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## Sex, Citizenship and the State: The Construction of the Public and Private Spheres in Colonial Eritrea

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In 1905, during a solemn address on the state of the judiciary in Eritrea,<sup>1</sup> the *Procuratore del Re* (Public Prosecutor), Ranieri Falcone, discussed interracial concubinage at some length. Falcone pointed out that mixed unions between Italian men and Eritrean women were widely practised.<sup>2</sup> He would rather have done without them because he considered them detrimental to Italian prestige. But, Falcone argued emphatically, the state had no right to intervene and forbid such relations: 'Indeed, how could the law possibly forbid these *de facto* unions, as long as the partners want them? Can the legislator create a completely new conflict between the law and the partners' conscience?'<sup>3</sup>

A Fascist judge would have not posed a similar question and would instead have boldly stated the state's right to regulate individual intimate behaviour. In fact, some 30 years later, the first of the Fascist race laws made 'relations of a conjugal nature' between a citizen and a colonial subject a crime, punishable by up to five years of imprisonment (Royal Decree 19 April 1937, No. 880).<sup>4</sup> Falcone, however, like the Governor

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of the time, Ferdinando Martini (1897–1907), was inspired by solid Liberal principles and believed that the state should refrain as much as possible from intervening in citizens' personal lives.

Western liberal principles, however, were not well suited to travel to the tropics. On African soil, their contradictions were stripped bare. Colonial subjects were, by definition, deprived of the rights of citizenship; and the citizens whose conscience and conjugal practices deserved respect turned out to be male citizens only. In the same address, in fact, Prosecutor Falcone stressed the need for the legal prohibition of marriages between white women and colonial subjects. Colonial governors, such as Martini and his Liberal successors, shared Falcone's ideas on this subject: they interfered only sporadically in the interracial sexual relations of Italian men, but took energetic measures to prevent any form of sexual relations – from prostitution to marriage – between European women and colonised men. During Martini's period in office, two white women married Eritrean men, and they were promptly requested to leave the colony.<sup>5</sup> Not a single voice raised doubts about the state's right to carry out such an intrusive repressive policy against European women.

This chapter looks at governmental policing of interracial sexual relations and mixed-race children in colonial Eritrea (1890–1941), focusing on the nature of state–citizen relations that they reflect and, at the same time, they reveal. Such a perspective helps us understand how and why colonial sexual policies changed over time. It sheds some light on the consequences of the Fascist seizure of power in the colonies; and it makes for a telling example of how, in Liberal Italy, the notion of private sphere was articulated along gender, class and racial lines.

As anthropologist Ann Stoler has pointed out, during the early days of Western rule in Asia and Africa, colonial authorities tolerated – or even encouraged – interracial concubinage, and were willing to incorporate mixed-race children into the white communities. At the beginning of the twentieth century, however, and increasingly throughout the 1920s, colonial authorities banned interracial concubinage, and replaced it with marriage between Europeans. Interracial sex remained confined to the racially acceptable context of prostitution. Stoler explained such a shift in colonial sexual policies by arguing that interracial 'concubinage... "worked" as long as European identity and supremacy was clear. When either was thought to be vulnerable, in jeopardy, or less than convincing' the colonial elites responded by closing ranks. This shift in colonial sexual polices, Stoler further argued, was a consequence of 'an increasing rationalisation of colonial management'.<sup>6</sup>

This rationalisation was first and foremost the consequence of political and social events taking place in the colonies. But colonial rulers' attitudes towards interracial concubinage and mixed-race children also responded to developments taking place in the metropole.<sup>7</sup> One of these was the reconfiguration of the relationship between the citizen and the state that took place in Western countries starting from the First World War, when state power greatly expanded. In the following decades, the fact that there was a new understanding of state rights and responsibilities is clearly demonstrated by welfare policies, the new interest in eugenics and the Fascist pro-natalist campaign, which rested on the ideological premise that for the common good the state could legitimately intervene in individuals' lives, even in an aggressive way. As David Horn has pointed out, 'previously private behaviors were made targets of a permanent governmental management'.<sup>8</sup>

In Italy, the shift from Liberalism to Fascism brought about a dramatic change in the governmental understanding of state prerogatives. But in the same period, a shift in the prevailing notions of private and public spheres occurred all over the Western world. In the 1920s and 1930s, therefore, not only Italian colonial rulers but also other colonial rulers found it easier to intervene in realms that, in the previous decades, liberal rulers had deemed as pertaining to (male) citizens' intimate sphere and thus ideally outside the state's reach.

### **Public prostitutes for privates, private concubines for officers**

During the Liberal period, in attempts to regulate interracial sexual relations, the Italian authorities made a sharp distinction between concubinage on the one hand, and prostitution on the other. Although colonial governors perceived concubinage as having consequences for the construction of racial hierarchies, overall they did little to regulate it. In contrast, colonial authorities did not grant special racial relevance to prostitution (in this period Italians and Eritreans shared the same prostitutes) but they minutely regulated it. Concubinage was regarded as a relationship that took place within the individual private sphere. Governor Martini and his successors monitored it, to make sure that it conformed to perceived standards of white prestige, and occasionally they repressed behaviour that they considered damaging to the racial order. But they intervened only reluctantly into private lives, especially if the individual in question was one of their peers: that is, a white, middle-class man. Prostitution, by contrast, was considered to be a public

service, the regulation of which naturally fell within the governmental sphere.

Colonial regulation of prostitution was modelled on the metropolitan system.<sup>9</sup> Prostitutes were provided with a licence and segregated in special areas, under the control of the Carabinieri (one of the Italian police corps). They had to undergo periodical medical checks, which were recorded on their licences. If a woman was found to have a sexually transmitted disease, the authorities withdrew her licence until she had fully recovered. Sick women were mandatorily confined to a *sifilicomio*, a special hospital for the treatment of such diseases. This system was established as soon as the Italians arrived in Africa. Indeed, almost immediately after they occupied Massawa in February 1885, the Italian military command issued a regulation on prostitution,<sup>10</sup> and only four months later, in June 1885, the first *sifilicomio* started to operate.<sup>11</sup>

Over the years, the colonial government refined the organisation of the 'service of prostitution' set up in 1885. New rulings on prostitution were issued in 1892, 1903, 1916 and 1925, but the system remained fundamentally the same.<sup>12</sup> Its main goal was to protect the Italian military from the dangers of sexually transmitted diseases. In a colonial situation, to keep the army fully efficient was in fact a vital need, and sexually transmitted diseases ranked as one of the leading causes of morbidity among the military.<sup>13</sup> Discouraging military men from having relations with prostitutes was not even discussed, since governors and military commanders believed that a regular sexual life was necessary for the wellbeing of soldiers. The government thus mobilised medical doctors and the Carabinieri, in order to create a restricted pool of sanitised women – the licensed prostitutes – at the men's disposal. The outcome was a highly repressive system, which both men and women disliked and tried to evade. In practice, therefore, state-controlled prostitution remained something where only marginal African women worked – those who did not have a good enough support network to enable them to avoid police round-ups and forced vaginal examinations – and which only Italian privates, who could not afford to keep a concubine, frequented.

It is important to underline that it was only after the invasion of Ethiopia that the Italian government began to conceive of prostitution as an instrument for its racial policy. Starting in 1935, in fact, the government set up a network of segregated brothels, banned interracial concubinage, and attempted to limit interracial sex to prostitution.<sup>14</sup>

At the time of Italy's first African war (1885–96), however, colonial rulers had taken quite the opposite course of action and actually

encouraged officials to take local concubines. According to Alessandro Sapelli (an Italian officer, and later colonial official, who served in Eritrea at the time), as soon as they gained some knowledge of the local population, several officers then started to

consider [it] detrimental to their dignity to meet with their own subordinates or with other natives in the so-called 'horse-shoes' [the brothel]<sup>15</sup> even if the natives took care to clear off when a white man arrived. So, the system of permanent unions started. The officer had a *tucul*<sup>16</sup> made for the woman he had chosen. He provided her with the means for a decent living, and for keeping the necessary domestic servants.<sup>17</sup>

Other sources indicate that colonial authorities encouraged officers to take African concubines. According to Giuseppe Daodiace (Governor of Eritrea, 1937–40), for example, 'general Baldissera had issued a circular letter telling officers that they should take a *madama* [in Italian colonial jargon, an African concubine] as soon as they landed in the colony'.<sup>18</sup>

One should consider, at this point, the fact that during the first decades of Italian rule in Eritrea, the sex ratio within the white community was highly unbalanced. At the time of military conquest, European women were extremely few. Afterwards, their numbers grew slowly: in 1905, single European men numbered more than 1,300, whilst single European women numbered 73. Only 20 per cent of the European adult men were married, and not all of them had their wives with them.<sup>19</sup> It is therefore not surprising that many Italian men consorted with local women.

After the devastating defeat that the Italians suffered at Adwa in 1896,<sup>20</sup> the military, who had ruled the colony thus far, were replaced by a civilian governor, Ferdinando Martini (1897–1907). Italian colonial strategies changed greatly as a result and so did sexual policies. In the conquest years the Italians had asserted their authority over the Eritreans primarily by means of military might. In such circumstances, governmental encouragement of interracial concubinage amounted to a statement of the colonisers' right of conquest over colonised women. After Adwa, however, in order to impose Italian authority, Governor Martini initiated a new policy which was a careful blend of repression and initiatives which aimed to build up Italian 'prestige'.<sup>21</sup>

In general, Martini considered the 'unions between white men and native women' to be a 'very serious inconvenience'.<sup>22</sup> However, he did not try to stop private citizens from contracting such unions, and

neither did he discourage colonial officials from keeping African concubines, probably because they tended to run their personal affairs discreetly. Military officers, however, were quite another matter as they were used to a different style of rule. In some cases, their behaviour caused public scandal, and Martini expelled the officers in question; but there was also a good deal of what was seen as unbecoming behaviour that was too widespread and not serious enough to be dealt with by actual expulsion. This was the case, for example, with quite a few officers who housed their concubines in military facilities, 'lodged at state expense!' as an enraged Martini noted in his diary.<sup>23</sup> 'We should put an end to these *madame*' he wrote a few months later, 'State facilities are reduced to brothels. Officers lose any dignity and decorum with these whores.'<sup>24</sup> Martini thus agreed with the military command that officers should be forbidden from keeping their concubines in state dwellings.<sup>25</sup> He did not go any further, however, and we know that military officers continued to have long-term relationships with local women. As long as they kept out of the public view, and they remained confined to officers' private lives, interracial sexual relations were tolerated and allowed to persist.<sup>26</sup>

Martini's successor, Giuseppe Salvago Raggi (1907–15), went further and forbade colonial officials from 'cohabiting with native women' and from marrying them (something that, in reality, was already not actually happening).<sup>27</sup> The prohibition against concubinage appears to have been selectively enforced when it came out, and rapidly forgotten afterwards. In fact, there are well-known cases of colonial officials who lived with Eritrean women in the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>28</sup> It seems likely that the government wanted a legal instrument to prosecute couples whose behaviour it considered disgraceful, but it was willing to turn a blind eye to couples who kept a low profile.

Until the war on Ethiopia (1935–6), therefore, the government kept an eye on long-term liaisons by men vested with public functions insofar as they took public relevance. Providing that officers and officials ran their sexual affairs discreetly, as private affairs, however, the state did not interfere. The Fascist March on Rome initially made no difference to governors' attitudes in this respect. Interracial concubinage, even though it was still undoubtedly practised by Italian men of all walks of life, was naturally decreasing, due to the balancing-out of the sex ratio in the Italian community itself. In 1905, there were 5.5 European adult men (including the military) for every European woman, while in 1931 this figure had dropped to 1.6 to 1.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, the 1920s and early 1930s were marked by a low degree of racial conflict in the colony;<sup>30</sup>

racial hierarchies were solidly in place and fostered governors' relaxed attitudes towards interracial concubinage. This situation changed with the invasion of Ethiopia, when Mussolini ordered massive Italian settlement in his newly-created empire and dictated a segregationist policy. Mussolini's offensive especially targeted interracial concubinage, which was booming due to the arrival of thousands of Italian men. At that point, at least in the dictator's plans, state control over citizens' sexual lives became systematic.

### **The colonial state, Italian fathers and Italo-Eritrean children**

As far as colonial sexual policies are concerned, there was therefore continuity between the Liberal and early Fascist periods, and a radical shift occurred only with the war on Ethiopia and the race laws of the late 1930s. In some respects, this periodisation also applies to colonial policies towards Italo-Eritrean children (i.e., the children of mixed race unions between Italians and Eritreans). During the Liberal and early Fascist periods, Italian law provided no special status for such children. Juridically, the Italo-Eritreans were either Italian citizens or colonial subjects. As a rule, children were supposed to acquire their fathers' citizenship upon legal recognition. If Italian fathers legally recognised them, in fact, the children automatically gained Italian citizenship. However, colonial rulers seemed in general to believe that – regardless of paternal recognition – Italo-Eritrean children were indeed Italian, and therefore the state had special responsibilities towards them. Starting from the First World War, therefore, the colonial state took an increasingly active role in providing for the welfare of Italo-Eritrean children, and for their legal definition as Italians.<sup>31</sup>

This attitude was reversed after the invasion of Ethiopia, when Mussolini set the colonial government the goal of stopping the birth of mixed-race children, whom he perceived as a serious political danger for his empire. He thus promoted aggressive propaganda and repressive legislation against interracial mixing. This new trend culminated in 1940, with a law that prevented the paternal recognition of mixed-race children and classified them as colonial subjects.<sup>32</sup>

The anti-miscegenation policy of the late 1930s appears in many ways to be in striking contrast to the policy followed by the colonial governments in the previous decades. However, on close examination, one can see that there were more similarities between the two policies than one would think at first sight. These two policies, in fact, had common roots

and shared the same ultimate goal. Both tackled the contradictions between Italian paternal prerogatives and colonial racial stratification. And both aimed at building a two-tier society, in one case by turning the Italo-Eritreans into colonial subjects, and in the other case by incorporating them into Italian ranks.

Moreover, if one looks carefully at governmental policies regarding Italo-Eritrean children in the years 1885–1934, one can see that the differences between the Liberal period on the one hand, and the early Fascist period on the other hand, were significant. Both Liberal and early Fascist rulers agreed that Italo-Eritreans ought to be considered Italian, but the former did not intervene in the relationship between fathers and children. Liberal rulers, in fact, allowed fathers to freely decide on the incorporation of the Italo-Eritreans into the Italian community or, conversely, on their exclusion. By contrast, starting from the First World War, and increasingly during Fascism, colonial rulers took this power for themselves. Initially they used it to include Italo-Eritreans into the national community, and after 1935 to exclude them. If one looks at colonial policies regarding Italo-Eritrean children from the point of view of the distribution of power between state and citizens, the invasion of Ethiopia thus no longer appears as a turning point, and political continuity within the Fascist period emerges.

In colonial Eritrea, the birth of Italo-Eritrean children was a common occurrence. In 1931, a census listed 515 children born to Eritrean mothers and Italian fathers, out of a total Italian population of 3,688 (4,188 including the military).<sup>33</sup> There were also undoubtedly other Italo-Eritrean children who were never registered in the Italian birth records, but we do not know how many. According to governmental sources, the number of Italo-Eritreans born before 1935 totalled 800.<sup>34</sup> Between 1937 and 1952, at least 5,000 Italo-Eritreans were born.<sup>35</sup>

The Italians had different and conflicting attitudes towards Italo-Eritrean children. Both according to accepted wisdom and according to the Italian civil code, it was paternity that defined a child's identity. The child of an Italian father was thus to be considered to be Italian. At the same time, racial prejudice against mixed-race children was also widespread. Such contradictory attitudes towards the Italo-Eritreans confusingly co-existed throughout the entire colonial period.

During the Liberal and early Fascist periods, the notion that the child of an Italian father was Italian prevailed. A significant number of Italian men – it seems at least 50 per cent – recognised their Italo-Eritrean children, but many others abandoned them.<sup>36</sup> Those abandoned by their fathers were often left in destitute conditions. This caused some



embarrassment to the colonial government. It is important to note here the fact that the Eritreans too considered a child's identity to be defined by its paternal descent. As a result, for the Eritreans, the destitute children who had been abandoned by their Italian fathers were Italian, regardless of whether they had been legally recognised or not.

Until the First World War, the colonial government did not take any initiatives to change the lot of Italo-Eritrean children. Falcone and other influential members of the colonial elite maintained that, for Italian fathers, to recognise and take care of their Italo-Eritrean children was the right thing to do.<sup>37</sup> However, the government did not encourage fathers to care for their children, and neither – I should make clear – did it discourage them from doing so. Quite simply, the government did not interfere in the relationships between fathers and their children.

In 1917, for the first time the colonial government positively asserted the idea that the Italo-Eritreans should be seen as Italian, regardless of paternal recognition. In a long circular, the Regent Governor – De Camillis – instructed colonial officials to register even non-recognised Italo-Eritreans in the Italian birth records, as children of unknown Italian fathers. In such a way, the governor explained, the children could get 'the citizenship they deserve'.

De Camillis' initiative stemmed from concern over Italian 'prestige'. In a speech delivered at a conference of the Italian Anti-Slavery Society, he explained that: 'Because of the prestige that must suffuse the dominant race *vis-à-vis* the native element, one cannot allow or tolerate that an individual in whose veins white blood runs... could share the lot of the most wretched native, the abandoned native.'<sup>38</sup> In his circular, De Camillis recalled that Italian legislation did not allow for paternity searches.<sup>39</sup> However, he believed that it was possible to recognise mixed-race children at first sight, due to their physical features. Moreover, he explained, 'public opinion... indicates who the father is'. De Camillis thus instructed colonial judges to set aside legalistic concerns, and to proceed to the registration in the Italian birth records of mixed-race persons who – after careful investigation – turned out to be children of Italian fathers.<sup>40</sup>

We do not know what percentage of the 515 Italo-Eritreans who were listed as part of the Italian community in 1931 had gained Italian citizenship thanks to De Camillis' initiative, but there is evidence that the 1917 circular was indeed enforced during the following years, including after the Fascist seizure of power.<sup>41</sup>

Granting Italo-Eritrean children Italian citizenship and Italian names, however, was not sufficient to disentangle the colonial government

from the political embarrassment that destitute Italo-Eritreans caused. As a result, in 1928 Governor Corrado Zoli started to provide for the placement of Italo-Eritrean children in missionary homes. In the previous decades, colonial officials had occasionally asked the missionaries to accept some destitute Italo-Eritrean children in such homes. From October 1928 until the end of Italian rule in Eritrea, the colonial government systematically paid for the boarding of destitute Italo-Eritrean children hosted in these institutions.<sup>42</sup> In such cases, the government also exercised tutelage over the children. It was the government, in fact, that decided if and when the child could leave the missionary home.

When the colonial state started to take on the financial burden of supporting destitute Italo-Eritrean children, it also started to pursue the children's fathers actively in order to make them pay for the children's support. There is evidence that the colonial government, with the help of the army, tracked down some military officers who had previously served in Eritrea and had been repatriated, abandoning their Italo-Eritrean children; they were then made to pay for their children's boarding fees.<sup>43</sup> Despite being explicitly forbidden by the Italian civil code, paternity search was thus practised as an official policy by the colonial government.

Zoli's initiative grew out of specific colonial contingencies, but it also reflected broader political shifts that took place in the metropole. In the late 1920s, the Fascist pro-natalist campaign encouraged a reconsideration of paternal responsibilities. In 1930, the president of the Opera Nazionale Maternità ed Infanzia (ONMI, the Fascist welfare agency for mothers and children), Sileno Fabbri, pointed out that illegitimate children had the highest mortality rate and were 'predisposed to rebelling against society'. As a consequence, he argued, paternity searches amounted to 'an act of defence of the race'.<sup>44</sup> ONMI thus helped single mothers to find the fathers and to convince them that they 'should marry ... or at any rate secure economic support'.<sup>45</sup> The parallel to Zoli's initiative is evident.

This background helps explain the solution that Zoli adopted for what he defined as 'the problem of mixed race'. Enforcing paternity searches was in tune with the current political mood, and Fascist ideas regarding the relationship between the state and its citizens made it easier for the colonial government to intervene in the relations between Italian men and their Italo-Eritrean children, even if the letter of the law dictated otherwise. Zoli's initiatives were not motivated by humanitarian intent or by egalitarianism. On the contrary, he was committed to widening the gap between the colonisers and the colonised and the incorporation of the Italo-Eritreans into the white community served this goal.

Moreover, he saw Italo-Eritreans who had been abandoned by their fathers as a possible source of social unrest, and raising them in missionary homes ensured that they were kept under control.

Inclusive policy as a strategy for social control was also the rationale behind a 1933 law that provided for the granting of Italian citizenship to Italo-Eritreans of unknown fathers.<sup>46</sup> The law blended somatic and meritocratic criteria for access to Italian citizenship. For the Italo-Eritreans, Italian citizenship was not a right; it was rather a goal they could achieve only by following a humiliating application process and subjecting themselves to the arbitrary judgement of colonial officials.<sup>47</sup>

From the point of view of state–citizen relations, there is more in common than would seem at first sight between the 1933 law and Zoli’s policy of forcing fathers to support their children on the one hand, and the 1940 law that forbade them to do so on the other. In both cases, in fact, the state claimed for itself the right to define the proper relationship between biological filiation, paternal duties and social identity. Both when Fascist governors granted Italian citizenship to non-recognised children, and when they classified the mixed-race as colonial subjects, it was the state – and not the fathers themselves – which decided whether to make of an Italo-Eritrean child a citizen or a subject. The balance of powers between male citizens and the state shifted in favour of the state, and Italian fathers lost the power to define their children’s legal identity.

## Conclusion

The degree of continuity between Liberal and Fascist colonialism is a controversial issue. In the memory of many Eritreans and Italo-Eritreans, Fascism actually arrived in the colony only in 1935, when thousands of Blackshirts landed in Massawa and when Mussolini’s segregationist policy started. There is no doubt that the invasion of Ethiopia and the creation of the Italian East African empire brought about a deep political and social upheaval in the colony. The Italo-Eritreans were among the first victims of this new political trend. From their point of view, a periodisation of Italian colonialism would see 1935 as a turning point, but a focus on the relations between citizens and the state suggests a different periodisation.

Similarly to the metropolitan state, the colonial state started to expand its power during the First World War and further increased it in the 1920s and 1930s. It was only after 1935 that Fascism embraced biological racism. Beforehand, the state had used different criteria to differentiate between citizens and colonial subjects. But in the 1920s the power to define such criteria began to be centralised in the state. It was not the way

in which the state used this power so much as this centralisation of power in itself that distinguished Fascist colonialism from Liberal colonialism.

## Notes

1. The Italian military conquest of Eritrea started in the 1880s and in 1890 the Italian government formally established the colony. In 1941, defeated by the British, Italy lost its colonies in the Horn. For a general history of Italian colonialism in Eritrea see Angelo Del Boca, *Gli italiani in Africa Orientale*, 4 vols (Turin: Einaudi, 1976–84); Nicola Labanca, *In marcia verso Adua. Esercito, politica e società alle origini dell'imperialismo coloniale italiano* (Turin: Einaudi, 1993); Nicola Labanca, *Oltremare. Storia dell'espansione coloniale italiana* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2002). For a history of Eritrea under Italian rule, see Irma Taddia, *L'Eritrea colonia (1890–1952). Paesaggi, strutture, uomini del colonialismo* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1986); Tekeste Negash, *Italian Colonialism in Eritrea, 1882–1941. Policies, Praxis and Impact* (Uppsala: Uppsala University, 1987); Alessandro Triulzi (ed.), *La colonia: italiani in Eritrea*, special issue of *Quaderni storici*, XXXVII, 109 (2002); G. Barrera, 'Colonial Affairs: Italian Men, Eritrean Women, and the Construction of Racial Hierarchies in Colonial Eritrea', PhD dissertation, Northwestern University 2002.
2. On the widespread practice of interracial concubinage in colonial Eritrea see: Araia Tsegai, 'Eritrean Women and Italian Soldiers: Status of Eritrean Women under Italian Rule', *Journal of Eritrean Studies*, IV (1989–90) pp. 7–12; Gabriella Campassi, 'Il madamato in Africa Orientale. Relazioni tra italiani e indigene come forma di aggressione coloniale', *Miscellanea di storia delle esplorazioni*, XII (1987), pp. 219–60; Barbara Sòrgoni, *Parole e corpi. Antropologia, discorso giuridico e politiche sessuali interrazziali nella colonia Eritrea (1890–1941)* (Naples: Liguori, 1998); Ruth Iyob, 'Madamismo and Beyond: The Construction of Eritrean Women', *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*, 22 (2000), pp. 217–38; Barrera, 'Colonial Affairs'.
3. Ranieri Falcone, 'L'amministrazione della giustizia nella colonia Eritrea. Resoconto letto nel dì 23 gennaio 1905 dal procuratore del re cav. Ranieri Falcone all'assemblea generale del Tribunale d'appello sedente in Asmara', in Ferdinando Martini, *Relazione sulla Colonia Eritrea del R. Commissario civile deputato Ferdinando Martini, per gli esercizi 1902–907, presentata dal ministro delle colonie (Bertolini) nella seduta del 14 giugno 1913*, *Atti parlamentari, Camera dei Deputati*, Legislatura XXIII, Sessione 1909–1913 (Rome: 1913), p. 322.
4. On this law and its enforcement, see Richard Pankhurst, 'Fascist Racial Policies in Ethiopia, 1922–1941', *Ethiopia Observer*, XII, 4 (1969), pp. 270–85; Alberto Sbacchi, *Ethiopia under Mussolini. Fascism and the Colonial Experience* (London: Zed, 1985); Luigi Goglia, 'Note sul razzismo coloniale fascista', *Storia contemporanea*, XIX (1988) pp. 1223–66; Giulia Barrera, *Dangerous Liaisons: Colonial Concubinage in Eritrea (1890–1941)*, Program of African Studies Working Papers, 1 (Evanston: PAS, Northwestern University, 1996); Gianluca Gabrielli, 'La persecuzione delle "unioni miste" (1937–1940) nei testi delle sentenze pubblicate e nel dibattito giuridico', *Studi piacentini*, 20 (1996), pp. 83–140; Sòrgoni, *Parole e corpi*.

5. Falcone, 'L'amministrazione della giustizia', p. 320.
6. Ann L. Stoler, 'Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power. Gender, Race, and Morality in Colonial Asia', in Micaela di Leonardo (ed.), *Gender at the Crossroads of Knowledge. Feminist Anthropology in the Postmodern Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), pp. 51–101, now in Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).
7. Other scholars have made a similar point by discussing – for example – the impact of purity campaigns in the British empire, or male colonisers' anxieties about the emancipation of Western women during the First World War; see Kenneth Ballahatchet, *Race, Sex and Class under the Raj. Imperial Attitudes and Policies and their Critics 1793–1905* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1980); Ronald Hyam, *Empire and Sexuality: The British Experience* (Manchester: Manchester University Press and New York, NY: St Martin's Press, 1990); Penny Edwards, 'Womanizing Indochina: Fiction, Nation and Cohabitation in Colonial Cambodia, 1890–1930', in Julia Clancy Smith and Frances Gouda (eds), *Domesticating the Empire: Race, Gender and Family Life in French and Dutch Colonialism* (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1998), pp. 108–30.
8. David G. Horn, *Social Bodies. Science, Reproduction, and Italian Modernity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 24.
9. On the regulation of prostitution see Mary Gibson, *Prostitution and the State in Italy, 1860–1915* (New Brunswick, NJ and London: Rutgers University Press, 1986).
10. *Disposizioni di massima emanate da questo Comando circa la prescrizione per il servizio della prostituzione nei presidi di Massaua, Moncullo ed Otumlo comunicate a tutte le autorità civili e militari Egiziane ed Italiane in Massaua* issued by Comandante superiore Saletta, no date (but some time between February and June 1885), no. 947; Archivio dell'Ufficio Storico Stato Maggiore Esercito, Roma, *Carteggio Eritrea*, busta 120, fasc. 2 'Servizi vari', sottofasc. 'Prostitute'. For a short discussion of prostitution in the period of military rule, see Labanca, *In marcia verso Adua*, pp. 219–220.
11. Francesco Guerriero, *Relazione intorno al servizio sanitario civile praticato in Massaua e villaggi dipendenti durante l'anno 1886*, Massawa, 12 Jan. 1887. Archivio Storico Diplomatico del Ministero Affari Esteri (hereafter ASDMAE), Archivio storico del Ministero Africa Italiana, 32/1, fasc. 2.
12. DG (Gubernatorial decree) 20 May 1892. A copy of this decree can be found in ASDMAE, *Archivio Eritrea* (hereafter AE), busta 169, fasc. 'Prostituzione'. DG 30 May 1903, no. 213 'Regolamento per i Commissariati regionali', articles 427–36. DG 9 Sept. 1916, no. 2,634, issued by Regent Governor Giovanni Cerrina Feroni. DG 16 Aug. 1925, no. 4,319.
13. For statistics on mortality rates in Eritrea see ASDMAE, AE, buste 741, 744, 828.
14. Del Boca, *Gli italiani in Africa orientale*, Vol. 3 (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1982), p. 245; Sbacchi, *Ethiopia under Mussolini*, p. 317; Sòrgoni, *Parole e corpi*; Barrera, 'Colonial Affairs', pp. 343–50.
15. In colonial brothels, prostitutes' dwellings were arranged in a wide circle, whence the name 'horse-shoe', which in Italian colonial jargon denoted the brothel.
16. 'Tukul' is the name Italians gave to African dwellings, generally of circular form.

17. Alessandro Sapelli, *Memorie d'Africa (1883–1906)* (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1935), p. 197.
18. See the long letter by Daodiace to an unidentified 'Eccellenza', no date [1945?], where he explains his position *vis-à-vis* the Fascist race laws; private collection, London. See also Oreste Calamai, *Rivelazioni africane*, cited in Aldo De Jaco (ed.), *Di mal d'Africa si muore. Cronaca inedita dell'Unità d'Italia* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1972), p. 238.
19. Francesco De Angelis, 'Il censimento del 1913 della popolazione italiana ed assimilata nella Colonia Eritrea', *L'Africa Italiana. Bollettino della Società Africana d'Italia*, 40 (1921), pp. 65–73.
20. The Italians were trying to advance inland into Ethiopia, when the Ethiopian army led by Emperor Menelik II inflicted on them the most devastating defeat ever suffered by a European army on African soil. Italy lost 4,000 Italian and 2,000 colonial soldiers.
21. Giulia Barrera, 'The Construction of Racial Hierarchies in Colonial Eritrea: The Liberal and Early Fascist Period, 1897–1934', in Patrizia Palumbo (ed.), *A Place in the Sun: Africa in Italian Colonial Culture* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003), pp. 81–115. On the notion of 'white prestige' in a colonial situation, see Dane Kennedy, *Islands of White. Settler Society and Culture in Kenya and Southern Rhodesia, 1890–1939* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1987), pp. 153–4.
22. Martini, *Relazione sulla Colonia*, p. 49.
23. Martini, *Diario eritreo*, Vol. 1 (Florence: Vallecchi, 1946), pp. 86–7, 4 March 1898.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 220, 4 July 1898.
25. We do not have direct evidence of how this prohibition was agreed upon; but, from Martini's diary and from the comments of its editor, Riccardo Astuto (Governor of Eritrea, 1930–35), one can infer that it was Martini who pushed the commander to take action. From Astuto's comment we learn as well that the military commanders enacted this prohibition by means of two confidential circular letters. *Ibid.*, p. 262.
26. See Riccardo Astuto's notes on Martini's diary: *ibid.*, p. 262.
27. Royal decree (hereafter RD) 19 Sept. 1909, no. 839, art. 43. Salvago Raggi also issued a confidential circular letter on the same question (21 Sept. 1909, no. 3,333) but so far research for a copy of it has been unsuccessful. Until the Regio decreto legge (R.d.l) 1728/1938 ('Measures for the defence of the Italian race'), interracial marriage was legally possible; but the 1914 regulations for colonial officials stated that officials who married 'native women' would be dismissed from office: RD 10 Dec. 1914, no. 1,510 'Modificazioni all'ordinamento del personale civile della Colonia Eritrea', art. 42.
28. The only case we know in which the rule was enforced is that of Ugo Auritano. (See Archivio centrale dello Stato (hereafter ACS), *Ministero dell'Africa italiana, Governo dell'Eritrea*, busta 1090, fasc. 527E 'Auritano Ugo'.) Colonial officials who lived openly with Eritrean women included Alberto Pollera and Ugo Bolsi. See, respectively, Barbara Sòrgoni, *Etnografia e colonialismo. L'Eritrea e l'Etiopia di Alberto Pollera, 1873–1939* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2001) and Hanna Gonnice Bolsi, interview with author, Asmara, October–November 1998.
29. My reworking of data from De Angelis, 'Il Censimento' and Vittorio Castellano, 'La popolazione italiana dell'Eritrea dal 1924 al 1940', *Rivista italiana di demografia e statistica*, II, 4 (1948), pp. 530–40.

30. Barrera, 'The Construction'.
31. I have discussed these issues in greater depth in my 'Patrilnearità, razza e identità: l'educazione degli italo-eritrei nell'Eritrea coloniale, ca 1890–1950', *Quaderni storici*, XXXVII, 109 (2002), pp. 21–53.
32. Law 13 May 1940, no. 822, 'Norme relative ai meticci'. On the Fascist campaign against mixed-race children, besides the studies already cited in n. 4 above, see Centro Furio Jesi (ed.), *La menzogna della razza: documenti e immagini del razzismo e dell'antisemitismo fascista*, Scritti di David Bidussa ... [et al.]. (Bologna: Grafis, 1994); Gianluca Gabrielli, 'Un aspetto della politica razzista nell'impero: il "problema dei meticci"', *Passato e presente*, XV, 41 (1997), pp. 77–105; Barrera, 'Colonial Affairs'.
33. Castellano, 'La popolazione italiana'.
34. Riccardo Astuto, 'Gerarchia di razza o reciprocità egualitaria penale?', *Il Diritto razzista*, II, 5–6 (1940), p. 180.
35. Gino Cerbella, *Eritrea 1959: La collettività italiana nelle sue attività economiche, sociali e culturali* (Asmara: Consolato generale d'Italia, 1960), p. 10.
36. According to a note by colonial official Luca Pietromarchi, in 1922 in Hamasien (the region of Asmara) there were 306 Italo-Eritreans. Of these, 165 had been recognised by their fathers and 146 had not (Archivio Vicariato Apostolico Asmara (hereafter AVA), 84/1/1 and 87/8/9). The high incidence of paternal abandonment was exposed by Mauro da Leonessa, 'I Meticci nella colonia Eritrea', *Atti del quarto congresso nazionale della Società antischiavista d'Italia (dicembre MCMXXVI)* (Rome: Anonima romana editoriale, 1927), pp. 340–51, and by Camillo De Camillis, 'La questione dei meticci nelle nostre colonie', in Società antischiavista d'Italia, *Terzo congresso antischiavista nazionale, Roma 21–22–23 aprile 1921. Relazioni e documenti* (Rome: Tip. ed. Laziale A. Marchesi, 1921), pp. 268–73.
37. See, for example Adalgiso Ravizza, 'Matrimoni misti e meticci nella colonia Eritrea', *Rivista d'Italia*, XIX, Vol. 2, fasc. 9 (1916), pp. 333–62.
38. De Camillis, 'La questione dei meticci'.
39. The 1865 civil code (art. 189) permitted paternity searches only in rape cases.
40. Gov. Eritrea, Dir. Affari civili, Circular 'Meticci. Iscrizioni delle loro nascite nei registri dello stato civile. Cittadinanza. Obbligo di leva', Asmara, 22 Sept. 1917, no. 12545. ASDMAE, AE, busta 261, fasc. 'Meticci 1917–1918', sottofasc. '1918' (sic). This circular has been almost entirely reprinted in Ester Capuzzo, 'Sudditanza e cittadinanza nell'esperienza coloniale italiana nell'età liberale', *Clio*, XXXI (1995), pp. 75–7.
41. Paolo Teodorani to Celestino da Desio, Asmara, 19 Jan. 1920, in AVA 85/1/26. Marino Mutinelli, 'La difesa della razza nell'Africa Orientale Italiana', in *Atti del terzo congresso di studi coloniali: Firenze – Roma, 12–17 aprile 1937*, Vol. II, *Sezione: politica* (Florence: Sansoni, 1937), p. 174; Astuto, 'Gerarchia di razza', p. 180.
42. The missionary archives preserve a collection of decrees or formal letters from the colonial government, which request that specific 'meticci' of unknown fathers, being in destitute condition, be accepted by missionary homes, and specified that the government would cover the expenses: AVA, 85/1, 85/2, 86/1, 86/3/2. The latest letter is dated 12 Dec. 1940; 86/1/43.
43. AVA, 85/1/37 and 85/1/45.
44. Sileno Fabbri, 'La ricerca della Paternità', *Gerarchia*, 10 (1930), 658, cited in Horn, *Social Bodies*, p. 74.

45. Chiara Saraceno, 'Redefining Maternity and Paternity: Gender, Pronatalism and Social Policies in Fascist Italy', in Gisela Bock and Pat Thane (eds), *Maternity and Gender Politics: Women and the Rise of the European Welfare States, 1880s-1950s* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 207.
46. Law 6 July 1933, no. 999, 'Ordinamento organico per l'Eritrea e la Somalia' (Organic Law for Eritrea and Italian Somaliland), art. 18. Children of unknown parents born in Eritrea or Somalia could apply for Italian citizenship at the age of 18, if their 'somatic types and other clues' (such as having a 'perfectly Italian upbringing') proved that one of their parents was of 'white race'. The Italian law was similar to the French decree for the granting of French citizenship to children of unknown parents – but presumed to be by a French parent – born in French West Africa, issued in 1930. See Owen White, *Children of the French Empire: Miscegenation and Colonial Society in French West Africa, 1895–1960* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).
47. On the arbitrary enforcement of the 1933 law, see the long memo by Michele Carchidio Malvolti, 'L'esperienza dei meticci', Jan. 1939, AVA, 84/1/2a.