Italianness at the mirror

The Juventus Club of Addis Ababa and the "return" of children of immigrants to Ethiopia

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Abstract. Colonial and post-colonial structures play a key role in the analysis of the children of immigrants in Italy. However, little research has been done on this topic in the former colonies. The purpose of this article is to analyse how coloniality and post-coloniality play a key role in the determination of mobility projects to Ethiopia by Italians of Ethiopian origins. Focusing on the Juventus Club in Addis Ababa, the city's postcolonial space par excellence and at the same time one of the reference spaces for Italians of Ethiopian origin during their stay in Ethiopia, the aim of the paper is to show the complex field of meanings within which the children of immigrants reproduce their Italianness. The Italian post-colonial structures, dynamics, and symbols that are considered, function as a mirror that reflects the relation between children of immigrants and Italianness both in Italy and in Ethiopia.

Keywords: Second generation; Italianness; Colonialism; Counter diasporic mobility; Ethiopia.

Introduction

In recent decades there has been a consolidation of studies on the relationship between Italian children of immigrants[1] and Italian colonial and post-colonial legacies.

[1] For a panorama of the studies on the relation between children of immigrants and the Italian context see, among others, Andall (2002); Giacalone (2011); Colombo, Rebughini (2012); Marinaro, Walston (2010); Riccio, Russo (2011); Riccio (2016); Queirolo Palmas (2006); Ambrosini (2009).

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In some seminal works on children of immigrant the "legacy and memory" of Italian colonialism (Andall 2002) have been central to the analysis. In the last two decades, studies on the nexus between children of immigrants and coloniality (Thomassen 2010; Marinaro, Walston 2010; Grimaldi 2022) have discussed the notion of "second generation"[2] giving it new meanings. The link between the subjectivity of children of immigrants and coloniality has been widely explored within the framework of the Black Mediterranean (the Black Mediterranean Collective 2021; Grimaldi 2019a, 2022; Hawthorne 2022), where the analysis of the structures of marginalization in Italy is directly linked to the emergence of European modernity and its history of empire, colonial conquest, and racism (Danewid 2017).[3]

However, despite the flourishing literature on this relationship and the specific attention paid to children of immigrants from former Italian colonies (especially from Ethiopia[4] and Eritrea),[5] very few studies have focused on the ways in which coloniality affects the subjectivities of Italian children of immigrants outside Italy, especially when they refer to their ancestral land.

The paucity of literature on this subject is certainly related to the Italian context and its relation to the colonial history: although since the seminal work of Del Boca (1976) there has been an increase of studies on the colonial and post-colonial structures in the former Italian colonies, there is still a long way to go to explore the effects of the Italian imperial history on the subjectivities of the people involved.[6] On the other hand, the absence of a research tradition on this topic has much to do with the political and analytical framework that guides the analysis of the so-called "second generations": in fact, the literature on children of immigrants still tends to consider them as cultural and racial "halves" (Silverstein 2005). With a few notable exceptions,[7] in the analysis of the relation of children of immigrants with the ancestral land, the place where they were born or raised is almost absent from the inquiry. Influenced by a

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[2] The term "second generations" has been contested both as a descriptive concept and as an analytical tool. In reference to the Italian context see, among the others, Colombo, Domaneschi, Marchetti (2009); Colombo, Rebughini (2012); Thomassen (2010); Andall (2002); Grimaldi (2022).

[3] See, among others, Proglio (2017); Raeymaekers (2014).

[4] The definition of Ethiopia as an Italian "colony" is a matter of a long debate (Triulzi 1982) which goes well beyond the scopes of this article. Although Ethiopia was never fully occupied nor fully controlled by Italy, it is undoubtable that before as well as after the AOI, Italians played a decisive role in shaping Ethiopian policies and imaginaries (Trento 2012). In this sense I follow Marchetti (2014) in using the term "postcolonial" in relation to the Italian presence in Ethiopia after the end of the AOI.

[5] See Andall (2002); Arnone (2010); Martignoni (2016).

[6] For the analysis of the postcolonial legacy in the former Italian colonies see Chelati Dirar (2007).

[7] On the analysis of long-term mobility projects of the children of immigrants in the ancestral land see among others King, Christou (2010; 2011; 2014) and Potter, Philips (2006; 2008; 2009).

certain methodological nationalism (Wimmer, Glick Schiller 2002), this perspective reproduced the triad of "home – belonging – nationality" as a central category of inquiry and implied a rupture between the place where children of immigrants were born or grew up and the place of their ancestral origins (Soysal 2002). Following this perspective, however, the risk is to frame the very experience of the children of immigrants as the material representation of a "rupture" between modern national identification and colonial otherness (Said 1978) or to frame their "in-between" status as a starting point for analysis rather than as an object of inquiry. It is no coincidence that, as King and Christou (2010) point out, most analyses on children of immigrants' patterns of mobility to the land of their ancestors have largely focused on short-term, holiday visits. Framed as the liminal space of holidays, the ancestral land would represent a third space (Bhabha 1994) par excellence: a space where children of immigrants negotiate their relationship with the ancestral land within a framework of structural difference.[8] In such a perspective, the role played by the place where they were born or grew up in orienting their mobility paths towards their ancestral land is obscured, denied, or simply considered a mere identity pole rather than a material reality. This is so even when, as in the case of the relationship between the Italian nation-state and its former colonies, the relevance of colonial and post-colonial structures continues to affect the very determination of spaces and identities (Hawthorne 2021; Grimaldi 2017; 2021; 2022).

In this paper I try to shed light on how coloniality and its contemporary reverberations affect the relationship of the children of immigrants with their ancestral land. I draw on research conducted in Ethiopia with Italians of Ethiopian origin who have undertaken medium and long-term mobility projects to Addis Ababa. Specifically, I consider the ways in which Italian colonial and postcolonial structures and discourses intersect with modern Ethiopian national identification and affect the experiences of children of immigrants with their ancestral land. I will focus on the Juventus Club of Addis Ababa, one of the city's postcolonial spaces par excellence (Fuller 2007). Through an ethnographic lens, I will explore the reasons why children of immigrants

[8] In her work on the Eritrean second generations short term mobility to Asmara, Bettina Conrad (2006) poignantly showed the relationality between resemblance and difference by analyzing their patterns of identifications within the ancestral land. They were locally labelled as Beles, a Tigrayan word for "prickly pear". Prickly pear in Asmara is harvested during the summer season, when children of immigrants return to the ancestral land. Therefore, the term Beles indicates the seasonal nature of their presence in Eritrea as well as their perception as a "resource" as they typically contribute through remittances and gifts: a presence based on their structural differentiation from the local context.

consider the club as one of the reference points in their experience of the ancestral land, despite the fact that it is also where they are constantly facing the same processes of differentiation they live in Italy. By focusing on the ways in which their being Italian is intertwined with the club's function as both a hub of cosmopolitan Addis Ababa and a trace of the Italian postcolonial presence in the Horn of Africa,[9] the article will reveal the club's function as a mirror. Drawing on Sayad's metaphor of migrations as a mirror (2002), the analysis of Club Juventus will reflect the relation between children of immigrants and Italianness (Vicini 2021), not only in Ethiopia, but also in Italy. The article, in this perspective, is an example of the processes of reterritorialization of the symbolic borders in which racialized subjects reproduce their experience of the nation (Dahinden 2022).

The present work is part of a multilocal ethnography (Giuffrè, Riccio 2012; Riccio 2007) that I conducted between Italy, Ethiopia, and the United Kingdom for my Ph.D. thesis. I built my research in Ethiopia by following an Italian of Ethiopian origin, Johnny,[10] a cultural anthropology student enrolled in a university in Amsterdam who was himself researching ethnographically the return practices of "second generations" Ethiopians to their ancestral country.[11] By following his research, I had the opportunity to meet the group of Italians of Ethiopian origin who were staging counter-diasporic projects (King, Christou 2011) and investigate the relevance of Italian colonial and post-colonial structures in orienting their presence in Addis Ababa. I gained access to the Juventus Club thanks to Marta, an Italian of Ethiopian origin, who was a member of the club's board of directors. The paper is based on the ethnography I conducted with three children of immigrants in the club (two men and a woman in their late twenties), and enriched with the narratives and interviews I collected from members of the club (old white Italians or mixed Italian-Ethiopians born or raised in Ethiopia), as well as with archive material (newspapers, books, archival documents) of the club. The data on which this article is based were collected in 2016, before the outbreak of civil war in 2020 that shook Ethiopia and the entire Horn of Africa.[12]

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[9] It is out of the scopes of this article to analyse how during the Italian postcolonial presence in the Horn of Africa, Ethiopia itself acted as a hegemonic power in the area reproducing a proper colonial attitude especially regarding the issue of the Eritrean independence. See Iyob (2000).

[10] Names and direct references to the people I worked with are changed for privacy reasons.

[11] In this article I will refer to people born and raised in Italy from at least one Ethiopian parent and not Italians or mixed Italians who were born and raised in Ethiopia whose relationship with national identity, ancestral land, and the very concept of home is totally different. On the analysis of these relations see Grimaldi (2022).

[12] On the civil war in the Horn of Africa see Plaut, Vaughan (2023).

Club Juventus and its multiple configurations

> J: I was in Addis in the summer of 2006, when the World Cup final between Italy and France was taking place. The club was packed with hundreds of people and there were strict access controls. When I got to the entrance, the guard stopped me and told me there was no more room to get in. Meanwhile, lots of people were getting in without any problem. It was ridiculous. I did not try to convince him, I just pushed him away to get in. He grabbed my arm and pushed me violently out of the doorway. He shouted at me to go away and threatened me with a stick.
> G.: So you did not see the match?
> J.: I eventually managed to get inside, but I spent the whole time thinking about the guard. These are my memories of the day Italy won the World Cup.[13]

These words were spoken by Johnny the first time we entered the Juventus Club, the Italian clubhouse in Addis Ababa. Officially known as the *Circolo Sportivo Italiano Juventus* and – at the time of the research – widely regarded as one of the city's most important sporting centers,[14] the Juventus Club was a significant hub for the cosmopolitan circles of Addis Ababa, thanks to its western standards, its facilities, and its renowned Italian restaurant and bar. At the same time, the club was the social and symbolic reference space for Italians in Addis Ababa, and a hub in the city for the social and institutional activities connected to the "Italian community".[15]

As clearly emerged in the previous ethnographic extract, Johnny was very surprised when he came to know about the social relevance of the club among his networks. Johnny was at his first non-holiday experience in Ethiopia, and he never paid attention to the club: a place that, in his words, has never been of great relevance for the Milanese children of immigrants who go to Ethiopia for short vacations. He always insisted on the absurdity of going to a place that made him feel uncomfortable in "his own" country.

This contradiction, as I will show in this article, impressively reasserts the social function of the Juventus Club in the counter-diasporic experience of the children of immigrants. The club is a place of legitimation of the subjectivities of children of immigrants and, at the same time, a space of radical marginalization. In order to understand this function of the club as a "mirror" of the relationship that the children of immigrants have with the concept of Italianness

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13 Fieldnotes, 13.01.2016

14 https://www.thereporterethiopia.com/1249/ (last accessed 16.05.2024)

15 I will deepen the history of the club and its impact in the making of the Italian postcolonial presence in the Horn of Africa all along the article.

in the ancestral land, it is first necessary to understand how and why these two features are constructed. From this perspective, it is necessary to understand why the cosmopolitan environment of the Juventus Club can be attractive to people who have moved from Western environments to their "ancestral land". In doing so, the category of "modernity" will emerge as a significant trope that links the contemporary configuration of the club to its postcolonial heritage.

Italians of Ethiopian origin and the "value" of difference in the ancestral land

Looking at the second-generation return paths of *Bajan Brits* (British of Barbadian origin) to the postcolonial context of Barbados, Potter and Phillips (2006) analyzed the ways in which they related to western modernity as a source of identification in the ancestral land. The category of the West and, moreover, the ways in which *Bajan Brits* performed their Britishness (from the English accent to patterns of behavior) allowed them to locate themselves in a position of economic and social privilege within the Barbadian postcolonial context (Ivi, p. 913). The narratives collected by Potter and Phillips (Ivi pp. 914-919) show representations of the local environment within a framework of differential power relations. Bajan-British children of immigrants explicitly self-represent through the hegemonic values of the colonizer (determination, organization, proactivity), in a relationship of contraposition with the devaluing tropes of the colonized (laziness, disorganization, fatalism). Their positioning, from this perspective, assumes a hybrid function, granting them a privileged status, but at the same time preventing them from full assimilation within their ancestral context (Ivi, p. 920).

There are striking similarities between the process highlighted by Potter and Phillips[16] and the way in which Italians of Ethiopian origin have constructed their relational field within the ancestral land. Like the Bajan British, Italians of Ethiopian origin also presented their "western" and "modern" nature as a primary source of legitimation within the Addis Ababa environment: from this perspective, the Juventus Club, with its western and Italian style, would represent the perfect environment for them, specifically because of their "otherness" in relation to the wider Ethiopian environment. According

[16] It is necessary to state that this process analysed by Potter and Philip is just an acid test of the salience of the "returns" whose analysis in the Italian history (from the return of the Italian migrants from all over the world to the so called *colonie libere*) goes well beyond the scopes of this work. For an analysis of the relation among colonies and *colonie libere* see Calchi Novati (1992).

to this perspective, marginalized Italians – as they are considered in Italy – would automatically turn into bearers of Western hegemony once in their ancestral land: bearers with no intention (or even possibility) of "adapting" to the ancestral environment. Their "Western" attitude towards the ancestral land would, in this perspective, be the inevitable effect of their being "modern" in an "unmodern" society.

The analysis of the performance of "differentiation" in the ancestral land by the children of immigrants, however, cannot be reduced to an (unconscious) echo of the colonial and postcolonial structures that have oriented the relationship between Italy and Ethiopia, the former colonizer and the colonized societies. This framework runs the risk of falling into what Said (1978) defined as a binary framework: a Eurocentric way of thinking that produces an ontological and epistemological "otherness" as a test to reproduce a self-validating Western identification. The analysis of the "modern" attitudes of the children of immigrants should take a different path: while the meanings associated with Western modernity have indeed been the main source of legitimation of the European colonial enterprise (Mignolo 2007; Bhambra, Holmwood 2021), they are undoubtedly interrelated with the meanings that have spread "within" the former colonies. In fact, the category of modernity, far from being abolished (Appadurai 1996), has become one of the cornerstones of the postcolonial panorama.

The case of Ethiopia is paradigmatic in this respect: modernity is a central category to understand the very making of Ethiopia form the era of Menelik II[17] and the need to "modernize" the country has been part of its nationalist discourse since the end of the Italian occupation.[18] In recent decades, however, the rhetoric of development (Lyons 2007) that has spread in Ethiopia has become transnational: it has implied large investments and a strong involvement of people of Ethiopian origin around the world. The Ethiopian government's effort to involve people abroad was so strong that the term "diaspora"[19] itself

[17] On the process of construction of the modern Ethiopia from the Highland empire to its present configuration see Zewde (1991).

[18] Haile Selassie, in his act of "forgiveness" of the Italians said that he hoped that: "Italians (technicians, businessmen and workers) would remain numerous in Addis Ababa to ensure that industry and commerce flourished and that the level of civilization in the capital did not drop" (Calchi Novati 1996).

[19] In Ethiopia there is an ID card for people of Ethiopian origin, the so-called "diaspora card" designating the "foreign rational, other than a person who forfeited Ethiopian nationality and acquired Eritrean nationality, who had been Ethiopian national before acquiring a foreign nationality; or at least one of his parents or grandparents had been". This card allowed the Ethiopian abroad to access specific regulations advantaging them in their engagement to Ethiopia (Kuschminder, Siegel 2013), in working and economic activities, in taxation, in housebuilding processes (Grimaldi 2018).

became a proper institutional category and a form of recognition within the Ethiopian public sphere.[20] The category of diaspora has specific social attributes in Ethiopia: diaspora people are "mobile"; diaspora people are "modern"; in short, diaspora people are the material representation of the developmental paradigm that underlies the Ethiopian nation-state (Grimaldi 2018).
From this point of view, the meaning taken by the concept of diaspora in Ethiopia seems to be crucial in order to understand the social positioning of Italians of Ethiopian origin in their ancestral country. It makes it possible to understand the reasons why they put in place practices of social, economic, linguistic, and symbolic differentiation from the average Ethiopian social setting, without falling into an epistemological essentialization of their being "Italians". Far from being proof of their inability to adapt to the ancestral land, their Western-style behavior is in fact a real source of recognition which allows them to build their mobility to Ethiopia as an asset (Moret 2016). Juventus Club is the material representation of this paradigm. But while it is one of the "symbols" of modern Ethiopia, it is still marked by colonial and post-colonial structures.

The Juventus Club: between cosmopolitanism and coloniality

Club Juventus is structurally linked to the reorganization of the Italian presence in the Horn of Africa immediately after the end of the AOI experience.[21] Officially founded in 1952 to form an Italian football team to play in the Ethiopian championship, the club gradually acquired institutional value. Since 1959, when the foundation stone of the current building was laid, the Juventus Club has configured itself as a mirror of the structures reproducing the Italian post-colonial presence in the region.[22] On the one hand, the club was completely cut off from the rest of Ethiopian society – non-Italian members were only admitted in 1997. On the other, it was a center of transregional postcolonial Italianness, organizing leisure activities such as football tournaments or car races aimed at connecting

[20] In December 2023 the Ethiopia's Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed Ali launched a proper campaign worldwide to engage children of immigrants in order to – following the prime minister words – "connect to your multicultural roots, connect to your history and leave your legacy". The hashtag is very revelatory: #BackToYourOrigins campaign. See https://taarifa.rw/ethiopias-prime-minister-urges-second-generation-ethiopians-worldwide-to-return-home-in-back-to-your-origins-campaign/ (last accessed 16.05.2024)

[21] Another institution directly connected to the colonial past is the Italian school of Addis Ababa; for the analysis of the Italian school in the former colonies see Pesarini (2022); Ghidei Biidu, Marchetti (2010).

[22] On the link between sport and colonialism see Stoddart (1988).

the geographically distant contexts of the former empire, first and foremost Addis Ababa and Asmara. The club's attitude as a center of post-colonial Italianness declined drastically after 1974, when the fall of Haile Selassie and the rise to power of a communist military junta led thousands of Italians to leave the former colony (Del Boca 1976). Since then, however, the club has grown in institutional importance as a link between Addis Ababa and Italy: the Juventus Club was a reference point for Italians during the political upheavals that swept through Ethiopia from the seventies until recently,[23] and it was (and still is) a de facto interlocutor with the Italian institutions both in Ethiopia and in Italy.[24]

However, with the turn of the millennium and the spread of Ethiopia's nation-state development policies, the club once again transformed its social function. It opened up to the wider Ethiopian social space and gradually reconfigured itself as a hub of cosmopolitan circles in Addis Ababa. At the time of the research, most of the people who participated in the daily activities of Club Juventus were not Italian nationals. Middle-class Ethiopians and Western expatriates attended the dozens of sports courses that Club Juventus offered, dined in the club's Italian restaurant or attended the evening parties organized by the club's bar. Today, Amharic and English, rather than Italian, are the most commonly spoken languages at the club.

At the time of the research, however, I even met people who explicitly defended their fascist affiliation and their racial superiority over the Ethiopians, or even their nostalgia for General Graziani.[25] The vast majority of these people were born or grew up in post-colonial Ethiopia: some of them never left Ethiopia, others returned after the fall of the Derg and the opening of the Ethiopian nation-state to neoliberal policies. As one of them told me, explaining his decision to leave Ethiopia when Haile Selassie was overthrown: "I was born a fascist. I couldn't live or die under a communist regime".[26]

The club, in short, is a place where multiple and often contradictory meanings circulate. In the same space, it was possible to feel in a cosmopolitan place oriented towards the West and to be the target of racist and supremacist rhetoric linked to Italian imperialism in Ethiopia.

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[23] These events go form the deposition of Haile Selassie in 1974 and the instauration of the Derg (Pankhurst 2001), to the liberation of Ethiopia in 1991 (Zewde 1991) from the war against Eritrea in 1998 (Iyob 2000), until the civil war that erupted in November 2020 (Tronvoll 2022).

[24] Club Juventus Archives. Gazzetta del Circolo sportivo Juventus (1991).

[25] Graziani, the so-called "butcher of Ethiopia", was one of the most famous and brutal fascist generals. Among the many atrocities he perpetrated during the repression of the Ethiopian resistance against the Fascist occupation, he was responsible of mass murderers by using toxic gas on the population. For an overview on Graziani and his postcolonial legacy, see Morone (2013), Campbell (2010).

[26] Fieldnotes, 01.04.2016.

It is therefore necessary to understand how the Italians of Ethiopian origin who frequented the club made sense of these contradictions that constituted the everyday life of the place.

Children of immigrants at the Juventus Club: keeping coloniality invisible?

During my fieldwork at the club, I met Marta, an Italian Ethiopian in her late twenties who had moved from Italy to Ethiopia to work for an Italian NGO two years before. She was on the board of Club Juventus, so I asked her how the organization dealt with the presence of fascists and colonial rhetoric in the place. She was obviously aware of this presence but did not attach any importance to it. She classified the nostalgic discourses about the Italian fascist period, led by its oldest members, as a "folkloric" element. She said that it was impossible to change their minds, but that it was tolerable because they had no decision-making power. She added that it was unfair to send them away as they were in their room playing cards – they spent most of their time in a *member only* room separated from the rest of the club – and keeping each other company.[27]

In Marta's view, the Manichean distinction between "Italians" and the others, which the old fascists had reproduced, belonged to the club's past. A past that is still present, but that does not affect the day-to-day dynamics of the Juventus Club.

This apparent coexistence seemed to be confirmed in the analysis of the way in which Jack, the other Italian of Ethiopian origin I met in Addis Ababa, made sense of his social experience at Club Juventus. Jack was born and raised in Milano and he moved in Addis Ababa in 2013 to work in his father's construction agency but specially to escape from financial problems he had in Milano. In 2015, Jack decided to attend a taekwondo course at Club Juventus. The course was run by an Italian-Ethiopian man who had lived in Italy for over 20 years, and the students were people of Jack's own status and age. Most of them were Western expatriates. Although he had never practiced taekwondo in Milan, he said he decided to start because it was a way of dealing with the stress of his life in Ethiopia. Jack felt disoriented in Ethiopia – he was almost forced to leave Italy – and he constantly remarked on his difference from the wider local environment. It was precisely for this reason that he chose the Juventus Club

[27] Fieldnotes, 21.03.2016.

as his routine space. In addition to being able to speak his mother tongue, share Italian food or watch Italian television, the club allowed him to make his being Italian a source of differentiation from the Ethiopian setting and a source of identification in the cosmopolitan niche of the city where he made most of his friends and social relations.[28]

In his experience of the club, Jack never clung to the institutional function of the club, nor to its value as a discursive pole of national belonging. At the same time, he never had problems with the "hidden" part of the club, which consisted of nostalgia for the post-colonial era. In short, he usually neither joined nor suffered from the differential order that reproduces Italianness in the club in its (post)colonial configuration.[29] Alongside Marta and Jack's explicit representations of a denial of the relevance of the colonial and postcolonial paradigm that sustains the club, however, the ethnographic practice revealed other processes. The "spatial" division between one club configuration and another was anything but fixed: while it was true that the "*nostalgics*" spent most of their time in a private room, they were certainly not barred from accessing the rest of the club. On the contrary, it was that room to be the "members only" area, the space where the "others" could not enter. It was common, instead, to encounter these "*nostalgics*" at the bar counter, at a restaurant table, or in the outdoor courtyard of the Juventus Club. People who, more or less consciously, enacted micro-practices related to an Italianness linked to postcolonial imaginaries. The following extract from my fieldnotes shows how the two seemingly coexisting paradigms structurally overlap in the Juventus Club.

I sat at the table with Johnny, Marta and Tesfay, an American of Ethiopian origin. Tesfay was Marta's flat mate and Johnny had asked her to arrange a meeting with him to carry out an interview for his research. Jack reached us because he was there for his taekwondo training. Because of Tesfay's presence, we mainly spoke in English rather than Italian. In the middle of the conversation, a middle-aged white Italian interrupted to ask for some information about the club. When Marta answered him, he complimented her on her wonderful Italian and began to talk about his trip to Ethiopia and his plans to move to Addis Ababa for good. What impressed me the most was the way he addressed differently each of us based on his own assumptions about our own degree of "Italianness". When he spoke to me, he spoke proper Italian, whereas, when he talked to the others, he uttered words very slowly, building simple seman-

[28] The sporting activity, in fact, placed him in a space of validation of his black masculinity in the white niche of the expats of Addis Ababa: Stuart Hall called this phenomenon of ambivalent admiration and alterization orienting the white gaze on black men in sport "the spectacle of the other" (1997).

[29] Fieldnotes, 17.03.2016.

tic structures, and often conjugating verbs in the infinitive tense, or avoiding using articles. He also kept tapping or leaning on Marta's shoulder while he spoke. Ten minutes after he left, while Marta and Jack immediately began to laugh, Johnny nervously began to speak against the old man. On the contrary, Marta was much more concerned about what he was saying than about his behavior. She thought his behavior was a matter of ignorance. In her words, although she did not find it justifiable, it was understandable that an old Italian man who saw four black people had behaved that way.[30]

It is crystal clear that the man behavior was part and parcel of the structures that maintain hegemonic Italianness in the club. From the man's attitude, my whiteness was the mirror where to reflect his self-ascribed hegemonic condition. On the contrary, his behavior towards the others reproduced, even in a physical way, their supposed "deviation" from a normative Italianness: a deviation that he explicitly represented through his use of language and body.

The main aspect that emerges from the extract, however, is that while Marta and Jack did not react strongly to this process, Johnny found the behavior of the man unacceptable. In trying to understand such a different reaction it is possible to shed light on the value of Italianness for children of immigrants in their counter-diasporic journey. It is necessary to start from an assumption. Jack and Marta's presence in Ethiopia was very different compared to Johnny. They were in Addis Ababa respectively from two and three years with no projects of leaving the city. In their experience of the ancestral land, therefore, the Juventus Club had a crucial relevance. The club was a space of social identification, legitimation, and recognition, and one of the most important locations for giving meaning to their experience of Ethiopia. In the club Jack found his cosmopolite niche, while Marta invested so much in that space to become part of the board. The relevance of the club as a gauge to reproduce their Italianness in Ethiopia to them was incomparably more important than an episode of "differentiation".

Johnny's positioning about the club, on the contrary, was totally different: his presence in Ethiopia was short termed and not intended to be permanent, therefore he never thought of the club as a space of social legitimation, nor as a context where to fund his perspective about the ancestral land. Johnny was an international student with a strong political commitment: his reaction mirrored the processes of differentiation that he had experienced in Italy during his whole life, but with the aggravation of being racialized even in his own place of origin.

[30] Fieldnotes, 26.03.2016.

The excerpt above clearly shows that it is impossible to think of the club as a space where the meanings associated with a certain configuration can be selectively deactivated: what makes the club a source of legitimation for Italians of Ethiopian origin can – at any moment – overlap with colonial and postcolonial structures. The effects of these ongoing superpositions, furthermore, differently act on the people depending on the ways they make sense of their counter diasporic project.
The overlapping between these different meanings, as I will show in the next paragraph, can even be institutionally driven. I had the opportunity to see the salience of these processes during the visit of the President of the Italian Republic, Sergio Mattarella, to the Juventus Club. On this occasion, the club became a real mirror that reflected the differential condition of Italians of Ethiopian origin.

Losing domesticity at "home": the Juventus Club and the bare citizenship

I heard about President Mattarella's official visit to the club a few days before the event. The purpose of the visit was to meet the Italian community in Addis Ababa after an institutional trip to Ethiopia. In the days leading up to the visit, the club was in turmoil. Marta, as a member of the Club's Directory Committee, spent most of her days there.
She had to organize the reception and was involved in the security of the club and the organization of accesses. It was the question of who to let in that interested me most. Throughout my fieldwork I met many people who frequented the Italian clubs in Addis Ababa, even if they were not Italian citizens. Many of the Ethiopians who returned from Italy did not meet the requirements to apply for Italian citizenship,[31] even though they had lived in Italy – sometimes for decades.[32] Some others, born in Ethiopia (or Eritrea) of extra-marital rela-

[31] According to the law 91/92, Italian citizenship to extra EU members may be "conceded" to immigrants regularly residing in Italy for at least 10 years. The concession of the citizenship is subordinated to a series of legal, economic and cultural requirements the applicants need to satisfy. On the procedures to obtain Italian citizenship see https://www.esteri.it/it/servizi-consolari-e-visti/italiani-all-estero/cittadinanza/ (last accessed 17.05.2024).

[32] I am not considering here the people who had the possibility to benefit of the Law 218/1995, "Reform of the Italian System of Private International Law", who stipulates that foreign judgments are automatically recognized in the Italian legal system provided they meet certain requirements. This law became a means to regularise various pending situations regarding Italian citizenship in the former occupied territories, see Fusari (2020).

tionships between Italian men and Ethiopian women, had no formal recognition.[33] I asked Marta how they decided to deal with these cases and whether it was necessary to present an Italian passport at the entrance. Marta reassured me that a passport was not required and that the guards would have selected people at the entrance. She added that the decision of the club's directory committee was aimed at avoiding a direct link between being Italian and having a defined legal status.[34]

However, the decision not to use a formal tool to identify who could enter made the recognition of who was "Italian" a subjective matter; the guards had to decide in a discretionary and arbitrary manner for each case. Paradoxically, this situation led most Italian citizens of Ethiopian origin to bring their passports and use their legal status as a source of recognition on the day of the President's visit. At the end of Mattarella's institutional visit to the club, in fact, I met Lili, a returnee from Milan in her fifties. Born and raised in Asmara, she moved to Italy in the Nineties, acquired Italian citizenship, and decided to settle in Addis Ababa with her family in 2010. She told me that she arrived late at the club (the entrance was closed thirty minutes before the President's visit for security reasons), so she had to wait outside the club for the whole of the President's speech. As she told me, there were a lot of people with her. And almost all of them spent all of the time waving their Italian passports in front of the guards and claiming to be allowed in. Once inside, however, she and her friends, who had also returned to Ethiopia from Italy as "Italian citizens", seemed far from being shaken by their previous experience. On the contrary, they started taking pictures of the stage from which Mattarella was speaking and posting them on Facebook.[35]

While Lili and her friends had no problem showing their passports, Johnny's case was different. Unlike most of his Italian network, Johnny decided not to go to the club that day. As he told me the morning before the event, he thought it was crazy that Italians of Ethiopian origin wanted to take part in a discourse from which they were excluded in their Italian daily lives. When I got home after the event, I met Johnny. He seemed quite shaken. He told me that since most of the people he knew were at the club and he was bored at home alone, he had considered joining us. As he prepared to leave the house, he instinctively put his Italian passport in his pocket. It was one of the first times he took his passport all over his staying: normally the passport was well secured in a

[33] For the analysis of this phenomenon, called "*Madamato*", in Ethiopia and Eritrea, see among others Sorgoni (1998); Iyob (2000); Barrera (1996); Pesarini (2015); Le Houérou (2015); Trento (2011).

[34] Fieldnotes, 12.03.2017.

[35] Fieldnotes, 15.03.2016.

hidden part of his room in order to avoid the risk of losing it. Yet when he realized the implications under this instinctive act, he immediately dropped his bag and decided to stay at home. He said that he did not know what had made him think of taking his passport, but that it was one of the most humiliating things that had happened in his whole life.[36]

The "humiliation" that Johnny felt was quite understandable. He perceived that even in his ancestral land he had to "prove" to be Italian and that he had no other means to do it than his passport.

Johnny's experience shows that the reproduction of a hegemonic Italianness can trace such a deep line of differentiation to produce a condition where citizenship is the only source of recognition in the experience of the children of immigrants. In his work on the concept of the future (2013), Appadurai introduces the notion of bare citizenship, drawing on Agamben's "bare life". Bare citizenship describes a state of deprivation of social capital and cultural credibility (p. 122), divesting citizenship of its social and political meaning and reducing it to a statistical fact (p. 123). Appadurai's "bare citizenship" serves as a yardstick for exploring the contrasts between the celebration of a transnational Italianness and its social effects on structurally differentiated Italians. On the day of the Italian President's visit, the admission policy to the club was not based on Italian citizenship or other "tangible" criteria. It was a legally empty space (Agamben, 2003); a space in which the mechanisms of recognition – and admission – were implicitly founded along those racial and class lines reproducing a hegemonic Italianness. In this perspective the admission policies of the club became a mirror of the power relations that reproduce a hegemonic Italianness in Ethiopia: and as it emerged in the ethnographic extract, it produced different reactions.

In the case of Lili and her friends – who despite the Italian citizenship self-perceived as "locals" the lack of their recognition was offset by the social value of their entry into the club: an entry that was configured as a source of legitimation in relation to their wider Ethiopian network. They had no problems in showing or even waving their passport in front of the guards. On the contrary, these self-validating characteristics were completely absent from Johnny's experience. Born and raised in Milan, he constantly had to confront the issue of social recognition in Italy since his childhood, with his differential condition compared to the hegemonic representation of Italianness. However, in his counter-diasporic journey to Ethiopia, with the exception of his transnational family, most of his social networks were linked to Italy. While most of them

[36] Fieldnotes, 15.03.2016.

minimized or denied their differential condition in relation to a hegemonic Italianness to perform their presence in Ethiopia (as Marta and Jack did), he had no reason to do so. His initial decision to take his passport to the club was all but irrelevant in this perspective. In his unconscious gesture, he felt he had to accept his differential condition as a given: by taking his passport he implicitly acknowledged that his legal status – and not the way he spoke, behaved, dressed or lived his life – was his only source of recognition of his Italianness. In this way, even in Addis Ababa, he felt that he had to prove to be Italian: same as when he was stopped and searched by the police during his adolescence in Milano.

The act of taking his passport, in short put Johnny under a mirror that reflected the processes of differentiation he lived in Italy even in the ancestral land. The way he had always thought about Ethiopia since his trips with his parents during his childhood was of a place where he could feel legitimized because of his difference, of his being part of the western world, and even of his being Italian. The fact that the very categories that he had always putted in place in his counter diasporic journeys – modernity and Italianness – marginalized him represents a loss of the references that have always oriented his staying in Ethiopia. Johnny loses his orientation, finds himself lost. Ernesto de Martino (1977) defines this phenomenon of loss of cultural horizons as a crisis of domesticity. In showing his passport Johnny did not just experienced (outside of Italy) the same processes of differentiation connoting the most of his life in Milano. The very categories through which he built his relation with the ancestral land entered in crisis.

Conclusion. Researching the "second generation" condition

The paper focuses on the dynamics of the counter diasporic projects (King, Christou 2010) of the Italians of Ethiopian origin, exploring the importance of postcolonial spaces in shaping their mobility trajectories and identity patterns: postcoloniality, far from being a mere historical trace, represents a living reality that acts on their lives and produces social meanings (Potter, Philips 2006). The article moves beyond an epistemological approach based on an alleged "in-betweenness" of the children of immigrants (Silverstein 2005). At the same time, it rejects a perspective that imagines the context of residence and the ancestral land as structurally separated (Soysal 2002). Instead, it shows how children of immigrants understand their Italianness as an asset for better social positioning in Ethiopia (Moret 2016). In this sense, the Juventus Club – a space with a distinctly postcolonial matrix – turns out to be revealing of the complex-

ities and stratifications (Altin 2024) on which children of immigrants represent and practice their ancestral land. In the club, Italians of Ethiopian origin can, on the one hand, emphasize their Western and cosmopolitan status in order to reproduce a precise and recognizable positioning in Ethiopia. On the other hand, the analysis shows the performativity of the colonial and postcolonial dynamics and rhetoric that run through the Juventus Club. These dynamics can reproduce the differential structures that characterize the experience of the children of immigrants in Italy, their constant being placed "beyond" the social and symbolic fences within which a hegemonic idea of Italianness is reproduced (Grimaldi 2022).

In this sense, the article opens up to central questions in the existential trajectories of the children of immigrants, which go far beyond their relationship with the land of their ancestors. Rather, the social dynamics studied turn out to be a mirror (Sayad 2002) that reflects the condition of Italians with a migrant background even in the context in which they were born and grew up. A mirror that reflects the field of possibilities and constraints, of marginality and privilege that underpins the transnational life of children of immigrants, showing the historical continuities and interactions that reorganize the postcolonial in the contemporary scenario. It is a mirror that, in addition, questions the processes of the de-territorialization of the symbolic border of citizenship and belonging in the contemporary scenario. The processes of "migrantization" (Dahined 2016) in the children of immigrants' experience – both in Italy and in their ancestral land – show that the lack of recognition of their Italianness turns to become part and parcel of a real border regime (Dahinden 2022). The ethnographic process, in this perspective, reveals the performativity of the category of "second generation" as a "condition" (Grimaldi 2021; 2022) rather than a sociological descriptor. Ethnography shows how this condition stays for the material representation of a set of differentiation patterns, emphasizing a never-ending continuity (racially, culturally, symbolically) with what is perceived as an incommensurable "otherness".

The article is based on the analysis of dynamic with a clear postcolonial connotation: although the postcolonial lens constitutes a central element of my argument, it can also be seen as a potential limitation of the research. An urgent question that needs to be addressed is: how useful can Italianness be as a heuristic concept in the construction of the "return" of Italians with a migrant background, whose contexts of ancestral origin were alien to the Italian colonial dimension? How Italianness enters in the definition of returnees' practices in a space where it is not as relevant as it is in Ethiopia? How its "modern" configuration can be played by children of immigrants in their ancestral contexts? And how it can "turn" into a differential structure? Further analysis can

take into consideration the role of the structures of Italianness in orienting the "counter-diasporic" mobilities of children of immigrants well beyond colonial and postcolonial settings.
This paper aimed at emphasizing the necessity to add complexity to the debate on children of immigrants in Italy, their mobility patterns and their place in the national scenario (Vicini 2021), showing the necessity of an urgent need for political change.

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