

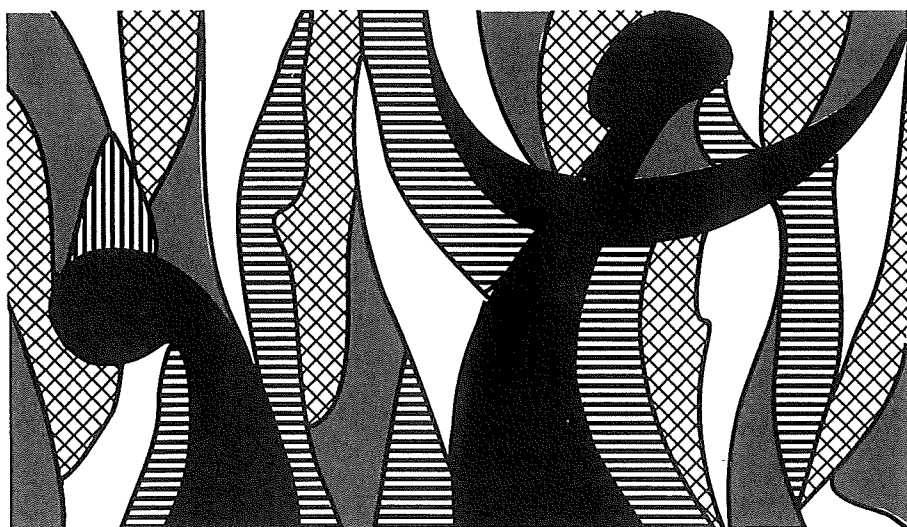
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THE CONSTRUCTION OF INTER-RACIAL SEXUALITY IN COLONIAL ERITREA (1890-1941)

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**THE CONSTRUCTION OF INTER-RACIAL
SEXUALITY IN COLONIAL ERITREA
(1890-1941)**

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In the first section of this paper I outline some historical and political aspects related to Italian colonialism in Eritrea in order to set a framework in which the control of inter-racial sexuality can be contextualised. In the second section, I focus on one particular form of inter-racial sexual relationship, concubinage, which was known in Eritrea under the name of *madamato*. I analyse how the perception of this institution evolved during the fifty years of Italian colonial rule, a process which reveals the changing role local women were supposed to play at different times *vis-à-vis* the colonizers' society.

SOME ASPECTS OF ITALIAN COLONIALISM IN ERITREA

Italy was a late-comer in the process through which other more powerful European nations shared the rest of the world, and the country's colonial experience was quite brief if compared to that of other countries. Italian "official" colonialism lasted about fifty years, from 1890 - when Eritrea was first founded as a colony - to 1941. The colonial territory comprised first Eritrea, then Libya and Somalia, and from 1935 Ethiopia. In 1936 Eritrea, Somalia and Ethiopia were united to form the so called Empire of Italian Oriental Africa.

The emphasis which the literature has placed on such spatial and temporal exiguity of Italian colonisation has resulted in a marginalisation of this field of research: until very recently, Italian historiography mostly focused on military, political and diplomatic aspects of colonialism, leaving the domain of cultural and social history largely unexplored ¹. In addition, the literature on the subject often reproduced and circulated myths which were functional to a justification of Italian imperialism. Among these, the most popular and long-lasting is probably the one which refers to Italian colonial-

1. For a critical review of historiography on Italian colonialism, see Labanca 1993.

ism as *colonialismo bonario*, a "friendly colonialism" inherently different and better-natured than that of other colonial empires. The presumed friendliness was related to the demographic character of Italian colonialism, i.e. to the fact that from the start one of the main rhetoric of colonisation was to acquire land in order to absorb excess and impoverished national workforce. Described as an "imperialism of the poor" rather than of capitals, Italian colonialism was long portrayed as a more human and less cruel form of domination.

If the above mentioned representation has resulted in a diminished comprehension of the phenomenon, the additional scarcity of historical and ethnological sources makes the analysis and reconstruction of the social history of colonial Eritrea even more problematic. On the one hand, there is hardly any literature written by native people during the colonial period, partly due to the particularly poor schooling and educational system set up by the colonizers. The Italians were perfectly aware that education and participation in the administration of colonial life would have challenged colonial rule and the dominant position of the colonizers. Thus, schools for local people were discouraged in the earlier period, and later tailored to provide a separate, strictly elementary and mainly practical education. Through separate and poor education Italy "attempted, and with considerable success, to prevent the evolution of an Eritrean intellectual life" (Negash 1987:84)².

On the other hand, many Italians who settled in the colony were themselves poorly educated, given the internal conditions of the mainland at the time when colonial expansion was started. Only a minority was able to write about their personal colonial experience, and memories or diaries are very scarce if compared to those available for other colonial contexts (Labanca 1990; Taddia 1988). Italian women writers are virtually non existent. To the general scarcity of sources we should probably add another reasons which can partially explain the lack of literature on the subject: the almost thirty years of war between Eritrea and Ethiopia which followed decolonization and which prevented many scholars to study the social history of Eritrea until very recently.

Looking more specifically at the anthropological literature produced over the last thirty years, there is also a striking lack of studies, especially ones

2. In a recent book collecting the memories of Eritrean and Ethiopian men who lived during the colonial period, one of the most frequent complaints refers precisely to the lack of education native people were allowed under Italian rule; see Taddia 1996.

concerning the relationship between anthropology and colonialism. This topic, highly debated in France and Britain since the early 1970s, was poorly explored in Italy. As Solinas pointed out a history of the relationship between administrative practice in the colonies and ethnographic research during Italian colonial experience still needs to be carried out (1988:5)³.

In one of the first articles dealing with anthropology and imperialism in the Italian context, Lanternari argued that professional anthropologists were very few during the early colonial period, and that they worked rather "at home", basing their speculations on data and information gathered by travellers, explorers or colonial officers who did not have any training in the discipline. Moreover, what he terms the "ideological narrowness and cultural blindness" of the Fascist regime prevented in Italy a flourishing of anthropological disciplines at a time when social anthropology was gaining academic and political recognition both in Britain and France (Lanternari 1974:322-324).

What is also important to remember is that Fascist ideology was obsessed with the problem of race and with race-ranking. It was not anthropology *tout court* that was censored, but rather a certain (social) anthropology, while the long established tradition of physical anthropology (now renamed anthropology of race) was being strongly sustained by the regime.

Moreover, it would be misleading and reductive to think that, until professional fieldwork became an established practice the discipline itself did not exist (Pels and Saleminck 1994). The many explorers, travellers or colonial officers who somehow "played" ethnographers have produced a consistent and interesting corpus of material. This material is extremely important for two main reasons: firstly because it represents the only means to recall information about the life and culture of different East-African groups at the time of their contact and clash with European powers. Secondly, because according to the standard of that time many of these texts were highly valued and largely used by the few existing academic anthropologists. The distinction between professional and non professional figures is a rather recent one and does not apply to the disciplinary context of the time. At the time, this ethnographic material was circulating within the academy and among the larger public. To study those less orthodox, non-academic roots of Italian anthropology might prove useful in contesting an (often implicit) assumption: the idea that, given the minority character of Italian colonialism, and given the

3. See also Dore 1980 for a review of existing Italian anthropological literature about the colonial experience.

weakness and poverty of anthropological discipline, the link between the two was virtually non-existent, or at least non-influential.

Before turning to the configuration of inter-racial sexual relationships in Eritrea, some historical aspects concerning the actual setting up of the colony should be briefly mentioned in order to outline the context within which the colonial sexual policy came to be structured.

At the time when the country started its colonial expansion, Italy had just become a nation-state. The expansion itself was seen by the monarchy and the military *élite* as a way to gain recognition and prestige vis-à-vis the other European powers. The internal political climate was geared towards the newly unified country and the creation of a nation-state, and large sectors of capitalist classes were either not interested or explicitly against a colonial adventure. The country was characterized by a consistent economic depression and internal uneven development. In this respect, Gramsci defined Italian colonialism as a "passional, oratorical colonialism, without any economic or financial basis" (Gramsci 1975:2018, v.III). In his opinion, colonial expansion served to sidetrack internal economic problems, such as was the landless peasants' claim for land. From the start, one of the main purposes - and rhetoric - of expansionism was to acquire land to absorb excess and impoverished national work-force.

When Eritrea was founded in 1890, the intention of the Italian government was to make it a colony for settlement. This intention largely failed and the colony became rather a source for raw materials and, more importantly, a supplier of soldiers for further Italian colonial expansion. It was only between 1935 and 1941 that the policy of settlement started to be more effective.

When the Italians first established the colony, the territory was inhabited by various ethnic groups. At the beginning it was estimated that there were about 200,000-250,000 people. Coeval ethnographic sources usually describe the various local groups as divided into three different social formations. The first and larger group was that of the Tigrinyans living in the highlands on the border with Ethiopia. They were mostly Coptic-Christians, and had a political organization which has been portrayed as semi-feudal. It was a peasant society divided into three main classes: the peasantry, the high clergy and a ruling *élite*. At the local level, a group of the wealthiest elders administered the village and periodically revised the codes and customary laws (Perini 1905; Conti Rossini 1916) ⁴.

The second formation for size comprised seven ethnic groups (Afar, Bilen, Beni Amer, Habab, Hadendoa, Mensa, and Marya) which were different for

language and history, but which were grouped together because they shared a similar political structure. These groups, mainly Muslims, were nomadic or semi-nomadic with a pastoral or agro-pastoral economy. Their political structure was described as aristocratic because the division among the classes of aristocrats, serfs and slaves was perceived as quite sharp (Munzinger 1891; Conti Rossini 1916).

The third formation comprised three ethnic groups, Baria, Kunama and Saho. While the Saho were a pastoralist society of Muslim religion, Baria and Kunama were peasants and were defined as animistic and matrilineal. What they had in common was the political structure, which has been described as egalitarian. These groups were organized in clans made up of families, which constituted the political and economic unit, and the life was administered at village level by a council of elders. By the first decade of this century, the Italian administration had forced these groups to accept the institution of chieftanship, and therefore a hierarchical structure (Munzinger 1890; Pollera 1913).

The type of government chosen at the outset for the colony was that of direct rule: Italian legislative and judicial organisation was to be extended to its new dominions, and local people were to forcefully abandon their customs. This project required an economic and military strength that Italy lacked, so that what prevailed in the end was a dual, "hybrid" system, whereby local people were allowed to retain their own customs under strict control from Italian administration. Despite this system acknowledged a certain degree of power to local chiefs and notables, it was never explicitly close to British indirect rule and Eritrean *élites'* role was actually reduced to that of spokesmen of the Italian government (Negash 1987:107).

THE CHANGING REPRESENTATION OF INTER-RACIAL SEXUALITY

As it has been thoroughly demonstrated (Stoler 1991), concubinage was by far the most common form of inter-racial sexual arrangement in British, French and Dutch colonies until the 1920s, when it was replaced either by prostitution or by marriage of European male colonizers with white women. Was this also the case for colonial Eritrea? In relation to the first Italian colony this topic has been left largely unquestioned (Campassi 1983; Barrera 1996).

4. See Crummey 1980 for a discussion of the feudal system, and Kemink 1991a and 1991b for a description of the various consuetudinary codes.

At the beginning of the present century Ferdinando Martini - the first civil Governor of the colony - appointed a commission of jurists and men of law with the scope to formulate a new Civil Code to be applied to both Italian nationals and the indigenous population. The formulation of the Code took about six years of passionate debates, which became particularly heated when it came to the regulation of intimate relations among colonizers and colonized. The final version of the colonial Code established that Italians could marry indigenous people only with the Governor's consent; the Governor should allow the marriage only in "strictly exceptional cases" when the union was between an Italian woman and a local man. Those rare Italian women married to indigenous men would then have full rights on their body, on their possessions and on their children. What was known in the mainland as the institution of "marital authority" did not apply to them. In addition, according to this Code Italian, fathers could legitimise their natural mixed offspring without having to marry the mother.

The colonial Code shows significant differences with the Code of the mainland. For instance, in the Italian Civil Code of the time there is no mention of racial difference as one of the factors which could be considered as an impediment to marriage. In the mainland, Italian women were utterly subjected to their husbands' authority for whatever concerned decisions about their offspring or their own possessions. In Italy, a father could legitimise his natural offspring without having to marry their mother only in rare and inevitable cases, for instance if the mother was in jail, or if she was dead.

The colonial Civil Code was never officially adopted in Eritrea. But since it was not replaced by an organic juridical corpus until the late Fascist period, the Code retained its importance for many years: colonial judges and civil servants unofficially kept on referring to (and being inspired by) the colonial Code in all those cases where the Italian Code could not be applied to the colonial context. Moreover, both the Code and the juridical debate which surrounds it can help to highlight in what ways the difference between white and black, or citizens and subjects, was conceived.

The differences between the two Codes are quite revealing. Firstly, they show that the concern with the protection of what was termed "racial prestige" was inscribed in the juridical and political discourse from the very beginning of Italian colonial experience. Although racial laws and the related effort to establish a regime of apartheid emerge only in the mid 1930s, colonial discourse and practice were from the start inspired by "a clear and precise distinction between Eritrean subjects and Italian citizens" (*Relazione sommaria* 1905). The codification of mixed unions is a good example of this

concern. On the one hand, the difference of race between the two spouses comes then to be seen as a legal impediment to marriage. On the other, while in Italy the discriminant to get access to full rights was sex (i.e. only the husband had a full juridical personality), in the colony it was race (i.e. the white wife had a higher position *vis-à-vis* her native husband).

Secondly, and despite illegal unions were never openly encouraged by the colonial power, they were *de facto* promoted. To allow an Italian father the legitimation of his natural children without having to marry their mother was a way to tolerate and indirectly support concubinage at the expense of mixed marriage. Concubinage, rather than marriage, became the most frequent form of inter-racial conjugal union in colonial Eritrea.

Concubinage, in colonial Eritrea was called *madamato*. The *madama* was the native woman temporarily living with an Italian man, performing domestic and sexual services and being rewarded in kind (food, clothes) and/or in money. In Eritrea, as the colonial judge Ravizza says: "to have a madama was an easy and widespread thing; everybody had a madama, civilians and military men, men from low or high class" (1916:334).

Since concubinage was strongly stigmatised in the mainland, a situation like the colonial one (whereby "everybody" had a concubine) needed some sort of justification. Many authors of the time who had a solid personal colonial experience justify this situation by explaining that those Italians who go to Eritrea are mostly young males (soldiers or settlers) who are faced with a new and hard social environment and therefore need some "distraction": they need to have a woman, "even a coloured one" (Pollera 1922:76).

But the second and more frequent justification which can be found in the literature of the period is that *madamato* should be considered equivalent to a customary form of temporary marriage existing in the colony under the name of *demoz*. For instance Alberto Pollera, a civil servant who spent his whole adult life in Eritrea and published important ethnographic essays, writes: "since concubinage in Abyssinia is legalised through the institution of *demoz*, native women are quite happy to have a relation with white men" (1922:75). Until 1935 *madamato* is openly tolerated on the ground that it reflects a local arrangement. And the three terms: concubinage, *madamato* and *demoz* are treated as equivalent.

The question we should ask is: were they really equivalent? In the previous section I focused on colonial sources, and particularly on a relatively consistent corpus of ethnographic material which can partially counterbalance the lack of studies from professional anthropologists, and prove useful in trying to answer the question. This ethnographic material describes, sometimes

with a wealth of details, the different forms of marriage existing among the various ethnic groups at the time of the Italian occupation.

For instance, we are told that among the pastoralist or agro-pastoralist Muslim groups with an "aristocratic" social formation there existed different types of marriage which had some common characters. The sources describe how among these groups marriage was always contracted by the families of the future couple, and the consent of the spouses was not taken into account. In addition, children were usually betrothed at a rather young age (girls between 9-12). In theory, the marriage was supposed to last; in reality, men could divorce their wives although the opposite was not possible. Married women who were caught in illicit affairs were either killed or obliged to leave the group. Thus, according to the sources, there was no form of institutional temporary union among these groups (Munzinger 1890; Conti Rossini 1916).

If we then turn to the so-called egalitarian groups, we learn that the sexual customs were extremely free. Travellers and settlers stress with surprise that among Baria and Cunama women usually had sexual experiences before marriage and could choose their own husband. They could also have sexual relations with partners other than the legal spouse, and natural children were accepted and welcomed. But again, no legal temporary union existed (Munzinger 1890; Pollera 1913).

Among the Tigrinyans, the sources describe two types of marriage. The first, called *qal-kidan*, was stipulated by the spouses' families and was based on the communion of goods between the couple (*berki*). Divorce was possible, also for women. A variant of this form of marriage was sanctioned by the church and was named *qal-kidan ba querban*: in this case divorce was more difficult to obtain, and the marriage was said to be preferred by older couples or by members of the church. The second form of marriage was called *demos*. This is described as a temporary contract between two consenting adults, who lived together usually for a fixed period of one year, although the contract could be renewed (Conti Rossini 1916).

Thus, according to the ethnographic sources a type of union which showed an institutional temporaneity existed only among the Tigrinyans of the highlands, and not all over the colony as it was implicitly held by those colonizers who wanted to justify the spreading of concubinage on the whole territory on the ground that it reflected a local arrangement. Being a legal union, *demos* was perceived as a second type of marriage and was not socially stigmatised. Both women and their children had various rights which protected them once the union came to an end. Women married through *demos* had a right to their contribution even if they were left by the man before the

arranged date, and to a part of it - in proportion to the duration of the union - if they decided to break the relationship. Children born out of a *demos* relation were to be provided for by their father: if the birth took place once the relationship was already terminated, paternity (and the related duties) was assigned upon a declaration on the mother's part. The children were then considered legitimate and were treated on equal terms as those born from the more permanent union. Weissleder comments:

Rather than being the loosest form of marriage, [*demos*] tends to give maximum protection to the economic interests of the women [...] That it should be so is not surprising, for the *demos* union is established with this in mind (1979:74).

As we can see, *demos* in Eritrea was very different from a relationship of concubinage experienced in Europe. In Italy, concubinage was illegal, it was socially and morally stigmatised, and no juridical device protected the abandoned woman or her natural children, who were often negatively addressed as "bastards". But *demos* was also different from the Tigrinyan form of concubinage, which apparently existed under the name of *cingherèt* and which was locally perceived as an informal and looser union when compared to *demos* (Caffarel 1913:474).

As mentioned in the first section, a relative scarcity of sources make it difficult to outline the actual sexual practice and intimate life between colonizers and colonized. It is virtually impossible to know what type of feelings characterised these unions and how single individuals felt toward their partner. But we can tentatively imagine a situation whereby Italian men perceived and treated a *madama* as they would treat a concubine in the mainland. They would therefore feel no juridical obligation to respect the duration or the terms of the contract, to pay the eventual contribution, to maintain or legalise their offspring. On the contrary, native women might have entered a *madamato* relationship because it was presented to them - and accordingly translated in the colonial juridical texts - as equivalent to *demos*, i.e. as a legal and protected union. What the Governor Ferdinando Martini wrote in this respect is dramatically revealing: "Italian men can thus cheat, and native women can be cheated" (1946:145, vol.1).

The situation was obviously harder when children born from a *madamato* relationship were not legitimised by the Italian father. As analysed, women from aristocratic formations could not go back to their group once they had left it, nor would their natural children be accepted. Tigrinyan women could always go back to their group, but it seems that their "mixed" children would find it difficult to be fully accepted by the maternal group. Some writers of

the period motivate this difficulty on racial grounds, implying that miscegenation is naturally opposed in all human cultures. Others offer a more "sociological" explanation, stressing that in patrilineal societies - as those of the Eritrean highlands - children were supposed to belong to the father's group and to inherit from him. Their joining the maternal group would cause an unforeseen fragmentation of the land which would prove disruptive for the whole group's economic life.

Whatever might have been the reason, natural (i.e. unrecognised) "mixed" children lived in dramatic conditions: those who showed some concern about this problem, reported that the majority of them among the young males were involved in criminal activities, while adolescent women frequently entered prostitution. It is not easy to quantify what "many" means, because statistical sources on this aspect are not available. But it was estimated that at the beginning of the 1920s in Eritrea, on a population of about 3,000 whites, there were about 1,000 unrecognised mixed children (De Camillis 1921)⁵.

Until 1935 - at a time when the Fascist regime is fully consolidated - most colonial literature addressing the wider public still reiterates the equivalence between concubinage/*madamato* and *demoz*: "These unions [madamato] are not immoral. According to the christian-coptic tradition *demoz*... is a legitimate form of union" (Jensen 1935:42-43). From the following year, with the foundation of the Italian Empire on 8 May 1936, things change drastically. After the conquest of Ethiopia, the Italian government and the Fascist regime face new problems and constraints: at a foreign policy level, mainly the economic sanctions signed by the majority of the member country of the Society of Nations - to which Ethiopia adhered; at the level of internal policy, the need to extend a still weak control over a greatly increased number of colonized people (from a few hundred thousand people in former Eritrea, to about eight million estimated to inhabit Ethiopia). As Ann Stoler argued in relation to other colonial empires, when the colonizers' identity and their supremacy were in danger of collapsing, the borders marking the separation

5. I refer to children born out of a temporary union between Italian men and Eritrean women because the opposite case - Italian women having a temporary relationship with Eritrean men - was apparently almost non-existent. Again, no statistical sources are available on the matter, but for the early 1920s I could find only three cases of Italian women who had actually married Eritrean men in the colony. A possible explanation might be found in the extremely low number of Italian women who migrated to Eritrea: in 1913, out of 2,410 Italians only 731 were women (of which 317 were under 15 years old). See Castellano 1948:136

from the colonized were redrawn on a clearer and stricter basis (Stoler 1991). The final five years of the Italian colonial experience, from 1935 to 1941, witness the maturation of Fascist colonial ideology and the establishment of a full "direct rule" which implied, among other things, a policy of separation and distance of the nationals from the local people (Goglia 1981).

In the juridical field, a fast sequence of new laws was intended to set up a policy of apartheid. From 1937 locals could not enter bars, cinemas or public transport used by nationals, and the towns were divided into white areas and black areas. In the same year, any Italian having a conjugal relation with a colonized person was punished with up to five years of prison. In 1938 marriage between Italians and persons belonging to any other race (including Jews) was forbidden. Finally, in 1940 a new law stated that mixed children were to be considered and counted among the colonized, they could not be recognised or legitimised by their Italian parent, and consequently they could not gain the Italian citizenship.

From the mid 1930s the regime also actively encouraged families of Italian settlers to populate the colony. Various initiatives were taken at different levels to prepare the so called "new fascist woman" to face her future life in the colony. Theoretical and practical courses, and *ad hoc* manuals all contributed to the creation of a new role for the Italian woman: she became the sole vehicle of preservation of the Italian race. As a guardian of the purity of race, the white woman was invited to compete with local women, who were said to be not only beautiful but also more obedient to their husband's will. To win, wrote one of the manuals, the Italian woman had to be much more obedient and subjected to her husband than her dangerous competitor.

In those years, the formulation of the new racist ideology of the regime was concurrently supported by a flourishing of publications in physical anthropology and biology. In the course of a few years, a complete re-invention of the geography and history of population of the horn of Africa led to the banning of what was then known as the Hamitic hypothesis. According to this theory, which spread in Europe also thanks to the formulation of the Italian anthropologist Giuseppe Sergi (MacGaffey 1966:3)⁶, the Ethiopians were classified as a branch of the Hamitic species, to which also the Mediterranean and the Nordic European variety belonged. Under the Fascist period this theory was obviously perceived as fundamentally undermining a clear

6. Particularly, it was the 1901 English expanded translation of a booklet published by Sergi in 1985 which became well-known and largely discussed within European academies. See Sergi 1901.

and scientific separation of the races: Sergi did not only identify a Euro-African race, but in his formulation the cradle of the so-called Arian civilization was to be found in the region of the horn of Africa. On the contrary, according to the new anthropology of the regime, Ethiopians were to be considered as a true African race completely separated from the white Caucasian one. In addition - as claimed by the young anthropologists of the regime, such as Cipriani - even if in the past Abyssinian people had shown a level of civilization in some respects "higher" than that displayed by all other African groups, they had mixed with "black Africans" for so long, that they were completely degenerated. The mere statement that Eritreans and Ethiopians were "truly black" as some say, or "really African" was thus a sufficient explanation of their alleged inferiority, used to justify apartheid, the recent racial laws and the prohibition of miscegenation (Cipriani 1936).

At the same time, and just like in political discourse, anthropologists and biologists also placed the white woman at the centre stage. No matter if one scientific theory claimed that children inherit their genes mostly from the mother (and as we know, in Eritrea virtually all mixed children had a white father and a native mother rather than the opposite); while another theory claimed that the results of miscegenation are unpredictable and disharmonious (producing dangerous individuals in social, political and racial terms). Both theories equally led to the same political result: only the Italian woman could "save" the white race.

Although political, juridical and scientific discourses focused almost obsessively on the white woman, they ended up defining by opposition a new role for the native woman. Because the native woman could not aim to play the wife of the Italian coloniser, not even temporarily (according to the new law); because the colony was to be populated by Italian settlers (the new political aim and effort); and because Ethiopians were classified as truly black and blacks as inferior (anthropological discourse), the Eritrean woman came to be conceptualised only as a prostitute or a servant *vis-à-vis* the Italian men. What the 1937 law against *madamato* wanted to ban was the possible existence of any form of reciprocity and affection in interracial relations, on the ground that such noble feelings could be shared only among individuals of the same "level".

This becomes particularly evident if we look at the trial sentences against *madamato*, which from 1938 started to be published in juridical periodicals. The sentences reveal very clearly the new will and the effort to draw a clear and safe line between what should be considered a licit domesticity and what should not. According to the colonial judges, we learn that a legitimate rela-

tion between a national and a native woman must be driven by a "mere physiological need [...] a temporary sexual outlet of the kind a man can occasionally have with his own servant" (Corte d'Appello di Addis Abeba, 17 march 1939).

For instance, Giovanni Spano, an Italian man accused of *madamato*, was not believed when he said that the woman he was caught with was "only a servant". This is what the sentence said:

Given the well known jealousy of this man, who forbid his madama to meet with other men [...] and even beat her up [...] we can hardly think of a more complete husband and wife relation [...] A man does not beat up a servant out of jealousy (Tribunale di Gondar, 19 November 1938).

Another trial sentence explains very well where the line between a legitimate and an illicit intimacy needed to be traced. The Italian man Seneca appears to be one of the few nationals who openly confessed to love the Eritrean woman he was caught with, to have always lived and eaten with her, to desire to get married and have children with her. This is what the sentence says:

This is a macroscopic case of indigenation. What we have here is not a white man who sexually desires a black Venus [...] but it is the Italian soul that is so much confused that a native woman is raised up to the level of a real partner [...] The man should be charged with one year and a month of prison, which is long enough for his brain to clear up, and enough to push the female into hundreds paid relations (Corte d'Appello di Addis Abeba, 31 January 1939).

In conclusion, I would like to stress some of the aspects that have emerged so far. The first concerns the chronology of the sexual policy. Italian colonialism has undergone a pattern which is similar to other colonial powers in terms of interracial sexuality and sexual control. In most European empires:

Concubinage was a domestic arrangement based on sexual service and gender inequalities which 'worked' as long as European identity and supremacy were clear. When either was thought to be vulnerable... increasingly through the 1920s, colonial élites responded by clarifying the cultural criteria of privilege and the moral premises of their unity. Structured sex in the more politically safe context of prostitution, and where possible in the more desirable context of marriage between full-blooded' Europeans, replaced concubinage (Stoler 1991:60-61).

In comparison with other colonial contexts, the shift from concubinage to prostitution or "pure-blood" marriage took place in colonial Eritrea in a later period, in the late 1930s rather than in the early 1920s.

Unlike in other countries where concubinage was officially encouraged or even prescribed, in Eritrea it was tolerated and justified only as a temporary necessity. Despite this, and despite mixed marriage not being officially prohibited until 1938, *madamato* remained throughout almost the whole colonial experience the most common form of mixed union.

As many historians have argued, 1936 is to be considered a landmark after which the official policy drastically changes. I would also suggest that at other levels (those of scientific discourses, common sense, and practices) there are important continuities between the liberal and the fascist period, and that a social - if not juridical - discrimination was there from the outset. The sentence "Eritrea is full with females, what is lacking is women [...] who can only be white" (Paoli 1908:106) can be taken as a paradigmatic assertion of the latest fascist period, but it was written at the very beginning of the Italian colonial experience.

The last concluding remark is about the effects of concubinage. No contemporary literature on Eritrea mentions *demos* as a customary form of marriage, as though it had never existed. What we can probably say now is that, through *madamato*, *demos* first lost its character of economic protection for the woman and her children, and later became highly stigmatised and assimilated to prostitution. In 1939 a young ethnologist wrote: "Despised even by the natives [...] as it is now, the institution of *demos* is inevitably fading away" (Masucci 1939:752). I think it is possible to say that the Italian interpretation and presentation of *demos* throughout the whole colonial period as equal to the form of concubinage experienced in the mainland led to the death of *demos* itself.

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