scholarship characterized by Hung and Belloni's interventions makes way for the study of Eritrean subjectivities as Italian post-colonial subjects.

Anthropology of Migration to Italy

Much of the literature on migration to Italy understands migration from the global South as a relatively new phenomenon for a country that is most often characterized by high levels of emigration and internal migration from South to North (Andall 2000; Carter 1996; Cole 1997; 2007; Giordana 2013; Krouse 2018; Tuckett 2018). Moreover, Italy did not have comprehensive immigration legislation until the passage of the Martelli law in 1991; the single law that existed was written in 1931 and stipulated that foreigners declare their presence to local police authorities (Andall 2000; Krouse 2018; Tuckett 2018). Throughout the 1980's, Italy engaged in periodic amnesties of undocumented workers (Andall 2000), yet there were no programmatic efforts to regulate immigration until European integration. The Martelli law not only recognized the rights of immigrants and regularized their status, but it also securitized immigration as EU countries viewed Italy as a porous border that encouraged unauthorized migration to the EU (Tuckett 2018).

It is Italy's role as the Southern border of the European Union that scholars of migration in Italy focus on. Cristina Lombardi-Diop and Caterina Romeo (2015) have theorized a post-colonial Italy through disparate but interrelated phenomena. The authors argue that post-coloniality in Italy can only be understood vis-à-vis the existing Southern question that hangs over the nation—the question of the economic and political domination of the South by the North and of the enduring patterns of poverty and economic underdevelopment that are understood as cultural or racial characteristics of Southern Italians (Carter 1996). The authors also look towards new patterns of mobility between places like Italy and Senegal, or Italy and the

Philippines that are the result of the restructuring of global capitalism in the late twentieth century and shifts towards the feminization of migration. Third and most important, the authors locate Italy as the Southern border of the European Union within a context of economic contraction and austerity; Italy is more like many global South nations than its wealthier peers in the European Union. The authors' main contention is that this specificity to Italian post-coloniality demands greater attention than existing theoretical strands within post-colonial studies allow, arguing that post-colonial studies has theorized the post-colonial condition through the British and French examples.

Italy is both subject to larger and more formidable powers, while exercising greater policing powers in the Mediterranean at the behest of its German creditors. While it is true that a pronounced hierarchy exist between European Union member states, a post-colonial perspective that understands the enduring legacy of colonialism and imperialism throughout the European continent is necessary to understand that right-wing paroxysms gripping the continent. Even in the case of peripheral colonialism, like that which characterized Italy, or the Nordic countries, colonial taxonomies and imaginaries continue to undergird not only emic conceptions of belonging but also legal-juridical and political-economic structures (Pesarini 2017; Welch 2016). It has now been over two decades that increased immigration from the global South has characterized European societies and yet immigration remains the current single most important political and symbolic issue with regards to European integration (Abeles 2001, Shore 2000; Carter 1997) and immigrants are often cast as threats to national cultures in receiving contexts (Vertovec 2011).

While not all European countries were involved in colonial expansion to the degree that characterized British or French colonialism, racism has flourished across continental Europe.

Ironically, the supra-nationalist vision of a united Europe, which was meant to correct the tribalist and parochial nationalisms that dogged Europe's history, has justified new right discourses centered on the immutable cultural differences between Europe and its others (Shore 2000). Further, the mobility of migrants themselves threatens definitions of nationhood based on rootedness to place (Malkki 1992). Moreover, migrants' rootlessness and their divided loyalties evoke much of the anti-Semitic past—the schema through which much of European racism is filtered (Lowe 1996). Finally, the "racial criminalization of migrants" in the European Union has almost exclusively focused on African migrants (Palidda 2011).

The anthropological literature on migration in the Italian context is large. Much of that work situates itself within a larger context of economic restructuring and the crisis of Italian capitalism (Cole 2007; Krause 2018). While most ethnographies have dealt with questions around alterity (Giordana 2013), cultural belonging, demographic anxiety, and labor competition (Cole 2007; Krause 2018), few have used race as a key analytic for making sense of the migrant experience. Lucht (2011), Carter (1993), and Cole (1997, 2007) vividly depict the abjection of West African migrants in Italy, who are conceived as unalterably and radically other. While Cole (2007) focuses his analysis of immigration on the basis of categories of work, these categories are nevertheless inscribed on the bodies of racialized groups, with African women in particular in his ethnographic examples, shuttled almost exclusively into sex work[24]. These colonialist

[24] While the demographics of sex work in Italy reflect immigration waves of vulnerable populations—for example, the earliest waves of sex workers were women who arrived from Eastern Europe, often referred to as *ragazze polacche,* or Polish girls, West African women are inextricably linked to the imagination of street prostitution. *Nera, prostituta, migrante* (black, prostitute, migrant) was often a shorthand to describe the racialized hyper-vulnerability of West African women who were sex trafficked in humanitarian language and that simultaneously indexed moral decay in right-wing imaginations. This is what Patricia Hill Collins refers to as a controlling image, " images are designed to make racism, sexism, poverty, and other forms of social injustice appear to be natural, normal, and inevitable parts of everyday life" (69). Nevertheless, this racializing language framed everyday experiences that my interlocutors dealt with in encounters and is reflected in ethnographies of the Italian context (see Tuckett 2018; Mahmud 2012).

imaginaries of black people as closer to nature, as solely bodies whose only value lies in the extraction of labor, still very much structure racial taxonomies around labor. West African men tend to have the greatest difficulty in finding work and are often shunted into the lowest rung of the informal labor market (Carter 1997; Cole 2007).

In the Italian context, the difficulty of obtaining legal status, the segmented and contracting labor market, coupled with the relative newness of Italian national identity have created a migrant pool of readily available and exploitable labor (Cole 2007). While racisms tend to be local and contextual, based on existing relationships of subordination and stratification, DuBois' conception of the color line still holds in the Italian case. Dubois' conception of race as a color-graded hierarchy of exploitation and under-development vis-à-vis differences of phenotype has a particular salience here (Dubois 2001). For Dubois race is a global problem, and the abjection of black persons follows from colonial logics, which imagined Black Africa as the nadir of humanity (Wynter 2002). While Italian colonialism involved violence, its racial dimensions were not clearly articulated until Fascism. Italy had neither the experience of massive post-colonial population movements that France and Great Britain had, nor a formal decolonization process. Further, Italian colonialism is a long-forgotten moment and Italian historiography and public discourses have reinforced this silence (Ben-Ghiat 2015)[25].

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[25] Race in the Italian context is a messy affair, not necessarily bound solely by a black-white binary. Endogenous racializing practices around the Roma, Southern Italians, and Italian Jews were also imbricated with colonial racial taxonomies that were based on color-coded hierarchies between colonial subjects (Libyans versus darker-skinned Eritreans, Ethiopians and Somalis) and mixed-raced subjects of AOI. Recent studies (Hom 2019, Pesarini 2017, Welch 2016) understand that race took a greater role in national identity formation and the biopolitics of the Italian state than earlier studies accounted for. A 2011 Human Rights Watch Report alerted public authorities towards the increased prevalence of hate crimes targeting immigrants from the global South, Rom encampments, yet the report highlights the fact that the true scale of the problem is unknown because of restrictive laws around what constitutes a hate crime. The particular focus on blackness here comes from the fact that Eritreans are racialized as Black and because discourses that stigmatize and stereotype Black people in the Italian context became the backdrop on which Eritreans discussed issues related to identity and place; these discussions were not always progressive in nature, with some of my interlocutors who were born and raised in Italy (some of the darkest hued) reproducing racializing discourses by warning me that I needed to "be careful of the Blacks because they steal," thus reinforcing their own inclusion in Italy society by excluding those they imagined to be lower placed than them on a color based hierarchy.

Nevertheless, racial discourses circulate on a global scale and are interpolated according to local realities. My attention to race and mobility in this study follows from an engagement with transnational black studies. Transnational black studies focus on the African diaspora formed as a result of the Atlantic slave trade in Latin America, the Caribbean, and North America. Recent research has oriented itself to racial formations in Europe, the role of slavery on the European continent, and the imbrications between colonial past and current immigration policies (Keaton; Small & Hine 2009) that continue to define who belongs to the category of universal humanity and who is excluded from that category.

The current migration crisis brings into relief questions around the colonial past, but more importantly, greater questions around human rights and universal humanity. Ben-Yehoyada (2015) has written on how unauthorized migration into the European Union exemplifies transnational region formation. He argues that a scalar conception of hospitality is necessary to understand clandestine migration into the European Union, hospitality-- i.e., migrant rescue in this case-- as the inscription of a transcendent humanity against the parochialism of nation-states and their boundaries:

> By veering our attention towards the sea, we get a dynamic view of what the political and the moral aspects of action come to stand for on a transnational scale, when Europeans grapple with 'how to deal with strangers' (186).

While it is important to historicize transnational linkages across the Mediterranean, his analysis is incomplete, glossing over more pertinent questions of power, abjection, and the role of the European Union in marking its African and Asian neighbors as unalterably 'other.' The attenuation of asylum rights, the right to settle, and increasingly stringent border regimes, coupled with the political crises of North Africa and the Arab World, have made the

Mediterranean into a "liquid frontier.[26]" Transnational connections across the sea exist within deep asymmetries of power. Yet, Ben-Yehoyada's insights are valuable insofar that they understand the migration crisis not solely as a crisis of governance but as a crisis of meaning, of what it means to be a post-War European in a world still marked by the ruins of the colonial world (Stoler 2013).

Methodology

This dissertation is based on 19 months of fieldwork in Bologna, Italy and sister cities in Emilia-Romagna. Bologna was chosen for its symbolic importance to hegemonic Eritrean nationalism that was promulgated by the Eritrean People's Liberation Front. The longstanding nature of diasporic mobilization for an independent Eritrean nation from 1974-1991 strongly delineates the form of diasporic belonging, social conflict and forms of affiliation that exist within the diasporan community there. This support for the EPLF's struggle translates to support for the current government in power, the Party for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ) (Arnone 2014). Because of the transnational nature of the Eritrean state, cities in exile reflect the politics of differently oriented and competing Eritrean groups. For example, Kassel, Germany is an Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) stronghold and the historical memory of the Eritrean community there is strongly aligned with the sense of betrayal that many who were associated with the ELF felt with regards to the violent civil-war that took place between the EPLF and ELF and led to the exile of the former group (Redecker-Hepner 2009). Moreover, Bologna is known as a migrant friendly city (Haywood 2016; Però 2007) that was the heart of Italian anti-fascism and Communism; this status marks the city as an exception to the current right-wing and anti-migrant

[26] Throughout the course of my fieldwork pro-migrant rights activists would refer to the Mediterranean variously as '*un cimitero*,' or a cemetery for the numbers of unenumerated migrant deaths. Liquid frontier also references documentary films, artistic installations that deal with the 2013 Lampedusa sinking.

politics taking place in Italy and throughout the European Union. Nevertheless, the idea of objectified cultural differences (Liberatore 2017; Vigh 2006; Vertovec 2011)—that differences between cultures are natural and at times incommensurable—pervaded the substance of my conversations with Italians who worked in immigration services, academia, and in everyday encounters. This idea of culture as a static, immutable and reified thing that people possess was also shared amongst my interlocutors and many other members of immigrant groups I spoke to during my fieldwork. The only exception I noted was amongst members of the group *Second Generation*, an NGO promoted by the city government to highlight the situation of the children of immigrants born and raised in Italy who can only petition for citizenship at the age of 18 under cumbersome bureaucratic requirements.

This sense of culture as essence and culture as tied to phenotype meant that I experienced much of the same racism that my interlocutors encountered. At an interview with a member of the *Partito Democratico*, I was told to find my 'people,' when I struggled with the Italian I was still learning. During a conference on representing refugees, of which I was part of the panel, a professor at the University of Bologna, jokingly but derisively, asked me if my passport was American or Eritrean. He then responded, "let me guess American, or else you wouldn't be here." Issues around class, race, gender, nativity and migration status affected how I was received, perceived and which spaces I had access to both within the Eritrean community and the wider city culture. My own positionality, as an Eritrean-American, was both a point of convergence and one of conflict. Because of my perceived Eritrean-ness (and the sense that being Eritrean was an immutable essence that I shared with my interlocutors) I was implicated in the conflicts that dogged the community. During interviews with Eritreans of disparate political positions, I was expected to take sides and was often privy to the insults that each side lobbied

against the other. This also explains the reluctance and difficulty I had in conducting formal, recorded interviews. Nevertheless, my ability to speak Tigrinya, which is notable and rare for a member of the second-generation diaspora, made me into a sympathetic listener to refugees of both generations whose stories had rarely been heard. Thus, I was viewed both as a CIA 'spy,' as one of my interlocutors joked, and an open and sympathetic, yet naïve, listener. Therefore, the majority of the data for this dissertation came from informal interviews and conversations, participant observation, my volunteering with the NGO *Eritrea Democratica*, and archival research done at the historical archives of the City of Bologna and the *Lelio Basso* Foundation. Archival research was done to analyze the discursive construction of Eritrean nationalism in Italy and its imbrication with global Marxism. Secondly, aware of the sensitive nature of writing about Eritrean refugees in a context in which Eritreans were increasingly prosecuted in human smuggling cases, the episodes I recount in the course of this dissertation were public facing events. This decision was based on the fact that I did not want to jeopardize the identities of my interlocutors.

My political inclinations as a leftist and as someone who is the child of immigrants and was raised within a context of anti-migrant sentiment in the state of California (this was during the early 90's when California's voters passed Proposition 187, which barred undocumented immigrants from using non-emergency public services like schools and non-emergency hospital services) meant that my political stance was aligned with the experiences of recent refugees. Nevertheless, because I was an outsider in the community and had never spent time in Eritrean diasporan political spaces as an adult, I tried to maintain a sense of empathy even when I was told things that I disagreed with. I found it very difficult and, in some sense, painful to hear the deeply negative and untrue depictions of recent Eritrean refugees by Eritreans who themselves

were refugees forty years ago. From these experiences, I realized that sentiments like compassion and pity (Fassin 2007) and affects like empathy are politically constituted and oriented (Butler 2004).

Coming to Italy to conduct ethnographic research around borders, refugees, memory and national identity after the election of Donald Trump with his promises to build a 3,000-mile wall clarified and sharpened my ethnographic praxis. Moreover, over the course of five years I have seen the Italian context change significantly from a public outpouring of sympathy towards refugees and a strong spirit of volunteerism in 2015 to the criminalization of immigrant communities and the dismantling of the already existing *sistema d'accoglienza*, or the system of refugee reception, in 2018. These changing circumstances also affected the writing of this dissertation and the kind of data I was able to collect. Whereas in 2015, the conflict between the two generations of Eritrean refugees was pronounced and expressed itself in everyday encounters, by 2018 the conflict took on a discursive and digital turn and was framed by larger concerns around trafficking, smuggling, and the question of migrant rescue at sea. This, in turn, changed the tenor of activism for Eritrean dissident activists who began to form solidarities with Italian activists, other African communities who suffered under the decree on security and migration, and anti-fascist groups. It also required a shift in my methodologies as I realized that social media and the print media were sites of political polarization, organizing and the dissemination of images, rumors and discourses. Victoria Bernal (2014) described the role of the internet, but more specifically diasporan websites, in the political imaginations of Eritreans, little research has looked at how political speech takes place through memes, Facebook posts and Instagram. Facebook was an important medium through which Eritreans organized, communicated with one another, and made visible the violence inside Libyan detention centers

in real time. Social media's immediate and unmediated nature, its ability to disseminate information, rumors, and discourses rapidly and its ability to create information silos, as its critics charge, means that it is an increasingly important site for studying how the 'nation' is imagined and enacted. It was through Facebook messenger that Eritreans encamped were able to connect with activists and make their situation visible to a wider, yet segmented, public. It was also through Facebook that activists gained recognition within the diasporan community and were able to parlay this recognition into a form of expertise as the example of Yosef will show.

I volunteered with the group *Eritrea Democratica*, a communications NGO founded by dissident Eritrean activists. My role there was as a translator on official communiques that the group disseminated amongst other Eritrean diasporan groups in Europe and to media like *Al Jazeera Europe.* I also spent a significant amount of time at activist meetings and eventually I was sent out into the 'field' as a representative when activists could not attend critical meetings with representatives of NGO's, the local government, the local press or to events with other activist groups. I was to keep detailed notes and interface with the organizations. The group was deeply involved as what I theorize as 'ethnic knowledge brokers'—they used their identity positions to influence policies on the local level on refugee and migrant integration and sought to shift the discursive terrain on how refugees were represented in public life and in media. It was this attention to how politics is made and lived locally (Kertzer 1980) that drew my attention to Bologna and to this dissident group. Moreover, I was also able to do in-depth interviews with two key members of the organization on several occasions over the course of five years. The organization also provided informal care to Eritreans in *Centro Mattei*, a secondary center of refugee reception situated in the outskirts of the city. I was asked to take recent refugees to buy cell phones, take them to buy monthly bus passes to access language training, and visit them in

hospitals when they were sick; I also attended weddings and holiday festivities that the group organized for recent refugees. This was part of a politics of care that I outline in the chapter "Caring for the Future."

To access Eritreans of the first generation I had to spend a significant amount of time with their children, many of whom were my own age. I met these young people through activist channels and in spending time at local bars. Bars were ideal spaces to interrogate affect as they were informal spaces in which people maintained a sense of community. In the Italian context, bars are social spaces in which patrons while away their days, read the newspaper, or meet friends. In effect, they are distinct from English or American conceptions of bars as a place to imbibe alcohol. Bars were established diasporic spaces, the site of tense negotiations as I witnessed several times the passionate arguments that would occur about the meaning of military service in their Eritrean context, the nature of the Eritrean regime, or whether or not Italian society was 'racist,' discussions which engaged place, identity, duty and power. It is in the landscape of Eritrean bars in Bolognina that "people play Eritrean TV and music, speak Eritrean languages, and discuss political and social issues involving Eritrea and its diaspora." Further, "they often reman disengaged from life where they have resettled and are therefore 'invisible' or misunderstood by host societies" (Redeker-Hepner 2009: 195). These bars were also the site in which Eritreans coordinated politically. The landscape of bars in Bolognina also reflected a micro-geography of political cleavages with some bars frequented by PFDJ supporters and others by those who were critical of the regime. Ultimately, they were spaces in which my interlocutors imagined the nation and were suffused by displays of both passionate and banal nationalism (Billig 2005). I spent time in politically neutral bars, dissident bars, and bars associated with

hegemonic nationalism. From spending time in these bars, I was able to schedule more in-depth interviews with members of the first diasporan generation.

Because many refugees were afraid of what would happen to them if they spoke critically of the Eritrean regime and because many refugees and even established migrants felt as though their legal status was insecure in Italy, I had difficulty in obtaining consent for recorded interviews. I was able to secure consent for interviews only after I had established significant trust and rapport with my interlocutors. Those who agreed to be interviewed were people who were deeply disengaged from Eritrean nationalism and did not have kinship ties to family still in Eritrea. In this context of deep mistrust, insecurity and fear I had to maintain a methodological flexibility in order to access the world of my interlocutors.

Conclusion

Young Eritreans follow circuitous and dangerous routes to find refuge. Some migrate to the Gulf Economic Community via Yemen, a country currently at war and facing a humanitarian catastrophe; others traverse the Sudan, Libya and the Mediterranean to enter the European Union, where they press onwards to places like Sweden and the United Kingdom; while others still travel from Dubai and onwards to the US/Mexico border exploiting existing visa regimes between countries. The numbers of Eritreans who flee the regime are high-- up to 7,000 people left monthly during the height of the European Migration Crisis in 2015 (UNHCR 2015). Yet Eritrea's refugee crisis, one of the top ten in the world (UNHCR 2011), receives scant media and political attention. In fact, over the course of the writing of this dissertation, Eritrea's refugees have become objects of militarized humanitarianism and have been further subjected to the politics of containment vis-à-vis border externalization schemes between the European Union and the nominal authorities in Libya.

During these journeys, journeys that can take years, Eritreans find themselves in various forms of detention and encampment. The experiences of political repression, the search for refuge and asylum, and mass militarization, Tricia Redecker-Hepner (2009; 2013) argues, have created a distinct mode of political mobilization for this generation of refugees who employ the discourse of human rights to articulate their demands for justice. Nevertheless, in the course of the five years of research in the writing of this dissertation, current policies and events have changed dramatically in Italy, the European Union, and globally. A right-wing, racist resurgence has marked the liberal societies of the global North (with the exceptions of Canada and New Zealand); mass illegalization and encampment of ethnic others in places like India and China have faced little public outcry; and border regimes have both expanded their scope spatially and legally and are imbricated in institutional humanitarianism (Ticktin 2016). Furthermore, human rights and humanitarianism as a dominant discourse and as a form of governance are under attack; the consequences of which are unclear at this moment.

These circumstances continue to frame the subjectivities of Eritreans in diaspora, their relationships to one another, and forms of political mobilization. Nevertheless, while I try in this dissertation to avoid the methodological nationalism (Glick-Schiller &Wimmer 2002) that characterizes migration studies, I understand the enduring importance of nationalism to the lives of my interlocutors and to the host societies of which they are a part of. National and racial identities are here used as categories of subjectification and identification that are made and remade in everyday encounters. Nonetheless, this analysis does not rely solely on the power of nations and states to control meaning, deploy violence, or be the sole political form through which resistance to violence is enacted in the study of Eritrean refugees' lives in Bologna. Local, national, and transnational processes are at play, crisscrossed by social agents and histories that

operate on different temporal, spatial, and socio-political scales. I have tried my best to render this complexity in this dissertation with the analytical tools that I have.

Notes

1. All names have been pseudonymized.
2. Because of the sensitivity of my interlocutor's social positioning, I have focused almost entirely on public memory and events that were in the public register.

CHAPTER 1

Memories of the Nationalist Struggle: Place-Making and the Makings of the Eritrean Community in Bologna

Epigraph

The most difficult roadblock for the Eritreans to overcome will not be the Ethiopian army, but an intricate web of internal contradictions. Richard Sherman

Introduction

Kiros owned what was Bologna's first ethnic restaurant. Opened in 1991, the restaurant served food from South Africa, Eritrea and Ethiopia, Egypt and Senegal. It was pan-African cuisine that catered to an imaginary of authentic African-ness. Serving a clientele of mostly local Italians, Kiros had grown quite wealthy over the years. Eritreans often jokingly complained that his restaurant was too expensive for the majority of Eritreans to dine in. He, nevertheless, worked almost every single day of the week, charming the clientele. Well-built and dressed in batik wax print pants, he would sit down at the table of his favorite clients to chat with them about their lives. Images of Eritrea, of African savannahs, and of the numerous awards he'd won from the city government lined the walls of the restaurant. On Saturday nights, when the restaurant was full, he would come out in a *daishiki* and drum. I was impressed by his skills as a drummer. An Italian belly dancer would trail behind him and those in the restaurant looked transfixed by her languorous movements as her hips moved in patterns both jagged and fluid.

Everyone knew Kiros—those who knew his politics, which were critical of Eritrea's regime, would remark that his *injera* was no good, although he was one of the few purveyors of *injera* made with *teff,* the grain grown in Eritrea and Ethiopia that was the substance of injera, the staple in both Eritrean and Ethiopian diets. He was still, nevertheless, the heart of the community, providing food, assistance and care to any Eritrean who asked. Moreover, what few people knew about him was that he was a trained medical doctor, and that he volunteered for and

created an EPLF radio project in Bologna. He dutifully attended *Festival Eritrea* every year from when he arrived in 1982 until the last festival in 1991 at de-facto Eritrean independence. When he would mention those days, his eyes would brighten. Those were sweet days, when life was *tuum* or delicious in Tigrinya.

Kiros moved to Italy as a teenage boy. He was one of hundreds of young men selected for a scholarship to study in trade schools and universities in Italy. When I asked him if this was an institutionalized undertaking by the government of Italy, he smiled wryly. The *Arcivescovo* or the Archbishop of Bologna had missions in Keren, and Kiros was one of the lucky few to be selected, to be saved from the war. He arrived in 1982 for what was to be a two-year scholarship to study at the University but decided to stay in Italy as there were no signs that the fighting between Eritrea and Ethiopia would end. He arrived with only one other Eritrean. He explained to me that the women who dominated the community as domestic workers rarely socialized with the few young men who were on scholarship at the university. In his recounting there were only seven or eight other Eritreans studying at the University of Bologna—in his recollections there were no other Africans. Life as a student refugee in the 1970's and 1980's was extremely lonely and even if someone had the credentials as an engineer or doctor finding work was difficult once one had graduated.[27] Eritreans had no protection against non-refoulement and many of these young men worked itinerant jobs, *in nero*, or under the table, to subsidize their housing and meal allowances from the university.

Kiros' life in Italy was centered in Bolognina; his restaurant and home were there, and his three children grew up in that working-class neighborhood. His memories were anchored as

[27] Under Italian immigration policies and labor laws, certain occupations are reserved solely for Italian citizens. With the passage of the Martelli Law in 1991, foreign nationals had more opportunities to regularize their status in the country and more access to the labor market in the domestic service, construction and agricultural sectors. See Tuckett 2018.

much to his life in Keren as they were to the life he had built in Bolognina. When I asked him what the political life in the city was like, here is his response reproduced in full:

> "This neighborhood was the historical seat of the Italian Communist Party. For us Eritreans and Ethiopians, and for the guerilla fighters our sense of loyalty to the PCI was very intense. We were always a part of the *festas* for the PCI. I participated every year. This is a point of nostalgia.

Each August from 1981[28] until independence in 1991, close to thirty thousand Eritreans would come from across Europe, the Middle East, and sometimes North America to attend Festival Eritrea in Bologna. The festival would bring representatives from Eritrea's student movement, the mass associations in exile, representatives from the Front in the Sahel, Italian anarchists and other leftist groups sympathetic to the EPLF, and other left anti-colonial groups like the PLO. In those hot, sticky, and waning summer days, Eritreans would gather in *Parco Nord* and on the last day would congregate in *Piazza Maggiore* to dance, eat, and celebrate the day that Eritrea would be free from Ethiopian occupation. Moreover, performance troupes would re-enact life on the front for live audiences; these performances would be captured on videotapes and circulated across the diaspora. Tricia Redeker-Hepner (2009) has written on the Eritrean festival circuit in the United States and its importance in constituting Eritrean diasporan identities and the transnational social field. Festivals were the main vehicle through which the independence movement built upon the spontaneous loyalty of its exile community and formalized them within systems of transnational governance (Arnone 2014; Bernal 2014; Redeker-Hepner 2009). Not only were these festivals integral to state building from exile, but they also cemented Eritrean identity in situ and in practice. When I would ask Italians if they knew about these festivals, I would receive a blank stare. While the festivals were important to

[28] Eritrean representatives from the Front would convene in Bologna as early as 1974 from documentary sources. See also Tabacco 2001.

the collective memory of both generations of Eritreans, they were largely forgotten in the collective memory of the city more generally. I often asked myself, why were Eritreans invisible? What was it about larger transformation in the city's culture from a strong left to its more neoliberal tourist context that made this process of becoming invisible so complete? And how does this historical moment continue to structure the terms of being and belonging in the contemporary diasporan community?

In this chapter I focus on the role of that Festival in structuring the terms of being and belonging in the community and how the Festival fit in the wider left-wing culture of the 70's during the pivotal *anni di piomba*, or the years of lead during which Italy was rocked by an increasingly deadly conflict between various groups including the extra-parliamentary left, the Red Brigades, and various radical right-wing groups against the neoliberal state. The chapter analyzes materials gathered from the archives of the *Lelio Basso* foundation, the historical archives of the city of Bologna, and materials gathered from former festival participants—photos, videocassette tapes of the festival, and political pamphlets produced by the EPLF, ELF, the National Union of Eritrean Women, and the Eritrean Worker's Party. In the chapter, I argue that the Festivals were not only sites for the transformation of political subjectivities into hegemonic notions of Eritrean-ness (Redecker-Hepner 2009) but that for many participants these were the only venues in which they could meet and confer with relatives, friends and lovers who were displaced across vast territories. These were spaces not only for the constitution of political alliances but were deeply imbricated in the formation of community; therefore, Eritrean nationalism took on an increasingly intimate form as the state was imagined and enacted through existing channels of intimacy (Riggans 2018).

Moreover, Eritrean nationalism as practiced and imagined in a space like Bologna was deeply imbricated with the culture of the variegated left, or what Richard Drake terms the "extra-parliamentary left" (2000), a collection of radical student groups, professors, and workers who were alienated from the PCI's entry into the parliamentary system and its disavowal of revolutionary politics. The collapse of the PCI and of the variegated left was as deeply disorienting for Eritrean diasporan subjects as it was for many Italian Communists (Kertzer 1990). Therefore, this chapter looks at Festival Bologna within the wider left-wing culture of Bologna. Eritreans in their narratives of this period understood themselves as Eritreans in waiting[29] as they were Bolognese—something that Italian conceptions of identity rooted in localism and structural colorblindness in which whiteness indexes Italian-ness (Pesarini 2017) fail to apprehend. This sense of being connected to the social centers and leftist city politics that characterized Bolognese life, though, was mediated by class and gender—it was overwhelmingly middle-class and educated men who could participate in city life, while women were often the intimate labor that powered the festivals and sustained the community.

Furthermore, studying diaspora without taking into account locality reinforces the sense that immigrant communities are bounded, homogenous and outside of national time, as permanent problems in and of themselves to social integration within host societies (DeGenova & Glick-Schiller 2014). I argue in fact that Eritreans' narratives of their strong left-wing attachments in their politics reinforced their sense of belonging to Bologna through their relationships with various left-wing groups like the *Partito Radicale*[30] . Bologna was for those who were active in Eritrean organizing for an independent nation a site of Internationalist politics

[29] "In-waiting" here refers to the aspirations for a recognized Eritrean state within the international state system.
[30] The Radical Party still continues to support Eritrean activism. In a Rome based meeting with Eritrean dissident activists, the Radical Party opened its door and support for Eritrean refugees. It also volunteered a slot on its radio station for *Eritrea Democratica* to air its concerns.

(Tabacco 2001; Arnone 2014). Finally, the silences and elisions that I found in interviews and archival documents speak to the profound violence and social upheaval that characterized the historical juncture of the 1970's and 1980's in Italy and in the contemporary moment with the exodus of Eritrea's youth. This chapter will, therefore, historically situate these silences and elisions to show the fraught ways in which this historical period is remembered by Eritrean and Italian intellectuals and those who participated in diasporan organizing for an Eritrean state.

Unlike Benedict Anderson's insight that nationalisms unite people who will never meet in person (1983), in the case of the Eritrean example, nationalism united and sought to supplant already existing networks of solidarity, intimacy and care (Riggans 2013). Yearly face-to-face encounters were as important to how the nation was imagined as the circulation of nationalist media within a transnational social field that was constituted by disparate Eritrean exile groups in the service of nation-building and that was ultimately captured by the EPLF. In fact, it is still very much the case that Eritrean officials circulate within diasporic spaces. Yemane Gebreab, himself a native of Keren, and the Head of Political Affairs and advisor to the President, frequently attends diasporan festivals throughout Europe and North America.

As Kiros explained to me during our three-hour interview:

> For the city of Bologna this was a huge boon economically. The city of Bologna sponsored *Festival Eritrea* and they would pay for the gas, the gazebos, everything was done gratis. Almost 30,000 people would come. During July and August Bologna was filled with Eritreans. It was very easy. It was considered an annual gathering, a political one with the scope of national liberation. And many Eritreans came from Norway, Sweden, Greece, all the European countries, the US, from Africa directly and the Middle East. Here there was a culture that we Eritreans were united. Those who grew up in Europe, married, went out together made friendships together. Leftist Italians saw this unity, this political work with much enthusiasm. This was also very advantageous economically for the city of Bologna, because everyone would rent hotel rooms, they'd go to pools, they'd consume gelato and pasta…this was a wealth for the commune of Bologna."

Festival Bologna was and remains deeply implicated in people's identities, social memory and place-making practices. Bologna became the heart of pan-Eritrean nationalism (Arnone 2014) within a wider left-wing culture in Italy and globally that has since diminished in importance.

In interviews gathered with Eritrean men and women who immigrated to Italy from 1971 to 1985, the migration crisis represents an event that instantiated 'racism,' in the individual memories of my interlocutors. This does not necessarily accurately reflect historical realities, yet the sense that they are living in a troubling historical moment was pronounced amongst my interlocutors. Moreover, for Eritrean migrants of this generation, the category 'migrant' or *extra-communitari* simply did not exist; their experiences were politically legible vis-à-vis the festivals, aid and mass organizations that grew out of exile. Only with the passage of comprehensive immigration legislation, the creation of social welfare and service provisions for migrants, and the humanitarianization of discourses around difference did the social and legal category of migrant come into being[31] (Tazzioli 2019). Structurally invisible within the larger Italian society, Eritreans of this generation organized their own autonomous institutions that were imbricated within internationalist and radical politics.

It felt like a strange reversal that fifty years since the left-wing student and worker demonstrations and global strikes of 1968, the year 2018 would be marked by paroxysms of right-wing violence and electoral gains for neo-fascist groups throughout much of the liberal societies of the global North (Mahmud 2016). It was an exceptional moment in recent Italian history: Italians elected the first far-right coalition government in Western European postwar history. This was also the year that the bulk of my fieldwork took place. It was a year marked by

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[31] Migrant is here used to denote those who have legal recognition to remain in Italy but who occupy a racialized subject position. Migrant includes different legal categories of persons: labor and economic migrants, illegalized workers, refugees, second-generation children of non-EU nationals in the Italian case.

high profile shootings and immigrant killings, and a year characterized by a three-fold increase in hate crimes from the previous year.[32]

This chapter will first analyze the discursive construction of Eritrean nationhood by Eritrean intellectuals and Italian sympathizers alike by looking at how both groups interpreted the period of Italian colonialism as the origin of Eritrean nationhood. I argue that discourses around Eritrean nationalism and the period of Italian colonial rule continue to influence individual narratives and social memory around Festival Eritrea. In the second part of the chapter, I interrogate the many silences that I encountered when speaking to Eritreans who attended these festivals within the larger social, political and economic context of their migratory trajectories. In particular, I compare the experiences of Eritrean students and their relationships to Eritrean nationalism to the experiences of women who labored in domestic service. Tanja Muller argues that "the success of the Eritrean revolution relied to a large extent on the spread of its ideology among a sufficiently large part of the population via a program of political education" (2005: 2). Extending that claim further, I argue, broadly, that politicization followed class and gendered lines. Taking into account a place-centered analyses, I place Bologna's radical politics at the heart of questions around the social and collective memory of this pivotal moment.

For those who were embedded in the left-wing city culture of Bologna, Eritrean nationalism was imbricated in leftist global politics and structured how individuals narrated intimate and individual memories of Ethiopian violence. Ethiopian violence was understood through Marxist discourses around decolonization, as I argue later. Nevertheless, for many of the

[32] These numbers are still up for scrutiny as reporting standards for what constitutes hate crimes vary from region to region. Nevertheless, the United Nations Human Rights office (November 2018) expressed grave concerns for the climate of hate promulgated by the coalition government of 2018.

badanti, who cooked and volunteered in the festival circuit, nationalism's affective glue was much more personal—for many of these women who were separated from children, partners, and kin the festivals became the only vehicles in which they could see friends and family who were displaced across vast distances. Imagination was in many ways the preserve of the elite, while embodied participation in festivals served was the affective glue between nation and citizen-subject.

Bologna and the Years of Lead

Renato Zangheri, Bologna's mayor from 1970-1983, presided over a commune that was beset by a series of radical demands by student and workers' groups and attacks by both left and right-wing terrorist groups. More broadly, the 1970's and 1980's represented a crisis of hegemony for the PCI as it failed to capture the political imagination of an increasingly radicalized youth movement that in its most radical and violent iteration was represented by *Potere Operaio*[33] and *Brigate Rosse*[34]. The PCI's pragmatic stance towards parliamentary politics and its historic compromise with the Christian Democrats (DC) meant that it abandoned the ethos of revolutionary change which animated the extra-parliamentary left (Drake 2000). The contest between the DC and the PCI for electoral gains, which many stalwart communists saw as the constitutive conflict between labor and capital, neutered larger aspirations for the revolutionary and vanguardist movements in radical imaginations.

Moreover, the extra-parliamentary left made traditional demands linked to labor struggles—for fair wages, better working conditions, et cetera—but it also organized disparate

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[33] *Potere Operaio* was a radical left-wing group that operated between 1967-1973. Antonio Negri led the workerist group which eventually splintered with Valerio Morucci eventually moving onto the Red Brigades.
[34] *Brigate Rosse* was a radical left-wing terrorist group that split off from the extra-parliamentary Left. They were responsible for the 1978 kidnap and murder of Prime Minister Aldo Moro who was also the president of the Christian Democrats.

social movements that addressed gay rights, the feminist movements, and wider calls for increased personal freedoms. This call for disruptive, spontaneous, violent, sustained and creative protest hoped to dismantle the capitalist state apparatus and took full force in the late 1970's under the local leadership of *Lotta Continua,* or the struggle continues. With the democratization of Italy's higher education system in the late 1960's, poorer students from the South and working-class students were able to attend universities. Their lives as university students were characterized by poverty and precarity, much like the lives of Eritrean students. Shut out from the traditional working-class movements and from a guaranteed entry into the white-collar or middle classes, student protestors took on an increasingly antagonistic stance towards the state.

Lotta Continua formed out of the student worker movement in Turin in 1969 and organized the many unskilled factory laborers who emigrated from the South who were alienated from some of the mass organizations of the PCI. In 1977, following violent clashes between *Lotta Continua* and Communion and Liberation, a right-wing Catholic group, Francesco Lorusso, a student organizer, was killed by Bolognese police. His killing resulted in the quasi-military takeover of the University, as the city exploded in violent clashes between police and student groups. This was also the era that saw the rise in social centers and squat occupations of housing which continue to characterize city life. This is the context for making sense of a city culture that was anti-authoritarian and committed to rebellion as political praxis as one of my interlocutors mentioned. In her estimation, as a former professor and senator, those who supported the EPLF were naïve in the same ways that many in the extra-parliamentary left were. But I also think that that estimation can only be served through the gift of hindsight. Political

projects rarely begin with an eye towards their own dissolution, of their own contradictions and incommensurability.

Right-wing violence also worked to undo the hegemony of the PCI and its historic compromise with the DC. The conflict between Neo-fascists, radical right-wing Catholics and other assorted groups and the extra-parliamentary left took on an increasingly deadly character which defined the era. *Gli anni di piombo*, or the years of lead between 1968-1988, saw the rise of violent right and left-wing political terrorism. Bologna was particularly hit by the wave of clashes between students and police, and terrorist bombings. *La strage di Bologna*, or the massacre of Bologna, was one of the worst mass killings in Italy's post-War history. The 1980 bombing of the Central train station killed 85 people and was attributed to the neo-fascist group Armed Revolutionary Nuclei. The bombing has left a lasting imprint on the city. Each August, Bolognese march to memorialize the attack including many of my interlocutors who lived through that moment.

Hence support for the EPLF was embedded within the crisis of student demonstrations and the killing of Francesco Lorusso in 1970. Renato Zangheri died on the last day of my first summer of fieldwork on August 6th, 2015. He was one of the few architects of city life that I happened to have learned, by chance, held the key to unlocking the mystery of why the city of Bologna decided to aid the EPLF. In public pronouncements he likened aid to Eritrea's guerillas as a moral duty. I tried to find others who could give me answers. But I realized that there were no easy answers or that the search for answers would instead elucidate larger questions around what the political valence of silence is in the context of violence, the failure of the global Left, racism, war and displacement.

Eritrean Nationalism and the Colonial Question: Intellectual Legacies

The Eritrean festival in Bologna was not only a festival that united exiles in the project of state building from afar, but it was also the center for intellectual debates as to what Eritrean statehood could mean in an era of decolonization and self-determination. Eritrean nationalists were also invested in 'writing,' the nation; historiography was an important avenue through which nationalists made the nation real (Anderson 1983). From anecdotal and documentary evidence I collected, Eritrean intellectuals from the Front engaged with Italian leftists in Bologna. These intellectual exchanges also formed the substance of the political education of the masses, with similar discourses, images and ideas transmitted across the writings of Eritreans and Italian friends of Eritrea. Moreover, these historical narratives form the basis not only of national identity but are narrativized by individual Eritreans in their own personal histories in discussions around place and memory.

For Eritrean nationalists, two critical events stand out in the history of Eritrean nationhood: the period of Italian colonial rule from 1890-1941 and the experience of Ethiopian repression from 1962-1991. This part of the chapter will critically assess how the two historical periods are discursively linked through Eritrean nationalist discourse. The debates that Eritreans engaged in that I chart through historical documents gathered in the archives of the city of Bologna, the *Biblioteca Centro Cabral, Fondazione Lelio Basso* and interviews with Eritreans who worked with the city government illustrate the changing conceptions of colonial power between that of Italian rule and the experiences of total war under the Derg regime. For Eritrean elites, Ethiopian occupation was discursively constructed as colonialism on the African continent that was sustained and supported by the United States and then the Soviet Union (Saleh Sabbe 1974).

Italian colonial rule created dramatic social changes in Eritrean life (Sherman 1980). As Richard Sherman notes: “socially, the Italian occupation had a more far-reaching impact than it did politically. As second-class citizens, or more correctly, subjects, most Eritreans had little opportunity for political participation” (1980:122). However, these social transformations could not be realized without the exercise of violence; as Angelo Del Boca has noted, Italian colonial rule was particularly violent (2005). For example, Eritrean regional or ethnic leaders who resisted colonial occupation were killed or imprisoned in the Nocra prison camp off of the coast of Massawa (Hom 2018) calling into questions any notions of the relative humaneness of Italian colonial rule in contrast to its British or French counterparts.

Moreover, colonial rule brought few opportunities for social mobility for most subject Eritreans. Most men were conscripted as low wage mercenaries and many women were shuttled into forms of prostitution and *madamismo* (Sorgonì 2002, Barrera 1996). At best, Eritreans could serve in low-level administrative positions in the colony. Nevertheless, the short period of British administrative rule during the waning years of World War II created a light industrial economy imbricated in trade networks with the Middle East (Sherman 1980: 122). This meant that Eritreans were becoming politicized within an incipient trade unionist movement and within wider transformations towards the urbanization of Eritrean society.

For Eritreans, Italian colonial rule is discursively constructed as the beginning of a political subjecthood characterized by successive and mutable forms of outside colonial rule. The paradoxical support that Eritrean intellectuals received from Italian sympathizers is only understood in relation to changing conceptions of what counted as colonial rule. American aggression in Vietnam and Cold War proxy warfare meant that Africa and much of the global South were subject to American neo-colonial and imperialist violence in the leftist political

imagination. Moreover, academic studies of decolonization, as Kay Warren argues (1998), "generated broad, comparative generalizations about agrarian class relations and global divisions of labor as conceptualized by Marxist, dependency and liberal forms of economic determinism [Chilcote 1982, Migdal 1974]" (5). These discourses were also applied to the Eritrean condition by Eritrean intellectuals and Marxist sympathizers. This unfortunately reductive conception of neo-colonial rule, I argue, blinded many left-wing intellectuals to the legacies of Italian colonialism and to their government's continued role in the post-colonial politics of places like Somalia (Liberatore 2017). For Eritreans, on the other hand, revolutionary nationalism meant that longstanding differences of language, ethnicity and religion were subsumed by an ethical-political connection between the incipient state and subject (Redeker-Hepner 2009). Scholars like Victoria Bernal (2014) have argued that Eritrean identity is a political one that was constructed in the context of the Nationalist movement. Nevertheless, Eritreans are deeply attached to the Nationalist project even in the context of continued depopulation (Riggans 2016).

Throughout much of the 1970's and 1980's Eritrean scholars, academics sympathetic to the Eritrean liberation movement, and leftist figureheads engaged in the discursive construction of Eritrean nationhood[35]. They did so through a writing of Eritrea's political and cultural history. Eritrean historiography emphasized the importance of Italian colonialism in creating a distinct Eritrean political identity from that of Ethiopia and understood Ethiopian rule as a continuation of neo-colonial rule through Cold War proxy warfare. For Eritrean intellectuals, decolonization not only signified the end of formal Italian colonial rule, but also the end of forms of domination embedded within the international state system (Getachew 2016) and Cold War proxy warfare. Nevertheless, elites were not the only groups engaged in imagining and writing the nation.

[35] See Sorenson (1991) "Discourses on Eritrean Nationalism and Identity" in the *Journal of Modern African Studies*

Eritrean workers' groups were also theorizing the Italian colonial condition as a pre-condition to Eritrean sovereignty and as the historical and political origin and justification for the Eritrean state. For example, the National Union of Eritrean Workers writes in 1974:

> "Gli italiani occuparono l'Eritrea nel 1889 conquistando entità fondamentali diverse… 1) una base di popolamento per i coloni italiani; 2) uno sbocco per i prodotti industriali italiani; 3) una base di partenza per la conquista coloniale dell'Etiopia, della Somalia e di altri paesi della regione." "Alcune osservazioni sulla storia della classe operaia Eritrea
>
> *The Italians occupied Eritrea in 1889 by conquering fundamentally diverse groups. 1) [Eritrea was] a slated as a settler colony; 2) it served to reabsorb Italian industrial products; 3) a military base for the colonial conquests of Ethiopia, Somalia and other countries in the region. Some Observations from the History of the Eritrean Working Class*

Eritrean intellectuals centered Eritrea in the project of Italian colonialism in the African continent at a time in which Italian historiographers like Angelo Del Boca were just beginning to unearth the crimes of the Fascist regime in Ethiopia and Libya. (Ethiopian historiographers were also making concerted arguments to justify Ethiopia's claim to Eritrea.)[36] This historiographic work was meant as a corrective to the glaring absence of any kind of public or institutional memory around Italian rule in Eritrea (Chelati 2007). For example, even with the ostensible end of Italian colonial rule in 1941, Italians remained in the former colony until the better part of the 1970's. Because of these personalistic networks between Eritreans who studied under, labored for, or married Italians, the few Eritreans who immigrated to Italy did so without any institutional framework governing their movement.

Subsequently, individual memories without a shared or collective framework mark the experience of colonialism for both Eritrean and Italian subjects. With the exception of the publication of war memoirs in Italy, little media, film, public memorials (with the exception of

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[36] ibid

monuments to fallen soldiers who died in colonial campaigns, or streets named after former colonies) exist to make sense of the colonial past. While the memory of Italian colonial rule is felt in the built environment of Asmara (Fuller 2011) and continues to undergird the politics of no war/no peace between Eritrea and Ethiopia as Fuller (2011) argues, forgetting Italian colonialism was a constitutive part of how the nationalist moment was felt and remembered. In order for both Eritrean and Italian intellectuals to make the argument for nationhood they had to selectively remember which parts of Eritrea's contemporary history fit into politically legible calls for self-determination and decolonization under the auspices of global Marxism.

Nevertheless, these arguments around Eritrean nationalism were also expressed in popular notions of Eritrean identity through the Eritrean festival circuit which was engaged in the political education of the *hafash* or masses (Arnone 2014; Tobacco 2001; Redeker-Hepner 2009). For example, when I asked Kiros what he and other Eritreans imagined the connection to be between Eritreans and Italians his response was both personal in nature, while connected to the particular historical reality of Eritrean askaris in the Italo-Turkish war (1911-1912) and during the Pacification of Libya (1923-1932):

> When I was young there was always a connection that young Eritreans felt to Italy. We would root for the Italians during the World Cup… Our grandfathers were askaris. This connected us to the Italians; however, when you speak to my grandfather as he talks about Eritreans who died in Libya, that was not our country, that [country] did nothing to us…We killed so many people, we had a war between Africans and they [Italians] were just standing by as we killed one another. So many people. We went to Ethiopia; we fought a war against Ethiopians. They [the Ethiopians] have terrible memories of the Italians. However, there were Italian missionaries who helped so many people, who brought food and clothing for Eritreans. This created a connection…there were monasteries and priests."

For Kiros and other Eritreans of the Nationalist generation in Italy, the collective memory around Italian colonial rule is framed by ambivalence, fraught intimacy and relations of complicity (Bhaba 1994). This ambivalence is expressed in how Kiros answers my question

through a series of juxtapositions around sentiment, action and time: that Eritreans root for Italian teams—sports as a site of the expression of nationalist sentiment—but that this affinity could only be instantiated through the violent complicity of Eritrean *askaris* in the genocide of Libyans, in the betrayal of African against African. In the present, Italians' charity redeems them as Ethiopian aggression transforms the colonial condition that many Eritreans find themselves in. This example shows how larger nationalist discourses permeate how the past is remembered on an intimate scale.

When framing the arguments for Eritrean nationhood, Eritrean intellectuals emphasized that ongoing violence at the hands of Ethiopia's regime was tantamount to ongoing forms of colonial rule. For Osman Saleh Sabbe (1974), the intellectual figurehead of the Eritrean Liberation Front, Ethiopian rule was described as "*del potere colonialista etiopico in Eritrea*," or colonialist Ethiopian power (6). For figures like Sabbe, the fact that Eritrean lives continue to be framed by political violence even with the ostensible end of European colonial rule marks the call for Eritrean statehood and sovereignty as the only guarantee for a live-able life for the majority of Eritrea's inhabitants, as those who lobbied for independence made clear.

The Derg's[37] extreme violence radicalized many Eritreans further. For Kiros,

> Kiros: I was very angry at Ethiopia. In 1977, I was in a house. The war had just begun on a Tuesday at noon. Keren is a city situated in a valley surrounded by mountains. There were a number of dead Ethiopian soldiers, wounded, captured. While they were escaping, they entered our house. We were on the floor. The windows were open, there was plastic covering the windows. There was an old woman with us who was praying in a loud voice. There were three, [Ethiopian soldiers] they sat in the windows, with their Kalashnikovs and they began spraying bullets into the room. We said we are Christians; we began to pray, and we said we will see you in the next life. No one died. Look, I said Ethiopia, no. Enough.

[37] The Derg, or the Provisional Military Government of Socialist Ethiopia, ruled as a military junta from 1974-1987; it formally lost power in 1991. The Derg's reign was marked by violence—the Red Terror, in which political opponents were killed or imprisoned without trial, the escalating wars between the EPLF and the Ogaden People's Liberation Front and the 1984-85 famine were some of the crises that rocked Ethiopia at that time.

> Kiros: They would take the boys as soldiers; they would take you out, kill you and leave you on the street. We were traumatized.

For Kiros and many other Eritreans I spoke to, Ethiopian violence became a violence that was both personal and immediate—it was also a violence that felt like a betrayal. To be angry at Ethiopia, as Kiros frames it, is not the same kind of anger an Eritrean would display towards the United States, an abstract kind of anger towards what most Marxists at the time would call the global hegemon. To be angry at Ethiopia was an intimate kind of pain implied within the very statement 'we said we are Christians.' By invoking Christian fraternity, Kiros implies that the Ethiopian soldiers were obligated to show mercy towards their brothers, to one's friends. That the defeated soldiers would commit indiscriminate and wanton violence at a request for mercy implied by the statement 'we are Christians' instantiates a rupture—that is why Kiros ends his statement by directly addressing Ethiopia "Look Ethiopia, no."

That moment of wounding also instantiates a longstanding politics of enmity between Eritrea and Ethiopia, a wounding both imagined through intimate terms and that takes place within a larger geo-political context. And, in Kiros' telling, which borrows so deeply from Christian iconographic thought, that moment stands as a miracle in which no one dies even in the onslaught of bullets. Both Eritreans and Ethiopians are Coptic Tewhado Christians—one of the few indigenous Christian groups on the African continent; millennia long Christian identities is what defines many highland Eritrean and Ethiopians.

Kiros was part of a wave of Eritreans who were able to migrate to Italy through the aid of various Italian groups not necessarily aligned with the Italian state. In the post-colonial period, socialist and radical friends of Eritrea in Italy gave significant material and ideological support to the EPLF's nationalist struggle as did missionaries from the *Comboniani* in Verona who were engaged in more depoliticized humanitarian relief projects in Eritrea. Nevertheless, these were

not the concerted actions of institutional actors but were the actions of a small network of committed radical groups and individuals. The PCI had no clear stance on the question of Eritrean sovereignty and did not question the position of the USSR in supporting the Derg. In addition, within the wider left-wing culture of the 1970's in Italy, the PCI did not address the question of Italian colonialism through any reparative mechanism for Libyans, Eritreans, Somalis and Ethiopians who were harmed by colonization, even though Ethiopians and Libyans continually demanded forms of reparative justice (Labanca 2007).

The PCI, however, did support anti-colonialist struggles in other parts of Africa (Borusso 2009), namely in Mozambique. For one of my interlocutors, an Eritrean woman and a citizen of the city since 1971, this left-wing colonial amnesia was incredibly frustrating. She worked closely with the PCI and later the PD on reforming the immigration system in the early 90's, soon after the passage of the Martelli law. She organized public events through the University of Bologna to educate city residents on the history of Italian colonial rule in *Africa Orientale Italiana.* For her, this left-wing amnesia was best encapsulated by an anecdote she shared with me.

The city would regularly show Gilles Pontecorve's *Battle of Algiers* (1966), the Italian-Algerian co-production that chronicled Algerian resistance to French colonial rule, but when she suggested screening Akkad's 1981 *Lion of the Desert* which documented Omar Muktar's resistance to Italian colonial rule during the Pacification of Libya (and was funded by Colonel Mummar Gadaffi) city officials flatly declined the screening. (The film was not allowed to be screened until 2009.) She then looked at me with an expression of incredulity. When I walked in, hoping to discuss this historical moment she grew agitated and cold. The Peace Deal between Ethiopia and Eritrea had just been signed that month. I asked her what she thought of the Peace

Deal as many of my friends and interlocutors were temporarily filled with joy at the prospect of returning home. *Next time we'll have coffee together in Asmara, Fiori.* "It is just a business deal between Eritrea, Ethiopia and China," was her response. We then sat down, and I politely asked her if I could take notes. She obliged me. I began, as I always did, explaining my research, how I was interested in how people remember the nationalist past, in their impressions of that moment.

She showed me little warmth. This was often the case when I asked questions that weren't supposed to be asked. I told her that I was interested in what Festival Bologna meant to people who lived that historical moment and how they understand their present circumstances. As we sat in her office, me eagerly taking notes and taking in all that she patiently explained to me, I felt at a loss as a fieldworker. How was I to deal with the silence, anger and suspicion, not necessarily directed at me, but at anyone who would want to revive the memory of something that in the act of remembering brought so much pain? Each time I would ask to interview people I received similar responses. Either people refused to be recorded, or they rebuffed my questions. Their responses centered around two poles: the festivals were either a place for the indoctrination of the masses (as critics of Eritrea's regime would charge) or it was this beautiful moment of solidarity (and that those who opposed the government were idiots who didn't know what they were talking about). These deeply polarized responses reflected the contours of existing social cleavages, but it also underscored the importance of these festivals in the lives of both supporters and detractors of the regime. She responded curtly that she had never attended a Festival. I smiled and hoped that an opportunity for some kind of connection hadn't been missed.

I took my notebook out and I asked her what she thought were some of the most important issues affecting Eritrean women. When she began talking about her years of advocacy for migrant women, her expression softened. She came to Italy to study in 1971 at the age of

twenty and her years were filled with hardship, insecurity and deferred ambitions. Her name was all over the archival documents I found in the city's archives as head of various humanitarian organizations that brought medical aid to Sudan. Her written appeals to successive Bolognese mayors for Eritrean refugees in Sudan showed a dogged commitment towards the vulnerable and the forgotten.

She called the relationship between Eritrea and its former colonizer, *cattiva coscienza* or bad conscience. She explained that, unlike Moroccan immigrants who were able to secure housing through the city's generous welfare system, Eritrean women who worked as domestic workers were shut out of these programs and lived in uninhabitable housing on Via Corticella in the periphery of Bolognina. According to her recounting, these women who had labored as domestic workers "were prisoners of the home and prisoners of the state," triply imprisoned by gender, class and racialized migrant status. Many of them came from rural areas in Eritrea and followed Italian families who had fled Eritrea during the Derg's total war.

For her, this colonial guilt meant the desire to continue to do harm to those who had already been injured. *Cattiva coscienza* signified an ambivalent relationship between colonizer and colonized that mixed unassimilated guilt, structural forgetting, and abandonment. To extend Davide Pirò's argument (2007) that class reductionism made it difficult for the left-wing city administration of Bologna to respond to the needs of migrants from the global South, effectively ghettoizing and further marginalizing the immigrant communities the city administration managed, I argue that romantic discourses around revolution, de-colonization and self-determination obscured the material circumstances of many Eritreans' lives. Poverty, social and political disincorporation, and precarity characterized many Eritrean migrants' lives, even if for

some the purpose of their migratory projects was to enable them to agitate for an independent Eritrean state (Arnone 2014).

As our conversation continued, she explained to me what laws governing movement for foreign, non-EU nationals entailed at that time. For her the Martelli law[38] was a triumph as it meant that foreigners could have a modicum of rights in Italy. Working with members of the PD as a consultant on migration issues, she grew frustrated by the programs the PD had put forth to help members of the Italian diaspora who wanted to return to Italy rather than regularizing or aiding the thousands of foreign nationals who lived in Italy but whose status was precarious. Invited to a conference in Germany on migrant integration and EU policy, alongside members of the PD, Mihret marveled to me at the indignity of never having been able to even hold onto her own passport and airplane ticket. For her this marked her out as a target of suspicion by her colleagues who were afraid that she would use any opportunity to permanently leave Italy. “We were locked in,” she said, “the only reason the festival took place in Italy was that we couldn’t leave.” Nevertheless, as a medical doctor, her class position meant that her critical voice was legible within left-wing city politics even though her gender, racial and migrant status marked her as an outsider, never fully incorporated into the political culture of the wider institutional left.

Bologna’s Left-Wing Intelligentsia and the Question of Eritrea (1970-1991)

Eritrean intellectuals and friends of Eritrea understood Ethiopia as an extension of a greater system of global imperialism that included both the Soviet Union and the United States. In documents gathered at the *Lelio Basso* foundation, I found that Ethiopia was discursively constructed as a client state of the United States under the leadership of Haile Selassie, and then

[38] Martelli law (defined in the introduction) not only regularized migrants already on Italian territory but also established entry quotas of non-EU nationals in Italy but also provided for immigration detention and the establishment of detention centers for undocumented migrants.

as a client of the Soviet Union under the Derg regime. After the deposition of Haile Selassie in 1974 and the subsequent ascession of the Derg regime, Eritrea's guerilla movement found itself at an ideological impasse. Both the Derg and the EPLF were Marxist-Leninist vanguard movements. For Italian Communists, who had wanted to carve out an alternate path through Euro-Communism,[39] the question of whether to support Eritrea's guerilla movement was linked to the struggles of the greater Communist world, rather than the question of colonial relations between Eritrea, Ethiopia and Italy. It was also quite critically invisible in terms of a greater politics of migration (Però 2007), which did, at that time, acknowledge and accommodate the existence of Southern Italian migrants (Kertzer 1980) through economic reductivist policies that emphasized material justice for Southern migrants.

In contrast, migrants from the global South, while few, were largely unintelligible. No laws existed governing their presence on Italian soil; no social services were in place to cater to their needs; and no language or ideology existed to make sense of their place in the national community (Pirò 2007). As Shewit, an Eritrean woman who migrated to Italy in 1981 explained to me:

> I arrived in Rome on an airplane. I came here because my sister was here. I came to Italy pretending to be this Eritrean man's daughter, and I didn't have my own passport. But somehow, I was able to enter Italy. I didn't have documents here for two years. I entered without documents, and it was terrible. There weren't even ID cards when I entered.

For the first wave of Eritrean migrants, life as undocumented workers presented significant challenges. The festivals represented a respite from the social isolation and anomie that characterized exile.

[39] Eurocommunism refers to Communist parties in Western European countries which wanted to distance themselves from the Communism of the Soviet Union. Eurocommunism sought to build alliances and widespread support through democratic means.

Nevertheless, Eritrean migrants were neither vilified outsiders, nor a people with a possibility for assimilation. Subsequently, Eritreans of this generation described their situation as being that of a 'curiosity;' that people were curious about their presence rather than hostile. The only ideology that existed to make sense of their presence in Italy was through the language of internationalism and decolonization. For example, Anna Arnone (2014) argues that "nation-building was the very reason to migrate for most Eritreans who arrived in Italy before their country's independence" (74). Further, she writes "[the Bologna festival] was such a formative collective experience that people often refer to it to exemplify what their migration experience was about and how fundamental it was for the Eritrean community in Italy and the diasporic networks" (Arnone 2014: 75).

Therefore, for Eritreans committed to the liberation movement, their lives in Italy represented a moment and point of transit in their political lives and migratory journeys[40], a transitory phase between national liberation and the possibility of returning to an independent 'home.' Subsequently, aspirations for statehood intertwined with personal motivations and desires (Bernal 2014, Redecker-Hepner 2009). Eritreans understood their situation as temporary; moreover, they were interpreted as neither migrants[41] nor post-colonial subjects by the wider culture—a situation that rendered them as liminal subjects.

Nevertheless, for friends of Eritrea, like Piero Gamacchio, Eritrea's independence movement was part of a second wave of decolonization that would prove to pave the path towards socialist modernist development in Africa:

[40] Most Eritreans left Italy through UNHCR resettlement programs to the United States, Canada and the UK during the 1980's. See Marchetti (2013) and Belloni (2019).

> essi hanno infranto il classico schema piccolo borghese delle élites africane, ristretto all'obiettivo dell'indipendenza politica, per proporre invece un progetto, più esteso, di indipendenza economica e cultural, quale premessa alla successiva fase di transizione al socialismo (1974).
>
> They have broken the classic pattern of bourgeois African elites, who, restricted solely to the objective of political independence, were instead proposing a more extensive project of economic and cultural independence that would pave the path for the next phase of socialist transition.

Bolognese intellectuals were invested in the outcomes of Africa's various decolonization movements like their French socialist counterparts. Friends of Eritrea, a collection of academics, activists, radical leftists, and city officials sympathetic to the Eritrean cause, provided significant aid to Eritrea's guerilla movement that was both unofficial and tacitly tolerated by the greater Italian Communist party as one of my interlocutors emphasized. Later, when Eritrea's guerilla movement captured state power, municipalities throughout the Red Belt of Italy organized local development projects under the sign of *gemellaggio,* or twin-city partnerships. For example, in 1992 Florence became Asmara's twin-city under a development project that would provide potable water and waste management services to the city. This was also related to a separate project to voluntarily repatriate Eritreans who had been displaced during the thirty-year war with Ethiopia undertaken by the government of the region of Lombardy.

Friends of Eritrea and Contemporary City Politics

For friends of Eritrea, Eritrea's slide into dictatorship was felt as a personal betrayal. For example, one of the most central figures in Bologna who supported the EPLF described what she saw in Asmara in 1992 when she was sent there as part of a development assessment project carried out by the city of Bologna, as "an embarrassment." Here she referred to the years of support she and others gave the EPLF, which resulted in what she saw as less than satisfactory results when she arrived in Asmara. She refused to be interviewed further and others who were

close to her described her dogged pursuit and advocacy for the EPLF as naïve and linked to a wider city culture at that time that was "pro-rebellion and anti-authoritarian." Part of her reluctance to speak at greater length also stemmed from a series of exposes that unfairly linked the city government's support of the EPLF in the 1970's and 1980's to aiding Eritrea's current regime. For example, Fabrizio Gatti[42], an investigative journalist who writes on clandestine migration, begins an article published on July 27th, 2014 thus:

> *In Comune nessuno si è accorto che la città, medaglia d'oro della Resistenza e simbolo della fermezza contro il terrorismo, sta offrendo la sua immagine a uno dei regimi più sanguinari del nostro tempo*.
>
> In the municipality, no one has noticed that the city, the emblem of the [anti-fascist] resistance and as a symbol in the fight against terrorism, is offering its image to one of the bloodiest regimes of our time.

Fabrizio Gatti is part of the Italian press that feeds an alarmist discourse around clandestine migrants that simultaneously constructs them as a threat and an ultra-vulnerable group. His reporting on *Festival Eritrea* contributes to some of the silences that I encountered as an attack on the historical memory of the left launched in the service of promoting Eritrean migrants' rights. More generally, remembering the socialist past is a fraught task in the midst of a right-wing resurgence; the story of the Left is one of defeat, mistakes and zealotry, especially in the Italian context (Traverso 2016, Drake 2000). Neither Italians nor Eritreans who were invested in the liberation movement would speak to me. Part of this stemmed from a reluctance to remember what was a fraught historical moment; support for Eritrean activists took on an extra-legal dimension and was done through the tacit support of authorities who publicly

[42] Gatti is an investigative journalist for *L'Espresso* and *Corriera della Sera* who has spent a number of years traveling clandestine migrant routes and as an investigative journalist he lived an alternate identity as Bilal, a Kurdish asylum seeker. In the aforementioned article, Gatti maintains that Eritrea's government is indebted to the Italian government for the number of Eritrean asylum seekers that land on Italy's shore.

tolerated the Festival by calling it a cultural festival, but were nevertheless aware of its political dimensions as I had learned in my interview with Kiros[43].

For intellectuals like Lelio Basso, the Marxist lawyer who argued for Eritrean self-determination, the contest between Eritrea and Ethiopia's communist movements in the imagination of Italian leftist intelligentsia signified the search for a morally purer utopic project on the African continent (Borusso 2009). The dissolution of global Marxism and with it the promise of decolonizing movements in the third world, creates what Enzo Traverso (2016) terms a left-wing melancholia—a current of mourning that charges through Socialism's tragic defeats in the twentieth century in the cultural imagination of many Marxists. For the Italian left-wing intelligentsia that supported the EPLF, debates around Eritrea's current political situation are filtered through personal and collective recriminations around the collapse of the left-wing project globally and in Italy more particularly.

Once the student groups deposed Haile Selassie and the Derg captured state power, the argument that Ethiopia was a feudalistic, client of the United States lost some of its salience. It put many Marxists in a bind; how were they to distinguish between two ostensibly Marxist regimes, and considering the immense human suffering that the war produced, what position, in good conscience, could fellow Marxists take? Some groups took the humanitarian route. Based in Khartoum, the Eritrea Relief Association (ERA) coordinated humanitarian relief for refugees displaced across the border with Sudan. It had branches in the United States, Canada, and Italy. In Bologna, it was headed by former ELF members and counted the membership of local politicians, and university professors.

Silences in the Nationalist Past

[43] Kiros described acting as an interpreter between city officials and representatives of the EPLF and later the PFDJ on multiple occasions.

I often took silences to be an impasse between myself, my interlocutors and the knowledge that I was producing. But silences, as many anthropologists have argued (Weller 2017, Gammeltoft 2016, Navoro-Yashin 2012, Allison 2011, Warren 1993, Basso 1970) resist clear interpretation. Silences tell us something, but what they say is indeterminant and often conceived of as the absence of voice and agency (Kidron 2009). Silences, under therapeutic logics, are pathological. Moreover, under those same logics, voicing the traumatic past is the first step in healing from the psychic wounds of an injurious past. Nevertheless, silence is implicated in how social memory is produced and transmitted (Weller 2017).

I first wanted to study this moment because it seemed so *impossible.* My mother's stories of the *Derg's* violence seemed so fantastic and of another world. It was hard for me to understand that we occupied the same world, that we lived in it. The desire to know came from this need to objectify and parcel out the past as a knowable, assimilable thing, and as the child of those who survived war and displacement, having some kind of mastery of a deeply painful past, a past that was pregnant with the possibility of revolution, of futures possible (Scott 2013) would lead to a redemption of that revolutionary past and of the possibilities that could have been. My own and wider assumptions about returning voice to those denied voice within the context of traumatic memory or political violence precluded my understanding as to how silence was an agentive exercise in and of itself that called into question the relationship between researcher and subject.

For example, Kidron (2009) in writing about silent memory-work with regards to children of Holocaust survivors argues that "these logocentric readings have led to a neglect of the phenomenon of silence as a medium of expression, communication, and transmission of knowledge in its own right or as an alternative form of personal knowing that is not dependent

on speech for its own objectification" (7). The silences I encountered were selective; certain questions, certain moments elicited this response. Straddling the line between professional exigencies and my own positionality, I had expectations for what critical memory-work looked like that led to significant disappointments and to a sense of having failed as an ethnographer. Many sympathetic Italian and Eritrean academics cautioned me when I began my research by telling me that "no woman of that generation will speak to you." Some, in fact, did. One woman, who wanted to have her pseudonym be "Princess," agreed to an interview without audio recording. She explained to me that her mother was still in Eritrea, so she preferred not to talk about Eritrean politics over the course of our conversation. Invariably, she did speak about Eritrean politics.

She ushered me into her perfectly curated apartment, filled with pictures of herself when she was young, pictures of her daughter, her family in Eritrea, and a ceremonial coffee set that sat on the coffee table, more ornamental than useful. I stayed at her home for many hours, while she continually brought me food and tea. As a guest, there was no way I could politely decline the food set in front of me. While I took notes, she took great pains to tell me a version, albeit a curated one, of her life. Only when I stopped taking notes did she begin to speak with more candor.

She had started one of the first inter-cultural centers for migrant women and had long worked as an advocate for immigrant women's rights in Emilia-Romagna. I realized, quite quickly, that Cecil Kyenge, the former Italo-Congolese minister of integration, was her close friend. She gave me a calendar from her organization that featured women from Eritrea, Congo, Cape Verde, Romania and Palestine, all dressed in the traditional clothes of their respective cultures. Inter-cultural organizations often showcased these images, offering a vision of reified

and objectified cultural differences that indexed a respect for multi-culturalism that often intertwined with racializing logics (Liberatore 2017). The calendar made me think about all the ways in which migrant women have to make themselves legible in Italy. I imagined what life was like for a black woman, young and alone in what must have felt like hostile or alien territory. "I always worked as a waitress, but never in anyone's home," she explained to me. I think for Princess it was a point of pride that she never had to work as a *badante*[44]. Over 90% of Eritrean women worked as domestic care workers during the 1980's (Marchetti 2012: 143).

Her advocacy work centered around female domestic workers. She lobbied for the region of Emilia-Romagna for access to social housing for domestic live-in workers; domestic live-in workers could not leave the homes of their employers.[45] She was one of the first inter-cultural mediators in the region, a position that involves liaising between migrant and refugee communities and social service providers. Cultural mediation in Italy is one of the main pathways towards job security and cultural capital for many migrants (Tuckett 2018, Giordana 2013). The awards from the *commune* that lined her walls attested to this life of public service and to her role as a pioneer. When I asked her why so many Eritrean women were recruited as domestic laborers, her seemingly flippant response revealed an abiding anger "well it was in vogue to have '*una piccola negra a casa,* or a small n*** at home.'" Black women were in her estimation a passing fad and an ornamental object to have in the home.

Jacqueline Andall (2000) documented the lives of black women domestic workers in Italy from the 1970's to the 1990's. Her research focused on Eritrean, Ethiopian and Cape Verdean domestic laborers as some of the first wave of global South labor migrants to Italy. Writing

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[44] Often my interlocutors would use *badante* interchangeably with domestic worker. Eritrean women also labored as *badante,* or elderly care givers.
[45] Domestic service contracts had striking similarities to the Kafala system in the Middle East, which tied a migrants' status as tied to employer-based contracts.

against the prevalent cultural stereotypes and alarmist media discourses that depicted black women as prostitutes, Andall instead adopts an intersectional framework to complicate Italian gender discourses. She argues that black women migrants' labor released Italian women from stultifying gender expectations and enabled many white Italian women to enter into white-collar positions. Black women in turn became the object of a set of gendered, racial and economic anxieties around the phenomenon of migration from the global South.

"I speak to so many researchers," she began "and none of them ever call me or thank me afterwards." She continued to describe a particularly frustrating experience with an Italian post-doctoral researcher with whom she was organizing a public event on Italian colonialism. In telling me about this young researcher with whom Princess had an extractive relationship, Princess was tacitly instructing me into the proper relationship between researcher and 'subject.' But our relationship as researcher and subject was also complicated by the fact that I was like 'her daughter,' as she and others of her same generation referred to me. My youth, my shared ethnic background meant that there were things that I should have known not to ask or say. The statement but *You are Eritrean* became the meta-textual background through which I was instructed as to what was say-able versus what was best left unsaid. Apocryphal stories, side-long glances, silence and re-directing conversation allowed some of those whom I interviewed to say what they felt was needed to be said.

Princess wanted me to send her the notes I had taken over the course of our conversation. She made clear to me as someone who was in a public position that she wanted to have as much control as possible with how her words were going to be used. When I stopped taking notes, when I sat there, truly as a guest, Princess shared her frustrations, her grievances and dreams with me. Only when I put away my notes did she engage with me in a relaxed manner. (She

ironically pointed out that my IRB script made her feel as though I was a serious professional, while others I had interviewed flinched and grew more fearful in response to the formal language of the document.) Princess never talked about the festivals. Her silence was a response, its own kind of coded, opaque way.

When I wanted to speak about the festivals, she redirected the conversation (as did Mihret) to the question of immigration and migrant rights. Part of this, I realized, is linked to the kinds of cultural and social capital that are accorded to immigrants within a larger migration industry and the political imperatives that it demands-- researchers come wanting to speak about migrants and migration; migrants in turn can parlay this into employment and other forms of social and cultural capital. However, redirecting conversation was a strategic move to avoid talking about an unpleasant past in an already unstable present. Unlike Spivak's (1988) path-breaking argument that nationalist discourses and the political economy of global scholarly production silences subaltern women, I found that women strategically deployed silence to save face, to avoid painful memories, and to reverse the relationship between researcher/researched.

While much of feminist anthropology's concerns destabilized and problematized the masculinist assumptions embedded in anthropology's epistemology (Abu-Lughod 1990; Visweswaran 1994), certain paradigmatic conditions within fieldwork remain, conditions which my interlocutors used to hold me to account ethically. In conducting research on a past that some willed to forget and others romanticized, I found myself at an impasse. I found few secondary scholarly resources on this moment, either in Italian or English. There were also the usual silences embedded in the archive itself (Truillot 1995), with newspaper article clippings, pamphlets and the occasional letter between mayors that didn't betray much of the motivations, sentiments or thinking of these historical actors. I felt as though I had found a wall of silence

every which way I turned. The silences I encountered filled me with a sense of shame as a fieldworker, as though it was my own failings as a co-producer of knowledge that created these moments of irresolvable silence.

I often reflected on the impassable silence that came out of Eritrea at that time. When peace was at hand, there was no communication from Eritrea's government in the days before the 2018 Algiers Peace Deal was signed. The regime's dogged silence was a testament to its power. Afternoons in Bolognina were spent parsing this silence with my interlocutors, its meanings, trying to find something that would give sense or prepare Eritreans for what would happen next with regards to the Peace Deal. On an intimate scale, the silences I encountered in the course of asking what was not to be asked stood as small rebellions, acts that destabilized any claim to authority that I could make in objectifying and in turn 'knowing' an experience that my interlocutors did not want to reflect upon. It felt to me at times, as someone who is decades younger than most of the people I spoke to, as the intrusion of the young into an un-shared past. More than anything, silence alerted me to the ineffability of the past.

As Robert Weller writes (2017)

> Most current understandings tie silence closely to the exercise of power, as when Derrida speaks of textual erasure or Foucault of silencing sexuality. At its most obvious, this is the silence of the censor, of children seen but not heard. More subtly, it is the silence from which every discursive world must arise, and which always haunts that discourse, lying in wait between the words and lines….[silences] show how the irresolvable and uninterpretable core of silence nevertheless always offers a glimpse of some alternative to dominating discourses, a hint of some other possible sacred (2).

Silence stood for my interlocutors not as a form of evasion, but as a means to protect one's identity from the intrusions of a painful and unresolved past. But silence also stood as a barometer of trust especially in the context of disappearances, political betrayals, and violence that characterizes Eritrea's political present. Silences were moments in which my interlocutors

faced the possibility that I could possibly be someone not to be trusted, that even though I shared the same ethnic background, I was still a stranger. Kay Warren (1998), writing on *la violencia*, the period of violence between military and insurgents that exiled a significant proportion of Guatemala's indigenous Maya population, argues that *la violencia* ushered in a regime of silence. Silence divided the world between insiders and outsiders and, she added, "those unable to deal with strategic ambiguities are by definition strangers with whom it would not be wise to share information" (40). In the context of violence, terrorism and deep uncertainty veiled silences were strategic; they delineated the contours of who could be trusted in situations of irruptive violence in which trust was still a necessary ingredient to survival.

Gendered Political Participation

Cultural Politics of the EPLF

During the first summer of my fieldwork, I attended a public screening of the documentary film *Asmarina*. The film was a bold statement to an Italian public that imagined that migrants were always out of place and outside of national time. The documentary used personal archives, archival images from Festival Eritrea and interviews with members of Eritrea's diasporan community in Milan and Bologna to highlight the vibrant nature of the community. One scene stood out in the documentary: Wedi Shawel, a comedian and performer, began spoofing an Italian song "*Asmarina*,[46]" to a crowd of 10,000 plus people. Here is the partial text with translation:

Non so se ti chiami Cicci, Lilli o Zazà
Sei nata ad Asmara e sei un fior di beltà
Fanciulla Asmarina, sei più bella per me
E ogni giorno alle tre suono e canto per te, e mi ricordo di te
Asmarina Asmarina di bellezza sei regina
A vederti da lontano casca quello che ho in mano

---

[46] Bella Abissinia is a common colonialist trope. See Iyob (2007) for a discussion of how colonial concubinage has

Asmarina guarda un po.
Asmarina del mio cuore.

I don't know if your name is Cicci, Lilli, o Zazà
You were born in Asmara, a flower of beauty
Girl from Asmara, you're the most beautiful to me
And every day at 3, I play and sing for you, thinking of you
Asmarina (little Asmara) of beauty, you're a queen
When I look at you from afar I drop everything at hand.
Asmarina look a little
Asmarina of my heart.

The song was sung in Pugliese dialect. It was the soundtrack of the documentary that hummed in the backdrop. At one point, the documentary cycles to Wedi Shawel's rendition of *Asmarana. Asmarana*, in Tigrinya is a play on the Italian diminutive *Asmarina*. *Asmarana* translates to 'our Asmara.' Sung during the height of Festival Bologna, it elicited wild applause from the audience. Wedi Shawel, slim and well-dressed, began the set by apologizing for not speaking Italian. He then begins a rendition of the famous Italian song in near perfect Italian, momentarily stunning the crowd with his linguistic acumen. He lets the audience's laughter ebb and then begins his own version in Tigrinya. *Our Asmara, within our vision and in our hearts, so close at hand.* The song then goes on to describe Asmara's neighborhoods, from the wealthy *Tiravolo* to the working-class slum of *Abba Shawel*. Asmara as the capital city becomes the rightful preserve of the Eritrean people through the collective efforts of all Eritreans who were involved in the liberation movement. The feminization of Asmara suffered under Italian colonialists is vindicated through military and social struggle. Men and women plastered the singer in (what that time I assumed were) *lire,* Italy's former currency.

In the festival circuit, Eritrea's women were depicted as guerilla fighters, suffering wives to their male counterparts, or as peasants under siege from Ethiopia. These performances as Matzke argues "used [performance] as tool of entertainment, propaganda and nation building,

but also to boost morale and develop stamina in the protracted battle for sovereignty and survival" (2016:17). Under the auspices of revolutionary nationalism, the question of Eritrean women's roles in the new nation took on increasing importance (Muller 2005, Bernal 2001). Women were to be liberated from traditional gender roles through their sacrifices and commitment to the liberation struggle. While both men and women participated in the struggle for liberation, gendered expectations never fully vanished (Bernal 2001). And save for a core of elite women (Muller 2005), political education and participation for many Eritrean women followed the lines of gendered labor expectations (Bernal 2014). Working-class women cooked and cleaned during festivals and sent their wages to the liberation movement while being shut out of larger decision-making structures.

Working-Class Women and Festival Bologna

I interviewed two women who attended these festivals and worked as live-in domestics throughout the 1980's and 1990's. One of these women, Alganesh, had a much larger stake in the movement. Her husband was a member of the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front[47] (TPLF) who had long since moved to Tanzania. A civil engineer, he could not find work in Italy and so the family lived, as many post-colonial migrants do, transnationally. I brought chocolates to our meeting. Her daughter, who became my good friend, laughed as her mother-- who stayed preternaturally slim--ate all of the chocolates I had brought over the course of our two-hour interview. During the interview, she gingerly took out all of her photos and memorabilia from that moment. There was her employment contract in Italian and Amharic; pictures of herself in full afro in front of an EPLF banner with, quite critically, only Italian demonstrators behind her;

[47] TPLF and EPLF ousted the Derg Regime in 1991. Following the 1998-2000 border war, the formerly friendly relations between the TPLF, which captured state power in Ethiopia and became the Ethiopian People's Democratic Revolutionary Front, soured.

pictures of the EPLF soccer team. She distinguished herself from the other domestic workers who came from rural villages and followed Italian families. She applied to work as a domestic laborer because as she explained to me, she wanted adventure and a sense of freedom.

She mostly spoke to me about the dangers of being an attractive maid. In her first job she was locked in by her employer, who, she explained to me, resented her beauty and the attention shown to her by her husband. She waited each day for the postman, who one day told her that there was another girl like her (an Eritrean domestic) who lived close by and wanted to send her a message. Our two-hour conversation focused on the loneliness and isolation of those years; the difficult women she worked under, and the older Italian men who wanted to marry her. When I asked her about the festivals her only response was "oh yeah, of course we went, every year." I probed further, hoping to elicit reflection as to what she thought of that moment, what her expectations were, what it meant to someone like her. I realized, that attending the festivals was so commonsensical that there really wasn't much to say about them. The fact that attending the festivals went unremarked spoke to their enduring power in defining membership within the Eritrean community (Bernal 2014, Redecker-Hepner 2009, Koser & Al Ali et al 2001).

A few weeks later her daughter mentioned to me that her mother attended the 40th anniversary of Festival Bologna in 2014. She remembered her mother waiting anxiously for this man with whom she had a love affair years before. They would see each other during the festivals before she had met and married her current husband. For two out of three days she asked where this man was, what had happened to him all these years, if he was still living in Germany. On the last day, she encountered his cousin who told her that the man had died two years before. My friend told me that for the rest of the festival her mother sat in a corner in

mourning. She then went on to marvel about what her mother's life must of have been like; the desires and dreams that she buried, raising her own and other people's children.

Shewit, Alganesh's cousin, also agreed to be interviewed. She had four adult children who lived at home with her. She was kind, affable and punctuated each statement with 'can you believe that!' After I had read my IRB statement, Shewit grew concerned. I translated the document to use the *lei* form to demonstrate respect for my interlocutors, but the legalese behind the document and the formal language intimidated Shewit. Nevertheless, with a little time she relaxed and began telling me about the circumstances that pushed her out of Eritrea. At 16, Shewit made the decision to leave alongside her boyfriend. It was 1981 and the fighting between the EPLF and the Derg had intensified. Fearing that she would be recruited to fight for the EPLF through the *gifa*, or conscription, she and her boyfriend (now deceased husband) made the decision to contract smugglers to cross into the Sudan.

Shewit then continued

> We went to an empty house, so even EPLF would control documents, and you could get unlucky if you were a woman and there was a smuggler would take your money and leave you in the Sahara. I had no idea about politics. And the police told us that the *tegadelit* can take you back to Eritrea. If you want to go to Khartoum, you can hitch a ride, so we went to Port Sudan. We had no identity documents; we travelled on fake documents and took a plane to Khartoum. We didn't know what Khartoum was like, there was no one there. They met a woman who told their future. My boyfriend spoke Italian, and he met this Italian guy, and they started a conversation. He told him that he has workers who are Eritrean, you guys can stay at my hotel. We were introduced to his driver.

I was surprised later during the interview when Shewit began speaking about the festivals that there was no contradiction in her mind between her fear of conscription under the EPLF and her participation in the festivals.

> Shewit: We got married after 21 years of living together. We've always been here in Bologna.
> Fiori: How was Bologna?

Shewit: I love Bologna, I like Bologna, it's always been clean.
F: Did you go to the festivals?
S: I always went, until now, was recorded and registered with the festivals that were going on in Bologna, with *Hizbawi Gimbar*[48]?
F: How were the festivals?
S: Before independence, everyone would have so much fun and come from all over the world to these festivals. There were congresses, we would spend at least two days together. *We would meet everyone, from our childhoods, and it was a beautiful experience.*
F: Was it the social aspect that attracted you?
S: There were singers, two days of political education, one night was done in Piazza Maggiore, there was a stage, we had buses that were available for us, there was a basketball stadium that we had access to, we would watch theater, performances at these stadiums. We were given a palazzo to do these festivals. During the day all education, at night we had parties.
F: So everyone was happy?
Shewit: We waited all year for the festival. I also registered as a refugee for UNHCR in Rome who went to the US and to Canada.
Fiori: Did any of your friends go to America?
Shewit: No, they didn't. But now when I think about a bunch of people left. There was a lot of socializing; there were a lot of people who also went to Germany.

For many Eritreans, Bologna is metonymically linked to the Festival and to the nationalist moment. These festivals were a particular moment in participants' lives that indexed connection, community and possibility in a context of invisibility, displacement, trauma and loss. For most working-class women, connection with kin, friends and lovers was as important if not more important than the politicization that took place in these congresses. Intimacy, ideology and political participation converged to create the nationalist world—an alternate, ineffable historical moment, one that in its silences and elisions continues to haunt the present.

Conclusion

This chapter has situated Eritrean nationalist politics within the left-wing politics of Bologna of the 1970's-1980's. In describing Bologna Festival Eritrea (1981–1991), the chapter

[48] *Hizbawi Gimbar* refers to the EPLF

describes the work of Eritrean nationalists in imagining (Anderson 1983) the nation within the context of Bolognese intellectual and political life. It has underscored the importance of Eritrean historiography in thinking and enacting the nation and how these discourses permeate people's recollections of that historical moment. Secondly, the chapter has looked at the gendered and class dimensions of Eritrean political participation both within the festival circuit and within city politics more generally. Political participation, in terms of access to decision-making structures, was determined by the confluence of gender and class. Those most likely to participate were students who were already part of internationalist solidarity movements. Moreover, for working-class women, most of whom worked as domestic care workers, festivals were a chance to connect with kin, friends and lovers displaced over vast territories. In this way, the festivals were social and intimate events that made the question of nationalism one that was deeply imbricated in individual and social life and social identity.

Festival Eritrea Bologna was an integral part of the migratory experience for Eritreans of the Nationalist generation (Arnone 2014). It structured the terms of being and belonging not only within the diasporan community but also within a conception of being Eritrean in Bologna, which was tied to the EPLF vis-à-vis the festival circuit. In the following chapter, I look at how the memory of Bologna as the locus of Eritrean identity in Italy is used in the present by pro-refugee activists in their institutionalized memorializing practices. For many Eritreans of Generation Asylum reclaiming Bologna became a symbolic contest for who would speak for the de-territorialized nation. Moreover, Bologna as a site of anti-fascist resistance was also a symbolic resource that refugee activists utilized to make affective and political claims to the city and to their country of settlement.

CHAPTER 2

Memorializing the Lampedusa Sinking: Memorial as Social Process

Introduction

We had gathered to pay tribute to those who had died crossing the Mediterranean on October 3, 2013. This ceremony was to mark the five-year anniversary of the Lampedusa sinking, and of the continuing toll that tragedies in the Mediterranean claimed on exile communities in Europe. The *comune di* Bologna, the city government, sponsored a garden of memory or *il giardino della memoria,* to hold in memory those whose lives were claimed by the sea. But the memorial was paradoxical in its nature- how is one to memorialize a phenomenon that is not past but very much part of our contemporary moment, and barring any political interventions, will continue to define our futures as well? Many of those present were themselves survivors of journeys similar to the one that claimed 366 lives in Lampedusa, journeys that they willed to forget. Forgetting, though, entailed disavowing whatever community many young Eritrean men had created for themselves and their families in Italy. I was there to witness and to act in solidarity with people I had genuinely called friends over the five years that I had been coming to *Bolognina*, spending Saturday afternoons on *Via Nicolo dell'Arca*, the single street dotted with Eritrean restaurants and bars, bars that had long been abandoned by their former Italian owners.[49] *Nicolo dell'Arca* was also the street in which Eritrean women lived as squatters throughout much of the 1970s and '80s as landlords refused to rent to single women, let alone single Black women.[50] Bologna, while welcoming in some ways, denied the presence of Eritreans, who were largely invisible, living in the periphery of the city, working for the postal service at night loading and unloading

[49] Many Italian owners of small bars and restaurants have sold these establishments to ethnic entrepreneurs, mostly Chinese, in response to the protracted economic crisis that has taken hold since the 1990s.
[50] For a discussion on the racial and gender dynamics of early immigration to Italy, see Andall 2000 on the politics of domestic labor. Italy's early immigration was notable precisely because of the large presence of single women as migrants engaged in care work; most of whom came from Cape Verde, Eritrea and Ethiopia.

boxes, in people's homes as cleaners. *Cattiva coscienza*- that is how one of my interlocutors, a resident of the city since 1971, described the relationship between Eritreans and Italians, one of guilt, indebtedness, and ultimately rejection for an unassimilated and expunged colonial past.[51]

La strage di Lampedusa or the 'Lampedusa tragedy,' was, at that time, "the most dramatic human disaster in the Mediterranean Sea since the Second World War" (Kushner 2016:207). In sight of land, 366 men, women, and children perished in what was, at the time, the worst sinking in recent memory. Only five days later, another 800 people perished off the coast of Lampedusa. These two maritime disasters marked a turning point; since the late 1990's Italy has heavily fortified its maritime borders or outsourced the policing of boat migration to third party[52] countries like Libya. They created a momentary respite from policies aimed at turning back and intercepting migrant boats. For a short period, from October 18, 2013 to October 31, 2014, Italy introduced *Mare Nostrum*, the military-humanitarian operation that rescued 138,366 people (Amnesty International, 2014). This was to be a brief respite though from earlier policies that involved pushback deals with third countries. With waning electoral support in 2017 the *Partito Democratico* (PD) or the Democratic Party of Italy, reinstated the Friendship accords with Libya, a series of agreements that gave aid in apologia for colonial crimes in exchange for

[51] For a discussion on the legacy of Italian colonialism, see LaBanca (2002), Del Boca (2005). The present rise in right-wing violence has altered the ways in which Eritreans remember the past.

[52] Third party countries refers to countries of transit, while sending countries refer to migrants' country of origins. 'Safe third country,' on the other hand refers to countries in which "A **third country** that treats a person seeking **international protection** in accordance with the following principles:
(a) life and liberty are not threatened on account of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular **social group** or political opinion;
(b) there is no risk of **serious harm** as defined in Directive 2011/95/EU (Recast Qualification Directive) ;
(c) the principle of **non-refoulement** in accordance with the **Geneva Refugee Convention and Protocol** is respected;
(d) the prohibition of **removal**, in violation of the right to freedom from **torture** and cruel, **inhuman or degrading treatment** as laid down in international law, is respected; and
(e) the possibility exists to request **refugee status** and, if found to be a **refugee**, to receive protection in accordance with the **Geneva Refugee Convention and Protocol**. From the EU Commission

the interception and detention of clandestine boats and migrants by Libyan authorities. With this act the migration crisis was once again displaced back to African and Middle Eastern shores. Nevertheless, the sinking, however momentarily, became a pivotal or generative event of the European migration crisis. An outpouring of public mourning followed the shipwrecks, bringing into relief questions of historical responsibility, whose lives are grievable, and the politics of how to mourn others (Butler 2004). Most of the drowned were Eritrean, a fact that was often lost in media representations of the sinking, or more perniciously, unimportant with regards to larger geo-political concerns.[53] Moreover, "in 2013, close to 15,000 migrants were processed through Lampedusa, most fleeing from Eritrea" (Kushner 2016:206). For Europeans, the migration crisis tested the limits of a European public committed to human rights, to living with strangers, to the "bounds of their political union and boundless humanity" (Ben-Yehoyada 2015: 184). For Eritreans, though, the crisis signified the breaking point of a number of long-standing incommensurables that dogged the Eritrean body politic- generational and ideological conflict within diaspora, the formation of alternate diasporas, the scars of serial war, and the human costs of continued depopulation and political repression.

This chapter, then, describes the efforts of activists to claim discursive space in Bolognina's ethnic quarter. Discursive space is used here to signify two agendas that activists had: one, to shift the terms of debate, linguistic possibilities and imaginaries around refugeehood, political action and 'Eritrean-ness' and two, to claim actual space, to make 'place,' in a context in which the voices, perspectives and presence of migrants, and recent Eritrean refugees more specifically,

[53] At a March 3, 2018, event for *Nigrizia*, the critical magazine dedicated to reporting on African issues, and sponsored by the *Comboniani* of Verona, Father Mussei Zerai, the Eritrean Swiss Catholic priest, and Nobel Peace Prize nominee, was relaying an anecdote of a meeting he had with EU officials regarding the plight of Eritrean refugees in Libyan detention centers. In the course of the re-telling, Zerai was simply told that Eritreans were 'sacrificeable.'

is rendered unintelligible. This entailed re-appropriating dominant frames used to understand Eritrean refugees- humanitarian and Italian and Eritrean nationalist discourses- that flattened the heterogeneity of voices and perspectives within the Eritrean diaspora. I do so by linking two events—the Lampedusa sinking and the inauguration of a garden of memory—in time and space. Using situational analysis (Gluckman 2014; Kapferer 2015), I examine how these two events contained emergent potentialities and critical re-articulations around shared conceptions of community, diasporic belonging, and the politics of life (Butler 2004; Das 2006). This engagement comes from an understanding that diasporas, those creatures of imagination (Appadurai 1996), are in fact made in places, places that have a surfeit of memory, longings, and projections, places that in equal measure also contain forgotten multitudes. Places anchor memories (Nora 1989), memories which provide the foundation for utopic imaginations (Traverso 2016).

The chapter does so by recounting activists' efforts to memorialize the Lampedusa sinking as both a means of engaging in intra-diasporic competition for who represents the Eritrean community and efforts to engage in the creation of institutional memory of the migration crisis as a politicized undertaking. Politicized is used here to denote the efforts of activists to hold authorities accountable for deaths in the Mediterranean, to name those who died, and to render these deaths not as naturalized phenomena but as the direct consequence of policies promulgated by powerful actors within embedded imperial histories. In particular, activists are engaged in a "historicization for a mass movement that in many cases leaves not a trace" (Kushner 2016:228), by efforts to name a range of actors and social and political relationships responsible for the phenomenon. The chapter will then describe the two memorials that marked the opening of the garden, and the arguments that framed what the memorial should accomplish. Subsequently, the

Lampedusa sinking became the 'generative' moment or critical event (Das 2006) marking the migration crisis, a "place [that] came to symbolize more the intense human tragedy and drama of modern migration, evoking sentiments of pity, shame and fear in equal measures" (Kushner 2016:203). Engaging in and appropriating the imaginary of the migration crisis by Eritrean activists was a fraught process that entailed negotiations, intra-diasporic conflict and significant entanglements with a range of institutional actors across local, national and transnational scales.

There was a shared awareness amongst my interlocutors that Lampedusa was a tragic moment that spelled the possibility of change at an unprecedented scale. In their eyes the sinking and the death of 366 people, all but five of whom were Eritrean, signaled a watershed moment. It meant the recognition of the scope of political suffering for young Eritreans, whose flight from Eritrea belied the significant political, ecological and social crisis afflicting the country. On April 13, 2018, the city of Bologna inaugurated the fifth public memorial to mark the October 3, 2013 boat sinking off the coast of Lampedusa. Through the efforts of *Comitato Tre Ottobre*, the Committee for the 3rd of October, led by the charismatic Eritrean-Italian refugee advocate Tarek Berhane, the Italian state recognized that day as a public day of mourning for victims of migration (*il giornata della memoria delle vittime di migrazione)*. Members of *Eritrea Democratica*, the media and communications group founded by Eritrean dissidents in Bologna, organized a two-part memorial to the victims and survivors of that disaster. The first to take place marked the inauguration of the memorial; the second, which took place on October 3rd, 2018, commemorated the five-year anniversary of the sinking through the unveiling of a permanent installation of public art alongside the memorial plaque. This was preceded by months of negotiations between the government of the *quartiere* of Navile and members of the Eritrean community.

However, efforts to memorialize the sinking were not shared across the entirety of the diasporan community in Bologna. For the 'nationalist generation' of Eritrean refugees (Redeker-Hepner 2013)—those who came of age during the thirty-year long war between Eritrea and Ethiopia-- the exodus of young people fundamentally challenged their identities, the basis of national cohesion (Woldemikael 2011) and forms of local community practiced in exile. Youth out-migration was a painful reminder of some of the challenges that the nationalist movement faced in its post-revolutionary moment.[54] Further, the phenomenon was often greeted with denial, shame, confusion or grief by members of the first diasporan generation. Others were regime supporters who saw migration as deeply threatening and destabilizing to the Eritrean state. This was clear to me when I arrived for preparations for the memorial. Other than two older stalwart critics of the Eritrean regime, not a single member of the established diaspora came to the memorial, nor did anyone associated with the various chapters of the Party for Democracy and Justice, the PFDJ-, the offshoot of the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) and current ruling party of the state- like the Youth or Women's wing [YPFDJ and the National Union of Eritrean Women (NUEW), respectively].

The memorial served as a kind of 'memory politics,' and signaled a generational rupture between the nationalist generation and generation 'asylum,' or the post-revolutionary generation (Redeker-Hepner 2014). The Lampedusa sinking, and the experiences of forced migration characterized by clandestine and boat migration, created the conditions for the articulation of a group identity distinct from forms of identification encouraged by the de-territorialized Eritrean

[54] Ninety percent of Eritrea's refugees are between 18-24; this was documented in a report for Amnesty International in 2013. Youth out-migration is also characterized by a high number of unaccompanied minors. Eritreans refer to refugees of the second generation as *menaseyat*, or collectively as youth, even if some refugees have long exited that category. Many young people leave Eritrea in response to indefinite military service; however, as Valerie Frank (2016) has asked provocatively, why have refugees, since 2015, leave at ever younger ages?

state (Redeker-Hepner 2008). Young Eritreans who had made the Mediterranean crossing refer to themselves in relation to other members of the community as *nihna bi bahri zemazana*, we who came by the sea. Hence, the shared experience of the Central Mediterranean crossing created a social framework through which recent Eritrean refugees could articulate a political identity distinct from hegemonic nationalism or the various positions of Eritrean opposition groups, like those that came from the remnants of the Eritrean Liberation Front. Moreover, their experiences attested to the range of actors and institutions that have shaped their migratory trajectories and subjectivities. Additionally, some activists engaged in a multi-various political critique at their country of origin, countries of transit and country of arrival (Fiore 2018:59). This was illustrated by the kinds of debates that activists were engaged in around the purposes of the memorial, which will be described in greater detail in the course of the chapter. Further, for refugees whose lives are framed by stops and starts on journeys that can take years to reach their final destinations, in places in which they are unwanted, claiming a place to call one's own, even a small garden on the periphery of Bolognina counted as a major victory.

Il Giardino della memoria: A Day for Remembering

I arrived, like a good ethnographer, early for the preparations. Young African men- Eritrean, Senegalese, Nigerian, Gambian and Sudanese- came from *Centro Mattei*, Bologna's reception center in the vast SPRAR system, the ad-hoc and improvisatory system that Italy had set up in dealing with the increasing numbers of arrivals from the Global South (Albahari 2016; Fiore 2018). We were lucky that day, that after months of unseasonable rain, we were graced with sunshine. I greeted my friends one by one with three kisses on the cheek. They asked me to perform in the memorial, and while I felt an immense unease at having public attention directed my way, I obliged them knowing that my performing would be seen as an act of solidarity and

commitment to my interlocutors. Through the course of my fieldwork, I was often asked to pick 'sides,' in the ongoing political conflicts that plagued the community in Bologna. Being a member of the Eritrean diaspora, albeit one who carried with her an American passport and a graduate degree from a prestigious American university, I had a responsibility to *choose*. I could not stand as a dispassionate observer, and while I strove to understand perspectives I disagreed with, it did not free me from being entangled, gossiped about, and eyed suspiciously for having aligned myself with the group of activists that I worked with. To perform then, at that moment, meant that a member of the Eritrean-American diaspora, a diaspora that was viewed as having much more privilege and power, validated this intervention. I also think some of my interlocutors thought it was funny to put me in awkward situations-- I had no idea I was performing until I arrived ten minutes before the preparations for the memorial began, and no one else wanted to perform-- as I was always game as an eager ethnographer. Eritreans have a well-developed sense of humor in the face of dispiriting political realities, (Bernal 2013) of which sometimes I was the butt of the jokes.

As we surveyed the small park attached to a social center that would be the scene of the memorial, we began our preparations. Press from local newspapers were invited; the mayor of Bologna as well as the president of the *quartiere*, or neighborhood were there. Police flanked the entrances of the park, nonchalantly chatting with one another, bored looks passed around. An hour before the performance, we fanned out a white sheet on the grass that would serve as our boat; we would perform with *Cantieri Metticci*, the local theater group composed of Italian and refugee performers. *Metticcio* was a re-appropriation of the Fascist classification of mixed-race subjects of *Africa Orientale Italiana*. I wondered to myself if the founders of this group understood what this term meant for Eritreans, Ethiopians and Somalis who were the victims of

systemic rape (Sorgoni 1999), and later denied citizenship under Italian citizenship laws that have changed only marginally since the end of Fascism (Deplano & Patriarca 2018). I wondered if this re-appropriation, done in the spirit of solidarity, only served to further instantiate distance between citizen-subjects (most of whom were Italian and white) and rights-less migrants (Kushner 2016; Puggioni 2015; Rinelli 2015). I kept these thoughts to myself as we practiced our piece. This piece was supposed to signify the struggle of life against death, as our tortured body movements mimicked the trashing waves in the Central Mediterranean, the white sheet, our boat, that would ferry us to safety.

Some of the young men there were unmoored; they had that look of radical disorientation that I had seen on the faces of many refugees in transit when I began my research in 2015, the year that marked the migration crisis.[55] One young man who was scarcely out of his teen years was struggling to practice our routine. He was agitated, and the embrace between the survivors and the metaphoric dead that was to mark the end of our performance proved too much for him; he stormed away, and we continued with our practice. I was to be one of the survivors who unveils the dead, as we pulled the white sheet away to reveal their bodies, and return them to the land of memory, to the land of the living, to struggle against the waves and the impending danger that marked our journey.

While we performed this piece, one of my interlocutors, Yosef, a fiery orator, activist and actor, began reading the text that accompanied it, while we performed our practiced routine. Here is the text in full (my own translation from the Italian):

"*On that day 364 people died. We remember their names; we call some of their names. By calling their names we want to renew their memory, just as life itself is rebirth, like the grass that*

[55] In 2015, over 1.2 million refugees from Syria, Eritrea and Nigeria arrived into the European Union. It also marked a turning point in European border regimes, as a more compassionate policy that did not entail pushbacks was instituted that year. However, by 2016 the European Union had signed a pushback deal with Turkey; in 2017, the *respingimenti* deals were reinstituted with the nominal authorities in Libya.

grows in this garden. This is important because every name has a history; each name tells a story. These names, though, touch us, they force us to understand. How have we come to a situation this grave, this tragic? To remember means to hold in our lives their memories, to understand the circumstances that have forced so many young people to flee from their homes; or to die in a voyage that these young people full well know is filled with danger? While we remember all of those who have died in the Mediterranean, we are forced to remember that most of those who died that day were young Eritreans. It's important that we remember by asking, why, why did all of these young people abandon their country? What forced them to escape. We find the answer in their names."

Kifleyesus… Easter had just passed, *Kifleyesus, a part of Christ*
Leteamlakh, god's day
Meron, the oil of God
Okbit, refuge
Zinafiqesh, desire
Medhaney, medicine
Semhar, unity
Tesfahiwet, the hope of life
Teklemariam, the plant of the Madonna
Teklom, their plant
Mekonen, noble, a people with a history that has been recounted for over four millennia
Harinet, means liberty
Tesfay, hope
Before we can say anything more, all of those young people wanted to better their lives.
Mehari, he who pardons. We pardon those who continue to suffer.
Merih, the guide, the guide who left because his country no longer had a competent guide.
Sid, happiness
Semere, semere
Ibrahim, the father of all of us
Qsanet, tranquility
Fithi, justice, Selam, peace, Semhar, Semhar
Delina, we desire

As Yosef read the names[56] in his usual delivery, brusque, angry, and impassioned, the crowd composed of mostly Italian retirees, Eritreans of the second diasporan generation, children and local officials maintained a respectful silence. We performers were surrounded by photographers as local newspapers covered the event. The memorial, more broadly, was a self-conscious performative and communicative act that worked to counter the logic of death at sea

[56] As this was a dramatic monologue, written by Yosef, the punctuation and spacing of the text reflects these conventions.

that has become the dominant modality for the maintenance of racialized and spectacularized borders (DeGenova 2001). It also served as a pointed critique of existing Eritrean diasporan politics, as a majority of the community, some fearful of the consequences of speaking out, either tacitly or overtly supported the regime of Isaias Afwerki, the current president of Eritrea whom many dissident activists charge with singlehandedly sabotaging the promises of the independence movement.

The Lampedusa sinking has resulted in a number of national and local memorials in Italy, and other EU wide efforts to memorialize the sinking. What has been striking regarding these memorials is the conspicuous lack of voices, perspectives and names of the survivors, or the involvement of diasporic communities that they are a part of (Horsti & Klaus 2019). It is, therefore, important to underscore how efforts to memorialize migrant death at sea by communities affected by border policies are fundamentally distinct from those forms of memorialization undertaken by institutional actors. Moreover, memorializing efforts from within marginalized communities challenge the existing status quo in which "migrants are at best seen but not heard" (Kushner 2016: 228). Migrants are (re) presented globally; their lives, bodies, images are mined as news stories, highlighted in human rights brochures (Maalki 1998) meant to humanize them at best, and at worst to render them as faceless threats looming at the gates of wealthy countries. This is especially true in the Italian context which celebrates the efforts of someone like Mimmo Lucano, the mayor of Riace, whose example of civil disobedience to the Decree on Security and Migration[57] is the focal point of anti-racist resistance, while immigrant or non-white activists, let alone the survivors of these journeys, are given scant attention.

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[57] The Decree on Security and Migration sought to dismantle the existing framework for humanitarian protection; increase police powers and the use of non-lethal weapons like tasers; augment the waiting period for citizenship applications from two years to four years; and render those convicted of crimes related to citizenship stateless (only for naturalized citizens; this is in line with existing laws in the UK, France and Germany). Many Italian activists

Yosef, a political activist who has come to represent the interests and perspectives of the Mediterranean generation, was part of the planning committee of the memorial. His selection of the names of those who died was a critique that framed the discussions of the memorial's purpose: should the memorial focus on the politics of European borders, or of the political situation of Eritrea? Can the memorial achieve both purposes at once? This was the substance of the heated discussions between Yosef, someone I would classify as an organic intellectual in the Gramscian sense, and Tewolde, an Eritrean political science student at the University of Bologna. Tewolde was not a refugee; he did not cross the Mediterranean. He instead won a scholarship to study political science and wrote his master's thesis on the politics of European border externalization schemes. His was a privileged entry to Italy and most of the people he socialized with were Italian leftists who worked in the *centri d'accoglienza*, or refugee reception centers. He was nevertheless a part of *Eritrea Democratica*, and the choice to expand the scope of the memorial in its second iteration was a compromise between embodied and experiential knowledge as exemplified by Yosef, and the abstract- the historical-structural and philosophical- perspective that Tewolde's intervention called for. Listening to Yosef and Tewolde, I thought of the multitudes that diasporas contain- of life trajectories, legal statuses, aspirations, abilities, class, gendered and sexual orientations--against the idea that they are ossified, backwards looking creatures of nostalgia.

It was clear that the performances and speeches around the inauguration of the memorial served a didactic and ideological function. Memorial planners, all of whom were Eritrean Italian, hoped that many who would attend would be locals who were not necessarily involved in immigration services, as service providers and activists in *centri d'accoglienze*, refugee reception

argued that the measure was meant to institutionalize racism. Since the collapse of the coalition government in October 2019, many of the provisions of the decree are being contested in constitutional courts.

centers. Part of the strategy of *Eritrea Democratica*, the NGO that launched the memorial, was centered on increasing awareness and understanding around Eritrean issues, but more importantly, it was about accessing and disseminating information about developments in Eritrea. Eritrea is one of the most closed societies in the world, in which information is tightly regulated (Bernal 2014). Eritrean opposition groups, like *Arbi Harinet,* Freedom Friday, contest government control through opening channels of communication between diasporan groups and Eritreans 'at home' (Plaut 2016). Other than local Italians, the memorial was attended by recent refugees who were housed in *Centro Mattei*, the local reception center. This was part of a long-term strategy that activists explained was about the incorporation of new refugees into opposition groups critical of the Eritrean regime. This practice, though, was met with criticism by other Eritreans who worked in humanitarian relief, who believed it was opportunistic and insensitive to the needs of recent refugees who had experienced immense trauma and violence.

The performance included these recent arrivals, while Yosef recited the names of the deceased. Their names, chosen for their symbolism, were expressions of the desires that frame the migratory trajectories of Eritrean refugees and of the suspended ambitions of a generation. As Jeniffer Riggan (2016) argues in regard to the *Warsaw Yikulow*, the program of national development that the UN rapporteur credited as the "main driver of migration out of Eritrea" (2018:8), many young Eritreans live in a state of permanent liminality. This sense of suspension and hopelessness is countered by the immense risks that young Eritreans take to find refuge. This was highlighted by the series of pointed questions that Yosef begins his piece with and his selection of symbolically potent names to convey these shared desires amongst Eritrean youth. Throughout the course of fieldwork, refugees were unintelligible[58] as political actors and as

[58] Here I use intelligibility in the sense that Butler does in *Frames of War* (2004). In the text she argues that intelligibility is conditioned by existing historical schemas regarding what things are knowable (ontologies).

desiring subjects, in that their flight could only be understood as an expression of radical desperation. In public events sympathetic to refugees, of which there were many over the course of my fieldwork, refugees were described as fleeing from hunger, violence and war (*loro stanno scapendo [scapando] dalla guerra, dalla povertà, dal fame… povera gente)*. While this statement does contain a certain structural truth to the enduring and over-deterministic nature of post-colonial violence and poverty (Ticktin 2016), it is also engaged in constructing a truth regime of its own. Refugees need to mobilize significant material, intellectual, and emotional resources to reach European shores (Belloni 2018), however much humanitarian discourse constructs refugees as depoliticized objects of care (Feldman 2007; Ticktin 2016). By emphasizing hunger, a kind of biblical and embodied suffering, these discourses understand the hardship that people on the move experience as naturalized, depoliticized phenomena, and mobilize sentiments of compassion and sympathy (Fassin 2012) that instantiate distance and hierarchy. I want to emphasize that it is incredibly difficult for truly hungry people to move—politics is what moves people.[59]

Further, much of the Italian public discourse, dominated by the right in the last twenty years, understands refugees as a burden to Italian society. Ferried in 'water taxis-'the pejorative appellation for NGO's engaged in maritime rescues--, refugees strain the already fractured body politic. Refugees historically trouble sacral notions of sovereignty and belonging (Agier 2005; Agier 2016; Besteman 2016; Maalki 1996). That they traverse bodies of water further threatens racialized forms of territorial sovereignty (Mannik 2017). While European leaders hope to

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Intelligibility is the prerequisite to recognition, or the ability to re-think, re-formulate or re-imagine social realities and affective states conditioned by existing political registers. Re-cognition can also signify a change in existing perceptual categories which are conditioned by racial schemas.

[59] Only 3% of the world's population is currently migrating, even though environmental loss, political conflict and dispossession continue apace. The significant resources necessary to move prevent the majority of those who could from migrating.

counter human smuggling and trafficking by blocking the movements of refugees and partnering with governments like the nominal authorities in Libya, Niger, Sudan, and Eritrea, -- in essence saving bodies from drowning in the Mediterranean-- Eritrean activists engage in a communicative politics with two publics in mind- the Eritrean diasporan public (Bernal 2014) and the wider Italian and EU publics. A large part of this engagement is centered on creating awareness of the human and political crisis afflicting Eritrea, in much the same way social movements have campaigned historically to raise public consciousness around large-scale social problems (Tarrow & Tilly 2015). This deeply humanist belief in the power of conscience, witnessing, and calling attention to the crimes of states and state actors has been the crux of human rights discourse in the latter half of the 20th century (Meister 2011). While the professionalization of human rights and its incorporation as a hegemonic form of governance (De Waal 2005; Meister 2011) has created new forms of power, the appropriation of human rights discourse by those whose rights have been systematically violated, I argue broadly, is distinct, both constraining and enabling various political interventions. Moreover, for Eritrean activists of the second generation, these rights include the right to mobility, to safe passage, and to the recognition of the permanent 'state of exception,' (DeWaal 2015) that has characterized the country since 2001. This is why some of the leading figures calling for the institutionalization of the Humanitarian Corridor in Italy have been Eritrean activists.[60] Eritrean activists drew on embodied and experiential knowledge gained through the experience of migrating through the Central Mediterranean to make wider critiques around the discursive construction of

[60] In Italy, advocates for the Humanitarian Corridor program include the Community of San'Egidio, Evangelical groups, and civil society groups like *Comitato Tre Ottobre,* headed by the Eritrean-Italian refugee activist Tareke Berhane, and high-profile members of the Catholic Church, including Father Mussei Zerai. The Humanitarian Corridor project brought 1,000 Syrians and 500 Eritreans directly from camps in Lebanon and Ethiopia to France and Italy respectively. It based its selection criteria on the basis of vulnerability and provides full integration services. It is meant to provide a model for EU member states to emulate.

refugeehood. They, nevertheless, made these critiques by engaging with the very materiality of death and by translating the pain of loss into language and performance.[61]

Death at sea both metaphorically and physically erases the traces of the lives of those who make these journeys. Moreover, the logic of death at sea is that the efforts to name and mourn the dead are suspended. The bodies of those who die are often difficult to locate, to trace. Those who travel by boat do not carry requisite identity documents; their bodies are carried away, sometimes washed ashore, often to non-European shores.[62] It is the inability to name, to see their faces, to bury the dead that suspends mourning. This is a special kind of violence, one that Jason DeLeon names as necro-violence, state violence that desecrates the corpses of the dead (2015). This is especially true for Coptic Tewhado Christians who comprise half of Eritrea's population and bury their dead on natal land, as one of my interlocutors emphasized. The inability to return home to bury one's dead is devastating under the cosmology of Tigrayan Christians, who are the majority of Eritrea's population and the largest group to leave Eritrea (Riggan 2018). In this climate, naming and remembering counter the violence of racialized death at sea. As Horsti and Klaus (2019) emphasize in relation to previous efforts to memorialize the Lampedusa sinking:

> The public display of the names of the dead is a reminder that they were social beings who had once been named, and were then called by their name and who are now missed and mourned…the act of naming… restores to the dead the ties that once bound them to members of a community that is largely outside of the field of vision of either the memorial's creators or the audiences imagined by them (148).

What makes this memorial unique is precisely the fact that the memorial's creators were invested in a communal politics that was outside of the immediate scope of vision of the memorial itself.

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[61] For a further discussion on loss and trauma see Bubankt & Lucht (2011).

[62] Media representations of the crisis focus on the spectacle of rescue, ignoring the cumulative tragedy that citizens of North African countries face in their exposure to the materiality of death. Traffickers have responded to push back schemes by using even more unseaworthy vessels. Most of these shipwrecks tend to occur close to land in Libyan and Tunisian territory.

Moreover, many of those involved in the planning of the memorial were survivors of similar journeys or were invested in a humanitarian politics that was grounded in the experiences of Eritrean refugees in particular. It was especially poignant that day to have Yosef read those names, Yosef who himself could have died at sea, who held onto dear life as the hurried 'captain' pushed people off of the overcrowded *gommone* in his recounting of his journey to Europe.

Those names not only recalled the dead and their hopes in life but instantiated a community of survivors who shared the experience of the Mediterranean crossing. Survival, though, came with significant structural challenges. Through the course of my fieldwork, my project was met with incredulity by Italians. Eritreans, unlike other ethnic communities, are largely illegible to many Italians. They are part of the *family*, as the consigliore of the *Partito Democratico,* told me, unlike *i filipini o marrocchini*. They are considered to be good, quiescent immigrants. They do not gather in *Piazza Maggiore*. They are ex-colonial subjects, subjects who do not demand reparations like the Libyans or Ethiopians did. To many Italians, Eritreans barely figured as one of many ethnic communities in Italy's changing demographic landscape. The internal conflicts and place making practices that Eritreans engaged in were largely invisible to outsiders, rendering it difficult for outsiders to properly decode what the memorial actually signified. Thus, the memorial was a performative act, an act of signification directed at both supporters of the Eritrean regime, and to a wider Italian public within a climate of racial retrenchment and *ressentiment* promulgated and expressed by the populist coalition of the Northern League and the MI5. Thus, the coded critique leveled at the Eritrean regime was lost to certain members of the memorial's public. We see this clearly when Yosef invokes *Merahi*, or the guide. *Merahi* in Tigrinya approximates to leader, while the Italian translation *guidatore*,

which Yosef used, fails to underscore the critique leveled at President Isaias Afwerki, who is often imagined as the embodiment of the independence movement by supporters of the PFDJ and to its detractors as the saboteur of Eritrea's post-independence trajectory.

The paradox of memorializing a phenomenon that is not past but is very much part of our contemporary moment was not lost to the architects of the memorial. The sense of urgency, the arguments that framed the ideological purposes of the memorial were part of the substance of the unveiling of the public art. The election of the populist coalition and the passage of the *Decreto di sicurrezza e migrazione*, or the eponymous 'Salvini' decree, put many refugee activists on edge. In late September 2018, when these debates took place, activists like Yosef emphasized the need to center the memorial on the experiences of Eritreans. Others, like Tewelde, adamantly argued that the memorial needed to address contemporary political developments in Italy, to expand outwards into larger questions of race, migration, and belonging. These arguments that framed the public memorial were markedly different from institutionalized commemoration of the migration crisis. With the exception of radical, anarchist collectives like the Sicilian *Akvusa*, institutional memorialization of the migrant crisis in Italy displayed a glaring absence of migrant voices, concerns, or even, the testimonies of survivors (Salerno 2017). For example, Daniel Salerno (2017) writes of locals' efforts to memorialize the 1997 sinking of the *Katër I Radës* which killed 83 Albanian emigrants fleeing the collapse of the Communist regime there. The sinking, in which an Italian Navy ship collided with the Albanian ship, underscored Italy's increasingly militarized response to boat migrants, a phenomenon that would only harden with time. In the essay, Salerno argues that efforts to memorialize the wreck, which excluded the voices and testimonies of survivors, failed to mourn those who lost their lives adequately. In

effect, the memorial served to reify existing discourses of Italian hospitality, while maintaining hostility toward outsiders.

This can be seen as an oversight that, in any case, depoliticizes deaths at sea within a wider culture of memorialization that takes limited interest in the politics that undergird global migration movements. The institutional memorializing of migrant death, under a climate of border externalization, paradoxically, puts the question of migrant death outside of our present moment, divesting a sense of politicized urgency in dealing with the phenomenon. In fact, I would argue that it enables powerful actors to abdicate responsibility for the policy decisions they make that cause these deaths. Moreover, mourning those who have died traditionally means that the dead count in the political community of mourners (Butler 2004). Who counts is a freighted moral and political question, especially in the context of state-sponsored violence (Nelson 2015); it is never a rational calculus, but one determining value in deeply unequal social formations. However, mourning by institutional actors in this context achieves another aim—it fits into a moral economy that privileges witnessing and allows powerful actors to articulate an admission of past evil, while suspending justice indefinitely for the victims of that past hurt in the present (Meister 2011).

Even the name that Italy's government has given to the October 3 sinking, the *day of memory for the victims of immigration,* is telling; it suggests that migrant death is part of a naturalized cosmology that underscores the ahistorical relationship between global North and South, in which the south indexes human backwardness and suffering. Immigration is not what causes these deaths; it is policy decisions made with the explicit knowledge that unauthorized border crossings should carry immense risks to persons (DeLeon 2015). Precisely by conceiving of migrant death as a phenomenon that is past, outside of our collective present, this conception

limits collective agency to confront policies that are promulgated to protect European publics from threats to the polity that migrants represent.

The Making of a Migration Crisis Imaginary

Before the increase in boat migration from Africa, Lampedusa figured little in the modern Italian imaginary of nationhood (Kushner 2016). A peripheral island that has suffered the brunt of administrative neglect, geographically closer to Africa than to mainland Italy, Lampedusa has served as a penal colony throughout the 19th and 20th centuries (Kushner 2016). It is currently a 'hot spot'—a place of swift identification and adjudication of asylum claims, return, administrative detention for irregular migrants, that serves an intelligence gathering apparatus for counter smuggling operations. Since Italy began dealing with irregular boat migrants in the 1990's with the fall of the Albanian regime, asylum and migration management has taken on an ad-hoc and improvisatory nature that has, over time, coalesced into a series of practices that have accreted into the current system in place (Albahari 2016).

It is precisely Lampedusa's peripheral nature- both geographically and as a part of the spatial imaginary of nationhood—that has allowed the island to serve as a node in efforts to contain migration from Africa to Europe. Before the October 3rd sinking, there were numerous strikes, fires, and protests by the migrants held in administrative detention on the island. These acts of resistance (Fiore 2018) were met with little public attention; that many of the detainees were Tunisians who left as a result of the 2011 uprising that was the catalyst for the Arab Spring mattered little and the management of migration focused on keeping migrants out of sight, under a policy of containment and sequestration (Albahari 2016).

While Lampedusa served as a node in the complex management of mobility in the Euro-African Mediterranean, Lampedusani, and Italians more generally, were unaccustomed with

encountering death or the human suffering that characterizes clandestine or irregular migration. This has been the consequence of the *Respingimenti* deals, or the push-back deals. Under Silvio Berlusconi's tenure as Prime Minister, Italy signed a number of agreements with Libya's Muammar Gaddafi, ensuring that migrant boats and migrant detention would fall under the authority of third and transit countries like Libya. This was matched with economic and development aid in reparations for Italy's colonial crimes in Libya (Fiore 2018). However, with the NATO-backed coalition that ousted Gaddafi in 2011, the pushback schemes failed to reduce the number of boat migrants, as the Libyan state experienced a generalized breakdown. Europe's border externalization schemes and their momentary breakdown from 2013 to 2016, created the sense of 'crisis,' as boats from Africa represented *un flusso* or an overwhelming tide of human migration that was seen as unprecedented.

Lampedusa followed the logic of compassion and repression (Fassin 2005) that structures European asylum laws. Public officials professed profound sadness, with Pope Francis inveighing against a European culture of indifference to the suffering of others (Hooper 2013). However, the sinking was met with a rash of military technologies meant to detect and 'prevent' further sinking through policies of border externalization, increased punitive measures against accused traffickers,[63] and surveillance of migrant and diasporan communities. Combined with media disinformation as to the causes and reasons for large-scale migration and the legal attenuation of rights to settle, and the erosion of family reunification policies, European publics have largely been inured to the consequences of major shifts in the government of immigration (Fassin 2011).

[63] The most recent case of mistaken identity involved an Eritrean refugee who was wrongly identified as a people smuggler. The case highlighted the dangers that Eritrean refugees face not only by the transnational Eritrean state but by authorities eager to prosecute cases of human smuggling.

Italian activists in solidarity with migrants would regularly invoke the imagery of the Mediterranean as *un cimitero*, or a graveyard. This reversal of the Mediterranean's traditional associations as a space of encounters served to reaffirm the notion of the Mediterranean as a space of hospitality and conviviality that emphasizes the nature of living with strangers (Ben-Yehoyada 2016), rather than a space that has turned into a routinized site of abjection and death. However, the October 3rd sinking marked a watershed moment because of the very materiality of death that the Lampedusani encountered with the sinking. Its highly mediatized nature in Italy, Europe, and the world, and its geographic proximity to Europe itself (Kushner 2016; Fiore 2018; Horst & Klaus 2019) made this a generative event (Kapferer 2005; 2015) of the migration crisis. Moreover, a sense of injustice and shock at existing policies, and the inappropriate response by authorities amplified a sense of the uniqueness of the event. For example, Lampedusani who rescued drowning migrants were charged with aiding and abetting illegal migration under the *Bossi Fini* laws; the survivors of the disaster were promptly put into administrative detention on the island and were barred from attending the state funeral in Agrigento (Kushner 2016). Finally, the 366 corpses were left in coffins in the hangers of the island's sole airport for over a month; islanders complained of the smell, leaving an imprimatur of the worst kinds of institutional abandonment and neglect (Horsti & Klaus 2019).

How did Eritreans react to such a tragic event, an event that had the whole world witnessing? Lampedusa fractured an already polarized diaspora. Detractors of the Eritrean regime were taken aback that officials from the Eritrean government were invited to the state funeral in Agrigento. The official response from the Eritrean government was to report that African migrants had died; only three days later did the Eritrean government confirm that those on the boat were Eritrean nationals. The imagery of rows of coffins in the Lampedusa airport

hangar, of women swathed in their white cotton veils, *netzela*, mourning the dead, were quickly appropriated by opponents of the Eritrean regime. When I attended the 2015 demonstration in Geneva in support of the UN Rapporteur's findings on Eritrea, as part of the demonstration, I carried a placard with precisely that iconic image with the words written '*sebkum abeyulyu*?' which translates to 'where are your kin/people?' Its iconicity derived from the fact that the image indexed the culture of martyrdom of hegemonic Eritrean nationalism (Bernal 2014; Bernal 2017; Redecker-Hepner 2009; Riggan 2016). Martyr's day is a national holiday of public mourning for *tegadeliti*, or freedom fighters who sacrificed their lives for the independence movement. As part of the secrecy with which the clandestine organization operated, and within a wider project of building networks of loyalty (Brown 2013) between fighters and the incipient nation-state, kin were not notified of the deaths of their family members who served in the front until de-facto independence in 1991. Loyalty to the incipient state was to take precedence over existing forms of solidarity. Moreover, kinship is also the vector through which the state maintains control over its subjects (Muller 2013; Riggan 2016), exercising various forms of intimate control. Mobilizing idioms of relatedness, affinity, being and belonging, serves to link the temporalities of past sacrifice and legitimate and ritualized forms of mourning attached to the hegemonic project of nation building, to the present in which those who died in Lampedusa were not accorded the same *right to be mourned*. It also connects kinship to larger notions of peoplehood, emphasizing the embodied and experiential over imaginative and discursive constructions of peoplehood. This troubles limited and exclusive parameters of belonging that nationalist discourse mobilizes in constructing peoplehood (Balibar &Wallerstein 1990).

The deaths of the Lampedusa refugees were mediated through existing symbolic logics governing notions of citizenship, belonging and nationalism in the Eritrean context. To employ

the imagery of martyrdom is to appropriate the highly potent symbolism of the 'Struggle' (Riggan 2016) and to cast it as a critique of existing politics. Political struggle, more generally, is built on the capture, re-casting, and appropriation of emotionally potent symbols (Kertzer 1988). While European publics were engaged in their own politics of mourning, the histories, symbols, and politics of the Eritrean diaspora went largely unremarked and invisible. As Horst & Klaus (2019) argue, this was due to the hegemonic hold of humanitarian discourse in mediating and making sense of the event:

> "Following the disaster of 3 October 2013, members of the Eritrean diaspora organized commemorations, which were often also protests against the regime that forced Eritreans to flee their country. For example, on 12 October, over a thousand Eritreans gathered in a Tel Aviv park for a memorial service [Hartman 2013]. These commemorations- and the fact that the dead had ties in the global North and could therefore be seen to also belong there- received little attention in the European media. We argue that this is a consequence of the humanitarian framework that informed the reporting of the Lampedusa disaster…" (146).

But for many Italians, the migration crisis also served to shore up a sense of beleaguered nationalism, that the number of refugees represented a threat to national identity, to Italians' hospitality in the face of strangers who had been taken advantage of, and to a sense of unfairness that Italians were burdened with policing Europe's borders. As *brava gente*- a good natured people who eschew violence- Italians experienced the migration crisis, and migration from the global south more generally, as a loss of innocence and an unmooring of their social worlds- a *crisis of presence* as Elizabeth Krauss (2018) argues in her ethnography of Chinese entrepreneurs and fast fashion workers in Prato, Italy. Borrowing from De Martino (1956), Krause argues that a *crisis of presence* signifies an inability for past and present to cohere into novel forms in the future, resulting in a state of suspension for those living through crisis. As Krause illustrates, this crisis of presence is felt by Italians in a context of contracted economic futures, as changing

economic and labor configurations under globalization upend existing labor arrangements and with that wider notions of community, belonging and individual subjectivities. Subsequently, these changes have transformed Italy from a country of emigration into a country of immigration. Moreover, increased immigration from the global South indexes this upended social world, as it is the most visible manifestation of wider economic and social changes under a context of austerity and labor market restructuring (Carter 1997; Cole 1997).

While much of the literature on immigration in the Italian context emphasizes this ambivalence in the face of strangers (Cole 1997; Giordana 2013), or the rejection and abjection of migrants (Lucht 2011), recent research has begun to underscore local forms of solidarity with migrants (Tazzioli & Waters 2018). This research has emphasized how solidarities are produced vis-à-vis existing local idioms and the memory of previous political struggles (Gray 2016; Narotzky & Smith 2006). For the local commune, then, the memorial served to reaffirm existing Italian nationalist discourses of the *good Italian*, the Italian who welcomes (*gli italiani che accogliono)* others. In Bologna in particular, Italians and Eritreans alike summoned the city's history as a bastion of leftism and anti-Fascist resistance as a historical and symbolic resource to counter the policies of the Northern League.

Bologna's Memorial for the Victims of Immigration: Politics of Place and Memorial as Social Process

The creators of the memorial understood the message that they hoped to impart, locating that message within the particular history of the city of Bologna and the role of Eritrean migrants there. It is important to unpack the processual nature of the memorial as a site of contestation, and, more importantly, as the site of the formation of new types of diasporan subjectivities. In order to understand the histories that creators of the memorial engaged with, it is important to

address the historical composition of the Eritrean community in Italy, more widely, and Bologna, in particular, in relationship to Italy's post-war left-wing politics.

Bolognina was the base of the Communist party. Piazza dell'unita, the site of the *svolta di Bolognina*, or the turning point of Bolognina (Kertzer 1996) where Achille Occhetto, general secretary of the PCI, announced the renaming of the party, effectively conceding that world Communism had ended with the fall of the Berlin wall. Bolognina also reflected the recent demographic trends in Italy. With a population of *stranieri* reaching 26%, (Comune di Bologna, 2016) the highest of any neighborhood in Bologna and three times higher than the national proportion of foreign-born residents, Bolognina was often spoken of as a dangerous and undesirable place by many Italians I encountered. My Italian interlocutors would caution against Piazza dell'unità as that was where one could buy illicit drugs. Walking on a sunny day, one is struck by the diversity in age, race and ethnicity amongst those who congregate in Piazza dell'unità. One of my favorite sights was watching Chinese, Arab, African and Italians playing basketball in the courts together. It indexed a cosmopolitanism, an uneasy one, that was missing in spaces like Piazza Maggiore, the heart of the city and the site of the municipal government. While Piazza Maggiore was monumental in size, lined with arcades that showcased the latest fashions, Piazza dell'unità had a lived-in sense that Italians often referred to as *degrado*, or degraded. If this was a consequence of institutional neglect in a context of austerity and economic crisis that has afflicted Italy (Herzfeld 2009; Muehlbach 2013) or of the unease that the presence of migrants created (Giordana 2013; Krause 2018) one could not say definitively.

For the government officials, like the mayor of Bologna and the president of Navile, the memorial celebrated this diversity. It was a moment to highlight *la convivialità* (the conviviality) or the ability "to live together," (*vivere insieme)* that characterized city life from its roots as a

bastion of anti-fascist resistance, to its role as the locus of Italy's radical left, and finally to its latest incarnation as a migrant friendly city (Pirò 2002; Haywood 2015). The mayor and the president of the *quartiere*[64], in particular, kept emphasizing that being and belonging to Bologna came from this act of living together—a vision of identity that was experiential, historical and situational, effectively contesting idioms of identity based on rootedness and consanguinity.

This radical history was also summoned by the head of *Eritrea Democratica*, as he began his introductions. Tedros was also the founder of an NGO called *Second Generation*, which sponsored activities for the children of immigrants and for Bolognese to interact with one another. A city resident for the last twenty years and an Italian citizen, he began his remarks by saying how happy he was that the city government approved this project. Flanked by the mayor of Bologna, the president of the *quartiere*, the archbishop of Bologna, and the head of the Islamic community, Tedros' presence as a leader and as a speaking subject was at odds with how migrants are discursively represented in Italy. He took the occasion to praise the city for how it has handled migrant integration; that it was a model is to be emulated across other communes in Italy. *Io credo che Bologna sia la città che porterà un cambiamento. (*I believe that Bologna will be the city that brings about change.) While other formerly leftist cities in Tuscany began to embrace the ideology of the Northern League party, electing right wing officials to public office in the former Red Belt, Bologna's city government embraced its identity as a migrant friendly city. Numerous film festivals, performances by migrants, and theater workshops addressed the theme of migration throughout my fieldwork. Migrants were part of a concerted politics of city-making (Simsek-Caglar & Glick-Schiller 2018) that linked Bologna's past as a site of anti-fascist

[64] *Quartiere* refers to district or neighborhood in Italian.

resistance to an imagined future as a cosmopolitan and welcoming city that countered the growing tide of right-wing racism in Europe.

The crowd listened attentively and patiently, encircling the speakers. Children grew impatient and played, while the adults maintained a somber silence. No fewer than seventy people attended the memorial, many of whom were friends of the organizers, or local retirees who saw their community center plastered with fliers advertising the event. Representatives from *Comitato Tre Ottobre,* and the head of the Islamic community of Bologna spoke at length of the politics of European borders. The head of the Islamic community, in particular, spoke passionately of the Syrian war, and of the global suffering that perpetual war inflicts on humanity. While these two speakers linked the memorial to broader geo-political concerns—border externalization schemes, the immense inequality between the Global North and South, and military interventions in the Middle East—they were in fact chosen by architects of the memorial to create solidarity with other groups similarly invested in a pro-refugee politics. Moreover, the architects of the memorial were in the minority in terms of intra-diasporic Eritrean politics in Bologna. Much of the Eritrean community in Bologna was invested in upholding the historical memory of the EPLF's diasporan organizing efforts in Bologna. The collective memory of the community was based largely upon the legacy of Festival Bologna, and of the relationship between the EPLF and the local representatives of the PCI.

Historical Composition of the Exile Community

The Eritrean community in Bologna was one of the first migrant communities in the city. Comprised mainly of young, female migrants, most of whom worked as live in domestic workers (Andall 2000), the community was emblematic of the post-colonial migration that characterized Italy's entry as a receiving country for migrants in the late 1970's and 1980's. Italy experienced

the “feminization of migration,” (Hoffman & Buckley 2013; Freeman 2011; Donato 2011) as part of a wave of gendered labor migration that spoke to shifts under globalization that sought out affective labor and care work in migrant receiving countries. While Eritreans were granted refugee status in many global north countries as a result of the guerilla war between Eritrea and Ethiopia, Italy, while a signatory to the UN Convention of the Rights of Refugees, never fully implemented the convention (Belloni 2018) with respect to its post-colonial migrants from the Horn of Africa. Therefore, Eritrean women were considered labor migrants and lacked international protection. This left many of them triply vulnerable, vulnerable under a migration system that had a poorly articulated system of rights, vulnerable as labor migrants within private homes in which it was difficult to guarantee labor protections against overwork, sexual harassment and exploitation, and finally, as refugees who had few protections against refoulement.

The first wave of Eritrean migrants, in the 1960’s and ‘70’s, were often students, young professionals and political figures. The second wave came shortly after the 1974 Ethiopian revolution under the Derg, and the internecine fighting between the Eritrean People’s Liberation Front and the Eritrean Liberation Front. At this time, the Derg engaged in a policy of total war against the secessionist group, which resulted in mass flight. This expanded the composition of the exile community as total war changed the ethnic, religious, and gendered demographic make-up of the diaspora. Under these conditions, many young women were recruited as domestic laborers by Italian Catholic organizations that were privy to the conditions in the country and used their resources to enable the movement of Eritreans to Italy. From data gathered in interviews with Eritreans of the first diasporan generation, much of this migration was mediated through personalistic networks between Italians who remained in the ex-colony, and Eritreans.

The class and gendered dimensions of the Eritrean diaspora in Italy marked it as distinct from diasporas in the United States, Great Britain, or in the Middle East. As young single women who were employed in highly gendered and increasingly racialized labor (Andall 2000) as domestic care workers, they formed the "masses," that the EPLF wished to transform under its revolutionary developmentalist program (O'Kane and Redecker-Hepner 2009). Many Eritreans were among the earliest beneficiaries of the United States' Refugee Resettlement Program, and of the introduction of the Family Reunification Act (Redeker-Hepner 2009). Subsequently, UNHCR offices in Rome relocated Eritrean refugees to the United States and Canada throughout the 1980's (Belloni 2018). The Eritreans who have remained in Italy, with the exception of some professionals who are well integrated in Italian society, are some of the least resourced and vulnerable migrants living in Western societies, a group that my interlocutors characterized as more vulnerable to the surveillance and forms of duress practiced by representatives of the Eritrean government in exile[65] (Bozzini 2011). Therefore, for many of the anti-regime activists, re-appropriating and 'claiming' Bologna as a site of resistance to both the Eritrean regime and a resurgent right-wing politics that had increasingly taken hold since the 'migration crisis,' was an act of identity legitimation. Moreover, Bologna's legacy as a site of anti-fascist resistance and its history as the base of the Italian Communist Party served as a symbolic resource that cemented a sense of belonging to the city, to Italy, more widely, and to the historic, anti-colonial left. Moreover, throughout much of the 1970's and 1980's Eritrea's nationalist movement was supported by the Arab states and Western socialists (Plaut 2016:72). While the PCI did not take a clear position on the question of Eritrean sovereignty, organizations like the Eritrean Relief Association operated in Bologna and were supported by university professors and the city

[65] See Bozzini work on transnational authoritarianism, as well as Bernal's 2013 essay on Eritrean cyber-politics

government (Eritrea Relief Association, 1974). There existed longstanding personal networks between members of the city government and representatives of the "Front." Therefore, this aspect of Bologna's history, largely invisible to most Bolognese, was important to diasporan subjectivities. When asked what Bologna's role in Eritrean independence was, most Eritreans would list forms of solidarity and exchange: the medical care of wounded ex-fighters in Ospedale San'Orsola, the transfer of funds through local banks to the revolutionary movement, the solidarity of some of the most prominent citizens of the city to the Eritrean movement, and the role of *Festival Bologna* in cultivating a sense of Eritrean-ness .As one of my interlocutors, an anti-regime activist, emphasized during an activist meeting, "if we can organize in Bologna, it sets an example to our brothers in Florence and Bari."

Therefore, the preparations for this memorial are situated in thick relations across time and space that made Bologna itself and its limited solidarity with the Eritrean movement a site of possibility for the earlier generation whose members experienced racialized and gendered exclusion and social anomie. We can also trace some of the hostilities toward recent arrivals to a wider city culture amongst diasporan subjects dominated by the history of the EPLF, which has found the question of recent refugees to be an affront to the notion of sacrificial citizenship (Bernal 2014) it has sought to cultivate amongst its subjects.

The Contemporary Legacy of Festival Bologna

City officials were also responding to comparatively recent events around the question of Eritrea. For city officials, too, memories of how the 40th anniversary of Festival Bologna in 2014 ended in violence were hard to shake off. The PFDJ (Party for Democracy and Justice), hoping to revive waning enthusiasm in the diaspora, re-launched *Festival Bologna.* The festival was met with protests by anti-regime activists. Moreover, there were accusations that security forces from

within the PFDJ were surveilling the festival and that demonstrators were met with violence (Plaut 2016). What local officials believed was an occasion of celebration and a moment for *co-paesani* or compatriots to congregate was in fact an Eritrean government sponsored event. Those academics close to the situation of Eritreans often spoke to me of the deep naivete of the PD (Democratic Party of the Left), and their lack of historical consciousness when it came to the relationship between the PCI and the EPLF, especially in light of Eritrea's current political crisis (Jourdan, personal communication 2017). This precedent, however, set the stage for anti-regime activists to compete for who would represent the interests of the Eritrean community in Bologna. Anti-regime activists hoped to compete for discursive space—the ability to set the terms of debate and to alter public consciousness, in the hopes of effecting larger scale transformations. Once preparations for the memorial were concrete, those associated with the PFDJ wanted to take part in the memorial. My interlocutors were left incredulous; their invitation to have the head of the Eritrean Tewhado Orthodox Church in Bologna speak at the memorial was rebuffed. While chatting with recent arrivals from *Centro Mattei* at the memorial, they also noticed the dearth of Eritrean faces. *Why*, they implored me, *this is important*. I had no answer to give them and felt a distinct sense of shame.

The preparations for the memorial were a year in the making and required logistical considerations by the government of the *quartiere* of Naville. Since the election of the coalition government of MI5 and *La Lega,* Bologna had been the site of civil and legal resistance to some of the coalition government's most hardline policies towards migrants and refugees. While preparations for the memorial began well before the election results were announced, there was a palpable fear that the *Partito Democratico* would lose a significant amount of its support. Following a meeting with city officials in which I was present and taking notes, Tedros, head of

Eritrean Democratica, joked about the *politica*, or the politics of anti-migrant sentiment in Italy. This meeting took place soon after the February 2018 shooting in Macerata, in which neo-Fascist Luca Traini shot six African immigrants. This was one of the first incidences of catastrophic violence against immigrants in Italy that would portend more attacks that would take place in the early tenure of the coalition government. Tedros joked, darkly, of the irony of me being mistaken for a refugee and being attacked, the irony of an American doctoral student conducting research having to fit into Italian racial imaginaries. He referred to me as *that which does not fit.* I laughed too, as I had grown accustomed to the gallows humor that developed between me and my interlocutors, indexing the growing rapport we shared. However, it was a fear that I felt keenly throughout my own fieldwork. The sense of being out of place, of being difficult to place for both diasporan Eritreans and Italians, the difficulty that people had in making sense of me, led to an immense sense of loneliness and anxiety, a sense of profound dislocation. My racial positioning in the field indexed refugeehood, even though I had a privileged passport, and a privileged pass to work in Italy.

Conclusion: Memory Politics and the Politics of Grief

Judith Butler's seminal work, *Frames of War* (2004), alerted social theorists to the cultural work involved in framing some lives as ungrievable in the context of the War on Terror. Butler argues that these lives, the lives of the uncounted, or the collateral damage of endless war, cannot be apprehended as living, as the registers through which we recognize life are already politically structured. Further, lives are precarious, dependent on social and political networks to sustain them (2004:23). This condition of interdependency creates a political obligation to the building and maintenance of networks that sustain life. Powerful media discourses and representations around this politics of life work to frame war (or in this case the war on illegal

migration or 'trafficking') so that those who are killed elsewhere—subject and racialized populations—are rendered as un-grievable, un-countable,[66] and immemorable.

To die without having been grieved involves a profound erasure; it is almost akin to never having lived at all. Grief, therefore, involves recognition, or a re-thinking, or re-patterning of consciousness that breaks out of these established frames to produce productive and messy entanglements (12). Butler's intervention is targeted at Western audiences, who are largely inured from the consequence of decisions made in their names. But for communities affected by large-scale state violence, in which state violence is mystified and erased, there is an urgent need to grieve those who have died and to hold powerful actors accountable for these deaths.

Grieving entails both to hold in memory those who have died and to resist efforts by powerful actors towards erasure, evasion and structural forgetting (Connerton 2008). Grief is a social process that illustrates how communities constitute themselves, define membership, and reproduce themselves over time. Therefore, grieving is intimately tied with memory politics and the wider reproduction of society. While grief itself is an affective state of loss, the act of grieving within the context of state violence can spur new forms of solidarities, create new affective states, and mobilize social movements committed to ending forms of state violence and remembering the victims of that violence.

Hence, memory politics have played an important role for victims of irruptive and large scale and state-sponsored violence. Efforts to hold authorities and institutions accountable for mass killing and other forms of political violence have relied on the power of collective memory

[66] No European governmental body is tasked with enumerated migrant death at sea. This also follows from US government's policies regarding migrant death at the US/Mexico border. Counting migrant deaths would entail culpability and admission of clear cognizance that border policies are meant to be deadly. By failing to enumerate migrant deaths, these deaths become invisbilized, unaccountable in a strict legal sense, and contribute to a wider cultural climate of racist sentiment against migrants. *See* DeLeon (2015).

projects (Stern 2004), which have focused their energies on countering cultures of institutional mendacity and structural forgetting (Feldman 2001). This has especially been the case in situations of political violence in which individual memories are subsumed by powerful nationalist narratives or in contexts in which voice and memory are denied to victims of violence in the aftermath of state-based violence (Feldman 1991).

Research conducted on memory politics in the context of Eritrea's diaspora has emphasized the importance of the "struggle" in the constitution of political subjectivities (Redeker-Hepner 2008), and of the freighted nature of the past and of 'memory,' in the context of total war, displacement and the revolutionary movement (O'Connell 2011). Victoria Bernal (2017) argues that powerful official narratives around martyrdom and sacrifice enforce silence amongst Eritrean diasporan subjects. Personal and individual experiences of suffering during Eritrea's protracted war for independence are subsumed under nationalist narratives that base collective identity on shared suffering in service of revolutionary nationalism. Revolutionary change under the auspices of the EPLF entailed the total and radical restructuring of society. In referencing Kligman's work, Bernal notes that:

> Eritreans share experiences not only with other post-colonial and racialized populations but also with other post-socialist populations that similarly were caught up in radical, dogmatic attempts to remake society through centralized politics from which no dissent and no legal means of escape were permitted [(Kligman 1998;Yurkchak 2005) 25].

Memorializing projects that run counter to the hegemony of the EPLF and now PFDJ's state and nationalist building projects are rare. Bernal's inclusion of the counter-hegemonic martyr's archive on Dehai.org, which lists the political figures who have been disappeared since a de-facto state of emergency was declared in 2001 in the aftermath of the 1998-2000 border war, illustrates the political stakes of such a move. The memorial re-appropriated the discourse of martyrdom and the sacrifice of the *tegadelit,* or freedom fighters, that dominates nationalist

narratives. It became a counter-hegemonic project that mourned the disappeared and celebrated their sacrifices as part of an aspirational and future *demos* that has been indefinitely deferred.

While Eritrea's political culture is fractured along lines of ethnicity, religion, generation and the various waves of exile communities, the experiences of the post-nationalist war generation coalesce around shared experiences of forced migration and transit. The experiences of transiting, of being clandestine, and of the contours of migrating to Europe and elsewhere for the post-nationalist generation mark shifts in Eritrean political subjectivities. While many young migrants, most of whom migrate during adolescence or the nebulous category of youth (Belloni 2019), do not necessarily articulate a politicized critique of their circumstances, they do see their own identities as distinct from the earlier generation. In the course of fieldwork, members of the second diasporan generation would refer to themselves as "we who crossed the sea," a phrase that indexes both a distinction from the earlier generation and the seed of a collective political subject. The Mediterranean crossing figures centrally in the narratives of Eritrean migrants; it is the collective traumatic experience of a generation, the experience that marks a historic shift and with it a shared narrative of survival and resiliency.

While the phenomenon of migrant death at sea is part of our collective present, efforts to memorialize the Lampedusa sinking by Eritreans inaugurate a fundamental and necessary shift for the Eritrean diaspora. It makes for the possibility of an articulation of different models of citizenship and belonging both in the European Union but amongst diasporan subjects who are nevertheless intimately tied to the de-territorialized Eritrean state (Redecker-Hepner 2009; Riggan 2016). To put the responsibility of migrant death at the hands of both European border policies (and the policies of the Italian state more specifically), and broader Eritrean politics is to articulate a vision of historical responsibility and indebtedness, to what we owe one another and

what it means to live together, *a vivere insieme,* as the creators of the memorial and the mayor of Bologna emphasized.

Directing and Caring for the Future: Contesting State Power in Transit

Introduction

On January 7, members of an Eritrean NGO I volunteered with organized a Coptic Orthodox Christmas for recent Eritrean refugees in *Centro Mattei*, a secondary refugee reception center in Italy's SPRAR system. We had reserved the large *aula* in Centro Zonarelli, the inter-cultural center just outside the center of Bologna. Each one of us had given ten euros to help pay for the food, decorations and utensils for the event. I arrived early to help with the set up. My first job was to make sure to collect the ten-euro donation from everyone there whom I judged would be able to do so. Ahmed believed that fewer people would shirk their responsibility in the face of someone who was a guest. He worried that if he had taken on this task, friends would shrug their shoulders and say, 'next time,' and next time would pass without mention. Ahmed gave me a conspiratorial nudge as he sent me on my way, the smiling debt collector that I was.

Members of the Eritrean community were invited to eat, dance and drink with the young men who were temporarily housed in the center. Even though these young men were effectively passing through Bologna, either relocated to secondary shelters across Italy or when, having grown frustrated with the refugee reception system in Italy, gone on clandestine journeys to Northern Europe, these gatherings were meant to instantiate a sense of community while giving new refugees the sense that they were included in a transnational exile community. This informal welcoming work on the part of the NGO augmented and surpassed the welcoming work of the state and was meant to instantiate a sense of community out of the ephemeral socio-political and embodied realities of transit migration (Vogt 2018).

This afternoon was no different from other events I attended with my friends and collocutors. Similar events transpired anytime there was a major Christian holiday, and with it

we would have two celebrations, one to mark the Roman Catholic date and one to mark the Coptic Orthodox one. During these events, mostly young men from *Centro Mattei* would be invited to eat, dance, and celebrate with their co-nationals. A grey and imposing concrete structure, much closer in architecture to a prison or detention center, than a center for care, it housed refugees whose identities had been verified and who were then deemed eligible for asylum. Many of the members of the NGO I volunteered with worked in *Centro Mattei*. I had visited the center when I donated a number of items of women's clothing to the women housed in the center, hoping to ease some of their burdens. Members of the NGO believed that it was best for refugees to leave the center as often as they could, whether it meant riding the bus, or as Dawit had asked me, to take a young woman to language classes and help buy her a monthly bus pass so that she could ride the bus without being ticketless.

Notwithstanding the fact that these gatherings had become routine, it was rare to ever see the same person twice in these types of gatherings. The only time I ever saw someone who was transiting across Europe for a second time was at Bologna's central train station. I had met him two months earlier, shortly after he and a group of men had disembarked from Sicily. Of the five young men with him on that day, he was the only one who spoke to me. The day I saw him for a second time, our eyes locked, but I could tell he did not remember me. Many of these young people like him were only passing through. But this sense of passing through also affected those whose status in the community seemed more secure. Even if people in the community stayed, sometimes for years, I would return for another summer or year of fieldwork and that person with whom I had formed a tentative friendship would be gone. It was apparent to me that Italy was not a country in which a significant number of my interlocutors aspired to remain[67] (Tuckett

[67] These sentiments of wanting to leave were more pronounced amongst young men of generation Asylum. Many of them wished to rejoin partners who had successfully resettled in Sweden and other Northern European countries.

2018; Belloni 2019). Since 2013, the numbers of Eritreans has dropped significantly in the community from a high of 572 people in the Metropolitan city of Bologna in 2013 to 421 at the close of 2019 (ISTAT 2021). In 2015, the Eritrean population in Italy numbered approximately 13,500 people (Amnesty International 2015); in 2019 that number declined to 8,035 people (ISTAT 2021). Moreover, in 2015 nearly 39,000 Eritreans arrived on Italian soil, but only 730 people applied for asylum there (Belloni 2018). But I often wondered what this did to communal life, to have so many friends disappear, sometimes into successful resettlement in a more prosperous location, sometimes into a life of illegality, and at other times returned after having failed in these attempts to make a better life elsewhere.

Subsequently, during these gatherings in which my interlocutors would attempt to make community out of this disjointed affective reality, we would distribute clothing and other necessities that had been donated by the wider community to these recent arrivals. On this particular occasion, after the festivities had come to a close and as I set out to distribute the items that had been donated—mostly women and children's clothing to a group of young men—some of the young men grew increasingly frustrated, holding up the children's clothing, items like fuchsia-colored sweaters and capri cargo pants, to their frames and tossing these items aside. *Ewa*, one of them exclaimed "what will this do for us!" I, too, was surprised by the number of women's and children's clothing and how at odds it was with empirical reality. As I surveyed the room there was not one woman nor child. But as is often the case, the image of need, of deserving others was obviously gendered—it was women who gave (Malkki 2006), women who cared and racialized women who were in need of care and became the objects of care. Yet that evening and countless other evenings contravened these easy assumptions and stereotypes. In

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Second generation Eritrean-Italians had more ambivalent feelings about being both Eritrean and Italian, but patterns of onward mobility were not necessarily demarcated by generation, immigration status, or gender.

2015, nearly 70% of asylum claims lodged in the EU by Eritrean asylum seekers came from men (EUROSTAT 2020). These skewed gender dynamics, however, were not unique to Eritreans. With the de-facto attenuation of family reunification laws many young men erroneously believed that their partners could join them at a later date, if they had partners to begin with. Nevertheless, family fragmentation and the accompanying lack of romantic or sexual intimacy characterized many of these young men's lives well before their migratory journeys, one of many detrimental consequences of mass militarization in Eritrea (Birgir 2017; Van Reisen & Maware 2017).

In this chapter, I argue that Eritrean men construct alternate forms of community through the course of their migratory journeys. In particular, I focus on the role of settled Eritreans in 'directing' the conduct of recent arrivals through the care practices I highlight above. Here I refer to direction in the Foucauldian sense as an open-ended practice, one which is not invested in the coercive force of the law but that which structures a potentially liberatory politics; direction is most importantly, consensual in nature and characterized by an incomplete reciprocity (Jobe 2014). By 'caring' for refugees, more or less settled Eritreans construct alternate forms of political community, hoping to instantiate shared values of mutual care, inter-dependence and social solidarity out of the ephemeral embodied, social and political realities of transit migration. I locate this ethics of care within the social realities of transit migration. Moreover, I argue that 'transit' emerges not only from the discursive construction of transit migration, including the laws that criminalize transit, but that 'transit' describes a limitless liminality, a protracted experience of insecurity and a sense of never having arrived that characterizes the lives of refugees and migrants in Italy (Lucht 2011; Tuckett 2018). This sense and experience of transit describes a state of being not only for those who are currently migrating, but those who have

lived in Italy for decades. It is in this social reality that care takes on its political and politicized contours.

Care here is conceptualized using both the paradigms of Aristotelian, Foucauldian ethics as care of the self, or simply, as ethical self-fashioning (Foucault 1980, 1984; Mahmood 2005, Das 2006, Lambek 2010) and feminist ethics of care which understands care as a multi-scalar, relational practice that collapses Western binaries around emotion and reason (Noddings 1989; Gilligan & Richards 2008). Feminist ethics of care grounds care as a practice constitutive of human sociality and in turn political justice. By moving away from "the institution of marriage or categories of kinship, sexual identities, gender inequality, or power differentials generally, to a concern for the *actual situations* [emphasis added] in which people experience the need to care and be cared for and the political economies of their distribution," [(Borneman 1997: 583) Malara & Boyleston 2016:43) I locate transit migration as the site in which care is enacted by non-state actors. Further, in transit, Eritreans experience a social reality marked by its ephemerality, a deeply and paradoxically grounded ephemerality, in which one's body is subject to the threat of violence, yet one's social subjecthood is effaced. Nevertheless, unlike the 'social death' experienced by the enslaved person (Patterson 1982), transit migration—characterized too often by its illegalized and clandestine nature-- is paradoxically marked by a sociality that both upends and creates new and contradictory intimacies (Agier 2016, Vogt 2018). For example, my interlocutors emphasized the experience of transiting as characterized by emotions of intense intimacy/anomie and loneliness, and trust/distrust. Moreover, even if transit signified a limitless liminality, major life events still took place in transit. Some of my interlocutors married and formed lasting partnerships in detention; one of my interlocutors gave birth shortly after having disembarked in Sicily; some witnessed friends die en route while transiting across the

Mediterranean. Consequently, this liminal space of transit represents not only the interstitial space between departure and arrival, but also an affective state of never having arrived and of movement between socio-political space and in and out of legal-juridical categories as a much less spectacular, but quotidian experience.

As I have emphasized, transit's most deleterious effects are felt—those with illegalized/insecure status live under profound insecurity on a phenomenological level (Willens 2007; Andersson 2014a, 2014b; DeLeon 2016; Vogt 2018). In transit one is moving and being moved, quite literally as both an object and subject of humanitarian detention (Albahari 2017). That seeming lack of agency, of being subject to an oppressive and unremitting state power, was countered by the work of care that I reference above. Care was meant to give hope, or *tesfa*, as an emotional resource that gave those who received it the capacity to care for themselves as a form of self-belief or capacity building (Massumi 2015) and in turn care for others. Most importantly, in structures of social abandonment, even the asymmetric giving that I describe comes from an acute emotional and social need to establish social bonds out of this transitoriness. As my ethnographic vignettes will illustrate, the reality of transit, I argue more broadly, troubles categorical distinctions within migration studies that hinge on binaries between sending and receiving contexts, migrants and citizens, refugees and economic migrants and diaspora and nation (Ehrkamp 2019).

Defining Transit

Categorical definitions of transit migrants, or transit migration come from EU policy prescriptive papers from the early 1990's (Düvell & Collyer 2014), which expanded the ambit of migration management from within the European Union to encompass the states that border the EU. The recent anthropological interest in transit migration, however, comes from a recognition

that powerful states are increasingly tolerating, at best, or at worst, deploying extra-legal violence against unauthorized migrants in interstitial spaces that confound simplistic definitions of state sovereignty (Andersson 2014; Vogt 2018). For example, Coutin (2005) defines transit as "the time and space when migrants are most bereft of state protection, and therefore, most vulnerable to crime, exploitation, injury and death" (196). Nevertheless, as a category of analysis, transit migration is difficult to pin down (Düvell & Collyer 2014). De-emphasizing state power/violence in defining transit migration, Papadopoulou-Kourkoula (2008) defines it instead as "the situation between emigration and settlement that is characterized by indefinite migrant stay, legal or illegal, and may or may not develop into further migration depending on a series of structural or individual factors" [4, (Düvell & Collyer 2014: 14)]. As Düvell & Collyer emphasize (2014) there is no consensus as to what transit migration is, as the term indexes migration *a posteriori* and future migrant intentionality to migrate into European space, a hierarchically demarcated space with Occidental Europe in its center (Mahmood 2018). Therefore, transit spaces describe not only extra-European space, but hierarchically demarcated intra-European space.

This expansive definition of a transit migrant is problematic for its unstated assumptions. The unasked question, who is a transit migrant, instead, looks towards how migrant typologies act as subjectivizing and racializing mechanisms (Silverstein 2004) and what they tell us about changing configurations of state power. Because so much of the definition of what constitutes transit migration hinges on assumptions regarding migrant intentionality towards further migration, it is unclear as to what transit does analytically. Moreover, transit migration does not describe an actual social process-- unlike transnationalism as an analytic-- insofar that it describes expansive and expanding state efforts towards migrant deterrence premised on logics

of preemption (Massumi 2015). Transit migration then instantiates both a "legibility effect…the production of both a language and a knowledge for governance and of theoretical and empirical tools that classify and regulate collectivities, and a spatialization effect…[which] produ[ces] boundaries and jurisdiction" (Trouillot 2001:126). Put simply, transit migration describes the boundaries of what constitutes European space and who belongs in it. Nevertheless, transformations in categories have lived effects and it is for this reason that I locate transit as a productive space to interrogate racializing technologies and resistances to them.

Put simply, a transit migrant is a racialized non-EU citizen who resides in the periphery of Europe, in countries like Greece and Italy, and in a periphery that includes non-EU states, like Morocco or Niger, that border the European Union. This simplistic definition reflects the various legal and discursive measures employed to expand migrant detention, surveillance and containment; moreover, these measures are inscribed on the bodies of racialized subjects. Very often, it is Black Europeans who are the targets of border control policies, as their bodies signifiy the border itself (Palidda 2011; Mbembe 2019). For example, as one of my interlocutors emphasized, shortly after having been returned from the United Kingdom, it was much easier for his Albanian friends to evade the daily, humiliating document checks at bus stops and train stations. Another interlocutor described her humiliation after producing her Italian identity card to a French border guard, whom she overheard say that he just didn't believe that she was an Italian citizen, even in the face of documents that attested to that reality. These daily slights accumulated and attested to the power of the ocularity of race (Omi & Winnant 2015), its visuality that is nevertheless founded in the historical realities of chattel slavery and European colonialism and neo-colonialism in the African continent.

Notwithstanding the fact that states are increasingly invested in preemption and deterrence, transit also holds a dual meaning; it is also an imaginative and discursive space that reflects refugees' aspirations to move on to a better elsewhere. This moving on to an elsewhere though, is not without risk. In historical countries of transit, like Italy, many of my interlocutors, some of whom had secured international protection, and some who were even naturalized Italian citizens, engage in illegalized practices to leave Italy and gain citizenship elsewhere. Yet, it often goes unremarked that many white Italians also aspire to leave Italy. For example, in 2011 the number of Italians hoping to secure a livelihood elsewhere was higher than the number of non-EU migrants entering Italy for the same reason (Fiore 2016:4). I use this statistic as a counterpoint to underscore how non-EU movements are criminalized, pathologized or treated as aberrant, with significant resources expended to understand the phenomenon of unauthorized migration or the intentions of migrants who face increasing risks in their migratory journeys. Nevertheless, many naturalized Eritreans leave Italy for the same reasons that many young Italians aspire to leave the country, with the added difficulty of living in a society marked by institutional and popular racism. Describing a social and legal environment in which "Eritreans had to carry the racism of [Italian society] on their backs," many of my interlocutors described the frustrations of living in a society with little social and economic mobility as the main impetus to make risky onward journeys.

In transiting, my interlocutors were still subject to legal and extra-legal violence and detention that they had experienced in sites like the US/Mexico border, Canada, or in detention in places like Switzerland and the United Kingdom. This exposure to both legal and extra-legal violence occurs well after having secured some form of legal status in Italy as refugees or in the process of making refuge elsewhere. Nevertheless, those whom I spoke to who arrived in Italy

during the 1970's and 1980's also engaged in the same clandestine means to enter the territory. Whether this included using fake passports to enter the territory, paying land smugglers to enter Sudan, or living in Italy without legal status or with precarious legal status, what differentiated the experiences of those who arrived during the 'Nationalist' generation (Redecker-Hepner 2014) and those who have arrived in this contemporary moment are the actual stakes of migration. For example, Milena Belloni describes the logics of Eritrean refugees transiting through Europe in this moment using the concept of entrapment (2019) in which at each stage of their migratory journeys Eritreans find themselves trapped with ever higher stakes attached to onward migration.

Taking into account these heightened stakes involved in migration and with aiding those who are migrating, I position the work of directing the conduct of young Eritreans in the process of migrating as a radical political praxis, one which illuminates the teleological limits of border policies (Foucault 1984). By risking arrest, termination from work, and being subject to campaigns of disinformation to care for refugees, to provide for quotidian comforts, to speak the truth regarding the situation that migrants face, my interlocutors were engaged in imagining an 'otherwise' to anti-migrant policies (Foucault 1984). Moreover, through caring for others they were also engaged in ethical self-fashioning, embodying and crafting alternate forms of political subjectivity. However, I contrast this care with the work of caring for kin in the clandestine border crossing (Hung 2019), by highlighting the public nature of this kind of affective labor, its largely unreciprocated nature, and that it takes place between more or less strangers. As many of my interlocutors emphasized, Eritreans aid kin in transit regardless of their political affiliations, but they do so secretly. Moreover, this practice is also unlike humanitarianism, which represents an unreciprocated gift-- one which maintains and instantiates hierarchy (Fassin 2005, Ticktin

2011, Muehlebach 2018)-- in that it is future oriented (Brun 2016) and imagines gift-giving as a liberatory practice that transforms individuals living under various forms of duress.

Eritreans who migrate and transit in significant numbers (Redecker-Hepner 2009; Bernal 2014) find creative ways to maintain community out of dispiriting social and political realities. This chapter takes seriously this murky concept of transit and Italy as a trans-generational space of transit, illustrated by the experiences of fragmented families across the political and legal spaces Eritreans inhabit, to underscore how care has come to be both criminalized and politicized in this moment. First, to illustrate the daily practices of care that constitute political community I will examine daily, embodied practice. These practices include visiting hospitalized refugees, clothing donation drives and holiday celebrations, highlighted above. Together they work to instantiate a set of relational practices out of the uncertain migratory trajectories that characterize many refugees' lives, practices that counter regimes of racialized abandonment and social anomie that arise in the ephemeral social-political and embodied realities of transit migration. Second, I look to the work of *tesfa* or hope that those who care for refugees summon as both an embodied and material practice, one that shapes ethical self-fashioning for givers of care and directs the receivers of care into moral and novel ways of being Eritrean.

Additionally, care re-works definitions of masculinity in which intimate heterosexual relationships are foreclosed to men by radically skewed gender dynamics. Based on my observations and backed by demographic data published by the city of Bologna, Eritrean men outnumber women by a ratio of two to one. Moreover, many of the women of the community, referred to as *adetat,* or the mothers of the revolution, were considerably older and aligned themselves with the nationalist project. I sensed that for many of the young men I encountered, young men whom I would describe as the children of the revolution, social rejection by these

same styled, politically symbolic mothers radically reconfigured the terms of sociality and political love and loyalty (Malara & Boylston 2016). In some cases, mothers rejected their biological sons under unclear intimate circumstances that followed the contours of the political, gendered and generational cleavages that I describe. This rejection also indexed the patchwork manner in which men had to reconstitute not only the social but the notion of the political, as the terms of Eritrean identity is overwhelmingly political in its nature (Bernal 2013, Redecker-Hepner 2009, Riggans 2016). These sets of social and political constraints gave way to a space in which more settled refugees took on a kind of brotherly love, caring for those who are in many ways, intimate strangers, based partially within a disinterested humanitarian ethos that was contradictory in its nationalist, politicized and instrumentalist nature.

The Work of Welcoming

Eritrea Democratica was unique in that of the many migrant associations in Bologna, it was able to successfully gain NGO status. This legitimized the statements the group released and gave a professional veneer to their activities; it also made them unlike cultural organizations in that by pursuing NGO status they were trying to impact policies and decision-making on a local scale. Tedros, the head of the group, was adept at local organizing. Without his stewardship of the group, *Eritrea Democratica* would not have been able to scale up its activities and would have remained just a collection of like-minded friends. Most of its members, unlike Tedros who was a naturalized Italian citizen and university graduate, were refugees whose status in Italy was provisional. Their activities with the NGO were relegated to weekend gatherings over pastries and coffee, as many of the members of the group worked nightshifts for the postal service or had to care for their own small families. On another related and important note, NGO-ization was also a strategic move in shoring up counter-hegemonic power within the politically fractured

Eritrean diaspora in Italy. When Italian politicians or media approached migrant communities for insights or statements as to developments in their home countries, *Eritrea Democratica* was able to parlay NGO status to lend legitimacy to its public statements and jockey for a space in local politics.

With the rise of established and growing migrant communities, community associations and women-led intercultural associations (Bernacchi 2015) took on a greater role in migrant advocacy. Specifically, in the local government of immigration in Italy, migrant groups are defined as discrete, bounded groups in which nationality defines membership. Unfortunately, these groups can only petition for recognition at the local level around largely symbolic issues (Però 2007). In the case of *Eritrea Democratica,* the communications NGO founded by Eritrean refugees, culture is not what is at play. The NGO, which blends the humanitarian ethos of witnessing with its attendant cultivation of political conscience and Eritrean nationalist aspirational politics, advocates for reform in Eritrea and the recognition of Eritrean asylees' rights in the EU. Nevertheless, an overlooked, yet significant aspect of the NGO's political advocacy centers on meeting recent Eritrean refugees' immediate affective, embodied and materialist concerns. Outside of its formal participation in local politics, the NGO regularly organized holiday parties, clothing drives, and medical care for Eritrean refugees in *Centro Mattei*. For example, members of *Eritrea Democratica* would also regularly interface with local humanitarian organizations like *Labas* to provide legal aid for those who were wrongly put in detention. As critics of the Eritrean government, their official activities focused on crafting official statements regarding critical events that impacted Eritrean refugees at the EU-wide and national level, and events happening within Eritrea proper. The other, more unofficial labor that the group engaged in was around helping recent arrivals integrate into Italian society. This

welcoming work, much like the discourse around *accoglienza* or refugee reception, was meant to augment formal reception services that many of the members of the NGO worked in as cultural mediators.

Orthodox Christmas and the Racialized and Gendered Terms of Caring

The festivities for Orthodox Christmas took place in a recently re-purposed grocery store on the outskirts of the city. The space was partitioned by a series of ornate fabrics meant to hide the makeshift nature of the space, with its plywood walls, painted black, and recently built stage. The space now belonged to a local theatre group, *Cantiere Metticci,* that was composed of local Italian and refugee performers. Yosef, who had developed his oratory skills performing with the group, had arranged for the space and had assembled a number of local volunteers to provide the sound system and catering for the evening. We were each asked to bring a dish for a potluck style meal in which we had arranged for a DJ, and brought donations of clothes, diapers and infant products for the sole young woman of the *Mattei* group. I had spent the afternoon cooking curried lentils that I had accidentally over-spiced. After a 45-minute bus ride, my sister and I had arrived. (She came to visit me for the winter holiday to help soothe my intense loneliness.) We arrayed all the food we had brought on a long wooden table. As soon as I arrived, my sister and I were commissioned to serve food to the guests by Abeba, the woman who had cooked the majority of the evening's feast. Abeba was a former guerilla fighter who had been relocated through the humanitarian corridor program. She and her five children were given an apartment, provided language training and significant assistance in navigating the immigration system. She immediately called out to my sister and me, referring to us as the *girls*, and told Tedros, the leader of the group, that we need to start serving food right away. Tedros ceded to her requests while stifling his laughter, knowing that I had been summoned to do woman's work, which my

doctorate should have exempted me from, as he often joked, and that my sister was there solely as a guest. Unlike the common expectations that women volunteer their labor, Tedros made sure that Abeba was generously paid for the food that she and her daughters cooked.

As I walked to the restroom, I spied Tekeste speaking to two teenagers. I stopped to say hello and introduce myself. Tekeste, who had survived the Mediterranean crossing and detention in Libya, patiently explained to the two young men who were early to the preparations that 'no Eritrean is unemployed here in Bologna; we take care of each other.' The two young men remained silent; I struggled to read their impassive facial expressions. I think Tekeste wanted them to remain in Bologna rather than trying their luck in places like *Calais*[68]. Tekeste was an active member in the postal worker union. Alongside his Italian colleagues, Tekeste led pickets against the 'Amazonization' of the postal service. A young father of two, he exuded patience, taking on a newly won paternalistic role with the young men from the center.

As we continued with our set up, Kiros brought 30 teenagers from *Centro Mattei* with him. During the evening's festivities, I counted one woman among the 30 odd young men and adolescents present. She brought her infant and partner with her. Kiros, on the other hand, as chaperone of our guests or *agaish*, was one of the first Eritreans to arrive through the *Corridoio Universitario*, the university corridor before the program had been fully institutionalized. The program, which was one of *Eritrea Democratica's* earliest achievements, selects a small number of refugees from the *May Ani*, *Adi Harush*, and *Hitsats* refugee camps in Ethiopia to study at the University of Bologna. Kiros had graduated from the faculty in law with a specialization in

[68] Calais is a transit camp that grew out of the border between France the UK. In 2016, it was demolished by French authorities. At its height the slum housed close to 8,000 people *see Human Rights Watch Report.* In 2015, the camp became a potent visual for the migration crisis. Although there are no clear figures for how many people resided in the camp, Eritreans represented a significant number of transit migrants still encamped well after the 2016 demolition.

international relations. Over the course of the year, I noticed that Kiros grew increasingly frustrated by the lack of career mobility or intellectual stimulation his position as a cultural mediator afforded him. He was stuck in racialized care work; cultural mediation, in which members of particular national and ethnic communities act as interpreters, translators and counselors of recent refugees, a privileged occupation for members of minoritized communities. Cultural mediators often only work with members of their own communities through both a process of self-selection and language skills (Però 2007). The position is one of the few career options available to both recent migrants and those of the second generation that does not entail dirty or difficult itinerant and informal manual labor (Tuckett 2018, Cole 2007). Nevertheless, as raced subjects, conceived of as permanent outsiders of the Italian nation (Hawthorne 2017, Pesarini 2017), African cultural mediators had few paths for upward career mobility.

As we continued preparing for the event, an Italian volunteer with a local NGO began chatting with my sister in English. My sister told her that she was learning a few words of Italian on the app *duo-lingo*. The volunteer, who spoke from a place of genuine sincerity, told my sister that with time she would be able to learn Italian. My sister remarked that she didn't need to. The volunteer looked incredulous and asked why. Maybe she hadn't detected my sister's pronounced American accent, or if she were more discerning, her slight Californian lilt. My sister explained casually that she would be returning to Los Angeles in a few weeks. The volunteer's eyes widened in an expression of confusion and embarrassment. She then quickly excused herself from our company. My sister and I chuckled, but it was clear from that encounter, and from future similar encounters that I would have over the course of my fieldwork, that refugeehood and the attendant term *migranti* had been increasingly schematized around African-ness and Blackness, more generally. Even though Italy's migrant communities are characterized by a

hyper-diversity, Black tourists[69], Black students and Black Italians were often assumed to be recent refugees. Moreover, the country's significant number of refugees and migrants from Ukraine, Russia, Albania and other post-socialist countries outside of the EU, means that in reality refugees transcend racial categories. Notwithstanding the fact that the term migrant, as a legal-juridical category applies to anyone coming from outside of the EU, the emic understanding of Black people is that they are conceived solely as migrants in Italian popular culture. This has been partly shaped by media representations of the spectacle of African boat migration that reflects both contemporary efforts to keep Africans out of the EU at increasing human and financial costs (Andersson 2014b) and the unresolved tensions around the colonial and fascist past. Moreover, for Black Italians, including those who have attained juridical citizenship or who have citizenship through *jus sanguinus*, or the law of blood, via either a parent or grandparent of Italian heritage, the visuality or the ocularity of race (Omi & Winnat 2015), marks Black Italians as 'matter out of place,' to borrow from Mary Douglas (1960), relegated solely to the makeshift encampments and squat occupations in urban peripheries that characterize the imaginary of the migrant ghetto, to begging in the streets or as dependents in refugee camps. As Angelica Pesarini (2017) notes, "in contemporary Italy the idea of Blackness associated with Italian-ness still appears, to some, an impossible semantic match, an irreconcilable

[69] A popular meme at the time of this research showed Magic Johnson and Samuel L. Johnson surrounded by high end goods in Forte Di Marmi, the popular and high-end tourist beach town on the Tuscan coast. The caption then read "Boldrini's resources in Forte dei Marmi shop at Prada with our €35. Share this picture if you are outraged!!!" referring both to Laura Boldrini, the president of the Lower House and a champion of migrant rights and to the common misinformation around the 35 euro per day per migrant that each center of welcoming receives to support its total operating costs. Boldrini is often the target of right-wing death threats. Bottura, a left-wing satirist, created the meme in an effort to highlight the absurdity of Italian debates on migration. While most Italians understood the satirical content of the meme, it was nevertheless taken up by *CasaPound*, the radical right political movement that has its home in Rome.

paradox." Black Africans were at best dependents and at worst 'animals'[70] and criminals in public discourse and imagery.

Within the institutional structure of refugee and asylum care these racial hierarchies are also pronounced in terms of job security, status and pay. Because the system of *accoglienza* employs a significant number of Italian university graduates in the liberal arts, the majority of care workers are white Italians. Moreover, cultural mediators, both because of their legal-juridical status, as non-citizens and as racialized laborers, do not have the opportunities for upward career mobility that are afforded to native white Italians. Further, their positions are deeply precarious. For example, Yosef led a national anti-racist demonstration in Rome and was fired from his position as a cultural mediator when video from social media of the event was shared with his employer. On the other hand, Italian workers are not subject to the same racist double standards and can develop significant social and political capital as advocates for migrant issues. Very often, as the encounter above illustrates, for many Italian care workers and volunteers, it was unclear who was doing the caring and who needed to be care for.

Abeba instructed me to be generous with serving the adolescents who had survived Libya and the Mediterranean crossing. *Meskinawyat.* The poor souls she said. "We are very lucky we didn't have to cross the Mediterranean," she told me, motioning to her daughters. As the line for food grew longer, I started to apportion smaller servings to make sure that everyone was able to eat. Abeba tsked at me. Luckily, I was rescued from the task of having to decide how much each person would eat by a friend who took over ladling lentils and curried vegetables onto *injera*. My sister and I then took our portions and sat with a group of young adults and teenagers. They were

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[70] In 2018, the murder of 18-year-old Pamela Mastropietra shocked Italy. She was dismembered and stuffed in a suitcase. A 29-year-old Nigerian man was charged for her murder. In return, Luca Traini shot six African in Macerata. After this incidence, I noted a marked change in attitudes with even a social anthropologist who referred to African men as 'animals,' not the innocents that humanitarian discourse

unusually silent, but because my sister is a comedian and disarmingly charming, they began to ask her a series of pointed questions. My sister negotiated the linguistic impasse between herself and her collocutors by using gestures, animated facial expressions and the few Tigrinya words she remembered. Her presence brought a much-needed levity to the encounter. One young man began flirting with my sister, whom he asked if she had a wife, as he struggled with his English. My sister laughed and told the young man that her greatest love was her cat, Madame, gently rebuffing their advances. Unsolicited, he began to describe his experiences in Libya with a single gesture: a slitting motion across the neck. Words weren't necessary to convey the violence of transiting through Libya. It was common knowledge in the exile community that Libya represented the most dangerous point of one's journey to Europe. The joking and conviviality of the moment then quickly dissipated.

Feminist theorists define care as a relational, multi-scalar and political practice (Noddings 2013, Held 2006, Hochschild 2000, Tronto 1993). Feminist ethics of care contest normative, masculinist conceptions of justice that center around universal precepts and abstracted relationships (Gilligan 2008, Noddings 1984). Rather, feminist ethics of care emphasize the situated and inter-personal dimensions of moral action, recouping the under-valued role of care and inter-personal responsibility in questions around ethics and political actions. While critics of this model argue that the ethics of care paradigm reinforces gender essentialisms, I argue that care-based ethics can be applied to the care work that racialized men conduct both formally and informally in this case, as cultural mediators within the refugee reception system and as members of the NGO *Eritrea Democratica.* By conceiving of care as a politicized undertaking and imbricated in the realities of transit migration, Eritrean men rework notions of community, friendship and everyday ethics in the face of repressive and ever-expanding state power. In this

case, care for recent refugees is undertaken almost solely by men[71], some of whom are formally employed in the asylum system and some of whom are not.

Countering Stucked-ness with the Work of Hope

There lurked an unacknowledged social fact amongst Eritreans and Italians. Many Eritreans desired to leave Italy[72] and made every conceivable effort to do so. As Dawit made clear to me "Italian authorities know Eritreans want to leave, and they let them leave." For example, a little under 11,000 Eritreans disembarked in Sicily as of May 2015 (International Organization for Migration Factsheet 2015), few applied for asylum in Italy. Transit migration within the EU, while less risky than clandestine journeys in the Sahara and the Mediterranean, nevertheless present significant risks. During my preliminary research in 2015, I had heard countless stories of refugees being abandoned by land smugglers in remote regions of the Alps. Even while encamped at an anarchist solidarity camp between the Italian and French border, I found few Eritreans there. The no-border activists remarked that the Eritreans trusted no one and were willing to take on risky journeys in the Alps, notwithstanding the danger that even if one makes it to one's final destination that one could be detained and removed to Italy only to restart the entire asylum process again.

Eritreans would take on risky and illegalized journeys in order to escape the sense of being stuck in place. In this case, refugee stucked-ness does not only refer to restrictions on

[71] From anecdotal observation, Eritrean women of the second generation often worked in professional and office settings. While women faced gendered and raced discrimination, European and more specifically Italian stereotypes around the desirability of Black women from the Horn gave Eritrean women a level of social capital to navigate these raced and gendered regimes. Stereotypes around the '*bella abissina*' or the beautiful Habesha woman, which found their roots in Italian colonization of the Horn, shaped how women were treated and perceived. More importantly, native language proficiency in Italy and a concomitant lack of proficiency in Tigrinya served as a practical barrier for those women who would seek employment in this sector. *See* Wikkan 2016, for a discussion on Dutch racism and sexualization of Black women.

[72] In the course of fieldwork from 2015-2018, no less than seven of my interlocutors left Bologna. One interlocutor made it to Houston, Texas; another left for the United Kingdom, still another found a home in Sweden, another erased all social media and moved to Canada as her father explained to me (she had long-term residency in Italy).

physical mobility. Legal mechanisms that managed mobility also deeply circumscribed life paths and chances. For many of the young men I worked with, long term family separation, suspended ambitions, under and un-employment and difficulty in finding romantic partners meant that their lives in Italy were lived in a suspended present. Nevertheless, men's lives revolved around the friendships that they had with one other. Friendship sustained community when other forms of affinity, relationality and sociality were foreclosed to men[73]. And friendship took on a deeply political valence as it followed already existing political divisions within the community. Overwhelmingly homosocial in its nature, caring for one another, providing friendship, meeting material and emotional needs is part of a concerted project to fashion alternate ways of being Eritrean, as my interlocutors often emphasized. Reflecting on their own migratory journeys, the emotions of fear and uncertainty that characterized the Mediterranean crossing and their early days in Italy, my interlocutors would make reference to the simple acts of care and instruction as particularly emotionally potent examples of friendship and ethical relationality. As Girmay, one of my interlocutors and my first entry into the community described his first days in Italy while we walked through Bolognina, having Estifanos buy him a pair of pants stood out as one of his first memories of Estifanos' decency and humanity. These ordinary acts fashion new social bonds and forms of relationality that are situated in what Michael Lambek and Veena Das (2010) in the everyday, everyday conditions of social and political crisis.

Early in my fieldwork, at the height of the crisis in 2015, I interviewed an Eritrean man in his mid 30's who aided refugees in transit. Our lives converged in strange ways, something that I cannot recount here to avoid revealing his identity. But, when we first met, he was jobless, spending his days in local bars debating with other Eritreans about the future of the country.

[73] Elsewhere I have written on kinship, intimacy and the punishing Eritrean state

Riven by the political conflicts that shaped the Eritrean community, Hagos imagined that aiding recent arrivals would break the ideological and psychological hold the regime in Eritrea exercised over its exile communities. Nevertheless, under EU law 1.1a aiding and abetting the entry or transit of unauthorized migrants is a criminal offense. His words, translated from the Tigrinya, below

> The difficulty of dissent even for recent arrivals lies in the fact that if you go and criticize the government during a festival, people are afraid that they will be videotaped and then will lose relationships back in Eritrea. Even those who had left Eritrea would become upset with me for my activism because their parents would be arrested; their family members didn't have light. The reason that I can do this activism is that my whole family lives outside of Eritrea. I have five siblings; they all live outside of Eritrea. None of them, though, can return to Eritrea. The stakes for activism in Italy is high because of the context of how difficult it is to survive as an immigrant in Italy. Also, the community does not help recent arrivals, and the [Eritrean] embassy encourages others not to help recent arrivals. People are secretly helping recent arrivals, but for me, I hope to help new people leave Italy because I don't want them to live that life that I have here, without papers and without work. I've been imprisoned by law, and if another Eritrean meets that same fate, I want to help them escape it.
>
> So, my goal is that they have somewhere to sleep, a life to live in a place like Sweden, or Switzerland, a job, and then they can build an opposition movement. The reason I do this is to underscore the fact that people no longer help one another in Eritrea, and if we can rebuild trust and mutual assistance, then I think to myself that that Eritrean who goes to wherever country, will begin to help others as well.

For many Eritreans and other refugees Italy is conceived as a point of transit in longer journeys towards a place that Eritreans can make refuge in. But his words above underscore not only a desire to help make refuge, refuge that he had not yet found, but to create alternative forms of being and belonging. For Hagos care, *hagaz*, or aid is teleological in nature; it is meant, inasmuch to instantiate a democratic Eritrea, as it is to inculcate or direct the receivers of aid to be givers as well once they had found refuge. For Hagos this aid was meant to counter the sense of radical individuation or atomization that came with the experience of migrating to Europe, in which he stated in the same interview that "one buried one's suffering." Hagaz, or aid was "unlike relations

of control or coercion their aims and objectives remain open to the possibility of building new relationships and potentially more ‘political’ forms of social action” (Bose 2014).

Hagos later found a position as a cultural mediator. He often asked me to help recent arrivals from the center. Care was as simple as taking recent arrivals to the local TIM [telecom mobile phone service] to buy a sim card so that they call family to let them know that they had arrived safely. At another time, Hagos asked me to visit a young woman who was in the hospital. Before I could though she had been discharged and transferred; it was unclear as to where. Yet Hagos was not alone in hoping to instill hope, mutual care and inter-dependence as values central to imagining alternate forms of being Eritrean.

Tesfa, or hope in one’s self, one’s capacities to struggle has animated Eritreans’ political mobilizations around mobility and refuge. Activists saw their own aid for refugees in transit as a political praxis that instilled hope in those who gave and received aid. Hope was both an affect and an embodied exercise that centered around giving and receiving care in networks of mutual aid in the context of structural abandonment that characterizes young Eritreans’ lives. It was also, quite critically, linked to the imagination of futures possible. For example, Giorgios often referred to young refugees as a lost generation. Considerably older than Hagos, Giorgios took on a fatherly role.

His wife expressed her frustrations to me at the International Women’s day demonstration that her husband had taken on the role of a saint, shouldering the burden of responsibility for ‘these orphaned children.’ She looked at me with a sideways glance. Each time I would meet with Giorgios, who would normally maintain a preternatural calm, he would, instead, bristle with barely contained rage anytime he would describe the injustices against *menasayat,* or youth and their own inability to as he said to me ‘to think for themselves,’ as

expressed in the phrase *"kulum hangol te-hatsbom e'yom; suk'ilum e'yom," or that they've all had their minds brainwashed,* in reference to the young Eritreans who had arrived on Italian shores.

As Giorgios had said to me in one of our first conversations: *nihna itom quolut zeseguego ena n'mtsi. Tesfa khn khibom ina nedeley* "we organize the children who have been kicked out, we give them hope and that is what is important. We help them a little on their road or journey. We are very few here; we have little capacity; and we ourselves need help. We are doing something outside of the law." The word *tesfa*, roughly translates to hope in English, but through the course of conversations Giorgios reiterated this word repeatedly. *Tefsa,* though, conveys a sense of self-efficacy, self-belief, which would mean more appropriately hope within oneself, within one's capacity to accomplish something. In a polysemic language like Tigrinya, *Tesfa* also refers to God's plan. For Giorgios to refer to recent arrivals, some, but not all, of whom are unaccompanied minors, as children who have been forced out or abandoned, was to emphasize that recent refugees were in need of care and that the act of caring, even if it came from putative strangers, was the first step in reconstituting community. Care was conceived as a political act that contests policies of structural abandonment.

Conclusion: The Obligation to Care, the Ethics of Friendship in Fieldwork

Over the course of fieldwork many of my interlocutors would classify me as their friend. I too attended weddings, parties, and marshalled whatever resources I had to similarly care or counsel recent refugees. Fieldwork for me revealed a set of tensions between professional exigencies (to collect the necessary data to finish this dissertation), the close personal relationships I developed in the field, and the ethics of representation. While my feelings and acts of care were genuine, the exigencies of academic research brought up a number of anxieties

I had about instrumentalizing such relationships to extract knowledge. Documenting the ways in which refugees navigate social and political structures that oppress them left me with the question that is at the heart of refugee studies: who does this knowledge serve? In writing about Eritrean refugees, I wanted to avoid seeing like a state—using state-centric categories that work to manage and surveil migrant communities-- without obscuring the very real and significant material, political and symbolic challenges that Eritrean refugees face in their activism. In 2018 when the bulk of my research took place, many Eritreans were heavily surveilled by Italian authorities who took the community to be the center of transnational human smuggling and trafficking syndicates. People I worked with were targeted by right-wing disinformation campaigns in major Italian publications. The stakes for political activism were high and being entrusted with sensitive information meant that this work has been invested in the same ethics of care that I foreground this chapter with; that I too was imbricated in a web of mutual care, reciprocity and responsibility.

However, *Tesfa,* or hope in one's self, one's capacities to struggle has animated Eritreans' political mobilizations around nationhood, mobility and refuge. Hope was both an affect and an embodied exercise that centered around giving and receiving care in networks of mutual aid in the context of structural abandonment that characterizes young Eritreans' lives. It was also, quite critically, linked to the imagination of futures possible. At times, observing the heated arguments regarding the political situation in Eritrea, and observing the obvious pain that my interlocutors felt, with their desires to return home diminishing as the horizon for positive political developments in Eritrea continues to remain out of reach and Europe continues being more and more inhospitable, I wondered with great worry and pain what the future holds for my

dear friends. Without the work of hope, as my interlocutors emphasized, though, how were Eritreans to strive or dream of a future, let alone survive in the present?

In the following chapter, I describe activist efforts to render visible the violence of Libyan detention centers. I focus on how Eritreans of different political generations engage with the crisis happening in Libya and activist efforts to end the Libyan detention system and free Eritreans detained there.

CHAPTER 4

Libya and a Phenomenology of Violence: Countering Structures of Deniability

Epigraph

We constantly struggle for freedom, dignity, safety and a better future, then we become prisoners of our dreams. Some of us still want to search for the meaning of hope in the conviction that something will turn out well, with the certainty that something make sense, regardless of how it turns out. This harrowing, step-by-step journey to Europe leaves many of us crushed by laws, with no hope but to evade power. But we keep struggling and dreaming. So, we are alive.

The words of Chat, a 15-year-old Eritrean boy at Calais camp, as relayed to Italian journalist Sara Creta.

Introduction

I had met Andom shortly after the April 13 inauguration of the Garden of Memory in Bolognina. Andom had heard that I was a scholar and writer of some type who was interested in publicizing the plight of Eritrean refugees and of "telling the truth about our situation." His wiry frame belied an anxious and frenetic emotional life that followed the contours of his own journey to Italian citizenship. Born in Eritrea to a mother who spent the majority of her adult life in Sweden, Andom was raised by his grandmother in a small village outside of Asmara, the capital city. He did not know his father, and his paternity was a painful secret that the family guarded with care. He felt the sting of maternal rejection keenly, and it often dovetailed with how he spoke of his journey from Eritrea, through Libya to Italy. This was a journey that involved, as he explained it to me over the course of eight hours, intimate abandonment, betrayal, the caprices of traffickers, and the love and solidarity of his wife.

Andom wanted me to write his biography. At 47 years old, he grew up in the tail end of the war for independence and served in the second Ethiopian Eritrean border war from 1998-2000. When he first approached me at the inauguration, he introduced himself and told me that his brother had died in the Lampedusa sinking: "You could not believe what it was like to

identify his remains…this was my younger brother." I did not know how to respond to him. I often found myself at a loss when confronted with the openness and at times, nonchalance with which my interlocutors spoke of experiences of violence. I listened as patiently and attentively as I could. He gave me his phone number and said that he wanted to be interviewed. This was at odds with the reticence and mistrust most of my interlocutors showed when it came to recorded interviews. I followed up with him as soon as I could, and within the following week I was to have lunch with Andom and his wife, Tsege.

Andom was forthcoming from the beginning and saw my involvement with him and his family as a chance to share and make sense of his emotional pain. A few weeks after our telephone conversation, I met Andom for our scheduled meeting at a café in the small town where he lived in Emilia Romagna. While waiting for Andom, I was met with a barrage of texts from him saying that he had been arrested by the police for a parking violation. Reeling from the shock and anger at what I was led to believe was an instance of racial profiling, I was then surprised when Andom arrived at the café, explaining to me that he had been joking the entire time. His joking left me feeling a bit of unease, but it was common for my interlocutors to make these kinds of destabilizing and dark jokes, to play off of my earnestness. Andom was solicitous, and he immediately offered to pay for my coffee and demanded that I also enjoy a pastry. After I finished the pastry and coffee, Andom and I made the short walk to his car. A small, dark-slate hatchback, the car served its purposes well—it was economical, a sound investment considering its age. Andom told me that he was saving to buy a newer model. He had been working for some time at the outlet mall unloading boxes and merchandise.

Andom parked in front of his apartment block. We crossed a small courtyard adjacent to the building in which children played to reach the apartment. We entered the unlit foyer and took

the stairs up to his second-floor apartment in a *casa popolare*, or government-supported housing for the poor. When I walked into Tsege and Andom's small apartment, I first noticed all of the Orthodox Christian iconography that lined their walls. Their apartment, two bedrooms in total that they shared with their two growing sons, was packed with knickknacks, clothes, books and an assortment of things. I was their guest for the evening. Tsege then offered me a bountiful lunch of *tsebi dorho, dulot* and *alicha*—spicy chicken stew, a stew of liver and tripe, and curried string beans and potatoes to be eaten with *injera*, the spongy flatbread that is a staple of Eritrean and Ethiopian cuisine. She then promptly began complaining about how much weight she had gained in Italy while I indulged in Sunday's lunch alone, as everyone had already eaten. I chuckled—weight gain after arriving in Europe was a common lament of my interlocutors. While Tsege and Andom were excited to share their home with me, their two teenage sons ignored my presence and were on their way to basketball camp for the weekend. Andom had assiduously saved his earnings to send his sons to camp; he glowed with pride, beaming at his growing sons. It was a chance for his boys to become Italian, as he explained to me. I came to learn, over the course of our interview, that the elder, Adam, was born two days after Tsege and Andom had disembarked in Sicily; Tsege was pregnant through the entirety of her imprisonment in Libya.

The aroma of incense and roast coffee permeated the space, creating a haze that blanketed the room. Over the coffee ceremony, which was served with the customary popcorn, Andom began speaking of the contours of his life. Andom and Tsege met and married on the clandestine Saharan migrant trail (Andersson 2014); they celebrated the birth of their son shortly after disembarking in Sicily. The eight-hour day that I spent with them was one of the most difficult and emotionally taxing experiences of my fieldwork. It wasn't solely for the fact that I

had to listen to their narrative of extreme violence. Andom genuinely believed that I would help him. I did not understand in what way I could help him. During the car ride to his home, he spoke to me about his brother in Denver, Colorado who owned a store. This was his rich brother who ignored his entreaties for help. While I waited for the train back to Bologna, he spoke to me about his mother's abandonment, how she favored the twins she gave birth to in Sweden, how she never came to see the birth of his sons. He kept asking me if I thought his mother ever loved him. I didn't know how to respond. He insisted that we take a walk in the outlet mall—he wanted to buy me a gift so that we could remain friends. I tried to decline politely; I tried to explain to him that I couldn't help him in the ways that he imagined I could help him, that I was a researcher. He told me that I was Eritrean and had an obligation to care. He then became visibly angry and hurt and began insulting me and my looks. After I left, I received a barrage of text messages from him that were so desperate and sad. I could not respond, and l could not reproduce them either.

When I spoke to Tedros about that day, weeks later, after having returned from Rome together, he told me to treat the incident with discretion. Tedros explained that many Eritrean men are lonely, long for some form of social connection and struggle to make sense of their experiences. Not only did Tedros head *Eritrea Democratica,* but he also worked with mental health service providers to help Eritreans access mental health services. He then went on that for these men any perceived connection with a woman was misconstrued as sexual in nature. I have been genuinely pained as to whether or not to write about this incident over the course of the last three years. For the most part, the incident left me feeling unnerved, vulnerable, destabilized and strangely ashamed. I reflect on this incident for the multiple difficulties that women, but

especially women of color fieldworkers face and of the emotional entanglements that are difficult to make sense of over the course of fieldwork.

Part of these difficulties stemmed from the fact that over the course of fieldwork, people shared the most sensitive information with me with the expectation that as an Eritrean from the United States, I could use my professional status to help them. When I would try to explain the limits of academic research, or the precarity of my own professional status as a lowly graduate student, I was met with confusion. People shared stories of some of the most horrific instances of violence with me with a nonchalance that I found difficult to understand. I began to realize then that experiences of violence were so ubiquitous as to be part of the quotidian fabric of social life. Even those who did not directly experienced violence would share the experiences of other Eritreans who had. For example, when my mother came to visit me in Bologna, we went out to dinner at Kiros' restaurant. He gave us dinner gratis, but he spent a part of the evening recounting how his bus boy, who was Eritrean, had been tortured by the Eritrean regime. By giving him a job, Kiros explained to us, he slowly began to re-enter, as Kiros put it, 'human life.' My mother was so pained listening to that anecdote that she told me she did not want to meet any more Eritreans over the course of her vacation.

When I began long-term research, I asked Girmay to help me meet older women whom I could interview. I told Girmay that I was interested in national identity, memory and how people experience this present moment. Girmay had been deeply invested in my project from the first day that we met. He introduced me to people; he explained to me what questions I could or could not ask. At times, he was taken aback by how people would open up to me. On another incident, we were on our way back from Michael's neighborhood to Bolognina. Michael was married to an Eritrean woman who was born and raised in Bologna. Michael would comment on the

unusualness of his marriage because he had crossed the Mediterranean and as he explained to me those who were born and raised in Italy didn't want to have anything to do with recent immigrants. While sitting in Michael's car, Girmay tried to explain to him what my research project was about. Michael and Girmay then began to have a heated exchange about my research. Michael looked ominously towards me and said in English "curiosity killed the cat." Girmay explained to him that I wasn't interested in human trafficking or smuggling, which was the topic that had gotten Michael so heated. Michael protested and said "she can't be naïve; she'll have to deal with, it's just part of people's lives here."

In hindsight, Michael was right. I did not want to write or to enter into that world, but reflecting on violence was important. Eritreans remember violence-- violence in transit, violence at home-- to counter structural deniability. These individual narratives of violence coalesce around particular collective experiences that my interlocutors would recount: 1) military service in Sawa; 2) transiting in Libya; and 3) human smuggling in Italy. These narratives did not only circulate amongst those who had experienced these kinds of violence but also amongst those who lived within the community who recounted secondhand narratives of violence. Moreover, experiential narratives of violence, however fraught, circulated through both the registers of human rights discourses and through the trope of the trickster. These narratives were not only told by those who had first-hand experience of violence but also amongst diasporan Eritrean subjects who had not experienced violence. These narrative strategies worked to build collectivities in the midst of protracted political and structural violence.

In the first part of this chapter, I focus on Andom and Tsege's narrative of survival and journey both for its detail and specificity and because Andom and Tsege agreed to have their experiences recorded. When Andom said that he wanted me to write his biography, it was clear

that he wanted his experience recorded in some type of historical record. Part of writing on this violence wasn't to spectacularize it—it was as many of my interlocutors emphasized just part of their lives. Even in describing instances of extreme violence people would laugh or joke about it, which I found jarring, but those reactions in speaking about violence indexed a habituation to multiple forms of violence on the part of my interlocutors and underscored how violence was, nevertheless, important to their identity formation. It was partially one of the reasons why my interlocutors would make jokes about rape, border deaths, and of having to gender bend to evade border agents in Libya with an ease that was troubling to an outsider. Nevertheless, it was rare for Eritreans to speak of their own experiences of violence—they often referred to someone else's experience of violence and gave vivid depictions of others' experiences of violence and the trickery that was necessary to survive or escape the violent moment. I wondered if this was a narrative strategy to objectify and distance themselves from the violent event or if it was part of a narrative strategy that transformed their status from victims to social agents.

For example, Mihret, who grew up in Bologna, told me a story that a 15 year-old-girl who had transited across the Mediterranean had recounted to her in Milan. "You know Fiori, this girl was beautiful. Obviously, she'd gone through an early puberty, large hips and full breasts, which made her into a target. She told me a story about a 'friend' who was in Sawa. This friend…an older general began to visit her in her bed….She kept getting excited as she told the story, so it was obvious she was talking about herself. She kept buying time by flirting with him and telling him that she was a virgin…she wasn't ready and that they should only kiss. The evening that she told him she was ready to have sex, she told him that they should continue kissing as they had before. Then she bit off his tongue and escaped." I was horrified; I was, nevertheless, impressed by the secondhand narration of the girl's cunning and trickery. However,

I was aware that sexual violence was a ubiquitous reality of my interlocutors lives and I didn't seek to minimize their experiences. But part of the art of survival that my interlocutors narrated was hinged on the necessity of trickery to survive. In the recounting of the girl's tale, by taking on the persona of the innocent virgin, of one who would only submit to this older and more powerful man's demands for sex if it were romantic and loving, the girl's story was transformed from a narrative of predation and abuse to one that upended gender and age-based hierarchies of status. The girl spun a web of deceit, planned for days how she would escape and avoid having to consummate the relationship with this powerful man. In narrating violence, Eritreans were not constructing themselves as victims but as tricksters who in their calculation and cunning upended existing racial and gender hierarchies that constrained their lives. In writing on Trickster Theater in Ghana, Jesse Weaver Shipley (2015) argues that the figure of the trickster represents a form of agency and mediation that is denied to post-colonial African subjects under extractive and oppressive regimes of value. Tricksters evade boundaries; they shapeshift (Cox 2016). Moreover, tricksters elude institutions of power and confuse orders of power that seek to make them legible and hold them in place, as this anecdote illustrates.

On a broader note, anthropologists have wrestled with the fraught ethics of writing about violence (Das 1987; Warren 1993; Bourgois 2001). What kind of relationships does the act of writing about violence condition between ethnographers and their interlocutors? What is the ethical imperative for the ethnographer working in conditions of protracted political conflict and state violence, as Alex Khasnabish (2004) provocatively asks? My own relationship to these questions is complicated. I often thought that the contingency of where and when I was born was the only accident that separated the trajectory of my own life from that of my interlocutors. But that contingency is material here, because I could not, in any way, liken my own position as an

American citizen with that of my friends who were separated not by divisions of race but by a legal-juridical status that is, for people like me, born the children of non-white immigrants, increasingly at stake in many global North nations (Fekete 2018). That status was what allowed me to sit in Andom and Tsege's home as an ethnographer rather than a friend who shared a similar past. Anthropologists like Lila Abu-Lughod (1991) have written about the dilemma that people like me, native anthropologists, or "halfies"—"people whose national or cultural identity is mixed by virtue of migration, overseas education or mixed parentage" (466)—face in fieldwork, that our experiences in conducting fieldwork collapse the easy dichotomy between self and other that the discipline posits. Further, Abu-Lughod argues, this paradigmatic opposition between self and other instantiates and maintains hierarchy in the course of fieldwork and reproduces it in anthropological discourse. But in conducting fieldwork among people whose identities converged with my own yet whose experiences were radically divergent from mine, I felt an imperative to maintain a self that was not taken over by the cumulative weight of my interlocutors' experiences. Part of this need to maintain some distance stemmed from a sense of respect for the singularity of my friends' experiences.

Writing Against Violence

In 2004, Andom and Tsege embarked from Tunis to the Sicilian shores. There were 98 people on board from their recollections—15 Ghanaians, 5 Egyptians, 7 Ethiopians and the rest were Eritreans, including two children and a heavily pregnant woman. They were abandoned for what they described as days, and the Italian coast guard made no attempt at rescue. After four days, a Tunisian vessel rescued them and took them back to Tunis. The Tunisian authorities sent them to Libya; there, they were arrested and detained. During their sea voyage, their captain, a

young Ghanaian man, dove into violent waves to alert the Tunisians to the location of his wards; he died in his attempt at rescue.

Tsege–

Note: These are the unedited words of Tsege that I translated from Tigrinya. The phrases and ideas are fragmentary in nature—because of the nature of unmediated conversation, because of the consequence of traumatic memory and because some of them are lost in the process of translation.

In Libya, the prisons are terrible: There are spaces in which there's lice and urine; they feed you like dogs. There were two crazed men, a black Libyan and a Nigerian. The Nigerian began eating; we wouldn't though. After two hours there, the prison warden came, and he told us to leave. One by one, he asks us what we had done while holding a stick; he also had a gun. One said he fought with a Libyan, and the warden would hit them. I was the only Eritrean. We told him that we were trying to leave illegally, and he left us alone. He treated the Nigerian with disdain; the Nigerian didn't speak Arabic, and the warden beat the Nigerian until he was bloody and destroyed. The warden kept asking for his name, but he couldn't respond. I've never seen someone so beaten. There was a small bathroom; there was a latrine, but it was filled to capacity and was ready to spill all over us. The Nigerian and Ghanaian were right next to the latrine. The Nigerian was mentally retarded. He beat the Nigerian guy so badly his scalp came off. When the warden left, the Nigerian man started eating. The warden said, "Look at this slave, eating while I'm ready to beat him." There was a young man from Niger with us. The guy from Niger told the Nigerian in English that they were going to kill him. The Nigerian was ill, mentally ill; he had no capacity to defend himself…

In the meanwhile, we were so frightened. I regretted not telling him that I was Eritrean. I kept thinking of Saba and the other women. Why are we here? The young man from Niger told us we were in the largest prison in Libya. Where are we? We have children. What will happen to them? We asked the Nigerien guy to ask the Libyans, because he spoke Arabic. The Nigerien told them that nothing would happen to the women and children. The prison had three thousand people. You have to pass seven doors to reach our ward. In the courtyard, they took us out; the warden asks what's your name; he stops at the Nigerian who was beaten so badly; the warden broke sticks on the Nigerian's body; he used three sticks. The Nigerian had diarrhea all night; he kept cleaning the latrine and eating. The taxi driver told the warden that the Nigerian cleaned the latrine, and they kept beating him. I kept marveling that his head wasn't swollen. They gave us numbers; my number is 42. There were Sudanese there. These Sudanese told me to stick with them, "These Libyans take drugs; they will hurt you. Write a letter, and we will take it to your family to tell them that you've been arrested in Libya." We were only in the prison for two months. That prison we were in was legal; it was detention before seeing a judge. We were lucky because we couldn't be deported because there was no Ethiopian embassy; neither the Egyptian nor the Sudanese authorities would take us. We also had children with us. We were first in Zuwara—we stayed there for two weeks; this is when we first got there from Tunisia—then to Surmana; from Surmana after two weeks, we were

transferred to Juwaza, that's in Tripoli. This was the immigration office. We didn't stay there longer than one week. When the Libyan authorities knew that the United Nations representatives were there, they cleaned up the prison, stocked Coca-Cola, but as soon as the authorities left, things went back to what they were. One morning they called us. We were two children, two women and four young men in a small car, without knowing where we were going. We were taken to Mahali Jhededa, another prison. There were seven Habesha arrested there. One of the prisoners had a brother in the U.S. who worked for the Red Cross. He would contact the prison (the brother), when the Libyan authorities realized that these people had money, and so they transferred this man to seven prisons. When we go out to eat in the courtyard, they would beat you with a stick on the neck. One of my friends, Binyam, died after he was hit in the neck. You would always have to duck to avoid being hit by the stick. They would beat the bigger men, not the skinny ones. These men were thin like me, but the way they would beat you…

They transferred us to the court in containers. People would die along the way to the court. We had to pay 120,000 dinar to leave the prison, for punishment for entering and staying in the country illegally. We were able to leave because of these Muslim Ethiopian women who were in the country legally and had contacted a lawyer. All the Eritreans who were with us were deported back to Eritrea. The Eritrean government sent a form to the Libyan authorities pretending to be the UNHCR; all of the Eritreans filled it out.

In September 2004, we tried to go to Italy. We stayed back. The women left Libya first during the day; the men because they arouse attention from the authorities left later in the evening. After two months, Andom also reached Italy.

Part of the uniqueness of this narration during my fieldwork was that it was the only instance in which my interlocutors described the violence that they themselves had experienced. But it's important to note, Tsege never describes violence that happened to her. She describes instead the racial violence meted against the ill Nigerian man and the fear and powerlessness that she felt. I will never know whether she experienced sexual violence en route. This narrative was striking because nowhere is there a sense of agency in the narrative; it is by sheer luck that she survives. But I didn't understand why both she and Andom wanted to share these details in such a forensic manner. I wonder if, after having had to recount her testimony during asylum proceedings, she had developed this objectified narrative of things that happened to her. Nevertheless, their individual desire to share this experience of violence formed part of a larger collective desire to

counter structures of deniability by remembering violence. The following vignettes flesh out what I mean by structures of deniability.

Structures of Deniability

On March 6th, 2018 I attended an event sponsored by the Comboniani of Verona and the Foundation *Nigrizia*. Tedros had asked me to attend and meet Father Musei Zerai, the Eritrean Italian Catholic priest and 2014 nominee of the Noble Peace Prize, as he couldn't make the event. At the event were seven Eritrean nuns and many elderly Italians. In total, I counted 150 people there. I noted only one other African man in the audience. Jessica Cugini, the director of *Nigrizia* and the moderator of the event who began by introducing the sponsored events of the month. She then began by reflecting on the recent election results which propelled the MI5 and the Northern League into office. She began to speak of the 1935 fascist invasion of Ethiopia. She said that the Catholic Church was complicit in this occupation, and that "*non vogliamo giudicare le persone*," we don't want to judge people, but "when we speak of these things to say that these things happened in the past, but the past doesn't heal all wounds. We ask the Italian Church to ask for forgiveness to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church." Throughout the evening, the crowd of elderly persons there were moved and respectful.

Jessica Cugini, before introducing Father Zerai, pivoted and began speaking about the history of Eritrea. Asmara had recently been chosen as a UNESCO world heritage site. Eritrea's history is intertwined with fascism she began, explaining the racial laws and how many mixed-race children were abandoned in Eritrea. These children, she explained, were conceived as *ibidismo* or a pollution. She then ceded the floor to Father Zerai who began to speak. He had a PowerPoint behind him that read "Ethno-Demography of Eritrea." He began "Italians have not come to terms with their past. There are 45,000 Eritreans of mixed Italian heritage who cannot

get Italian citizenship. The racial laws still affect Eritreans. They have to flee and cross the desert." He continued "Eritreans were sent as askaris to Russia, Albania, Greece, Libya, Somalia, Ethiopia… Eritreans were used as objects by Italians." He continued with his political genealogy of Eritrean identity and statehood remarking on the Eritrean/Ethiopian federation, the lack of political freedoms in Eritrea and the fact that the Eritrean constitution has never been implemented.

When Father Zerai turned to describe military service and the conditions in Sawa, he stopped at a slide that read "*Sawa: campi militari e prigione."* Sawa, military camps and prison. He then showed pictures of the tortured bodies of young conscripts. At the mention of Sawa, an Eritrean man stood up to interject. Later, I would learn that he was called Dr. B, by one of the Eritrean nuns who accompanied me while I waited for a taxi. He stopped Father Zerai's presentation to say that Sawa was in fact, not a military camp; that he had done military service in Sawa. He continued by saying that conscripts only stayed in Sawa to reach "*maturità."* Father Zerai tried to continue with his presentation by countering that the experience in Sawa violates these young people's rights. Further, many of these conscripts are younger than 16 he emphasized. I could see that both men were getting visibly agitated. Jessica Cugini then interjected to restore order. Father Zerai moved on to show the images of torture that were submitted to the UN Rapporteur on Eritrea. Father Zerai described how adolescent girls in Sawa are rendered "*dolcificante*," or sweetener for military officers.

Father Zerai didn't solely lay blame for the plight of Eritrean refugees at the hands of the Eritrean regime. His careful narration of Eritrean history, beginning with Italian colonialism, ended with the deaths of young Eritreans in places like Calais. It spanned both temporal and geographic locations, implicating the Eritrean state, the European Union and Italian colonization

in structuring the present moment. Jessica Cugini also commented by saying "*il muro che l'Europa sta costruendo fatto di accordi per impedire l'arrivo dei profughi*." The wall that Europe is constructing is made of accords that block the arrival of refugees. Father Zerai's intervention also included a political economic analysis "if Africa were to develop, we would lose access to these resources, 60% of which were needed for industrial processes." The director of *Nigrizia* then began to take questions. An audience member stood up to ask, "how does the state continue with no economic activity;" another genuinely distraught audience member asked, "what will happen to Eritrea?'

Father Zerai's response touched upon the themes of this dissertation:

> "It is hard to speak of prospects for the future in Eritrea because the architects of Eritrea's future have escaped or have ended in prison. Seven thousand young people were sent to Nakfa in November and December without food. They returned almost as skeletons. The diaspora is divided. There is no way to construct an alternative or viable future. The regime, the YPFDJ[74] (Youth Party for Democracy and Justice), works a lot with the diaspora. There is no real unity in the diasporic opposition."

After Father Zerai's dispiriting assessment of the future of Eritrea, Dr. B, instead of addressing Father Zerai, turned to Jessica Cugini and asked "why is there no ambassador for Eritrea here? Why are there no opposing voices here? *Poveretta*, poor one, he said to Jessica Cugini "you're just being manipulated." Father Zerai didn't address Dr. B, instead he continued clicking through images of the tortured bodies of young Eritreans as his coded response to Dr. B's query. Their broken bodies stood as stark material evidence, as evidence that countered the denial of violence in the present that Dr. B as someone who clearly supported the regime in Eritrea was engaged in. Borrowing from Raymond Williams' understanding of 'structure of feeling,' (1970) as the affective terrain of society in particular historical juncture, I understand

[74] Youth PFDJ refers to second-generation Eritreans who belong to the party's mass organizations in exile. YPFDJ formed in response to the 1998-2000 border war with Ethiopia.

structures of deniability as highly charged emotional responses that circulate around collective experiences that contest normative definitions of group identity. In the examples shown above, Italian colonialism is a historical event that complicates nationalist narratives of the good Italian that elicits charged emotional responses. Moreover, Sawa is understood as formative event in the lives of its young conscripts because it fits into narratives of self-sacrifice that undergirds Eritrean nationalism. Finally, European border regimes complicate the idea of a liberal-democratic Europe that supports human rights. These institutional paradoxes circulate on the ground level on the basis of affective disposition, as deeply charged collective emotions that find expression in individual and collective narratives. More broadly, these structures of denial spanned temporal and geographic locations as the narratives of Jessica Cugini and Father Zerai illustrate—denial of the continuities between the colonial past and present, denial of the violence of the Eritrean regime and of the human rights crisis affecting the country, and the denial of rights to refugeehood that 'the wall built by the accords' created.

At the end of the event, I went up to Father Zerai to tell him that Tedros had sent me. I was surprised that he remembered me from an event in Ferrara that I attended with ten other Eritreans from Bologna in October. This time, he greeted me with immense warmth. I was then introduced to the Eritrean nuns who had sat at the front of *Sala Africa,* or Africa room. I had explained to one of the nuns that I was spending the evening in Verona and had rented an Airbnb for the evening. The elderly nun would not let me wait alone for a taxi at night. She accompanied me while I waited for a taxi to take me out of the city center. "I don't understand someone like Dr. B," she began. "Yes, who was he?" "He's a doctor in Venice. I just don't understand why a rich man like him would want to hurt these young people." I understood by 'hurting these young people,' she meant denying their experiences of violence. But in calling attention to his class

position, the nun was making reference to the classed dimensions of political participation for Eritreans. For the next thirty-five minutes as I waited for the taxi she called, she described her niece's experiences of torture. Her niece had tried to escape Eritrea and was captured at the border. She described each graphic account and indignity to me. I tried to maintain my own impassive expression, but listening to these accounts was taking a significant toll on my health—I spent much of my fieldwork very sick.

When I returned to the Airbnb, I began speaking to my roommate. A Honduran-American girl from Boston, she asked me what I was doing in Italy. I told her I research Eritrean refugees. She then exclaimed that her friend was Eritrean. She was travelling as a tourist and her friend who invited her to Italy had abandoned her. I offered to walk around the city with her the next day. In the morning, the host had laid out a breakfast spread. She spoke English very well and remarked that the message I had written her on Airbnb app was in perfect Italian. "I knew it wasn't a google translation. What do you do here?" I explained that I research migration. Jokingly, she continued "those lucky refugees, you know if I only had to pass through Libya, I could collect 35 euros a day!" My roommate hung her head in shame; she later told me she was worried that the host and I would fight. I looked at my host and said, "I doubt you would want to be in Libya." She then laughed and told me she was joking. But, momentarily, I noticed a flicker of worry in her expression, a moment in which she understood that she needed to save face. I wasn't angry at my host in that moment. I felt sad and I realized how deep these structures of denial were, how they circulated as jokes, as forms of minimization, in which I could tell that the woman didn't understand the gravity of what she was even joking about, or more perniciously, maybe didn't even care about (Wekker 2016).

It was common to hear that refugees collected 35 euros per day. This was a piece of misinformation based on the fact that each refugee who is served in a structure of *accoglienza* is apportioned 35 euros per day for their care. The 35 euros covers the salaries of cultural mediators, the rents for these structures, food, and other needs. Refugees are given 2,50 euro daily as pocket money. It was not the glamorous life that my host imagined. But that common form of misinformation circulated because it tapped into a structure of feeling (Williams 1970) that was present at that moment-- this notion that Italians were suffering the loss of a strong social welfare state, living under conditions of economic precarity (Muehlebach 2018). It was captured in the notion of *prima gli italiani,* or Italians first, that Matteo Salvini, head of the League, mobilized during the party's electoral campaign. I don't doubt that my host probably didn't want to rent out her spare room to strangers, or that she couldn't comprehend the gravity of the situation she was joking about, but it was nevertheless so disheartening to hear her say what she said.

Our Brothers in Libya

When I returned to fieldwork in the fall of 2017, the intensity of political activism among Eritreans had begun to ebb. The European migration crisis had made Eritreans visible as a minoritized community in ways that later would have negative consequences. However, in the summer of 2015, and shortly after the Lampedusa sinking in 2013, there was a sense that, however tragic these events, change was on the horizon. By 2017, many activists had begun to grow tired and could not see any of their efforts to change policies as having any impact on the ground. When I first saw Yosef, after a hiatus of 16 months, he asked me to help in his project documenting the locations, names, and conditions of Eritreans in detention centers in Libya. He had partnered with two Italian journalists sympathetic to the plight of Eritrean refugees, one who

had worked in years past on ending the organ trade in the Sinai desert. Yosef needed me to translate the testimonies from Tigrinya to English, as his ultimate goal was to present these findings to the European Court for Human Rights. Other Eritrean refugees had success in holding Italy accountable in the 2009 court case mentioned earlier. I went into this task quite naively and with a sense of fear. Over the course of fieldwork, Italian and Eritrean activists I knew were subject to threats, physical assaults and surveillance by Italian police. Many of the testimonies I translated were of the whereabouts of minors who had made the Saharan journey alone. Here is one such testimony:

> Name: Fisseha Tsegab
> Age: 15
>
> He first went to Ethiopia from Eritrea. He then trekked to the Sudan. He paid $1,200 to smugglers to make it to the Sudan. From Sudan, he then went to Libya, in which he paid another $2,000. Before he could make it to Libya, he was kidnapped. His family paid another $2,500 for his release. After he was released from his kidnap, another smuggler kidnapped him again, promising that he would be able to disembark for Italy. He paid another $3,000. His sister, Sara, currently lives in Sweden, and Fisseha is still in Libya, and he's waiting for help.

Throughout the course of the year, Yosef kept working on his lonely cause. He urged his fellow activists not to forget about those trapped in Libya, often referring to them as our brothers. In the lead up to the inauguration of the Garden of Memory, Yosef began a letter-writing campaign to the embassies of Israel, Uganda and Rwanda against the "voluntary" and summary repatriations of Eritreans to those countries. Since I was the only person who had a native command of the English language, I wrote these letters as a representative of *Eritrea Democratica.* Yosef was often a lone voice in his efforts toward an activism based on a transnational Eritrean refugee experience—one that centered on threats of forced removal, capture, containment and the threats from the power of the transnational Eritrean state.

While sitting at the social center, soon after our meeting to discuss the details of the opening of the Garden of Memory with representatives from the *Quartiere di Navile,* Yosef brought up the plight of Eritreans stuck in Libya. Tedros, a local activist and ever the pragmatist, told him to leave the situation alone and that "we are powerless." Tedros was interested in winning local victories, in building coalitional politics and in the politics of long-term settlement. Yosef, instead, railed against Italian colonialism and would often be overtaken by memories of his past. Sitting together at a McDonald's in Rome after an activist meeting, Yosef recalled his humiliation by a Swiss police officer when he was apprehended without documents and returned to Italy; he spent the night in prison stripped of his clothes and marveled at the unnecessary cruelty of the prison guards. Tedros told him to think of his future in Italy, not to look backwards, and that their activism should focus on making sure that "one of Salvini's followers doesn't shoot you in the street because you're black, and no one goes looking for you, because you are a n*****." I was taken aback by Tedros' bluntness. He usually didn't put things so plainly.

Yosef always maintained that his past linked him to Eritreans trapped in Libya. When I first interviewed him, he described himself as a victim of political violence, a trope he would later develop in his public addresses. Tedros, on the other hand, was oriented towards his future in the country. He was married to an Italian woman, studied at the University of Bologna, worked for the local government and saw himself firmly as both Italian and Eritrean. For Tedros, politics was about solidarity—he had no interest in returning to Eritrea and wanted to create an Italy in which Blackness was as much an integral part of the nation as any other identity category.

Toward the end of my fieldwork in November 2018, I had my final interview with Yosef. Throughout our two-hour interview, Yosef answered call after call from Libyan detention centers describing torture, beatings and the complicity of UNHCR officials, who one caller described as "know[ing] what they're (detention guards) doing to us, know[ing] that the guards steal the food they bring us and sell it back to us." I was struck by Yosef's response: He calmly told them to continue their "struggle" and that those like him, recent refugees who also survived Libyan camps, would continue to "struggle" alongside them. I worried deeply for him. I worried for the psychological toll his work was taking. I worried for him when he played the death threats he was receiving. I worried for him when he began being referred to as a 'smuggler.'

Conclusion: Violence as a Generative Force

In this chapter, I've focused on three structuring events that Eritreans narrate 1) military service in Eritrea and 2) transit in Libya and 3) debates on human smuggling/trafficking. I argued that remembering theirs and others' experiences of violence works to counter structures of denial and deniability. Moreover, in narrating violence Eritreans construct identities that transform them from victims of violence to social agents who resist and evade structures of power. Part of the logic of exposing violence and torture hinges on actively countering the denial of violence that is taking place in the present. Remembering past violence and its continuities in the present allows Eritreans to maintain communal bonds in a deeply charged and hostile present moment.

These structures of denial are multifarious—they are made material in laws, in contests over public memory like the example of Father Zerai illustrates, affects, and misinformation that circulates rapidly in an era of social media. In the following chapter, I write about refugee integration more broadly. I end with a reflection on the experiences of second-generation Eritreans and how they understand their future in Italy.

CHAPTER 5

The State of Integration: Emergency, Illegality, *Accoglienza,* and Rhetoric of Dependency

When I began long-term fieldwork, I, like many of my interlocutors, had to navigate Italy's immigration bureaucracy. Having confused the visa process with the permit to stay, I had passed the eight-day period from arrival within which one must submit the permit application by over a week. Without an application receipt for a permit to stay, I was in murky legal terrain, and could have been expelled were it not for my American passport and the relative leniency with which I was treated by immigration authorities. I was, nevertheless, panicked. Accustomed to my existence in the United States as a Black American, in which my encounters with the state were often negative, I assumed the same would be true in Italy. I arrived, nervous, with the requisite paperwork for my immigration meeting at the *questura.*[75] The officer, a young and friendly man, flipped through my paperwork, and asked me whether or not my father was Italian. "But your name is Fiori, you know Fiori is an Italian name." I nodded and smiled. Although my last name is Berhane, a non-Italian and obviously Tigrayan last name to those who possess any knowledge regarding the Horn of Africa, his remark reflected a growing awareness that one could in fact be Italian and not white.

He noticed that I was born in Los Angeles and we talked about the city of angels and his desire to see Hollywood. Next to me, on my right, was a family from Bangladesh who, from the encounter I observed, were not fluent in Italian. The officer, a woman whose demeanor exuded contempt, unlike her amiable colleague next to her, began yelling at the Bangladeshi woman who struggled to make sense of her commands. "Giù!" she motioned downwards for the woman to

[75] *Questura* refers to a municipal police office that handles immigration matters.

place her index finger on the machine that would record her fingerprints. Each one of her expressions grew angrier and more insistent than the previous one. I could not hide my own expression of shock, and the young officer looked over embarrassed at his colleague and then at me. He smiled, handed me the receipt for my permit, and a packet of documents that I had signed entitled *l'accordo d'integrazione,* an integration agreement. He then told me that he hoped my stay in Italy would be a positive one. My sojourn at the *questura,* the police station that handled migration matters, lasted ten minutes.

For the remainder of my 15 months in Italy the agreement stayed in a drawer next to my bed, long forgotten. I never fulfilled any of the requirements stated in the document, nor did I subsequently have problems when I applied for another visa and permit to stay the following year. My American passport was enough of a promise of integration. I had been warned, though, by my interlocutors that the experience at the *questura* would be a demeaning and draining experience, one in which I would be given the run around and asked to produce document after document according to the whims of the officer handling my case (Tuckett 2018). Yet, my nationality blunted the effects of gendered racism that I had been accustomed to. After what I expected to be a full day at the *questura*, I walked to the local Eritrean bar. After a half an hour walk in which I followed the contours of the major road that circumscribed the city from Bologna's suburbs, I entered the bar in which my interlocutors whiled away their days. When I entered during the mid-day lull, the bar owner, Solomon, laughed and greeted me by saying "oohh they must have kept you waiting for hours, there." I told him that it was fine, actually, and that even though my documents were late in being filed I didn't have much of a problem with the friendly young man who handled my case. He looked a bit surprised but reminded me that I was treated '*come una regina'* like a queen, because of my American passport. He then began telling

me a story of a friend of his who had first lived in Italy and then moved to Canada. When he returned to Italy, to the same *questura*, in which he was previously treated with disrespect as a holder of an Eritrean passport, with a Canadian passport instead, a new world opened up to him. Solomon chuckled ruefully when describing his friend's transformed state.

Solomon had lived in Italy for over two decades. He had still not applied for Italian citizenship. I asked him why he hadn't, even though having Italian citizenship could open possibilities that were hitherto closed off to him. He shrugged his shoulders and said that the hassle, the expense, and the waiting were too much for him. While scholars writing of the US context have noted that naturalization has been a strategic move to secure rights and enhance transnational capacities amongst migrant communities (Coutin 2001), Solomon's apathy towards naturalization, although he fulfilled the requirements to lodge a successful naturalization application and had significant transnational connections and obligations, indexed a common sentiment shared by many of the migrants whom I worked with. The Italian state was seen and felt by my interlocutors and many other migrants I had met as arbitrary, unwelcoming, and a site for personal and political disinvestment[76] (Belloni 2019, Tuckett 2018), and citizenship became "nothing more than a bureaucratic process" (Tuckett 2018: 118). Unlike the official discourses of welcoming, or *accoglienza* that abound, state power was understood as arbitrary, capricious and personalistic (Schneider & Schneider 2005). For many Eritreans, Italy was close to home, not

[76] See Muehlebach 2012 on a discussion of the neoliberal Italian state, writes "The withdrawal of the Italian state, always exceptionally "alien" to its citizens (Ginsborg 2001: 139) and appearing as incomplete, inconsistent, partial, riddled with factionalisms, and "in pieces" (Schneider and Schneider 2003: 34), has occurred with a swiftness unusual for Western Europe and is perhaps better comparable with some non- European contexts where the déplacement of the state has so rapidly occurred because states had less of a presence there in the first place [(Trouillot 2003: 9)] (16). Over the course of fieldwork, Eritreans would refer to their presence in Italy as foreigners and that Italy was not their country as a reason for returning and engaging with Eritrean politics so that they could return home.

only because of colonial ties, but because of a shared sense of personal and collective disempowerment that characterized life *here* and back home, as my interlocutors emphasized. Life in Italy was at odds with how Eritreans imagined life in Europe would be.

The document I signed earlier in the day, promising the state in full faith that I would invest in a pact to integrate, belied a discomforting reality—how were the many migrants who enter Italy through extra-legal and illegalized channels to integrate into a society that has long viewed them as a security problem and has tolerated their presence solely in a transitory state? (Andall 2000, Caneva 2014) Moreover, sentiments shared with me through daily talk with Italians, those who worked in migration services, and those who had minimal contact with migrants, hinged on the idea that Italy received *worse* migrants than places like Germany and the United States which could select migrants on the basis of skills and aptitudes. Italians had been burdened with *care* and had to fulfil obligations to *charity* enshrined in official state documents which defined Italy as the locus of a universalist Catholicism that welcomes the poor and those suffering (Albahari 2017). Yet this welcoming was, in many ways, underpinned by paternalism, and sentiments of ambivalence, and resentment on both the part of those welcoming and those being welcomed. In this chapter, I look at how official discourses around integration and *accoglienza,* or migrant reception welcoming are at odds with migrants' embodied and materialist realities as barely tolerated subjects in Italy, migrants whose status is contingent and provisional. In particular, I look at how discourses around integration and *accoglienza* are interpreted by Eritrean activists and how these discourses structure a field of social action that will be described in greater detail in the following chapter.

I reference here Wendy Brown's writings on tolerance discourse (2007). Brown understands tolerance discourse as a discursive form that veils the extra-legal violence of liberal

regimes against marked racial and sexual others. While generally hailed as a victory of liberalism, tolerance channels negative affective dispositions of majoritarian polities in their appropriate channels, cordoning off messy entanglements and potential civic and political conflicts that could bring about calls for social equity and justice. As such, tolerance discourses neutralize calls for radical redistribution or other forms of social justice foreclosed by liberal models of multi-cultural inclusion. I argue that *accoglienza* functions in a similar manner—it legitimates extra-legal violence against migrants in detention centers across the Euro-African Mediterranean within which migrants are conditionally accepted in a larger social and discursive field as racialized objects of care (82).

Integration is suffused by similar anxieties underpinning tolerance discourse that Brown underscores. *Accoglienza* is a state institution, and a discourse that circulates in everyday life. It calls civil society groups, individuals and certain bureaucrats to exercise *welcoming* while "the state engages in extralegal and persecutorial actions toward the very group that it call upon the citizenry to be…" welcoming towards (84). I define integration as a racially-ethnically and class stratified policy prescriptive that casts certain groups as more or less integrate-able. Subsequently, this is a discourse suffused by negative affect, yet is marked by its putative racelessness. It, nevertheless, calls forth existing racial schemas, while producing new migrant racialization. In particular, I look towards how new categories of migrants, particularly 'transit migrants,' collapse existing categories between refugees, asylum seekers, long-term migrants, citizens of 'migrant heritage' and how this new category maps onto existing racial schemas, as well as onto security and policy directives. As Barbulescu reminds us (2019) "'integration' applies, not to citizens, but to *others*[77] (ie, non-citizens, migrants)" (6). Yet the inability of

[77] Emphasis added.

certain groups to 'integrate', like Turks and Muslims in Germany, even with juridical citizenship status (Mandel 2008), reflects racialized conceptions around which groups are more or less close to Europeanness and therefore easiest to integrate. Europeanness, here, is defined by liberal political values, secularized Christianity, gender equality, and respect for human rights (Mahmud 2013, 2016). More specifically, European Muslims are the particular target for discourses surrounding migrants' divided loyalties (Asad 1993; Bowen 2007; Cesari 2004; Haddad & Smith 2002; Kepel 1997; Lewis & Schnapper 1994; Nielsen 1995; Roy 2004; Vertovec & Rogers 1998; Werbner 2002; 2005; Wikan 2002). Islam, more generally, is imagined as inimical to liberalism, human rights and gender equality, while Blackness is imagined outside of the category of universal humanity[78] (Wynter 2003).

Literature on immigration in Europe, whether produced by governmental bodies or within existing paradigms in migration studies, has posited immigrants as a problem to national integration (Bloemrad et al 2008; Fassin 2011; Silverstein 2005; Thomas et al 2013). Integration, put simply, has been based on the citizen, non-citizen distinction, yet integration also belies issues of cultural citizenship and belonging (Chavez 2013) and elucidates emergent migrant typologies (Silverstein 2004) that reveal changing configurations of state power. On a practical level, integration is a social good that is differentially accessed; holders of blue cards[79] have near equal status to EU nationals, while refugees, even those who have secured international protection, often remain marginalized long after the moment of emergency. Integration therefore reflects raced, gendered and classed understandings of *who* can acquire citizenship in its most

[78] See also Muehlebach 2018 for a discussion on the racialized nature of humanitarian sentiment in Italy.
[79] Blue-card refers to a special working permit for highly educated third country nationals. Those eligible for blue-cards must show higher education credentials or a salary that is 1.5 times greater than the average national salary for the EU member state in which they reside. Blue-card holders have the same rights of movement within the Schengen as EU nationals, favorable family reunification conditions, and entitlement to unemployment benefits.

expansive sense as a condition of political and social belonging that addresses intangible, yet crucial, dimensions of social life, like dignity, and security of person, which are more and more out of reach even for racially unmarked nationals (Muehlebach 2012). Put simply, more than defining the object of integration, integration discourse defines the ideal *European* vis-à-vis their relations with marked racial others.

Integration Italian Style

The concept of 'integration' and its use throughout other countries in Western Europe as a policy directive is premised on the understanding that legal migrants continue to face structural barriers to education, employment, housing and cultural rights. Integration services such as language training, employment and vocational training, as well as the provision of housing and health services are meant to "ensure [ing] that all those who are rightfully and legitimately in the EU, regardless of the length of their stay, can participate and contribute….[it] is key to the future well-being, prosperity and cohesion of European societies" (EU Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2017). Yet everyday discourse frames integration as an individualist and culturalist endeavor; certain groups and individuals are more or less likely to integrate than others. Integration policy, moreover, is not standardized; it reflects the inequalities among EU member states, between regions within EU member states, and between migrant groups (which are imagined as homogenous) and individuals.

Integration is portrayed as a public boon in policy documents, but it is also a deeply contentious issue (Tilly & Tarrow 2017). It touches upon the tensions between rights and obligations in liberal societies; cultural belonging and juridical citizenship; and the role of the state in civil society; and, finally, state power and sovereignty. While EU policy instruments have long debated the most effective forms of migrant integration, in Italy, the concept is

relatively new (Caneva 2014). The document that I signed requires anyone from the age of 16-65 who is not a citizen of the EU and has a permit for the duration of one year to acquire 16 credits in courses either in Italian history, civics, language at the A2 level in order not to run afoul the law. In the second year of a non-EU migrant's stay in Italy, one is required to acquire 30 credits in these same courses. There are exceptions though; unaccompanied minors and those who are recognized as victims of human or sex trafficking are not required to fulfil these requirements. Failing to fulfil these requirements can result in legal sanction. As Barbulescu (2019) notes:

> "Failing to participate or to successfully complete the requirements in the new programs has serious consequences for reuniting with family members, renewal of residence permits, access to social benefits, permanent residence, and acquiring citizenship. In this way, integration contracts and examinations become the effective precondition for migrants' rights in the country of residence. This is a break with an earlier legal tradition that considered residence the sufficient condition for access to many rights for noncitizens. Instead, legal residence became a necessary rather than a sufficient condition" (19).

Sanction based assimilation has been a norm in the EU starting in the early 2000's, when multi-culturalism became a shorthand for migrant ghettoization (Liberatore 2017). The assumption behind these tests is that they move away from ethnic models of citizenship and assimilation towards more civic ones; having knowledge of a country's language, institutions and history stand as prerequisites to maintaining legal rights to residence. The rise of these mandatory tests has gone hand in hand with the rise of deportation throughout the continent and has served as a migrant disciplining mechanism (DeGenova 2002). Moreover, for many of the migrants I met, who had to constantly secure temporary housing (sometimes on a night-to-night basis), or informal employment to survive, the expectations for these sanction-based programs were misaligned with the reality of their lives.

Italy was once a major migrant sending country that has now transformed into a major migrant destination country in Western Europe. The question of integration, long ignored in

which earlier migration policies posed migrants as a temporary presence changed with increasing normalization of migration policies amongst EU member states (Andall 2000). Migrants' presence in the territory had to be formalized and regularized according to EU norms. Italy has dealt with the problem of unauthorized, informal and undocumented migration through periodic migrant amnesties (Andall 2000). Nevertheless, sanctioned-based integration falls in line with the dominant conception of migration as a problem of security (Caneva 2014) that holds in Italy.

In response to an EU-wide directive, in 2010, the Italian government created a ministry for integration; the office lasted for only four years. Cècile Kyenge, a Congolese-Italian doctor and member of parliament was the second and the last person to hold the position of minister for integration. She was also Italy's first Black minister. Her short-lived tenure, from 2013-2014, was marked by extraordinary displays of sexism and racism from her Northern League colleagues. Kyenge was called an orangutan by avowed anti-migrant politicians, had bananas thrown at her, and was likened to a prostitute or domestic worker. This was a national embarrassment for Italy, insofar that Kyenge's biography was a testament to the best models of migrant integration put forth even by the measure of EU policy directives. A member of parliament, a medical doctor, married to a fellow (white) Italian politician, Kyenge embodied the success story of earlier models of migrant assimilation.

Yet her example, and others, elucidate the limits of integration as it is deployed in a state like Italy, one characterized by national membership on the basis of sanguinity, native Italian language proficiency (although Kyenge speaks Italian), and Catholicism (Ballinger 2020) and whose history has been marked by significant out-migration. Such exclusive parameters of belonging, matched by an EU that has gradually disinvested in social welfare, and an Italy

characterized by austerity and protracted economic crisis, reveals integration to be a social and political good that is in short supply there (Herzfeld 2009; Muehlbach 2012).

Why did Kyenge's short tenure as minister of integration elicit such derision, such public anger and lead to the eventual dismantling of the ministry? In liberal, multi-cultural societies like the UK, Kyenge would have been held up as a model of assimilation, whose example would have been used to dampen more radical demands for social equality and justice. In many ways, I use the example of Kyenge to highlight the more profound differences between integration, as a policy imbricated within racial liberalism, and the logics of welcoming. While migration literature has many well-founded critiques of integration as a concept and state policy, integration, I argue, still holds a promise and potential for full citizenship that logics of emergency, care and charity cannot fulfill. However, freighted with civilizational, racist assumptions integration is, it still holds a future-oriented telos that the work of *welcoming* and the temporal logics of emergency foreclose.

I begin by reflecting on the language of the *accordo d'integrazione.* The agreement on integration reads thus:

> The identity of our people has been shaped by the Greco-Roman and Christian-Judaic traditions, which coming together in an original manner have been known to make Italy a country of solidarity in its own interior capable of *hospitality and charity*[80] in what concerns all those who arrive in its borders. The respect for life, the centrality of the individual, the capacity to give, the value of the family, of work and the value of community: these are the pillars of our civilization, building on the origin and the vital substance that is this direct openness toward the other and toward the things that characterize us. [(National Plan for Integration in Security—Identity and Encounter 2010, 4; authors translation) Barbelescu (2019:300)]

The integration document delineates the contours of national membership on the basis of a Greco-Roman and Christian-Judaic tradition projected into time immemorial (Anderson 1984),

[80] Emphasis my own

yet what is striking in the document is how migration to Italy is implicitly configured under the logics of emergency in which those who arrive in its borders are discursively constructed as objects of hospitality and charity. Solidarity here is vertically oriented rather than its more common and politicized definition as a horizontal practice of mutual aid between more or less equals. In this reconfiguration, the state demonstrates solidarity towards suffering others (Ticktin 2011) and its apparatus of institutionalized care instantiates and maintains categorical differences between migrants, *who are shown solidarity and care*, and citizens, *who have the capability to show solidarity and care*. In the section below, I will describe Italy's migration policies and its system of *accoglienza*, or welcoming, in greater detail to argue that the nature of the system of *accoglienza* is premised on a universalist humanity with values of charity and Christian witnessing (Muehlebach 2012, Albahari 2017) underpinning it. These values are at odds with the political economy of migration (both authorized and unauthorized) and its racial dynamics in contemporary Italy. While Andrea Muehlebach (2012) argues that an ethical citizenship based on volunteerism has taken hold in a post-Fordist Italy, one that is imbricated with and reproduces neoliberal economic practices, I argue that migrant welcoming takes place within a much more (racially) fraught social field occupied by professional humanitarian workers, refugees, their diasporan communities, local Italians and EU-wide migration specialists who have competing moral imaginations, demands and interests. *Accoglienza*, then, takes place within these spaces of political and affective indeterminacy as the moral and ethical grounds of cultural citizenship in Italy run up against the materialist and state policies that reproduce racial hierarchies and neoliberal policies of structural abandonment in its treatment of marked others (Fekete 2018).

On a practical level, documents like the accord were rarely mentioned or noted by my interlocutors who experienced immigration matters as opaque and confusing. When speaking to Tsege (whose story was recounted in Chapter 4), she remarked that she had not renewed her permit to stay, saying that it didn't really matter as she was unemployed and caring for their children at home. I was confused as her husband was a naturalized citizen, evidence that he navigated the immigration bureaucracy with a certain level of skill and could have done the same for his spouse. But her understanding of the utility of a permit to stay was contingent on employment status and the access to public space that employment permits. She didn't understand that a permit was also associated with rights to the public health system and some labor and housing protections. Further, depending on the class position of my interlocutors, some Eritreans lacked minimal language skills after years of living in Italy—many could not write in Italian. At times, I was asked why I was able to speak Italian while, after having lived in Italy for years, many Eritreans still weren't able to do so. (The question was asked in a hostile and suspicious tone, or in a jocular manner, depending on who asked it.) My interlocutors didn't understand or know that these immigration matters could affect their life chances and that language proficiency was required under sanction-based integration policies.

Welcoming Refugees: Race and Migration

The crisis of Albanian boat migrants in the 1990's was a critical event in the creation of a refugee welcoming system in Italy (Albahari 2017). In response to the significant number of Albanians arriving after the fall of the Communist regime there, Italian authorities arranged for the disembarkation of thousands of unauthorized Albanian *profughi,* or political refugees. The state displaced the work of caring for these refugees to volunteers and the Catholic Church. This would be consequential in the national (and EU wide) management of unauthorized migration as

integration policies would from then on be shaped by policies emphasizing containment, physical sequestration and isolation from city centers (Però 2007). Further, these practices would instantiate the 'policing-humanitarian nexus'(Albahari, 2017:37) that characterizes migration controls. NGO's like CARITAS, the Catholic Church, trade unions like CGIL (the Italian General Confederation of Labor) and ASGI, the Association on Juridical Studies on Immigration took on the role of provisioning shelter, of creating local labor and migrant solidarity organizations (Cole 2007) and petitioning for the rights of refugees and migrants more generally. As Maurizio Albahari notes:

> "Those maritime arrivals elicited sovereign responses that extend into the present. Early experiences of physical confinement were institutionalized into the immigrant holding centers eventually dotting the Italian peninsula and the EU's borders. Catholic ideas and influential members of the clergy also assumed a fundamental role in the humanitarian confinement that defines the Italian and EU liberal-democratic approach to unauthorized migrants (2017: 37).

Public attitudes towards Albanian refugees quickly swung from ones characterized by sympathy, compassion and expressions of solidarity to open hostility in the span of a few years. The arrival of unauthorized boat migrants from Albania created a moral panic (Salerno 2017), and this moral panic reinforced the state of integration: the normative institutional political and social order in which migrants are never seen, nor heard from. Care-- at best paternalistic and at worst veiling the violence that state authorities deploy-- here is configured around the logics of policing and public order and it has remained so in the present. Notwithstanding the unpaid labor of Italian volunteers, and humanitarian professionals who see their work in the migrant reception system as politicized, as a form of solidarity with migrants, these shared sentiments veil the political economy of migration and the raced and gendered regimes of labor it creates.

In 2015, at the height of the crisis, over 39,000 Eritreans entered the European Union via the Central Mediterranean route to Italy (Belloni 2018); 763 applied for asylum there. They

entered into the vast *Sistema Protezione per Richiedenti Asilo e Rifugiati* (SPRAR), Italy's refugee reception system. The system funnels refugees and migrants into a two-tiered reception system. The first tier, the first aid and reception centers, meets the immediate needs of refugees at points of disembarkation. From 2006 onwards, however, these centers have been replaced with 'Hotspots,' centers of identification and fast-track expulsion and emergency first aid, further entrenching the policing humanitarian nexus. Those who are deemed to have credible asylum claims are then transferred to first-line centers for accommodation (*prima accoglienza*), like *Centro Mattei* in Bologna, as they await final decisions for asylum adjudication. These centers are staffed by social workers, psychologists, physicians and cultural mediators who often act as interpreters for service providers. Refugees are then funneled into secondary reception centers after positive asylum decisions while they wait to find formal employment and permanent housing.

Once fingerprints of asylum seekers are taken, asylum claims can then only be lodged in the EU country of first entry. With few legal channels of entry for migrants from the global South, many take extra-legal overland or maritime routes across the EU. This leaves the 'burden of care' for migrants up to the poorest countries in Western Europe—Italy, Greece and Spain—which have comparatively fewer resources to integrate refugees (Caneva 2014, Hung 2019b). Eritrean refugees have sued the EU arguing that Italy's patchwork integration system means that it cannot fulfil its promises to protect refugees that it had undertaken as a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Refugees (Hung 2019b). But the reality of refugee reception and the lack of meaningful social, economic and political integration in Italy means that as political subjects, those who passed through the refugee reception system are in a semi-permanent situation of political and social suspension. Because of the lack of formal integration

services such as those that exist in countries like Sweden and Germany in the form of employment and language training, the period of 'welcoming' extends well past the emergency stage and can take on an embodied sense of permanent transitoriness in the lives of refugees.

In 2018, during long-term fieldwork, the system of *accoglienza* was under attack by the coalition government of the League and the Five Star Movement. The decree on security and migration, which detractors charged would instantiate institutionalized racism rather than the de-facto, everyday popular racism that most migrants in Italy face, was an out and out attack on the entire system of welcoming. The decree dismantled the national framework for humanitarian protection (which is enshrined in the Italian constitution). It levied heavy fines on NGO search and rescue operations in the Central Mediterranean. The most spectacular instantiations of this policy included the arrest of Carola Rackete, the captain of the Sea Watch boat. Moreover, it institutionalized at sea detentions and the sequestration of migrants on boats[81]. For migrants awaiting naturalization decisions, it increased the waiting time for decisions on citizenship naturalization from two to four years. On the security front, the decree allowed for the use of tasers and other non-lethal weapons for municipal police forces. As of October 2020, two years after the decree was introduced in law, it has been dismantled in favor of an overhaul of the migration system towards one that would remediate the significant challenges listed earlier, including the lack of substantive integration services, and the system's orientation towards the logics of emergency (Fassin & Pandolfi 2010).

The system of *accoglienza* is a charged social field, inspiring calls for reform or demolishment from critics of both the right and left. Moreover, charges of mafia involvement in

[81] The policy of at sea or off shore quarantine has become a norm since the beginning of the pandemic in 2020. See also https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news-feature/2020/11/9/italy-migration-ferries-coronavirus-quarantine-health-asylum

the refugee reception system have spurred right-wing calls to dismantle the system, leaving refugees even more vulnerable to exploitation by criminal syndicates, as many refugee advocates argued through the course of my fieldwork. However, it is more likely the case that temporary refugee structures are lucrative for landlords whose expenses are subsidized by the EU because these structures can host more people in less space (Hung 2019:126), rather than the alarmist depictions of refugee reception centers as another lucrative site for mafia expropriation. In sum, the lack of permanent and stable housing and work contracts that characterizes migrant life, as Carla Hung (2019) argues, is part of a policy of racialized disenfranchisement: to successfully apply for Italian citizenship migrants need to prove ten years of stable residence in a single location and secure work contracts for that duration of that time. Here state racism and inter-personal racism (the refusal of landlords to rent apartments to migrants) intersect to mark migrants in a socio-political state of suspension.

Refugees' life chances are also dictated by the same uneven geographic economic development that characterizes the North South divide, as well as by the existing political cleavages in Italy. Rome, a city administered by the MI5, with a strong neo-fascist presence, was characterized by a deep and open hostility towards migrants that Davide Però (2007) likens to a 'cartography of contempt.' There, municipal policies around housing forced working and legal migrants into illegal squat occupations that lack running water and sewage and are subject to violent expulsion and removal (Hung 2019a). Foggia, in the Apulia region and the breadbasket of Italy, is also the site of incipient political movements around the rights of the 'invisibles,' African migrants working in the hyper-exploitative agricultural industry in the South. Foggia has also seen racist attacks and murders of African union organizers and a deadly fire in a migrant worker encampment. Bologna, a left-wing stronghold facing an acute housing crisis,

nevertheless, provided significant social supports for migrants. However, even with formal rights to stay in the country, many refugees find themselves homeless and unemployed. Although integration is a policy prescriptive emanating from the EU and significant financial resources are distributed to EU member states to achieve integration, there are few structural incentives for the state or civil society to integrate refugees. The integration industry, much like the trenchant critiques of development (Ferguson 1994; Escobar 1995) that understood development as a depoliticizing and civilizational discourse, can also be applied to integration and migrant reception in the Italian context. Yet, I argue that integration still holds the possibility for refugees to exercise full political, social, cultural and economic rights as permanent members of society, as fully incorporated members of the body politic, that I've underscored above.

Nevertheless, logics of care, underpinned by state practices of containment, sequestration and detention, veil the racialized political economy of unauthorized migration, in which illegalized, deportable, racially marked and stigmatized labor constitutes the labor that sustains Europe's breadbasket. Yet anti-black ideologies made material by the conditions in which African migrants work, and the violence that they are subjected to in transit and in detention in Libya, interpellate (Althusser 1971) these racialized laborers as simultaneous security threats, migrants in need, and finally as deportable labor (Pradella & Rad 2017). It is in this context, in Italy's segmented and contracting labor market (Cole 2007), that African migrant men work in the lowest sector of the informal labor market. Many Eritreans exit the refugee reception system before their cases can be fully determined[82]. They also tend to take on informal labor in an effort to support kin in their sending contexts and pay back the exorbitant fees paid to human

[82] See 2019 UNHCR report on "Eritrean, Guinean and Sudanese Migrants and Refugees in Italy." 29% of Eritrean asylum cases were rejected or closed in 2017. The authors of the report note that the high proportion of closed or rejected asylum cases amongst Eritrean migrants in Italy reflect either onward or secondary mobility or relocation.

smugglers. Yet moral panics around the shadow or black economy ignore the role of undocumented, poorly paid and informal labor that characterized the country's economic boom of the 1960's (Yanagisako 2002; Muehlbach 2012; Krause 2018). Migrants enter into a formal economic system that is sustained by a significant informal economy. And because of significant spatial and symbolic segregation, migrants are kept in a state of social suspension, frustrated by the lack of opportunities afforded to them and assailed by the inter-personal and micro-social dynamics of racism on a daily basis, which will be explored in more depth in the following section.

Deracinating Refugees: A Black Woman Speaks

I had volunteered as an observer for UNHCR's integration focus groups. The day scheduled for my first observation, I took the train to Ferrara, a small city an hour outside of Bologna and met with the UNHCR team I would be working with. At the busy central train station, I met with Massimo who would be leading the team. Massimo, the lead facilitator, was a kind and patient man, almost avuncular, who displayed a dispassionate demeanor in professional settings. I had met him the week before, following the community dinner held after the unveiling of public art memorializing the Lampedusa sinking [see chapter four]. Massimo had done his doctoral studies in the sociology of religion. He began working with UNHCR after he took a volunteer position in Kenya, following a disappointing round in the Italian academic market. His contracts, which lasted between a year and two years, allowed him to provide for his young family. For the majority of his working week, he went from city to city conducting these focus groups, while his family lived elsewhere. He would often show me pictures of his four-year-old son and his newborn baby. Being separated from his family for long periods of time gave Massimo a sense of empathy when working with refugees. After these focus groups, Massimo

and I would have dinner together, reflecting on what we observed as social scientists. Dinners with Massimo were often a reprieve; he was genuinely kind, attentive and an empathetic listener as I expressed my own frustrations with the bald racism I faced in everyday life and the shock we both shared in observing the difficulties many migrants and refugees faced in Italy.

We conducted our focus group at a social cooperative in Ferrara with a number of refugees who volunteered for that day's focus group. My role was to keep copious notes in English—meaning that I had to engage in real time translation as I took notes—and to notice any things that the facilitator had failed to note. I imagined my role was to be as invisible as possible as an observer. Yet when we began our introductions, Massimo and Chiara, who facilitated the group, were visibly uncomfortable when the participants of the focus group thought that I was also a refugee and had to explain that I was in fact working with UNHCR personnel. We sat together in the offices of the organization in a small grey room with a single window that looked out to a large road below. At that day's meeting were four men and two women; the nationalities represented included Pakistan, Ethiopia, Cameroon, Syria and Senegal.

We began the session with Massimo explaining the parameters of the meeting—that whatever was said in the meeting would remain anonymous, paraphrased in UNHCR materials, and would be used by UNHCR personnel to advise local and national governments on best practices towards refugee integration. He began the meeting with a targeted list of three core areas that defined integration: access to employment, housing, and social life—whether or not refugees had access to Italian social networks. Below are selected transcriptions and my simultaneous translation of the meeting:

Abdul: Not everyone can find a job.

Abdul: I work in a *centro di accoglienza*. I've worked there for four or five years. This luck is not available to everyone. There's no system for labor. You're expected to have all of the requisites as someone who has never experienced these difficulties.

Maria: I have the same feelings as Abdul. They don't allow us to express ourselves or discover ourselves. I studied as a social worker in Cameroon; they won't recognize my former education. If I had some possibility to take two or three courses so that they'd recognize my former education to keep my diploma. I had done everything they had asked me to do. I arrived at this office, they sent me to a meeting of social workers in Bari; I went there. The thing that made me feel bad… I am a political refugee. In reality, I am a social worker. [I went to the office wanting] to know if there is a way to help me to recognize my degree. She [the head of the social worker's association] took my documents in front of everyone, she says in front of me; 'she says she thinks she studied social work, but in her country, they study in dialect.' Things don't work that way there. She was the president of the network of social workers. You have my diploma in your hands, you could read that it was in English or in French. I didn't say anything because I wanted to stop myself from saying bad words. After a week, she told me to take my documents to Rome to a ministry there. After almost two months, I received a response from the ministry that they wanted to see the original documents. Another problem, there are places that are reserved only for Italians, even if you have citizenship. ***Italians cannot accept that you to work with them. There's no possibility to move up in your work.***

Massimo: ***Because they won't recognize your degree?***

Maria: Not because of that, but because of the fact that they don't want you to move up.

Abdul first begins by highlighting the difficulty in finding formal employment in Italy; he then positions himself as one of the lucky ones who has found a position as a cultural mediator. He points to the unfair expectations that state authorities have for refugees, positioned as objects of care, yet having to navigate a system that in Abdul's words is non-existent. Yet, here I reflect on Maria's experiences as a social worker and her insights as to the social and ideological reasons for which refugees cannot move up in Italian society. After what seems to be encounters with an opaque and difficult to navigate bureaucracy, Maria describes a humiliating encounter with the head of the social worker's association. When the social worker mocks Maria for deigning to believe that her degree is equal to an Italian degree, Maria begins to grow increasingly frustrated. While dialect in the Italian context refers to one of the many spoken

Italian dialects, here the social worker describes African languages as dialects, placing them within a hierarchy in which European languages are the languages of professions, commerce and knowledge. When Maria expresses frustration at the fact that the diploma in front of the social worker was in a European language that is in fact more hegemonic than Italian, Maria is angered by what she understands as the contemptuous blindness of her collocutor. Maria's training as a social worker in her native Cameroon allows her to make these sociological observations that other participants in the focus group do not make. Moreover, her frustration also reflects expectations she has regarding her professional status and what she deems suitable work considering her degree. While Massimo tries to place the blame on the difficulty Maria has in having her degree recognized in an inefficient bureaucracy, a suggestion that Massimo could then take up with local authorities, Maria, instead links the opacity of the state and its indifference to migrants as a mechanism to maintain racialized labor hierarchies. As a street level bureaucrat (Lipsky 1980), the head of social worker's association embodies Maria's imagination of the Italian state—one which is suffused by negative affect, namely contempt (Però 2007).

> **Maria**: In all of these cases, we need to keep going forward to fight to live. Our problem is that what prevents us from integrating in Italian cities is the color of our skin. Since childhood I was always independent. I have done everything. Since coming here, leaving my country that had so many problems. In every sense I feel blocked.

Here Maria identifies the main obstacle towards integration as race, pointing to a sense of suspension that characterizes her life in Italy. Below, Mirvat, a twenty-six-year old Syrian refugee tries to decouple race from refugeehood, using her own personal experience as a counter to Maria's blunt assessment of the state of integration. Mirvat, blue eyed and fair complected, points out that the stigma attached to refugeehood is essentially non-racial—unattached to phenotype, but to a type of xenoracism—

> “a racism that is not just directed at those with darker skins, from the former colonial territories, but at the newer categories of the displaced, the disposed and the uprooted, who are beating at western Europe’s doors….It is a racism, that is, that cannot be color-coded, directed as it is at poor whites as well, and is therefore passed off as xenophobia, a ‘natural’ fear of strangers. But in the way it denigrates and reifies people before segregating and/or expelling them, it is a xenophobia that bears all the marks of the old racism. It is racism in substance, but ‘xeno’ in form. It is a racism that is meted out to impoverished strangers even if they are white. It is xenoracism” [(Svinandan 2001) Fekete 2001: 23-24].

Xenoracism as a concept refers to the enduring political, economic and social structures of marginalization that reproduce and maintain racial hierarches. Yet as a concept it refers to the fact that the structures and techniques of racialization can also be repurposed towards those who are not necessarily racialized according to existing phenotypic, color-based or colonial hierarchies. Xenoracism refers to the simultaneous mutability and enduring quality to racializing discourses and images. Both xenoracism and overt color-based racisms exist in the Italian context, as the example of Albanian boat migration illustrates. Nevertheless, the ocularity of race (Omi & Winant 2014) and the fact that Mirvat is visually identified as Italian, allows her to have more opportunities to build personal relationships with Italians that do not exist for Maria. Yet, Mirvat emphasizes that it is language that marks her rather than the visuality commonly associated with race.

> **Mirvat**: everyone thinks I’m Italian but when I say that I’m a refugee everything changes.

Below, Maria builds a consensus with members of the focus group when she begins reflecting on the state of anti-migrant discourse. Her encounter with a mother of a child who, elsewhere, referred to her as a ‘monster,’ prompted shock from the facilitators of the meeting. I, too, was shocked by her description of this encounter. Yet it didn’t surprise me. I often joked with friends that Italian racism was markedly unsophisticated and overt; paradoxically, at times it was almost child-like and innocent-- as when people would ask me why my curls were tighter than my

collocutor Girmay's-- unlike the polite and veiled racism that I'd often encountered in my personal and professional life in the United States.

> **Maria**: The politicians need to change the ways they speak about foreigners to Italians. They are the ones who are responsible for creating this perception. When one goes to people's houses, they hear this discourse on TV. They need to change the way they treat foreigners. They play with images, with the thoughts of the people in relation to foreigners. A foreigner is someone who steals jobs, who knows nothing, who can't do anything. How am I supposed to deal with this if this is the discourse people hear everyday? I had a dinner with my co-workers. We had finished eating around 8, in fact it was a lunch because we start at 2. We left and we were in the center. Then this little boy stopped in front of me with fear. The mother told him that he wasn't supposed to leave her side because there are black people who steal children. It's the politicians.

Here, Maria links popular and everyday racism (Essed 1991) with state discourses that emphasize the radical alterity of migrants and the scapegoating of migrants with regards to economic and social breakdown. Yet her inclusion of the anecdote of the little boy, who stood in front of her with fear, renders Maria a fantastic figure—a creature of a social imaginary run amok with anecdotes of African savagery and monstrosity, more closely aligned to the racial ideologies of the US antebellum than to the exoticism and eroticism with which Black people were imagined in Europe and Italy, more specifically (Wekker 2016). Inasmuch as scapegoating is politically instrumentalist, it is also part of the realm of dehumanizing fantasy and projection, which Maria alludes to in positioning the instrumentalist logic of politicians and political discourse with how she is referred to as a monstrous figure in the eyes of a child. Maria's complex positioning of how racism functions is at odds with the technocratic realm of humanitarian governance, which imagines the state as disinterested in terms of the cultural norms it upholds, as embodied by the kinds of questions that Massimo asks. Nevertheless, Massimo was acutely aware of the social and political impasses that he had to work around, and he often privately conveyed to me much more critical insights on the state of integration than his professional position would allow as a disinterested humanitarian.

Chiara: do you have friends from university that you go out with?

Mirvat: No because they're six years younger.

Abel: I have many friends.

Munir: It's not hard with people you know or with your neighbors. They have terrible images. When they understand that you're not a monster or a stereotype, they're wonderful.

Maria: The politicians need to change this. It's hard for them to approach you because they have this idea that you're bad. So, you're the one who always has to prove your worth. If the politicians don't change the way they speak about foreigners, then nothing will change.

Munir: you know for someone from Ferrara a person from *Rogero* is a foreigner.

Maria: Never at the level of what a black person experiences. If you and I (points to Mirvat) they'll look at me and say that I'm the foreigner, after they speak to you then they'll know you're a foreigner.

Yet, as the above example shows, official humanitarian discourses deracinates refugees, ignoring the fundamental role that racism plays in refugee reception and integration. Integration is racially stratified; those most likely to integrate, as I had argued earlier, were those deemed closest to Europeanness. Yet, Munir aims to complicate the ascription of race as the master category (Omi & Winnant 2015) for making difference legible in Italy. Difference in the Italian context is imagined along the lines of local and regional variation in habits, customs and food (Ben-Ghiat 2015), which Munir referenced by mentioning *Roggero,* a neighbourhood of Ferrara. Mirvat, who was young and not visually marked as Muslim or foreign, had a very different experience of what it meant to be a refugee in Italy than what Maria experienced. When I met Mirvat, I noted her elegant clothing, which was out of place for the meeting, but I assumed that she, like many Northern Italians, dressed in a stylish manner for all kinds of occasions. Later at dinner, I met her Italian partner, and Mirvat explained to me that she had just left a professional

shoot for a tango group that she had joined. Mirvat was socially integrated, if not yet legally integrated.

Before Mirvat joined our dinner in Ferrara, the two facilitators, Massimo and Chiara began speaking about the marked racism of Italian society. Chiara who had previously worked in Colombia for UNHCR chuckled and said that "Italian society is just behind." I then proceeded to bring up the impasse between Mirvat and Maria which I thought was a productive rejoinder to the marked racelessness of humanitarian discourse in Italy; alterity was the dominant academic framework to make sense of pronounced racial hierarchies that followed the contours of the global color line (DuBois 1921). Each time I tried to bring up the question of race, the conversation would turn to xenophobia or other mentalist or psychological explanatory frameworks for racism. It was only in moments of private frustration that Africans or Black Italians openly described the racism that they lived under. Massimo, who was genuinely conflict-averse, made a wincing facial expression when I brought up what had happened at the meeting. "It was a bit tense between Maria and Mirvat, no…I don't think Maria liked Mirvat too much."

I was disappointed though that the conversation between Mirvat and Maria was interpreted solely through the lens of Maria's hostility towards Mirvat. Having a direct understanding of what it means to live under racist and sexist double standards, I heard Maria's voice as someone who was frustrated that the reality of her life was being denied to her, rather than the collective wisdom that was taking shape at that moment that Maria was a hostile collocutor. I understood Maria's position all too well. Yet, in that moment, Maria's political and politicized observations on the state of integration were illegible under a humanitarian framework that is deeply imbricated with a state racism that it vociferously denies (Fassin 2005; Ticktin 2011; Muehlebach 2018). Maria was speaking aloud an uncomfortable and widely

unacknowledged truth (Bourdieu 1972): that 'know your place' racism exists and that it, rather than migrants themselves, is the greatest problem towards integration. While xenoracism (Sivanandan 2001) does exist simultaneously with and sometimes at odds with color-coded racisms in Italy and Europe more widely, the socio-political reality remains that the greatest migration controls in the EU are directed at Africans (Palidda 2011). Moreover, Africans are also the overwhelming target of hate crimes in Italy and beyond (EUFRA 2018). Here the xenoracism, the 'racism meted out to impoverished strangers,' or the racism meted out to poorer neighbors, in this case, is oriented towards Africa, an Africa that occupies a space of negation—a negation of humanity, political possibility, and modernity itself.

At the time during which I conducted fieldwork, the murder of 18-year-old Pamela Mastropietra at the hands of a 29-year-old Nigerian man sparked immense public anxiety. Luca Traini, a local candidate for office who ran on the Northern League platform, shot six Africans at the Macerata train station in retaliation for the killing of Pamela Mastropietra. The gruesome nature of the killing coupled with public attitudes that were increasingly suspicious, if not openly hostile towards male African migrants, created a difficult situation. The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights wrote in a 2018 report that "people of African descent face widespread and entrenched prejudice and exclusion" (1). According to the report 48%[83] of people of African descent faced racially motivated harassment in Italy (2019:20). Italy did not report the highest number of persons having experienced racial harassment of the 12 European countries surveyed—Finland surpassed that number with 61% of people of African descent having

[83] This number reflects those who had experienced some form of racial harassment in the last five years. The report defines racial harassment as "offensive or threatening comments in person; threats of violence in person; offensive gestures and inappropriate staring; offensive or threatening emails or text messages; offensive comments made about them online." The report also included document checks as perceived racial profiling and police beatings as the most extreme examples of racial harassment. Italy had the highest rate of perceived racial profiling by police at 70% of respondents believing that they were stopped according to race.

reported experiences of harassment. These European wide dynamics that the authors cite reached an inflection point with regards to public fatigue with the migration crisis and the highly charged murder of Pamela Mastropietra. For African migrants living in this charged moment, including many of my interlocutors who reported similar experiences of racial harassment, the feeling that they were unwanted, socially rejected and unable to access respect, upward mobility or access to fundamental needs like housing left many of them feeling increasingly hopeless with regards to their future in the country. This sense of being out of place was exemplified by a comment Samuel, an Eritrean man, made when we attended a demonstration in Geneva when I went inside a shop and bought those around me bottles of water. "How is it that you feel comfortable being around white people?" he asked. I was genuinely taken aback by that question, but it underscored the fact that experiences of discrimination and pre-emptive self-segregation in fear of social rejection undermine processes of social and political integration. This is the reality of political discourse and imagery that Maria speaks into public debate.

Against Accoglienza: The 'Care' in Bordering Europe and Italy as a Transit Country

Amongst Italian intellectuals, there were deeply critical voices directed against the discourse of dependency and paternalism that the charged term *accoglienza* connoted. Below, I describe the public intervention of one such critic: Andre Segre, the prolific filmmaker and professor of film at the University of Bologna. Segre has produced a number of documentaries and fictional films that deal with irregular migration to Italy, the most striking being *Come un'uomo sulla terra,* Like a Man on Earth, which follows Dagmawir Yimar as he recreates the passage across the Sahara and the Mediterranean to reach Europe. In that film Dagmawir Yimar also confronts a number of EU policy specialists on migration, using his embodied experience as a starting point for interrogating these relations of power across time and space.

I went to a public screening of Andre Segre's *Le ordine delle cose,* the order of things, on a wet October evening in 2017. An obvious allusion to Foucault's seminal text, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of Human Sciences,* the film is a fictional account of the life of a Somali woman who is trapped in a Libyan detention center. While stranded in Libya, she hopes to be reunited with her husband in Norway. The film follows the moral reasoning of Corrado, a member of the Ministry of the Interior charged with stopping human smuggling across the Mediterranean, who meets Swada and begins a series of email correspondences with her. In the film, Corrado metonymically stands in for Europe's conscience. Swada begins emailing Corrado and he begins to form an emotional bond with her. He then petitions the Norwegian government to grant Swada a humanitarian visa. In the end, Corrado decides against helping Swada, reinforcing the order of things. The film reproduces the infamous conditions of Libyan detention centers—overcrowding, cruelty, torture and makes allusions to the sexual violence that predominates in these centers. Moreover, it juxtaposes the affluence of Corrado's existence to the abject conditions within these camps that Swada is subject to. Most importantly, the film highlights an ethical impasse that Corrado finds himself in deciding whether to use his institutional clout to *save* a single woman that he has maintained an emotional bond with, or to stay true to his position and maintain a dispassionate demeanor in the face of massive and overwhelming human suffering. The film ends with Corrado abandoning Swada to her fate, disrupting any moral vision of the white male hero. Corrado is complicit in the violence he witnessed and through his professional standing facilitated in Libya; he returns to his life, never having to think of Swada again. The film, released in 2017, was hailed as prophetic; the director, Segre, accurately predicted the reintroduction of the Friendship accords with Libya.

At the end of the screening, Andre Segre, a director of a non-profit center that managed secondary *accoglienza*, and a number of high school students took the stage to offer commentary, read poems related to the migration emergency, and field audience members' questions. Segre sat in the center of the stage and dominated the space. As they began fielding questions, a member of the audience, whom I would learn later was Libyan, stood up in anger to say that the characters spoke Tunisian Arabic and that Italians conveniently forget their own colonial atrocities in Libya. While the audience passed confused looks around, Segre continued with his intervention, arguing that we do not need to welcome migrants, as welcoming indexed paternalism, racialized condescension and effaced the economic and structural issues at hand that pattern movements from Africa to Europe. True enough, I thought. Later, during intermission the same man who interrupted Segre asked me if I was Somali while we were both in line to buy snacks. It was odd, to say the least, of witnessing that encounter of 'deflect the blame' take place between an Italian director who was summoning Europe's conscience without making any substantive mention of colonialism, a post-colonial subject deflecting blame to his neighbors (it's the Tunisians!) for the racist complicity of Libyan authorities in the policing of migration, and myself, both the American observer being constantly observed and mis-categorized and a post-colonial subject in my own right.

Segre referred to the space of the Libyan detention center, like many other activists also do, as lagers, summoning the memory of the Shoah. Yet, the audience member's critical intervention--which was done in the style of what-about-ism--obscured his more substantive critique, that of the presentism of Segre's intervention and its obfuscation of the paradigmatic role of colonial violence in structuring the present. Segre brushed off the man's impassioned and slightly incoherent interjection, and continued explaining that many of these young men who

arrive on European shores are capable of working, that they come to Europe to work. Serge's intervention hinged on restoring political subjecthood through a Marxist vein to those who are rendered as depoliticized objects of care. These are workers; their labor sustains our societies, he kept emphasizing. As *accoglienza* was continually being attacked and the very minimal provisions of care being stripped during the political moment that preceded Salvini[84], the director of the secondary institution for *accoglienza* grew visibly alarmed. She emphasized that many of the refugees whom she worked with had experienced severe abuse and violence and were in fact in need of more care, not less. Aware of the need to build social consensus and solidarity with migrants—however freighted that was—she continued by describing the services the organization provided and how deeply needed these services were to meet the material and psychological needs of recent refugees. I, too, was aware of how our critical academic discourses could be misconstrued by non-academic publics and, more importantly, that these discourses could circumscribe the possibility for endogenous social change (Atshan 2020).

Both of these observations were anchored in real political conditions; welcoming did circumscribe political possibilities, casting migrants as dependents or more perniciously, as new right discourses emphasized, as drains to the social body. Moreover, welcoming was not redistributive, and it veiled the contemporary political economy of unauthorized migration in the Euro-African Mediterranean, which is heavily reliant on deportable labor. Yet, many African migrants are severely traumatized by the racist violence they experience in transit and in detention, giving them, under Italian national frameworks that adjudicated asylum, humanitarian status as victims of human trafficking and smuggling. Nevertheless, it was only by subjecting

[84] See US State Department Report on Human Rights in Italy. https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/ITALY-2018-HUMAN-RIGHTS-REPORT.pdf

themselves to the violence of human trafficking and smuggling syndicates in places like Libya, that Africans, whatever their motivations for mobility might be, can move.

What Segre hoped to underscore, which was lost to many members of the audience, was the paradigmatic role of state violence in creating the conditions of possibility for *accoglienza* to emerge as this Janus-faced political entity. *Accoglienza* effaced the role of the Italian state (embodied in the person of Corrado) in marking and making Swada (a Somali woman) a particular kind of political subject, one in need of care, if and only if, she survived detention in Libya. Much like the example of Miriam Ticktin's subjects in France, who chose to purposely infect themselves with HIV/AIDS rather than risk deportation (2011), the institution of *accoglienza* as a national manifestation of EU asylum policies effaces the structural violence that brings it into being: the longue durée of colonial and post-colonial violence. Moreover, it falls in line with state racisms embedded in policy prescriptives within supranational entities like the EU (Fekete 2000). That Segre referred to Libyan detention centers as lagers underscores the limits of Italian public discourses around the colonial past and its imbrication with the contemporary migration crisis (Hom 2019). And yet it is a strategic move to call forth the memory of fascism and Italians' complicity in the Holocaust, precisely because it is the paradigmatic racist violence that is universally condemned in Europe. More importantly, the appellation of 'lager' underscores the cruelty of global migration management, moving away from the neoliberal and technocratic discourse of 'border management,' that emphasizes 'human capital,' and reinforces the fiction of orderly migration.

The 'Second-Generation' and the Everyday Politics of Race and Integration

Alganesh served me pasta with eggplant in the apartment she shared with her daughter, her son-in-law, and her grandson. "We were sitting there, on the bus, me and my girlfriends,

laughing and speaking Tigrinya, when this old man, got up and screamed at us to speak Italian and to go back to where we came from. Can you believe that? I've been in this country for 40 years and in that time, no one has said something like that to me." Alganesh, then continued. "Ewa—she exclaimed in Tigrinya, to mark the outrageousness of what had happened to her on the bus. "I got up and said to that man in Italian, that yes I do speak Italian, that I am a citizen of this country…He said nothing to the Filipina women, only us, because we're Black." Alganesh's frustrations echoes Tuckett's (2018) insights that for many non-white Italians, citizenship is a formal legal technicality that doesn't redress larger issues around systemic, popular and everyday racism.

The scene Alganesh described was common. I had witnessed similar scenes on the public bus, not all of them so neatly mapped onto the color line throughout my time in Italy. Between the woman who screamed to a group of teenagers to speak Italian when their suitcase fell onto her foot and her husband who interceded on her behalf to further scold the group of teenagers, to the anecdote that was conveyed to me by a Chinese American recipient of the Rome Prize who was punched by an unknown man on a public bus in Rome who told her that she smelled, the everyday of public space was an arena through within which these racial categories were negotiated, reified or, at times, discarded for an ethics of living together. As I've argued earlier, integration is a public discourse, a social good and policy prescriptive that is stratified and premised on global and localized racial hierarchies. Integration, at its core, though, belies a possibility of cultural and legal-juridical citizenship that, at this time, is structurally impossible within Italian national law (Tucket 2018), and circumscribed by the imperatives of EU wide immigration policing which renders Italy a border zone within the EU tasked with keeping racial outsiders out. That is why during my first summer of fieldwork in 2015, Italians and Eritreans

alike described authorities' apathy and at times their facilitation of refugees' onward movement towards Germany and the UK as commonplace practices. As one Italian so candidly put it "let them go, we don't want them," in reference to the thousands of migrants who had transited across Italian soil that summer.

Yet, Anna Tuckett's (2018) ethnographic examples of second-generation children, those born in Italy or brought to Italy at a very young age, who lack juridical citizenship, locates the struggles of the 1.5 generation as a germane space for productive public discussions around the injustice of children who are culturally Italian, yet rendered 'structural outsiders' by migration policies that display a significant lag with daily, embodied practices on the ground. For Tuckett, children who dress, comport, gesticulate and speak with regional dialects embody Italian-ness, even if their racialized bodies are semantically construed as inalterably other. When I returned in 2017 for long-term fieldwork, both the question of *ius solis*, the question of citizenship by birth, and the reintroduction of the Friendship Accords were part of the same morally charged field of what it meant for Europeans to live with others in a world of deep and lasting inequities (Ben-Yehoyada 2015). That fall, *ius solis* was rejected by Italian voters, and the government quietly reintroduced the accords at the behest of central planners at the EU.

I often marveled as an outsider at how people like my friend Mihret were not read as Italians. Mihret often twirled her little purse on nights out at the discoteque when she wanted to get her point across, embodying the sassiness of women like Sophia Loren, so important to the imaginary of Italian womanhood. Born in Bologna, an Italian citizen, a Black woman who constantly emphasized that she was *Italian* and who looked to the history of African Americans as a palimpsest for how Black Italians could eventually just become Italian, Mihret was just *so* unequivocally Italian to me. During the 1970's, her mother came to Italy from Eritrea on a

domestic worker contract and her father studied engineering at the University of Bologna. Both were involved in organizing for the Eritrean People's Liberation Front and the Tigrayan Liberation Front. She often expressed deep pain for the situation of recent Eritrean refugees to me, having volunteered, while heavily pregnant, to feed and clothe some of the thousands who transited through Milan's central station in the summer of 2015.

I felt closest to Mihret for a number of factors. We were the same age; she spoke English well and was ambivalent about Eritrean diasporic politics. She had also travelled extensively and so we would trade travel stories. Mihret expressed deep uncertainty for her young daughter's future in Italy. As a four-year-old, her daughter had been the target of racial epithets at her private kindergarten. Mihret was in a paradoxical position as someone who was culturally and legally-juridically integrated and yet who faced everyday racism. In fact, Mihret was so integrated that the parents at her daughter's kindergarten felt comfortable making racist jokes about migrants dying in the Mediterranean while conveying to her that she was just unlike those in the boats. "In another time, my mother would have been on one of those boats," she would say to me in response to interlocutors who weren't there with us.

Yet, Mihret would, unlike other young Eritreans who rejected recent Eritrean refugees, emphasize the ties between herself and the newcomers, the contingency of her own life in Italy, and more profoundly, point to the uncertainty that her young daughter would live within the unclear trajectory of social integration for migrants that characterized Italy. Unlike Mihret, who had to apply for citizenship at the age of 18, her daughter was born with Italian citizenship. She would be the third-generation Italian citizen in her family, and yet cultural paradigms around national belonging ascribed inalterable alienness to a child whose only language is Italian. Nevertheless, on the level of everyday life, I began to note changes, particularly amongst

younger Italians and their relationships to their non-white peers at the university, amongst groups of teenagers, and children at elementary schools. For example, when I spoke at the University of Salerno, the only hostility I faced was from the academics who invited me and not the students I spoke to, who were engaged and challenged by my presentation on the sexual politics of Italian colonialism.

Mihret's embodied experiences and her Italian habitus were perplexing for older Italians, yet instinctively legible for those our own age and younger. One particular incident stands out. Mihret and I were approached by a group of young men who began flirting with us. Hearing us speak English, they asked where we were from. They were then shocked when Mihret responded to them in Italian and I followed suit. They were surprised by my proficiency in Italian for an English speaker, but turned to her and said, "*well you're Italian*," when they noted her Bolognese accent. The conversation then turned to Mihret's proficiency in English, uncharacteristic for an Italian, and Benito, one of the young men named after the Mexican revolutionary Benito Juarez, rather than Mussolini as he later explained to us, was charmed by Mihret. Their easy banter, their Italian affectations belied both a cultural and personal intimacy (Herzfeld 2005). Mihret, nevertheless, rebuffed his advances, later telling me that a relationship with an Italian man could only be based on racial exoticism, rather than mutual respect.

Mihret became Italian through the fact that her family had taken advantage of working the margins (Tuckett 2018), of navigating Italy's migration bureaucracy through their transnational connections. When Mihret's father realized that he would not be able to secure permanent employment in Italy as a civil engineer, he chose to move alone to Tanzania, while his wife and children remained in Italy. This was a strategic move to shore up citizenship for his daughters and wife, whom he supported financially from abroad. But, more importantly, his

move was in response to the fact that his possibilities for upward social and economic mobility were deeply circumscribed by race. For the first generation of Eritrean refugees, no system of welcoming or social integration existed. Their lives were a testament to working the gaps within a system in which they were neither legible as particular kinds of political subjects, i.e. migrants, nor accorded the possibility of being Italian citizens in the fullest sense. Exercising transnational capacities (Khoser & Al Ali 2000) was a requisite to building the possibility for social, political and economic integration for the first generation of Eritrean refugees in the Italian context, and in their various countries of settlement. Moreover, many Eritreans of the nationalist generation took advantage of refugee resettlement programs in Canada and the US to leave Italy and used family reunification policies in those countries to reunite fragmented families. Sometimes, families weren't successful in this endeavor, but they still managed to live transnational lives before the normalization of restrictive migration policies across the nations of the global North. As migration policies have securitized, Eritrean refugees have become the target of deportation regimes, subject to racial profiling as potential transit migrants and warehoused in detention centers, even if they have the privilege of being internationally recognized refugees. Refugeehood has had contradictory political effects in the lives of Eritrea's recent refugees and in the lives of refugees globally. Care, in effect, has come to veil the more extreme violence that characterizes global migration orders, becoming a palliative to the deeper inequalities that South to North migration in the post-war period helped to mitigate.

Conclusion

This chapter has critically assessed the state of integration in Italy, one which is characterized by discourses around welcoming, or *accoglienza*, as racially charged and stratified policy prescriptive that crosses international, supranational and national jurisdiction. This

analysis has attempted to address any methodological nationalism (Glick-Schiller 2005) that would assess solely Eritreans' ability to integrate into Italian society, reinforcing the fiction of the boundedness of migrant groups and members of host societies through the citizen migrant divide. It has instead engaged in a multi-scalar analysis that locates the disparate moral and political economies that structures *accoglienza*, but more particularly, the migration crisis as a particular field of social action.

As Eritrean migrants of generation Asylum (Redecker-Hepner 2013) continue to lay claim to a politicized refugeehood, one which aims to hold powerful actors to account for the death and suffering that they are exposed to, and makes demands to refuge, refugee reception becomes a space through which the political cleavages of Eritrea's diaspora were exercised. Too often, this was to the detriment of recent refugees who are caught between conflicts that stretch across space and have been long in the making.

CONCLUSION

When I began research in 2015, at the height of the crisis, many of my interlocutors were hopeful that with the publication of the UN Rapporteur's Special Report on Eritrea that the world would begin to see and address the conditions within Eritrea that were leading to this mass exodus. In successive demonstrations in Geneva in 2015 and 2016 in support of the Rapporteur's findings that the Eritrean government may have committed crimes against humanity, Eritreans chanted 'down down dictator,' and 'Isaias to ICC,' a catchy rhyme that indexed a faith in international organizations' capacity to formally adjudicate questions around responsibility and political justice for Eritrea's refugees. The question of making visible the crimes of the state was central in the work of activists who had an unshakeable faith that making violence visible that was denied, minimized and veiled would lead to political justice in a near future. Visibility and creating public awareness of human rights violations are still central to the presumptions of the human rights organizations and, more broadly, to social movements beginning with slave abolition (Tilly and Tarrow 2015). Eritrean activists engaged in activism that was multi-modal, improvisatory, flexible, creative and attuned to local politics at different temporal and spatial scales. For example, the chapter on Memorializing the Lampedusa Sinking, illustrated how acting on the scale of local politics through arts activism had the potential to shift the terms of public debate and representation on a larger spatial and political scale. Most importantly, this activism was oriented towards the experiences of recent Eritrean refugees who faced changed global conditions around a more securitized and militarized response to global migration (Redeker-Hepner 2013; Besteman 2016b). While some close to the activist group I worked with argued that this 'undisciplined' activism was reactive to social forces rather than proactive and that Eritreans didn't have a clear or programmatic plan or vision for what the future would look

like, I argue that this assessment was a misreading of what political activism looks like in the context of protracted precarity and vulnerability that characterizes the experiences of many Eritreans.

In conversations with many of my interlocutors, I was taken by the kind of pointed insights and high-level theorizing on the nature of class, race, gender, nation, revolution and diaspora that some of my interlocutors engaged in. In this dissertation, I have privileged the critiques of my interlocutors and their forms of self-representation. This privileging follows in the tradition of Black feminist thought. Patricia Hill Collins, the sociologist who writes on Black American women's experiences, notes that "[the] significance of Black Feminist epistemology may lie in its ability to enrich our understanding of how subordinate groups create knowledge that fosters both their empowerment and social justice" (1990: 334). Moreover, Collins argues that this knowledge of subjugated groups (328) counters the over-representation of negative and damaging representations that follows them. This epistemological orientation deals with fundamental questions in social science research as to whom to believe and why. In this dissertation, I understand my interlocutors as co-producers of knowledge in the process of writing this dissertation—these are their words, their worlds and their social practices that I'm attuned to. Nevertheless, while I was deeply aware of my own position as a researcher who could come in and out of their worlds, I still had to grapple with deeper questions as to what purpose knowledge serves. Trained as a self-reflexive researcher, I found it difficult to come to terms with how my words as a scholar would be given authority and weight by an authorizing institution like Brown, while my interlocutors were being attacked by right-wing press. That I could be able to have a career speaking and writing on refugee issues, while some of the most brilliant people I knew were cleaning airports. By accident of birth (and some strange

combination of biography, personality and aptitudes), I was the example of the first-class citizen Girmay cites below. But these contradictions present within the field of ethnographic research and particular to my racial and social positioning, revealed to me that diaspora is a tricky and messy space to navigate as a researcher who belongs within these complicated stratifications of gender, race, class, and nativity that make diasporas. In the end, though, I was still people's '*haftee*,' or sister, as they would remind me.

For example, here is an excerpt from one of my earliest interviews with Girmay who in our conversations was engaged in an analysis of citizenship and diaspora:

> "within the diaspora you have power; that's why you see these festivals, because in the diaspora there is power, and the government is afraid of that. You have to leave Eritrea in order to become a first class citizen. [the government] pits the diaspora against the people living within Eritrea as it stands."

Taking Girmay's words at face value could entail making claims that even forced migration isn't motivated solely by need but by desire and aspiration (Belloni 2019, Chu 2011). While that is true, desire and aspiration are also situated within significant material inequalities. The statement 'you have to leave Eritrea to become a first-class citizen' understands citizenships as hierarchically oriented, that citizenships are not equal and that life chances follow these global hierarchies of nations; the rights and protections (and access to material resources) that citizenship confers is situated by place and time. The right to citizenship, or as Arendt posits the 'right to have rights,' (1973) is still a fraught legal framework that came out of the context of mass statelessness in the European post-War context. As Mira Siegelberg's historical account shows (2020), the effort to end statelessness and to tether political life and rights to the state reinforced the nation-state's power against other possible political configurations. Eritrean activists wrestled with a series of paradoxes related to the hegemony of the nation-state as a

guarantor of rights, their relationship to other Eritreans in diaspora and to the fact that formal recognition as refugees didn't evacuate the substantive question of what political protection from violence means in practice in an era of increasing racial retrenchment. Yet in this statement Girmay also inverts the relationship between a racially marginalized and stratified diaspora (Bernal 2013) to what scholars have pointed to as Eritrea's transnational authoritarian regime (Bozzini 2011, Redeker Hepner 2008). Citizenship, as having a right to democratic deliberation in the affairs of state and in governing one's own life course, many activists reiterated to me, could only be claimed in exile. In positing a counter to nationalist discourses that discursively cast out-migration as treason, activists reiterated that those of the Nationalist generation were able to enjoy democracy abroad while demanding obedience of those who remained 'back home.' Yet these young activists themselves were now in diaspora, temporally and politically oriented to their experiences back home, much like the Nationalist generation whose rituals and symbols of belonging coalesced around the "Struggle," or the war of liberation as I showed in the first chapter. At other points in the interview, excerpts of which were included in Chapter 4, Girmay underscored the structural difficulties of engaging in activism in a context of economic precarity and right-wing reaction in Italy which was also imbricated within Eritrea's intimate and punishing form of governance (Riggans 2016). People like Girmay were engaged in knowledge creation using their situated experiences to de-stabilize simplistic narratives of nation, sacrifice, identity, development and refugeehood that travelled across nationalist and internationalist registers (see also Memorializing the Lampedusa Sinking).

Later, in the same interview, Girmay says:

> Before 2001 no one left Eritrea. In 2001 fifteen government ministers were arrested, thirty journalists, eleven newspapers shuttered, the only one that remained was *Hadash* Eritrea (New Eritrea), even student groups were shut down. To observant people it's clear that something is going on, but before this, after the war the idea was that we would fight,

> that there would be peace, and we would return to our lives. No one was leaving, before 2001 you might find two people out of a hundred who went to or wanted to go to Sudan. Back then, that type of person, it was easy, he just boarded a bus and went to Sudan. After 2001, all of these arrests were to inculcate terror, but within the government, the desire is for people to leave.

The war that Girmay refers to is the 1998-2000 border war between Ethiopia and Eritrea which resulted in the state of no war and no peace that characterized the two countries since 2000 and led to the 2001 crackdown on dissent. Girmay here narrates the history of the nation to me, periodizing the rise of out-migration as a response to the curtailment of political and human rights. Earlier in the interview he described himself as a stalwart nationalist who was willing to sacrifice for his nation at increasing personal costs. For Girmay, his own biography is intimately tied to how he imagines and narrates the nation and to his own burgeoning political consciousness. He, nevertheless, reinforces nationalist discourses by referring to 'that type of person,' those who would leave before 2001, as a distinct political subject from those devoted to the nationalist cause like his previous self. But the appellation of 'that type of person,' who may have left Eritrea for a confluence of personal reasons, also underscores the fact that as political conditions deteriorated in Eritrea and globally with the War on Terror, 'that type of person,' one who could exercise personal agency in questions around mobility, ceased to exist. Out-migration became both more common and riskier. That year, 2001, marked what he views as the dissolution between the bonds of government to its citizens (Aretxaga 2001). But Girmay's analysis of out-migration is also complex and multi-scalar; it is also a potent critique of state power/violence as simultaneously disciplining, instrumentalist and symbolic when he says that political arrests following the 2001 crackdown were meant to inspire terror for a larger public, even if their targets were those closest to the regime. Further, a discourse and practice that criminalizes migration is not intended to reduce migration, it may, in fact, paradoxically

encourage it as Girmay observes by saying that government officials, while publicly condemning migration create the political conditions for its attenuation. This is similar to the observations that social scientists have noted in which the Eritrean state, but developing states more broadly, are dependent upon emigration on a political economic standpoint and in the Eritrean example shoring up political rule (Poole 2013). Here Girmay reads a hidden transcript of power (Scott 1992), that, nevertheless, acknowledges the difficulties that poor African states have in meeting the needs of their youthful populations who are cast as risky and destabilizing populations.

These examples above underscore how individual memories of political violence coalesced into situated knowledge critiques that my interlocutors self-consciously crafted to hold authorities accountable for the pervasive violence Eritreans faced at home, in transit and in their countries of settlement. Using a mixture of personal and nationalist narratives, plumbing the colonial past as a means to make sense of a charged present, Eritreans made larger discursive claims on the nature of refugeehood and debated the terms of diasporic belonging and citizenship in formal and institutional settings and through intimate, situated and creative practice. Remembering was an active, creative and future oriented project that understood Eritrean diasporan subjects as part of a larger social body constituted by political forces far greater than themselves. Yet it was a social body whose members were in need of care, nurturance, and hope as my interlocutors emphasized in word and deed. To remember was a form of memory work that looked to the past as a symbolic resource through which members could maintain communitarian and social bonds. Even if this past was painful, contested or violent, remembering it through jokes, through rumors or hearsay as my interlocutors often did and through biographical narratives that collapsed individual memory with historical time, allowed Eritreans to make claims towards reparative justice in an uncertain and deeply contingent present

and future. Remembering gave coherence and meaning to a past and the practical tools towards ethical self-cultivation and practice in the uncertain present. This is what anarchist theorist Uri Gordon calls generative temporality, or 'catastrophic' hopes (2018) which arise in conditions of unremitting crisis—the hopes that exceed hope, the hopes of continuing living in conditions of political tragedy when anticipated futures fail to materialize.

In that same 2015 demonstration in Geneva, Tedros, the leader of *Eritrea Democratica,* expressed his incredulity at a question that a Swedish reporter asked him. He paraphrased it to me: "she asked, well Eritrea has met its development goals, Eritreans have far lower rates of HIV/AIDS then other African countries; what are you protesting here?" Tedros, whose English was scattershot, was taken aback and couldn't muster an intelligent response to the journalist's query in that moment. The subtext of that question, which reinforced the notion that economic development and global health were going to solve the more difficult and interconnected political crises that shaped Eritrea and other post-colonial African states, dogged political activists committed to a communicative politics that sought to shift public opinion and understanding of the issues that faced not only Eritreans, but refugees and migrants more generally in Italy.

Unfortunately, the idea that Eritrea's crisis was overwhelmingly an economic one and not a political one took hold in EU policy circles. EU officials sought to fix the cause of Eritrea's human rights and political crisis to economic underdevelopment and to the regime's isolation from the international community which exacerbated this underdevelopment. Commentators noted the unfair and deleterious effects that sanctions had on Eritrea's population; they also noted the double standards within which Ethiopia was allowed to evacuate the legally binding

arbitration of the Algiers peace agreement following the 1998-2000 border war[85]. In 2018, towards the end of long-term fieldwork, Eritrea and Ethiopia made peace. Girmay was ecstatic and texted me that we would have coffee together in Asmara. I was more circumspect for what the future of Eritrea's refugees would hold.

Severe depopulation in Eritrea is a human catastrophe; I do not minimize the violence that Eritreans are exposed to in transit, that there are no clear figures for the Eritreans who have died in war, en route and in acts of quiet despair, that family fragmentation is routinized and that the significant inequalities between those in diaspora and those subject populations at home instantiates resentment in those left behind and a sense of entitlement and privilege for those abroad (Hirt 2013; Belloni 2019). Yet the efforts of European authorities to pinpoint root causes of migration in the case of Eritrea suffers from an economist's understanding of forced migration and an Africa framed as a space of underdevelopment (Ferguson 1996). For European officials, the hegemonic imagination that economic development naturally led to the liberal democratic state operated on the level of public transcript (Scott 190). On a more informal level, officials were at a loss with how to deal with right-wing populist attacks on the integrity of the EU that leveraged the presence of migrants from the global South as an attack on national identities and put the legitimacy of the EU in crisis. To save the liberal democracy of the European Union, as Simon Mordue, who was at the time the Deputy Director General for Migration for the European Commission, stated, officials were tasked in making 'tough decisions.' Mordue was invited to speak at Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, and I attended his talk in early 2018. I tentatively asked him about how these 'tough decisions,' that entailed partnering with the authoritarian regimes in Sudan to stop human trafficking and increasing development aid to

[85] These observations are based upon public statements of Vincent Cochetel, the UNHCR head for forced migration in the Central Mediterranen, at the time of fieldwork in 2018.

Eritrea to curtail out-migration could undermine the EU's public image in the long run as an upholder of liberal-democratic norms and humanitarian values. Mordue first told me that the EU didn't increase development aid to Eritrea. The EU Commission's website showed that for the period 2016 to 2020 the EU commission had committed 200 million euros towards developing the energy sector and supporting governance in Eritrea. For the previous four-year period development aid had been capped at 50 million euros (EU Commission 2018). Eritrea's government has never conducted a census, released a formal budget of economic activity (Welde Giorgios 2014), and for a government accused of gross and systemic abuses money that is unaccounted for has the potential to exacerbate these abuses rather than ameliorate them, a point I was trying to politely make. After the talk, Mordue came up to me to say that he had been in Libya and that these were indeed tough decisions. I don't doubt that it was difficult for Mordue to reconcile his own humanity with the professional exigencies that his position entailed and the contradictory and incommensurable values he was supposed to uphold. These confused responses to both the growing threat of the right and to, EU officials, the discursively unintelligible nature of political violence in Eritrea that drove what Milena Belloni calls 'migration at all costs' (2019) have made the situation of Eritreans and other forced migrants increasingly precarious.

The experience of Eritreans is not unlike the experiences of other categories of stigmatized migrants on a phenomenological level. Yet, it is important to underscore that the United Nations has classified Eritreans as a temporary protection group; moreover, Eritreans overwhelmingly receive positive asylum responses in the EU, at a rate of 81% in 2019 (EUROSTAT 2020). This leads me to what I noted as a troubling paradox over the course of the six years that I have worked on this project. This is the paradox of humanitarian recognition in

the lives of Eritrean refugees, a paradox that has troubled me and troubles others who write on refugee issues (Besteman 2016). Making visible the political violence that Eritreans faced through high profile discursive interventions like the UN Rapporteur's report and by petitioning international organizations like the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, did not ameliorate the lived conditions of Eritreans at home, as refugees in transit or in their countries of settlement. It paradoxically made my interlocutors into targets of right-wing discursive violence and material violence in transit. Instead of guaranteeing Eritrean refugees protection from political violence, this paradoxical humanitarian recognition has attenuated their vulnerability and created new ones. The 2017 prosecution of Father Mussei Zerai, the Swiss Eritrean priest who was nominated for the Noble Peace Prize in 2014 for his work with the NGO Habesha illustrates the stakes of migrant activism. Father Zerai had been prosecuted for aiding and abetting unauthorized migration through the *Bossi Fini* laws. Father Zerai provided the coordinates of migrant boats in distress to the Italian coastguard. The prosecution alleged that he had secret chats with a German NGO that was alleged to have had communications with traffickers in Libya. I had several encounters with Father Zerai during my fieldwork. (The first time that I met him in Ferrara I mentioned his courage and he rebuffed that assessment by saying that he did only what had to be done.) Father Zerai's prosecution was unique only insofar that he was a highly visible pro-migrant activist and was only recently in consideration for the Nobel Peace Prize.

Father Zerai's prosecution though indexed what had been increasingly classified in European press as "crimes of solidarity." Martina Tazzioli (2018) describes the common slogan that followed the criminalization of solidarity, 'solidarity is not a crime' as

> "[a] response to legal prosecutions and municipal decrees, which, especially in Italy and France, have been intended to act against citizens who provide logistical and

> humanitarian support to transiting migrants. Such criminalization of individual acts of solidarity and coordinated platforms of refugee support is undertaken both in the name of national and European laws, in opposition to the facilitation of irregular entries, and through arbitrary police measures."

For Tazzioli, these prosecutions herald a new form of bordering which is aimed at capturing and containing migrants, in effect, evacuating the legal and ethical obligations towards non-refoulement and unlawful detention that are embedded in the international refugee regime. But Father Zerai's prosecution also underscores the limits of humanitarian reason (Fassin 2011) in its racializing logics which strive to preserve solely the bare life of racialized subjects. Humanitarianism forecloses the future, as critics have charged, in that its temporal logics are attuned solely to the logics of emergency (Fassin & Pandolfi 2005; Redfield 2013; Muehlebach 2018). Institutionalized humanitarianism is also increasingly imbricated with border regimes (Ticktin 2016) which has clear resonances in the experiences of Eritreans migrating to Europe.

The future for Eritreans at this moment is uncertain. Even those who have secured permanent status in the countries of the Global North nevertheless have family members in transit, in refugee camps, or 'back home,' as Eritreans commonly refer to Eritrea. Political violence has reverberations across time and space (Feldman 1991, McGranahan 2010) and for Eritreans who may find a respite from violence or never directly experienced it, the violence that their compatriots and family faced was deeply troubling and painful, as many of my interlocutors emphasized. When faced with Mihret's deep pain at witnessing the suffering of recent Eritrean arrivals-- Mihret who grew up comfortably in Bologna-- I struggled to respond. I had also witnessed this deep pain amongst more or less privileged Eritreans. For example, it was obvious to me when Rahele, an Eritrean woman and financial executive I met at the Oslo Human Rights conference in New York, spent the entirety of our one-day conference in tears at the situation of

Eritrean refugees, that she too felt pained by the violence that Eritrean refugees are subjected to. She told me that she and her family were re-located from a refugee camp in Ethiopia to the United States in the 1980's. At the time, I found her tears insufferable, but that was because to continue doing the fieldwork that I did, I too had to bury my own suffering at witnessing and listening to experiences of gross abuses and the memory of my family's suffering. Yet her pain underscored the fact that violence was experienced collectively and that the people I worked with remember this violence in order to find accountability, political justice or to maintain a sense of connection to other Eritreans separated by geography and the circumstances of life.

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