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**THE ENGAGEMENT OF WOMEN
FROM DIASPORAS OF THE HORN OF AFRICA**

A Sociological Analysis on Agency, Intersectional Engagement,
and Social Change in Women's Biographies

Coordinator: Prof. Marco Caselli

Supervisor 1: Prof. Mariagrazia Santagati

Supervisor 2: Prof. Mari Toivanen

PhD Thesis of

Marta Visioli

N. Matricola: 5013947

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Introduction

Diasporas are central phenomena in the contemporary global scenario, with a social, political and symbolic value that redefines the conception of spaces as limited by borders. Often it is difficult to understand what diasporas are¹, as they appear as abstract entities. Diasporas are part of the phenomenon of migrations, but they differ within this in that they are not given entities, but are social constructions characterized by heterogeneity and a more or less strong link with the country of origin. Concerning the diasporas' link to the country of origin, an aspect that differentiates them from communities defined as transnational, there is a debate characterized by divergent points of view, which will be explored in this thesis. The central aspect of diasporas are the subjects who compose them, those people who actively redefine the spaces that they inhabit.

Starting from the individuals, basic entities of the diasporas, the latter can be represented in a multiple way, as communities, symbolic spaces, and much more, depending on the sensitivities of the people who are part of it. Diaspora literature has explored the multiple roles that diasporic actors play in modifying diasporic spaces and in creating transnational networks, not only between members of the same diaspora, but also between different diasporas (Arjun Appadurai, 1949; William Safran, 1999; Robin Cohen, 1997)². Indeed, there are various forms of diasporic engagement, generated by diasporic subjects, which refer to the political, social, cultural and remittance spheres. Diasporic engagement has a value both discursive and practical, and consists of all the activities and organizations created by diasporic members to carry out social, political, cultural and development support activities between the country of residence and the country of origin or descent (Giulia Sinatti, Cindy Horst, 2015). In particular,

¹ Alongside scholars themselves diasporic, such as Kwame Anthony Appiah and Arjun Appadurai, one of the first to explain diasporas is the sociologist Robin Cohen. In his book *Global Diasporas* (1997) he shows how the diasporic condition belongs to many cultures, that is, to all communities that live outside the native or imagined land, and that recognize themselves in the language, religion and culture of origin. R. Cohen, taking into consideration the different forms that the diaspora has taken, distinguishes between diasporas produced by empires, colonizations or racial and ethnic segregation, and those produced by the need to move to seek work, as in the case of the workers and leaders of today's transnational corporations, up to the cultural diasporas.

² For the bibliographical notes I chose the APA style, but indicating the first and last names of the authors to distinguish the gender.

remittances are a key area in which diasporas around the world are active, and they come in various types, of which financial remittances are the main ones.

In the different forms of diasporic engagement, diasporas' women play a key role, as they are often the driving force and organizers. They are the protagonists of various forms of engagement³, which have led to the birth of many female diasporic organizations around the world, as well as of a rich cultural and literary production called diasporic literature. It should be noted that the use of the expression *diasporic women* does not suggest that I wish to label them within a closed and rigid category, but simply highlights their link with the diasporas. Particularly relevant is the female diasporic contribution to remittances, as well as to peace and conflict processes, in which women play a significant but often undervalued role. Indeed, diasporic women often have a central role in the processes of peace and conflict that is not always adequately valued. Some studies have shown that the roles that women can play in this sense are of great importance and cannot be considered homogeneously, or separated from their social positions (Rachel Busbridge, Monika Winarnita, 2015; Nadjé Al-Ali, 2007).

Nevertheless, the perspective of women participating in the different diasporic processes has been little deepened, especially of those from the African diasporas⁴. These women should not be regarded as objects of such processes, but as the guiding subjects of them. This sociological perspective that sees African diasporas' women as active and guiding figures, even of eventual change, is still undervalued. Within the African diasporas, there has long been a subordinate and sexualized representation of the Black woman, considered almost exclusively as a victim, which still persists in most Western social and cultural systems (Camilla Hawthorne, 2022). In particular, the Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali diasporas have a large female component that has been represented in the literature mainly in view of Italian colonial oppression (of which it is absolutely necessary to speak), with some exceptions. These exceptions concern studies of scholars, including women belonging to these same diasporas, who have valued the

³ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in *Diasporas old and new, Women in the Transnational World* deepens the multiple roles of women in diasporas, between forms of engagement and cultural ties.

⁴ S. E. Erskine and D. Bilimoria explain that "Afro-Diasporic women are Black women from across the African diaspora who identify as African, West Indian, African American, Afro-Latina, Afro-Asian, biracial, multiracial, or a combination of these identities, and who may speak any language (Parker & Ogilvie, 1996; Erskine et al., 2019)" (Samantha E. Erskine, Diana Bilimoria, 2019, 319).

female agency in the creation of movements and diasporic activism, as well as of a diasporic literary production, that shed light on the history of these diasporas and the colonial past from a female and internal perspective (Caterina Duraccio, 2020; Angelica Pesarini 2014; Igiaba Scego, 2023). The sociological literature lacks a systematic analysis of the main forms of engagement of these women, at the diasporic level and beyond, focusing on their representation as agents of change. This is a gap that the present research wants to fill, relating multiple spheres and spatialities, as well as starting from the biographical experiences of the women of these three diasporas.

In this research, the approach adopted is therefore to thematise the forms of engagement linked to the Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali diasporas from an intersectional and female perspective, emphasizing the role of these women as protagonists and promoters of a process of change, in multiple spatialities. The interpretative framework used in the analysis tries to merge the theory of intersectionality regarding the intersection of multiple structural factors, such as gender, race, class, etc., that causes complex intersectional discriminations (Kimberlé Crenshaw 1991, Patricia H. Collins 2015), with the theory of agency developed by Giddens (1979), according to which subjects have an active role in changing the reality in which they live. These apparently opposite perspectives are merged because, through the interviewees' agency, intersectionality is not only a cause of discrimination but becomes a resource to develop an intersectional struggle against oppression.

The research approach itself thus represents an intersection of aspects (three different diasporas, engagement, race and gender), and considers the knowledge from the margins as a starting point to produce further knowledge that does not remain closed within academic walls but stimulates good practices. The starting point, that cannot be ignored in this research, is my positioning as a female and white researcher. Positionality is an aspect that can greatly influence research, and that implies the need for negotiation and reflexivity (Mari Toivanen, Bahar Baser, 2017; Karen T. Fischer, 2015). Therefore, I try to step back to allow the perspective and narratives of the women interviewed to emerge, amplifying their voices and implementing a process of self-reflection on my own positioning. The contribution is thus intended to be not only from the point of view of content, but also methodological, as I enact a necessary process of deconstruction when doing research with racialized subjects.

The aim of this contribution is threefold. *First*, a descriptive aim, that is, identifying the main women's forms of engagement connected to the Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali diasporas, focusing on commonalities and divergences between Italy, Finland and the other spatialities involved. *Second*, an analytical aim, that is, to investigate and interpret the meanings and ways of experiencing diaspora and related engagement, in the different countries. *Finally*, the broader aim, which constitutes the heart of the research, is to highlight the changes achieved and to be achieved through the various forms of women's engagement that have emerged, from an intersectional and social change perspective. These three objectives are linked together and are indicative of the three levels of research involved: a more descriptive level, an interpretative level and a level that could be defined as the social impact of this engagement.

From the point of view of empirical investigation, the articulation of research questions refers to these three levels. Indeed, the questions aim both to describe the forms of engagement of the women from the Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali diasporas; and to investigate their interpretations, as well as the dimension of social change, starting from their biographical paths. Specifically, the research questions are the following:

- What are the different forms of engagement of women from Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali diasporas, in Italy and Finland?
- How do women from Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali diasporas live and understand the diaspora?
- Which are the interviewees' interpretations of war and peace within diasporas?
- How are the forms of women's diasporic engagement influenced by the multiple spatialities in which they operate, and how does such engagement generate change in these spatialities?

The research was carried out in Italy (in Milan and other cities, depending on the residence of the respondents) and in Finland (in Helsinki), to detect the different ways of living these three diasporas and the related forms of engagement between North and South Europe. In particular, the choice of these countries has been determined, on one hand, by the lack of studies on Ethiopian and Eritrean diasporas in Finland, where only the Somali diaspora was developed; and, on the other hand, by the unprecedented juxtaposition of Italy and Finland, two totally different social realities belonging to two

distinct European contexts, southern and northern respectively. Investigating the women's forms of engagement in these three diasporas, and in these two countries, can thus reveal interesting and hopefully new findings; the focus will be on women because the female component within the considered diasporas is very active in various areas, which have been highlighted by this research. In Italy these diasporas are historically present because of the link with colonialism; while in Finland, apart from the Somali diaspora, which is among the most numerous, the other two diasporas have been little investigated. To provide some basic contextual data, Italy has a population of 58 983 000 millions (Istat, 2022); while Finland has a population of 5 554 960 millions (Statistics Finland, 2022). Considering the different population density of the two countries, in Italy the population with citizenship of an African state is 22.4% of the Italian population (Istat, 2022); while in Finland it is 65 007, that is, 1,17% of Finnish population (Statistics Finland, 2022). Among the population of African origin in Italy, the total population of Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali citizenship is 22 177; while in Finland it is 27 049. In light of these data, it emerges that the total population with Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali citizenship is higher in Finland than in Italy; the high overall number is due to the substantial presence of the Somali diaspora. In general, this is a striking overall figure that has determined, among other factors, the choice of this Northern European state.

It should be noted that in this study the contexts of Italy and Finland are not compared in a systematic way, that is, applying for example the context theory or analysing the specific characteristics of each context; but the two European countries will be the socio-cultural background for comparing and understanding the biographical experiences of the interviewees. Therefore, an overview of the main political and social characteristics of the countries will be presented, also thanks to the data collected in the research, exclusively with the aim of contextualizing the different societies to which the interviewees belong. The focus is on subjects, not on contexts.

In order to achieve these objectives and answer the research questions, the methodology that appeared most suitable was qualitative. This has allowed me to reconstruct the meanings of the diasporas and the various forms of engagement of the respondents, starting from their biographical paths. In particular, the research was divided into two phases, both in Italy and in Finland: a first exploratory phase of

meeting with key informants on the topic, some of them belonging to the three diasporas, and carrying out in some cases semi-structured interviews; and a second phase characterized by 30 biographical interviews with the women protagonists of diasporas-related engagement.

This thesis is divided into two parts. The first part is a review of the literature on the theme of diasporas within the Migration Studies, relating this theme first to macro and then to micro theories, to provide the theoretical basis to the various dimensions that will be investigated in the research. Therefore, after presenting the main debates on the definitions of diaspora, and its relationship with the concept of transnationalism (Chapter 1), the focus moves to the relationship of the diasporas with the Peace and Conflict Studies⁵ (Chapter 2). The relationship of diasporas with the processes of peace and conflict is an interesting aspect to develop from a sociological point of view, especially from a female agency perspective. The contribution of women to social studies within the Peace Studies will be thus outlined, and an overview of the main forms of women's diasporic engagement in this field will be presented. Then, Chapter 3 illustrates the theoretical approach of intersectionality, which is related to the diaspora and its female component. As a result of the relationship between female diasporas and the intersectionality theory, an intersectional academic effort is illustrated, presenting the main contributions that aim to decolonize the cultural imagination. Finally, in Chapter 4, a decolonial reading of women's role in diasporas is presented, emphasizing their agency and illustrating their main forms of activism. The focus then narrows on the role of women in African diasporas, specifically developing the Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali diasporas in Italy and Finland respectively. In particular, data about the presence of these three diasporas in Italy and Finland are presented, as well as the relationship between history, colonialism and the female gender. In this way there is a general picture of feminist activism both in the African diaspora, and in the Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali diasporas. In summary, the first part illustrates the field of study of

⁵ The academic founder of the Peace Studies is considered the sociologist Johan Galtung, in the 1960s. This field of discipline and research was then developed by other scholars. Shaheen Showkat Dar talks about a disciplinary evolution of the Peace and Conflict Studies: "Peace and Conflict Studies is one of the fast emerging interdisciplinary subjects in the academic universe of the 21st century. The subject is the outcome of thought that it is not desirable that human decisions and resources should be invested in mutual destruction by engaging millions of humans in fighting wars and killing one another. Rather, such resources should be devoted for mass construction of peace by means such as research, dialogues, negotiations, and reconciliations" (Shaheen Showkat Dar, 2017, 47).

diasporas, breaking it down to define it sociologically, and then to relate it both to the processes of peace and to the theory of intersectionality. In outlining these relationships, the red thread is formed, alongside the diaspora, by the female figures of the diasporas, and in particular of Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali ones, who decline their agency in various forms of engagement as it is deepened in the next part.

The second part of the thesis, instead, explains the qualitative sociological study concerning the women's meanings and forms of engagement related to Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali diasporas, as well as the social changes linked to their engagement. Specifically, starting from the description of the research design and the methodological path (Chapter 5), the analysis of the empirical documentation collected is presented. Chapter 6 presents the results of the exploratory study of the phenomenon of the three diasporas in Italy and Finland, aimed at contextualizing and delineating the phenomenon under study. This first part of the research was carried out with 11 semi-structured interviews and informal meetings in Italy and 6 in Finland. In doing so, the relationship between the three diasporas is also highlighted, as is the choice of the geographical contexts of Italy and Finland.

Chapter 7 and 8 explain, instead, the results of biographical interviews. Two types of analysis were carried out: a *thematic analysis*, in which the key themes of the research are identified from the biographical paths (Chapter 7); and a *biographical analysis* of the women's paths, which have been elaborated in the appendix, where interviewees have given their consent (Chapter 8). The narratives of the women interviewed are therefore the starting point of both the analytical processes, which made it possible to answer the research questions. This second part thus presents the research results that explore the heterogeneity of forms of female engagement, as well as their interconnections. These various dimensions of engagement are analyzed according to the approach of intersectionality, in dialogue with the epistemological category of agency from a constructivist perspective. Secondly, the meanings and different experiences of the diaspora, as well as the concepts of peace and conflict, are illustrated. From interviewees' interpretations interesting thematic nodes emerge, which are useful to read and relate to each other the various forms of engagement described. Finally, the reciprocal influence of the spatialities in which the interviewees act is presented,

accentuating the present and future dimension of social change deriving from the forms of engagement described.

Lastly, the conclusions of this thesis (Chapter 9), following the path of the individual and collective change that these interviewees have traced, come to emphasize the aspect of social change, in order to highlight the problematic aspects on which Italian, Finnish, but in general Western societies must work more to increase social justice and equity. Therefore this research presents, alongside the theoretical contribution explained before, a broader contribution related to a social impact dimension, while also developing a reflection on the positioning and autobiographical change of my path as a researcher. Indeed, the study of the forms of engagement of women in these diasporas helps to indicate suggestions for the improvement of societies, with a focus mainly on Black people and people with a migrant background in general.

PART I

Women in the diasporas between war and peace. A theoretical and phenomenological review

CHAPTER 1

Diaspora in Migration Studies

In the last decade there has been an increase in the studies concerning the phenomena of diaspora and transnationalism within the field of Migration Studies, interpreting them through interdisciplinary concepts that may be of interest to disciplines such as sociology, politics, economics, and history. The aim of this chapter is to provide, with a sociological approach, a comprehensive overview of the meanings of the concept of diaspora, discussing its limits and comparing it with other key concepts used in the analysis of international migration. In particular, starting from a macro perspective, the sociological meaning of diaspora, its main dynamics of formation and continuity, and its relation to physical and digital spaces will be analyzed, with an in-depth look at the African diaspora. The focus will be on diaspora as a relational process and concept connected to various spatial, temporal and disciplinary dimensions.

The importance of studying diasporas in Migration Studies lies in shedding light on the agency of diaspora actors, who not only maintain ties with their community of origin but also create new communities, international diasporic networks and are central to co-development dynamics. While in Europe diasporas in general have been studied to a greater extent, also at a sociological level, in Italy several studies have been carried out (Petra, Mezzetti et. al., 2010) but little in-depth study has been done on gender dimensions, especially from a sociological point of view.

1.1 Conceptual definitions of diaspora: past and current debates

Diaspora is a key concept in a contemporaneity characterized by continuous evolutions, through time and specialities, which are influenced by globalization, migrations and digitalization. Diaspora is also an old concept, and its meaning has recently changed. In outlining the origin and evolution of the definition of diaspora, the

historical perspective is often intertwined with the sociological one. Originally, the term diaspora referred to the historic movements of some groups, especially Jews and Armenians, and later also of religious minorities in Europe. One of the original uses of the word diaspora comes from the Greek language, based on a translation of the Hebrew term *galût* “that describes the formation of scattered Jewish colonies outside of Palestine as a result of the Babylonian exile, beginning in 586 BCE” (Manuel A. Vásquez, 2010, 128).

In Ancient Greek the word diaspora, composed by the preposition *dia* (over) and *speiro* (to sow) referred to colonization and migration (Lisa Anteby-Yemini, William Berthomière, 2005, 262). Historically the notions of diaspora and religion have been interconnected, often reinforcing each other, as they manage in similar ways the articulation of collective and individual identities.

Subsequently, starting from the 1970s, the concept of diaspora has experienced several interpretations and applications (Rainer Bauböck, Thomas Faist, 2010): there are different definitions of diaspora that emphasize various and significant aspects. In social sciences, the term diaspora did not appear before the 1980s because, according to the sociologist Judith Shuval, “before the 1960s, immigrant groups were generally expected to shed their ethnic identity and assimilate to local norms. Groups that were thought unable to do this, weren’t admitted, eg. Chinese people to Canada, non-Whites to Australia” (L. Anteby-Yemini, W. Berthomière, 2005, 262). In addition, G. Sheffer claims that the first theory of diaspora goes back to Amstrong’s paper “Mobilized and proletarian diasporas” published in the *American Political Sciences Review* in 1976. G. Sheffer explains also, in his book *Modern Diasporas in International Politics* (1986), that referring the term diaspora only to Jewish people is a mistake, as different diasporas were previously present, such as Phoenicians, Assyrians or Nabatheans. In theorizing the concept of diaspora, the Jewish Diaspora model has been used as an archetype in traditional diasporic literature. In summary, it is possible to identify three phases of the theorization of the concept of diaspora: the Classical Period, the Modern Period, and the Contemporary or Late-Modern Period. The first phase is associated with the oldest diasporas and is linked to Ancient Greece. The second phase relates the concept of diaspora to central events of the Modern age, such as colonization and slavery; this period also includes three sub-phases: the expansion of European Capital (1500-1814),

the Industrial Revolution (1815-1914) and the war period (1914-1945). Finally, the third phase in the theorization of diaspora includes the period between the end of the Second World War and today, in which the process of globalization and its effects is central (Michele Reis, 2004). The events characterizing these three historical periods influence the diasporic processes, and therefore the theorization and definition of the concept of diaspora.

Furthermore, one of the main theorists on diasporas, R. Cohen, explains that diaspora studies can be divided into four phases: the classical phase in the pre-1980s, the 1980s to the mid-1990s phase, the mid 1990s phase and phase four from the 21st century (J. E. Dodson, 2014). In defining diasporas, Cohen states that diaspora is often an undertheorized term, and he tries to explain what diasporas are through categorizations. In general, according to him, most diasporas share these characteristics: dispersal or voluntary travel from an homeland, a collective memory, an idealization of the original home, a movement of return, a strong sense of ethnic belonging over time, a difficult relation with the new society, the solidarity with other diasporic members around the world and the possibility of a creative and successful life in the new country (Cohen, 1997). However, Roza Tsagarousianou and other researchers, such as J. Clifford, point out some weaknesses in Cohen's understanding of diaspora, although acknowledging his emphasis on less explored dimensions of diasporas such as creativity. The limits of Cohen's work (but also of the work of other researchers) are firstly the emphasis on the relationship of diasporas with a "homeland" (that is proper for some, but not all the diasporas); secondly the demarcation of diaspora as a field of investigation through a set of characteristics, a type of checklist (Roza Tsagarousianou, 2019). As the notion of diaspora is elusive and most definitions are not able to include the fluid character of diasporas, J. Clifford states that a word like diaspora should not be constructed through an ideal type. To deeply understand diasporas, R. Tsagarousianou states that it is necessary to move forward from the notions of "homeland" and "ethnic group", as well as from the logic of identity and geographical location to conceive diasporas as characterized by imagination, hybridity and transnationality.

In this regard, Stuart Hall points out that ethnicity cannot be enough to describe diasporic identities: the key feature is creativity, that is at the core of diasporic

subjectivities. S. Hall considers the concept of ethnic identities as a paradox, as it produces negative effects with regard to representation, especially political representation (Stuart Hall, 1996). The notion of ethnicity focused more on processes within the nation-states rather than transnationally; and considering diasporas merely in relation to ethnic culture reproduces the power relations that generated a national or ethnic culture. In short, it is necessary to focus more on the articulated processes of negotiation of the diasporas that often go beyond the limits of “ethnicity”, rather than on ethnocentric definitions of diasporas.

Next to R. Cohen and S. Hall, W. Safran is another key theorist on diaspora who is closer to Cohen’s vision. According to Safran, one of the main aspects that identifies a diaspora, differentiating it from other migrant groups, is the orientation to homeland. He clarifies that there are different interpretations of the concept of homeland, specifically “members of ‘serial’ diasporas, who are going from one hostland to another, may keep the homeland in their consciousness, but such a homeland, if it exists at all, may be little more than a utopia to which one is not expected to ‘return’” (William Safran, 2004, 16). Additionally, the link with the homeland is shown by some cultural and psychosocial manifestations, such as the use of the original language. Regardless, most diasporas keep a double connection, to two countries and two cultures. In summary, Safran emphasizes also the symbolic meanings of diaspora, which became a metaphor of alienation, transcendence, all characteristics of postmodernity. Diaspora is also the symbol of globalization and fluidity, and it is a process that is destined to grow in the future, and not to stop (Safran, 2004).

In the theorization and analysis of diasporas, particularly relevant are also the explanations of the concept provided by K. Tölölyan and R. Brubaker. These two authors have been chosen because they are among the main scholars of the diasporas, with interesting approaches and that in some respects complement each other. The first one is a diaspora scholar from an internal perspective, being a member of the Armenian diaspora; the second one studies diasporas from an external perspective. Indeed, the first author is an Armenian-American professor, one of the founders of the field of diaspora studies and the founding editor of the Journal *Diaspora: a Journal of Transnational Studies*; while the second author is a distinguished Professor of Sociology at the University of California. K. Tölölyan states that the contemporary discourse on diaspora

studies is characterized by divergent views on its key concepts, as for example diasporic and ethnic, dispersion and diaspora, network and node, global and transnational, global and local, sedentariness and mobility (Khachig Tölölyan, 2007). Nowadays there are around three dozen transnational communities whose members (intellectuals, artists, and political elites) define themselves as diasporas. This is due to a greater spread and popularity of the term, which involved among other things a crisis in the differentiation between dispersion and diaspora. “When ethnics, exiles, expatriates, refugees, asylum seekers, labor migrants, queer communities, domestic service workers, executives of transnational corporations, and transnational sex workers are all labeled diasporas, the struggle to maintain distinctions is lost” (Tölölyan, 2007, 648-649). K. Tölölyan firstly highlights the need to distinguish the concept of diaspora from that of dispersion. A diaspora that arises from a catastrophe inflicted on the community suffers a trauma and often becomes a community to which the work of remembrance and commemoration is a constant, even in shaping the cultural and political engagement. On the other side, dispersion results from chain or individual migration due to economic reasons, and in these groups the commemoration is less strong.

Secondly, not all ethnic communities can be considered diasporic, while the reverse is true. In fact, the main characteristics of diasporas are often considered the sharing of a collective culture and identity, which preserves the social and cultural practices of the homeland, in the same form or in contaminated, so-called hybrid, forms (Tölölyan, 2007, 649). Moreover, a key feature especially of the diasporas generated by conflicts or disasters in the homeland is a “rhetoric of restoration”, which is realized through the commitment to keep relations both with kin groups in other countries and with the homeland. The concept of “home/homeland” in diaspora studies can be problematic, as scholars continue to define as host countries those countries that have been home to many diasporic peoples for years (Robin Cohen, Carolin Fischer, 2020). This is true for the first generation, but not for those born in these “receiving” countries; however, this does not prevent later generations (if they want) from maintaining ties with the “homeland” of their forefathers. To solve this terminological problem, K. Tölölyan refers to the US as his home and the home of its Armenian diaspora, while he regards Armenia as the homeland of his ancestors.

Furthermore, in relation to the concept of diaspora derivative terms have been introduced: diasporicity (a condition), diasporization (a process) and diasporology (a field of inquiry). K. Tölölyan deepens the concepts of diasporization and diasporicity. The process of diasporization consists in not considering the existence of diasporas in any form of dispersion, but in adopting a conception of “becoming-diaspora”. According to this scholar, it is indeed necessary to view diaspora as a process of collective identification and as a shape of identity characterized by evolving differences, rather than as the definition of an unchanging concept. Diasporicity manifests itself instead in connection with the difference, as diasporic communities prefer to integrate and have citizenship without assimilation. In particular, in some cases they organize political, social and cultural work to support and defend their “difference”, this is especially the case when prejudices arise from the consideration of racial and religious differences (such as Muslims, Jews, Black people, etc.). Tölölyan explains that even if parental, cultural and religious ties with the homeland are lost or remain in a weak form, “the discriminatory treatment suffices to sustain an ethnoracial community that can be reimbued with notions of diasporicity” (Tölölyan, 2007, 650).

The second author, the sociologist R. Brubaker, argues instead that the term diaspora has experienced so far a dispersion of meaning that he defines “diaspora” diaspora, regarding not only the academic field, but also the media and the self-representations of different groups. Despite this dispersion of meanings, according to him it is possible to identify three constant criteria to define the diaspora: the dispersion in space, the orientation to a “homeland” and the boundary-maintenance. The first one is the most widely accepted criterion, even if some would rather replace “dispersion” with “division”, defining diasporas as “ethnic communities divided by state frontiers” (Rogers Brubaker, 2005, 5). The concept of dispersion can be understood in a narrow sense as forced/traumatic dispersion, in a broader sense as any kind of dispersion in space across state borders, or in a metaphorical sense as a dispersion within national borders. The second criterion is “the orientation to a real or imagined ‘homeland’ as an authoritative source of value, identity and loyalty” (Brubaker, 2005, 5).

This is a highly debated concept: it was emphasized by earlier discussions, but criticized by more recent ones, for example by the anthropologist James Clifford, who considers the model of William Safran and others incorrect. It should be noted that W.

Safran is one of the classical scholars of the diaspora, and conceives it in a classical and somewhat positivist way. Safran's approach is more classical and deterministic, while Cohen's and Brubaker's approaches draw from the constructionist understanding of diaspora. According to Safran's model, diasporas are linked to continuous cultural connections with the homeland and to a desire for return. In particular, W. Safran explains that the focus on the motherland in diasporas is also manifested by psychological and/or cultural aspects, including language. The use of the alphabet of the language of origin is one of the main expressions of the culture of a diaspora that has adopted the language of the host country (Safran, 2004). J. Clifford, from his anthropological perspective, emphasizes the importance of decentralizing this conception (James Clifford, 1994). Also R. Cohen's definition of diaspora partly goes further than William Safran's definition, according to which the people involved in diaspora "are strongly motivated to maintain support for their homeland, and communal consciousness and solidarity enable them to continue to take an interest in homeland affairs" (Delphine Ancien, Mark Boyle, Rob Kitchin, 2009). According to Cohen, this is a key feature of diaspora, but this should include also: the groups who moved both voluntarily and as result of persecution, aggression or hardship; the groups who have settled in a new place for a long time; and it should consider also the positive aspects of the diasporas' lives in the country of destination.

Finally, the third criterion is the boundary-maintenance and concerns the preservation of a distinctive identity in the host society or societies. R. Brubaker also speaks of the term "diasporic", emphasizing that it is risking losing its discriminating power, as if everyone is considered "diasporic", then nobody really is, and this could mean the disappearance of diaspora. Specifically, the adjectives "diasporic" and "diasporan" indicate a modality or an attribute, as for example in diasporic identity, diasporic citizenship, diasporic imagination, diasporic consciousness, diasporic culture, diasporic religion, diasporic networks, and diasporic nationalism (Brubaker, 2005, 4). Although boundary-maintenance is a key feature in understanding diasporas, there is an ambivalence in the literature, where hybridity and fluidity within diasporas are also emphasized. For example, Stuart Hall underlines the coexistence of heterogeneity and identity in diasporas, affirming the recognition of hybridity (Stuart Hall, 2018). In this line of thinking and breaking away from the Eurocentric perspective, Arjun Appadurai

(Appadurai, 1996) further explores the concept of maintaining cultural hybridity in the diaspora. He was among the theorists of a shift in perspective in the literature of diaspora. While the old perspective was assimilationist and methodologically nationalist, assuming that immigrants ceased to have ties with their homelands; the new perspective seems to consider the age of diaspora and de-territorialization as overcoming the age of the nation-states. Appadurai states, in fact, that diasporas generate ethnoscapas in global cities, reconfiguring the experience of identity and creating new belongingness. He introduces the power of imagination as a key feature in determining human actions and movements, and therefore as one of the main reasons for contemporary diasporas. He states that the power of imagination is a key part of the subjective composition, and it is nowadays fed by digital communication and media.

We may speak of diasporas of hope, diasporas of terror, and diasporas of despair. But in every case, these Diasporas bring the force of imagination, as both memory and desire, into the lives of many ordinary people, into mythographies different from the disciplines of myth and ritual of the classic sort. (Appadurai, 2004: 17) (Sofia Cavalcanti Zanforlin, 2016, 197).

According to Appadurai, it is therefore necessary to also analyse the diasporas in relation to the rapid flow of digital information and images that transcend national spaces. This is the reason why he speaks about “public spheres of diasporas”, which are situated within a specific national territory, but at the same time transcend it through the Internet. In addition, Brubaker explains that defining diaspora as referring to a group or community may give rise to problems of groupism. While the concept of nation-state should have been overcome, the notions of community and identity remain; even seeing diaspora as a non-territorial form of belonging presupposes the existence of an identity that is re-interpreted. Therefore, to overcome the problems of groupism Brubaker suggests considering the diaspora first as a category of practice and only then as a category of analysis. This means, in summary, “to speak of diasporic stances, projects, claims, idioms, practices, and so on”, rather than of a diaspora as “an entity, a bounded group, an ethnodemographic or ethnocultural fact” (Brubaker, 2005, 13).

Finally, to include the latest theorisations on diaspora, the concept of post-diaspora has recently appeared. It has been developed especially since the mid 2000s as a

theoretical concept which allows the analysis of the complexity of diasporic experiences in globalization, by translating discussions regarding time, space and belonging into a conceptual frame that goes beyond the concept of diaspora (Jonathan Rollins, 2010; Suzanne Scafe, 2019). Michel S. Laguerre (2017) develops the idea of post-diaspora and post-diasporic as a kind of metamorphosis of the diasporic condition in terms of political and social equality, as the character of post-diasporic presupposes the acquisition of the full rights of citizenship of the various countries, overcoming the concept of identity linked to a single nation-state. Thus, this concept becomes necessary to understand diasporas with a translocal approach, where time and space, as well as borders, are even more fluid. Post-diaspora, in relation to transnationalism, deepens the fluidity of migration (Scafe, Leith Dunn, 2020) and S. Scafe develops it with an interesting approach (2019) to explore the inhomogeneity of diasporas (and in particular of African diaspora), power relations and the relevance of different narrative representations of multiple spaces.

In conclusion, this section provided an introductory theoretical framework on diasporas, exploring the main definitions and debates from the oldest to the most recent. S. Banerjee et. al. (2012) emphasize the need to adopt a scholarly approach which is open to continuous changes in studying diasporas. These authors also use the concept of “routing” to reflect the multifaceted nature of diasporas, which must be studied as ongoing processes, rather than as fixed concepts (Sukanya Banerjee et. al., 2012). In the next section, bearing in mind what has been said so far, the causes and consequences of diasporas will be explored to better understand their dynamics and the leading actors.

1.2 Causes and Consequences of diasporas

Moving further in the sociological analysis of diaspora, but considering the assumptions made so far, the sociologist Jualynne E. Dodson argues that there is a great amount of literature about diaspora, but less literature concerning the sociological definition of diaspora and how it differs from the idea of migration. She explains that every diaspora includes a type of transnational migration, but the reverse is not true (Jualynne E. Dodson, 2014). In particular, J. E. Dodson refers to Cohen’s sociological study of diasporas as an important starting point to theorize and to conduct research on

this topic. Robin Cohen provides, in fact, some necessary conceptual tools to understand diasporas and their causes, identifying five ideal types of diaspora (Cohen, 2023):

- Victim diasporas (e.g., classic diasporas forced into exile such as the Jewish, African, Armenian diasporas)
- Labour diasporas (e.g., movement in search of work and economic opportunities such as the Indian and Turkish diasporas)
- Trade diasporas (e.g., migrations seeking to open trade routes and links such as the Chinese and Lebanese diasporas)
- Imperial diasporas (e.g., migration among those keen to serve and maintain empires such as the British and French diasporas)
- Cultural diaspora (e.g., those who move through a process of chain migration such as the Caribbean diaspora).

These ideal types are on the borderline between definition and explication of the causes of diasporas; however, they have been included in the section on the causes of diasporas because they distinguish types of diasporas according to the dynamics that caused them. It is possible to see in this analysis how the causes of diasporas are varied; these typologies should not be considered separately from each other as the causes of diasporas can often be intertwined. Additionally, among the causes of diasporas mention should also be made of the so-called “disaster diasporas”, which are generated by major economic and climatic changes affecting poor rural communities. Indeed, climate and economic crises both have a strong impact on affected communities in terms of mass displacement and social and economic instability (Stephen M. Marson, Mac Legerton, 2021).

One of the questions that should be asked is whether or not one can speak of causes of diasporas, as it is not always easy to identify them as presented in ideal models. Colonialism, or rather “colonialisms”, can be considered among the various factors that caused the diasporas, which are often not explored in depth. The relationship between colonialism and diasporas is proven by the fact that, as the scholars of colonialism explain, the main forced movement of world population took place first during transatlantic slavery (from XVI to XIX century), and then “from the high point of

formal colonialism, from the mid-nineteenth century into the first half of the twentieth” (Ato Quayson, Girish Daswani, 2013, 10). It is true that diasporas include both voluntary displacements of populations and forced displacements, but it is a fact that colonialism had a strong influence on the various diasporas. Most diasporas are consequences of colonial policies and the processes of decolonisation that affected Africa, Australia, Latin America and even parts of Asia (such as the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947 and the traumatic dispersal of populations that followed). In summary, “the politically spasmodic form of the nation-state has also been responsible for processes of dispersal and diasporization” (Quayson, Daswani, 2013, 146). Then there are the diasporas caused by a more informal, hidden and disguised colonialism, such as the case of the Palestinian diaspora, which began with the First World War and the establishment of the British protectorate in Palestine. The forced displacement of Palestinians from their lands includes over 700,000 Palestinians forced to leave their homes for the establishment of the state of Israel, which also occupied the West Bank and Gaza Strip in 1967 (Rasem Bisharat, 2019).

Another key aspect in understanding the causes, or better the dynamics, of diasporas is globalization. J. Friedman explains that in the increasing global and interconnected world the causes of transnational and diasporic processes can be attributed to the expansion and fluctuations of the global system (Jonathan Friedman, 1990). Moreover, in this new scenery the concept of boundaries is no longer a central one, nor is there a clear geographical delimitation of spaces; therefore defining the causes of diasporas becomes even more complex. In line with this, the causes of diasporic and transnational processes can be linked to the evolution of political, economical and social conditions in both sending and receiving countries. The arising of global networks is a determining factor in population movements, as the discourse around globalization gives much information about qualities and quantities of actors’ relations in various states (Ulf Johansson Dahre, 2007).

In summary, identifying the causes of diasporas can be difficult, if on one hand some literature has focused on which can be the possible causes of these phenomena, on the other hand it is necessary to problematize the topic of the causes, that is, if it is possible to speak about causes of diasporas and transnational movements and if they can be understood only in relation to global processes.

Alongside the causes, and often in connection with them, the consequences of diasporas are of central importance. Among the widespread consequences are the various forms of mobilisation of diasporas towards their country of origin, with different objectives including preserving their identity and influencing the political and social system of the home state through campaigns and lobbying (Connor Kopchick et al., 2022). Moreover, some diasporas (but not all), where they acquire a range of tools and experience, can become agents of development in their countries of origin (Giulia Sinatti; Cindy Horst 2015). Diasporas can also be “agents of change” because they generate political, social and cultural resources which can have a significant impact on the homelands, by not only supporting but also changing them (Simon Turner, Nauja Kleist, 2013). One of the main consequences related to diasporas as sources of development are the remittances. In particular, the economic remittances are by far the most commonly referenced aspect of migrants’ and diasporas’ impact in their homelands, secondly the political ones, and more recently the emphasis has also been on the social remittances. P. Levitt and D. Lamba-Nieves rethink the concept of social remittances, starting with the exploration of how they transform the meaning and value of time and consequently rebalance the relationship between development and migration. Specifically, they distinguish between individual and collective social remittances (which circulate and are sustained in collective settings and organisations); and describe the potential of social remittances to impact not only practices at the local level, but also regional and national changes. Furthermore, they highlight how pre-migration experiences influence their activities in the countries where they settle and, consequently, their remittances as well (Peggy Levitt, Deepak Lamba-Nieves, 2013).

However, several criticisms have been made to the expression “social remittances”. Firstly, criticism of the analytical clarity of the concept of social remittances, as it encompasses very different phenomena; secondly, the fact that these phenomena have specificities and novelties, for which they should be distinguished and named differently; and finally, the risk of a one-sided interpretation in the literature on the subject, whereby emigration countries are represented exclusively as receiving remittances of all kinds (P. Boccagni, F. Decimo, 2013). Regarding specifically the criticism on the lack of a political and economic dimension in the analysis of social

remittances, Stefan Rhoter, to give an example, considers political remittances to be completely separate from social remittances. Another position in the literature considers political remittances as derived from economic remittances on a collective level. Political remittances in this case are understood as “the changes in political identities, demands and practices associated with migration, mainly in migrant-sending countries” (Paul Tabar and Wahib Maalouf, 2016, 105). The analysis of remittances, central to the understanding of diasporas, could continue to be explored further.

Regarding especially the political impact, another aspect that can be considered an important consequence of diasporas is the emergence of diaspora institutions, linked to the development of new types of global and transnational governance (Alan Gamlen, 2014). As Gamlen explains, diaspora institutions are spreading even further: they “extend domestic realms beyond national borders, projecting infrastructural power extraterritorially, shaping migrants’ senses of self, and reconfiguring the spatiality of states in ways unimagined by modernist geopolitical thinking” (Gamlen, 2014, 183). These institutions have a key role in coordinating the various engagement activities of diasporas, as well as in realizing political and social transformations. They are defined as state offices dealing with people who migrated and their descendants; the problem is that this conception of diaspora institutions does not include diaspora organizations of migrants, political parties and institutions in the military or legal field, and diaspora offices linked to local governments (Gamlen, 2014). All these entities, which are not formally considered as diaspora institutions, are equally important and can be considered consequences of the diasporic processes.

Among the main causes and consequences of diasporas, the dimensions of time and space are also central features. Considering the increasing fluidity of borders and the overcoming of the concept of nation-state in an even more globalized world, diasporic movements generate processes that go beyond the temporal and spatial categories. Chandra Mohanty (2003) explains how diasporas and living abroad allow the development of forms of transnational solidarity, which constitute one of the replies to increasing globalization. These solidarities generate spaces that are politically powerful and inhabited by collectivities who develop their sense of home in new societies. Diasporic flows have relevant consequences also in shaping and transforming the spaces they inhabit: they enrich societies by contributing to improve and reform them. As S.

Batha and A. Ram explain (2001), diasporic personalities in Western societies negotiate with different voices and positionalities linked to gender, race and power issues, challenging both symbolic and geographical borders. These diasporic voices thus produce a cultural and social mobilization, which has also a political impact. G. Proglío, for example, points out that colonialism and the related ideas of nation, race, etc. were organized “around and from the concept of the border” (Gabriele Proglío, 2020), a notion which postcolonial writers try to deconstruct. Through their diasporic writing they overcome borders, and they criticize and reinterpret the slavery and past colonialism that they directly experienced together with racism, prejudices and other kinds of violence. G. Proglío interprets the diasporic condition as not directly connected with criticism against the system, but as “being in between”. This positionality allows the production of a different knowledge that can disclose other perspectives on the world. Other theorists emphasize the transnational dimensions of the diasporas. R. Tsagarousianou distinguishes between “crystallized” and “fluid” diasporas: the first ones are, according to him, “dynamic and organizationally sophisticated social formations characterized by very high efficiency of transnational networks” (R. Tsagarousianou, 2019); the second ones lack organization and have less efficient networks.

In summary, what can be interpreted as the consequences of diasporas include different types of remittances, development initiatives and engagement activities, as well as the birth of institutions linked to diasporas and with the role of coordination. Exploring the causes and consequences of diasporas has also allowed us to show the first links between diasporic and transnational processes, which will be deepened in the following paragraph.

1.3 Diaspora and transnationalism

In relation to the concept of diaspora analyzed so far, in a global scenario with increasingly flexible and multifaceted borders, a new perspective in the study of migration emerged in the 1990s: the paradigm of transnationalism. As M. Ambrosini (2008) explains, considering migration as transnational means adopting the concept of

the “transmigrant”: one who does not experience a sharp distinction between country of origin and country of arrival, but maintains a series of social relations with the country of origin, not considering national borders as a limitation (Maurizio Ambrosini, 2008, 45). And therein lies the fluidity of globalization, in which the more traditional categories of “immigrant” and “emigrant” are interpreted more flexibly or superseded. In order to fully understand the term transnationalism and distinguish it from the term diaspora, we need to delve into its main meanings. Ambrosini specifically identifies three sociologically significant meanings of the concept of transnationalism that underlie its evolution (Ambrosini, 2008). The earliest is the definition proper to cultural anthropology developed in the early 1990s by Glick Schiller, Basch and C. Blanc-Szanton, who understand transnationalism as “the process by which migrants construct social fields that bind together the country of origin and the country of settlement” (Schiller et. al., 1992).

The next definition is the one proposed by Portes and his collaborators (Portes, Guarnizo and Landolt 1999), who restrict the applicability of the concept to the co-presence of the following conditions: the involvement in the process of transnationalism of a substantial percentage of people (immigrants in this case); the persistence over time of the activities in which people are engaged; and the inability of existing concepts to explain the meaning of these activities. The focus is also on transnationalism from below and not as an alternative to migrant assimilation (Ambrosini, 2008). The third elaboration of the concept of transnationalism is the one proposed by Faist (1998-2000), who speaks about “transnational social spaces”, which can be: kinship groups characterized by reciprocal ties, such as those that regulate remittances; transnational circuits characterized by instrumental links of exchange; and transnational communities characterized by bonds of solidarity that derive from a common conception of collective identity. A further clarification on the concept of transnationalism is made by K. Tölölyan, who emphasizes that he uses this term differently from some colleagues. First, he points out that, before the birth of the nation-states, there were trans-state diasporas and not transnational ones. As the scholar explains from his perspective, the history of the term “transnationalism” reveals that its first employment dates to 1918, when the American intellectual Randolph Bourne used it in its essay. “Though it is often used carelessly as a synonym for globalization,

transnational properly designates an action or relation that involves the crossing of a national border by a non-state entity” (Tölölyan, 2007, 652). Non-state identity can refer to a family, a corporation, an individual, an NGO, or any other non-state organization such as a social movement or even a terrorist group. The word became then a constant of political, economic and later sociological discourse in the 1980s, following the founding of the newspaper *Transnational Corporations* with the support of the UN. The *trans-* prefix is different from the *supra-* prefix: for example the European Union is a supranational and not a transnational body. K. Tölölyan claims: “I teach a course titled DTG: Diaspora, Transnationalism, and Globalization, and I always begin by insisting that the first term is nested in the next, larger term, and the second in the third” (Tölölyan, 2007, 652).

In this framework, Ambrosini also explains that a variant of the transnational perspective, very intertwined with it, is the study of migrations as diasporas, with their “diasporic” identities. As emerged in the previous section, diasporas are not a given, but they are social constructions and heterogeneous phenomena (Nicholas Van Hear, 1998). Narratives and interactions play an important role in diasporas, where not only community ties, but also forms of domination and different forms of identification are generated. In the diasporic spaces, diasporas, dislocations, localizations, borders and different types of processes (cultural, political etc.) intertwine. The diasporic space is therefore a conceptual category not only of migrants and their descendants, but also of the natives, resulting in a blending. The same diasporic identities are redefined as “transnational identification networks that enclose imagined and encountered communities” (Van Hear, 1998, 78-79).

Some critics argued that this carries the risk that almost every migration component with the awareness of common origins and with a collective organization can be considered a diaspora. The first criticism concerns at the theoretical level the ambiguity of the term transnationalism, as its temporal and spatial parameters and its position in relation to other concepts (such as globalization, multiculturalism) are not specified. The author considers that transnationalism is not opposed to assimilation but constitutes a variant because the migrants who try to keep ties with the places of origin are also active in the current society where they live. On this point, some food for thought should be suggested by A. Sayad, who argues the paradox of the “double absence”,

whereby the migrant feels absent from his land of origin and in the new society to which he/she has moved, where he/she feels both included and excluded (Abdelmalek Sayad, 1999). But on the other hand, transnationalism is the paradigm of the “double presence”, as it refers to the presence and ties simultaneously in different spatialities.

The second criticism concerns the past, where, in fact, the migrants historically maintained different kinds of ties with their places of origin. According to the critics, if a new social category (in this case the transnationalism) has historical antecedents, its scientific validity is denied. But A. Portes and other colleagues claim the opposite: it is an advantage that the new conceptual category of transnationalism has precedents in the past, as it can connect the past and contemporary experiences, allowing us to understand them in greater depth (Alejandro Portes, 2001). Finally, the third main criticism is about the real extension of the transnational migrant phenomena. If they are considered as regular practices of participation in two different social contexts and countries, only a few people regularly participate in transnational activities, including occasional participation in, for example, projects. But the scholars of transnationalism believe that social relationships cannot be contained within the national borders, and that the concept of diaspora has been established in opposition to the concept of nation. The suggestion is therefore to consider the diaspora not as a defined entity, but as a category of practice to articulate projects, to mobilize, and to formulate different identities.

Deepening the relationship between diaspora and transnationalism, R. Bauböck and T. Faist try to clarify the similarities and differences between these two different concepts, by approaching them as descriptive analytical notions, as socially constituted formations, and as socio-cultural conditions. Analyzing the two concepts as descriptive notions, they state that while there is a strong tradition in the use of diaspora as a descriptive and analytical category (for example in Safran's and Cohen's studies), and while the focus of diaspora studies has been mainly on issues of cultural distinctiveness and on social practices, as, for example, entrepreneurship; the focus of transnational studies has been mainly on mobility and networks. As social formations, the authors refer to J. Dahinden and M. Bruneau to deepen the concepts of diaspora and transnationalism. J. Dahinden did an empirical analysis on transnationalism, differentiating between “more sedentary and more nomadic forms of cross-border movements and ties (Bauböck, Faist, 2010). J. Dahinden departs from M. Bruneau and

does not oppose transnationalism and diaspora, but she looks at “transnationalism through mobility” and “diasporic transnationalism” (Janine Dahinden, 2017). According to her, diasporic transnationalism indicates the ties and social formations across borders that migrants and their collectives entertain; while transnationalism through mobility “by contrast is characterized by circulation and thus perpendicular movement across borders” (Bauböck, Faist, 2010, 18). Dahinden’s and Bruneau’s analyses (Michel Bruneau, 1994) of these concepts are useful because they are examples of how diaspora and transnationalism can be used as conceptual tools to talk about contemporary mobilities; and they additionally show how studies on transnationalism try to include issues developed by the diaspora studies. As socio-cultural conditions, R. Bauböck and T. Faist point out the relevance of a social constructivist perspective that shifts the focus from transnational communities to transnational practices, with the aim of avoiding essentialized conceptions of migrant groups (as for example being national or transnational). Furthermore, the authors further deepen the main similarities and differences between the concepts of diaspora and transnationalism. They are both elastic concepts and “usually concern sustained cross-border ties including regions of origin, destination and lateral ties to other regions in which migrants reside” (Bauböck, Faist, 2010, 20).

But they are also different. First, transnationalism is a broader concept than diaspora as it refers to all sorts of social formations that transcend borders and also to phenomena as, for example, networks of businesspersons and social movements. Additionally, as transnational communities include a broader range of phenomena they include diasporas, but not all transnational communities are diasporas. The second difference is related to identity and mobility issues. Both transnationalism and diaspora use these concepts, but they put emphasis on them in a different way. While diaspora approaches focus more on issues of collective identity, transnational approaches take their inspiration from cross-border mobility. Finally, the third distinction is related to the time dimension. The concept of diaspora is usually linked to “a multi-generational pattern, while transnational analysts deal with recent migrant flows” (Bauböck, Faist, 2010, 22).

1.4 Digital spaces and translocality

The translocal character of the diaspora has increasingly produced interactions between physical and digital spaces, and has led to the spread of the so-called digital diasporas. The concept “digital diaspora” has no clear and unambiguous definition: the several digital diaspora approaches are reflective of the different paradigms of diaspora studies. Over time, the elaborations of the concept of digital diasporas have taken different forms depending on the academic positions that inform them, as well as of the methodologies by which they are studied. Moreover, there are terminological alternatives to the word “digital diaspora”, such as online diaspora, e-diaspora and virtual diaspora (Laura Candidatu, Koen Leurs, Sandra Ponzanesi, 2019, 35). The social anthropologist Michel S. Laguerre for example defines virtual diaspora as:

the use of cyberspace by immigrants or descendants of an immigrant group for the purpose of participating or engaging in online interactional transactions. Such virtual interaction can be with members of the diasporic group living in the same foreign country or in other countries, with individuals or entities in the homeland, or with nonmembers of the group in the hostland or elsewhere. By extension, virtual diaspora is the cyber expansion of real diaspora. No virtual diaspora can be sustained without real-life diasporas, and in this sense it is not a separate entity, but rather a pole of continuum (Michel S. Laguerre, 2000, 1).

From this conception it follows that the members who are protagonists of this virtual interaction are involved in activities linked to information technology. In particular, three main features are considered the components of the social infrastructure of digital diasporas: migration, information technology connectivity, and networking (M. S. Laguerre, 2006). Immigration is a necessary condition for the group or individual to be considered diasporic. The only exception is when diaspora is the result of the redefinition of a state’s borders: in this case the former inhabitants of the state become the citizens of the new territory, without a migration outside the state.

Second, IT connectivity is the condition without which digitization would not be possible; therefore, it enables the diaspora to express its digital identity. The relationship between diasporas and IT produces different embodiments of the digital diaspora (Johanna Vollmeyer, 2022). A first incarnation can be the digital diaspora expressed as a virtual community, since various individuals with the same ethnic or national

background meet in different (host) countries online, creating one or more interactive virtual spaces. In this way the virtual diasporic community becomes the online extension of the real community of residence, as the online activities of its members affect the community of residence. A second embodiment of the digital diaspora considers both the positive and the negative effects of the IT revolution on the diasporic community. If a diaspora becomes digital because of the positive impacts of IT, it can manage the use of this new technology; in the second case, instead, the IT revolution causes the gentrification of the area of residence and it forces the members of the diasporic community, willingly or unwillingly, to enter the digital sphere.

Finally, the third component of the social infrastructure is networking, and it is necessary to make the process of online communication operational, and then the digital diaspora operative (Alonso Andoni, Pedro Oiarzabal, 2010). Networking means that the members of the diasporic group take part in cyber communication activities with other people in their network of contacts. These criteria provide a framework to study and understand digital diasporas. Analyzing virtual transnationalism and diasporas allow us to address the problems of “groupism” and “methodological nationalism, since Internet users do not follow distinctions based on group or national boundaries. But, on the other hand, it is not possible to analyze these activities only through the Internet, as digital spaces are only the extension of offline spaces (Kathrin Kissau, Uwe Hunger, 2010, 248).

The relevance of the Internet in studying migrants’ transnational activities or diasporas concerns the fact that it can be an asset in analyzing some of their key aspects, such as identity construction, social networks, the local dimension of the daily life of migrants, etc. In particular, the Internet has become essential for deepening, for example, the following dimensions: the construction of a shared imagination for migrant groups (for which inter-group communication is central, also through internet platforms); the local and transnational networks in which people are involved (the Internet allows the online structures of these networks to be studied, delving into the features of diasporic communities); the daily lives of migrants, where the Internet has become central with emails, forums, weblogs, online chats, etc.); the various levels of migrant interaction reflected by the Internet as a meeting point where diasporas shape their community, social and political visibility.

However, in studying digital diasporas, and in general diasporas, it is relevant to adopt a critical approach and to deconstruct diasporas: this approach includes engaging both with the different theorizations of digital diasporas and with the postcolonial and feminist perspectives on diaspora studies. Focusing on the needed relationality between disciplines and methodological traditions, Internet studies lacked an exchange with anti-racist, feminist and postcolonial perspectives, resulting in the elimination of critical voices in the digital diaspora canon. Specifically, as we have seen when outlining the framework of understanding of digital diasporas, the online and offline realities are connected and “this coexistence of digital and embodied selves create new possibilities for reinterpreting migration not as a mere territorial dislocation but as being part of imaginaries on the move, as Appadurai wrote (1996)” (Candidatu, Leurs, Ponzanesi, 2019, 40). But the comprehensive conceptualization of the digital diaspora as an offline-online continuum needs both a methodological and an epistemological shift. As diasporic members are connected in different ways and through different practices, then an intersectional and postcolonial feminist lens is needed to deconstruct digital diasporas in dynamic and heterogeneous entities that place importance on hybrid identities, class, gender, ethnic differences and race.

The earlier postcolonial and feminist conceptualizations of diaspora (Chitra Kumar Karki, 2021) emphasized mainly two points. First of all, even if digital activities are central for migrants to feel at home and to create community, their future orientations and transformations should also be considered. In this sense, the digital diaspora should not be understood in a limited way as a vertical relationship with the land of origin, or horizontal with a transnational group, but should be interpreted through “digital network configurations” (Candidatu, Leurs, Ponzanesi, 2019, 42). This means that diasporas are not a priori predetermined entities, but can be conceived in the course of their formation and changes. Second, the feminist perspective stresses the need to include race, gender, queer and class analysis in studying diasporas: scholars such as F. Anthias and Yuval-Davis speak of the need to study the diaspora with a feminist and intersectional perspective (Nira Yuval-Davis, 1999). that deconstructs conservative interpretations of diasporic formations. This topic will be deepened in Chapter 3.

In deconstructing the digital diaspora issue, to deepen the different features that are present in it and often not considered, M. S. Laguerre reports on some of the aspects

that part of the IT literature has focused on: the digital divide between those who can and those who cannot have access to the Internet, showing how the gap grows or decreases; race and its different manifestations or its invisibility in the online space; gender and the impact of IT on it; virtual communities and the ways in which diasporas use the Net to communicate, to access information and to keep relationships; development and the ways in which the communities can help democratize the country of descent; security and the way in which the online interaction can undermine the maintenance of social order and peace. The relationship between IT, diasporas, and the different structural factors has heterogeneous outcomes, considering that diasporic communities have different IT experiences and practices.

Some experience a digital marginality, that is, the inability to access digital services; some experience displacement and gentrification; others experience *technopolis*, that is, the concentration of technical expertise in a specific group; or empowerment due to individual social ascendancy (Laguerre, 2006). Here, only the issue of displacement and gentrification, which is connected to power relations, will be explored in depth. M. Laguerre illustrates a displacement model which is connected to three phenomena: the gentrification determined by the arrival of the dot-commers, the increase in the cost of housing and the displacement of residents to a less-expensive urban area. Displacement has an impact on both those who have to change neighborhoods (often migrants or diasporic minorities) and the old residents, as they have to relate to the newcomers. The role of social media and digital spaces in this process is that they often reflect and reinforce gentrification. Indeed, while digital technology scholars argue that digital technologies facilitate horizontal networks, on the other hand recent research reveals that mass digital diffusion fosters state control and generates inequalities in status and social networks (Marion Lucille Williams et. al., 2019). Representations of places on digital platforms are important as they symbolically shape and represent the experience of place and define who belongs there. Zukin (2010), Smith (1996) and other gentrification researchers have stressed that print media performs a critical role in marking neighborhoods as safe for investment, and it is likely that digital platforms perform similar roles (Irene Bronsvoort, Justus L Uitermark, 2022).

Alongside gentrification, it should be remembered that digitization promotes the empowerment of marginalized people in various ways. The insulation from the digital

world can, in fact, turn into participation: the computer access allows people who have been left out of the labor market to search for jobs that require a telepresence; but also to take part in the Internet economy, in civic and social groups and activities and in political processes. So, while on the one hand digitization reproduces inequality, on the other hand, at the discretion of the users, it can be used as a tool to overturn power relations: marginalized people can have online access to the same information and even to middle- and upper-class circuits. Therefore, empowerment through digitization can be communicational, social, political, economic and religious. Just as online marginality can fuel offline marginality, online social mobility can lead to offline social mobility (Laguerre, 2006). This is further evidence that IT and the interwebs of migration and digital uses have a multidimensional and mutable nature.

In conclusion, it is therefore necessary to explore how, in both online and offline diasporas, power relations, arising from the intersections of gender, origin, race, and social class, are both exclusionary and inclusive. Different digital diasporic formations, in fact, generate, and are influenced by, different hierarchies, positionalities, and power dynamics.

1.5 Alternative knowledge production

It is moreover necessary to stress that diasporic and transnational approaches to migration are linked to some alternative knowledge production strategies, that is, the so-called *denaturalization*, *demigrantization* and *decolonization*, as the sociologist Anna Amelina explains. This is a relevant point in challenging and discussing sociological knowledge in a reflexive way, questioning how knowledge is produced in Migration Studies in particular. This sociologist is central in this regard because she was one of those who investigated new approaches and methodologies in migration research, in order to first establish a new epistemological basis in this field (Anna Amelina, Thomas Faist, Devrimsel D. Nergiz, 2016). Going into the specifics of the three approaches, the process of *denaturalization* started in the mid 1990s with the aim of challenging the vocabulary in migration studies, especially in relation to assimilation and integration theories, following the first criticism in this field. The main critique was

against the concept of methodological nationalism, which overlapped the boundaries of society with those of the nation-state without questioning the nationalist ideology. Different sociological approaches were consequently developed to denaturalize, both theoretically and methodologically, the nationalist theories in migration and also in transnational migration research.

These approaches were in line also with the call for *demigranticization*, aimed to question a-priori categorizations in the field, such as the naturally given distinction between “migrant” and “citizen”, that is the result of a nationalistic perspective. To improve the academic knowledge production, the attempt of *demigranticization* suggests three strategies (Amelina, 2022): including in migration (and transnational migration studies) also other social theories such as critical race theory and mobility approaches; reflecting critically on the practices of naming and on their social consequences, in particular “differentiating between common-sense/political (emic) and analytical (etic) categories in migration studies” (Amelina, 2022, 2397); and finally implementing a methodological change that consists in not using the migrant population as the unit of analysis, but parts of the whole population (in which migrants are included). The third approach to produce alternative knowledge is *decolonization* of the perspectives in migration research. Decolonial approaches can introduce a critical perspective in transnational migration studies (Nof Nasser-Eddin, Nour Abu-Assab, 2020), as they develop a critical reflection about coloniality as a social principle at the core of Western modernity. The decolonial perspective especially considers the social interdependencies of knowledge, power and inequality that cross the borders of regions and nations.

One of the key points emphasized by the decolonial approach is that sociology has always considered the concept of modernity as deriving from the industrialized “West” and then carried over to the rest of the world, without contemplating the possibility that modernity might have existed before and not in the “West”, such as in the Islamic Golden Age. However, one risk of adopting the decolonial approach is that, because it is in vogue in the academy, there is widespread distrust regarding its appropriation. It must also be said, however, that the decolonial approach was anticipated by scholars such as R. Siebert (1942) and by the Latin American school from Anibal Quijano (1930) onwards (Jairo I. Fúnez-Flores, 2023), before it became popular in the academy.

Regardless, this approach can bring the risk to keep capitalist structures, racial exclusion, and white privilege intact. To cope with this, some methodological suggestions can be extrapolated from the notion of “coalition” of the Black feminist theorist Bernice Johnson Reagon. “For Reagon, egalitarian practices of knowledge production begin with addressing cross-cultural differences as a coalition that works from multiple points of departure towards a common struggle” (Alicia Izharuddin, 2019, 137).

Along these lines of decolonising knowledge, K. Tölölyan argues that there is a difference between the discourses that diasporas use to talk about themselves, which he defines as the study of diasporas, and the studies done by non-diasporan scholars, that he defines as diaspora studies. It is important to distinguish who represents the diasporas, whether the community itself or scholars. In fact, diasporic communities through self-study generate different forms of self-knowledge and various self-representations, which may take the form of public performances, daily practices, oral and written archives or of the native-language press of communities as, for example, the Chinese and the Armenians.

On the other side, next to this key approach, there is a theoretical and critical reflection developed by the sociologist M. Bommès about the (false) opposition between transnationalists and assimilationists, and explained by Christina Boswell and Gianni D’Amato (2013). However, it is possible to note that just as the *demigrantization* approach appeals to consider parts of the entire population of a country (and not just migrants) as a unit of analysis, so M. Bommès, as we shall see, argues that assimilation is a common feature of all individuals (without distinctions) living in a modern and differentiated society. In this way, migrants are regarded as citizens. M. Bommès illustrates, indeed, that assimilation indicates a condition of life that is common to all individuals living in a modern society, implying, for example, the expectation that all subjects will adjust their actions and behaviours according to the structural conditions of the many social systems. “Seen in this way the problem of migrant assimilation refers to no more (and no less) than to the conditions under which they succeed or fail to fulfill the conditions of participation in social systems” (Boswell, D’Amato, 2013, 113).

Transnationalists and multiculturalists, as C. Boswell and G. D'Amato (2013) explain, criticize assimilation approaches, and methodological nationalism, because these attitudes do not consider transnational spaces and new processes of cultural pluralization. Then, according to multiculturalist scholars, assimilation research adopts a limited frame of analysis, focused on the nation-state concept of society; while the so-called transmigrants are taking an increasing part in multi-directional transnational social relations, creating new pluri-local social spaces. Transnationalism refers to the emergence of social structures that overcome national borders and are interpreted as the result of long-lasting migrations made stable by transnational organisations and networks. Starting from this premise, M. Bommes explains that, in his opinion, the argumentations of the transnationalists and the assimilationists can be conceptually reconstructed, within a common theoretical framework of analysis, as two different hypotheses about the consequences of international migration, instead of referring to two opposing research approaches. Therefore, he proposes to deconstruct these two apparent conceptual oppositions and to recompose them differently. The starting point is to conceive society as differentiated into modern organizations and systems, rather than as a collectivity. In this model of modern society, the processes of cultural pluralisation and the national and transnational closures or openings depend on the different social systems. According to the empirical observations, the author claims two main points: first, multiculturalism and assimilation do not contradict each other; and, secondly, transnationalism does not contradict the assimilation thesis. However, this perspective is also presented here in order to have an overall thematic framework.

These theories are open to criticism, and they present fallacious points. The main argument relating to the first issue is that the key aspect for assimilation is the differentiation of social systems (in line with the modern conception of society); and this assimilation with the aim to take part in the different systems occurs in a culture-transcending manner, in the sense that organizations of the modern society can handle with different cultural orientations. In the case of the second issue, instead, the social systems in which individuals want to participate can overcome the borders of a nation, but transnational migrants (as all the individuals of a modern society) have to assimilate to the requirements of these social systems. So, they need to find a balance

between the demands of the family members in the country of origin, and the conditions of realization (in education, at the workplace, etc.) in their new (own) country.

In the theoretical framework outlined so far, it thus emerges how there are different perspectives on the concepts of diaspora and transnationalism (and on the related concepts); outlooks that in some cases have points in common, while in others appear to be at odds with each other. Relationality is thus the key to analyze diaspora and transnationalism sociologically and from different angles: it implies considering several methodologies and perspectives on diaspora studies. The dimension of the “relational” allows therefore to investigate the different manifestations of the diasporas and their interrelationships with the different social systems, structural factors, as well as agency with the agency of the individuals. In the next paragraphs these interconnections will be explored in more detail, primarily the link between diaspora and the digital and communication sphere, that pervades all fields of contemporary society.

1.6 A focus on the African diaspora

In relation to the analysis made of the concept of diaspora, the sociological explanation of the African diaspora deserves special attention. It became visible in the academic literature, related to the “routes of passage” of African descendants, only in 1965, after the International Congress of African Historians held in Tanzania. This allowed to incorporate the African diaspora into the United Nations’ Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization’s multivolume *General History of Africa*. To provide a complete sociological insight of the African diaspora, Jualynne E. Dodson refers to the sociologist Ruth Simms Hamilton’s four theoretical propositions (Ruth Simms Hamilton, 2007). It must first be said that Ruth S. Hamilton exchanged her ideas about her understanding of the African diaspora with Joseph E. Harris, who provided the following theoretical definition of African diaspora: “the African diaspora resulted from unique historical developments, namely, the global slave trades conducted for centuries primarily by Arabs and Europeans, and the Berlin Conference of 1884-85 that partitioned Africa and set boundaries that continue to divide ethnic groups and inspire irredentism” (Dodson, 2014, 50).

This definition has been considered accurate by other experts and able to position the African diaspora within the global context, which contributed to shape it as a social formation. Harris with his definition also distinguishes this phenomenon from other diasporic movements. Ruth S. Hamilton decided to move forward this mainly descriptive definition of African diaspora: her goal was to build a theory by identifying a set of concepts that would support the empirical results. She therefore identifies four conditions specific to the African diaspora that have evolved over time and space; but which, while adapting to new epochs and global realities, persist in shaping them. The conditions that R. Hamilton identifies, to which the descendants of the African diaspora have been subjected globally, are as follows (Dodson, 2014, 52):

1. Migration and Geo-Social Displacement: The Circulatoriness Phenomenon,
2. African Diaspora Connections: Myths and Realities of Homeland Relations,
3. Power, Domination, Inequality: Structurations of Black Dispossession,
4. Agents of Resistance: Diasporic Identities and Communities of Consciousness

These conditions are based on empirical research conducted in various places around the world (R. S. Hamilton, 2008). In summary, the first condition refers to the state of continuous movement and displacement, both geographical and social, in which Afro-descendants have found themselves since the beginning of their diaspora. The Circulatoriness Phenomenon makes it possible to observe the movements of people in this diaspora through time and space, paying particular attention to the growth of geographical displacements since the 15th century. Furthermore, the concept of “circulatoriness” reinforces the conception of the African diaspora as both a condition and process, as it seeks to map the process of identity reinterpretation as one of the outcomes of the dynamics of the African diaspora. R. S. Hamilton (2007, 2) explains that “circulatoriness illustrates how identities change as they are changed by structural transformations across the African diaspora”. This concept was also developed by some postmodern researchers, such as Stuart Hall and Kobena Mercer, who clarify how African diaspora dynamics transformed their cultural identities by generating new hybrid ones, which live at the same time in different spaces (Agatha S. Oliveira, 2014).

The second condition concerns the presence or absence of ties of Afro-descendants with the land of origin/descent. The third one concerns considering the intersection of race, gender and class discrimination as the source of constant conditions of oppression towards a large part of the Afro-descendant population. This oppression is perpetrated in particular through the so-called “Black dispossession”, which refers to the taking away of land and rights from Black people at an economic, social, political and/or environmental level. It constitutes a form of violence that affects Black communities especially in the Americas. Finally, the last condition refers to Afro-descendant people as resistant to Western cultural domination and with their own collective consciousness. Sociologist Jualynne E. Dodson identifies aspects in these conditions that can be better explored. First of all, she makes some clarifications regarding R. Hamilton’s indications on the historical and current living conditions of the descendants of the African diaspora. Dodson identifies the 1950s and 1960s, a period when many African colonies became independent, as the historical dividing line. Political and social changes influenced, in fact, the processes within the African diaspora. In particular, before 1950 the transnational migration of its members was mainly involuntary. After the 1950s and 1960s, on the other hand, it was only groups from certain African nations that moved (it must be remembered that nations on the African continent were created by European colonialism); and involuntary displacements were joined by semi-voluntary migration, the so-called “push and pull phenomena” linked to global political, social, environmental and economic problems. Moreover, a central aspect emphasized by Dodson, is the mistake made by many researchers in not considering current migrations, and related phenomena, as consequences of past dynamics related to the African diaspora.

In this regard, it should be pointed out that until the 1950s/60s, the expression “African diaspora” did not appear in the English-speaking states, although it had existed for a long time. There was, however, the concept of Pan-Africanism, which was an expression of the demands of Black movements internationally. Today, the African diaspora occupies a central position in diaspora studies. It is not easy to explain why one speaks of an “African” diaspora.

This leads us to the question of what is Africa and who are Africans that constitute, when dispersed and reconstituted, African diasporas. The idea of 'Africa' is an exceedingly complex one with multiple genealogies and meanings, which make any extrapolations of 'African' culture and identity, in the singular or plural, any explorations for African 'authenticity', quite slippery as these notions tend to swing unsteadily between the poles of essentialism and contingency (Paul Tiyambe Zeleza, 2008, 7).

At the beginning of the 21st century, the meanings of "Africa" and "Africaness" have been changed by the processes of globalization and integration. Paul Tiyambe Zeleza further explains that the way in which different migrants from Africa have formed themselves into diasporas is complex. A particular distinction must be made within what are called "new or contemporary" African diasporas, which comprise three different diasporic flows: "diasporas of colonisation, diasporas of decolonisation and diasporas of structural adjustment" (Zeleza, 2008, 12). The former includes students who migrated abroad to study and stayed, mariners who became settlers, and in general all those who left Africa and became citizens in the host country. The second type of diaspora includes the so-called "indigenous" Africans and the European and Asian colonists who during and after the struggles for independence moved to live overseas. Finally, the last diasporas developed from the 1980s onwards due to migrations caused by political, social and economic crises, and destabilization caused by SAPs (Structural Adjustment Programs) (Howard Stein, Machiko Nissanke, 1999). These diasporas involve traders, professional elites, students and refugees. Such clarifications on historical distinctions and causes within the African diaspora are relatable to the dimensions of movement and geo-circularity identified by R. Hamilton in his propositions. That is, the fact that the descendants of the African diaspora have been, since the beginning of their diaspora, in continuous movement locally, nationally and globally. The aspect of movement in the African diaspora is another dimension that Dodson expands on, building on what R. S. Hamilton analyzed. The sociologist Dodson explains that, in expanding on Hamilton's circulatoriness phenomenon, it is necessary to consider that the modern semi-voluntary movements of African descendants are induced by the same political, social, etc. conditions that determined the involuntary movements of their ancestors. In his opinion, the conceptual framework of the African diaspora

should continue to be applied to verify historical and contemporary migration patterns within this diaspora.

The third of Hamilton's propositions that Dodson expands on is that relating to power, domination and inequality within the African diaspora. According to Dodson, R. S. Hamilton does not pay enough attention to intersectionality in analyzing African diaspora, despite her focus on the oppressions generated by the combinations of gender, race and class on most of Afro-descendants in the world (Dodson, 2014). The dimensions investigated so far are the areas where researchers can make new theoretical contributions, expanding on the theoretical propositions of R. S. Hamilton on the African diaspora. The anthropologist Sheila S. Walker, for example, tried to generate knowledge on the African diaspora from the inside through her wide-ranging research. In 2002 she involved Afro-Latins for a project about them and she invited also Afro-descendant leaders of nine Spanish-speaking South American states: "We came up with key themes for understanding the African diaspora and asked the invitees to use them to write texts about their communities within the context of their nations' histories" (Sheila S. Walker, 2015, 506).

She has been involved in decades of anthropological research on the African diaspora in different geographical areas. One of the main characteristics of the global African diaspora that she noted is the synergy between its members, which stems from the coming together of Africans from different African states to generate innovative cultural forms in the diaspora.

Finally, in relation to discourses and practices of oppression and subordination, Dodson emphasizes the need to develop Hamilton's assertion on the permanence of inequalities in the lives of members and descendants of the African diaspora. The paradoxical issue to be unraveled concerns the fact that Africans and Afro-descendants, regardless of where they live and despite the process of integration into new societies and the succession of different generations, continue to experience social, political and economic inequalities. Part of the reason for this lies in the affirmation of Eurocentric ideology, which throughout history has created a kind of racial hierarchy whereby all too often Afro-descendants still experience racism and processes of racialisation, brought about by complex, multilevel dynamics inherited from previous historical periods. A decolonial effort is therefore urgently needed, not only for the African

diasporas. Diasporas in general can challenge Eurocentric and North-centric visions and epistemologies: they can be rethought as agents of globalization and decolonisation, rather than mere consequences of these (Ipek Demir, 2022).

In this chapter, a literature review on the sociological significance of the concept of diaspora was presented, shedding light on its main causes and consequences, as well as on its relation to the concept of transnationalism and to both physical and virtual spaces. The concept of diaspora has been explored in its basic components and relationships between time and space. In particular, concerning these last two aspects, the centrality of digital spaces in diasporas emerged, which constitute a relatively innovative element in the field. Finally, a certain type of diaspora has been sociologically themed, that is, the African one, which includes several diasporas from this continent. The debate on the African diaspora has been illustrated, from which emerges the central contribution of Ruth S. Hamilton that is going beyond the descriptive definition of this diaspora, to thematize and interpret it sociologically.

The most interesting aspect that emerged from the review of the literature on diaspora and transnationalism in this chapter concerns the thematization of critical approaches and an alternative form of knowledge to that, which has dominated the study scenario for years. These alternative approaches include engaging both with the different theorizations of digital diasporas and with the postcolonial and feminist perspectives on diaspora studies. Focusing on the needed relationality between disciplines and methodological traditions, diaspora studies lacked for some time an exchange with anti-racist, feminist and postcolonial perspectives, that now needs to be valorized.

Adopting this view and continuing to explore the multiple characteristics of the diasporas, the following chapter discusses a central dimension of diasporas, namely their relationship with the dynamics of peace and conflict across the boundaries of both geographical and digital spaces.

CHAPTER 2

Female diasporas between war and peace

The aim of this chapter is to provide a concise but comprehensive overview of the diasporas' relationship with the experiences of war and peace, highlighting the multiple connections among the several spaces crossed by diasporic actors, and then focusing on the role of women in these spaces. To do this, we proceed initially at a macro level, outlining in the first paragraph the various initiatives that diasporic communities can undertake in support of peace and war, going beyond the dichotomous relationship of host and country of origin. In the second paragraph, based on a consolidated sociological tradition, we present a review of the international literature on women's activism in the field of war and peace, to give an overview of feminist theories and activities between peace and war. Therefore, in the last paragraph we move on to identify the intertwining features of these two frameworks: we focus on the recent developments in the literature that have combined the topic of diasporas and wars, with the women's activism in war and peace, in order to investigate the different forms of women's diasporic engagement both between war and peace, and between time and space.

2.1 Diasporas between war and peace

One of the crucial questions regarding diasporas concerns whether they have a facilitating role in peace and in conflict. In recent decades, diasporic groups have assumed a central role in understanding and influencing conflicts, alongside other entities, first of all NGOs (Paula Doherty Johnson, 2007). This is a complex issue: as diasporas are social groups who are heterogeneous, they are characterized by different power relations and interests that are especially affected by generation, gender, class, profession or religion. Here we will try to explore the main roles that diasporas can play in wars, both in exacerbating conflict and in facilitating peace processes.

According to the United Nations' 2019 data, about 3.5% of the world's population no longer lives in their country of birth, for various reasons including the outbreak of wars and conflicts. Ongoing conflicts and peacebuilding activities are increasingly changing diasporic practices, partly due to the increasing long-distance interventions of diasporic groups (Mari Toivanen and Bahar Baser, 2020). The type of diasporas' interventions in wars and conflicts often depends on the power relations as anticipated before, but respectively this shifts within the diaspora, and among the diasporas, the countries of arrival and the countries of origin. According to this perspective, "powerful diasporas" can intervene in conflict (Hazel Smith, Paul Stares 2007), while diasporas with less power have no possibility of intervention. However, the role of diasporas in wars/conflicts⁶ depends on various factors, including the different reasons and dynamics involved in the conflict/war, the level of political organization the diaspora has in the host and the receiving country, as well as its ability to exert pressure, and the international relevance of the conflict/war. These roles range from constructive contributions, such as introducing cooperative practices, supporting moderate positions and changing conflict dynamics; to possible destructive functions such as supporting extremist violent factions or worsening feelings of hatred. Some research have produced a (not complete) review of the main case studies of involvement of diasporic groups in their homeland conflicts⁷ (Marion Mercier, Fabio Mariani, and Thierry Verdier, 2018). Finally, when analyzing the different roles of diasporas in peace and war processes, it is crucial to consider them as non-state actors. Diasporas are in fact often represented as non-state actors, but this does not mean that they have less power than state actors. There is evidence that diasporic mobilization as non-state actors may contain various authoritarian elements and strategies of power (Fiona B. Adamson, 2020).

2.1.1 The types of interventions of diasporic communities in conflict phases

⁶ While war refers exclusively to armed confrontation, the term conflict encompasses a range of semantic nuances: it can refer to armed struggles as well as to social conflicts and the expression of differences. Here the terms war and conflict are used encompassing all these different meanings.

⁷ These cases are for example: the Sri Lankan diaspora; Kurdish diaspora; Irish diaspora; Croatian diaspora; Somali diaspora; Eritrean diaspora; Nigerian diaspora; Kenyan diaspora; Congolese diaspora; Cuban diaspora; Colombian diaspora; Venezuelan diaspora; Albanian diaspora; Jewish diaspora; and Armenian diaspora (Marion Mercier, et. al, 2018).

Starting from the model developed by J. Bercovitch (2007), it is possible to identify four basic areas (military, political, socio-cultural and economic) in which diasporic communities can influence a conflict at each specific phase of conflict, namely conflict emergence, continuation, escalation, termination and post-conflict reconstruction. The influence of diasporas in conflicts is understood, according to this model, to be a positive influence, if it leads to the interruption, end or resolution of a conflict; while as a negative one, i.e., a worsening of the conflict; or a neutral impact, if no relevant change occurs in the course of the conflict. In the following table prepared by J. Bercovitch, it is possible to see a summary of what has just been described (Jacob Bercovitch, 2007).

Fig. 1 - Different interventions of diasporas in conflict phases

Table 2.1 The influences of a diaspora in different phases of a conflict

Phase of conflict	Political influences Positive/Neutral/ Negative	Military influences Positive/Neutral/ Negative	Economic influences Positive/Neutral/ Negative	Socio-cultural influences Positive/Neutral/ Negative
Conflict emergence				
Conflict continuation				
Conflict escalation				
Conflict termination				
Post-conflict reconstruction				

Source: J. Bercovitch, 2007, 29.

J. Bercovitch's model was chosen because it explains in detail the types and degree of influence that diasporic communities can have in different phases of conflicts. This model will later be expanded with a sociological analysis of the role of diasporas in wars and conflicts. To explore the table in detail, let us start from the conflict prevention phase (not shown in the figure), that is, the moment when the clash is still latent, but hostilities begin to arise between the parties over issues such as territory and resource management. In this phase, diaspora actors can help prevent the outbreak of conflict through political and economic measures. The former mainly involve advocacy activities, i.e., diasporic organizations can make international public opinion, and especially civil society and the government of their home country, aware of the risk of a

possible war, so that they can try to avoid it. Instead, the economic measures that can be taken by diasporas in this case are financial remittances, which reduce poverty and make the parties involved less inclined to start a conflict for fear of losing the money received. In the emergency and continuation phase of the conflict, i.e. the phase when the conflict has become manifest because the parties have decided that it is the best option, diasporas can exert political influence, economic support, or military support. *At the political level*, diasporic members can support the parties in various ways, such as media campaigns, organising mass protests, or demanding political unity. *At the economic level*, remittances from diasporas can be a double-edged sword: they can be used in the prevention phase, but can also lead to an escalation of the conflict by creating more hostility. “Palestinians, Jews, Tamils, Lebanese, Kurds, Armenians and many other diasporic communities have all contributed substantial economic resources to their homelands and have all allowed conflicts in their war torn societies to become even worse” (Bercovitch, 2007, 31).

The military support of the diasporas concerns, instead, the escalation phase. Diasporas can indeed provide weapons, training activities or even personnel and volunteer fighters. In the termination phase of the conflict, i.e., when the parties, having experienced losses in both life and financial resources, have decided that it is better to end the conflict, diasporas can provide political support. While diasporas, as mentioned above, can support and increase violence in conflicts, they can also support the end of clashes, and foster peace processes. Diasporic communities can sustain the termination phase by promoting dialogue, mediation between the parties contacting for instance the United Nations or the international community, and by involving their members in problem-solving workshops that facilitate the process of conflict resolution.

Finally, in the post-conflict and reconstruction phase (the final phase of which are the activities and all interactions that take place when the conflict is over and which aim to ensure the stabilization of the situation to avoid a re-explosion of the conflict), diasporas can again provide political and economic support and, in addition, also exert socio-cultural influences. *At the political level*, diasporic communities play a central role in shaping a democratic civil society that does not run the risk of relapsing into conflict. They can inform people in the country of origin about democratic policies and organize initiatives to counter the remaining repressive regimes and corruption, as well

as propagandize the need for new peaceful and democratic state structures. *At the economic level*, diasporas (especially in wealthy states) are crucial to consolidating the peace process through the promotion of economic recovery. In fact, their financial remittances help to implement a disarmament process and induce the motherland government to favour policies that guarantee peace. Finally, diasporic communities play a central role during the post-conflict phase in the socio-cultural sphere. On the one hand, they offer skills and knowledge through diasporic literature and other cultural production that can contribute to the education of the population; on the other hand, diasporic groups can support the psychological and social rehabilitation of the victims of the conflict, a fundamental aspect of the reconciliation process. Therefore, post-conflict work needs to be creative: if political and economic evolutions are necessary, cultural and psychological transformation is equally important. In this regard, the concept of “diaspora circulation” (Rudhramoorthy, Cheran 2004), developed by R. Cheran although not new in international migration, is considered an effective tool in the post-conflict and reconstruction phase. A significant example of diaspora circulation in the post-conflict phase, is that of the diasporic groups who contributed to reconstruction in conflict zones of Sri Lanka. In particular, Cheran identifies three main areas that can be affected by diaspora circulation: “knowledge capital and knowledge transfer; capacity building and investment; peace building and strengthening civil society” (Cheran, 2004, 13).

In summary, the first field refers to culture and knowledge circulation, for example through diasporic literature (as mentioned before); the second field is specifically about the organization by diasporic groups of training programs and skills development for the population; the third area includes all the types of activities organized by diasporic communities which can support peacebuilding (including diasporic literature), as well as the promotion of communication and exchange among the different civil societies of the same country, which often do not frequently communicate.

The model explored so far is quite exhaustive, as it describes the types of intervention of diasporic communities not only in the post-conflict and peacebuilding phase, but also in the other phases of the conflict, in which the diaspora can support or even exacerbate the ongoing clashes. In this regard, it is possible to deepen the so-called negative role that diasporas can have in conflicts in the homeland, which includes (in

addition to what has been said so far) also two frequently encountered phenomena: the union of members of the diaspora with criminal and extremist groups; and the triggering by members of the diaspora of conflicts upon their return home, due to personal interests or lack of attention to the dynamics present on the territory after the passage of years (Lucia Bird, 2023). Regarding the choice of diasporic members to join criminal or terrorist groups, it is not easy to understand the reasons. According to some research, the level of integration of diasporas in host states can influence their type of conflict participation (Bird, 2023).

However, these observations seem not to consider the different diasporas and contexts. As for the triggering by members of the diaspora of conflicts upon their return home, it is interesting to report two case studies selected in an analysis made by Mahdi Abdile (2014), both related to the Somali diaspora. The first case concerns the return of a member of the diaspora to eastern Somaliland (where after the conquest of independence for about 50 years there had been no other conflicts), who rekindled tensions between his clan and the opposing clan because of his decision to build a house in that territory (Mahdi Abdile, 2014). The second case concerns, instead, a member of the Somali diaspora who on his return, also in Somaliland but in the area of Oog, decided to start an agricultural project with a farm to produce food for the population. This area of Somaliland suffered, in fact, from lack of food and the purpose of the man was to help and not to create hostility. However, this project led to a conflict because the hostile clan claimed that the farm was situated in a disputed area between two clans. These two cases of conflict eruption can be clarified as follows:

In the case of Galgal, the returnee from the diaspora consciously inflamed the situation on the ground, but the intervention of the PIP helped defuse the conflict. In the example of Oog, the returnee was clearly aware of basic opportunities to invest in his home area, but his 'local knowledge' of the dynamics on the ground had atrophied during his years of exile (Abdile, 2014, 88).

In the light of the various diasporic interventions in conflict situations seen so far, it is also interesting to report the following concept of peacebuilding in relation to a study of diasporic engagement for peace in the Horn of Africa.

Peacebuilding is defined as the nonviolent activities of various actors, including individuals and groups, aimed at sustainable transformation of the structures and patterns that foster conflict. This definition goes back to Johan Galtung's understanding of peace, conflict, and nonviolent conflict-transformation. Galtung (1996: 31–33) distinguished negative peace from positive peace: negative peace is simply the absence of violence, while positive peace enables individuals, groups, and “systems” (including nature) to coexist and develop peacefully. Conflict is perceived as arising from the incompatibility of goals among individuals or within groups (Galtung 1996: 70–71) (Markus Virgil Hoehne, Dereje Feyissa, Mahdi Abdile, 2011, 72).

In summary, for diasporic interventions in support of peace-building to be fruitful, it is therefore necessary to consider the levels of peace identified by the sociologist J. Galtung, but also to plan interventions that take into account each specific context, studying its past and present characteristics. In addition, failed interventions must be models from which to metabolize errors, to avoid repeating them in the future and for an improved progressive diasporic engagement for peace.

2.1.2 Studies analyzing heterogeneity and tools of diasporas

After this general review of the main interventions of diasporic groups, both for peace promotion and conflict perpetrating in homelands, it is necessary to deepen the following related key aspects, to better understand the dynamic of diasporas in peace and war. First of all, diasporic groups in fostering conflict or supporting peace processes in the homeland are characterized by heterogeneity (both within and between diasporic communities) and different generational mechanisms (Mari Toivanen, Bahar Baser, 2020). It is in fact necessary to move beyond the triadic relationship among diasporas, host countries and homelands, to shed light also on the dynamics at work in diasporic groups. This heterogeneity within diasporic groups is articulated differently. On one hand, diasporic communities from the same country can reiterate the conflict processes in the host country; moreover transnational spaces can serve as sources of transmission of dynamics of structural and cultural violence, as well as of reiteration of power

conflicts between different diasporic actors (Toivanen, Baser, 2020). In this regard, Zlatko Skrbis has deepened the concept of *conflict import* of diasporic groups and has discovered that also the host country plays a role in influencing the types of actions of these groups (Zlatko Skrbis, 1999). The actions that can be carried out in the host countries are the creation of civil society organizations, manifestations, protests in parliaments or in districts with migrant population; some examples of diasporic groups who are still dealing with their conflict issues in the host countries are the Serbs and Croats in Australia and the Turkish and Greek Cypriots in London (Toivanen, Baser 2020). This discourse can be linked to the role of diasporas in supporting/increasing conflicts, as mentioned earlier.

On the other hand, the heterogeneity of diasporic communities is characterized by various interventions according to different diasporic generations. There is a consistent difference between the activities to support peace or conflict in the homeland of the first generation, and the ones of the second generations, who are usually born in the host country. The role of the second generations can be ambivalent: young people can perpetuate the conflict dynamics transferred by their parents in the host country (Baser, 2015); or they can support the conflict or the peace process in the motherland, usually through sending remittances, humanitarian aid, knowledge transfers and organization of political protests via social media.

In this regard, another key aspect that needs further investigation in the picture that has emerged so far is the role of the media in diasporic activities for conflict promotion or peacebuilding. Media transparency is one of the pillars of democratic societies; therefore, in conflict contexts, the media have an even more important function because the people's need for information increases (Matthew Loveless, 2008). Diasporas use the various social media to construct and disseminate meanings about events in their country of origin, as well as to promote democratic values. It should be pointed out that diasporic communities can influence the people left behind and the conflict dynamics in the homeland; but conflict situations in turn have a great impact on the way diasporas use the media: diasporic groups tend to look for alternative sources for information and compare news found online with information they receive from friends and relatives living in the conflict zones. In addition to the modes seen above, diasporic actors play a key role in influencing public opinion in the motherland by choosing which content to

re-share and also producing alternative online material via platforms, which generates parallel sources of information. In this way, diasporas develop ideological and political meanings of what is happening in the homeland, also constructing themselves as political actors (Ola Ogunyemi, 2017). Alongside the use of social media to promote peace in the contexts of origin, there is the use of media as tools that foster processes of radicalisation and violence among diasporic groups.

An example of radicalisation is the following, regarding the Sikh diaspora: “radicalisation particularly affected the younger and more assimilated emigrant generations. As a consequence, radical groups grew stronger in the Sikh diaspora in Britain, Canada and the United States. Radicalisation peaked with the bombing of the Air India Flight 182 jumbo jet on 23 June 1985” (Daniele Conversi, 2012, 1368). In the age of globalization, social media and the Internet play a central role in fostering radicalisation and organizational processes online. This brief exploration of the role of the media revealed that the media are among the most decisive factors in the diasporas’ interventions, influencing their modes of action and their breadth of impact.

2.1.3 Alternative models about the diaspora-war-peace relation

In addition to the above, it is useful to explore some alternative models to interpret the relationship of diasporas with war and peace, to deepen some of the concepts mentioned above, such as *conflict import* and heterogeneity in diasporas. The first alternative model (Maria Koinova, 2018) concerns the mobilization of diasporas across time and space in multiple contexts, without exclusively considering the host state and motherland. Going beyond the dichotomous vision of diasporas as peacebuilders or peace-wreckers, diasporic communities must be considered as well as for their heterogeneity (as explained above) as agentic actors, and therefore also detached from the influences of the source context and the host context. In addition, diasporic communities operate in multiple spatial and temporal contexts (local, national, supranational, and global) that can exert an influence on diasporic activism, but can in turn be reshaped by the latter. As Koivona explains:

I made an early endeavour to theorise about diaspora positionality and the power diasporas derive from relationship to different contexts (2012). [...]

More recently scholarship has started growing from different directions and scholarly networks to show that diasporas mobilize beyond a classic triangular relationship model considering interactions between host-states, home-states, and diasporas, but do so in a variety of spaces, such as cities, online, refugee camps, supranational organizations, sites of global visibility, and spaces contiguous or distant from the homeland (Koinova, 2018, 1258).

With regard to the multiplicity of spaces of diasporic actions, three different areas of engagement have been identified, which in turn present different combinations of public and private spheres: the private sphere linked to the domestic and family sphere; the public sphere linked to the diasporic community; and the public sphere linked to the “imagined community”, which comprises various spheres including the transnational political sphere (Van Hear, Cohen, 2017). The analysis of these spheres of diasporic engagement is interesting because “by disaggregating ‘diaspora engagement’ we tease out different orders of connection and disconnection between the diaspora and those at home. In particular, we reveal the conditions and circumstances that can generate common ground as well as rendering them at odds with one another in conflict settings” (Van Hear, Cohen, 2017, 4). Moreover, the engagement of diasporas in these three macro-spheres varies depending on whether the diasporas are distant diasporas (generated by the outbreak of conflicts in their territory, as in the case of the Somali, Afghan and Sri Lankan diaspora); or contiguous diasporas (people dispersed close to their territory due to the introduction of borders, as in the case of the Kurds and groups belonging to the former Soviet Union). This diasporic mobilization in peace and war processes also changes according to distinctions in class, social capital and resources in general (Van Hear, Cohen, 2017); as well as according to contextual differences. Interventions organized by the diasporas cannot be generalized, but vary in every context, certainly presenting similarities, but also many differences.

On the same line, the second model (Élise Féron, Bruno Lefort, 2019) aims to go beyond the reductive view of diasporas as peace-makers or peace-wreckers to interpret the diaspora-conflict nexus in a more complex way, that is “to understand the diasporas-conflict nexus as a series of configurations, in which actors such as diasporas themselves, institutions or individuals in countries of origin or in countries of settlement, as well as transnational actors, can all play a decisive role” (Élise Féron,

Bruno Lefort, 2019, 36). From a practical point of view, this means the analysis of both contentious spaces created by diasporas and contentious spaces that give rise to diasporas, as well as events or time conjunctures that can foster interrelationships between diasporas and conflicts. This interpretative key contemplates a co-construction of diaspora and conflict, whereby on the one hand conflicts influence diasporas and their resources; on the other hand, diasporas can contribute to the reproduction and expansion of conflicts, also mobilizing resources of various kinds for them. Specifically, diasporas can expand conflict spaces by investing in new forms of mobilization (such as digital spaces), which make conflicts “transnationalised” (Jennifer Brinkerhoff, 2009). This leads diasporic actors, in turn, to develop transnational interventions by taking action in one or more conflicts (not only in the country of origin). This mutual influence between diasporas and conflicts also affects the temporal dimension. The practices of diasporic communities (such as the preservation of conflict memory, or other mechanisms of community reproduction) can extend conflicts over time, prolonging their consequences even after they have ended in the country of origin. On the other hand, conflicts can allow diasporic identities to be preserved over time (Féron, Lefort, 2019). Therefore, “diasporas can be seen as spaces where conflicts can be both expanded and distorted at the same time spatially and temporally” (Féron, Lefort, 2019, 46).

After providing a macro picture of how diasporas can operate in peace and war processes and in multiple spaces, let us investigate in the next paragraph how women fit into the scenario of war and peace activism. Based on a literature review, an international overview of the main feminist theorists on peace and war, and the main forms of activism that have been developed, will be outlined.

2.2 Women between war and peace: a female theoretical approach

With regard to the engagement between war and peace, we now move from the exclusively diasporic sphere to the more general sphere, in order to get an overview of the role of women in this engagement. Indeed, within the framework of historical, political and sociological studies on engagement between war and peace, a number of women’s contributions have been highlighted and analyzed, who have been decisive

and have very often brought about global change through their interventions, both on a practical and intellectual level.

In particular, Lynn McDonald spoke about an under-explored theme such as the role of women in social theory, identifying a strand of studies relating various women theorists to the themes of war and peace. There are a number of women of global significance who have theorized on the concepts of peace, war and militarism, in many cases also inspiring their own and others' activism in the field. Their intellectual activism served as a guide for more practical activism.

Activism is defined in Webster's New World as taking a direct direction to achieve a political or social end. [...] The state of intellectual activism, when the intellectual goes beyond simply thinking, analyzing and evaluating different concepts, issues and situations to taking physical steps to convert thoughts into actions (Dia N. Sekayi, 1997, 8).

Thus, intellectual activism enriches activism with critical thinking and intellectual skills that allow actions to be better directed to achieve certain goals. In fact, some of these women theorists, who contributed politically and socially through their writings, actively participated in the women's peace movement. Given the breadth of the literature, here we will mention the main theorists, who are considered the pioneers of a female approach to the topic: Jane Addams, Olive Schreiner, Bertha von Suttner, Emily Green and Catherine Marshall (Lynn McDonald, 1998, 260-262). Lynn McDonald explains (1998) that there is a gender gap in favor of women in activating themselves for peace processes, although this is not to diminish the role that some men have played in advocating for peace, nor is this to argue that there is an automatic association between being a woman and advocating for peace.

The intellectual work of women theorists on war and peace constituted the so-called *knowledge front*, i.e., the acquisition and utilization of intellectual expertise in this field to repair war-affected societies in 1920/30, and more. The idea of "knowledge front" reveals a continuity of intellectual and scientific activity from war to peace, and offers "space" to examine the professional lives of university-educated women in this period (Julia Horne, 2016). Among these famous women are the doctor and researcher in medicine Elsie Dalyell, and the feminist and teacher Lucy Woodcock. Both of them in the course of their lives resolutely employed knowledge to improve the physical and

economic conditions of women and children, as well as the chances of peace by countering the advance of fascism. Lucy Woodcock not only worked as a teacher, but also developed new themes in the field of social activism (Horne, 2016).

This social and peace activism is also very much felt, with different characteristics, in Jane Addams and in Mary McLeod Bethune, the latter the only Black woman who was able to participate in an official capacity at the United Nations Birth Conference in San Francisco in 1945. Jane Addams, besides being famous for founding the Hull House social settlement in Chicago in 1892, was the founding president of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) during the First World War. The organization's goal was to try to end the war in Europe. Jane Addams then also collaborated with other Americans to help the US get out of the war. Her first texts on peace date back to 1907; the author and reformer then continued to write and organize peace initiatives until her death in 1935. In addition, Jane Addams and Emily Greene (pacifist and economist) both won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1931 and 1947 (McDonald, 1998).

Mary McLeod Bethune, on the other hand, was primarily an activist for the rights of the Afro-descendant community in America, leading national organisations such as the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History (now the Association for the Study of African American Life and History), while also receiving several awards and honours. She chose to broaden her interest outside the Afro-descendant communities, to also devote herself to “international peace and Moral Re-armament Movements” (Sheila Y. Flemming, 2022, 25). Among her values, she advocated equality among all people and the realization of global peace. She was often invited to give speeches in America, Europe, Haiti and Liberia.

Both the intellectual and practical activism of these women is united by a certain declination of their agency⁸, in mobilizing not only to make the societies in which they live more peaceful, but also to produce knowledge and strategies in this regard. Activating their agency, therefore, in dialogue with the dimension of the social

⁸ The first to use the term agency was the sociologist Anthony Giddens in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Agency indicates a form of participation that manifests autonomy in action, i.e., a choice between possible actions, and which supports social change (Bjerke 2011; James 2009; Valentine 2011). A. Giddens focused his analyses on the ways in which human actions are dialectically connected to the social structure in such a way that the two dimensions are mutually constitutive. (Laura M. Ahearn, 1999).

structure, these women shaped and modified the societies of their time, with a view to peace and democracy. Moreover, on a more practical level it is interesting to note the emergence of a new literature, alongside that emphasizing the contribution of social activists and socially committed peace intellectuals. This innovative literature highlights the agency and activism of ordinary women living in areas of conflict and violence. These women, besides fulfilling their roles as daughters, mothers and wives, in their own small way can make a difference in promoting peace or conflict (Paula Banerjee, 2008).

2.2.1 War and peace as gendered activities

War and peace can be considered gendered activities. In conflicts, women and children are often the most affected victims; however, women should not be seen exclusively as passive subjects, since many activate their agency in war and post-conflict situations. Indeed, these ordinary women are the protagonists of visible political action in their daily lives, where they devise survival strategies for their families and communities, as well as a language of resistance. The peace activism of women in conflict situations often tends to be undervalued due to the fact that their language of resistance stems from their cultural experience as women considered without empowerment. These are protest strategies that employ symbols of motherhood and rituals, which when brought into the public arena these women politicize and transform. For example, in the case of ethnic and nationalist conflicts in Sri Lanka, or in Nepal, or on the India-Pakistan border, women have been at the forefront of trying to prevent the outbreak or relapse into violent conflicts, and later trying to build a lasting and inclusive peace (Rita Manchanda, 2005). “Women’s agency is visible in spontaneous and sporadic interventions to protect their families from immediate violence, in campaigns against human rights abuse and for justice; in building trust and reconciliation across the conflict divide” (Manchanda, 2005, 4741).

Women’s peace activism has grown recently, particularly following United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on “Women, Peace and Security” in 2000 (Judy El-Bushra, 2007). This has encouraged a growth in the number of both women and

women's organizations working for peace, in various ways and at different levels. To better understand this phenomenon, we explore the theoretical and sociological assumptions concerning the relationship between women, war and peace. According to feminist theory (Maggie Humm, 2003), analyzing conflicts in connection with gender relations and gender identity allows for the exploration of issues relating to men, women and violence: these are issues that relate to the nature of patriarchy and its social dynamics. In particular, it leads to the question of whether men should be categorized exclusively in warring roles, while women in peace-promoting roles, or whether both men and women can fill these roles. As J. El-Bushra explains,

Consigning women to the status of victim represents a sort of secondary violation. Essentializing their roles as wives, mothers and nurses is not only unrealistic but also tends to blind us to the injustice of women's exclusion from the world of active players and decision makers. Feminism may be a project to promote women, but it is much more than that, encompassing a way of viewing the world, of putting the accent on the defense of rights, not the defense of women alone (Judy El-Bushra, 2007, 145).

On the other hand, in fact, there is the activism of women at the military level in conflicts, as women have mobilized militarily, alongside state and non-state actors, in various ethnic, national and revolutionary clashes. Examples are the Maoist women fighters in the civil war in Nepal, who make up one third of the guerrillas; as well as the women fighting alongside the men in the Naga nationalist battle in the identity conflicts in north-east India. "There is the agentive moment produced by women transcending traditional social rules and joining the fighting ranks" (Manchanda, 2005, 4741).

This opens up a reflection and a debate on what kind of pro-women's rights vision is possible when women are involved in ideologies of militarism. The former United Nations Special Rapporteur on Women argues for example that women's choice to fight often proves counterproductive to their empowerment as it is a sign of a militarisation of civil society that goes against the defense of human rights (Coomaraswamy 1997, Manchanda 2001). I believe that this discourse cannot disregard contexts and varies according to geographical, historical and social contexts and the type of military deployment of women. In the case of Soviet militancy, for example, many women

fought in the Soviet army during the Second World War (Joshua S. Goldstein, 2001); a totally different case from the women who fought in the partisan resistance in Italy. In the summer of 1944, there were around 35,000 women partisans: although the majority did not hold combat roles, a significant number entered the war alongside the men for the liberation from fascism (Dan A. D'Amelio, 2001). These were clearly military roles played by women, but in totally different contexts and for totally different objectives. In the case of the women of the partisan resistance in fact (but as in other cases of conflict around the world), their militarisation was aimed at participating in social change to ensure that all rights were respected. In this case, women's military activism in war is considered an activism for peace, in the sense that it is aimed at overthrowing a dictatorial system and repression of rights.

Historically, and still today, women's engagement with warfare is therefore diverse. Several women who participated in the First World War, such as Vera Brittain, Vita Sackville-West, Virginia Woolf, achieved much more than suffrage (Lynne Segal, 2008). What is interesting about these women is that they later became pacifists, which suggests a desire for peace that drove and characterized their actions. Today there are more women than before fighting in armies. On this issue we cannot overlook the problems and the multiple dynamics it entails: in the military, women fight for different reasons, and they also have to deal with issues within their own military. Moreover, L. Segal (2008) explains that some women, including feminists, fight precisely to improve the conditions of women within the military environment, who are victims of violence by male soldiers. In this regard, H. Benedict (2007) reports that in the United States more than 160,000 women have been enlisted to fight in Afghanistan, Iraq and the Middle East since 2003; and that the main problem that female soldiers report is the fear of abuse, harassment or violence from male colleagues because the army does not guarantee them protection. This is one of the many issues that women have to face and consider when they decide to mobilize militarily, with different motivations. Therefore, the relationship of women with the spheres of war and peace is complex and varied, and perhaps cannot be reduced, today as in the past, to a dichotomous view of activism for peace and activism for war, because sometimes these two levels overlap. To explain further, while in some cases the distinction between activism for peace and activism for war is clear-cut, in other cases it is not; therefore, a dichotomous classification would be

reductive and not inclusive of all existing cases. In the light of the main contributions of the literature so far, it can be said that it is always necessary to contextualize women's forms of activism between war and peace in the various social, cultural and political contexts.

2.3 Possible entanglements: women diasporic engagement in conflicts between time and space

In this paragraph, I will look at the intertwining aspects of these two frameworks explored so far, i.e., I will present an overview of the main features of women's diasporic engagement between war and peace. Despite the often dominant cultural and patriarchal views that tend to devalue women's participation and leadership in political and social initiatives, diasporic women have always played an active role in their communities, including in relation to peace and conflict. In order to understand the role of diasporic women in conflicts, one must first bear in mind that gender norms cannot be neglected in the context of origin, in the host context and above all in the diasporic community in order to understand the possibilities for political action by women, men and others. Moreover, as emerged from the research conducted by Rachel Busbridge and Monika Winarnita on a project aimed at bringing together different diasporic communities experiencing conflict in their homeland (Rachel Busbridge, Monika Winarnita, 2015), the roles that women from diasporas play in mediation and conflicts cannot be separated from their experiences and their social positions. The research results show, in fact, that most of the women who actively participate in dialogues and mediation have a high level of education and are professionally qualified.

That said, diasporic women can play multiple roles in conflicts. First, they can support peace processes in many ways, such as contributing to reconciliation processes, recovering the historical memory, doing advocacy, promoting dialogue and democratization (Report ICIP, 2021, 26-27). Women in diasporas can carry out all these activities, but it is certainly not easy: spaces need to be opened up for them to act in support of peace. These spaces are characterized by the exchange between civil actors (who are often excluded from peacebuilding processes), such as members of the

diasporas, and community leaders in the conflict-ridden homeland. In some diasporas, these spaces for dialogue and action have been more significant than others. The most emblematic cases in this regard are those of the women of the Afghan, Syrian and Colombian diasporas, who have denounced the exclusion of women from the negotiation processes in their countries of origin and have mobilized to obtain the inclusion of women in the peacebuilding processes of their respective countries (Report ICIP, 2021). In the case of the Afghan diaspora, much of the mobilization to include women in negotiation processes came from diasporic women themselves; so much so that during an international meeting in Moscow held in 2019, the organisation *Afghan Women's Network* also presented the demands of diaspora women regarding negotiation processes⁹.

On the other hand, in the case of the Colombian diaspora, the activism of diaspora women and exiled people has been very significant and useful during the negotiation processes between the FARC guerrilla groups and the Colombian government. Besides these three cases considered emblematic, there are other significant cases in which diasporic women have played key roles. These are, for example, the women of the Iraqi diaspora and from the diasporas of the Horn of Africa. The case of women in the Iraqi diaspora shows how connections with women's or pacifist organizations in the countries of residence can influence actions and attitudes towards the country of origin. Indeed,

Members of the London-based group "Act Together : Women's Action on Iraq", for example, have been very much influenced by their alliance with Women in Black (WIB), - a worldwide network of women opposing war and campaigning for peace with justice. While WIB is not homogeneous in terms of the political orientation and background of its members, it does project and mobilize around non-violent resistance. Without doubt, Iraqi women's associations in the US have been influential with respect to US policies on Iraq and vis-à-vis the various interim Iraqi governments. US-based Iraqi women activists and organizations have been heavily involved in shaping emerging women's organizations and groups inside Iraq. Organizations like the Women's Alliance for a Democratic Iraq (WAFDI) are receiving grants for this purpose from the US government (Nadje Al-Ali, 2007, par. 20).

⁹[Women and the Afghan peace and reintegration process | International Affairs | Oxford Academic \(oup.com\)](https://academic.oup.com/ia/article/doi/10.1093/ia/iaa001/5481111)

As it has already been explained, the context of residence influences diasporic activities between peace and conflict in some contexts more than in others, and ambivalently, as in the case of women in the Iraqi diaspora. In the case of the diasporas from the Horn of Africa, according to the results of research analysing their peacebuilding engagement (towards the homeland) in Italy, Germany, Norway, Finland and the Netherlands, women played a key role, also organizing themselves in inter-diasporic networks. One example is the case of the *Multicultural Women Peacemakers Network* (MWPN) in the Netherlands, which aims to mobilize against war and to promote a culture of peace in Ethiopia (African Diaspora Policy Centre, 2010). With regard to diasporic and inter-diasporic networks, it should be noted that diasporic networks are more complex than diasporic groups. Their presence is in fact not always empirically proven, but, as Cuko and Traoré explain, manifests itself “because of crosscutting memberships of individual diasporic members in multiple social circles entwining to knit social systems. These systems are structured social relationships, whose values and potentials are far greater than those of single members” (Sara Cuko, Mariam Traoré, 2008, 30).

The social relations underlying diasporic networks can constitute both opportunities and obstacles for the activities and goals of diasporic members’ actions, in this case women. Alongside actual peace negotiations, the topic of inter-ethnic dialogue within divided diasporas is crucial in view of conflict resolution, as it triggers processes to eliminate prejudices and biases. There are several cases of diasporas that are highly fragmented within themselves, such as the Somali, Rwandan and Sri Lankan diasporas. To cite an example of inter-ethnic dialogue in which diasporic women have claimed to actively contribute, between 2003 and 2011, a series of dialogues were initiated within the Rwandan diaspora in various countries such as France, the USA and the Netherlands (Report ICIP, 2021).

The interesting aspect to note in providing a picture of diasporic women’s involvement between war and peace lies in the fact that, as diasporas are internally heterogeneous and not wishing to fall into essentialist and dichotomous interpretations, within the same diasporas women may support peace negotiations; they can take part or even promote inter-ethnic dialogues within divided diasporas; they may take military

sides, even supporting extremist political parties in the homelands; or they may unwittingly contribute to fuelling stereotypes and/or tensions that lead to the outbreak of conflict. The framework of women's diasporic engagement between war and peace is therefore complex and varied. The socialization patterns experienced by the subjects have great weight in determining their predisposition to peace or conflict, with obvious implications in diasporas. As has been explained earlier, diasporic members may also support conflicts and finance authoritarian regimes in the homeland by providing material and non-material resources (Smith, Stares 2007). In the specific case of diasporic women, they can also mobilize in this regard: there are many examples that challenge the still widespread prejudice that women are pure and peaceful beings, while men are warriors (Report ICIP, 2021).

In the Kosovo-Albanian diaspora, where many women had previously supported nonviolent movements, several women also supported the Kosovo Liberation Army with funding and made financial donations in support of the war (Koinova 2013). In the Kurdish diaspora, on the other hand, much of the diaspora finances and supports the Kurdish Liberation Movement (Baser 2011). In particular, women in the Kurdish diaspora assumed a more important role than their counterparts in other Middle Eastern states. This was due not only to their considerable organizational skills, but also to the fact that they predominantly embraced a vision more related to the PKK's (Kurdistan Worker's Party) ideology: originally a union between revolutionary socialism and Kurdish nationalism, with the aim of founding an independent Kurdistan state (Ofra Bengio, 2016). Still in the Bosnian and Iraqi diaspora, several women have actively supported armed groups in their respective conflicts. In particular, as mentioned earlier, several women in the Iraqi diaspora have heterogeneously supported military factions in Iraq: some supported the US invasion against Saddam Hussein; others financed Iraqi militias against the US.

Finally, women of diasporas can play a key role in post-conflict reconstruction towards the countries of origin. As anticipated by Manchanda's studies, the female contribution is central in the post-conflict reconstruction phase to spread a peacebuilding perspective that also takes into account female agency, and not only the male vision. In this regard, Asha Arabi (2008) discusses the pivotal role of women from the Sudanese diaspora in the post-conflict reconstruction phase, highlighting their

central contribution in terms of gender perspectives in peacebuilding processes and rebuilding society. Another interesting case concerns the so-called *diaspora advocacy journalism* in the post-conflict situation in Syria, which Rana Arafat (2021) discusses. It is about Syrian diaspora journalists, including women, initiating transnational advocacy practices to defend human and women's rights, and thus improve Syrian society in the post-conflict phase. This activity of advocacy also established a network, in cooperation with Syrian Kurdish Journalists' Union, to improve and support the role of Syrian women in the media and civil society organizations.

In conclusion, this chapter began by outlining the different types of interventions (in fig. 1) that diasporic actors, as individuals, groups or networks, can undertake in support of peace and war processes. In doing so, it has also gone beyond the triadic relationship between the host context, context of origin and diasporic communities, to delve into the heterogeneity within diasporas and the most recent models in the literature on the subject. This first framework was then flanked, in the second paragraph, by the overview of women activists and theorists on peace and war in the international scene, such as Jane Addams, Olive Schreiner, Bertha von Suttner, Emily Green and Catherine Marshall, that is necessary to outline their main activities on a practical and intellectual level in an all-embracing way (thus also outside the diasporas). Finally, in the last paragraph, the interventions of diasporic subjects and groups for peace and war have been intertwined with women's pro-peace or pro-war activism, in order to present the main forms of activism resulting from this intertwining. That is, the various activities that diasporic women can undertake in support of peace processes, or in support of violence and conflict. It was explained as, within the same diasporas, women may support peace negotiations, promote inter-ethnic dialogues within divided diasporas, take military sides even supporting extremist political parties in the homelands, or they may unwittingly contribute to fuelling stereotypes and/or tensions that lead to the outbreak of conflict. This argumentative procedure allows us to continue in the next chapter entering the meso and micro level, as the main roles played by women in diasporas will be outlined by adopting the intersectionality theory.

CHAPTER 3

Diaspora and intersectionality: from macro to micro theories

Proceeding along the lines of the critical approach, we go more in-depth in the analysis of diasporas with an intersectional perspective. The aim of this chapter is to explain and summarize the dynamics involving diaspora actors (especially women), through the lens of intersectionality. This theory was chosen as a part of the theoretical framework for the analysis, because it allows the detection of the complex intersections of structural factors operating in diasporas, and their effect on diasporic subjects. Taking as a reference the intersectional perspective, this will then be outlined and applied in the context of diasporas, by making first a review of the literature on the role of women in diasporas, and then by focusing specifically on the women belonging to the African diaspora, identified as an emblematic case in the area of both practice and intellectual activism.

The aim is to shed light on the agency of diasporic women, who have often been represented according to essentialist views as passive subjects and socially constructed as victims of conflict, by exploring the various activities of which they are the leaders and protagonists. The first feminist studies on diasporas gave attention to women as a separated group from men who need to negotiate two kinds of gender relations: within the country of descendant and the country of residence. This approach was soon replaced by a focus on differences that emphasized the intersection of race, gender, class and sexuality, and other factors. Both Black and post-colonial feminist scholars criticized the “naive notions of sisterhood and the wider postmodern shift towards multiplicity, positionality and fragmentation” (Nadje Al-Ali, 2010, 119); this has generated a worry about the differences within the category of women. To understand this, it is necessary to start from the sociological elaborations of intersectionality, a theory that arose from the mix of the critical race and feminist theory. Therefore, this theory will first be defined in order to arrive at an understanding of the development of intersectionality.

3.1 Defining intersectionality within the frame of Critical Race Theory

One of the leading contemporary sociologists of Black feminist thought and critical race studies is Patricia Hill Collins. She explains that critical race theory is “an interdisciplinary, historically situated way of theorizing and resisting systemic racism that has taken various forms both inside and outside the academy” (Patricia Hill Collins, 2021, 84).

The expression “critical race theory” appeared together with CRT around the 1970s in the US as a widespread topic of discourse by legal scholars, activists and lawyers across the country in the atmosphere of the civil rights era, and it was advanced academically in the 1990s (William F. Tate, 1997). CRT is a range of knowledge that uses theoretical tools to critique the political and social practices that constitute systemic racism; critical race theory and its scholars problematize Western conventions concerning social theory, and in fact have historically challenged these standards of knowledge. Patricia H. Collins explains that there are three epistemological criteria that differentiate critical race theory (or critical race theorizing) from the traditional counterpart, that is, from traditional race theory, which has never addressed issues of ethics and politics by adopting an apparently apolitical approach. The first criterion is the aim of critical race theory to change social relations, supporting a distinctive theory of social change: this theory concerns implementing race, racism and anti-racist discourse and practice, both within society and its own knowledge base. “Within this logic, systemic racism constitutes a changing same social formation grounded not in linear, evolutionary processes where colorblind racism replaces color conscious practices, but rather one where forms of racism influence one another” (P. H. Collins, 2021, 89).

The second criterion concerns the expression by the critical race theory of a “reflective accountability”, which concerns how individual and group positioning within power relations gives shape to both the processes of theorizing, and to social theory as a product. The third criterion is that critical race theory introduces, instead of the value of neutrality of traditional theory, a situated ethics that emphasizes the stance of critical theory: this ethical aspect allows consideration of critical theorizing as a fundamental type of practice for social transformation. The main works of critical race

theory do not appear in academic disciplines, but cross both the academic and disciplinary borders. The birth of critical race theory in the 1990s, in the legal sphere, shows this transcending of academic boundaries, although it has subsequently benefited from the presence of several Black scholars in the academy, a presence that has provided a fundamental interpretative context. Even if grounded in the legal sphere, the CRT's focus on social justice ranged and drew on different disciplines and theoretical traditions (Collins, 2021, 85).

In particular, with regard to the relationship between CRT and sociology, critical race theory is not far removed from the origins of the sociology of migration: while the former originated in the legal sphere, the latter was born in the Ivy halls of the Chicago School. CRT studies broke the binary analysis of race based on Black and white opposition, considering the experiences of all racialized groups (also immigrants). CRT linked to Migration Studies analyzes how the process of racialization of the immigrants takes place, allowing one to observe the dynamics in the social construction of racial meanings. "Drawing from Michael Omi and Howard Winant's (1986: 65) writings on racial formation theory, CRT researchers interrogate the ways that "the racial order is organized and enforced by the continuity and reciprocity between micro-level and macro-level of social relations" (Gabriella Sanchez, Mary Romero, 2010, 780). Furthermore, a central aspect that these two authors make clear in the social construction of race, concerns the apparent contradiction between the dimension of the racialised body and that of the social construct. If race is more social than biological, then the concepts of racialised corporeality and belonging should be abandoned. However, Michael Omi and Howard Winant explain that these two dimensions coexist. On the one hand, in fact, racialisation is determined by certain phenomenal characteristics of bodies; on the other hand, this marking of racialisation is declined in different ways depending on socio-historical contexts. In short, therefore, the "Blackness" (or "Whiteness") of bodies retains a value, even if race is socially constructed (Michael Omi, Howard Winant, 2016, 1064).

In analyzing these processes of racial formation, CRT scholars approached gender, sexuality, colorism and class concerning migrants' experiences and observed that they differed according to social, historical and political circumstances. Within this frame and in line with this analysis, lawyer and activist Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw

emerged. She developed the theory of intersectionality, which needs to be related to this field and to racial formation theory and which stems from a knowledge grounded in the experience of the margins. However, although Black Feminism and race, class and gender studies were central to social justice projects both inside and outside the academy, most contemporary narratives on intersectionality situate its emergence as a field of study in the academy. One clarification before continuing: on the subject of Black Feminism, it should be pointed out that it is closely related to the concept of *Womanism*, coined by the writer and activist Alice Walker in 1983 to link Black women to feminism. *Womanism* is in fact a social theory that specifically considers Black women; “Alice Walker contends that at the heart of Womanism is its holism, the whole sense of being a woman. Walker makes the case that a Womanist is aware of her own value. Indeed for Walker, Blackness is implicit in the term. There is no need to preface it with Black as in Black feminism” (Rose M. Brewer, 2021, 97).

Womanism and Black Feminism are therefore equally related to each other. Building on the intellectual richness of K. Crenshaw’s work, contemporary narratives should situate her work more within the historical conjuncture between the knowledge projects of social movements led by Black women and the institutionalization of race, class and gender studies.

If intersectionality was then initially introduced by K. Crenshaw in the legal field, other Black scholars must also be considered among the founders, e.g., Anna J. Cooper and Ida Wells-Barnett in sociological literature. They argued that the subordination of African American women lay in the ideologies of gender and race that aimed to motivate practices such as eugenics and lynching. Despite this significant contribution, their work is rarely valued as foundational to intersectionality. Also, the studies of Nira-Yuval Davis, Floya Anthias and other feminists represented important intersectional knowledge projects. In this situation, the empowerment of African American women needed knowledge projects capable of counteracting both sexism and racism (Collins, 2015, 7). In particular in her work *A Voice from the South by a Black Woman of the South*, which is a volume of essays and lectures published in 1892, Anna J. Cooper argues that just as whites cannot speak for African Americans, so African American men cannot expect to fully and adequately reproduce the exact voice of the Black woman. The overall title of her work derives from her position as a woman

scholar, Black and Southern, born as a slave in the segregated American South. In fact, the author explains how social systems of oppression converge around issues of gender, race and social class, which, in their intertwining, generate complex inequalities: with her reflection, Cooper anticipates the intersectionality approach by about a century, albeit in an embryonic way. This book therefore remains a milestone for Black feminist theory and is widely cited by numerous scholars including, to name a few, Hazel Carby (1987), Patricia Hill Collins (2000), Karen Baker-Fletcher and Paula Giddings (1996), (Mark S. Giles, 2006).

3.1.1 The definitional dilemma of intersectionality

The theory of intersectionality is characterized by a definitional dilemma. Patricia H. Collins states, in fact, that it is possible to see intersectionality, but difficult (though not impossible) to define it: “the term intersectionality references the critical insight that race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, ability, and age operate not as unitary, mutually exclusive entities, but as reciprocally constructing phenomena that in turn shape complex social inequalities” (Collins, 2015, 2). Although there is consensus on this, there is little clarity on what to consider and define as intersectional. Patricia H. Collins addresses three interdependent issues of intersectionality: 1) intersectionality as a field of study located within the power relations it deals with; 2) as an analytical strategy that allows social phenomena to be understood from new angles; and 3) as a critical praxis guiding social justice projects.

First, considering intersectionality as a field of study, it became part of the US academy during the 1980s, but only in terms of content and not denomination. Instead of the term “intersectionality”, race/class/gender studies were used as an umbrella term to group together the ideas of different social justice movements. In this context, scholar-activists who shared similar (though differing) views on interlocking oppressions, community organizing, identity politics and social justice introduced a different approach of thinking in research and the curricular aspects of academia. Even if both Black feminism and race/class/gender studies were central inside and outside the academy for the development of intersectionality, contemporary narratives concerning

its emergence increasingly place its origin as a field of study within academia. To complete the above, the main sources on the birth of intersectionality name Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) as its founder, citing her *Stanford Law Review* article “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color.” This article highlights the connection between the sensitivities of social movements and community organisation, arguing the need for intersectional frameworks to address the social problem of violence against Black women and to empower them. Within critical race studies, K. Crenshaw’s work also addresses key issues in race formation theory. It is therefore necessary to place (and not isolate) K. Crenshaw’s work within the framework outlined thus far (Kimberlé Crenshaw, 1991).

Secondly, intersectionality should be addressed as an analytical strategy. Sumi Cho, Kimberlé Crenshaw, et. al., (2013, 795) argue in fact that: “what makes an analysis intersectional is its adoption of an intersectional way of thinking about the problem of sameness and difference and its relation to power”. Intersectional frameworks can be adopted to analyze and rethink violence, social and other problems so as to deepen their understanding. For example, intersectional analyses of violence against women (but not only) have informed public policy and political activism. In this regard, the work of Ida Wells Barnett was particularly significant, showing how Black feminist epistemology conceptualizes and values experience as part of epistemic resistance. In Ida Wells-Barnett’s time, the harms inflicted individually on women, men, and children, and those suffered collectively by the African American population, emphasised the need to believe the victims of lynchings. Moreover, the interpretation that African American people gave to their experiences was of great importance. This interpretation of experience informs the theoretical analysis of Black feminism in general, and the concept of intersectionality in particular. Ida Wells-Barnett produced intersectional analyses of lynching because her intellectual activism was always based on the lived experiences of African American women and men (Fabio Corbisiero, Mariella Nocenzi, 2022, 227-228).

In addition to this, there are several areas to which intersectional analyses can be applied. In summary, Patricia H. Collins explains that intersectionality as an analytical strategy allows:

- 1) to rethink work, identity, family and similar social constructs, exploring how capitalism and the mechanisms of the labour market organization support inequalities.
- 2) Expanding the lens of gender, race and class to nation, ethnicity, age, sexuality, ability and similar categories of analysis. “Intersectional frameworks have also deepened our understanding of nationalist ideologies, as evidenced in Nagel’s (1998). [...] The political behavior of subordinated groups as they aim to empower themselves has also garnered intersectional analysis” (Collins, 2015, 12).
- 3) Rethinking the different manifestations of violence.
- 4) Focusing on identity through the analysis of how intersecting identities generate different social experiences for certain individuals and social groups.
- 5) Reflecting on the epistemological workings of intersectionality and on methodology. Many researchers posed the problem of how intersectionality can be conceptualized in a specific research design, paying attention to the contradictions that characterize intersectional knowledge projects and trying to provide appropriate theories and methods.

The third fundamental dimension stressed by P. H. Collins concerns intersectionality as critical praxis, i.e., how social actors (e.g., activist intellectuals) employ intersectionality to realize social justice projects. “This praxis perspective does not separate scholarship from practice, with scholarship providing theoretical frameworks that people are encouraged to apply to practice. Instead, both scholarship and practice are recursively linked, with practice being foundational to intersectional analysis” (Collins, 2015, 5).

This dimension of intersectionality constitutes a kind of bridge between theory and practice, as defined by Cho, Crenshaw, et. al., in the following way:

we define praxis as encompassing a wide range of phenomena, from society- and work-centered movements to demand greater economic justice for low-income women of color (e.g., Carastathis 2013; Chun, Lipsitz, and Shin 2013); to legal and policy advocacy that seeks to remedy gender and racial discrimination (e.g., Carbado 2013; Verloo 2013); to state-targeted

movements to abolish prisons, immigration restrictions, and military interventions that are nominally neutral with respect to race/ethnicity, gender, class, sexuality, and nation but are in fact disproportionately harmful to communities of color and to women and gays in those communities (e.g., Spade 2013). As part of these efforts, scholars and activists illustrate how practice necessarily informs theory, and how theory ideally should inform best practices and community organizing. These concerns reflect the normative and political dimensions of intersectionality and thus embody a motivation to go beyond mere comprehension of intersectional dynamics to transform them (Cho, Crenshaw, McCall, 2013, 786).

Examples of intersectionality as a critical praxis concern, in some cases, social institutions that aim to make intersectionality central to their organisational mission and practice; but also in the area of human rights: the ideas expressed in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights bear a strong resemblance to the strands of intersectionality aligned with social justice initiatives. A central figure in this regard was bell hooks (1952-2021), a pseudonym for the African American writer and activist Gloria Jean Watkins, who developed in her texts an intersectional feminism that was accessible to all (bell hooks, 1984). In her critical approach, she emphasises the need to consider the intersection between each type of domination and how it is exercised, to be able to identify the different levels of oppression present and to avoid including only those forms of domination that affect white Western women.

3.1.2 The theory of translocational intersectionality

Continuing with the theorisation and practice of intersectionality, another relevant theorisation that deserves to be treated is the one developed by the sociologist Floya Anthias. Her theoretical-interpretive approach of “translocational intersectionality” (F. Anthias, 2020). conceives of intersectionality as it is understood in Critical Race Theory, but related to the dimension of translocality, which makes it possible to relate the macro level of the geographical and social spaces with the micro level of the marginalized or stigmatized subjects. Bearing in mind the emergence of intersectionality

theory (as has been explained), Anthias believes that the intersectional lens can be applied not only to certain disadvantaged groups (such as Black women), but also to privileged groups to analyse how power relations are visible in the production of both privilege and disadvantage. Specifically, Anthias goes beyond the classical intersectional approach, as she conceives of the intersection between categories (such as gender, ethnicity, race, class, and more specifically, migrants and refugees) that are not only fixed, but also have an increasing fluidity.

The approach of translocality in intersectionality introduces the aspect of displacement, both physical and non-physical, and of belonging: F. Anthias considers “belonging and non-belonging (or differential belonging)” as a process and a result of the creation of boundaries, and as the marks these leave on the human experience, location, and modes of identification. Belongings can be fixed or fluid for different groups and are enactments in social spaces that articulate power relations. In this regard, Anthias explains that borders also create spaces of contradiction and ambiguity, where subjects live in conditions bordering on the inhumane (e.g., homeless people, women victims of violence, Cypriot refugees in Cyprus, exploited workers, etc.). These are “limbo spaces” where subjects, deprived of a political voice, wait to be ordered around: Anthias calls this situation “the fixed unfixed”. Anthias’ line of thought takes up that of Frantz Fanon, who in his work *Peaux noires, masques blancs* (1952) distinguishes between: “Zone de non être”, that is the space of non-being, of non-humanity, of invisibility inhabited by people of the Black race; as opposed to the “Zone de être”, the space of being, of visibility and privilege inhabited by white people¹⁰. The processes in these spaces not only divide and stratify people, but also facilitate stigmatization. The sociologist Erving Goffman (1978) explains that an analysis of the behaviour of individuals reveals a somewhat defective defined identity, as it is divided into virtual social identity and actual identity: the former is the version of self-legitimised by society shown in public; the latter is the personal identity that individuals imagine they possess in the private sphere. Stigma arises when the rift between virtual and actual social identities becomes unresolvable. Anthias proposes a further elaboration of the concept of stigma, highlighting the making of social categorisation processes in which both stigmatised and non-stigmatised subjects/groups participate. As stigma as well as

¹⁰ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), trad. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2008).

moral valuation are formed intersectionally, she claims that: “the overall effects for individuals and groups is a result of the ways the separate categories fuse and shape each other at determinate points and in relation to economic and political effectivities” (Anthias, 2020, 84). It is thus possible to see how Floya Anthias focuses above all on the applicability of intersectionality, deepening the two dimensions of intersectionality indicated by P. H. Collins (namely intersectionality as an analytical strategy and a critical praxis) within social spaces that are not always well-defined and translocal, and also delving into the conditions of the subjects involved.

With regard to intersectionality as a critical praxis, i.e., as a theory guiding practical actions, Anthias proposes an interesting theme, which also highlights the centrality of the value of transnationality: the promotion of solidarity politics instead of identity policies. An example of solidarity politics is the so-called *politics of translocation*: politics centered on networks and alliances that transcend borders (transnational), and the limits of categories of race, gender, ethnicity, religion, and social class, through time and space. Dialogue is a necessary component in politics, but it is not sufficient to protect the most oppressed and marginalized groups. Therefore, identity categories need to be dismantled (deconstructed) with a view to translocation. An example of this is the organisation of the Black Lives Matter movement, which, although it was born based on the recognition of Black identity, has the potential to mobilise also queer, or disabled groups, as the fight against oppression also concerns many others. As P. H. Collins says, solidarity politics should be flexible and situational; and as Anna Julia Cooper says: “all prejudices, whether of race, sect or sex, class pride and caste distinctions are the belittling inheritance and badge of snobs and prigs. The philosophic mind sees that its own ‘rights’ are the rights of humanity” (A. J. Cooper, *A Voice from the South: By a Black Woman of the South*, 2017, 68). This intersectional approach draws attention to the deconstruction of identity categories and is the theoretical approach that will be adopted in this research, with a focus on the translocal dimension.

In conclusion, it is also necessary to introduce what is defined as an increasingly common risk, namely the process of *whitening intersectionality*. This expression refers to the combination of intersectional theory with feminist disciplines and the decentralisation of the central and constitutive role of race in intersectional thought and practice (Sirma Bilge, 2013). It is believed that intersectionality has been “whitened” in

that a colonisation of the work of Black women writers and feminists has taken place, making intersectionality a frame for academic knowledge production. Moreover, the whitening of intersectionality is partly achieved by excluding from the debate or neglecting the works of those who “have multiple minority identities and are marginalized social actors - women of colour and queers of colour” (Bilge, 2013, 412). This problem is widespread in Europe. Indeed, F. Anthias states:

My view, and I will be brief, is that all questions require an examination of the ways in which intersectionality is being used and the authoritative voices within it. [...] I will therefore not engage with the issue ‘who started it’ or ‘who has the right to use it’ and ‘who it should be about’ that I see as actually inimical to intersectionality itself (Anthias, 2020, 72).

Leaving open this still hotly debated issue, the following section will apply the theory of intersectionality seen so far to the context of diasporas, in order to investigate the multiple intersections in diasporic settings.

3.2 Social locations in diaspora: translocational positionality

The theory of intersectionality combined with translocality is a necessary lens for analyzing how the intersections of gender, race, class, religion and ableism within diasporas determine different social, cultural, political dynamics. Translocational intersectionality is linked to transnational and diasporic organizations, networks and politics, since it is based on categories whose boundaries are not presented as fixed, and therefore encourages policies that do not focus on boundaries and on the reinforcement of identity categories. The need for alliances and networks that transcend geographical and categorical boundaries of gender, “race”, class, sexuality, ethnicity, ability and religion are central to promoting the politics of translocation, also characteristic of diasporas. Starting from the question: “How do gender, class, race and sexuality intersect and constitute each other in specific contexts and within processes related to diaspora formations, mobilizations and cultural productions?” (Al-Ali, 2010, 119), it is possible to show how the existing literature has investigated the intersections between

these dimensions within diasporas, as well as the inequalities and power hierarchies they generate.

F. Anthias approaches and analyzes social locations such as gender, “race”, ethnicity, class, etc. Starting with the gender factor and its intersections, an intersectional analysis allows “gendering” to be analyzed in the sense of processes in which hierarchies are decided, reproduced and challenged, not considering gender exclusively as a social and cultural construction of the meaning of “being a woman” and “being a man”. The sociologist Sirma Bilge points out that the introduction of the gender dimension in migration and diaspora studies only dates back to the 1980s, when an attempt was made to remedy the exclusion of women from these fields of research. However, the transition to the “gender and migration phase” took place in the early 1990s with the aim of providing new analytical and methodological frameworks (Bilge, Denis, 2010). A key aspect she emphasises of contemporary research on gender and migration concerns the diversity inherent in the category “gender”, as well as in “migrant women” (and migrant men), and the increasing intersectionality of axes of power in modelling gendered experiences and migration processes. Although the category of gender in diasporas has in most cases been considered in a binary way, some research (Elyssa Faison, 2001; Meg Wesling 2008) has been done on the need to make diaspora queer as well, identifying how heterosexual norms were privileged in supporting definitions of ethnic diasporas. Intersectionality within queer studies allows attention to be focused on other identifications that should be considered alongside gender and sexuality, to untangle the interconnection among discourses, inequalities, identities and institutions (Alexander Dhoest, 2019, 388).

It is precisely the complex interactions between categories that are not fixed and isolated that generate equally complicated dynamics. Speaking of interactions between various dimensions, Jenny Douglas explains how for example women in the African-Caribbean diaspora¹¹ face inequality in education, health, social care and employment in the UK and US, “because of their racialised, gendered and classed experience” (Jenny Douglas, Naomi Watson, 2013, 1). In her study of the inequalities in which this diaspora is the protagonist, J. Douglas explains that one cannot homogenize

¹¹The word *African-Caribbean* means Caribbean women with African cultural heritage, whose grandparents or parents were born in the Caribbean.

these women, who are diverse in terms of religion, ethnicity, age, class, sexuality and disability, and geographical origin; but one must investigate the different ways in which these axes of oppression can intersect.

In 2005 an interdisciplinary research group of feminists initiated a research project at Duke University (North Carolina) on *Diasporic Hegemonies*, to link feminist transnationalism and feminist research on the African diaspora, by focusing on how communities in different cultural and geographical sites establish and keep ties, and how these ties are shaped by internal and external social, political and material dynamics (Tina Campt, Deborah A. Thomas, 2008). The scholars collaborating in the project come from different universities in Canada, the USA and Europe and represent different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. The studies carried out as part of this project highlight the role played by racial and gender formation in the movement of global capital. In particular, it is emphasised how diasporic dialogues are never entirely fair, as they reproduce the power relations in which they are embedded. The dynamics of diasporas are thus shaped by these asymmetrical power relations both externally (through the factors that generate migration and movement), and internally (through the ways in which power relations shape racial and gendered formations within diasporic communities). The gender factor and the gendering process are pervasive, as nationalism, ethnicity, racism and class are gendered phenomena, whose changing configurations are part of those broader movements related to the shift from “modernity” to what is termed “post-modernity” (Avtar Brah, 1996). In this transition, criticism of the concept of Eurocentrism, nationhood and related ethnicity developed, also in connection with the analysis of diasporas. The issue of Eurocentrism has always been controversial. The so-called postmodern era has certainly marked a transition from the previous era in terms of discourses and practices. However, a problem persists, which arises when the discourse on race is not considered central to the formation of the annals of Western knowledge and ethics.

In this respect, the race factor comes into play. George J. Sefa Dei explains that Blackness is central to African and related diasporas, and must be considered in intersection with colonialism and the new “colonial forms and colonising relations” (George J. Sefa Dei, 2018, 122). He also argues the importance of going beyond a fixed ideology of race and theorizing Blackness in relation to the African diaspora and the

African continent: the conception of Blackness is shaped by different geographical locations, histories, political and social realities. Blackness must therefore be understood in all its complex dimensions, i.e. gender, class, race, geography, disability, etc.; and resistance must be considered as a central component of this heterogeneous Blackness. In connection with this, intersectionality in the diaspora must also concern the production of diasporic knowledge in academia. The reproduction of academic boundaries by means of a “politics of knowledge” is codified in the whiteness and centrality of only certain bodies. Although a process of deconstruction of the Eurocentric framework has begun, the production of knowledge on a social, political, cultural level still revolves around the notion of “borders”. One need only think of the concept of ethnicity, which is a way of narrating everyday life from the perspective of boundary-forming processes. “The point is that ‘ethnicity’ is no more or less ‘real’ than class or gender, or any other marker of differentiation. What is at issue is the specificity of power that configures and is exercised in a given articulation of these differentiations” (Brah, 1996, 241). This discourse relates to the fact that the usefulness of the concept of diaspora in our times lies in being articulated together with the concept of “borders”, and in dealing with issues related to transnational movements of people, technologies, capital, circulation of information and cultures. Moreover, the recent change in the nature of global flows has led diasporas to develop ties to multiple homelands and to contribute to the emergence of “new ethnicities”, contesting traditions shaped by class, gender, sexuality, religion (John Eade, 2012). In particular, V. S. Kalra et. al., (2005) emphasize the importance of “diaspora space” as the place of intersection of borders, diaspora and dislocation, that is metaphorically the space in which diaspora theory is combined with the concepts of hybridity and multiculturalism.

3.2.1 The under-explored factors of religion and ableism about diasporic subjects

Despite the fact that race, gender, class and sexuality are usually considered the main intersecting factors, the factors of religion and ableism/disability are also highly relevant when studying diaspora formations and processes. As far as religion is concerned, the study of the intersection between religion and diaspora has become central especially in recent years, including works also on media studies and

transnational migration. Seán McLoughlin explains that research on diaspora literature is unanimous in tracing the first treatment of contemporary diaspora religion to a publication by Ninian Smart (McLoughlin, 2010). Furthermore, in the *New Handbook of Living Religions*, Hinnells explains that the challenges of plural societies in identifying cultural and religious differences have been central. However, according to Hinnells, despite the fact that, on the one hand, the presence of “world religions” in global cities has fostered new religious currents alongside Christianity; and on the other hand, studies suggest that migrants are more religious after migration, though scholars of migration and diaspora in other disciplines have somewhat neglected the value of religion (John R. Hinnells, 1997).

What makes religion a key element in diasporas is “the dimension of suprahistorical or trans-historical transcendence” (Vásquez, 2010, 132), which adds a powerful and sometimes utopian character to diasporas. “Cosmization”, that is the insertion of the time and space of the sacred within geography and history, constitutes one of religion’s main contributions to the diasporic experience. The dimensions of time and space are as central to religion as they are to diasporas. The space-time compression that characterizes globalisation implies a deterritorialization and reterritorialization of religions, weakening dualistic categories. However, one of the main theoretical matters that has preoccupied scholars over the past decade, concerns the question of whether a specific tradition or religion can be described in terms of diaspora. In this regard, S. McLoughlin explains that “in the same way that religion ‘reinforced ethnicity’, Cohen suggests that religion provides ‘additional cement’ to diasporas and ‘is likely to enhance social cohesion’” (McLoughlin, 2010, 19). As a matter of fact, Cohen (2008) states that religious diasporas are examples of ‘deterritorialised’ diasporas with different representations of homeland. The intersection between religion and diaspora is complex, and several levels can be distinguished. At the *structural level*, the intersection between religion and diaspora has become institutionalized in most Western states through normative discourses, restrictive immigration laws and coercive integration policies. The category of the nation-state continues to be central in determining the ways and conditions in which diaspora and religion interact. In the Western public sphere, the role of religion has often been reduced to debates about terrorism (in reference to the Islamic religion). At the *discursive level*, this intersection has become

an object of monitoring, to categorize individual subjectivities and collective identities considered different. Finally, at the *situated level*, the intersection of religion and diaspora is renegotiated through daily interactions with the structural constraints of states of residence (Dominic Pasura, 2018). If, as seen above, the intersection of religion-diaspora is articulated at various levels, it becomes more complex when considering the intersections of religion with other factors such as gender and/or ethnicity, etc. The intersectionality related to diasporas, and migration studies in general, concerns therefore many possible combinations.

Alongside the dimension of religion, one that deserves particular attention is the previously mentioned (and still little investigated) one of ableism, which, when intersecting with racism, produces particularly strong discrimination. “The term ableism refers to the socio-cultural production of a norm and normality that presupposes the efficient (non-disabled) body as the unquestioned natural and privileged state (Campbell 2009 Maskos 2010; Wolbring 2008; Pieper 2011)” (Marianne Pieper, Jamal Haji Mohammadi, 2014, 70). It is therefore a set of prejudices and discriminatory attitudes towards people with disabilities that are based on the concept of ability, i.e., the standard body with sensory, physical and cognitive ability is taken as the ideal model and becomes the evaluative criterion for all bodies (Rosa Bellacicco, et. al., 2022). In Italy, ableism is still little used in common language and public debate, compared to other forms of discrimination such as sexism and racism. Ableism manifests itself at the symbolic, discursive, and institutional level, and also in architectural structures designed exclusively for people considered “able-bodied” (i.e., not disabled). Discriminations based on ableism become even more difficult to counter when it intersects with other factors such as gender, sexual orientation, citizenship, age (minors and the elderly) and origin.

In diasporas, these intersections often occur. In particular, when also the dimension of Blackness is involved there is a strong epistemic violence. “As ‘a disabling virus within literary discourse,’ blackness has become a way in which the image and persona of black bodies are constructed and used to serve as both literary texts as well as ‘the entire range of views, assumptions, readings, and misreadings that accompany Eurocentric learning about these [black] people’ (Morrison 1992, 7)” (Paul Banahene Adjei, 2018, 277). Unfortunately, the practice of disability is often used to justify unfair

treatment of Black people and the language of ableism has often been used to justify racist acts experienced by Black people. Rosemarie Garland Thomson (1997) and Davis (1995) consider disability as a form of race and ethnicity, stating that disabled people are part of the oppressed groups. Discrimination is increased when disability intersects with the gender factor in addition to ethnic origin. The complex interplay between disability and gender in people's lives and in diasporas, falls into contexts that seek to challenge the concepts of citizenship, transnationality, and postcolonial nationality. The sociologist Mark Sherry, in his article *Postcolonising Disability*, provides a background and critical approach to analysing the intersections between postcolonialism, disability and gender. In a similar vein, Pushpa Parekh, an expert in Postcolonial Studies, explains that an in-depth study of the triangulation between gender, disability and postcolonialism has not been tackled before. She only outlines (Pushpa Parekh, 2007, 2) the following studies that have analysed the intersection of gender, race and disability in relation to the Global North: Saxton and Howe's *With Wings: An Anthology of Literature By and About Women With Disabilities* (1987); Thomson's *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature* (1997); Snyder, Brueggemann and Thomson's *Disability Studies: Enabling Humanities* (2002); as well as Smith and Hutchinson's *Gendering Disability* (2004). Considering the intersections enunciated above is crucial to get a complete picture of the various dimensions and related power dynamics present in the diasporas. Moving from the macro to the micro, we now investigate the actors who experience these dynamics in diasporas, focusing on diasporic women and presenting an overview of their main roles.

3.3 The agency of women in diasporas

The roles of women in the various diasporas are connected to the conception of agency in social theory, which was outlined in the previous chapter. As seen above, in the 21st century, Diaspora Studies still placed little value on this perspective. Often the focus on gender has led to the victimization of migrant and diasporic women as passive agents. Feminist studies have attempted to counter this stereotypical representation of such women: since diasporas maintain ties with the country of origin, various aspects

including gender relations have an influence on diasporic women. Feminist research reveals that, on the one hand, the gender hierarchies present in the state of origin can be reinforced and become even more rigid in the diaspora; on the other hand, diasporic conditions can enable diasporic women to express their agency and change their living conditions. (Amba Pande, 2018). In this regard, “Pessar and Mahler’s later establishment of a framework called ‘gendered geographies of power’ allowed for the study of social agency by examining the various ways in which women negotiate within multiple diasporic contexts and complex relationships by examining the individual as well the social, hierarchical contexts within which transnational migration was experienced (Sandhya Rao Mehta, 2018, 18).

Patricia R. Pessar and Sarah J. Mahler (2006) explain that gender does not coincide with the dichotomous variable of sex, but is one of the main complex factors that organizes social life from the origin of human existence.

In relation to women’s agency and roles in diasporas, it should be pointed out that the role and participation of women is a dynamic process that is constantly changing. Women’s dynamics in diasporas are constantly moving and changing, so much so that it is difficult to provide an up-to-date analysis of them (Spivak, 2000). G. C. Spivak makes a distinction between old and new diasporas, more from a conceptual perspective, in which the activities and representations of women also change. The old diasporas are described by her as the product of wars, religious and other persecution, slavery, trade and colonization, before the world order was consolidated as transnational. The new diasporas are those linked to the transnational world, i.e., the export of male and female labour, and the search for political asylum. The study of diasporic women and their access to national civil society is a very complex subject. According to this scholar of postcolonialism and feminism, women of both old and new diasporas cannot participate in the critical agency of civil society, because, even those who take the collective risk of acting as agents in the civil society of nation-states, are not acting for all women. In particular, she explains that feminists with a transnational consciousness must be aware that the civil system they seek to improve with a view to greater gender justice may continually hinder them. Therefore, she defines the diaspora-bound activist woman as a woman in whom

her energy must be spent upon successful transplantation or insertion into the new state, often in the name of an old nation in the new. She is the site of global public culture privatized: the proper subject of real migrant activism. She may also be the victim of an exacerbated and violent patriarchy which operates in the name of the old nation as well—a sorry simulacrum of women in nationalism (Spivak, 2000, 8).

Alongside this vision of a kind of “captivity” of the diasporic woman within a state system and a social structure on which in fact she cannot act effectively, there are other perspectives on women’s agency in diasporas. Several researches (Deepali Karche, Sandip Mane 2022; Nadjé Al-Ali 2007; Apala Vatsa 2016) have investigated the different roles of women in the various diasporas, thematising different declinations of their agency. It should be remembered that agency is not only a reaction by means of actions, but can have several facets. Here, the focus is on the main activities carried out by women connected to diasporas. These women have always been active on various fronts, especially organizing remittances, social and political activism, writing and cultural activities, and the creation of international and support networks, including digital ones. These spheres of action are not to be considered separately, but often intersect and/or are in co-existence in the actions of diasporic women. We will now explore them in more detail.

Firstly, managing *individual and collective remittances* has always been a central aspect of the functioning of diasporic groups. Women in diasporas have various roles in organizing individual and collective remittances (which can be of various types), both through external and official channels. Some studies on the social aspects of remittances (Kunz 2008; Rahman 2013; Ambrosini 2014) have investigated gender mechanisms in individual remittances and the function of diasporic women in generating remittances. Gender dynamics may condition the use of remittances and their long-term effects; and these remittances may in turn help change gender relations in the motherland (Nare Galstyan, Maurizio Ambrosini, 2023). With regard to collective remittances specifically, diasporic women can play a key role in their collection and sending through informal channels. Since it is not possible to go into every diaspora, the case of the women of the Armenian diaspora in the Netherlands is given as an example of efficiency. A distinction must first be made between a formal and an informal level. In the first case,

one speaks of remittances managed by networks of diasporic organizations that link various diasporic communities together and influence diasporic agendas and policies.

In these organizations, men of the Armenian diaspora often run the main activities, while women lead secondary actions, such as gatherings in churches. In the case, for example, of collective remittances consisting of donations from participants in religious services, a strong emotional value is present, especially if these are intended to protect the motherland. Diasporic networks at the informal level, on the other hand, are unregistered organizations and groups of relatives and neighbours, who work together to support those in need in the motherland. The latter comprise mainly women who are not affiliated with official diaspora organisations. In the case of the women of the Armenian diaspora in the Netherlands, having been marginalized in the official diasporic networks, they created their own informal diasporic networks, organising themselves to collect and send collective remittances. “Another form of ‘collective remittances from below’ was initiated by informal groups of women, such as neighbors, friends, and acquaintances that at times even transcended co-ethnic links” (Galstyan, Ambrosini, 2023, 29).

The central role of women from the diasporas in remittances is only one of the aspects involving them. A second key role of diasporic women concerns activism, political and social. There is a need to distinguish between social and political activism. “Activism is intentional action by an individual to bring about social or political change. This action is in support of, or opposition to, one side of a controversial argument” (Marc Brenman, Thomas W. Sanchez, 2004, 6012). The literature on activism reveals an evolution in recent years, with the increasing prominence of the younger generation leading to its transformation. In general, political activism is characterized by two dimensions: the so-called “repertoires” of political action, i.e., the ways in which citizens decide to speak out themselves politically; and the organizational structures (agencies) through which citizens mobilize for political expression (Pippa Norris, 2004). Social activism, instead, is about collaborating with other people to generate change in society. The term “social” refers both to society and to an idea of activism that strengthens the possibilities of participation. It is a reflection of a personal choice of engagement in society. However, political and social activism often overlap (Marc Brenman, Thomas W. Sanchez 2004). Another type of activism that has recently

emerged is termed “postethnic activism”, which can be both social and political and has been investigated mainly in northern European states.

The notion ‘postethnic’ refers to how specific ethnic group membership is rendered irrelevant in the racialisation processes that cluster people as ‘non-European,’ ‘immigrant’ and ‘different’ based on phenotypic characteristics, and religion, despite the fact that they were born and raised in the Nordic region. Thus, the activism that develops to challenge and transform such categorisations and exclusions is not based on ethnic origin, but sees the common ground in the processes of being racialised as non-white or ‘other’ (Suvi Keskinen, 2022, 3).

Social and political activism is common to many diasporic women. In this regard, it must be stated that still too often Muslim women (e.g., from the Iranian, Indian, Palestinian, and South Asian diaspora) continue to be stereotyped in the Western world, according to the colonial narrative of the oppression of the Muslim woman who wears the veil¹². This is for example the case of diasporic Turkish women in Germany, where media, cinema and social policy literature produces stereotypes of them (Katherine P. Ewing, 2006). In reality, Muslim women of the diasporas are responsible for several initiatives, such as taking action within the legal system for the rights relating to marriage and inheritance; making “work claims” to obtain rights from the State, and getting involved in the generation of income (Patricia Jeffery, Kaveri Qureshi, 2022). The mobilization of Muslim women (and not only) has many aspects in common, but also varies in the different diasporas. In the case of women from the Iranian diaspora, for example, there is a long tradition of representing their experience of migration and diaspora. In particular, Iranian women activists have increased the use of the so-called “diasporic websites” to support women left in Iran, transferring valuable information and creating networks between those outside and those inside Iran (Sanaz Nasirpour, 2016). Their activism can be seen both as social and political: Iranian diasporic websites

¹² Leila Ahmed explains in her work *Women and Gender in Islam* (1992) that there are two main reasons why in the West the veil is associated with oppression. First, the affirmation of Western superiority and its civilizing mission towards Muslim societies, considered inferior. Second, the use of this narrative by white feminist movements that pose as saviors of oppressed women.

allow them to address diasporic issues and to support the plight of women in Iran. In this case it is possible to see how activism is connected with digital networks.

Regarding political activism, particularly significant is the case of the women in the Kurdish diaspora, which is the largest diaspora in the world without a state and the most politically active in Europe. In particular, Kurdish women mobilize a great deal for their rights. According to research done by Shahrzad Mojab and Rachel Gorman (2007) with women of the Kurdish diaspora in Sweden, Canada, Great Britain and Iraqi Kurdistan, Kurdish nationalist organizations reproduced patriarchal dynamics that were themselves reflected within the Kurdish diaspora. However, women of the Kurdish diaspora are very active in organizations that defend the Kurdish diaspora, and in particular the rights of Kurdish women. The mobilization of women in this diaspora is visible in diasporic organisations such as the Kurdish Women's Rights Watch (established in 2004) and the Kurdistan Women Union (KWU) (Baser, 2013). A significant example of social activism in the diaspora, instead, is that of women in the Indian diaspora. Women activists from the Indian diaspora, particularly in Canada, have in fact organized a series of initiatives to raise awareness of the issue of violence against women in India (but not only in India), which is linked to a still too widespread conception of the subalternity of migrant women (Neelu Kang, 2006). Finally, in Italy Tiziana Chiappelli (2016) contributed to research on political activism of women, showing that Italian policy does not have a programme that considers gender and migrant background as factors in the promotion of subjects' participation.

With regard to postethnic activism, it is linked to the Asian, Latin American and especially African diaspora (which will be explored in more detail in the next section). This type of activism, that has been defined above, makes much use of digital spaces, in particular social media, to create spaces of support, sharing and to generate political mobilization: to engage in debates, share stories and initiate campaigns. However, for postethnic activists, media visibility is ambivalent; while on the one hand, it allows the target audience to find the platform and the platform to provide new perspectives in public discussions; on the other hand, media visibility exposes activists to hate speech (Keskinen, 2022). The use of digital spaces (Facebook groups, Instagram, etc.), however risky it may be, enables one to become politically active and to create support networks. Keskinen illustrates some examples in this regard, such as the following one:

“Deniz, one of the young women who established the discussion site Makthavarna (The Power Holders) on Instagram, argues that social media is a perfect site for organising. [...] Makthavarna, active from 2014–2019, was organised as a separatist account that provided space for new guest posters every week” (Keskinen, 2022, 72). In summary, she explains that social media are key tools for the engagement of activists and for their collective mobilization, which is often reinforced by face-to-face meetings with the aim of creating spaces of sharing and of strengthening engagement.

Last but not least, there is the cultural and literary activity of the women of the diasporas. Prominent among the literary production of diasporic women is that of women from the South Asian diaspora (in addition to that of women from the African diaspora, which will be explored in Chapter 4). For instance, the works of Monica Ali, Anita Desai and Jhumpa Lahiri have won, or been nominated for, international awards such as the Pulitzer Prize. Women authors from the South Asian diaspora have mainly published prose texts (novels, autobiographies, short stories and memoirs), which have various similarities in terms of content, political orientation and narrative style. A recurring theme is, for instance, the struggle of diasporic women to find a negotiation between their two homes: the motherland and “the diasporic home”. The relevance of this diasporic literary production lies in the emergence of an alternative feminism, in which diasporic women have found a way to express their voices about specifically female themes and issues, and the condition of diasporic women writers who find themselves between two (or more) cultures (Sam Naidu, 2008).

Another significant example of diasporic women writers and artists is that of the Iranian diaspora, where diasporic visual literature developed in the form of graphic narratives, photo-poetry and poetic films. In Iranian diasporic literature, the difference between the literary production of those who have voluntarily emigrated and the so-called “exile literature” of those who carry within themselves a sense of exile, is highlighted (Mehraneh Ebrahimi, 2019). The themes of exile and resistance are very strong in the narratives of the women of the Iranian diaspora. “As opposed to a generalized literature of exile, *ghorbat* literature would be an apt -though difficult- way to describe the writings of the Iranian diaspora. *Exile* does have poetic connotations, but its historico-political strings make it a distasteful choice to describe all the literature written outside Iran by Iranians, as is currently in fashion” (Ebrahimi, 2019, 22).

To recapitulate, a brief overview was presented here about the main roles of women in diasporas, that are multiple and in areas as varied as remittance organisation, activism, the creation of international digital networks and diasporic literary production. These domains, as we have seen, are interconnected and each one constitutes an effective way in which diasporic women express their agency and seek to bring about change for the better. Continuing in this vein, the following section will further narrow the focus, exploring the role that women play in the African diaspora, particularly in relation to different shades of activism.

3.4 Black Mediterranean and intersectional academic effort: the voices to decolonise the cultural imaginary

In line with the above, intersectionality as a critical practice must inform not only the actions taken by racialised and discriminated subjects, but also academic practices. Thus, there is a need for an intersectional academic effort that does not exclusively address intersectionality on a theoretical level, but that concretises it in academic practices that combine intersectionality and decolonisation. Still too often, university knowledge production processes are disconnected from everyday realities, and reproduce Western power dynamics. There is a need for academic knowledge to become a protagonist in a decolonial and intersectional effort. Sara Ahmed in her essay *Feminism and Fragility* addresses the problem of university decolonisation in relation to the need for institutional change. Universities have a fundamental role, and responsibility, in the process of decolonisation. In this regard, G. K. Bhabra explains:

There are also important methodological and epistemological reasons to emphasize contestation over definitions of ‘decolonising’. Indeed, one of the key challenges that decolonising approaches have presented to Eurocentric forms of knowledge is an insistence on positionality and plurality and, perhaps more importantly, the impact that taking ‘difference’ seriously would make to standard understandings. The emphasis on reflexivity reminds us that representations and knowledge of the world we live in are situated historically and geographically. The point is not simply to deconstruct such understandings, but to transform them. As such, some

decolonising approaches seek a plurality of perspectives, worldviews, ontologies, epistemologies and methodologies in which scholarly enquiry and political praxis might take place (Gurminder K. Bhambra, et. al. 2018, 2).

G. K. Bhambra emphasizes the transformative dimension of a decolonial academic approach, in which decolonial approaches apply a plurality of perspectives, epistemologies and methodologies that make research a political praxis. The decolonial approach is thus also combined with an intersectional effort, as it is characterized by an intersection of aspects that aim to emphasize knowledge production from the margins, and not Eurocentric. In this regard, as Priyamvada Gopal explains, “in its most skeletal form, ‘decolonisation’ is the process which signifies the end of rule by a foreign power and the recuperation and/or formation of an ‘independent’ entity, usually a nation-state, through a process often referred to as a ‘transfer of power’” (Priyamvada Gopal, 2021, 881). Since 2017, echoing in part the Rhodes Must Fall, Oxford (RMFO) campaign, the process of university decolonisation has become central to several university campuses in Europe, the United States, Canada and Great Britain, leading to various forms of student activism aimed at decolonising university curricula (Gopal, 2021). She further explains that the process of decolonialism of institutions has a reparative function and must also be related in the light of anti-colonial thinking. In this case, anti-colonial thought refers to intellectual work and a process of cognitive production that informs practices aimed at achieving the goals of decolonisation. “Anti-colonial practice invokes a critical and radical spirit of enquiry and action rather than a singular state to be feasibly arrived at within the modest—and inevitably compromised—parameters of the university” (Gopal, 2021, 889).

This intersectional and decolonial academic endeavour is linked to the emergence of other voices in the academic landscape and beyond, the expression of an alternative and precisely decolonial knowledge. Particularly significant is the research collective called Black Mediterranean Collective, which emerged after the migration crisis in the Mediterranean of 2015-2016. It is an interdisciplinary group that studies questions of colonialism, Blackness, racism, migration policies and citizenship in Italy (Hawthorne, 2022). This supports a production of knowledge from the perspective of diasporic subjects. The concept of the Black Mediterranean is in fact linked to the diasporas that

have crossed the Mediterranean and has been thematised by Cedric J. Robinson (1983). Indeed, the latter developed his concept of racial capitalism from the Mediterranean, where the main routes and systems of exploitation in plantations were concentrated (Miles Ogborn, 2023). Furthermore, C. Hawthorne explains that contemporary literature about the concept of Black Mediterranean is no longer just a condition that has been superseded by North Atlantic regimes of racial capitalism, but is a living place where a continuous reproduction of racism, resistance and Black subjectivities takes place (Hawthorne, 2022). To date, scholars such as Alessandra di Maio believe that the Black Mediterranean is no longer just a precondition of modern racial capitalism, but reproduces at the intersection of anti-Neri violence and the liberation struggles of Blacks in the Mediterranean (Hawthorne, 2022). Considering the colonial heritage of the Black Mediterranean, an effort is needed to decolonize this cultural system (without forgetting the past), which must also be intersectional since it considers the intersection of multiple factors in Black subjectivities. In fact, protagonists of the practices of decolonization embody the intersectionality, especially the female diasporic subjects, whose protagonism must be emphasized. Consequently, the decolonial practices to be implemented must consider the intersectionality of struggles and structural aspects to be countered. It should be borne in mind that the academic world, a privileged environment, is not the main place of production of knowledge linked to the Black Mediterranean. Several female Black Italian writers, and also Black documentarists, have articulated in artistic form analysis of Blackness through the paradigm in countertrend of the Mediterranean. These are effective examples that show how to connect Italy to a large Black diaspora without considering the Atlantic as the only generator of Black diasporic cultures (Hawthorne, 2022, 257, 258, trad. M. Moïse). The concept of the Black Mediterranean is therefore linked to many issues that inform the decolonial approach to be adopted.

G. Proglío explains the decolonization of the Mediterranean is “an epistemological practice of border dismantling and scrutiny of the ways in which powers overlap and intertwine. [...] Means thinking of the Mediterranean as a space of investigation beyond its geographical boundaries” (Gabriele Proglío, 2016, xii). A process of cultural deconstruction, in a decolonial and intersectional perspective is therefore fundamental, because without it not only are the structures of power and the practices connected to

them preserved, but are also replicated. This is the theoretical approach that this research wants to adopt, to make a contribution to the process of decolonization of knowledge, but not only in academia.

In conclusion, this chapter has begun by outlining the theoretical approach to intersectionality, focusing on its origins and development as a theory and process at the sociological level. This framework was necessary to then go on to identify the intersections of gender, class, ableism, race and religion in the practice of diasporic experiences, to understand how these various power dynamics operate in the diasporas. Among the diasporic subjects, I decided to focus on roles and experiences of diasporic women, keeping in mind the intersectional framework (with its various intersections) in which they are embedded. From the review of the literature on the role of women in the diasporas in general, it emerged that these women, although often still represented as passive subjects, are able to activate their agency by playing various and necessary roles in the diasporas.

CHAPTER 4

A decolonial interpretation of gender in the African diasporas: a focus on Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali diasporas

This chapter aims to outline the phenomenon of diasporas from a female and decolonial perspective, to provide the necessary contextualization before proceeding with the research part. To understand what is meant by a decolonial approach and its difference from post-colonialism, the work of Gurminder K. Bhambra is particularly relevant:

Decoloniality similarly emerged from the work of diasporic scholars from South America and, interlocutors—for the most part, refers back to those locations and their imperial again, primarily to Europe although addressing a much longer time frame. Whereas postcolonialism refers mainly to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, decoloniality starts with the earlier European incursions upon the lands that came to be known as the Americas from the fifteenth century onwards. Postcolonial and decolonial arguments have been most successful in their challenge to the insularity of historical narratives and historiographical traditions emanating from Europe (Bhambra, 2014, 115).

Therefore, the chapter starts from a broader presentation of the various roles of women in the diasporas from a decolonial perspective, and then progressively circumscribes the phenomenon to the women of the African diasporas, and later of the Horn of Africa. Specifically, paragraph 4.1 gives a brief overview of what it means to adopt a gender perspective in diasporas analysis, exemplifying it with a description of the main activities of diasporas women. Paragraph 4.2 narrows the focus of the

phenomenon, concentrating on the activities of women of the African diaspora from a decolonial perspective, linking them to the distinction between practical and intellectual activism. The meanings of these two types of activism and their different declinations are then explained, highlighting the connection between them. Finally, paragraph 4.3 reaches the heart of the phenomenon, presenting the main studies on women of the Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali diasporas with a focus on Italy and Finland. Their main contributions and activities within the various diasporas are emphasized, and to better understand the importance of their contribution and of the organizations they founded, a synthetic and decolonial overview of the situation of women in these three countries is made. In the course of the chapter, through these three paragraphs heterogeneity and similarities emerge at the same time both among women of the various diasporas, and among women specifically of the Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali diasporas. A union in diversity that leads to different forms of mobilization is to be investigated and deepened.

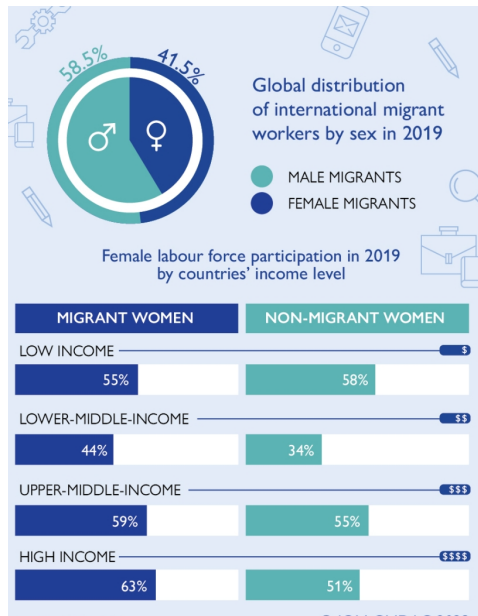
4.1 The role and activities of women in diasporas: a review of studies

Women are a central component in international migration and diasporas, and constitute almost half of all international migrants (Ruby Dhar, 2010). According to the studies that have been conducted, in the 1960s and 70s only men were considered active migrants, while women were seen as passive subjects who accompanied men with their children. In the 1980s, not much changed in the literature on migration, which continued to focus mainly on men. The only marginal change concerned a greater consideration of the gender dimension, but mainly regarding the different role of the sexes in the migration path (Dhar, 2010). In particular, it was S. Castles and M. J. Miller who highlighted the new century, called *The Age of Migration*, as being characterized, among other aspects, by women's prominence in migration. But in reality women are already present before, although their presence has been undervalued (Stephen Castles, Mark J. Miller, 2013).

In the 1980s and 1990s, developments in feminist theory contributed to the focus on gender in migration theory. It should be pointed out that while “sex” is understood as a biological product of chromosomal structures, gender is socially constructed. “In feminist theory, gender is seen as a matrix of identities, behaviors, and power relationships that are constructed by the culture of a society in accordance with sex” (Monica Boyd, Elizabeth Grieco, 2003). Gender is thus considered an organizational element underlying migration and related processes, such as the preservation of a link with the country of origin and the contemplation of a possible return. In this context, a *turning-point* was also the United Nations’ paradigm shift from *Women in Development* to *Gender and Development* in the ‘80s (Carol Miller, Shahra Razavi, 1995), which progressively shifted the perspective from biological to social distinctions between women and men. Women began to be seen as equal partners in the economy and in development.

The importance of women in diasporas and international migration concerns, in fact, not only their numerical growth, but also their contributions to the social and economic life of the countries of arrival and departure. In this respect, there are significant geographical differences: in 2019, women made up more than 50% of all migrant workers in Northern, Western and Southern Europe; but less than 20% in the United Arab Emirates (ILO, 2021). Although migrant women constituted a larger labour force than migrant men, in many states the participation of migrant women in the labour force was higher than that of non-migrant women.

Fig. 2 - Global distribution of international migrant employees by sex



Source: ILO, 2021

As can be seen from the graph, the highest participation gap, with twelve percentage points difference between migrant and non-migrant women, was recorded in high-income countries. These are followed by lower middle-income countries, which show a participation gap of ten percentage points. (ILO, 2021). Moreover, there is a high number of undocumented female workers, some of whom are exploited in employment and also suffer racist and sexual discrimination in the workplace (Eleonore Kofman et al., 2000). The data relate to women defined as “migrant women”, and it should be noted that all diasporic women are migrants, but not all migrant women are also diasporic. Often the expression “migrant women” is used in a comprehensive way, including those who economically support the country of origin and have exchanges with it.

Following this overview, it is necessary to narrow the focus on the discourse of gendering the diaspora. This issue can be analyzed at two levels: a first level considers the ways in which women and men in the diaspora participate in social relations in the country of establishment, in their own “diasporic communities” and in the transnational networks of diasporas; a second level consists of investigating how gender relations determine the positionalities of the groups themselves, focusing on the differences within the groups and the distinct trajectories and places (Anthias, 1998). An example to

better understand the two levels of analysis concerns, with reference to the first level, some research has been carried out on migrant women and their descendants in employment within national labour markets (Annie Phizacklea 1983, Sallie Westwood, Parminde Bhachu 1988). This research points to the peculiar labour market experiences of women from diasporas compared to men, and investigates the interactions between ethnicity, gender and racialisation in this area. With reference to the second level, instead, research investigates, for example, the ways in which gender relations give a group the opportunity to occupy certain economic niches or to selectively reproduce (Clifford, 1994) the material and cultural relations in which it lives.

Within this discourse of gendering the diaspora, the focus will be specifically on women in diasporas, without dwelling on the contribution of diasporic women to peace and war processes, as this was thematically addressed in Chapter 2. First of all, it should be pointed out that the roles of women vary in the numerous existing diasporas (Jewish, Palestinian, African, Caribbean, Kurdish, Asian, etc.), but in almost, if not all of them, women have played active roles in different spheres. What will be presented here will therefore be a review of studies, done in a cross-sectional manner without going into the specifics of each diaspora, but reporting at most a few illustrative cases. Areas of both diaspora and transnationalism will be considered, concerning the women's roles, as often intertwined (taking into account the differences set out in paragraph 2 of Chapter 1). It should be noted that gender-related research in diaspora and transnational studies, which does not cover spaces typically considered feminine, such as domestic spaces, is limited.

What is most represented is that men often have a public role and in formal and institutionalised transnational networks, which keep contacts with actors in the country of origin. Instead, women seem to play a key role only in informal networks and organisations related to family and friends, struggling to get out of the private sphere (Liza Mügge, 2013). In reality, this is a limited representation. In 2007, following a seminar organized by the European Women's Lobby (EWL) that brought together women leaders from different migrant communities in Europe, who spoke for themselves, the European Migrant Women's Movement was born. It is a transnational migrant network that has set itself three objectives:

- bringing the issues of women with a migrant background to light, in order to influence political decisions at a European and national level (Jane Freedman, 2008);
- supporting migrant women by sharing information and mutual aid;
- making visible and enhancing what migrant women do in societies

Furthermore, there are different women's transnational groups which organize activities beyond ethnic divisions and in defence of human rights, such as (F. Anthias, 2020): *Women Wage Peace* in Israel/Palestine (largest grassroots peace movement in Israel)¹³; AWMR *Association of Women of the Mediterranean Region* (an association of women who promote cooperation in the region, transcending cultural, racial, social, economic, sexual, national, ethnic, religious, political and all other barriers)¹⁴; WIDE *Women in Development Europe*¹⁵; DAWN *Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era* (a transnational feminist network of researchers, activists and scholars from the Global South, who work for gender, economic, and ecological justice, as well as for democratic development)¹⁶.

4.2 Women of the African diaspora: practical and intellectual activism

After an overview of women's roles in diasporas, we narrow the focus to women in the African diaspora. It should be noted that the African diaspora, which was introduced in Chapter 1, is internally heterogeneous and comprises a variety of diasporas related to the different states of the continent. It is difficult to estimate the numerical extent of the African diaspora, due to incomplete data and conceptual differences between migrants

¹³ [Women Wage Peace - Women Wage Peace](#)

¹⁴ [Association of Women of the Mediterranean Region | UIA Yearbook Profile | Union of International Associations](#)

¹⁵ "WIDE+ is a European network of associations and activists that fights for women's rights, as part of a larger struggle for social justice, sustainable livelihoods and human rights. We advocate changing European policies that affect people in and outside of Europe. WIDE+ promotes inclusive and intersectional feminist movement building in Europe, in solidarity with feminists in the global South." [WIDE+ is a European feminist network of women's rights advocates, women's rights organizations and development NGOs. \(wideplus.org\)](#)

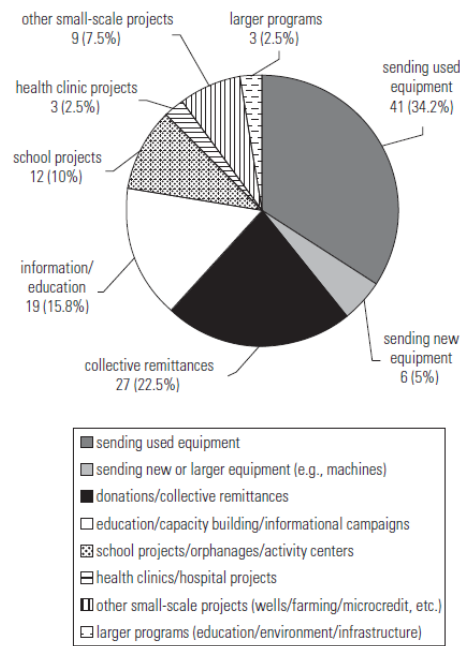
¹⁶ [DAWN – Feminists Transforming a Fierce World \(dawnnet.org\)](#)

and diasporas. With reference to the African diaspora, a more restrictive and convenient definition of diaspora as “foreign-born population” is usually adopted. According to the World Bank, the total number of international migrants from Sub-Saharan Africa in 2015 is 18,676,830 (most recent data)¹⁷. In particular, 25,291 from Somalia, 1,072,949 from Ethiopia and 15,941 from Eritrea. It should also be pointed out that African diasporas living within the African continent comprise more than 14 million people (almost half of the total number of African diasporas), as the first destinations of African diasporas are other African states (Sonia Plaza, Dilip Ratha, 2011).

Here, a review will be made of the literature that valorises the general role of women in the African diaspora at the level of activism. It is possible to distinguish between an activism of these diasporic women on a more practical level (political, social, etc.) and an activism on a more intellectual level, but without falling into the error of dichotomising. It should be pointed out that intellectual activism has already been defined in section 2.2, but here it will be explored in depth and contextualized outside the realm of war and peace, to explore its wider application. At the level of more field activism, the contribution of women in the African diaspora has been central first to support development, struggles for independence, and the creation of democratic and peaceful societies in Africa. Before delving specifically into the roles of these women, it is useful to provide an overview of the type of development interventions of African diaspora associations in favour of the various African states. The following chart (Plaza, Ratha, 2011) summarizes the main types of development activities carried out by members of the African diaspora:

Fig. 3 - Main types of development activities by African diaspora’s members

¹⁷ [International migrant stock, total - Sub-Saharan Africa | Data \(worldbank.org\)](https://data.worldbank.org/SH.UY.CD?locations=SS)



Source: Authors' calculations based on survey.
 Note: Since some associations are (or have been) involved in several different types of development activities, the activities total 120. This figure, however, does not indicate the volume of the activities undertaken by the associations.

Source: Sonia Plaza and Dilip Ratha, 2011, 152.

From the graph you can see how, among the African development initiatives, in the first place there is the sending of used equipment (34.4%), in the second place collective remittances (22.5%) and in the third place educational projects (15.8%). The lowest percentage among the types of development activities is represented by clinical health projects (2.5%) equal to larger projects in general (2.5%), due to the complexity of their management. There are several internationally recognised African diaspora co-development initiatives, such as the United Nations Digital Diaspora Network, founded in 2003 for the African continent. At a more political level, the United Nations Development Fund for Women has made an appeal to mobilize the resources of the diaspora to support the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

However, one of the problems and criticisms leveled at co-development (understood in the classical sense as co-financing diaspora projects, and often abbreviated as “development”) in the African diaspora concerns the fact that support is often mainly targeted at elites in Africa (Plaza, Ratha, 2011). Furthermore, making members of diasporas protagonists in the co-development process often remains idealistic, because not all of them have management skills. Development and migration processes can only

bring benefits for all if they include constant dialogue between members of the diaspora and other actors involved. Among the strategies, diaspora dialogues, which can be informal or formal, have become fundamental because they allow “to create communication channels and links, and to offer a friendly platform for mutually beneficial interactions among diaspora members, governments, and other stakeholders” (Ndioro Ndiaye, Susanne Melde, and Rougui Ndiaye-Coïc, 2011, 234).

To ensure dialogue between governments and diaspora members, databases have also been set up which contain information on the skills and professional qualifications of diaspora members living in North America, Europe and the Global South who want to contribute to development projects. Among these, some databases specifically regard members of the African diaspora, particularly women: there are many skilled and qualified women who can contribute to African development. This contribution is made mainly through financial remittances and social remittances. The former increase the direct participation of all women in development processes in their states; the latter consist of the exchange of knowledge, skills and competences between women in the African diaspora and those living in Africa, with the aim of improving the socio-economic, health and gender equality status of women. The women in Africa, in fact, are more often victims of poverty and gender discrimination than men (Amira Awad Osman, 2007). The sharing of information took place both individually and with women’s organizations, between women in the African diaspora and women living in Africa; as well as through the planning of activities to counter patriarchy and ideological bias. “These exchanges have resulted in creating spaces for developing the advocacy capacities of women organizations/individuals, providing platforms for amplifying the struggles for women across the continent and in the Diaspora” (Amanda Coffie, 2020, 14).

The African diaspora also played a central role in the resistance to colonialism and its direct involvement began with the various struggles for independence from Western rule, directly and indirectly supporting various women and women’s organizations in different African states. In particular, African diasporic women played a central role in supporting women’s empowerment and also in the emergence of Pan-Africanism. “For example, the Diasporic connections between Mrs. E.V. Kinloch, a South African woman, and Henry Sylvestre Williams, an Afro-Trinidadian lawyer, resulted in the

formation of the African Association in London in 1889 by Williams, who first coined the term “Pan-African” in the early 1900s (Reddock 2007, p.257)” (Amanda Coffie, 2020, 14). Another example is that of Madie Hall, who from the African diaspora in the United States of America contributed personally to the development of women’s organizations in South Africa and supported South African women during the struggle for independence. In addition to the support of women left in Africa, the involvement of the African diaspora makes it possible to monitor the democratization process of the government and to ensure respect for human rights.

The activism of women in the African diaspora in support of independence processes, as well as their activism in development processes, is linked to the political and social sphere. Next to this kind of activism towards the land of origin, there is also the political, social and intellectual activism of these women. As far as *political activism* is concerned, this is mainly related to Black feminism in the African diaspora that developed in the United States since the Civil War to obtain civil and political rights, with a great expansion in the second wave of the 1960s and 1970s. During this period, hundreds of African-American women organized themselves both locally, nationally and transnationally, in institutions and at grassroots level; some of the most famous organizations include the Black Women’s Liberation Group (BWLG) and The Third World Women’s Alliance. Afro-descendant women activists held several protests and strikes in the United States for the recognition of Black women’s rights in various areas, such as healthcare, housing, employment (Benita Roth, 2003).

In addition to political activism, they also developed more intellectual activism, which will be explored later. Afro-descendant women actively participated in all matters of American public life to ensure the development of an autonomous Black community by organizing themselves politically. The activism of women of the African diaspora in the United States became exemplary throughout the world, inspiring Black feminist movements in many European states. In Italy, for example, in May 2020, following the assassination of George Floyd in the USA, the Black Lives Matter movement began to take shape, which also increased the political and social activities of Afro-descendant women. “Italian Black women are more active and stronger than Italian Black men. This is not a 'feminist statement', it is a fact! Italian Black women expose themselves more courageously and actively work to support their community. In a profoundly male

chauvinist and white country, Black women raise their voices and strategically seek to enter those spaces that are not easily accessible to women in general” (Abril K. Muvumbi, 2023, 32S). Several women descendants of the African diaspora have in fact created associations/movements for social promotion and/or political mobilisation in Italy, to try to make their voices heard and bring about changes in political and social norms. Some of them have also managed to enter the Italian political scene.

In relation to activism, central has been the role of digital platforms (Francesca Sobande, 2020) which have become the means for political and social activism and which also foster the creation of transnational support networks. In Italy, for instance, over the past decade, social media have been increasingly used by Afro-descendant women activists (and not only) to raise awareness on issues that are usually overlooked in mainstream communication. As Giulia Fabbri explains, social media activism constitutes an important space of representation for Black women, who can feel visible by counteracting under-representation in the public space. Digital platforms become powerful tools for exercising intersectional activism, according to new strategies and languages. A significant example is the campaign *#SayHerName*, that counteracts the intersectional invisibilization of Black women in the US by spreading awareness about the stories of women who have been killed or have been subjected to police violence. Additionally, as Camilla Hawthorne (2019) explains, from 2010 onwards several young Afro-descendant Italians became active on social networks, organizing initiatives and cultural debates on pressing issues such as citizenship and structural racism. This social media activism is transversal: it is not only characteristic of political and social activists, but also of a more cultural activism. Let us now deal with the second type of activism of which women in the African diaspora are protagonists: so-called intellectual activism. As will be seen, this activism is often the guide and inspiration for more practical and militant activism. Sociologist Patricia Hill Collins, who calls herself an intellectual activist, explains that there are two main forms of intellectual activism. “One form of intellectual activism aims to speak the truth to power [...] On a metaphorical level, speaking the truth to power invokes images of changing the very foundations of social hierarchy where the less powerful take on the ideas and practices of the powerful, often armed solely with their ideas” (Collins, 2012, 10). Much of P. H. Collins’ academic

production (e.g., *Fighting Words: Black Women and the Search for Justice* of 1998) is about the truth of power, in order to provide alternative analyses of social injustices by addressing the scholarly public. The second form of intellectual activism mentioned by P. H. Collins “aims to speak the truth directly to the people. In contrast to directing energy to those in power, a focus that inadvertently bolsters the belief that elites are the only social actors who count, those who speak the truth to the people talk directly to the masses” (Collins, 2012, 10).

To summarize, while the first type of intellectual activism addresses the entities that symbolize power, the second type addresses people directly. A significant example of this second form of intellectual activism is the poem *Speak the Truth to the People* by the African-American poet Mari Evans, which is about the political and social protests of the Black Power and Civil Rights movements of the 1960s and 70s. Mari Evans’ poetic production is inspired by the Black Arts Movement and aims to speak the truth about issues as varied as militarism, racism, discrimination, sexism, homophobia and class exploitation. She wants to raise awareness of the fact that ordinary people need real ideas and proposals to accompany them in their daily lives. In general, her production can be seen as exemplifying the traditions of intellectual activism, as it speaks of the many ways in which people offer the power of their ideas in the service of social justice issues. The main themes of intellectual activism, which P. H. Collins dealt with in the course of her activism, can be summarized as follows: Black feminism and its focus on the intersection of power systems; Black academic production, with the sociology of knowledge and its analysis of power relations; critical education, i.e. the need to develop a better understanding of teaching and learning; American racial politics as a way to better understand social hierarchies in general; and the development of self-reflexivity within intellectual activism itself (Collins, 2012). These issues are also related to the so-called Afrocentric concept of humanism; according to Kwame Gyekye (1987/1990), the humanist doctrine considers human dignity and needs to be of central importance. Many female intellectual activists in the African diaspora embody the principles of this humanism in their models of discourse and activism, so much so that their activism (not only intellectual) is also referred to as “humanizing activism”. In this regard, Valeria G. Harvell states:

Drawing connections between the humanistic principles articulated by many Afrocentric scholars and Black women's humanizing sociopolitical activities, [...] African American women have been the most ardent promoters, defenders, and practitioners of the humanistic vision within the Black community (Collins, 1990, p. 37). Their struggles provide us with the "richest lessons" and represent the "best instructional models" of that humanistic vision actualized, past or present, in the liberation movement (Valeria G. Harvell, 2010, 1053).

Afro-descendant women's activism for liberation from physical and intellectual oppression was not limited to the Black community, but as Anna Julia Cooper stated, African-American women believed that the rights of all human beings were sacred, regardless of gender, race, origin or socioeconomic status. Another dimension of Black women's intellectual activism is constituted by the literary and artistic production by women of the African diaspora. The literary production of women of the African diaspora is widespread in many states, including the United States, Italy, northern European states, etc., united by the fact that language and the narrative sphere in general can be a political and social tool for generating agency. "Black diaspora women writers deploy storytelling, critical theorizing, and remembrance practices to comprehend, resist, transform, and heal from patriarchy, racism, colonization. Writing, language, and the spoken words are creative, political, and intellectual weapons that Black diaspora women use to fight back against their assumed and constructed invisibility, powerlessness, and voicelessness" (Anh Hua, 2012, 30.) Diasporic literature thus becomes a site of resistance and engagement in activism for social change. African diaspora writers, for instance, use stories (semi-realistic or autobiographical) that, by attributing meaning to their own experiential memories through contextualized histories, achieve narrative empowerment especially for those subjects who are in continuous struggle against various forms of oppression. The value of African and even Black diaspora literature in general (female) is both individual and collective, as it creates a transnational cultural circuit that allows Black diaspora women to elaborate a feminist diasporic imaginary. In Italy we have for example the writings of women from the African diaspora, whose stories insist on the need to broaden the meaning of being Italian, considering that the racialisation experiences of Black people in Italy are often

invisible. They are a substantial number, including to name a few Djarah Kan, Igiaba Scego, Ubah Cristina Ali Farah, Espérance Hakuzwimana Ripanti, Gabriella Ghermandi. The works of these and other female writers from the African diaspora reflect, in different ways, on how institutionalized techniques of power, such as checkpoints, migration control and residence permits, control the freedom of movement and the lives of Afro-descendants in Italy (Christopher Ian Foster, 2015).

In summary, the literature of the African diaspora has spread widely in the northern European states, where various diasporic female writers (and also male) have challenged Western literary forms, combining Nordic and African cultural and poetic traditions. In Sweden, for instance, Lovette Jallow is well known; in Great Britain there is for example Nadifa Mohamed; in France Fatou Diome; who have different origins within the African diaspora and different styles, but a common goal. In conclusion, in outlining the forms of practical and intellectual activism of women in the African diaspora, it emerged how these two different types of activism are not separate, but communicate with each other; so much so that in many cases, some women are both intellectual, political and social activists. Intellectual activism, as was explained, drives the various dimensions of activism in the field, forming its epistemological basis.

4.3 Studies concerning women of Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali diasporas: a focus on Italy and Finland

Within the African diaspora, several diasporas can clearly be distinguished, including the Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali diasporas that are part of the Horn of Africa diasporas. These three diasporas have created diasporic organizations that are active in various countries around the world on a social, political, and cultural level, including towards their countries of origin. In this paragraph, the focus narrows and concentrates on the activities and organizations created by the women of these three diasporas, adopting a female perspective. An overview of the literature on the main forms of mobilization of women from these three diasporas around the world is therefore presented here.

Particularly significant is the research made by Amira Awad Osman, which provides an overview of these women's forms of mobilization. While highlighting the various obstacles that the women of the diasporas in question had to go through, this author draws attention to their responsive and constructive capacity (Osman, 2007).

Women from the Horn in Diaspora, notably, women asylum seekers and refugees face many problems such as loneliness, racism and isolation. However, women have come together to challenge these obstacles and to empower themselves. They have also been able to make enormous contributions to development, conflict resolutions and peace building in their countries of origin (Osman, 2007, 34).

Related to this, H. Moussa in her book delves into the lived experiences of Ethiopian and Eritrean diaspora women who have come to Canada. The focus is on the interpretation attributed by these women to what they experienced, emphasizing the heterogeneity present among women of the same diaspora, even in outlining future paths (Helene Moussa, 1993).

In describing the women of the Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali diasporas as powerful and resilient actors, A. A. Osman identifies several areas of intervention in which these women are protagonists. First, the creation of diasporic women's organisations, such as *Nuba Mountains Women Group* in London, *Southern Sudanese Women Group* in London, and *Sudanese Women's Group* in Brighton (Osman, 2007). Here are also mentioned some Sudanese organizations, as the Sudanese diaspora was another significant diaspora from the Horn of Africa, although it is not thematised in my research. These organizations are active in various fields, including social initiatives, defense of women's rights and gender discrimination, and peacebuilding activities. A second key area in which Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali women are active is in changing gender relations in the diaspora, in many cases challenging certain cultural norms in their country of origin. In many European states, these women have in fact created their own identity as independent women, often also economically. To give examples, in London, women from the Ethiopian and Eritrean diasporas have started small businesses such as restaurants; while in Sweden, many Somali women have created community organizations and women's capacity building programmes (Osman,

2007). To better understand the relevance of this contribution, it is necessary to digress briefly into the status and level of participation of women in the three states of Ethiopia, Eritrea and Somalia. According to research by the Agency for Peacebuilding, among the three countries, Eritrea is the worst off in terms of women's rights and level of participation. "The government is repressive in all aspects of life and while there is no specific bias against women, these are also victims of SGBV and several traditional harmful practices (THPs), like FGM/C. There is at present no space for civil society to work in the country" (Bernardo Monzani, Bernardo Venturi, Giulia Pasquinelli, 2016, 8).

Somalia is in a slightly better situation than that of Eritrea, with a general marginalization and disempowerment of women and girls. The only positive note concerns the growth of women's rights movements and organizations. Finally, in Ethiopia, although women are still victims of violence, for example through the practices of female genital mutilation and forced marriages, several laws have been adopted in defense of women. The latter began to be elected to national and local authorities. However, there is still work to be done to improve the situation: "women and girls also have fewer economic and educational opportunities than men, although indicators in this respect have significantly improved over the last 15 years" (Monzani, Venturi, Pasquinelli, 2016, 9). In this regard, a study by Gemma Burgess highlights the presence of forms of female activism in Ethiopia, which constitute a little-known story. With the transition to a more democratic political regime, new spaces for women's activism have been created that have led to the creation of organizations, the most famous of which is the civil society organization the *Ethiopian Women Lawyer's Association* (EWLA), aimed to raise awareness of women's rights (Gemma Burgess, 2013). The delineation of the female condition in the states of origin/descent is significant to have a complete picture of the women of these three diasporas and to better understand their mobilization.

A third fundamental contribution by the women of these three diasporas concerns the sending of financial remittances, which are fundamental to support their families and communities. Another key area in which these women have become very active is engagement to contribute to peacebuilding. "Women of the Horn of Africa have realized the heavy cost of armed conflicts. In exile they have mobilized and organized

themselves to promote conflict resolution and peace building and formed their own peace building organizations” (Osman, 2007, 33). Indeed, there are several associations and organizations that were founded by women of these three diasporas. Some examples are associations born from the collaboration of women from these various diasporas, such as ex. *Women in Development Network and Peace* (ADIR) in Milan and *Centro Alma Mater* in Turin. There are also transnational networks or associations for peace promotion, such as IIDA-Italy, created by Somali women and based in Turin; or the reference network for the Somali diaspora in Europe, namely the *Somali Women's Diaspora Network*, which has performances in various countries, including Finland, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands (Matteo Guglielmo, Petra Mezzetti, et. al., 2010, 20).

Finally, an area in which women from all three of these diasporas are active is that of writing, which they define in many cases as “diasporic”. This diasporic literature provides a female decolonial interpretation of the Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali diasporas from the perspective of women who experienced it directly or indirectly through their families. International writers such as Maaza Mengiste, of Ethiopian origin and living in New York, Ribka Sibhatu of Eritrean origin and living in Rome, Igiaba Scego of Somali origin who now lives in England, Yirgalem Fisseha Mebrahtu, of Eritrean origin, who now lives in Germany and is also a poet and journalist, reinterpreted the diaspora from a female perspective. Regarding North Europe, the case of Finland is interesting, where a literature of the African diaspora has developed with anthologies that realize bell hooks’ concept of talking back, i.e., “a liberating act by which oppressed, or otherwise marginalized minorities move from mere objects to subjects, expressing their perspectives vis-à-vis the power and conceptions of the majority” (bell hooks, 1989, 9). There are, for example, the following anthologies: *Kotona Suomessa (At Home in Finland)*, *Suomalaisia (Finns)*, *Kuuntele minua! (Listen to me!)*, *Nimeni ei ole pakolainen (Refugee is not my name)*; as well as an anthology of poems collected and written by sixteen women from the Somali diaspora, living in Finland (A. Rastas, 2014). This last one is intended for a Finnish, Swedish and Somali audience, as it has a title in three languages (*Sagaal Dayrood - Nio höstregn - Yhdeksän syyssadetta*, Nine Autumn Rains 2000), and contains various literary genres, including

traditional poems. The latter are usually written in reaction to certain events and also convey political messages (Eila Rantonen, 2009).

It should be made clear that these different areas in which women from these three diasporas are protagonists are in some cases coexistent, as some are active in more than one sector. In this section, a brief overview has been given of women from the Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali diaspora, who have been presented by illustrating the main areas in which they are active. This choice was determined by the fact that, by outlining their areas of activity, it is possible to understand their process of subjectivation and identity construction.

4.3.1 Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali diasporas in Italy: between history and gender

Since the research focuses on women related to the Ethiopian, Eritrean or Somali diaspora, it is necessary to describe the connection of these diasporas from the Horn of Africa with Italy. It is necessary to take a step back in history to understand the arrival of these three diasporas in Italy, which are distinct but interconnected. The socio-historical roots go back to the experience of Italian colonialism in Ethiopia, Eritrea and Somalia (but also in Libya, Albania and the Aegean Islands). Camilla Hawthorne in her book *Contesting Race and Citizenship: Youth Politics in the Black Mediterranean*, translated into Italian by Marie Moïse, states that Italy was a colonial power from 1869, long before fascism, until 1943 (Hawthorne, 2022). One of the main historians who shed light on the violence of Italian colonialism is Angelo Del Boca, with several books including *Italiani brava gente? Un mito duro a morire* (2020).

The first Italian conquests in Africa date back to the late 19th century, with the control of the African ports of Assab and Massawa. Following the partition of African states among European powers (between 1881 and 1914), Italy gained control of Somalia and Eritrea. With the 1935-36 war Italy conquered Ethiopia, which was united with Eritrea and Somalia to form Italian East Africa. On this occasion Vittorio Emanuele III assumed the imperial title of king of Ethiopia and the birth of the Italian Empire was officially proclaimed. Italian colonial rule ended after the fall of Fascism with the peace treaty of 1947, which imposed the loss of all the Italian colonies. Only Somalia was assigned in 1950 to the newly formed Italian Republic under trusteeship,

to prepare it for independence. This administration ended in 1960 with Somali independence, thus sanctioning the end of the Italian colonial era. The Italian colonial period in Ethiopia, Eritrea and Somalia was characterized by violence on many levels: physical, social, political and cultural (Hawthorne, 2022).

Emblematic was the repressive Italian policy in Ethiopia, where the appointment of General Rodolfo Graziani as viceroy of Ethiopia resulted in the establishment of a very repressive regime towards the local population. In 1937, one of the greatest massacres of Italian colonialism, known as the massacre of Addis Ababa, was carried out as revenge for the assassination of R. Graziani, in which Ethiopian civilians were massacred (Paolo Borruso, 2020). Italian colonial rule also left traces in Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali architecture, leaving an indelible mark even in the aesthetics of some cities. Not only that: it also committed thefts, including the import of the Axum Stele to Rome in 1937, which was only returned to Ethiopia in 2005. In addition, a specific focus is on the treatment of Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali women during colonialism. In the early stages of Italian colonialism (1890-1922), liberal governments allowed more or less formalized unions between Italian colonists and local women (Fiori Berhane, Diego Maria Malara, 2020).

The history of these diasporas intersects with the dimension of gender: the women of these areas have in fact suffered a colonial representation, which they are actively trying to decolonise in the present. The Italians introduced *madamato*, whereby women who contracted with Italian families to perform domestic services also became the *madamas* of their husbands. *Madamato* was introduced first in the Eritrean colonies, and then throughout Italian East Africa.

Madama. This term referred to women who would temporarily live with Italian men “performing domestic and sexual services and being rewarded in kind and/or money”. *Madamato* was apparently built on an existing form of temporary marriage in Eritrea known as *demos* consisting of an Eritrean woman, normally a Christian Coptic, who “commits herself, directly or through her family, to live in conjugal union with a man, for a given length of time, and for the payment of a given sum”. According to Eritrean customary norms, in cases of children born within this context, the father had to provide economic support to his partner and their offspring (Angelica Pesarini, 2020, 26).

The problem was that the Italians altered the local laws by not recognising the birth of any children and, in general, not recognising equal rights for women involved in the *madamato*. The situation was further complicated by the Fascist regime, which forbade sexual relations between Italians and “other races” under the racial laws of 1937; and, in 1940, it was forbidden for children born to mixed couples to acquire Italian citizenship. “Today, similar legal anxieties permeate the sclerotic debates about the acquisition of citizenship for the children of non-European nationals born on Italian soil (*ius soli*)” (Berhane, Malara, 2020, 6). However, we should not think of Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali women exclusively as victims. In fact, these women have been in many cases organizers of the colonial resistance in the African states and of the contrast to racism, both in the colonial period and in the subsequent diasporas. The female component was the engine of diasporas.

From the 1960s, diasporas began from the former Italian colonies in the Horn of Africa, largely made up of women recruited by Catholic charities to work as domestic workers in Italian white families (Wendy A. Pojmann, 2006). As Gabriele Proglorio explains, the people interviewed in his research state that the area known as the *Black Mediterranean* begins in Ethiopia, Eritrea and Somalia. Indeed, from the *Black Mediterranean*, numerous routes to Europe depart, in each of which “multiple lines intersect, defined by the availability, or lack, of opportunities on the basis of gender, race and class, religious and ethnic identity, age, and employment status” (Gabriele Proglorio, 2020, 91). These diasporas also played a central role in the transformation of urban spaces in Italy, immediately showing themselves to be active subjects: “in Turin and other Italian cities such as Bologna and Rome, people from the Horn of Africa and West Africa have transformed vacant municipal buildings into living quarters” (Heather Merrill, 2018, 19).

Going into the specifics of the three diasporas, in the case of Ethiopian and Eritrean diasporas, two diasporic flows into Italy can be identified, a first in the 1960s/70s and a second flow in the 1990s. With regard to the Eritrean diaspora, one of the main research projects was that of Sabrina Marchetti, who sheds light on the Eritrean female diaspora of domestic workers who arrived in Italy in the 1960s and 1970s to work for Roman families. Through the stories of these women, the history of the Eritrean diaspora in

Italy is reconstructed, and their connection to the colonial past (Sabrina Marchetti, 2011). Alongside the factor of Italian colonialism, however, these diasporas are also connected to the outbreak of internal wars. In 1961 the Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie, after returning to Ethiopia, annexed Eritrea. Thus began the war of liberation of Eritrea against Ethiopia, in which women were also in the forefront fighting for independence. Many were part of the Eritrean Liberation Front and supported the national cause even in the diaspora. Alongside the diasporic flows for contacts and domestic work, these flows from Ethiopia and Eritrea are also due to war. However, these diasporas are not only directed in Italy, but also in several countries of Northern Europe where living conditions were better (Valentina Fusari, 2020).

With regard to the Somali diaspora, it is possible to distinguish three main flows into Italy: the 1950s, when Somalia was under the government of AFIS (Italy's trusteeship in Somalia)¹⁸; the 1970s, due to the dictatorship of Siad Barre; and from the 1990s onwards, following the outbreak of civil war. The first two flows of Somali diaspora are almost exclusively towards Italy. The third diasporic flow instead takes on a more extensive character, with many destinations in Northern Europe (primarily Sweden, Finland and England) (Duraccio, 2020). Moreover, an aspect that characterizes the Somali diaspora concerns the presence of tensions and clashes between clans, which is something that the diaspora drags along as it moves to various states around the world (Joakim Gundel, 2002). Also in the case of the Somali diaspora, the first two flows saw a large presence of women for contacts with Italian families or domestic help. A decisive factor that determined the choice of Italy as the destination of the three diasporas was also knowledge of the Italian language. In fact, the Italian colonial regime imposed the Italian language as the official language in all the colonies, building schools and cultural institutions that promoted the Italian cultural system (Caterina Duraccio, 2020). After contextualizing at the historical level these three diasporas in connection with Italy, the life of these three diasporas in Italian society will now be deepened.

¹⁸ "That of AFIS (Administration Trusteeship of Italy in Somalia), is a completely unknown and obscured attempt. In the 1950s the United Nations Organisation granted Italy political government and economic control over Somalia. In theory, the task of AFIS is to transform the East African country into a democratic and independent state. The choice to entrust the administration to former colonists is not very common in processes of decolonisation and has given rise to a new phase of Italian colonialism in Somalia" (Duraccio, 2020, 204).

Making a switch on the situation of these diasporas in the present, according to Istat data (Istat, 2020), people with an Ethiopian, Eritrean or Somali background are present in Italy as shown in the table below:

Table 1 - Population of Somali, Ethiopian, Eritrean Citizenship in Italy, at 31 December 2022

Citizenship	Men	Women	Total
Somalia	7 189	2 160	9 349
Ethiopia	2 638	3 786	6 424
Eritrea	3 381	3 023	6 404

Source: prepared by the author on ISTAT data (demo.istat.it).

After settling in Italy, the Ethiopian and Eritrean diasporas mainly moved to the cities of Milan, Bologna and Rome; while the Somali diaspora moved to Turin and Rome. These three diasporas went from a situation of colonialism and/or war, to one, in Italy, of social unfairness towards members of the diasporas and people with a migrant background in general, as demonstrated by the migration policies in force (ISMU, 2022). Sara Margazora and Valeria Deplano speak of a double violence towards members, and especially women, of the diasporas in that in addition to colonial domination they have to experience discursive domination in Italy, because being Italian is not recognised alongside being Ethiopian, Eritrean or Somali (Sara Margazora, 2015). Many are bearers of Italianness, even more so as they are sons or daughters of Italian fathers and Ethiopian, Eritrean or Somali mothers.

The distinctive character of these three diasporas right after their arrival was their mobilization, which will therefore be dealt with here in order to move closer to the current situation. These diasporic communities were very active after their arrival in Italy, and organized themselves by creating networks between the various diasporas. In particular, the Ethiopian and Eritrean diaspora transformed and redeveloped the Porta Venezia district of Milan in the 1970s/80s, opening a series of businesses. An interesting element that also links these two diasporas concerns the production of the *Habesha* identity, a way of shaping and representing the belonging that is shared between Ethiopians and Eritreans and mainly concerns the new generations. This model is redefining the diasporic field (G. Grimaldi, 2021). In Milan, around the Viale Piave district, an active religious community linked to the Ethiopian and Eritrean diaspora has also developed, with the creation of women's solidarity networks. In Rome, too, the Eritrean diaspora community organizes religious gatherings in the Eritrean Coptic Orthodox Church of San Salvatore in Campo. A number of cohabitation practices that characterize the Ethiopian and Eritrean diasporas are contrasted with identity patterns that mark differences between the Ethiopian and Eritrean components (G. Grimaldi, 2015).

According to a study conducted by IOM, the diaspora associations¹⁹ in Italy are geographically concentrated mainly in Northern Italy and Lazio, with a total of 1413 associations present in the country (IOM, UN Migration 2020). Many associations of diasporas have taken an increasingly central role in international cooperation initiatives, collaborating with the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and development cooperation agencies. In order to involve an increasing number of associations, the "National Summit of Diasporas" project has been carried out since 2017, which networks existing diaspora associations in Italy and offers them a point of contact with national political institutions, local authorities and civil society organizations. Furthermore, the Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali diasporas have given rise to a very significant, mainly female, literary production of the diaspora, which has become part of Italian literature and

¹⁹ Diaspora associations, in the IOM study, are defined as "those organisations, formally or informally constituted, that host within them people with a migrant background who decide to formally join together to pursue common goals, no matter what they are." (IOM, 2020, 8). Furthermore, in this study the expressions "diaspora associations", "migrant associations" and "associations with a migrant background" are used interchangeably. This aspect could be criticized.

culture. Writers such as Gabriella Ghermandi, Maryam Mayo, Igiaba Scego, Erminia Dell'Oro, Cristina Ubax Ali Farah and others (Eliana Pili, 2015; Duraccio, 2020) have reconstructed the history of the diasporas from a female perspective, highlighting the link between past colonialism and the current Italian context. These are women writers who are part of the three diasporas and who seek with their literary production to deconstruct the colonial legacy still strong in Italian society, as well as to decolonise the socio-cultural imaginary, in particular linked to the female figure. A long and centrally important work. This decolonisation is implemented first and foremost by presenting the female figures of these diasporas as active subjects who counteract the sexualisation of their bodies and colonial victimisation; by attempting to raise awareness of other forms of knowledge from colonial and white ones.

The Italian context in which diaspora-related members live today is indeed complex. First of all, the problem of racism persists in Italian society on both an individual and systemic level. According to data from *Lunaria*, an association that promotes social justice, out of a total of 7267 documented cases of racism and discriminatory acts detected from 2008 to 2019, the majority (2656) are committed by institutional actors (Lunaria, 2020). The issue of racism personally touches the diasporas of the Horn of Africa, as colonialism is perpetrated by an attitude of Italian white superiority that has remained over time. Racism is in fact a persistent and rampant problem in various sectors of Italian society (Grazia Nalletto, 2009). One of the problems that hinders the resolution of the issue is that everyday white Italians are reluctant to face explicit discussions on racism, despite the re-emergence of racial nationalism and episodes of violence throughout Italy (Hawthorne, 2023). Racism in Italy is in fact rooted at a structural level in various areas. As G. Gilardoni explains, racism acts in the economic structure through practices of exploitation and legitimization of domination; in the political-institutional structure through colonial logics; in the social structure through a line of color that distinguishes privileged social positions and not; and finally at the level of psychological structure by implementing processes of alienation and inferiorization of the other by itself (Guia Gilardoni, 2021).

Remaining on the institutional level, another problematic issue in the Italian context is the citizenship law. The issue of citizenship is here thematized as it has an impact on

members of the three diasporas, and in general on people with migratory backgrounds. In the past, these diasporas were penalized because of the lack of recognition of Italian citizenship to children of mixed relationships. In 1940, in fact, the children of mixed couples, born also within the madamato, could not acquire Italian citizenship. This discriminatory practice has remained in the present, though not so explicitly. It has in fact taken the most veiled form of a difficult and restrictive Italian citizenship law. Italy has one of the most restrictive citizenship laws in Europe. As sociologist Angelica Pesarini explains,

In Italy, due to the official erasure of the ‘race’ category, the national census carried out every ten years by ISTAT (Italian National Institute of Statistics) does not make any reference to ‘ethnicity’. ‘Race’ and ‘ethnicity’ are considered by the Italian state to be inherently discriminatory categories. There are, instead, questions related to citizenship—specifically, Question n. 3.1 (‘What is your citizenship?’) and Question n. 3.2 (‘Have you had Italian citizenship since birth?’). These are followed by questions aimed at verifying the place of birth of the parents—namely, Question n. 3.4 (‘Where was your mother born?’) and Question n. 3.5 (‘Where was your father born?’). Such questions, apparently objective and neutral, gain a charged meaning when seen in relation to the Italian citizenship law, and its concealed references to the categories of ‘blood’ and ‘race’. The citizenship Law currently in force since 1992 privileges *jus sanguinis* ‘right of blood’ as its inspiring principle. This is in contrast to countries such as the USA, where the principle of birth-right citizenship or *jus soli*, ‘right of soil’, governs the conferring of citizenship (Angelica Pesarini, Guido Tintori, 2020, 358-359).

The law referred to is Law no. 91/1992, according to which the *ius sanguinis* is in force: those whose parents (even if only their father or mother) are Italian citizens acquire Italian citizenship by right at birth (Law no. 91/1992, Article 1, para. 1, letter a). The law also recognises the alternative criterion of *ius soli* only residually and for

certain limited cases (Parlamento Italiano, 2022)²⁰. This law is problematic and fuels inequality. Indeed, those who are born in Italy from parents without citizenship, not only cannot apply for Italian citizenship before the age of eighteen, but once they come of age, they have to go through a long bureaucratic process. This issue is relevant for understanding the current living conditions of diasporic citizens in Italy.

Finally, another problematic aspect in Italy concerns the colonial question (which has been discussed earlier), of which public denunciation is still too slight if not absent, legitimized by the myth *Italians Good People* (Gilardoni, 2021). Furthermore, Italy has never made colonial reparations for the damage perpetrated during colonialism in parts of the Horn of Africa, unlike other European states such as Germany. The colonial mentality is therefore still rooted in Italy at an institutional and individual level; but it is also widespread in other European states such as Finland, as will be seen in the following paragraph. The contribution of the Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali diasporas, and diasporas in general, is central to changing societies both in Italy and Europe. The presence of the diasporas from the Horn of Africa in Italy has been explored so far; now their relations with a Northern European country to which they are equally connected, Finland, will be investigated.

4.3.2 Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali diasporas in Finland: between history and gender

As seen, diasporas cross multiple spaces and are characterized by transnational mobility. In the case of the Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali diasporas, they often reached northern Europe, in particular Sweden, United Kingdom, Germany and Finland. The focus here is on Finland, a state that has been affected by diasporas from the Horn of Africa, especially since the 1990s, as will be explained in this paragraph.

Overall, the African diaspora in Finland includes the residents of Finland of full or partial African descent, mostly from Sub-Saharan Africa. Finland was not a colonizing power on the African continent, so the reasons for the diasporas are different (alongside, of course, the Italian colonialism explored in the previous paragraph). Among diasporas of African origin, the Somali diaspora is the largest in Finland, as data show. As Päivi

²⁰ [La cittadinanza: quadro normativo vigente \(camera.it\)](#)

Pirkkalainen and J. Gundel (2002) explain, due to civil war and inter-clan conflicts, the Somali population began its diaspora from 1988 onwards, in some cases moving internally, in others heading for neighboring African states or Western states.

But what distinguishes Somali diaspora from the other classical diasporas who have suffered from disaster, such as the African-Americans suffered from slavery, and the Palestinians who had to flee their region because of the formation of Israel, is that in the case of Somalia there was no “external enemy” as such (Päivi Pirkkalainen, 2005, 39).

Finland was chosen as a destination by many Somalis, as it had initiated cooperation projects, mainly health, in Somalia during the 1980s. In 1986, Finland was the third state in the world to support Somalia, after Italy and the USA, along with the World Bank. After the war, Somalia remained divided: the northern part, known as Somaliland, proclaimed independence in 1991; while the north-eastern regions formed the state of Puntland in 1998, which does not enjoy full autonomy. Currently, tensions persist in central and southern Somalia (Pirkkalainen, 2005). An interesting aspect of the Somali diaspora concerns the preservation in many cases of clan dynamics. These have been maintained with the arrival of the diaspora in Finland, although there has been no lack of contamination with this Western and northern context. In this regard, the heterogeneity of the Somali diaspora is interesting; as M. H. Ingiriis explains, “in South Africa, as in Finland, clan identity exists along with other national and religious identities. The triple heritage identity of Somalis - Arab, African and Muslim - helps them find shelter in the most difficult human conditions of exile” (Mohamed Haji Ingiriis, 2020, 973). Despite the prevalence of clan dynamics in the Somali diaspora, a distinction must be made between the so-called “Westernized Somalis”, who for the most part were born and bred in the diaspora; and the “non-Westernized Somalis”, who are more connected to the dimension of clanship (Stephanie R. Bjork, 2017).

With regard to Ethiopian and Eritrean diasporas, their presence is numerically smaller than in the Somali diaspora, but no less significant. For this reason, the literature on these two diasporas is significantly reduced. Alongside colonialism, the tensions that led to the Ethiopian and Eritrean diasporas began in the 1960s: in Ethiopia, with

nationalist guerrilla groups against the government of Addis Ababa; in Eritrea, with the fight against the Ethiopian occupation. The main guerrilla groups were the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF), the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF), and the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF) (M. V. Hoehne, D. Feyissa, M. Abdile, 2011). As a result of the war and internal clashes, the Ethiopian and Eritrean diasporas began to move to Western states, including Finland, which had initiated peacekeeping operations within the United Nations, along with other European states. The largest diasporic flow in Finland has occurred since the 1990s; however, in the case of the Ethiopian diaspora three diasporic flows can be identified. The first flow between 1974 and 1990, due to the establishment in Ethiopia of the Dergue military regime; the second flow since the 1990s; and the third flow after 2005 following the national elections that led to a regime of repression with the arrest of journalists and political opponents (Feven C. Abegaz, 2013). In the case of the Eritrean diaspora, it is important to point out also the massive arrival of Eritreans in Finland, all under the European Schemes for Relocation and Resettlement Programme, following the refugee crisis of 2015 (Migration Institute of Finland, Marko Juntunen, Osama Al Aloulou, 2019). Many of those who arrived in Finland (not only from Eritrea, but also from Syria and Iraq) were relocated from Italy and Greece. Existing research concerning the Eritrean diaspora in Finland is scant. One of the main studies conducted nevertheless highlights an interesting aspect to understand this diaspora. As M. Juntunen, O. Al Aloulou explains,

The history of the diaspora plays a central role in this respect: given the fact that [...] especially Eritrean diaspora in Finland lack historical depth and internal ethnic and political divisions, the Eritrean interviewees had experienced the diasporic community as less fragmented. Especially the Eritreans in our sample, as noted earlier, perceive everyone simply as a victim of state violence and all maintain firm social contacts with other members of the Eritrean diaspora (Juntunen, Al Aloulou, 2019, 53).

From this research emerges a strong unitary element within the Eritrean diaspora in Finland, which shared a past of war and suffering. From the same research, it also emerges that most members of the Eritrean diaspora are Christian. Making a switch to

the situation of these diasporas in the present, the data in the table below refer to the presence of members of these diasporas in Finland (Statistics Finland, 2020).

Table 2 - Population of Somali, Ethiopian, Eritrean Citizenship in Finland, at 31 December 2020

Citizenship	Men	Women	Total
Somalia	11 741	11 053	22 794
Ethiopia	1640	1327	2967
Eritrea	806	482	1288

Source: prepared by the author on data of Statistics Finland

First of all, a clear demographic distinction emerges: while the Ethiopian and Eritrean diasporic communities in Italy are clearly more numerous than those in Finland, the Somali community in Finland is numerically superior to the same one in Italy. Once in Finland, the Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali diasporas settled in the political, economic and social environment. The Somali diaspora, being the most numerically substantial, is the most active in Finland, where it has established a series of organizations with both Somali and Finnish personnel, which are mainly concerned with implementing cooperation and peacebuilding projects in Somalia. The Somali diaspora is therefore very active towards the country of origin, and is predominantly of the Muslim religion (Mahdi Abdile, Päivi Pirkkalainen, 2011). Despite being reminiscent of internal divisions due to clan tensions in Somalia (Bjork, in Abdulkadir O. Farah, 2007), the Finnish Somali diaspora tends to be fairly united and active, even at the level of transnational networks with the Somali diaspora in the world. In particular, Somali women are very active within the diaspora, and the dimension of gender, also intersected with other factors such as religion, is central. The dimension of women's solidarity is stronger in the Somali diaspora than in the Ethiopian and Eritrean

diasporas, but there is no strong decolonial component, unlike in Italy, according to studies, as Finland was not a colonial country.

On the other hand, the Ethiopian and Eritrean diaspora is less organized at the level of transnational diasporic networks, but still active. The Ethiopian diaspora, from what is present in literature, is active both in Finland and towards Ethiopia with the support of technology. The few existing studies reveal that the Ethiopian diaspora in Finland is more digitally active than that in Italy:

Ethiopians in Finland use the Internet rigorously; they check various news and information portals every day, they maintain contact with Ethiopians in the homeland and diaspora as well as keep their memories of the homeland intact by actively participating in homeland affairs. [...] In the experience of migration and immigrant lifestyle, it is common to be part of a social group with people of the same ethnic origin who are assumed to have common identity, history and ties to the host country that bring them together under various associations or organizations. This is what Vertovec (1999) calls social morphology. Ethiopian diaspora, who have been living in Finland for more than 20 years, have established an Ethiopian Community in Finland. It is an organization aimed at bringing Ethiopians together. [...] There are Ethiopian Orthodox congregations, Evangelical, Muslim and Catholic gatherings in Finland. They use the Internet to communicate and send email reminders about upcoming events (Feven C. Abegaz, 2013, 53, 59).

This quotation provides a concise picture of the life of the Finnish Ethiopian diaspora. It is interesting to see how the Ethiopian diasporic community, despite being little known in Finland, has created an organization that operates not only locally, but also transnationally with digital support. A diaspora that therefore crosses geographical and digital spaces. The Eritrean diaspora, on the other hand, is mainly organized by meeting in the Orthodox Church of Helsinki and Tampere, where they also organize remittances and fundraising activities for various social initiatives, even towards Eritrea. There are no specific studies on the Eritrean diaspora in Finland, only in Sweden and Norway (Ali Nur, 2019; Yonas Zemuy Kebedom, 2019), as it is more present in these

states. One dimension that unites the Eritrean diaspora in various states, and therefore also characterizes the diaspora in Finland, is digital activity. Research showed, in fact, how the digital sphere is also central to the Eritrean diaspora. In particular, V. Bernal's research sheds light on how the use of digital spaces by the Eritrean diaspora generates new public spaces in which to mobilize with social actions. She explains that

Eritreans in diaspora use the Internet as a transnational public sphere where they produce and debate narratives of history, culture, democracy and identity. Through the web diaspora Eritreans have mobilized demonstrators, amassed funds for war, debated the formulation of the constitution and influenced the government of Eritrea. [...] Cyberspace has facilitated the participation of the diaspora in the formation of Eritrea's national institutions and political culture. The reach of the Internet is already vast and its uses in politics are growing, so that in the future Eritreans and others around the world are increasingly likely to communicate with each other and to the powers that be via cyberspace (Victoria Bernal, 2006, 162).

On the whole, the Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali diasporas move between geographical and digital spaces, which allow them to expand their space of identity and action. In the specific case of the Finnish context, these diasporas found themselves adapting to a different social environment from the Italian one, albeit with some similarities. The Finnish education and state system provides more subsistence for people with a migrant background than the Italian system, however it is by no means a perfect system. Indeed, as shown by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights' data, Finland ranks third in Europe for racism and discrimination, surpassing Italy. In this regard, the Finnish Ministry of Justice published a report on the level of racism and discrimination in Finland in 2021. It is a report that gives a fairly comprehensive picture of the Finnish situation regarding discrimination in various social spheres. Among the most interesting data in the report is the fact that discrimination against people of Roma origin is more common in Finland than in other European states: according to the Fundamental Rights Barometer 2019, more than half of Finns (53%) do not want to live next door to people of Roma origin. Racism and

discrimination on the basis of skin colour are also widespread in Finland (65%), while discrimination on religious grounds is less common (Simo Mannila, 2021).

The sociologist Magdalena Jaakkola also analyzes the attitudes of Finns towards people with a migrant background during the period 1987-1999, and identifies an increase in negative attitudes towards them, with a peak in 1993, corresponding to a widespread state of unemployment in Finland. Moreover, in general, the group most discriminated against is that of people of Somali origin (Magdalena Jaakkola, 2000). As Anna Rastas explains, although Finland has never established colonies of its own and its involvement in colonial projects has been less than that of other European states, it has nevertheless benefited from Eurocentric economic exploitation as a result of the colonial system (Anna Rastas, 2014).

Finns' ideas about the relations between Finns and Black people are largely based on what may be called Finnish (or Nordic) exceptionalism. By that I mean a sense of moral superiority that is based on, and maintained by, denials of Finns' involvement in the history and legacy of European colonialism and slavery. A common sentiment among Finns is that since they never have been colonizers and slave traders themselves, European colonialism, slavery and racism does not concern them (Rastas, 2014, 192).

It is a relevant aspect that Finland is also part of a Eurocentric cultural system, centred on Western superiority in relation to civilizing values. This is a collective mentality that unites the West in general and therefore is also shared by Italy and Finland, despite their different historical pasts. This is a discourse that opens up the theme of relationality between different geographical and social spaces, crossed and inhabited by diasporas, which will be explored in the following research part.

In conclusion, this chapter has presented an overview of the role of women in diasporas, from a female and decolonial perspective, progressively narrowing the focus, to arrive at introducing the activism of women of African diaspora and then Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali diasporas. Starting with a more general overview of the active role of women in general in the diasporas, the second paragraph outlined the role of women in the African diaspora, highlighting the centrality of female figures. Both paragraphs

emphasized female agency in the organization of remittances (individual and collective), co-participation to the development in African countries, political and social activism, cultural activities and literary production, as well as the increase of digital support networks at a transnational level. The second paragraph specifically focused on both the practical and intellectual activism of women in the African diaspora, echoing the distinction made by P. H. Collins. Finally, the last paragraph of the chapter further narrowed the focus by dealing with Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali diasporas, especially in Italy and Finland, to provide an overview of the histories of these diasporas, of their establishment in the two EU countries and of their gender dimension.

The women of these three diasporas embody with their agency a decolonial view as, not forgetting the past, they act in a challenging and exemplary manner on several fronts. With their initiatives and engagement they embody a decolonial approach, that, as well as the postcolonial approach, represents a form of intellectual resistance that, as G. K. Bhambra states, offers “in the words of María Lugones, the possibility of a new geopolitics of knowledge” (Bhambra, 2014, 120). With their multifaceted activism these women have become emblematic worldwide, creating an international diasporic feminist consciousness and knowledge. Overall, it is interesting to see how in Italy and Finland there are different collective mobilisations of Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali diasporic communities. These different activities, but at the same time with common aspects and goals, create a relationality between the different spaces of Italy and Finland. Since this relationality has been little explored in the literature, it would be interesting to concretise it, connecting the different diasporic phenomena with each other in order to expand their transnational networks. In the following part of the research, the perspective of women from these three diasporas will be broadened, focusing in particular on the dimension of social change little explored in the literature so far. Although there are in fact some studies (few) on the forms of engagement of these women, the picture is not complete and the perspective of agency in relation to change is little explored.

PART II

**A qualitative research about diasporic women's forms
of engagement and social change in Italy and Finland**

CHAPTER 5

The methodological path of the research

This chapter prepares the chapters for the presentation of the analysis and the research results, illustrating the methodological path of the research. The chapter starts with the presentation of the research problem, consisting in the need to bridge a knowledge gap in the forms of engagement of women in the diasporas of the Horn of Africa, presenting them in a systematic way and with an intersectional approach. To bridge this knowledge gap, the research aims to answer four related research questions:

- What are the different forms of engagement of women from Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali diasporas, in Italy and Finland?
- How do women from Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali diasporas live and understand the diaspora?
- Which are the respondents' interpretations of war and peace within diasporas?
- How are the forms of women's diasporic engagement influenced by the multiple spatialities in which they operate, and how does such engagement generate change in these spatialities?

On the basis of the research problem, the design of the research and the methodology chosen to answer the questions and to achieve the research objectives are then presented. The presentation of the methodology is preceded by an epistemological reflection. Epistemologically, research takes off from the epistemological category of agency and a constructivist approach to knowledge, built on the experience of the interviewees. This epistemological premise sees its realization in the choice of a qualitative methodology, which places the subjects as knowledge producers at the

center. The research methodology is then illustrated, distinguishing between categories of analysis and categories of practice, and explaining the criteria of choice of the interviewee. The research aims, in fact, to answer the four questions through 30 biographical interviews, of the type of *racconti di vita*²¹, of which 16 were made in Italy and 14 in Finland. This main research phase was preceded by an exploratory study to contextualize the phenomena of the three diasporas, through semi-structured interviews to stakeholders expert on the topic. In particular, 11 interviews were conducted with stakeholders in Italy and 2 in Finland, which were supplemented with 4 informal meetings. Furthermore, it is clarified that, despite the geographical choice of two different countries (justified in the presentation of the research problem), the research does not carry out a systematic comparison between the social contexts of the two countries, but the comparative dimension remains in the background to better understand and compare the different forms of engagement of respondents. The chapter ends with a central methodological reflection on the issue of the researcher's positionality, bringing to light the process of deconstruction and critical reflexivity that has been put in place by the researcher in the research process.

5.1 Research problem and research questions

In order to understand the problem that the research aims to address, it is necessary to contextualize it within the theoretical framework that has been outlined in the previous chapters, focusing on a few key aspects. In the field of diasporas and migration studies, we have seen different theoretical models. On the one hand, Robin Cohen's (and others') model identifies diaspora through idealtypes, emphasizing its relations

²¹ Rita Bichi resumes the work of Daniel Bertaux (*Les récits de vie: Perspective ethnosociologique*, 1997) and distinguishes between *storie di vita* and *racconti di vita*. In the latter, the interviewer starts from an aspect of the subject's life, from which the interviewee will trace back to his/her entire life experience. While having freedom of choice of experiences to dwell on, the interviewee is implicitly induced to deepen the experience and aspects emphasized by the researcher. In life stories, on the other hand, the interviewee is free to narrate his/her entire life experience without the interviewer focusing on episodes relevant to the research (Rita Bichi, *L'intervista biografica*, 2002).

with the context of origin and describing the diaspora with a list of characteristics. On the other hand, another strand of studies that includes Roza Tsagarousianou and Arjun Appadurai conceives of diasporas as mutable entities, characterized by imagination and heterogeneity. The latter invites us to go beyond the logics of homeland, identity and ethnic group, conceiving multiple and mixed spaces in which diasporas move. According to these different visions of diasporas, there are different ways of conceiving and articulating the activities of diasporic engagement, in form and goals, which, as we have seen, are very varied (they can be in support of peace processes, conflicts, social activism, etc.). These diasporic activities are organized by actors with different positions and modes even within the same diasporas. In particular, the gendered dimension, as explained above, plays a central role in the organization of certain activities over others, and intersects with other factors that determine different power dynamics.

It is precisely the issue of intersectionality in the diasporas, little explored in Italy at the academic level, that opens to the need to look at female and racialized actors, protagonists of the diasporas, and at forms of engagement from an intersectional perspective. A perspective that avoids, however, an approach of victimization of these and that reverses the dynamics of knowledge production, making them protagonists of an alternative cognitive production; a perspective in which the researcher personally makes a decolonial and deconstruction effort, to let emerge this form of alternative knowledge. In this perspective, it has been chosen to focus on women from the Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali diaspora to fill a gap that has long represented them exclusively as victims of a colonial regime, or discriminatory and subordinate practices in the contemporary. Bearing in mind that this vision is significant and necessary, as it sheds light on a series of persistent and not-to-be-forgotten oppression dynamics, there is no systematic investigation into the forms of engagement in which they are involved. In particular, there is a lack of emphasis on the transformative dimension of their forms of engagement, with a view to social and feminine change. The choice of women from these three diasporas of the Horn of Africa, which are distinct but connected, does not want to reproduce rigid ethnic divisions, but refers to the historical presence of these three diasporas, especially women (as explained in Chapter 4), in Italy and, later, in Northern Europe. Moreover, these women are linked to areas in the Horn of Africa of

past and present wars, and have been investigated in the literature also by previous researchers. Two distinct geographical contexts, such as Italy and Finland, were chosen specifically to analyze two different relationships with the colonial mentality, as well as with the three diasporas.

However, the research should not be viewed in a comparative light since no systematic comparison is made between the two European countries. The comparative aspect remains, in fact, in the background and serves to have a more complete picture of the forms of female engagement of these three diasporas, between North and South Europe. Finally, it should be pointed out that the geographical spatialities taken into account in presenting the research problem are many (Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia, Italy and Finland). These countries should not be considered as rigid national entities and systematically compared spatialities, but as fluid spaces crossed and experienced by diasporas. Not only that: it will emphasize the transformative dimension exerted on these spaces by the three diasporas, and specifically by the women.

From the research problem presented, the following research questions arise²²: what are the different forms of engagement of women from Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali diasporas, in Italy and Finland? How do women from Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali diasporas live and understand the diaspora? The first and second research questions are thus motivated by the need to focus on diasporic women's perspectives in the ways they conceive and experience diaspora, as well as how they organize forms of diasporic engagement.

The social actors of the diasporas are considered central, since the diaspora is an elusive network at the level of social phenomenon, but it can be understood from the meaning that social actors give to it. The intention is to see how these diasporic subjects (women) conceive of diaspora and diasporic engagement activities, identifying whether the phenomenological level departs from existing theoretical models of diasporas, as well as examining whether it is necessary to move beyond existing theories on diaspora

²² "Theories give rise to problems and questions, guide the choice of methodology, and provide an interpretive lens for data. Theories situate the study in an ongoing line of research in science education and provide a rationale and relevance for the study" (Dale Baker, 2002, 176). In addition, David Silverman (*Doing Qualitative Research*, 2022) explains that research problems can also arise from social issues, and that the way one conceives and approaches research problems depends on the social worldview model that one adopts.

and diasporic engagement. It is the members of diasporic communities who experience or have experienced diaspora, in ways that are different from each other; so no one can define and explain it better than them. Here the third and fourth research questions arise: which are the respondents' interpretations of war and peace within diasporas? How are the forms of women's diasporic engagement influenced by the multiple spatialities in which they operate, and how does such engagement generate change in these spatialities? These questions make it possible to explore, on the one hand, the influence of political and social economic systems, etc., in these countries, as perceived by these subjects; on the other hand, the influence of diasporic women with their engagement on them, investigating whether these actions can bring or have brought about changes.

These research questions aim to achieve the research objectives, which are three. A descriptive aim, which is to map the main women's forms of engagement related to the Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali diaspora, identifying similarities and differences between Italy, Finland and the other spaces involved. An analytical aim, that is to shed light on the meanings of diaspora and related engagement, analyzing its connections with these women's experiences in different countries. Finally, a broader aim is to explore the various forms of diasporic engagement of these women from the perspective of social change. In order to best answer the research questions and achieve these three objectives, a certain methodological path was devised.

5.2 From the epistemological approach to methodology

5.2.1 Epistemology

The methodological choice presented in this paragraph is guided by a certain epistemological approach and is intended to best answer the research questions. Epistemology and methodology are distinct, but intertwined in social research: the former concerns the ways in which knowledge can be produced, the latter concerns the tools needed to achieve this²³ (Simona Miceli, 2019). The main epistemological

²³Furthermore, H. S. Becker explains about epistemology: "Like many other philosophical disciplines, epistemology has characteristically concerned itself with 'oughts' rather than 'its,' and settled its

category underlying the methodology required to answer the research questions is that of *agency*. The concept of agency has been much debated in sociology; according to Loyal and Barnes (2001), the modern debate on agency dates back to the formulation of T. Parsons's theory of action²⁴. Mustafa Emirbayer and Ann Mische (1998) define agency as "the temporally constructed engagement by actors of different structural environments, the temporal-relational contexts of action, which, through the interplay of habit, imagination and judgment, both reproduces and transforms those structures in interactive response to the problems posed by changing historical situations" (Steven Hitlin, Glen H. Elder, 2007, 172). Agency is therefore not to be confused with free will, nor with an action always aimed at resistance to a system (resistance is only one of the forms of agency). Moreover, agency refers to the sphere of action and in order to be understood, it cannot be disassociated from the social context(s) in which it is embedded. In the case of this research, we are talking about female agency, of racialized women. There is, therefore, another guiding epistemological category, namely that of *Womanism* (defined in Chapter 3, paragraph 3.1). This concept of social theory is crucial to understand the point of view of racialized women, who are detached from and often disregarded by mainstream feminism, which mainly focuses on white women.

Since the epistemological category of agency outlines the image of a reflexive social actor, capable of constructing the meaning of action in the context in which he or she is or operates (Miceli, 2019), this category is operationally translated into a qualitative methodology. The qualitative methodology was chosen because, in order to answer the research questions outlined above, we start from the experiences and points of view of the social actors (in this case, the women of the diasporas) from a constructionist perspective²⁵. This methodology makes it possible to investigate how women from the

questions by reasoning from first principles rather than by empirical investigation. Empirical disciplines, in contrast, have concerned themselves with how things work rather than what they ought to be, and settled their questions empirically" (Howard S. Becker, 1996, 54).

²⁴Talcott Parsons in *The Structure of Social Action* (1937) develops a social action theory called voluntarist, according to which each individual simultaneously takes into account the environmental conditions that affect the action, and the psychological and motivational components that characterize the ability to choose, which is based on interests but also on moral values.

²⁵In *The Social Construction of Reality* (1966) by social construction, sociologists Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann mean the process by which people continuously create, through their actions and interactions, a common and shared reality that is experienced as objective and dense with meaning subjectively. They unite the micro and macro planes of sociological analysis in theory and research.

Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali diasporas live and define the diaspora, as well as the type of engagement more or less connected to it, emphasizing similarities and differences. Although agency and intersectionality are apparently two opposing epistemological perspectives in approaching subjects, the epistemological challenge of this research is to show how these two perspectives can be in dialogue with each other. Indeed, the results of the research will show how the agency of the respondents reinterprets the theory of intersectionality, transforming disadvantages into advantages, with a transformative capacity that only racialized subjects can have in relation to intersectionality as they experience it in person.

The data analysis followed the constructivist approach, starting from the experiences and narratives of the interviewees. It is important to emphasize that the women interviewed were influenced by the research situation and the positioning of the researcher (which in some cases they pointed out) in the construction of their narratives (see 6.4). Sociologically, the way in which they constructed their life narratives and the themes they brought up, which varied between research in Italy and research in Finland, are especially relevant. Their narratives allow us to partially answer the research questions, but provide a fairly comprehensive and meaningful picture of the phenomenon under investigation. The women interviewed are in fact the main representatives of their diasporic communities and of different forms of engagement: although not numerous, constitute the main voices on the subject of this research.

5.2.2 Methodology

This epistemological premise determined the choice of the qualitative interview²⁶ as the research technique for data collection, in particular the semi-structured interview²⁷

²⁶ The technique of the qualitative interview in social research was mainly thematized by Alberto Marradi (*Metodologia delle scienze sociali*, 2007), but not only. Sabrina Corrao explains that the interview is a dialogue between interviewer and interviewee, during which you can use different support tools for conducting and recording information. During the qualitative interview you can use, depending on the level of structuring, tracks with aspects of the theme or open questions. For the recording, in addition to paper material, also audio instruments or video recording (Sabrina Corrao, 2005).

²⁷ “The SSI is designed to ascertain subjective responses from persons regarding a particular situation or phenomenon they have experienced. It employs a relatively detailed interview guide or schedule, and may be used when there is sufficient objective knowledge about an experience or phenomenon, but the

and the biographical interview²⁸ of the type *racconto di vita*. *Racconto di vita* was chosen because it allows the researcher to deepen a certain aspect of the participants' lives, in this case diaspora-related engagement, by tracing back from it to the lives of the interviewees. This type of interview allows the research questions to be answered by placing the themes that emerge from the interviews in a coherent, rather than fragmentary, framework, and from the perspective of the interviewees from a constructivist perspective. In this way, by starting from the point of view of racialized subjects, it is possible to deconstruct dominant conceptions of the topic, in order to reconstruct its meaning from their representations. While these women experience different geographical spatialities, they also construct and modify from a female and racialised perspective, the multiple geographical and social spaces in which they operate.

The research was divided into two phases and carried out in two different countries, first in Italy (in the main cities where the women of the diasporas concerned are active, that is, Milan, Rome, Padova and Bologna) and then in Finland (mainly in the city of Helsinki). The first phase of the research in Italy was characterized by 11 semi-structured interviews with stakeholders (both men and women), with the aim of defining the field of investigation and having an overview of the topic by experts. In Finland, instead, the first phase of the research was characterized by 2 semi-structured interviews and 4 informal meetings with some experts and colleagues, who provided both a framework on the topic, and contacts of women from the diasporas to be interviewed later. The decision to conduct semi-structured interviews in Italy (in 2021) and mainly informal meetings with experts in Finland (in September 2022)²⁹ was

subjective knowledge is lacking (Merton & Kendall, 1946; Morse & Field, 1995; Richards & Morse, 2007)" (Michele J. McIntosh, Janice M. Morse, 2015, 1).

²⁸ Biographical interviews are qualitative interviews that aim to gather information (experiences, reflections, emotions, etc.) on the entire biography of the subjects (life stories), or on a specific phase of their life (*racconti di vita*). (Antonio De Lillo, Laura Arosio, 1941). The biographical approach developed initially in the United States, especially in the Chicago School, starting from the book *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* (1918) of Florian Znaniecki and William I. Thomas's. This work is considered one of the classics of sociology in which the biographical approach is developed (Mariagrazia Santagati, 2020).

²⁹ For the list of stakeholders in Italy and Finland, please refer to the two tables in Chapter 6. A clarification also on the different types of coding chosen for the analysis. To identify stakeholders, the following acronyms are used: It1EXP-F for Italy and Fi1EXP-M for Finland, with a final indication of male or female gender; for the biographical interviews the acronyms IT-1 and FIN-1 are used; finally, to identify the *biographical portraits*, elaborated during the analysis, the acronyms IT-bio-1 and FIN-bio-1 are used.

motivated by the fact that the wealth of information gathered during the semi-structured interviews in Italy allowed for a comprehensive contextualisation of the phenomenon of Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali female diasporas. Therefore, in Finland the meeting with experts in the field, who were instrumental in providing contacts of the women to be interviewed, was sufficient for the exploratory phase of the research. By stakeholders are meant professors and experts of various kinds on the theme of diasporas from the Horn of Africa (including some who belong to the diaspora), who work for research centers or organizations of the diasporas, and/or who collaborate for various projects with people involved in these diasporas. What is interesting about these stakeholders is that some of them, besides being experts on the Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali diasporas, were also part of them. Therefore, they provided both an expert and insider perspective on the issue at hand, which was crucial in familiarizing with the research phenomenon.

Regarding the way the interviews were conducted, the grid of the semi-structured interview with privileged witnesses included a series of questions (not always according to the established order), related to the following themes: description and contextualization of the Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali diasporic communities in Italy; transnational networks and types of activities of these diasporas; focus on the generational and female component of these diasporas; forms of engagement of these women in Italy and in the various countries in which they are active; objectives and impact of the various engagement activities; link of these diasporas with issues related to peace and conflict, and any activities organized on the subject; and, lastly, predictions for the future.

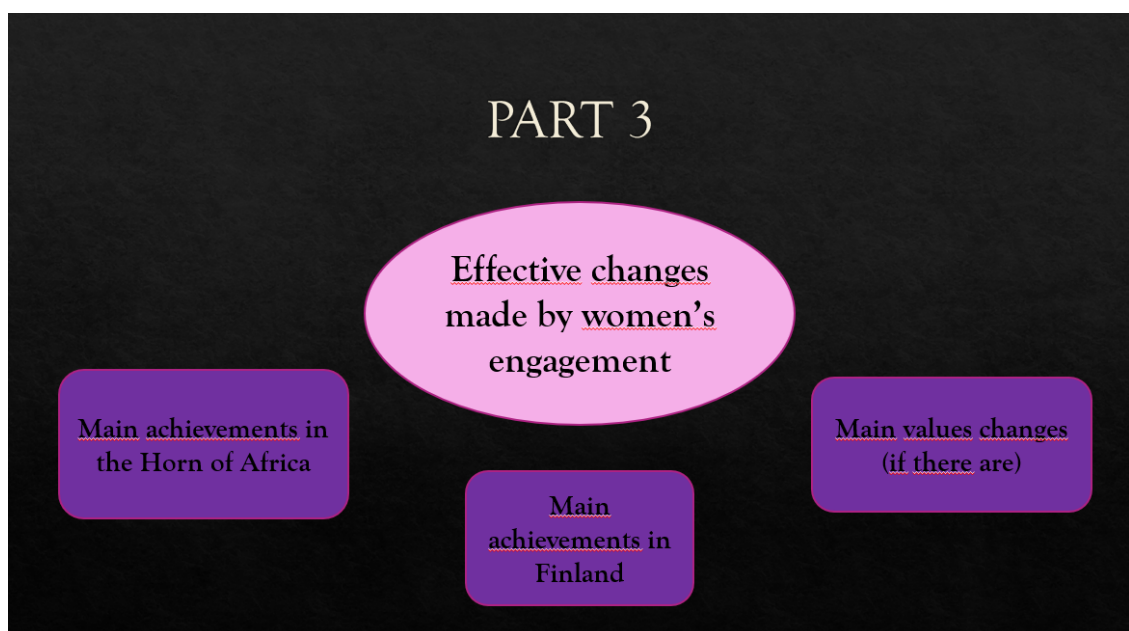
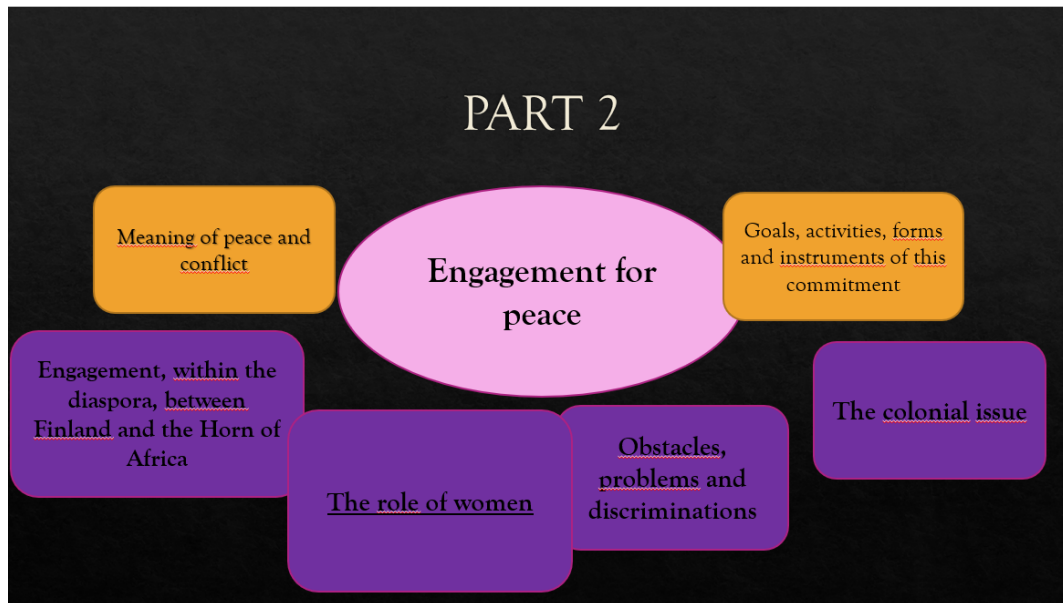
The second phase of the research is instead characterized by biographical interviews of the type *racconti di vita*, which focus on the experiences of engagement of women of the Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali diasporas in different areas (political, cultural, social, supporting peace processes, etc.).

5.2.3 The biographical interview's grid and the biographical portraits

In the biographical interviews, carried out first in Italy (in Italian) and then in Finland (in English), the respondents had the freedom to choose which aspects to deepen, starting with the following opening question: *I would like you to describe your engagement, touching on the various points on the slides in the order you prefer*. The grid of the interview was a methodological experimentation, which consisted of six Powerpoint slides. Each slide focused on specific dimensions related to engagement and diaspora. The choice to conduct the interview with slides was due to the desire to guide the respondents on the main aspects of the research to dwell on, also through visual support. The interviews were carried out both online and in presence (at the discretion of the interviewee), and this methodological technique proved useful for both modalities of conducting the interviews. Indeed, it made it possible to focus on the main themes investigated by the research and to link them together. In particular, with this modality the interviewees have constructed their speech connecting the various themes, as well as their biographies, in different ways and dwelling on different aspects.

Fig. 4 - Slides with the main points of the interview's grid





Some important dates

Please build three timelines, explaining each date

- ◇ A timeline of your biography (birth, studies, main choices, migration)
- ◇ A timeline of your commitment
- ◇ Some significant dates, for you, about the history of your own countries

CONCLUSIONS

Challenges

Fears

Future prospects
of the engagement

Main aspect to work
on, in the future, in
her commitment

Main aspect to work
on regarding the
commitment for peace

The first slide was about the meaning that each one attributed to their engagement and to the diaspora, describing their objectives, tools, difficulties, results, as well as the evaluative dimensions of the values and motivations underlying them. The second slide dealt with the specific theme of engagement for the support of peace, understood in a broad sense, also focusing on colonial rule and the impact of different contexts. It should be noted that, among the various engagement activities, particular weight was

given to those promoting peace processes, also considering the international conflict situation at the time the research was conducted. The third slide was focused on the changes made by the engagement of women of these diasporas in the various spaces in which they are active. The fourth slide was dedicated to their biographical journey, starting from birth and focusing on the most significant dates in the history of each engagement. Finally, the fifth slide was about the future prospects of their engagement: challenges, fears, and what we need to work on in the future. Each interview lasted an average of h1.30. Respondents were free to move their narrative between slides, and to skip some themes if they desired to do so. The visual representation of the themes of the interview allowed me to focus and reflect on the language used by me as a researcher in dealing with certain issues, which for my positioning could be poorly perceived by the respondents. The construction of the language of the interview track is of fundamental importance in order not to offend the sensitivity of the participants, especially when doing research with racialized subjects. Overall, the use of PowerPoint slides in conducting the *racconto di vita* proved to be a useful and successful experiment.

I made 30 *racconti di vita*, 16 in Italy between 2021 and 2023, and 14 in Finland from September to December 2022, from which I created as many *biographical portraits*³⁰. These are summaries that describe the biography of the respondents, but thanks to the sociological imagination of the researcher have the function of rereading the individual history by highlighting the social dynamics. The description of the analysis procedure carried out is presented in section 6.3, here the methodological procedure as a whole is presented. In the analysis of data and *biographical portraits*, a methodological technique called “member checking”³¹ was used, with the aim to discuss

³⁰The sources of reference for the realization of these *biographical portraits* are as follows. B. Lahire speaks of “portraits de configurations”, a kind of sociological portraits in which the sociological work, while not neglecting the singularity of the cases presented, compares the various biographical descriptions that emerge in the portraits. Indeed, he is not content with purely idiographic descriptions that reveal the absence of interpretative orientation (Bernard Lahire, 2016). A synthesis of the biographical interviews (of the life-story type, however) was also done, in a different way, by C. Ottaviano, G. Persico (2020), who summarized each biography in narrative form within boxes. The narratives contained in the boxes are the result of a synthesis work carried out by researchers and protagonists of the interviews, with the aim of promoting a dialogue, also with academic writing and theoretical concepts.

³¹ “By carrying out member checking - a technique that allows for the deepening, repeating, and adjusting of data gathering and analysis together with participants - researchers can achieve transactional validity. Transactional validity refers to improved accuracy of data and analysis through a dialogical and recursive

with the interviewees the results to be published. This qualitative methodological technique consists in asking for feedback from participants on the interpretation of the results, as well as on the research process, highlighting any critical issues. To apply the “member checking” technique, the women interviewed in Italy and Finland were therefore sent the *biographical portraits*, drawn from the interviews, to ask them which contents to keep and which to delete. In addition, with the interviewees in Italy who were available, an online discussion meeting was organized in which the following sensitive issues were discussed, presenting the following points via slides: my positioning and the question of whiteness; the need to distance oneself from the Eurocentric perspective in conceptualisations of themes; and the debate on the terms of inclusion and intercultural education (which arose among the different generations of interviewees). Not all the respondents were available for this meeting of informal confrontation in Italy (only 6), mainly because of the understanding with other work commitments rather than the rejection of the comparison. It was a very productive moment of exchange, which not only allowed me to start a process of self-reflection on my positioning, but also allowed me to discuss the issues mentioned above.

The issues arising from this meeting are discussed in more detail in section 6.5. In summary, the meeting was conducted informally, presenting the issues to be addressed on two slides, on which the respondents began to discuss with each other and ask me questions. The interesting aspect was the intergenerational debate that arose spontaneously among the respondents, revealing different views on concepts such as “inclusion and intercultural education” and ways of living the engagement. An interesting fact emerged at the linguistic level, as the women of the diasporas of the older generations used different terminologies to describe their engagement, compared to those of the newer generations. For example, the expressions “inclusion and intercultural education” were used by older generations, while the newer ones try to develop a communication that does not focus on the idea of being included in something. The women of the newer generations therefore deconstruct concepts hitherto taken for granted, such as inclusion, which implicitly presupposes “a being out of something.” Moreover, the women of the newer generations also in their engagement

process of consensus building among researchers and participants” (Martina Angela Caretta, Maria Alejandra Perez, 2019, 360).

aim more to deconstruct a Eurocentric cultural system and contest more clearly the positionality of the researcher.

Finally, on the basis of the methodology there is the fundamental question of the ethics of research, which has been of great importance. First, before each interview, a form was sent to each interviewee to be signed, with the explanation of the research and the communication that the data would be processed anonymously. In addition, at the end of the drafting of biographical summaries, respondents were asked to eliminate parts in case they felt uncomfortable. The final decision has always been of the interviewees, which in some cases have decided to leave some information that could lead back to them. Regarding the names of organizations with which they work, some respondents decided to leave the names, while others to anonymise them. Each biographical summary that appears in the appendix was in fact sent and approved by the respondents.

5.3 The choice of subjects in Italy and Finland: characteristics of the interviewed women

Regarding the field of investigation, research was chosen to be carried out in the geographical spaces of Italy and Finland due to the historical presence of the Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali diaspora respectively, as explained in Chapter 4. In particular, the choice of Finland among the various Northern European states was determined by the fact that the Somali community is the largest African diaspora community in Finland; whereas the Ethiopian and Eritrean communities in the same country have been little explored in the literature. Within these diasporas, the decision to focus on the female component was due to the need to shed more light on the female gender perspective in diaspora-related forms of engagement. Despite the fact that several research projects have been done on women's forms of associationism also related to diasporas, little emphasis has been placed on these women as agents of change and on the declination of their agency. Moreover, focusing on the female component of these diasporas aims to deconstruct the representation of subalternity of Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali women

in general, linked to colonialism, in order to highlight their character not as victims, but as active subjects and drivers of change.

That said, the criterion for the selection of women to be interviewed concerns the co-presence of two characteristics: connection to the Ethiopian, Eritrean or Somali diaspora; and participation in one or more forms of engagement. No generational distinctions were made, as there are women of different generations linked to these three diasporas and active in different fields, who in many cases also collaborate with each other. Once the selection criterion of interviewees has been established, there was a first moment of meeting with experts in the field, both in Italy and Finland, who provided the contacts to identify the initial respondents. Later, the first respondents were identified and used the so-called *snowball technique*³², for which the latter indicated the names of other women to be interviewed. This was a significant element as well as for the suggestion of contacts, also because it allowed rebuilding of the networks of diasporic and transnational collaboration of the various women interviewed at the level of engagement. However, in order to ensure the heterogeneity of the women interviewed and not rely solely on the contacts suggested by other respondents, at the same time a verification of the main Afro-descendant women of these diasporas, who are active in various forms of engagement in Italy and Finland, was made. There were no fixed numbers of respondents related to each diaspora (Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali), but the attempt was to balance as much as possible the presence of women from the three diasporas both in Italy and Finland. However, it should be remembered that the choice of these three diasporas does not aim to offer fixed criteria of ethnicity, but constitutes a frame of reference for delineating the field of research. 16 women were identified in Italy and 14 women in Finland, belonging to different cities in the case of Italy, while mainly in Helsinki and surroundings in the case of Finland. The interviews were therefore not carried out exclusively in the city of Milan in Italy, so in many cases because of the distance they were carried out online. In Finland, however, most of the interviews were in person, except in a few cases where the interviewees lived outside Helsinki. The tables 3 and 4 show respectively the main characteristics of the

³² The sampling through the snowball technique is characterized by successive phases. First, the people who have the right characteristics are interviewed; then these provide indications to contact other people with the same characteristics, and so on (Piergiorgio Corbetta, 1941).

interviewees in Italy and Finland. Where the description “Italo-Ethiopian” appears, this means women who were born of an Italian and an Ethiopian parent.

Table 3 - Characteristics of the women interviewed in Italy

Code	Age (approximately)	Background	Educational qualification
IT-1	45	Eritrean	University Degree
IT-2	40	Eritrean	High School
IT-3	45-50	Ethiopian	High School
IT-4	40	Somali	PhD Student
IT- 5	40	Ethiopian	High School
IT-6	60	Somali	High School
IT-7	30	Italo-Ethiopian	University Degree
IT-8	60	Somali	University Degree
IT-9	65	Eritrean	University Degree
IT-10	35	Eritrean	PhD Student
IT-11	50	Italo-Ethiopian	University Degree
IT-12	50-60	Somali	University Degree
IT-13	60	Somali	University Degree
IT-14	70	Italo-Ethiopian	University Degree
IT-15	60	Eritrean	University Degree
IT-16	30-40	Eritrean	PhD

Source: prepared by the author

Table 4 - Characteristics of the women interviewed in Finland

Code	Age (approximately)	Background	Educational qualification
FIN-1	40	Somali	University Degree
FIN-2	50	Somali	University Degree
FIN-3	25	Somali	VET Qualification
FIN-4	50	Ethiopian	University Degree
FIN-5	30	Somali	University Degree
FIN-6	30	Somali	University Degree
FIN-7	40	Eritrean	VET Qualification
FIN-8	30	Somali	University Degree
FIN-9	35	Somali	High School
FIN-10	20-30	Eritrean	University Degree
FIN-11	40	Eritrean	VET Qualification
FIN-12	30-35	Ethiopian	PhD Student
FIN-13	30-40	Ethiopian	University Degree
FIN-14	30-40	Ethiopian	University Degree

Source: prepared by the author

In summary, as David Silverman explains “in qualitative research, we do not try to generalize about populations but about social processes. So don’t worry about the apparently ‘non random’ choice of cases. Your analysis of these cases will succeed if it allows you to identify credible social processes” (David Silverman, 2017, 263). The choice of women to be interviewed was partly a collaborative process, in which the researcher partly relied on other experienced people, and partly made a search for contacts and related information on the latter. The relevance of the women chosen to be interviewed lies in the social processes in which they are protagonists, and which influence and transform with their actions.

5.4 The analysis procedure

From an operational point of view, the choice that was made to proceed with the analysis was, starting from *racconti di vita*, to create *biographical portraits*, from listening to the interviews. This choice was due to the desire not to violate the biographical structure of the interview and the narratives of the interviewees, avoiding fragmentation. Therefore, *biographical portraits* of approximately two to three pages each were created, first of the interviews made in Italy and then of those made in Finland, following the orientation of the interview's grid. The themes developed in these *biographical portraits* were therefore always the same, but are presented according to the order and relevance of the interviewees. The *biographical portraits*, where the interviewees gave their consent, have been included in the appendix of this thesis, coded as shown in the two tables below. It is considered significant to present respondents' biographical narratives in their completeness, due to the importance of the meanings conveyed.

Table 5 - *Biographical portraits* in Italy

<i>Biographical portraits</i>	Women's ways of defining
IT-bio-1	Political and social engaged woman
IT-bio-2	Artistic and social engaged woman
IT-bio-3	Political and social engaged woman
IT-bio-4	Academic and social engaged woman
IT-bio-5	Political and social engaged woman
IT-bio-6	Teacher and writer
IT-bio-7	Social engaged woman
IT-bio-8	Writer and social engaged woman
IT-bio-9	Social engaged woman
IT-bio-10	Academic and social engaged woman
IT-bio-11	Political and social engaged woman

IT-bio-12	Social and intercultural educator
IT-bio-13	Social and intercultural educator
IT-bio-14	Writer and social/intercultural educator
IT-bio-15	Political and social engaged woman
IT-bio-16	Academic and social engaged woman

Source: prepared by the author

Table 6 - *Biographical portraits* in Finland

<i>Biographical portraits</i>	Women's ways of defining
FIN-bio-1	Teacher and writer
FIN-bio-2	Social engaged woman
FIN-bio-3	Teacher and social engaged woman
FIN-bio-4	Political and social engaged woman
FIN-bio-5	Entrepreneur and social engaged woman
FIN-bio-6	Social engaged woman
FIN-bio-7	Social engaged woman
FIN-bio-8	Educator and social engaged woman
FIN-bio-9	Political and social engaged woman
FIN-bio-10	Social engaged woman
FIN-bio-11	Social engaged woman
FIN-bio-12	Academic and social engaged woman
FIN-bio-13	Educator and social engaged woman
FIN-bio-14	Academic and social engaged woman

Source: prepared by the author

Two types of analysis were carried out, dealing with interviews made in Italy and Finland jointly, without separating them so they can better relate to each other. The two analyses conducted are a thematic and biographical analysis, which are not separate from each other but closely related and complement each other. Biographical analysis

constitutes a further analytical elaboration following thematic analysis in that, after an initial analysis, it interprets life tales in the form of *biographical portraits*. This analysis was made according to the diachronic perspective of the biographical approach, deepening the main themes emerged. This allowed at macro and meso level to relate individual biographical paths with the historical and social context in which they are set. At the micro level, it made it possible to identify different individual types of women among the interviewees, highlighting their agency and relating these individual types to different forms of engagement. Furthermore, macro, meso and micro sociological levels are connected in identifying the stages of a pattern of change in the respondents' life paths. The thematic analysis³³, instead, is characterized by identifying from the interviews four thematic groups, codified to answer to the research questions. In carrying out this coding, four interrelated thematic dimensions emerged: a first thematic area concerns the meanings and ways of experiencing the diasporas; a second one regards the meanings of war and peace, linked to the diasporas; a third one deals with the forms and meaning of engagement; and finally a fourth one is about the changes achieved by their engagement, considering the influence of the countries of residence. Carrying out the coding in this way made it possible to bring out the meanings attributed by the interviewees to these four thematic dimensions within a biographical and narrative coherence that allows the individual cases to be given value.

In particular, the relevance and choice of also conducting a thematic analysis alongside a biographical analysis was determined by the need to focus on the four central aspects that unite the biographical paths of the interviewees. The four thematic strands identified allow the intersecting dimensions that emerge in the fluidity of the biographies to be explored. On the one hand, therefore, these thematic aspects central to answering the research questions emerge fluidly in the spatio-temporal course of the interviewees' biographical paths; on the other hand, they are explored as if through a magnifying glass with thematic analysis. Finally, biographical and thematic analysis have been linked together to avoid a fragmented analytical framework and to show how the thematic areas emerged are not detached from the biographical paths, but emerge

³³ Thematic analysis is a procedure that uses themes as a unit of classification, which are simple propositions that synthesize more articulated propositions (Gianni Losito, 1946). In the thematic analysis of this research the key issues were identified by the words of the respondents, using research questions as a guide.

from them. These types of analysis have made it possible to develop an interpretative pathway from the key interpretations of the women interviewed, who provide insights to revisit theoretical categories relating to diaspora theory, national contexts and forms of diasporic engagement. The perspective developed through the analysis of the interviews is one of deconstruction of Western categories, which I have attempted to adopt throughout the analysis.

In conclusion, at the level of analysis, it is important to clarify the distinction between categories of analysis and categories of practice. As R. Brubaker explains, the boundary between the two types of categories is often thin, and it is important for scholars to position themselves critically and self-reflectively with respect to the categories they use (Brubaker, 2013). In conducting biographical and thematic analysis, the respondents were identified as “women of diasporas” (respectively of Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali diasporas). This category of analysis has a coincidence also in the practical category, as they are women who belong to three different diasporas and participate in the diasporic processes in practice, but should not be considered as a homogeneous group, but heterogeneous, even within the same diaspora. This is the first fundamental aspect to take into account when adopting “women of diasporas” as a category of analysis. The second fundamental aspect concerns the risk of labeling those results from adopting this category of analysis, as it implies a kind of differentiation from the rest of the population. The category of analysis adopted of “women of diasporas”, in relation to the narratives of biographical interviews, refers to the women related to the three diasporas in a wide sense: they are not only women who directly lived the diasporic flow moving to Italy or Finland; but also those who were born in one of these EU countries. The expression refers therefore to women who maintain a more or less strong link with their own or other diasporas, from a transnational perspective, which translates into various engagement activities that are not, however, limited to the diasporic sphere. For this reason, the analysis category of “women of diasporas” is also related in the course of the analysis to the concept of post-diasporic, which allows analysis of the complexity of diasporic experiences in globalization, by translating discussions regarding time, space and belonging into a conceptual frame that goes beyond the concept of diaspora and homeland (Rollins, 2010; Scafe, 2019). In summary,

the analytical category “women of diasporas” is not meant to be a rigid label that pits women with a diasporic background as opposed to other subjectivities; rather, it is meant to open up a reflection on their central role not only in the diasporas but also beyond, for the improvement of the societies in which they live. Therefore, in analyzing the different engagement activities of these women, a reflection is also developed on how they define themselves, deconstructing and redefining concepts.

In order to avoid highlighting a differentiation due to ethnicity, space is left in the analysis for the self-definition that emerges from the biographical narratives of the interviewees. Therefore, the self-definition and construction of feeling Italian or Finnish by the interviewees is also emphasized, which represents an important point of contact between categories of analysis and categories of practice.

5.5 My positionality as researcher

A methodological issue that is at the heart of this research, being research with racialized subjects, is the problem of the researcher’s positioning³⁴. Indeed, the issue of the researcher’s positionality occupied a large part of the discussion with the interviewees. Positioning oneself when conducting research with racialized subjects is crucial, as it allows for a process of self-reflection on one’s own privilege. As a researcher (therefore representative of an institution), and a white woman (therefore belonging to a Western state, in the case of Italy also colonial) I had to initiate a process of reflection, both to deconstruct my Western knowledge, and to adopt certain expressions³⁵ over others in the relationship with the respondents. Indeed, when doing research with racialized subjects or groups as outsiders, one is considered by them to be incapable of understanding cultural complexities and the racism they suffer. Moreover,

³⁴“During the last couple of decades, efforts to problematize essentialist approaches that treat insider and outsider dilemma of researcher positionality in terms of ethnic or national belonging to a community have been rapidly gaining volume, especially in migration studies where scrutinizing these identities has become all the more complex (Amelina and Faist 2012; Shinozaki 2012; Carling, Erdal, and Ezzati 2014; Ryan 2015)” (Bahar Baser, Mari Toivonen, 2018, 1).

³⁵Reflection on the oral and written language (e.g., in the interview grid) to be used is a central dimension, as language is performative. Thus, although it implies a representation of reality that has a practical feedback and produces certain social representations, it does not remain abstract.

the outsider researcher is often viewed with distrust as being associated with “white elites” who want to do research on issues that do not affect them personally. In this regard, it is significant what B. Baser and M. Toivanen explain, echoing Carling, Erdal and Ezzati’s categorisation; namely that methodological debates centred on the opposition between knowledge from an internal perspective and objective external knowledge tend to reduce ethnicity to a static social category, instead of conceiving it as situational and plural. Indeed, one has to ask in which situations ethnicity becomes meaningful and why the researcher’s ethnicity becomes particularly relevant only in certain circumstances (Baser, Toivanen, 2018).

I experienced this situation first hand, especially in Italy when I received several refusals to participate in the research, revealing how my ethnicity as a white woman was particularly relevant in a research situation. In Finland this situation occurred to a lesser extent, as I only received one refusal. Even in the case of the women who decided to participate in the research, during the interviews in Italy there were objections to certain points of the research, and references to my position of privilege. Therefore, when doing research with racialized subjects or groups, one needs to be aware of the power relations at play. One must keep in mind that the researcher’s positionality varies not only spatially, in different geographical areas or research spaces, but also temporally (Baser, Toivanen, 2018). The political circumstances of a given country, for example, greatly influence the perception of the researcher’s positionality. The fact that my positioning elicited different reactions in Italy and Finland is a sign of the influence of different spatialities and contextual conditions. A significant event to better understand the different perception of my positionality between Italy and Finland was an episode in which I was attributed white fragility by a person who had refused to do the interview. The expression white fragility means “a state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves” (Robin DiAngelo, 2011, 57). This is an implication that must be contemplated and be aware of, when doing research with racialized groups. In the cited episode, this supposed feeling of white fragility was triggered by defining my behaviour as unconsciously discriminatory, the result of my white membership.

To best address the issue of the researcher's positionality, during the research process I adopted a posture that can be called *active reflexivity*. The latter consists first of all of humility, understood as acceptance of "complex contingence and human-ness of the research enterprise and allow this recognition to shape our research designs, interactions, and interpretations (Fujii 2017)" (Jessica Soedirgo, Aarie Glas, 2020, 529). To be actively reflective one must therefore, as these two researchers explain, continually question one's own positionality and work on the dynamics of social interaction. In fact, the researcher has to reflect on how the interviewees (in this case, racialized women) perceive his or her positionality and try to put himself or herself in their shoes, also paying attention to the linguistic and content formulation of the interview questions.

More narrowly, we see active reflexivity as a triple movement consisting of ongoing interrogations of (1) our positionality; (2) how our positionality is read by others, given their own social location and the contexts in which we interact; and (3) the assumptions about our conclusions in the first two stages (Soedirgo, Glas, 2020, 527).

Therefore, in the course of my research I started a process of deconstruction, which led me to implement negotiation processes with the interviewees, but also to reduce the distance between researcher and participants, deciding to adopt the path by doing different research strategies. Convinced of the fact that a process of self-reflection is necessary in any type of research, even if it does not involve racialized subjects, I decided to make the data analysis process participatory for the part concerning the writing of the biographical summaries of the women interviewed. In connection also with the ethics adopted in the research, I opted for a co-construction of the biographical summaries, sending each interviewee her own biography. Each one then considered whether it was necessary to suggest changes, or directly delete parts or details that could lead back to her. This process of co-construction aims to reduce the distance due to the positionality of the researcher, as well as the hierarchy inherent in research in general. The adoption of these strategies is precisely the result of the implementation of a process of *active reflexivity*, and also implied that some interviewees, especially in Italy,

did not give feedback on their biographical synthesis. This is why the appendix of the thesis does not include all the *biographical portraits* of the interviewees. I consider this to be an added value and not something that detracts from the research, as it is evidence of the freedom granted to the interviewees, as it should be, and also a significant piece of data regarding the researcher's perceived positionality. Indeed, the missing *biographical portraits* mainly concern Italy where already at the beginning of the research, as explained above, more distrust emerged. This must also be related to Italy's colonial past, which has left a considerable mark even today.

In summary, the choice of this methodology thus allows the research questions to be answered by placing the subjects at the core of knowledge production; it also tries to bridge the gap, still too widespread in research, between researchers and participants. The process of *active reflexivity* led to the development, from reflection on my own positioning, of a broader reflection on the methodological level that highlights techniques to improve the research process not only with racialized subjects, but in general. Research participants should be regarded not as objects of study, but as subjects with whom the research is carried out.

In conclusion, adopting the analytical and methodological approach described above, the following chapters will present the results of the sociological investigation. These not only reveal the richness of what emerged, but also the limitations due to the subjectivity and positioning of the researcher as a white woman and representative of an institution. While always bearing this in mind, the research findings presented below are the result of a process of deconstruction of the researcher, as well as of a process of negotiation with the participants of the research, who contributed to the analysis of the results by providing their interpretations.

CHAPTER 6

An exploratory study of Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali diasporas in Italy and Finland: the contextualisation through the voices of interviewed stakeholders

This chapter aims to contextualize the phenomenon of three diasporas of the Horn of Africa, respectively Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali, in Italy and Finland, through the first phase of the research characterized by semi-structured interviews to stakeholders and informal meetings with experts on the topic. This exploratory study aims to understand the main characteristics, engagement and connections of the three diasporas, as well as the relationality between the various geographical contexts under consideration, to get a useful frame for the second and biographical phase of the research. Figure 2 represents a map of the Horn of Africa, showing the geographical areas from which the three diasporas originated, with some internal divisions. The Horn of Africa represents one of the most strategic areas of Africa, and it is interesting to know more about it.

Fig. 5 - Map of the Horn of Africa and its internal divisions



Source: Iginio Gagliardone, Nicole Stremlau, 2011, 3.

“The Horn of Africa is one of the most important and strategic areas of Africa and the global economy. It is a bridge between Africa and the Middle East, as well as a gateway to the oilfields of the Persian Gulf. It is a culturally and historically rich region of the world with great natural resource potential” (Abdi Jama Ghedi, 2007, 61)³⁶.

Going into the specific structure of the chapter, section 6.1 explains why Italy and Finland were chosen to investigate the Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali diasporas; and how the process of entering the field to find stakeholder contacts came about. In this regard, in Italy 11 semi-structured interviews to stakeholders have been done; while in Finland 3 semi-structured interviews and 4 informal meetings. The reason why fewer semi-structured interviews were conducted in Finland is due to both time reasons and the fact that, given the research experience in Italy, various contextualizing information on the three diasporas could also be derived from the biographical interviews. Therefore, with regard to Finland, useful information from the biographical interviews is also used in outlining the phenomenon.

³⁶ World History Archives [The economic history of the Horn of Africa as a whole \(hartford-hwp.com\)](http://hartford-hwp.com)

Section 6.2 contextualizes the three diasporas in Italy, focusing on three main themes emerging from the semi-structured interviews, namely the characteristics of the three diasporas, their main forms of engagement and mobilization, and the female component. In outlining these three diasporas in Italy, issues of war and peace are highlighted, also showing the connection between the situation of war in the Horn of Africa and Italian colonialism as determining factors in the generation of these diasporas towards Italy. Section 6.3 contextualizes, instead, these same three diasporas in Finland following the same thematic division as the exploratory study carried out in Italy. These are successive diasporic flows at a temporal level compared to those of Italy, and determined by both similar and different reasons. In describing the three diasporas in Finland, a comparison is also made with the same diasporas in Italy to highlight commonalities and differences.

Finally, a further step is made to interpret the three diasporas in Italy and Finland according to the paradigm of fluidity: these diasporas, although living in specific countries, favor the creation of spaces without borders through their transnational networks, supported especially by digitalization. In short, the Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali diasporas are investigated in Italy and Finland, but this must not limit the vision to two national states with rigid and fixed borders. The intent is to challenge this status quo. This will also be the point of contact for the subsequent analysis of the second phase of the research.

6.1 The access to research field through contacts, interviews, and events: relationships between geographical spaces

Italy and Finland are two different European contexts, but they share also some similarities, regarding for instance the discriminatory attitude and Eurocentric colonial mentality. This is one of the aspects that show the connection between these two states as geographical and social spaces in which to investigate the presence of the Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali diasporas. But it is not the only factor. Previous research within the European *Diaspeace Project Diasporas for Peace* (2008-2011) chose, along with other

EU states, Italy and Finland to analyze the transnational political activities of the Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali diasporas based in Europe. The research carried out in the framework of the *Diaspeace Project* reveals that these three diasporas, at the moment in which their transnational political engagement concerning in particular peacebuilding was analyzed, have internal divisions both in Italy and in Finland. In addition to the Somali diaspora, which is fragmented by clanic, regional and other divisions (religious, generational, etc.), the Ethiopian and Eritrean diasporas also present internal fragmentation and politicization. These divisions are probably imported from the country of origin, which may influence transnational interventions (African Diaspora Policy Center, 2010).

More in-depth research was then carried out on the Somali diaspora organizations in Italy and Finland which are active at transnational level. According to this research (carried out within the *Diaspeace Project*), in Italy there are 41 networks and organizations related to the Somali diaspora (Petra Mezzetti, Valeria Saggiomo, Päivi Pirkkalainen, 2014). These organizations differ according to their level of professionalization: some have exceeded the level of voluntarism and have become more structured. They are also organizations with Italian staff and other backgrounds; and in some cases carry out at the same time different types of activities aimed both at Italy and Somalia. In Finland, instead, there are over 100 registered associations of the Somali diaspora, of which about fifty are active. This is certainly influenced by the fact that in Finland and in the northern European states in general, establishing an association is easier. “In the case of Finland, Somalis are active in associations which they have established on their own, or else they join multicultural or native Finnish NGOs and CBOs, which also lobby on Somalia-related issues at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs” (Petra Mezzetti, Valeria Saggiomo, Päivi Pirkkalainen, 2014, 172). *Diaspeace Project* represents an excellent starting point for the present research, even though it deals with somewhat different topics. Additionally, in this project an investigation has not been made of the various organizations of the Ethiopian and Eritrean diasporas present in Italy and Finland.

This exploratory background research makes it possible to define the two contexts and the relationships between them. It is possible, in fact, to investigate the relationship between Northern and Southern Europe, with a view to movement and translocality

between spaces and borders in the North and in the South. The Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali diasporas are characterized by mobility not only between Italy and Finland, countries that are situated respectively in Southern and Northern Europe, but also among other European states, whose borders should begin to be deconstructed. Indeed, borders exist on maps but not in reality: they can be defined as a Eurocentric mental construction that limits the freedom of movement between spatialities. What is interesting is that these borders also divide Europe epistemologically. The terms northern and southern Europe refer to a kind of internal division of Europe, according to which the northern European states have more efficient Welfare state systems and are therefore superior to the southern European states. One could speak of a kind of “colonialism within colonialism”, which breeds prejudice. The sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos explains this distinction well:

the historical problems of internal colonialisms, between North Europe and South Europe, return to the recent policies of the European Union. As academics and intellectuals, we need to be aware of the deep histories of such debates, the long term (*longue durée*), and the types of prejudices that compromise solutions of the present predicament. Such solutions need to afford dignity for people, and particularly for those seeking social protection and well-being in a society that is becoming increasingly exclusive and discriminatory (Boaventura de Sousa Santos, 2016, 17).

Diasporas in general challenge the Eurocentric conception of borders by creating translocal, geographical and digital spaces in which they produce new cultural, political and social meanings. Specifically, Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali diasporas connect Italy and Finland, and in general the Northern and Southern world, especially through digital transnational networks, which in today’s increasingly digital world are the continuation of physical spaces. What is interesting is that the Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali diasporas have developed digital networks that also create an exchange beyond borders between Europe and their respective Horn of Africa states. According to a research by Open Society Foundations that maps the use of digital media by these three diasporas, these have created several websites and forums that have facilitated the

organization of transnational political and social initiatives between Europe and the Horn of Africa. Moreover, Iginio Gagliardone, Nicole Stremlau, (2011) identified the websites that are most popular³⁷ among the three diasporas and significant because they enable a relationality between different geographical spaces, transposing a kind of “borderless digital geographies” as spaces of action into the digital. “Digital media allow the creation of a space that is neither here nor there, but can also serve as a space that is both diaspora and homeland at the same time, creating new possibilities for connection and disjuncture” (Ponzanesi, 2021, 4). The first websites of the Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali diasporas were created by members of diasporic communities in the United States or European states (Gagliardone, Stremlau, 2011). Digital spaces are constantly evolving, particularly with the emergence of new generations of diasporic citizens.

Considering this premise, my research starts by identifying some stakeholders to be interviewed with semi-structured interviews, through organizations of the Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali diasporas both in Italy and Finland. The interviews with stakeholders (11 in Italy, and 2 in Finland together with various informal meetings), prior to the biographical interviews with the active women, allow to contextualize the phenomenon of the three diasporas to have the necessary knowledge on the subject. Access to the research field in Italy was made possible thanks to the existence of the project called *A.M.I.C.O.*, led by the *IOM Organization*, that saw the participation of different Ethiopian and Eritrean diasporic organizations, alongside other diaspora organizations, (Stefano Marinelli, Ylenia Rocchini, Bernardo Monzani, 2021). Thanks to the contact of the IOM’s referent for the AMICO project, I had access to the file of organizations from the Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali diasporas that had taken part in this project, which were 13 in total. I thus contacted each of them, and the ones that replied to me were as follows: *Associazione Shukran* in Milan, of the Somali diaspora; *Ass. Soomaaliya Onlus* in Turin, *Associazione AMEB* in Milan, *Ass. Generazione Ponte*

³⁷ The main websites founded by these three diasporas are respectively (Iginio Gagliardone, Nicole Stremlau, 2011):

for the Eritrean diaspora, <http://www.dehai.org>, <http://asmarino.com>, <http://awate.com>; for the Ethiopian diaspora, <http://www.nazret.com>, <http://www.ethiopianreview.com>, <http://www.ethiomedias.com>; for the Somali diaspora, <http://www.hiiraan.com>, <http://wardheernews.com>, <http://www.sirag.org.uk>.

in Turin, *Donne Eritree* Bologna, *Associazione Amici dell'Etiopia* in Trento, *Associazione AELAP* in Piemonte, *Associazione Corno d'Africa ODV* in Cagliari. Although there are not many organizations, they are active on various fronts.

The contacts of these organizations were crucial in identifying stakeholders, both active in these associations and not, who were experts of the three diasporas and available for an interview. The access to the field for my research therefore took place, as far as Italy is concerned, on the one hand through the receipt of contacts of diaspora organizations and stakeholders; on the other hand through participation in events organized on the topic of diasporas and engagement. In particular, I took part in the annual summit called the *National Summit of Diasporas*, in Rome, where all diaspora organizations in Italy are involved. The aim of this event is to foster the leadership of the various diaspora organisations in cooperation projects; in addition, this summit led to the creation of the *Italian Coordination of Diasporas for International Cooperation* in December 2023. I also participated in the *Black History Month* initiatives in Turin, where events are organized by people with a migrant background and various members of diasporas; as well as in some initiatives organised by *Milano Città Mondo*, which through the citywide network of associations, citizens of diasporas, activists and scholars cultivated over the years, promotes various participatory activities. Participating in these events allowed me to make important contacts not only for my research, but also for future collaboration, and to get to know several renowned representatives of the Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali diasporas in Italy.

With regard to Finland, the access to the field was made possible due to some contacts provided by researchers of *CEREN, The Centre for Research on Ethnic Relations and Nationalism* of the University of Helsinki, where I was visiting researcher from September to December 2022. Thanks to the contacts provided, also by word of mouth, I was able to conduct three interviews with stakeholders who were experts on the subject, and a series of informal meetings with several members of the Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali diasporas in Finland. The interviews to stakeholders in Finland were sufficient for the access to the research field. I had already gathered enough information about the context of the three diasporas, also in relation to Finland, as some of the interviewees in Italy had also worked there. These three semi-structured interviews were complemented by some informal meetings that were very useful for a

more specific knowledge of the topic, which were possible thanks to my participation in several events of African diaspora organizations in Finland.

In particular, I took part in the annual event of *Think Africa Week*, which brings together all members/organizations of the African diaspora in Finland to discuss concrete actions that diasporas can implement; and to *Global Somali Diaspora Summit*, which unites members of the Somali diaspora from all over the world. This last is organized each year in a different EU city and has in its organizing committee many members of the Somali diaspora residing in Finland, who plan the summit each year in a different state. Moreover, I had the opportunity to visit the *Tampere Peace Research Institute* (TAPRI) of Tampere University, in a city not far from Helsinki. Here I had a meeting with a researcher who is an expert on migration and peace activities. Participating in these events was very useful to gather contacts and background information regarding the three diasporas, as well as to see how collaborative networks are created between members of all African diasporas in Finland. The access of the research field was therefore conducted in a similar way in Italy and Finland, as semi-structured interviews with stakeholders were accompanied by informal participation in a series of diaspora organizations' events. The contacts of stakeholders and at events were also crucial for the second phase of the research, as they enabled me to find women active in the three diasporas who were available for biographical interviews.

The tables below show the stakeholders interviewed in Italy and Finland, with their respective areas of expertise, to gain a more systematic view of the first exploratory phase of the research.

Table 7 - Stakeholders in Italy

Interviews to stakeholders in Italy	City and expertise
It1EXP-F	Pavia, scholar of Ethiopian and Eritrean diasporas
It2EXP-M	Milan, expert on Ethiopian and Eritrean diasporas
It3EXP-M	Milan, expert on Eritrean diaspora

It4EXP-F	Cagliari, expert on Horn of Africa diasporas
It5EXP-F	Milan, expert on Somali diaspora
It6EXP-M	Turin, expert on Somali diaspora
It7EXP-F	Milan, expert on Somali diasporas
It8EXP-F	Rome, expert on Eritrean diaspora and on diasporas in general
It9EXP-M	Turin, expert on Somali diaspora
It10EXP-F	Milan, expert on Eritrean diaspora
It11EXP-F	Milan, researcher of <i>Diaspeace Project</i>

Source: prepared by the author

Table 8 - Stakeholders in Finland

Interviews/ meetings to stakeholders in Finland	City and expertise
Fi1EXP-M	Helsinki, expert on Horn of Africa diasporas and researcher of <i>Diaspeace Project</i>
Fi2EXP-M	Helsinki, expert on Somali diaspora
Fi3EXP-M (meeting)	Helsinki, researcher on African diasporas at CEREN
Fi4EXP-F (meeting)	Helsinki, one of the organizers of Global Somali Diaspora Summit 2022
Fi5EXP-F (meeting)	Tampere, researcher at Tampere Peace Research Institute
Fi6EXP-F (meeting)	One of the members of <i>Think Africa</i> organization

Source: prepared by the author

These two tables show the characteristics of the stakeholders who were interviewed in Italy (It) and Finland (Fi). In the alphanumerical abbreviations, the initials *EXP*

indicate that they are experts on the topic, while the letters *M* (male) or *F* (female) denote the gender of the interviewees. It should be pointed out that the female stakeholders differ from the female respondents of the second phase of the research, in that they have been scholars and experts on at least one of the three diasporas for several years, and most of them do not feel themselves to be activists. In Finland, the first two stakeholders were interviewed with semi-structured interviews, while the other four were interviewed in informal meetings. Stakeholders in both Italy and Finland were provided with useful characteristics for an overview, without giving too many details in order to respect anonymity. Moreover, most of them in both countries are of Ethiopian, Eritrean or Somali origin.

For both countries, stakeholders with various backgrounds, researchers, scholars or experts from the three diasporas, many of whom are also active in diaspora organizations, were interviewed. Expert stakeholders from all three diasporas were contacted, although as can be seen in the table in Finland there is more expertise on the Somali diaspora due to its large presence. Two researchers of the *Diaspeace Project* were also interviewed, respectively a female in Italy and a male in Finland, who provided important information to contextualize the three diasporas. As mentioned above, fewer experts were encountered in Finland due to both time constraints and less availability. Therefore, the presentation of the results of the exploratory study in Finland will be supplemented with some contextualizing information from the biographical interviews.

6.2 “When you get inside the community dynamics you realise that there are many sub-stories” (It2EXP-M): diasporas of the Horn of Africa in Italy between war and peace

The semi-structured interviews with stakeholders in Italy were analysed on a thematic level to provide the necessary information for the exploration of the research topic, i.e., the engagement of women in the Horn of Africa diasporas. Therefore, in these interviews, stakeholders were asked about the contextualisation of the three diasporas in Italy, in order to have a more general and complete picture in which to place the research. Three key aspects emerged from the analysis that allow us to

understand the internal dynamics of the three diasporas, namely, the main characteristics of the three diasporic communities in Italy as united, but also heterogeneous and fragmented within themselves; the main forms of mobilization of these diasporas; and the female component as a driving force within each diaspora, which began in the past. Starting with an exploration of the phenomenon of the Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali diasporas in Italy, it is possible to identify aspects that the three diasporas have in common, as well as peculiar characteristics of each and their internal divisions. With regard to the Ethiopian diaspora, a strong link with the Eritrean diaspora emerged, due to cultural, linguistic and religious ties, but also the emergence of certain tensions due to political reasons.

The fact that Eritrean and Ethiopian diasporic communities are predominantly Christian should somehow tie us, let's say they are ethnic Habesha. The term Abyssinia or Abyssinian is given in the fascist period erroneously, because in reality Abyssinia is the translation of Habesha, which is an ethnicity, Abyssinia is the occupied territory and the Habesha is precisely my ethnicity, the one that populates part of Eritrea, Tigray and Ethiopia. So we are somewhat bound together by this commonality of religion, customs and also the language, Amharic. We had problems with Ethiopia for years, because there was this detachment, also political, which is very much felt abroad (It8-F).

So I'll make a premise: the fact that I feel attached to a community alone is not in my blood. I feel bound to people in general, I never talk about a community, and it goes without saying, however, that part of my life has been crossed, influenced, conditioned by everything that happened in the Ethiopian community of Eritrea, which for me are always the same thing, anyway. So I will always talk about unity. [...] Porta Venezia is a place that is very connected to the two communities since the late 60s, 70s and I think it is a very ritualistic community. Here it is easy to identify them, also for their rituals, perhaps in religious places. Later other spaces were also created, the one that has perhaps remained intact over time is Porta Venezia, which is always a reference point even for those who are just new to Milan (It10-F).

In addition to the information already provided by previous research, the interesting aspect that emerges from these quotes are the internal voices of these diasporas in Italy. In the case of the Ethiopian diaspora, it is hardly described as a diaspora in its own

right, but its connection to the Eritrean diaspora is always highlighted. This is the community that identifies itself as *Habesha*, comprising an ethnic group living in part of Eritrea and in the Tigray region of Ethiopia, who share religion, customs and language. Incorrectly, this community had been called Abyssinia by the fascists. The two interviewees are on the same line of thought regarding the sense of unity between these two communities. The shared spatialities of the two diasporic communities in the Horn of Africa are also repeated in Italy, with the creation of the Porta Venezia community in Milan, which became since the 1960s and 70s a symbolic and reference place for these diasporas. A space that is regenerated by these diasporic communities and transformed, making Porta Venezia a thriving commercial and cultural hub as it is today. Nevertheless, some tensions between the Ethiopian and Eritrean diasporas are also highlighted due to the outbreak of an armed conflict between 1961 and 1991, following the annexation of Eritrea by the Ethiopian government, which ended, after about thirty years, with the Eritrean victory and the proclamation of independence. Alongside this strong unitary character of the Ethiopian and Eritrean diasporas, a politicized and divided component also persists in Italy, as reported in the following quote.

When we were not yet talking about the Eritrean diaspora, precisely in the 1940s, when Italy lost its colonies in the Horn of Africa in 1941, at that time we had a first exit of Italian families from Eritrea, some of them decided to take their maids, the nannies who had been working with them for a lifetime. [...] It is not recognised as a diaspora in the sense that Eritrea did not exist as a nation-state or as a claim to nation-status at that time. Instead, when one really begins to speak of the Eritrean diaspora is in conjunction with the start of the war of liberation. [...] In the 1970s and then again in the 1980s there is a strong recrudescence of the conflict between the two fronts, it splits and so we have an Eritrean population fighting against what is called, by them, an African Ethiopian colonial force, so in Italy at that moment a politicized component begins to be created, strongly linked to what is the Eritrean nationalist question, especially in Bologna, Florence and Milan. [...] Whereas before there was a politically cohesive diaspora, especially in Europe, from 1998 and then in 2000 there is the so-called second diaspora, i.e. a diaspora that moves for different reasons than the one that moved in the 1960s and 1970s. It does not move in response to external violence, but because of a tightening of population control (It1-F).

This quote from an expert scholar on the Eritrean diaspora allows us to better contextualize this diaspora in Italy. It sheds light on what can be considered a pre-diaspora, as we do not yet speak of diaspora since Eritrea as a nation did not exist: it is the first flow of Italian families who returned to Italy after colonization, bringing with them in some cases Eritrean nannies. The first to arrive in Italy from Eritrea are therefore women, who are mainly nannies. It is only from the 1970s onwards, however, that people start talking about the Eritrean diaspora in Italy, coinciding with the beginning of the Eritrean war of liberation against the Ethiopian occupiers. It is a diaspora that becomes increasingly politicized and translates the nationalist question into Italy as well. Moreover, it is possible to divide the Eritrean diaspora between a first diaspora (before 1998) which was politically more cohesive; and a second diaspora (from 1998/2000), which was more disaggregated and moved from Eritrea because of population control. It is interesting to note the transformative character of the Ethiopian and Eritrean diasporas, at the level not only of the transformation of spaces, as we have seen in the case of Porta Venezia district in Milan, but also of instances: they bring a series of political issues to Italy, also creating spaces for discussion around certain issues regarding the Horn of Africa. The situation of the Somali diaspora in Italy, on the other hand, is different. As the following quote shows, it has a smaller presence than the Ethiopian and Eritrean diasporas.

Somalis and Somalia once had a relationship of a certain kind with Italy. Before colonialism, then after independence, and then from the 90's onwards another relationship. And as you well know, Somalia however went to war and lost, let's say, the relationship with almost all countries and it also applies to Italy, which no longer has a foreign policy of a certain type in the African continent, but especially in the Horn of Africa. [...] So young people like myself, like so many others have arrived as asylum seekers, as refugees, etc. [...] There is not a specific characteristic and if we want to talk about connections of a certain type between the old generation and the new generation, Italy for many Somalis is a transit country, so there is not a connection between different groups, between different cities (It6-M).

The Somali diaspora arrived in Italy around the 1960s and 1970s, but the interviewee distinguishes different evolutionary phases of the Italy-Somalia relationship: the relationship during colonialism, after Somalia's independence (1960) and after the 1990s. He does not see many connections between older and younger generations within the Somali diaspora in Italy, as for many Somalis Italy is a transit country for moving to other European states. This has not facilitated the creation of a community network of the Somali diaspora in Italy, in his opinion.

If, however, we go on to analyse the forms of mobilization of these three diasporas in Italy, which is the second theme that emerges from the stakeholders' interviews and which is useful for contextualising the research theme, all three diasporas turn out to be very active, right from their first arrival in Italy. In the case of the Somali diaspora, for example, there is mobilization both in Italy and towards Somalia, as the following expert explains:

In general, I think all of them, but I don't want to speak for everyone now, but the Somali community is usually very busy dealing with day-to-day issues both within the diaspora, in the context where they live in Italy, as well as issues in their community of origin. So there are 1000 issues daily to deal with. My role is to be an active part of that, like many others. [...] In this collective effort to keep the community alive and active, both locally, i.e. in Italy, and in the community of origin, I have a formal role as president of an association. [...] As I said before, the Somali diaspora, and almost all diasporas, are also involved in supporting their communities of origin. So many years ago, we created this association for international cooperation, i.e., for cooperation projects in Somalia, but which also deals with the local community in Italy, as far as possible often through other organizations (It9-M).

This quotation reveals a great engagement of the Somali community both in Italy and towards their country of origin; an engagement that is defined as a 'collective effort' by the interviewee, and which therefore suggests the presence of a network of actions. In particular, the interviewee is the president of an association that deals with cooperation projects in Somalia, but also supports the local diasporic community with the aid of other organisations. This insight into the engagement of the Somali diaspora seems to be in contrast to what the previous interviewee claimed; but it needs to be read through the

lens of individual stories within each diaspora. Indeed, the character that emerges is one of heterogeneity of experiences: depending on the individuals' experiences of the diaspora, a different picture sometimes emerges. It is by uniting these various images of diasporas that the frame is completed. A further insight into the forms of mobilization of the Somali diaspora emerges from the following quote by a researcher from the *Diaspeace* project.

So what we verified in our research was that substantially the divisions that we traced in the Somali diaspora in Italy were very often due to divisions and differences in political orientation with respect to the country of arrival and not to the country of origin. That is, the divisions on which these associations or these leadership figures are based are divisions of political orientation in Italy. [...] One has to see which areas the diaspora comes from, some macro divisions do exist, in the sense that anyway one tends to send aid to the motherland and perhaps support the home communities on a territorial basis. [...] The forms that I remember we traced were above all economic remittances, whether this money was then all directed exclusively to finance peaceful projects is to be seen, in the sense that one must also immerse oneself in those contexts. Somehow this money went both to build the peace projects and to possibly finance armed entities to defend those properties. The other issue in my opinion was to finance remittances, if you like, of a more political nature (It11-F).

Several interesting aspects emerge from this extract, primarily the fact that the research revealed internal divisions within the Somali diaspora that mainly reflect Italian political divisions, and not divisions within the motherland. Somalia-related territorial macro-divisions emerge mainly when mobilising and sending remittances, as members of the Somali diaspora tend to support the areas they come from. The main remittances are economic and financial of a political nature, but the money sent does not always support the population or peaceful projects. So although the *Diaspeace* project's research has identified support from the Somali diaspora to peacebuilding projects in their home country, there remains a grey area where it cannot be said with certainty that all funding goes to support such projects. Still, in the context of diasporic mobilization and engagement, a network also emerges that sometimes unites the three diasporas, as explained in the following quote:

Our association includes people from Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia, Djibouti, Sudan and also Kenya. We are active not only for people from the Horn of Africa, but also from West Africa and North Africa. [...] We give services to all the people who need our support, so we collaborate not only with associations, but also with institutions that ask us for help during extraordinary landings or landings organised with humanitarian corridors. So our service or activity is broad and is not limited only to third sector associations, but also to institutions that ask for our intervention. [...] The associations of the diasporas are organised in the form of associations, which are very active, but also in the form of communities or even in the form of friendships: not everyone is organized in an association with statutes, there are also forms in which friendship networks are created. [...] There is also a digital community of the Eritrean diaspora, and situations of online community gathering, exchanges of information, exchanges of help, including financial help, are created (It4-F).

This quote brings out further aspects of the mobilization of these three diasporas, in Italy and beyond. First of all, although the interviewee is an expert on the Eritrean diaspora, an interconnection emerges between various African diasporas in supporting those in need both in Italy and in the Horn of Africa and other African areas. In fact, the association with which the interviewee collaborates supports all diasporic citizens and those with a migrant background, networking not only with other associations but also collaborating with institutions. Another aspect that is highlighted is the different types of aggregation and mobilization of these diasporas in Italy, which can be in the form of associations with statutes, communities, friendship networks or even digital communities. An example is given of the Eritrean diasporic community, which is also active digitally for the exchange of information, remittances and financial aid. Diasporic engagement as a network of relationships and exchanges, even at a transnational level, is an interesting dimension that emerges and thus characterizes these diasporas. However, the mobilisation of the Ethiopian diaspora was less specifically thematised by the stakeholders interviewed, and was often associated with the Eritrean diaspora, as the following quote shows.

The Eritrean community is almost a political body so there are regular meetings, there is an agenda, there are conferences. The Eritrean community is very structured and driven

as a political body, it also participates when there are meetings at the international level and also in Eritrea. The role of the diaspora is strongly taken into account, also because it really has considerable economic and political weight. For the other communities, they are organised in associations, so there are those that are more dynamic, those that are less so, for the Somali community there are a lot of personalities, so they rely more on individuals who somehow manage to weave relationships that can then lead to aggregations. And the same for the Ethiopian diaspora (It8-F).

From the interviewee's words, a further piece emerges that allows us to better understand the Eritrean diasporic community in Italy, but also the engagement of the other two diasporas. The Eritrean diasporic community has a recognised political and economic role in Italy and a very organized and almost political structure, with a precise agenda and conventions. This political dimension of the Eritrean diaspora joins the other dimensions that have emerged. Somali and Ethiopian diasporas, on the other hand, have an engagement which is linked both to associations and to the emergence of charismatic personalities, who manage to play political roles or to become leaders of groups within political and social participation in Italy. There are thus two souls of diasporic engagement, which in some cases may be coexisting: a mobilization in the form of associations, groups or networks, including digital ones, also active towards the Horn of Africa states; and an engagement on a more individual basis that is carried out by prominent members of these diasporas.

From the information that has emerged from these three diasporas in Italy, it is possible to interpret them through the paradigm of fluidity, as their characteristics and engagement do not reveal a closure within certain national borders. In particular, the Ethiopian and Eritrean diasporas in the words of the interviewees present their own peculiarities, but also the blurred boundaries between them so that they can be understood as a fairly fluid community, which also organizes joint actions. The Somali diaspora, on the other hand, is described as quite fragmented internally, but can be interpreted with a fluid approach as it has developed networks in various parts of the world. It is a somewhat more dispersed but more international diaspora.

Having explored the main characteristics of the Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali diasporas in Italy and their engagement, based on what emerged from the semi-structured interviews, the last theme to be explored is the female dimension of

these diasporas. In particular, a contextualisation of the figure of women from these diasporas will be made, from the perspective of stakeholders and experts, which will be useful to better understand the second part of the research on the engagement of women activists, more or less related to these diasporas. The following quotations already reveal some key information to better understand the female component of these diasporas.

The woman is a central figure, even in political life, during the period of the struggle for independence many women were soldiers, those who were not at the front kept their families going because the men were at the front ... so they certainly took on a role of responsibility and a virtuous role because they kept their families going in a situation of war and important social situations, and I have always seen women who, in short, were protagonists of their personal and family affairs. But a distinction must be made, if we think of women who had the opportunity [...] In cultural life, if I talk to you about the women I have known who have been able to study, who have been able to realise a path of their own, I can think of more than one: they have a leading and strong attitude. So the distinction is always to be made, the women of this type are strong and central protagonists of community life: writers, activists, directors (It2-M).

[...] I have seen Eritreans and Ethiopians jointly helping people who had arrived in landings and then arrived in Milan, Eritreans and Ethiopians together acted as interpreters, it was always or almost always women who translated from Amharic to Italian or from Tigrinya to Italian, for the doctors, because then the people would answer the doctors' questions in their own language. And so this cooperation also made it possible to overcome the linguistic aspect in very practical matters (It2-M).

These extracts already highlight several aspects central to understanding the role of women. In relation to the Ethiopian and Eritrean diaspora, the centrality of the female figure emerges both at the political level and as a family leader. At the political level, several women, especially Eritreans, fought for liberation. Women also emerge as protagonists in the Italian social, political and cultural scenario, becoming writers, activists, or film directors, etc. However, the interviewee specifies that these are women who have had opportunities or have built them for themselves. Alongside the role of individual female figures, a community and network aspect also emerges among the

women of the diasporas, as in the case of the interpreting service that many women performed when needed in Milan. There is therefore a strong female component in Ethiopian and Eritrean diasporas, which is characterized both by a strong individual component and engagement, and a communitary dimension. The following quotation gives further information regarding women of Eritrean diaspora:

A series of events began to take place to raise funds and to support not only the diaspora, but also the Eritrean nationalist cause, and women were also at the forefront. Women are politicised, they support the national cause in the diaspora as well as in their home country where we have women active at the front, about 30% of the Eritrean Liberation Front is made up of women. [...] And after this phase, which lasted until Eritrea gained independence in 1991, we see a female component growing in dynamics, for new women born in Italy, some of whom are now activists and have also created associations, others are still in these groups tied to the Eritrean government (It1-F).

First of all, the politicization of Eritrean women is reaffirmed, both in Eritrea, where 30% of the Liberation Front is made up of women, and in Italy, establishing a link of continuity with the country of origin. Furthermore, an increase in the female component of the Eritrean diaspora after 1991 is described, which is divided between those who became activists and/or founded associations; and those who are still part of political groups linked to Eritrea. Overall, this is a very active and internally complex female component. With regard to the Somali diaspora, a female dimension of more community-based engagement emerges, also with a transnational perspective.

Somali women have been very useful because, not only in Italy, but also in Great Britain, Canada, America many women have become active. The majority of Somali women in Italy work, they are well integrated especially those who came 30 or 15 years ago [...] On cultural activity there are many Somali women, they are never lacking, and there are active associations; for everything women are active, except perhaps a little less in politics (It5-F).

And I know many Somali women who are active in very different ways in Italy. In the Somali diaspora you can identify different genders, so a more female diaspora in a

certain period, in the 1990s, before the war. [...] Many women went to more northern countries, more affluent, when they arrive there they are helped (It7-F).

These quotes already reveal several interesting facts for understanding the female component of the Somali diaspora in Italy. First of all, there is a strong transnational character of the women of this diaspora, and of the diaspora in general, who have not only moved to northern countries, but have also become active in various states around the world, such as Canada, Great Britain. Insofar as Italy is concerned, Somali women are all active and working, and compared to those of the Ethiopian and Eritrean diasporas they are more active in the cultural and social sphere than in the political one. Furthermore, one of the interviewees explains that it is possible to distinguish a mainly female diaspora within the Somali diaspora, which is that of the 1990s before the outbreak of war. Additionally, it is interesting to note the following quotation, which provides the perspective of a man about Somali women:

In my opinion women in general of the diasporas, but especially in the case of Somalia, are the lynchpin of both community and financial stability of Somali families in Somalia, and also of the diaspora. [...] Somali women do not feel less than males, they do not feel less than white people. In general, the female gender has less bargaining power in this world; nevertheless, they have obviously been more committed, so they have been more successful (It9-M).

This quote expresses the centrality of women in the diasporas in general, and in the Somali diaspora specifically, as leaders of both the community and financial stability of the diaspora, and of families in Somalia. These comprise leadership and livelihood roles, but also entail female figures asserting their rights. Indeed, the interviewee's words open a reflection on gender equality, emphasizing Somali women's awareness on this issue that they feel neither inferior to men, nor less than white people. This awareness of their value has led them to be very active and to become successful women.

Finally, these interviews with stakeholders in Italy make it possible to explore the characteristics of the three diasporas, relating them to each other and adding to the already existing studies the perspectives of subjects often within the diasporas and the

specific dynamics that characterize them. Among the most interesting aspects that emerged from this exploratory survey on the three diasporas in Italy is the political dimension, which for the Ethiopian and Eritrean diasporas is on the one hand linked to engagement in Italy, and on the other hand to the political situation in the states of origin; for the Somali diaspora, by contrast, there is a greater engagement in peace projects towards Somalia, and a greater activation in networks, including transnational ones. Another interesting aspect concerns the female dimension, which is central in the three diasporas, although with some differences. In the Ethiopian and Eritrean diasporas, women have played a central role in humanitarian support in Italy, Eritrean women also provide political support in Eritrea, and alongside community engagement they stand out in Italy in the political, social and cultural spheres. In the Somali diaspora, instead, women are central figures, but are mainly active in the Italian socio-cultural sphere and towards Somalia. We will now investigate the three diasporas in Finland to compare the main findings with Italy.

6.3 “In a lot of Finnish areas migration was new: somebody had never seen a Black or a Muslim person” (Fi1EXP-M): diasporas of the Horn of Africa in Finland between war and peace

In the exploratory research phase in Finland, specifically in the city of Helsinki, I conducted 2 semi-structured interviews with stakeholders and 4 informal meetings with experts. The themes that emerged were the same as in the study in Italy, as the outline was the same, namely the characteristics of the three diasporas in Finland, their mobilization and their female component. What emerges is a more consolidated presence of the Somali diaspora, which is also framed in more detail and has many differences compared to Italy; while the Ethiopian and Eritrean diasporas are less numerous in Finland, but still represent an active and little-known community. Starting with the characteristics of the Somali diaspora in Finland, it is a much larger diaspora than the corresponding Italian one, as it counts at least three generations.

Finnish Somali diaspora is very unique; it has three generations: one is my generation who came in 1990s; then second generation is the one that came about 10 years after; and the third generation are young people who were born in Finland. [...] In 1990s it was a very difficult time because Finland did not know anything about foreign people, when the civil war broke out in Somalia, people traveled to Finland and Finnish citizens had never seen Black people, Muslim people from Africa, it was a white dominant society (Fi2-M).

The history with the Somali diaspora is that there were a number of arrivals to Finland pre-1990, but pre-1990 they were very few. Most of them were professionals. Then in the 1990s, because of the conflict in Somalia, there was an increase in the number. [...] Children came as part of the family reunion, so at that beginning we were mostly men, until the early 2000s, but later on there were a lot of female arrivals through the family reunion process (Fi1-M).

These quotes from interviews with two stakeholders make it possible to identify the main characteristics of the Somali diaspora in Finland, which comes later than the Italian Somali diaspora. In particular, there is a first generation that arrives before the 1990s and in the 1990s; a second generation that arrives from 2000 onwards, as a consequence of the Somali civil war; and finally the third generation of people born in Finland. It is also interesting to understand the composition of this diaspora in Finland: those who arrived pre-1990 were mainly professional workers and men, while from the mid 2000s many women began to arrive. Children also came with the Somali diaspora, mainly through family reunification. Also interesting is the contextual information on the Somali diaspora in Finland, the fact that the first diasporic arrivals found themselves in an environment that was unaccustomed to immigration and Black people, thus very discriminatory and predominantly white. This aspect is less marked in the case of the Italian context, however, where there is a greater habit of migration and diasporas, despite the presence of racism.

As for the Ethiopian and Eritrean diasporas, as mentioned above, their presence is not very numerous compared to other Northern European states, but no less significant. It is certainly less valued by existing research.

Ethiopians started migrating in the '70s and in the early '80s because of the conflict in Ethiopia, but also at the latest stage. [...] I remember I have Ethiopian friends whose parents arrived in the 1970s or 1980s. So they are a bit older, but at the same time they have been coming because of the instability of the 1990s. [...] There was a family reunion, but within the Ethiopian communities there was also non-dividing migration, so there were students who came here and settled here, and created families and so on (Fi1-M).

There are thousands of Ethiopians in Finland, that's a lot for me considering that Finland is such a small country. I have a lot of friends that are like engineers and computer scientists and nurses. There are a lot of Ethiopian women that do nursing jobs, there are many professional Ethiopians living here (FIN-12).

These quotes provide a framework for the Ethiopian diaspora in Finland, which is quite numerous considering that Finland does not have a high population density compared to Italy. In particular, part of the diaspora arrived in the 1970s and 1980s due to the conflict situation; another part in the 1990s. In addition, alongside family reunification, some members of the Ethiopian diaspora arrived as students, settled in Finland and created their own families, and a new generation descended from the diaspora. Members of the Ethiopian diaspora are currently employed in different professions in Finland, such as engineers, scientists, nurses, and there are also several women from the Ethiopian diaspora, who mainly do nursing work. With regard to the Eritrean diaspora, instead, no strong unitary dimension emerges with the Ethiopian diaspora, as in the case of Italy. Indeed, in Italy, despite some divisions due to the political situation and conflicts in the countries of origin, a collaborative dimension has emerged. In the case of Finland, on the other hand, this collaboration is not evident, with each diasporic community generally collaborating mainly with members of its own community, as described in the following quotation:

the Somali, Ethiopian and Eritrean diasporas have always had conflict among themselves. Somalia and Ethiopia had border conflicts, so collaborating wasn't an option: and, on the other hand, Ethiopia and Eritrea had a very long conflict. There has always been a division between

these three communities (Fi1-M).

Instead, the following quote specifically contextualizes the Eritrean diaspora in Finland:

Initially, the Eritrean diaspora was few in number in Finland; the first ones started to arrive around the 2000s. From 2016 onwards with the refugee crisis a substantial flow of Eritreans began, and as the Eritrean community began to grow in numbers in Finland, they began to organise themselves to cooperate and become active (Fi6-F).

Regarding the main characteristics of the Eritrean diaspora in Finland, it is a diaspora that arrived quite late in Finland, around the 2000s. Initially it was not a large diaspora, then following the refugee crisis of 2016 it started to increase; and consequently also to organise itself on a community level and think about various initiatives. It is a diaspora that differs greatly from the corresponding Italian diaspora, and of which, being relatively young, not much is known. But this is not to say that it is a diaspora of lesser value. As it concerns, instead, the main ways in which these diasporic communities are organized and engaged in Finland, some differences from Italy also emerge here. Starting with the Somali diaspora, the Finnish diaspora is very active and organised, networking a great deal in both Finland and with cooperation and peace promotion projects in Somalia.

The Somali diasporic community in Finland is characterised by a large Muslim component, both male and female, who are very active in organising conferences, meeting in mosques and also working in cooperation with associations to support peace projects against war in Somalia. I am, for example, in the organizing committee of the Global Somali Diaspora Summit, which brings together members of the Somali diaspora living all over the world and this year, 2022, will meet in Helsinki (Fi4-F).

I have a long career in Finland as a journalist. I also came back to my country, Somalia, to train journalists, I trained in all over the country over 1000 journalists. I also started this campaign in Somalia through the media with the idea to create a media platform for peace builders and peace initiatives. [...] Through this media campaign people try to tell

their stories, share their painful stories. I have been working as a peace activist journalist, and we create the programme called Peace Journalism in Somalia [...] Somali diaspora from all over the world they're engaging not only in terms of peace building but also development of the country with different projects from different places and political sectors, Somalia is a very diaspora's dominated area. Also in the business sector diaspora is dominant (Fi2-M).

Regarding the engagement of the Somali diaspora in Finland there is a rich mobilisation on several levels. First of all, a very active Muslim component of the Somali diaspora, which was not consistently present in Italy, is described. This is active in organising conferences, open to the entire Somali diaspora and not just the Muslim component, including the annual Global Somali Diaspora Summit. Here, another key aspect of the Somali diaspora emerges, the transnational dimension linked not only to the country of origin, but also to a sense of networking with other members of the Somali diaspora around the world, with whom exchanges and collaborations are created. There are also several Somali diaspora associations that collaborate with cooperation projects for Somalia. In this regard, one of the stakeholders interviewed, who is a journalist, recounts that he started in Somalia a media programme called *Peace Journalism*, with the aim of collecting and sharing the painful stories of those who experienced the Somalia of war, to promote sharing and reflection. He explains that engagement for peace building, but also for the development of Somalia, is something that is felt by the Somali community around the world. Overall, therefore, a more communal engagement of the Finnish Somali diaspora emerges, compared to the Italian one.

With regard to the engagement of Ethiopian and Eritrean diasporas, I will also partly use information from biographical interviews, which allows us to contextualize them as a phenomenon, in order to provide a more complete picture. Some interviewees in Finland have in fact provided information on the characteristics and engagement of Ethiopian and Eritrean diasporas, which are part of the exploration of the phenomenon.

*The Ethiopian diaspora is actively trying not only to bridge the knowledge and the gaps, but to transfer skills and possibilities to actively engage between host and home country. But then within the **** platform, diaspora is everybody who are together trying to*

change both the situation of Africans in Finland, but at the same time trying to bridge the gap and create new possibilities within the African as a continent (FIN-13).

I started my personal activity to help Eritrean people in 2016, because at that time, a lot of Eritreans arrived to Finland, and most of them were asking help. [...] We have a lot of activities in the church, we meet every three months and we have small snacks and coffee, tea, and we all gather together and we share information. We talk about different topics and also we organise different activities for our children, Eritrean children together (FIN-11).

These quotations reveal interesting information regarding the engagement of Ethiopian and Eritrean diasporas in Finland; even if there is not a large amount of information, there is enough to understand that these diasporas are active, although they are less numerous than the Somali diaspora. Ethiopian diaspora, in particular, is also connected to a platform with other African diasporas (including the Somali and Eritrean ones), to try to develop an engagement between Finland and the countries of origin. Specifically, the Ethiopian diaspora is motivated to spread skills and knowledge on different topics both within the community in Finland, and to create a bridge to transfer opportunities to Ethiopia. The engagement of this diaspora is therefore transnational, and also organized through networks with other African diasporas in Finland. The Eritrean diaspora, instead, has an engagement that is mostly related to its Christian part, as there is a strong aggregation of the Christian community. This is an aspect that can be considered in common also with the Eritrean diaspora in Italy. The activities organized in the churches are, in fact, not only moments of solidarity and sharing, but also opportunities to do activities for children, as well as to support Eritreans in the country of origin. This strong community dimension is close to that of Somali diaspora, and it is in some way the key for the survival of the Eritrean community, as it ensures continuous support if needed by community members.

An interesting aspect that emerges from the quotations, and that characterize the three diasporas, is their character of fluidity: *Somali diaspora from all over the world they're engaging not only in terms of peace building but also development of the country; But then within the **** platform, diaspora is everybody who are together trying to change both the situation of Africans in Finland and in the African continent.*

Indeed, what transpires is the conception and engagement of the diaspora not only within certain national boundaries depending on where a specific diaspora lives; but as a transnational community. This can be interpreted according to the paradigm of fluidity, whereby reference is no longer limited by national borders, but also by the community acting and keeping in touch transnationally even through digital platforms.

Finally, with regard to the female component of Somali, Ethiopian and Eritrean diasporas in Finland, they are very active, as in Italy, but with some differences. Starting with the Somali diaspora, women are active in different ways, as shown in the following quotations.

Most women of Somali diaspora in Finland are Muslim women. Muslim women are strong and independent. We are not like victims. [...] I think that women of Somali diaspora made the main achievements, introduced new behaviours and are trying to help their fellow sisters back home. [...] I think women should be also involved politically, because they are, I can say that they are more active in the society and in building this society (FIN-5).

Somali women gather together. And they help for example new Somali immigrants that come here. They help them for example with translations, or foreign office for immigration, or health, something like that. We are just. We help. And we also organize activities (FIN-2).

The first peculiar aspect that differentiates women of Somali diaspora in Finland from those in Italy is the Muslim religion. From the exploratory study in Italy, in fact, and also from the biographical interviews, there was no mention of Somali Muslim women linked to the diaspora. This does not mean that the Somali diaspora in Italy has no Muslim members, but it is certainly not numerically substantial. Somali women in Finland are described in the quotations as strong, active and independent, fighting the stereotype of the Muslim woman as submissive. Somali Muslim women are considered the drivers of achievements and activities within the diaspora in Finland, participating in social and cultural life and organizing initiatives. They help in different sectors, such as the immigration office, new arrivals, language translations, and the health system. Moreover, they are also active towards Somalia, especially in projects aimed to support

Somali women. This is an interesting element that is less emphasized in the Italian Somali diaspora: even if Somali women in Italy are also organized transnationally with digital networks, Somali women in Finland are more focused on peace projects in Somalia, and in supporting other women. With regard, instead, to women of Ethiopian and Eritrean diasporas,

Women's engagement in associations, that would be where I see a lot of African descent women running different associations. [...] I see many women challenging the status quo and being upfront there and being a role model to our children, because we don't have enough role models, especially of people of African descent (FIN-13).

It's very important for women to be involved in the church and to be a part of it. So, if we have to speak in Finland, I would say that almost none of us have been particularly involved in peace activities. We would like to do this kind of activity, and everyone would like to have this kind of activity, especially the recently immigrated Eritreans. And I would say the role of women would be great here, and all of them would like to participate, but they need guidance on how to put it into action, we would like to have it in the future (FIN-11).

These quotes are from a woman from the Ethiopian diaspora and one from the Eritrean diaspora, respectively. The first one explains that Ethiopian women and women of the African diaspora in general are engaged at the level of associations, to organize initiatives and to challenge the status quo in Finnish society. This opens up a reflection on the interesting issue of the lack of role models for the new generations who are not unilaterally white people. In this regard, women from the Ethiopian and other African diasporas are also active in Finland, providing different models that challenge the dominant representativeness, and make room for other representations as well. Women in the Finnish Eritrean diaspora, on the other hand, participate only to a small extent in associations, as they mainly organise themselves around church activities. The Christian community of the Eritrean diaspora is in fact a central presence in Finland, and several community activities are organised in this setting. With regard to the issue of peace, the Eritrean women would like to become active in the future, because it is an issue close to their hearts but in need of specific training and organisation. The engagement of women

of the Eritrean diaspora in Finland is therefore mainly related to the religious community sphere, and in this it differs from that of Eritrean women in Italy. The latter were in fact also politically active, both in Italy and towards Eritrea with their participation in the question of independence.

Furthermore, based on this exploratory study to contextualize the three diasporas in Italy and Finland, it is possible to say that in Finland, the most active women are those of the Somali diaspora, followed by those of the Ethiopian diaspora, and finally by those of the Eritrean diaspora. The fact that the latter are less active does not mean, however, that their contribution is worthless or less important. On the contrary, studies to date have not valued the engagement of women from the Ethiopian and Eritrean diaspora in Finland, which this research attempted to do. In Italy, on the other hand, it is not possible to make a clear distinction between the levels of engagement of women from the three diasporas, as they are all very active at both community and individual levels. The Italian Somali diaspora is perhaps more disjointed and less active in the form of networks, in addition to the fact that the engagement of Muslim Somali women is lacking as the Muslim religious dimension is almost absent.

In conclusion, briefly comparing the situation of the three diasporas in Italy and Finland, Finnish Somali diaspora overcomes numerically even the same Ethiopian and Eritrean communities in Finland. This is an interesting fact, due not to a colonial past (absent in Finland), but to previous international cooperation in the 1980s. These three diasporas thus differ between Italy and Finland due to different past ties: in Italy, colonial ties; in Finland, cooperation relations in the case of the Somali diaspora; and, in the case of the Ethiopian and Eritrean diasporas, refugee crisis. These distinct facts and historical links explain the different timing of the arrival of diasporas in the two countries. First in Italy, during the decolonisation process and then due to the outbreak of wars and internal tensions; at a later stage in Finland following the start of cooperation projects or the displacement of refugees. As for the engagement of these diasporas in the two countries, in both there is a diasporic mobilization, but in Italy especially at the cultural, social and political level, while in Finland through social and religious networks. In particular, Eritrean and Somali diasporas in Finland have a strong religious dimension in their engagement, for Eritreans linked to Christian church while for Somalis their connection to Muslim community. This religious dimension is not very

strong in Italy, where instead a politicized engagement predominates. Also common are the problems faced by diasporic communities with regard to discrimination, racism and structural obstacles in general, although racism is reportedly more present in Finland than in Italy.

Moreover, there are some differences at the level of diasporic networks. In Italy, the Ethiopian and Eritrean diasporas are more organised in networks and organisations than the Somali diaspora, which is more fragmented and more likely to move to northern European states. In Italy, the three diasporas also organise different initiatives at inter-diasporic level, even with members of other non-African diasporas. In Finland, instead, the Somali diaspora is distinguished by being very active in the organization of diasporic networks and activities, especially within the diaspora itself. The Muslim religious dimension of the Somali diaspora is stronger than in Italy, and mosques become important places of aggregation and also organization of remittances and aid to be sent to Somalia. The Ethiopian and Eritrean diasporas, also for the lesser number, are instead less active, but still organize activities. In particular, the Eritrean community gathers especially on religious occasions. But there are also moments of aggregation of members of the African diasporas, in which members of all three diasporas take part, such as the *Think Africa Week* organized annually and bringing together all the African diasporas present in Finland.

Finally, this chapter has analyzed the phenomenon of Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali diasporas not only by relating it to the geographical spaces of Italy and Finland, but also by going beyond physical spatialities. If geographic spaces on the one hand are useful for locating and analyzing phenomena such as diasporas, on the other hand a further step is necessary. In a global order that has been based on limited borders and mobility for centuries, one suggestion for the future is that diasporas in general play a transformative role in conceiving the various spaces from a translocal perspective.

CHAPTER 7

From diasporas to social change: women's forms of engagement

The purpose of this chapter is to present and describe the main findings of the research, following a logical order that focuses on the themes set out in the research questions. The chapter is divided into four paragraphs, according to the thematic division emerging from the analysis and described in the research questions. Each paragraph relates the findings of research both in Italy and Finland, placing them into a dialogue with each other. Specifically, the four thematic paragraphs concern:

- the main forms of diasporic engagement, highlighting the definitions given by the respondents, as well as similarities and differences;
- the perceptions and meanings of diaspora, and beyond, according to the women interviewed;
- a focus on diaspora-related representations of war and peace;
- and, finally, the social changes deriving from women's engagement, considering the perceived effect of the spatialities on the engagement of these women.

This criterion for the presentation of results makes it possible to examine in depth the various key dimensions for understanding the respondents' forms of engagement. On the one hand, the sphere of the Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali diasporas is crucial, and is experienced by each woman in a different way; on the other hand, the contextual dimension is also central to explore the influences exerted by and on the social structure. However, the spatialities of Italy and Finland are in the background of interviewees' experiences, and are not analyzed in a comparative way: they are necessary to better understand women's narratives, as well as their international diasporic and post-diasporic networks. Specifically, these two countries were chosen due to their very different societies: the Italian one in Southern Europe and with a

colonial past; the Finnish one in Northern Europe, without a colonial past and with a rich state. The reason why a systematic and detailed comparison between these two states was not made is the fact that the focus of this research is the biographical and engagement experiences of the women interviewed, and their way of experiencing geographical spaces, that is why in the findings I talk about “perceived effect of the spatialities on the engagement”. Since the subjects are the starting point, their perspectives on time, space and engagement are analyzed, and not the other way around, i.e., the effect of national contexts. The contextual elements, between which the differences are only hinted at, thus serve as a frame in which to place the narratives of the interviewees.

Concerning the relationship with existing literature, an interesting aspect is that the Ethiopian and Eritrean diasporas in Finland have been treated very little in the literature. In the case of the Eritrean diaspora, research is almost absent. As the results of the research will show, the Ethiopian and Eritrean diasporas in Finland, although not as large in numbers as the Somali diaspora, are present and active. That said, it is necessary to distinguish between an academic level of approach to diasporas and a practical level. The former is a level of study of diasporas in most cases by scholars who are not part of diasporic communities and therefore have no direct experience of the diaspora. The knowledge they produce is therefore from outsiders to the phenomenon. On the other hand, on a practical level, members of diasporic communities can offer an inside-description of their experience and talk about it in usually informal and non-academic spaces. As sociologist K. Tölölyan explains (2007), those belonging to diasporas can produce forms of self-knowledge through everyday and/or performative practices. This form of knowledge comes close to what F. Rizvi calls “diasporic thinking” (F. Rizvi, 2015) in reference to the critical thinking developed by S. Hall³⁸: a way of thinking that aims to produce knowledge as situated practice and that brings theoretical thinking and practice closer together. My position in dealing with the topic of diaspora and related forms of engagement, albeit as an outsider, is precisely that of

³⁸ “Hall did not so much write about 'diaspora as a discrete sociological object,' as he wrote 'from the social world of diaspora to produce knowledge as a situated practice of interruption.' Hall thus opened up a mode of critical thinking that may be referred to as 'diasporic,' concerned with analyses of lived practices around the experiences of transnational mobility, border crossings, and interconnectivity”. (Fazal Rizvi, 2015, 271).

bridging the gap between the theoretical academic field and the practical field, in dialogue with the research participants by trying to overcome this dichotomy. Bridging the distance between scholars from outside the diaspora, which I am, and members of the diaspora means questioning a Western form of knowledge and trying to adopt the participants' point of view. The presentation of and reflection on the research results will therefore be a progressive process of deconstruction, which will produce, in the concluding chapters, reflections, insights, and suggestions for an alternative knowledge production.

In conclusion, this chapter, which adopts a constructivist approach and focuses on the agency of the subjects in presenting results, will be enriched by Chapter 8, which will explore other key aspects that emerged from the analysis process. Chapter 7 focuses on a more thematic analysis, while Chapter 8 does so on a more biographical analysis; it is possible to identify recurring elements in these two chapters, but they are developed in different ways and from different perspectives.

7.1 The forms of women's diasporic engagement

Considering the female perspective connected to the Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali diasporas, the findings from the interviews related to the main topic of this research, that is, the forms of women's diasporic engagement, are now presented. The 30 biographical interviews conducted are used here as the basis for the analysis. The perspective adopted in the presentation of the results in all four thematic paragraphs follows a view of diaspora as fluidity between spatialities, without constraints within national borders. Therefore, the results are not grouped by distinguishing between Italy and Finland, but are related to each other. However, some qualitative matrices are presented with the aim both of codifying the interviews conducted, and summarizing the forms of engagement and the main themes that emerged from the research.

With regard to terminology, it was decided to use the term "engagement", explained in the theoretical chapters (Nicholas Van Hear, Robin Cohen, 2017), instead of the term activism in order to avoid attributing a priori labels to the interviewees and to leave

them the choice of how to define themselves. In fact, not all of them, as will be seen, define themselves as activists, or if they define themselves as such, they attribute their own meaning to the term activism, far from the mainstream or Eurocentric conception. Despite the choice of the term engagement in this research, a minority of respondents describe themselves as activists, both in Italy and Finland. This fact does not constitute a contradiction, but is significant for the research because space is left to the interviewees to define themselves, and it is a relevant fact that a small part of them defined themselves as an activist, explaining the meaning he attributed to this term. Later, this aspect will be explained and deepened later, starting from the analysis of the interviews, but it is necessary to introduce it in order to clarify the choice of the term engagement, which is a term we can say is an all-encompassing and more neutral word in terms of meaning.

From the interviews, different types of engagement emerged (social, political, cultural, engagement for peace, and professional engagement, that are summarized in the tables at the end of this paragraph), which are more or less connected to the respective diaspora. Each form of engagement is aimed at acting more upon one area of society than the others (political, cultural, etc.). It should be borne in mind that the classification of the various forms of engagement that emerged does not assume clear-cut boundaries, but in some cases several forms of engagement are in dialogue with each other and coexist in the biographical paths of the interviewed woman. It is therefore a nonrigid classification, made on the basis of the types of activities organized by each respondent, which are different from each other but have in common the objective of changing Italian and Finnish societies for the better. The forms of engagement described aim to address persistent problems in the Italian system, as evidenced by the data and contextualization described in Chapter 4. In order to better understand the types of engagement that emerged, the words of the respondents describing the meaning and characteristics of their engagement are given for each type.

The second form of engagement that emerges from the interviews is *social engagement*. This type of engagement is very varied, as can be seen from the interview quotes below. Chapter 3 presents a definition of social activism as collaboration with other people to make changes in society. The adjective “social” refers both to society

and to the dimension of participation of many people. In addition, it is explained how social and political activism often overlap (Marc Brenman and Thomas W. Sanchez, 2004) in the sense that political activities often have a social impact, while social activism can also be political when it promotes initiatives dealing with rights; therefore the borders between these two kinds of activism are not fixed. As explained above, the term engagement and not activism is used here, but the elements of this definition are used in describing social engagement. The interviewees' experiences add different nuances to this social engagement, personalizing it and giving it a feminine aspect.

With my association's group I try to counter the dominant narrative in Italy about people of foreign origin, who must be able to express their own narrative. For me, let's say, the engagement was born a bit with my person and let's say my migrant background; therefore my origins, in my specific case Ethiopian, gave a very strong push to what was then my professional engagement, which then also coincided with a kind of activism. This is because I have been, let's say, very sensitive to issues relating to the children of immigrants, as the daughter of immigrants (IT-5).

I do a lot of voluntary work, projects not in my schools but outside, for example we have this project of voluntary work that was with minority groups, we had workshops, we were discussing how we can share and raise awareness, for example make awareness about LGBTQ+. [...] Also about social media activism, so how we can promote and showcase different minorities and the problems they have with social media, as well as the power that social media have (FIN-3).

These are some examples of interviewees' social engagement, which, as can be seen, is heterogeneous and difficult to delimit. A further example is as follows:

In 2015, when a lot of refugees came to Finland, I heard in news, television, social media that the Tigrinya speaking refugees were stuck in one centre because they didn't have any interpreter. [...] I am not an activist but in my free time I want to influence especially women so that we can change the society of Eritreans. [...] In our culture mental health is taboo, so I started using social media to raise awareness on the importance of mental health (FIN-7).

From these extracts, the main interviewees' forms of *social engagement* emerge. It is possible to identify three main features of this kind of engagement: its connection, respectively, with Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali diasporas, which makes this engagement fluid; the digital dimension of this engagement, emerging especially in Finland; and the aim of raising awareness on minorities, not only connected to the three diasporas. The interviewees' *social engagement* can be therefore defined as transversal, digital and sensitive to current social problems. It is interesting to see how this engagement has commonalities between the three interviewees considered, belonging to different diasporas: the first one is Ethiopian, the second one Somali and the third one Eritrean. Moreover, there are some characteristics in common with political engagement, such as the aspect of digitalization, which is in line with the previous literature on digital diasporas. A central component of digitalization in diasporas is, in fact, networking, which is necessary to make the process of online communication, and diasporas' activities, operational (Alonso Andoni, Pedro Oiarzabal, 2010). Networking means that the members of the diasporic group take part in online communication and activities with other people of their network of contacts, not exclusively of their own diasporic group.

In both Italy and Finland, *social engagement* consists of raising awareness on different social issues, related to various minorities, depending on priorities. The *social engagement* of the women interviewed thus concerns a mobilization for the recognition of the rights of people linked to diasporas and migration in general, through social actions of various kinds undertaken at an informal grassroots level and/or with organizations. The aspect of formal associationism is a central theme in the *social engagement* of respondents, in fact, beyond a more individual *social engagement*, the community and associative dimension is very strong. Organizations and associations allow the creation of diasporic and digital networks of social engagement among diasporic women and subjects. These more formal networks allow the organization of the various social engagement activities in a systematic way. Another interesting aspect that emerges is the coincidence, sometimes, between *social engagement* and the profession carried out. The work done by the interviewees is chosen according to the

social actions they want to undertake in their engagement and, vice versa, their social engagement stimulates their profession.

However, the analysis also reveals differences with respect to how social engagement is told. Narrations reveal different ways of living and understanding social engagement. Through the interviewees' narrations, different meanings of social engagement are in fact constructed, which are respectively realised in various subtypes of social engagement. Thus, from the quotations given, which are only a few examples, some women carry out social engagement through an association, others are mainly dedicated to the promotion of the rights of women from diasporas and with a migration background, while others are educators or interpreters. We can thus speak of a multifaceted *social engagement* as it includes voluntary work, both individual and collective through associations, as well as digital networks to raise awareness on sensitive issues online and offline. It is moreover an engagement in some cases linked to interviewees' professions, whereby social engagement also becomes professional and the two dimensions intersect.

The second form of engagement that emerges, which is actually transversal to the other typologies but which it is good to introduce here as it emerges, is the engagement that I have defined as *professional engagement* (as several interviewees identified it as such). In particular, in the IT-5 quotation the interviewee makes it explicit that her interests and her past have led her to make her profession her engagement, also activating herself professionally on the issues that are close to her heart. In the case of the quotation FIN-7, on the other hand, the interviewee explains that the critical event of a mass arrival of Eritreans in Finland led her to decide to become an interpreter. This profession also becomes her cue to get active on social media, to break certain cultural taboos. It should be made clear that professional engagement is not understood as an activation for financial or personal return, but as a need so strongly felt by the interviewees that it leads to the joining of the two levels of voluntary and professional engagement. The professional sphere thus becomes an opportunity to pursue voluntary engagement. Not only the personal experience of engagement pervades in some cases the profession of the interviewees, but also their job can affect their engagement, as the following quotation shows.

Look then, what does engagement mean to me? For me it is very complicated, in the sense that it was also mediated a lot by the professional role I had. [...] So when we talk about groups of people who are united by an ideal, by a purpose, again we are never necessarily talking about a look towards the same country, but more towards an intention, a sense of collective identity that can be defined not necessarily by geographical borders, but also simply by desires or a desire to respect rights. So I have always adopted that kind of interpretation of engagement, and in that sense I feel part of the diaspora, not necessarily when looked at from an associative, organisational point of view, but I feel part of a community that cares about purpose. The purpose of rebalancing these social, economic and rights imbalances within the current system, cultural, economic and, in short, human (IT-11).

In this quotation the interviewee explains how their professional role has been central in the development of her meaning of engagement. She emphasizes the responsibility she feels in her engagement to make the social system more equal, especially in its collective dimension. The latter is an interesting dimension of engagement, not only professional, as it highlights the collective and network dimension of the engagement of many interviewees: despite the different declinations of the forms of engagement, there is a strong sharing of a common goal of tackling the many injustices and imbalances present in the Western systems. *Professional engagement*, in short, consists of the interconnection between professional and extra-professional dimensions, with a mutual contamination that enriches the different forms of engagement (social, political, etc.) of most of the interviewees in both Italy and Finland. It is an engagement that highlights the fluidity of spaces for action, transforming formal work spaces into dynamic places for reflection on urgent issues.

The third form of engagement to emerge from interviews is *political engagement*. Existing literature on the topic shows that women of different diasporas are involved in various kinds of political engagement. Significant in particular is the case of women of the Kurdish diaspora (Mojab, Gorman, 2007): this example refers to a kind of political engagement that includes a collective female mobilization from below. From my research findings, *political engagement* refers in some cases to formal political initiatives, and/or participation in elections and political parties; in other cases to informal political activities and to a wide sociological meaning of “political” that

includes all bottom-up initiatives that are able to mobilize public opinion. The political dimension is in fact often present in the background of social and cultural initiatives of interviewees (both in Italy and Finland), therefore beyond the narrowest meaning of formal political participation. This is visible for example in the following quotations:

I have been part of a group for years where there are a number of women from the diaspora. This is an exchange group, a support group, a women's strategy group made up of parliamentarians, activists, scholars of various kinds, all with, let's say, Somali backgrounds, almost all belonging to the diaspora, therefore, with at least dual citizenship, most, not all. [...] This group acts on various levels to support peace, activism, and to create a political space (IT-4).

I came as a refugee from Ethiopia. [...] I am an expert, not an activist. So when I came here, I started to help women, not only Ethiopians, women in general, I noticed they don't know their rights. [...] And I've got already some laws changed because of my work, because of advocacy on gender, violence and forced marriage. [...] We collected a petition and we send it to the Finnish Parliament to change the law (FIN-4).

These quotations reveal one meaning of *political engagement* shared by the interviewees, that is an informal engagement, feminist and capable of creating new unconventional political spaces. It is also an engagement that has a fluid character, as it is diasporic and overcomes the national borders through digitalization, connecting European countries with the Horn of Africa in developing political strategies to address global issues and problems even in African countries. Additionally, it is heterogeneous because it includes women with different expertise and roles, including parliamentarians, activists and scholars as specified in the first quote, who take part in an informal political space. An aspect that leaks implicitly into this is also the question of what is political and what is not. This is an interesting question that allows us to delve into the sociological meaning of “political”, also in light of the evolution that *political engagement* has had over time and space. As is also evident from the first quotation, this engagement has shifted a good deal online and there is an interpenetration between online and offline participation; furthermore, there is a widespread distrust of formal politics, which is considered to be no longer sufficient and

needs mobilization from below and demonstrations to be stimulated and made aware of urgent issues. As the second quotation reveals, in fact, the activities of political advocacy from below can have an impact on more formal politics. Finally, in both the quotations the political engagement described has an attention to women's rights, among the other issues, showing a female political engagement not only in terms of the actors involved, but also in the activities that characterize this engagement. This sheds light on a typology of female political engagement which also seeks to counter an often still patriarchal political and social system.

On the other hand, the following quotations reveal another kind of political engagement, characterized by formal political activities and participation in elections. The interesting aspect of these quotations is the dissatisfaction arising from participation in formal political engagement. In the first case, the interviewee expresses the fact that the formal political experiences she had were not positive. The second quote, instead, emphasizes the transition from a formal political engagement to a more *social engagement*, as this one (defined and deepened later) allows the interviewee to be closer to the people and to support them to a greater extent.

*Because the left in Italy today is very fragmented, so when a space opened up to nurture this possibility, I gave my availability. The Italian left told me we are trying to do this with *****, and we would like to have your contribution, with respect to the issues I told you. [...] The more institutional engagement, let's say untied from self-organisation, responds, then in fact it is not always the case, to my need to make an impact on an institutional level as well. [...] And so it was, in the sense that my first candidacy was at the Regionals with ***** coalition. Then at the European elections for the left, they were all not exactly positive experiences, and then at the municipal elections³⁹ (IT-1).*

*I run for the elections and in 2017 I won the elections in the socio-democratic party in the city of *****. [...] I am more in social engagement now. I feel somehow like I'm active but these days I think people are understanding it differently. What does activist means? I want to be influencer, I want to be like a person who people will remember or at least*

³⁹ Chapter 7 will include excerpts from biographical interviews conducted in Italy and Finland, coded respectively with the abbreviation IT- and FIN- (which differ from the abbreviations IT-bio and FIN-bio, used to indicate the *biographical portraits* analyzed in Chapter 8). The excerpts of the interviews in Italy are translated here into English.

have some kind of impact. I wanna leave some mugs in my life. You know I wanna help people and support people, so they can stand up on their own (FIN-9).

The *political engagement* that emerges from these quotes is present in both Italy and Finland, and is characterized by an engagement in institutional politics, i.e. in elections, as municipal councilors, etc. From these quotations it is possible to deduce two relevant aspects. First, the more or less explicit need of the interviewees to take part in institutional politics with the aim to dialogue with the institutions to improve them and their procedures. Second, the disappointment following formal political engagement, as they saw in many cases the rigidity of the institutions and their distance from the concrete needs of the people. So much so that the respondent in Finland decided to abandon political engagement in favour of social engagement. This opens a reflection on what politics is becoming, increasingly disconnected from society and increasingly unable to respond to social needs, with a few exceptions.

In summary, the *political engagement* of the interviewees implicitly refers to two levels. There is a more informal and grassroot level, which aims at a political mobilization from below, while, at the same time, also involving public opinion and the greatest number of citizens. Another more formal level concerns instead a more institutionalized political engagement through elections and parties. In some cases, in the respondents these two levels are co-present and both important. The involvement in a more formal political engagement does not exclude a more informal engagement, which is of fundamental importance for understanding the needs of citizens. Additionally, from the interviewees' experiences the formal political engagement was in some cases a necessity, as they highlighted the need for dialogue with the institutions and to work within them to try to enact changes. Lastly, it should be recalled that, according to the interviews, the boundaries between the various forms of engagement (political, social, cultural, etc.) should not be regarded as rigid and fixed. Although there are distinctions in types and descriptions of the characteristics of each engagement, it is visible how in the experiences of the interviewees these different types of engagement intersect and influence each other.

The fourth form of engagement that emerges is *cultural engagement*. This type of engagement has not been thematised as such in the literature as it is very much related

to social engagement. However, the following studies mentioned in Chapters 3 and 5 have thematised the value of women's diasporic literature as an important form of cultural engagement (Amy K. Kaminsky 1999; Anh Hua, 2012; Mehraneh Ebrahimi, 2019). The cultural engagement that emerges from the interviews is characterized by different declinations depending on the experiences of the interviewees. Thanks to what emerges from the interviews, it is possible to thematise more systematically what is meant by cultural engagement in these women's experiences.

So being the person I am also means activating myself according to my mode, which as I said before is writing. [...] Each of us then chooses our own way of activating ourselves and mine came spontaneously. I have always written, I have always expressed my emotions, my feelings through poetry ever since I was a little girl, and so this has been my mode of activism, and activism means coming out of your shell of protection. [...] So it takes a lot of courage, and also a lot of awareness (IT-6).

In my opinion, engagement is something that I do everyday. When I go to my work, when I teach etc. [...] I am involved in writing books. I have written three children books in Somali and one book about my life in Finnish. Children's books are for peacebuilding. [...] Writing for me is a form of engagement, but I am also a member of two organizations based in Finland, which act globally. I like the word activism (FIN-1)

The first declination of cultural engagement that characterizes the interviewees consists of writing books and poetry to educate the public with specific messages. In particular, in this type of cultural engagement a strong link emerges between the biographical path of the interviewees (especially in the first quotation) and their literary production. This one becomes both a personal need for expression, and a collective need to make a difference and contribute to social change through one's literary activity. Writing becomes a form of activism to express dissidence and to raise awareness of urgent issues, such as discriminations and wars.

So I was a musician for 10 years, then photography overlapped with that in the sense that my interest in photography started during the music years, and then the more traditional

*activism let's say, came a bit later. [...] over the last few years, I have set up a multimedia archive of diaspora stories, and the idea kind of comes from the film **** (IT-2).*

We make cartoons in Somali language for the youngsters, for the children especially, and we have a lot of audio books in Somali language. So our mission is to provide alternatives for all these animations that our children watch or any of Somali speaking children watch. Just to enhance that language learning skills here in, especially in the Western countries and to preserve the history and the cultural stories and books that we have since Somalia (FIN-6).

These quotations reveal the second declination of cultural engagement, that is in the visual form which includes art, film and music as effective tools to convey messages of change. In particular, the two quotations give two different examples. In the first quotation, the interviewee in Italy was involved in music activities, which were in a way functional to activism (or engagement) because they brought her closer to the world of photography. From there, she discovered a passion that led her to make visual culture, with cinema and photography the main tools in realising the goals of her engagement and delving into the dynamics of diasporas. In the second quotation, the interviewee instead uses the project of an animated film to counteract cultural assimilation in a way that encourages children to preserve their own culture.

Why not create intercultural meeting places? And that is where our journey began. Instead, on the intercultural and multicultural front, no longer just aimed at our own Italo-Somali community, but with other women from other countries and Italian women who took up this challenge [...] there was the creation of this intercultural women's centre that still exists today. In short, I am still part of it and I have been its president for some time and in which there are Italian women, foreign women, foreign women from different countries (IT-13).

The third declination of cultural engagement includes all the cultural/educational activities, such as workshops and intercultural centres, which through their participatory programmes aim to actively involve women, citizens or children, to reflect together on certain issues, as well as to explain and promote interculturality, always with the aim of social improvement.

Therefore, the cultural engagement that is described in the interviews includes different modes of expression: literary and poetic, where writing uses a *language of dissidence* when it aims to convey certain messages (first and second quotation); visual, where artistic and cinematic performances are adopted by the interviewees (third and fourth quotation); and cultural-educational, when interviewees organize cultural activities and laboratories to promote women empowerment and awareness in schools and other institutions on the topics of discriminations and human rights (fifth quotation). It emerges that cultural engagement is more multifaceted in Italy than in Finland, in different declinations.

Cultural engagement is common to the women interviewed in both Italy and Finland, with the difference that in Italy it takes the various forms listed, whereas in Finland it is predominantly literary. An interesting aspect that Italy and Finland have in common is the fact that women active in cultural engagement are in most cases also teachers. *Cultural engagement* therefore often coincides with the profession pursued, and in a broader sense fulfills an educational objective. Women who are active in this engagement have in fact stated that they want to educate people in the societies in which they live. Beyond the quotations given, this type of engagement is characterized in both Italy and Finland by the realization of a series of events, public and otherwise, such as conferences, seminars, cultural festivals (Black History Month in Italy; African Diaspora Week in Finland). These cultural events, in which I had the opportunity to take part, have a wider impact on the society as they address different issues through cultural initiatives, becoming not only cultural events, but also annual occasions of social impact and aggregation involving a growing number of people.

Cultural engagement can thus be defined as a form of engagement that, through multiple forms (writing, art, cinema, teaching and edu-cultural laboratories) aims to convey strong social, educational and sometimes even political messages to raise awareness of various issues. Different studies have been done on the importance of culture worldwide as a social tool to mobilize people. Some examples regard the Iranian women's literature, such as the graphic narratives of Marjane Satrapi, who with some of her texts constitutes a break in the literary production of the Iranian diaspora after the Revolution. Then there is the visual literature of the Iranian diaspora, which finds

expression in the photo-poetry and poetic films of Neshat (who lives in the United States), which, with allusions and elisions, speak of strong themes such as the courage of Iranian women during the war between Iraq and Iran. It is therefore possible to see how the cultural and literary activity of women from the diasporas can also be an effective communicative tool for change. Another significant case is the literary production of women from the Latin-American diaspora. Female diasporic writers from Chile, Uruguay and Argentina, such as Ana Vasquez, Luisa Valenzuela, Cristina Peri Rossi, who were exiled in the 1970s and 1980s (Amy K. Kaminsky, 1999), show the effect of this exile in their works, revealing the desire and complexity of returning to their homeland in the future. Through their memories, they describe how they perceive their identity and their sense of belonging to a place, in stories of dislocation and relocation, addressing different interconnected themes.

Finally, the last form of engagement that emerges not on its own, but in coexistence with other forms, is *engagement for the promotion of peace*. Diasporic engagement for peace was discussed in Chapter 2, in which several studies presenting different types of engagement for peace were presented. In particular, the main concepts characterizing the engagement for peace, developed by the literature, are the different types of intervention in conflicts by diasporic groups according to conflict phases (Jacob Bercovitch, 2007); the heterogeneity of diasporic engagement for peace, also in terms of generational mechanisms (Mari Toivanen, Bahar Baser 2020); and, regarding the women's role, the importance of the contribution for peace, especially of women from diasporas of the Horn of Africa (African Diaspora Policy Center, 2010). Among these aspects explored in previous studies, the dimensions of heterogeneity and the key role of women from diasporas (e.g. from the Horn of Africa) in peace processes return in what emerges from the interviews. Furthermore, from the findings it is interesting to see how much the interviewees' engagement for peace takes up or departs from the following concept of peacebuilding developed in the literature, where peacebuilding, recalling scholar J. Galtung's conceptualization, is understood as the set of non-violent activities by various actors (both individuals and groups) to transform in a lasting way the elements that foster conflict, debilitating them. (Hoehne, Feyissa, Abdile, 2011). This key definition finds different realizations in interviewees' engagement, who in

some cases conceive this engagement in the traditional sense and more focused on the country of origin; while others interpret it in relation to the society in which they live. In the latter case, engagement for peace becomes a set of initiatives to promote peace understood as social justice, counteracting the mechanisms that do not guarantee it. These two types of engagement for peace emerge from the following quotations. These interview quotes outline an engagement characterized by more traditional peacebuilding activities.

*I remember that the Region of Lombardy gave me a Prize for Peace many years ago [...] And then what to do for peace? Wars, I have seen wars, I have lived them, I was part of the Eritrean independence movement a long time ago, I participated in the guerrilla warfare, by the way, for Eritrean independence for years. I know what war means and I know what war brings: misery, death and hunger. As an NGO **** we collaborate with ****, as well as with the Eritrean diaspora. For example, we are now taking about 40 women who are refugees in Ethiopia and we are doing skill upgrading, we are giving them a chance to prepare themselves in the world of work (IT-9).*

In this quotation from an interview in Italy, the woman interviewed was deeply affected by her past in choosing to engage in building peace in some African states; and her commitment was such that she even received an award. Similar in some respects are the following quotes.

We started a project in Somalia with independent media in 2007, during the war between Somalia and Ethiopia. It was difficult to start because during the war most of the media were under control. We provided Somali women with the equipment to film and do radio broadcasting, in a city near Mogadiscio. [...] In the team of the project there were also Finnish women, and we trained in Somalia about 20 women. The women walked around their home area, and told stories through the use of the camera. [...] The topic of the films was telling the situation of war. [...] This project supported peace in the sense that it allowed women to become more aware of the governmental situation (FIN-2).

I am from Ethiopia, I work on a project that supports the African Union in conflict prevention and mediation. [...] Engagement for me is trying to be an active citizen and

*take my space in Finland. [...] I do also a lot of work with Subsaharian Africa and Horn of Africa, I studied Peace and Conflict Studies wanting to work in that area and I worked at ** Court in ** and then in peacebuilding organizations. I was always aimed towards that (FIN-14).*

These three quotations express a more or less traditional concept of engagement for peace, or peacebuilding, which is peculiar to the minority of the respondents and more common in Finland than in Italy. It is a female engagement for peace characterized by fluidity and transnationality, with the aim of providing a space of exchange between the different diasporic spatialities to share practices of peace. The cases reported regard, in fact, women of three different diasporas, who organize activities which are in line with the definition of peacebuilding, between the countries to which they are connected. These three interviewees are united by their personal past experiences of war, which in part led them to become active in the *engagement for peace*. The relevant aspect of this engagement is that it allows to deepen the role of Afro-descendant women in organizing activities for peace; considering that often they are deemed marginal in war politics and conflict resolution. Here, the interviewees have a key role in activities for peace, working together with people, and especially women, living in contexts of war. Their *engagement for peace* is of women for women and has a diasporic character.

In the next quotations, instead, a more innovative conception of *engagement for peace* is developed by the interviewees, which also provides insights into its meaning from a sociological point of view. Indeed, *engagement for peace* becomes a set of transversal activities, which can be cultural, political, social, and educational, aimed at educating for a peaceful society as a place where the rights of all are guaranteed. According to this conception, many apparently peaceful Western societies are not. Social conflict thus becomes a means to achieve a condition of peace as social justice: there is no peace without justice. The following quotations shed light on different ways in which interviewees try to build a just and peaceful society.

I wrote three books for children on the topic of peacebuilding. I decided to write these books because we need more peace and rights. [...] For three years I was chairperson for

an organization in Finland dealing with peace and development and I organized different activities, for example educating children to peace through stories (FIN-1).

Peace means being able to have, for example, a citizenship, a community that can find its institutions and dialogue with you. I leave behind a country that has had a conflict, we are in a real war. [...] Engagement for peace means what I am doing, everything I write, which has war as its starting point (IT-8).

When people ask me “how is the war in your country and what are you doing for your country? Um, and I say what country of mine?” I won the peace prize. [...] I have lived in Eritrea for many years, I know those women, I am Ethiopian, but I have the right to cry and write about other people’s wars, because all wars disturb me, disturb me inwardly (IT-14).

These three quotations are in a sense united by the use of cultural activity and writing to educate children, but also adults, what it means to build peace. The quotation instead of IT-1 follows in part this line, but stresses more the need to decolonize Western societies to make them truly just and peaceful. It highlights the hypocrisy of societies like the Italian one that profess to be champions of human rights, when in reality they discriminate people.

Peace and equality go somewhat hand in hand, not in the sense that diversity does not exist, but equality in the sense that we should all try to start from the same starting point. [...] Look also at the realities of those that declare themselves as promoters of equal rights, of equality, of peace, no to war nor to conflict, even those especially in Italy are deeply problematic. [...] We have to decolonise, when you say re-learn, re-educate, these are things we all have to do because then we Afro-descendants or people of other descent in general are the first to over-justify acts of micro-racism or situations that are not so conscious, because we also come from this culture. [...] We (Italians) are the first among the well-meaning to be unable to create relationships that are truly equal, that are truly about exchange and confrontation, that are not about “I, white Italian, look down on you” (IT-2).

These quotations shed light on interesting and unusual aspects of engagement for peace, which are common both to Italy and Finland but more developed in Italy, probably also because of the colonial past. As anticipated, it is an engagement for peace aimed at building greater social justice in Western societies. A first aspect that emerges from the extracts is the importance of writing as a tool to promote a culture of peace and tolerance, raising awareness on peace as the necessity of equality and citizenship for all the members of a society. A second aspect is the engagement for peace as solidarity among the members of different diasporas, without ethnic distinctions. Lastly, a third aspect, thematized mainly in Italy, is the hypocrisy of a society that professes to be peaceful, but in which in reality white supremacy, racism and micro-racism, and inequality persist, related to colonial heritage. In this sense, engagement for peace becomes “confrontation, decolonization, re-education”, to build a society that is truly peaceful and fair, with no A and B social groups. These conceptions of engagement for peace are food for thought to implement societies that are truly peaceful, as peace understood only as the absence of war is reductive. Where there is a lack of respect for the rights of all, and social justice, there is no peace.

In summary, *engagement for peace* is a sensitive topic in which only a few of the women interviewed are personally involved. It is an engagement related to the concept of peace, whose interpretations that emerged are explained in paragraph 7.3. As explained below, engagement for peace relates not only to situations of armed war, but also to situations of social conflict. It can thus be defined as a form of engagement that encompasses all those activities (struggle, dissidence, awareness-raising, training) that aim at building peaceful societies in a broad sense, including reconstruction after an actual war. It is possible to identify two souls of engagement for peace. A soul linked to the most traditional and themed form of engagement in literature, in which the interviewees participate with projects and initiatives to build peace in the states of origin. Another soul that goes beyond this traditional conception of engagement for peace and that conceives this engagement as a means to bring more peace understood as social equity and rights in Western societies in which the women in question live.

In conclusion, the forms of engagement that emerge from the interviews are summarized in the two tables below.

Table 9 - Interviewees and types of engagement in Italy

Respondent	Age (approximately)	Background	Type of engagement
IT-1	45	Eritrean	Political and social
IT-2	40	Eritrean	Social and cultural
IT-3	45-50	Ethiopian	Political + focus on peace
IT-4	40	Somali	Social and political + focus on peace
IT-5	40	Ethiopian	Social and political
IT-6	60	Somali	Cultural/educational (writer)
IT-7	30	Italo-Ethiopian	Social
IT-8	60	Somali	Cultural and social (also writer)
IT-9	65	Eritrean	Social + focus on peace
IT-10	30-40	Eritrean	Social and political
IT-11	50	Ethiopian	Social and political
IT-12	50-60	Somali	Social and political
IT-13	50-60	Somali	Social and cultural
IT-14	70-80	Italo-Ethiopian	Social and cultural + focus on peace
IT-15	60-70	Eritrean	Political and social
IT-16	30-40	Italo-Eritrean	Social and cultural

Source: prepared by the author

Table 10 - Interviewees and types of engagement in Finland

Respondent	Age (approximately)	Background	Type of engagement
FIN-1	40	Somali	Social and cultural + focus on peace

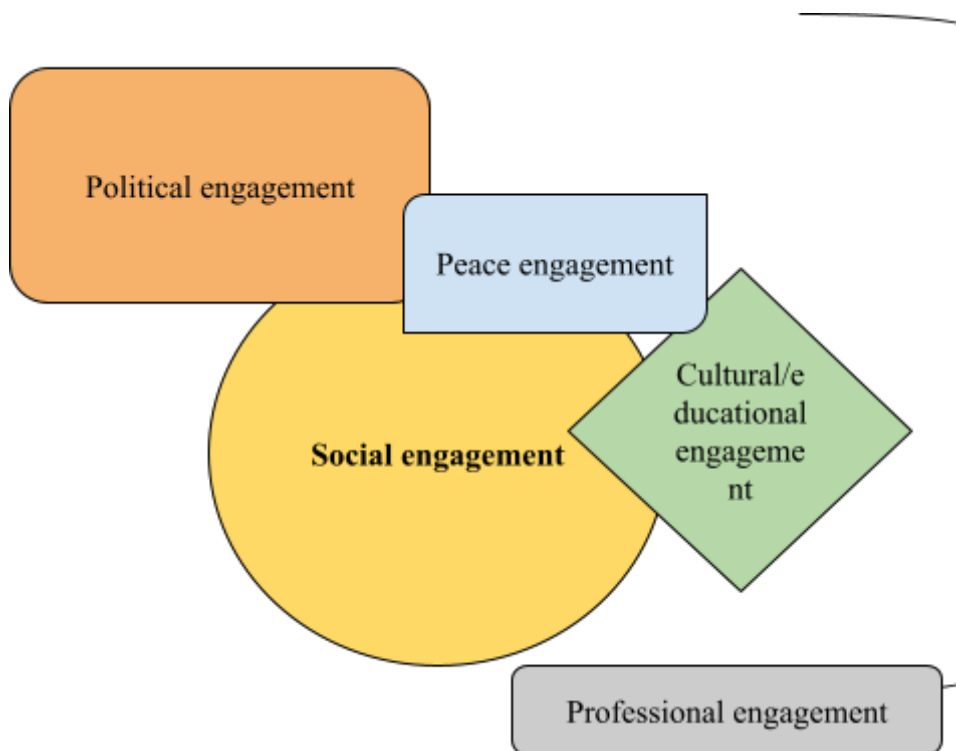
FIN-2	50	Somali	Social + focus on peace
FIN-3	25	Somali	Social and political
FIN-4	50	Ethiopian	Social and political
FIN-5	30	Somali	Social and political
FIN-6	30	Somali	Social and cultural
FIN-7	40	Eritrean	Social
FIN-8	30	Somali	Social and political
FIN-9	35	Somali	Social and political + focus on peace
FIN-10	20-30	Eritrean	Social
FIN-11	30-40	Eritrean	Social and cultural
FIN-12	30-35	Ethiopian	Social and cultural
FIN-13	30-35	Ethiopian	Political and social
FIN-14	30-35	Ethiopian	Political + focus on peace

Source: prepared by the author

Table 11- Recurrence of types of engagement

	Social engagement	Political engagement	Cultural/ educational engagement	Engagement for peace	Professional engagement
ITALY	14	8	6	4	11
FINLAND	13	7	4	4	9

Fig. 6 - Combinations of types of engagement



Tables 9 and 10 show the main forms of engagement in which the interviewees are active, respectively, in Italy and Finland. The criteria adopted to relate the women interviewed to specific forms of engagement have been the main activities they do (political, social, cultural etc.), which compare as first in the two tables. As can be seen, interviewees are involved in more than one type of engagement; thus the engagement in which they are more active appears first, followed by the others. From the research findings, it is possible to define the different types of engagement emerged. *Social engagement* concerns those respondents who have defined their engagement as social or carry out activities that fall within the scope of social support and awareness-raising (e.g. mediation, associationism, etc.). *Political engagement* includes both those who hold or have held formal political positions (candidates in parties, municipal councillors), and those who are active in informal political groups and engage in politics from below. *Cultural engagement* refers to the activities of teachers/professors, educators and/or writers who address, through cultural activities, different topics related to diasporas and women's/human rights.

The *engagement for peace* is the most difficult to define; as explained, it includes a more traditional engagement for peace as peacebuilding, with projects in conflict areas, as well as a more innovative engagement for peace by spreading what can be called “a culture of equality”, raising awareness through books and social events about the hypocrisy of Western societies that appear peaceful, but do not really guarantee the rights of all without discriminations. Finally, professional engagement refers to interviewees who intersect their activism with their profession to such an extent that the two spheres struggle to be distinguished. The professional sphere then becomes an opportunity to become active on issues that one considers a priority, for example through teaching, research, or other work.

In table 11 it is possible to observe the number of interviewees who are active in every type of engagement. As explained, the forms of engagement are often coexisting and intersecting with each other, therefore only the forms of engagement in which women are more active have been considered. It can be seen that in table 11 the most frequent types of engagement follow the same pattern in Italy and Finland, with social engagement in first place, political engagement in second place, cultural/educational engagement in third place, and peace engagement in fourth place. Professional engagement is instead present when there is a strong link between the engagement and the profession in the interviewees’ life. The majority of the women interviewed show this connection and coincidence, both in Italy and in Finland, as they have made the profession they perform on a daily basis a place of their engagement.

This opens up a reflection on the translocal dimension of the interviewees’ engagement that goes beyond the 'conventional' spaces of activism, and also allows for networking between those who engage in different forms of engagement and have different professions. Also, in terms of time, the forms of engagement are heterogeneous in the sense that they include interviewees from different generations, with the exception of some forms of engagement that are more homogeneous: cultural engagement that is common to interviewees between 40 and 60/70 years of age in Italy, while between 30 and 40 years in Finland. In general, it is possible to see from the ages of the interviewees that in Finland they are younger overall than in Italy, due to the fact that the Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali diasporas were more recent. Furthermore, from

the characteristics of the forms of engagement that emerged, it is possible to identify engagement overall as post-diasporic (S. Scafe 2019; M. S. Laguerre 2017) as it goes beyond the traditional conception of diaspora by including not only women from the diaspora, but also women born in Italy or Finland, whereby individual experiences cross multiple spaces and temporalities.

Tables 9 and 10 also represent the different combinations of the forms of engagement of the respondents, which are also summarized in figure 6. The latter shows how the various forms of engagement connect: the forms are in order of size according to the frequency of the type of engagement, whereby social engagement is in the middle, in second place political engagement which combines with both social and peace engagement; in third place cultural/educational engagement which connects with social and peace engagement; finally, professional engagement encompasses all these types of engagement as several professions of the interviewees coincide with engagement. Further details on the various combinations in tables 9 and 10 reveal that both in Italy and Finland the same intersections are repeated: social engagement is always combined with political engagement (6 combinations in Italy and 6 in Finland) or cultural engagement (5 combinations in Italy and 4 in Finland); political engagement in addition to combining with social engagement also intersects with engagement for peace (2 combinations in Italy and 2 in Finland). Instead, cultural engagement is combined only with social engagement and in few cases with that for peace (never with political engagement); engagement for peace is combined with political, social and cultural engagement in both Italy and Finland; Finally, there are few cases in which respondents are active only in one type of engagement (2 cases in Italy and 2 cases in Finland). Exploring the various combinations of engagement is relevant because it highlights the fluidity of their boundaries and the interchange between different spaces of action that allow the creation of networks between interviewees. A relevant dimension that emerges by exploring the combinations and the encounter of different spaces is the relationality of engagement, in which each type dialogues with other types.

In summary, these are forms of engagement that have, as we have seen, different declinations depending on the interviewees' experiences. Moreover, these forms of engagement do not have rigid and fixed boundaries, but are in many cases joint. From

the analysis emerges in fact a combination of different forms of engagement; the situation seems quite similar between Italy and Finland, in Italy the number of respondents active in cultural engagement is higher. Moreover, in Italy there is a higher recurrence of professional engagement among the interviewees, who express in many cases more than in Finland the need to act and be active in all possible spaces to bring about change in society. As it is shown, I have not done a systematic comparison between Italy and Finland, but I have presented the interviewees' forms of engagement and their different combinations considering the two states as background. Alongside the differences, several similarities surprisingly emerged among the interviewees' narratives in Italy and Finland, by mapping their main forms of engagement with a translocal perspective.

7.1.1 Intersectional engagement and biographical paths

The forms of engagement described so far clearly present a link to the three diasporas. Each of the forms of engagement is in fact connected, to a greater or lesser extent, to the Ethiopian, Eritrean and/or Somali diaspora. As is evident from the interview excerpts reported, the various types of engagement aim to carry out activities that benefit the diasporic communities not only to which they belong, but in general. In this there is a fluidity of boundaries between the diasporas, which collaborate with each other and do not follow a rigid division. In addition, it emerged as the link with the diaspora has in many cases been the motivation to undertake specific types of engagement. There is therefore a mutual influence between forms of engagement and diasporic communities linked to them. The different ways of understanding and experiencing the diaspora of the women interviewed are described in the next section.

Moreover, all these forms of engagement are derived from the analysis of the *biographical trajectories* of the women interviewed, which will be further developed in Chapter 8. An interesting aspect concerns the transversality of forms of engagement among the three diasporas. It turned out that engagement mostly involves action, a dynamic drive to achieve certain goals. However, engagement is expressed by the women interviewed also as a stance, a posture with respect to certain themes. This

position emerges for example in the engagement that can be defined as more academic, in which some women interviewed are involved both in Italy and in Finland. They are researchers who express a position in the academic field and also seek to bridge the gap between the institutional environment, and the informal environment, between theory and practice.

It's not easy for me to do this PhD and it's not easy to immerse myself in this way and in research, because I don't have archives, I don't have non colonial archives, so I had to invent how to give voice to subordinates, so go study oral history (IT-4).

*I am doing my PhD work at **** and I am also involved in some projects related to human rights. [...] As I am involved with human rights studies, I see it as more than my work, because of course it is a way of life for me. [...] I am also involved in teaching, I teach law at the university, I feel responsible to show students that the image that they have of us is mostly not so good. I work hard to make them see the positive of our continent, and of Ethiopia as well (FIN-12).*

In previous tables 9 and 10, it is possible to see how there are different types of engagement in common among the various diasporas, united by the need to bring about change from below. Despite these commonalities, one must bear in mind the uniqueness of the women's biographical stories (see the appendix), in which the path that led each interviewee to engage in a certain type of engagement emerges. In the various *racconti di vita*, private space, i.e., one's personal history, meets public space, i.e., one's path of engagement. As is evident from the *biographical portraits* in the appendix, the concept of trajectory⁴⁰ concerns individual paths, in this case of the women interviewed, which are connected to a socio-historical context. This context links the individual paths, i.e. creates a point of contact between them.

In my research, socio-historical context means the set of historical and social events that characterize, in the past and present, the societies to which the interviewees are linked (thus including Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia, Italy and Finland), but considering

⁴⁰ "D'un côté de l'échelle interprétative, « le concept de "trajectoire" qui redéfinit dans ce cadre l'objet biographique comme "intérieurisation du probable" » (Passeron, 1989: 21)" (C. Perrin-Joly, V. Kushtanina, 2018, 117).

them without a rigid national distinction, but rather with attention to the interrelationships between the various historical events, in a kind of transnational point of contact. Among these spatialities there is not a clear separation, but a transnational link in space, and in time, that is in the past as in the present. Indeed, there is a kind of historical cyclicity that leads to the repetition of historical facts, in different forms but with the same underlying meaning, that connect the various contexts. Indeed, as emerges from the experiences of the interviewees, historical facts of colonialism, war, and segregation are repeated, in different forms from the past, in Italy and Finland, several years apart. This is visible in the historical events experienced by the interviewees:

And I would like to go back to my country to live, I tell you frankly. And now for the government is the worst time Somalia is going through, after the civil war for so long. [...] This is because there used to be hidden Italian colonialism. Always “Italians good people”, it was not. We recognise what damage Italians have done and if we have reached this point it is also thanks to Italy (IT-12).

The quotation IT-12 already reveals an interesting aspect, that the interviewee defines “hidden Italian colonialism”. It is a feeling that the Italians felt almost legitimate in doing what they did with colonization. This hidden colonialism is also taken up in the following quotation of IT-10, as it is now concealed in Italy in the current immigration laws and in the political and cultural representations of certain categories of people.

Eritrea was “invented” by Italy, before Italian colonialism it was a part of Ethiopia. And after Italian colonialism it was re-annexed to Ethiopia and that is the reason why there have been all these years of war of independence between Eritreans and Ethiopians and a post-colonial conflict. Somalia, instead, I mean they are cousins, we recognise historical geographical commonalities. [...] Colonialism, for me, is not just a fact of invasion of other lands, but it is a cultural construction that finds legitimacy, it is also an ideological construction that produces legitimacy for the hierarchisation of groups. And so it is strongly active in all aspects of life: today from immigration laws, to cultural and political representation (IT-10).

I am from Somalia. So we haven't had peace for almost like 30 years. We didn't have peace because of the civil war. [...] But it's not only about war. It's also when you have peace, what comes with peace? Are people who live in that country happy? Is there a social system? Is it fair? Are people treated the same way? Do we have racism? Things like that (FIN-8).

These quotations not only reveal the interviewees' experiences of historical events, but also the transnational connection of different spatialities in determining these events. It is in fact possible to identify some recurrences in the quotations, which unite the different geographical areas. These commonalities are the wars in Somalia, Ethiopia and Eritrea, the Italian colonialism which badly affected the conflict situation in the Horn of Africa, and the permanence of the colonial heritage in Italy and also in Finland (in the form of white supremacy as Finland was not a colonial power). These quotations show the temporal and translocal link between past and present, as the modern societies in which interviewees live reiterate past forms of conflict and discriminatory ideologies, without seeming to make any progress. In biographical narratives, according to a diachronic perspective individual temporalities remain influenced not only by the socio-historical context, but also by classical sociological variables such as gender, religion, social status and origin. This influence of structural factors on individual trajectories leads individuals to develop life and engagement paths by developing different responses through agency.

In the case of the women interviewed, an engagement they defined as intersectional emerged in several interviews, which considers the intersection of their structural characteristics of gender, origin, etc. and consequently develops an engagement that is an intersection of struggles. The term *intersectional engagement* is not widely used in literature, while recurrent is the term intersectional activism (see Kendall L. Broad, 2017; M. Brown, R. Ray Summers, 2017). First of all it should be borne in mind that this term, as the concept of intersectionality, is often abused and not used correctly. Intersectional activism can refer to an intersection of struggles that must necessarily involve marginalized people, specifically, considering the origin of intersectionality, heterosexual Black women or of the LGBTQ+ community. The sociologist Kendal L. Broad speaks for example of intersectional activism in reference to social movement

intersectionality, or to collective actions of resistance and intersectional practice, aimed at achieving certain goals (K. L. Broad, 2017). P. H. Collins, as explained in Chapter 3, speaks of intersectionality as a form of critical practice (P. H. Collins, 2015). The term *intersectional engagement* includes what has been said so far, with the difference that it indicates not only concrete actions and collective mobilizations, but also a simple stance (as mentioned before) on certain issues. *Intersectional engagement* also emphasizes an individual, and not just a collective, dimension of dissidence and resistance.

This intersectionality that characterizes engagement is a very interesting fact and is also declined in the intersection of different areas and spaces of commitment, from the boundaries conceived as fluid and not rigid. On the theme of the intersection of spaces of engagement in professional, social, and university fields, some studies were made (Rosangela Lodigiani, Barbara Barabaschi, Mariagrazia Santagati, 2023). In addition, as a central aspect, it has been adopted as a term preferred by most of the respondents, both in Italy and in Finland, who do not call themselves real activists. For this reason, we speak of *intersectional engagement* and not of intersectional activism. The following quotations show how the interviewees conceive their own engagement as intersectional, explaining the meaning.

I am, let's say, forcibly relocated, so this is an important aspect of intersectionality and engagement, the engagement related to positioning, it's something that at first, at least for me, came in a way let's say unconsciously and then doing a job, a type of job that requires thought, critical thought, deep reflection ehm... you choose. You choose how to place, don't you? (IT-4).

When you're a person at the intersection between various bits and pieces, between various things, between various realities, between various cultures, I had requests from some realities of the Italian LGBTQ+ community to participate, to collaborate, but I had found myself making almost watertight compartmentalized speeches. I did it for a while, but I realized that it didn't make any sense, because if you make a certain type of discourse, of openness, of inclusion, you have to do it across the board, i.e. you can't do it on a specific issue such as citizenship, but not on the right of an LGBT person. And vice versa it goes both ways (IT-2).

From these quotations concerning interviews in Italy it is possible to note a strong connection between the self-conception of interviewees' personalities as an intersection of factors, and their vision of engagement as intersectional. It is as if with their words they describe a line of continuity between their intersectional being and their personal engagement: since the interviewees are socially positioned for their intersectionality, so is their engagement. This aspect is felt more in Italy than in Finland, although it is present. Although not explicitly stated, FIN-13 feels part of the Black women who are trying to change the status quo of Finnish society starting from their marginal and intersectional positioning.

Engagement for me is an active participation in politics, an active participation in civil services, an active participation wherever you are in need. This is how I understand engagement. [...] Some Black women have become researchers or professors at the University of Helsinki, but they are few. In general, Black women are trying to change the status quo (FIN-13).

This *intersectional engagement* opens a critical reflection on the most widespread conception of activism, often mainly linked to a Eurocentric perspective, which only recently began to be questioned (Hendrik C. Van der Westhuizen, Lia M.M Hewitt, 2021). This way of seeing and experiencing engagement in relation to individual life trajectories leads to questioning a Eurocentric view of activism, which often excludes certain minorities or does not involve racialized people themselves. It should be remembered that *intersectional engagement* makes sense and can only be realized by individuals, particularly women, who experience intersectional positioning. Although there are some studies that thematize different forms of engagement of women with migratory backgrounds, in different sectors (working, associative, etc.), (Rosa Gatti, 2016; Silvia Carabelli 2020), the *intersectional engagement* that emerges from the interviews is different because it starts from a biographical experience and from the incarnation of intersectionality by the participants, as they are all Black women. Secondly, the intersectional dimension is thematized by the interviewees as a condition at the base of their engagement in the first individual, and then also collective.

Quotes from the interviews reveal, in fact, that the positioning of the women interviewed is at the core of their engagement, is intertwined with it and determines its activities. Being at the intersection among different realities and factors implies that respondent's engagement reflects this nature and is therefore an intersection of struggles and rights⁴¹. The fact of reflecting the intersectional nature must not, however, be seen in a deterministic or reproducing perspective of oppression; but as a reaction to constraints and a practice of resistance. No battle for the rights of discriminated minorities can be left behind in this type of engagement.

Intersectional struggle and engagement thus aims to protect the rights of all those discriminated and/or marginalized minorities that are neglected by other movements professing to be for social justice. There is a theoretical debate on the issue, whereby movements that fight against sexism often do not engage in the same way against racism and intersectional discriminations. Like Anna Julia Cooper, Audre Lorde, in her famous collection of essays *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (1984), condemns white feminist movements that in advocating for women's rights neglected those of Black women. Audre Lorde explains that there should be no hierarchy of oppression, and states:

Any attack against Black people is a lesbian and gay issue, because I and thousands of other Black women are part of the lesbian community. Any attack against lesbians and gays is a Black issue, because thousands of lesbians and gay men are Black. There is no hierarchy of oppression (Audre Lorde, 1984).

Audre Laurde, as bell hooks and many others have very well themed the question of the intersectionality of oppression, which cannot overlook the multiple factors of oppression that characterize primarily Black communities.

Finally, the intersectional engagement of interviewees with its different declinations can be interpreted also in the light of the theoretical concepts of *decolonization* and

⁴¹ The intersection of struggles to secure the rights of discriminated minorities recalls Anna Julia Cooper's argument in the essay *Woman versus the Indian*. Indeed, the author argued that Black women would champion the cause of the rights of all humanity, and therefore of all marginalized groups. It is interesting to see how centuries later A. J. Cooper's anticipation of intersectionality is reflected and materialized in the engagement carried out by the women interviewed from the Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali diasporas.

demigrantization. Decolonial approaches introduce a critical perspective in transnational migration studies (Nasser-Eddin, Abu-Assab, 2020) by developing a critical reflection about coloniality as a social principle at the core of Western modernity.

*I set up the group **** two years ago precisely to try to decolonise or at least address the extreme whiteness and unrepresentativeness of Black people. [...] Decolonising for the group means from the point of view of language teaching, practices, we have addressed the presence of Blackness in the academy, the “Invisibility Place”, and also just on gender, intersectionality, etc. Why this? To create awareness, to create reflection on certain issues, on certain spaces, and for me this is important (IT-4).*

Also in universities I see what the mentality is when it comes to work with Africans and the mentality is always not helping each other, not working together but helping them because they need our help. [...] So that’s very colonial way of thinking. It should be both ways. Europeans should also go to African universities and see the resources that they have, there are different resources from what we have here. [...] And I feel like I would contribute to that, but with my work specifically (FIN-12).

These quotations reveal how the engagement of these interviewees, both working at university, is aimed also to spread a decolonial approach in the production of knowledge and in education. Both of them, in fact, underline the problem of invisibility of Black people in academia due to the domination of a Western and white social paradigm. Their effort is to criticize and propose both theoretical and practical alternatives to this one-sided perspective, enriching academic knowledge and education in general. Interviewees’ engagement embodies a decolonial approach with the aim of generating awareness on these issues. Furthermore, this engagement can be interpreted also in light of the concept of demigrantization (Amelina, 2022), as women interviewed are active to deconstruct terms connected to a-priori categorizations of subjects with migrant backgrounds (such as *migrants*, *integration*, etc.), proposing linguistic practices (and reflection) that do not favour a contraposition between an “us” and a “them”. The paradigm of demigrantization is connected also to the concept of postethnic activism, according to which, regardless of ethnic origin, individuals and groups are lumped

together by racialisation processes as non-white or “other” (Keskinen, 2022). The interviewees, despite being chosen on the basis of their connection to the Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali diasporas, express in their words and experiences a commonality with other racialized people. The following quotation, in particular, thematizes the necessity to overcome ethnic distinctions when they become ground of discrimination. An example is given of the social sphere of education in Italy in which there is increasing privatization, excluding and penalizing the poorest sections of the population and often also people with a migration background. In general, it is stressed that people are classified according to ethnic origin, although in many cases born in Italy, and placed at the base of the social pyramid, especially if Black.

You only get access to quality schools if you pay and they are private schools. So what does this mean? That you only reach a certain level of education if you are rich. Then guaranteeing a basic level of education is one of the premises against which the discourse of, for example, overcoming ethnic communities takes place. [...] I was born in Italy, and the most significant changes had a season, which is the 1990s, when that season ended, a profound decline began with respect to the condition of people of foreign origin. [...] We have promoted networking spaces, with different youth realities but not only, composed mainly of racialized people, and we have helped to renew a somewhat too aesthetic discourse on the meaning of racism (IT-1).

The persistence of the social classification based on ethnic origin, with attribution of value, is a current problem that has persisted since the times of colonization. Interviewees’ engagement is therefore also postethnic as, next to diasporic networks, it goes beyond ethnicity, drawing attention to the need to avoid oppositions between an us and a “migrant other”, and calling for change in a white, Western-centric social system. With postethnic activism the racialized groups organize in multiethnic communities to challenge racial hierarchies and create a more just social system, as in the case reported in the quotation. In the postethnic activism, as can be deduced from the words of the interviewee, it naturally creates a solidarity between racialized people regardless of ethnic origin, as they are grouped as a category in opposition to the Western population. The goal is to challenge these categorizations and to act to change them. This does not

mean that all Black people are equal (another risk is homogenisation), and there are distinctions even within the various diasporas. Postethnic engagement aims to raise awareness of the condition of those who are considered “other” in society, because of a color line (Fanon, 1952) that, even today, divides people into first- and second-class citizens.

7.2 Ways of understanding and living the diaspora

The forms of engagement presented so far necessarily relate to the second thematic area that emerged, that is, the different ways in which the respondents live and understand the diaspora, or rather the diasporas. Exploring this topic is crucial for two reasons. First, to better contextualize their different forms of engagement, which may be more or less related to their diasporas. Second, to get closer to the process of deconstructing theoretical categories from a constructionist perspective; that is, through the meanings and experiences of the subjects. Additionally, the decision to present the results of the interviews without grouping them according to the three diasporas (Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali) responds to the will to go beyond a subdivision by ethnic group. While bearing in mind that these three diasporas have different histories, it was decided not to adopt ethnic origin as a criterion for grouping the findings, but to bring the different meanings and ways of experiencing diaspora into dialogue with each other, giving examples that refer to the various diasporas. The differences in the meanings and ways of living the diaspora, as well as the common aspects will be valued; first presenting the differences and then the similarities. It should also be remembered that the interpretation and ways of living the diaspora follow a female perspective, as the other thematic areas presented do. Only recently the literature has begun to analyze migrations and diasporas with a focus on the female component (Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 2000; Amba Pande, 2018). In this research the perspective adopted is not only feminine, but also intersectional, since the voice is that of Black women of three different diasporas, but connected to each other. The attempt is

to present their views, as well as personal and common experiences of diaspora, so that knowledge on the subject is produced by those who have direct experience of it.

7.2.1 Different meanings of diaspora

First of all, it must be made clear that not all 30 women understand and experience their diaspora in the same way, even in relation to the same diaspora. Some still feel a connection to their diasporic group, a relationship that is articulated differently; others feel less connected to the diaspora. The excerpts from the following interviews are significant because they reveal two opposite ways of understanding the diaspora. In the first extract, the interviewee makes a linguistic reflection on the use and meaning of the term diaspora, revealing that she does not recognize herself in the word diaspora now widespread, but wants to adopt a word of her own dialect, which is not specific. In the second extract, instead, emerges a personal meaning of diaspora, linked to two key dimensions: that of disintegration, and that of change.

I do not like the word diaspora because, as I said, we have our own language that we should use. I mean, the international community can use it, but me as an Ethiopian I do not choose to use another language. "Diaspora" is not in the local language, so I prefer to have a local language, I am sure that among 84 local languages I will find one. [...] We are a country that was never colonized, so we should respect our language (IT-3).

On the other hand, an example of the opposite meaning of diaspora:

And so the inside of my family too, we spread out a lot, divided a lot. Eh what is diaspora for me... for me diaspora is disintegration, change. It's a change not so much of values, because in my opinion it's not a question of values, at least for most of us, but it's really a question of a different worldview (IT-7).

In this passage, a meaning of diaspora emerges as opposed to a sense of unity and community, i.e., a sense of disunity and change, which can also lead to the development of a different worldview. This interpretation highlights a relevant aspect of diasporas,

namely how they can divide rather than unite. In reality, the diaspora is subjectively something ambivalent, since history, personal and family identity coexist in it, but also a dimension of division that disintegrates the different bonds. Moreover, this dimension of disgregation highlights that diasporas should not be treated as homogeneous entities, but as heterogeneous ones. The heterogeneity of diasporas is a central point in this research, which is better themed in the analysis of the biographical paths of Chapter 8.

Another interviewee highlights another interesting way of interpreting the diaspora, which reveals its ambivalence.

What does diaspora mean to me on a personal level? So, taking away the work sphere eh...for me diaspora is me, it's my family, it's my history, it's my life and all that I am formed of, that has formed me, that forges me, in which my roots reside. So in a concrete sense and for me on a personal level and on a story level, in fact, since we are talking about life stories. Diaspora is something I cannot escape. It is not an external concept, it is not a concept described only from an academic point of view. From the point of view of a scholar, first of all, I am a product of the diaspora. I am a product of the diaspora, of what? Of the meaning, not even of diaspora, of the meaning of diaspora. And I try to explain it in a very simple, practical sense, within my own history (IT-4).

In this interview excerpt, it emerges how the interviewee separates two meanings and ways of experiencing diaspora: a personal meaning that is more concrete and refers to her history and family; and a more academic and theoretical meaning, according to which she is a product of diaspora. Interestingly, diaspora in this case becomes inseparable from the individual. An interesting aspect that the interviewee points out is that she considers herself a product of the diaspora. In her understanding of diaspora, despite the identification of two distinct meanings, it is as if the distance between the theoretical level and the personal, concrete level of diaspora is also bridged. In the case of this interview, she is at the same time part of the Somali diaspora and a scholar of the diaspora, representing one of the few cases among the interviews made of what K. Tölölyan (see Chapter 1) calls the *study of diasporas*, by those who are part of it.

That is, the diasporas are also different in terms of generations, i.e. those who left the country in the 1970s who remember a country in a certain way, those who lived a little more reflexively like me, whereas those who are leaving now who are 20 years old if not younger almost know three different countries, understand? Culturally. I don't know if it's the same for Somalia, maybe for Somalia it is, for Ethiopia it's already a bit different, but there's just so much diversity, the experience of the individual then reflects on how they relate to others and how they also relate to the country (IT-2).

It is relevant to cooperate and exchange with Somali mothers and women of the first generation, who are in contact with the people in Somalia. Often both first and second generations gather in mosques and organize fundraising activities for Somalia or remote social and psychological support, as some of them are mental health experts. [...] I take part in these activities, often with my aunt, and we also organize informal meetings and discussions with family and friends. Usually in Helsinki it is the younger generation who organizes activities, and involves the first generation (FIN-3).

These two interview passages highlight interesting aspects. A central aspect, that distinguishes but also unites the women interviewed, is the generational dimension of the diaspora. Alongside this central dimension, however, several intersecting dimensions emerge from these extracts. These are individual, family, spatial, and historical variables that distinguish diasporas and not only the ways of understanding them, but also of living them. Deepening the generational dimension, meanings and representations of diaspora can vary considerably within the same diaspora depending on the generation, also determining possible transformations of the diasporic community. The interesting aspect related to the generational dimension that is highlighted by the respondents is the link of this dimension with the relational sphere. Members of different generations of the same diaspora relate differently within the diaspora, and with the country of origin, as they understand it differently.

The generational issue is also linked to another key theme that the respondents in general have addressed in relation to the meaning of diaspora, connected with the personal elaboration of their own identity. It is about feeling Italian or Finnish, regardless of whether they were born in one of the two European countries or not. Frequent is the mistake of attributing, in an almost automatic way, the link with the

diaspora or one's community of origin to people with a migrant background. Instead, it is necessary to start entering into the view that these women, especially if they were born in Italy or Finland, but not only, can and have the right to self-define themselves and to feel more belonging to Italian or Finnish culture than to their own culture of origin (while not denying it).

So far, we have seen the perspective of those (the majority of respondents) who still feel a bond with their diaspora. The aspect of respondents' feelings in thematizing their diaspora meanings is a theme that emerges. It is a variety of feelings that are co-felt, and sometimes opposed to each other. These are feelings of melancholy, solidarity, sadness, suffering, or happiness, depending on personal experiences. Others, instead, claim to feel, or be seen as, less connected to their diaspora.

That is, in the case of the Eritrean diaspora, then my family and I are not much, we are strongly anti-government and we are not much more part of diaspora networks, if not family networks. They are definitely more extended families than the European concept of family, but since 97, 98 we are no longer part of the diaspora community in the territory because it is full of pro-government people. Because we are strongly anti-government (IT-10).

When I went back to Somalia to my family, they did not see me as Somali. [...] The problem is that when I am here they don't see me as Finnish, but when I go back to my home country they don't see me as Somali. Many children from diasporas, who were born elsewhere, have identity crises because they do not know where they belong. Now I am proud to be Finnish-Somali, but I feel different from the women in Somalia (FIN-3).

In these two excerpts, taken from different interviews, it emerges how the link with the diaspora may not remain a constant in one's life. In the first case, the interviewee chose to maintain only ties with family members and not the diasporic community. In the second case, the interviewee expresses an uneasiness linked to the diaspora, in the specific Somali case, in how much from the people living in Somalia is not seen as Somali, while from the Finnish is not seen as Finnish, despite being born in Helsinki. This leads the interviewee to develop a personal interpretation of her diasporic identity

and to define herself as Finnish-Somali. The last interview excerpt refers to the need to prefer heterogeneity over homogeneity, to always take into account differences and representations from the point of view of individual subjects.

Alongside the differences explored so far, it is possible to identify the prevalence of some ways of understanding the three diasporas over others between Italy and Finland. While the distinctions are relevant and must be taken into account, the analysis of the interviews also revealed recurring meanings of diaspora. The common meanings of diaspora that emerge from the following extracts are, in summary, the diaspora as a feeling of solidarity; the diaspora as a union, both at the family level and at the social level; and diaspora as a geographical passage, both as a moment of transition and also inner change.

I think of my parents, I think of my family anyway, and I think of them, in the sense that for me they are, let's say, the most direct contact with respect to the subject of diaspora. I also think of a series of sensations that is then the melancholy, the distance and the fear also of sometimes returning to the country of origin. The change, no, the growth that then takes place even, let's say, to those who came to Italy and now live here for many years. [...] But I can't think of words, it may be that these words bring to mind a passage. A passage from one place to another, but also an existential passage, a transformation and a bridge too I imagine probably (IT-5).

When we say diaspora it has a meaning of its own [...] but for me personally diaspora means community, diaspora means home, diaspora means family network, friendship, support network. After that, diaspora is also courage, it is also detachment, it is also mending, putting back together pieces of a puzzle that have been scattered over time (IT-2).

Diaspora is a feeling, it is not just a phenomenon, it is accompanied by many feelings. In the classroom, I find myself first and foremost with diasporic people. [...] When I teach at the university, I have diasporic people with different backgrounds in front of me, and I feel like I'm in a community where we understand each other (IT-16).

Entering into the specific of the quotations, those related to Italy focusing mainly on the emotional-affective dimension linked to the meanings of diaspora as passage, fragmentation, but also reunification and community. For example, IT-5 speaks of feelings of melancholy related to the diaspora, especially in relation to the past; while IT-16 speaks of feelings of solidarity related to the present temporality of the diasporic communities. The interviewees in Finland, on the other hand, relate more to the diaspora with an identity dimension: their sense of a fragmented identity, but also of a reconstituted and rediscovered one in the new society. An identity that is multi-faceted, transnational and constantly evolving.

Diaspora means for me, basically, that I am African, I am from Somalia, I came when I was a child so for me is that I know who I am and I know my identity now. When I was younger it was hard to build my identity [...] but now I have found my place in Finnish society (FIN-8).

For me diaspora means someone who is relocated to a new place and finds his/her own community within the new place, trying to maintain contact with the home country while living in the host country. So someone who has this transnational kind of identity, between the home country and the host country, and living in between these societies (FIN-13).

In these different interview excerpts of women from the Eritrean, Ethiopian and Somali diasporas in Italy and Finland, two recurring, interconnected ways of understanding diaspora emerge: diaspora as a community and family network; and diaspora as a bridge that allows its components to be reunited over time. While diaspora is often associated with an abstract concept, these ways of understanding it bring it back to a concrete, communitarian dimension and to a character of mutability over time, in which individuals and groups are the agents. An interesting aspect that also emerges from the interviews in Finland concerns the way diaspora is understood in relation to identity. The concept of identity is considered outdated in much of the literature and is a concept that has been the subject of several debates. The interviewees use the term identity by linking it to the meaning of diaspora, as for them diaspora means having a multiple and transnational identity, linked to several spaces in relation to each other. In

describing the meaning of diaspora, certain feelings also emerge, especially in Italy. These are negative feelings such as nostalgia and melancholy over the separation and fear in relation to the past and the country of origin/descent; but also positive feelings such as a sense of solidarity and mutual understanding.

7.2.2 Female ways of living the diaspora

With regard, instead, to the ways of living the diaspora, it is possible to identify both in Italy and Finland a more personal and affective way of experiencing diaspora linked to an individual or family dimension; and a more public and socio-political way of experiencing diaspora, linked to a more collective dimension. Then there is also a third way of living the diaspora that perhaps connects the more personal dimension to the more public dimension: the diaspora as a transnational digital community. The element of the digitalization of diasporic and transnational networks is becoming increasingly relevant not only in the way of living diasporas, but also in the organization of diasporic networks of engagement and mobilization. It should be remembered that these three ways of living the diaspora are not to be understood in a disconnected way, but are related to each other and often coexisting.

My relationship with the diaspora is a human relationship not a political one, because in the diaspora, as you well know, there is both the political connection for the situation in Eritrea, which is a situation let's say quite critical where the country, the young people don't see the future, obviously, because from the age of 16-17, until the age of 50, they go to do their permanent military service. And this doesn't allow them either to study or to have a family. It is a country where there is no freedom of the press, where there is no constitution, where there is the largest number of prisons. And this has been going on for almost 30 years. This also becomes a reason for the diaspora to meet and to mobilize (IT-9).

I feel Finland is my home, but at the same time, it is very strange, when I think about home I always think about the people. I have made family here, so I consider Finland my home, but I also have parents and my immediate family that live in Ethiopia (FIN-12).

I experienced the diaspora as almost an acquaintance and a unification, a union with my family members who I had no way of knowing and interacting with because I was here and they were over there, and the diaspora therefore led me to meet my distant family members, to get to know them better, to deepen our traditions, our experiences, and also to try to find a linguistic tool with which to interact (IT-6).

In the extracts reported, the interviewees express a more human than political relationship with the diaspora. These two aspects usually coexist in diasporas, but here one dimension prevails over the other one. The family and personal dimension in living the diaspora emerges, but also the link with the country of origin on a human level. In the description, for example, of the situation in Eritrea, reference is made to a complex human situation of the lack of freedom and a future for people, which leads to living the diaspora with a sense of sadness for the country of origin. In the diaspora, however, there is also the possibility of reconstruction. The diaspora on a personal level is also experienced as the creation of a family and a home in Italy/Finland and a sense of belonging to that place. In the diaspora, from a human point of view, multiple spaces live together as families.

Alongside a more personal way of living the diaspora, there is a way that can be considered more political and social, of mobilization and aggregation.

*I am a diaspora, and I work for the diaspora community. Because I think that diaspora is also an identity that you can embrace, not every immigrant may feel part of the diaspora. [...] Within **** platform diaspora is everybody who together tries to change both the situation of Africans in Finland, and at the same time trying to bridge the gap and create new possibilities within Africa as a continent. So yes, this is what I feel about diaspora and identity within that (FIN-13).*

In the '90s I was very active in the diaspora, not only the Somali one. Meetings were often held in Milan to discuss problems and proposals, doing politics from the bottom up.

With the diaspora the assembly was held, that elected its representatives and all the classic things that need to be done. And I did more than one, two associations. [...] The diaspora was complex, there were not only Somalis, we were a network (IT-8).

We have links actually, we have small groups that we join together to help the children, to pray together. We also try to keep our culture somehow, trying to be united. [...] There are a lot of links, we also have parents in different parts of Europe, we also have old friends. I am trying to keep my identity that is linked to Eritrean culture (FIN-11).

In these extracts emerges, both in Italy and in Finland, a more public and community way of living the diaspora, which is predominantly cultural, but sometimes social and political as well. But that can also be all these aspects together. Indeed, there is talk of cultural and religious aggregation among members of the same diaspora; but also of meetings between the various diasporas as occasions to make politics from below. These three extracts refer to ways of living the most collective and aggregative diasporas, respectively of the Ethiopian, Somali and Eritrean diaspora. In fact, we talk about informal associative moments, but also about the organization both in the Italian and Finnish case of intra- and inter-diasporic meetings for the discussion of political and social problems, as well as of possible solutions. An interesting aspect to note is also that, although the Ethiopian and Eritrean diasporas are present in fewer numbers in Finland than in Italy, the women interviewed stressed how these communities are still active and create collective mobilization. Compared to the Somali diaspora, the interviewees explain that less activities are organized, but above all women make their voices heard. The Ethiopian and Eritrean diasporas in Finland have been given less attention by literature, given their minor but no less important presence. The diaspora therefore also becomes a social and political space, usually led by women, where mobilization for social change takes shape both within a diasporic community, and between different diasporic communities.

The aspect of the interconnectedness between various diasporic communities is very significant because it represents a way of experiencing the collective diaspora that goes beyond borders. In fact, a way of living the diasporas as interconnected spaces between several states has also emerged, and not only in Europe. In this regard, a third way of

living the diaspora emerges, both in Italy and in Finland, which is that of the diaspora as a virtual community. The digital dimension unites in a certain sense both the personal and public dimension of the diaspora, since digital media are used both to maintain contact with family members, and to create virtual diasporic spaces where organizing political and social actions.

I am active on social media to break the taboo of mental health in Eritrean culture. I explain to them, both men and women, that they can ask help through therapy. The knowledge of mental health is in fact very little in the Eritrean culture and even in the diaspora. I believe that raising awareness on this issue is very important. I have noticed over the years more acceptance of psychological suffering in Eritrean culture (FIN-7).

You have no idea, you have no idea the development, the knowledge, the use of social media, the technology of Somalis, it's something impressive. I mean, to tell you, [...] at a certain point they made me discover a radio station run entirely by women, global, where they talk about everything, I mean everything from money management to political strategies, difficulties with children, difficulties with men (IT-4).

The excerpts from the interviews show how digitalization allows the creation of networks of collaboration not only for families, but also for people who have needs in their country of origin. Diverse digital diasporic networks of support/mobilization are created, often starting with the initiative of an individual as in the case of FIN-7. The latter took action to talk about psychology and mental well-being, knowing that it is a taboo subject in Eritrean culture and therefore is neglected. Moreover, some digital spaces are created only by diasporas' women, in which a collective mobilization of women develops that can bring added value to the entire diaspora, as IT-4 explains. This creates a continuity between the diaspora as a geographical and virtual political-social space; but also between the diaspora as a physical and virtual personal space. Digital spaces have indeed become central in maintaining contacts between the various members, in this case female members, of the diasporas, and in expanding their networks at a transnational level.

Finally, in line with this last discourse on the fluidity of diasporic spaces, the interpretative concept of the post-diasporic can be useful to understand the different experiences of the interviewees related to diasporas. In particular, two declinations of post-diasporic can be found, that of M. S. Laguerre, who interpret post-diaspora and post-diasporic as a kind of metamorphosis of the diasporic condition in terms of political and social equality; and that of S. Scafe, who emphasize the dishomogeneity and power relations within African diasporas. Moreover, the concept of post-diasporic emphasizes the translocality and fluidity of borders, by developing a concept that goes beyond the concept of diaspora, even in forms of engagement that do not only involve nation of origin and residence, overcoming even this dichotomy.

I have been living in Finland for more than 12 years, so I would consider Finland home more than my home. (FIN-12)

Diaspora, it seems to me, is a somewhat essentialising conception, that is, there is a group of people and what they have in common is an ancestral land. The fact that they are gone. And the relationship they have with each other has no continuity. (IT-10)

These quotations reveal in a certain sense the overcoming of the concept of diaspora understood as relation with the country of origin as the main home (Brubaker, 2005), since interviewees conceive as the main home the country in which they live or in which they are born, and suggest also with their narratives to overcome the concept of diaspora as contraposition between fixed separated identities and national spaces, embracing a fluid and comprehensive identity. Therefore, they pretend to be treated as citizens with the same rights as the others. In particular, in Italy this post-diasporic view is more developed than in Finland, probably also due to the fact that the diasporas in question have a more ancient presence in Italy. The second quotation, in fact, makes explicit the need to overcome the concept of diaspora as essentializing and often reductive in describing the real experiences of people connected to diasporas, who often have no relationship of continuity between themselves and their land of origin. Moreover, many of them are descendants of diasporic citizens, as they were born in Italy. Therefore, the interesting finding is that interviewees develop a double conception

of diaspora: one that is more related to a classic view of diaspora, especially developed by older generations; and one that is post-diasporic, especially developed by younger generations. It is possible to interpret diaspora and post-diaspora with a translocal and temporal lens, which shows the evolution of the concept starting by the experiences of the subjects linked to diasporas. Both in Italy and Finland, interviewees who experienced diasporas in first person or a long time ago generally express a meaning and a way of living the diaspora that is more connected to a classic view of diaspora. Interviewees, instead, who lived diasporas indirectly (born in Italy or Finland), or more recently, personally elaborate the concept of diaspora going beyond the latter. And here we enter the concept of post-diasporic precisely to describe the experience of these subjects, for whom the concept of diaspora becomes reductive. They express the need to go further not to be labeled in that concept, identifying with an experience that considers a greater fluidity of spaces.

In conclusion, these multiple ways of understanding and living Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali diaspora must be considered when approaching the different forms of diasporic engagement, analyzed in the previous paragraph. The various women's forms of engagement are more or less connected to the diasporic (and post-diasporic) dimension, and there is no shortage of reinterpretations of it, giving it new meanings. It should also be kept in mind that the meanings and ways of experiencing diaspora that have emerged in Italy and Finland should not be understood in isolation from each other. Indeed, specific ways of understanding diaspora give rise to specific ways of living it. A sort of parallelism can be identified between the ways of understanding the diaspora as it emerged from the analysis, and the ways of living it, summarized below without reporting the various nuances explained above. From the meaning of diaspora linked to a more individual and intimate dimension, comes a way of experiencing the diaspora more linked to the family network. From the meaning of diaspora linked to a more collective and community dimension, also at an inter-diasporic level, derives a way of living the diaspora as a place of meeting and political and social mobilization. From the meaning and experience of post-diaspora the traditional concept of diaspora is overcome, starting from what some of the interviewees live in a perspective of translocation and fluidity. This should be the starting point for future research in

diaspora studies. The digital dimension constitutes a point of contact between the two axes meaning-way of living the diaspora.

In the following paragraph, a specific dimension of the diasporas will be explored, to which a separate space is devoted, that is, the meanings of war and peace in the diasporas. It is necessary to address this issue in order to better understand, among the forms of engagement that have emerged, the engagement for peace outlined above.

7.3 Interviewees' interpretation of war and peace in diasporas

The topic of war, and in particular of peace, is a very delicate and necessary subject to be dealt with at present, due not only to international events, but also to the socio-political situation in the Italian context and Finnish context. It should be noted that in Italy a right-wing government has been in office since October 2022, which has made the already difficult living conditions of many people with a migration background (and not only) even worse (Valerio Alfonso Bruno, James F. Downes, 2023). In Finland, however, at the time of the interviews (September-December 2022) a centre-left government was in office, but in 2023 it was replaced by a conservative right-wing government. This brief contextualization is necessary to better understand what follows.

There is often a tendency to give a one-sided or reductionist interpretation of the concept of peace, but it is important to avoid simplifications and investigate its many facets. Interesting interpretations of the concepts of peace and war related to diasporas emerged from the interviews, which reveal useful keys for interpreting contemporary diasporic and transnational processes. It is possible to identify two key dimensions that emerge both in Italy and Finland. The first, and most prominent, concerns an interpretation of the concept of peace that goes beyond the well-known conception of peace as the absence of war (J. Galtung, 2010). The meaning of peace that emerges in fact refers to a condition of equality and equal rights that allows all people in a society to live in real freedom and security. In this meaning of peace, the individual and collective dimensions are united; and even conflict takes on a positive meaning where it

becomes an instrument of dissidence to achieve equality, and thus peace within societies. The second meanings of peace and war that emerge are instead linked to a more collective dimension. In fact, they refer to the three diasporas, highlighting how in some there is an internal peace within the diasporic community; while in others there are internal conflicts that persist from the situation in the country of origin. Linked to these two levels of meaning is the engagement for peace discussed in section 7.1. It is in fact an engagement, which, unlike as commonly understood in the literature on diasporas, aims at achieving peace primarily as equality and security for all within European societies. Secondly, this engagement includes, in some cases recounted by the interviewees, the organization of activities to promote peace practices in contexts of war or instability in Ethiopia, Eritrea and Somalia.

These quotations relate the meaning of peace to freedom and safety within a society (IT-6 and FIN-10); but also to equality and respect of human rights as an essential condition for real peace, both in Western societies and in the Horn of Africa (IT-2 and FIN-4). These are peace meanings which are very similar to each other, despite different nuances; and it is interesting to note the commonality of views between interviewees in Italy and Finland, that despite living in very different contexts, have a strong connection for the similar biographical experience.

For me, peace means first and foremost being free. To be free to be oneself, that is, to be free to be able to speak, to be able to express oneself and to be able to work (IT-6).

What peace means to me is safety, and being heard and seen is what allows you to feel safe in the environment you are in (FIN-10).

Peace and equality go somewhat hand in hand. Eh not in the sense that there is no diversity, but equality in the sense that we should all try to start from the same starting point, then each one arrives with his own strength where he arrives, but at least that. Because peace even in everyday life is often not there. We are the first of the well-thinking people not to be able to create relationships that are truly equal, that are truly of exchange and confrontation, that are not of "I, white Italian, look down on you because I am like that" (IT-2).

I want to build peace, starting from the idea that everyone has the same rights. In Ethiopia especially, this is something it is needed to work on. We have to work all at the grassroots level, especially as diaspora we have to make change [...] We have a big opportunity and we have to be more responsible, not emotional (FIN-4).

The following quotes from IT-1 and FIN-7 introduce an additional element, which they have in common: the generative conflict for social progress. Indeed, the two interviewees distinguish war from unarmed conflict, which becomes necessary in some cases to change unjust aspects of societies, including Western ones. In reference for example to the achievements in terms of social and civil rights in the past, the dynamics of social conflict were necessary.

For me, the opposite of peace is war, not conflict. Conflict in societies in most cases produces progress. So it has been in all social achievements and in all civil achievements. It has never been an easy path, that is, coming from the concession. War is only destruction. While conflict can be generative, war is only destruction and death. Is there anything else? Peace is the condition of progress. So it is essential, just as it was for Europe (IT-1).

Peace means that a person can live without any fear, and where she/he wants. Peace means that nobody obliges you to do things you don't want to do. If you don't have peace, you don't have nothing [...] Conflict does not always have a negative meaning. It becomes negative when it means being deprived of something against one's will (FIN-7).

In the light of respondent's diasporic experiences, the meanings of peace and war that emerge are mainly related to the Italian or Finnish, and in general Western contexts. Two interesting aspects are emphasized by most interviewees: peace above all as freedom of expression and to be able to be oneself; and war as the opposite of peace and as different from conflict, which is seen as generative. It is a vision of peace that is not reductive, but that is added to the conception of peace related to war (also themed by the interviewees), and that is very felt in the networks of the diasporas in general. It is connected with a concept of resistance that is not military, but social and cultural against

a series of injustices and limitation of freedom, only towards certain social groups, in Western contexts.

Regarding the first aspect, it is significant how, with reference to Italy and Europe in general, a situation of peace to all intents and purposes is not perceived. Peace and equal rights should in fact go hand in hand in democratic societies, but where the rights of all are not protected, conflict becomes necessary as a generator of progress. And here the second aspect comes into play. This is clearly not armed conflict, but here conflict is understood as a necessary mobilization for social improvement, the so-called positive conflict⁴². A kind of relationship between peace and conflict thus emerges. Indeed, conflict becomes the means to achieve the social condition of equality that coincides with peace. Peace is thus not interpreted in a reductionist way as being exclusively associated with war contexts, but the interviewees go beyond the mainstream concept of peace, as well as of conflict. It should be noted, however, that the concept of conflict is much more themed by the women interviewed in Italy than in Finland. Although there is a positive interpretation of the conflict in Finland when it is generating change, very few respondents understand it. In fact, a negative vision of conflict emerges mainly, often associated with war. In summary, in these emerging meanings it is interesting to see how women interviewed, both as individuals and as part of diasporic communities, deconstruct the meaning of peace and war/conflict, to produce some new meanings in the light of their own experiences.

Furthermore, from the interpretations of peace expressed by interviewees emerges in most cases the relationship between peace and equality in Western societies, as IT-2 explains, where conflict (different from war) becomes the necessary means to achieve progress, and thus the condition of peace. They want to raise awareness of the lack of peace in seemingly peaceful Western contexts, but which do not recognize the rights of all and where the interviewees do not always feel safe. This conception of peace is interesting if connected with the biographical experiences of the interviewees, many of whom have experienced a war situation in the Horn of Africa. From their descriptions of peace and conflict it is therefore possible to develop a post-diasporic interpretation

⁴² Positive conflict means a social conflict that generates social changes. This type of conflict, in fact, not only generates new rules and institutions, but can also be stimulating at the level of new perspectives (Lewis A. Coser, 1957).

once again, as they do not interpret peace and conflict only in relation to the country of origin, but develop these dimensions in particular in relation to the context in which they live, in line with the post-diasporic conception of M. S. Laguerre for which post-diasporic is an evolution of diasporic condition with regards to political and social equality, as the character of post-diasporic presupposes the acquisition of the full rights of citizenship of the various countries. This is in line with the “revolutionary” conceptions of peace and conflict expressed by the interviewees.

On the other hand, however, there is a second level of meanings that emerge. This is a concept of peace linked more to the diasporic community of belonging, also in connection with the past and the historical present in the Horn of Africa. In the first extract of FIN-11 a conception of peace emerges as a union of the Eritrean diasporic community, to realize initiatives that promote peace; and a female diasporic solidarity is also emphasized:

Peace means living in love. In my personal life I do not have many conflicts with people because I try to avoid negative thoughts. If there are conflicts, I prefer to talk to the person to try to solve the problem. I would like to engage for peace in the future, many Eritreans who arrived in Finland have experienced traumas due to the war. So peace for these people is very important; women in the Eritrean diaspora would like to work for peace (FIN-11).

This quotation reveals a different conception of conflict, seen mainly as negative, and draws attention to the need to work together for peace as a diasporic community, both in Finland and towards Eritrea. In the second and third excerpts (IT-6 and FIN-6), instead, interviewees talk about the difficulty of maintaining peace in Somalia, as well as the persistence of some hostility in the Somali diaspora due to clanism.

To strive for there to be a way to create the possibilities not only for peace, but also for dialogue especially between people. Because I realize through speeches, through events that take place, that unfortunately we do not succeed as Somalis in abandoning this idea of tribalism, and seeing Somalia as one country and one ethnic group. We are one ethnic group, but then there are the various tribes that try to emerge, and this also happens

outside. This is a sad thing for me, because I have always recognised myself as Somali (IT-6).

I think that in a country like Somalia, there's just so much of injustice, especially from what I've seen. When I went back home just this summer it would take a lot of work, definitely peace making. [...] We don't bring the cultural differences that we had back home into the country where we are living. Within our community we can continue to build peace (FIN-6).

Overall, these interview extracts show the connection of the meanings of war and peace with diasporic communities in relation to Ethiopia, Eritrea and Somalia. It should be pointed out that only a few interviewees related the themes of peace and war to diasporas and their internal dynamics. It is therefore a secondary issue that emerges, but still relevant. A difference immediately appears between the Eritrean (and also Ethiopian) diaspora and the Somali diaspora. While the former seems to have more cohesion within itself, so much so that the interviewee speaks of “internal peace”; the Somali diaspora is more divided. Internal divisions are often a source of instability and concern both hostilities between clans, and the presence of negative components of the diaspora, which often exploit rather than help Somali territory. However, a difference emerges regarding the Somali diaspora in Finland, which is very large compared to Italy. In Finland, in fact, there is greater mobilization by diasporic citizens to try to resolve internal tensions of the Somali diaspora community, that the women interviewed in Finland declared, too. Internal tensions and conflicts do not remain an obstacle, but become a further stimulus to peace building.

7.4 Perceived effect of the contexts and social changes brought about by women's engagement

This paragraph presents the results for the fourth thematic area identified, perhaps the most significant. These are the research's findings that answer the last question of research, and highlight both (and especially) the changes resulting from the engagement

of women interviewed; and the influence exerted by the spatialities in which these women operate. To get a complete picture of the contexts of Italy and Finland please refer to Chapter 4 of contextualization.

Starting from the changes made, from the interviews emerges how women activate their agency, understood here according to the conception of A. Giddens (Anthony Giddens, 1979) as the ability of social actors to influence reality and make a difference through their actions (M. Eriksson, 2008). However, it must be remembered that agency should not be understood in a reductionist way as a reaction to structural constraints, but as a reinterpretation of the social structure: there can be different ways and levels of interaction between agency and social structure, which do not necessarily lead to change. Here we have opted for A. Giddens' conception of agency because the emphasis in the interviews is on change, whether real or desired. Giddens' view is also complemented in the analysis of the results by the approach of M. Emirbayer and A. Mische, who conceptualize agency "as a temporally embedded process of social engagement" (M. Emirbayer and A. Mische, 1998, 962) and break it down into various dimensions. In this view, agency is informed by the past, and oriented towards the present and the future. This approach proves perfect for analyzing the *biographical trajectories* of the women interviewed from a diachronic perspective, as will be explored in more detail in Chapter 8.

7.4.1 Social changes from women's engagement in Italy and Finland

From the excerpts of the interviews below, the present-oriented dimension of agency defined as practical-evaluative capacity and the future-oriented dimension defined as projective capacity emerge in particular. These dimensions should always be considered in relation to the past-oriented dimension defined as international or habitual aspect, and

are all interrelated⁴³. The following quotes shed light on the results achieved by the interviewees.

So the change...maybe the changes are two. One was a change perhaps also cultural, I must say unfortunately not political, substantially of emergence. In other words, if before the phenomenon of the second generation was not a public phenomenon at all, thanks to our commitment, not only mine, it clearly became a theme that had a public visibility. If you talk about ius soli, now everyone knows what it is; if you talked about it 15 years ago maybe 2/3 people knew. [...] A small change is that of having impacted with a campaign on a decree that now allows a lengthening of the time frame for acquiring citizenship for those who, born and raised in Italy, at the age of 18 have not been informed of the opportunity. It therefore makes it the responsibility of the municipalities to warn those over 18; if these young people do not receive this letter, that one-year time frame for acquiring citizenship does not lapse, but is extended because the municipality has not warned them. [...] But otherwise there is a lot of work to be done (IT-5).

*I think that from the point of view of language and analysis we have made some changes, this as far as activism is concerned more if you like cultural, theoretical, in short, pedagogical. [...] Then with **** we certainly produced changes, improvements in the lives of the people we met, better than nothing. And in some cities we also created collaboration protocols so that family reception became an institutional practice within the integrated reception systems, this is also an achievement (IT-10).*

But the effort is so much, for what I am saying there is a great change: the initiative we saw in Rome a month ago is a great indicator. To see realities of our diaspora representing realities that were unthinkable a few years ago (IT-15).

⁴³ “The iterational element refers to the selective reactivation by actors of past patterns of thought and action, as routinely incorporated in practical activity, thereby giving stability and order to social universes and helping to sustain identities, interactions, and institutions over time. [...] The practical-evaluative element entails the capacity of actors to make practical and normative judgments among alternative possible trajectories of action, in response to the emerging demands, dilemmas, and ambiguities of presently evolving situations. [...] Projectivity encompasses the imaginative generation by actors of possible future trajectories of action, in which received structures of thought and action may be creatively reconfigured in relation to actors’ hopes, fears, and desires for the future.” (Mustafa Emirbayer, Ann Mische, 1998, 971).

In Italy, the interviewees report some small but significant changes as they are a sign that society is slowly changing. From these interview excerpts, what emerges above all is the practical-evaluative dimension of agency, which is directed towards the present. Indeed, social actors respond to the contingencies of the present by developing strategies to change situations through their practical-evaluative capacity. In doing so, this dimension of agency is linked to the contextualisation of the subjects' social experience (M. Emirbayer and A. Mische, 1998)⁴⁴.

The women interviewed explain how, in the light of the social context (Italian and Finnish respectively) in which their experiences are embedded, they have contributed to visible changes in the present. In both Italy and Finland, women claim to have contributed to changes. In particular in Italy, a cultural change is identified, concerning the public visibility of second generations and people with a migration background; together with a small political change concerning the timing of citizenship acquisition. Thanks to a campaign, it was achieved that 18-year-olds have a longer deadline to apply for citizenship if they have not been informed by the municipalities that they could proceed with the citizenship's application. The responsibility for information therefore lies with the Italian municipalities. At the socio-political level, there is also a change in reception processes, with the introduction of some improved practices compared to the Italian system. Finally, there is also a change at the linguistic level, whereby attention has developed in public and academic language due to awareness-raising activities carried out by racialized people.

I saw a change in attitudes in Finnish society, I had the opportunity to conduct some training for professionals and I saw changes. We come to be a voice for other women, for change (FIN-4).

Main changes have been in regard to charity aspects and food programs, especially for the orphanage children. My mom was the one who established a project, in which each month she gathered monthly donations. She is responsible for this orphanage where she gives food supplies and everyday supplies to over 200 orphanages in Somalia. [...] The

⁴⁴ "Through deliberation with others (or sometimes, self-reflexively with themselves) about the pragmatic and normative exigencies of lived situations, actors gain in the capacity to make considered decisions that may challenge received patterns of action" (M. Emirbayer, A. Mische, 1998, 994).

social changes that our Somali cartoon project is bringing about is to help Somali children to build their identity, to understand their language and their parents. [...] Another change regards the fact that the Finnish government in Helsinki used to invite different Muslim representatives of mosques, and for such a long time there were no young people attending those meetings. So when they heard about us, they invited us. I was one of the youngest among the people that were invited. Our achievements speak for us (FIN-6).

In Finland, on the other hand, it is interesting to see how there is a change in attitudes, which can therefore be considered cultural and social. In particular, FIN-4 talks about the importance of women in diasporas who have become a point of reference for other women, tracing a path of change that they follow and continue. Additionally, there is a greater orientation than in Italy towards change in the country of origin. In the last excerpt, the interviewee FIN-6 talks about the results achieved by a project in Somalia, which was carried out not directly by her but by her mother. This project has not only allowed the transmission of Somali culture to children born in Finland, but also contributed positively to a better representation of the Muslim community in Finland, still suffering from prejudice. Thus contributing to social and cultural change, but also partly political. All the reported extracts indicate only a few changes and emphasize that there is still much work to be done for change.

For a more complete picture, according to the theory of social change these are processes of change within the system, not of the system. As also explained by T. Parsons, the change of the system occurs when “all major structural relations, its basic institutions and its prevailing value system have been drastically altered” (Lewis A. Coser, 1957, 202). Change in a social system is the result or sum of previous changes that have taken place within the system. Social conflict becomes the tool for dissidence and for bringing about changes within social systems. Changing a system is a complex process, and the possibility of change depends on the system’s level of resistance to change (Lewis A. Coser, 1957). The changes realized by the women interviewed are therefore small, but relevant, changes within the social system, aimed at modifying the system over time. Indeed, exploring the future prospects of change various levels of projectivity emerge, as the following quotations show.

For the future, I think it is necessary to continue doing what I am doing, with my work and my engagement. My work and my engagement are two different things, in the sense that 50% I am volunteering and 50% it is my work. [...] I would like to contribute both to future peace in my country and here in Italy for equality. We must leave the second, third or fourth generations a situation with less racism and create a multicultural community. Italy is on the road to change (IT-12).

The quote IT-12 about Italy reveals an engagement for future change that is transnational, as the interviewee wants to contribute both to peace in her country of origin and to equality in Italy. Peace and equality are two interlinked concepts, as it emerged earlier, and the interviewee's words also reveal a sense of responsibility towards future generations, to whom she wants to leave a better society. What emerges, then, is a projectivity of agency which is linked both to a sense of responsibility and a will to change the status quo. The latter aspect also emerges in the following quotations from Finland.

In Finland not only the people who face the problems, but also the people who are not must be part of us. Black Lives Matter movement wants that, with all the problems that are happening here to the people of colors, also the other people must be part of it, because we need them to have a change. Our voices are not the most powerful ones, we need the Finnish people to speak up to the government. And for Somalia I think there are so many things we can do, but because of clans, wars and people who want to be in power we are stuck (FIN-3).

I see many women challenging the status quo and being role models for our children, because we do not have enough role models, especially of people of African descent or even other communities. [...] But I know that some of them are teaching at the university of Helsinki or doing their PhD, I know two or three who are currently teaching there. But their numbers are very limited, this is one thing I want to highlight. And if you think to higher educated women who are in high work positions now, the number is even lower. [...] We have to work hard so that we have more and more highly educated women with a migrant background (FIN-13).

From these three extracts, the so-called projective dimension of agency emerges⁴⁵. Starting from the challenges and problems encountered in the social spaces experienced, subjects activate their projectivity to develop projects to be realized. This includes a process of *hypothesisation* (M. Emirbayer and A. Mische, 1998), as the women interviewed hypothesize possible answers to the present reality, they seek and hope will be realized in the future. The interviews reveal interesting dimensions related to the projectivity of agency, namely a dimension of female solidarity for future change and an intergenerational dimension. Common to Italy and Finland is, first of all, the need for greater equality in society and representation of racialized women in educational and working positions. Hence, there is a collective mobilization to bring about change at an institutional level, which also includes a change in citizenship law and migration policies, with respect for human rights. On the other hand, in both Italy and Finland there is a willingness to take action for the realization of peace: in the first case peace is understood as a condition of life in Italy with real respect for the rights of all; in the second case, change for peace is more directed towards the war contexts in Somalia, Ethiopia and Eritrea.

7.4.2 The influence of geographical spatialities according to women's experiences

Let us now pass to a brief presentation of the results on the influence of geographical spatialities, necessary to better understand the importance of the changes realized or found. The need for change is in fact a response to the characteristics of the spatial contexts in which the women interviewed live and operate. The following quotations will explain how the interviewees perceived the influence of Italian and Finnish social contexts.

⁴⁵ “The subset of words used to describe this ability has ranged from the strongly purposive terminology of goals, plans, and objectives to the more ephemeral language of dreams, wishes, desires, anxieties, hopes, fears, and aspirations. In this article, we term it the projective dimension of human agency” M. Emirbayer, A. Mische, 1998: 984.

In my opinion, one thing that has remained very much of Italian colonialism is the predatory aspect precisely towards women, because I am reading, I am informing myself. [...] As for Italy and the colonial experience, there is certainly a very strong removal from memory, from consciousness, from everything. And I believe that today's racism has been fuelled more by the media than by our colonial past, especially in the late 1990s and early 2000s (IT-7).

An obstacle for me here is that usually organizations against racism are made up of white people. [...] When people in Finland talk about racism they do not talk deeply, because they didn't experience it. There is a kind of white savior: when African or colored people are talking about that issue it is not the same. This is linked to colonization because white people were seen as better; color people especially Africans were seen as nothing. So it is linked. Some people still think that because of the skin's color some people can decide instead of others (FIN-8).

A first interesting aspect that emerges concerns the colonial heritage that characterizes Italian society, and which has an impact on the lives and activities of the interviewees. This aspect is also present in Finland, but in the form of white saviour as Finland was not a colonial power. This link is interesting as it shows how even Western states with very different histories and societies are connected by a discriminatory mentality linked to a misconception of white superiority.

So the impact of the colonial heritage, for example, then the fact that I was a teacher anyway Black and African was not always easy. I have to be honest because often the first thing that people see obviously is my physicality, so the fact that I'm Black, so how can this Black person teach if she's a foreigner, right? So it wasn't much, it wasn't always easy and especially at the beginning, as the years went by, obviously working in a small school outside the city centre (IT-6).

The society of the last twenty years, therefore the politics of the last twenty years in Italy has been very much on positions of mediation much closer to the right. And the migration issue is one of the most visible. [...] There have been choices that cannot be read except

through the lens of subordination to a certain type of discourse, which is right-wing discourse (IT-1).

Extracts from the interviews reveal significant commonalities between the contexts of Italy and Finland. Three can be considered the key elements that emerge, which are interconnected: the legacy of a colonial mentality that influences the social structure of both Italy and Finland (even though Finland was not a colonizing power); an unequal political system, influencing the public and media representation of racialized people; and intersectional discriminations against Black women. The information that emerged from the interviews concerning the geographical contexts is in line with the data and information provided in Chapter 4 on contextualisation. The Eurocentric colonial mentality is the basis from which racism, but also *white saviour*⁴⁶, that is the holding of Western forms of knowledge as superior to others and therefore more authoritative, arise. The colonial legacy is an element that unites Italy (where it is present to a greater extent) and Finland and is an obstacle to overcome in order to bring about change through various forms of engagement. Also connected to the colonial legacy is an unequal political system, which distinguishes between first-class and second-class citizens and nurtures discriminatory attitudes such as racism and Islamophobia through propaganda on the one hand and unequal laws such as the citizenship law on the other.

Finally, the third contextual element identified by the women interviewed, especially in Italy, stems from the colonial legacy and constitutes a further obstacle. Black women experience, in fact, more complex forms of discrimination, known as intersectional discriminations, due to, as has been said earlier, the intersection of several structural factors, in this case the gender of “woman” and the origin⁴⁷. In Italy in particular, there is a strong link with the colonial past, where there has long been an exotic and disrespectful representation of the Black female body⁴⁸. While therefore for Black men only the first contextual element that emerged is an obstacle, for Black women the

⁴⁶ The concept of the *white savior* originates from the poem *The Burden of the White Man* (1899) by Rudyard Kipling. It indicates the misconception that Westerners felt like white saviours during colonialism. As a result, it has gone on to connote the superiority of Western forms of knowledge.

⁴⁷ It should be pointed out that intersectional discrimination here refers to Black women as participants in the research; but non-binary gender categories are also included in the literature on intersectionality.

⁴⁸ The exoticization of the Black female body was themed by C. Hawthorne and is a bitter legacy of Italian colonialism (Camilla Hawthorne, 2022).

obstacles are greater. As the interviews revealed, Black women faced various difficulties, in Finland but especially in Italy, at the beginning of their professions and/or their engagement. However, we must not fall into the error of victimizing Black women, who build the social reality in which they live, developing different responses to structural constraints and generating changes, as shown.

The following table themes the analysis carried out to bring out the changes made and to be implemented, linking them to the different dimensions of the agency. In particular, this table offers an overview by connecting the contextual conditions that emerge from the experiences of the respondents, with the changes.

Table 12 - Overview of the dimension of social change identified in the women's engagement

	Contextual conditions emerged from the interviews	Changes in the present (practical-evaluative dimension of agency)	Changes for the future (projective dimension of agency)
Italy	-Colonial legacy and related forms of intersectional discriminations (exotic representation of women's bodies) -An unequal political system, influencing the public and media representation of racialized people -Unequal opportunities in education and labour market	cultural level: increased public/academic representation and linguistic awareness of racialized people political/social level: new protocols for reception; regulation of municipal practices to improve information on Italian citizenship; greater public representation of diasporic communities	realization of a peaceful society, understood as a more equal one change of the law of citizenship reduction of racism and discriminations firstly at the institutional level (including education), and then also at the individual level
Finland	-Colonial and Eurocentric approach, which is reflected in an attitude of white saviour -An unequal political system, influencing the public and media representation of racialized people -Almost equal opportunities in education, but not in labour market	cultural level: greater representation of racialised women in the cultural/academic sphere social/political level: change of values and attitudes; young Muslim women in political or managerial roles implementation of projects that have improved living conditions especially in Somalia	Working on peace-building not only in the Finnish society (understood as real equity), but especially in the states of the Horn of Africa, with ad hoc programmes for the local population reduction of racism and discriminations firstly at the institutional level (including education), and then also at the individual level

Source: prepared by the author

In conclusion, this paragraph has drawn attention to the changes made and to be made in Italy and Finland, an aspect that has so far been little emphasized in the literature. Whilst the forms of activism and engagement of women with a migration background have been treated in the literature (Parin Dossa, 2004; Neelu Kang, 2006; Shahrzad Mojab and Rachel Gorman, 2007), there has been less focus on the changes achieved. What emerges from this analysis is that, despite the small changes made in Italy and Finland on various levels but mainly within the system, there is still much work to be done to improve the system itself. In particular, in Italy the focus of the women interviewed is mainly on future change in the Italian context, considering the changes made so far to be significant but not sufficient. In Finland, there is attention to future change not only in the Finnish context, but also in the contexts of Somalia, Ethiopia and/or Eritrea. Indeed, the interviewees emphasize the need to activate a projective capacity as diasporic communities also towards their states of origin. In Italy, therefore, the interviewed women together with their respective diasporas and in general people with a migratory background, are mainly focused on the Italian context; in Finland, instead, there is a double attention and mobilization towards Finnish and African contexts. Table 12 summarizes what emerged, relating the realized and desired changes to the contextual characteristics of Italy and Finland, based on what emerged from the interviews.

CHAPTER 8

Biographical Portraits of Diasporas' Women. Between individual and collective temporalities for greater social justice

This chapter deepens the analysis of the interviewees' biographical paths, elaborating them further and presenting them in the form of *biographical portraits*. The goal is to interpret in a comprehensive way the interviewees' life tales (collected in the appendix), in order to identify the interrelations among ruptures in the biographies' social order, their personal changes and paths of agency within engagement (Emirbayer, Mische, 1998), with a diachronic spatio-temporal perspective. In particular, an analysis of the *biographical portraits* will be carried out to highlight the dimension of social change both within the biographical paths of the interviewees, and within their social systems (Coser, 1957). Specifically, the analysis consists in identifying, in the various *biographical portraits*, the moments of rupture, called *biographical trajectories* (Riemann, Schütze, 1991), of the social/quotidian order; the *turning-points* perceived by the interviewees as personal changes and read through their biographical reflexivity (Minna-Kristiina Ruokonen-Engler, Irini Siouti, 2013); and finally the processes of personal activation in various forms of engagement. This analysis will be followed by a deepening of the diasporic and post-diasporic spatio-temporal dimension, exploring the intersections between individual biographical time and historical time. It will therefore be analyzed both the moments of change/transition within the individual paths of interviewees (micro level), and the relationships between individual paths and historical-social contexts crossed by the subjects (meso and macro level). This makes it possible to reduce thematic fragmentation and to include the four thematic areas emerged in Chapter 7 in a coherent and unitary intra-biographical and inter-biographical framework⁴⁹.

Before proceeding with the analysis of biographical paths, it is necessary to dwell on the way the women interviewed decided to construct their life tales. Although there was

⁴⁹ This is understood as focusing, during the analysis, both on individual biographical paths (intra-biographical) and among different biographical paths (inter-biographical).

a guideline on the topics to be addressed, they were free to choose what to narrate and how to narrate it. The interviewees' choice of content and language is indeed significant in understanding the messages they want to convey. First of all, the use of a language that I have defined as the *language of dissidence* already conveys a message in itself. This expression echoes bell hooks' thought. Indeed, one of the central themes of this scholar is the concept of the dissident approach and resistant language. In the book *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (trad. it. *Elogio del Margine* Maria Nadotti, 2020), for example, bell hooks analyzes the positioning of the margin as a generative space of resistance, which produces oppositional discourse. By *language of dissidence* I meant a mode of expression denouncing unjust social aspects, as well as privileged positions. It is a language that aims to create counter-stories to the dominant narratives. Some interviewees in fact, especially in Italy, have remarked and sometimes criticized my positionality as a white and privileged woman, as distant from the stories they would tell. The *language of dissidence*, therefore, already expresses a form of linguistic agency⁵⁰ and is consistent with the narration of the interviewees' stories. The dimension of this language emerges from micro analysis, as each interviewee builds her own personal narrative. Although there are different kinds of linguistic agency depending on the personalities of the respondents, which determine different languages of dissidence, these languages are united by a common goal: to counteract the status quo. To do this, the language forms of dissidence must enter into dialogue with social institutions, and therefore this type of language also concerns the meso-sociological level.

Turning to content, the women interviewed went through the most significant stages of their lives from childhood to the present day, choosing how much to deepen each stage. Each phase of life has a particular value, some phases more than others, and on the whole different experiences and meanings emerge that help to better interpret contemporaneity. The reconstruction of the biographical paths of each one is, in fact, significant because it provides a better understanding of how each woman's engagement developed, in some cases coinciding with her own career path. In each *racconto di vita*, individual history is intertwined with both an historical, social, political and cultural context. In the following paragraphs, these different dimensions will be identified and

⁵⁰ Linguistic agency can be expressed in various ways, including the use of arguments to support certain positions (Anil Al-Rebholz, 2014).

correlated. The relevance of these stories lies in the fact that they point the way forward for social change, as they are emblematic cases of tenacious and, in my opinion, exemplary women who have changed or are attempting to improve the societies in which they live. The experiences of the interviewees also had an impact on my research and biographical path, so I have included in this chapter an analysis of my personal change, through a work of autobiographical reflexivity on my path.

8.1 The *biographical trajectories* as ruptures of biographical order and the agency within *biographical portraits*: war, colonialism and new societies

The biographical paths of the interviewees are altered or destructed by breaking events that are defined trajectory processes, which disturb the macro-structures on social order in individual biographies (Riemann, Schütze, 1991). These events are thus contextual conditions or facts beyond the subject's control, which alter the order of their biographical paths. In the case of the interviewees, we will see that these are breaking events that happen to many of them, to which sometimes they react through their agency in similar ways, or sometimes in different ways. In order to analyse *biographical trajectories* as ruptures in individual biographies, it is first necessary to understand which are the biographical structures (macro level) of the interviewees on a temporal and spatial level.

At the macro level, different interviewees share some spatio-temporal biographical patterns. Specifically, they are united for example by their birth and childhood in the same geographical area; some of them were born in Italy or in Finland, with a consequently different link with the same diaspora.

The interviewee was born in the early 1990s in Veneto and says she only knew Ethiopia through the stories of her Ethiopian mother. More precisely, her mother grew up in Mogadishu, as her maternal grandparents were deported to Somalia during the Italian invasion of Ethiopia (IT-bio-7).

The interviewee was born in Rome in the 1980s to parents, both Ethiopians, who arrived in Italy in the late 1970s. In particular, her mother arrived when she was very young and felt more of a connection with the diaspora than she did, who explains that she experienced it 'reflexively', especially through concern for relatives left behind in Ethiopia. Today, however, her connection to the diaspora has become stronger because of the recent war in Ethiopia (IT-bio-5).

These two excerpts from *biographical portraits* show how these two women have the same biographical temporal and spatial patterns in the first stage of their life, as they were born in Italy (however in different regions), more or less in the same temporality (respectively 1990s and 1980s) and share also the same Ethiopian origin. Their childhood in Italy was characterized by little knowledge of Ethiopia, being rightly Italian. What they have in common is an experience of the Ethiopian diaspora in an undirected way, through the stories or experiences of their parents and relatives. The second interviewee recounts that she approached the diaspora more as an adult.

Others were born in Somalia, Ethiopia or Eritrea, in the same or similar years, sharing in this case both biographical temporality and space, but in a different social context from the Italian one.

The interviewee was born in Mogadishu in the 1960s and came to Italy in 1986 as a student, to escape the insecurity caused by the war in Somalia. She recounts migration as a very difficult experience, but one that also gave her a different perspective on things (IT-bio-8).

The interviewee was born in the 1980s in Mogadiscio. She arrived in Italy in 1993, traveling with her cousin on a visa to join her family, who fled the conflict in Somalia. This is a journey that the interviewee recalls as very significant: arrives in Italy as unaccompanied foreign minor, but explains that she has never been an asylum seeker. This last issue, she stresses, is very related to the problems of current legislation towards people migrating to Italy (IT-bio-4).

The interviewee was born in the 1980s in Mogadiscio, then moved while still a child with her family to a refugee camp in Kenya, where she lived until 1993. Historically, she

remembers 1986 as a significant date for the outbreak of war in Somalia, due to which she had to flee to Kenya with her family. After that they moved to Nairobi and in 1997 migrated to the city of Turku, Finland. The decision to migrate to Finland was due to the fact that her older brother had settled there in 1992. The brother was able to bring his whole family there by applying for family reunification. In 1992/1993 Finland was receiving many refugees from Iraq, Kurdistan and Somalia (FIN-bio-8).

These extracts show a commonality of biographical paths between three interviewees who live in different contexts (Italy and Finland), but who were born in Somalia and spent their childhoods in the same context. In these three extracts, trajectory processes clearly emerge as episodes of *biographical rupture*, which are beyond the control of the interviewees and alter the social structures of their biography. It was the outbreak of war in Somalia at the end of the 1980s, which forced them to flee. The war was a dramatic event that caused a great change in their lives, breaking the biographical social order. They cannot choose to flee, they are forced to survive, but they can choose with their agency where to go. In the case of the respondent in Finland, the war forced her into a series of displacements in Kenya before she could migrate to Finland. What is interesting is that the moment of rupture in the *biographical trajectory* is also linked to the war in the two previous extracts, of interviewees born in Italy, although with a different impact. In fact, the two Italian-born interviewees refer to the Italian invasion of Ethiopia and the war in Ethiopia not as breaking events in their biographies, but as traumatic events in the lives of their parents, thus influencing them only indirectly.

The *biographical trajectories* of interviewees are related not only to wars and colonialism in the Horn of Africa, but also to less dramatic events (but still causing ruptures in their biographies), such as the living conditions in Italian and Finnish societies, or a travel in a specific place. Significant examples of this are the following extracts of *biographical portraits*, the first by an interviewee in Finland, the second in Italy.

Later she moved to Finland from Eritrea. When she arrived in Finland, she settled in a small town, a small village where she was the only Black woman. The first years were

very hard for her; it was a shock at first. Although she knew the Finnish reality was totally different from what she was used to, it is one thing to hear about it and another to live there. She especially found it difficult to get used to the weather and the Finnish language. According to her, the Finnish system for people with a migration background did not work well that time. [...] In 2016 there was a turning-point in her life. In that year many refugees started arriving in Finland. Before 2016 there were not many Eritreans in Finland, now there are Eritreans living in almost every Finnish city. [...] She believes that Eritrean women, but also women in general, have great potential and can be active on various fronts. Starting from her personal experience, she wants to make them understand that great goals can be achieved: she started from scratch in Finland, in an unknown and difficult context for her, but she managed to achieve what she wanted (FIN-bio-7).

In the biographical path of this interviewee from Eritrea, a significant moment of rupture is described: her traumatic arrival in the Finnish society, specifically in a town where she experienced what she describes as “a shock”. It was in fact a closed and unwelcoming reality, to which the interviewee became accustomed over time. When she arrived in Finland there were not many Eritrean people, who mainly arrived with the 2016 refugee crisis. This is the *turning-point* year for her, where she became aware of her role and the support she can give to the Finnish reception system. Feeling close to the experiences of many Eritrean men and women arriving in Finland, mindful of her past experience, she decided to take action to become an interpreter and also to start raising awareness about the rights of people with a migrant background. From the interviewee’s words, it is possible to interpret her *turning-point* as a moment of becoming aware of her identity, which began following the first moment of rupture of *biographical trajectory* and was reinforced after the refugee crisis in 2016. After 2016, she activated her agency and began to change the direction of her life towards a social engagement, that also coincided with her new profession: she decided to study as an adult to become an interpreter, but her engagement goes even beyond her work, as she is also active on social media “When I start like my interpretation work, I was not active in media [...] I am interpreter but I am specialized in *****, so I started to use Facebook to speak about it, and I started speaking on the media to raise awareness (FIN-7).

The second extract, instead, describes a significant part of the biographical path of an interviewee in Italy, in which there are some points in common with the previous *biographical portrait*, but also some differences.

The year 2005 marks a significant change in the interviewee's life, as approaching the topic of migration allows her to reread and understand several episodes of her past life, such as her parents' migration to Italy, her birth in Italy, and to become more aware of the condition of people with a migration background. What she describes as "a leap" occurs: she feels a desire for 'narrative redemption' and engages with the group of her association to counter the dominant narrative in Italy about people of foreign origin, who must be able to express their own narrative. [...] Around 2006, another significant event occurred for the interviewee: her return from a few months' trip to New York. While in New York she felt less different, on her return to Italy she had the impression that everyone was looking at her, as if the brief detachment from the Italian reality had opened her eyes to how different the perception of foreigners in Italy was compared to the US (IT-bio-5).

First of all, two *biographical trajectories* can be identified from this second extract. The first biography-breaking event occurs in Italy, when in 2005 the interviewee comes into contact with the topic of migration in depth, studying it and relating it to her parents' diasporic experience. This fact can be considered a breaking point because it causes her to stop and reflect; she then becomes aware of her own past, and partly also on her diversity; something she had not done until then. She is suddenly confronted with issues that she had never thought about herself and the first *turning-point* occurs, which she describes as a leap, similar to a mental transition. She elaborates on this personal change: her awareness is connected to the start of an engagement. This realization leads her to decide to activate her agency in a form of engagement that, in her words, comes across as political and social, as she explains that she wants to change the dominant narrative about people with a migration background and contribute to the recognition of their political rights. In 2006, however, a second moment of *biographical trajectory* takes place, coinciding with a trip to New York, where she finds a less discriminating context than in Italy. This journey causes another break in her biographical order and leads her to feel uncomfortable upon returning to Italy. This moment of rupture triggers

a second *turning-point*, which, combined with the previous one, further heightens her awareness. The element of travel plays a rupturing role in the biographical social order, and triggers a process of personal change.

From the analysis of these two *biographical portraits*, it is possible to identify a recurrent pattern of change, which relates the personal change of the interviewees to the dimension of social change understood as a change within a social system (Coser, 1957). These are clearly two different levels of change, but it is possible to identify a connection between the moment of inner personal change (*turning-point*) and the beginning of a conscious activation process of the interviewees, with the common goal of bringing about social change within the system in which they live. This pattern of change, as I have defined it, is the following:

- *Biographical trajectory*, as an event of rupture of the biographical social order and everyday life (macro level): e.g., arrival in Finland; travel to New York →
- *Turning-point*, moment of transition and personal change of the interviewee (micro level) →
- Process of *activating agency* of interviewees and initiating engagement for social change (meso level)

In this pattern of change, the relationship between the biographical agency (Anil Al-Rebholz, 2014) of the interviewees and structural elements can be seen in initiating various forms of engagement to counteract a system-wide status quo and/or to raise awareness of problems, shortcomings and injustices within the Finnish and Italian systems. In this way, agency enters into dialogue, in the form of engagement, with social structures, but not only in an opposing view of agency versus social structure. Indeed, as Al-Rebholz (2014) explains, biographies overcome this dualism because they reveal the strategies and interpretative processes that subjects implement in relation to social structures. In the specific case of the interviewee in Finland, she activates to raise awareness, also on social media, of the needs and problems of Eritrean people; in the case of the interviewee in Italy to support the recognition of the rights of people with a migration background, primarily the right to Italian citizenship. This pattern of analysis is applicable not only to the two *biographical portraits* examined, but also to others, as summarized in the two tables below.

Table 13 - Patterns of change as an analysis of *biographical portraits* in Italy

Biographical trajectories (ruptures of bio structures)	Turning-points: personal changes	Agency related to engagement (Emirbayer, Mische, 1998)
<i>Questo viaggio è avvenuto nell'anno dell'indipendenza eritrea (1991) ed è stato per lei allo stesso tempo emozionante e complesso, dal momento che si è sentita di "essere altro" anche lì, essendo nata e cresciuta in Italia (IT-bio-2).</i>	<i>Ricorda quella fase come significativa in quanto le ha permesso di fare quello che definisce "scatto mentale", che le ha fatto comprendere la pericolosità di un discorso di esclusione (IT-bio-2).</i>	<i>Prende forma un impegno più sistematico dell'intervistata; formalmente è cominciato a metà anni 2000, mentre a livello informale era già iniziato prima [...] In quel periodo ha iniziato a concepire il suo engagement come un'intersezione di lotte, che riflette il suo essere intersezione di tante cose. [...] Per il futuro, vorrebbe che prendesse forma una figura di attivista intermedia tra l'attivista vecchio stile e l'attivista contemporanea, caratterizzata da spirito di sacrificio e di comunità. Soprattutto, ritiene che sia fondamentale passare il testimone e far sì che si prosegua in una direzione di cambiamento, affinché il lavoro fatto fino ad ora non sia vano (IT-bio-2).</i>
<i>Il 2005 segna un cambiamento rilevante nella sua vita, in quanto l'avvicinarsi al tema delle migrazioni le permette di rileggere e comprendere diversi episodi del suo passato [...] Intorno al 2006 si verifica un altro avvenimento significativo per l'intervistata: il ritorno da un viaggio di qualche mese a New York (IT-bio-5).</i>	<i>Avviene quello che lei stessa descrive come "un salto": sente una volontà di "riscatto narrativo" (IT-bio-5).</i>	<i>E si impegna con il gruppo della sua associazione per contrastare la narrazione dominante in Italia riguardo alle persone di origine straniera, che devono poter esprimere la propria narrazione. [...] Ricorda il 2013 come anno più significativo in merito ai risultati raggiunti. Si tratta dell'anno del "Decreto del Fare", che è rimasto l'unico risultato in tema di cittadinanza, in base al quale ai nati in Italia non sono più imputabili eventuali inadempienze commesse dai genitori nelle registrazioni. Inoltre, l'intervistata sta sviluppando il tema dei diritti della cittadinanza e dei figli degli immigrati anche in ambito narrativo: scrive racconti su queste tematiche e ha in mente una pubblicazione in futuro (IT-bio-5).</i>

<i>[...] Un avvenimento, negli anni '90, che lei stessa ricorda come particolarmente significativo: l'incontro in Sudan con 5 ragazzi soli su un marciapiede, dei quali il maggiore dell'età di 13 anni (IT-bio-9).</i>	<i>Questa frase colpì molto l'intervistata in quanto espressione di un forte impegno per la vita e di altruismo verso persone che il ragazzino nemmeno conosceva [...] Si è chiesta: "Perché io che ho la possibilità, che ho un lavoro e anche un benessere, non posso aiutarli?" (IT-bio-9).</i>	<i>Da quell'incontro è scattato nell'intervistata il desiderio di mettere a disposizione le proprie risorse per aiutare gli altri e quindi di cominciare il suo impegno sociale. Ha iniziato a recarsi nei vari campi profughi, per esempio in Etiopia [...] Dopo anni di impegno, ha deciso di fondare l'ONG ***: la prima sede è stata quella realizzata in Costa d'Avorio intorno al 2000; successivamente è stata fondata anche in Etiopia e a Milano (IT-bio-9).</i>
<i>Arriva in Italia nel 1993, all'età di 12 anni, viaggiando con il visto per raggiungere la sua famiglia, scappata per il conflitto in Somalia. Si tratta di un viaggio che l'intervistata ricorda come molto significativo: arriva in Italia come MSNA, ma spiega di non essere mai stata richiedente asilo (IT-bio-4).</i>	<i>Il suo percorso universitario è stato caratterizzato da diverse collaborazioni lavorative: inizia così a prendere consapevolezza che l'essere nata e vissuta per un periodo in Somalia le ha dato una conoscenza diversa (IT-bio-4).</i>	<i>Il suo impegno si può dire che è iniziato con l'iscrizione all'università. In quel periodo svolgeva un altro lavoro. [...] Comincia così a lavorare con la diaspora e sul community engagement [...] con l'obiettivo di cercare di decolonizzare l'ambiente accademico, portando i temi dell'invisibilità nera all'interno dello spazio accademico, e ritiene che sia necessario continuare a lavorare in questa direzione per il futuro (IT-bio-4).</i>
<i>È nata ad Asmara a fine anni '50 ed è arrivata in Italia molto giovane, all'età di 16 anni, per ricongiungersi con i genitori che vivevano in Italia. Nelle sue parole dice infatti: "...non sapevo neanche cos'era l'Italia, dov'era l'Italia. [...] Senza averlo pianificato, senza averlo scelto, senza averlo voluto. Quindi è stato uno strappo." I primi tre anni di vita in Italia sono stati di smarrimento (IT-bio-15).</i>	<i>Con ancora viva in lei questa ferita coloniale, dopo un breve periodo di stabilizzazione nel contesto italiano, l'impegno dell'intervistata prende forma sin da subito e in modo naturale come servizio verso gli altri (IT-bio-15).</i>	<i>L'impegno per lei deriva dalla traiettoria di vita. [...] Il suo è un impegno che si collega alla politica, ma che è anche sociale e culturale. Per lei: "l'impegno è una sorta di scelta di vita...per diventare strumento di cambiamento". Negli anni '70, l'intervistata inizia ad attivarsi. [...] Nel mentre ha iniziato a frequentare la scuola per i servizi sociali, al termine della quale è diventata la prima assistente sociale di origine immigrata presso il Comune di Milano. Descrive quegli anni come un periodo in cui il suo impegno politico era molto intenso e le ha permesso di</i>

		ampliare la sua rete al di fuori della comunità eritrea: frequentava CGL, ambienti femministi, e le donne del PC [...] L'aspetto su cui secondo lei è necessario lavorare maggiormente in futuro per portare avanti questo cambiamento è la politica, in quanto è l'ambito dove vengono prese le scelte principali (IT-bio-15).
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Source: prepared by the author

This table 13 shows five *biographical portraits* selected from those in Italy, in which it is possible to identify the recurring pattern of change stated, with some individual differences. The decision to report these excerpts of the *biographical portraits* in Italian is due to the desire to also show how these portraits were constructed: first in Italian through a reworking job, and then translated into English. Only five *biographical portraits* have been selected for reasons of limited space and because the type of analysis conducted best emerges from them.

First of all, these are interviewees linked to the three diasporas, from different generations, of which only the first two were born in Italy. As far as the events of breaking the biographical order are concerned, it is possible to note that they are common to all five cases, and consist either of a journey to the country of origin/abroad; or of the arrival in Italy which constitutes a traumatic moment as it emerges from their experiences. Only in one case is the breaking event represented by the encounter with orphaned children. These different events, traumatic in their own way with respect to the biographical order of the interviewees, trigger *turning-points* in the case of the first three interviewees, understood as moments of personal change. These are interpreted by the interviewees through their biographical reflexivity as changes of self that lead to a reorientation of their life path.

Only in three cases (out of the five), however, do real *turning-points* occur as a consequence of episodes of biographical rupture. Indeed, in the other two cases, the personal changes are not triggered by a traumatic event, but by an awareness of one's own position, and the last case is not even described as a true personal change. These

personal changes and/or awareness-raising lead the interviewees to activate their agency in the context of engagement, as a temporally embedded process of engagement, informed by the past, but also oriented towards the future (imagining alternative possibilities) and the present (Emirbayer, Mische, 1998).

As is evident from the quotes in the table, the interviewees show how their agency is linked to the various forms of engagement and the various temporal dimensions of their biographies. In all cases, engagement is informed by their past biographical events, but also by the present social contexts in which they live. In some cases, such as IT-bio-2 and IT-bio-15, engagement is experienced more as intersectional at the level of overlapping social, political and cultural instances and spaces. In other cases, such as IT-bio-5, there is a political engagement aimed at improving citizenship law. In the beginning of the engagement described in the *biographical portraits* of the interviewees, it is therefore visible how the various types of engagement are informed and influenced by past experiences; they have achieved certain results in the present (“Decreto del Fare” in terms of citizenship, process of decolonising knowledge, etc.) and also reveal a project dimension of agency oriented towards future goals. In fact, almost all the interviewees make explicit the aspects they need to work on in the future: the need for community activism and to carry on the work done so far (IT-bio-2), addressing political and rights issues also on a narrative level (IT-bio-5), working to decolonise knowledge and knowledge spaces (IT-bio-4), and finally working on politics as it is the core of change, being the space where the main decisions are taken. The temporal and biographical dimensions of past, present and future are thus also intertwined in the engagement phases of the interviewees.

Table 14 - Patterns of change as an analysis of *biographical portraits* in Finland

<i>Biographical trajectories</i> (ruptures of bio structures)	<i>Turning-points:</i> personal changes	Agency related to engagement (Emirbayer, Mische, 1998)
<i>The interviewee was born in Asmara in the '80s and she remained in Eritrea until about 20 years old. [...] Later she moved to Finland from Eritrea. When she arrived in Finland, she settled in a small town, a small village where she was the only Black woman. The first</i>	<i>According to her, the Finnish system for people with a migrant background did not work well that time. [...] In 2016 there was a turning-point in her life. In that year many refugees started arriving in Finland. Before 2016 there were not many Eritreans in Finland,</i>	<i>So, she decided to work to support the Finnish system with regard to refugees. She believes that Eritrean women, but also women in general, have great potential and can be active on various fronts. Starting from her personal experience, she wants to make them understand that</i>

<i>years were very hard for her; it was a shock at first. (FIN-bio-7)</i>	<i>now there are Eritreans living in almost every Finnish city. (FIN-bio-7)</i>	<i>great goals can be achieved. [...] She is motivated to work for social and cultural change not only in Finland, but also in Eritrea. The statement that guides her future is as follows: "The big things, I can't change them, but I want to start with what is closed to me". (FIN-bio-7)</i>
<i>The interviewee was born in the '70s in Ethiopia. In 1995 she moved to Finland: she explains that she came to Finland as a refugee, she arrived first in Helsinki and then was moved to a small city in the north of Finland. The arrival in Finland was a very hard time for her, as she experienced for the first time what it means to live without parents, as a refugee. (FIN-bio-4)</i>	<i>In particular, she recalls the years 2008 to 2011 as the most significant period (for her engagement too), as she "discovered herself". Then, in September 2011, there was a turning-point in her life ... (FIN-bio-4)</i>	<i>Then, in September 2011, there was a turning-point in her life, because she started to do what she still does today: working at the *****, dealing with human rights and in particular with migrant women, to oppose *** [...] She explains that in the future she would like to see the divorce law for women changed. In addition, she wants to contribute to the realization of peace, and she believes that the focus should be on the grassroots level, starting with spreading awareness that everyone has equal rights. (FIN-bio-4)</i>
<i>The interviewee was born in Mogadiscio in the '80s, and in 1990 she migrated to Finland in Espoo with her mum. In Helsinki, she had some difficulties adapting to Finnish society, because she arrived as a refugee child of 4 years old. (FIN-bio-5)</i>	<i>In 2013, she graduated and she started working as a nurse until 2020, when during the pandemic time she decided to quit her job because she did not feel well in the environment: people were always dissatisfied, they always found something wrong and she did not feel appreciated as a nurse. (FIN-bio-5)</i>	<i>During university, she carried out many activities, with the conviction that each individual must do his/her best to bring even a small change. At that time she explains that she was already an activist. [...] She decided to found "Hoiwa" in March 2020, that is an inclusive company with the aim of improving healthcare services in Finland, having at heart what she had studied for. Since the foundation of the company, she has started to gain media visibility, both on a personal level and in terms of the impact achieved by the company. Her fame grew until she was elected Entrepreneur of the Year in 2022 in Espoo city. Thanks to her company, she was able to become an emerging</i>

		female figure in the Somali diaspora. [...] For the future she hopes to expand her business and, as a woman of the Finnish Somali diaspora, to be able to guarantee the empowerment of women living in Somalia. She thinks that the members of the Somali diaspora are the key for change. (FIN-bio-5)
The interviewee was born in Helsinki in the '90s; she defines herself as Finnish-Somali. Her father arrived in Helsinki around 1993 and her mother in 1995 to escape the civil war in Somalia. [...] As a child in Helsinki she was unaware of discrimination, she thought there were no problems or discrimination in Finland: they probably surrounded her, but did not touch her personally. As she grew up, she became more and more aware of what people like her experienced, of the struggles to get a job: "when you are a Black person you have to do a lot more than other people" she states. (FIN-bio-3)	During these years growing up in Helsinki, she was also confronted with the construction of her identity, which she explains was difficult since she was born in Finland, but at the same time she did not feel part of Finnish society. "When I went back to Somalia to my family, they did not see me as Somali. [...] The problem is that when I am here they don't see me as Finnish, but when I go back to my home country they don't see me as Somali", she says. The problem of many children from diasporas who were born elsewhere have these identity crises because they do not know where they belong. (FIN-bio-3) Between biogr. rupture and turning-point	In 2017 she began her commitment at a formal level, as she began to collaborate with the organization Erasmus Youth in Helsinki. The years from 2017 to 2019, before the Covid pandemic, were central to her activism, because she managed to do a lot with various organizations. But it is in 2019 that she started her real social media activism [...] Often both first and second generations meet in mosques in Finland and organize fundraising activities for Somalia or remote social and psychological support. She is engaged in these activities, often with her aunt, with whom they also organise informal meetings and discussions with family and friends. [...] For the future, the interviewee hopes that the rights of nurses in Finland will be protected, as soon after graduation she will become a nurse. Although she will work in Helsinki, she would also like to travel to Somalia and other African states to do her job. Many things could be done in Somalia, but because of the government, the clans and the wars it is very difficult. (FIN-bio-3)
The interviewee was born in Ethiopia in the 1980s. [...] In 2010, she moved to Finland. The reason for her migration to Finland was both her desire to	This work situation shocked her [...] The aspect that gave her strength was the sharing with other people of the same goals,	After university she actively started her engagement. [...] In 2021 she began to work at an organization that deals with the issue that is close to her heart:

<i>obtain her Master's degree there and the fact that her husband was already living there. Her husband had moved to Finland because the Finnish government at the time hinted that there were several study opportunities for young people from different African states. [...]</i> <i>She was only the second year living in Finland and before arriving she had high expectations, including being able to do her dream job. In fact, she has found that the labor market is not so easily accessible for people with migrant backgrounds. (FIN-bio-13)</i>	<i>and the will to change this situation. (FIN-bio-13)</i>	<i>integration. She doesn't call herself an activist, but is very motivated to do what she does. This has become the motivation behind her engagement, which has led her to choose the profession she performs today as integration coordinator. She works directly with people with migrant background, but also organizes events and workshops on integration and facilitates peer support groups [...]</i> <i>There are still many changes to be made: women with a migrant background who hold high educational or working positions in general are few in number, and efforts should be made to increase their numbers. For the future, she believes that more changes need to be brought about in Finnish society, along the lines of what has already been achieved. (FIN-bio-13)</i>
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Source: prepared by the author

Table 14 shows the analysis of biographical change and engagement processes in the elaboration of *biographical portraits* in Finland, following the same pattern of analysis. Compared to the analysis for Italy, a greater commonality of the episodes of rupture of the interviewees' biographical order emerges, which in the case of Finland coincides in almost all cases with the journey to Finland and/or the confrontation with a different and discriminatory context for Black people. Specifically, FIN-bio-7 describes as a moment of real shock her arrival in Finland, in a northern town where she was the only Black person; an experience that provoked a break in her biographical order and that is common in a more or less intense way to other interviewees, such as FIN-bio-4 and FIN-bio-5, who describe arriving as refugees in a totally different context as a hard time. Also for FIN-bio-13 the Finnish context was different from what she expected, in particular, as her migration was due to study reasons, she found a discriminating work environment.

Only FIN-bio-3 experienced a biographical break (trajectory) somewhat different from the other interviewees, as being born in Helsinki she only realized as she grew up the climate of racism in which she lived, where Black people always had to prove themselves more than others. These experiences of suffering and biographical rupture that the interviewees experienced in their past are reworked and reinterpreted at *turning-points*, i.e., moments of personal transition and life change at the choice of the interviewees. The reflection that leads to the personal and life change of the interviewees is triggered by different events, the meaning of which is better understood when linked to past episodes of biographical rupture. Specifically, FIN-bio-7 experiences what she defines as a change in 2016, following the arrival of a large number of Ethiopian and Eritrean refugees in Finland, feeling the need to get active. FIN-bio-4 experiences a moment of reflection around 2008; FIN-bio-5 decides to activate herself following her experience with a heavy and discriminating work environment; FIN-bio-3 experiences a moment of change at the moment of becoming aware of her identity and diversity, which culminates with a trip to Somalia where she also feels different. Finally, FIN-bio-13 decides to change her life as a result of the discriminating experience of the Finnish working world towards people with a migrant background.

The moments of *turning-point* generate an activation of the respondents to produce changes within the Finnish society, according to a concept of agency linked to engagement and the temporal dimensions of past, present and future (Emirbayer, Mische, 1998). Therefore FIN-bio-7 decides to take action to contribute to the support of the Finnish immigration management system, with a mainly social engagement; FIN-bio-4 becomes a human rights activist, founding an organisation to protect the rights especially of women with a migrant background, through social and political engagement; FIN-bio-5 decides to found an organization, following negative experience in nursing, to protect workers and especially women workers; hers is both a social and political engagement. FIN-bio-3 activates both in a social engagement and in an engagement for the promotion of peace, as on the one hand she is involved with youth engagement, manifesting and spreading awareness on social networks about issues of Blackness and discrimination; on the other hand she participates with the Somali

Muslim diaspora in the support of Somalia in war. Finally, FIN-bio-13 has been active in a social and cultural engagement that is conceived as very connected to its profession of integration coordinator: having counted few people with migrant background in the various Finnish working environments, despite their good qualifications, it supports their training and employment, coping with an often difficult system.

8.2 “The big things, I can’t change them, but I want to start with what is close to me” (FIN-7): biographical reflexivity leads to different kinds of engagement

This part of the analysis aims to deepen the dimension of agency linked to the interviewees’ engagement that was introduced in the previous section, developing the concept of biographical reflexivity and comparing the types of engagement that emerged between Italy and Finland, as well as the different biographical paths. Biographical reflexivity is deeply connected with individual time, that is the time of personal experiences. “Biographical time (Bertaux, 1980) is the time of life history, the individual time” (C. Perrin-Joly, V. Kushtanina, 2018.). Alongside engagement as a collective mobilization there is also individual engagement: every woman interviewed becomes a kind of model for the change she is carrying out, not only in networking with others, but also on an individual level. The singular cases therefore become significant because they fall into a social historical context, with which they interact in a different way, but with the common objective of achieving change: a change that is realized primarily at the individual and personal level.

In order to understand how this change takes place, which leads the interviewees to activate in different ways, we need to start by analysing the moments of transition on a personal level. In the personal events of the respondents it is possible, in fact, to identify moments of transition or passages, in some cases defined as such by themselves.

She remembers the trip to Eritrea as significant, as it allowed her to do what she calls a “mental passage”, which made her understand the danger of a discourse of exclusion. In fact, she says, “I took agency, how is that said? Yes agency, on my identity and how to present it to others, obviously I was 11 or 12 years old, and there I felt the roots and the

most powerful transformations.” She became aware of a series of issues that allowed her to know herself thoroughly and to define herself (IT-bio-2).

2015 was the year of change because she felt that her path was a different one. She did not feel fully gratified by her work as a nurse. It is the year in which she starts thinking about concretising her activism: she has been interested in activism from a young age, but in 2017 she started working on a project with a Somali-Finnish NGO. The aim was to promote inclusion between Finnish children and children of other origins. She considers herself an activist (FIN-bio-8).

Significant individual transitional moments emerge from these excerpts of *biographical portraits*; placing excerpts about Italy and Finland side by side allows me to better relate to each other and bring out similarities and differences more clearly. It should be premised that transitional moments, defined as *turning-points*,⁵¹ are moments of biographical change such as the transition from childhood to adolescence, from adolescence to adulthood or from education to the world of work. Every moment of transition is significant, but here in particular the focus is on the moments of transition that express the individual change par excellence in the lives of the women interviewed. These moments are the result of an inner process of reflection and awareness, which lead the interviewees to choose a precise direction for their lives, taking risks. This ability to develop a self-reflection on their biographical experiences and to interpret them to change life is called biographical reflexivity. Biographical reflexivity can be understood as a recursive organisation and interpretation of biographical experiences; and part of the cognitive constitution of the biographical self (Minna-Kristiina Ruokonen-Engler, Irini Siouti, 2016). What emerges is how the interviewees develop discourses or simply identify moments of change in their biographies, which they also interpret in the light of political and social circumstances. Being reflexive means being able to reflect on one's actions and experiences and decide how to act accordingly, with the possibility of incorporating the dimension of change into future actions (Pedro G. Silva, 2021).

⁵¹ “Transitions are (extended) moments of biographical change where individuals within certain biographical, social and material situations establish expectations on the basis of their experiences and other forms of knowledge available to them” (Herwig Reiter, 2010, 1).

Specifically, the transitions reported in the quotations of *biographical portraits* consist, in the first case, of the awareness on the part of the interviewee of her own agency and of the transformative power of her actions: the moment she realized the power of her agency within engagement, she decided how to define herself, through her activism. The trip to Eritrea was the moment that she identifies through her biographical reflexivity as a moment of maturation, describing it as the beginning of a phase of “mental passage”.

In the second case, on the other hand, the transition took place in a workplace that she did not consider suitable: the interviewee understands that her path needs to be a different one. Therefore, her personal transition leads to the decision to concretise her activism, which until then had only been present in power and not yet realized. These two quotes were chosen because they well exemplify the moments of biographical transition, and are representative of what, in different ways, happened to all the interviewees. A. Giddens (1991, 243) defines transitions as “moments at which consequential decisions have to be taken or courses of action initiated.” In these moments of transition, the women interviewed fully activate their agency to start a type of engagement and change their life.

The transition is clearly visible in the extracts reported, but it is diversified in every life path. In fact, the events that lead the subjects to a moment of transition are different: in the first case, the trip to Eritrea triggered the interviewee’s discovery of another part of herself; in the second case, a work experience that did not fully meet the wishes and objectives of the interviewee. A process of biographical reflexivity and individual change therefore leads each woman to concretise this personal transformation externally as well, with concrete actions. The interviewees thus activate their agency in various forms of engagement; in particular in the process of passage from the *turning-point* to their activism, the practical-assessment dimension of agency comes into play, i.e., the ability of individuals to consider possible alternatives of action in response to certain issues and situations (Emirbayer, Mische, 1998). In order to understand the complexity of agency within engagement, it is also necessary to situate it on a temporal level, considering the relationship between past, present and future. The following extracts of

biographical portraits show how this complexity of agency manifests itself in interviewees' different forms of engagement.

*In 2010 she won a doctorate and began to interact with a political world that led her to bring out her interests. Her engagement then begins with her doctorate, which opens up a range of realities for her. Thanks to her doctorate, she also traveled to ***** for the first time and came into contact with a part of herself that she did not know. [...] The need to cope with certain racist situations and experiences is precisely what motivated her engagement. Indeed, the political act of which she became a protagonist is to share academic knowledge outside the academy as well, to respond with counter-narratives to dominant narratives linked to a colonial legacy (IT-bio-16).*

In Finnish society she felt she was the only Black person. Despite the difficulties, to this day she has rediscovered her pride in being the person she is [...] This awareness also led her to develop her engagement, since 2019/2020: she does not call herself an activist, but wishes to influence people and make an impact with her engagement. For her, her work coincides with her engagement, as she works in the field of human rights, her work is very much related to her life values. She defines her engagement as social, as she wants to raise awareness on different topics (FIN-bio-12).

In these two extracts, biographical reflexivity emerges differently. In fact, IT-bio-16 does not make it explicit that she has embarked on a path of reflection, but allows it to be implied: she explains that the academic environment in which she started her doctorate was politicized and induced reflection on certain issues. During her PhD program, she also went on a journey that led her to discover a part of herself she did not know, as well as to reflect on the need to take action to combat racism inside and outside the academy. The practical-valuative dimension of agency that led the interviewee to become a scholar and activist, with both cultural and political engagement, is thus discernible. In this engagement it is also possible to identify the dimension of power, on the one hand suffered through the negative experiences of racism, on the other hand exercised in a positive sense through an academic role that allows for an effective contribution. In the second case, FIN-bio-12 makes the process of biographical reflexivity more explicit in that she explains that the

difficulties she experienced in Finnish society due to her Blackness in a certain sense she has reworked them, and to this day she feels proud of her person. This realisation has led her to become active from 2019/2020 with an engagement that she defines as social, but which also touches on the cultural sphere as she works in academia. Moreover, for her, her profession coincides with her engagement in that it is conceived as a mission with the aim of changing the knowledge production and the stigmatized idea of Blackness.

Her engagement for peace (and not only) is also transversal to her work as a teacher and writer. In recent years (after 2010) she has in fact published (first in Somali, then also in Finnish and in English) a book for children, on the theme of peace; and a book in Finnish that tells the life of a Somali woman and her growth. One of the key values that pushed her activities is the value of education, that is crucial to make changes in people. (FIN-bio-1)

Her engagement is also an engagement for peace, in fact following the outbreak of war in Ethiopia in the Tigray region, she created in late 2020 with others a transnational online group composed of people of Ethiopian origin living in Italy and abroad, with the aim of defending Ethiopia and raising awareness on the issue. The aim of this group is to put pressure on the Ethiopian government to negotiate to achieve a peaceful situation in Ethiopia. In addition, women play a central role in this transnational group (IT-bio-3).

These extracts of *biographical portraits* reveal a different type of engagement for the promotion of peace in different spatialities: FIN-bio-1 is involved in a cultural engagement to promote peace in Finland, especially towards Somalia, through her writing, especially for children, and her activity as teacher; IT-bio-3, instead, decides to activate in her engagement for peace in Italy, after the outbreak of war in Ethiopia, through the creation in 2020 of an online group of activists. This kind of engagement has mainly political characteristics and also uses digital tools to influence the Ethiopian political context to press for peace. In these two excerpts, as in the two previous excerpts, forms of engagement emerge that intersect different forms and spatialities in a fluid way. In fact, none of the interviewees decides to engage in only one type of

engagement, but at least two types coexist, reflecting the intersectionality that characterizes them as people.

In this regard, I would like to quote also from the interviews (not excerpts from biographical medallions as before) that highlight both the biographical reflexivity and how the interviewees in some cases make explicit their conception of engagement as intersectional.

*I am committed, I would say, to changing the narrative, and I use the word narration on purpose and not narrative, on certain concepts such as otherness, migration, citizenship, Italian-ness, especially a central concept for me. [...] In my work, in my everyday life I come to terms with my positioning, my subjectivity: I am a woman, Black, with a surname ***. So this is an important aspect of intersectionality and engagement, the engagement related to positioning, is something that at first came in a, let's say, unconscious way and then doing a job that requires critical thinking, deep reflection...you choose how to position yourself (IT-4).*

2014 was the year of change: I decided that I did not want to study nursing anymore. [...] Women, especially when you are a Black woman, face discrimination: in the colonial times even women were seen as less than men, you know. Women didn't have their voices, so now, when we have our voices, we don't get the recognition we need. [...] Then we felt that we needed, as African people, an organization. And the first time we came together was 2020, after the death of Floyd which was in 2018, I think. After that, we came together, and we decided that we want to have our own organization to fight this police brutality, social discrimination, injustice, and racism here in Finland. And then the first protest that we made together was in 2020 (FIN-8).

These two quotations show in a different way the interviewees' conception of an intersectional engagement, connected to a biographical reflexivity on their positioning and on their person. IT-4 makes more explicit her reflection on her position as a woman, Black and with a certain background, that the Italian context continues to remind her and that led her to develop an intersectional engagement to change the dominant representation. On the other hand, FIN-8 does not explicitly thematize the conception of her engagement as intersectional, but speaks of intersectionality by explaining her

personal experience as Black woman. The intersection of gender and Blackness causes to Black women greater discrimination than to Black men. She also expressed her need for change because the nursing profession was not enough, revealing her biographical reflexivity: she felt the need to activate and create an organization. Therefore, together with other Afro-descendants, she founded an important organization in Helsinki to promote greater social justice by fighting racism, discrimination and police brutality. The interviewee was thus able to transform the intersectional disadvantage that characterized her in the engine of a struggle, even collective, for a change within the Finnish social system.

In summary, from the excerpts of the *biographical portraits* and the quotations, it emerges how, following a moment of transition, each interviewee outlines an individual line of engagement, which begins at a specific point in time and that is the consequence of individual critical thinking. The different kinds of engagement that emerge can be identified as various idealtypes⁵² of intersectional engagement, i.e., an engagement that, through the agency of racialized women, makes intersectionality an advantage in fighting against various forms of oppression. Intersectionality is thus declined in its form of critical praxis, as it leads a social movement that intersects struggles for all oppressed groups without hierarchies. We speak of idealtypes, and not of one idealtype, of intersectional engagement because each woman interviewed then declines her engagement in different spheres, i.e., political, social, cultural, for peace. As mentioned in Chapter 7, these are declinations of engagement often co-present in various combinations. Hence, different idealtypes of engagement correspond to singular individual types. Indeed, it is interesting to explore the uniqueness of the different kinds of women that emerge from the interviews.

These different typologies of engaged women are described in the excerpts and constitute various *dissident personalities*, who are in line with the *language of dissidence* they used to construct their biographies. A dissidence against an unjust system, evoking the concept of dissidence and resistance position developed by bell hooks. Each personality constructs her biography with a different, personal language

⁵² Max Weber formulates the concept of idealtype in sociology, which indicates conceptual abstractions that do not exist in reality, but that help to interpret and understand it. The ideal type is therefore a heuristic tool of generalization to understand reality, which is compared with the constructed ideal forms of the social scientist and thus is interpreted (Max Weber, 1922).

that emphasizes certain aspects over others, revealing different personalities. There are types of academic women, in whom a cultural and political engagement is combined; types of women who hold or have held political positions in Italy or Finland, but who are also active in the social sphere; writers and teachers, who convey messages of social change and peace; types of women who are educators and mediators, whose cultural engagement has a political and social impact; and types of women who call themselves activists and whose engagement is also oriented towards the countries of the Horn of Africa. These are personality types who do not represent fixed labels, but who are in dialogue across spaces and boundaries. Precisely dissident personalities who believe that conflict is necessary to deconstruct a status quo of injustice and achieve a situation of real peace, characterized by respect for the rights of all. An interesting aspect that emerges regarding these dissident personalities, and which distinguishes Italy and Finland, concerns the women of the Somali diaspora. The latter in fact in Finland, in most cases, link their engagement to a religious dimension as well, as they are all practising Muslims, as it is shown in the extracts below from *biographical portraits*.

What motivates her to continue on this path despite the difficulties is the support of the people who believe in her; in addition to the need to show Finnish society the value and independence of Muslim women, about which the media speaks almost only negatively. She wants her story heard. In Finland she organizes talks, she is a guest at NGOs' events, she organizes meetings with young people, and notes that many girls attend these events. She is also active for the empowerment of women in Somalia, through social media where many Somali women follow her and listen (FIN-bio-5).

In 2012 she decided to found with her husband and some friends an NGO, with the aim to create a safe space for Muslim people (mostly young, both male and female) who were born or migrated to Finland. [...] Through this organization, they tried to counter the islamophobia within Finnish society and the way the media represents Muslim people. One case they fought for, and succeeded in achieving results, was the need for representation in the media and on television of Muslim and racialised people, to avoid being talked about without their presence (FIN-bio-6).

The values underpinning their Muslim faith, and the discriminatory experiences they have had because of it and their veil, lead these Somali women to engage in various forms of engagement, challenging the stigmatized view still widespread in the West that sees them as not very active in public spheres. While in the women of the Somali diaspora interviewed in Italy this strong Muslim component does not emerge, in Finland Muslim women describe themselves as dissident personalities who are emancipated and leaders of their engagement. This relevant aspect makes it possible to counter the prejudice, still widespread in the West, that Muslim women do not express their agency in an emancipatory way, but are subservient to a male system.

Finally, all these types of “activists” identified express their biographical agency in a different way, realizing forms of engagement that are oriented not only to the present, but also towards the future. Within the line of individual engagement that each interviewee outlines in her biographical path, the dimension of the future also acquires a particular meaning: every woman projects her individual being into the future, in terms of expectations and projects. In outlining the future prospects of engagement, the projective dimension of the interviewees’ agency emerges (Emirbayer, Mische, 1998), who, in the light of the experiences and changes made in the present, project their engagement into the future. In outlining future goals, the interviewees also make a sort of assessment of what has been their life up to that moment, of what has brought their engagement and/or the work that is still necessary to do to improve societies.

The interviewee tells that her engagement continues today at the age of more than 70 years. She declares that we cannot stop for the future: “we need to continue to do what we have done. We need to go to schools to talk, to be seen, to tell of how bad the war is, because those who have seen it can tell it. It is necessary to educate for peace also within the school” (IT-bio-14).

For her future, she would like to expand her business, so as to also include a health training center that can prepare both professionally (nurses) and entrepreneurially. Moreover, she hopes, as a woman of the Finnish Somali diaspora, to be able to guarantee the empowerment of women living in Somalia. One of the main problems that cause

conflict is tribalism: people see others as enemies. She thinks that the members of the Somali diaspora are the key to change (FIN-bio-5).

These excerpts of *biographical portraits* reveal the future projection of women both as people, and as engagement and goals that they want to achieve. The need for social change is underlined, that here is understood as a change within a social system produced as an effect by a conflicting action (Coser, 1957). It is interesting to see how different perspectives of engagement emerge in these two cases. In the first case, there is the exhortation not to surrender and to continue on the line of what has been achieved so far, starting in particular from the education of the new generations in schools. Training is indeed a fundamental starting point for improving society. In the second case, there is an orientation for change also towards the country of origin/descent, with particular attention to the empowerment of women. The individual sensibilities and experiences of each interviewee are therefore reflected in certain forms of engagement, in a timeline that connects past, present and future. In this section of the analysis we have seen how the biographical reflexivity of the interviewees has led them to analyze their experiences and *turning-points* to change their life paths, starting different forms of engagement. In the next part, the dimension of agency tied to the various individual and collective temporalities will be deepened, in order to better understand the connection between the various forms of engagement and the biographical phases of the interviewees. Specifically, collective and individual temporalities within *biographical portraits* will be analysed, highlighting similarities and differences between Italy and Finland.

8.3 Intersections between individual and collective spatio-temporalities in the fluidity of *biographical portraits*

8.3.1 Significant historical events in the interviewees' timelines: war as a childhood memory

The analysis of the temporal dimension within the *biographical portraits* of the interviewees deserves special attention. Indeed, historical and biographical time intersect with each other in the biographies, making it possible to relate historical and biographical events of the interviewees and to better understand their personal choices and experiences. Many historical events are the same as those that constitute a break (*biographical trajectory*) in the biographical social order of the interviewees, as presented in the previous section; but in this section they are analyzed from a temporal perspective and related to the time phases of the interviewees' lives, from a comparative perspective.

First of all, it is possible to identify in the biographical paths collective temporalities that coincide with the time of historicity. This unites people from a given geographical context in a given era. The individual stories of the interviewees are united by a historicity and social contexts that are similar or in common: through their voices and narratives, the history of the diasporas in Italy and Finland and of colonialism is also reconstructed. An historicity reinterpreted, however, from a different perspective from the mainstream one: a female and non-Eurocentric perspective, which generates a new and authentic interpretation. The biographical method thus also becomes an instrument of historical documentation (Constance Perrin-Joly, Veronika Kushtanina, 2018). It is important to distinguish history from stories: stories are the minimum units that make up history, they are the basic elements without which history would not exist. Here, history is understood in the historiographic sense; and stories are understood as the *racconti di vita* of the interviewees, not life stories.

This is a necessary clarification to make at a methodological level. It is therefore necessary to start from individual stories, taking the perspectives of the protagonists who have lived the historical events first-hand, to fully understand the history, also shedding light on the aspects left obscured. From these biographical paths emerges a female and intersectional perspective (of Black women) on how history has affected their lives, and vice versa.

Starting from the presence of common historical and social events, it is possible to identify collective temporalities that unite, or divide, the various biographical paths in Italy and Finland. Some women interviewed shared the experience of war in Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia and/or the colonial experience, which led them to develop certain ways

of understanding and living the diaspora, as is evident from the following excerpts of *biographical portraits*.

The interviewee was born in Asmara in the 1950s and arrived in Italy very young, at the age of 16, to be reunited with parents who had been living in Italy for almost 2 years to escape the political situation in Eritrea. The first two/three years of life in Italy have been of bewilderment and of attempt of insertion in a totally different social context (IT-bio-15).

The interviewee was born in Asmara in the 1980s, is currently a mother and is working in Finland. Her childhood was marked by war: it was the time of the war between Ethiopia and Eritrea, which broke out in 1998. She studied high school in Asmara and then she had vocational training. [...] The situation in Eritrea at the time was very complex, there was a dictatorial regime and war. Later she moved to Finland from Eritrea. When she arrived in Finland, she settled in a small town, a small village where she was the only Black woman (FIN-bio-7).

In these first two excerpts we have different individual temporalities, as the two interviewees are both of Eritrean origin, but of different generations. However, both were born in Asmara and share the historical time of the war in Eritrea (even if in distinct phases) and then diaspora. Thus, an overlap emerges, in both cases, of the individual time of biography with the time of historicity concerning political instability and the war in Eritrea. In some cases the time of historicity has a greater impact than biographical time, as in the case of the second interviewee who recounts having lived her adolescence in a wartime context. In fact, the first one arrived in Italy at 16, while the second one lived her adolescence in the context of the war between Ethiopia and Eritrea. Although their diasporas are linked to two very different contexts, they both describe the arrival in another society as very complex at first.

The following two excerpts, instead, are from two interviewees with ties to the Ethiopian diaspora.

The interviewee was born in Ethiopia in the 1970s in Addis Abeba to an Italian father and an Ethiopian mother. Her mother and maternal family, however, felt partly Somali,

because her mother, despite being of Ethiopian origin, had grown up in Mogadishu. In her family life she also experienced the meaning of Italian colonialism, since her maternal grandfather was deported by the Italians to a prison camp in Somalia, while his father had fought in World War II and his uncle had campaigned in Africa (IT-bio-11).

The interviewee was born in the 1970s in Ethiopia, where she studied up to and including high school. In 1995 she moved to Finland: she explains that she came to Finland as a refugee, she arrived first in Helsinki and then moved to a small city in the north of Finland. The arrival in Finland was very hard time for her (FIN-bio-4).

In these two cases, the interviewees are both of Ethiopian origin and of the same generation, but their individual temporalities are influenced differently by historical temporalities. The interviewee in Italy was indirectly affected by the experience of colonialism, as her grandfather was deported by Italian colonists; while the interviewee in Finland saw her individual temporality of youth (in her early twenties) conditioned by her experience as a refugee, a status that inevitably had repercussions on her biography. She herself describes the initial period in Finland as being very complex at first. Finally, the following extracts regard the experiences of two women of Somali diaspora.

The interviewee was born in the early 1980s in Mogadishu, and explains that for her the place of birth is more significant than the date. She arrived in Italy in 1993, at the age of 12, travelling to join her family who had fled the conflict in Somalia. It was a journey that the interviewee remembers as very significant: she arrived in Italy as an MSNA, but explains that she was never an asylum seeker (IT-bio-4).

The interviewee was born in Helsinki in the 1990s; she defines herself as Finnish-Somali. Her father arrived in Helsinki around 1993 and her mother in 1995 to escape the civil war in Somalia. In Helsinki, she attended compulsory school, which in Finland is between 1 and 16 years of age, choosing in 2013 a high school and not a vocational school. She remembers her high school years as the most important years of her life, because they determined the person she is today (FIN-bio-3).

In the latter two cases, we have two interviewees linked to the Somali diaspora, both from younger generations in Italy and Finland respectively. It should be noted that none of the interviewees linked to the Somali diaspora in Italy were born on Italian soil, unlike the Somali diaspora in Finland. In fact, the first interviewee was born in Mogadishu and explains that she arrived in Italy in 1993 as an MSNA; therefore her individual temporality was strongly conditioned by the historical temporality of war in Somalia, which led her to leave in order to be reunited with her parents, who were already in Italy. On the other hand, the second interviewee was born in Helsinki and her individual temporality was characterized by a path that she describes as serene, even at the school level.

Deepening the analysis of these excerpts from some *biographical portraits* and relating them to each other, we can see that they reveal some key aspects regarding the individual and historical temporalities of the interviewees' biographical paths. These are respectively two extracts related to Eritrean, Ethiopian and Somali diasporas. Beyond the different diasporas, the women interviewed experienced common historical events: the situation of war and instability of the country of origin; colonialism, and the consequent diaspora. The common condition of war lived by the interviewees is experienced by each of them in a personal and unique way. Many women interviewed in Finland have the first impact with war during their childhood, and war becomes "a childhood memory". The war becomes a moment of rupture in the childhood of these interviewees, as well as of uprooting them from their homes. Indeed, in several cases, these interviewees report having had to move internally between various refugee camps in neighboring African states. The interviewees in Italy, instead, seem to be affected by the war in a more indirect way. They recount that it touched their families personally, as well as colonialism. The latter, perhaps more than the war, left its mark on the lives of the interviewees, who thematised it by also linking colonialism to the present.

Regardless of the origin of the diaspora, the arrival in Italy or Finland of the interviewees who were not born in one of these two states took place firstly in Italy then in Finland; specifically in some cases in the 1960s/70s, while in other cases between the 1990s and 2000s. In Finland, instead, only one woman among the interviewees arrived in the 1970s, while all the others moved to Finland between the 1990s and mid 2000s.

In the light of a macro diachronic reading, diasporas as historical and social processes influence the biographical paths of the women interviewed and, despite being three different diasporas, make these common paths.

In addition, the common condition of war and consequent diaspora has led some interviewees to become active in an engagement for peace. The excerpts from the *biographical portraits* that follow reveal the connection between biographical and historical experiences, and the development of consequent meanings of peace and conflict by the respondents. A next step also emerges: that of activating their agency in forms of engagement to support peace, in light of their biographical experiences of war and injustice.

Her engagement is also an engagement for peace, in fact, following the outbreak of war in Ethiopia in the Tigray region, she created at the end of 2020 with others an online transnational group composed of people of Ethiopian origin, living in Italy and abroad, with the aim of defending Ethiopia and raising awareness on the issue. The intention of this group is to put pressure on the Ethiopian government to negotiate for a peace situation in Ethiopia. Moreover, in this transnational group women play a central role and are often the organizers of events, awareness campaigns, and events in Italy. [...] It defines peace as a condition in which everyone should live, it should be a natural condition and not a situation to be conquered (IT-bio-3).

In this first excerpt, the Ethiopian interviewee describes an event that triggered her commitment to peace, namely the outbreak of war in Tigray (Ethiopia). The type of engagement you describe has a unifying character of the Ethiopian diaspora, as it is a collective engagement in which women often have a leadership role. It is also a transnational engagement that uses digital means to act more effectively. The following extracts are partly different:

The interviewee was born in Somalia in the 1960s and moved from a young age to Helsinki. [...] Her second dream was to help women in Somalia. She wanted to help women especially in the field of education, because according to her peace means also the freedom and independence of women. [...] In particular, she carried out a project in collaboration with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland and the Ministry of Foreign

Affairs of Somalia, aimed at implementing the media and communication skills of Somali women. 20 Somali women took part in this project, in which they told their personal experience of war by filming the neighborhoods in which they live in Somalia (FIN-bio-2).

The interviewee was born at the end of '80s in Mogadiscio, then moved while still a child with her family to a refugee camp in Kenya, where she lived until 1993. [...] For her peace means the absence of war, but also of social injustices. "Peace is not just the absence of war, there are people who are somehow threatened by the social systems of the countries in which they live" she says (FIN-bio-8).

These two other biographical excerpts show that from similar biographical experiences in the past, of war and diaspora, derive different individual conceptions of peace, which inform respectively different forms of engagement for peace. Both start from a war experience in Somalia, but FIN-bio-2 decides to activate with a proper diasporic engagement towards Somalia, organizing an educational project with Somali women in support of a culture of peace and female emancipation. FIN-bio-8, instead, chooses to focus mainly on combating the injustices and discriminations that exist in the Finnish context. The latter is in fact for her only largely peaceful, because she means peace not only as the absence of war, but as living in a society where you feel safe and respected. In summary, in the first two extracts (IT-bio-3 and FIN-bio-2) it emerges how peace is intended as a natural condition, taken for granted and not to be conquered. The engagement for peace that develops is oriented to the organization of humanitarian activities and peace education in the country of origin, or government pressure to initiate reconciliation procedures. In the last extract, instead, emerges a conception of peace not connected exclusively to the absence of war, but related to the oppression exercised by Western social systems where there is no real equality of rights. It is interesting to see that, despite the biographical experience of this interviewee is of multiple displacement because of the war, the engagement for peace in which she is engaged is aimed at fighting inequalities and discrimination in Finnish society. This is in line with her conception of peace. These examples of the activation of interviewees in a peace engagement are perhaps among the most emblematic cases of how biographical

experiences are decisive in activating themselves in a certain type of engagement, revealing a close connection between lived experiences and engagement.

The diasporic dimension becomes thus fundamental to understand the development of engagement pathways, collective and individual. Overall, in the biographical paths emerge collective meanings of diaspora and common ways of living it (alongside clearly individual nuances). In addition, from the excerpts of the biographies above, you can see the intertwining between interviewees' family stories, and the history of the three countries of the Horn of Africa. It is possible to identify two levels of interweaving: a first interweaving between the interviewees' stories including their families, and the history of the countries; a second interweaving between the three histories of the Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali diasporas. In many cases, the personal stories of the interviewees are so deeply intertwined with the transnational history of the three diasporas that it is difficult to distinguish them. Both the three diasporas and many interviewees' biographies are in fact united by situations of war, but also by the crossing of multiple spaces before arriving in Italy or Finland. In some cases, there is then a real intertwining of diasporic bonds, as interviewees were born in one country and then grew up in another, thus presenting links with more diasporas, as in the cases of IT-bio-11.

The main meanings of diaspora that emerged in the previous chapter are therefore better understood: a passage and a recomposition after a break. It consists of an historical and familiar rupture, to which at times follows a recomposition and reunification of families. After the arrival respectively in the contexts of Italy and Finland there will be a recomposition. The arrival was described in almost all the extracts as difficult due to the characteristics of the new societies; and in some the interviewees relate their personal experience to the rest of their diaspora, as in the following case:

She explains that, although little is said about it, there are thousands of people of Ethiopian origin living in Finland, she has several friends who are engineers or computer scientists for example. There are also many women of Ethiopian origin, who work mainly in the nursing sector. She is proud to be Ethiopian and she feels mainly Ethiopian: she was brought up with the idea that Ethiopia was not colonized, although the Italians tried.

Her Ethiopian pride was somewhat undermined following her arrival in Finland, due to racism (FIN-bio-12).

This *biographical portrait* extract is also significant because the interviewee provides relevant information about the Ethiopian diaspora in Finland, which is little known along with the Eritrean diaspora. There is scant research that explores these two diasporas, unlike the Somali diaspora, which is studied much more because it is more numerous. In particular, the interviewee focuses on Ethiopian women, also raising awareness of the gender dimension of this diaspora.

Reference is also made in some *biographical portraits* to the Italian colonial experience as intertwined with family life. Colonialism thus becomes not only an historical experience, but also pervades the private spheres of the women interviewed, who, as it emerges in the course of the biographical analysis, develop different reactions, such as anger, a sense of injustice, and the desire to take action. Another interesting aspect shared by many respondents in both Italy and Finland concerns what can be interpreted as the transition from a situation of lack of peace, due to the presence of armed war, to a European situation of lack of peace understood as lack of fair societies in which the rights of all are guaranteed. Not only this: many of them talk about the difficulty of feeling at home because of other people's perceptions. Indeed, they refer, for example, to being the only Black people in the North of Finland; or in Italy according to a construction of Italianness that does not include Blackness. This common socio-historical aspect provides an additional element to better understand the meanings of peace, war and conflict that emerged from the interviews and are explained in Chapter 7. This same geographical and social context was also experienced by the women interviewed who were born in Italy and Finland, and who constitute the minority of interviewees in both countries. However, they have lived in different historical and collective temporalities.

The interviewee was born in Rome in the late 1970s to Eritrean parents, and attended school in a historical period that she defines as unhappy for Italy. It is in fact an era of general instability [...] In particular, the interviewee explains that they are bad years

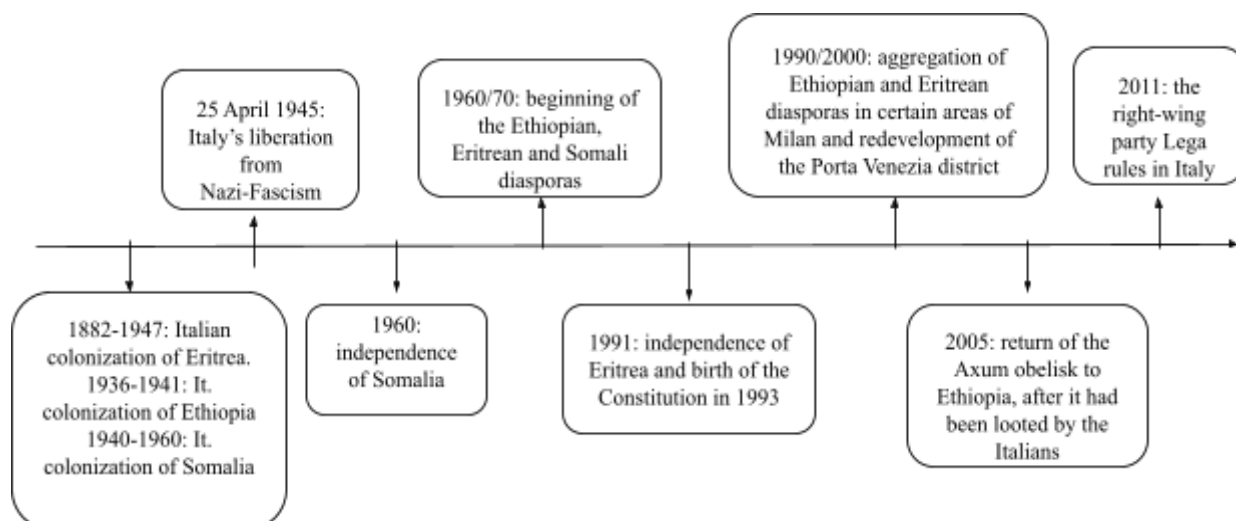
because of the re-emergence of a protectionist, nationalist and closed discourse at European level, especially against migration from the global South (IT-bio-1).

The interviewee was born in Helsinki in the 1990s; she defines herself as Finnish-Somali. Her father arrived in Helsinki around 1993 and her mother in 1995 to escape the civil war in Somalia. [...] As a child in Helsinki she was unaware of discrimination, she thought there were no problems or discrimination in Finland: they probably surrounded her, but did not touch her personally. As she grew up, she became more and more aware of what people like her experienced, and of the struggles to get a job (FIN-bio-3).

The extracts reveal the socio-historical context in which the interviewees were born, i.e., Italy and Finland respectively. Unlike the interviewees who were born in an African state and then migrated, they immediately fell into a European social and temporal context. In Italy, the 1970s were a period of closure due to the re-emergence of nationalist discourses at a European level as well; on the other hand, the Finland of the 1990s was a context characterized by discrimination, which was not always easy to perceive. Different temporalities therefore emerge, but which are connected with common biographical contextual situations. It should also be pointed out that the distinction of birth in Italy and Finland is only relevant at the level of biographical analysis, since many interviewees define themselves as Italian or Finnish regardless of whether they were born there or not. Women who have lived in Italy/Finland for years have the same right to feel Italian/Finnish as women who were born in either country.

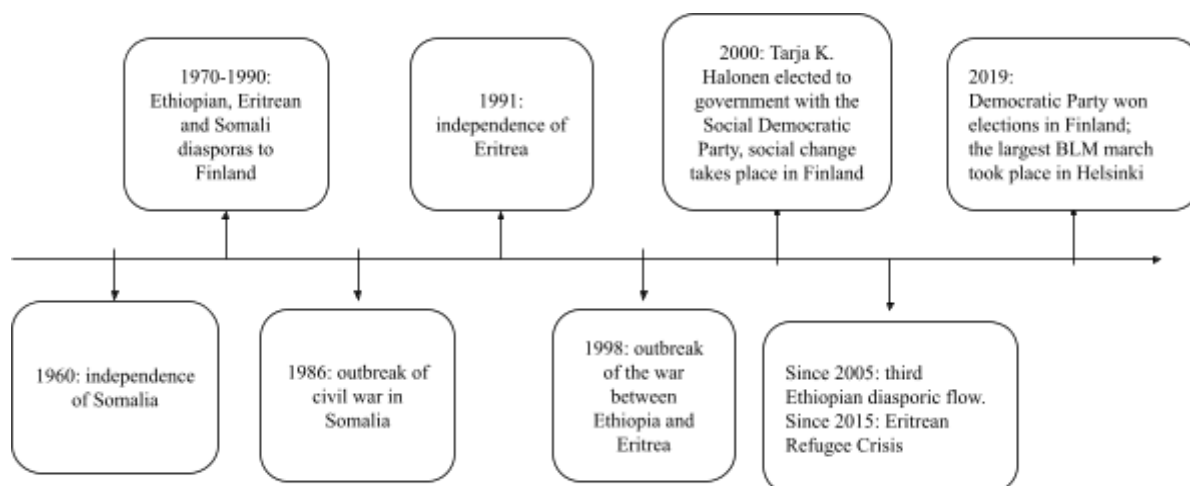
In summary, in highlighting the connection between the different personal and historical temporalities in the various biographies, it is possible to identify some historical events that are significant for the interviewees, which both unite and differentiate them. I have therefore constructed two timelines, respectively for Italy and Finland, which synthesize these historical facts presented by the interviewees as significant.

Fig. 7 Timeline of common significant historical events for interviewees in Italy



Source: prepared by the author

Fig. 8 Timeline of common significant historical events for interviewees in Finland



Source: prepared by the author

The two timelines show, on the one hand, the intertwining of the three diasporas, and, on the other, the historical events that happened in the Horn of Africa and European states; events that acquire a biographical significance as they were indicated by the interviewees as historical facts significant to them. In choosing these events, the interviewees made several similar choices, respectively in Italy and Finland, which convey a symbolic meaning. In the case of Italy, the recurring historical facts among the women's choices are, after the years of colonialism and diasporas, 25 April 1945, the

year of Italy's liberation from Nazi-fascism, and the years of independence of Eritrea and Somalia. These were events that brought about changes in their biographical paths, in some cases fuelling hopes for improvement in the societies in question.

In the case of Finland, instead, it is possible to find links with the historical facts identified in Italy. These are the Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali diasporas, which arrived in Finland later than in Italy; and the years of independence of Somalia and Eritrea, which are also highlighted by the interviewees in Finland. In the latter, facts related to the different wars are more emphasized by the interviewees, as well as Finnish political events, which traced phases of social change. The dimensions of the wars in the Horn of Africa are an historical component that is valued by interviewees in Finland more than in Italy. On the other hand, in Italy the issue of the colonial past and heritage is emphasized. As for political events related to contemporary times, they are highlighted by both the interviewees in Finland and Italy, relating them to their own experiences and to those of diasporas. In particular, in Italy some interviewees highlight 2011 as the beginning of a dark period due to the rise of the *Lega* party to government. In Finland, on the other side, some positive political facts are indicated: the election of Tarja K. Halonen in 2000 as head of the social-democratic government; and the victory of the Democratic Party in 2019 with Sanna Marin. It should be noted that after the end of this research (2023), the Italian and Finnish governmental systems changed, both taking a conservative right-wing orientation.

In summary, this biographical analysis with a temporal focus allowed to show the most significant historical and political events common to several interviewees, highlighting the connections and differences among generations and diasporas; as well as to compare them between Italy and Finland. In the next section the individual temporalities of the respondents will be deepened by retracing the most significant phases of their lives, to better understand their path of development of the agency linked to engagement.

8.3.2 Childhood, adolescence and adulthood: biographical agency between temporalities and spaces

There is also another level of temporality that can be considered collective and that refers to the meso-sociological level. This is the sequence of different temporal spheres in the life paths of the women interviewed, in which personal events relate to the social context in which they occur. Individual times relate to different social times, and in this relationship between the individual dimension and social contexts the interviewees' agency already emerges.

In the following excerpts of some *biographical portraits*, it is possible to see the sequence of different phases in the lives of the interviewees, and how their biographical agency emerges differently at distinct biographical stages of their lives. Starting from childhood, it is interesting to note how the interviewees describe and sometimes interpret their childhood with adult eyes, attributing to it different meanings.

In 1975, the respondent migrated to Italy, very young. [...] Her experience in Italy as a child is difficult because of the climate of discrimination present, which she finds similar (although for different reasons) to the discrimination her mother suffered in Somalia for being Ethiopian. However, this phase of suffering was also a phase of maturation for her. Such an experience as a child shapes her and leads her to find solutions as you grow up (IT-bio-11).

The interviewee was born in Ethiopia in the 1980s. She has a twin brother, and says that in her family she has always been treated equally with her brother. There was no distinction in treatment between male and female. That is why she felt very strongly about society's unfair treatment of women (FIN-bio-14).

These first extracts regard the biographical time of childhood of two different interviewees, one in Italy and one in Finland. They describe a totally different childhood. The former was born in Ethiopia but spent a difficult childhood in Italy, where she suffered discrimination. However, she now rereads that period of suffering as a phase of maturation, showing biographical reflexivity. The second interviewee was born in Ethiopia and spent her childhood there, which she describes as a joyful one with a family that educated her, from an early age, about the equal treatment of males and

females: an issue that is now close to her heart. The transition from childhood to adolescence is complex for everyone, being a phase of change. The complexity increases in the case when at the moment of evolutionary transition the diaspora is added to another state.

She arrived in Italy very young, at the age of 16, to be reunited with her parents who had been living in Italy for almost two years to escape the political situation in Eritrea. Her arrival in Italy was difficult, the first two/three years of her life in Italy were one of trying to fit into a totally different social context. She attended high school and immediately afterwards enrolled in the social services school in Milan. There was no lack of ties with the Eritrean diaspora community (IT-bio-15).

The time of adolescence was difficult: at very young age she was forced to do her military service, until she dropped out because she could not stand it any longer. Due to this choice, she was put in prison in Eritrea for several months. This experience caused her health problems for which she was hospitalized for a period. She says that being a woman at that time in Eritrea has been a very hard experience for her. After the military, she worked as a cleaning lady, and then decided to look for other job opportunities in the capital, as she was good at English. She thus started working with the UN peacekeepers,. She explains that some soldiers were good, others were racist even though they were doing a peacekeeping mission for the UN (FIN-bio-7).

These extracts concern the biographical time of adolescence, which for both interviewees was characterized by difficulties due to historical facts and complex social contexts. They are both of Eritrean origin, but the first one arrived in Italy at the age of 16 and she found a difficult social context, which took her a while to get used to. The second interviewee, instead, endured a difficult time during her adolescence in Eritrea, because of the historical context of the war that forced her to enlist, leaving a deep mark on her. In both cases, although in different ways, individual temporalities of adolescence are influenced by historical temporalities and spatialities in Italy and Eritrea respectively.

*In 2016, she obtained her bachelor's degree in ***** and in 2018 her master's degree in ***** while working for various cultural organisations in Turin, dealing with migration and the promotion of events related to Africa. The fact that she has always been interested in political thought led her to become active early on. In fact, her university career was characterised by various work collaborations (IT-bio-4).*

She decided to enroll at the University for Applied Sciences in Finland, to become a community educator. [...] In 2020 she was also among the founders of one of Finland's leading anti-racism organisations, for which she still works. This organization was founded by a group of activists and community organizers from several African states with the aim of raising awareness about and combating racism and other discriminations (FIN-bio-8).

Finally, these last extracts concern the time of adulthood, which in most cases coincides with the beginning of university and/or with the decision to begin their engagement. In the adult phase, the two interviewees in question show that they have understood what direction to give to their lives: the one in Italy begins to come into contact with political initiatives, thanks to the university environment, which will have a considerable weight in the beginning of her engagement; while the one in Finland founds an important organization to combat racism and discrimination, together with other activists. Overall, there are two examples for the childhood phase, two examples for the adolescence phase and two examples for the adulthood phase. Clearly, only two examples have been given for each phase, but as can be seen in the biographical summaries in the appendix, each interviewee talks about each phase of life and chooses which one to deepen more. In each time period, it is possible to identify a different impact of the social context and a relationship with it through agency. A biographical agency⁵³ already emerges, as in each life phase different individual interactions begin to develop in relation to the social processes experienced. There are clearly different interactions depending on life stages. In childhood, it emerges how lived social

⁵³ “Biographies are time and context embedded; they are relational, processual, and dynamic products of interactions between individual and social processes: micro-, meso- and macro-social constraints, opportunities and processes. [...] Depending on the particular life stage of the narrator and the social context biographies are constantly reinterpreted, relying on the narrator's biographical reflexivity, their biographical work and biographical knowledge (Anil Al-Rebholz, 2014, 82).

experiences begin to shape the child and give rise to embryonic thoughts of finding solutions to the problems they experienced.

During adolescence, the women interviewed cope with the difficulties they encounter and lay the foundations for their professional future. They begin to understand what moves them and what goals they want to achieve. The excerpts relate an adolescence in Eritrea and an adolescence as a woman of Eritrean origin in Italy. In both cases, the interviewees' ability to choose and determine their own destiny emerges strongly, but going through difficult and suffering experiences. Adolescence is described here as a moment of transition that is not only symbolic, but in many cases also real with obstacles to face before entering adulthood. Finally, adulthood is characterized by the full awareness of what one wants to be: there is the education and university experience that often coincides with work collaborations and the start of a certain type of engagement. Adulthood, however, is not lived as a totally linear path, as we have seen several are in fact the moments of *turning-points* that lead the respondents to give a turn in their lives and to become active in various forms of engagement.

Also, during adolescence and adulthood at the level of educational systems an interesting fact emerges. First of all, differences in the educational opportunities offered by Italy and Finland emerge from the biographical paths of the interviewees. Whereas in Italy there are various problems of access in some educational institutions and there is a clear distinction between public and private education, in Finland educational opportunities are more equal, as education is free for almost everyone. From the biographical routes it therefore emerges that, on a structural level, educational systems offer educational opportunities for all. However, in the course of their education the interviewees point out the presence of discrimination, more or less explicitly, in both Italy and Finland. During their education, they were in some cases underestimated in terms of their abilities due to their migrant background, and consequently directed by tutors towards less ambitious higher education paths. Nevertheless, almost all of them continued their education with university.

From this analysis of interviewees' individual temporalities it is possible to say that their diachronic biographical paths also become the paths of engagement: the interests and goals that begin to arise in childhood and adolescence are then realized in adulthood

in a professional path, which often coincides with their specific engagement. The time of individual experiences, career time and engagement time thus seem to overlap in the biographical paths of the women interviewed. The path by biographical stages⁵⁴ also becomes a journey to realize certain types of engagement, expressing biographical agency. Individual paths, while retaining their singularity, are united by common times and the realization of common types of engagement. These are the forms of engagement illustrated in Chapter 7: political, social, cultural, and peace engagement, but also professional engagement. The time of engagement then becomes collective because, between adolescence and adulthood, the interviewees in both Italy and Finland begin to give concrete form to a specific engagement, which many of them had begun to perceive since childhood.

To conclude, from this analysis it emerges how the biographical paths of the respondents through childhood, adolescence and adulthood, along with the differences indicated, also present aspects in common at the translocal level, between Italy and Finland, and at a trans-diasporic level that is beyond the individual diasporic ties. Beyond the cases presented, the interviewees' childhood is complex overall, either because of the Italian/Finnish context that is not very welcoming and open, or because of the experience of the war in the country of origin. However, there are cases, such as FIN-bio-14, in which a happy childhood is described, in which important values for the formation of the person are also transmitted.

Adolescence, on the other hand, is a complex phase for almost all the interviewees, with some exceptions, whether they live in Europe, or in Ethiopia, Eritrea or Somalia. In the event that adolescence has lived in Italy or Finland, the complexity of the life phase is added to often discriminating social contexts; in the case of adolescence in the country of origin the difficulties are due to the context of war linked to past colonialism, and in some cases the obligation of military service for boys and girls. Adolescence, however, is told by several respondents as a phase of growth and maturation, in which they begin to discover their own personality and sometimes to cultivate the interests that

⁵⁴ Monica Massari, in analyzing the biographical paths, highlighted an important element that is considered in this biographical analysis. "From a biographical perspective, gender, age, class, race or ethnicity are not mere categories to be related in an abstract theoretical model, but rather appear as causing intertwined experiences and situations in which one dimension may become more relevant than another or even recede into the background, depending on the particular biographical context, period of time and social space" (Roswitha Breckner and Monica Massari, 2019, 11).

later in adulthood will become the key to their engagement. In this sense adolescence becomes a key phase of transition. Finally, adulthood represents the final phase of the growth path of the respondents, in which each includes, rereading various events with reflexivity, the direction to be given to their lives. In adulthood there are moments of *turning-point* and transition, in which the interviewees with their biographical reflexivity decide to change the direction of their lives. It is because of this, alongside the socio-political influences of the spaces they visit, that they decide to focus on different forms of engagement. Speaking of spaces, a final interesting aspect that emerges from the analysis concerns the development of some shared engagement networks that bring together interviewees from different diasporas and generations. This aspect responds to a character of fluidity at both the spatial and temporal level, as it has a common basis in the translocal and shared similar biographical experiences of the interviewees during childhood, adolescence and adulthood. In other words, the fact that the interviewees described in their biographies common events such as war or the difficulty of a discriminating context during childhood/adolescence, challenging university paths and moments of reflection and change in adulthood, creates a common ground of biographical experiences and engagement between them. Biographies themselves are stories with the power of social change. Therefore, even the biographical approach itself becomes a form of mobilization and “a promise of cultural and political revolution, an instrument for a different, anti-authoritarian and anti-bureaucratic knowledge of society” (F. Chicchi, 2000, 3). This is a key aspect that is visible at both the individual and collective engagement of interviewees: on the one hand, the biographical tales of each interviewee become an expression of dissidence and resistance to an unjust system; on the other hand, the sharing of similar biographical experiences united the respondents in several cases, leading them to network for collective mobilization. This emerges from the following excerpts of *biographical portraits*:

Her engagement was also articulated outside the Eritrean community and at different levels (political, social and cultural). At the political level it began with the action to support Eritrea, first in the Liberation Front to free Eritrea, then becoming responsible for the organization of the popular front of Eritrea in Northern Europe and, in 1977,

president of the Eritrean community in Italy. [...] The interviewee explains that there have been several phases in her activism: an initial phase in which each group organized itself [...] Later there was a kind of evolution with the creation of “fluid networks” that were not based on the nationality factor (IT-bio-15).

“For me diaspora is a sort of support, a kind of activism, but all the time, constantly.” She feels a strong connection between diaspora and activism, she thinks the two are closely related because of the activities they propose. She feels this connection with the African diaspora as a whole, not just the Ethiopian diaspora, as she states that the African diaspora is distinct from the other diasporas in Finland. [...] The central aspect according to her is that “African solutions to African problems” should be found, with a different perspective from the Eurocentric one and with greater inclusion of people with an African background in the processes. There is often a colonial way of thinking, which neglects the contexts and the people who live in them (FIN-bio-14).

These two excerpts show how in both Italy and Finland the interviewees develop in many cases (in almost all of them) also a shared mobilization, next to an individual engagement, due to commonality of experiences and instances. In particular IT-bio-15 even identifies, with biographical reflexivity, different phases of what she calls her activism: initially activism took place mainly by networking among members of the same diaspora, in her case the Eritrean diaspora; later on, ethnicity no longer constituted a distinction and more fluid networks were created. FIN-bio-14, instead, in addition to its engagement for peace building, explains that she has always felt a common bond with the entire African diaspora in Finland, not just the Ethiopian diaspora. This has led her to become active with various diaspora organisations; a strong common point of collective mobilization is in fact the attempt to decolonise the perspective in addressing issues, to start thinking about social and political solutions from the internal perspective of the contexts concerned. The common experience of colonialism and war unites the stories of several interviewees, generating a strong feeling of sharing and a need for justice. Therefore, from the analysis a collective engagement also takes shape, made by diasporic and transnational networks both in Italy and Finland. A collective mobilization aimed to dialogue with the institutional and structural levels of societies:

different networks are created to implement the common goals of the various forms of engagement.

Moreover, the analysis and comparison of the various interviews in Italy shows more than in Finland an aggregation dimension among the interviewees, regardless of the diaspora and generation. Several interviewees have in fact made it clear that they collaborate with each other for some projects and activities of engagement, and in some cases they are also reference points for some marginalized communities.

Another interesting aspect that emerges regarding engagement networks, including transnational ones, concerns digitally active groups, which respond to the idea of digital diasporas as virtual communities, since various individuals with the same ethnic or national background meet in different countries online, creating one or more interactive virtual spaces (Vollmeyer, 2022). But what emerges from the interviews also goes beyond the conception of virtual communities as a continuation of the non-virtual diasporas, as it unites active women belonging to several diasporas. The aspect of digital communities as networks of engagement is central to the spatio-temporal dimension because it not only goes beyond spatial boundaries, but also temporal ones, since it unites the engagement of different generations in a translocal perspective. Furthermore, the beginning of interviewees' digital engagement, either individually or in a network, is also thematised by some interviewees on a biographical level. As far as collective digital engagement is concerned, two main aspects emerge, as can be seen from the following extracts:

The interviewee is also active in an online mobilization group of political engagement, which is composed only of women from the Somali diaspora, from different countries around the world. This group uses an intersectional approach to discuss and propose solutions to various problems; each one shares her know-how to organize effective campaigns of various kinds, at a transnational level (IT-bio-4).

Her engagement is also an engagement for peace, in fact following the outbreak of war in Ethiopia in the region of Tigray, she created with other people, in late 2020, a transnational online group made up of people of Ethiopian origin living in Italy and abroad, with the aim of defending Ethiopia and raising awareness on the issue. The goal

of this group is to put pressure on the Ethiopian government, negotiating to achieve a peaceful situation in Ethiopia. In addition, women play a central role in this transnational group and they are often the organisers of events, awareness-raising campaigns, and demonstrations in Italy (IT-bio-3).

These two extracts regarding interviews in Italy illustrate the development of a collective engagement within the same diasporic community, specifically Somali and Ethiopian, to improve the situation in the Horn of Africa. The common goal unites these two interviewees with the members of their respective groups, to try to find solutions to urgent problems by coordinating online.

In 2019 she started her real social media activism (she had started to be active on social media already in high school, but more for the fact that it was fashionable). [...] There was a volunteer project with minority groups that is related to a youth exchange Erasmus project, called Youth 2022: it is a social media activism project that aims to show the problems that different minorities with migrant backgrounds, in Finland, Sweden and Italy, have with social media and the power of the latter. In concrete terms, the project participants organized and took part in workshops, in which they discussed how they could raise awareness on sensitive topics (such as LGBTQ+ rights), how they conceived activism in these generations and how social media could be used effectively for these purposes (FIN-bio-3).

The two levels of collective digital engagement that emerge are on the one hand, as in the experiences reported by the two interviewees in Italy, an engagement that leads to the creation of groups that are digitally active transnationally, but with members of the same diaspora. The aim is to resolve issues of conflict and violation of rights in various spaces, including the country of origin. In the case of IT-bio-4, however, the digital group is entirely female, which is interesting because it allows the addressing of urgent issues from a female and in this case intersectional perspective. On the other hand, in the case of the interviewee in Finland, a mobilization on social networks as powerful means fosters the creation of transnational digital networks and with different ethnic minorities. The example above is a youth digital activism project, to raise awareness about the rights of different minorities, also LGBTQ+, even here with an intersectional

perspective. This digital project has allowed young people from various diasporas and backgrounds to become digitally active and network, as in the case of the interviewee.

From what emerged regarding collective digital engagement, it can be said that it is not only peculiar to the new generations of the analyzed diasporas, but it has an intergenerational character. Moreover, the interviewees in Italy reported cases of digital engagement by ethnicity, but this does not mean that members of diasporas in Italy are only active in this type of engagement. In fact, there are cases of digital engagement at a transnational level that unite members of various diasporas. Just as in Finland there are also digital mobilization networks based on specific diasporas.

In conclusion, this analysis according to the space-time axes has revealed on the one hand the commonality and difference of biographical experiences of the interviewees between childhood, adolescence and age of adulthood; on the other hand, it has considered, starting from the events and biographical temporalities, the development also of forms of collective engagement. The following table gives a summary of the analysis according to the time axis of individual and collective biography, based on the three key levels of sociology: macro, meso and micro. This allows for an overview of such analysis and also to systematize it.

Table 15 - The analysis of the *biographical portraits* identifying different sociological levels through temporalities

	Macro-sociological level	Meso-sociological level	Micro-sociological level
Biographical paths	collective and historical temporality: war and/or colonialism → Ethiopian, Eritrean or Somali diaspora → historical and social context of Italy or Finland (colonial mentality)	link between historical and individual temp.: connection between stages of life and social contexts → collective engagement and mobilization → social change	individual temporalities: personal turning-points → agency: from inner to outer change → identification of female types and ideal types of intersectional engagement

Examples from the biographical portraits	<i>The interviewee was born in Ethiopia in the 1970s in Addis Abeba to an Italian father and an Ethiopian mother. [...] She also experienced the meaning of Italian colonialism, since her maternal grandfather was deported by the Italians to a prison camp in Somalia. [...] In 1975 she migrated to Italy while still very young. She relates her family history to the consequences left by colonialism: the current Italian problem related to colonialism is in her opinion the removal of colonial responsibility. (IT-bio-11)</i>	<i>She decided to enroll at the University *** in Finland to become a community educator. [...] In 2020 she was also among the founders of one of Finland's leading anti-racism organisations, for which she still works. This organization was founded by a group of activists and community organizers from several African states with the aim of raising awareness about and combating racism and other discriminations. [...] Coming to changes made by female engagement, and in particular by her engagement, she thinks that with the organization where she works they are doing a lot. It considers particularly significant the documents that have been produced to raise awareness both of the institutions and of public opinion on the problems of racism and social injustice. (FIN-bio-8)</i>	<i>She remembers the trip to Eritrea as significant, as it allowed her to do what she calls a "mental passage", which made her understand the danger of a discourse of exclusion. In fact, she says, "I took agency, I was 11 or 12 years old, and there I felt the roots and the most powerful transformations." She became aware of a series of issues that allowed her to know herself thoroughly and to define herself. [...] Her engagement formally began in the mid 2000s, while informally it had already begun earlier. At that time, she started to conceive her engagement as an intersection of struggles, reflecting her being an intersection of many things. In fact, she also started to collaborate with the LGBTQ+ community in Italy, believing that a truly inclusive discourse must include all realities without leaving any behind. Thus, through meetings, connections with people and the exchange of ideas, she started to work on various more formal projects. (IT-bio-2)</i>
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Source: prepared by the author

The qualitative matrix of table 15 shows how the biographical paths of the women interviewed present three different levels of analysis, that is macro, meso and micro, which should be understood not as separate but as interconnected. The relevance of doing a biographical analysis for the present research lies in the fact that the answers to the research questions start from the individual and collective experiences of the subjects, which are articulated in a biographical time. A time that, as we have seen, is historical, collective and also individual. The biographical agency of the women

interviewed crosses these interconnected temporalities, giving rise, in relation to the historical-social contexts crossed, to different ways of experiencing diaspora and to different forms of engagement and social change. To resume what is presented in the table, in summary on a macro-sociological level, an historical and collective temporality emerges from the biographical paths, showing the connections between war and colonialism, which influenced the three diasporas and which also influence the Italian and Finnish social context today.

On a meso-sociological level, the relationship between historical temporality and individual temporality, and thus between individual experiences and socio-historical structures, is highlighted. At the meso-level, therefore, the connection that can be identified among the different phases of life and the distinct social contexts determines different forms of mobilization, including collective mobilization (engagement), which lead to greater or lesser social change. Finally, at the micro-sociological level, the emphasis is on individual temporalities and experiences. The transition moments (*turning-points*) of the interviewees are identified, from which the agency that projects inner change into external change emerges. The latter coincides with both the initiation of certain forms of engagement and the realization of social change. From this micro-sociological analysis it is possible to identify different female types, connected to different ideal types of *intersectional engagement*. They are, as we have seen, different types of engagement (political, social, cultural, for peace, professional) defined as intersectional, as the interviewees attribute to it an intersectional character that reflects their personalities and biographical paths. They not only see the various types of engagement as intersectional, by organizing their actions from a marginal perspective and considering an intersection of aspects; but they also live them in an intersectional way by combining the different forms of engagement, which therefore have fluid boundaries.

8.3.3 Biographical engagement and socio-historical contexts

In summary, the forms of engagement that characterize the life paths of the women interviewed in Italy and Finland can be understood within a diachronic dimension of *racconti di vita*. In this diachronic analysis, the micro and macro levels are equally relevant and in dialogue with each other. On the micro level, personal events follow their own rhythm and are characterized by a defined moment of transition, which is different for each individual path. The moment of passage determines a *turning-point* in the lives of the women interviewed, which is identified in the interviews with a significant date or a particular event in their lives, at which the engagement of each took a particular direction. The singular cases are, however, placed in a historical and social framework, and here the macro perspective takes over.

I was born into a family, my grandparents were partisans to say the least, and my parents not only participated in the birth of the Somali socialist revolution, but also experienced the dictatorship. Because this revolution then turned into a dictatorship, they were also opposed to this drift that it took. [...] I was born in a context conducive to commitment for me. I came to Italy before '91, I wanted to leave Somalia. The state seemed a bit blocked, I wanted to go, I left; but then I was part of the diaspora because I could not return, as the war had taken out all. I always return, I return with writing, I return with thought (IT-8).

I was born in the 80s and in the late 2000s I migrated to Finland. In 2016 I started my engagement to aid Eritrean people in Finland, there was a large influx of Eritreans to Finland. Historically, I remember 1991, the year of the independence of Eritrea, and the commemoration of the Eritrean martyrs on 20 June (FIN-11).

The connection of historical events and the social context with the life paths of the women interviewed is crucial to understanding the effects they exerted on their lives. On a historical level, the women's life paths are united by diaspora, Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali respectively, caused by conditions of instability or war. The unstable conditions in Ethiopia, Eritrea and Somalia were also brought about by Italy's invasion as a colonial power that perpetrated violence and exacerbated latent tensions. It should be noted that the Italian attempt to occupy Ethiopia failed with the Italian defeat at the

Battle of Adua in 1896. However, as explained in Chapter 4, Ethiopia also suffered Italian colonial rule for a time. The quotes from the following interviews show the connection in the life of the respondents between the historical and colonial past, and the social contexts in which they currently live. Extracts relating to the Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali diaspora respectively are presented.

With people or universities, I see what the mentality is when it comes to working with Africans and the mentality is always not helping each other, not working together but helping them because they need our help. So that's a very colonial way of thinking [...] It should be both ways. We should also, Europeans should also go to African universities and see that there are different resources from what we have here (FIN-12).

Nothing has been seriously done in Italy about colonial violence. Reparations are a transversal discourse, that is, that passes from objects in museums and from laws that have been in force, and that are still standing and discriminate against people. We have to look at a material aspect, a symbolic aspect, and we need the Western states, one by one, to take responsibility for what they have done and to do research (IT-10).

The current conflict in Somalia is linked to the colonial rule that Italy has tried to leave hidden behind the myth "Italians Good People". We Somalis know what damage the Italians have done and if we have reached this point, it is also thanks to Italy. Because they have also dusted off the question of clanism, and our Constitution has never been written, instead we still have the one produced by colonialism. [...] So the Italian is still there, there is the ambassador and there are Italian soldiers who live at the airport and I do not know what they do, not only them, but the whole world. They're not helping the country and they're there (IT-12).

At the level of Italian context, the women's life paths are influenced by the permanence of a colonial and racist mentality. It is possible to observe an intertwining between the historical dimension (in Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia and Italy) regarding colonialism, and the dimension of the current Italian context. This intertwining determines a considerable influence on the life paths of the women interviewed and on their relative engagement.

At the level of Finnish context, instead, an interesting aspect emerges. Despite the fact that Finland was not a colonial power, it retains a colonial mentality at the level of the social system that is close to that of Italy. This is because it fits into a vision of superiority of Western systems, which pervades more or less the entire West and on which systems need to start a process of self-reflection. This implies a presence in both countries of racism at both individual and systemic levels⁵⁵, as highlighted by the women interviewed.

The interesting aspect emphasized in these three quotations is the commonality of interpretation of the colonial past by the three interviewees, despite belonging to three different diasporas, but also to different countries and diasporic generations. Despite this similarity, only one interviewee (not only among the citations, but among all the interviews made in Italy) thematizes the issue of the lack of colonial reparations by Italy. The relationship between past and present colonial heritage on the one hand, and biographical paths of the interviewees on the other, will be deepened in Chapter 8, in order to complete this thematic analysis with a biographical one.

In conclusion, it is interesting to note a commonality and continuity between the forms of engagement of women from the three diasporas in Italy and Finland. Indeed, the forms of engagement that emerge from the analysis of the interviews are recurrent (political, cultural, social, for peace), with a prevalence of social engagement. Alongside the prevalence of social engagement, the emergence of cultural engagement is also consistent in both tables. This is a significant aspect because it highlights how the women interviewed use culture in its many forms (teaching, writing, art and theatre) to bring about change. A commonality that is also transversal from a generational point of view: in both tables we find various generations of women, with the difference that in Finland there is a greater engagement on the part of the younger generations.

The engagement that emerges from the biographical interviews can also be defined as intergenerational, as the forms of engagement described unite women of several generations, linked to the three diasporas. Despite the generational differences, it is

⁵⁵ According to 2023 data from the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, the European states with the highest incidence of racism and discrimination are ranked as follows: Austria 67%, Germany 65%, Finland 57%, Denmark 47%, Luxembourg 44%, Belgium 44%, Ireland 44%, Italy 33%, France 29%, Spain 24%, Sweden 21%, Poland 19%, Portugal 17%. These are clearly the cases that were declared by the respondents, so there may be many others that were not detected.

interesting to note that there is a sort of handover in the spaces of political, social engagement etc. to the new generations, and how the latter sometimes reinterpret engagement according to personal sensibilities and the historical moment they live. Regarding the new generations, their activism in Italy has been thematized for example by V. Riniolo and L. E. Ortensi (Veronica Riniolo, Livia E. Ortensi, 2021). Here, it can be seen, for example, that the new generations, both in Italy and in Finland, are more insistent on a political, social and cultural awareness of racism, struggling to combat it in a more radical and pervasive way. Another interesting aspect that makes engagement, in its various forms, intergenerational, is the presence of intergenerational and inter-diasporic networks among the women interviewed, who in many cases know and collaborate with each other.

One of the research contributions concerns the attempt to deconstruct a form of Eurocentric activism and engagement, describing the forms of engagement that emerged as part of intersectional engagement. Furthermore, alongside the forms of engagement that are in line with the existing literature, it is interesting to highlight an additional contribution of the research. This is the emergence, both in Italy and Finland, of non-traditional forms of engagement such as what can be called *professional engagement*. The latter consists in the coincidence, according to most of the interviewees, between engagement, understood as active commitment to achieve social change, and the profession they pursue. The boundaries between engagement and profession are therefore not clear-cut, but the women interviewed develop their own unconventional meaning of engagement. Engagement, with the various typologies identified, becomes in many cases inseparable from the profession and pervades this, as well as other aspects of the respondents' lives. It becomes, in other words, a kind of mission.

8.4 “You do not have the positioning to be able to produce intersectional thinking” (IT-10): my autobiographical reflexivity as researcher

As a last aspect to be developed I decided to give space to a fairly new form of analysis, regaining my autobiographical reflexivity as a researcher. The aim of this analysis is to reflect on my position not only as a researcher, but also as an individual, rereading my biographical path during the research from 2021 to 2023. During this process of analysis and autobiographical reflexive will be kept the red thread of the dimension of change, as it was explored in the biographical paths of the interviewees. The analysis of my biographical change will follow the pattern that I called pattern of change, which emerged from the analysis of *racconti di vita*. It is possible to distinguish four successive phases that have characterized my autobiographical process of reflexivity and personal change:

Phase 1: episode of a *break* in my socio-biographical order (or moment of *biographical trajectory*, Riemann, Schütze 1991), which is represented by the criticism and observations received by the interviewees as a white and privileged woman, who wants to do research with racialized women;

Phase 2: *Active reflexivity* (Soerdigo, Glas 2020): a process of personal self-reflection, combined with moments of dialogue with the participants questioning my privileges;

Phase 3: *Turning-point*, a moment of change and personal change, characterized by a moment of reflection and awareness of a series of themes and discourses related to the white privilege;

Phase 4: personal activation to contribute to social change, through my role as a researcher and beyond, and reflection on my support for the activities of activists.

The first phase, that of access to the field, was characterized by the entry into contact and the first acquaintance with the participants of the research: the application for participation, the start-up phase of the interview and its conduct. Being my first experience of research with racialized people, it was initially destabilizing to receive criticism about the choice to do research with Black women in Italy. The reception of criticism, but also of general comments on the role of research, represented a break in my biographical path in the sense that it allowed me to get in touch for the first time with other issues and placements. Some examples of moments that triggered the phase

preceding the subsequent change (called *turning-point*), are constituted by the following quotations:

One difficulty is that other spaces, not only those of political activism, civil society, also act for change. It is quite dramatic at the moment to see that this is not the case. All the knowledge - I return to this because you are a researcher and for me it is important that you enter your role and that you understand my message - all this accumulation of knowledge produces nothing in society (IT-1).

It is a claim that starts from a marginality and has not expressed itself more, is not that the white feminist, maybe from a good family, who was part of the movement "Non Una di Meno" until the other day, can say "we have an intersectional approach"; because you don't have an intersectional approach! You don't have the positioning to produce intersectional thinking (IT-10).

Both these interviews' quotations address the issue of my positioning, but touching on different aspects. The first one focuses on the role of the researcher, opening a question about why research is done with racialized subjects, as well as research in general. The question raised by this interviewee is as follows: is the collection and analysis of data an end in itself, or is it not only a means to help understand social phenomena, but also a way to improve society? In the second quote, however, the question of whiteness is criticized, highlighting its limitation in understanding the condition of marginalized subjects, who, according to the interviewee, are the only ones who are able to develop intersectional thinking. In particular, she criticizes white feminists who stand up for women's rights, without understanding what it means to produce real intersectional thinking because they do not have, or do not adopt, the necessary marginal positioning. These critical reflections made by the interviewees caused a break in my biography, first because they were unpublished and unexpected episodes in my biographical and researcher's path; and secondly because they put me in the position to ask myself why those criticisms had been made.

Thus began the second phase, in which I started a process of so-called *active reflexivity* beginning from these and other critical observations. This was the phase of

self-reflection on my positioning and privileges, as well as of dialogue and negotiation with the participants. This process of reflexivity allowed me to understand and analyse together with the participants the key aspects of my positioning. It is about my perception of myself as a 'white subject' and the perception that racialized subjects have of me. In this regard, a central concept, little addressed in research done by white people, is that of white fragility: the expression, coined in the American language as white fragility, indicates a condition in which even a minimal amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering defensive behaviour (DiAngelo, 2011). This is an implication to be aware of when doing research with racialized subjects or groups, questioning themselves. Moreover, the positioning of the researcher/researcher varies not only spatially, in different geographical areas or research spaces, but also temporally. The political circumstances of a particular country, for example, greatly influence the perception of positioning. In my case, the Italian socio-political context played a role in the perception of my positioning, as did the Catholic university institution I represented and the level of greater or lesser self-awareness I displayed in my interactions with the research participants, as well as the awareness of the interviewees in their interaction with me.

A key moment in this process was also the methodological phase of member checking, in which we discussed with those available how best to interpret the results of the research, clarifying certain aspects. Despite some misgivings, it was a moment of exchange not only between me and the interviewees, but also between the interviewees of different generations, which provided enriching insights. Both different perceptions by the interviewees of my positioning as a white woman and researcher; and different conceptualisations of integration, interculturality, and migrant background emerged from this common dialogue. In fact, the interviewees from younger generations proposed a linguistic reflection on these various terms, arguing the need for a terminological evolution to counter an implicitly discriminatory language, i.e., one that assumes an us-versus-them opposition. This reflection among the interviewees also triggered a linguistic and conceptual reflection in me, to become aware of the meaning that certain words acquire from the point of view of discriminated subjects, which is different from that of the researcher.

This discussion process, carried out at the end of the field research, was in a sense the concluding phase of the self-reflection on my positioning, which generated the change called *turning-point* (third phase). I would describe the *turning-point* as an awareness of my own positioning and consequently of the privileges of myself, and of all female researchers like me, of which I was initially unaware. This personal change was characterized, on the one hand, by a heightened awareness of my privileged position as a white woman and the responsibility arising from that role. This is a heartfelt responsibility and not an imposed one, in the sense that the research path has allowed me to become aware of the important contribution I can make as a researcher and as a Western woman. On the other hand, the change was also brought about by the encounter with the life stories of the participants, which were a source of inspiration for me as all the interviewees have exemplary stories of how to take action to make societies more just.

From the phase of personal change, I moved on to the fourth phase, that of personal activation, an unexpected effect of the research experience that led me to undertake advocacy activities for the defense of the rights of all subjectivities, and of women in particular. In summary, then, this research process resonated in me sensitivities that were already potentially present, and which found motivation to materialize. In fact, I felt the need to become active at the level of social and political participation, in order to raise awareness in my own small way on the issues of women's and minority rights, as well as on the use of correct language, putting into practice what I have learnt during this fruitful research process. Even as a researcher, I have become active because I do not want knowledge to remain an accumulation for its own sake, but I want it to contribute to changing unjust aspects of the social system. Studying and understanding social phenomena is sociology, but so is using the knowledge gained to improve society in the direction of greater social justice, which crosses the social spaces of everyday life as well as research activities inside and outside the academy.

CHAPTER 9

Conclusions

This concluding chapter sums up the entire research work, systematically presenting the main findings in relation to the theoretical-interpretative framework adopted. In particular, section 9.1 relates and connects the biographical analysis and the thematic analysis, showing how in reality these are not two strictly distinct analyses, but complement and reinforce each other. Section 9.2 presents the results of the research in response to each specific research question, and consistent with the descriptive and analytical objectives of this contribution. Finally, section 9.3 interprets the research results from a broader perspective, also in relation to the third research aim, that is to explore the various forms of interviewees' engagement from the perspective of social change. In this regard, I also develop in it a reflection on future research directions and my positioning as a researcher, as a result of the research process.

9.1 The systematization of the analysis: biographical paths and thematic analysis

This paragraph aims to systematize the whole analysis accomplished so far for the presentation of research results, making the connection between biographical and thematic analysis more explicit to avoid the impression of fragmentation. Biographical analysis focuses on the narratives and personal experiences of the 30 interviewees, by relating their biographical experiences to the key themes of the research questions. It is from the *racconti di vita* of the interviewees that the thematic analysis was carried out, bringing out the four thematic areas that emerge in Chapter 7. Since both a biographical and thematic analysis was carried out, the limitation and impression of this analytical choice is that of fragmentation. In reality, the two types of analysis allow for greater insight into both biographical and thematic aspects and complement each other. By linking biographical and thematic analysis, a rich and multifaceted picture emerges. It should be pointed out that the thematic analysis also starts from the biographies of the interviewees, but whereas the biographical analysis in Chapter 8 focuses on analyzing

and understanding the link between biographical experiences, engagement and change, and identifying a common analytical pattern; Chapter 7, on the basis of this analysis, delves into the specific thematic cores that emerge.

Regarding the forms of engagement and the related sphere of change, a correspondence between biographical and thematic level is detectable, as the types of women described represent different individual types (biographical level), who decline their individuality in one or more forms of engagement (thematic level). It is from the individual types that different kinds of intersectional engagement first take shape, and then become collective. The various personality types which emerge, as mentioned above, are not to be understood as rigid and fixed categories, but have aspects in common and contact with each other, which are reflected in common forms of engagement. Indeed, “each individual has a personal dimension as well as a collective one, making it possible to study personal circumstances only in connection with the contexts that endow them with meaning (Davies & Gannon, 2006; Gonick, Walsh, & Brown, 2011)” (Magdalena Suárez-Ortega, 2013, 189). The women interviewed define both their personal and collective dimensions: by defining themselves, they express their reflexivity, as they carry out a reflexive process on their existence. One can speak of biographical reflexivity (at the level of biographical analysis), but also of traces of reflexivity in the forms of engagement (at the thematic level). From the reflexive process that each interviewee carries out by interpreting her personal history, a reflexive and authentic knowledge⁵⁶ is produced, albeit mediated by the researcher who reports it: a knowledge produced directly by the protagonists of the political, social and cultural processes they deal with. Through a reflexive process that the interviewees enact during the interview, they trace their past and express their future plans and desires in their forms of engagement.

This reflexive knowledge is therefore connected to the life experiences of the respondents, where the dimension of the past has great value. From the relationship of biographical past and present experiences, and the reflective knowledge connected with them, derive the different interpretations of the meanings and of living the diaspora, as

⁵⁶ Reflective knowledge is a form of knowledge that derives from the process of reflection that the participants of the research put in place regarding their own life experiences, also expressing their own desires and future perspectives. This form of knowledge is an expression of the subjective consciousness of the participants. (Magdalena Suárez-Ortega, 2013).

well as the different meanings of peace and war. Among these aspects, it is particularly significant to expand the analysis of the meanings of peace and conflict that emerge from the experiences of the women interviewed, relating them to their biographical experiences. The interviewees' past experiences, comprised of colonialism, but also war, were fundamental not only in influencing different forms of engagement, but also in the production of meanings and experiences related to the dimensions of peace and conflict. Thus, the link between biographical and thematic analysis is also highlighted in the biographical experiences of war and peace, which, according to the different personal stories, have led to various interpretations of the meaning of peace and its engagement. Biographical experiences are central in outlining the concepts of peace and engagement: overall, on the one hand, there is a commitment to peace characterized by the organization of humanitarian activities and peace education initiatives towards the states of the Horn of Africa; on the other hand, there is an innovative concept of peace understood as a lack of respect for rights in Western societies and a relative commitment to promote more peaceful societies, in the sense of less discriminatory. These two interpretations of engagement and peace are common to Italy and Finland, but in Italy the need for a peaceful society as a more just one, where everyone can feel really safe, emerges. The reflexivity that characterizes the biographical level of analysis is also linked to the dimension of the future. Reflexivity thus connects past, present, and future, and also recalls the dimension of change.

In presenting the changes realized and desired by the interviewees, the biographical and thematic levels also come into contact. As explained in Chapter 8, those that are identifiable as transition phases or *turning-points* occur at the biographical level. These are sometimes defined as such by the respondents themselves and consist of an individual, inner level of change, that is reflected in certain choices of interviewees. To trigger them can be a journey, an episode happened in their lives or even a process of inner maturation. This individual change is linked to a social change (thematic analysis), as the interviewees following the lived *turning-point*, initiate a certain form of engagement, and/or participate in the realization of social changes. Therefore, there is a kind of line of continuity between the individual and the social sphere, and there are more coexisting dimensions of change. This connection between the two levels of

change, individual and social, emerges for example in the biographical extract that follows.

*During her experience with *****, in 2016 the interviewee decided to restart her university career by beginning her PhD in Social Sciences at the University of ****. Her research concerns the reception in the family of immigrant people, in response to a difficult historical period for immigrants in Italy. [...] She explains that she has always been connected to the anti-racist movements of those years in Italy: “Also thanks to Covid, in fact we have networks throughout Italy with racialized activists, with anti-racist activists and I also did, that is then in the end this is also my work, so I also did projects that had to do with these issues. I built toolkits, made laboratories, created groups of Afro-descendants who in short do a theoretical and political work on the territories” (IT-bio-10).*

It is interesting to see how the respondents who, on a biographical level, have turned their lives around, are at a social level agents of change. This shows a kind of implicit connection between biographical personalities and the dimension of social change.

Table 16 - Synthesis of biographical and thematic analyses

Biographical analysis (Chapter 8)	Thematic Analysis (Chapter 7)
-Individual types of women (biographical reflexivity) →	-different forms of intersectional engagement (traces of reflexivity in the engagement)
-reflexive knowledge from personal and biographical experiences of diasporas and war →	-personal meanings and ways of living diasporas, peace and war
-changes in life stages and personal moments of transition (<i>turning-points</i>) →	-the dimension of change is reflected in the social changes made, and to be achieved, through engagement

Source: prepared by the author

In conclusion, table 16 synthesizes the relationship between biographical and thematic analysis, highlighting the interconnections between biographical aspects and thematic areas to answer research questions. This systematization of the analysis is intended to show how the biographical analysis of life tales proves to be the starting

point for bringing out the central themes of the research. Each biographical aspect of the interviewees allows one or more related themes to be explored, making biography a key dimension in the understanding and analysis of social reality. Firstly, from the different types of women who emerged from the biographical paths, which should not be understood as rigid and fixed types, a different biographical reflexivity emerges in each specific case. By biographical reflexivity is meant here a reflexive process implicitly initiated by the interviewees and made explicit in the way they constructed their biographical paths. However, this reflexivity is not limited to the biographical level, but is also reflected in the different forms of engagement that emerged at the thematic level. Moreover, this biographical reflexivity leads to the production of a type of reflexive knowledge from the interviewees' personal experiences. Among these, various biographical experiences of diaspora, peace and war are also included. From the individual experiences, different meanings of peace and diaspora emerge on a thematic level, as well as various ways of experiencing it. And it is on the thematic level that it is possible to identify common meanings and ways of living among the interviewees.

Finally, a central dimension is that of change. The *turning-point* phase of change inherent in biographical paths, from which the activation of agency in various forms of engagement derives, leads the interviewees to make the change within the system the central theme of their engagement. Personal and social change thus becomes the key and the red thread between biographies and engagement. In the biographical analysis, changes emerge relating both to the natural transition between different phases of life (childhood, adolescence, adulthood); as well as individual transitional moments referred to as *turning-points*. What is interesting is that, on a thematic level, this individual dimension of transition emerges in two ways: on the one hand, individual transition phases often correspond to the initiation of a certain form of engagement; on the other hand, a social dimension of change is discernible as the interviewees, probably in the light of their biographical paths, make change one of the central goals of their engagement. Indeed, the thematic analysis reveals, in relation to the different dimensions of the interviewees' agency, the social changes that have been achieved in the present, and those desired for the future. The respondents' dimension of change is also connected to experiencing the post-diasporic, understood in M. Laguerre's sense as

the metamorphosis of the diasporic condition. Indeed, in their biographies, the interviewees revealed not only that they maintain a greater or lesser connection with the diaspora, but also that they want to change their condition in the sense of rejecting labels or encasings. They showed this through their life and engagement choices, going beyond a diasporic characterisation that would be limiting, and deciding how and whether to define themselves. For this reason, their engagement and personalities can be interpreted as post-diasporic, in the sense that they represent and aim at overcoming an assigned or taken-for-granted condition, reshaping it in a singular way.

To conclude, the biographical analysis allowed to avoid thematic fragmentation, linking the answers to the four research questions in a coherent and comprehensive framework that takes into account the various stages of the interviewees' lives. A frame in which historical, individual and collective time relate to each other, making it possible to highlight both the individual and collective profiles of the interviewees.

9.2 Concluding remarks of the analysis

In this research the intention was to answer the research questions emphasizing the dimension of social change that was achieved or indicated by the women interviewed, to trace the road to follow for a better future. The approach adopted placed the subjects at the centre of knowledge production, counteracting the hierarchy of researcher and participants and adopting an attitude of listening and learning from them. Here are some concluding reflections on the results to summarize the answers to the research questions, highlighting eventual problematic nodes, limits of the research, as well as the theoretical contribution and paths of future development in this research field.

First of all, it should be clarified that the choice of conducting qualitative research, first with semi-structured and then with biographical interviews, proved to be appropriate to answer the research questions. Starting from the exploratory study with stakeholders, the semi-structured interviews allowed the development of a general frame to contextualize Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali diasporas in Italy and Finland, adding useful information to existing studies. First, an interesting comparison between

these three diasporas in Italy and Finland emerged, which has not been highlighted by other research. These are diasporas with different histories, but also similarities between the two countries. In particular, in Italy there is a strong connection between the Ethiopian and Eritrean diasporic communities, and a greater fragmentation of the Somali one; in Finland, the Ethiopian and Eritrean diasporas are less connected and less well known, but still active on various fronts, while the Somali diaspora is very cohesive and active, unlike Italy. Without repeating the specific differences between these Italian and Finnish diasporas, the most interesting aspects that emerged, and which were then explored in greater depth through biographical interviews, concern the female component, and the Ethiopian and Eritrean diasporas in Finland.

Concerning these two diasporas, very few specific studies had analyzed them in Finland, and from what emerged, although less known and numerous, they are active together both with African diaspora organizations and within their own communities. In particular, the Eritrean community has an engagement very much connected to the religious dimension, where churches become hubs for meetings to organize activities; and to support refugees. On the other hand, with regard to the women's dimension of the three diasporas in Italy and Finland a cohesion across borders, at a transnational level and beyond diasporic affiliations emerged in the case of Italy; while a transnational engagement but more linked to individual diasporic communities in the case of Finland.

The aspects that emerged from the exploratory study were deepened or challenged by the subsequent part of the research. Analysing the biographical interviews from a biographical as well as a thematic perspective has in fact made it possible to understand the various forms of female engagement and their connection to their biographies, diasporas and contexts, answering the research questions.

With regard to the first question, that is, *what are the different forms of engagement of women from Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali diasporas, in Italy and Finland?* The forms of engagement of the women interviewed arise in general from a need to take control of the situation and make their voice heard regarding interconnected issues, which unite several Western societies including the Italian and Finnish. These issues refer to a political, social and cultural situation in which there is discrimination on

several levels. The engagement in emerging forms (political, social, cultural, for peace) is therefore the result of a need for a response, rather than a choice, and a maturation of awareness. This need is then transformed into a certain choice, as the respondents choose to focus on one or more forms of engagement, depending on their sensitivity. As seen in the analysis of the biographical paths of the interviewees, personal biographical time is intertwined with the timeline of engagement, so in most cases the moment of personal turning coincides with the beginning of engagement. On the whole, the forms of engagement that emerged present two souls, in many cases co-felt: a soul that can be defined as more passionate and, additionally, a professional soul. In various cases, in fact, the profession carried out as teachers, political figures, and researchers reconciles with the form of engagement carried out, and for this reason the presentation of the results also spoke of an engagement that can be understood as professional. Each form of engagement has its particular nuances, and this is evidenced by the singularity of the biographical paths.

The various forms of engagement can be considered different expressions of what I have defined as *language of dissidence*, that is, a style of communication and attitudes aimed at bringing changes in a system, challenging the system itself. This language of dissidence is more present in some interviews than others, but is the background to the various forms of engagement, uniting them. Speaking of language, one of the problematic issues is the use of the term “engagement” instead of “activism”. As explained in the presentation of the results, the term engagement was chosen because most of the respondents, both in Italy and Finland, did not recognise themselves in the term activism, understood in the mainstream sense. It is in fact an often abused term that tends to homogenize the many nuances of engagement. Despite the use of the term engagement, some interviewees use the term activists to talk about themselves, while clarifying the personal meaning attributed to the term.

In summary, therefore, the various forms of engagement that emerged are different expressions of an *intersectional engagement*, which summarizes one of the main theoretical contributions of the research. In *intersectional engagement*, the agency of the women interviewed, in fact, manages to dialogue with the intersectionality embodied by these women, making the latter a praxis through the intersection of their struggles: an

intersectionality that starts from a condition of marginality and becomes a central character of these women's resistance and dissidence, as also visible in the intersection of their various forms of engagement and different spaces, diasporic and otherwise. This finding constitutes a contribution to studies and debates on intersectionality. Furthermore, the engagement that emerges from the research can be defined as *post-diasporic*, since it goes beyond the diaspora and does not remain limited to it. Indeed, it is important to point out that the women interviewed, while maintaining ties with their diaspora, should not be rigidly labeled as diasporic women, and consequently their engagement should not be seen as such, either. Most of the interviewees feel themselves to be Italian or Finnish, while maintaining ties with their own culture, since they were born or have lived in Italy/Finland for many years. Their engagement therefore aims at a cultural change as well, whereby diasporic and migrant women cannot be considered as such forever, despite their connection to diasporas.

Finally, these research results make it possible to contribute to the debates on *demigrantization* and *decolonisation*, as on the one hand common categories (e.g., migrant, integration) in migration and diaspora studies are questioned by many interviewees: this allows the researcher to critically think about the categories adopted in the analysis. On the other hand, an attempt is made through the analysis to produce decolonial knowledge by giving space to the perspective of female subjects who have been colonized in the past. This implicates a shift from the dominant Western perspective. Furthermore, the interviewees themselves employ the term *decolonial* to develop reflections on how to challenge the dominant cultural perspective with their actions: their *language of dissidence* as well as their *intersectional engagement* personify this decolonial effort.

To answer the second research question, that is, *how do women from Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali diasporas live and understand the diaspora?* different ways of understanding and living the diasporas emerged, which are linked in part to the various forms of engagement. It is relevant that it is a female perspective in understanding and living diasporas. With regard to the meaning of diaspora, a personal and human significance of diaspora mainly emerges both in Italy and Finland, which however has different dimensions. First, the meanings that emerged from the interviews reflect the

ambivalence of the diaspora: the diaspora is understood as fragmentation and at the same time reunification of family and other affections. The diaspora has in itself an ambivalence of meaning, as it is both a bridge among spaces and cultures, and disintegration. In this ambivalence of meaning, however, the conception of diaspora as a network that transcends spaces and borders seems to prevail in the interviews. The aspect of networks is a central theme that emerges, highlighting the fluid nature of the diasporas, and also shedding light on a key element: that of engagement and union, also at the digital level, beyond the borders of the diasporas to which they belong. This aspect unites Italy and Finland, but is more prevalent in Italy. Moreover, within the personal meaning of the diaspora are included various dimensions underlined by the words of the women interviewed: a more intimate and individual dimension, a collective dimension, and a generational dimension. Regarding the generational aspect, it is interesting to note how the interviewees, belonging to different diasporas and generations, differ not so much in understanding the diaspora, but in living it.

The meanings of diasporas are related to different ways of living the diasporas. Three different ways of living the Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali female diasporas, both in Italy and in Finland, emerged: a more personal and intimate way, which refers to an individual and family dimension; a more public and socio-political way, which refers to a collective dimension; and finally a way of living the diaspora as a virtual transnational community, which connects the two previous modes. The diaspora is also a political and social space that transforms the spaces with which it comes into contact. Indeed, it has a political character, as some members of the diaspora are more or less politicized, in reference also to the state of origin. Moreover, in the ways of living the diaspora emerges a substantial generational difference not always explicit, but that leaks from the biographical paths of the respondents.

Women who belong to the first generations of the Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali diaspora (born in the 1960s and 1970s) have experienced the diaspora directly; while women born from the 1980s onwards have lived in the diaspora or as girls, or indirectly as born in Italy or Finland. The interesting aspect is that despite the differences of experience of the diaspora, there is a union between the various generations in the way of understanding it and, as seen above, in the forms of engagement. Regarding the ways

of experiencing the diasporas by the women, there are differences between Italy and Finland. While in Italy the Ethiopian and Eritrean diasporic communities are more linked to a collective political-social dimension, in Finland the Somali diaspora is more numerous. All diasporic communities also have transnational and virtual networks, in particular the Somali diaspora. The interesting aspect that emerges and that constitutes a fundamental contribution of this research is the fact that the Ethiopian and Eritrean diasporic communities have a collective dimension, including women, that had not been thematized so far by studies in Finland. In fact, these two diasporas have been little studied in this country for their reduced presence, and studies concerning the female component are practically absent. From the interviews made in Finland, instead, it emerged that there is a collective dimension especially social and female of Ethiopian and Eritrean diasporas: the women interviewed of Ethiopian and Eritrean origin are members of African diaspora NGOs in Finland; or gather together with the rest of the community in the Orthodox Church where they organize social support initiatives, including those towards the country of origin. These provide a way of experiencing the Ethiopian and Eritrean Finnish diasporas that therefore has a political-social soul, and another more socio-religious soul.

The collective dimension in living the diaspora is linked to forms of engagement, but also to a theme that constitutes the answer to the third research question, that is, *which are the interviewees' interpretations of war and peace within diasporas?* It deals with the different interpretations of the concept of peace and war of the interviewees, in relation to their engagement. One of the most interesting contributions of this research concerns the deconstruction of the concept of peace realized by the respondents (especially in Italy), so that peace is not understood exclusively as the absence of war, but as the absence of conditions of real equity of rights in a seemingly peaceful context, such as that of many European countries. Alongside the actual war situation in the states of Ethiopia, Eritrea and Somalia, a situation of lack of peace in Italy and Finland is therefore described as an absence of social equity. This first way of understanding peace is emphasized above all by the interviews carried out in Italy, probably for a longer presence on the territory and the development of a greater mobilization. The interesting aspect of this conception of peace is that it is linked not to war, but to the concept of

conflict. The centrality of the biographical experiences of the interviewees, who experienced war situations, leads them to distinguish between the concepts of war and conflict, attributing to the latter a meaning derived from their personal experiences. The conflict (not armed) is in fact understood in a positive sense when it becomes a necessary tool to counter the rules of a system that does not guarantee respect for the rights of all. Conflict becomes an expression of dissidence and resistance.

What is interesting is the emergence of this link between conflict and peace, where social, political and cultural conflict becomes functional to achieving peace. These modes of understanding peace and conflict are linked to the engagement for peace of the respondents, understood as an engagement connected to other forms of engagement to obtain the effective recognition of rights. However, another meaning of peace emerges from the interviews, related in turn to another type of engagement for peace. It is a meaning of peace that relates both to the situation of war in the countries of origin/descent, and to the situation of internal division of the diasporic communities. This interpretation emerges from the interviews, especially in Finland (but also in Italy), and is connected both to the presence of internal divisions in the diasporic communities, and to the divisions present in Ethiopia, Eritrea or Somalia. According to the results of the research, the Ethiopian and Eritrean communities present greater internal union, unlike the Somali community, where clanic hostility often also remains in the diaspora. This concept of peace is linked to a different type of engagement of the women interviewed, which emerges especially in Finland, characterized by activities common to the three diasporas to promote peace in their respective countries of origin. From the interviews emerge different interpretations of peace, in relation to war and conflict, which are connected to different types of engagement for peace, but united by the goal of producing change.

In conclusion, the last research question, that is, *how are the forms of women's diasporic engagement influenced by the multiple spatialities in which they operate, and how does such engagement generate change in these spatialities?* constitutes the heart of the thesis. The sphere of the changes within the systems made and desired by the women interviewed, in response to the conditions of the spaces in which they live, represents one of the main points of contact between the individual dimension of

respondents and the collective dimension of their forms of engagement. From the analysis of biographical paths emerge, in fact, alongside the influence of spaces on the life and engagement of the interviewees, a relationship between individual moments of transition (or *turning-points*), and the beginning of a certain type or types of engagement. The personal and different transition dimension for each interviewee produces a more public transition in the choice of forms of engagement. A first change can therefore be considered a *turning-point* in the life of the women interviewed, first at a personal level that is reflected in undertaking one or more types of engagement. The biographical experiences of the interviewees are united by various rupture events called *biographical trajectories*, which can be of many types (such as travel, diasporic displacement, or impact with a new context) and which trigger in many cases a process of personal and individual change called a *turning-point*. From this moment of personal change, the interviewees in many cases decide to turn their lives around by taking up a new profession and/or type of engagement. Their activation of forms of engagement led the interviewees to realize various social changes within the Italian and Finnish systems: this is the second level of change. There are some changes realized in the present, and others wished for the future, linked respectively to the practical-evaluative and projective (M. Emirbayer and A. Mische, 1998) dimension of the agency of the respondents. The first dimension of interviewees' agency refers to the small changes that they have managed to achieve in the present within the system, both in Italy and in Finland, with some differences.

The main changes are, at the cultural level, greater public/academic representation and linguistic awareness of racialised people, an element of change common to Italy and Finland. On the political and social level, however, the respondents in Italy were more pressing, and obtained new protocols for reception; regulation of municipal practices to improve information on Italian citizenship; greater public representation of diasporic communities. In Finland, instead, at the social and political level respondents noted a change of values and attitudes within Finnish society; and more young Muslim women in political or managerial roles. Additionally, they contributed to the implementation of projects that have improved living conditions of people, especially in Somalia. The changes made in Finland, and consequently the engagement related to them, is not only

focused on the Finnish context, but also on a transnational level towards the Horn of Africa states. In Italy, on the other hand, the changes implemented mainly concern the Italian context. The projective dimension of agency, instead, refers to the changes that interviewees want to make in the future, in light of the problems of the various geographical and social spaces in which the respondents operate. For more details about changes in the present and expected for the future, see table 12. These changes are therefore the result of a response of resistance to certain social, political and cultural conditions of the spaces in which the interviewees live and are active. The analysis of the interviewees' forms of engagement, applying the various dimensions of agency in connection with a perspective of social change, constitutes a contribution to agency studies.

On the other hand, an interesting picture emerges from the interviews about the perceived influence of the spaces of Italy and Finland, both on the biographical paths and the forms of engagement of the interviewees. One of the most significant aspects that the spaces of Italy and Finland have in common, despite a greater influence in Italy due to the colonial past, is the presence of a Eurocentric colonial mentality. This constitutes the basic condition from which a number of problems arise, and is linked to what the interviewees referred to as *white saviour*, that is, the conception of Western forms of society and knowledge as superior. This also relates to the concept of *white innocence*, which refers to the supposed good intentions of Western colonial actions. (Gloria Wekker, 2017). The *white saviour* thus produces a form of knowledge that is elitist and threatens to cover up other forms of knowledge, which arise from the margins. From the basic problematic condition, the interviewees explain that social conditions such as an unjust political system, which influences public opinion and media representation of racialized people; racism in employment and education; and intersectional discrimination against Black women arise. The latter aspect is accentuated in Italy due to the persistence of a disrespectful colonial representation of the Black body, which is still too often sexualised. The interviewees showed how with their engagement they are not victims, but combat the permanent conditions of Italian and Finnish social spaces, intersecting struggles and environments, diasporic and otherwise.

Despite the achievement of the three research objectives, it is possible to identify some limits of research in order to improve it in the future. This research was a process of deconstruction and self-reflection, which allowed me to acquire awareness on a series of issues in an enriching and constructive exchange with the respondents. In the light of a process of maturation to which this research has led me, I have identified a number of limits. First of all, I would have made the research process participatory from the beginning and not only in the data analysis phase, in order to realize a co-construction of the research with knowledgeable and experienced people, such as the women interviewed. Moreover, I would not have selected the respondents on the basis of belonging to the Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali diasporas, to go beyond the ethnic division. Although the research has clarified the approach adopted of non-ethnic categorization, the division of the three diasporas could constitute a kind of contradiction. To resolve this apparent contradiction, I adopted an approach that clarified the non-rigidity of this classification, which was dictated by the need to narrow the focus and contextualize the diasporas. In view of future research in similar fields, the suggestion is to go beyond ethnic divisions by adopting a postethnic perspective, overcoming borders and categories. Moreover, the advice at the methodological level is to reduce as much as possible the hierarchy between researcher and racialized subjects in order to produce new forms of knowledge that are embedded in contexts, and that do not reproduce the distance between academic and social spheres. Especially when doing research in these areas, the research process must be co-built and participatory, to achieve its highest purpose, which is not only to analyze phenomena, but to produce social changes.

9.3 The research findings from a broader perspective

This paragraph aims to thematise the research findings presented so far from a broader perspective, emphasizing the wider aim of this research, namely to explore the dimension of social change linked to the forms of engagement that have emerged. To explore this dimension, we consider not only the social sphere, but also that of political

and cultural institutions. This research was done not only to fill the knowledge gap related to the forms of engagement of women from the Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali diasporas, which is little explored in the literature from the perspective of agency; but also to provide indications of good practices to be adopted for social, political and cultural change.

On the one hand, the main contribution of this research at the theoretical level consists in a systematic mapping of the main forms of engagement of women of the Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali diasporas, between North and South Europe, adopting a theoretical approach that relates the theory of intersectionality to the agency. This is an oxymoronic approach, but one that is appropriate to the results of the research because women have translated the intersectionality they embody into an intersection of struggles, which depicts them not as victims but as agents of change. Intersectionality is not limited here to a reading of oppression and discrimination, but dialogues with the agency that transforms it in a way into a resource. In so doing, the interviewees produce a new form of knowledge, which as well constitutes the innovative contribution of research. This form of knowledge is both reflective knowledge through their biographical reflexivity, and what I have defined as *knowledge of dissidence*, understood as other knowledge, alternative and contesting cognitive forms that reproduce power dynamics. This research aims to bring to light a form of knowledge produced directly by the protagonists of the present research. This way of knowing includes both a personal interpretation, and from a female perspective, of the meanings and ways of living the diasporas. It is a contribution to the field of studies on diasporas because it emphasizes the individual and personal reading of diasporas, highlighting aspects in common but also a heterogeneity, and above all presenting a female reading. This dimension of meanings and experiences, which are biographical, female and intersectional, of the three diasporas of the Horn of Africa, therefore adds new knowledge to the literature on the subject. This form of *knowledge of dissidence* must not be limited to the academic sphere, as in this case it would remain an end in itself. The usefulness of this knowledge lies not only in a valuable theoretical contribution, but also in a practical and broader social contribution.

On the other hand, this research contributes to promote and strengthen social justice, through the recommendation of good practices to be adopted at formal and informal levels. In order to provide adequate recommendations related to social justice and cohesion, for improving policies in the various sectors (educational, social, etc.), it is first of all necessary to start from the perspective of the subjects who experience first-hand the problems they talk about, and who develop strategies for reacting to them. The first step is therefore to reverse the perspective, and start from the point of view of the subjects, in this case racialized women. The second step is to analyze the changes, realized and suggested, by the interviewees to identify some sort of guidelines for the improvement of our societies.

Not only that: the interviewees also identified a number of persistent problems in both Italy and Finland, in the face of which we cannot turn a blind eye. This research is in fact rich in insights, from which paths of change could be traced, adapting them to the specific conditions of the various geographical areas. What is also interesting is that the interviewees, especially in Finland, provide insights for change in the Horn of Africa countries to which they are linked, namely Ethiopia, Eritrea and Somalia. While highlighting the difficulty of change in these countries, there are actions taken by some interviewees as part of their engagement that can be glimmers of hope and pointers for actions to be taken at the political and social level. As I. Deutscher explains, it is important on one side to fully understand the problems created by the society, especially at the expense of some people; on the other side to apply social knowledge more effectively to solve these problems (Irwin Deutscher, 1966).

Finally, this research generated interesting results from a methodological point of view, which may be useful for future research. In fact, in line with the broader objective of searching for good practices to contribute to real social change, conducting biographical interviews with active women also triggered a process of biographical analysis and reflexivity on my own path as a young researcher. The stimuli from the interviewing experience and analysis, particularly the *member-checking* moment together with participants, not only allowed me to think about my other positioning as a white woman and researcher; but also triggered a break in my autobiographical path. Out of this rupture came a personal change that, in a similar way to the paths of the

interviewees, led me to take action socially and politically to contribute to an ongoing change for the betterment of my society. This choice was dictated precisely by the will to be questioned by the data, and not to stop at the production of sociological knowledge for its own sake. Through a constant dialogue with the participants I was able to reflect and become aware of my privileged position, deciding to direct my academic actions, and not only, in support of the improvement of Italian society. I myself embarked on an effort of deconstruction and decolonisation during this research, which, if I were to start the research over again from the beginning, would lead me to approach it in a completely different way, such as changing the categories of analysis and starting a participatory research from the beginning. I believe that these findings can also be significant for the debates on the *demigrantization* and *decolonization* of knowledge.

In summary, it can be said that, despite the limitations of the research highlighted in the empirical conclusions, this study has succeeded in achieving its three objectives. Indeed, by analyzing the biographical experiences of the interviewees, it was possible, first, to meet the descriptive aim of mapping the main forms of engagement of women linked to the Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali diasporas. Secondly, the analytical aim of highlighting the different interpretations of diaspora and forms of engagement, both in terms of meanings and ways of experiencing them, was achieved. In particular, the biographical, diasporic and intergenerational connection of the interviewees' experiences was analysed, leading to the interpretation of engagement as intersectional, but also as post-diasporic as it goes beyond the boundaries of each interviewee's own diaspora and the concept of diaspora itself. Lastly, the research also achieved the broader aim of exploring the various forms of engagement from the perspective of social change. The dimension of change constitutes the core of the research and also provides guidelines for the improvement of social and educational policies in Italy and Finland. Compared to the forms of female diasporic engagement described in the theoretical chapters, the types of engagement resulting from this research differ in a few respects.

First of all, these can be identified in an ideal-type of engagement defined as *intersectional engagement*, which has various declinations and is detached from

mainstream forms of activism. The various nuances of this engagement reflect the specific sensitivities of the interviewees, so while taking up the political, economic, social and peace areas already present in the literature, their forms of engagement enrich these areas with new nuances. Furthermore, the engagement that emerges can be defined as post-diasporic, as it is reductive to see it as exclusively related to diasporas. It is an engagement that goes beyond the mere diasporic dimension, and that shapes all the spaces it comes into contact with, going beyond the dual relationship with the country of origin (although the latter is present). Secondly, the forms of engagement discovered differ from the rest of the literature on the subject because the dimension of social change is emphasized in them. Indeed, the focus is not limited to the description and interpretation of engagement, but also the results achieved and advocated for the future are described, in close relation to the biographical paths of the interviewees.

In conclusion, it is worth mentioning possible future avenues from this research, to further explore some of the issues that have emerged. First, it would be interesting to make a sociolinguistic analysis on the construction of different *languages of dissidence*, an aspect that emerged from this research. Reflecting on the dimension of the performativity proper to language, it would be useful to explore how different languages and forms of communication are constructed in the kinds of female engagement, identifying different expressions of dissidence. Language is in fact a fundamental dimension of social and individual mobilizations, as a certain language is a reflection of an individual way of thinking, but also collective. Therefore, it is a central component of the social and cultural system. Another research trail to explore could be to investigate female and transnational diasporic networks of these three diasporas globally, or by involving more countries. It would be interesting to set up this research as participatory and co-constructed research based on research design. In fact, one of the intentions during this research was to put in contact the interviewees in Italy and Finland, to bring out possible points of contact and possibilities of collaboration. It would be good, however, that an in-depth study of this kind should be carried out together with the interviewees. Lastly, from the perspective of wider social impact and change, a future research path could be a systematic exploration of changes by sectors. That is, starting from the problems and changes indicated by the respondents

respectively in the educational, political, etc., and further investigating them, it is possible to systematically indicate guidelines to be followed for change in each sector considered. In social research, the dimension of social impact and utility is indeed of central importance.

I would like to conclude this thesis with what I learned during this research and which made me fall in love with sociology. Studying and understanding social phenomena is sociology, but it is also to use the knowledge gained to improve society in the direction of greater social justice, which crosses the social spaces of daily life as well as research activities inside and outside the academy, in accordance with what we have been taught by the founding fathers and mothers of the discipline.

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Appendix

Biographical Portraits

In the appendix you can read the texts of the *biographical portraits* of the women interviewed belonging to the diasporas from the Horn of Africa, who have given consent for the publication of their biographies. These last in many cases, as explained, have been co-constructed or revised with the participants. The *biographical portraits* faithfully reflect the concepts reported by the interviewees, who in many cases intervened directly on the text to formulate their biographies in the most effective way. The transcription word by word of what they said is reported in quotation marks; while the symbol *n.d.r.* indicates the editor's notes, which refer to additional information inserted to clarify some aspects. The richness of these *biographical portraits* lies in their uniqueness, as, despite the recurrence of similar themes, each participant faces them with a unique sensitivity, emphasizing different aspects. It's possible to identify in each portrait a chronological biographical line, built by the narration of each participant who chose what to tell and how to tell it.

IT-bio-1

L'intervistata nasce a Roma a fine anni '70 da genitori eritrei, cresce sentendosi straniera nel paese in cui vive e frequenta le scuole in un periodo storico che lei stessa definisce infelice per l'Italia. È infatti un'epoca di instabilità generale, sia per quanto riguarda l'incapacità del Paese di investire sulle nuove generazioni, sia per l'emergere di crisi legate al petrolio e alle prime grandi dismissioni di imprese pubbliche con conseguente privatizzazione. In particolare, l'intervistata spiega che sono anni negativi a causa del riemergere di un discorso di stampo protezionista, nazionalista e di chiusura a livello europeo, soprattutto contro le migrazioni dal Sud globale.

Dell'infanzia ricorda che dall'età di 8 anni ha due famiglie: una biologica e una acquisita. Si tratta di un aspetto centrale nella vita dell'intervistata, in quanto ciò le ha

permesso di acquisire un punto di vista critico rispetto ai limiti di entrambe le appartenenze, sentendo il bisogno di superarle. Riguardo alla sua famiglia biologica, racconta che sua madre è arrivata a Roma dall'Eritrea nel 1973, con un contratto da collaboratrice domestica in una famiglia italiana, così come la maggioranza delle donne eritree giunte in Italia. La condizione della madre è stata molto condizionata dal lavoro di domestica: a causa dello sfruttamento e dell'irregolarità contrattuale è stata irregolare per 10 anni, ed è riuscita ad ottenere il documento solo grazie all'acquisizione della cittadinanza italiana da parte della figlia diciottenne. I genitori dell'intervistata si sono conosciuti in Italia e, dopo la nascita del secondo figlio, si sono separati. Per incompatibilità con i tempi di lavoro sono intervenuti i servizi sociali, affidando i due fratelli, di 8 e 6 anni, a una coppia italiana. L'intervistata non vedrà più il padre fino a quando non si trasferirà a Milano, all'età di 21 anni.

Dei tempi dell'adolescenza ricorda un episodio in particolare, avvenuto quando aveva 14 anni: al rientro da un viaggio all'estero con la scuola, la polizia l'ha trattenuta in aeroporto costringendo tutta la scolaresca ad attendere per ore l'arrivo dei suoi genitori affidatari. Alla luce anche di quest'episodio, ritiene necessario che le comunità straniere abbiano spazio di parola sulle questioni che le riguardano. Spiega infatti: "nel momento in cui tu ti radichi sul territorio, inizi ad essere cittadino. E il fatto che questa cosa non si riconosca è un problema enorme rispetto alla possibilità di produrre cambiamenti. E quindi nel mio piccolo provo a fare qualche cosa". Dopo le scuole superiori decide di continuare gli studi con l'università e si iscrive prima ad Architettura a Roma, poi a Pianificazione Urbana a Milano.

A inizio 2000, l'intervistata decide di trasferirsi a Milano (dove vive tuttora) per concludere gli studi in Pianificazione Urbana presso il Politecnico. A causa della riforma Moratti, con l'introduzione del 3+2, ha dovuto iscriversi al primo anno seppur con parziale riconoscimento di alcuni esami. Durante gli anni al Politecnico afferma di aver stretto collaborazioni con insegnanti e assistenti più che con i compagni di corso; la sua idea era quella di dedicarsi ad un'urbanistica d'impronta sociale, con l'intenzione di lavorare nei paesi c.d. in via di sviluppo e condividere le proprie conoscenze e competenze personali per contribuire al progresso e al benessere di una comunità intesa in senso ampio. Questa motivazione porta l'intervistata a lavorare nel settore dell'urbanistica in Eritrea prima che in Italia.

Ricorda il suo primo viaggio da adulta in Eritrea del 2004 (la prima volta era andata all'età di 4 anni) come un momento molto importante. Aveva deciso di partire poiché sentiva di avere competenze e consapevolezza sufficienti per avviare un percorso lavorativo. Quest'ultimo le ha permesso successivamente di indagare anche come le istituzioni universitarie costruiscono i rapporti con i Paesi emergenti, spesso basati su relazioni gerarchiche. In Eritrea inizia a collaborare con l'Ufficio Tecnico di Asmara tramite una sorta di stage, lavorando ad un progetto europeo finanziato dall'*African Development Bank*. L'obiettivo del progetto consisteva nel disegnare il piano urbanistico di Asmara e il suo ruolo era quello di fare da tramite tra l'ufficio tecnico di Asmara e il gruppo di lavoro francese (in quanto il bando era stato vinto da un'agenzia di consulenza francese). L'intervistata sottolinea che avrebbe voluto occuparsi anche della fase d'implementazione del progetto (che poi non è mai partita), ma le è stato chiesto un ruolo di tramite grazie soprattutto al vantaggio di possedere una doppia cittadinanza, eritrea e italiana.

Tornata successivamente a Milano, ha continuato la sua attività nell'ambito dell'urbanistica d'impronta sociale, che sarà una costante nel suo impegno sociale e

politico. Al suo rientro a Milano è stata infatti tra le persone che hanno animato il percorso di Macao nei suoi primi anni, in qualità di referente del tavolo *L'architettura: città bene comune?* (n.d.r. il Centro per le Arti, la Cultura e la Ricerca Macao è nato nel 2012 come risultato di una mobilitazione dei lavoratori del mondo dell'arte, ed ha segnato un momento di grande innovazione rispetto alla tradizione milanese del rapporto tra movimenti sociali e spazi occupati). In quegli anni l'intervistata si è dedicata anche all'impegno per il quartiere di Porta Venezia a Milano, dichiara infatti: "E' stato proprio l'interesse all'urbanistica come fenomeno sociale, che ha prodotto il mio impegno anche rispetto a Porta Venezia. Nel senso che chi vive a Milano sa che questo quartiere ha conosciuto il processo di riqualificazione grazie alla comunità eritrea e etiope, habesha."

L'intervistata spiega che il quartiere di Porta Venezia è stato storicamente un quartiere complesso. Negli anni '70, infatti, era uno dei quartieri della malavita milanese, che la crescente presenza di bar e ristoranti eritrei, soprattutto in seguito alla diaspora massiccia dall'Eritrea a inizio 2000, è riuscita a trasformare. Si è trattato di uno dei primi esempi di trasformazione e valorizzazione spontanea di un quartiere, che non è stato accompagnato da politiche istituzionali di riqualificazione pianificata. Ciò è avvenuto in un'epoca tra l'altro difficile per le persone immigrate in Italia, in quanto caratterizzata dall'emergere di un forte protagonismo politico di destra in chiave anti-migrazione, in primis della Lega. In particolare, l'intervistata ricorda che alla fine del 2013 il numero di arrivati dall'Eritrea ha avuto un grande incremento, tant'è che per quasi due anni a Porta Venezia si è verificato un flusso di persone pari a 400/500 al giorno. Grazie anche ad alcune competenze specifiche del gruppo di accoglienza, sono riusciti a costruire una risposta organizzata ai bisogni primari dei nuovi arrivati. L'urbanistica ha permesso in quel caso di sensibilizzare le istituzioni pubbliche sull'esistenza di spazi abbandonati che potevano essere messi a disposizione per rispondere a quella fase di emergenza. Quel periodo ha portato alla necessità di formalizzare le attività di quel gruppo, soprattutto perché la comunità di riferimento non fosse esclusa dal dialogo con le istituzioni. Questo è un punto chiave per l'intervistata, la quale spiega che, nonostante il continente africano e parte dell'Asia a fine anni '50 si siano liberate dal colonialismo, oggi permangono forme di colonialismo più subdole caratterizzate da relazioni di inferiorizzazione delle comunità straniere e di subalternità rispetto all'Occidente. Come spiega, "se l'Occidente esiste bisogna affermare un'altra prospettiva, e per affermare un'altra prospettiva bisogna lavorare ad un'altra prospettiva e quindi costruire relazioni che vadano oltre il reciproco riconoscimento attraverso l'identità-nazionale."

Dopo una fase lunga e informale di impegno, nel 2014 nasce ufficialmente l'associazione di promozione sociale **** (n.d.r. che ha origine dall'esperienza di un gruppo di cittadini milanesi di origine eritrea ed etiope impegnati dal 2013 in attività di supporto e sostegno a persone rifugiate e richiedenti asilo provenienti prevalentemente dal Corno d'Africa). L'associazione ha come obiettivo principale la tutela dei diritti fondamentali di rifugiati e richiedenti asilo e la valorizzazione del protagonismo delle diaspore. Questa scelta è costata molto a livello di partecipazione (metà delle persone hanno abbandonato il gruppo), poiché la formalizzazione significa stare a delle regole che rendono gerarchici i rapporti. L'impegno politico e sociale dell'intervistata ha assunto inoltre forme differenti dall'associazionismo e dall'autorganizzazione, per la necessità di incidere anche a livello istituzionale. Uno dei problemi principali delle istituzioni italiane riguarda l'incapacità di costruire politiche efficaci riguardo alla

questione migratoria, anche per la mancata conoscenza dalle comunità di riferimento e delle loro dinamiche. Dall'attività di associazionismo, che comprende collaborazioni con associazioni come Arci Todo Cambia, piuttosto che organizzazioni più legate alla garanzia dei diritti fondamentali, come il Naga, ASGI, o realtà radicate in alcuni territori con una presenza significativa di persone immigrate (es. il Centro Sociale Cantiere), l'intervistata è arrivata alle elezioni comunali come consigliera del Municipio 3 di Milano.

Grazie alla visibilità derivata anche dall'impegno nell'associazione, l'intervistata ha ricevuto infatti dal partito Sinistra Italiana la richiesta di contribuire prima con Liberi e Uguali sui temi delle migrazioni, poi con Milano Unita sulla partecipazione, coesione sociale e le trasformazioni urbanistiche. Spiega di essere sempre stata una persona posizionata a sinistra, sostenendo che la politica italiana degli ultimi vent'anni ha supportato posizioni di mediazione molto più vicine alla destra. Nel suo percorso politico si è candidata inizialmente alle Regionali con la coalizione Liberi e Uguali; in seguito alle Europee per la lista La Sinistra, e infine alle elezioni Comunali con la lista Milano Unita. Racconta che queste esperienze non sono state positive "per la dimensione, diciamo, collettiva rispetto all'obiettivo che si davano quei percorsi; cioè di ricomposizione politica a sinistra... sono stata l'unica eletta della mia lista". L'intervistata spiega che attualmente come consigliera sta lavorando principalmente su tre aspetti: la partecipazione nei processi di trasformazione urbana, la salute e l'inclusione. In concreto chiarisce che la riforma della sanità proposta dalla regione Lombardia prevede l'istituzione di case di comunità, che sono degli spazi che dovrebbero ospitare dei servizi di medicina generale e dei servizi specialistici nei vari municipi. La legge prevede che ci sia una casa di comunità ogni 50.000 abitanti e il municipio 3, con più di 130.000 abitanti, ne ha una sola.

Infine, collegando la sua vita presente alle esperienze passate, l'intervistata identifica le date storiche per lei più significative. Nella storia italiana ricorda il 25 aprile 1945, data che per lei ha molti significati e che le ricorda i valori della Costituzione, che partono dall'esperienza forte delle persone che la hanno scritta. Ritene che oggi in Italia poche persone capiscano cosa significasse vivere durante la guerra, esperienza che ha contribuito a far comprendere il significato di essere uguali "in termini di aspirazioni e di condizioni che ti rendono umano". Per la stessa ragione ricorda come molto significativa la data della liberazione dell'Eritrea: il 24 maggio 1991.

In conclusione, guardando al futuro ritiene che per tutti, indipendentemente dalla provenienza, le prospettive siano poco rosee poiché manca un pensiero trasformativo all'interno della società. L'accumulazione di risorse, tra cui il sapere, anche quello accademico, non deve essere secondo lei fine a sé stesso, ma è importante che le risorse siano diffuse per produrre un cambiamento nella società. E' questa consapevolezza che alimenta la sua speranza in un futuro migliore.

IT-bio-2

L'intervistata nasce negli anni '80 a Milano da genitori eritrei. Al momento della sua nascita, il padre si trovava negli Stati Uniti: immagina che fosse un momento decisionale critico per i suoi genitori riguardo a dove stabilirsi, sfociato nella scelta dell'Italia. Il padre era arrivato in Italia nel 1973 come studente di ingegneria, aveva fatto la scuola italiana in Eritrea ed era considerato un mezzo genio a detta

dell'intervistata. La madre, cresciuta nella capitale Asmara, era arrivata invece in Italia, dove aveva conosciuto il marito, come giovane lavoratrice a fine anni '70. Lavorava nelle fabbriche italiane e nelle famiglie come donna di servizio. L'intervistata spiega che i suoi genitori ora non vogliono spostarsi dall'Italia, ma non sa se in passato avessero l'idea di tornare in Eritrea. Quella dei suoi genitori è una micro diaspora che si è ampliata sempre più nel tempo con amici, parenti e membri della guerriglia che si sono fermati in Italia. Anche lei si sente parte della diaspora eritrea, che da quanto racconta negli anni '70 e '80 era attiva in forme di impegno sociale, politico e culturale di stampo femminista. La diaspora sia etiope che eritrea è stata infatti caratterizzata da una componente femminile forte e trainante.

Della sua infanzia racconta che viveva in una classica casa di ringhiera milanese, la cui struttura facilitava la creazione di un clima di comunità in tempi molto diversi da oggi. La maggioranza delle famiglie era di origine immigrata e il contesto quotidiano era molto familiare: si viveva lasciando la porta aperta con i bambini che giocavano in cortile. Per quanto riguarda il percorso di studi, ha frequentato le scuole in una zona di Milano che da sempre o da che ricorda è stata popolata da immigrati: inizialmente immigrati provenienti dall'Italia meridionale e in seguito, da metà anni '70 inizio anni '80, anche da persone extracomunitarie, come la sua famiglia. Anche il clima nella zona della scuola era molto tranquillo: le insegnanti erano abituate ad avere classi multietniche e c'era anche una scuola di arabo dove gli studenti che arrivavano a metà anno scolastico avevano l'insegnante di sostegno. Durante le scuole medie, l'intervistata inizia a partecipare al gruppo scout non religioso: si tratta di un'esperienza nata quasi per caso perché alcune compagne ne facevano parte. Ricorda questa sua partecipazione (durata 10 anni) come formativa, in quanto le ha permesso di affrontare tante difficoltà future. È stata un'esperienza che le ha consentito di acquisire sicurezza e che è arrivata nel momento giusto, ovvero in concomitanza con il suo viaggio in Eritrea (ci era già stata da piccola ma non lo ricordava). Questo viaggio è avvenuto nell'anno dell'indipendenza eritrea (1991) ed è stato per lei allo stesso tempo emozionante e complesso, dal momento che si è sentita di "essere altro" anche lì, essendo nata e cresciuta in Italia. Il periodo trascorso in Eritrea è stato un grande momento di aggregazione per la diaspora eritrea di tutto il mondo, che tornava lì dopo anni con figli e parenti. Ricorda quella fase come significativa in quanto le ha permesso di fare quello che definisce "scatto mentale", facendole comprendere la pericolosità di un discorso di esclusione. Infatti, afferma: "Ho preso agency, come è che si dice? Sì agency, sulla mia identità e su come presentarla agli altri, ovviamente avevo 11 anni o 12 anni, e lì ho sentito le radici e le trasformazioni più forti, e la paura di perdere o di non essere abbastanza eritrea, la paura di non essere abbastanza italiana non l'ho mai avuta. Cioè io alle elementari nei disegni, sai quelli che si fanno a scuola, io disegnavo tutti neri, non so perché." Quest'esperienza in Eritrea, dove tornerà per l'ultima volta nel 1992, si collega quindi all'esperienza dello scoutismo, e alla presa di consapevolezza su una serie di tematiche che le ha consentito di conoscersi a fondo e di autodefinirsi.

Conclusa la scuola dell'obbligo, l'intervistata ha deciso di frequentare il liceo linguistico a Milano. Ricorda il periodo delle superiori come noioso e non ha nulla di rilevante da raccontare, se non appunto le esperienze legate allo scoutismo. terminate le superiori, si è iscritta a Scenografia alla nuova Accademia di Belle Arti: il teatro è da sempre una sua grande passione, anche se da dietro le quinte. Negli anni dell'accademia si è accorta che il mondo del teatro era un mondo elitario e, a partire dal 1998/99, si è interessata anche alla musica. Conclusi gli studi ha infatti iniziato a fare concerti con i

*****, è diventata la musicista elettronica del gruppo e ha iniziato a fare con loro tour in Italia e in Europa. Ricorda l'esperienza con il gruppo musicale, che durò 10 anni, come una grande famiglia, alla quale si sovrappose anche la fotografia, passione che nacque proprio negli anni in cui faceva musica. Poco dopo il 2010, arriva un altro viaggio, questa volta in Etiopia. Esperienza per lei meno formativa rispetto al viaggio in Eritrea, ma comunque significativa in quanto lo ha fatto con un cugino cresciuto a Bergamo. L'aspetto interessante di questo viaggio riguarda il fatto che, mentre parlava in italiano con il cugino passeggiando per le strade di Addis Abeba, veniva fermata talvolta da anziani che si inserivano nella loro conversazione parlando in italiano. Interpreta questo fatto come un segno del colonialismo italiano, che ha realizzato scuole in Etiopia ed Eritrea in cui si insegnava la lingua italiana come idioma ufficiale. A suo parere in Italia non è mai stato fatto un processo di assunzione delle responsabilità coloniali, a parte negli ultimi anni da un piccolo gruppo di ricercatori/ricercatrici che hanno iniziato a portare alla luce la questione.

È in questo periodo che prende forma un impegno più sistematico dell'intervistata, formalmente è cominciato a metà anni 2000, mentre a livello informale era già iniziato prima poiché inizialmente non ha mai voluto far parte di gruppi. L'unica organizzazione di cui ha fatto parte in modo formale è ***** (nonostante abbia collaborato anche con molte altre), che definisce come il primo progetto formale di attivismo tradizionale. L'esperienza con quest'organizzazione, con la quale ha mantenuto una collaborazione, è stata molto significativa. In quel periodo ha iniziato inoltre a concepire il suo engagement come un'intersezione di lotte, che riflette il suo essere intersezione di tante cose. Ha iniziato infatti a collaborare anche con la comunità LGBTQ+ in Italia, ritenendo che un discorso realmente inclusivo deve includere tutte le realtà senza lasciarne indietro nessuna.

Così tramite gli incontri, le connessioni con le persone e lo scambio di idee ha iniziato ad occuparsi di vari progetti più formali. Negli ultimi anni ha creato per esempio un archivio multimediale chiamato *****, la cui idea prende le mosse in parte dal film ***** (n.d.r. il film documentario realizzato nella comunità habesha di Milano presente in Italia da almeno mezzo secolo), pur essendo un progetto totalmente differente, che sta portando avanti anche negli Stati Uniti e che definisce come transnazionale. Da qualche anno l'intervistata si è infatti trasferita negli Stati Uniti (anche se torna per alcuni periodi a Milano), dove sta continuando questo progetto dell'archivio sulle diaspore. Vivere negli USA le fa sperimentare cosa significa essere realmente immigrata in un contesto altro, in quanto in Italia, essendoci nata, non era straniera. Nello specifico, il progetto riguarda una raccolta di storie ciascuna focalizzata su un individuo, per la maggior parte donne ma non solo, ed è legato anche all'ambiente accademico. L'intervistata insegna in alcuni corsi il significato di archivio e di storia, con l'obiettivo di scardinare certe parti della storia e valorizzarne altre, che magari non sono state riportate sui libri scolastici; e alcune storie sono seguite dagli studenti. Ciascun soggetto protagonista di una storia ha avuto un ruolo particolare in un determinato contesto storico, per cui l'idea è quella di ricollocare ciascuno nel proprio contesto e ricostruire le loro storie, con mezzi diversi, non solo video. L'Italia è molto coinvolta in questo progetto, a tal proposito l'intervistata riporta un esempio di storia che ritiene significativa, quella di *****. Si tratta di un racconto che sta seguendo personalmente che parla di una donna di origini dominicane, che vive in Italia e che quando viveva in Repubblica Dominicana è stata una partigiana della guerriglia del 1965 contro gli Stati Uniti. Faceva inoltre parte del primo Speak Easy LGBTQ+ di

Santo Domingo, dove nascondevano le armi per i guerriglieri, oltre ad avere avuto un passato di prostituzione che la ha portata ad attivarsi in Italia per salvare le donne prostitute contro la loro volontà. Si tratta di un esempio che l'intervistata definisce come significativo poiché nella ricostruzione della storia personale emergono vari nodi connessi tra loro: la guerra del 1965, la migrazione delle donne dominicane in Italia, le questioni LGBTQ+. L'idea che emerge dalla storia di questa donna esprime l'essenza del progetto, in quanto questa persona rappresenta un archivio storico.

Infine, collegando la biografia dell'intervistata con gli avvenimenti storici per lei più significativi, ricorda come particolarmente importante il 1991, anno dell'indipendenza dell'Eritrea, seguito dalla nascita della Costituzione nel 1993. Descrive quel periodo come una fase di celebrazione che è stata vissuta molto sia dalle diaspore, sia in Italia, in quanto la guerriglia ha coinvolto anche l'Italia. Sono infatti gli anni del Festival di Bologna, diventato talmente importante per tutta la diaspora eritrea ed etiope a livello internazionale da essere organizzato anche ad Asmara. Per lei questo avvenimento è una sorta di 25 aprile, ma con molta più partecipazione. Il 25 aprile è per lei un'altra data particolarmente significativa, che associa alle mondine: donne combattenti a suo parere emblematiche, che hanno lottato per i diritti dei lavoratori e che ricollega ai partigiani italiani e eritrei della guerriglia eritrea. E' infatti nella sua indole cercare sempre il punto di connessione tra le cose, aspetto che ritiene centrale anche nel discorso sulla pace: trovare il punto di accordo senza negare le diversità è un carattere a suo parere fondamentale. In conclusione, per il futuro, vorrebbe che prendesse forma una figura di attivista intermedia tra l'attivista vecchio stile e l'attivista contemporanea, caratterizzata da spirito di sacrificio e di comunità. Soprattutto, ritiene che sia fondamentale passare il testimone e far sì che si prosegua in una direzione di cambiamento, affinché il lavoro fatto fino ad ora non sia vano. E' questa la sua sfida più grande per il futuro.

IT-bio-5

L'intervistata è nata a Roma negli anni '80 da genitori, entrambi etiopi, arrivati in Italia verso la fine degli anni '70. In particolare, la madre è arrivata quando era molto giovane e ha sentito maggiormente il legame con la diaspora rispetto a lei, che spiega di averla vissuta "di riflesso", soprattutto attraverso la preoccupazione per i parenti rimasti in Etiopia. Oggi il suo legame con la diaspora si è fatto però più forte per la recente guerra in Etiopia; l'intervistata dichiara infatti: "io sono di origine tigrina e ho sentito molto diciamo la questione della guerra e tutte le dinamiche relative, anche con mia sorpresa devo dire, nel senso che ho cercato io stessa di capire, di attivarmi, di fare qualcosa anche se magari il tutto si è ridotto semplicemente in alcune donazioni." Spiega che nascere in Italia ha influenzato favorevolmente la sua vita perché le ha permesso di ottenere la cittadinanza italiana all'età di 16 anni, a differenza di molti suoi coetanei arrivati in Italia da piccoli e tuttora senza cittadinanza. L'intervistata attribuisce pertanto alla nascita un valore significativo, perché le ha consentito di avere diritti che molti suoi coetanei ancora non hanno. Affronta anche il tema della legge 91-92 sulla cittadinanza, attualmente in vigore in Italia, in base alla quale è possibile ottenere la cittadinanza soltanto alla maggiore età, a condizione che si è figli di stranieri e si è nati in Italia. A suo parere "è una legge molto distante da quella che è la realtà dei figli dell'immigrazione".

L'intervistata non si sofferma sul racconto della sua infanzia in Italia, e dell'adolescenza racconta di aver frequentato il liceo classico a Roma. Dopo il liceo decide di proseguire gli studi e nel 1998 si iscrive alla facoltà di Sociologia, per un interesse più verso gli aspetti teorici che metodologici. All'ultimo anno di università decide di congelare gli studi poiché trova un annuncio di lavoro per una redazione, e vuole cogliere l'occasione di fare la giornalista, desiderio che custodiva già durante l'università. A 24 anni è quindi assunta con un contratto a tempo indeterminato nell'ufficio stampa dell'Unicef con il ruolo di addetta stampa. Nello stesso periodo inizia una rubrica giornalistica poiché, afferma, "ho sempre avuto il vizio di fare troppe cose insieme e quindi portavo avanti anche questa passione per la scrittura e per il giornalismo." Grazie alle interviste svolte nella sua professione di giornalista viene a conoscenza di diverse situazioni ed entra in contatto con molte persone di origine straniera: questo determina una svolta nella sua vita. "All'età di circa 25 anni", dichiara, "mi sono attivata in prima persona per cambiare un po' lo stato di cose e promuovere appunto i diritti di cittadinanza per i figli dell'immigrazione. E questo l'ho fatto diciamo perché appunto ti dava un significato anche autobiografico, ma non solo, ho conosciuto moltissime persone nelle mie stesse condizioni, se non addirittura peggiori."

Nel 2005, data che identifica con l'inizio del suo impegno, decide infatti di non scrivere più storie di altri nella sua rubrica, ma di attivarsi in prima persona e di diventare protagonista: insieme ad altri figli/e di immigrati nati e/o cresciuti in Italia fonda così a Roma l'Associazione *Rete G2* Seconde Generazioni, una delle prime organizzazioni ad occuparsi di diritti di cittadinanza, (n.d.r. *Rete G2* oggi è un network di "cittadini del mondo", originari di Africa, Asia, America Latina ed Europa, che collaborano su due temi fondamentali: i diritti negati alle seconde generazioni senza cittadinanza italiana e l'identità come incontro di più culture). Per le attività svolte con quest'associazione l'intervistata ha ottenuto anche il riconoscimento istituzionale dell'allora Presidente della Repubblica Giorgio Napolitano. La decisione di dedicarsi totalmente all'associazione è da lei così spiegata: "i miei interessi anche giornalistici erano molto più ampi, cioè io scrivo un po' di tutto, di attualità, di cronaca e non avevo un interesse conscio all'inizio del tema delle migrazioni. Soltanto quando ho visto che persone, che avevano veramente la mia stessa età, le mie stesse situazioni, non avevano gli stessi diritti miei per delle differenze veramente minime, io stessa ero stupita di questo fatto, e l'ho trovata una profonda ingiustizia." Questo periodo dell'annata 2005 segna un cambiamento rilevante nella sua vita, in quanto l'avvicinarsi al tema delle migrazioni le permette di rileggere e comprendere diversi episodi del suo passato, quali la migrazione in Italia dei suoi genitori e la sua nascita in Italia, e di acquisire maggiore consapevolezza sulla condizione delle persone di origine straniera. Tant'è che prima di iniziare il progetto dell'associazione aveva solo "amici autoctoni". Avviene quello che lei stessa descrive come "un salto": sente una volontà di "riscatto narrativo" e si impegna con il gruppo della sua associazione per contrastare la narrazione dominante in Italia riguardo alle persone di origine straniera, che devono poter esprimere la propria narrazione. Spiega infatti: "per me diciamo l'impegno nasce un po' con la mia persona e diciamo che il mio background migratorio, quindi le mie origini, nel mio caso appunto specifico etiopi, hanno dato una spinta molto forte a quello che poi è stato il mio impegno professionale, che poi ha coinciso anche con l'impegno più di attivismo. E questo perché io sono stata diciamo molto sensibile alle questioni relative ai figli degli immigrati, in quanto figlia di immigrata."

Intorno al 2006 si verifica un altro avvenimento significativo per l'intervistata: il ritorno da un viaggio di qualche mese a New York, dove ha visto "la differenza rispetto alla questione multiculturale". Mentre nella metropoli statunitense si sentiva infatti meno diversa, al ritorno in Italia aveva l'impressione che tutti la guardassero, come se il distacco per un breve periodo dalla realtà italiana le avesse aperto gli occhi su quanto fosse differente la percezione delle persone straniere in Italia rispetto agli Stati Uniti. Questo viaggio è seguito da un viaggio altrettanto significativo: intorno al 2007 si reca in Etiopia (la prima volta era stata all'età di 3 anni ma non ricorda molto). Racconta in particolare un episodio di questa esperienza che ha assunto per lei un significato simbolico: l'aver visitato la città etiope di Axum, proprio qualche anno dopo il ritorno dell'obelisco "nel posto in cui doveva stare", simboleggia un ritorno dell'intervistata alle sue radici.

Rientrata in Italia, diversi sono i risultati che è riuscita a raggiungere negli anni con il suo impegno che definisce "su vasta scala", in quanto accanto alle attività per i diritti portate avanti insieme a *Rete G2* (e per 10 anni anche in collaborazione con Save the Children) ha conservato la sua professione di giornalista collaborando con *l'Espresso* e quindi *Repubblica*. Racconta: "ci sono stati dei riconoscimenti anche di impatto legislativo, perché ci sono stati dei minimi cambiamenti anche grazie alle campagne che io stessa diciamo ho ideato e promosso. In particolare, con *Save the Children* e con la *Rete G2* una campagna per i nati in Italia con i comuni, dove diciamo siamo riusciti un po' a impattare e a tirar fuori una misura all'interno di un decreto che in qualche modo va a limare la questione della cittadinanza a diciott'anni, con un'apertura maggiore da un punto di vista amministrativo, almeno per quanto riguarda l'acquisizione della cittadinanza a 18 anni. Nonostante questo, invece poi negli anni la legge non è stata cambiata, anzi, ha avuto anche dei peggioramenti negli ultimi anni con il decreto sicurezza." In particolare, ricorda il 2013 come anno più significativo in merito ai risultati raggiunti. Si tratta dell'anno del "Decreto del Fare", che è rimasto l'unico risultato in tema di cittadinanza, in base al quale ai nati in Italia non sono più imputabili eventuali inadempienze commesse dai genitori nelle registrazioni. Inoltre, l'intervistata sta sviluppando il tema dei diritti della cittadinanza e dei figli degli immigrati anche in ambito narrativo: scrive racconti su queste tematiche e ha in mente una pubblicazione in futuro. Attualmente l'intervistata è iscritta al secondo anno della facoltà di scienze dell'educazione e della formazione, dove le hanno riconosciuto alcuni esami di sociologia (in cui non ha conseguito la laurea). La decisione di riprendere gli studi dopo molto tempo, ma cambiando indirizzo accademico, è stata determinata da uno spostamento di interesse verso tematiche più relative alla formazione.

In conclusione, collegando la sua biografia al passato, gli anni storici per lei più significativi sono stati gli anni '90, per l'indipendenza dell'Eritrea, periodo che descrive con le seguenti parole: "Io l'ho vissuto molto, qui veramente come diaspora, ho visto persone allontanarsi e amici di famiglia eh...oppure una comunità che improvvisamente si è divisa, si è separata". Un altro momento storico che annovera come importante è stato il 2005, quando l'Obelisco di Axum è stato riportato in Etiopia, nella città di Axum (n.d.r. i frammenti dell'obelisco erano stati portati in Italia dai soldati italiani, dove furono restaurati ed esposti come stele tra il 1937 e il 2003 in piazza di Porta Capena a Roma).

L'intervistata è nata a inizio anni '60 a Mogadiscio, ed è arrivata in Italia nel 1969, quando era ancora una bambina, per ricongiungersi con la madre trasferitasi a Roma per lavorare. L'idea iniziale della madre era di fermarsi un periodo in Italia per poi tornare in Somalia, ma la diagnosi di poliomielite della figlia ha spinto la famiglia a stabilirsi in Italia per la necessità di cure efficaci. La diaspora familiare ha un carattere continuo nel tempo, finché quasi tutti i parenti si trasferiscono in Italia o in altri paesi europei. Dopo i primi anni più faticosi per la condizione fisica, l'intervistata ha iniziato ad imparare l'italiano prima leggendo Topolino e i fumetti, e poi i libri di scuola. Sin da bambina ha mostrato una passione per la lettura e la scrittura, anche se all'inizio dichiara che non tutti gli insegnanti accettavano che sapesse scrivere così bene. Alle scuole medie ha infatti iniziato a scrivere poesie, passione che è cresciuta durante le superiori: "da ragazzina scrivevo poesie," -spiega- "era il mio modo di parlare, di potermi esprimere liberamente, quindi ero una bambina un pochino solitaria, soprattutto alle superiori perché non trovavo sempre persone che mi capivano e quindi c'erano quelle ragazzine che magari ti etichettavano come straniera, nera, eccetera, quindi l'insulto era sempre quello; però poi avevo le mie amiche che invece mi capivano." In particolare, descrive l'adolescenza alle superiori come un periodo molto buio della sua vita, in cui ha sofferto molto. Ricorda in particolare una professoressa che le metteva sempre lo stesso voto e che a suo parere aveva un pregiudizio nei suoi confronti. Finché è stata sostituita da un'altra insegnante che apprezzava il suo modo di scrivere e le dava voti più alti.

Una volta ottenuto il diploma, l'intervistata decide di iscriversi nel 1984 alla facoltà di Magistero, dopo aver frequentato l'istituto magistrale. Il suo desiderio era quello di studiare le lingue, per cui sceglie l'indirizzo di lingue e letterature straniere. Anche quello è stato un periodo abbastanza complesso a causa della sua malattia, che l'ha portata a doversi operare. Intorno al 1993, dopo aver acquisito la cittadinanza italiana, partecipa ai concorsi pubblici per diventare insegnante: ad oggi sono quasi 30 anni che insegna nella scuola primaria. Nel mentre ha continuato a portare avanti la sua passione per la scrittura, tant'è che nel 2012 avviene una svolta significativa nella sua vita, afferma infatti: "è l'anno in cui ho vinto un concorso per un racconto, ed è stato insomma un anno importante perché mi ha fatto capire che quello che scrivevo poteva essere utile non solo come uno strumento, diciamo una valvola di sfogo per me, uno strumento per esprimere i miei pensieri; ma anche come uno strumento per far capire agli altri che cos'era, che cos'è, la diversità e che cosa vuol dire essere italiani di origine diversa. Questo mi è venuto in mente proprio in questo periodo". Inizia così la sua attività di impegno "per decolonizzare il pensiero" sia attraverso la scrittura, sia attraverso la sua professione d'insegnante, dichiara infatti: "ho notato nel mio piccolo mondo d'insegnante che molti non sanno che cos'è la Somalia, che rapporto c'è e c'è stato tra la Somalia e l'Italia; e quello che mi rattrista è che sono insegnanti spesso che non sanno questo. Perché quello che viene studiato nei libri di scuola è molto sintetico e soltanto la grandezza di ciò che è stato portato nei paesi colonizzati, senza nessuna considerazione della storia, della cultura, della musica, delle tradizioni dei paesi che sono stati appunto colonizzati. Quindi il mio impegno è legato più a un racconto di persona proveniente da questo paese. E quindi parlando con le persone con le quali mi sono ritrovata a lavorare, ho cercato di far capire che cosa davvero è stato fatto per esempio in Somalia dagli italiani. E spesso però mi sono ritrovata a fare dei confronti molto duri, perché dall'altra parte non c'era questa comprensione e questa consapevolezza di ciò che davvero vuol dire colonizzare un territorio [...] Non c'è

questo mettersi in gioco e cercare di capire invece ciò che è stato fatto in Eritrea, in Etiopia o in Somalia dal colonialismo italiano.”

Nel 2019 avviene un ulteriore cambiamento, in quanto l'intervistata inizia a pubblicare specificatamente poesie sul tema del razzismo; a tal proposito dice: “la mia prima forma di attivismo è stata scritta, cioè è scritta, perché io scrivo racconti, scrivo poesie e quindi attraverso la poesia mi sono trovata diciamo il mio mezzo, il mio strumento, per potermi attivare da questo punto di vista. Appunto nel 2019 è quando ho cominciato proprio a rendere pubblico quello che scrivevo.” Le sue poesie e i suoi racconti hanno iniziato infatti ad acquisire popolarità anche sui social, dove venivano riportate da altre persone e ricevevano feedback positivi. Ciò le ha permesso di stringere nuove conoscenze e di sviluppare anche un fruttuoso lavoro di rete, che l'ha portata in questi ultimi anni a rendere il suo impegno “più impellente”. Spiega infatti che, grazie anche ai social media, si è sviluppato un dibattito molto vivo che coinvolge diverse generazioni (sia di persone nate in Italia, sia di persone cresciute in Italia con origine diversa) riguardo ai fatti che avvengono a livello nazionale, con il desiderio di attivarsi per contrastare la permanenza di razzismo e discriminazioni in Italia.

In conclusione, ripensando alla storia vissuta ricorda come significative le date del 1 luglio 1960 (per la Somalia) e del 25 aprile 1945 (per l'Italia). La prima è la data in cui la Somalia ha ottenuto l'indipendenza, a tal proposito l'intervistata dichiara: “è il momento in cui i somali si riconoscono tutti come somali, è il momento in cui si urla la gioia di essere somali. Quindi per me è importante, perché è un rivalutare ciò che era la Somalia della mia infanzia, la Somalia della gioventù di mia mamma, dei miei genitori, quindi è più la Somalia bella che ricordo attraverso di loro. E una data importante dell'Italia, allora se devo associare questi due miei paesi che sono in me, una data che ritengo importante è il 25 Aprile”. Queste parole esprimono una connessione tra Italia e Somalia anche a livello di memoria storica, oltre che a livello di vita personale. Vicende storiche e vicende biografiche quindi si intrecciano.

IT-bio-7

L'intervistata è nata a inizio anni '90 in Veneto e racconta di conoscere l'Etiopia solo attraverso i racconti della madre etiope. Più precisamente la madre è cresciuta a Mogadiscio, poiché i nonni materni sono stati deportati in Somalia durante l'invasione italiana in Etiopia, quando ancora non si conoscevano (si sono conosciuti e sposati in Somalia). La madre è stata quindi pochi anni ad Addis Abeba: ha vissuto a Mogadiscio fino all'età di circa 13 anni e poi, neanche ventenne, si è trasferita in Italia. L'intervistata spiega che la madre ha studiato alle scuole italiane tanto che “la sua prima nazionalità è italiana e solo in seconda battuta è etiope o somala”. Il padre è invece romano, ma i genitori dopo essersi conosciuti hanno deciso di trasferirsi a vivere in Veneto per ragioni lavorative. Racconta che avendo una “parte africana della famiglia e una parte romana”, la disgregazione è stata una caratteristica costante della vita familiare. A proposito della diaspora dichiara infatti: “diaspora per me ha significato doversi misurare diciamo con i pregiudizi della gente, fondamentalmente; ma io di mio sicuramente ho avuto dei contrasti molto forti, poi crescendo con la mia parte diciamo africana della famiglia [...] E quindi anche all'interno della mia famiglia ci siamo sparpagliati tantissimo, divisi molto. E per me la diaspora è disgregazione, cambiamento. È un cambiamento non tanto di valori, perché secondo me non è una

questione di valori, almeno per la maggior parte di noi, ma è proprio una questione di visione del mondo diversa.”

L'intervistata spiega di essere cresciuta in Veneto in una famiglia abbastanza matriarcale, in quanto costituita principalmente da donne, e di aver avuto contatti soprattutto con “la parte nera della famiglia”. Durante la sua infanzia sono stati significativi i modelli rappresentati dalle due cugine maggiori e dalla madre; quest'ultima in particolare è stata un punto di riferimento per lei per quanto riguarda un'educazione femminista. Le raccontava per esempio che il padre si è imposto nella scelta del suo nome, senza considerare la volontà materna; riflesso anche di una mentalità maschilista dello Stato italiano, che non consente alle donne di avere lo stesso peso degli uomini nel riconoscimento dei figli. Anche i racconti delle zie sono stati significativi per l'intervistata, permettendole di sviluppare una sorta di memoria storica. In particolare, ricorda come significativo il fatto che la zia maggiore abbia lo stesso nome di una regina etiope, Zauditù (Zewditu), la quale - come la zia le ha raccontato - a causa di un complotto dovuto al suo essere donna è stata spodestata dal trono di imperatrice, pur essendo la legittima erede d'Etiopia. Zauditù era la figlia maggiore di Menelik II e restò in carica dal 1916 al 1930, anche se inizialmente le era impedito esercitare il potere (n.d.r.). Nel 1930, anno della sua morte, è diventato imperatore Haile Selassie; tuttavia diverse sono le voci che circolano sull'assassinio di Zauditù tramite avvelenamento. L'intervistata racconta infatti che la figura dell'imperatore Hailé Selassie è stata a suo parere idealizzata su molti fronti.

A parte la famiglia matriarcale, trascorre un'adolescenza molto difficile per alcune ingiustizie subite, finché nel 2012 consegue il diploma che ha segnato per lei una vera e propria “liberazione dal contesto scolastico”. All'età di 20 anni, si concretizza l'ambiente di femminismo respirato in famiglia, in quando inizia ad usare i social per informarsi maggiormente e sensibilizzare su tematiche femministe. A tal proposito dichiara: “ho iniziato a studiare e la cosa che mi ha colpito di più è la questione della tratta e della prostituzione, e del modo in cui viene trattata culturalmente la prostituzione [...] È la tragedia di molte ragazze, anche più piccole di me all'epoca. Anche adesso ovviamente, però all'epoca mi colpiva che fossero più piccole di me, e quindi in generale la cosa che sento più vicina al mio cuore, sebbene avessi subito molto razzismo anche da piccola, è questa”. Si iscrive così alla facoltà di scienze politiche, indirizzo relazioni internazionali e diritti umani, dell'università di ****, dove si laurea nel 2016. Rimpiange di non aver fatto anche la laurea magistrale. In ogni caso il 2016 è stato uno degli anni più importanti della sua vita, in cui ha fatto anche un viaggio molto significativo in Australia per svolgere un'esperienza lavorativa.

Il suo impegno è iniziato proprio intorno ai 20 anni e ha trovato espressione nella sua tesi di laurea: “ho scritto una tesi di laurea riguardo a prostituzione, diritti umani e sistemi legislativi in Europa sulla questione costituzionale;” -racconta- “mentre invece per quanto riguarda il razzismo, piano piano sono riuscita a trovare anche quest'associazione. Ci ho messo molto tempo in realtà a trovare altri ragazzi afro-discendenti con cui parlare.” L'associazione a cui si riferisce ha l'obiettivo di dare visibilità agli italiani con background migratorio e di promuovere un'idea di Africa che superi gli stereotipi esistenti. L'intervistata collabora dal 2018 (anno significativo per la sua attività di impegno) con questa associazione, con la quale ha svolto varie attività nelle scuole insieme agli studenti su educazione civica e altre tematiche. Al momento l'obiettivo su cui stanno lavorando è la campagna *Dalla parte giusta della storia*, finalizzata a riformare la legge sulla cittadinanza in Italia. La sua battaglia principale

resta però, accanto a quella femminista, quella contro la prostituzione e la tratta di esseri umani. L'intervistata approfondisce questo punto dichiarando: "io se potessi... e mi sembra sempre di avere poca agency, poca possibilità di fare, soprattutto da sola. Però a me interessano di più proprio le persone, gli ultimi, quindi la questione migratoria, la questione del caporalato, la questione della prostituzione, cioè per me quello è lavorare, perché penso che siano poi questioni che rientrano sempre all'interno di un quadro più grande di sfruttamento che minaccia anche il benessere diciamo degli italiani autoctoni no?".

Negli ultimi anni ha avviato inoltre il suo percorso lavorativo come giornalista: dal 2018 si occupa di social media management, dal 2020 ha iniziato a scrivere articoli e ora sta facendo il praticantato per diventare giornalista. Nel 2020 in realtà stava per trasferirsi a vivere a Londra, ma a causa dell'esplosione della pandemia di Covid ha deciso di tornare in Italia, dove ha iniziato a scrivere articoli per un piccolo giornale online con il quale racconta di avere un'esperienza molto positiva. In seguito alle esperienze maturate nella sua vita, spiega che l'identità per lei è un processo e si sviluppa grazie alla relazione con le altre persone, pertanto ha un carattere mutevole e non fisso. Ad oggi le sfide per il suo futuro sono diverse, tra cui quella di creare un podcast di tipo giornalistico in cui vorrebbe raccontare l'invasione italiana in Etiopia attraverso le voci di chi l'ha vissuta, in particolare tramite le testimonianze di sua mamma e di altre persone che ha conosciuto nel corso della sua vita.

IT-bio-9

L'intervistata non vuole specificare la sua età, è nata in Eritrea e ha frequentato le scuole in Eritrea, proseguendo poi gli studi presso l'Università di Asmara. Menziona come particolarmente significativi gli anni '70 in quanto è stato il periodo in cui è arrivata in Italia e si è distaccata dalla sua famiglia. Lo ricorda come una fase conflittuale della sua vita. Inizialmente doveva emigrare in Canada per studiare, ma i suoi genitori preferivano che stesse insieme ai suoi fratelli in Italia (seppur in città diverse). La sorella dell'intervistata si è stabilita così a Padova, dove si è laureata in medicina specializzandosi in pediatria e dove ora lavora come pediatra e fisiatra; mentre il fratello si è laureato in architettura, per poi trasferirsi a vivere a Londra dove si trova tuttora. L'intervistata si è stabilita invece a Milano, dove ha continuato gli studi universitari iscrivendosi alla facoltà di scienze politiche dell'Università Cattolica di Milano. Qui ricorda di aver vissuto un episodio spiacevole, ma significativo, di discussione con un professore che riteneva il colonialismo italiano come positivo per il Corno d'Africa. L'aver contraddetto questo pensiero, sostenendo che il colonialismo ha causato distruzione, ha portato l'intervistata a cambiare università e a iscriversi a scienze politiche presso l'università degli studi di Milano.

Terminati gli studi politici, ha deciso di specializzarsi anche in un ambito totalmente diverso: medicina Ayurveda, un campo che la appassionava molto. Si tratta di un tipo di medicina che si è sviluppato in India, motivo per cui l'intervistata ogni tre o sei mesi doveva recarsi nello stato asiatico per seguire le lezioni del suo professore, con il quale aveva concordato un determinato programma che le permetteva di studiare senza doversi trasferire in modo permanente in India. L'intervistata continua tuttora (seppur

conclusi gli studi) a recarsi in India per periodi brevi per svolgere ricerche e per aggiornarsi.

Una volta conseguite le due lauree in scienze politiche e in medicina Ayurveda, l'intervistata è stata assunta come consulente presso una grande azienda a Milano. Si trattava di un'impresa internazionale che all'epoca voleva installare dei terminali bancari in Africa. Sostiene di essere stata assunta anche grazie alla sua conoscenza delle lingue italiana, inglese, francese, araba e tigrina. Lavorò per quest'azienda fino a inizio anni '90, quando decise di cambiare professione poiché le attività aziendali non le bastavano più. È in quel periodo che è iniziato il suo impegno, innescato da un avvenimento che lei stessa ricorda come particolarmente significativo: l'incontro in Sudan con 5 ragazzi soli su un marciapiede, dei quali il maggiore dell'età di 13 anni. Alla sua offerta di aiutarli, il maggiore rispose che non avevano bisogno di nulla e che lui si sarebbe occupato dei più piccoli. Questa frase colpì molto l'intervistata in quanto espressione di un forte impegno per la vita e di altruismo verso persone che il ragazzino nemmeno conosceva. I ragazzi infatti non erano fratelli, ma erano sopravvissuti ad un bombardamento e, avendo perso tutti i familiari, erano riusciti a raggiungere il Sudan. Da quell'incontro è scattato nell'intervistata il desiderio di mettere a disposizione le proprie risorse per aiutare gli altri e quindi di cominciare il suo impegno sociale. Ha iniziato così a recarsi con i suoi collaboratori nei vari campi profughi, per esempio in Etiopia avevano, in un solo campo, 1500 bambini dai tre ai sei anni a cui davano un pasto al giorno. In Etiopia, ma anche in Costa d'Avorio, si è attivata per fornire i beni che mancavano e per dare assistenza (ad esempio mulini per macinare il grano, latte per i bambini, medicine antimalariche, etc.). Con i loro interventi cercavano di supportare in particolare anziani, bambini, donne, investendo anche sul lavoro di ricerca e di women empowerment. In particolare, per le donne che avevano subito maltrattamenti venivano messe a disposizione delle case di protezione in attesa di una soluzione alternativa, inserendo anche diverse di loro nel *CAM Generated* in modo che potessero trovare un lavoro e diventare indipendenti.

Dopo anni di impegno, l'intervistata ha deciso di fondare l'ONG *Gandhi Charity*: la prima sede è stata quella realizzata in Costa d'Avorio intorno al 2000; successivamente è stata fondata la sede in Etiopia, in altri stati africani e a Milano. Questa ONG ha collaborato e collabora tuttora con diverse organizzazioni, tra cui in primis *Caritas* e in seguito anche con *Comunità Sant'Egidio* e *UNHCR*. Spiega che sono numerose le organizzazioni della diaspora con cui collaborano, ma per scelta evitano le organizzazioni impegnate politicamente. Il periodo che l'intervistata ricorda come più significativo in merito al suo impegno per la pace è quello in Sinai, dove ha lavorato per più di 7 anni ed è riuscita a liberare più di 10.000 persone dal dominio e dalle prigioni egiziane locali; mentre circa 750 persone dai beduini trafficanti di organi e di esseri umani. Riguardo a quel periodo afferma: "Non mi ricordo gli anni quali erano, ecco lì ero molto combattente per la pace, più delle altre volte [...] Però lì invece tutto il vulcano è esploso, diciamo." Nonostante il suo impegno per la pace, l'intervistata ritiene che nelle questioni per la pace tra Eritrea ed Etiopia sia tutto superficiale. Fatica a parlare della situazione attuale perché prova molta rabbia per le ingiustizie commesse, tra cui attribuire il Premio Nobel per la Pace ad una persona che ha massacrato più di un milione di persone. Molti, tra cui donne e bambini, sono morti e continuano a morire di fame e di malattie, come il diabete, per la mancanza di insulina. Lei e i suoi collaboratori devono intervenire per vie traverse poiché, da un lato, non è consentito l'accesso nel Tigrai, e dall'altro ci sono le milizie eritree in Etiopia.

In conclusione, ripensando alla storia l'intervistata sostiene che non ricorda anni particolarmente significativi nella storia dell'Italia, a parte gli anni '70 per il suo arrivo; riguardo all'Eritrea sente invece come data molto importante il 1991 (anno dell'indipendenza), in quanto ha combattuto con il Fronte Popolare, uno dei due fronti di liberazione dell'Eritrea (l'altro era il Fronte di Liberazione Eritreo). Dichiarava però di non volere approfondire il racconto di questa esperienza e si limita alle seguenti parole: "Non vorrei parlarne, non vorrei farlo, ho detto niente politica. Vabbè, era politica e c'era un mio impegno totale, a 360° gradi. Prima di fare tutte queste cose umanitarie, quando ero studentessa universitaria, è un flash back abbastanza...pesante. Non mi sarei mai aspettata che dopo l'indipendenza succedesse questo ed è una ferita ancora aperta."

IT-bio-11

L'intervistata è nata in Etiopia a inizio anni '70 ad Addis Abeba, da padre italiano e madre etiopica. Sua mamma e la famiglia materna si sentivano però in parte anche somale in quanto la madre, pur essendo di origine etiopica, era cresciuta a Mogadiscio. Nella sua vita familiare ha sperimentato il significato del colonialismo italiano, poiché il nonno materno è stato deportato dagli italiani in un campo di prigionia in Somalia, mentre il padre ha combattuto nella Seconda Guerra Mondiale e lo zio ha fatto la campagna d'Africa. Nel descrivere la sua storia familiare, sono significative le parole che lei stessa utilizza: "Nella storia della mia famiglia c'era il colonizzato e il colonizzatore [...] Quindi una situazione in cui erano compresenti le varie anime di questa situazione, che da un punto di vista anche di definizione dell'identità in un certo senso è stato molto da elaborare." Ricollega la sua storia familiare alle conseguenze che ha lasciato il colonialismo: il problema attuale italiano legato al colonialismo è a suo parere la rimozione della responsabilità coloniale. Manca infatti la volontà di assumersi la responsabilità delle azioni commesse, poiché è diffusa la convinzione che le attività di cooperazione possano rimediare al passato. Lavorare sul processo di costruzione dell'identità nazionale in relazione alla storia è invece fondamentale per far emergere aspetti positivi e negativi e far quindi evolvere il sistema sociale.

Il periodo trascorso in Etiopia con la sua famiglia è breve, infatti nel 1975 l'intervistata migra in Italia ancora molto piccola. Per questo motivo spiega che culturalmente si sente connessa soprattutto alla cultura italiana. Tuttavia, ritiene che nelle famiglie con diversi background ci sia una contaminazione culturale che rende difficile stabilire le provenienze in modo rigido e fisso. Rispetto ai genitori si definisce stanziale, in quanto è cresciuta e vive tuttora a Roma. Gli anni da bambina in Italia sono stati difficili per il clima di discriminazione presente, del quale trova una somiglianza (anche se per motivi diversi) con la discriminazione subita dalla madre in Somalia, per il fatto di essere etiope. Questa fase di sofferenza è stata però anche una fase di maturazione, in quanto ha generato in lei il desiderio di trovare delle soluzioni a questi problemi, una volta cresciuta. Nonostante le difficoltà vissute in Italia, al termine della scuola secondaria decide di proseguire gli studi in università a Roma, laureandosi in Sociologia con una tesi sul divario digitale focalizzata sulla differenza di accesso agli strumenti digitali tra il continente africano e il mondo occidentale.

È proprio negli anni universitari che prende forma il suo engagement, rivolto principalmente agli ambiti della cooperazione allo sviluppo e delle migrazioni. Spesso è

stata definita attivista, ma lei personalmente non si definisce come tale. Il significato che attribuisce al suo engagement è la concretizzazione, tramite azioni, dei valori in cui crede, per un miglioramento della società. Le motivazioni che la hanno portata ad impegnarsi su questi fronti sono state quindi l'esperienza personale e familiare, che hanno determinato la volontà di elaborare risposte a determinate situazioni per riequilibrare gli squilibri presenti nelle società. Conseguita la laurea, l'intervistata cerca quindi di collaborare con diverse ONG italiane sul tema del divario digitale, che le stava molto a cuore; ma solo dopo varie ricerche riesce ad avviare una collaborazione con una ONG. Quest'attività le permette di entrare in contatto anche con diverse associazioni delle diaspore, con le quali avvia collaborazioni sui temi di comunicazione e inclusione dei migranti, all'interno dei vari progetti di cooperazione internazionale. Per lei engagement personale e professionale coincidono, in quanto il suo lavoro è sempre stato guidato dalla necessità di trovare soluzioni efficaci anche a livello di sistema e immaginario culturale.

Al termine di questi primi anni di lavoro, iniziano gli anni che l'intervistata identifica come maggiormente significativi per il suo impegno: il 2001 per il verificarsi di una sorta di cambiamento di prospettive e per i fatti avvenuti a livello internazionale; il 2003 per l'inizio del lavoro in un'organizzazione internazionale, con il ruolo di implementatrice di progetti nel settore migrazione e sviluppo; e il 2016 per la fine del lavoro presso quest'organizzazione. In particolare, il 2016 è stato un anno di cambiamento in cui l'intervistata ha deciso di lasciare il lavoro per dedicarsi principalmente al mutamento della narrazione sulle migrazioni. Ciò non ha significato tuttavia una totale interruzione dei rapporti con l'organizzazione. Il focus del suo engagement post-2016 è principalmente incentrato sul trovare modalità per cambiare le narrazioni dominanti sui migranti. Pertanto, inizia a collaborare anche con altre realtà e organizzazioni delle diaspore in Italia, e attualmente supporta molte organizzazioni italiane nel cercare di costruire una comunicazione migliore e più attinente ai valori progressisti di cambiamento sociale.

Nel 2020 è avvenuta quella che l'intervistata definisce una "presa di coscienza", in seguito all'esplosione della pandemia di Covid. Ha notato in particolare una crescita della polarizzazione in Italia, alimentata a livello istituzionale, e una strumentalizzazione delle divisioni sociali con l'obiettivo del controllo. Il suo impegno ad oggi è quindi anche quello di combattere le divisioni e l'odio sociale in qualsiasi ambito, in quanto concepisce il suo engagement come trasversale e quindi impegnato a tutelare i diritti di tutti senza distinzioni. Partendo da questa consapevolezza, le prospettive future del suo engagement riguardano l'organizzazione di attività a livello trasversale, senza distinzione di ambiti di serie A e di serie B, con l'obiettivo di far fronte a quello che definisce come "bivio epocale". In Italia e in Europa stanno infatti avvenendo cambiamenti profondi, anche sociali, e occorre a suo parere realizzare una svolta che trasformi le società in entità più complesse ed evolute. La sua paura più grande è che si opti per la strada più semplice, ovvero per la conservazione dello status quo. A tal proposito, tema chiave secondo lei per il futuro è la necessità di cambiamento anche in merito all'impegno per la pace, non solo nel Corno d'Africa ma anche a livello globale. Uno dei problemi principali per lei è il fatto che l'ordine mondiale, e le Nazioni Unite, siano guidati da un parametro economico, che non porta a fare interventi giusti per la costruzione della pace. È necessario un cambiamento di prospettiva nel guidare le azioni internazionali. Nell'impegno in ottica di realizzazione della pace ritorna quindi l'aspetto centrale del bilanciamento degli squilibri, occupandosi del benessere delle

società non solo a livello economico, ma soprattutto a livello di riduzione della forbice tra persone povere e privilegiate, che è una costante delle società ricche. Questo divario economico e sociale sta crescendo attualmente anche nella società italiana, e invece di facilitare la pace aumenta la conflittualità. In questo discorso è centrale anche il ruolo dell'Unione Europea, che a parere dell'intervistata si è allontanata molto dall'idea dei padri fondatori di condivisione di valori comuni. È necessario per lei ripartire proprio da questi valori e tornare a parlare d'identità non in ottica nazionalista e di difesa dei confini, ma al fine di promuovere una visione di Europa che nella pratica sia realmente comune.

IT-bio-13

L'intervistata è nata a inizio anni '50 a Mogadiscio, dove ha frequentato le scuole italiane. In particolare, ha fatto le scuole superiori da privatista poichè lavorava già presso l'azienda Fiat in Somalia. Si trattava di un lavoro impegnativo, al termine del quale doveva trovare le energie per dedicarsi allo studio. Questo era una parte di quello che il regime coloniale italiano imponeva. Nel 1972 decide così di migrare in Italia per scappare dalla dittatura militare instaurata in Somalia da quasi tre anni, che comportava diversi rischi tra cui le persecuzioni. A Torino (dove oggi vive da 50 anni) decide di frequentare l'università, e si iscrive alla facoltà di lingue dell'Università degli Studi di Torino. Da studentessa conosce il futuro marito, studente di medicina, e l'idea di entrambi era quella di andare a vivere e lavorare in Somalia una volta conclusi gli studi. Tuttavia il corso della vita ha cambiato i loro piani, e, conseguita la laurea, l'intervistata ha iniziato a lavorare nel settore contabile e amministrativo per diverse imprese, tra cui un'azienda tedesca. L'esperienza passata presso la Fiat e la conoscenza delle lingue le hanno consentito di lavorare con facilità in azienda fino al 1988, anno in cui decide di licenziarsi per dedicarsi totalmente a quello che diventerà il suo impegno principale: l'integrazione in particolare delle donne migranti e la mediazione culturale.

In termini di impegno, l'intervistata spiega che, a parte i primi due o tre anni di assestamento in Italia, poco dopo il suo arrivo, e fino a 6/7 anni fa, si è dedicata insieme ad altre donne della diaspora all'organizzazione di attività per le donne principalmente con background migratorio in Italia. Si era infatti resa conto che la maggior parte delle proposte presenti sul territorio erano dedicate agli uomini. A tal proposito racconta: "il primo impegno è stato nei confronti della comunità somala e italo-somala, perché c'erano problemi di lingua, c'erano problemi non tanto di lavoro, perché comunque il lavoro in particolare le donne lo trovavano. Però c'erano problemi di isolamento sociale, perché le donne che arrivavano dalla Somalia molto spesso lavoravano come colf o come badanti fisse nelle case delle famiglie italiane, ma non avevano assolutamente nessun tipo di rapporto con le persone, con gli italiani, con i piemontesi e con i torinesi." Accanto alla problematica legata alle donne, una questione chiave che riguardava i nuovi arrivati in generale era quella linguistica. La lingua somala, infatti, iniziò ad essere insegnata nelle scuole in Somalia solo dal 1972, a causa del regime coloniale. Prima di quell'anno non esisteva come lingua scritta, di conseguenza tutte le persone che erano state scolarizzate prima del 1972 non sapevano né leggere né scrivere in somalo. A tal proposito l'intervistata spiega che molti neoarrivati in Italia sapevano l'italiano, ma non conoscevano il somalo; lei stessa si definisce analfabeta nella sua lingua madre perchè sa parlare il somalo, ma non è in grado né di leggerlo né di

scriverlo. Per far fronte a tali questioni, nel 1985 l'intervistata fondò insieme a un gruppo l'associazione italo-somala *Shabel*, e avviò a Torino corsi di somalo per gli italo-somali e corsi di italiano per i somali. Questo è stato il primo step del suo impegno sociale.

Inizialmente le donne che vi partecipavano erano soprattutto di origine somala, eritrea e filippina; l'intervistata spiega infatti che in quel periodo l'Italia stava vedendo un aumento dei flussi migratori, a cui era impreparata soprattutto per la crescente migrazione femminile. Pertanto in quegli anni le donne erano assolutamente discriminate rispetto agli uomini. Intorno al 1990 in Italia c'era un grande fermento intorno alla questione migratoria ed alla preparazione di quella che poi venne chiamata "legge Martelli". Questo coinvolgimento intorno al tema, e l'impegno profuso dall'intervistata con altre donne migranti, condusse nel 1993 alla progettazione del *Centro Interculturale delle donne Alma Mater* dell'associazione *Almaterra*. Le attività dell'associazione permettevano di creare momenti di aggregazione e di scambio per le donne, che avevano la garanzia di un luogo sicuro dove potersi incontrare. In una fase successiva, il centro *Alma Mater* e le attività ad esso legate hanno iniziato a vedere la partecipazione di donne di svariata provenienza, tra cui anche italiane che hanno deciso di accogliere la sfida dell'interculturalità: l'obiettivo del centro era infatti coinvolgere anche le donne e le istituzioni italiane per un cambiamento positivo.

Riguardo al significato del suo impegno, l'intervistata racconta: "parto dalla parola attivismo perché io non mi sento di essere etichettata in quanto attivista, anche perché, voglio dire, alla mia età ormai posso essere poco attiva, preferisco il termine impegnata [...] Insomma, è un termine forse più forte di impegnata, anche perché come impegno secondo me ci sono diversi tipi di impegni."

Ad oggi l'intervistata riesce a conciliare la sua vita privata (ha 2 figli e 5 nipoti) con la sua attività lavorativa e di engagement, che nel corso degli anni ha portato anche alla realizzazione di alcuni cambiamenti in Italia: l'inserimento di mediatrici e mediatori in enti pubblici, che hanno avuto la possibilità di ampliare l'offerta dei loro servizi; la presenza di persone con background migratorio nelle istituzioni pubbliche; l'inserimento dell'educazione interculturale nelle scuole. A tal proposito afferma, per concludere: "la formazione e l'educazione nelle scuole, secondo me, produce un cambiamento e ha provocato un cambiamento. Quello che io non trovo, è un cambiamento nella classe politica."

IT-bio-14

L'intervistata è nata a fine anni '40 in un villaggio dell'Etiopia, da madre etiope e padre piemontese. Racconta di aver vissuto parte della sua infanzia (fino all'età scolare) in questo villaggio, in una famiglia di commercianti di caffè che definisce "armonica", anche se con diversità interne. Il padre era infatti un uomo che definisce "con la carnagione chiara", mentre la madre aveva la carnagione scura. Giunte all'età scolare, lei e la sorella furono mandate dal padre a studiare a Khartum in Sudan, con grande dispiacere della madre. Si trattava di una scelta inevitabile poiché nel villaggio in cui erano cresciute c'era solo una scuola con un'insegnante; i bambini più grandi erano infatti anche insegnanti dei più piccoli. L'intervistata ricorda l'esperienza sudanese come positiva, nonostante abbia sofferto la mancanza materna. In Sudan vivevano gli zii

e il cugino e lì ha iniziato ad entrare in contatto con la globalizzazione; racconta infatti “c’erano tante cose nuove: c’era il cinema, c’era la Coca Cola, c’era la Halawa” (n.d.r. Halawa è una sorta di dolce a base miele, e sesamo).

Terminate le scuole in Sudan, l’intervistata si sposta ad Asmara dove frequenta la scuola media e superiore con indirizzo magistrale: si tratta della migliore scuola italiana dell’Eritrea. Qui impara l’italiano e inizia a conoscere anche la religione cristiana. Racconta che ad Asmara c’erano tante scuole italiane: liceo scientifico, liceo classico, scuole di ragioneria. Ricorda la fase dell’adolescenza trascorsa al Collegio *Sacra Famiglia* (dal 1964 al 1968 circa) come un periodo “meraviglioso, ma anche di lotte e di disubbidienze”: ha stretto amicizie con le altre ragazze, ma ha anche vissuto l’eredità del colonialismo. Al collegio c’erano infatti molte figlie dei soldati che erano state abbandonate e perciò erano trattate come serve. “Erano le mie amiche, ho patito molto questa cosa”, spiega; “vedevo tante ingiustizie nei confronti delle donne di servizio, nei confronti di queste amiche, lì ho sviluppato l’impegno, ma non sapevo che stavo imparando a difendere i più deboli. Lo capisci dopo, quando cresci.” Durante la vita in collegio, l’intervistata racconta di aver imparato molto dalle varie esperienze fatte: ha appreso a non classificare le persone sulla base etnica, in quanto a scuola c’erano studenti greci, italiani, armeni, russi, americani, arabi, abissini, e di altre provenienze. A livello sportivo è stata invece capitana della squadra di pallacanestro della scuola, dove ha appreso l’importanza delle regole.

Terminate le scuole ad Asmara (durante le quali ha perso la madre, morta molto giovane), il padre fa acquisire a lei e alla sorella la cittadinanza italiana. Poiché come cittadine italiane non potevano lavorare ad Asmara, a inizio anni ’70 si trasferiscono a vivere a Torino: prima la sorella maggiore e poi lei. Il trasferimento in Italia è avvenuto a ridosso di un momento storico che l’intervistata ricorda come negativamente significativo: l’ascesa al potere nel 1975, in Etiopia, del dittatore Menghistu Hailé Mariam, in seguito alla morte dell’imperatore Hailé Selassié. Il padre aveva comprato alle due sorelle un appartamento a Torino, ma non era la prima volta che le due ragazze andavano in Italia, poiché il papà le aveva portate spesso dai parenti paterni. All’intervistata è sempre piaciuta l’Italia, perché fin da piccola l’ha associata a una “terra di vacanza”. Al momento del trasferimento permanente vive però il tema della sua identità in modo complesso, dichiara infatti: “Non sono italiana, non sono etiope, oppure sono italiana e sono etiope, però in mezzo a queste due, quante me ci sono? Quindi all’inizio la costruzione della mia identità è stata dura, durissima, ma per colpa degli altri non per colpa mia. [...] Io sono un puzzle di tutto e non voglio rinunciare a niente”.

Dopo qualche anno a Torino decide di iscriversi alla facoltà di scienze politiche dell’università statale; la sua idea iniziale era in realtà quella di trasferirsi a Londra con la speranza che fosse un luogo più multiculturale dell’Italia. Nel mentre ha però incontrato il futuro marito, e decide pertanto di stabilirsi definitivamente a Torino. Durante l’università, il suo impegno sorto nell’adolescenza continua e prende una forma più sistematica: essendosi diplomata ad Asmara come maestra, inizia a seguire un corso per insegnare alla scuola ortofrenica con i soggetti disabili. Poiché amava aiutare chi ha bisogno, inizia ad insegnare a individui portatori di handicap e fa il suo lavoro con passione. Tuttavia, poiché nel 1980 resta incinta della seconda figlia, per precauzione deve lasciare l’insegnamento (a scuola c’erano infatti alcuni soggetti violenti). La nascita delle figlie (la prima nata nel 1972) sono stati due momenti meravigliosi per

l'intervistata, come in generale tutta la sua vita familiare. Racconta che sono entrambe laureate e sono due donne meravigliose che ama ma molto.

Abbandonato quindi l'insegnamento, decide di provare una serie di concorsi per entrare nell'amministrazione, e riesce a superarli. Con l'inizio del lavoro d'ufficio nella pubblica amministrazione torinese è costretta a lasciare l'università; continua però a studiare da autodidatta. In questi anni di studio e lavoro, l'intervistata incontra e inizia a frequentare altre persone immigrate in Italia, con le quali decide di avviare dei progetti. In particolare, durante gli anni di maggiore flusso migratorio (dal 1980 in poi) sente la necessità di attivarsi maggiormente sul territorio, poichè spiega "cominci ad essere anche tu l'immigrata che fino a quel momento non avevano visto." Insieme ad altre donne con background migratorio sviluppa quindi un obiettivo comune: quello di chiedere all'amministrazione pubblica di dare degli spazi alle persone (in particolare donne) che arrivavano a Torino e che si riunivano in associazioni; le associazioni erano infatti molte ma non avevano spazi. La loro iniziativa è stata ostacolata dall'amministrazione torinese, tant'è che inizia a prendere forma l'idea di creare un'unica associazione femminile, dal momento che le richieste rivolte alla pubblica amministrazione erano uguali per tutte le associazioni. Creare un'unica associazione avrebbe quindi semplificato le cose.

Parallelamente, l'intervistata inizia ad intervistare, con un gruppo dell'IRES Cgil Piemonte, gli immigrati che arrivavano a Torino per capire come giungevano e che attività svolgevano. Questo lavoro darà vita al libro "Uguali e Diversi", pubblicato nel 1991. L'idea di creare un'unica associazione si concretizza invece nel 1993 quando fonda, insieme ad altre donne, il *Centro Interculturale delle Donne Alma Mater* come spazio di aggregazione femminile. Mentre per gli uomini con background migratorio esistevano infatti molti spazi e servizi, per le donne c'era poco: mancavano servizi ginecologici al femminile che potessero ovviare ai problemi culturali di coloro che non volevano farsi visitare da ginecologi uomini; servivano servizi di mediazione culturale agli sportelli per fare il documento d'identità o per la comunicazione medica. L'obiettivo di *Alma Mater* "era anche quello di far capire alla pubblica amministrazione e ai cittadini che non tutte le donne che arrivavano nel momento successivo a noi, dopo la prima generazione, fossero prostitute o ignoranti. Intanto abbiamo fatto con le donne che arrivavano; perché tutte avevano un lavoro nel loro paese e sono scappate o perché c'era la guerra, o perché c'era la dittatura eccetera. Per cui venendo qua non potevi buttare via questa ricchezza, e l'abbiamo utilizzata tutta, abbiamo fatto dei corsi per mediatori e mediatrici culturali", spiega l'intervistata.

Gli anni del centro *Alma Mater* sono stati gli anni più importanti nell'impegno dell'intervistata, anche se complessi in quanto era spesso in ospedale per un tumore alla testa. Tuttavia, ha cercato di essere presente il più possibile conciliando il lavoro nella pubblica amministrazione con le attività al centro interculturale, dove inizia con altre donne a sviluppare anche il laboratorio teatrale chiamato *Almateatro*. Nasce anch'esso nei primi anni '90 come gruppo informale di 18 donne provenienti da paesi diversi, che nel 2010 si formalizza nell'associazione *Almateatro*. L'intervistata racconta di aver scritto gran parte del primo spettacolo andato in scena, riguardante la storia di una donna eritrea che arrivava in Italia per scappare dalla guerra. Il messaggio che voleva trasmettere era che la guerra può togliere tutto, ma non può privare nessuno/a del proprio nome. Con questo messaggio l'intento era quello di ricordare a ciascuno/a l'importanza di rimanere persone umane. Il tema della guerra e della pace si riflette nella vita dell'intervistata non solo negli spettacoli di *Almateatro*, ma anche nel lavoro

di “educazione interculturale alla pace e alla mondialità” iniziato come volontaria con il centro *Alma Mater*. Quest’ultimo ha avviato infatti una serie di laboratori nelle scuole, inizialmente dalle scuole elementari fino all’università; in seguito sin dall’asilo. Tale scelta è stata dovuta alla necessità di insegnare ai bambini, sin dai primi anni di vita, l’educazione interculturale e alla pace. L’impegno per la pace è centrale per l’intervistata ed è rivolto a qualsiasi paese in un’ottica di sostegno e interconnessione mondiali, senza distinzioni etniche. Per questo suo impegno vince anche il premio per la pace Anna Kuliscioff, nello specifico per aver scritto una poesia dedicata alle donne eritree nel momento in cui è scoppiata la guerra tra Etiopia ed Eritrea. In quell’occasione aveva ricevuto alcune critiche per il fatto di aver mostrato solidarietà con le donne eritree, pur essendo di origine etiope. Solidarietà che motiva con le seguenti parole: “Allora per me insegnare ad amare la pace vuol dire avere il rispetto per tutti i popoli del mondo. Quando andavo nelle scuole a fare questo lavoro, dicevo ai ragazzi: in tutte le altre parti del mondo la pace è importante perché ci fa capire anche che tutto quello che noi abbiamo arriva da fuori. Allora dobbiamo fare in modo che queste altre parti del mondo non guadagnino solo mezzo centesimo per raccogliere il cotone. Bisogna sforzarsi perché tutti abbiano almeno il necessario per vivere”. Per l’intervistata impegnarsi per la pace significa quindi sviluppare una solidarietà oltre le divisioni etniche, così come continuare a ricordare e a tramandare questo impegno attraverso le generazioni, al pari della memoria coloniale, che ha conservato grazie ai racconti del padre sugli orrori del colonialismo italiano.

Il suo engagement, in una forte dimensione collettiva grazie alla cooperazione con le altre donne del *Centro Alma Mater*, ha portato inoltre diversi cambiamenti nella società italiana, in particolare negli anni ‘80 e ‘90. Diversi sono gli esempi che l’intervistata riporta: la scoperta di altri popoli e altre culture, nuove conoscenze riguardo a cibo, danze e letture, etc. I racconti realizzati nelle scuole e nelle università, in particolare, hanno coinvolto sia bambini che insegnanti, portando tutti a capirsi e non a combattersi.

In conclusione, l’intervistata racconta che il suo impegno continua ancora oggi all’età di oltre 70 anni, pur con ritmi più lenti. Il suo sforzo è quello di cercare di essere sempre presente in caso di necessità o di un’iniziativa importante del *Centro Alma Mater* e di *Almateatro*. Sottolinea infatti l’urgenza di non potersi fermare per il futuro: “c’è bisogno di continuare a fare quello che abbiamo fatto;” -afferma- “c’è bisogno di andare nelle scuole a parlare, a farsi vedere, a raccontare di quanto è brutta la guerra, perché chi l’ha vista la può raccontare. Occorre educare alla pace anche all’interno della scuola e quando bisticciano i bambini è importante che bisticcino, fa parte della loro formazione, però dopo parli di pace e dici di fare la pace. Sono parole così semplici, sembrano inutili, ma non lo sono”.

IT-bio-15

L’intervistata è nata ad Asmara a fine anni ‘50 ed è arrivata in Italia molto giovane, all’età di 16 anni, per ricongiungersi con i genitori che vivevano in Italia già da quasi due anni per fuggire dalla situazione politica eritrea. Il suo arrivo in Italia è stato difficile, nelle sue parole dice infatti: “Ero la figlia maggiore di 8 figli, stavo diventando adolescente e mi hanno catapultato da mattina a sera, non sapevo neanche cos’era l’Italia, dov’era l’Italia. [...] Senza averlo pianificato, senza averlo scelto, senza averlo voluto. Quindi è stato uno strappo.” I primi tre anni in Italia sono stati di smarrimento e

di tentativo di inserimento in un contesto sociale totalmente differente; ha frequentato il liceo e subito dopo si è iscritta alla scuola dei servizi sociali a Milano. Non è mancato il legame con la comunità della diaspora eritrea, composta però all'epoca prevalentemente da adulti, che erano quasi tutti analfabeti e lavoravano nei servizi di assistenza alla persona. Per lei diaspora significa e ha significato disgregazione. La sua famiglia (termine con il quale intende il suo nucleo familiare più stretto, ovvero la famiglia che ha creato in Italia, i suoi genitori e i suoi otto fratelli) è infatti sparsa per il mondo. In particolare, dei suoi fratelli alcuni sono morti in guerra, due vivono in Svezia, due in Germania, uno vive in Olanda e due o tre in Italia.

Del suo vissuto in Italia nel periodo post-arrivo racconta di aver instaurato reti importanti di supporto, con l'idea tuttavia che dopo pochi anni sarebbe ritornata in Eritrea. Per aiutare gli altri membri della comunità ha dovuto imparare l'italiano, che ha appreso in soli sei mesi portandosi sempre in tasca una radiolina, dopo aver trascorso i primi mesi in Italia senza pronunciare nemmeno una parola per timore di sbagliare e di essere rimproverata dal padre. Il padre e la madre parlavano infatti l'italiano perfettamente, avendolo imparato sotto il dominio coloniale. Del colonialismo italiano in Eritrea c'è molto da raccontare: l'Italia non si è attivata per riparare al proprio passato come hanno fatto altri paesi quali Francia e Germania, che hanno riconosciuto dei percorsi preferenziali per i cittadini degli stati colonizzati in passato. I genitori dell'intervistata erano stati costretti a imparare l'italiano nel loro paese e hanno entrambi lavorato con i colonizzatori italiani. In Eritrea vigeva un regime di segregazione per cui c'era la separazione di cinema e luoghi pubblici per indigeni e per italiani; per lavorare con gli italiani occorreva infatti avere un pass specifico. La colonizzazione e l'apprendimento forzato dell'italiano ha influenzato anche il lessico locale. In Eritrea sono cresciuti infatti contaminati dalla lingua italiana a tal punto che gran parte del loro lessico quotidiano risente dell'italiano: molte persone usano parole pensando che siano in lingua Tigrigna, senza sapere che derivano dall'italiano. E ciò va a discapito della ricchezza delle lingue locali. Il problema che persiste legato al colonialismo italiano riguarda anche il negazionismo sostenuto ancora da molti e assecondato anche da alcune persone in Eritrea; racconta infatti: "alcuni in Eritrea assecondano questa versione, l'Eritrea è stata costruita, certo loro la hanno disegnata, ma la fatica l'hanno fatta i nostri nonni, i nostri padri voglio dire. Rispetto a quello che ha lasciato è tanto quello che ha tolto. Io ho il nonno, il padre di mia madre, che è morto in guerra a fianco degli italiani [...] Perché erano contadini e non sapevano niente, gli davano qualcosa magari. Quindi è una storia pesante, lacerante, dove l'Italia comunque rifiuta di fare il punto su questa storia. Negli anni usciva fuori Montanelli quando era in vita, ogni tanto scriveva di quelle cose assurde." L'intervistata sottolinea che questa storia dolorosa non va rimossa, ma va ricordata la sua violenza, anche sulle spose bambine, e la manipolazione sulle persone.

Con ancora viva in lei questa ferita coloniale, dopo un breve periodo di stabilizzazione nel contesto italiano prende forma il suo engagement, che è nato sin da subito e in modo naturale come servizio verso gli altri. Il significato del suo impegno per lei deriva dalla traiettoria di vita; ritiene che sia le inclinazioni personali sia specifici percorsi di vita generano un determinato tipo di engagement. Il suo è un impegno che si collega alla politica, ma che è anche sociale e culturale. Lo definisce come "una sorta di scelta di vita, in base alle esperienze ti fai forza per diventare strumento di cambiamento." Negli anni '70, quando l'intervistata inizia ad attivarsi aiutando le persone più fragili, viene a contatto sempre più con le dinamiche discriminatorie del

contesto italiano, nel quale all'epoca non esistevano leggi sull'immigrazione e il permesso di soggiorno doveva essere rinnovato ogni tre mesi, altrimenti le persone immigrate avrebbero rischiato l'espulsione dal suolo nazionale. Per aiutare ed informare chi ha bisogno, si attiva inizialmente individualmente, e in seguito con altre coetanee di origine eritrea: intorno alla cappella eritrea di viale Piave, in zona Porta Venezia a Milano, si sviluppa così un luogo di aggregazione e di aiuto, dove le donne che lavoravano a Milano da ormai cinque o sei anni venivano accompagnate dal proprio datore di lavoro. Si trattava di donne che arrivavano da condizioni molto difficili; in questo spazio in cui ognuna si occupava dell'altra, le donne iniziano a conoscere la mediazione, la contrattazione, il funzionamento burocratico italiano. È proprio in tale luogo che l'intervistata conosce per la prima volta il sindacato.

Il suo impegno inizia così ad articolarsi anche al di fuori della comunità eritrea e a livelli diversi (politico, sociale e culturale). A livello politico è cominciato con il supporto all'Eritrea, in primis nel Fronte di Liberazione per liberare l'Eritrea, diventando poi responsabile dell'organizzazione del fronte popolare dell'Eritrea nel Nord Europa e, nel 1977, presidente della comunità eritrea in Italia. Nel mentre ha iniziato a frequentare la scuola per i servizi sociali, al termine della quale è diventata la prima assistente sociale di origine immigrata presso l'Ufficio Immigrazione del Comune di Milano. Descrive quegli anni come un periodo in cui il suo impegno politico era molto intenso e le ha permesso di ampliare la sua rete al di fuori della comunità eritrea: frequentava CGL, ambienti femministi, e le donne del PC. Grazie a questo suo impegno sono nate anche collaborazioni con alcune femministe che hanno permesso di realizzare i primi lavori sulla condizione delle donne immigrate in Italia. Inoltre, ciò ha contribuito alla fondazione della scuola di italiano per persone immigrate creata in via Pisacane per insegnare a leggere e scrivere in particolare alle donne, ma anche a chiunque avesse bisogno. Nel progettare questa scuola si è sviluppata una fruttuosa collaborazione con alcune insegnanti italiane.

Uno degli aspetti chiave che hanno accompagnato l'intervistata nei suoi vari livelli di impegno è stato il desiderio di crearsi una propria comunità oltre i confini di quella d'origine e composta da persone con cui condivideva idee e progetti. Negli anni in cui ha lavorato come assistente sociale presso il Comune di Milano, che ricorda come molto belli e proficui, ha fondato nel 1989 anche la cooperativa sociale *Il Tropico*, della quale è stata presidente fino al 2016: fu la prima cooperativa con una presidente immigrata. L'intervistata è stata inoltre la prima ad aver gestito la struttura di accoglienza più grande di Milano, grazie alla quale sono stati organizzati vari corsi di formazione per comunità migranti e soprattutto per le donne. Nel 1997 avviene un ulteriore cambiamento nella sua vita: deve lasciare il lavoro presso l'Ufficio Immigrazione in quanto è stata eletta come consigliera comunale a Milano per un mandato. Gli anni da consigliera nel Partito Democratico sono stati belli ma impegnativi, anche perché era il periodo di boom della Lega: spesso doveva girare per la città con la scorta per proteggersi da aggressioni, ma mai ha pensato di tirarsi indietro. Durante le riunioni comunali le capitava spesso di conservare una posizione indipendente, in quanto non sempre condivideva le posizioni del PD dell'epoca, sentendosi più affine al partito di Rifondazione Comunista.

Come bilancio dell'impegno in generale, l'intervistata spiega che ci sono state varie fasi nell'attivismo: una fase iniziale in cui ciascun gruppo si organizzava a livello nazionale per poi aggregarsi e dar vita a un coordinamento con tutti i gruppi di origine immigrata; e una fase successiva, di evoluzione, che ha visto la creazione di "reti fluide"

non basate sul fattore della nazionalità. Un esempio è stata la creazione della rete *Cittadini dal Mondo* a Milano, che è stata fatta poi confluire nel Forum omonimo, comprendente 42 nazionalità diverse. Dal 2001 fino al 2018 circa è stata inoltre dirigente della Lega di cooperative sia a livello nazionale, che regionale. I valori che la hanno mossa ad impegnarsi in tutte queste attività sono stati anzitutto la giustizia sociale: l'ambiente e il modo in cui è cresciuta le ha permesso infatti di maturare una coscienza su tale tema. Dopodiché considera centrali e irrinunciabili anche i valori dell'indipendenza, dell'autodeterminazione della persona e della libertà individuale. Sulla base di questi valori concepisce il suo impegno come attivismo: "l'impegno è attivismo, l'attivismo è praticare ogni giorno, è rivendicare ed elaborare strategie politiche per far valere i propri diritti, null'altro. E io lo sono dal primo giorno che ho messo piede in questo paese. Oggi magari un po' disincantata, forse delusa, perché come ti dicevo stiamo ancora parlando di diritto di cittadinanza [...] Un paese che sul tema dell'immigrazione ha molte lacune, quindi questo ti disarmo diciamo."

Oggi spiega che è giunta quasi al termine della sua attività lavorativa (anche se continua ad essere attiva) e sta gestendo lo sportello del lavoro a Milano, a supporto di tutte le persone disoccupate. In tutti questi anni di vita e operato in Italia vede la realizzazione di diversi cambiamenti. Il cambiamento è visibile secondo lei a diversi livelli, anzitutto in termini di composizione sociale e di temi che vengono affrontati pubblicamente dalle persone con background migratorio, in particolare da donne delle diaspore, che ad oggi ricoprono anche ruoli di rilievo. Rispetto all'Italia degli anni '70 e '80 sono stati fatti diversi passi in avanti, nonostante la strada per un reale cambiamento sia ancora lunga; sicuramente rileva un maggiore protagonismo del mondo femminile della diaspora. Quest'ultima conta quattro generazioni presenti in Italia e mostra una crescita dell'impegno e dei cambiamenti realizzati nel passaggio da una generazione all'altra. Secondo l'intervistata è in corso una trasformazione della società che continuerà anche in futuro: il cambiamento è visibile a livello professionale, intellettuale, economico, sociale e manageriale, poiché molte donne legate alle diaspore del Corno d'Africa, ma non solo, sono ad oggi politiche, scrittrici, intellettuali, poetesse, docenti, manager. Tuttavia si tratta di un cambiamento ancora piccolo; pertanto, l'aspetto su cui secondo lei è necessario lavorare maggiormente in futuro per portare avanti questa trasformazione è la politica, in quanto è l'ambito dove vengono prese le scelte principali. In conclusione, il suo augurio per il futuro è quindi quello di vedere un'Italia che sia realmente più equa e che combatta seriamente le questioni legate al razzismo e all'ingiustizia sociale.

FIN-bio-1

The interviewee was born in Mogadiscio in the 1970s. She attended primary and secondary school in Mogadiscio and she remembers her childhood in Somalia as very meaningful. In 1992, due to the Somali civil war, she moved first to a refugee camp in Mombasa, then to Nairobi, where she lived for almost seven years and met her husband. He migrated to Helsinki before her, and she joined him in 1999. In Helsinki she attended primary and secondary school again; after that, she went to the Open University of a Finnish city to study Pedagogy. By this time she already had children, but she felt supported by the Finnish state because for each of them she received financial support, as is the practice in Finland: the state provides for each child born

either cash support or items needed for the first months of the newborn's life. This choice is up to the family (specifically the mother), and she personally has always opted for the package of baby items (clothes, etc.).

In mid 2000, she became first a teacher in kindergarten, and later a teacher in schools. In addition to teaching, she became active in different fields, although not calling herself an activist. She managed to reconcile her engagement with her private life, characterized by a large family. She frequently uses digital spaces and social media for her activities, which she believes should be incorporated into the education system and also used with children. In the respondent two souls live together in her commitment: being active for Finland and Somalia. In the meantime (around 2014), besides being a member of several NGOs in Helsinki, she started to collaborate with an important organization for Peace **** in Helsinki, of which she was also chair for a period, a position that therefore came with organizational responsibilities. She is also a member of the organizing committee of the *****, which in 2023 took place in Helsinki. Concretely, the internal activities of this organization consist of meetings to reflect and together try to find solutions to the problems of conflict (one of the main problems are clans, but also the exclusion of women from decision making), and try to keep up to date on the situation in Somalia. The current problems of Somalia have also been determined by colonization, because, as she explains, the Somali state has been divided into five regions, increasing the conflicts among clans.

The problem is that this colonial mentality persists also in Finland: in the Somali diaspora often this division into clans is maintained. Some clans were in fact flattered for being preferred by the colonial regime and were favored over others. The organization for peace also has personnel who are in or are travelling to Somalia: in Finland, she explains, women of Somali origin have many more opportunities than in their country of origin. Diasporic women can help Somalia from Finland, but there they are limited in their decision-making power. Moreover, she has organized various activities to raise awareness on the theme of peace, such as organizing group meetings with children to tell them stories, to discuss the meaning of peace and to spread peace knowledge. She thinks that this is one of the most effective activities to promote peace. The theme of peace has always been close to her heart. For her, peace means freedom and the possibility for all people to take part in the life they want to build. The commitment to building peace is very much felt by a part of the Somali diaspora, in Finland but as elsewhere; as a part of the diaspora is still tied to a conflict mentality of division into clans. This division also affects women in the diaspora. Her engagement for peace (and not only) is also transversal to her work as a teacher and writer. In recent years (after 2010) she has in fact published (first in Somali, then also in Finnish and in English) a book for children, on the theme of peace; and a book in Finnish. One of the key values that pushed her activities is the value of education, which is crucial to make changes in people.

Regarding the results, she has seen various changes in the Finnish society, also related to the activities she realized together with other women, not only from the Somali diaspora. For example, she states: "eight/nine years ago we were only few women active for women rights, but nowadays we are a lot, hundreds of women." Social media have been crucial in these changes, because they allowed them to reach even more people and to spread awareness. Despite this change, there is the persistence of racism and discrimination in the Finnish society system. For example, she has not experienced discrimination toward her children and she is satisfied with the Finnish

education system, but not with certain institutional and societal mechanisms. She makes a comparison with Italy, for example, where many people are more welcoming and friendly than the Finnish people. Although she is satisfied with the Finnish education system, there are some aspects that should be improved. For example, children born to parents of Finnish origin study a more academic Finnish language at school, at a higher level than those children, also born in Finland, to parents who are not native Finns. This is subtle discrimination characterized by differential treatment toward those children born in Finland and who know Finnish at the same level as “native children” because they speak it in their families from an early age, although their parents are not native Finns. On the other side, one aspect of the Finnish education system that the interviewee agrees with is the so-called catchment area, i.e., children can only go to the school that falls within their area of residence. If parents want to send their children to a school outside that area, they have to give a valid reason, such as wanting a school that teaches in English. As a positive historical period in Finland, she remembers the 2000s, when Tarja Kaarina Halonen became president of Finland (in 2000, and was later re-elected again and remained in office until 2012). During Halonen’s presidency, the interviewee saw a positive change in Finnish society, characterized by a more peaceful climate and less racism.

Concerning Somalia, she has also seen some changes there, where women now speak out more about their needs and rights, thanks to the activities carried out by different organizations, not only the organization with which the interviewee works.

In conclusion, the interviewee says that in her life there were no years that were more important than others, but her whole life was really important. However, if she has to take stock of her life so far and choose a particularly significant date, she chooses 2019, when she published her first book and saw the realization of a dream. For the future, she hopes to achieve the goals she has set for herself, including continuing to train in education to become a better teacher. She hopes to impact Finnish society and contribute to improving the education system, also from the point of view of digitisation. Education for her is the key to change, even in the area that is closest to her heart, that of peace, where children must be trained to embrace differences. “Peace knowledge” is crucial according to her, and not only for children in Finland, but also and especially for those in Somalia, to educate the next generations to learn from the mistakes of the past, in order to build a better future.

FIN-bio-3

The interviewee was born in Helsinki in the 1990s; she defines herself as Finnish-Somali. Her father arrived in Helsinki around 1993 and her mother in 1995 to escape the civil war in Somalia. In Helsinki, she attended compulsory school, which in Finland is between one and 16 years of age, choosing in 2013 a high school and not a vocational school. She remembers her high-school years as the most important years of her life, because they determined the person she is today and were fundamental in the development of her personality and independence.

As a child in Helsinki she was unaware of discrimination, she thought there were no problems or discrimination in Finland: they probably surrounded her, but did not touch her personally. As she grew up, she became more and more aware of what people like her experienced, of the struggles to get a job: “when you are a Black person you have to

do a lot more than other people. I have to prove myself more, just so that other people can trust me”, she states. Over time, this has also increased in her a sense of responsibility, because if she as an individual performs poorly at work or makes mistakes, this has a negative effect on all people like her and those who will come after her. The racism that exists in Finland is different from other countries, because it is very hidden and it is mostly systemic racism: you have few job opportunities, it is difficult to get ahead, teachers are often prejudiced against Black people. She feels that other countries, like the UK for example, offer more equal opportunities, although there is still racism. “For example, I have aunts who live in Canada, and as soon as you land at the airport you see many Black people. [...] In Finland people do not even try to pursue higher education, because, even if you have the degree, which company will gonna take you?”, she says. Despite the fact that the education system in Finland is efficient and almost totally free, the problem lies in the aftermath, i.e., what one can do with a high level of education if one has a different origin from Finland. In a nutshell, the way it works is as follows: access to high school is regulated by scores and there are guiding teachers whose role is to guide students in their choices.

The discriminating aspect that the interviewee noted is that different advice is often given depending on the origin of the students. Although many students with migrant backgrounds have high scores, they are discouraged in a veiled way from pursuing a difficult higher education. The racism present is also connected to colonialism, although Finland was not exactly a colonising country. In fact, the “white saviour” approach linked to a colonial mentality is widespread, which is also manifested in taking pictures with children during projects in African states. During these years growing up in Helsinki, she was also confronted with the construction of her identity, which she explains was difficult since she was born in Finland, but at the same time she did not feel part of Finnish society. “When I went back to Somalia to my family, they did not see me as Somali. [...] The problem is that when I am here they don’t see me as Finnish, but when I go back to my home country they don’t see me as Somali”, she says. The problem of many children from diasporas who were born elsewhere is that they have these identity crises because they do not know where they belong. She now states that she is proud to be Finnish-Somali: she explains that she feels different from the women living in Somalia because of her different outlook on life.

In 2017 she decided to enroll in the faculty of Nursing at the Applied Science University (also in Helsinki); but after a year she changed university, while maintaining her field of study, which is now about to conclude. In 2017 she also began her commitment at a formal level, as she began to collaborate with the organization *Erasmus Youth* in Helsinki. The years from 2017 to 2019, before the Covid pandemic, were central to her activism, because she managed to do many activities with various organizations. This was a period that she recalls was intense and fun, in which she learned a great deal and created new valuable contacts. But it is in 2019 that she started her real social media activism (she had already started to be active on social media in high-school, but more for the fact that it was fashionable). Moreover, in 2019 there was the largest BLM march ever in Helsinki, with the participation of people from all walks of life, including white people, which made her proud to live in Finland. This year was the most relevant for her historically in Finland; while as for Somalia, the year of Somalia’s independence (1960) was recalled as significant.

She links her commitment to a sense of responsibility, stating that she always tries to give one-hundred percent in the activities she does, even if it is not always easy. She

feels that there is no point in being active in something where you cannot give your best. First of all, she is a supply teacher in religion and in Somali classes at school; secondly, she does a considerable amount of voluntary work, taking part in different projects. In particular, she mentions a volunteer project with minority groups that is related to a youth exchange Erasmus project, called *Youth 2022*: it is a social-media activism project that aims to show the problems that different minorities with migrant backgrounds, in Finland, Sweden and Italy, have with social media and the power of the latter. In concrete terms, the project participants organized and took part in workshops, in which they discussed how they could raise awareness on sensitive topics (such as LGBTQ+ rights), how they conceived activism in these generations and how social media could be used effectively for these purposes. Regarding the objectives of her activism she states: “the goal was for me to learn more, of course there is something that I know, but for me the goal was to learn more, because if I am an activist, someone will probably have questions. [...] I raise awareness and if they have questions I can answer them. For me it means learning more, being aware of the things that affect not only me, but also other people.”

This kind of activism is also related to diaspora, even if she explains that she feels part of the Somali diaspora in a different way, having been born in Finland. “This makes me like a fake diaspora person on move”, she states. The Somali diaspora in Finland is quite cohesive: the newcomers are helped with bureaucracy and the search for work, by people who were born or have been in Finland longer. Relationships are formed, even friendships, as happened to the interviewee. The distances between them are not so great, since people who arrive often suffer discrimination and struggle to get a job. Activism means wanting something better for them and thus also for her. For example, the interviewee explains that she is part of an organisation that helps Afro-descendant women who have undergone circumcision and migrated to Finland because they want a better life, often reuniting with friends and relatives who have moved there in the past. This activism linked to diaspora also concerns the engagement for peace towards Somalia. Peace for the interviewee means not having problems, and she considers Finnish society as peaceful: here women from the Somali diaspora talk often about the situation of people who remained in Somalia, and try to help them. To do this, it is important to collaborate and exchange with Somali mothers and women of the first generation, who have contact with the people left behind in Somalia (which is rare in the case of second generations). Often, both first and second generations meet in mosques in Finland and organize fundraising activities for Somalia or remote social and psychological support with video calls, as some of them are trained in mental health. She is engaged in these activities, often with her aunt, with whom they also organise informal meetings and discussions with family and friends. Regarding the organisation of activities, she explains that usually in Helsinki it is the younger generation that takes the reins and organizes, and then also involves the older generation.

The values of solidarity and religion are crucial in motivating all these activities, as she explains that in her religion nobody can be ignorant about what happens to other people: “what motivates me is that I want a better life not for myself, but for second-generation people”. She explains that she is happy with what she does and with the results. These are not large achievements, but even just having initiated conversations with women in Somalia on the subject of rights is an important achievement for her, because it opens the door to possible future projects. These are conversations carried out individually and in small groups, which allow knowledge to

be transmitted. In addition, there has recently been a growing awareness of the issues addressed through social media, both information and mobilization tools in Finland and across borders. Social-media activists not only publish content, but organize actions: you can not just post content. There are several demonstrations that are organized (Black Lives Matter Movement, protests against companies that are not sensitive to issues of racism, etc.), in which the interviewee often participates. The last was the protest of nurses regarding the salary gap and the lack of recognition of the rights of workers in this sector, so the government was asked to make a new law. The aspect of the action is fundamental, according to her.

For the future, the interviewee hopes that the rights of nurses in Finland will be protected, as soon after graduation she will become a nurse. Although she will work in Helsinki, she would also like to travel to Somalia and other African states to do her job. Many things could be done in Somalia, but because of the government, the clans and the wars it is very difficult. In particular, men from older generations living in Somalia are an obstacle, and often do not believe in the potential of women. If there are not some changes of mentality in Somalia, in her opinion, you can not overcome the problems. She has also fears: she fears that despite all the activism done in Finland so far, the results are not long-term. The biggest fear is that people do not see the changes, and that is why they stop acting. What she believes we need to work on most is to ensure that minorities make their voices heard for rights. Moreover, it is necessary to make all the people involved feel the necessity for change, even those that are not directly affected. Because to make a change you need them too.

FIN-bio-4

The interviewee was born in the 1970s in Ethiopia, where she studied up to and including high school. In 1995 she moved to Finland: she explains that she came to Finland as a refugee, first arriving in Helsinki and then was moved to a small city in the north of Finland. The arrival in Finland was a very hard time for her, as she experienced for the first time what it means to live without parents, as a refugee. The good thing, she says, was that she had the opportunity to study; in fact, she enrolled in a program offering a bachelor's degree of Design. Moreover, as she was almost the only migrant woman living in that city at that time, she started to think about different migrant issues that she could work on. She explains that she has Finnish citizenship, but it was very difficult for her to obtain it, as the bureaucratic procedure requires knowledge of the Finnish language. At the time, if you had not gone to Finnish schools, you could not obtain Finnish citizenship; and you had to wait up to five years after arrival in Finland to obtain a permanent residence permit. Today, the procedure is simpler.

In 1998 she obtained a residence permit, and she started part-time work as a designer. A date that the interviewee recalls as important was her first trip back to Ethiopia after five years in Finland. She spent three months in Ethiopia and was very happy to return. In early 2000 the interviewee moved to live in Helsinki and had children. In 2003 she started studying interpreting, and subsequently started a part-time job as an interpreter and translator, which allowed her to reconcile work and family life. From that moment, she explains, she started to engage on various fronts. In particular, she recalls the years 2008 to 2011 as the most significant period (for her engagement too), as she "discovered herself". Then, in September 2011, there was a *turning-point* in her life, because she

started to do what she still does today: working at the *****, dealing with human rights and in particular with migrant women, to oppose female genital mutilation practices. Initially, the interviewee also kept her part-time job as a translator, although it was difficult for her to reconcile the two professions, as the arrival of refugees was substantial and interpreters were needed. The year 2022 is also among the most significant of her life, as it marks the anniversary of the birth of the organization *****. In this regard she states: “I want to celebrate also because I saw a change in attitudes in Finnish society, I had the opportunity to conduct some trainings for professionals and I saw changes.” The interviewee says, in fact, “We come to be a voice for other women, for change”. Regarding Finland’s history, she recalls as particularly significant the years when the SPD (the centre-left Social Democratic Party) won the elections by a few votes (in 2019). As the interviewee at the time worked with ***** to support immigrants in the integration process, she saw a chance for immigrants to make their voices heard.

For the future she hopes that people coming from the countries where human rights are not respected become aware of the health practices that damage women’s health: young girls must have the right to choose what to do with their bodies. She explains that in Ethiopia genital mutilation is permitted and is practised on girls between birth and the age of 15, but not in Finland; therefore, they do not want this practice to continue on Finnish soil after migration. This practice is widespread in the Horn of Africa and in a total of 31 countries in Africa, but also in the Middle East and in some countries of Asia and South America. Although this practice is not legal in Finland, there are other laws that should be improved. For example, she explains that in the future she would like to see the divorce law for women changed. In addition, she wants to contribute to the realization of peace, and she believes that the focus should be on the grassroots level, starting with spreading awareness that everyone has equal rights. One must first of all work on the individual level on oneself: in Ethiopia especially, this in her opinion is a key aspect on which to work. “We have to all work at the grassroots level, especially as diaspora we have to make change [...] We have a big opportunity and we have to be more responsible, not emotional”, she states. One of the problems of all diasporas in Finland that she emphasizes is that they have comforts, but they are often emotional.

FIN-bio-5

The interviewee was born in Mogadiscio in the 1980s, and in 1990 she migrated to Finland in Espoo with her mum. Her mother had nine sons and only one daughter. In Helsinki, she had some difficulties adapting to Finnish society, because she arrived as a refugee child of four years of age. Of Somalia she has vague memories, she had photographs with her on the trip. She then grew up in Finland, with many obstacles due to her refugee status and an economic system that at the time was not as developed as it is today.

However, with time she managed to settle in Finland, and in 2009 she enrolled in the faculty of nursing and public healthcare at Metropolia University. During university, she carried out many activities, with the conviction that each individual must do his/her best to bring even a small change. At that time she explains that she was already an activist; activism for her is something that she feels inside and believes deeply, that is not done for money, but that is motivated by the values in which she believes and for which she

wants to fight. In her opinion, activism is done outside of one's work. Specifically, she defines herself as a social activist, that is, she aims to bring about changes in social norms and structure, but also seeks to socially sensitize others, both in person and on social media.

In 2013, she graduated and started working as a nurse until 2020, when during the pandemic time she decided to quit her job because she did not feel well in the environment: people were always dissatisfied, they always found something wrong and she did not feel appreciated as a nurse. Moreover, nurses receive a low salary in Finland. After a period of transition in which she had several online businesses, she decided to found *Hoiwa* in March 2020 (where she is actually CEO). *Hoiwa* is an inclusive company with the aim of improving healthcare services in Finland, having at heart what she had studied for. This company has been very successful, as it also aims to solve problems related to discrimination and racism in the health professions. Since the foundation of the company, she has started to gain media visibility, both on a personal level and in terms of the impact achieved by the company. Her fame grew until she was elected Entrepreneur of the Year in 2022 in Espoo city. Thanks to her company, she was able to become an emerging female figure in the Somali diaspora, whom people in Finland admire for her achievements. In fact, she explains that she does a great deal of activism (especially in advocacy) as well as being a business owner, trying on the one hand to make Finland more attractive to immigrant people, and on the other hand to make Finns understand how to deal with minorities and to be inclusive in the business sphere. In her opinion, working with people from different backgrounds can be enriching on a working level, because it allows the integration of different perspectives.

What motivates her to continue on this path despite the difficulties is the support of the people who believe in her; in addition to the need to show Finnish society the value and independence of Muslim women, about which the media speaks almost only negatively. She wants her story heard. In Finland she organizes talks, she is a guest at NGOs' events, she organizes meetings with young people, and notes that many girls attend these events. She is also active for the empowerment of women in Somalia, through social media where many Somali women follow her and listen. She also travels about three/four times a year in Somaliland (which is recognized as independent from Somalia and where there is no tribalism), and has the opportunity to organize empowerment events on site.

Regarding her activism, the interviewee also talks about peace activism, in which, however, she is not much involved because it deals with the empowerment of subjects. For her, peace means freedom of thought and choice, and she explains that in Somalia people are led or forced to act in a certain way. There is tribalism in Somalia, and every tribe thinks it is the best tribe, and that is one of the main obstacles to peace. To support people in Somalia, the interviewee explains that she sends money to family members, but the financial remittances of the Somali diaspora in Finland have also allowed the development of business activities on the spot, which have helped improve Somali society. Women have a central role, because they are very active, both in diaspora and in Somalia, but often this role is not valued. In Somalia, for example, they should be more involved politically, because society is mainly focused on men. She explains that there is a close connection between diasporas and the Horn of Africa: in her opinion, the latter cannot survive without diasporas. However, she explains that in the case of Somalia it is very difficult to help, because it is a very complex state.

If she has to take stock of her life, the most significant period in her life was 2017, when she separated from her ex-husband, who lived with her in Finland, and started to rebuild her life. “I had the opportunity to change my life as I wanted,” she says. The most difficult years of her life, linked to historical events, were the years after September 11, 2001, because after the attack on the Twin Towers she saw more hostility towards her, as a Muslim woman living in the West. She saw many more obstacles not only in Finnish society, but also in the possibility of travelling: people felt entitled to be aggressive and racist towards Muslims. She has seen some changes in Finnish society, even though she believes that the fruits of her labor will be seen over some years. In Somalia, instead, thanks to financial remittances and the various empowerment activities described above that she has initiated, she is seeing increased awareness and empowerment of Somali women (although it must be remembered that the respondent operates mainly in Somaliland). In addition, she explains that women from the Somali diaspora are very active in several NGOs based in Finland, which have been able to carry out several interventions in Somalia, such as building clinics (e.g. maternity clinics); as many Somali women in Finland are specializing in the health sector, they are counting on helping in the Somali conflict situation.

Today for her to be part of the Somali diaspora in Finland means having a Somali cultural background, to which she feels close, convinced that she can bring something good of Finnish society to Somalia; as well as being able to give Finland part of the Somali culture. She explains that as a Finno-Somali woman, she was lucky enough to be able to build her identity, deciding to develop a mixed identity that draws from multiple cultures. In addition, she also has the Muslim identity and explains that she is also building the identity of an entrepreneur, which is in the making. In her opinion, identity is not something fixed, but is constantly changing, and each person can always shape her own identity. The interviewee sees her activism connected to the Somali diaspora, but she believes that it is not necessary to be a diaspora woman to become an activist. She believes that even those who live in Somalia, if they make an effort as she did, can become activists to bring about change. Empowering people in Somalia can be considered part of her activism, too.

For her future, she would like to expand her Hoiwa business, so as to also include a health training centre that can prepare both professionally (nurses) and entrepreneurially. Moreover, she hopes, as a woman of the Finnish-Somali diaspora, to be able to guarantee the empowerment of women living in Somalia. One of the main problems that cause conflict is tribalism: people see others as enemies. She thinks that the members of the Somali diaspora are the key to change, because they are used to living in peace. It is not easy because often she is made to notice a distance between her and them; those who live in Somalia tell her that for her everything is easy because she lives in an efficient state, with a functioning government. She does not give up, she declares, in fact: “for me, as an activist, I face challenges.”

FIN-bio-6

The interviewee was born in the 1990s in Finland. Her parents migrated to Finland in December 1990, due to the beginning of the Civil War in Somalia, about eight months before she was born. She comes from a family of seven children, and she was the first of them to be born in Finland. While living in Finland, she realised the importance of

maintaining relations with her community, the Somali diaspora, both with Muslims and non-Muslims. In fact, she wishes to make it clear that although she is Muslim, she has never paid attention to distinctions. For her, diaspora means a community that lives outside its country of origin and maintains connections with its members all over the world. For her, diaspora also means people who understand her struggles, who share the distance from their land of origin or descent and who work together to try to help those left behind as best they can. She defines herself as a “builder of a community” not as an activist in the widespread sense of the term, although with her activities she tries to make an impact every day.

Raised up in Helsinki, she started to develop her commitment at a young age. Her commitment began in 2009 in Helsinki, a year before her marriage (in 2010), when she realised that there was a lack of people who looked like her, who had the same faith as her. Therefore, in 2012 she decided to found with her husband and some friends an NGO, with the aim to create a safe space for Muslim people (mostly young, both male and female) who were born or migrated to Finland. 2012 was a very significant year for her as she also had her first daughter. This NGO became one of the biggest youth organizations in Finland. Despite its name, it is not just an NGO for young Muslims, but is open to young people from different cultural backgrounds who can meet in that space after school to network. The first two years of the organisation’s start-up were difficult, due to the widespread climate of Islamophobia that reigned throughout Europe; but they were also important years of growth. Through this organization, they tried to counter the islamophobia within Finnish society and the way the media represents Muslim people; and in 2016 they had their first international speaker. One case they fought for, and succeeded in achieving results, was the need for representation in the media and on television of Muslim and racialised people, to avoid being talked about without their presence. There were clearly some difficulties along with achieving these goals. For instance, within the Somali diaspora, particularly in the Muslim diaspora community, those who make decisions and organise activities are usually the adults and elders. This is why some members were puzzled that the younger ones became so active. The interviewee therefore explains that while they had to cope with reluctance at the political and governmental level, they also had to react to some of the brakes put on them by older members of the Somali Muslim community.

While involved with the NGO, she decided to enroll at Metropolia University in Helsinki, where she graduated in 2017. Around 2017, before graduating, she reduced her commitment to the organisation (while still remaining active) and started working as a nurse for four years. 2019 was another important year for her, for the birth of her second daughter. In December 2021, she and her husband started a company that teaches Somali language in a fun and engaging way. This project includes a number of audiobooks for children in Somali language, with the aim “to provide alternatives to all these animations Somali children watch, to enhance their language learning skills, especially in the Western countries, to preserve the history, culture and books that we have.” The long-term goal is to erase, through entertainment, certain cultural norms that the Somali community possesses and to educate people. The interviewee adds that Somalia has a very rich cultural heritage and history, but mainly in oral form and little in written form. Before this project, she participated in a project called *Transnational Families in the Diaspora Community*, related to the Somali diaspora, in which the different ethnic backgrounds and traditions of families were explored. The goal was to

understand how Muslim families in the Somali diaspora understood family values once they moved to Finland. Her commitment includes, therefore, a variety of activities. She says that the commitment she was involved in at the age of 20 was different from her current commitment as a 30-year-old, which is one with a more international outlook. As a young girl, she did not think that as a single person she could have so much influence on people, but as she grew up and studied, she realised that even a single individual can have a great influence in her community. “The type of commitment that I would like to give to society would be from different angles. Number one, I fight against injustice, especially towards the people who do not have a lot of advantages or privileges”, she states. She also fights against injustices that are rooted at a more structural level in Finnish society. Furthermore, another issue that is at the centre of her efforts today is trying to change for the better some cultural aspects of the Somali diaspora. Moreover, she recalls a discriminatory incident in Finnish society concerning the sale three years ago in supermarkets of a sauce called “Black face pepper” to flavour food. She knew she had to contact the manufacturer about the problematic name, if she wanted the name to be fully changed. So, she contacted the manufacturer which was the biggest dairy manufacturer in Finland: she explained why the name “Black face pepper” is very offensive and racist and asked for the name to be changed. After that they agreed to change it and it was named “Black pepper sauce”.

Building her identity in the Finnish context was not easy for her; she says that if she had had to explain it 15 years ago, she probably would not have been able to. There was a time in her life when she did not know whether she belonged to Finnish society or to the Somali community; she felt in limbo between the two and did not want to choose sides. To this day, she can say that she has embraced both: with her children, she has tried her best to pass on Somali language and culture to them. Although she was born in Finland, Somalia remains important to her. In summer 2022, she made her first trip to Somalia, and it was a very significant moment in her life.

Regarding the commitment to peace within the Somali diaspora, she explains that they are making a community effort not to transport the tensions in Somalia to the European country in which they live. She also explains that the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs has good development and training projects in the Horn of Africa, especially in Somalia. For her peace means that every person can live in respect of their rights in every place. She explains that, since the Somali community in Finland is mostly Muslim, many projects aimed at Somalia (of which she is part) are organized in collaboration with mosques; various activities are organized such as fundraising, and remittances especially in times of difficulty for Somalia. Even on the subject of the commitment to peace, however, she often sees a sort of predominance in the decisions of the older generation of the Somali diaspora, the elderly. The youngest of the diaspora struggle to participate and to feel included in these projects.

Taking stock of the commitment, the motivations that determined the interviewee's commitment were desperation for what she saw and the need to change the way people considered them, as they were the first group of young people in the Somali diaspora to mobilize so actively; confident of the impact this commitment would have on Finnish society. This commitment has sometimes also required the need to be updated with training and workshops, even as a team, to be more prepared on the issues on which they wanted to raise awareness. With regard to the digital sphere, this has greatly helped our various activities also with regard to the aspect of remittances and exchanges with

Somalia. Regarding the connection with other members of the Somali diaspora in other states, she explains that the Global Somali Diaspora Summit held in 2022 in Espoo was her first opportunity of contact with other members, understood as an international meeting of all Somali components at the same time and place. As for Finland, it has always had a network of connections with the Somali diaspora and with the active subjects in it. In particular in the event of conflicts erupting in Somalia, there was a communication network to organize the sending of aid and remittances to the population. The interviewee believes she has a singular perspective, as she has many friends among Finns, among minority groups, and for a long time has not had close Somali friends. However, she explains that in times of need the Somali diasporic community supports each other very much.

Thinking about the history and changes, she believes that the main changes are made by women in the diasporas. In Somalia, several successful food programs were made, especially for orphaned children in Somalia, and her mother was one of the founders of a project. Partners who can participate in these projects can be of different diasporas in the world. However, in Somalia (to which, however, she is linked despite being born in Finland) the years of gaining independence were significant for the interviewee, but she explains that seeing the country that Somalia has become today, these years have lost their significance. She believes that the really important year will be when the country will achieve lasting peace, and hopes that this year will come soon. Instead, in Finland she remembers complicated historical periods when she fought together with others for the recognition of her rights and won a victory. She believes that her activities have had an impact especially at the grassroots level. A significant example for her is the recognition by the government of Helsinki, which usually invited only senior or prominent members of the Islamic diasporic communities on special occasions, when it learned about these young people active in the Somali diaspora invited them; and the interviewee recalls that they were the youngest of all the guests. The interviewee considers that this is already a relevant result of her/their commitment and that “achievements speak for us.” The social change that they are trying to bring, through the cartoon project and entertainment in the Somali language, is to prevent the Somali identity from disappearing in children born in Finland, helping them maintain a connection with their native language. In addition, these programs also aim to sensitize them to preserve positive traditions, and to abandon negative Somali cultural traditions. In fact, starting from children, her objective extends to the whole Somali diaspora: it is to reform some obtuse cultural aspects of the Somali diaspora, giving more space to the new generations.

In conclusion, for her future one of her main challenges is to be able to continue these activities of engagement as a woman, since in Somalia there is still a backward view on the issue of women. Her fear is not to see the results she wanted, once she reached the end of her life. The aspect on which she thinks we need to work more in terms of activism, is to try to change the way of thinking of some people, and to create unity, both in Finland and in Somalia above all. “The biggest impact you can make is talking to people, connecting to people, working with them; so that when people go home they can impact a lot of different people.”

The interviewee was born in Asmara in the 1980s, and is currently a mother working in Finland. Her childhood was marked by war: it was the time of the war between Ethiopia and Eritrea, which broke out in 1998. She studied at a high school in Asmara and then she had vocational training. The time of adolescence was difficult: at very young age she was forced to do her military service, until she dropped out because she could not tolerate it any longer. Due to this choice, she was put in prison in Eritrea for several months. This experience caused her health problems for which she was hospitalized for a period. She says that being a woman at that time in Eritrea has been a very hard experience for her. After the military, she worked as a cleaning lady, and then decided to look for other job opportunities in the capital, as she was proficient at English. She thus started working with the United Nations peacekeepers. She explains that some soldiers were good, but others were racist, even though they were doing a peacekeeping mission for the UN. The situation in Eritrea at the time was very complex, given a dictatorial regime and war.

Later, she moved to Finland from Eritrea. When she arrived in Finland, she settled in a small village where she was the only Black woman. The first years were very hard for her; it was a shock at first. Although she knew the Finnish reality was totally different from what she was used to, it is one thing to hear about it and another to live there. She especially found it difficult to get used to the weather and the Finnish language. According to her, the Finnish system for people with a migration background did not function well that time. For example, she says that when she arrived in Finland in a small town she had only a year to learn the language, after which she would have to find a job. Indeed, it is harder for an adult to learn a new language than a child. This is one of the main problems of the Finnish system. That time she wanted to study at the University of Applied Sciences, but because she did not know Finnish well she could not pass the entrance exam.

With time, she managed to get used to the new society and started studying at vocational school, which allowed her to make several friendships with Finns. Later, she moved to a bigger city. During her life in Finland she has worked in various professions, including as a retail saleswoman. She also experienced discrimination, and at the individual level she suffered some episodes of racism. For example, when she worked for a time as a retail saleswoman, she felt hostility from customers because of the color of her skin. Besides her professional life, family life is also important to her: Her children are partly Eritreans and partly Finns. Her daughter feels Finnish, since she was born in Finland and has never been to Eritrea: the problem is that she is treated as a foreigner, or is asked for example if she speaks Finnish.

In 2016 there was a *turning-point* in her life. In that year many refugees started arriving in Finland; before 2016 there were not many Eritreans in Finland, but now there are Eritreans living in almost every Finnish city. She was in contact with refugees through her work and thus perceived that Eritreans often struggle to fit into the Finnish context, as Finnish society often does not have the tools or does not want to understand that Eritreans, as well as other immigrants, have a completely different culture. There is a need for an efficient system that accompanies them and also provides them with basic and general background information about Finnish society. In her opinion, the problem is that the Finnish immigration services should do more, in general for all refugees. "Refugees must feel part of Finnish society; and other Finnish people must help them, because the Finnish language is not easy, the culture, the way of living, the weather, everything is not easy for them", she states.

For the interviewee, her identity today is both Finnish and Eritrean, and she feels part of Finnish society. If she thinks of the word diaspora, she does not really know how to describe it. She thinks that especially Eritrean women and women with a migration background should try to change society for the better. She believes that Eritrean women, but also women in general, have great potential and can be active on various fronts. Starting from her personal experience, she wants to make them understand that great goals can be achieved: she started from scratch in Finland, in an unknown and difficult context for her, but she managed to achieve what she wanted. “I want to influence people, saying that they can be what they want to be”, she says. For today's interviewee, peace means that a person can live without any fear, and where they want to live. Peace means to her that no one pushes you to do things you do not want to do. “If you don't have peace, you don't have nothing”, she states. She explains that she comes from a country where there is no peace, which gained independence in 1991, with recognition as a state in 1993. In 1998, however, war broke out again, between Ethiopia and Eritrea. She believes that in Finland, if one compares it to Eritrea, there is a peaceful situation. For her, conflict does not always have a negative meaning, because it can also refer to conflicts in relationships. Conflict becomes negative when it refers to being deprived of something against one's will. In connection therewith, regarding the engagement for peace, women in Eritrea were the first to fight for independence and thus for peace. She states, “women in our culture are very strong, they are like the peacemakers. They don't get like mad at small things, so they bring peace to the family and then to the community”. In Finland women in the Eritrean diaspora are also active in supporting peace. However, she explains that few Eritrean women hold high-level jobs and have a good level of education. She believes that many of them need help.

Moreover, a key aspect that needs to be worked on is a mobilization of the Finnish government, but also of other European governments, against the agreements with Libya on migration. It is unsustainable that there are still agreements of European states with the Libyan government. She is motivated to work for social and cultural change not only in Finland, but also in Eritrea. The statement that guides her future is as follows: “The big things, I can't change them, but I want to start with what is closed to me”.

FIN-bio-9

The interviewee was born in the 1980s in Somalia and she moved to Finland in 1991 with her family. She has been active since she was 14 years old, as her mother is a famous and active Somali woman in Finland. In this regard, she states: “Maybe I don't know the reason. Did I choose this path or did this path choose me? I always think: why am I so active?”. She studied at primary and high school in Finland and has Finnish citizenship. About the way of living the diaspora, she feels linked to the Somali diaspora. Indeed, she has good relationships with the Somali community, she takes part in different activities of cooperation and sensibilization, describing her identity as Finnish-Somali. In general, according to her, diasporas must be active in an interconnected way, creating a network of diasporas with different backgrounds.

Her engagement is therefore connected with the diaspora. In her engagement both her family and religious values play a great role: she does not define herself as a radical activist, but considers herself an activist in the sense that she wants to positively

influence people and to have a social impact. Her aim is working with people to improve services and Finnish society. In her engagement she is active both in Finland and toward Somalia. In Finland for six years she was part of one of the largest NGO in Finland, working on projects aimed at building collaboration between communities, authorities and NGOs. Even if Finnish society seems to be peaceful, she explains, there are hidden problems and conflicts within the society that if not solved can cause problems. With this NGO she also worked on a project aimed at promoting interreligious dialogue among different religious groups in Finland in order to promote a more tolerant society.

From social engagement she then moved on to more political engagement. Later on, she decided to run in the Finnish municipal elections and in 2017 she won the elections in the socio-democratic party for the City Council. During those years, her political engagement was combined with a more social engagement, which is what she would like to work on the most. She wants, in fact, to meet the needs of people who live in Finland, especially the ones with migrant backgrounds, to make them aware of their rights, to listen to their needs and then to improve the public services. During those years, she also joined the Board of an important organization related to Somali diaspora, where she took part in different projects aimed at promoting peace in Somalia. Engagement for peace is another area close to her heart. In her opinion, building peace in Somalia means first of all guaranteeing a livelihood and good living conditions to the people living there, and then implementing good projects to guarantee peaceful life conditions. She also cooperates with other NGOs in Finland.

In terms of achievements and changes, she thinks that Finnish society has seen some positive changes thanks to women's activities: there is more awareness about women's value in decision-making and more women, as she is, are taking part into politics, social organizations etc. with leading roles. This aspect in her opinion is very significant because it reveals a change in society. Compared to when she was young in the period 1995-2000, today in Finland there is not only more participation of Black women, but also more public representation. In Somalia, instead, there has been little change: she would like that women can become more visible and also active there. For the future, she would first like to do her best as a municipal councillor to improve Finnish society; but also to try to make an impact in Somalia. In Finland there are still problems related to hidden discriminations and systemic racism, for example in job applications, where there are contradictions. While the Finnish state encourages any citizen, regardless of origin, to apply for job offers, it tends to prioritize or disqualify people with a migration background for certain job positions. A striking example concerns the exclusion of Finnish women who wear the hijab from joining the police profession. Since, as she states, "people are ready to change", it is time to realize more change in the future, to create a society that is truly more inclusive.

FIN-bio-10

The interviewee was born in Sudan in the 1990s, but is originally from Eritrea. She has five brothers and two sisters. At the age of four, she migrated with her family to Finland, initially settling in the city of Oulu and, after some months, moving to the city of Kajaani. They were helped by the Red Cross to immigrate to Finland because there were conflicts in Sudan between Sudanese and Eritrean people. She explains that she

does not feel a strong connection to Eritrea, and because the Eritrean community is not very large in Finland, she has no friends of Eritrean origin. Speaking of identity, she explains that it is something that has always been difficult for her because she did not feel that she belonged to either the Eritrean diaspora or Finnish society. This worried her because she felt she had to belong to something, until she realized that her identity simply means being who she is as a person. She does not have to feel or declare that she belongs to something. Life in Kajaani was not always easy for her, she felt that her voice was often not heard. Here, she attended kindergarten, primary school and vocational school. She had no difficulty learning Finnish, but from the age of seven onwards she began to realise that she was different in Finnish society, even though she spoke the local language. From that moment on, a difficult period began for her as she started to question her sense of belonging. She then decided to enroll at university in the business faculty, also in Kajaani, as she would like to work in the human resources field. After graduating in 2021, she decided to move to Espoo to look for work, as she saw few job opportunities in Kajaani.

Here, she found a job for a large NGO, where she currently works as an associate coordinator. She finds it very interesting to work in NGOs, as this is her first experience in the third sector. She does not feel herself to be an activist, but describes her engagement as a series of activities to raise awareness on issues that interest her, mainly through social media. She states, “I am not an activist, but we do work with foreigners who moved to Finland, like in *Moniheli*, and we help them integrate in Finland, we offer them services. [...] I definitely think of my work as engagement and it offers people to feel safer here in Finland. For example we help them to feel understood in Finland. They cannot get any service in the language they want, I tried my best to help them, I tried to collect information for them to make the integration process easier.” She chooses to use the often much-discussed term integration and explains that a greater effort should be made by Finnish institutions, rather than by immigrants. Integration does not only mean that people with an immigrant background learn Finnish, but above all it means that they feel safe living in Finland. Its engagement is also characterized by sharing content on social media and participating in protests, with the aim of informing and educating people. However, she appreciates the fact that there are many women in the third sector, who bring a female perspective to organizations. There are also some associations that are led by women with a migration background who think up activities for women with a migration background. The problem is that this inclusion present in the third sector is little reflected in Finnish society, although it depends on the geographical area: in northern Finland there is more exclusion than in cities such as Helsinki or Turku, for example. She explains that she has experienced much discrimination in the past, starting from a very young age. She recalls that some children at school did not want to play with her. Then, once she grew up, the discrimination manifested itself at the employment level: she could not apply for certain jobs because of her migrant background, despite speaking fluent Finnish. This relates to the speech she made about peace: she did not feel she had a safe space in Finnish society. When she moved to live in Espoo the situation improved. The problem, therefore, exists at the systemic level. In fact, even if one has a high level of education, it is difficult to gain access to certain fields of work. For example, in the business sector, most of the people hired are white men. She believes that at the employment level there are not the same opportunities for white people and for people of Black or migrant background. In the school sector, on the other hand, she believes that even though the

Finnish education system is good, teachers should train more on understanding racism and diversity issues in order to be able to better approach these situations. Again, she recalls an episode from her childhood, when the psychologists at school only asked children with a migration background if everything was okay in the family. These questions had to be asked of all children, not just children with an immigrant background.

What prompted her to undertake this type of engagement was the fact that she has always been curious about integration and related issues. Already during her studies, she felt an interest in helping other people, so she thought about the best way to help people in Finland. From her words, altruism, the willingness to help others, emerges as her main value at the core of this engagement. In the light of her personal experience of living in Kajaani, she wants to help others ensure that their voices are heard and their presence appreciated. Since she was able to achieve this for herself, she thinks it is important for others to achieve it as well.

Although her engagement is not related to specific peace promotion activities, she explains: “what peace means to me is safety, and being heard and seen is what allows you to feel safe in the environment you are in.” Conflict, on the other hand, means disagreement for her. Overall, she believes that Finnish society is a peaceful society, but that it needs to learn to listen more. Some change is therefore necessary. She personally feels that she has brought about a little change with her bachelor thesis. In it she presented how Black women in Finland with a high level of education could achieve good job positions, even managerial ones. She is currently part of a project aimed at making people with a migration background aware of their rights, particularly with regard to housing. This will certainly have an impact on Finnish society. In addition, she has seen changes in associations founded by people with a migrant background: men are leaving more space for women. Men with a migrant background tended to dominate the third sector spaces in the past. Finally, she notes an improvement in the integration process of people with a migrant background compared to her parents' time. For example, before, access to services upon arrival was only in Finnish, now there are services in several languages. Today in Finland there are more resources for these people.

In conclusion, for her future, despite having had a positive experience in the third sector, she will decide if she will go on working in NGOs. She studied business and she wants to take some time to think about who she really wants to become, because she feels she never had the time and space to do this. Although this is something that frightens her, she is determined to take on this challenge. Finally, she believes that the aspect that needs to be worked on more in Finnish society is opportunities for people, especially women, with a migrant background. The wish is to see in the future more people like her working in positions of prestige.

FIN-bio-11

The interviewee was born in the 1980s and she has a background in accounting in her country before migrating to Finland in the late 2000s. Here, after learning Finnish she studied to become a nursing assistant. Among the aspects she considers most important in her life are family and education. She believes that education can improve the future. In 2016 she started her engagement supporting Eritrean people in Finland, as there was

a large influx of Eritreans. Among the most significant historical dates you remember 1991, the year of the independence of Eritrea, and the commemoration of the Eritrean martyrs on 20 June. She feels connected to the Eritrean diaspora. To describe what diaspora means to her, she uses the following words: "It is very difficult to explain what diaspora means to me, but I would say that it is moving from one's own country involuntarily to another, where one has to get to know its culture in order to try to engage in social life. So that is basically the way I would describe it. [...] We have links actually, we have small groups that we join together to help the children, to pray together. We also try to keep our culture somehow, trying to be united. [...] There are a lot of links, we also have parents in different parts of Europe, we also have old friends." In relation to this, she explains that she has always tried to maintain her original identity, linked to her Eritrean family and community. She wishes to preserve her own culture and also pass it on to her children, telling them about their origins. She would like to call herself an activist, but explains that at the moment, due to lack of time, she is unable to be 100 percent activist in her engagement, which is why she does not consider herself fully an activist.

She considers engagement as doing good to other people, helping them improve their condition. In her case, her job as an assistant nurse and her engagement are two separate aspects. In addition to her work, she helps the Finnish Eritrean diasporic community in various situations. She, together with her team, provides informal information to Eritrean people arriving in Finland on a variety of topics, e.g., the language courses, the health system, information and advice on the functioning of the educational world, and the working world in Finland. A key aspect is, for example, government benefits, which Eritrean people often do not know about. She explains to them what they are and how to request them. Underlying the engagement, a central aspect that motivated it is spirituality. This has brought much unity in the Eritrean diasporic community to help others. Another key element that motivated her to engage relates to her personal history. When she arrived in Finland there were not many Eritreans, so she did not receive much support. Therefore, she does not want other Eritreans to experience the same situation as she did in the past. She also found several difficulties in the course of her engagement, for example when she tried to point out difficulties in the area of social work, these were downplayed. Or rather, the managers excluded her in a way because they did not involve her in solving the problem she presented. Speaking of difficulties, she has also encountered obstacles in the Finnish education system. As a mother she has sometimes found isolation of Black children, in particular the case of a child of Eritrean origin who was wrongly accused of something he had not done. These behaviors adversely affect children, especially their self-confidence. Apart from the discriminatory episode described, she explains that there is equity in the Finnish education system. She explains that the Finnish education system is good overall: it is attentive to children and young people who have difficulties in school, and tries to help them. The only obstacle is Finnish: if you do not know the language well, it is a problem. There are also schools in English. She explains that she has also collaborated with another activist of the Ethiopian diaspora, on health rights.

Her engagement does not really include engagement for peace, although it is a subject that interests her. For the interviewee, 'peace means living in love. In my personal life I do not have many conflicts with people because I try to avoid negative thoughts. If there are conflicts, I prefer to talk to the person to try to solve the problem". She explains that she would like to do peace engagement in the future, partly because

many Eritreans who have come to Finland have experienced trauma from the war. Therefore, the topic of peace for these people is very important. Women in the Eritrean diaspora would like to engage in this area, but they need training to understand how to translate engagement for peace into concrete actions.

From the engagement and activities that concern her, she has seen several results. She explains that she has seen changes compared to the past, starting from the Eritrean community. Increasing numerically over time has also begun to organize and cooperate more. The fact that few people, including her, have started to set up kind of working groups, has been a stimulus for wider cooperation. She also sees results in the activities she has organized, for example some people have thanked her for the educational activities she has organized that have borne fruit. So, thanks to this engagement several people became aware of certain issues.

She explains that in the future she would like to devote more to the support of people, but she does not know if she will find the time because she has to look after her family too. In the future she would like to create, together with the people with whom she collaborates in her engagement, a group of women with migratory backgrounds, in particular Eritrean, with whom to discuss common issues. In addition, she would like to organize activities to raise awareness, about their rights in general, among women with a migration background. Finally, she hopes in the future to work with children, because she cares that Eritrean children growing up in Finland are aware of their culture of origin. She also hopes that children will be able to coexist Eritrean and Finnish culture. In addition, it would like to create greater awareness on the issue of disability among adults, as several cases of autism have been diagnosed among Eritrean children. She would therefore like to set up a group of women and mothers specifically dealing with this issue, including Finnish experts and doctors if necessary.

FIN-bio-13

The interviewee was born in Ethiopia in the 1980s. In 2002 she earned her bachelor degree in Ethiopia in ***** and she worked there for three years in a local NGO for gender and equality, with a role of communication officer/advocacy. Then, in 2010, she moved to Finland. The reason for her migration to Finland was both her desire to obtain her Master's degree there and the fact that her husband was already living there. Her husband had moved to Finland because the Finnish government at the time hinted that there were several study opportunities for young people from different African states, including Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria. In Finland, she studied her master degree in ***** at the University of ****. An interesting aspect that emerged from her thesis is that most of the respondents, despite being PhD students or having a master's degree, were unemployed. This shocked her, as she was only the second year living in Finland and before arriving she had high expectations, including being able to do her dream job. In fact, she has found that the labor market is not so easily accessible for people with migrant backgrounds. The aspect that gave her strength was the sharing with other people of the same goals, and the will to change this situation. After university she became a mother and also actively started her engagement. She was very determined to get a good job in a field that interested her. She thus started working as a promoter and team leader for ***** for three years. After that she decided to quit her job and take time for herself to figure out what she really wanted to do in life. So, around 2014, she

decided to start collaborating with ****, and in 2021 she began to work at an organization that deals with the issue that is close to her heart: integration. She does not call herself an activist, but is very motivated to do what she does. This has become the motivation behind her engagement, which has led her to choose the profession she performs today as integration coordinator.

She is currently working for an organization aimed at the integration of people with migrant backgrounds in the Finnish labor market and society. She works directly with people with migrant backgrounds, but also organizes events and workshops on integration and facilitates peer support groups for international job seekers. Referring to her engagement in relation to her work, she says: “Engagement for what we do here as integration is an active participation of both the host and immigrants communities, in order for us to have cohesion and a society where we both, we I mean the immigrants and locals, come to do what they need to do. So we create an inclusive environment for everyone to flourish. So engagement for me is an active participation in politics, an active participation in civil services, an active participation wherever you are in need. This is how I understand engagement.” The work and her engagement partly coincide: it allows her to learn more about the communities with migrant backgrounds in Finland; to better understand the challenges they face; and, as a mother, to understand how to deal with challenges and issues related to her children: a problem that, for example, white Finnish women do not have. Her goals are linked both to this engagement described so far, and to the activities she carries out as a volunteer with the organization *****. For example, they organized a podcast that aims to raise awareness of the existence of diasporic communities, also stimulating them to become more active, and to ensure that they are included in Finnish political and social realities. They also organize social events and workshops for both communities with migratory backgrounds and for locals, so that they can better understand and interact. With that organization she was also involved in decision making, and in organizational roles, cooperating with different African diaspora groups.

Speaking precisely of diaspora, for her diaspora means “someone who is relocated to a new place and finds his/her own community within the new place, trying to maintain contact with the home country while living in the host country. So someone who has this transnational kind of identity, between the home country and the host country, and living in between these societies. [...] I am a diaspora, and I work for the diaspora community, especially with *****. Because I think that diaspora is also an identity that you can embrace, not every immigrant may feel part of the diaspora.” She feels very happy for what she is doing now, and she feels she is able to contribute to change with her work and engagement, also in collaboration with different organizations, associations and the Finnish state as well.

Her engagement does not also include an engagement for peace, in fact she states: “It is very difficult to speak about peace and conflict, especially now that we as Ethiopians are in a situation of war, and I don’t really see myself playing any kind of active role to contribute to peace. My way of contributing is mainly by being silent, because at the moment what we get from the media or from the government is not correct. [...] Peace is living in harmony, we do not need to love each other, but to respect each other.” These words reveal the difficulty of doing something about this situation, because living away from the conflict, with impartial or even false information, makes it difficult to structure really effective activities and therefore limits her engagement. By translating the speech to Finland, she believes that society is peaceful, despite the fact that there are

anti-migration political parties. In fact, in Finland, which she calls her second home, there is freedom of expression and freedom of movement in safety. Her wish is to be able to transfer the organization and freedom she experiences in Finnish society to her home country. It comes naturally to her to relate Finland with Ethiopia, as they are her two homes. She also appreciates the Finnish education system in that it allows students the freedom to construct their own academic curriculum, within their chosen faculty, according to their interests. Now her children attend Finnish schools, and she is satisfied with their experience. There are tutors who counsel the children to help them understand whether they want to continue their studies or start working. However, she points out that there are aspects to be improved in the education system, which is not highly inclusive. For example, language: not speaking Finnish well is a big obstacle.

Her work and engagement described so far has brought some changes in Finnish society. For example, peer-support groups enabled some people with a migration background to find work or to start training. Their aim is in fact to motivate people to find a job, focusing on the motivational aspect, as well as on conveying awareness of one's capabilities. Moreover, there is an important collective dimension: she explains that the greatest changes were made by associations/organizations of women from African diasporas or with a migrant background. Some Black women have become researchers or professors at the University of Helsinki, but the problem is that their number is limited. In general, there are many women who are trying to change the status quo. There are still many changes to be made: women with a migrant background who hold high educational or working positions in general are few, and efforts should be made to increase their numbers. Therefore, on one hand Finnish society has positive aspects, while, on the other hand, there are several aspects that need to be improved.

In conclusion, for the future, she believes that more changes need to be brought about in Finnish society, along the lines of what has already been achieved. Her fear is that in the future many highly educated people will move to live in other countries: if Finnish society is not able to provide good job opportunities to well-educated and talented people, especially those with a migrant background, they will leave the country. Companies and Finnish society in general need to be more inclusive, and this is a front on which she also wants to engage in the future, networking with other organizations as well.

FIN-bio-14

The interviewee was born in the 1980s. She has a twin brother, and says that in her family she has always been treated equally with her brother. There was no distinction in treatment between male and female. That is why she felt very strongly about society's unfair treatment of women. In 2009, she moved to Finland because she wanted to learn and study in a society different from her own. The choice of Finland was determined by the fact that several friends had moved there to study. During her master's program, she collected data for her thesis about the work of different peacebuilding organizations around the world. She graduated in 2018 and in 2019 she did an internship at a peacebuilding organization. Back in Helsinki, she had a difficult time because she did not find any job.

She has always wanted to work in the field of peace promotion. While looking for a job in this field, in 2020 she took a six-month intensive course and passed the examination for the Finnish language. After that, she started an internship as a research assistant at a Finnish organization. In 2022 she got her current job working for an NGO supporting the African Union. She also works with the NGO ****, which is very active in Finland, and personally she feels very connected to the African diaspora in general, not only work-wise but also because of her personal experiences. She explains that she did not realize she was part of the diaspora and what diaspora meant until she arrived in Finland. She states: “I think that diaspora is when you have power and numbers, when I came years ago we were invisible, we were not able to get jobs, we had no education, there was just no mention of anything. [...] But now there are so many NGOs with a lot of projects helping immigrants who are educated to get a better job, and to get the same rights as Finnish people. [...] For me diaspora is a sort of support, a kind of activism, but all the time, constantly.” She feels a strong connection between diaspora and activism, and thinks the two are closely related because of the activities they propose. She feels this connection with the African diaspora as a whole, not just the Ethiopian diaspora, as she states that the African diaspora is distinct from the other diasporas in Finland. However, she personally does not use the term activist to define herself.

She states “engagement for me is trying to be an active citizen and taking my space in Finland in different areas that interest me. And sometimes engagement is not necessarily that you have to do so many things, but even to be present in those spaces is engagement for me [...] for me engagement starts with that, being present in those spaces. I try to actively volunteer in different organizations, so this is what engagement means for me”. However, she explains that engagement can also be directed towards the country of origin. The central aspect according to her is that “African solutions to African problems” should be found, with a different perspective from the Eurocentric one and with greater inclusion in the processes of people with an African background. There is often a colonial way of thinking, which neglects the contexts and the people who live in them. The disconnection between political decisions and local contexts is a big problem in her opinion. “Peacebuilding is focused on field work, there is a lot of negotiation but also a lot of politics that sometimes it is difficult to differentiate”, she states. There is often a connection between interpersonal conflicts and intra- or inter-state conflicts, and this discourages her because it reveals to her the situation in which that society finds itself. The term conflict is often associated with war and the escalation of violence, but it refers primarily to a relational level. Learning to put oneself in other people’s shoes and understand their experiences is the starting point, according to her, for achieving peace. However, conflict is not always negative, it is also positive. Today, peace is missing in many contexts because people fail to focus on so-called positive peace. There is in fact a positive peace and a negative peace, as Peace Studies explain: the former does not mean the absence of war, but actively working on the social level, even through conflict, for the realization of peace as a permanent condition. As for the role of women, she explains that although many women are mediators in conflicts, they are often excluded or their role is minimized. But in other areas she explains that women in Finland are more active than men. She explains that in Finland there are currently no active diasporic networks for the promotion of peace at the level of Ethiopian and Eritrean diaspora, there are only by the Somali diaspora.

In her engagement, she has also contributed to spreading knowledge on how to vote for people with a migrant background. Finland is, in fact, one of the few European

states where, after two years of residence, one can vote in municipal elections even without local citizenship, unlike other states where citizenship is required. There was also a project in cooperation with the Ministry of Justice that encouraged people with a migration background to go and vote and provided them with information on the conditions for voting. In fact, many of them do not know that they can vote. Overall, she defines her engagement mainly as political, as she deals with peace and conflict issues. However, she makes it clear that this does not mean she wants to be involved in Finnish politics, nor in the Horn of Africa. Her commitment is political even though she does not engage in politics at an institutional level.

In the area of peacebuilding engagement she struggles to see results. According to her, the main aspect that needs to be changed in Finnish society is the invisible level of discrimination and exclusion. If it is not brought to the surface it is difficult to fight. There is a kind of vicious circle whereby people who were born in Finland or who have lived there for many years are still excluded, in a subtle and invisible way, from some working professions. Even with regard to the acquisition of citizenship there are critical issues, despite that the Finnish system works better than other European states. She, for example, has not yet succeeded in acquiring Finnish citizenship; they are now trying to improve the system. When she was a student, she remembers that she had to apply for a visa every year, but now it is not like that. She applied for citizenship in 2022, and she has a two-year wait, which in her opinion is too long. The point is: if the Finnish system is efficient in all other areas, why is there this inefficiency in the areas of practices relating to people with a migration background?

In conclusion, looking to the future, she would like to work more with the African diasporas in Finland. She would also like to make her engagement more social and less political. She believes that working with diasporas is still an engagement for the promotion of peace, but on a more social than political level. Many members of African diasporas in Finland, in fact, return to their home countries and become leaders of projects on the topic.