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Abstract

The increasing presence of women migrants and ethnic minorities in western countries poses a series of challenges to established feminist theories and practices. Migrant women force us to realise that gender cannot be the only ground on which to analyse women's oppression. This necessity is highlighted in the feminist post-colonial critique of the notion of "global sisterhood". Such a critique generates fundamental questions about whether, how, and to what extent, it is possible to have a common political project among women positioned differently in particular in terms of 'race', ethnicity, legal status/citizenship, class and age. The thesis explores these questions within the specific setting of women's intercultural associations in Italy. It focuses on the challenges to the development of intercultural feminist practices based on a concept of reflexive solidarity. This research argues for the importance of identifying projects of common political engagement based on concepts of solidarity and dialogue. A mixed methods approach is adopted based on qualitative in-depth interviews with migrant and Italian-born women within six selected intercultural associations in Italy and on a documentary analysis of texts produced by the organisations.

This study shows that within these settings, while having a common political engagement among women positioned differently and unequally is recognised as an important aim to pursue, a number of specific challenges and obstacles to its realisation are identified. In particular, it explores the potential role that racialised politics plays in the framework of intercultural feminist practices by investigating how notions of identity, 'race', inequality and cultural difference are addressed, taking into account also the approach of critical studies on whiteness. The research reveals that contesting rigid categorisations of women, and recognising the hybrid nature of cultures, may address aspects of racism but may also serve to conceal power differentials. The research further analyses how power relationships and organisational practices affect the possibility of achieving forms of feminist reflexive solidarity. Specific attention is devoted to ways of contesting and challenging dominant cultural discourses, in particular through cross-cultural comparisons of practices harmful to women, and by developing policies that focus on the issue of domestic and care work at both individual and State level. These emerge as crucial issues in order to progress the transformative agenda of feminist intercultural work at both an organisational and a wider societal level.

Abstract [Italian version]

La presenza crescente di donne migranti e appartenenti a minoranze etniche nei paesi occidentali pone una serie di sfide alle teorie e pratiche femministe. Le donne migranti ci aiutano a considerare come il genere non sia l'unico elemento attraverso cui analizzare la discriminazione delle donne. Questa necessità emerge con forza dalla critica al concetto di "sorellanza globale" operata dal femminismo postcoloniale. Tale critica genera una domanda fondamentale rispetto al se, come e in che misura sia possibile costruire un progetto politico comune tra donne diverse principalmente sulla base della 'razza', etnia, status legale/cittadinanza, classe ed età. Questa tesi esplora tale domanda nell'ambito delle associazioni interculturali di donne in Italia. La ricerca si concentra sulle sfide legate allo sviluppo di pratiche femministe interculturali fondate su un concetto di "solidarietà femminista riflessiva" e analizza la possibilità di realizzare progetti per un impegno politico comune basati sui concetti di solidarietà e dialogo. L'approccio metodologico utilizzato si basa su interviste in profondità con donne migranti e Italiane di nascita, nell'ambito delle 6 associazioni interculturali di donne analizzate, e su un'analisi documentaria di testi prodotti dalle stesse organizzazioni.

Lo studio mostra come in questo ambito, mentre la costruzione di un progetto politico comune tra donne posizionate in maniera diversa e ineguale viene considerato un obiettivo importante da perseguire, una serie di ostacoli alla sua piena realizzazione sono identificati. In particolare, si esplora il ruolo che le politiche razzializzate svolgono nell'ambito delle pratiche femministe interculturali esaminando come le nozioni di identità, 'razza', disuguaglianza e differenza culturale vengono affrontate nelle associazioni, anche attraverso l'approccio degli studi critici su "l'essere bianco/a". La contestazione di rigide categorizzazioni delle donne e il riconoscimento della natura ibrida delle culture emergono come elementi utili a contrastare forme di razzismo, ma al tempo stesso possono anche essere utilizzati per nascondere differenze di potere. La ricerca analizza, inoltre, come le relazioni di potere e le pratiche organizzative condizionino la possibilità di ottenere forme di solidarietà femminista riflessiva. Un'attenzione specifica viene dedicata ai modi di contestare discorsi culturali dominanti, in particolare attraverso una comparazione interculturale tra pratiche dannose per le donne e attraverso lo sviluppo di politiche incentrate sul tema del lavoro domestico e di cura sia a livello individuale che statale. Queste emergono come questioni fondamentali al fine di far progredire l'agenda di un impegno femminista interculturale sia a livello associativo che a livello sociale più ampio.

I, Erika Bernacchi, hereby certify that the submitted work is my own work, was completed while registered as a candidate for the degree stated on the Title Page, and I have not obtained a degree elsewhere on the basis of the research presented in this submitted work.

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Introduction

This study focuses on the challenges to the development of intercultural feminist practices based on a concept of reflexive solidarity in Italy. These challenges stem from feminist post-colonial studies, in particular from a critique of the concept of “global sisterhood”. Such a critique generates a fundamental question about whether, how, and to what extent it is possible to have a common political project among women positioned differently and unequally in particular in terms of ‘race’, ethnicity, legal status/citizenship, class and age. This research explores the arguments put forward by key feminist post-colonial scholars arguing for the importance of identifying alternative projects of common political engagement based on concepts of solidarity and dialogue. The potential role that racialised politics plays in the framework of intercultural feminist practices is examined by investigating how the notions of ‘race’, difference and cultural difference are addressed, also taking into account the approach of critical studies on whiteness. By ‘reflexive solidarity’, I refer to a concept of solidarity which is based on an in-depth reflection by women who hold a privileged position especially in terms of ‘race’, ethnicity, legal status/citizenship, age and class about their own positionality and on how this affects the possibility of creating common projects with women who are positioned differently and unequally. This notion reflects the critical insights of feminist scholarship on reflexivity and of critical studies on whiteness, as I develop in chapters 3 and 4.

Italy is the focus of this study for a number of reasons. Firstly, as an Italian-born and Italian-speaking woman, with a history of activism on women’s human rights, I was in a position to establish access to a number of women’s intercultural associations in Italy. Secondly, there is a significant presence of women’s intercultural associations, bringing together Italian-born and migrant women, combining the promotion of women’s rights with interculturalism and anti-racism and providing a valuable framework to investigate the challenges of intercultural feminist practices. Thirdly, compared to other European countries with longer immigration histories, Italy started to be regarded as a ‘country of immigration’ more recently, starting from the 1990s, even if there has been migration already since the 1970s. As a consequence, the phenomenon of female migration, with particular regard to the activism of migrant women, has not been widely researched. More importantly, the majority of studies in this field are carried out from the

viewpoint of migration studies and not through the perspectives of feminist studies. Analysing the intersections between migration and gender in the framework of women's intercultural settings represents an important contribution to knowledge. More specifically, this research, while acknowledging the feminist post-colonial critique of the notion of "global sisterhood", highlights the value of maintaining a common political engagement among women positioned differently that is founded on the notion of solidarity and dialogue. To this aim this dissertation investigates the dynamics of identity and otherness and it explores the value of cross-cultural comparisons on practices involving women. It also analyses power relationships and organisational practices in specific intercultural settings. Finally, it addresses two specific areas that are crucial for the development of feminist solidarity within an intercultural setting, namely policies on cultural practices and on domestic and care work.

This study was initially focused on the challenges to the enactment of a concept of "international feminist solidarity" (Bernacchi, 2012), as an alternative to the notion of "global sisterhood". However, during the research process I have realised that the concept that is at the core of this thesis is intercultural feminist practices. In this research, I refer to intercultural feminist practices not only because these organisations refer to themselves as women's intercultural associations, but because they endorse the values of interculturalism in their activities. In particular, throughout this research I have analysed how associations deal with concepts of dialogue, mutual exchange, cross-cultural comparisons, as well as othering, racism and whiteness.

Genealogy of the Research Project

As I will explain in Chapter 4, I refer in my study to a feminist understanding of knowledge as 'situated' and 'subjective', as well as 'relational' and 'power-imbued' (Harding 2007, 1993; Haraway 1988). According to this vision, there is no "view from nowhere" as the subject influences the object of study. As acknowledged by Jacqueline Sanchez Taylor and Julia O'Connell Davidson, the growing body of literature on reflexivity:

Stressed that social researchers should reflect on how the data they gather and the way they analyse it may be affected by their own gender, class, race, national and sexual identity. It challenged orthodox assumptions about researchers as abstract, disembodied professionals who produce universal and objective knowledge, and talked instead of the need to situate knowledge through reference to the researcher's personal biography and particular and embodied standpoint [...] (Sanchez Taylor & O'Connell Davidson, 2010: 46)

For this reason, it is important to acknowledge the reasons and the biographical elements that have led me to investigate the topic of this research, my conceptual and methodological choices, and ultimately, how I approached writing the analytical narrative of this thesis. In Chapter 4, I will return to my positionality and how this has influenced the choice of the topic of this research and its execution.

Thus, the 'genealogy' of my research journey arises in and through the intersection of some biographical elements, the scholarship I have encountered during my studies and my experience as an activist in human rights organisations. The recurring element in my personal biography that has influenced the research topic is an interest in meeting and understanding the 'Other'. This journey was not exempt from complexities and contradictions. With regards to my biographical experiences, some travels in the Southern hemisphere that I undertook at an early age have been particularly significant. On those occasions, my reactions varied significantly. In one instance, it took the form of 'culture shock' because of the different living conditions and cultural habits of the population, as well as widespread poverty, making me feel uneasy about my privileged position. On another occasion, my reaction was one of fascination and a desire to be part of the local population. In relation to this point, Sara Ahmed's (2000) text "Strange Encounters - Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality" proved very helpful in making me realise how both attitudes can be just different versions of what she defines as "stranger fetishism". On the one hand, the tendency is to reify the 'Other' as only 'Other'. On the other hand, there is the tendency of exoticising the 'Other' or appropriating his/her difference in a consumerist manner. In both cases the (Western) subject remains positioned at the centre. It maintains the central position from which to judge the 'Others' and enter into relations with them.

Another biographical experience that influenced my research journey and my interest in studying migration issues is connected to friendships. Here again, I have come to question my attitudes, asking myself if my desire to meet and make friends with people who are different from myself in terms of 'race', ethnicity or country of origin also hides a desire to appropriate their difference. As I will illustrate in Chapter 3, Reina Lewis states with reference to her experience as an Englishwoman wearing the Islamic veil that she could "enjoy the pleasures of cultural transgression without having to give up the racial privilege [...]" (Lewis, 1999: 512). I have found similarities in situations in which I take part, for example, in events organised by African friends. In particular, I could enjoy the pleasure of being part of their group and of exploring different aspects

of their culture, including folkloric aspects such as dance, but once the events terminated I would return to my house and job, reflecting my racial privilege. The issue of the value and significance of friendship in feminist intercultural practices emerges as a controversial issue in my interviews.

Another event that had a great influence upon my personal journey, especially from a feminist point of view, was the conversion to Islam of an Italian-born friend and colleague which led to her wearing the Islamic veil. Such an event produced strong feelings of uneasiness, discomfort and anger among my group of women colleagues as we interpreted that change in our colleague's life as a possible attack on the rights and freedoms gained by western women. As I explain better in Chapter 7, feminist post-colonial scholarship made me question this position and helped me realise how easily western feminism puts itself at the centre and makes itself a point of reference when judging the trajectories of women in other continents. Moreover, I have come to realise how the western obsession with the Islamic veil has its origins in the colonial period.

In my B.A. dissertation, I concentrated on women's human rights from the perspective of international law while in my M.A. dissertation, I focused on the debate about the universality of human rights from the perspective of the international women's human rights movement. In this thesis, I started to address the philosophical questions around the universality of human rights, ethnocentrism and cultural relativism that have continued to be among my research interests. In that dissertation, my central point was that the terms of debate that oppose the concept of universality of human rights on the one hand, to that of cultural relativism on the other, vary significantly if we shift the focus from a theoretical approach to one centred on the experience of women's rights organisations in different countries and continents. My argument was that for those organisations, especially those located in the most deprived areas of the global South, human rights had come to represent a powerful tool with which to advocate their claims to their states.

As an activist in human rights organisations, I volunteered for several years in Amnesty International as coordinator of the women's working group that focused in particular on the Global Campaign "Stop Violence Against Women". Amnesty International uses human rights as its theoretical framework and, in this case, that of women's rights as human rights. In particular, it refers to international treaties, such as the UN Convention against all forms of discrimination against women (CEDAW) and to other international declarations and documents, such as the Platform for Action adopted by the UN Beijing Conference on Women. This is the theoretical

framework (Bunch, 1995; Peters, J., & Wolper, A. (Eds.), 1995) from which I started the research journey and from which I began to relate to other (not necessarily contradictory) theoretical paradigms, such as post-colonial feminism.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework adopted in this thesis refers to feminist post-colonial theories and responses to them, as Chapters 2 and 3 will illustrate. In response to the critique of the notion of “global sisterhood”, different theoretical perspectives are considered, including: “transversal politics” based on the practice of “‘rooting’ and ‘shifting’” (Yuval Davis, 1997; Yuval Davis 2006a, 2006b, 2012); “politics of identification based on the formation of coalitions as opposed to one of identity” (Brah, 1996); politics of “closer encounters” based on dialogue and on the work that is needed to be done “in order to get closer to others, without simply repeating the appropriation of ‘them’ as labour or as a sign of difference” (Ahmed, 2000); “non colonizing feminist solidarity across borders” (Mohanty, 2003) founded on decolonisation, anti-capitalist critique and the politics of solidarity. This thesis also adopts an approach based on intersectionality. As I further explain in chapter 2, intersectionality has been largely used both at theoretical and policy level to indicate the various axes of differentiation that shape people’s lives and contribute to social inequality. For the aims of this dissertation, I take into account differences among women particularly on the basis of ‘race’, ethnicity, legal status/citizenship, class and age. One of the difficulties in the application of intersectionality theory relates to the number of different grounds to include in the analysis. The grounds that I have included are those that emerged as the most significant within the explored intercultural feminist practices and contributed towards the establishment of a project aimed at bringing together feminist and anti-racist aims. This does not mean that other grounds, such as sexuality and ability are not relevant, issues that will hopefully be explored in further studies. The core research question that informed this study is the following: “How can practices of women’s activism in intercultural settings reveal the challenges of a project founded on a notion of feminist reflexive solidarity?”

Some of the most relevant questions that I formulated based on the literature review on post-colonial feminism (focusing on the different dimensions of feminist intercultural practices) include the following:

Concepts of difference and solidarity:

- What is the basis for working on a common political project between women positioned differently in terms of 'race', ethnicity, legal status/citizenship, class and age?
- How is difference and inequality addressed in the work of specific associations and as asked by Avtar Brah (1996: 114) "How are the boundaries of difference constituted, maintained or dissipated?"
- What are the assumptions that inform the thinking of Italian-born women in the associations, for example that migrant women should go through the same trajectory of emancipation as western women or that migrant women are viewed as a unified (homogenous) single category in opposition to Italian-born women.

Cultural difference and intercultural dialogue:

- How is the notion of cultural difference - including the issue of visible signs of cultural difference (e.g. the Islamic veil) - addressed? (Said, 1978; Yeğenoğlu, 1998; Lewis, 1999, 2004; Loomba 1998)
- To what extent is intercultural dialogue helpful to unveil deeply ingrained norms and practices that constrain women into assigned and subordinated roles across different countries and cultures? (hooks, 2000; Mendoza, 2002)
- To what extent is intercultural dialogue helpful to avoid both a position of "feminist fundamentalism" and of cultural relativism? (Anthias, 2002)

Racism and whiteness:

- To what extent is intercultural dialogue fostering an acknowledgement of whiteness as a position of privilege and as the unacknowledged ethnicity? (Frankenberg, 1993a, 1993b; McIntosh, 1988, 1990; Knowles, 2004)
- Who speaks for whom and who gets to be heard? (Kilomba, 2010)

Methodological Approach

The research adopts a mixed methods approach based on in-depth interviews with migrant and Italian-born women holding specific roles within the six selected intercultural associations in Italy and on documentary analysis of texts produced by the associations. The rationale for combining

these two methods of analysis lies in the need to examine the official discourses produced by the organisations together with the personal testimonies of the women who are involved with them. Chapter 4 will outline the research design and the method of analysis used in this thesis.

As the aim of the thesis is to describe the challenges to intercultural feminist practices based on a concept of reflexive solidarity in Italy, the interest is not in generalising the findings but in an in-depth exploration and description of the challenges and dynamics of feminist solidarity. Similar to what Sara Ahmed writes in relation to her research on diversity work, in the area of anti-racism and interculturalism there is a lot of emphasis on best practices and lessons learnt. In contrast:

There is much less research describing the complicated and messy situations in which diversity workers often find themselves. When description gets hard, we need description. (Ahmed, 2012: 10)

My research adopts a similar approach in relation to intercultural work in women's associations. At the same time, I have aimed at keeping a reflexive attitude that avoids judgemental attitudes towards my interviewees. The aim of the study is not to identify "good" and "bad" examples, nor to rank associations according to a value scale, but to describe "the complicated and messy situations" (Ahmed, 2012: 10) in which intercultural feminist practices are carried out.

Language and Terminology

In this research, I refer to two different sectors or categories of women: Italian-born and migrant women. For the purpose of this study, I regard it as relevant to distinguish between these two groups in order to identify power dynamics and asymmetries, as well as possible relationships and alliances. I am aware that such distinctions may reproduce an artificial hierarchy, as the process of naming and defining categories always includes such risk. However, as argued by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988) with reference to her notion of "strategic essentialism", it is possible to use collective categories for strategic reasons, despite knowing that these categories do not always correspond to "real" collective identities. I have used the term "Italian-born" instead of "Italian" to indicate that these women were born with Italian citizenship, which in practice however, can also be acquired through residence in the country. I have generally preferred the use of the term "migrant" instead of "immigrant" as the first generally conveys a more dynamic concept of migration, while the second is often used in common language with a negative connotation. By "migrant", I refer in particular to women coming from different continents,

including Eastern Europe, Africa, Asia and South America, namely from so-called “developing countries”. Even if there is no preclusion for migrant women from so-called “developed countries”, for instance Northern Europe or America, they are rarely members of the associations that I have studied. In Chapter 6, I will explicitly explore the question of complex and multiple identities and the naming and categorising of different groups.

Another contentious term is that of ‘race’ which I use in inverted commas in order to emphasise that it is a social construct and does not correspond to an essential category. As I explain in Chapter 3, while the concept of ‘race’ has been denied any scientific validity (Rattansi, 2007), social relationships continue to be informed by this concept. This is why it retains validity in the explanation of social events. As argued by Sara Ahmed (2012) in relation to the notion of ‘race’:

To proceed as if the categories *do not matter* because *they should not matter* would be to fail to show how the categories continue to ground social existence. (Ahmed, 2012: 182)

In this research I have also referred to associations whose basis is feminist and anti-racist, even though the term ‘feminist’ is generally not used in the description of the associations’ mission. Other terms are used, such as the promotion of women’s self-determination. In Chapter 5, I return to this point, in particular the question of whether the members of the association see themselves as feminist and how this notion relates to that of being part of a women-only association. For the purpose of this thesis, I argue that to study the challenges and dynamics of feminist intercultural practices, it is not necessary for intercultural associations to explicitly employ the term ‘feminist’ to describe their mission while working for the promotion of women’s rights and self-determination.

Outline of the Thesis

The thesis is organized in 9 chapters. Chapter 1 provides a summary overview of the phenomenon of migration in Italy, in particular female migration, the way it has been investigated by scholarship, relevant statistical data, as well as the legislative and policy framework that applies to migrants in Italy. Chapters 2 and 3 set out the theoretical framework of the thesis based mostly on the contribution of feminist post-colonial scholarship. Chapter 2 focuses on the feminist post-colonial critique of mainstream western feminism, in particular of the notion of “global sisterhood” and to the lack of acknowledgement of the relevance of racism. It then focuses on the

possibility to reframe different forms of sisterhood based on friendship or on a common political engagement (Tong, 2009) and on the use of intersectionality theory as a possible instrument to acknowledge differences among women. Finally, the chapter addresses the issue of alternative projects of a common political engagement among women based on the concepts of solidarity and dialogue elaborated by some feminist post-colonial authors (Yuval Davis, 2006a, 2006b, 2010; Brah 1996, Ahmed, 2000, Mohanty, 2003). Chapter 3 addresses the potential role that racialised politics plays in the framework of intercultural feminist practices. In particular, it focuses on two aspects: “cultural racism”, on the one hand, and a critical reflection on whiteness on the other. Concerning the first aspect, it shows how this has assumed a central role in racialised politics over recent years. The chapter focuses first on concepts of culture and cultural difference. In particular, both the risks of “feminist fundamentalism” and cultural relativism are explored. The tensions between multicultural policies and the attainment of migrant women’s rights are then addressed. Within this framework, particular attention is paid to the issue of traditional cultural practices involving women, such as female genital mutilations (FGM) and forced marriages. The special relevance of the issue of Muslim women is also highlighted and how these women have come to be represented as the embodiment of cultural difference. This chapter also presents a critical reflection on whiteness as an unspoken position of privilege and an unacknowledged ethnicity.

Chapter 4 explains the epistemology and methodology of the thesis. Reference is made to feminist scholarship in particular to the “feminist standpoint theory” (Harding, 1993, 2007; Hartsock, 1998) and to the notion of “situated knowledge” (Haraway, 1988), as well as to feminist interviewing. It then explains the methodology followed in the study, the research design and methods applied. In particular, the rationale for choosing a mixed methods approach, using documentary analysis and qualitative in-depth one-to-one interviews, is explained. Issues relating to the interviewing process and to the analysis of the data collected are also addressed. Annexes of my research instruments are included.

Chapter 5 introduces the data analysis of this research by presenting a profile of the associations on which this research focuses. It briefly presents their history; mission; typology; internal organisation and decision-making mechanisms; relationships with public authorities and funding; affiliation with international networks and collaboration with other women’s associations. This information is also provided in a summary and comparative table annexed. The final part of this chapter addresses the personal meaning that women interviewed attribute to their belonging to

an intercultural association, and the importance of personal relationships within the associations. It also addresses the relationship, as well as the tension and contradiction, between two central aspects of the association's mission and work, namely the consideration of the association as feminist and the value assigned to belonging to a women-only association.

Chapters 6, 7, 8 and 9 contain the main findings of the field research. Chapter 6 addresses the dynamics of identity and otherness within the framework of intercultural feminist practices. It first focuses on the contesting of the rigid categorisation of women on the basis of nationality grounds, promoting the idea that all individuals and cultures are hybrid and arguing that this concept of hybridity can be considered as a bridge between Italian-born and migrant women. At the same time, it also confronts women's testimonies with the concept of 'colour-blindness' and the risk that the notion of hybridity may conceal different power positions among women. It also addresses the risks of ethnicisation and exoticisation in intercultural work and analyses to what extent the associations contribute to opposing or reinforcing 'othering' attitudes towards migrant women. Chapter 7 focuses particularly on two cultural practices that are often taken to represent cultural difference, namely Islamic veiling practices and FGM. As well as analysing women's reflections on the emergence of these practices in Italy and Europe, an investigation of theatre performances by one of the associations (based on cross-cultural comparisons on practices affecting women) is also included.

Chapter 8 illustrates the dynamics and challenges of power relations and organisational practices in intercultural associations. The chapter also investigates the main barriers that emerge to the achievement of equal relationships and mutual exchange. The chapter first focuses on women's structural inequalities and how those intertwine with differences of treatment that, it can be argued, are due to forms of prejudice and racism. The issue of power-sharing and decision-making mechanisms within the associations is then examined. The specific experience of one association is investigated as within this association the issue of power-sharing intertwines with the topic of different strategies for the empowerment of women. The chapter also analyses the different forms of racism that emerge from the interviews, including mechanisms of patronising and what has been named "reverse discrimination" – which according to some amounts to racism, as I further explain in the chapter -, as well as issues of prejudices among migrant women. Finally chapter 8 investigates to what extent belonging to intercultural settings facilitates a reflection by Italian-born women on their whiteness, as a position of privilege and unacknowledged ethnicity. In

particular, it investigates to what extent Italian-born women have been able to go through a process, named by Gilroy¹ as 'moving from guilt to recognition to reparation'.

Chapter 9 focuses on two areas of policies addressed by the associations that are particularly significant for intercultural feminist practices, namely multicultural policies and policies on domestic and care work. On the first topic, the work of a selected association is analysed, as this association framed its policies on the possible tensions and contradictions between multiculturalism and women's rights. On the second topic, the chapter asks to what extent women's intercultural associations provide a space for reflection on the inequality of women in relation to domestic and care work, on the spaces of migrant women's agency in this field, as well as on the possibility of creating forms of feminist solidarity in relation to this specific issue. The final Chapter 9 contains the implications of the research findings for the challenges faced by intercultural feminist practices, based on a notion of reflexive solidarity.

¹ Speech by Gilroy cited by Kilomba (2010: 22)

Chapter 1

Profile of Migrant Women in Italy

1.1 Female Migration in Italy

In this introductory chapter, I provide a summary overview of the phenomenon of migration in Italy, in particular female migration and the way it has been investigated by scholarship. Key statistical data is presented and the legislative and policy framework that applies to the migrant population is analysed. In Chapter 5, I will address the topic of the activism of migrant women and I will present the specific associations on which I focus for this study. It must be noted that the topic of female migration into Italy has only started to be researched relatively recently and mostly from the viewpoint of migration studies. In contrast, as acknowledged by Bimbi (2003), there have been few intersections with feminist studies.

In contrast to other European countries with long immigration histories, such as the UK and France, but similarly to other southern European countries such as Spain, Portugal and Greece, Italy has witnessed significant immigration more recently, starting from the early '90s. There has been, however, migration since the '70s, when some specific groups of migrant women arrived in Italy in order to be employed as domestic servants in bourgeois families. The female percentage of total migration to Italy has always been relatively high (it has never been less than 30% of the total); in recent years there has been a constant increase in the number and proportion of female migrants, and indeed they have outnumbered male migrants since 2008 (see Table 1 and Chart 1).

Female migration to Italy has been described as part of the Mediterranean model of migration. This refers to a large presence of spontaneous labour migration, to the lack of comprehensive migration policies and to a large informal labour market. This model is also described as characterised by the presence of migrant women coming alone to work in the domestic and care sector, thus providing for the care needs unaddressed by insufficient welfare measures (King 2001). However, recent scholarship (Anthias, et al. 2013b) has questioned the presence of a homogenous southern European model of migration arguing for both the existence of important

differences among southern European countries and of significant similarities between the north and south of Europe. The latter concern gendered labour markets and the occurrence of a convergence in welfare and labour market policy in European states, as well as migration policies. The phenomenon of feminisation of migration has been noted in literature as affecting migration towards the European Union over the last twenty years (UNFPA, 2006; INSTRAW, 2007). It has been noted (INSTRAW, 2007) that the term “feminisation of migration” is misleading as it might suggest the idea of an absolute increase in the proportion of migrant women, when already by the 1960s women represented 47% of the total migration. Even if an increase in the number of migrant women in specific regions has occurred, the most significant change in the last number of decades is the increase in the number of women migrating alone in search of jobs, rather than for family reunification reasons. The feminisation of migration that is regarded as characteristic of the Mediterranean model is reflected in a deskilling of migrant women who are employed in low-wage jobs, even when they hold professional and educational titles. According to the literature, this feature characterises female immigration to Italy from the early waves of the ‘70s to the present day (Campani & Chiappelli, forthcoming).

The majority of migrant women coming to Italy in the ‘70s in order to be employed as domestic maids in upper class families came from the Philippines, Cape Verde, the Dominican Republic, Somalia, Eritrea, Sri Lanka and El Salvador and often arrived via the networks of the Catholic Church. During this period, migrant women remained rather invisible as they were mostly employed as live-in domestic workers. During the ‘80s, women started to be employed as daytime domestic workers, and no longer as live-in domestic workers, achieving a greater degree of autonomy and becoming more visible.

The FeMiPol report² argues that scholarship - up to the end of the ‘80s - investigating the phenomenon of this early immigration often referred to a condition of “triple oppression: social, economic and cultural” (Campani, 2007: 5), or to a “triple invisibility” (Chiappelli & Cabral, 2006: 3). This was based on the women’s arrival in Italy, their employment in the domestic sector, and also the fact that they were not particularly visible in public places. During this first phase, Giovanna Campani (2007) argues that another lens through which the behaviour of migrant women was analysed was that of tradition versus modernity and she argues that this approach

² The Research Project FeMiPol is a Specific Targeted Research Project of the 6th Framework Programme of the European Commission about “Integration of Female Immigrants in Labour Market and Society”.

risked reinstating stereotypes about the lack of emancipation of migrant women compared to the supposedly emancipated Italian-born women. On this point she states that:

Thinking that to concepts of tradition and modernity would correspond some opposite behaviours of subordination and emancipation, does not take into account the large diversification of the immigrant population and the complexity of the situation in which immigrant women are. (Campani, 2007: 6)

This reflection endorses the feminist post-colonial critique - explored in Chapters 2 and 3 - of a linear progression from a state of subordination to one of emancipation that western women had supposedly gone through and women from the southern hemisphere would be called to imitate (Ahmed, 2000).

During the '90s Italy witnessed an increasing presence of immigrants and started to be commonly defined as an "immigration country". During this period a significant number of migrant women arrived in Italy for family reunification purposes, linked to the passing of a specific piece of legislation. This meant that women who had arrived alone in the '70s and '80s, could now request that their husbands and children join them. Mara Tognetti Bordogna (2012)³ argues that the women who come for the purpose of family reunification have more difficulties regarding their integration into the new society, as they are more dependent on their husbands and lack family networks. Moreover, the fact that these women are dependent on their husband for their permit to reside has a clear negative impact in cases of separation, divorce or domestic violence. Another frequent problem is the lack of a sufficient knowledge of the Italian language among these women who tend to have limited contacts with Italian society. This results in "an unbalanced gender and generational relation within the family" (Chiappelli & Cabral, 2006: 16), as the mother risks losing her authority over her children.

According to the literature, it was during this period that the phenomenon of the trafficking of women for sexual exploitation also became significant in Italy (Carchedi et al., 2000). Some authors (Ambrosini (ed.), 2003; Leonini, 1999) argue that a significant number of migrant women may have known that they were migrating in order to be involved in the sex-industry, however the conditions of violence and exploitation to which they were submitted were often far more severe than they had expected. Campani (2000b) argues that, during this period, female migration started

³ Tognetti Bordogna has carried out an extensive review of the literature on female migration to Italy, therefore I refer here to her work.

to become increasingly associated with prostitution. In this way, stereotypes and false representations are created. The phenomenon of trafficking also led governments to start legislating on this issue. In particular, the legislative decree 286/1998 established that women who were victims of trafficking could be involved in social reintegration projects and be granted a special permit to reside. A specific law on trafficking was later approved in 2003 (law 228/2003) which establishes the measures for provision of assistance to victims of trafficking. Having already started in the '80s, during the '90s the numbers of women refugees continued to increase, as many women fled from conflict situations. However, as the numbers were fewer than male refugees, no specific social policies were designed for them. On the contrary, according to Tognetti Bordogna (2012), these women often faced specific difficulties such as being subjected to sexual violence during the trip or indeed having escaped from violence, creating the need for gender-specific policies.

In this period, a number of studies were published that described the heterogeneity of migrant women's situations depending on their different life-paths, origins, and the different contexts of their arrival. Some of this research also explicitly criticised the approach "tradition versus modernity". For instance, Vicarelli states:

The immigrant women themselves are autonomous and able to develop an identity, which is not that of their past but nor is it the one that western women want; immigrant women themselves take a position in relation to migratory processes, to the means of inclusion inside host societies, but above all to their being collocated between their culture and the one, in transformation, of host countries. (Vicarelli, 1994: 9, *author's translation*)

Starting with the new millennium, the phenomenon of migrant women being employed in the domestic and care for the elderly sector, mostly as live-in workers, becomes increasingly significant. The FeMiPol report summarises the following four characteristics of the Italian society that led to such a situation:

a) the constant and progressive ageing of the Italian population; b) the "segmentation" of the Italian labour market; c) the increasing entry of Italian women into the labour market; d) the critical situation of the Italian welfare state. (Chiappelli & Cabral, 2006: 3-4)

This situation has been described in the literature as a shift from the condition of *colf* to that of *badante* - (Campani & Chiappelli, forthcoming), namely from being employed in upper class Italian

families as domestic maids (*colf*) to being employed as carers for old people (*badante*⁴). In this second case, migrant women have been employed also by lower income families who use their pension or some welfare subsidy to cover the cost of a domestic worker in the absence of sufficient welfare measures dedicated to the care of old people. I will return to this point in Chapter 9, focusing specifically on the role of migrant women in domestic and care work.

Some scholars (Ambrosini & Cominelli, 2004) have identified four types of situations that have led to migrant women being employed in domestic and care work: exploratory; utilitarian; family-based; and promotional. These four categories are not mutually exclusive. The first trend is represented by young women who are motivated by curiosity and end up doing this kind of work almost by chance: they can aspire to change their job, though they can also be subjected to exploitation. The utilitarian profile is represented by the women who come for limited periods with the sole aim of earning money. They come mostly from Eastern Europe on tourist visas. The family-based profile is composed of women who have left their family and children in their country of origin. They come from countries such as Peru and Ecuador and often attend training courses in order to obtain some social mobility and take part in associations. Finally, the promotional profile is composed of adult, well-educated, women who were professionals in their countries of origin. This is the group for which it is most difficult to accept this kind of work and they leave it as soon as they can. The authors indicate that this profile of women is also active in civil society organisations. This last profile is confirmed by data that shows a general difficulty for migrant women with high levels of education in finding employment appropriate to their qualifications; a large part of this is due to the difficulty of having their educational achievements recognised (Chiappelli & Cabral, 2006: 15). These patterns also emerge from the interviews that I carried out, including the specific issue of the role carried out by migrant women in the domestic and care sector and their position in relation to that of Italian-born women.

Other difficulties that emerge from the studies in the field that are summarised in the FeMiPol report, are a “powerlessness” and “voicelessness” of migrant persons, often due to the prejudiced attitudes reflected in their interactions with institutional representatives (Chiappelli & Cabral, 2006: 15). Furthermore, migrant women often face a dual hostility both from their own national/ethnic group, when they express their willingness to study or work, and from Italian

⁴ This term, which literally means “the one who looks after”, has a derogatory connotation which reflects a negative attitude both towards old people and migrants. The term has been criticised by migrant organisations but is commonly used.

society (Chiappelli & Cabral, 2006: 16). On this point Wendy Pojmann (2006) emphasises how migrant women are viewed in very stereotypical terms and are often judged on the basis of how similar or different they are to Italian women. She concludes that both Italian institutions and Italian-run associations dealing with immigration have failed to devise a comprehensive strategy for integrating migrants and for addressing differences based on 'race', ethnicity, class and gender.

During this period, advances in communication technology, as well as low cost flights, influence the modality of migration by increasing so-called transnational migration; this is characterised by alternating periods abroad and in the person's country of origin. According to Schmoll (2005) this kind of emigration is particularly apparent in the Euro-Mediterranean area. The use of communication technologies via the Internet also makes it easier for the women to maintain contact with children that have remained at home, and therefore to maintain their maternal role. Moreover Tognetti Bordogna (2012) emphasises how, through this kind of emigration, women have the potential for negotiating gradual changes in gender relationships.

Recent studies have described the situation of migrant women as one of a "frozen professional destiny" (Campani & Chiappelli, forthcoming) in domestic and care work. It has been argued that in the overwhelming majority of cases, it is not a temporary occupation, leading to more qualified professions; rather it becomes a permanent job. Jacqueline Andall (2003) also referred to the emergence of a "caste of service". The only possibility of improvement for migrant women in Italy appears to be that of moving from a situation of live-in domestic workers to one with residential autonomy. Moreover, it is argued that the fact that the migrant women are faced with a "frozen professional destiny" has led to an exhaustion of the older female migratory chains (for example from the Phillipines and Cape Verde) which have been replaced with new flows from Eastern Europe. For instance women migrants from the Philippines currently tend to move to other European countries, the USA or Canada (Campani & Chiappelli, forthcoming).

Finally, as regards the situation of the children of migrants, the so-called "second generation", studies on the topic are not very extensive especially as regards the specific situation of girls. Tognetti Bordogna (2012) argues instead that there is gender specificity to the detriment of girls. According to the author, this is based on the necessity for girls to undertake a more complex trajectory of negotiation of their identity, both in relation to society and to their family. At the same time, she recalls how different studies carried out in Italy have shown a great heterogeneity of individual trajectories as well as a plurality of identities among these young people.

Concerning the forms of activism, the most relevant association is the “G2 Network” which defines itself as:

[...] a national non-partisan organisation founded by the children of immigrants and refugees born and/or raised in Italy. Members of the G2 Network defines themselves as “children of immigrants” and not as “immigrants”. Those born in Italy have not made any migration, and those who were born abroad but raised in Italy have not emigrated voluntarily, but were brought to Italy by parents or other relatives. “G2” does not stand for “second generation immigrants”, but for “the second generation of immigration”, defining immigration as a process that transforms Italy, from generation to generation. (Rete G2 – Seconde Generazioni)

The G2 network focuses on issues relating to citizenship, and, in particular, it advocates for the change of the citizenship law that is currently based on a *jus sanguinis* principle. There does not appear to be associations composed specifically only of the daughters of migrants.

1.2 Profile of Women Migrants in Italy

In 2011, the National Office for Statistics (*Istat*) registered the presence of 4,570,317 resident ‘foreigners’⁵ of which 2,369,106 (51.8% of the total population) were female as against 2,201,211 (48,2%) male. Resident ‘foreigners’ represent 7.5% of the total population. Irregular migrants are estimated at between 500,000 and 700,000. As already recalled, since 2008 migrant women outnumbered migrant men (see Table 1) and this is in the context of a consistent rise in the resident foreign population since 2002 (see Table 1). During 2010, this increase was estimated at 7.9%. During this same year, the number of resident foreigners rose primarily as a result of immigration from abroad (425,000 individuals) but also partly as a result of births of children to migrants (78,000), 13.9% of the total number of those born to residents in Italy.

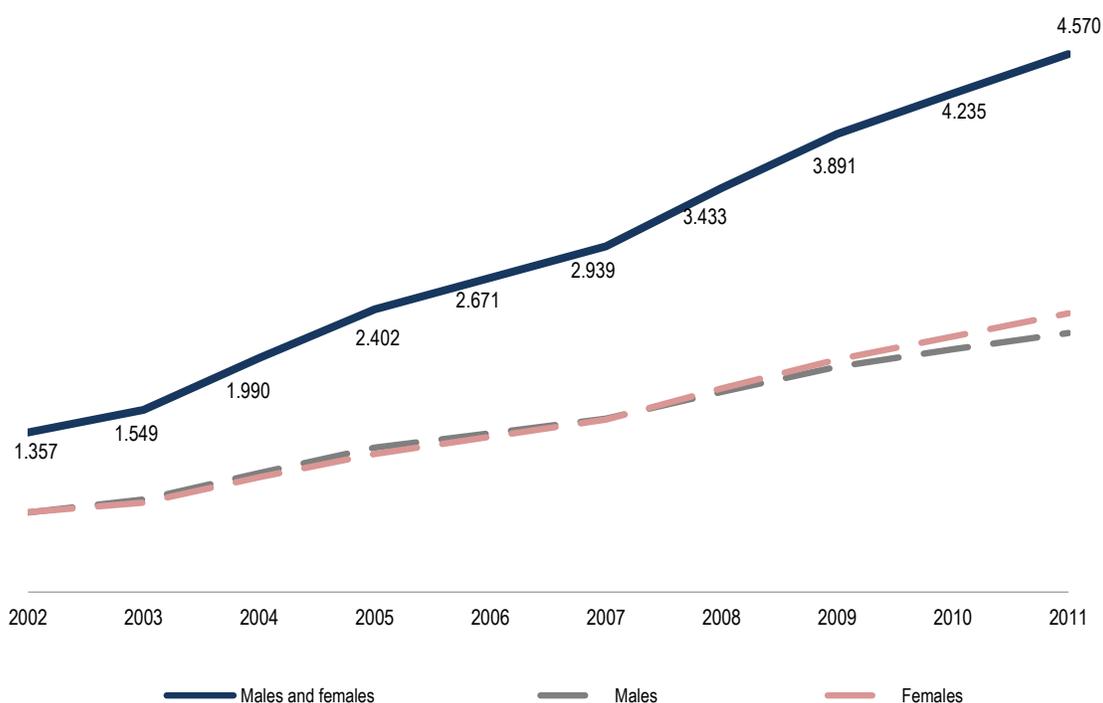
⁵ I have used here the term ‘foreigner’ as this is the language used in statistical reports, however I have put it in inverted commas in order to emphasise the difference from the terminology that I decided to employ in this research, namely that of “migrants” and “ethnic minorities”.

Table 1: 'Foreigners' Residing in Italy at 1st January – Years 2002-2011 (Thousands)

Years	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Total	1,357	1,549	1,990	2,402	2,671	2,939	3,433	3,891	4,235	4,570
Females	50.11%	49.13%	49.15%	48.92%	49.42%	49.88%	50.42%	50.84%	51.29%	51.84%

Source : Istat

Chart 1: 'Foreigners' Residing in Italy at 1st January - Years 2002-2011 (Thousands)

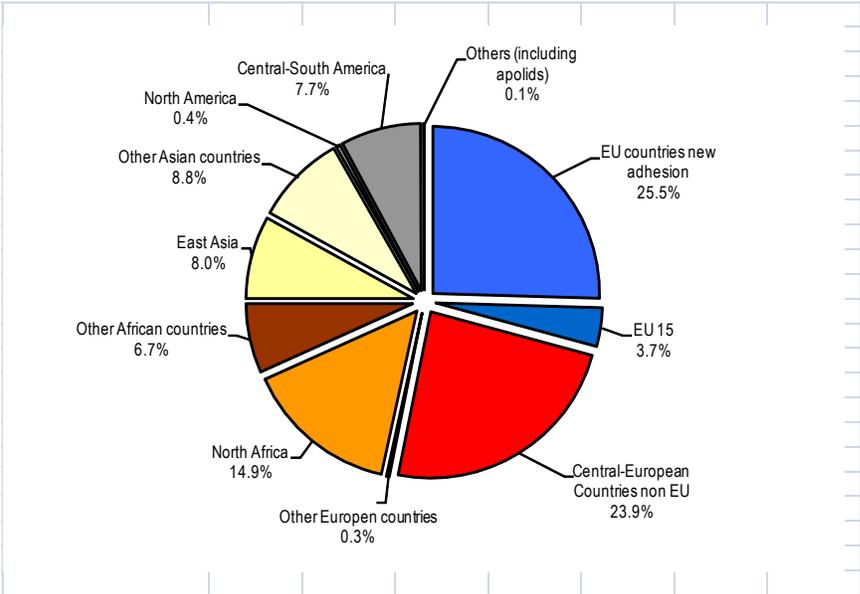


Source: Istat

Regarding countries of origin, Italy has a very diverse migrant population. However, concerning the geographical areas, (see Chart 2 and Table 2) in 2011 Europe is the area where the great majority of migrants come from accounting for 2,441,467 (53.4% of the total migrant population) of which 56.7% is female. This is followed by migrants from Africa accounting for 986,471 migrants (21.6% of the total migrant population) of which 40.6 % is female and Asia accounting for 766,512 migrants (16.8% of the total migrant population) of which 45.7% is female. Finally, North and South America account for 372,385 migrants (8.1% of the total migrant population) of which

62.3% are women. It is South America that makes up the great majority of that migrant population accounting for 354,186 migrants (7.7% of the total migrant population) of which 62.7% is female. Breaking down the data into single countries of origin, in 2011 Romanian citizens - accounting for nearly one million migrants - made up the largest 'foreign' population in Italy (21.2% of the total number of 'foreigners'). Romania was followed by Albania, Morocco, China, Ukraine and the Philippines (see Table 2). These countries were also the most important countries of origin for migrant women but with some important differences. In some cases the female presence is significantly higher than the male one, reflected in the overall data revealing that Italy has had distinct female migration flows since the early migrations of the '70s. This is very evident in the case of the Ukraine where the female percentage of migrants is 79.8% and also for Poland (71.2% female), Moldova (67.2%), Bulgaria (61.8%), and to a lesser extent Romania (54.6%). Regarding Asia, the Philippines have a female percentage of 57.8%. Finally for South America, Peru has 60.1% of migrants who are female and Ecuador 58.5%. In the majority of these cases, the larger presence of women may be ascribed to the employment of women in the domestic and care sector and in some cases also in the sex-industry, although the number of women employed in this sector is difficult to ascertain.

Chart 2 - 'Foreigners' Residing in Italy by Geographical Area of Origin - 1st January 2011



Source: Istat

Table 2 - 'Foreigners' Residing in Italy by Sex and Geographical Area at 1st January 2011

GEOGRAPHICAL AREAS AND COUNTRIES OF CITIZENSHIP	1st January 2011		
	Total	F	% F
EUROPE	2,441,467	1,383,945	56.7
Europe 15	171,351	103,801	60.6
(a) Countries of new adhesion	1,163,469	663,294	57.0
of which: belonging to central-eastern Europe	1,162,427	662,611	57.0
of which: Romania	968,576	529,265	54.6
Poland	109,018	77,603	71.2
Bulgaria	51,134	31,586	61.8
Europa 27	1,334,820	767,095	57.5
(b) Central-eastern Europe (non EU countries)	1,094,123	609,891	55.7
of which: Ukraine	200,730	160,113	79.8
Moldova	130,948	87,951	67.2
Other European countries	12,524	6,959	55.6
AFRICA	986,471	400,843	40.6
Northern Africa	678,929	274,042	40.4
Other African countries	307,542	126,801	41.2
of which: Nigeria	53,613	29,064	54.2
ASIA	766,512	350,282	45.7
Eastern Asia	366,306	194,608	53.1
of which: Philippines	134,154	77,595	57.8
Other Asian countries	400,206	155,674	38.9
AMERICA	372,385	232,064	62.3
Northern America	18,199	10,060	55.3
Central-Southern America	354,186	222,004	62.7
of which: Peru	98,603	59,293	60.1
Ecuador	91,625	53,640	58.5
OCEANIA	2,642	1,593	60.3
Stateless	840	379	45.1
TOTAL	4,570,317	2,369,106	51.8

Source: Istat

(a) It includes 10 countries that entered the E.U. on 1st May 2004 (Czech Republic, Slovakia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovenia, Hungary, Cyprus and Malta) and two countries that entered on 1st January 2007 (Romania and Bulgaria).

(b) It does not include countries which, though belonging geographically to the area of Central and Eastern Europe, in the course of time have joined the European Union. The following countries are included instead: Croatia, Serbia, Montenegro, Kosovo, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia, Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Albania, Turkey.

Similar data emerges from the elaboration done by *Censis*⁶ (2013) on data referring to residence permits granted in the year 2012. The countries of origin with a high female percentage are the same as those listed in the 2011 *Istat* survey. Moreover, as regards South America, Brazil is shown to have a percentage of migrants that are female at 73.1%.

⁶ Censis is the acronym for the Research Centre on Social Investments (*Centro Studi Investimenti Sociali*).

As regards the grounds on which residence permits are granted, *Censis* (2013) registers that in 2011 the number of residence permits granted on family reunification grounds (42.7% of the total) exceeded the number of work permits (36.0%). Among those who have been granted a family permit on family reunification grounds, 60% are female. Moreover, the female percentage raises to 69% of the total if we consider migrants aged more than 20 years. The majority of female reunification permits are granted to migrants who come from North Africa (especially Morocco), the Balkan area (in particular Albania) and South America. Although holding a family reunification permit does not prevent access to paid employment, migrant women who have this kind of permit are in a disadvantaged situation where they wish to divorce or in the case of domestic violence, as their permit to stay depends on their husband.

Concerning education, (see Table 3) *Istat* notes that while generally the level of education of the migrant population is high, in the case of migrant women, the level of education is very similar to that of Italian-born women. For instance, in 2011 *Istat* registered that 53.9% of migrant women have at least a secondary level of education compared to 55.8% of Italian women. More specifically 11.5% of migrant women have a B.A. compared to 14.9% of Italian women, whereas in the case of men only 6.7% of migrant men hold a B.A. compared to 12.1% of Italian men. Moreover, 42.4% migrant women have attained an upper secondary education compared to 40.9% Italian women and 46.1% migrant women have attained a lower secondary education compared to 44.1% of Italian women. This data confirms that there is a significant incongruity between educational qualifications of migrant women and their restricted occupational opportunities. As already emphasised, this is due to a number of factors, including the lack of recognition of educational attainments, discrimination, as well as the demand for migrant women labour in selected sectors, especially that of domestic and care work.

Table 3: 'Foreign' and Italian Population (15-64 years) by Education Degree and Sex, 2011

		Lower secondary education attainment	Upper secondary education attainment	Tertiary education attainment
'Foreigners'	Males	54.0	39.3	6.7
	Females	46.1	42.4	11.5
Italians	Males	46.5	41.4	12.1
	Females	44.1	40.9	14.9

Source: *Istat*, Labour Force Survey

As regards the average number of children, according to the SOPEMI report published by *Censis* (2010b), migrant women have double the level of fertility (2.3 children per woman) compared to Italian-born women (1.3) and they tend to have children at a younger age, on average at 27.9 years compared to 31.7 for Italian-born women.

Regarding occupation, according to *Censis* (2013), there is a “gender polarisation” in the occupation of the migrant population. Whereas migrant women are predominantly occupied in non-commercial services⁷ (79% of the total) men are mainly occupied in the industrial and agricultural sector. The rest of migrant women workers are employed in the industrial sector (10.6%) and in the sales and retail sector (7.9%). The large presence of migrant women in the domestic and care work sector is also confirmed in different reports and official statistics. For instance, the survey of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies on the employment contracts activated in 2011 (Table 4) indicates that there were 98,592 contracts involving migrant women as domestic workers and 63,123 as personal assistants at home. These two typologies together made up about 35% of the total number of employment contracts involving migrating women. This confirms that domestic and care work represents the most significant sector in which migrant women signed a work contract in 2011.

Table 4 - Contracts Involving Workers with non EU Citizenship by Gender (Female) and Profession (First Ten Most Numerous Professions) – Year 2011

Profession	Absolute value	% value
Domestic workers	98,592	21.8%
Waiters	65,723	14.5%
Personal assistants at home	63,123	13.9%
Agricultural labourers	30,358	6.7%
Cleaners	27,476	6.1%
Cleaners in hotels	19,140	4.2%
Shop assistants	14,920	3.3%
Bartender	12,809	2.8%
Cooks in hotels and restaurants	7,557	1.7%
Porters	7,306	1.6%
<i>Other jobs</i>	<i>105,558</i>	<i>23.3%</i>
Total	452,562	99.9%

Source: Ministry of Labour and Social Policies

⁷ Non-commercial services include: transports and storage; information and communication; financial and insurance activities; real estate activities; professional, scientific and technical professions; rental and travel agencies; support services to business; public administration and defence; compulsory social security; education; health and social services; arts, sports and entertainment; domestic and care work; extra-territorial organisations.

In another report, *Censis*⁸ (2010a) estimates that, in 2009, there were in Italy a total of 1,538,000 domestic workers, employed both on a regular and irregular basis, of which the overwhelming majority were migrant women (71.6%) mostly from Eastern Europe: Romania (19.4%), Ukraine (10.4%), Poland (7.7%) and Moldova (6.2%), as well as the Philippines (9%) and Peru (5.5%). This report also highlights that the presence of domestic workers in Italian families has significantly risen over the last few years. Currently, one Italian family in 10 employs a domestic worker. The overwhelming presence of migrants in this sector is confirmed by the European Migration Network (2010) which indicates that 5 times more migrant workers are employed in the domestic and care arena than Italian-born workers. As regards the share of women employed in domestic work, the overwhelming majority of women both among Italian-born and migrants is similar in terms of percentage (81.4% of 'foreigners' are women and 84.3% of Italian-born are women), but other characteristics vary such as age and education. Migrant domestic workers are younger (57.3 % of migrant workers are under 40, as against 51.4 % of Italian-born workers). The report also clearly emphasises that the education level of migrant women domestic workers is higher than that of Italian-born women: 37.6 % have a high school diploma (compared to 23.2% of Italian-born women) and 6.8% (compared to 2.5% of Italian-born women) have a third level qualification. Based on the interviews with a sample of domestic workers, the *Censis* report also indicates that there is still a high percentage of irregular work in this sector, as only 38.2% of the sample declares that they have regular full-time work, while 39.8% states that they have no regular employment, and for the remaining 22% access is only partial and irregular, declaring less hours than they really worked. Most importantly, the report states that the percentage of domestic workers living in the employer's own home (26.5% of the total) is composed almost exclusively of migrant women. However, in the last few years there has been an increase in the percentage of Italian-born women working in this sector compared to several years ago. They appeared to have almost completely abandoned this kind of work. This is certainly linked to the current economic recession. Finally, as regards wage levels, the *Censis* report indicates that the average salary of a domestic worker is usually less than €1,000 net per month. One woman in four domestic workers earns less than €600 per month, and another quarter between €800 and €1,000. Only 14.6% earn more than €1,200 per month. Moreover the report estimates that the average hourly wage is a euro less per

⁸ Censis published a study in 2010, in conjunction with the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs about the risks connected with domestic work. The research is based on interviews with a sample of 997 domestic workers.

hour for migrant women for the same kind of work compared to Italian-born women (€6.80 against €7.80).

Overall, migrant women have a labour market participation rate of 53% which is much lower than that of migrant men (82%), but interestingly it is higher than that of Italian-born women (46%) (Campani & Chiappelli, forthcoming). Generally, higher labour market rates for third-country migrant women, relative to national women, are also registered in other southern European countries, in contrast to older immigration countries (Ayres et al, 2013). However, disaggregated data relating to the type of occupation, show that in Italy migrant women are much more likely to be employed in low paid and low-skilled sectors than Italian-born women. In particular, data, elaborated by Fullin (2012) on the basis of the *Istat* Labour Force Survey, indicates that in 2010, 58% of migrant women were employed in unskilled manual work as against only 12% of Italian-born women, while 17.6% carried out skilled manual work, as against 10.1% of Italian-born women. As regards intellectual, professional and clerical employment, only 18.4% of migrant women were employed in this sector, compared to 69.5% of Italian-born women. The percentage of women employed in the agricultural sector is low for both migrant (6%) and Italian-born women (8.4%). Furthermore, the same data shows that the situation for migrant women worsened in the last few years as the percentage of migrant women employed in unskilled labour increased from 47% in 2007 to 58% in 2010. Also at EU level, there is evidence that migrant women are heavily over-represented in low-skilled and low-paid occupation. Moreover, highly educated third-country migrant women are less likely than women nationals or EU migrants to have a job that is consistent with their educational attainments and qualifications. This is regarded as a failure by the EU to use migrant women's skills as well as a clear indicator of the discrimination that they are faced with (Ayres et al, 2013).

As regards employment of migrant women in the self-employed sector, according to the data collected by the Observatory on the Development of Female Entrepreneurship of *Confcommercio* and *Censis*, there are about 100,000 migrant women in this area: 70% in services; 13.5% in property rental and the travel market and 15% in commerce and restaurants. This sector is predominantly composed of Chinese women (15.8%), followed by Romanian (7.6%) and Moroccan women (6.7%). In 2010, there were 98,294 companies managed by migrant women, while the number of Italian-born women who are entrepreneurs is 1,234,443. It is also relevant to note that, while the number of Italian-born women entrepreneurs had slightly decreased over the previous

year (-0,1%), the rate of migrant women had increased by 6% (Confcommercio & Censis, 2011). As regards the countries of origin of women who are employed, the 2012 *Caritas-Migrantes*⁹ report indicates that migrant women who have the highest rate of employment are women who migrate on their own. The great majority (60%) come from Europe, with 16% from Africa, 14% from Asia and 10% from the Americas.¹⁰

Migrant women are also heavily involved in the sex industry ranging from trafficking to “voluntary” prostitution. Data collection in this field is particularly difficult given the illegal nature of this activity. According to the International Organisation for Migration, trafficked people in Italy are estimated at between 19,000 and 26,000 each year, while the organisation *Caritas* estimates that there are 30,000 trafficked people in Italy (*Gruppo Abele*, 2008b). Furthermore, some data is available through the registration of projects carried out thanks to the legislative decree 286/1998. As already recalled, this piece of legislation established that people who are victims of trafficking may be involved in social reintegration projects and be granted a special permit to reside. From 2000 to 2012, 665 projects were financed, aimed at 21,378 trafficked people (of whom 1,191 were minors). However, the number of people who received some form of support, without being formally inserted in the projects, was much larger as it amounted to 65,000 people (Dipartimento pari opportunità, 2012).¹¹ In addition, following the new law on trafficking 228/2003, from 2006 to 2012, 166 projects have been approved that assisted 3,770 trafficked people.¹²

The Coordination Committee of Government actions against trafficking in 2008 estimated the number of migrants involved both in street and indoor prostitution between 29,000 and 38,000. Further data is provided by *Gruppo Abele* (2008a), a Catholic organisation that has long been

⁹ The *Caritas Migrantes* report is produced every year by *Caritas*, a Catholic organisation that has long been involved in providing services for the migrant population.

¹⁰ Concerning the specific countries of origin, within Europe, Romania is the largest category with 375,049 registered employed women, followed by the Ukraine (121,158), Albania (71,215) and Poland (69,602). The majority of employed women migrating from Africa come from Morocco (50,980), Nigeria (12,793) and Tunisia (8,680), while those from Asia come mainly from China (56,325) and the Philippines (52,352). Finally employed women from the Americas come mainly from Peru (40,314) and Ecuador (33,315).

¹¹ Data available at: www.pariopportunita.gov.it/index.php/component/content/article/70-traffico-di-esseri-umani-/2295-contro-la-tratta-di-persone and www.pariopportunita.gov.it/images/stories/documenti_vari/UserFiles/II_Dipartimento/tratta/Dati%20per%20sito_18_04_2013.pdf consulted on 18th May 2013

¹² Projects provided for by law 228/2003 normally last three months and can be renewed for another period of three months. In some cases, people who benefit from these projects, once these are terminated, continue to be assisted through the projects of art. 18 of legislative decree 286/1998.

involved in the provision of services for migrants including for migrants involved in the sex-industry. In 2008, the association published research based on a sample of 4,000 women involved in prostitution that the association contacted through its work. The research revealed a number of characteristics of the women and their work. First of all, 80% of the women stated that they knew that they were going to be employed in prostitution, while 14% stated they did not know it and that they were victims of violence and/or kidnapped. 86% of women practised prostitution on the street, 63% of the women had attended school for a maximum of 8 years, while 28% had attended secondary school or university. Regarding their work situation in their country of origin, the great majority of the women had unstable jobs or were unemployed while only 10% stated that they had had a permanent job. The great majority of women (78%) stated that they were unmarried and 30% stated they had one or more children. Concerning the involvement of women in indoor prostitution, research published by Carchedi & Tola in 2008 and referring to the period 2001-2007¹³ estimates the total number of people involved in this kind of sex industry at between 11,900 and 15,500. They estimate the rate of comparison between street and indoor prostitution at 68.1%, namely for every 100 persons who are involved in street prostitution there would be 68 in indoor prostitution (*Gruppo Abele 2008a*).

1.3 Legislative and Policy Framework

Italian policy on immigration was initially characterised by a lack of regulation that has given rise to situations of juridical uncertainty that fostered exploitation and racism (Hein, 2010). Italy started to legislate on the subject at the end of the '80s, while in more recent years there has been a tendency towards a more restrictive regulation of migration policies. Furthermore, public discourses have often fostered the criminalisation of migrants and asylum seekers accompanied by racist attitudes within which some nationalities have been targeted more than others.

Around the end of the '80s, the institutions started to legislate on the subject (Valtimora, 2009) with the Law 39/1990, the so called *Martelli Law* that regulates both categories of migrants and asylum-seekers. The law provided for a significant regularisation of migrants already present in the country and it established a flow of immigrants based on a call mechanism. However, scholars and experts on migration issues emphasise the inadequacy of this law in regulating the phenomenon

¹³ This research is based on three projects carried out at local level: the Roxanne project in the municipality of Rome; the On The Road project for the Province of Pisa and the West Project for the Emilia Romagna Region.

of immigration (Valtimora, 2009). It was not until the end of the '90s that Italy approved a legislation designed to treat migrants in a homogenous manner through law 40/1998, the so called *Turco-Napolitano* law. The law established a yearly quota mechanism for non-EU citizens. The prospective migrant workers had a position with an employer, but could also be requested by individuals, family members, associations or local public bodies. Concerning the control mechanisms, the law established the opening of centres for the temporary detention of irregular migrants for a maximum of 30 days.

Different laws have been passed since then on the subject, restricting the rights of migrants. The main ones are the law 189/2002, so called *Bossi Fini*, and a number of legislative measures approved in 2009 that have been labelled under the name of the "security package". The law *Bossi-Fini* was based on a vision of the immigrant as worker that translated into a stricter link between the length of the residence permit and the length of the employment contract - although the law has never been strictly applied. Other restrictive aspects introduced by the law include the forced accompaniment to the border of those who have been expelled and their residence in temporary centres while awaiting expulsion. Furthermore, all migrants who come from outside the EU are obliged to be photographed and to give their finger-prints, thus treating them differently to Italian citizens and suggesting parallels between the condition of migrants and criminals. Finotelli & Sciortino (2009) argue that the intent of the law was clearly that of achieving a definite reduction in the number of unwanted flows. This was to be achieved also through the control of ships near the Italian coasts. Notwithstanding this restrictive aim, the law was accompanied by a regularisation process aimed at more than 600,000 migrants. This restrictive intent has been reinforced even more strongly by the so-called "security package". Already the definition puts out a clear message that migrants are a potential danger to citizens' safety. This concept has been particularly endorsed by some right-wing parties, driven by *Lega Nord* (Northern League) which has made overtly racist arguments as the basis of its policies and has achieved its political success around them.¹⁴ Such a perspective is clearly reflected in the "security package"

¹⁴ It is also important to note that the role of the press has been quite powerful in depicting migrants, especially undocumented ones, as dangerous criminals, thieves and rapists. This is obvious every time that an article or a news headline reads "Clandestine migrant raped/stole/assaulted..." The repeated use of this language and the large attention given to those facts by the media are powerful tools to instill in the population the conviction that migrants are to be feared and that irregular migration equates to criminality. It is also possible to observe a specific trend of racialisation in this vis-à-vis Albanians, who came in large numbers after the collapse of the communist regime, then Romanians, for whom Italy posed no restrictions after their entry into the EU, and the Roma populations who have been especially targeted. On the other

that first and foremost introduced the crime of irregular entry and residence, which was later to be deleted by the European Court of Justice as it was found to be in conflict with the European Directive on return of third-country nationals. In addition, the law created the juridical concept of “participation in the crime” for all those who help undocumented migrants, while it obliged civil servants to report them to the authorities. Moreover, it required the obligation to show a residence permit for all civil status acts with the exception of the registration of children to school and access to the health service.¹⁵

In 2010, the “Plan for Integration in Security” was introduced. It is based on five principles of integration: education and learning, work, housing and local administration, access to the most essential services, integration of minors and second generations. The agreement introduces the so-called “Point-based Permit of Stay” that must be signed by all adult migrants applying for a residence permit in Italy, and is valid for two years. In 2010, language tests were also made mandatory to obtain a long-term residence permit. In the same year, Italy also adopted the “Second Security Package” that *inter alia* delegated the responsibility to renew residence-permits to the Municipalities. All these measures can be regarded as good illustrations of the growth of securitisation in migration policies that has taken place in Europe over recent years. These policies are premised on what Triadafilopoulos has defined as an “aggressive civic integrationism” (Triadafilopoulos, 2011 in Anthias et al. 2013a: 5). Reinforcing that view, Floya Anthias et al. (2013a) state:

In the shadow of Islamophobia, particularly, and the related securitization discourses, integration is conceived as an accomplishment to be performed by the migrant prior to the right of residence rather than after it. (Anthias et al. 2013a: 5)

Moreover, as Anthias et al. (2013a: 3) note, these principles are valid only for migrants coming from developing countries and not for migrants coming from developed countries such the U.S.A., western Europe or Japan.

hand, Muslims have been generally targeted on cultural and religious grounds, not only as suspected terrorists after the 9/11 events, but also in relation to crimes committed against women, in particular honour crimes.

¹⁵ It is relevant to note that in a first draft of the legislation, irregular migrants were denied the right to access the health service, but because of strong opposition shown by the representatives of the medical profession, the provision was later withdrawn. This, together with the opposition shown by many jurists on the juridical concept of the crime of being undocumented, witnesses that the current state legislation on migration does not have the support of the whole population; indeed it is one of the most contested.

As regards the policy on asylum (Hein, 2010), Italy still does not have a unitary law in this field. Until the beginning of the '90s, Italy only welcomed asylum-seekers from European countries, with only a few exceptions (when ratifying the 1951 UN Convention relating to the status of refugees it had opted for the geographical limitation clause to Europe)¹⁶. At the beginning of the '90s, it withdrew the clause, thus opening up to asylum seekers from outside Europe. Large numbers of people fleeing from wars or unstable countries arrived by sea initially from Albania, then from the ex-Yugoslavia, Kosovo and Somalia. In the absence of normative provisions, specific temporary measures had to be found, leaving those asylum seekers in an uncertain state for a considerable period of time. During that period, the practice of 'rejections at sea' began through the setting up of naval blockades in order to prevent people from landing on the Italian coast. This provoked some major incidents including one case in 1996 where almost 300 people died off the Sicilian coast. After that, the procedure stopped temporarily but resumed again in 2009. The current legislation that derives from the endorsement of the European directives on asylum, has introduced the institution of 'subsidiary protection'. This can be granted to those who do not have grounds for having refugee status but are fleeing from armed conflicts, for example.

Finally, as regards regulation on citizenship, this is granted on the basis of a *jus sanguinis* principle, primarily through birth. Law 91/1992 establishes that migrant people are allowed to ask for Italian citizenship only after 10 years of regular residence in Italy. This is a rather long period in comparison with other EU countries - for instance France and the UK require a minimum of 5 years residence, while Germany requires 8 years.¹⁷ The same law establishes that children of migrant parents who are born in Italy, and have resided in the Italian territory without interruptions until the age of 18 years, are entitled to Italian citizenship within one year. This regulation is regarded as particularly restrictive as it excludes children who have been away from the Italian territory even for short periods, such as 6 months or one year. Moreover, it is possible to access this procedure only within one year after having reached the age of 18 years. For these reasons associations of the so-called "second generation" of migrants are involved in advocacy campaigns in order to request a new citizenship law based on the principles of the *jus soli*, namely on the basis of residency on the territory.

¹⁶ The U.N. Convention relating to the status of refugees, permitted the State to adopt a geographical limitation clause indicating from which region it was willing to accept asylum seekers.

¹⁷ On the different modes of acquisition of citizenship in the EU, it is possible to visit the EUDO CITIZENSHIP Database on Modes of Acquisition of Citizenship in Europe at <http://eudo-citizenship.eu/databases/modes-of-acquisition>

1.4 Concluding Remarks

In this introductory chapter, I have presented a profile of migrant women in Italy and provided an overview of the history of female migration to Italy and the way it has been analysed in studies to date. I have also presented the main statistical data profiling the number and characteristics of migrant women in Italy, in particular their countries of origin, occupation and education. Some comparative analysis with Italian-born women is included. Finally, I have provided a legislative and policy framework describing the evolution of the migration legislation and the current laws applying to migrants and asylum seekers.

The picture that emerges shows that the female migrant population has outnumbered male migrants since 2008 and, in 2011 it represented almost 52% of the total number of 4,570,000 regular migrants residing in Italy (corresponding to 7.5% of the total population). While overall there is a close gender balance in the female and male percentage of migrants, this is far from homogenous when national origins are analysed. In some national groups there is an evident over-representation of women, while in others, of men. This shifting gender imbalance is due to gender polarisation in the employment sector. The overwhelming majority of women in some national groups is due to their high level of employment in the domestic and care sector, as well as in the entertainment and sex-industry (although data in this sector is difficult to ascertain).

The employment of the first waves of migrant women arriving in Italy as domestic maids in upper class families has been displaced, over the last decade by that of 'family assistant' for the care of elderly people in both middle and lower income families (the so-called transition from *colf* to *badante*). This is largely due to the inability of the welfare system to provide for the needs of an increasingly ageing population, coupled with the impossibility that other family members, traditionally women, will provide for the care needs of their families. In line with other southern European countries, migrant women have a higher employment rate than Italian-born women. However, they are over-represented in low-skilled and low-paid occupations, despite educational qualifications similar to those of Italian-born women. Moreover, the situation of migrant women has been described as one of a "frozen professional destiny" (Campani & Chiappelli, forthcoming) in domestic and care work. In the overwhelming majority of cases, it is not a temporary occupation leading to more qualified professions. Rather it becomes a permanent low-status position. Moreover, it is argued that this situation has led to a depletion of the older female migratory chains (for example from the Philippines and Cape Verde) which have been displaced

with new flows from Eastern Europe. (Campani & Chiappelli, forthcoming). As in other European and western countries, the high level of employment of migrant women in the sector of domestic and care work, that was traditionally performed by Italian-born women, raises the central question of asymmetries and inequalities among women. I will return to this point in Chapter 9 when dealing with specific Italian intercultural associations' policies on this issue.

In conclusion, in this chapter I have identified the main characteristics of female migration to Italy and of related State policies. This provides a framework for my analysis of intercultural feminist practices in selected associations. More specifically, I will return, in the analysis chapters, to the question of how structural inequalities between Italian-born and migrant women in relation to citizenship rights, as well as migration policies, impact on the development of intercultural feminist practices.

Chapter 2

Beyond the Critique of “Global Sisterhood”: Towards Feminist Reflexive Solidarity?

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I explore some of the most significant contributions of feminist post-colonial theories and the responses to them in light of the following questions: How can feminist postcolonial thinkers guide us in developing a common agenda among women while simultaneously acknowledging differences primarily of ‘race’ and ethnicity, but also differences of class and age? How can feminist post-colonial theories help to illuminate both the challenges and possibilities of instigating and maintaining a project founded on the notion of feminist reflexive solidarity?

By post-colonial feminism, I refer to feminist theories that focus on the legacy of colonialism and racism in women’s lives and which criticise the universalising tendencies expressed in western feminism, in particular for not being inclusive of the experience of women in colonised countries. At the same time post-colonial feminism also acknowledges the limited attention devoted to gender issues in mainstream post-colonial theory. I have also included voices of black feminism who have equally focused on the intersections between gender, ‘race’ and class in black women’s lives. In this theoretical framework, I draw mostly from authors writing in English and who base their studies on the legacy of British colonialism. However, I have also included some references to authors, such as Fatima Mernissi (2001), Meyda Yeğenoğlu (1998), Reina Lewis (1999; 2004) who refer to French colonisation as well. Italian post-colonial studies, referring to Italian colonisation, have started only recently. They focus mostly on biographical experiences of migration and issues of identity and language while reflections on feminist concerns are less developed (Ponzanesi, 2004).

In this literature review, I do not aim to give a complete account of the vast body of literature of feminist post-colonial theories. Rather I assess the contribution of those authors that I argue are most relevant in relation to the question of building of a project based on a notion of feminist solidarity. I use the concepts provided by post-colonial feminism to analyse, in a broader sense, relationships of dominance that originate from the colonial experience. I argue that concepts provided by post-colonial theory, and specifically post-colonial feminism, are critical to the investigation of power relations affecting the migrant population who come from previously colonised countries, focusing on the specific case of Italy. As argued by Sara Ahmed (2000: 10): “colonialism is structural rather than incidental to any understanding of the constitution of both modernity and postmodernity”. In relation to this point, I refer in particular to the concept of post-coloniality that - more than that of post-colonialism - emphasises the relationships between the colonial past and the present. The emphasis on this link is also relevant to the investigation of personal relationships among women positioned differently along the axes of ‘race’ and ethnicity, such as those occurring within women’s intercultural associations in Italy analysed in this thesis. As emphasised also by Sara Ahmed (2000: 13): “We need to ask how contemporary modes of proximity reopen prior histories of encounter”. At a geopolitical level, Etienne Balibar (2004) also notes the relationship between the colonial past and current migratory policies both at symbolic and practical levels. In particular, he notes the existence of administrative instruments to control migrants that are similar to those used for a colonised population; a similar ethnicisation of migrant workers “following the old model of *ethnic classification* invented by colonialism in order to divide and hierarchize the dominated” (Balibar, 2004: 42).

In order to develop a conceptual framework that underpins this thesis, in this chapter I first address the feminist post-colonial critique of the notion of ‘global sisterhood’, a notion that many authors regarded as premised only on the experiences of white, western, middle class women (Mohanty, 1984; Spivak, 1993; Ang, 1995; hooks, 2000; Ahmed, 2000). I then focus on the critique by post-colonial feminism about the lack of acknowledgement of the importance of racism in western feminism. I refer here to the debate on “racism versus sexism” that characterised ‘second wave’ feminism¹⁸. On the basis of the critique of the concept of ‘global sisterhood’, I then reflect

¹⁸ By ‘second wave’ feminism, studies generally refer to the women’s movement that affirmed itself during the ‘60s primarily in western countries. While ‘first wave’ feminism mainly focused on women’s legal equality and suffrage, ‘second wave’ feminism addressed a broader range of issues including sexual and reproductive rights, violence against women, *de facto* discrimination. It was during ‘second wave’ feminism that the notion of ‘global sisterhood’ was created.

on the possibility of reframing different forms of sisterhood. I refer to the question posed by Rosemarie Tong (2009): whether such a revisited concept should be based on friendship or on a common political engagement. I then address the issue of intersectionality as a possible instrument to acknowledge and address differences among women. Finally, I explore possible alternative projects of a common political engagement among different women based on concepts of solidarity and dialogue elaborated by a number of feminist post-colonial authors.

2.2 “Global Sisterhood” under Discussion

The critique of the concept of global sisterhood as one that, it was argued, was in reality only premised on the experience of white, western, middle-class women may be considered as the basis for reformulating a project based on a notion of feminist reflexive solidarity. The concept of global sisterhood was conceived based on the conviction that patriarchy is the fundamental form of structural oppression that affects all women. On this premise, women were called to unite against patriarchy. However, feminist post-colonial authors have argued that those theories took little account of the different experiences of Third World, black and women from ethnic minorities. They have also shown how western feminists often positioned themselves in a patronising manner towards those women, while often not acknowledging their own position of power at a personal as well as geo-political level. In this way, feminist post-colonial authors aimed to oppose any form of female essentialism, as well as female chauvinism, defined as:

[...] the tendency of some women, particularly privileged women, to speak on behalf of all women, including women they regard as “other” than themselves. (Tong, 2009: 200).

Feminist post-colonial scholarship also criticised the tendency by western feminism to represent Third World women as a homogenous category and as necessarily more oppressed or less emancipated than western women. One of the scholars who first posed this question very strongly was Chandra Mohanty in her very influential work *Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses* (1984), in which she criticises the representation of “Third World Woman” as a homogeneous, monolithic subject by western scholars. At the same time she specifies that she is aware of the fact that there is no single and unified western scholarship or political praxis. In spite of this, she argues that western feminism is the scholarship by those authors that define others as non-Western and, as a consequence, themselves as western - thus assuming the West as the primary point of reference, as regards both theory and practice. She also underlines that the same

criticism can be made of Third-World scholars who write about their own countries employing the same methodology. Mohanty also shows how this kind of analysis hides a binary logic on the basis of which if women are powerless, their gaining of power would mean the reaching of the feminist goals, without questioning the structure of power itself. Consequently, western scholarship is criticised when it does not acknowledge the need to situate itself within the global economic and social system of power. Otherwise, she states, it will be seen by Third World women as contiguous with western imperialism.

bell hooks (2000) shares a similar criticism towards hegemonic western feminism for its intention to claim ownership of the feminist movement, as well as its lack of willingness to challenge the capitalist system. She also criticises the paternalistic attitude through which western feminists regard themselves as emancipated and “therefore in the position to liberate their less fortunate sisters, especially those in the “Third World”” (hooks, 2000: 45). However, hooks also distinguishes between this kind of western feminism - that she defines as “power feminism” (hooks, 2000: 45) - from the radical and socialist feminist movements that were also present in the US - as well as from the feminism expressed by western women in less privileged positions than wealthy, white and heterosexual women.

The relation between western feminism and other feminisms is described by Sara Ahmed as a narcissistic one “but a narcissism that is haunted by the spectre of difference: the other reflects back the image of what ‘we once were’, or even ‘what we might have been’” (Ahmed, 2000: 165-166). Ahmed criticises any representation of a linear progress from a state of subordination to one of emancipation that western women apparently went through and that Third World women would be called to imitate. Ahmed further notes that the universalism that denotes western feminism is premised on two opposite fantasies, either of distance or proximity. In the first case, western feminism refuses a real encounter with women of other countries by homogenizing them into a unified category. Ahmed specifies how this happens, for instance, when western feminists see the Islamic veil as an invariable sign of women’s subordination, a point also emphasised by Mohanty (2003). On the other hand, universalism can be read as a “fantasy of proximity” in the sense that “one already knows what ‘the other’ means (and therefore needs)” (Ahmed, 2000: 166).

In a similar way to Mohanty (2003), Spivak (1993) criticises the way in which the category of the ‘Third World woman’ is articulated in western literature. As noted by Childs and Williams (1997:

166) “her primary objection is that many analyses leave the interrogator’s place transparent and unquestioned”. This appears to be a fundamental point for any project built around concepts of feminist solidarity. Spivak refers for instance to the way ‘sati’ - the practice by which a widow burns on the funeral pyre of her husband - has been portrayed in western literature, namely that of “white men are saving brown women from brown men” (Childs and Williams, 1997: 163).

In order to better understand the standpoint of feminist post-colonial authors, and their relationship to western feminism, it is fundamental to take into consideration the historic dimension. As underlined by Sara Ahmed:

My consideration of the relationship between stranger fetishism and postcoloniality is also a thesis about how postcoloniality is impossible to grasp in the present. (Ahmed, 2000: 14)

In this effort, the account by Ania Loomba (1998) of colonialism and its legacy is particularly helpful. Loomba is careful not to fix First World and Third World feminism in homogeneous categories acknowledging differences of ‘race’, ethnicity, class, religion, sexuality, and politics. However, she argues that there is a general degree of scepticism in post-colonial countries towards the word ‘feminism’ because it is seen as having a western connotation and consequently is often linked to a legacy of colonial exploitation. Furthermore, women of post-colonial countries, she states, have sometimes identified themselves more with other issues than feminist ones, such as that of national liberation. This argument is also made by different post-colonial scholars, for instance Len Ang (1995) who argues that feminism cannot be a home for all women as, for some of them, other political projects may be more relevant. The point is well exemplified in the following quotation of a South African feminist cited by Loomba:

burning one’s bra to declare one’s liberation as a woman did not connect psychically as did the act of a Buddhist monk who made a human pyre of himself to protest the American occupation of Vietnam. And perhaps that was the point – we were a people under siege. As women we identified with this – the national liberation struggle was our struggle. (Kemp et al. 1995: 138, cited in Loomba, 1998: 228)

On the basis of this critique of the notion of global sisterhood by post-colonial feminism, I have identified a number of themes to investigate in my field research on women’s intercultural associations. In particular, when analysing the relationship between Italian-born and migrant women, I have focused on the presence of patronising attitudes by Italian-born women based on the assumption that migrant women should go through the same trajectory of so-called

'emancipation' as western women. What Sara Ahmed (2000: 5) defines as a "fantasy of proximity". I have also investigated whether migrant women are conflated into a homogenous category. In relation to the notion of feminism, I have asked whether there is an explicit reference to "feminism" in the description of the aims of the association or if this is a contentious term and as a result other notions are used to refer to the promotion of the condition of women. Finally, I have asked "who speaks for whom?" and "who gets to be heard?"

2.3 The "Sexism versus Racism" Controversy

Post-colonial feminism has also pointed to the way in which the issue of racism has been overlooked by western feminism. The question of which form of oppression, whether racism or sexism, was more fundamental was commonly debated by 'second-wave' feminists. A belief was generally held that racism was itself caused by sexism and that efforts to eradicate sexism would bring an end to racism, but not vice-versa. In particular, Elizabeth Spelman (1988) identifies those arguments in the work of some key feminist authors of the '70s such as Kate Millet (1969), Shulamit Firestone (1970) and Mary Daly (1975). Firestone (1970: 117) describes racism as "extended sexism" as she sees sexism as the model for racism. Millet (1969: 33) describes sexism as more fundamental than racism for three main reasons: it is more difficult to eradicate, it has a more "pervasive ideology" and it provides the "most fundamental concept of power" in our society. Daly (1975: 56) also sees sexism as the "root and paradigm" of other forms of oppression. Racism is described as a "deformity *within* patriarchy [...] It is most unlikely that racism will be eradicated as long as sexism prevails" (Daly, 1975: 57). On this basis, Daly invites black women to see what unites them with white women, namely a shared experience of sexism. She sees racial distinctions as one of the elements in patriarchal societies which aim at dividing women.

It can be argued that those descriptions deny the specific reality of black women's lives as they do not consider the impossibility for black women to separate their identity of being a woman from that of being black. Furthermore, they do not take into account the fact that often black women have perceived racism, and not sexism, as the first form of oppression they experience. As noted by Spelman (1988: 124), these descriptions also do not acknowledge the role that white women play in racism and classism. Moreover, no positive role is assigned to "racial" identities as if once racism is eliminated, black women would not have any further interest in their 'blackness'. These

considerations will play a central role in devising a theory founded on intersectional analysis, as I will detail in the following paragraphs.

However, it is also important to acknowledge that not all strands of western feminism have identified the ground of women's oppression only in gender. For instance Brah, referring to socialist feminism, recognises that:

This strand of feminism distances itself from the presumed 'radical' feminist emphasis on power relations between the sexes as the almost exclusive determinant of women's subordination. (Brah, 1996: 104)

Socialist feminists refer to a dual-system explanation of women's oppression based on both sex and class. They also acknowledge that women's oppression is determined by their role in production and reproduction, sexuality, and socialisation of children (Mitchell, 1971). Similarly to many feminist post-colonial theorists, they stress the role played by the capitalist system in women's oppression. For instance, Iris Young (1981) underlines how the use of women as a secondary labour force is a fundamental element in the functioning of capitalism.

Nevertheless, as indicated again by Brah (1996: 104) "until recently, western feminist perspectives, on the whole, paid little attention to the processes of racialisation of gender, class or sexuality." This is why post-colonial feminist theories have underlined how:

Majority feminists with immense power to define the dominant feminist discourse were, and still are, able to impose their constructions of female empowerment upon all women irrespective of differences of race, culture, religion, sexuality or class. (Malik, 2009: 2616)

This poses the fundamental question of, if and how it is possible to acknowledge women's difference while still engaging in some forms of shared political commitment. As formulated by Tong (2009, 323) the greatest challenge posed by post-colonial feminism appears to be "how to unite women in, through, and despite their differences." Or as affirmed by Brah: "It is now widely accepted that 'woman' is not a unitary category. The question remains whether it can be a unifying category" (Brah, 1996: 89).

2.4 Sisterhood Revised?

Based on her question, Tong (2009) identifies two ways through which a revised concept of sisterhood can be regained, namely through friendship or through a common political

engagement. The first option is advocated by scholars such as Robin Morgan (1984), Elizabeth Spelman (1983, 1988) and Maria Lugones (1983). In particular the exchange between Spelman and Lugones (1983) poses important questions on the reasons why such unity should be an aim, and also, on the modalities through which to reach it. Spelman (1983) poses the following fundamental questions:

What do I and can I know about women from whom I differ in terms of race, culture, class, ethnicity? What happens when oppressors want to undo racism or other oppression; how do they go about acquiring knowledge about others, knowledge whose absence is now regretted? (Lugones and Spelman, 1983)

Spelman (1983) answers by highlighting the importance of being ready to challenge one's own view and change oneself, not by simply tolerating the "other", but "welcoming" the other. In response, Lugones (1983) states that it is necessary to first verify the reasons for this interest in those previously marginalised as "others". She invites us also to consider the possibility that they would not be willing to engage in such a joint effort, but prefer to work among themselves to encourage the emergence of their own voices and theories. This position is also advocated by Ang (1995) when she argues that there is a measure of incommensurability in the difference between the feminism expressed by white women and that of "other" women. This, she argues, is primarily due to the fact that we live in a global system based on white capitalist supremacy which is the result of 500 years of colonialism and imperialism. This fact, she states, inevitably locates women in different power positions that cannot simply be overcome by making feminism more "pluralistic". Lugones (1983) then places a negative value on the motives of such an interest if they are found to be a desire to enlarge one's own knowledge, or even worse, come from a sense of duty. She concludes that the only valuable ground to bring women together, notwithstanding their differences, is to be found in friendship.

In contrast, many other feminist post-colonial authors argue that the ground for a project of unity among women is to be found in common political engagement. For instance, hooks refuses a sentimental kind of sisterhood and argues that differences among women will initially be the source of disagreement and confrontation. It is only later that they will become a source for positive advancement. At the same time she argues that:

Women do not need to eradicate difference to feel solidarity. We do not need to share common oppression to fight equally to end oppression [...] We can be sisters united by shared

interests and beliefs, united in our appreciation for diversity, united in our struggle to end sexist oppression, united in political solidarity. (hooks, 1984: 404)

Interestingly and in contrast to other post-colonial thinkers, hooks clearly states that it is not the concept of “sisterhood” itself which is wrong - on the contrary this is seen as necessary for any feminist project - but the way in which it has been constructed and used is wrong, as it was premised only on the western women’s experience. Therefore, hooks describes the notion of “sisterhood” as still necessary and powerful, but warns: “As long as women are using class or ‘race’ power to dominate other women, feminist sisterhood cannot be fully realized” (hooks, 2000: 16). More recently she also highlighted the importance of how to think and write beyond the boundaries which keep us all over-racialised (hooks, 2013: 8).

In my research, I investigate whether the category of sisterhood is mobilised in the associations’ work and if it is understood as a “sisterhood of friendship” or a “political sisterhood” (Tong, 2009). Tong also argues that these two notions are not mutually exclusive, as often the building of political alliances offers the possibility of also establishing friendship. In my analysis, I also refer to the reflections elaborated by Lugones and Spelman (1983) in order to investigate the basis for the interest on the part of Italian-born women in relationships with migrant women.

2.5 Intersectionality: a Useful Tool for Acknowledging Difference?

In addressing the shortcomings of the notion of global sisterhood, and the necessity to acknowledge differences among women, one of the most common strategies devised has been that of intersectionality. On this point, Brah and Phoenix argue that:

Recognition that ‘race’, social class and sexuality differentiated women’s experiences has disrupted notions of a homogeneous category ‘woman’ with its attendant assumptions of universality that served to maintain the status quo in relation to ‘race’, social class and sexuality, while challenging gendered assumptions. As such, intersectionality fits with the disruption of modernist thinking produced by postcolonial and poststructuralist theoretical ideas. (Brah and Phoenix, 2004: 82)

The concept of intersectionality was first devised to emphasise the fact that black women’s lives were not only shaped by their gender, but also their ‘race’ and class as well as their sexualities. Kimberlè W. Crenshaw (1989) who first coined the term in 1989, pointed out that the subordination experienced by black women exceeded the simple sum of their ‘race’ and sex. Brah

and Phoenix however identify in the famous speech of Sojourner Truth¹⁹, “Ain’t I a woman,” a fundamental anticipation of the concept of intersectionality:

Sojourner Truth’s identity claims are thus relational, constructed in relation to white women and all men, and clearly demonstrate that what we call ‘identities’ are not objects but processes constituted in and through power relations. (Brah and Phoenix, 2004: 77)

Another fundamental antecedent identified by Brah and Phoenix is that of Combahee River Collective, a black, lesbian, feminist organisation based in Boston that in 1977 argued for “the development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking” (Combahee River Collective, 1977: 272). Patricia Hill Collins (1990) also referred to interlocking oppressions before the term intersectionality was begun to be used.

Since then, the notion of intersectionality has been largely used both at theoretical and policy level to indicate the various axes of differentiation that shape people’s lives and contribute to social inequality. The concept has been used not only in feminist theories, but more broadly in social theory, and at a policy level, including in the context of international organisations dealing with human rights issues. Most of all, intersectionality highlights the mutual constitution of social divisions, for instance it is not possible to investigate gender without referring to ‘race’ or class. As explained by Anthias: “The mutual constitution of gender, ‘race’ and so on refers essentially to the postulate that they are affected by each other” (Anthias, 2013b: 13).

Notwithstanding the importance of the concept of intersectionality, there are various, sometimes competing understandings of it, and a number of difficulties in its practical application. For instance, Nira Yuval Davis points out how the idea of intersectionality has sometimes been used on the basis of an “additive model of oppression” (Yuval Davis, 2006a: 205). She criticises for instance, the “triple oppression” model that was common among black women’s organisations in the UK that was based on the idea that black women experience discrimination and oppression on the basis of their gender, ‘race’ and class (Yuval Davis, 2006a: 195). On the contrary:

¹⁹ Sojourner Truth was an African-American abolitionist and women’s rights activist. Truth was born into slavery but escaped with her infant daughter to freedom in 1826. Her famous speech “Ain’t I a Woman?”, was delivered in 1851 at the Ohio Women’s Rights Convention. In her speech, she emphasised the differential way in which gender identity is assigned depending on ‘race’.

[...] the point is to analyse the differential ways in which different social divisions are concretely enmeshed and constructed by each other and how they relate to political and subjective constructions of identities. (Yuval Davis, 2006a: 205)

This point is shared also by Spelman (even if she does not refer specifically to the concept of intersectionality) when she criticises any additive analysis where one form of oppression is “merely piled upon another” (Spelman, 1988: 123). As a consequence, sexism and racism are seen as “interlocking”, so that discussions about what form of oppression is more fundamental lose much of their sense. Spelman concludes that:

[...] according to an additive analysis of sexism and racism, all women are oppressed by sexism; some women are further oppressed by racism. Such an analysis distorts Black women's experiences of oppression by failing to note important differences between contexts in which Black women and white women experience sexism. The additive analysis also suggests that a woman's racial identity can be “subtracted” from her combined sexual and racial identity: “We are all women”. But this does not leave room for the fact that different women may look to different forms of liberation just because they are white or Black women, rich or poor women, Catholic or Jewish women. (Spelman, 1988: 125)

Another problematic issue identified by Yuval Davis in relation to the practical applicability of intersectionality is the identification of social divisions. Numerous attempts have been made at this task. One of the most comprehensive is that of Helma Lutz (2002b) who identified 13 axes of social divisions, but as stressed by Yuval Davis, the list is potentially endless and this may clearly pose practical problems. A partial solution can be found in the fact that, on the one hand, there are some social divisions that tend to be relevant for most people, such as gender, ethnicity, class, and stage of life. On the other hand, there are social divisions because of belonging to particular groups only, e.g. refugees or indigenous people, that concern fewer numbers while remaining very essential for those groups (Yuval Davis, 2006a: 203). Anthias summarises the limitations in the use of intersectionality as follows:

[...] the ‘listing’ of differences (often reduced to identities) that intersect and the impossibility of attending analytically to this plurality, as well as potential competing claims about which are the most important of these, or how many differences should be incorporated”. (Anthias, 2013b: 5-6).

In order to overcome such limitations, Anthias proposes to locate: “[...] social categories and divisions within a broader social framing that attends to power, hierarchy and context - both spatial and temporal.” (Anthias, 2013b: 6). She also highlights the necessity of not seeing the

metaphor of 'intersection' as a specific place occupied by people or groups, but rather to "focus on the dynamic and located dimensions of inequality and division in terms of their *relationships* with each other" (Anthias, 2013b: 13).

In a project based on the notion of feminist solidarity within intercultural settings, beyond the obvious dimension of gender, those of 'race', ethnicity and class assume a special relevance. At a more analytical level as regards migrant women, their migrant or refugee status is also of fundamental importance. However, in some circumstances the social divisions of sexuality, age and ability can also prove relevant. In such a project it is important to recognise that the way in which social divisions intermesh may vary according to the context and time period taken into consideration.

2.6 Towards the Building of Feminist Reflexive Solidarity?

By sharing a criticism of the concept of global sisterhood, some feminist post-colonial authors argue for the importance of building an alternative project of common engagement among women positioned differently, which I have named "feminist reflexive solidarity". In this section, I explore their contributions, acknowledging also those by authors who place themselves in a more critical position. As indicated in the introduction by 'reflexive solidarity', I refer to a concept of solidarity which is founded on an in-depth reflection by women who hold a privileged position especially in terms of 'race', ethnicity, citizenship status and class about their own positionality and on how this affects the possibility of creating common projects with women who are positioned differently and unequally.

Yuval Davis identifies with "transversal politics" - defined as "a democratic practice of alliances across boundaries of difference" - an alternative to identity politics (Yuval Davis, 2006a: 206). The central point is that the basis for common action is to be found "in common values" rather than "in common positioning or identifications" (Yuval Davis, 2010: 278). Furthermore, from an epistemological point of view, by referring to Hill Collins (1990), Yuval Davis (2010) underlines how:

[...] the recognition that from each positioning the world is seen differently and that, thus, any knowledge based on just one positioning is 'unfinished' (as opposed to 'invalid'). Therefore, the only way to approach 'the truth' is through dialogue between people of different positionings, the wider the better. (Yuval Davis, 2010: 278)

Yuval Davis grounds this concept on her experience in transnational networks working against religious fundamentalism in Great Britain and Israel/Palestine (Yuval Davis, 1997). She states that she borrowed the idea from a group of Italian feminists who used it to describe the practice of 'rooting' and 'shifting' that they applied in meetings bringing together Palestinian and Israeli women. The idea was that of women from different backgrounds coming together in a process of dialogue in which each would come with her 'rooting' in terms of membership and identity, but would be ready to 'shift' in order to dialogue with the other women who have different memberships and identities. The condition to make these coalitions work was to focus on the results to achieve, more than on the identities of the participants. Yuval-Davis states that transversal politics should be used across the spectrum of politics, from grassroots organisations to state and international level. However, as already stressed, she specifies that this process is possible only when people share compatible value systems. Finally, Yuval Davis recognises that "differences are important but, on the other hand, that they should be contained by, rather than replace, notions of equality" (Yuval Davis, 2010: 278). The concept of transversal politics based on the practice of 'rooting' and 'shifting' may be regarded as a helpful methodology for building a project based on a notion of feminist solidarity. However, it is not clear to what extent women who find themselves in a more privileged position - both in personal and in geopolitical terms - are called to put their position into question.

Similarly, Brah (1996) opposes a concept of politics of identity in favour of one of politics of identification. To this aim she argues that there is a need to conceptualise difference and to adopt an intersectional analysis. She advocates that it is fundamental to distinguish when 'difference' is organised hierarchically or laterally. In other words, when the term 'difference' is used to describe the particularities of a social group or, when it indicates a modality of domination. Relating to this, Brah asks a number of key questions for any project that aims at bringing together women positioned differently along various axes of differentiation:

How does difference designate the 'other'? Who defines difference? What are the presumed norms from which a group is marked as being different? What is the nature of attributes that are claimed as characterizing a group as different? How are the boundaries of difference constituted, maintained or dissipated? How is difference interiorized in the landscapes of the psyche? How are various groups represented in different discourses on difference? Does difference differentiate laterally or hierarchically? (Brah, 1996: 114)

Those questions have been crucial in informing my research on the articulation of difference within the chosen women's intercultural associations. Brah also specifies that:

These processes of political identification - of the formation of 'communities in struggle' - do not erase the diversity of human experience; rather, they enable us to appreciate the 'particular' within the 'universal', and the 'universal' within the 'particular'. (Brah, 1996: 93)

However, Brah argues that these processes are deemed possible only if they are premised on the recognition of the "interconnectedness as well as the specificity of each oppression" (Brah, 1996: 93). At a practical level this is translated into the necessity to work locally and to link this work with broader national and global movements. Sara Ahmed also stresses the importance of the formation of alliances, however, her focus is not on common values, but on the work that we need to do "in order to get closer to others, without simply repeating the appropriation of 'them' as labour or a sign of difference" (Ahmed, 2000: 180). Ahmed also unveils how in a postcolonial order, relationships with people from colonised countries are often characterised by 'stranger fetishism' and she argues for the necessity to overcome this form of appropriation of difference. In Chapter 6, I analyse how this concept plays out in intercultural settings in Italy. In particular, I identify the risks of ethnicisation and exoticisation that emerges in the experiences of some associations.

Ahmed also looks at the ways in which western feminism responded to the critique of the notion of global sisterhood and acknowledges that there is now a much greater awareness of the question of who speaks and for whom. However, this has led in some cases to a reaction of silence that Ahmed reads as a form of cultural relativism and a denial of responsibility. On the contrary, she stresses how western and Third World women cannot avoid an encounter, as they are already within the framework of a globalised economy where Third World women provide for the cheap labour that is at the basis of the capitalist system. The question, therefore, is not if the encounter has to take place but how it takes place. Ahmed then asks a crucial question for any project aiming at bringing together women from First and Third Worlds, namely:

How can women encounter each other differently, given that such encounters are already mediated by the divisions of labour and consumption that position women in different parts of the world in relationships of antagonism? (Ahmed, 2000: 171)

This question has framed my analysis in particular as regards the role played by migrant women in domestic and care work. Ahmed also focuses on the risk of western women of appropriating or commodifying the difference of women from Third World countries. She emphasises how, in the international division of labour, the unequal power relationships are hidden behind what she calls “commodity fetishism” (Ahmed, 2000: 168) as a way of appropriating the difference between women. However, Ahmed highlights how, in reality, that encounter is “highly mediated and dependent on forms of concealment” (Ahmed, 2000: 169). Finally Ahmed argues in favour of a politics of closer encounters that is based on dialogue necessary precisely because of our differences and in opposition to either universalism or cultural relativism.

Like Ahmed, Mohanty stresses the importance of focusing on the position of women in the global market and she advocates for a “non-colonizing feminist solidarity across borders” (2003: 224). When revisiting her initial essay, Mohanty (2003) specified that she did not argue the impossibilities of building alliances between First World and Third World women, but for the construction of a “non-colonizing feminist solidarity across borders” (Mohanty, 2003: 224). She also argued that vague notions of global sisterhood should be replaced by a feminist notion of solidarity grounded on an anti-capitalist critique. More specifically she referred to an international feminism without borders founded on three concepts: decolonisation, anti-capitalist critique and the politics of solidarity. Mohanty stressed the distinction between “without borders” and “border-less” as she underlined that it is important to acknowledge borders of ‘race’, class, sexuality and ability in order to be able to cross them.

As already recalled, bell hooks (1984, 2000) calls for the necessity to regain a concept of sisterhood among women who are different on a number of grounds, but warns that this will be possible only if women in a position of privilege stop using their ‘race’ and class power over other women. She also argues that a feminist position needs to go together with an anti-capitalist critique. Spivak does not advocate forms of feminist solidarity among women positioned differently. However her notion of strategic essentialism can be a useful element in this context. Spivak states that for strategic reasons it should be possible to use collective categories, such as “women”, “Third World women” and “workers”, despite knowing that these categories do not correspond to “real” collective identities. She underlines that there is a difference between theory and strategy, so what may not be correct from a theoretical point of view, may be useful in strategic terms. “Strategic essentialism” describes a situation in which a temporary solidarity is

made in order to act and mobilise around a specific aim. This concept can be very helpful in relation to forms of women's activism and to building alliances between women positioned differently along various axes of differentiation. If it is clear that the purpose for which the category "women" is mobilised is a strategic one with regard to a given social change, the use of this category may be less contentious.

In contrast to those who argue in favour of a necessary encounter among First and Third World women, Ang (1995) advocates for a 'politics of partiality' rather than one of 'inclusion'. The latter aims at obtaining a universal position that recognises feminism as a political project for all women, while the former has a clear awareness of its limitations because it recognises that feminism cannot be a home for all women. For some of them, other political projects may be more relevant. Her main point is that if mainstream feminism has acknowledged the critiques of the notion of global sisterhood, it still needs to act in order to accommodate difference. She underlines how there is a desire to reconcile differences within feminism in order to maintain the notion that feminism can be a home to all women. Arguing a contrary position, she criticises this attitude that focuses on resolving differences based on an 'a priori' assumption that good communication can be established. She advocates for "a point zero" in communication, and she argues that instead of looking away from those moments in which communication seems to fail, special attention should be devoted to them. She is very afraid of an attitude that tends to appropriate difference. Her conclusions are antagonistic to any form of common political engagement, other than partial. As argued by Lugones (1983), it should come as no surprise that previously excluded women would want to build their own theories and practices in an effort to preserve their difference from what they perceive as attempts of appropriation and commodification.

A position that is neither centred on dialogue between First and Third World women, nor aims at the construction of a separate theory by Third World women is argued for by Chela Sandoval (1991, 2000). According to this author, feminist hegemonic theory can be overcome only through a theory and method of "oppositional consciousness" based on the experience of Third World women. Initially, Sandoval (1991) argued for the necessity of a paradigm shift in order for hegemonic feminism to eliminate its exclusionary and racist practices. She also explained how U.S. Third World feminism works towards a theory and practice of oppositional consciousness that demands the rejection of any ideology as the final one, and instead asks for a "tactical subjectivity" "which is the capacity to recenter depending upon the kinds of oppression to be

confronted” (Sandoval, 1991: 14). In a later work, Sandoval (2000) develops her concept of oppositional consciousness further and refers to a methodology of the oppressed as one developed by subjugated people belonging to minorities, living in a majority culture. She notes that:

The skills they might develop, if they survive, have included the ability to self consciously navigate modes of dominant consciousness, learning to interrupt the ‘turnstile’ that alternately reveals history, as against the dominant forms of masquerade that history can take, ‘focusing on each separately’, applying a ‘formal method of reading’, cynically but also un-cynically, and not only with the hope of surviving, but with a desire to create a better world. (Sandoval, 2000: 104)

The final goal of such methodology is described as the “democratization of power” through active social engagement. The main point of interest in Sandoval’s methodology is the fact that she reverses the hegemonic framework in which white, western people are positioned at the centre. Such a methodology is premised on the idea that oppressed people, precisely because of their position, are those who are best placed to develop a methodology that can oppose the dominant capitalist and patriarchal society. Secondly, even if Sandoval is conscious that not all oppressed people will be in a position to develop such a methodology, as she adds “if they survive”, it appears that her claim is in opposition to Spivak’s conclusion that the subaltern cannot speak (Spivak, 1993, 1996b). Finally, even if Sandoval argues for the elaboration of a methodology from the standpoint of the oppressed, she does not aim at creating a separate U.S. Third World women’s movement, but a general methodology of liberation that interrogates the concept of power.

2.7 Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, in this chapter I have argued that a project based on a notion of feminist reflexive solidarity should be based first of all on the acknowledgement of the critique of the notion of “global sisterhood” as a concept that, it is argued, was in reality premised predominantly on the experience of western, white, middle-class women and was not inclusive of the experience of Third World women. This point is paramount in feminist post-colonial theory and it goes together with the need to carry out an intersectional analysis primarily on the basis of ‘race’, ethnicity, legal status/citizenship, class and age. As a consequence, the necessity to identify relationships between sexism and racism is also identified. Following the acknowledgement of such critiques,

western women should recognise their position of power in the global economic and social system and refuse neo-colonial or paternalistic attitudes towards Third World women. While acknowledging critiques of the notion of global sisterhood, a project based on feminist solidarity still retains the importance of a common political project among women who have different and unequal positions primarily in terms of 'race', ethnicity, legal status/citizenship, class and age. In relation to this point, this chapter illustrated alternative projects based on the concepts of solidarity and dialogue elaborated on by a number of feminist post-colonial authors. For instance Mohanty (2003) refers to "non colonizing feminist solidarity across borders", Yuval Davis (2010; 2006a; 2006b) to "transversal politics based on the practice of 'rooting' and 'shifting'", Brah (1996) to a "politics of identification based on the formation of coalitions as opposed to one of identity" and Sara Ahmed (2000) to "closer encounters" through dialogue. In my research, I referred to the theories explored above in order to investigate on which basis working across differences is possible. Following Yuval Davis and Brah (1996), I investigated whether identity politics is replaced by forms of 'politics of alliances and identification' on the basis of common struggles and/or common values. I also examined how difference is conceptualised within selected intercultural associations in Italy and how it stands in relation to the concept of equality. Ahmed's reflections of "stranger fetishism" informed my analysis on the risks of ethnicisation and exoticisation in intercultural work. Ahmed's and Mohanty's analysis of the different positions occupied by western and Third World women in global economics informed my investigation of the role played by migrant women in domestic and care work. I ask the question whether the category of women as a political group is mobilised and if it is used in a strategically essentialist way (Spivak). Following Sandoval (1991, 2000), I also investigate if the chosen associations provide any elaboration on the possibility that migrant women, because of their less privileged status in society, may be those best positioned to develop a methodology that interrogates the concept of power. In the next chapter, I will focus on the issue of racialised politics (including concepts of culture, cultural difference, multiculturalism and whiteness) and how they stand in relation to the building of a project based on a notion of feminist reflexive solidarity.

Chapter 3

Racialised Politics, Cultural Difference and Whiteness

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I focus on the role that racialised politics plays in the articulation of a project of intercultural feminism based on a notion of reflexive solidarity. By 'intercultural feminism', I refer to a feminism based on an exchange among women, who are different especially in terms of 'race', ethnicity, legal status/citizenship, class and age, which is aimed at identifying how different cultural norms impact on women's lives and on which strategies to adopt to address them and, more generally, on how to best promote women's position in society. By 'racialised politics' I refer to politics that is informed by relations of 'race' in a broader sense, rather than a strict biological concept that has proven scientifically invalid (Rattansi, 2007). The concept of racialisation is based on the acknowledgement that:

[...] there is in fact a whole spectrum of views from strict biological determinism [...] to very confused and loose mixes of cultural stereotypes which may not contain any specific biological markers at all [...] (Rattansi, 2007: 107)

In addressing racialised politics, I focus mostly on two aspects: "cultural racism" on the one hand, and a critical reflection on whiteness on the other. As I will illustrate in the research chapters, these two issues are central to the work and activities of the organisations that I have studied as they are amongst the most pressing ones for intercultural feminist practices based on reflexive solidarity. Concerning the first point, I focus on cultural aspects as this has assumed a central role in racialised politics in recent times. As noted by Ali Rattansi (2007), since the concept of 'race' has been denied any scientific validity, few theoretical, as well as political positions, openly assume a racist view. However, the concept of 'race' seems to have been replaced by that of culture. Rattansi refers to:

[...] a changing relationship between earlier, overt racism and the emergence of a more covert racism which attempts to escape the opprobrium of open racism by omitting issues of *biology* altogether and focusing instead on questions of *culture* and ethnicity. (Rattansi, 2007: 95)

Similarly, Adam Kuper states that culture can become “a euphemism for ‘race’, fostering a discourse on racial identities while apparently abjuring racism” (Kuper, 1999: 14). In the Anglo-Saxon context this attitude has been defined as cultural racism, neo-racism or racism of cultural difference, while in France it is referred to as cultural differentialism (Rattansi, 2007: 102). This is premised on the idea of an incompatibility between the cultures of non-white ethnic minorities and the French culture or way of life (Rattansi, 2007: 95, 102). This is evident, for instance, in debates over the Islamic veil that have led to a ban on wearing it in public settings and in schools, in the name of the French concept of *laïcité*²⁰. At the same time, Rattansi (2007: 104) reflects on the fact that in these new forms of racism, cultural traits are often used in an essentialist way which tends to naturalise them - namely they come to be addressed in a similar way to biological characteristics.

In order to deconstruct discourses of “cultural racism”, I focus first on concepts of culture and cultural difference. In particular, I explore how perceived cultural difference may lead to forms of “cultural racism”, as well as forms of “feminist fundamentalism” based on ‘othering’ mechanisms. I then focus on multiculturalism, and I address, in particular, the tensions between multicultural policies and the implementation of the rights of migrant women, including the possibility that such policies may lead to forms of “cultural relativism”. Within this framework, I pay particular attention to the issue of traditional cultural practices involving women, such as FGM and forced marriages. I also highlight the special relevance of attitudes towards Muslim women, especially veiled ones, and how these women have come to be represented as the embodiment of cultural difference. To understand this phenomenon, I refer here to a historical reading of colonialism and post-colonialism such as that provided by Loomba (1998), as well as the notion of ‘orientalism’, as defined by Edward Said (1978), in the symbolic construction of women from non-Western countries and especially of Muslim women as ‘the other’.

²⁰ This term refers to the concept of secularity that has a long history in France. It indicates the separation between religious issues and government affairs.

The other element which proves crucial in understanding how racialisation plays out in intercultural settings, is that of a critical reflection on whiteness. In particular, I reflect on whiteness as the unacknowledged other side of the coin of racism. As indicated by bell hooks:

It is more useful for everyone (especially black people/people of colour) to think in terms of white supremacy rather than racism, because we usually associate racism with overt discriminatory acts of aggression by whites against blacks, whereas white supremacy addresses the ideological and philosophical foundations of racism. (hooks, 2013: 177)

I argue that thinking in terms of “white supremacy”, as well as “white privilege”, is particularly useful for a project based on a notion of reflexive feminist solidarity. While focusing on specific acts of racism normally does not challenge the personal responsibility of white people who are active in intercultural settings (as generally they would not identify themselves as racist) thinking in terms of white supremacy and white privilege, and how this benefits all white people, involves a larger sense of responsibility. Therefore, in the last part of this chapter, I explore whiteness, as a racial and ethnic dimension of privilege that normally goes unacknowledged and unnoticed.

3.2 Perspectives on Culture and Cultural Difference

This section focuses on the topic of cultural difference which has assumed a central relevance in discourses of racialised politics, especially with reference to the position of non-Western women. As already noted, reference to cultural difference is argued to be a new way to mask discourses of racism. Moreover, the issue of traditional cultural practices involving women, such as FGM and forced marriages, is often taken to represent in public discourses the patriarchal nature of non-Western societies compared to western societies as ones that supposedly protect women’s rights. How the issue of cultural difference is addressed becomes therefore a central aspect for a project based on feminist solidarity and to the work of the organisations examined in this study.

In order to address the issue of cultural difference, I first address the concept of culture, which is itself a highly debated one. I refer here to a social constructivist approach on culture that, as indicated by Sheyla Benhabib (2002), is normally the one adopted in post-colonial, post-modern and critical theories. Benhabib explains that such an approach is based on a critique of the idea that cultures are totalities that can be neatly described and that there is a clear correspondence between them and groups of the population. In contrast, a social constructivist understanding stresses the internal differences as well as power relations inside a given culture. This approach

does not deny the importance of cultural differences, nor does it maintain that they are imaginary or unreal. However:

[...] any view of cultures as clearly delineable wholes is a view from the outside that generates coherence for the purpose of understanding and controlling. (Benhabib, 2002: 5)

Similarly Anne Phillips states that:

People draw on a wide range of local, national, and global resources in the ways they make and remake their culture. (So culture is not bounded). There are always internal contestations over the values, practices, and meanings that characterise any culture. (So cultures are not homogenous). There is often some political agenda – reflecting power struggles within the group or the search for allies outside – when people make their claims about the authoritative interpretation of their culture. (So cultures are produced by people, rather than being things that explain why they behave the way they do). (Phillips, 2007: 45)

A social constructivist approach on culture proves particularly useful when dealing with non-Western cultural practices detrimental to women. Racist arguments against migrant populations are often based on perspectives that see specific practices as integral to specific cultures. Those views do not take into consideration the evolving nature of cultures as well as power struggles within ethnic and migrant populations.

Among the many definitions of culture that adhere to this perspective, the one advocated by the Indian scholar, Rao, appears particularly relevant in the context of this study. She defines culture as:

[...] a series of constantly contested and negotiated social practices whose meanings are influenced by the power and status of their interpreters and participants. (Rao, 1995: 173)

In order to better understand the issue of non-Western traditional practices detrimental to women, I refer here to a historical analysis of colonialism and post-colonialism. On this point Loomba (1998) explains that:

[...] for both colonisers and colonised, women, gender relations as well as patterns of sexuality come to symbolise both such a cultural *essence* and cultural *difference*. (Loomba, 1998: 218)

It follows from this that in certain historical-cultural contexts, the perpetuation of some cultural practices may become central to an anti-colonial struggle. In this sense, acknowledging the

contribution by Yuval Davis & Anthias (1989), Loomba (1998) emphasises the specific role of women as biological and cultural reproducers of the nation that is often defined as “mother”.

While recognising this legacy, feminist post-colonial scholars with a non-essentialist understanding of cultures, have generally argued for the necessity to oppose those cultural traditions that are detrimental to women, while at the same time not rejecting the cultures of post-colonial countries, as such. In relation to this, Uma Narayan is very straightforward when she states that westerners, while recognizing their past guilt in relation to colonialism, should not at the same time refuse to engage in ethical or political criticism towards those populations (Narayan, 1997: 127). She also, however, finds it unfair to be labelled as westernised when she condemns practices like FGM, in opposition to “authentic” Indian women who are presumed to endorse uncritically all aspects of their culture (Narayan, 1997: 146). The issue of “authenticity” and “representation”, namely who speaks on behalf of whom, is a particularly relevant point. This is especially true when it refers to the issue of harmful practices directed at women justified in the name of culture. The point is addressed also by Arati Rao who acknowledges that no other social group more than women has experienced violence in the name of culture and asks:

What are the *politics* of any argument based on culture in human rights discourse today? [...] I question our easy acceptance of cultural differences as they are presented to us, and critically assess four major components of any claim made from culture. First, what is the status of the speaker? Second, in whose name is the argument from culture advanced? Third, what is the degree of participation in culture formation of the social groups primarily affected by the cultural practices in question? Fourth, what is culture, anyway? (Rao, 1995: 168)

Rao problematises any easy association of specific practices with cultures, especially by those who argue for the justification of practices detrimental to women in the name of culture.

Alongside the necessity to condemn cultural practices that are detrimental to women, feminist post-colonial authors argue for the necessity to unveil the different values that are assigned to detrimental cultural practices that are prevalent in the West, including in international forums and human rights treaties. On the issue of “who sets the agenda” Breny Mendoza (2002) emphasises that it would be interesting to see if women from the South, within the framework of international forums, could raise issues concerning women from the North - such as anorexia or sexual objectification of women in the media - in the same way as women from the North talk about FGM or the Islamic veil. On the same point hooks states that:

A decolonized feminist perspective would first and foremost examine how sexist practices in relation to women's bodies globally are linked. For example: linking circumcision with life-threatening eating disorders (which are the direct consequence of a culture imposing thinness as a beauty ideal) or any life-threatening cosmetic surgery would emphasize that the sexism, the misogyny, underlying these practices globally mirror the sexism here in this country. (hooks, 2000: 46-47)

The rationale behind the different consideration given to non-western and western cultural practices is explained by Phillips:

[...] the language of cultural practice or cultural tradition is now mostly reserved for the practices and traditions of non-Western culture. Culture is so thoroughly equated with minority or non-Western culture that it has become virtually redundant to preface it in this way. This is a deeply troubling equation. Because it makes the cultural specificities of people from majority groups less visible, it encourages them to treat their own local practices as if these were universal rules of conduct, spawning much indignation against newcomers, foreigners, or immigrants who fail to abide by the rules. (Phillips, 2007: 63-64)

In line with these reflections, I argue for the necessity of building forms of intercultural feminism that focus on how cultural practices influence women's lives cross-culturally. In Chapter 7, I will investigate the modalities through which some of my chosen associations carried out a process of cross-cultural comparisons on practices detrimental to women.

3.3 Debates on Multiculturalism

Cultural difference, in contexts where ethnic minorities are present, raises the issue of multiculturalism. By this term I refer to the politics of recognising difference in opposition to policies of assimilation. However, multiculturalism is "a slippery and fluid term" (Lentin and Titley, 2011: 2) which lends itself to different understandings. As indicated by Alana Lentin and Gavan Titley:

It may retain a fairly useful if limited descriptive sense in post-colonial, migration societies, but it also skitters off to index normative debates, real and imagined policies, mainstream political rhetorics, consumerist desires, and resistant political appropriations. (Lentin and Titley, 2011: 2)

A first fundamental distinction is between a descriptive and a normative use of this term. In the first instance, multiculturalism cannot be disputed as it stands for the presence of cultural diversity in current societies. In the normative sense, different understandings are, instead, possible. On

this point, the distinction operated by Anthias (2002: 279) between liberal and critical or reflexive multiculturalism proves useful. Anthias argues that liberal multiculturalism refers to policies enacted by States and agreed by the majority population that decides the terms for the participation of minorities. These policies are those most commonly criticised by feminist scholarship, including feminist post-colonial authors, because they regard culture as fixed and unchanging. They also prioritise communitarian culture over women's rights. In contrast, reflexive or critical multiculturalism (Rattansi, 1999; Parekh, 2000; Anthias 2002) recognises the fluid and evolving nature of cultural identities as well as the possibility of hybrid identities.

For the purpose of this thesis, I focus in this section on the possible tension between some forms of institutionalised multiculturalism and women's rights. This is a central theme for any project based on a concept of feminist solidarity, namely how to address the tension between recognition of cultural diversity and the protection of women's rights. This issue emerges as problematic also in relation to the policies and practices of the intercultural associations in Italy. In turn, this issue translates into the challenge of how to avoid, what Anthias (2002: 275) defined as "the Scylla of feminist fundamentalism" on the one hand, and the "Charybdis of cultural relativism" on the other. Both points are paramount for a project based on feminist solidarity. A number of feminist post-colonial scholars, while arguing against assimilationist policies, have also addressed the shortcomings of multiculturalist policies. Yuval Davis is particularly straightforward in this critique when she argues that the feminist version of multiculturalism has developed, as a form of identity, politics that:

[...] tend not only to homogenize and naturalize social categories and groupings, but also to deny shifting boundaries of identities and internal power differences and conflicts of interest. (Yuval Davis, 1997: 119)

Yuval Davis, Anthias & Kofman also criticise multicultural policies on the basis that:

Such constructions do not allow space for internal power conflicts and interest differences within the minority collectivity, for instance conflicts along the lines of class, gender, politics and culture. Moreover, they tend to assume collectivity boundaries, which are fixed, static, ahistorical and essentialist, with no space for growth and change. (Yuval Davis et al. 2005: 523)

Multicultural policies have also been criticised for the issue of representation, as often those who are recognised as representatives of minorities are in power positions in relation to the other minorities' members. Anthias, Yuval Davis & Cain (1992) also note that often minorities are

represented by traditional male voices. At the same time, it is argued that multiculturalism does not challenge the western hegemonic culture and that, on the contrary, it can have the effect of being divisive as it tends to underline the cultural differences between ethnic minorities, instead of the common experiences they have of racism, as well as social and economic exploitation (Bourne and Sivanandan 1980; Mullard 1984 as cited in Yuval Davis et al. 2005: 523). Anthias & Yuval Davis conclude that multiculturalism may have harmful consequences for women due to the fact that often cultural differences are defined on the basis of specific gender norms based on the control of women (Yuval-Davis & Anthias 1989).

Some associations of women from ethnic minorities or women's international networks share this criticism. For instance, Saghal (2004) notes that associations of Asian migrant women in the UK have criticised multicultural policies, especially on the basis that ethnic minorities are normally represented by religious leaders, while women or other dissenting people are not given a voice. Criticism of multicultural policies was expressed also by the international network Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUML).²¹ For instance, Marième Helie Lucos, a representative of WLUML, stated at a conference organized in 2007 by the Italian association *Trama di terre*²², that multiculturalist policies are based on confusion between culture and religion, that they interpret the notion of culture as something static, and that they disregard the fact that religion is not homogenous. Moreover, she argued that they are anti-democratic because the so-called "communities' representatives" are not elected and because they replace the laws approved by the people with God's laws. This implies an erosion of the concept of secularism. She concluded that multiculturalism is the current version of the reactionary patriarchy that they reject (Helie-Lucos, 2009: 6-10).

When dealing with cultural practices detrimental to women, an issue that is frequently posed as problematic for migrants and ethnic minorities is how to deal with the issue of practices harmful to women, namely if it is dealt with internally it runs the risk of concealing harm and suffering or, if it is dealt with publicly, there is the risk of raising the level of racism towards the groups involved (Kalra et al, 2005: 59-60). As underlined by Kalra et al. (2005: 58) the way followed by various

²¹ WLUML is a network active over two decades and currently present in more than 70 countries "that provides information, support and a collective space for women whose lives are shaped, conditioned or governed by laws and customs said to derive from Islam". (From the website <http://www.wluml.org/node/5408> accessed on the 10th May 2013)

²² The conference was provocatively entitled "Is multiculturalism bad for women?" I will return on the activities of *Trama di terre* on this topic in Chapter 9.

migrant women organisations has been to specifically address those issues by fighting against both “community cultural orthodoxy” and “mainstream prejudice”. Yet, because of this, women are often criticised for damaging the interests of ethnic minorities by their internal critique. As highlighted by Kalra et al. (2005: 59) such criticism does not only come from fundamentalists but, paradoxically, also from representatives of liberal and leftist groups with the aim of protecting ethnic minorities from mainstream racism.

Among liberal theorists, Susan Moller Okin (1999) prompted a large debate on the relationship between multiculturalism and women’s rights in her well known work *‘Is multiculturalism bad for women?’* Okin criticises multicultural policies for having a detrimental effect on women’s lives on the basis that most minority cultures are more patriarchal than western culture. As a consequence, she argues that women belonging to such minorities have no interest in having their culture preserved. To support her argument, she cites a number of examples of what she terms ‘cultural practices’, such as veiling, polygamy, clitoridectomy. Okin also questions the idea that the self-proclaimed leaders of a group - composed mainly of elderly male group members - might not represent the interests of all of a group’s members.

A number of objections have been raised to Okin’s argument. Those that are most relevant for a project based on a notion of reflexive feminist solidarity concern the concept of culture and the risk of promoting racist attitudes towards minority populations. For instance, Katha Politt (1999) and Marta Nussbaum (1999) emphasise the overly-simplified description of cultures provided by Okin. Pollitt (1999) and Bhabba (1999) highlight that cultures are not static, lacking internal conflict, on the contrary they are constantly evolving. Most importantly, Homi K. Bhabba (1999) criticises how Okin (1999) presents minority cultures as backward, patriarchal and illiberal compared to mainstream western culture. Okin states that even if western culture may discriminate against women in practice, it provides for domestic laws which can produce an equitable familial culture for women and girls. In contrast, Bhabba notes how in western countries the law is not able to provide for such protection, as shown in statistics of domestic violence. I argue that this is a fundamental aspect to take into consideration in order to avoid a position of “feminist fundamentalism”.

A further objection that is particularly relevant for a project founded on a concept of feminist reflexive solidarity is advanced by Bonnie Honig (1999). This scholar objects that Okin, by putting a number of cultural practices such as veiling, polygamy and clitoridectomy on the same level and,

not contextualising them, is at risk of promoting racism and xenophobia towards migrant populations (Honig, 1999). Similarly, Anthias (2002) notes the presence in all cultures of practices that do not promote women's autonomy. She further states that:

[...] there can be no absolute consensus on these issues and they are emergent rather than given; women themselves need to engage in much more dialogue around them. (Anthias, 2002: 279)

In Chapter 9, I will return to the issue of the challenges of keeping feminism and anti-racism together in the practices of selected associations that have specifically dealt with the issue of cultural practices and multiculturalism.

In opposition to ideas of a "mosaic multiculturalism" defined by Benhabib as:

[...] the view that human groups and cultures are clearly delineated and identifiable entities that coexist, while maintaining firm boundaries, as would pieces of a mosaic (Benhabib 2002: 8)

some authors have underlined notions of hybridity. Some scholars have pleaded for the recognition of each society and culture as hybrid. For instance, Benhabib (2002: 25) argues for "a recognition of the radical hybridity and polyvocality of all cultures. Other authors have focused more specifically on the relationship between migrant populations and host societies and have emphasised how hybridity involves both groups - what Brah (1996) refers to as 'diaspora spaces'. For instance, Karner states that:

Hybridity is not only encountered among communities of migrants and their descendants. On the contrary, syncretism – the merging of cultural elements, ideas and practices of diverse origins – is a defining characteristic of 'diaspora spaces' in their entirety. In other words, hybridity features in all our lives. (Karner, 2007: 95)

At the same time, Karner emphasises how the power position of the groups involved remain very different:

Of course [...] such diasporic spaces are structured by multiple axes of inequality (Brah 1996) and hence contain vastly different subject positions. How one experiences hybridity, whether as a source of consumerist pleasure or as a struggle with contradictory expectations, depends significantly on one's position in this matrix of power. [...] Put yet another way, the mixing of cultural elements, the enjoyment or negotiation of diasporic hybridity, must be understood in its wider social contexts, which continue to be shaped by steep inequalities and multiple exclusions. (Karner, 2007: 95)

This is signalled also by Anthias when she states, with reference to the notions of diaspora and hybridity, that:

Although explicitly claiming the political space of contestation over the fixities of identity and culture that are so prominent in racialized discourse, they may function, unintentionally, to provide a gloss over existing cultural hierarchies and hegemonic practices. (Anthias, 2001: 619)

In Chapter 6, I will return to how notions of hybridity may function as a powerful tool against racism and as a bridge between women positioned differently, but how they can also hide asymmetries and differences in power positions. In conclusion, I argue that, with reference to the possible negative effects of institutionalised multiculturalism, particular forms of intercultural feminism should be promoted. In Chapters 6 and 7, I will explore how a concept of intercultural feminism is implemented in practice in specific women's intercultural settings.

3.4 Muslim Women as the Embodiment of Cultural Difference?

In this section, I focus on the specific issue of Muslim women as, in the present context, they are often identified in public discourses in western countries, including Italy, as the embodiment of cultural difference. They are seen as the symbol of 'the Other' *par excellence* as they are considered to bear an irreconcilable cultural difference to western values. This has been evident in particular in France, where the wearing of the *hijab*, the veil that leaves the face clear, covering women's hair, is prohibited in schools and the full Islamic veil is prohibited in public. Even if in Italy the so-called "veil controversy" has not reached the same levels, a number of bills prohibiting Islamic veiling practices have been discussed in Parliament as well as by some municipalities at local level. Even intercultural feminist settings are not necessarily exempt from these 'othering' attitudes. Indeed these issues represent a challenge for intercultural feminism, as I will further illustrate in Chapters 6 and 7.

I investigate here the roots of these attitudes by referring to the seminal work on Orientalism by Said (1978), to the work by Loomba (1998) and to other post-colonial authors such as Lewis (1999, 2004;), Yeğenoğlu (1998), Mernissi (2001) who have reflected on the issue of Muslim veiled women. I also argue that western feminist contexts are not necessarily exempt from these 'othering' and Orientalist attitudes and I reflect on possible strategies to contest them as proposed by feminist post-colonial scholars. For example, Lila Abu-Lughod warns that:

Representations of Muslim women are particularly fraught in this era. This imposes on those who work on anything to do with them a responsibility to think critically and to be vigilant against having our analyses hijacked by others or unconsciously infiltrated by divisive values or fantasies. (Abu-Lughod, 2011: 53)

In order to understand the roots of this 'othering' process, it is important to recall how this dates back to colonial times. Furthermore, representations of Muslim women often follow Orientalist canons. Said (1978) used the term 'Orientalism' to indicate how western arts and literature have described the East in a way that is deeply and constantly prejudiced by Eighteenth and Nineteenth century European imperialism. Said defines Orientalism as "a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between the 'Orient' and (most of the time) 'the Occident'" as well as: "A western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (Said, 1978: 2-3).

As emphasised by Childs and Williams, Said's critique is centred on the fact that western representation of the East appears to be a classical knowledge/power conception:

[it] not only constructs the Orient, but constructs it precisely as its Other, the repository of all those characteristics deemed as non-Western (and therefore negative). (Childs and Williams, 1997: 100)

Said highlights how this is evident in the appropriation by westerners of the work of creating representations for large parts of the world, an appropriation that essentially deems Eastern people as incapable of representing themselves. In other words, the representation of Eastern cultures becomes strictly linked to their historical domination. In relation to this, Spivak states that:

Europe [...] consolidated itself as a sovereign subject by defining its colonies as "Others" even as it constituted them for purposes of administration and the expansion of markets. (Spivak, 1985: 128)

Similarly, Ruth Frankenberg points to the fact that:

One effect of colonial discourse is the production of an unmarked, apparently autonomous White/Western self, in contrast with the marked, Other racial and cultural categories with which the racially and culturally dominant category is coconstructed. (Frankenberg, 1993b: 17)

Another important contribution to understanding the roots of 'othering' attitudes towards Muslim women, and more generally women from colonised countries, is provided by Loomba (1998). This scholar analyses the representation of colonised women and how this still has repercussions on the way that women from the Southern hemisphere are perceived in contemporary western societies. She shows how women from colonised lands are generally constructed as "other women" and how this "haunts the colonial imagination in ambivalent, often contradictory ways" (Loomba, 1998: 157). On the one hand, they are represented as barbaric, promiscuous and immoral – this especially regarding black women – while on the other, they are sometimes seen as the perfect example of feminine passivity, subjected to men.

Other post-colonial scholars have focused more specifically on the figure of the Islamic veiled woman and how this has obsessed the colonial imagination. Yeğenoğlu tells us that "the most blatant example of the fear of the other and associated fantasy of penetration is French colonialism's obsession with the woman's veil in Algeria" (Yeğenoğlu, 1998: 39). She argues that on the basis of Enlightenment principles, where knowledge must know no obstacles, the veil represents an obstacle to visual control by colonisers. The project of the colonial administration, stated as basing its rule on transparency and visibility, is then accompanied by the aim of the unveiling of women. As a consequence, Algerian resistance becomes condensed in the veil. According to Frantz Fanon, the French colonial administration centred its political doctrine around this point.

If we want to destroy the structure of the Algerian society, its capacity for resistance, we must first of all conquer the women: we must go and find them behind the veil where they hide themselves [...] (Fanon, 1965: 37-38)

In relation to this point, Yuval Davis (1997) has comprehensively shown how women are regarded not only as the biological reproducers of nations but also the cultural ones. In the Algerian case, the wearing of the veil adds a further dimension as it comes to also represent a visual obstacle to domination and the primary symbol of cultural difference.

In relation to the notion of intercultural feminism, it is important to recognise that there is a legacy of this obsession today, evident in some feminist discourses. As the Italian philosopher Rosella Prezzo (2008) very pointedly acknowledges in her book *Veli d'Occidente* ("Western veils"):

[...] an inescapable desire to “unveil” Muslim women became part of the whole ideology of the West as a conqueror-liberator. The colonial logic identifies the veil as oppression and unveiling as liberation. The image of the Other is thus fixed, on both sides, in the double register of veiling / unveiling. (Prezzo, 2008: 97, *author's translation*)

In contrast, the author shows how the veil has been a central element in relation to the construction of feminine identity since the foundation of western civilization, in the three monotheist religions and not only in the Muslim religion.

In order to challenge processes of ‘othering’ and homogenisation of Muslim women, it is important, first of all, to recognise the different Muslim veiling practices as well as the different meanings attributed to them. On this point, Lewis (2004) emphasises her efforts to get rid of the idea of “the veil” as a single element and of its homogenizing effect on viewing women from Islamic societies:

One of the reasons why I have been at such pains in this book to draw out the nuance of specific historical experiences and representations of veiling, de-veiling and segregation is to provide a corrective to the continued tendency to talk about ‘the’ veil and women from Islamic societies as a single group. (Lewis, 2004: 268)

Lewis describes many different versions of veiling practices in Muslim countries from a historical perspective. Indeed Muslim veils can have different names and shapes according to the country or region. Just to recall the most common ones, they can vary from the *hijab*, a scarf that covers the head and neck but leaves the face clear, to the *niqab*, which only leaves the area around the eyes clear, to the *burka*, which covers the entire face and body, leaving just a mesh screen to see through. These veiling practices have different meanings and are sometimes regulated by law in both Muslim and western countries.²³ Moreover, women living in Muslim countries may have very different positions in regard to the wearing of veils that range from seeing it as a free choice – that in turn can assume different meanings from strictly religious, to political, to reasons linked to identity – to regarding it as an imposition to be fought against where it is made obligatory. For

²³ In Muslim countries, the legislation can vary greatly from country to country and also within the same country on the basis of governmental changes. For example in countries like Afghanistan, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Sudan the wearing of the veil is mandatory, whereas in other countries – such as Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria, Egypt, Ethiopia, Senegal, and Tajikistan - it is prohibited in some settings, such as education and government. Turkey, where the wearing of the veil was previously banned in the Ataturk Republic in 1923, ended the headscarf ban in universities in 2010.

example, Ruba Salih (2008) distinguishes between the Islamic veil as a religious obligation, as a symbol of modernity, and as a consumption model. She concludes that:

While the political debate often mires itself in the definition of the veil as a symbol of submission for women who wear it, an alternative view allows the understanding of the multiplicity of meanings that the *hijab* can have in the lives of Muslim women. These meanings often contribute to destabilize and complicate the ideas we have in Europe about emancipation vs. oppression, visibility vs. invisibility of women's bodies, secularism vs. religion, public vs. private and above all freedom of choice vs. obligation, personal autonomy vs. religious authority. (Salih, 2008: 128, *author's translation*)

In particular, she explains how the choice of wearing the *hijab* is sometimes advocated by young educated Muslim women as a choice of modernity, something that opposes the western concept of modernity. By citing Leila Ahmed (1992), however, she also notes how:

[...] both the narration of the veil as a symbol of oppression and the counter-narration that regards it as a symbol of resistance, are erroneous perceptions, based on, and reinforcing, western colonial discourse. (Salih, 2008: 128, *author's translation*)

At the same time, as recalled by Lewis, it is also important to consider that the obsession with the Muslim veil is not specific to the West:

[...] the obsession with the veiled woman and with the local and international significance of visible Islamic practice is not confined to the West: the veil has reappeared (if it ever went away) both as a choice, newly energized by a generation of young women who reject the secular modernity of many postcolonial states in the Muslim world, or worn as a badge of pride by women in diasporic communities, or adopted strategically to facilitate otherwise transgressive gender behaviours; and as an imposition, remodelled by Islamic revivalist forces reliant on their own nostalgic investment in narratives of an imagined prior golden moment of organic Islamic religiosity. (Lewis, 2004: 268)

In Chapter 7, I will show how the legacy of the colonial obsession with Islamic veiling practices still plays out in women's intercultural settings. I will also reflect both on different associations' policies on this subject, as well as on women's different personal attitudes.

Some feminist post-colonial authors, focusing on the figure of Orientalist representations of Muslim women, also provide insightful examples of cross-cultural comparisons that can be regarded as examples of intercultural feminism. These can also be considered as a further strategy to counter 'othering' and homogenising processes of Muslim women. For instance, the Moroccan sociologist and novel-writer Mernissi provides a revealing reading of two competing narratives

developed in the West and in Muslim countries on the issue of the *harem*, in the novel *Scheherazade Goes West* (2001). In her novel, Mernissi unveils how the ideas of the *harem* held by western journalists, who are interviewing her, are based on Orientalist representations²⁴ where women in the *harem* are represented as naked, passive and ready to satisfy all men's desires. As noted also by Graham-Brown (1988), in an Orientalist vision the *harem* comes to symbolise a place where women are held as male possessions. Such an understanding provokes opposing reactions of both excitement and disgust.

In contrast, Mernissi emphasises how Eastern painters represent women in the *harem* as active and combative, as they are often portrayed in the act of travelling or fighting. Mernissi also stresses how in the Muslim world, beauty, intelligence and activeness go hand in hand, while in the western world, she argues, the opposite seems to be case. Mernissi comes to the conclusion that there must be a link between the depiction by western painters of women in the *harem* as passive and vulnerable and the position of influential western philosophers that women have limited access to knowledge. She cites, for instance, Kant (1960) who recommends that women avoid too abstract and complicated intellectual speculation as, even if they can succeed, this would diminish the attraction they exert on men. Mernissi concludes that western men have been highly sophisticated in devising a subtle means of controlling women that reads: "if intelligence is a male prerogative, women who dare to appropriate it, lose their femininity". Mernissi also notes that western women, in order to be accepted and considered feminine, need to respond to strict aesthetic standards that she condenses in the concept of "size 6"²⁵. This is what she calls the 'Western *harem*'. Quoting Pierre Bourdieu (2001) and Naomi Wolf (2002), she argues that body codes paralyse western women in their capacity to compete for power.

Mernissi's novel can be regarded as a powerful account of how a cross-cultural comparison between East and West can help to reveal not only prejudices of the Muslim world, but also hidden assumptions of western culture that are so deeply ingrained, they often go unnoticed by westerners. In particular, the split between beauty and intelligence is blatantly and increasingly evident in some western contexts, including Italy, as underlined by the philosopher Michela

²⁴ Mernissi cites the paintings by Ingres, Matisse, Picasso, Delacroix, the opera by Verdi Aida, the ballet of Sheherazade, as well the more modern representations in Hollywood movies and Walt Disney cartoons.

²⁵ In common discourses size 6 is regarded as the aesthetic norm to which women should aim in Western countries.

Marzano (2010).²⁶ While on the one hand, in public discourse there is an obsession about the appearance of the bodies of Muslim women, the western cultural norms that underpin the rigid control over women's physical appearance, often goes unnoticed.

Another example of cross-cultural comparison is provided by Lewis (1999) in her work on the dialogue that takes place between the English feminist Grace Ellison (*An Englishwoman in a Turkish Harem*) and her Ottoman Muslim friend Zeyneb Hanum (*A Turkish Woman's European Impressions*). Lewis focuses, in particular, on how the act of cross-cultural dressing affects English and Turkish women differently. Ellison appears fascinated by the *harem* culture and sees the veil as an enchanting element to the point that she enjoys wearing it herself in order to look Turkish when going out with her Turkish friends. In this context, Lewis notes that "she can enjoy the pleasure of cultural transgression without giving up the racial privilege" (Lewis, 1999: 511). The book by Zeyneb Hanum and her sister Melek tell "the reverse side of the charade" (Lewis, 1999: 512). In this case, the two Turkish sisters travel to Europe but remain rather deceived about western freedom and find signs of the *harem* in European culture and institutions. Lewis notes that when they dress in European clothes, their act cannot be considered in the same way as that of Ellison:

However oppositional Ellison's gender identity is as a feminist in England, when she presents herself in a veil, we, her readers, know who she 'really' is underneath [...] but Melek Hanum in her European dress is not the equivalent of a Turkish woman in English dress and neither is Zeyneb Hanum in Turkish dress in Europe the equivalent of an Englishwoman in European dress in Turkey. (Lewis, 1999: 517)

Lewis, however, also notes that when Zeyneb Hanum decides to portray herself veiled on the cover of her book, she may do so in order to exploit the Orientalist framework and to attract western readers' attention and, by that, raise her sales. In this way, Lewis's analysis reveals all the complexities of cross-cultural operations grounded in the fact that western and Eastern women do

²⁶ Marzano (2010) argues that women in Italy, after the enormous gains obtained in the '60s and '70s, nowadays only seem to be called to imitate a pervasive model, that of *veline* (Italian term that indicates young good-looking women who participate in media programmes with the only role of offering their very scantily dressed body to the male gaze). Marzano identifies in a number of phenomena such as plastic surgery, food disorders and self-mutilations, symptoms of a "bleeding identity" resulting only from the desire to please men. Those same issues have also been at the core of the establishment of a new women's movement in Italy in recent years called "If not now when?" which brought to the streets thousands of women and men protesting in particular about sexual objectification of women in media as well as in Italian politics.

not occupy the same position in a world order, where western standards are considered to be the norm against which to evaluate other cultures. This point is paramount when addressing the issue of the “reciprocal gaze” between western and non-Western women that also emerges in my field research. As I will show in Chapter 7, in various instances, Italian-born women on the one side, and migrant, including Muslim, women on the other, show a “reciprocal gaze” that includes judgement and incomprehension. However, their position cannot be regarded as on an equal level, as migrant women belong to the minority, while Italian-born women are part of the majority population.

More recently, issues of racialisation and cultural difference around Muslim women have been raised in relation to ‘war rhetoric’ and the misuse, of supposedly feminist concerns, to justify western military interventions in Muslim countries. The arguments put forward have been similar to the colonialist rhetoric of “white men are saving brown women from brown men” as affirmed by Spivak (1993). This has been recently stressed by Riley et al (2008: 2) in their effort to “challenge US imperial wars crafted as rescue missions in the name of democracy and ‘civilization’”. According to these authors:

These wars, with their disproportionate and annihilating effect on the lives of women, with the ensuing traffic in gendered bodies, with the manipulation of racialized discourses of male supremacy and female helplessness as justification, raise profoundly feminist issues, and require a complex, anti-imperialist feminist engagement. (Riley et al, 2008: 2-3)

Similar expressions have been used by Brah & Phoenix:

What are the implications for feminisms of the latest forms of postmodern imperialisms that stalk the globe? What kinds of subjects, subjectivities, and political identities are produced by this juncture when the fantasy of the veiled Muslim woman “in need of rescue”, the rhetoric of the ‘terrorist’, and the ubiquitous discourse of democracy becomes an alibi for constructing new global hegemonies? (Brah & Phoenix, 2004: 83-84)

When aiming to build a project of intercultural feminism based on a notion of reflexive solidarity, it is fundamental to bear in mind the broader geopolitical picture regarding western wars in Muslim countries, as well as the consequences this has on Muslim migrant populations in western countries. In Chapter 7, I will return to this point especially when dealing with the activities organised by specific intercultural associations.

3.5 Whiteness as the Unacknowledged Ethnicity

Within a reflection on racialised politics, the notion of whiteness is central to this study because the encounters between white Italian-born and migrant women underpin both the conceptual question and the empirical context of this research. As a consequence, it emerges as a critical issue for a project of intercultural feminism based on a notion of reflexive solidarity, precisely because as, underlined by Caroline Knowles:

An analysis of race that has nothing to say about whiteness is incomplete: missing half the problem. More than half of the problem for racism [...] plays a significant part in race making, and racism is a white problem, to which black people have been forced to respond. (Knowles, 2004: 174)

As recognised among others by Rich (1979); Brah (1996); Ang (1995) whiteness does not necessarily entail an open belief about the superiority of white people, rather it sees itself as the “norm” by positioning itself at the centre, in an unspoken position of dominance. Adrienne Rich was one of the first white feminists to identify what she referred to as “white solipsism” to indicate the tendency “to think, image, and speak as if whiteness described the world” (Rich, 1979: 299) and as:

[...] not the consciously held belief that one race is inherently superior to all the others, but a tunnel-vision which simply does not see non-white experience or existence as precious or significant, unless in spasmodic, impotent guilt-reflexes, which have little or no long-term, continuing momentum or political usefulness. (Rich, 1979: 306)

Dyer (1997) equates the position of being white with that of being human and notes that there is nothing more powerful than being human. A similar critical understanding of whiteness became the basis for the creation of critical white studies that have been acknowledged as part of human sciences curriculums since the late 20th century. Critical whiteness is thus conceived as a way of:

[...] challenging the privileges accruing to whiteness, and seeing it as a set of racially located positions among others, and not as a ‘norm’. (Knowles, 2004: 199)

Such a position is based on the acknowledgement that being white equates to the experience of an ethnic and “racial” positioning in the world. On the contrary, whiteness has been and is normally seen as a neutral category that does not require specific consideration or analysis.

Ethnicity and 'race' are categories that are normally used to describe the 'Others', namely the non-Westerners and non-white. As underlined by Brah:

Racialisation of white subjectivity is often not manifestly apparent to white groups because 'white' is a signifier of dominance, but this renders the racialisation process no less significant. It is necessary, therefore, to analyse the processes which construct us as, say, 'white female' or 'black female', as 'white male' or 'black male'. Such deconstruction is necessary if we are to decipher how and why the meanings of these words change from plain descriptions to hierarchically organised categories under given economic, political and cultural circumstances. (Brah, 1996: 105)

Frankenberg has been one of the first scholars to research this issue in her pioneer work based on interviews with white women. Here, she articulated the concept of whiteness as follows:

First whiteness is a location of structural advantage, of race privilege. Second it is a "standpoint", a place from which white people look at ourselves, at others, at society. Third "whiteness" refers to a set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed. (Frankenberg, 1993b: 1)

Ang in referring to Frankenberg, also states that: "The extent to which this white self-exnomination permeates mainstream feminism should not be underestimated" (Ang, 1995: 61).

The concept of whiteness as privilege is endorsed also by Peggy McIntosh (1988, 1990) who - differently from that stated above - comes to question the notion of whiteness precisely because of her feminist concerns and her teaching in a Women's Studies programme. Her reasoning is based on the comparison between male privilege and white privilege. Through her analysis of unacknowledged male privilege and of interlocking hierarchies, she comes to the conclusion that whiteness functions as a similar phenomenon:

I think whites are carefully taught not to recognize white privilege, as males are taught not to recognize male privilege. So I have begun in an untutored way to ask what it is like to have white privilege. I have come to see white privilege as an invisible package of unearned assets that I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was "meant" to remain oblivious. White privilege is like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools, and blank checks. (McIntosh, 1988)

What is most interesting in McIntosh's analysis is that she unpacks the concept of whiteness by identifying a list of privileges which white people enjoy in their everyday life for the simple fact of being white. Because the first characteristic of white privilege is that of being invisible and

unacknowledged, such an exercise, she argues, proves particularly useful in relation to any project in which white women want to understand and question their position of privilege.

The conceptualisation of racism as “white supremacy” also raises the issue of whether it is possible to attribute racism to non-white people. On this point Grada Kilomba states:

[...] *racism is white supremacy*. Other racial groups can neither be racist nor perform racism, as they do not possess this power. The conflicts between them or between them and the white dominant group have to be organised under other definitions, such as prejudice. (Kilomba, 2010: 42)

In contrast, Rattansi refers to this position as “the disastrously confused and unworkable formula popular with many anti-racists: ‘Prejudice + Power = Racism’” and argues for a position that “does not assume that racism is simply a property of white cultures and individuals” (Rattansi, 2007: 2). At the same time he also recognises that “it is important to bear in mind a distinction between general ‘prejudice’ and racism properly so-called” (Rattansi, 2007: 3). In Chapter 8, I reflect on how prejudices among migrant women may represent a significant obstacle in the framework of feminist intercultural practices, and address whether they can be regarded as racism or not.

The scholarship presented above raises the issue of how it is possible from a white person’s point of view – and for the purpose of this project, in particular, from a white woman’s point of view - to endorse a critical understanding of the concept of whiteness. Gilroy²⁷ identifies the following defence mechanisms enacted by white people as a framework for the analysis of whiteness:

[...] five different ego defense mechanisms the *white* subject goes through in order to be able to ‘listen’, that is in order to become aware of its own whiteness and of itself as a performer of racism: denial/guilt/shame/recognition/reparation. (Speech by Gilroy in Kilomba, 2010: 22)

Many postcolonial scholars have referred to the uselessness of guilt. For instance Audrey Lorde states about guilt:

If it leads to change then it can be useful, since it is then no longer guilt but the beginning of knowledge. Yet all too often, guilt is just another name for impotence, for defensiveness destructive of all communication; it becomes a device to protect ignorance and the continuation of things the way they are, the ultimate protection for changelessness. (Lorde, 1984: 130)

²⁷ Speech by Gilroy held in Berlin in 2004 at the *Haus der Kulturen der Welt*.

The central issue for a project based on a notion of reflexive feminist solidarity among women positioned differently, especially in terms of 'race' and ethnicity then becomes how to transform guilt into responsibility. In Chapter 8, I analyse how intercultural associations dealt with the issue of guilt by Italian-born women, which is confirmed as a central topic, and to what extent they have facilitated a process of assumption of responsibility. Such a process is well exemplified by Kilomba when she writes:

Reparation then means the negotiation of recognition. One negotiates reality. In this sense, it is the act of repairing the harm caused by racism by changing structures, agendas, spaces, positions, dynamics, subjective relations, vocabulary, that is giving up privilege. (Kilomba, 2010: 23)

Kilomba identifies the significance of the giving up of privilege with an alteration of power distribution in a number of specific locations, both at institutional level and at the level of relationships.

On the possibility of giving up racial privilege, critical studies on whiteness propose different reflections. Frankenberg (1993a) warns that it is not possible to renounce 'race' privilege as our lives are embedded in a political and social system on which it is founded. As a white feminist, she invites us to work on three levels: a re-examination of personal history, a theoretical transformation of feminism and a practical, political engagement (Frankenberg, 1993a: 78). Frankenberg (1993b: 243) herself recognises that the key point is the alteration of the distribution of power. She also argues that a critical understanding of the concept of whiteness is fundamental in order to verify the grounds on which anti-racist work is carried out by white people (Frankenberg, 1993b: 242). Such a consideration is consequently paramount in the work of feminists who are engaged in intercultural settings. In relation to the possibility to renounce 'race' privilege, McIntosh (1998) appears to put a stronger emphasis on individual decisions. At the same time, she is aware that while individual acts may have an alleviating effect, they do not resolve the problem. Like Frankenberg, she sees the final objective as being linked to the redistribution of power and in the redesign of social systems.

On the basis of this recognition, studies on critical whiteness have generally opposed colour-blind policies. These policies are premised on the idea that 'race' should not be taken specifically into account in the drafting of State policies supporting the idea of a 'post-racial' world. The rationale behind this theory is the idea that, in order to prevent racism and discrimination, 'race' should

simply be disregarded. These theories have been criticised on a number of grounds, in particular for their inability to see that racial differences influence the distribution of power in society, and for their inability to question white privilege. For instance Sullivan (2006) states that in the U.S. after the '60s, there was a transition from a situation of *de jure* to *de facto* racism and emphasises how: "In this atmosphere of alleged colour-blindness, racism continued and continues to function without the use of race-related terms" (Sullivan, 2006: 5). Bonilla-Silva (2010) criticises the idea that the U.S. can be regarded as a post-racial society and shows how "colour-blind" policies combine to perpetuate discrimination and disadvantage based on racial grounds, and also to maintain white privilege.

Another central aspect in a critical analysis of whiteness is the notion of whiteness as a socially constructed concept. As a consequence, it is important to recall that whiteness is an unstable category which is subject to historical variations. (Knowles, 2004; Rattansi, 2007) In particular, in relation to the Italian context, it is important to recall that Italians, together with other European ethnicities, have not always been regarded as white. For instance, concerning the United States, Sullivan (2006: 3) notes that a number of ethnicities that are currently regarded as white - including the Irish, the Italians, the Greeks, the Poles, and the Jews - were regarded as black or "off-white" until the twentieth century. Furthermore, since whiteness is a relational and site-specific category it is important to note historical differences in the construction of whiteness in Italy. I argue that critical studies on whiteness provide useful categories of analysis that can be applied in the Italian context as well. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to identify the specificities of an "Italian whiteness" compared to an "Anglo-Saxon whiteness" that has been much more largely investigated. However, some recent studies (Giuliani & Lombardi-Diop, 2013) focus on a critical reflection on whiteness in the Italian context, showing the relevance of this tool in relation to Italian history. Poidimani (2009) emphasises the central role that the concept of 'race' played in Italian colonialism, as well as in the fascist regime of the 1930s and 1940s, and in the construction of an Italian identity. This is evident in the *Manifesto of Italian racism*²⁸ - published in 1938 on the basis of Mussolini's ideas - that formed the basis of racial policies of Italian colonialism. Moreover, official documents of the time endorse the rhetoric of the European

²⁸ The manifesto clearly acknowledges the presence of biological races and the existence of a "pure Italian race" defined as Aryan. It also argues for the necessity to operate a distinction between European Mediterranean people (Western) on the one hand, and Eastern and African people on the other. It also warns that the European physical and psychological characteristics of Italians do not have to be altered in any way. Finally it states that Jews do not belong to the Italian 'race'.

civilising mission - in relation to African populations specifically - referring to concepts of a white and black 'race' (Poidimani, 2009). At the same time, a narrative of a "pure Italian 'race'" intertwines with Orientalist discourses about the south of Italy. Jane Schneider (1998) argues that in Italy people from the South have been 'othered' by people from the North, in ways that can be regarded as similar to those taking place in Orientalist processes. Also, Enrica Capussotti (2012) states that in Italy, until at the least the 1950s and 1960s, the other - functional for the identification of hegemonic gender, class, and national models - was still placed at the Italian border.

Finally, in a critical study about whiteness, it is also important to consider whether this attention may reinstate the power positions that it aims to criticise. In relation to the new field of study about whiteness, bell hooks states:

Overracializing whiteness then made it seem as though white skin and the privileges that it allows were the primary issues, and not the white supremacist ways of thinking and acting that are expressed by folks of all skin colours. (hooks, 2013: 6)

In contrast bell hooks calls for a politics of accountability "wherein we are all compelled to move beyond blame to see where our responsibility lies" (hooks, 2013: 6).

3.6 Concluding Remarks

In this chapter, I have investigated the potential role of racialised politics in a project based on a notion of feminist reflexive solidarity within intercultural settings by examining in particular the relevance of cultural racism on the one hand, and whiteness, on the other. I argue that such a project should guard against what Anthias (2002: 275) named the "Scylla of feminist fundamentalism and the Charybdis of cultural relativism". To this aim, notions of culture and cultural differences should be evaluated on the basis of a social constructivist concept of culture (Benhabib, 2002). The latter emphasises the evolving and disputed notion of cultures, in opposition to theories that see culture as ahistorical and static, a concept that can be neatly described and attributed to specific groups of population.

A project based on a notion of feminist reflexive solidarity within intercultural settings should also evaluate critically the effects that specific kinds of institutional multiculturalism have had on women (Yuval Davis, 1997; Yuval Davis et al. 2006). At the same time, in order to avoid a position

of “feminist fundamentalism”, I argue for the necessity to explore the building of forms of intercultural feminism based on a mutual exchange among women who are different, especially in terms of ‘race’, ethnicity, legal status/citizenship, class and age, and which is aimed at identifying how cultural practices influence women’s lives cross-culturally. In this effort, it is important to examine how specific attention devoted to uncovering cultural practices detrimental to women (that are prevalent in the West but are normally not regarded as such) could be implemented (Honig, 1999). Within this framework, it is also relevant to explore how the issue of the representation of Muslim women may be addressed, especially veiled Muslim women, as they are currently represented in public discourses as the embodiment of the ‘Other’ *par excellence*. As a consequence, a deconstruction of ‘othering’ and Orientalist processes will prove necessary. Finally, I have explored how a project based on a notion of reflexive feminist solidarity within intercultural settings could incorporate a critical reflection on whiteness, as an unspoken position of privilege and an unacknowledged ethnicity. In particular, reflections on how to move from guilt to responsibility and reparation may be helpful and necessary in intercultural settings bringing together Italian-born and migrant women.

Chapter 4

Epistemology and Methodology of the Study

In this chapter, I locate my positionality in the context of a feminist epistemological approach. I refer here to feminist scholarship on the notion of knowledge as situated, subjective, power-imbued and relational. More specifically I draw from “feminist standpoint theory” and from the notion of “situated knowledge”. I also reflect on scholarship about feminist interviewing and how this influenced my interviewing process. This chapter also provides a reflection on the challenge of ‘translating’ feminist standpoint theory into a methodological strategy. This requires critical reflection on my own positionality as a researcher as well as the ways in which I employed the specific qualitative methods of data collection and analysis used in this study. The latter are explained in the last section of this chapter. In particular, I explain the rationale for choosing a mixed methodology approach using documentary analysis and qualitative in-depth one-to-one interviews. I address issues relating to the interviewing process, including pilot interviews, interview guide, and the actual carrying out of interviews. Finally, I describe how I conducted my data analysis at four levels: recording and transcribing each interview; taking notes immediately after each interview or event in which I participated; developing and filling out a template generating a framework of analysis; designing a coding process and developing detailed codes to apply to the data through the use of the software package MaxQda. My research instruments are presented in Annex 5 Template - Framework for Data Analysis and Annex 6 Coding Structure for Data Analysis.

4.1 Acknowledging my Positionality

Acknowledging my positionality is fundamental as my biography influences what I study, the questions I pose and how I pose them. Being aware of my position and possible bias can also be helpful to contextualise and recognise the limitations of my study. Such a perspective is linked to an interpretivist as well as a feminist approach. However, as recognised by Sanchez Taylor and O’Connell Davidson:

It is one thing to recognize in the abstract, that researchers come to their research with particular histories and that the way their bodies are socially marked has implications for the process of the research, but not so easy to write about this in relation to specific pieces of research. (Sanchez Taylor & O'Connell Davidson, 2010: 46)

My positionality can be described as that of a white, Italian-born, middle class woman who is also a PhD student and a human rights activist. As a consequence, as a white, western woman researching intercultural work with migrant women in Italy, I am myself at the centre of the very critique that I am researching. The risk is that of reproducing the power relations that I aim to examine in this research and ultimately to transform. This is because as a white, Italian-born woman, I am in a position of power in relation to the migrant women interviewed. Even if I may be aware of my positionality and privileged status, I continue to be embedded in this power system, so the risk of reproducing power asymmetry is always present.

Circumstances that helped me to reflect most on my positionality have been the reading of feminist post-colonial scholarship. However, the experience that raised the most radical challenges on this point on a personal level was the attendance of a course on “Interdependencies of Racism and Sexism” in Humboldt University in Berlin, December 2012 organised by *Intergender*²⁹, which brought together PhD students from different countries and institutions with a particular focus on racism and racialised politics. On this occasion, one black professor stated that in her course she does not let her white students carry out research on the black population in order not to reproduce a colonial order of knowledge. The question was also raised of “who benefits from this research?” Those radical issues made me reflect on the pervasiveness of the colonial legacy and on the fact that migrants and ethnic minorities are constantly researched on, often with the intent of verifying the extent of their “integration” to norms established by the majority. Even if my research does not focus on migrant women as such, but on their encounter with Italian-born women in intercultural settings, I have asked myself whether my research was perpetuating this colonial legacy. Reflecting at the end of this research process, I could have put more emphasis on the position of Italian-born women seen through the eyes of migrant women. Yet, my research clearly poses questions on this perspective. In the following chapters, I will show how one of the main challenges for Italian-born women working in intercultural settings is that of going from a situation of guilt to one of responsibility. Writing as a western woman doing research on migrant women and women from ethnic minorities, the same challenge applies to me. In this

²⁹ Intergender is a Research School in Interdisciplinary Gender Studies.

trajectory, naming my power position is a first step in this process because those in power positions are never asked to name their privilege. However, in this exercise we also need to be careful to not put whiteness at the centre again.

A different situation occurs with my Italian-born respondents as I share with them 'race', citizenship and probably class. Indeed:

[...] constructions of similarity and difference influence every aspect of the interview project: shaping the questions researchers ask and don't ask, the ease or difficulty of recruiting informants, the kinds of rapport that develop in the encounter, and the lenses through which researchers produce and analyze interview data. (DeVault and Gross, 2007: 182)

Even with Italian-born women, I still hold the position of a researcher, which already entails a position of power as someone who produces knowledge. The aim of this research is not an evaluation as such of the specific associations chosen for this thesis, but an in-depth description of the challenges inherent in intercultural feminist practices. Notwithstanding this, the way I have been perceived on some occasions by my interviewees, was precisely that of the researcher who has the power to produce a specific representation of them and of the associations to which they belong. Such power may also be seen as the ability to pass judgment, which may lead to suspicion and a lack of confidence from the respondents. Therefore, I aimed at keeping:

[...] a reflexive awareness that research relations are never simple encounters, innocent of identities and lines of power, but rather, are always embedded in and shaped by cultural constructions of similarity, difference and significance. (DeVault and Gross, 2007: 181)

My position as a human rights activist may act, although not necessarily, as a mitigating factor because it narrows the gap between the academic world and that of activism. Another common factor is the fact of being a woman who focuses on women's issues in her studies as my respondents do in their own work. There is a vast body of literature on the topic of women doing research on women. As a western woman researching on migrant women, it is important to acknowledge the positionalities deriving from different locations in the geopolitical framework:

It is not only our status as "women" that matters, but understanding the unequal, uneven, complex relationships between women - locally and abroad - and our relationships to histories of colonialisms, patriarchies, imperialisms and racisms that is key to any liberatory feminist project. (Grewal & Kaplan, 1994, 2000; Mohanty 2003 as cited in DeVault and Gross, 2007: 191)

As a researcher, it is fundamental to be aware of these different positionalities when interviewing migrant women. I will return to this point in the next section when dealing with feminist interviewing.

4.2 Epistemology

In this research, I refer to the vast body of feminist scholarship on the notion of knowledge as situated, subjective, power-imbued and relational, as developed by authors such as Harding (1993, 2007); Haraway (1988); Hesse-Biber (2007). I drew in particular on “feminist standpoint theory” and on the notion of “situated knowledge”. Feminist standpoint theory borrowed initially from the Marxist concept that individuals’ experiences determine their way of seeing the world (Hartsock, 1998). As a consequence, the knowledge of the worker/slave is broader than the one of the master because the first has to understand both his/her own world and that of the master in order to survive (Hesse Biber, 2007: 10). Similarly, women’s oppressed position in society provides them with a more comprehensive possibility of understanding society. However, feminist standpoint theories have developed in different directions, some of which are not unproblematic. One of the most important problems is how to ‘define’ the oppressed group and the related risk of seeing women as a homogenous category. In order to avoid such a risk, I referred in particular to those versions of feminist standpoint theories that take explicitly into account women’s diversity (e.g. in terms of race, ethnicity, class, sexuality). Sandra Harding, one of the key theorists of standpoint theory, has herself reformulated her theory in order to allow for a broader notion of difference and intersectionality (Stoetzler & Yuval Davis, 2002).

The notion of “situated knowledge” was elaborated by Donna Haraway as a way to achieve a feminist understanding of objectivity. She states that:

Feminist objectivity is about limited location and situated knowledge, not about transcendence and splitting of subject and object. It allows us to become answerable for what we learn how to see. (Haraway, 1988: 583)

At the same time she warns that:

But not just any partial perspective will do. [...] We are also bound to seek perspective from those points of view, which can never be known in advance, that promise something quite extraordinary, that is, knowledge potent for constructing worlds less organized by axes of domination. (Haraway, 1988: 585)

Such an epistemological approach leads Haraway to strongly criticise relativism that is seen as a “denial of responsibility”, while “the alternative to relativism is partial, locatable, critical knowledge sustaining the possibility of webs of connections called solidarity in politics and shared conversations in epistemology” (Haraway, 1988: 584). Haraway also shares the conviction that the subjugated may hold a vantage point in their understanding of the world. Nonetheless, she is aware of the “serious danger of romanticizing and/or appropriating the vision of the less powerful while claiming to see from their positions” (Haraway, 1988: 584). As I addressed in Chapter 2, such a risk of appropriating difference or fetishizing the ‘Other’ is a central point in post-colonial feminism, as described by authors such as Ang (1995), hooks (1992) and Ahmed (2000).

From an epistemological point of view this led me to adopt a relational conception of standpoint theory. In this I draw from Hill Collins who referred to multiple systems of oppressions. Hill Collins also called “for a dialogue between people from different positionings as the only way to approximate truth” (Hill Collins as cited in Stoetzler and Yuval Davis, 2002: 319). It is based on these premises that Yuval Davis articulates her concept of ‘transversal politics’ one of the key theories that I refer to in my theoretical framework, and that she describes as:

[...] the recognition that from each positioning the world is seen differently and that, thus, any knowledge based on just one positioning is ‘unfinished’ (as opposed to ‘invalid’). Therefore, the only way to approach ‘the truth’ is through dialogue between people of different positionings, the wider the better. (Yuval Davis, 2010: 278)

Starting from these premises, my effort has been to avoid a paradigm in which difference is simply added in. As argued by Hesse Biber & Yaiser, the risk is that:

Within this solely additive model the “Other” that had been created by the universal “Woman” becomes exotic and exciting. [...] The researcher maintains their dominant position as the one with the power to add the difference. (Hesse Biber & Yaiser, 2004: 106)

In order to avoid this, I have referred in particular to Lynn Weber (2004) who sums up the most important insights emerging from scholarship dealing with difference issues. First of all, she invites researchers to deal with the categories of ‘race’, class, gender and sexuality as not fixed, but as constantly changing on the basis of economic, political and ideological modifications. Secondly, she argues that these categories must be seen as socially constructed with the consequence that:

[...] we cannot *fully* capture their meaning in everyday life in the way that social scientists often attempt to do by employing them as variables in traditional quantitative research. [...]

This practice reinforces the view of race, gender and sexuality as permanent characteristics of individuals, as unchangeable, and as polarities – people can belong to one and only one category. (Weber, 2004: 125)

Thirdly, she makes the point that these inequalities are not only socially-constructed and historically specific, but also: “historically specific, socially constructed hierarchies of domination - they are systems of power relations” (Weber, 2004: 127). Such an understanding leads to an examination and questioning of the power position of the privileged group, as critical studies on whiteness have started to do. Weber states that:

Because the one cannot exist without the other, any analysis of race, class, gender, and sexuality must incorporate an understanding of the ways in which the privilege of dominant groups is tied to the oppression of subordinate groups. (Weber, 2004: 128)

Another point raised by Weber concerns the inter-relatedness of social categories and the fact that people can be in dominant and subordinate position at the same time. On this point, reference to intersectionality theory, as acknowledged in Chapter 3, proves crucial. Furthermore, scholarship on gender, ‘race’, class and sexuality underlines the interdependence of knowledge and activism. On this point, Weber (2004) also emphasises the importance of asking what are the implications for social justice of the questions you pose, how you pose them and the answers you obtain.

In conclusion, in order to avoid appropriating and fetishising difference, I have constantly aimed at returning to my positionality and adopting a critically self-reflexive approach by documenting each specific moment of my field research - from the access to the involved associations, to the carrying out of interviews and the participation in events organised by the associations. Moreover, during the research process, I also kept a reflexive attitude on my previous experience as a human rights activist. In particular, I have confronted myself with issues that emerged from my interviews with Italian-born women, such as the risks of patronage and exoticisation in relation to migrant women, as well as the fact of being embedded in and enjoying a situation of white privilege. I have recognised how my personal trajectory is not exempt from these situations. This is why, as already acknowledged, this thesis does not aim to endorse a judgemental attitude towards interviewed women, but in identifying the challenges and progressing the agenda of intercultural feminist practices. Those challenges apply also, to some extent, to my experience as a human rights activist

working in particular on issues of violence against women that involve both western and non-western women.

In carrying out interviews, I drew on the vast amount of feminist reflection that acknowledges the complexity of the interview process, and signals a number of necessary precautions to take when interviewing from a feminist perspective. As argued by De Vault and Gross (2007) this stems from:

[...] the fascinating complexity of human talk - the flexibility and productive powers of language; the subtle shades of meaning conveyed through the nuances of speech, gesture and expression; issues of translation; the ineluctable locatedness of any moment or stretch of talk [...] the injuries and uses of silence; the challenges inherent in listening. (De Vault and Gross, 2007: 173)

To this, they state, must be added:

[...] the hierarchical, often charged relations between researcher and informants, the politics of interpretation and representation, and the social consequences of making claims on the basis of science. (De Vault and Gross, 2007: 173)

The relationship between interviewer and interviewee has always been at the core of feminist reflection. Ann Oakley (1981) in her seminal work *Interviewing Women: a Contradiction in Terms* criticised the hierarchical relationships within interviewing procedures based on the objectification of the respondents. In particular, she states that:

[...] when a feminist interviews women: (1) use of prescribed interviewing practice is morally indefensible; (2) general and irreconcilable contradictions at the heart of the textbook paradigm are exposed; and (3) it becomes clear that, in most cases, the goal of finding out about people through interviewing is best achieved when the relationship of interviewer and interviewee is non-hierarchical and when the interviewer is prepared to invest his or her identity in the relationship. (Oakley, 1981: 41)

As noted by Shulamit, Oakley opposed the “scientific ethic of detachment and role differentiation between researcher and the subject” (Shulamit, 2002: 27). On this basis, she questioned radically the possibility of producing an objective knowledge and stressed the importance for the researcher to build personal relationships with the interviewees, based on a “feminist ethic of commitment and egalitarianism” (Shulamit, 2002: 27). Such a position has been later criticised by other feminist scholars who have stressed the relevance of power asymmetries between the researcher and the interviewees, even when they are women. I find this particularly relevant in a study that focuses on differences among women. For instance, Pamela Cotterill (1992) warns that

even if all women have important experiences in common, there are still structural differences in relation to class, age, 'race' and disability. She also reminds us that it would be simplistic to assume that all women identify with each other on the basis of a common oppression because the latter varies in nature and degree. Similar conclusions are reached by Catherine Riessman (1987) in her article *When Gender is Not Enough*. Cotteril suggests therefore, that the interviewer should be a sympathetic listener but not necessarily on the basis of shared experiences. This is the approach that I aimed to attain in my experience as researcher and interviewer. On the one hand, being a woman facilitated communication but, on the other hand, I always had clear in mind that my life experiences were not the same as those of my respondents, and very different from some.

A related point that has been highly debated in feminist reflection on interviewing is whether the researcher is best placed being a friend, a stranger, neither or both (Schulamit, 2002: 26-27). In my experience, my relationship with the interviewees was never that of a friend, with one partial exception, but in some cases I had a previous knowledge of some respondents because I participated in some of the events organised by their associations. In all circumstances what I found crucial was the element of trust (Schulamit, 2002: 29), namely the possibility to be seen as a person who could be trusted, from a professional as well as a personal point of view. Regarding this point, my experience as an activist in other associations may have acted as a facilitating factor. The most challenging aspect was establishing my desire to be seen as a person with whom interviewees could talk freely about their experience in the association without fear of being judged or evaluated. Another point that proved crucial in my experience was the importance of active listening:

Active listening means [...] allowing that information to affect you, baffle you, haunt you, make you uncomfortable, and take you to unexpected detours [...] (Gordon, 1997: 40, as cited in DeVault and Gross, 2007: 182)

Active listening implied that, even if I had an interview guide to follow, I was ready to go more in-depth on some points, to change the order of the questions, and in some instances, even to include, to some extent, unexpected issues. Moreover, it meant that I had to devote special attention to the issue of language, especially given the fact that many of my respondents were not native Italian speakers (the language in which interviews were conducted) and that I conducted the interviews in a language that is not the one used in the drafting of my research.

4.3 Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative methodology given the interpretative nature of the primary research question which reads: “How can practices of women’s activism in intercultural settings reveal the challenges of a project founded on a notion of feminist reflexive solidarity?” Qualitative methodology is particularly appropriate as it permits reaching a deeper analysis of people’s views and understandings. It also provides what has been described as a rich and thick description of people’s realities:

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of interpretative, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations [...] At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretative, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000: 3)

The mixed-methods research methodology encompasses the use of a documentary analysis of documents produced by the associations combined with in-depth interviews with migrant and Italian-born women holding specific roles within the associations, normally including the association’s President, some founding members, and women in charge of projects that are particularly relevant for my research. The rationale for combining these methods lies in the aim of comparing official policies and discourses produced by the associations, through documentary analysis, with the “relation between individual belief and organisational ideology” (Reinharz, 1992: 148) and through in-depth interviews.

4.3.1 Research Design

My study was initially framed as a comparison between Italy and Ireland, two countries that show a number of similarities, as well as differences, in relation to migration. However, on the basis of the literature on multi-sited ethnography (Hage, 2005; Marcus, 1995), I realised that a focused in-depth study on one specific socio-cultural context would allow for a more integrated research project and for a complex exploration of the key concepts of interest. Therefore, I then decided to focus only on Italy.

In order to answer my research question, in the Italian context, associations that define themselves as intercultural and aim at bringing migrant and Italian-born women together were

chosen for this research. The selected organisations aim at combining the promotion of women's rights with the values of interculturalism and antiracism. In particular, I have identified the following associations:

- *Almaterra* (Turin)
- *Almateatro* (Turin)
- *Trama di Terre* (Imola)
- *Nosotras* (Florence)
- *Punto di partenza* (Florence)
- *Le Mafalde* (Prato)

The majority of these associations combine a range of services directed at migrant women, policy development and advocacy work with rights promotion activities. It can be argued that *Almaterra*, *Trama di terre* and *Nosotras* are the most well-known associations of this kind and were founded at the end of the '90s. *Almateatro* is a group dedicated to theatre activities that only recently separated from the main association *Almaterra*. In addition to these associations, I have chosen to include *Punto di partenza*, an association that originated from the experience of *Nosotras*, but aimed to create a more political project. Even if this association has not been very active in the last number of years, I have included it in the study as the issues it addressed in seminars and activities it carried out in the past are particularly significant for the purpose of this study. Finally, *Le Mafalde* has only recently been set up and is interesting because it was set up by a younger generation of women compared to the other associations mentioned. Furthermore, I have personal connections with some of its founding members and this was useful in order to carry out pilot interviews. All of these associations are located in the centre-north of Italy. My intention was to have associations also in southern Italy. However, I could not identify - neither in the literature nor through my research - any organisation in southern Italy with the specific characteristics of women's intercultural associations. In the next chapter, I provide a more detailed description of the associations' mission, activities and organisational structure.

Regarding access to the associations, in some cases I had previous contacts with some members or had participated in some of their events, while in other cases I had no previous knowledge. In the case of *Le Mafalde* and *Trama di terre*, I had been invited to speak at a seminar organised by the association as a representative of the Italian section of Amnesty International on the Global

Campaign “Stop Violence Against Women”. This position may entail both advantages and disadvantages. The possible advantage lies in the fact of having previous knowledge and sharing the experience of activism. The possible disadvantage is being identified with one specific organisation and its theoretical framework. Regarding the association *Punto di partenza*, I had previous knowledge of two founding members. Concerning *Almaterra* and *Almateatro* I had only indirect contacts through friends, whereas in the case of *Nosotras*, I attended some of their events, and also had contacts through friends.

Finally, the research on which this PhD is based has successfully gone through the process of approval by the Ethical Committee of University College of Dublin.

4.3.2 Documentary Analysis

In the documentary analysis, I examined different kinds of documentation produced by the associations, such as publications, conferences and seminars proceedings, websites, videos, brochures and, in the case of *Almateatro* ‘performance scripts’. The aim of this analysis is two-fold. First of all, I carried out a general analysis of the associations in order to contextualise my chosen topic. In particular, I identified history; mission; typology; internal organisation and decision-making mechanisms; relationships with public authorities and funding; affiliation with international networks and collaboration with other women’s associations and their specific focus of activities. This part is documented in Chapter 5. In addition, I drafted an information request form (Annex 4) addressed to the associations in order to collect information on these same issues. In some cases, I asked my contact person in the association to fill out the form. When this was not possible, I collected this information at the time of interview.

Secondly, I analysed the documents produced by the associations on specific themes of analysis such as domestic and care work; multiculturalism; practices detrimental to women; and racism. More specifically I examine the scripts of some performances by *Almateatro* in Chapter 7; I analyse the proceedings of some seminars held by *Punto di partenza* in Chapter 8. I also studied the documents produced by all the associations on the specific subject of domestic and care work as well as the documents produced by *Trama di terre* in relation to the theme of multiculturalism and

women's rights. In the case of *Trama di terre* and *Nosotras*, I also drew from my participation to some events organised by the associations.³⁰

4.3.3 In-depth Interviews

The second component of my research design included in-depth interviews carried out with migrant and Italian-born women having specific roles in each association. These generally included the president or spokesperson of the association and some founding members as well as those responsible for projects that are particularly important for this research. In choosing the women to be interviewed, I requested, where possible, to include women from different ethnic backgrounds and from different age groups. The selection of the interviewees was done by the president of the association with whom I first made contact or the person to whom she referred me. In some cases it was also suggested to me to speak with more women of the association by my first interviewees.

I ensured the confidentiality of the interviewing procedure by avoiding recording any personal identifiers. Interviews were recorded with the permission of the interviewee and I transcribed the text entirely. I carried out my ethical responsibilities by giving respondents the possibility to access the transcript of the interview and the right to ask the interviewer to stop the recording at any time or even to have the tape completely erased. Furthermore, interviewees were given the possibility to withdraw from the research at any time. Anonymity was ensured as all interviewees' names have been changed in this research. Real names are only reported when the speech of association members has been published in a public document or in a seminar report. When I have cited excerpts from interviews, the only personal characteristics that I have indicated relate to the fact of whether it is a migrant woman (MW) or Italian-born (IBW). For the purpose of this research project, such specification is important in order to investigate intercultural practices and power relations among the two groups of women. Where relevant, I have specified the name of the association of which the women are members. In other cases I have only referred to the women's

³⁰ For *Trama di terre*, I participated in the following seminars: "A Choice of Law: if I Get Married it Is for Love" held on the 3rd April 2012 and to the seminar "Between your Honour and my Freedom. Fighting Violence Against Women Through an Intercultural Approach" held on 21st September 2012. In 2007, I had also participated to the seminar "Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?" as a representative of Amnesty International Italy. For *Nosotras* I participated in two events of presentation of the Project *NeroArgento* on domestic and care work that took place in June 2011 and to a theatre performance sponsored by the association on the same theme entitled "Eating, Drinking, Sleeping. Stories of *Badanti and Badati*" (those who look after and those who are looked after). I also participated in some seminars and informal meetings organised by *Le Mafalde*.

testimonies when the focus of attention was on intercultural practices and dynamics and not on the experience of a specific organisation.

In my in-depth interviews I used an interview guide (see Annex 3). The interview guide consisted of three sections: the first included a profile of the interviewee's biography and of the history, mission and values of the association. In particular, it focused on the first involvement of the interviewee with the association, her present role, as well as her reflection on the establishment and development of the association and its mission in relation to the promotion of the position of women. Key questions also related to the importance attached by the interviewee that the association is composed only of women and of migrant/ethnic minority and Italian-born women together. The second section dealt with the issues, activities and role played by the association. More specifically, it focused on the choice of issues addressed, the main obstacles faced, and the importance of the relationship with other women's and migrant/intercultural associations as well as with associations in the countries of origin of migrant women. I posed the questions in this section on the basis of the information collected through my documentary analysis and as well through the associations' forms. The last section addressed the challenges and included the most sensitive areas of my research. In particular, this part focused on the relationships among the women members of the association and specifically on the power-sharing and decision-making between Italian-born and migrant women. It asked about the position of migrant women in the association and their influence on the policies of the organisation. Moreover, it included a part addressed to Italian-born women about their process of reflection on their own positionality. Notwithstanding the guide, interviews were necessarily devised as in-depth and open-ended. In particular, I included a number of questions concerning the more sensitive issues (e.g. internal conflicts) that I asked in those cases in which a sufficiently confidential and relaxed atmosphere was created. Furthermore, in some interviews I adjusted the questions in order to focus on projects with which interviewees were particularly involved.

In order to test the interview guide, I carried out two pilot interviews, one with an Italian-born woman and another with a migrant woman, members of *Le Mafalde*, made possible by my contacts with one of the association's members. Both interviews proved helpful in testing the extent to which the interview guide was a valid instrument to address my theoretical questions. They also showed very different reactions on the part of the interviewees. In the case of the Italian-born woman, answers were very direct and straightforward and the interviewee was also

willing to address sensitive issues, such as internal conflicts and the relationship between migrant and Italian-born members of the association. This could be due to the fact that I had previously met and spoken with this person. On the contrary, the second interviewee, who was a migrant woman, appeared more reserved and less inclined to go into some details of the internal dynamics of the association. She was also afraid of not fulfilling my expectations. This made me realise the importance of conveying the message that the interview is about her personal experience in the association and not about my expectation as a researcher. Pilot interviews confirmed my intention of putting some questions in brackets and asking them only if the necessary confidence had been established. Generally they showed that the interview guide served its purpose and that a lot of richness came from personal narratives. However some questions, especially those in the section about “challenges”, proved too abstract and forced me to reformulate them in a more concrete way. Concerning the contents of the answers in some cases they met my expectations, while in others they did not. This was also good evidence that the formulated questions were valuable and useful, as the answers were not predictable. Pilot interviews were also helpful in order to test the information and consent form (Annex 2) in which I provided a description of the focus and aims of the research and explained how I was going to guarantee the confidentiality of the interviewing procedure.

I carried out a total of 27 recorded interviews (16 with migrant women and 11 with Italian-born women) over a five months period from March 2012 to July 2012. I carried out 8 interviews with *Almaterra* (and one not recorded), 6 with *Trama di terre*, 5 with *Almateatro* (and two lengthy conversations with one member), 4 with *Le Mafalde*, 3 with *Nosotras*, 1 with *Punto di partenza* (and two lengthy conversations with two members). My initial intention was to interview 3 or 4 women in each association. However, during the course of the interview procedures, I also followed the indications given to me by the association’s president or by the contact person to whom I was addressed. As a consequence, in some cases, especially for the larger associations such as *Almaterra*, I interviewed a larger number of women. As shown, I interviewed women from all my chosen associations with the partial exception of *Punto di partenza*. This was due to the fact that the association has almost ceased its activities. For this reason, I have focused my analysis on the proceedings of the seminars carried out by this association. Nevertheless, I had a lengthy conversation with two of the founding members which I did not record because I was in the initial stage of the research. Once I carried out the analysis of the proceedings of the seminars, I also decided to meet again with one of the founders of the association and carried out a formal

interview with her. This was the only interview that I carried out at a later stage, in April 2013, as it had as its main task to get some specific clarification about the association's activities.

I normally carried out the interviews in the premises of the association and in some cases in the interviewee's house or in a public place. When interviews took place in the association's premises, interviewees were more likely to be interrupted or to have more limited time available. In contrast, interviews that took place in private homes or in public places normally lasted longer. In these circumstances, it was also fairly common that once I stopped the recorder, interviewees continued the conversation. In some cases such conversations proved very useful. The same can be said about informal conversations that I had when visiting associations or participating in some of the events they organised.

Regarding my relationship with the interviewees, in most cases it was relatively easy to establish a situation that promoted a context of trust, where interviewees could feel at ease to answer my questions. Yet situations varied to a certain degree. In one case only, the interviewee didn't feel at ease with the recording of the interview, even if she had initially given her consent for it. Therefore, in this case I decided to stop the recording and I have not included this interview in my data as I felt that the ethical principle of making the interviewee feel at ease had to take precedence over my interests as a researcher. In other cases the interviewee expressed both a great interest in my research and in my personal journey. In some cases, I was also asked specific questions about my PhD and research. In a few cases, a more personal connection developed on the basis of sharing similar personal trajectories, both with Italian-born and with migrant women. In more than one case, when I thanked the interviewee I was told that the interview had been an occasion for them to reflect on their experience in the association and that they would be interested to know the results of the research. In a few cases, I was told that it would have been nice to work together and in one specific case, I was invited to take part in a new association that one of the interviewees had founded. In all of these different circumstances, scholarship on feminist interviewing proved very helpful. On the one hand I could explore the question of the falseness of the idea of separation between the subject and object of the study, the researcher and the object of the research. On the other hand, I could also explore the fact that being a woman interviewing another woman does not necessarily entail a privileged access and that issues of 'race', class and age are sometimes equally significant as personal trajectories.

4.3.4 Data Analysis

My data analysis took place on three levels. Firstly, I kept a research diary by drafting notes after each interview, as well as after participating in events organised by the associations, in order to note the most relevant issues that emerged as well as maintaining a constant reflexive attitude in relation to the interviewing procedure. Secondly, I drafted a template (Annex 5) for each association in order to have a first analysis of the collected data both from the interviews and from the documents produced by the associations. Thirdly, I transcribed the full text of all interviews and I used a coding system (Annex 6) using a software package (MaxQda) to facilitate the carrying out of a thematic analysis. Regarding the first level of analysis, the reason to keep a research diary, was not only to note the most relevant points that emerged from the interviews but also personal impressions deriving from my interaction with the interviewee - issues emerging from body language and contextual information that do not emerge from transcripts. Moreover, in some cases interviewees continued to talk after I stopped the recorder, so that in my notes I included this information as well.

Concerning the template, I identified 18 objectives. For each of these objectives, I identified the theoretical question/s, the key indicators and the related questions asked during the interview, or taken from the association form or within the documentary analysis. I then made a preliminary analysis of these issues for each of the associations. The objectives I identified are the following: first, objectives related to the relationship between migrant and Italian-born women such as: level of solidarity among migrant and Italian-born women; incidence of the political and economic context on the possibility of achieving solidarity; relationship between Italian-born and migrant women - level of patronising; level of othering; level of sense of shared belonging/commonality. Secondly, objectives concerning decision-making mechanisms within the association such as: level of agreement in the definition of feminist strategies / other strategies for the advancement of the position of women; construction of common strategies (working across difference); level of conflict/disagreement (about mission and values and issues to address). Thirdly, objectives related to the association's mission about the promotion of the position of women such as level of transnational feminism; level of intercultural feminism; level of addressing difference; and level of addressing cultural difference. Finally, objectives regarding the process of self-reflection by Italian-born women and the relevance given to anti-racism: level of centrality of the experience of subordinated people; level of awareness of own positionality in terms of personal and geo-political

power relations; centrality of anti-racist aims and activities; relationship between racism and sexism; and representation of whiteness.

The aim of the template was to identify a number of indicators for each level as well as the specific instruments needed to find relevant information. This instrument of the first analysis proved very useful in narrowing down broad theoretical questions by identifying specific indicators. It also helped in identifying possible gaps about sources of information. In some cases, answers did not come from specific interview questions, but emerged transversally. For instance, as regards the issue of patronising or othering attitudes, this emerged from the general way in which Italian-born women referred to migrant women in the interview. The template also facilitated making interconnections between different dimensions of the research data. This preliminary analysis emphasised the relevance and the wealth of information in relation to some dimensions over others. In particular, a number of dimensions about the relationship between Italian-born and migrant women emerged, for example, levels of patronising and othering. Also the dimension of intercultural feminism proved very rich in information, whereas other dimensions such as level of awareness of own positionality in terms of personal and geo-political power relations, relation between racism and sexism and representation of whiteness proved more difficult and complex.

A more analytical level of analysis was ensured through a coding system that I created in order to identify themes running through my interviews that are directly relevant for my research (Matthews & Ross, 2010: 332-340). The coding system is organised around five key themes: feminism; solidarity; difference; personal involvement; context and organisation. For each section, I identified a number of codes by giving them a name and a summary description. In some cases, I also indicated sub-codes, as for instance with the themes addressed by the association in a specific area such as feminism (“Women’s rights”, “Racism and sexism”, “Cultural difference themes”, “Violence against women”). The first section indicates issues that could be broadly seen as related to feminism. The most frequent codes in this section relate to intercultural feminism and reflection on cultural difference, as well as to the associations’ mission on the promotion of women, women’s relationships within the association, the significance of women-only associations and collaboration with other women’s associations. The second section refers to the concept of solidarity and how this is enacted within different associations. In this section, the most frequent codes are about migrant women’s role, reflection on migration policies/issues, decision-making and generating consensus. As regards the themes addressed by associations in this area, the most

frequent references were to migration-rights and domestic and care work. The third section focuses on how issues of difference are addressed within associations. In this section, the most frequent codes relate to internal conflicts, reflection on identity, working on an equal basis, working together, as well as the issues around 'patronising attitudes'. The fourth section relates to women's personal involvement within associations. In this area, the most frequent codes concern the personal meaning women attribute to their belonging to the association. Finally, the last section focuses on issues relating to the context and organisation. In this area, the most frequent codes are those about decision making and working processes, as well as internal obstacles. The exercise of coding the transcriptions of interviews proved very useful in order to identify common themes running through interviews and to carry out an in-depth analysis of the different topics emerging from the interviews. Given the complex nature of the issues addressed, in various cases I assigned more than one code to the same paragraph as some concepts overlap, such as 'patronising attitudes', othering and western emancipation. Finally, because the coding system resulted in a very detailed analytical investigation, the preliminary analysis through the template proved useful in not losing the general overview.

Chapter 5

Women Mobilising in Intercultural Settings in Italy

This chapter contextualises the analysis of the work carried out by the women's intercultural associations discussed in subsequent chapters. As already specified, women's intercultural associations were chosen to answer my research question on the challenges of intercultural feminist practices founded on the notion of reflexive solidarity. These associations define themselves as intercultural and aim at bringing migrant and Italian-born women together as well as combining the promotion of women's rights with the values of interculturalism and anti-racism. Before examining each organisation's organisational structures, characteristics and areas of activities, I locate the analysis of my chosen associations within the larger framework of migrant women mobilising in Italy. Such contextualisation is helpful in order to fully capture the groundbreaking nature of women's intercultural associations as well as to understand the characteristics of migrant women mobilising in Italy.

In the second part of this chapter, I focus on the subject of the women's personal motivation - for belonging to the association, as well on their relationships within the organisation, in order to introduce a number of themes that will emerge in the following chapters exploring the challenges of intercultural feminist practices. I will illustrate how personal relationships are a key part of women deciding whether to become and remain members of a women's intercultural association, as well as a facilitating factor in the sharing of a common political engagement within the association. I will also show how belonging to a group composed only of women is regarded positively by a strong majority of the women interviewed and how in the majority of cases, it has a less controversial meaning than that of considering the association as feminist.

5.1 Migrant Women Mobilising in Italy

In this section, I first provide a brief overview of the different forms of activism among migrant women and then focus more specifically on the experience of women's intercultural associations.

As recalled by Tognetti Bordogna (2012), studies on the topic of migrant associations are not extensive and even less so on migrant women associations. Moreover, research that investigates the relationship between the activism of migrant women and Italian feminist movements is rare. The most comprehensive work on this issue is the text *Immigrant Women and Feminism in Italy* by Pojmann (2006), which investigates the different forms of activism involving migrant women over the last decades, as well as its relationship with the most significant associations led by Italian-born women. Other authors like Andall (2000) and Merrill (2001, 2006) focus their analysis on specific migrant women associations while Campani (2011) reflects on the specific directions taken by some of the migrant women leaders who set up some important associations.

During the '70s when migrant women initially arrived in Italy, they were mainly employed as domestic workers for middle-class families. Associations were set up with the support of the Catholic Church and to a lesser extent also of the Protestant and Coptic churches (Tognetti Bordogna, 2012). During the '80s, the first migrant women's organisations on a national basis were formed specifically to provide solidarity and mutual support networks. Tognetti Bordogna (2012) notes how during the '90s many migrant associations, including migrant women organisations, were set up mainly at the urging of trade unions and not for profit sector and as the result of local projects. Specific associations were also developed to train cultural mediators or are themselves composed of cultural mediators. In these associations, women often represent the majority. Moreover, in this period new migrant associations were set up in order to avail of national legislation providing funds for projects involving migrants as well as funds provided by local administrations. On this point, Tognetti Bordogna (2012) states that a significant number of migrant women's associations originate from projects funded by public bodies. She also argues that in this way, the sector of migrant women's associations moves from being self-defined and aimed only at the protection of its members, to being able to negotiate with local authorities.

Key organisations that were formed during the '80s on a national basis are the Association of Women from Cape Verde, founded by Maria De Lourdes Jesus, and the Filipino Women's Council set up by Charito Basa (Pojmann, 2006). Campani (2011) notes the exceptional life experiences of these two women: the first arrived in Italy as an adolescent working in the domestic sector, and then became a journalist and writer; the second was also working in the domestic sector for the first part of her stay and was later awarded a prestigious national prize by the President of the Republic. Campani argues that these life directions can be considered the result of an exceptional

capacity for success regardless of difficulty, but do not apply to the great majority of migrant women who have been confined to the domestic work sector.

Another significant association based on nationality is the Eritrean Women's Association, which is characterised by Italy's colonial ties with Eritrea. Pojmann (2006) states that Eritrean women thought that these ties would be advantageous for them, but this was not always the case. Pojmann (2006) argues that Latin American women had yet another story, most of them were poorly educated, came from rural areas and often escaped from difficult family situations. They had links with the Catholic Church but were also able to form their own associations. One of the most significant ones is the Brazilian Women's Association set up by Rosa Mendes, who had been a feminist activist in Brazil.

As for Muslim women's associations, as noted by Pojmann (2006), these are rather numerous, as women-only groups are quite common in the Muslim culture, as the Muslim religion assigns different spaces to women and men. Such associations often direct most of their efforts towards trying to overcome general stereotypes of Muslim women, as well as towards supporting their members in the practice of the Muslim faith. One of the most important is ADMI, the Association of Muslim Women in Italy, a member of the European Forum of Muslim Women. The association refers to itself as "a bridge between Muslim women and Italian society aiming at fostering dialogue and exchange on all issues involving women primarily, and more generally the Muslim community". (ADMI, 2012) Among the objectives of the association is that of "correcting the distorted image of Muslim women that has been created at various levels, and to inform on women's rights in Islam by making known the rights that Islam gave to women". The association is often consulted by media and institutions in relation to issues involving Muslim women in Italy and abroad.³¹ (ADMI, 2012) Yet women from Muslim countries do not necessarily join associations on religious grounds. Pojmann (2006) notes that, in particular, women who did not migrate for purposes of family reunification but who were either single, divorced or without family ties, were more likely to join multi-ethnic associations. She also notes a strong presence of what she defines as "independent self-identified Muslim women" (Pojmann, 2006: 97) in multi-ethnic associations such as *Trama di terre* and *Almaterra*, to which I will return in the next section.

³¹ For instance, the association criticised the bill (Bill 2422 "Modification to Article 5 of Law 22 May 1975, n. 152) forbidding the wearing of the *burqua* and the *niqab*, judging it anti-constitutional and strongly discriminatory as it focuses on a specific religion.

As regards Eastern European women's associations, they began to be established with the rise of immigration from these countries during the '90s, which coincided with the fall of communist regimes and the Balkan war. Pojmann (2006) notes that Eastern women's associations tend to focus on intercultural issues and to promote the professional advancement of women, but do not provide basic services. She argues that this is a clear sign that they tend to relate to Italian society on a more egalitarian basis.

It was in the '90s that intercultural associations composed of both migrant and Italian-born women were set up. Pojmann emphasises that, before the '90s, feminist organisations had relationships with feminist movements in other countries, including Third World countries, and invited activists to Italy. She argues that they did not, however, have special relationships with the women from these countries living in Italy, as:

Migrant women first viewed Italian women as privileged, while Italian women saw migrant women as somehow outside the realm of Italian feminism. (Pojmann, 2006: 72)

Testimonies of some migrant women's leaders emphasise the difficulty of establishing a relationship with Italian-born women's associations as the latter did not integrate migrant women's concerns in their agendas. Pojmann (2008) adds that, even where migrant women's leaders had relationships with Italian feminists, they did not consider it useful to immediately unite their interests. They regarded as more urgent the need to set up their own associations which focused on access to political, social and cultural rights: "It was clear that without basic rights, inequality would always frame their relationships with Italian women" (Pojmann, 2008: 199).

The turning point which led to the creation of women's intercultural associations can be identified as the Beijing Conference on Women, organised by the United Nations in 1995. Ironically, it was in Beijing some migrant women's leaders first met with Italian feminists. On this point, the speech by Charito Basa - as already stated one of the most important leaders of migrant women - during a conference held in Bologna is particularly significant:

I challenged them when in Bologna after the Beijing conference they organized a big seminar - bringing Beijing home. And, they were all talking about, and I refer to all of those who were there, all the Italian women who were there - who were famous feminists who were intellectuals. They said it was a very interesting experience for them to be in Beijing and to have met women from the African region, women from India, women from all over the poor countries and that they should do something to support these women. I was very upset and I

grabbed the microphone and I said “hey we’re here ... we’re here” and I don’t know. I can’t remember anymore what I said but I just went on ...And some of them were crying and many of them apologized actually. (Speech by Charito Basa in Pojmann 2008: 193)

Another conference was organised in Turin in 1996 in which nearly six hundred women participated. The general aim of the conference was to build a society free from racism and violence and to implement the Beijing platform in Italy. Every session was co-chaired by an Italian-born and a migrant woman. On the experience of the encounter between Italian-born and migrant women in common associations, Pojmann concludes that:

Migrant women’s associations in Italy have begun to work more closely with Italian feminist organizations on issues pertaining to globalisation and the development of an international women’s movement, but these relationships have yet to make a dramatic impact on the construction of theories and practices that effectively utilise the experiences of migrant women. (Pojmann, 2006: 162)

As well as migrant women associations that are set up on a national basis and women’s intercultural associations composed of migrant and Italian-born women, multi-ethnic associations composed of migrant women of differing nationalities were also set up in the ‘90s. NO.DI is probably the most significant one. It was formed in 1994 based on the coming together of various leaders of migrant women associations and is aimed at supporting migrant women in achieving their rights. Another important multi-ethnic association is *Candelaria*, which originated from a group of Argentinean and African women and, as well as offering a range of services, has been able to create complex projects in conjunction with Italian institutions. In particular, it developed projects that aimed at fostering communication between Italian-born and migrant women and at enabling migrant women to leave domestic work.

5.2 Profile of Women’s Intercultural Associations Addressed in the Thesis

Within the framework of migrant women mobilising that I have described in the previous section, in this section I address the associations on which I focus my research. As explained in Chapter 4 in which I present the methodology of this study, I have chosen to concentrate this research on women’s intercultural associations because they bring together migrant women and women from ethnic minorities with Italian-born women and they combine feminist and anti-racist aims in their mission statements. For these reasons, they are particularly suited to my research question focused on exploring the implementation of a project of feminist intercultural practices in Italy. In

particular, I have chosen to study six associations: *Almaterra*, *Almateatro*, *Trama di terre*, *Nosotras*, *Punto di partenza* and *Le Mafalde*. As specified in Chapter 4, the rationale for choosing this selection lies in the significance attained by some organisations, such as *Almaterra*, *Trama di terre* and *Nosotras* in delivering services, organising campaigns, securing funding and other activities and from which other associations originated later, such as *Almateatro* and *Punto di partenza*. To these I have added *Le Mafalde* which is a smaller and more recent association that has been set up by a younger generation of women. For each organisation, I briefly present their history; mission; typology; internal organisation and decision-making mechanisms; relationships with public authorities and funding and affiliation with international networks and collaboration with other women's associations. In an annexed table (Annex 7), I also provide this information in a summary, comparative form. This section is based mainly on the analysis of the documents produced by the associations and the information collected through the information request form (Annex 4). However, some citations from interviews are also included.

5.2.1 History

The first women's intercultural association - having the explicit aim of bringing together Italian-born and migrant women - to be set up in Italy is *Almaterra* in 1993. *Trama di terre* followed in 1997, and then *Nosotras* in 1998. The *Almateatro* group has been active within *Almaterra* since its establishment and became a separate association in 2011. *Punto di partenza* was formally set up as an association in 2005, although it started its activities in 1998, and *Le Mafalde* in 2009.

The history of *Almaterra* began on 8 March 1990 with the meeting of a group of women belonging to the Turin Women's Centre and a group of migrant women. The result of this meeting was the ambitious project of creating an intercultural centre for women. Taking its name from the former school building in which it is located, the *Alma Mater* Centre (later called *Almaterra*) was opened in 1993, thanks to the support and commitment of local government bodies, several women's associations, and women involved in the trade union movement. The founding members were 15 migrant and 9 Italian-born women and the first president was Sued Benkhdim from Morocco.

Almaterra's history is characterised by a number of specific elements that have influenced its direction to the present day. First of all, as regards Italian-born women, the association is born out of the experience of a group of feminists who were active in the Turin Women's Centre and who in particular were linked to the association *Produrre & Riprodurre* ("Produce and Reproduce"). This

association's ideas have greatly influenced *Almaterra*. *Produrre & Riprodurre* had been created by women who were active in the *Intercategoriale Donne CGIL-CISL-UIL*, a joint group of women from the three most important Italian trade unions as well as the UDI (Union of Italian Women), one the most significant feminist-left associations in Italy. As a consequence, the association focused on work related issues as well as on the question of paid labour and unpaid, reproductive labour. *Produrre & Riprodurre* believed, in particular, in the value of cooperatives as an alternative to the capitalist model of production, providing the opportunity for women to be liberated from the alienation of industrial work and for them to be able to express themselves in a non-hierarchical environment. The setting up of women's cooperatives indeed became one of the most important activities undertaken by *Almaterra*, to support migrant women's autonomous labour.

On the issue of domestic and care work, *Produrre & Riprodurre* expressed the idea that this kind of work was largely undervalued and it was also convinced that "emancipation was impossible for women who were confined entirely to the home, whether as housewives or domestic workers" (Merrill, 2006: 145). Furthermore, Merrill argues that the association adopted "a developmentalist model, in which gender relations in pre-capitalist societies were interpreted as more patriarchal than in the advanced industrialised world" (Merrill, 2006: 145). The author further argues that, as a consequence, the women members of *Produrre & Riprodurre* regarded women from the non-industrialised south of Italy as more oppressed by patriarchal structures than women from the north of Italy. This confirms the presence of what has been defined as "orientalism in one country" (Schneider, 1998) leading to a contradictory situation whereby the same women that are interested in promoting the overcoming of stereotypes of migrant women, themselves risk promoting a stereotype of women from southern Italy.

Almateatro has been devoted to theatre activities since the establishment of the association *Almaterra* and only recently decided to convene as a separate association, on the basis of disagreements about the organisation's management as well as the potential for accessing specific funding. The theatre group was initially established by two Italian-born playwrights, Giovanna Rabazzana and Gabriella Bordin. Rabazzana left the group after a few years, while Gabriella Bordin continues to work with the project and is currently *Almateatro's* President. The group's core philosophy is that of using theatre in order to promote an exchange among women from different nationalities through a different, freer, form of expression involving a less asymmetrical relationship between migrant and Italian-born women.

Trama di Terre was formed in 1997 in Imola, a medium-sized city in Emilia-Romagna, in central-northern Italy, as a result of meetings between migrant and Italian-born women held in Torino and Bologna, and also after a professional training course financed by the European Social Fund that brought together migrant and Italian-born women. In particular, the idea of setting up the association was first expressed in the meeting between Tiziana dal Prà, an Italian-born woman who had long been active in feminist groups, and an Algerian woman involved in the promotion of women's rights. The figure of Tiziana dal Prà has remained fundamental throughout the history of the association, as she has been the president from its inception to the present day.

Nosotras was set up in 1998 in Florence, again from an encounter between a group of migrant and Italian-born women who were active in the feminist movement. In this case, migrant women have had a particularly strong and visible role. Women presidents such as Clara Silva, Mercedes Frias and at present Leila Aibi have been particularly authoritative and have significant personal achievements. Clara Silva is a University professor and Mercedes Frias has been a parliamentarian. The association has cooperated with local institutions since its establishment.

Punto di partenza's activities intersect with those of *Nosotras*. Even though the association was formally set up in 2005, on its website³² it lists a number of activities carried out by *Nosotras* that have been ongoing since 1998. In particular, it refers to, a number of seminars bringing together migrant and Italian-born women; these were called Summer Universities - held in 1998 and 1999 - and the Campus of Women's Culture held in 2000. Mercedes Frias, first president of *Nosotras*, spearheaded these innovative projects. The idea of setting up this association originates from a group of migrant and Italian-born women (where migrant women were in the majority at the beginning) who had already worked together in other associations. With the setting up of *Punto di partenza* they aimed to promote a political reflection on a number of themes that they had encountered in their experiences, such as North-South imbalance, impoverishment of the southern hemisphere, racism and sexism, and domestic and care work. Most of all they aimed to address these themes starting from an act of becoming aware of asymmetries among women as well as among countries.

Finally, *Le Mafalde* was set up more recently in 2009, by a younger generation of women. The idea originates from a group of young Italian-born women who were already involved in the

³² The website is no longer active, but its contents have been put in a CD-Rom that I was given by a member of the association.

“immigration field” and some of whom had studied together at a Masters course on interculturalism. Some of them also shared a specific commitment to women’s rights and gender issues and had carried out studies on these subjects. It is thanks to the encounter with some migrant women, in the setting of a local information centre in Prato, a town near Firenze, that the association was born.

5.2.2 Mission

In the articulation of the associations’ mission the most frequent words or phrases are: ‘women’s self-determination’, ‘interculturalism’ and ‘valuing differences’. Exchanges between women who are different in terms of nationality, but also on other grounds, are at the core of the associations’ missions (see Annexed Table 7). A theme which is emphasised by the majority of these associations is that of contesting the stereotype of immigrant women as people in need and, in contrast, celebrating the skills of migrant women. Somewhat different from most of the associations’ missions is that of *Punto di partenza*, where the emphasis is not so much on the value of differences as such, but on the problematic elements that arise from a lack of citizenship rights. As stated by Giovanna in her interview:

The aim of the association was not to support, incentivise, promote, but it was to bring together different experiences and thoughts, different because they were born into different contexts with different roles and positionalities. Both [Italian-born and migrant] have asymmetrical experiences, so there isn’t anyone who supports others. We are here, we live here, we work together here from a political point of view [...] (Giovanna, IBW)

The association goes beyond the idea of the need to overcome stereotypes about migrant women and to support them in their empowerment. Rather, the association aims to reflect on the roots and consequences of these different positionalities.

As regards the theoretical approach taken to the promotion of women’s rights, the most common references are to the concept of “women’s self-determination” (in particular *Almaterra*, *Punto di Partenza* and *Le Mafalde*) and to the “philosophy of gender difference” (*Nosotras*, *Trama di terre*). The latter expression refers to the most common approach followed by Italian feminist groups which can be broadly linked to the approach of “second wave” feminism. In practice, women’s intercultural associations characterise themselves not as being places of theoretical elaborations, but rather as being founded on specific practices and relationships. Furthermore, as I have described, most of the associations on which I focus, were born from the actions of a group of

Italian-born women who had been active in feminist groups and migrant women who had rather varied experiences of the direction of women's empowerment in their countries of origin. This is why in the associations' mission statements, and in the descriptions of their activities, there is no specific reference to feminism but rather to phrases such as "women's self-determination" and "gender difference approach".

5.2.3 Typologies of Services and Activities

Concerning the typologies of services and activities carried out by the associations, all of the organisations, except *Almateatro* and *Punto di partenza*, combine service provision addressed mainly towards migrant women, or more generally towards migrants, with intercultural and awareness raising activities, as well as some forms of advocacy. The first typology of activities includes information and counselling services (in particular, relative to legal, health, employment and sometimes also psychological issues) training and support in employment searches, courses in the Italian language, and linguistic and cultural mediation. In these information and counselling services, the so-called cultural or intercultural mediators generally have a fundamental role. This position, which initially functioned as the role of an informal link between the migrant population and local services, has subsequently been regulated and specific courses have been created in order to train migrants to carry out the duties of the post. Women's intercultural associations that are service providers have all offered courses on cultural or intercultural mediation that have become increasingly specialised in different areas such as the social area, health, school or legal mediation. The core services of the associations are the provision of mediation and counselling services and the promotion of intercultural relations. The three main associations, *Almaterra*, *Trama di terre* and *Nosotras* (and to a lesser extent the smaller association *Le Mafalde*) all provide legal counselling, support in the search for employment and Italian language courses. Information on specific activities carried out by the different associations is provided in the annexed table (Annex 7). The other typology of activities carried out by the majority of the associations is the promotion of intercultural exchange and awareness-raising on issues regarding migration, interculturalism, women's rights and sometimes also topics concerning globalisation and north-south imbalance. *Almaterra* and *Trama di terre* have set up documentation centres that collect texts on these topics as well as producing their own publications, which are often the results of the training courses, seminars and other initiatives in which they were engaged. On the one hand, these centres aim to provide a space for migrant women to engage in dialogue amongst

themselves and with Italian-born women, and on the other, they aim to promote the concept of intercultural exchange at a local level through the organisation of seminars, conferences and training courses. They have also become observatories of the migration phenomenon at a local level. Independently of the existence of a space called “the intercultural documentation centre” all associations create public initiatives in order to promote intercultural exchange. They are also all involved in giving courses or seminars in schools on issues such as racism and sexism, interculturalism and women’s rights. The majority of these associations also involve themselves in some forms of advocacy, especially on the specific issues in which they mostly work on.

Almateatro and *Punto di partenza* are different from the other associations in that they are not service providers. *Almateatro* focuses solely on cultural work, in particular through theatre performances and awareness-raising and training activities in schools. *Punto di partenza* focuses its activities on the political work of awareness-raising based on the organisation of residential seminars where women from the southern hemisphere are called to act as teachers as I explain in more detail in the following sections.

5.2.4 Internal Organisation and Decision-Making Mechanisms

All associations have a members’ Assembly, a Board and a President, according to the relevant legislation. However, the degree of importance of these bodies in the decision-making process varies from association to association depending on the size of the association in question, which varies greatly. Furthermore, all associations have enacted formal or informal policies that address the balance between migrant and Italian-born women on the Board, and in most cases, they have also adopted policies of positive discrimination towards migrant women when deciding on the role of President. In some cases associations have also set up other decision-making mechanisms alongside the formal bodies. For instance, in *Almaterra*, which is the largest association, counting 1,300 members³³, in addition to the Board there is a body called the “enlarged Board” that meets monthly in which every woman involved in the association’s activities can participate. The underlining philosophy is that if one woman has a project, and she shares it with others and takes responsibility for it, she can undertake it independent of the Board. *Almaterra* also has a policy of having a migrant woman as president. This principle was respected from the association’s founding until recently (2009) when the Presidency went to an Italian-born woman. Ada explained

³³When considering the number of 1,300 members, we have to take into account that women who wish to avail of the services of the Turkish bath have to become members of the association.

in her interview that, due to a significant economic crisis suffered by the association, no migrant woman was available to take up the post, as it also entailed a personal economic responsibility. At present (2013), the association is presided again by a migrant woman, Carmen Mercedes Caceres. *Almateatro* is currently a separate association but comprised of only of 7 members, even if formally there is a President (the Italian-born Gabriella Bordin who is also the playwright) and a Board, decisions are taken by a working group formed of all of the association's members.

Nosotras, which has about 50 members and 150 supporting members, also enacted policies of positive discrimination towards migrant women that led to the presence of migrant women in the role of association president. As already highlighted, in this case the role of migrant women has been particularly significant because of the political perspectives of the women who have held the presidency. In addition, in this association, Ellen explains in her interview that, alongside the role of the Board, when a member feels that there is a problematic situation that she would like to focus on, she proposes a project to the others and together they try to identify a means to address this issue. *Punto di partenza* has also always had a migrant woman as President. This choice was regarded as consistent with the mission statement of the association. The association counted about 15 formal members, but a number of other women were active in the organisation. Moreover, each edition of the seminars organized by *Punto di partenza* was attended by about 100 people. *Trama di terre* is in a rather different situation from the other associations as, since its establishment, the president has always been the Italian-born Dal Prà, while the presence of migrant women on the Board has varied over the years. The association has 75 women members coming from 22 countries. *Le Mafalde* is a smaller association. Initially the President was an Italian-born woman, but later the responsibility was passed to a migrant woman.

Finally, most associations find some difficulties in handling the relationship between people who are paid to work in the association and unpaid volunteers. In terms of decision-making processes, the structure of the association facilitates a situation in which decisions are taken by the people who spend more time working within the association, while those who have less time to devote to it may feel marginalised.

5.2.5 Relationships with Public Authorities and Funding

All associations have relationships with public authorities, to a greater or lesser extent. Alongside the possibility of availing of national and regional funding, in several cases the personal

involvement of some of the local female administrators was fundamental to the setting up and running of the associations. The relationship with public authorities is particularly important for the associations that are service providers. This also creates some difficulties as regards the autonomy of the association, especially when it comes to the ability to criticise specific policies or laws.

Almaterra was supported since its inception by the City Council of Turin and the Regional Commission for Equal Opportunities. It also received major funding from the Minister for Social Affairs. The Italian-born founding members were acquainted with local institutions and politics through belonging to leftist groups and trade-unions. This knowledge of the political landscape helped in building positive relationships with local authorities. The importance of having political support is underlined by Isabel, who in her interview emphasises that the route to autonomy for migrant women has been made possible due to the support of both the Italian-born women within the association and of some female politicians. She emphasises that these routes are costly, therefore funds are crucial, but they are very different from a charity as they aim to build women's independence. In recent years, however, due to the economic crisis, *Almaterra* had its funding cut by a significant amount and this has had a significant negative effect on its activities.

Almateatro also avails of public funding for putting on its performances. This means that in some cases, institutions like the Commission for Equal Opportunities have commissioned performances from the group on specific themes, such as violence against women. However, the group also decides the topics of other performances on the basis of members' personal interests, as well as implementing the association's mission statement. Moreover, even when plays were commissioned on a specific issue, the group has been able to write them according to its mission and values, as in the case of the play "Who Is The Last One?" on the subject of FGM, where it compares this practice with aesthetic surgery, as I will discuss in Chapter 7.

Trama di terre has agreements with local authorities but only for the delivery of certain projects, so it maintains a strong sense of autonomy. The relationship with local administrations appears to involve more conflict than in the case of *Almaterra*. On this point Michelle, in the interview I carried out with her, describes the relationship with the political system as the most difficult part of the association's mission because it is based on a total delegation of the management of the migration phenomenon by the public administration. *Trama di terre's* position on politics is also specific to the association as it decided, in some cases, to openly criticise not only certain national

laws and policies, but also decisions taken by the local administrations. This position stems in particular from the critique put forward by the association to what it has defined as multicultural policies, to which I will return in Chapter 9. Michelle emphasises the difficulty of the relationship with local authorities as, if it becomes too tense, the association risks withdrawal of funding.

Nosotras also cooperates with municipal and regional authorities, especially with the network of social-health services, and it is part of regional and municipal plans for local development and social inclusion. It has also obtained funding from national and European projects. At the end of '90s and the beginning of 2000, the association offered some Summer Universities and a Campus of Women's Culture that was sponsored by the Tuscany Region, as well as through European funds. *Punto di partenza* continued the work of organising seminars to which women from the southern hemisphere were invited to speak. Cooperation with local administrations proved crucial in this case, in order to obtain funding for hosting residential seminars and inviting women from abroad. The realisation of these projects is described in the interviews as particularly complex and time consuming. An example of this is the organisation of a seminar in which the association cooperated with 27 local administrations.

Le Mafalde is a mostly voluntary organisation and obtains its fund through specific projects, however, it is hosted in a municipal centre. Mary, an Italian-born founder of the association, states that this is sometimes a difficult arrangement, especially because over the last few years the local council has made public statements that discriminate against the migrant population. Flora comments that "the balance between these things has been a bit difficult", and that they have tried to have their information centre outside of the municipality centre, but this proved impossible due to a lack of funds. She highlights that, on some occasions they preferred to mediate, while on others they opposed the council's position regardless. For instance, they were the only association that denounced the racist public posters to the UNAR, the National Office against Racial Discrimination.

5.2.6 Collaboration with Women's Associations and International Networks

All associations participate in networks or have collaborations with other organisations at local or national level. The importance of cooperating with both public offices and other associations that provide services for migrants is often emphasised in order to create synergies and an appropriate system of information and counselling addressed towards migrant women. However, cooperation

with other women's associations is often described as more difficult. For the larger associations, in particular, it emerges that it is not easy to cooperate with other women's associations as they are seen as competitors for funding. In other cases, they also have differences in approaches. For instance, relationships with other women's as well as intercultural associations prove difficult for *Trama di terre*, both on the basis of funding competition and the different approaches taken. Annina, an Italian-born woman member of the association, states that cooperation with other intercultural associations is easy when they engage in mutual fund-raising activities, but when they have to address the more sensitive issues, such as FGM or forced marriages, the other associations at times do not want to take a public position. Historical feminist associations, she states, are not ready to leave the field to others and always want to set the agenda to follow. Michelle recalls that other associations asked *Trama di terre* to coordinate a network of women's intercultural associations in the Emilia Romagna region. This project was not pursued, however, because other associations were not ready to take on a public position on certain sensitive issues and did not want to sign the petitions drafted by *Trama di terre*. *Almaterra* also undertook the task of forging a relationship between a network of women's associations in Turin, in which only Italian-born women participate, and migrant women. This lack of communication confirms what emerges from the literature (Pojmann, 2006), namely that often Italian-born and migrant women's associations continue to be rather separate entities. *Almaterra* is also coordinating the network of women's intercultural associations in the Piedmont region.

As regards participation in international networks, or the collaboration with organisations operating in other countries, this varies greatly based on the association's size, skills and history. *Trama di terre* is probably the association that, in the last few years, has invested most in the creation of partnerships, especially on the issue of multiculturalism. It cooperates with international networks, such as WLUML; with women's associations operating in other European countries, such as the Southhall Black Sisters (SBS)³⁴; and with women's associations operating in some of migrant women's countries of origin. *Nosotras* is also part of a number of international organisations, in particular networks dealing with FGM. Despite its many local and national affiliations, as well as its relationships with some women's associations abroad, *Almaterra* has less co-operation with international associations. It has connections with some women's associations

³⁴ SHBS is an organisation set up in 1979 in the UK "to meet the needs of black (Asian and African-Caribbean) and minority ethnic women"³⁴ which has devoted much attention to violence against women. (From the website <http://www.southhallblacksisters.org.uk/> accessed on the 10th May 2013)

in countries where it carries out development cooperation projects. *Almateatro* has cooperated with women's associations as well as with individual artists from different countries. *Punto di partenza* has cooperated with women involved in social movements in the southern hemisphere.

Only a small number of associations have brought development cooperation projects to fruition, in particular *Almaterra* and, to a lesser extent, *Nosotras*. However, these projects do not necessarily derive from the relationships that migrant women have with their countries of origin. On this Patricia states:

For the last 20 years it has always been the same women founding members of the association working on international cooperation projects, with us beside them, but never involved, or if we were it was only in a small way, sometimes in translating. This is something I have never quite understood. ... We do international cooperation? Let's really do it! [...] For me it was obvious to reflect together, exchange ideas, but instead I did my own projects ... and the women involved in international cooperation in *Almaterra* did their own projects; sometimes we met during evening events, but each of us took care of our own backyard, and unfortunately it has remained so. Even today, I could say that beyond support projects and service provision, because of the political contexts, there have been instrumentalisations. (Patricia, MW)

She comments that such lack of collaboration between Italian-born and migrant women created some frustrations because, she argues, migrant women who arrived in Italy in the '90s had knowledge and skills that they could use. I will return to this idea in Chapter 8.

In the next chapters, I will explore more in-depth selected aspects of the associations' work. In particular the experience of *Almateatro* is described in Chapter 7 when focusing on intercultural work and cross-cultural comparisons on practices detrimental to women. *Punto di partenza's* activities are addressed mostly in Chapter 8 when dealing with the issue of women's asymmetries and inequalities. Chapter 9 will address the critique of *Trama di terre* on multicultural policies with a specific focus on forced marriages, as well as the critique of *Nosotras* in relation to FGM. Chapter 9 will also discuss policies of the associations on the issue of migrant women's involvement in domestic and care work.

5.3 “Why Are We Part of it?” Personal Meanings and Women’s Relationships within the Associations

5.3.1 “There Must Be Something Deep”

In this section, I address the personal meanings women interviewed attribute to belonging to an intercultural association, beyond that of the official mission of the organisation. This preliminary analysis is important to introduce a number of themes that will emerge in the following chapters exploring the challenges of a project based on a notion of feminist reflexive solidarity. One of the most important meanings is that of establishing friendships and, especially for migrant women, of escaping from loneliness and isolation. Other motivations for belonging to the associations that emerge frequently relate to the desire to help other women and the idea of the association as a place of learning or employment, as well as a place that allows free expression and enhances recognition. I first focus on the central role of women’s relationships and then I address other motivations for belonging to a woman’s intercultural association.

In Chapter 2 it was described how, on the basis of the critique of the notion of global sisterhood, some scholars proposed a reformulation of alternative forms of a common political commitment among women positioned differently mainly in terms of ‘race’, ethnicity, class and sexuality. Tong (2009) identifies two possible ways through which a revised concept of sisterhood can be rediscovered, namely either through ‘friendship’ or through a ‘common political engagement’. In this section, I reflect on how women members of intercultural associations described their relationships, whether they referred more to a notion of friendship or to a notion of a common political engagement.

In relation to the concept of sisterhood, only in one specific case was there an explicit reference to it, when Yvonne talks about “a great intercultural, transcultural sisterhood”. In addition, in two other cases, the women within the association referred to other members as “sisters”. For instance Flora described the experience of another woman within the association by stating that:

[she] says we are her sisters because she was alone, she was depressed and found people to laugh, joke and meet with and they even functioned as therapy for her. (Flora, IBW)

Emma describes the association as her “second home” and the other women as her “sisters as when I arrived, they gave me a wonderful welcome”. While in the first case there is a clear reference to a feminist understanding of the concept of sisterhood, in other cases, describing

other women members of the association as “sisters”, refers more to the personal dimension of friendship than to a common political commitment.

While references to the concept of sisterhood are infrequent, references to the concept of friendship are very common. In some cases, women consider the establishment of relationships based on friendship as particularly important or even the most significant achievement for them. For instance, Francesca (IBW) states: “We established a great friendship and mutual esteem and this is the most beautiful thing”. In addition, Flora affirms:

Yes, doing things, sharing things to do, that’s good. It is, however, friendship that has dissolved some problems, their stories, their tears ... And it is the greatest treasure that I have gained from *Le Mafalde* in the end ... That is beyond everything that we have done, praise, glory, etc., out of all those I think friendship is the best thing. (Flora, IBW)

In Flora’s testimony, the dimension of friendship takes precedence over that of having a common political project, as she describes it as “the greatest treasure”, even more so than the activities that they have carried out.

In other cases, especially when women have known each other for many years, their relationship is described in terms of deep affection. For instance, Isabel when describing the first time she visited the association, states:

There was F., a Nigerian woman that I love so much ... so there were these women whom I love today regardless of how many years have passed. (Isabel, MW)

Anna, an Italian-born woman, describes the relationship that they had, especially in the early years, as “poetic, romantic, fantastic, illuminating, tender, exciting, loving ...”. She also states how the theatre practice facilitated an intimate relationship as it was based on a “direction where you touch each other, you massage, you smell, you enter into an intimate relationship”. However she recognises that, later on, their relationship became more complicated:

[...] then over the years other interests have surfaced: how to earn a living, the menopause, the children to nurture and sustain and the difficulties of not succeeding; at that point jealousy, conflict and intolerance takes over. (Anna, IBW)

Isabel’s and Anna’s words about the deep affection towards each other within the group shows a relationship based on reciprocal care and even love that comes before, or is at basis of, a common political engagement. Similarly, in several cases women underline how, during their first meeting

with the association, they felt welcomed by other women and this feeling contributed to their decision to become members. For instance Vera states:

I liked it from the start. I first met 3 or 4 members of *Le Mafalde* who had been here for a long time. They were very helpful and nice, I immediately felt at ease with them. (Vera, MW)

She then explains that during that period she had to study for an exam, and once she had finished she decided to come back and, because of the atmosphere she found there, decided to remain. In this case, the fact of having felt welcomed and supported at a personal level becomes the precondition to engage in a common political project as Vera remained in the association until she came to hold a significant role within it. Similarly, Isabel recalls:

I got there and I felt welcomed, this was definitely a gift that *Almaterra* gave me, its welcome. I used to do domestic work, that kind of thing ... and they said "we don't have anything, but if you need us we are here. (Isabel, MW)

Yvonne also recalls how she felt welcomed by the association. She states:

I must say that the thing that struck me in *Nosotras* is their welcome. [...] *Nosotras* has become my reference point. All the women were very welcoming, it seemed as if I had been part of *Nosotras* for years, forever. I immediately felt at ease, at home. (Yvonne, MW)

In these testimonies the use of the word "welcome" is very frequent and sometimes it is linked to the idea of feeling at home, an aspect which is particularly important for migrant women. Ellen makes reference to the same concept:

For me *Nosotras* is my home, my refuge, it comes second only to my family, for me it's everything ... if I don't come for some time, I miss it... (Ellen, MW)

Another aspect that often characterises the relationships between women is that of mutual support which is regarded, especially by migrant women, as a valued help in overcoming loneliness and difficulties. For example, Linda says: "I got in touch with the association through my research to escape the loneliness and discomfort as a migrant woman" (Linda). Also Josephine states:

[...] then I started to grow through this ... so that today I can truly say that my tendency towards depression is gone not only through coming here, but also through relationships with the other women. (Josephine, MW)

Ellen describes the association as an “internal network” and she explains that it is based on self-help that can take different forms, from personal help with child-minding, to economic support, to helping the woman to identify publically funded support.

In conclusion, the dimension of friendship emerges as having a special relevance for women belonging to the associations. For migrant women this element is crucial in order to overcome the solitude and isolation to which they feel confined, after their arrival in a new country. Friendship is also regarded as important by some Italian-born women who consider it a fundamental way to enter into a relationship with migrant women. Associations are often conceived not only as a place in which projects can be instigated, but also as a living space, where women can spend time together, cooking, talking and often also engaging in a number of artistic or recreational activities. As a consequence, the dimension of personal relationships acquires a special relevance as a vehicle for sharing a common political project. Tong (2009) argues that the building of political alliances also offers the possibility of establishing friendships. In this case, however, it would appear that the relationship between the two dimensions also goes in the other direction, namely, it is the creation of relationships based on friendship that facilitates the sharing of political projects.

As regards other motivations for belonging to a women’s intercultural association, the desire to help other women often emerges as a significant factor for both migrant and Italian-born women. For instance, Marta, a migrant woman, states:

There must be something deep because otherwise you don’t stay; there must be a very important motivation. What I can give to people is rewarding for me, maybe not giving a job, but support, a little bit of security, this gives me the greatest sense of satisfaction. (Marta, MW)

In this testimony, the idea that “there must be something deep” to remain in the association is linked to the possibility of helping other women, of supporting them in their life direction. In this specific case, Marta is a migrant woman who has experienced the difficulties in the migratory process and enjoys the fact that she has the potential of supporting other migrant women. Another migrant woman, Dorothy, describes a very similar experience:

So I’m here primarily because I really believe that this place is useful, in being open to women, [...] to give a simple answer to a need, even if we cannot give it at least we can indicate where a person can go and I like that. Then I like to interact with other women, to have an exchange,

[...] talking to a woman about her problems, what she thinks, also helping her to know herself and to go beyond, to see beyond her problems. (Dorothy, MW)

In this case, the opportunity of helping other women is connected with the desire for an exchange with other women. This attitude avoids the patronising mindset that is not necessarily absent in a relationship between migrant women, explored in Chapter 8. Moreover, Dorothy emphasises that this relationship is not simply aimed at supporting other women with practical issues, but more deeply “to know herself [...] to see beyond her problems”. Gloria also reflects on this when she states:

We are also a place where a person can talk about their life direction [...] at some point I say, “you have been able” ... “You have been self-determined, and what do you want to do now?” (Gloria, MW)

Gloria emphasises how, in her relationships with other migrant women, she makes them notice how they have defined their own direction and she invites them to continue doing so by asking them what they would like to do in the future. Gloria’s approach clearly goes beyond simple assistance, instead aiming to support women in recognising and pursuing their own empowerment. Similarly, Jessica values the opportunity to dedicate her energies to other women and she specifies that:

Our immigration, I am talking about Arab immigration, is all male, and anyhow men know how to move, know how to find solutions if they want to, [...] not so the women. When they arrive, women should be guided 100% by men, and if we look at the immigrant women who have arrived in our area they are for the most part from the interior of Morocco, they are women who are not able to move, who do not easily accept integration, they find it difficult to attend Italian classes [...]. So why not help them specifically? (Jessica, MW)

Jessica aims to make migrant women more empowered and autonomous. Her words also show how an intersectional analysis is needed to analyse the relationships among women from the same country, who are different in terms of class and education. In particular, migration from Morocco is an important phenomenon in Italy and there is a significant number of women arriving for family reunification purposes who are illiterate and/or have low levels of education. Other migrant women from the same country, however, have very different life paths as they are well educated, had jobs in their country of origin and, in a number of cases, came to Italy by themselves. In this case, intersectionality is fundamental in order to resist the risk of conflating

migrant women or women coming from one country into a single, homogenous category (Hill Collins, 1990; Anthias, 2013a, 2013b).

From the point-of-view of Italian-born women, Sara emphasises her desire to work for the empowerment of weaker groups in society. She states:

probably [it is] this desire to work for the protection of groups, in this case women, but in general the weaker, more vulnerable, overexposed parts of the population. This leads me to want to continue this direction even though it always requires so much effort, so yes I think it's just that, working towards empowerment. Of course it is a constant challenge because we always start from different points, we often don't know if we get anywhere and when, but when you arrive it is like the fuel to keep you going. (Sara, IBW)

Sara acknowledges the different positionalities of women with whom she works, but she also has a clear idea about women's empowerment and this is what makes her stay with the association. She uses the example of a migrant woman who had been victim of violence by her husband and one day decided to escape that situation and asked for help from *Trama di terre*. Sara states that when she first arrived she was so frightened and cold that she just spent the time "curled up on the radiator, for the whole morning, silent as she didn't speak a word of Italian". Two months later she was receiving applause from the clients of a restaurant where she had cooked, "dressed as a Senegalese princess, with a smile from here to here, dead tired from her work, but happy". Sara comments:

After a year and a half I still weep, I am moved [...] You immediately understand the situation ... to question number 1: "What makes you stay?"... it is this. (Sara, IBW)

In this case, Sara contrasts the image of the needy and helpless migrant woman with that of the same woman who has become empowered and declares that it is to support this kind of development that she stays with the association.

Flora, another Italian-born woman, describes the practical aspect of the association that permits the completion of concrete projects as one of the most significant reasons for her to belong to the association. She mentions a number of projects they implemented and she comments:

[It is] this thing here that makes me feel good staying with *Le Mafalde*. From thinking to action. And it's great, it's a great thing. (Flora, IBW)

Another meaning which is frequently attributed to the association is that of being a place of learning, as well as in some cases a place of employment, for which women, both migrant and

Italian-born, often express much gratitude. For instance Jessica states:

It is a place that welcomed me, a place that helped me to obtain training, a place that offered me a job, a place where I grew up, where I learned and am continuing to learn, so I will always be grateful for this place, for all that it gave me the chance to do. (Jessica, MW)

Jessica is very grateful for the opportunities that the association gave her both in terms of training and employment and she emphasises the fact that it is a continuous process of learning that the association is providing. Annina also highlights a dynamic dimension in the learning process offered by the association when she states:

Yes, it is a kind of university, of training ... It is a place of learning. I cannot define it as such; it is more a process of continuous change. (Annina, IBW)

Similarly, Lisa states:

This association is, for me, like a school, one can learn from day to day, every day there is always some experience, innovation. (Lisa, MW)

Annina and Lisa both highlight how the process of learning leads to continuous change and innovation. In other cases, women emphasise how their life would have been different had they not encountered the association, partly because in some cases the association offered them a job. Moreover, some women underline how the association provided them with a place for expression and recognition that they couldn't find in other places, in particular as migrant women. For instance Patricia emphasises that:

[...] that place, since there is a perennial lack of places, that place, for those years, was able to ensure a continuous learning place, for us it was the theatre, the place where we trained to work in schools, the place where we constructed small performances and the place of a lot of reflection [...] (Patricia, MW)

Similarly, Karen states:

It's a space where I feel free, where I can create, I can work and I can find my strength and my point of view and no one tells me "no, you cannot do this rather than that". (Karen, MW)

Patricia and Karen both emphasise the importance of having found a place where they could freely express themselves and where they could use the skills and experiences that they had developed in their countries of origin. Patricia refers to the possibility of emerging from the "invisibility" in which most migrant women found themselves. The same is true of Bianca who sees the

association as an opportunity to be seized, as there were not many places where migrant women could express themselves.

In conclusion, this section shows how personal relationships, sometimes described in terms of caring and loving friendships, are a central element to women deciding whether to become and remain members of a women's intercultural association. Therefore, the dimension of personal relationships often emerges as a facilitating factor in the decision to share a common political engagement within the association. It also demonstrates how the women interviewed interpret the organisation's mission both as a way to enhance their own empowerment and self-determination, as the association represents a place of learning, and sometimes of employment as well as a place to emerge from invisibility and to support the empowerment of other women.

5.3.2 "We Cannot But Be Feminists"

In this and the following sections, I focus on reflections on two central aspects of the association's mission and work, namely whether they regard the association as feminist and what value they place on belonging to a women-only association. These two aspects are clearly interrelated even if they also present tensions and contradictions. Concerning the first aspect, as I detailed in the first part of this chapter, the term feminism is not normally used to describe the mission of the association, although in some cases, associations have been founded by women who belonged to feminist associations and who clearly define themselves as feminist. During the interviews, I asked women if they perceive the association as feminist or not as a way of exploring the different meanings and the possible contradictions that lie within this concept. As I detail in Chapter 2, the word and the concept of feminism has sometimes been considered in negative terms by Third World women for a number of historical reasons, linked with the history of colonialism. However, even if this dynamic clearly emerges in a number of cases, there are not two homogenous groups, namely Italian-born women supporting a concept of feminism on the one hand, and migrant women opposing it on the other. Indeed, some migrant women clearly identify the association to which they belong as feminist. For instance, Yvonne states:

Yes, I think that a group of women together cannot but be feminists. They are necessarily so, but as to which feminism ... if we can really define or describe a particular orientation, this I do not know, but feminist, definitely. (Yvonne, MW)

In this account, Yvonne implies that, in her view, a group of women together, who are working for the improvement of the position of women in society, cannot help but be feminist. She also adds that she wouldn't be able to indicate a specific strand of feminism. This implies the idea of an overarching understanding of the concept of feminism as generally promoting the position of women. Paulette, a Muslim woman wearing the veil (*hijab*), in a very straightforward way, states: "Yes, it's a feminist association, it defends women's rights and those who work within it are also women." In both Yvonne's and Paulette's view, feminism is equated with working for the promotion of women's rights.

In other cases, women implicitly affirm that they consider the association feminist. For instance Gloria, states:

I came to work in the association, to do social and gender work. [...] At that moment I did not know that I was feminist in principle ... They have legitimised a little a role that I have had in my life, because I was very self-determined in my choices ... Despite this, I fulfilled my role in a bit of a negative way, but then they told me about self-determination, autonomy, women's abilities ... so I said "wow, I did well then". (Gloria, MW)

Also Marta states that:

At first I thought it was by chance but later I discovered that I was very similar in many ways to this association, the mentality that the women have, the women's self-determination, because I was already like that, very determined, independent, perhaps here I have revalued a part of myself. (Marta, MW)

In both Gloria and Marta's accounts, feminism is understood as being self-determined and autonomous. They have both developed this perspective in their own lives but, until the time that they joined the association, they had not completely realised this aspect of their lives. In this sense, belonging to the association had a consciousness-raising role, which is regarded as one of the main objectives of feminist movements. Giovanna has no doubts in defining herself and the other members of the association as feminists. She states:

I am feminist, we are feminists, in different ways, yes, but as to the question of whether we are feminists or not, all of us in *Punto di partenza* would answer yes ... so the first thing that comes to my mind is about the practices, it's the practice and the relationship, so first of all continuing to have these practices and these relationships. (Giovanna, IBW)

Giovanna links her understanding of feminism to two key concepts: practices and relationships. She emphasises the importance of political work going beyond theory into practice, a central

feature of the Italian feminist movements (Bono & Kemp, 1991). Other women show a less straightforward understanding of feminism, as they feel the need to specify which kind of feminism the association is endorsing. For instance Anna, an Italian-born woman, states:

[...] well if feminism is to give a voice to women who for so long have been silenced and confined to areas of non-representativeness in the public, political and cultural life, then of course it's a feminist work. We are all feminists and we put forward a feminist work. (Anna, IBW)

Anna's understanding of feminism is of giving a voice to women who have long been excluded from the public sphere. However, she then specifies that, even within an association comprised of women, there can be power structures and this is one of the reasons why, in her personal vision, she has revised her understanding of feminism to the point of stating: "I don't believe in feminism anymore".

In a number of cases, women expressed an understanding of feminism as a theory "against men" and felt the need to distance themselves from this interpretation. For instance, Linda states: "Feminist ... in the right way; not in the way that we are against men ...", then she partially amends saying: "well, not in the right or wrong way, feminist as regards how to see policies for equal opportunities, but we are not against men". In this account, Linda initially implies that there is a wrong way of seeing feminism, namely that of "being against men". She then corrects herself by saying that it is not the right or wrong way, but she specifies that the way in which her association can be defined "feminist" pertains to the sphere of policies for equal opportunities. In other cases the idea that feminism equates to "being against men" makes the women conclude that the association should not be regarded as feminist. For example, Jessica states:

If ... until last year, we welcomed young Tunisian boys, we helped with teaching them Italian, we did things to support them as well ... I do not think ... no, not feminist. We work with women, but I do not think that's the right term for the association, for what I see, for what I believe. (Jessica, MW)

In a very straightforward way Emma says:

I did not realise that they were feminists, because they have never criticised men, sometimes they even helped foreign male students to integrate. So I do not think that they are feminists. (Emma, MW)

Emma has recently joined the association and this is why she refers to “they”, when she talks about the association’s activities.

In other cases the association is not regarded as feminist as the concept of feminism is felt to be something backward. For instance Ellen states:

The word feminist is already medieval [...] it creates too many prejudices ... it is old-fashioned ... the days when we were fighting to wear mini-skirts, to have abortions are past; the word feminist is already old-fashioned. (Ellen, MW)

Similarly Chiara, a young Italian-born woman states, with reference not only to her opinions, but to those of other young Italian-born women belonging to the association:

It is a too dated word to be used today, because while many issues of that time are still relevant today: such as abortion ... many others are not, such as the relationship with men. This is an association in which men are not allowed even during public events and parties, or at least not always allowed. And I find it absurd because among my friends, my peers, I do not have the problem of claiming anything, because I feel perfectly recognised, which certainly was not the case for those from the seventies, because they had to look for the break, the separation, and a separate place. (Chiara, IBW)

In these accounts Ellen, a migrant woman and Chiara, a young Italian-born woman, define feminism as “old fashioned” and “outdated” because, they argue, some of the causes it championed have been won, even if, interestingly, they do not come to the same conclusions in relation to the abortion issue. In particular, Chiara cannot understand the rationale for excluding men from the association and she attributes this to the fact that her generation has a different relationship with men than that of women in the seventies. In this Chiara appears to share a similar position to many migrant women as I will detail further in Chapter 8.

Finally, in other cases, women state that they do not consider the association as really feminist, but they wish it could become so. For instance Marta, a young migrant woman, states:

I feel that at this moment this association is acting as more of a support, an aid to women, and I do not know what this has to do with feminism, I do not know if it is really feminism; before we focused more on policies [...] it is very difficult at this time so maybe the women themselves do not have the concentration to follow an idea, at this time it is very difficult for me to talk about feminism because the women are the first to be affected, aren't they? [...] It is women who have a lot of difficulties at this time, so maybe we need to work on this here, maybe we should take the road of feminism again. (Marta, MW)

Marta initially states that because of the current economic crisis, the association is concentrating more on supporting women and she doesn't know if this can be regarded as feminist work. She argues that, because of the current difficult circumstances, there is no space for a wider theoretical approach ("follow an idea") as women are the first to be affected by the economic situation. Significantly, however, in the same sentence she reverses her argument by stating that because of this, maybe they should endorse again "the road of feminism". Marta realises the importance of going back to some form of theoretical explanation as to why it happens that women are the first to be affected by the economic crisis. In other accounts, feminism is not regarded as "dated" or "old-fashioned", but as a valid theory which should be referred to again in these specific historical circumstances. Also Vera, another young migrant woman, states that they are still in the phase of supporting women, whereas she would like the association to be really feminist. She states:

I wish it was a feminist association because there is a need to claim certain rights. They are not missing, [...] but they are not respected. [...] We just help, we do not go beyond that. [...] I'd like to make our feminism stand out; I know that other women think differently, but I say that it is needed, the '70s are not over, it seems ... (Vera, MW)

In this case, Vera emphasises the fact that feminism, in her view, is not an outdated project to be confined to the '70s and that, even if women's rights are now guaranteed by law, they are not implemented in practice.

These accounts show different understandings of feminism as well as different, sometimes opposing views, about its desirability. Women who endorse feminism equate it with promoting women's rights, self-determination, focusing on practices and relationships, and giving a voice to women who have long been excluded from the public sphere. Women who oppose, or have doubts about the idea of the desirability of belonging to a feminist association, regard feminism as a concept that is 'against men' or an outdated movement that is no longer necessary as its aims have already been achieved. Moreover, in this wide spectrum of positions, Italian-born and migrant women are very mixed. In this sense, the argument that feminism is necessarily a western concept is not endorsed by this research. On the other hand, this research also shows that it is not necessary to declare oneself a feminist in order to work together for the promotion of women's rights or for women's empowerment.

5.3.3 Women-Only Associations

This section focuses on the meaning that women attribute to belonging to an association composed only of women and how this intersects with the idea of feminism. The question of whether they should be composed only of women is an important one that has been discussed during the establishment of the associations. In some cases, such as that of *Almaterra*, the option of setting up an association composed only of women derived directly from the separatist choice made by feminist movements during the '70s. In the other cases, it derived from a need to have a specific space where migrant and Italian-born women could meet and exchange experiences. In the majority of cases, women consider it very significant that they belong to an association composed of women only, while a minority of them regard this as a fortuity. Women who define the work of the association as feminist tend to also value belonging to a women-only association and most of the women who do not consider the association feminist also enjoy the possibility of being part of a women-only group. A number of women argue in different ways that work produced by a group composed only of women has a distinctive character. For instance Yvonne – who had declared “A group of women together cannot but be feminists” - states that:

[...] being all women in the end gives a feminine character to the way of working, to the thought behind all actions ... It really enables the establishment of a 100% female area that is not the sum of several women, but the construction of a way of being women in the world of associations, which is certainly different from the mixed one [...] It is almost a bodily perception of what it is to work “in the feminine”, which then is effective, it is professional and it works, it is not something that one says ‘it is looser’ or ‘less rigid’, it is not that I mean ... I can say what it isn’t, but I cannot say what it is. (Yvonne, MW)

Yvonne has a clear perception - that she describes as “almost a bodily perception” - of the specific character of the work carried out by a group composed only of women, but she finds it difficult to define it without generating a number of stereotypes that have been attributed to women. She feels the need to specify what it is not (“looser or less rigid”) and to affirm that it is “professional and it works”. Other women explicitly emphasise the potential and the efficiency of a group of women working together. For instance, Francesca states:

I immediately liked the idea, especially because I strongly believe in the power that a group of women can have in bringing many things to fruition [...] I consider myself a feminist and I believe in the value that a woman can add to society; unfortunately, at least in Italy but not only, we live in a world where women are not allowed to express themselves so incisively, more than anything else it seems that we should almost assume a male role, rather than being able to express our femininity. For me it is very important that women have decided to get together to create something together. Even more important is the fact that women from

different backgrounds have decided to give an added value to their differences working for a common goal. (Francesca, IBW)

Francesca strongly emphasises the power of a group composed of women-only and she links it to the possibility of expressing a distinctive female character. At the same time, she recognises the importance of differences among women as she refers to “women from different backgrounds” as an added-value. Flora also emphasises the significance that belonging to an association composed of women only, including women from different countries, has for her but she states that not all women had the same opinion at the setting up of the association:

For me, the fact that it is [composed] of women is very important and the fact that it is both Italian women and migrants gives even more value to the association ... I was one of those who believed more in the fact that it is composed of women. Many had doubts, especially some immigrant women. But I think instead that belonging to it, they have realised how ... maybe we still need a space for women especially given that there are Muslim women, there are women who may feel limited in their ability to do things by the presence of men. (Flora, IBW)

Flora recounts how, even those women who initially had doubts about forming an association composed only of women, then came to consider this as a significant advantage. However, she then states that they have decided to reflect on this because they don't know the views of the women who have joined the association recently.

Among the women who feel the need to make some distinctions in their consideration of the association as feminist, there are no problems, instead, in recognising the value of a women-only group. For instance Linda says:

It's important to me because women have in my view a very great power in relation to the difficulties of life. It is women ... the majority ... and it depends on the different cultural contexts, but women are the ones who take the first step towards initiating change or to provide not only for themselves; sometimes they sacrifice themselves for their family. (Linda, MW)

Interestingly, Linda identifies women's specificity, not only in their abilities to “provide not only for themselves”, which is something that is frequently attributed to women, but also in their ability to “initiate change”, which, in contrast, is not often recognised as a woman's ability. Anna states that is has been important to her mainly for two reasons:

Working and taking into account women's times and then addressing issues that purely concern the women's world, from a perspective of women in an intercultural analysis. (Anna, IBW)

As regards the second area she adds:

In any case the history, the culture is represented purely from the men's viewpoint, so it is right, useful, necessary and urgent that women give voice to their construction of history. (Anna, IBW)

The rationale for having a woman-only group lies therefore in two aspects: the respect for women's times equated with the possibility of having and rearing children, and the opportunity to narrate their own story, which in feminist reflection is referred to as "herstory"³⁵.

A number of the women interviewed emphasise how women, even if they are different, find commonalities that enable them to work together. For instance Ellen states:

Among all women ... there is a mode of communication that is different; in one way or another you get to understand each other. If you do not share ideas, everyone thinks in a different way ... but there are other relationships that endure. [...] with women I found that the relationship continues, there is always something that connects you to another woman ... [...] What counts as the first point is seeing ourselves as women, once we see ourselves as women and talk about our body which is the same ... it has no nationality. (Ellen, MW)

Ellen identifies a specificity in the way women stay together and in their ability to go beyond their diversity of opinions and to find commonalities at another level. She then identifies the condition for this way of recognising ourselves as women starting from what we have in common, namely our bodies. The relationship women have with their body is taken as the basis for a relationship between them. This can be regarded as a classic feminist theme, even if, Ellen does not like the idea of seeing the association as feminist, as she regards feminism as an outdated project. In a similar way to Ellen, Linda states: "women find a common ground or can speak openly amongst themselves, even if they are different".

In a few cases, women interviewed state that it is more difficult to work among women, but that they value the outcome of this work highly. For instance Chiara states:

It's more difficult being together in an all-woman environment, but there is a spirit of cooperation and a willingness to do [things] that I have not found anywhere else. It's massively powerful. (Chiara, IBW)

Jessica states:

³⁵ "Herstory" refers to the idea that history has been written from a male perspective, and therefore a specific emphasis on women's role in history, or history told from women's point of view, is necessary. The term was coined during the "second wave" feminism and has been attributed to Morgan (1970).

It's true that it is hard to work in an all-woman environment, there are always things that are said, misunderstandings ... But I loved it from the beginning because we are all women and we dedicate our work, our time, to volunteering for the association, for women ... (Jessica, MW)

In both cases Chiara, a young Italian-born woman, and Jessica, a young migrant woman, share the idea that working in an all-woman environment is more difficult, but also more satisfying, something that they particularly enjoy. Interestingly both Chiara and Jessica had criticised the use of the word "feminist" in relation to the association's work.

Finally, in a few cases, it isn't a woman's specific choice to belong to an association composed entirely of women, but it assumes a meaning subsequently. For instance, Vera affirms:

For me, the fact that it is of women-only makes no difference, it could also be men, I like the idea of being part of something, even if it is a small community [...] Then if we go into detail, yes it is a good thing that this is an association of women, it is beautiful because women still have more need of these places in my opinion, especially foreign women. (Vera, MW)

For Vera it emerges that the most important thing is being part of a group but, at the same time, she argues, that women might have more need of these spaces. Interestingly, however, as already noted, Vera also expresses the wish that her association could become really feminist. For Bianca, belonging to an association composed only of women is not intentional:

For me, this was not critical; for me it was by chance that it was an all-female group, in the sense that I have always done everything in mixed groups, it was not something that was important to me or that I looked for [...] there were not many spaces for foreign women who arrived in Italy at that time, so it was an opportunity to be seized, and I took it. (Bianca, MW)

To my question if this idea later became important or remained secondary, she answered that:

It's important because *Almateatro* has always written performances from a women's perspective, and of course, this has its own weight and value. (Bianca, MW)

Even if belonging to a specific association may have been a necessary choice if women wanted to be active in the civic sphere, this doesn't mean, in Bianca's view that belonging to that specific association has not assumed a special meaning. In this specific case, Bianca expresses some uneasiness about belonging to a feminist association, as she found the feminism expressed by the Italian-born founders of the association to be a bit 'rigid and outdated'. In contrast, both Marta and Gloria, even if their decision to participate in an association composed only of women was initially by chance, they then came to particularly appreciate this fact. As already stated, for both

Marta and Gloria belonging to such an association is felt as a legitimisation of their being self-determined.

In conclusion, my research shows that belonging to a group composed only of women has, in the majority of cases, a less controversial meaning than that of interpreting the association's work as feminist. In most cases, this element is perceived positively even by those women who do not identify the association as feminist. Only in a minority of cases was belonging to an association composed of only women seen as unimportant and, even in these instances, it became significant after a time. The reasons for valuing belonging to an association composed only of women are expressed in the distinctive character of the work produced and, in the nature of the relationships established among women that are founded on the possibility of finding commonalities, and going beyond their differences.

5.4 Concluding Remarks

In this chapter, I have contextualised the work carried out by the associations on which I focus in this research. I have argued that within the framework of migrant women's mobilising, the experience of women's intercultural associations is particularly significant. As stated by Pojmann (2006), they represent a first attempt to bridge a gap between the diverse experiences of Italian feminism with those of migrant women's organisations that had remained rather separated realities until the '90s. While feminist associations in Italy had been involved with issues of international feminist solidarity by cooperating with women's associations from different countries, they had little relationship with the women coming from the same countries migrating to Italy. The need to bridge this gap is reflected in the mission statements of these associations that began to be set up after the UN Conference on Women that was held in Beijing in 1995. In their mission statements, women's intercultural associations are described as aimed at bringing together Italian-born (referred to as 'native') and migrant women and at combining the promotion of women's rights with the values of interculturalism and anti-racism. The very fact that associations are composed of Italian-born and migrant women and that they regard this as a value, lends itself to an analysis of how the whole issue of inequalities and asymmetries between these two groups of women are dealt with within the associations. Chapter 8 will investigate these issues and will analyse how the associations address questions of power relationships, white privilege and racism. The fact that some associations, in particular *Almaterra* and *Trama di terre*,

originated from the involvement of Italian-born women in specific feminist experiences, generally linked to leftist ideologies, also shapes the mission, values and activities of those organisations. In Chapter 8, I will reflect in particular on how those experiences influence the possibility of reaching a situation of mutual exchange in the articulation of strategies to promote women's position in society, by looking at the specific case of *Almaterra*. In Chapter 9, I will focus on how the feminist, secular philosophy underpinning the mission of *Trama di terre* has led to a critique of multicultural policies. Differences in relation to the typology of associations, for instance, whether they include service provision, as *Almaterra*, *Nosotras*, *Trama di terre* and *Le Mafalde* do, or do they concentrate on cultural work, as *Almateatro* does or political work, as *Punto di partenza* does, have an impact on how specific topics are treated. This is particularly evident in issues regarding cultural practices involving women as I will investigate in Chapter 7. For instance, the cultural work carried out by *Almateatro* lends itself to the deconstruction of a number of discourses on examples of cultural differences, but does not aim to address the broader level of State policies. In relation to the issue of domestic and care work, there is a difference in the way this is addressed by associations that have a role in the training and support of migrant women involved in this job (such as in particular *Almaterra* and *Nosotras*), from those that carry out more political work on the issue, as I will explain in Chapter 9. Finally, policies concerning the internal organisation, including policies of positive discrimination, are seen to influence power relationship within the associations, as I will investigate in Chapter 8.

Chapter 6

Dynamics of Identity and Otherness within Intercultural Feminist Practices

This research aims to analyse how the practice of women's activism in intercultural settings can illuminate the challenges of a project founded on the notion of feminist reflexive solidarity. As shown in Chapter 2, feminist post-colonial scholarship criticised the notion of global sisterhood arguing that such concept was premised only on the experiences of white, western, middle-class women. This scholarship also argued that the notion of racial discrimination had been largely disregarded by dominant western feminism discourse as well as the role of white women in its perpetuation. On those premises, some of those authors argued for the necessity of a separate scholarship by lack and post-colonial scholarship, whereas others still held as important the possibility of keeping a common feminist commitment. In turn, western feminism in some of its articulations, responded to the critiques advanced by post-colonial feminism, by engaging with issues of critical studies on whiteness and 'race', and on notions of global feminism. Building on that scholarship, my research interrogates the practices of women's intercultural associations in the light of the following key issue: how to acknowledge differences among women - based primarily on 'race', ethnicity, legal status/citizenship, class and age - whilst simultaneously maintaining a common political project. In chapter 3, I have referred to the notion of intercultural feminism that I defined as based on an exchange among women who are different especially in terms of 'race', ethnicity, legal status/citizenship, class and age which is aimed at identifying how different cultural norms impact on women's lives and which strategies to adopt to address them. Intercultural feminism is also based on a notion of intercultural dialogue, namely a process of interaction among women, in this case, who come from different cultural backgrounds with the aim of reaching a mutual exchange on an equal basis on how to best promote women's position in society.

I argue that in order to create and maintain a common political project aimed at the promotion of the position of women, a mutual exchange has to take place between women who are different in terms of 'race', ethnicity, legal status/citizenship, class, education and age. By 'mutual exchange', I refer to a situation in which women are ready to enter into dialogue and learn from each other's experience in particular regarding strategies to advance the position of women in society. Therefore this situation has to be mutually transformative. However, because such an exchange is fundamentally mediated by both unequal positions of power and racialised biases and discourses that operate unconsciously or invisibly as 'norms', this is to be regarded as an ideal to aim for. Even if a concept of 'mutual exchange' is to be regarded as an aspirational value to attain, it is useful in that it identifies the direction to follow within intercultural feminist practices. As such, a common project with migrant women cannot evolve unless the Italian-born women working in these associations acknowledge the lessons of feminist post-colonial scholarship in this regard. In this chapter and in the following one, I illustrate some examples of the extent and circumstances of such mutual exchange in my chosen associations by identifying a number of key areas where significant attempts have been made in particular around issues of identity and otherness. My analysis identifies a number of both facilitating and limiting factors and situations in the effort to create forms of feminist solidarity.

In this chapter, I focus on the moments and contexts which promote the contesting of rigid categorisation of women by both Italian-born and migrant women. This contesting leads to an awareness about, and potentially transformative actions toward, a number of issues and situations central to the cultivation of a common project such as the sharing of what is referred to "a starting point a bit displaced", the need to move beyond divisions on nationality grounds and to promote the idea that all individuals and cultures are hybrid as a bridge between Italian-born and migrant women. At the same time, I also confront the women's testimonies with the concept of 'colour-blindness' and the risk that the notion of hybridity may conceal different power positions among women. Finally, I address the risks of ethnicisation and exoticisation that can be present in an intercultural work by tending to perpetuate the legacy of colonialism and Orientalist attitudes.

6.1. "A Starting Point a Bit Displaced"

In this section, I focus on the issue of contesting rigid categorisations of women as a facilitating element for reaching forms of feminist solidarity. More specifically, I focus on how the concepts of

identity and identity categories are perceived and understood by the women interviewed. As described in Chapter 5, in this research I refer to associations composed of migrant and Italian-born women, as the division of members into these two categories is made in the statutes and in the mission statements of the organisations themselves. That said, normally the term 'native' is used by the associations instead of my chosen designation of 'Italian-born'. My research shows, however, that belonging to an intercultural association facilitated, in certain cases, awareness about the limited and controversial nature of any categorisation like Italian-born or migrant. I argue that such an element facilitated working together on a common project, but I also investigate the ways that it may hide different power positions among women.

In relation to this, Hall's definition of identity appears useful. Hall defines identities not as essences or roots but as 'ongoing projects of becoming' (1996: 4). Elaborating on Hall's definition, Karner states:

Rather than the static and one-dimensional phenomena they are widely believed to be, identities are shown to be subject to ongoing negotiations. These are shaped by experiences and memories of migration and settlement, by racial marginalization, exclusion and discrimination, as well as by group-internal struggles over self-definitions, role compliance and cultural change. In addition to being constrained by multiple structures of power, identities involve individuals' agency and must be understood in historical context. (Karner, 2007: 6)

The accounts of both Italian-born and migrant women reflect such complexity and the difficulty of recognising oneself in rigid identity categories. For example, some Italian-born women recognise the category of 'Italian-born' as limited and controversial, for them. Annina expresses feelings that this identity category is limiting for her as this does not really correspond to how she feels:

So it is not true to say 'You're Italian and you have a certain culture, you are a migrant and you have a certain culture', because I'm Italian but how many things do I recognise myself in Italian culture? I've never had a television in the house; I do not even know what cartoons my peers watched. I've always been the outsider in the class when they said 'But you do not eat the meat, you do not have a television, your dad irons, washes and vacuums'. I have always felt a bit apart, so maybe there is this sense of alienation that we have in common, and that more than anything else enables us to confront each other, to all have a starting point a bit displaced. (Annina, IBW)

Annina clearly expresses her difficulty in sharing a sense of belonging to the Italian society and she questions the easy assumption that being Italian-born corresponds to having a specific culture as well as being migrant corresponds to having a different culture. Similarly Anna says "I define myself migrant but I am an Italian-born..." and referring to her initial experience in the *Almateatro* group she emphasises the following:

[...] they were working on 'the identity in transformation during migration processes'. This was the topic and I was extremely touched both from a professional ... and a personal point of view because I was very aware of the identity transformation from my own perspective ... as I felt really lost about my own identity. (Anna, IBW)

In this account Anna criticises any clear cut division among Italian-born, and migrant women as she emphasises how she could share the experience of identity in transformation through migration. She also comments that she felt more disoriented on her return to Italy than when she migrated elsewhere in Europe. In that case it was more normal to have a certain degree of disorientation as she was a foreigner, whereas in Italy she was just expected to feel 'at home'.

Both Anna and Annina share the experience of feeling different from their peers, of not sharing a common sense of belonging to the 'imagined Italian community'. In response to this Anna says: "I am an anomaly in comparison with many others ... once I was a strong anomaly". It also emerges that one of the main reasons why they find themselves at ease in an association composed of women coming from different countries is that they share a sense of displacement, or even of 'alienation' as indicated by Annina in relation to the broader Italian society where they are located. The fact of sharing "a starting point a bit displaced" that "more than anything else enables us to confront each other" can therefore be considered as a facilitating factor in women's relations and in their working at a common project.

In the interviews, it emerges that the category of being a migrant woman is also sometimes questioned. For instance, Patricia states about her experience of being a migrant woman in Italy:

As if I was not a migrant, I have felt rather foreign at home, based on my historical-political-democratic views, therefore in my country of origin I was a foreigner [...] Turin allowed me to explore my concept of the role of the mother or of women in society, whereas my city - notwithstanding the professional opportunities it offered me - wouldn't have because social control in the private sphere is much stronger, sexism and patriarchy were still to be fought against and in any case I would have had, as a woman, more problems with certain things. There are always these perennial contradictions and ambiguities ... even if there has also been continuity in my cultural and political trajectory. (Patricia, MW)

This account appears as a mirror image of those of Anna and Annina. They both express difficulties in sharing a sense of belonging to the Italian identity, whereas Patricia states that she felt rather foreign in her country of origin. At the same time she recognises the contradiction in her statement and more largely in her identity. In these accounts by the three women (Anna, Annina and Patricia) the categories of being Italian-born and migrant are contested and contextualised. I argue that this can facilitate the reaching of a position of mutual exchange within the associations

as it questions the categorisation of women into rigid and mutually exclusive categories and the characteristics that are normally attached to them.

6.2 “We All Feel Equal”: Going Beyond National Divisions

Following on from the previous section, I focus here on the contrast between the question of the significance of belonging to a specific nationality or culture and the significance of belonging to the broader categories of ‘women’ or of ‘people’. I argue that such a position can be regarded as a facilitating factor in order for women to work together to achieve a common project. However, such a position, to some extent, contradicts the theory of post-colonial scholarship on the need to acknowledge different power positions among women. Therefore, I confront such a position with the risks of ‘colour-blindness’. For instance, when I asked Anna if she thought that Italian-born and migrant women share the same fundamental agenda, she answered that I should have changed the question radically as dividing women into Italian-born and migrants is already very reductive because “you can be a migrant coming from Switzerland, or from Somalia, but that has nothing to do with it, we are women” and she added:

[...] it is not a cultural question ... I say, and keep on saying, this in schools, we are people ... we do not have to stop to the fact that you are Italian, Moroccan, Somali or from Montenegro, no you are a person. You, and I who were born here, we are different [...] (Anna, IBW)

In this account Anna, who, as already indicated, is an Italian-born woman but also refers to herself as a migrant, argues for the necessity of going beyond the division into specific nationalities in order to look at the common condition of ‘women’ and of ‘people’. In Anna’s interview, the fact of belonging to specific nationalities is seen mostly as a source of discrimination and this is why she argues for the need to overcome those categorisations in favour of larger identity categories such as ‘women’ and ‘people’. At the same time, Anna emphasises differences among people of the same nationality. In this way, she deconstructs the idea of a homogenised concept of nationality, as largely shown by the literature in this field (Castle & Miller, 2009, Goldberg, 2002). Bianca also reflects on the relevance that coming from different countries may have for migrant women. On the one hand, she recognises that she shares a common condition with other migrant women – this she defines as based on a number of practical difficulties such as the lack of family and friendship networks - but on the other, she also underlines the irrelevance of nationality in some relationships with Italian-born women:

There were very normal relationships with some Italian women in the group, very plain ones that had nothing to do with our origins, it was not critical, it was not important, it was an encounter between people and that was fine in the sense that there was an opening on both sides and then a willingness to work together, to do things, as it was with Laura ... when I am with Laura the last thing I think is that I am from Latin America and she is Italian, I couldn't care less, it has nothing to do with it. In these relationships nationality has no weight, nothing to do with the type of relationship established. (Bianca, MW)

In this account, Bianca also underlines the importance of “work[ing] together” and that in her view commonality is found in praxis, in “do[ing] things” for a common aim. Similarly Isabel, a migrant woman, states that: “we start from the fact that we are born in other countries, but it is not true, you stay with people that you resemble more”. In saying this she also seems to deconstruct the idea of a perceived homogeneity among people coming from the same country, whereas friendship (‘you stay with’) is based on sharing certain common issues with people (‘resemble more’) that may or may not include country of origin. In fact she also states that she has two best friends, one from her country of origin and another who comes from a different continent. According to her, this should be the basis for seeing migration in a different light:

I know you, you know me, we like each other, whether you are black, or white, or blonde, who cares? We like each other as people; we think we are honest people, able to be together, to hell the rest. Here I believe diversification becomes a natural state of being. (Isabel, MW)

In this account the fact of sharing personal relationships among people who recognise themselves as honest and able to cooperate take precedence over categorisation of people into national or ethnic categories.

Other women underline that their common condition as women comes first or is more important than their different nationalities. For instance, Ellen states:

What counts first is seeing ourselves as women; once we see ourselves as women and we talk about our body that is the same ... it does not have a nationality. (Ellen, MW)

Ellen affirms that the most important element in working together is sharing the common condition of being women; in particular women's bodies are regarded as the common element that does not have a nationality. This reflection appears to echo Virginia Woolf's famous statement “As a woman I have no country” (Woolf, 1938: 129), therefore even contradicting to some extent the argument of feminist post-colonial scholarship about the need to recognise women's differences on the basis of ‘race’, ethnicity and nationality. Similarly Karen, when responding affirmatively to my question if they work together on an equal level, states:

I think that we all feel equal, we only see that we are women, we don't think that we are from different cultures, according to me. A. I do not see that she is Italian, M. I do not see that she is from Eastern Europe, L. and F. I do not see that they are Latin-American and also G., I see that we are women who cooperate, as women, citizens of the world. (Karen, MW)

Again in this testimony what enables the women belonging to the association to cooperate is the practice of giving more relevance to their common condition as women than to their differences of nationality. Even more strongly, Karen endorses a position of cosmopolitanism when she refers to being "citizens of the world".

Also Yvonne, when referring to their work, underlines the need to go beyond any judgmental attitude based on ethnicity and nationality and states:

As soon as we enter *Nosotras* we leave outside, not only the prejudices, but also any attempt to judge the other [...] We set those to zero. A Somali is equal to a Tunisian, she's equal to an Italian, an English woman or French woman, to an Albanian or Romanian. I think that this is the basis that enables us to work together. It's that nobody feels superior or inferior to others. From that point of view we are able to work well. (Yvonne, MW)

With these words, Yvonne implicitly states the need to go beyond prejudices or conversely the sense of superiority attached to specific nationalities. She concludes that what permits them to work together is the fact of considering themselves as equal, independently from their nationality. Those positions favouring a greater identification with the category of women, or even people, rather than identification with a specific nationality are regarded by the women involved in the association as a pre-condition to work together at a common project. Given that migrant people have been and still are stereotyped in Italy, the necessity of going beyond the categorisation of people into specific nationalities is to be understood first of all as a refusal to endorse those prejudices. In this framework, it is therefore easy to understand why focusing on common humanity is considered as a fundamental prerequisite for working together. In conclusion, those women's accounts run counter to any strict concept of identity politics based on ethnic or national basis. This reflects, as discussed in Chapter 3, that much feminist scholarship, including post-colonial, has identified a number of shortcomings in the concept of identity politics based on the fact that identities are essentialised (Yuval Davis, 1997, 2010). In fact, this research indicates that some women criticise precisely the fact of being representative of a specific nationality or group based on migration status. Yet, while such a position facilitates an intercultural dialogue, at the same time it can also be seen as supporting a notion of 'colour-blindness', namely the idea, as described in Chapter 3, that posits the best way to end discrimination by treating individuals as

equally as possible, without regard to 'race', culture, or ethnicity. As already emphasised, the notion of 'colour-blindness' has been criticised for concealing the persistence of inequalities and discrimination that are based on 'race'.

In this last part, I therefore confront the women's testimonies with those reflections. First of all, it is important to consider that this request to look beyond the 'racial' or ethnic characteristics of a person comes, in this case, from migrant women. On the basis of the idea of ethnicity as a 'tool of exclusion' (Karner, 2007), it must be taken into consideration that people who belong to marginalised or oppressed groups and who are often referred to through 'racial' and ethnic categories, sometimes feel the need to "jump out"³⁶ of those categories. Additionally, it is important to reflect on the fact that these migrant women do not seem to be unaware of power relations as they have experienced them in their own lives. However, they feel that the cause of discrimination against migrants lies in prejudices that are often based on nationality. This is why they advocate the need to go beyond the division of people into national groups in favour of seeing the common 'personhood'. At the same time, diversity is not eliminated but, in Isabel's words, "[it] becomes a natural state of things". In this she acknowledges diversity, but also expresses the desire for diversity to be seen as "natural", in order to prevent discrimination on its basis. In other words, the women's testimonies when they refer to being equal, do not describe reality as it is, but as it should be. The interviewed women show an awareness of differences, but they refer to an aspirational, almost utopian idea of equality. As indicated by Anthias:

Despite its difficulties, the notion of equality retains its seductive draw and is indispensable. This is because it brings into focus what the aim is in a way that few other claims can. (Anthias, 2002: 284)

More generally those testimonies also re-propose a reflection on the long-standing debate on universal versus particular and sameness versus difference, as I illustrated in Chapter 3. Moreover, as indicated by Brah it is also important to identify how difference is conceptualised. For instance, Isabel's description of diversity endorses a concept of difference as organised "laterally" rather than "hierarchically" (Brah, 1996: 115). In relation to this Brah states that such distinction is fundamental for a number of reasons, among which:

³⁶ This expression was used by Prof. Grada Kilomba during the course organized by Intergender on "Cultural Analysis of the Interdependencies of Racism and Sexism" that I attended at the Humboldt Universität, Berlin, 10-13 December 2012.

[...] it reminds us that our experiences are not constituted solely within 'oppressions'. Our lives encompass such an immense range of variability geographical, environmental, physical, emotional, psychological, psychic and social, all imploding into one another - that meaning constantly eludes compartmentalisation and totalisation. In this sense, *cultural diversity* is the refusal of 'fixity of meaning', as articulated, for example, in art, music, literature, architecture, religious practices, science and technology, forms of economic organisation, political traditions, and changing modalities of subjectivity. (Brah, 1996: 91)

Whereas hierarchical difference leads to oppression, horizontal difference describes a variety of experiences in various areas of human life. It is in this sense that Isabel refers to a "diversification" that should be seen as a "natural state of being".

Finally, I have argued here that going beyond national divisions facilitates the working together of women at a common project, even if it may hide differences in power positions among women, as suggested by feminist post-colonial scholarship. This leads us to question the notions of equality and difference. In the women's accounts, equality is retained as a fundamental aspirational concept, while difference is analysed in order to distinguish when it differentiates laterally or hierarchically.

6.3 "Mixed, Multiple, Impure Identities": Hybridity as a Bridge among Women

In this section, I focus on the concept of hybridity promoted in the work of *Almateatro*, and I argue that for this association such a notion functions as a bridge among women who are different in terms of 'race', ethnicity and nationality and facilitates forms of intercultural feminism. However, I also indicate how this concept may conceal differences in power positions. As described in Chapter 5, *Almateatro* is a group dedicated to intercultural theatre that operated within the larger association *Almaterra* until recently and then decided to constitute itself as a separate organisation. Its performances aim at narrating history from women's point of view, to write a her-story, and focus on different themes, from cultural practices involving women, to violence and war, to globalisation processes and ecology. In various performances, the issue of identity categories is central. In particular "Hidden Stories", that combines the stories of women involved in migratory processes both in the past and now, proposes a reflection on the concept of hybrid identities. The performance is based on research conducted by the association entitled "1492: Trajectories, Migration, Stories" that investigates a number of historical migratory processes, such as the European colonisation of indigenous populations, the forced exodus of Africans to America

and the Sephardic migration.³⁷ In the performance's prologue we can read:

*... Women who are able to change, to grow to welcome.
Mixed, multiple ... impure identities.
Everybody is the result of an ancient mix, even those who believe that they have a well-defined
nature and boundaries.
We are everything and the opposite of everything.
How many roots, nostalgias, memories are there within us?
And how many encounters are necessary to make ourselves what we are?
And how many more will change us? (Almateatro, 1998: 15, author's translation)*

The script shows that the issue of identity categories is resolved by adopting a notion that hybridity is something that characterizes every person "even those who believe that they have a well-defined nature and boundaries". As a consequence all identities are described as "mixed and impure" rather than divided into fixed and rigid categories. This is regarded as an on-going process that happened in the past and is due to continue into the future. The text also conveys the idea that the encounter with other people is constitutive of our identity, for example "how many encounters are necessary to make ourselves what we are? The sentence "we are everything and the opposite of everything" again opposes any static notion of identity and promotes an idea of identity as a process which does not exclude contradictions. This idea is reiterated in the section of the performance entitled "the woman who had many names", where we can read:

*Who am I? I am ... No
Who am I? I am ... No
I am Esther ... I am Zeida ... I am Luna
Maria ... Menica ... Aquilina ...
But who cares? Who cares?
[...] For I celebrate the feast of Purim
And of Yom Kippur
And also the holy Christmas ... and Lent
And the feast of Ramadan.
(Almateatro, 1998: 32-33, author's translation)*

This last text conveys the idea of multiple identities and, in this specific case, religious identities. Such a narrative may be taken to represent a celebration of syncretism also from a religious point of view. The idea that all persons have a hybrid nature is reiterated in various parts of the performance, as well as the idea that cultures are hybrid. While the performance is based on a

³⁷ The research (Bordin & Rabezzana, 1997) reflects on: the "encounter-clash" between peoples and on the different attitudes towards the 'other'; the 'mestizo' society and the creation of new identities and their possible coexistence. It also analyses forms of resistance and the integration of Indian, African and Jewish cultures. The research was therefore aimed at prompting a reflection on identity and how the exodus of entire populations in the past still affects the construction and perception of self today.

research that pays particular attention to *mestizo* societies in America, the performance's text underlines how the notion of hybridity applies to everyone.

It is impossible to separate Indians, European, Africans. [...] I am the daughter of those mixings. I am not India anymore, I am not only Spanish. I have African blood in my veins. [...] I learnt to add, to superpose, to reach purity in confusion, in redundancies. (Almateatro, 1998: 29, author's translation)

In this text the fact of having a mixed, multiple identity is lived as an experience in which the person learns "to add", and even to reach "purity" out of this apparently confusing identity. The concept of "purity" is clearly evoked in opposition to any view that uses this notion for exclusionary projects. In another part of the text such projects are evoked through the voice of a protagonist who speaks about different historical discriminatory projects:

*We need to establish exactly how many quarters of African blood
And how many of European blood ...*

Separate. Filter. Purify.

*To which ethnicity do you belong?
To which religion do you belong?*

*Cleansing. Ethnic cleansing.
Cleansing of the territory.*

[...]

*Serbian mother. Croatian father.
Your son has to choose.*

*Jewish father. Arian mother.
Your situation is too delicate!
Too much confusion, too many passports!*

*Separate. Filter. Purify.
(Almateatro 1998: 29-30, author's translation)*

By bringing together different historical episodes such as the discrimination of black people in America, the nationalism in ex-Yugoslavia and the Jewish shoa, the performance conveys the message that those episodes happened because of the need to "separate, filter, purify". In opposition, the idea to reach purity in confusion is put forward as an antidote to any nationalistic and discriminatory projects. The representation of people's identities and cultures as mixed appears to be in line with postmodern theories of culture. As indicated by Campani:

Culture from now on is understood as a dynamic concept, more or less homogenous, but never completely coherent. There are no 'pure' cultures and other 'mestizo' cultures, as all are to some extent mixed cultures. (Campani, 2001: 42 *author's translation*).

Furthermore the idea of "mixed, multiple, impure" identities is also described through the concept of nomadism. In the foreword to the performance script drafted by the playwrights we read:

"Hidden stories" tells about women who transform themselves, who live on the boundaries, abandoning heavy certainties to arrive to a form of nomadism that is not an absence of identity, but openness to transformation. In this way they continuously redesign the maps of their identity. (Almateatro, 1998: 7, author's translation)

Such reference to the notion of 'nomadism' is then explicitly put in relation to the work by Rosi Braidotti as some excerpts of her work on the nomadic subject are included in the text of the research:

The nomad does not stand for homelessness or compulsive displacement: it is rather a figuration for the kind of subject who has relinquished all idea, desire or nostalgia for fixity. It expresses a desire for an identity made of transitions, successive shifts and coordinated changes without an essential unity. The nomadic subject, however, is not altogether devoid of unity: his mode is one of definite, seasonal patterns of movement through rather fixed routes. (Braidotti, 2011: 57)

Braidotti affirms, however, that nomadic status is defined more by the overturning of conventions than by the act of travelling itself and she emphasises the image of the nomad "as opposed to the images of both the migrant and the exile" (Braidotti, 2011: 57). However, in *Almateatro's* performance, the two concepts – the physical migration and the nomadism of the mind – are strictly related as the women protagonists that are "able to change, to grow, to welcome" are also "women who leave ... who arrive ... who transform themselves". In this sense, migrant women are described as being in a privileged situation to reach a condition of nomadism which is based on the abandonment of those that are defined as "heavy certainties" while instead being available to transform themselves. If such a condition is to be preferred, then migrant women can be regarded as being in a privileged situation, showing the way to other women.

In conclusion, the performance "Hidden stories" represents a clear celebration of hybridity and cultural as well as religious syncretism. Such a position can be regarded as a powerful antidote to forms of racism as if all identities and cultures are mixed, the grounds for classifying people into distinct and rigid ethnic or national groups - on the basis of which people are discriminated against - lose much of their strength. From this point of view, hybridity can work as a facilitating factor

towards forms of solidarity as it bridges differences among women. On the other hand, the notion of hybridity also has some important limitations, as by focusing mainly on culture, it risks understating the importance of power differentials among different groups in society. As I have illustrated in Chapter 3, even if the process of hybridisation does not only concern the migrant population, but also involves the host society, the power position of the two groups still remains different (Brah, 1996; Karner, 2007; Anthias, 2001).

Such a challenge is also acknowledged by Heather Merrill – who has conducted research on *Almaterra* and *Almateatro* when commenting on another performance of *Almateatro* entitled “Black moon” that focuses on the mother-daughter relationship. Merrill writes:

The representation of women as universally united by their relationships with their mothers obscures the situated and lived differences between participants in *Almaterra*. Putting forth the image of a common, intercultural woman, *Almateatro* contributes to the image of an ideal world, free of power differences between women. (Merrill, 2006: 187)

On the concept of hybridity, Anthias concludes that the:

The acid test of hybridity lies in the response of culturally dominant groups, not only in terms of incorporating (or co-opting) cultural products of marginal or subordinate groups, but in being open to transforming and abandoning some of their own central cultural symbols and practices of hegemony. (Anthias, 2001: 630)

This can be regarded as a useful roadmap to test the usefulness of the concept of hybridity in intercultural work. In conclusion, the focus by *Almateatro* on hybridity functions as a double sword: on the one hand acting as a bridge among women positioned differently but on the other, by focusing mainly on cultural elements, it tends to conceal differentials in power positions. This is why it becomes important, as suggested by Anthias, to evaluate the extent to which the endorsement of a hybrid position, may also lead to changes in some central practices of the majority population.

6.4 The Risks of Ethnicisation and Exoticisation

In the previous sections, this research indicated how belonging to an intercultural association prompted reflection, in some cases, on the limitations of classifying people into rigid reductionist categories. In this section, I explore how this work has led to reflection on the possible limitations of an intercultural work strategy, in relation to the risk of ethnicisation and exoticisation. By

ethnicisation I refer to the idea of attributing the causes of social phenomena to ethnic differences. Building on Said's definition of Orientalism, as addressed in Chapter 3, I define exoticisation as the process amongst westerners of founding their relationships with people coming from non-western countries upon their desire for, and curiosity about, the 'exotic' and upon the folkloric aspects of non-western cultures. This objectifies people from non-western countries and reduces their culture to a simplified version that only considers some of the most external folkloric aspects. This notion is related to what Sara Ahmed refers to as 'stranger fetishism' (Ahmed, 2000: 1). A reflection on those concepts emerges in particular in relation to the theatre work carried out by *Almateatro*. Attitudes founded on ethnicisation and exoticisation are clearly exemplified by Bianca when she states:

Many times I felt too little folkloric ... too European, too white ... the fact is that I am Latin-American, but I am not indigenous, I am not black ... So there was a certain stereotype within the group that I felt I needed to observe and I have always refused to be part of this reading, but it was so ... I've always said, too pale, too European, not 'folk' enough in my ideas, ... I do not observe *Ramadan*, I do not go to church [...] (Bianca, MW)

With these words Bianca emphasises the risk of reducing differences among women to 'folkloric' aspects in their intercultural theatre work as the interest shown by the public in other cultures is often based on those same aspects. On the contrary, she feels that she doesn't fit with this 'exotic imagery' as, even if she is Latin-American, she looks "too European, too white", also "not 'folk' enough in her ideas". Moreover, she reflects on the fact that the group had, to some extent, endorsed the stereotype that she had always denied.

Patricia also reflects on the risks of reducing an intercultural work to its ethnic and folkloric aspects. With reference to a performance about the Somali war and Italian colonialism in that country, she states:

It reduces the audience's interest, because it is not fun, not food, not folk, not ethnic, for the last 20 years there has been talk about food ... I try to avoid an approach where ethnic, exotic and folkloristic food is presented as the focus of interculturalism ... I try to present contents at another level ... for instance starting from literary and artistic initiatives [...] (Patricia, MW)

Patricia states that requests for intercultural works are often based on the elements of "fun", "food", "folk", "ethnic", whereas when they address more difficult and sensitive topics that also imply the recognition of Italian colonial responsibilities, this draws much less interest. Patricia also

refers to the fact that very often intercultural events are reduced to an exchange about food, as if migrant women could only bring this kind of knowledge and not their thoughts on other topics.

Anna describes instead how those processes affect her negatively, even though she is an Italian-born woman, as the public attention is primarily focused on women from other countries. In particular, she argues that since she is an Italian-born woman, her personal migration journey and the disorientation caused by it, is irrelevant to the public:

No one cares if you are more disoriented than someone else because you come from a 20-year old emigrant background, or your parents were non-intellectual fishmongers ... so by overcoming stereotypes we recreate other stereotypes ... it was difficult for me [...] (Anna, MW)

Anna includes the element of “class” in her analysis by referring to the low class of her fishmonger parents. In this way, she implicitly underlines the importance of an intersectional approach that takes into consideration how different dimensions intersect and contribute to determining how people are discriminated against and oppressed; on the other hand, focusing only on one dimension such as ‘race’ or ethnicity in intercultural work can conceal other kinds of discrimination. This is why she concludes that for her it was difficult to accept the fact that “by overcoming stereotypes we recreate other stereotypes”.

Almateatro however also proposed a specific reflection on those issues in the performance entitled “All Inclusive”, in which it focuses on the process of ethnicisation and exoticisation that inhabitants of First World countries impose on the places where they go on holiday in the southern hemisphere; processes that these countries are obliged to accept in order to be part of the global tourist industry. The performance is a critique of globalised tourism but also aims at reflecting on those Orientalist processes that render non-western cultures exotic, while refusing to see their realities and complexities. In the script of the performance it is stated:

Inhabitants of the First World are able to travel and do not have a problem in adapting every place on the planet to their needs and ‘denaturing’ cultures up to a point of rendering them ridiculous in the name of tourist consumption. (Almateatro, 2001, author’s translation)

Bianca explains in relation to the performance:

We chose the theme of tourism, how the Third World is sold in the First World, how the sale of these paradises, of these exotic worlds is managed, where the money from this great global movement ends up and how much remains in Third World countries where many tourists go. (Bianca, MW)

The performance is first set in a surreal fair where actresses promote “holiday packages”, according to the “all inclusive” formula. Then the two protagonists talk about the strategies that they have had to put in place in their countries in the southern hemisphere in order to participate in the rich tourism market in which they are often forced to “sell” their culture, and sometimes their own bodies. In order to counter this culture of globalised tourism, the protagonists compare those travels to ‘real’ travels, which the actresses took from their own experiences. The performance ends with the question: “And what if those ‘natives’, whom the tourists discovered and found so beautiful, full of charm, picturesque and, hospitable, became the tourist’s neighbours? [...]” (*Almateatro*, 2001, *author’s translation*). In this way the performance aims at contrasting the processes of ethnicisation and exoticisation as they occur in the global tourist industry with the discrimination and racism suffered by the same people once they migrate to western countries.

Also the association *Punto di partenza* prompted reflection on ethnicisation and exoticisation processes in relation to the representation of the ‘other’ in western society, and in particular in Italy. To this aim it invited to speak at the seminars it organised on the issue of racism, Chantal Spitz, a writer from Tahiti and the scholar Nirmal Puwar as representatives of post-colonial reflection. Spitz proposed a very critical reflection about the representation and the self-representation in the colonial experience. In particular, she described the creation of the myth of the ‘good savage’ and how this myth still influences current representations:

Since more than two hundred years, we are the good savage, a myth that has been born from the European philosophical imaginary. This identity that has been given to us from the other part of the world, namely here in Europe, deprives us of any possibility of being something else. We are forever the women painted by Gauguin, written by Loti and filmed by the MGM in the “Bounty revolts”. Lascivious women, ready and happy to satisfy the whims and fantasies of the white man. As for our men, they are only able to fish, climb trees and play music. (Spitz, 2005, *author’s translation*)

The idea that the colonial representation described colonised people in very detrimental stereotypical categories was largely shared by the participants in the seminar. In relation to this a participant stated:

In my experience in Italy, we, as western people, we start from our culture which is the “Culture” with a capital “C” ... on the contrary the culture of others is just about food, dances... In Italy we never read nor really understood the history of countries and of people who come to us. Therefore it is always this attitude from a high culture that consent towards these “easy” forms of culture, where we eat, dance, we dress; there is the ethnic fashion also

by those who wear the braids, even if they are blonde, etc and also through this, racism is propagated, namely in considering these cultures as secondary and subaltern. (Tsevrinis, 2005, *author's translation*)

This account goes to the roots of ethnicisation and exoticisation processes. Whereas western culture is regarded as the culture *par excellence*, that of other people coming from the south of the world is taken into account only for selective folkloric aspects, while their overall history is disregarded. As a consequence, those cultures always remain secondary and subaltern.

During the seminars organised by *Punto di partenza*, Puwar (2004) also proposed a reflection on the representation of the other's body. She underlined the challenges arising when previously excluded women are invited to participate at the table of groups and coalitions. In particular, she posed the question of what people positioned at the centre expect from those women and what happens when they do not conform to the expectations about being "victims", but present instead as lawyers, writers, public speakers. She emphasised how the "hunger for victimology" has a long history in the West and how colonialism used feminist language to justify itself.

In the work carried out by *Punto di partenza* the process leading to awareness about the need to overcome an exoticising attitude towards people who come from the south of the world by western people is regarded as a foundation:

For me and maybe also for those of us who continued to meet and to work, the 'primordial' experience in our common work has been that of feeling a real interest for the other ... I don't mean the other as an exotic example of a different culture, but the other for the contents that she expresses, deriving from the trajectories that led her here, from the lived experiences, from the positioning occupied in society. (Moccagatta, 2002, *author's translation*)

Finally, in this section I have illustrated how feminist intercultural practices have, in some cases, led to reflections on the risks associated with ethnicisation and exoticisation in intercultural work. This is the result of focusing mainly on specific folkloric aspects of non-western cultures. The need to overcome an approach to interculturalism founded on those aspects is therefore clearly advocated by some associations. Those associations underline the importance of promoting an intercultural exchange on a deeper level and on an interest for the 'others' which is not based on exotic aspects but on their story and positioning in society.

6.5 Concluding Remarks

In this chapter, I have focused on the contestation by both migrant and Italian-born women of the division of women in rigid categorisations. I have shown how this led to a number of situations that acted as a bridge among the women, such as sharing “a starting point a bit displaced”; the willingness of going beyond national divisions and the underlining that all identities and cultures are hybrid. I argued that in some instances, this facilitated the reaching of a situation of mutual exchange on a more equal level. This is valid, in particular, when there is a need to go beyond the stereotypes that are attached to specific nationalities in order to recognise each association member as equal. Also the notion of hybridity may function as a powerful antidote against racism as it opposes the idea of separate and ‘pure’ culture in favour of the idea that every person and culture has mixed origins. However, I also confronted those notions with the concept of ‘colour-blindness’ and argued that they may function as to hide differences in power among women and white privilege.

Finally, I have shown how the intercultural work has, in some cases, engendered a reflection on the risks associated with ethnicisation and exoticisation processes which tend to perpetuate the legacy of colonialism and Orientalist attitudes. In the case of *Almateatro*, the theatre work prompted a reflection on the risks that an intercultural work may perpetuate, in some instances, stereotypes by focusing on folkloric aspects of cultures and it advocated for the need to situate intercultural work at a deeper level. *Punto di partenza* regarded the awareness about those risks as a precondition for a common work among women positioned differently.

Chapter 7

Intercultural Feminism and Cultural Difference

In this chapter, I address efforts undertaken by the associations to counter 'othering' processes through an in-depth reflection about the different meanings of cultural practices involving women, such as the Islamic veil, as well as through cross cultural comparisons of practices detrimental to women such as FGM and aesthetic vaginal surgery. As shown in Chapter 3, the issue of the representation of Third World women in western feminism is a key one in feminist post-colonial scholarship. A number of authors (Mohanty, 1984; Spivak, 1993; Ahmed, 2000) argued that dominant discourse in western feminism tended to represent Third World women as necessarily less emancipated and to describe their different cultural practices in an 'othering' way, without holding to the same scrutiny their own culture.

In particular, I focus here on two cultural practices that are often taken to represent cultural difference, namely Islamic veiling practices and FGM. Concerning the topic of the Islamic veil, described in the first section of this chapter, I argue that the way this issue is addressed in the associations reflects an important 'test' for those seeking to build intercultural feminist platforms and practices. As in the dominant discourse - veiled Muslim women have been constituted as the embodiment of cultural difference and as irreconcilable with western values - I analyse to what extent the associations contribute to opposing or reinforcing such 'othering' attitudes and to what extent the wearing of the veil represents a point of contention amongst the women themselves. Finally, I show how the issue of the Islamic veil also engendered a larger reflection on constraints on women across countries and cultures in the specific experience of *Almateatro*.

In the second section, building again on the experience of *Almateatro*, I show how the association managed to contrast 'othering' attitudes when referring to FGM practices, by comparing them with aesthetic vaginal practices which are prevalent in western countries. At the same time, such an operation also aimed at identifying a number of western cultural practices that are detrimental to women but not normally regarded as being so. I analyse how such cross cultural comparison

may establish a situation of mutual exchange favouring intercultural feminism but also to what extent it lends itself to the risk of promoting cultural relativism.

7.1 The Islamic Veil as a Test for an Intercultural Feminism?

In this section, I focus on efforts to counter 'othering' processes put in place by the associations in relation to specific non-western cultural practices. In particular the issue of the Islamic veil is explored in this section, while that of FGM is investigated in the next one. I argue that the attitude towards these issues can be considered as a key test for the building of a notion of intercultural feminism. As described in Chapter 3, the issue of the Islamic veil has been made to come to symbolise one of the most evident representations of the embodiment of cultural difference. In dominant discourses, veiled Muslim women are regarded as being at irreconcilable odds with western values as the Islamic veil is taken as a symbol of women's submission and of the resistance to a westernisation process. However, the aim of this section is not to investigate those representations as such, nor the complexities around the different meanings that the Islamic veil can assume. Rather, the aim is to analyse to what extent the women's intercultural associations on which I focus in this research contribute to opposing or reinforcing such 'othering' attitudes and to what extent the wearing of the veil represents a dividing line among women members of the associations. Finally, the specific experience of the association *Almateatro* is explored as this association in one of its performances, deals with the issue of the Islamic veil as a starting point for a more general reflection on the centrality of the covering and uncovering of women's bodies in different countries and cultures.

In Chapter 3, I have illustrated how the western obsession with the Islamic veil originated in the colonial period (Fanon, 1965; Yeğenoğlu, 1998; Lewis, 2004) and how there is still a legacy of that obsession today, even in some feminist settings. This is evident when different veiling practices are represented as homogenous and the various meanings attributed to them by the women are not recognised (Lewis, 2004). In the introduction, I have acknowledged how the reading of postcolonial scholarship made me aware of my own prejudices towards the issue of veiled Muslim women. Notwithstanding this awareness, I have also recognised how my positionality as a western woman always entails the taking of a complex and tentative position when researching on Muslim women.

7.1.1 Contested Perspectives on Islamic Veiling Practices

The work carried out by the associations, as well as the personal accounts by the women involved on the issue of Islamic veiling practices, reveal an awareness of the sensitivity of these issues albeit with different results. All associations support the idea of women's freedom in the wearing of the Islamic veil and ask that women should not be discriminated against because of this. However, personal reflections on this issue can vary significantly. For instance, the issue of the wearing of the veil as a symbol of cultural difference which may create division among the women of the association emerges explicitly in a number of interviews. It is important to specify that in the interviews the issue of the Islamic veil emerges almost exclusively with Italian-born women, therefore the following is an account of the opinions of non-veiled Italian-born women on this issue. The point of view of some women coming from Muslim countries is however presented later in the exploration of the complexities and contradictions around policies on Islamic veiling practices.

On one end of the spectrum we can find the position of those who have discussed this issue at length and find it meaningless to continue to debate the topic from the point of view of women's rights. They believe that the issue has to be understood as a matter of a woman's personal choice. For instance, Ada states that in the early years of the association the issue of the veil was a constant source of debate while now:

It has even become annoying to continue talking about it, so much so that when a journalist calls asking: 'I want an interview with a veiled woman' we answer 'listen, here there are only women, we are not concerned with whether they wear a veil or not', we are fed up with the subject [...] (Ada, IBW)

With the answer "here there are only women" Ada counters 'othering' processes put in place by journalists who objectify veiled women by categorising them into a unified group. Other testimonies, however, seem to say something different. Chiara, a young Italian-born woman, states:

[...] there was a very young second generation Moroccan schoolgirl who wore the veil; it was very difficult for me to relate to her, we used to talk about the veil, why the veil? All her explanations have never been enough, she is super intelligent and very committed, but there are some things I just cannot relate to, there is a limit. The Somali and Muslims often joke 'why do you put on that low-cut blouse, it's not good'. They are laughing and joking, but they're still saying it to you ... and when I answer 'because I like it' sometimes someone will say to me 'you're a little 'bitch', and it's not just me, it has happened to the other girls as well. Some of them are happy to discuss it, others aren't ... I understand the point made by the

people to whom it is possible to speak, usually second generation or more adult people ... but I do not accept it. This place is called a feminist place, but when they answer 'I feel freer with the veil', I say 'ok, we don't have much more to say to each other [...]' (Chiara, IBW)

Chiara shows an awareness of the fact that the Islamic veil is often seen as a symbol of ignorance and backwardness as she seems to be willing to oppose such views when she underlines that the Moroccan girl to whom she refers is a very intelligent and committed person. However, she also strongly states that she cannot understand how you can be "freer with the veil". According to her, there is a contrast between this point of view and belonging to an association that is regarded as feminist. Chiara's testimony also raises the issue of the gaze of Muslim women towards young Italian-born women. Chiara interprets this gaze as very judgmental but fails to see her own perspective as such. It appears that this intercultural dialogue hasn't been able to reach a position of mutual understanding, as Chiara concludes that at a certain point "we don't have much more to say to each other". Such a position may also be influenced by the age factor as Chiara is a young woman, as well as other young Italian-born women who express the most critical views in relation to the wearing of the veil. In this respect Ada's account of the fact that they are fed up of talking about the veil witnesses that this is not considered a source of division among older women within the association anymore as the issue has been discussed at length. On the contrary, younger women still consider the issue of the veil as a source of division. Sara, another young Italian-born woman, shows an even greater uneasiness about this issue when she states:

It struck me the other day when I saw this woman who was carrying a baby to kindergarten. It was already hot and she was wearing this long black tunic that covered everything but her feet and hands, and wearing an almost integral veil, which covered everything but the oval of her face [...] I realised that up until two and a half years ago, I would have said "she is so beautiful, it is so nice to finally see that, even in small villages, these women have the right to dress as they wish ..." [...] the other day my gaze stopped on this woman's eyes, it seemed to me as if she was carrying a cage. I focused on the only thing I could see of her, her eyes, in order to enter into a relationship with her, and I felt like she was wearing a mask of loneliness ... now I do not want to exaggerate, but really she was empty, there was nothing there ... and I no longer thought "how nice to see a woman dressed in traditional costume ... look at us with our mini-skirts, with this hair, look how clean she is" [...] I thought, "this woman must be trapped in a world of cages" because she was pushing a stroller, had another daughter next to her and she was lost, completely lost, a girl who must not have been older than thirty at most [...]

(Sara, IBW)

In this testimony Sara, starting from a position of idealisation and aesthetisation of veiled Muslim women - when she states "she is so beautiful", "look how clean she is" – arrives to a position of judgment and of distance - "a mask of loneliness", "really she was empty, there was nothing

there”, “a world of cages”. Such a reflection echoes what Sara Ahmed (2000: 166) defines as “fantasy of proximity” versus “fantasy of distance”. During the interview with Sara, I then asked if, in the course of the association’s activities, this topic was discussed among the women who are welcomed temporarily in the apartments provided by the association for women who face economic, familiar or other kinds of difficulties and she answered:

We talk about it in a delicate manner [...] it is also important to understand how there are women that would take the veil off tomorrow, but you cannot say to them “Do it! Who cares?” [...] So you listen and ask, talk, question why, ... why they don’t want to remove the veil ... because people make judgments, perhaps because it also protects them, or because they’ve never taken it off. [...] What I have done sometimes instead is asking, “But will you let me see your hair? Let’s try it, just between ourselves” ... self-esteem and vanity can be rights for women who are denied it. Then I say, “Let me see, look how beautiful you are” and “Do you like the veil? Why do you wear it?” ... this is not a taboo at all. (Sara, IBW)

In this account, Sara reveals the importance of handling the issue of the wearing of the veil with sensitivity, but her starting point is an understanding of the veil as a limitation as the “unveiling” attitude permeates her discourse. In particular in this instance, the wearing of the veil is understood as a denial of the right to vanity, which Sara believes to be a right once it is negated. Interestingly, however, Sara also talks about how she is considered to be “wrong” by migrant women with whom she works because she is in her thirties, she is unmarried, does not have children, and does not wear make-up, so she is seen as “wrong” or at least strange. Similarly to Chiara’s experience, there appears to be a reciprocal gaze between young Italian-born women and Muslim women in which one judges the other as different and not fitting the norms of femininity prescribed by their own society. This illustrates how ‘othering’ processes exist in both directions, even if they are enacted by women who are in different power positions. Italian-born women, being part of the majority population, are in fact in a position that enables them to render non-Italian-born women “other”, whereas Muslim women, being part of the minority, do not have the same power.

In some cases the wearing of the veil is set in direct contrast to the possibility of considering oneself feminist. For instance two Italian-born young women refer to the wearing of the veil as being an obstacle to the possibility of being feminist. Flora states:

Now F.’s husband is saying, “Oh, you made her become too feminist!” But F. is not a feminist, she is a veiled Muslim, I mean she doesn’t look like an emancipated feminist, but she was leaving her husband home alone at times to come to meetings and conferences, something that she didn’t do before [...] (Flora, IBW)

In this account being “a veiled Muslim” equates to not looking like “an emancipated feminist”. Similarly Francesca states, with reference to a veiled woman who is a member of the association:

I'd like to know if the others are actually feminists in the same way that I consider myself, if they think the same things about the role of women. I know some of them don't, ... I am thinking of a specific woman ... when we discuss certain points she is a bit rigid. Maybe, ... it is due to her cultural background, to her upbringing, I do not know. (Francesca, IBW)

Francesca considers the veil to also be a barrier that to a certain extent can limit the friendship and the intimacy among the women of the group, as the act of unveiling is taken as a sign of confidence and trust:

[...] although I see that she has come to be more relaxed lately in the sense that we have created an internal climate of friendship. She had never removed the veil when we were together, but one day it happened, we were by ourselves and she removed her veil. For me it was an important sign because ... it was a demonstration of friendship and trust, at least I saw it like that and it was an important gesture for me. (Francesca, IBW)

In this account, the veil is seen as a symbol of a barrier or boundary between the women, in a similar way as when Sara asks the women with whom she works if they would let her see their hair. For Italian-born women, especially the younger ones, the act of uncovering is seen as a way to bridge their distance with Muslim women. One wonders however what would be the reciprocal for Muslim veiled women in relationships with non-veiled ones, if it was that the latter cover up more. Once more this issue poses the question of who should go towards whom and how it is possible to work together for a common aim while maintaining differences. The understanding of the veil as a boundary is also endorsed in one performance by *Almateatro* “Chador and Other Veils”, which is expanded upon in the following sections.

7.1.2 Complexities and Contradictions around Policies on Islamic Veiling Practices

In the previous sections, I have illustrated how the issue of Islamic veiling practices is addressed within the associations and, to what extent it represents a divisive issue among the women. I have also explored to what extent associations have been able to counter othering mechanisms through their activities, as well as through cross-cultural comparisons. However, those reflections and activities relate to the meaning of the veil for the women involved, while not aiming to address the issue of State policies around Islamic veiling practices, with the exception of *Trama di terre*. In this section, I investigate the position taken by the association on this topic and the reflections that

emerge from the interviews. In the previous sections, I have shown how intercultural work can function at the level of deconstruction of hegemonic discourses and also raise critical awareness on the issue. However, the question is to what extent intercultural work can also provide some answers when confronted with the necessity to influence specific State policies in the interests of migrant women in particular.

On this topic, the interviewed women draw attention to the necessity not to homogenise women coming from Muslim countries into a single category by distinguishing between the veil as a choice and as an imposition. For instance, Michelle highlights the necessity of seeing how this topic is addressed in Muslim countries in terms of policies and legislation and to compare it with western countries. She recalls how women in Morocco who perform certain roles or jobs cannot wear the veil. This makes her ask: "So what are we talking about? Why is it so in their Muslim countries?" She then states that Italian feminists do not report the statements of the feminists in Morocco and in other Islamic countries when they say: "All right, do you want to wear it? Wear it, but please wear it with a flower, with colours, so that we understand that you are not a bigoted, fundamentalist". She recalls an occasion in which a woman from the *Maison des femmes* of Paris, who was participating in an event organized by *Trama di terre*, asked "but how can you accept a veiled woman at a feminist event?" She then adds:

And do you know who this woman was? She was a woman who had spent three years in prison because she removed the veil in her own country. So this issue is always more complicated than one thinks. (Michelle, IBW)

Such a reflection accounts for the need to go beyond a simplistic vision that would pretend to homogenise women living in Muslim countries, as well as women who declare themselves feminists in those countries, into a single category. This account leads to a reflection on the fact that avoiding an Orientalist gaze based on 'othering' attitudes should not equate to disregarding the situation of women living in Muslim countries who consider the wearing of the veil as an imposition and fight for their right to not be forced to wear it. Michelle also states that, in the organisation, women can certainly wear the veil if they wish but she recalls an occasion when a girl who did not want to wear the veil entered the association's building and she recounted how her father - who had found out about this - had cut her hair as a punishment. About this Annina comments that:

It is a common practice, a way of living together every day, so that you see that certain things are bad and certain things are good. Then you can talk about the fact that, that issue maybe comes from your culture, but we both perceive that if she is forced to wear the veil by her father under threat of beating, that is detrimental ... and then you can be Muslim as much as you want, but you can see for yourself that that is not good [...] (Annina, IBW)

In this account, Annina emphasises the fact that it is through “a common practice” based on “living together every day” that it is possible to “see that certain things are bad and certain things are good” independently of whether they derive from culture or religion. Reinforcing this idea, she also explicitly states that “no-one has to teach to anyone else” and that in the association they do not have a colonialist attitude based on the conviction by Italian-born women of knowing the needs of migrant women. She is convinced, instead, that some situations, such as the one described above, speak for themselves, making it possible to arrive at common conclusions.

In a few cases, the issue of the *burqua*, the integral veil leaving a mesh for the woman to see the outer world, was raised during the interviews. In relation to this Sara affirms:

Before becoming involved with the association I thought, “Look how bad those governments, those municipalities, provinces, regions banning the *burqa* are, look at the *Lega*”³⁸ ... then I put it on once and I thought “no, wait a moment” [...] I do not hold authoritarian opinions but let’s try to understand the issue here, whether the wearing of the *burqua* is a right, yet another cage, or a form of violence. Then you start to talk to the women, it makes you realise that there is no freedom in the wearing of the *burqua*, and underlying that a woman must be able to show her face. (Sara, IBW)

In this account, Sara considers her position about the banning of the *burqua* on the basis of two personal experiences: the first is the fact that she put on the *burqua* herself, the second from listening to the accounts of some of the women involved. Her conclusion is that “there is no freedom in the wearing of the *burqua*”. At the same time there is no willingness to act in a “liberating” manner as she states: “When a husband says “put the *burqua* on”, I cannot be the other husband who says “no, don’t put it on.” By comparing the association to “the other husband”, Sara appears to realise that women’s associations sometimes impose their understanding of women’s rights and emancipation on other women, and that this also does not equate to respecting women’s freedom.

The *Trama di terre* organisation was specifically consulted by the local municipality about the possibility of introducing a ban on the wearing of the *burqua*. Michelle explained that the issue

³⁸ The *Lega* to which Sara refers is the *Lega Nord*, an Italian political party that has overtly fomented racist attitudes towards the migrant population.

arose when a woman wearing the *burqua* went to school to pick up her son and another parent complained to the school director. She commented that she found the making of a complaint perfectly understandable. In response to the municipality's request, the members of the organisation, especially those from Muslim countries, held a meeting among themselves. Even if the personal experiences of the women from Muslim countries were very different, they all shared the conviction that the wearing of the *burqua* does not derive from any religious prescription. The women's experiences ranged from those of a woman from Tunisia who does not wear the veil and who declared that she was afraid of the *burqua* as it would set women's rights back centuries, to those of a woman from Morocco who wears the *hijab* but is against the wearing of the *burqua*, to those of a woman from Pakistan who wore the *burqua* for two years from the age of 13 to 15 years when she had to travel a substantial distance to attend school and was afraid of sexual violence. She declared that the *burqua* deprives one of one's identity and she wouldn't see any reason to wear it in Italy. Finally, the women of the organisation produced a document in which they stated that it was not necessary to put up any signs banning the *burqua* in the municipality because a public officer can always ask a woman wearing it to identify herself. Notwithstanding the opposition to the *burqua*, the women of the organisation agreed on the uselessness of an administrative measure banning it, but instead they requested that the municipality start a dialogue with women wearing it.

The process through which the women from *Trama di terre* came to a consensus when asked by the municipality about the delicate issue of the banning of the *burqua* can be regarded as an example of the possibility of keeping a common political aim promoting the position of women among women who are different in terms of 'race', ethnicity, legal status/citizenship, class, age and religion in this case. This was achieved through the instrument of dialogue which in turn was made possible because of the sharing of compatible values – as argued by Yuval Davis (1997) – namely in this case a compatible idea about women's freedom and dignity. Furthermore, this was obtained thanks to a consultation process open to all members of the association, but giving a special place to women who might be more involved or knowledgeable in the issue, namely women coming from Muslim countries. In this specific case, therefore, intercultural work proved helpful when interrogated about state policies and not only for the deconstruction of hegemonic assumptions about cultural difference.

7.1.3 Islamic Veil as a Starting Point for a Reflection on Different Women's Constraints

In this section, the specific experience of the *Almateatro* organisation is investigated with reference to the performance "Chador and other veils" where the issue of the Islamic veil is taken as a starting point for a broader reflection on the cultural constraints that women face in all cultures.³⁹ I argue that such an approach favours a situation of mutual exchange which in turn acts as a facilitating factor in the reaching of intercultural feminism and in avoiding forms of "feminist imperialism". At the same time, I also investigate how the performance, by contextualising the Islamic veil within other forms of patriarchal limitations of women's freedom, fails to acknowledge instances in which Islamic veiling practices are explicitly endorsed by women and reclaimed as a form of modernity. Such a view poses great challenges to the common secularist vision of modernity which is prevalent in western countries. Commenting on the performance "Chador and other veils", Bianca states:

This was to investigate a bit the history of the veil, but not of the Muslim veil, rather of the veil that women have in all cultures; the relationship with the body, the relationship that cultures have with women's bodies, should they be covered, should they be uncovered, what can be seen and what can't, what can be done and what can't. (Bianca, IBW)

The performance analyses the issue of the veil in terms of boundaries as an ordering principle or as something to overcome. The veil is also investigated in relation to the occupation of external space and as a way of life. As underlined by Bianca, this perspective opens up the discourse and prompts a reflection that is not confined to Muslim women but is relevant to women independent of their country of origin or cultural background. The performance's presentation reads:

Hiding your body from an outside world that is often intrusive, or showing it without any problems.

Growing up with the desire to be seen and fully occupy the outside world, or feel in control within a space marked by clear boundaries and defined roles.

Are boundaries to be considered as word order, or are boundaries barriers to be overcome?

Which veils cover or protect, consciously or unconsciously, the female body?

³⁹ *Almateatro*, in preparation for the performance "Chador and Other Veils" also carried out research on Muslim migrant women aimed at countering stereotypes and prejudices against this group that became very common in Italy with the rise of immigration. In the script, the meaning of the Islamic veil, and more broadly the position of women in the Muslim religion, are also explored in a historical context. Moreover the research investigates the role of fundamentalism and the relation between Islam and feminism, as well as the processes of change Muslim migrant women were undergoing. The research also includes a reflection about colonialism and the role that feminism has had in the colonial experience.

The show starts from the individual experiences of the performers who, through their own memories, describe the solutions adopted, the journeys taken, the veils worn, the space occupied by “being in the world”. (Almateatro, 1999, author’s translation)

More specifically, the performance presents and compares two women’s stories. The first is a Somali Muslim woman who accepts the religious and cultural prescriptions of her society. In doing this she is supported by her family and society but her freedom is constrained. In a specular manner, the second woman, who is Italian-born, chooses to contravene social and cultural expectations with the result that she finds herself in a situation where she was free, but also alone. In order to explain those constraints of women’s freedom, Bianca states:

That isn’t the only veil, [there are] also all the others that we wear every day, all the women in the world, because there isn’t a culture that is really free of this stereotype of the need to exteriorise women’s bodies in a certain way. Almost every man is frightened by a woman’s sexuality ... and the idea was ... this discourse about the veil that they put on their head, it wasn’t just that, it goes beyond that. (Bianca, IBW)

With these words, Bianca underlines how exteriorisation of women’s bodies is central in every culture and she attributes the cause of this to the fear that, she argues, almost all men have of women’s sexuality. She then goes on to articulate the relationship between the Muslim veil and other forms of women’s constraints that are prevalent in western countries. In this account, the Muslim veil is regarded as a cultural imposition but not one of greater importance than other issues:

This was also in the line with: ‘what is the difference between the dictatorship of the size 6 for women and the Muslim veil? What is the difference? There is none’. It is the same as being subordinate to the male because you have to please him, to let him see your tits ... you have to be a certain way to please others, to feel beautiful. So it was almost saying ‘but see that we all have these veils, these impositions’, so the story was somewhat intended to open up a discourse about all of the things that have been imposed on the body and not stop at the issue of the veil, because the veil is a problem when it is imposed, but if you want to cover up from head to toe, go for it, if that’s your choice. In the end this is the discourse that we have, because who are we to judge anything? (Bianca, MW)

Those kinds of comparison appear very similar or even directly influenced by the reflection carried out by Mernissi (2001) in her book “Scheherazade goes West” as described in Chapter 3. Bianca highlights that there is no difference between the Muslim veil and “the dictatorship of the size 6” because in both cases this behaviour is dictated by men, therefore it is the result of a patriarchal order. In this way, Bianca uncovers some impositions suffered by western women that are normally not recognised as such and puts them on the same level as other cultural constraints

such as the Islamic veil. However, while she states that the veil is a problem only in so far as it is imposed, Bianca frames the different forms of exteriorising women's bodies, within a patriarchal order. In this way she fails to recognise the act of those women who claim the wearing of the veil not only as an act of women's choice, but also of women's freedom and as a sign of modernity. As indicated by Salih:

The *hijab* is, in fact, an instrument of transmission of a representation of a different modernity from the western one, especially since it has become for the young educated women, a global symbol of Islamic identity. (Salih, 2008: 129, *author's translation*)

In a similar way to Bianca, Karen affirms:

A woman who is a model is not a free woman, she is a slave. In the same way a woman in Afghanistan who wears the *burqua* is not free, she is a slave, for me there is no substantial difference both are not free [...] (Karen, MW)

In this account, Karen extends the comparison further by putting two apparently opposite situations, such as being a model and that of wearing a *burqua* on the same level. Also Karen's reasoning goes in the direction of establishing a more reciprocal situation between western and non-Western women. However, the extent of women's freedom in choosing those behaviours is not explored.

In conclusion, in previous sections I have shown how attitudes towards the Islamic veil represent an important test in the reaching of forms of intercultural feminism. I have argued that because in dominant discourses Muslim veiled women have been represented as irreconcilable with western values, the extent to which associations have been able to counter those 'othering' attitudes is crucial to promoting intercultural feminism. In the first part I have shown how, where those 'othering' attitudes prevail, especially on the part of young Italian-born women, intercultural dialogue is under threat. However, those situations, if on the one hand risk promoting a form of "feminist intolerance", on the other they also show a reciprocal gaze within which also Muslim women display disapproval towards the behaviour of young Italian-born women. Yet, those two gazes cannot be put on the same level as the two groups are not in the same power position. In the second section, I have analysed the complexities of intercultural work when associations shift from the level of deconstructing hegemonic discourses around Islamic veiling practices to having to provide answers about policies on the issue. I have shown how, in one specific instance, the association *Trama di terre* managed to reach an agreement, through dialogue, when asked by the

local municipality about a proposal on the banning of the *burqua*. Finally, I have described how in the experience of *Almateatro*, the issue of the Islamic veil is taken as a starting point for reflection on different constraints faced by women in all cultures. I have argued that such experience goes in the direction of reaching a situation of mutual exchange facilitating forms of intercultural feminism. However, it fails to recognise those instances where the Islamic veil is endorsed as a symbol of women's freedom and of modernity. In the next section, I continue the discussion on how a comparison between different cultural practices may contrast 'othering' processes and promote intercultural feminism.

7.2 Cross-cultural Comparisons on Practices Detrimental to Women

In this section, I focus on the specific attempts to counter 'othering' processes that have been enacted by the organisations, particularly in relation to the issue of non-Western traditional cultural practices, such as FGM while at the same time identifying cultural practices detrimental to women that are common in the West and are normally not regarded as being so. As already indicated, such an attempt can be considered as a facilitating factor in a process of intercultural dialogue aiming at building forms of solidarity among women who have different and unequal positions in terms of 'race', ethnicity, legal status/citizenship, class and age. In this section, I also investigate what the limitations are of such a process and the risks that this might lead to forms of cultural relativism.

In relation to a process based on intercultural dialogue, the work by *Almateatro* is particularly significant. In *Almateatro*, the intercultural work is described as permitting the comparison of different forms of discrimination and oppression faced by women in different countries and cultural contexts. Anna compares this function to that of a mirror:

[...] the intercultural aspect is useful, interesting because it serves to reflect, it creates a comparison not only between people, but also between cultural practices and this helps. It's a mirror. You look at yourself, you see, "well, I recognise that issue...", so it is useful. (Anna, IBW)

In various performances, a number of situations involving women from different countries are described in a way that emphasises their similarities. For instance, "Nasty Love" focuses on violence against women, in particular domestic violence, underlining how this phenomenon involves women in all countries and from all social classes. Violence against women is described as

the most extreme result of a patriarchal culture that is present in all societies and thus becomes an element of commonality amongst women internationally. In the script of the performance one can read:

Violence against women has no geographical boundaries, it does not spare any developed or developing country, it doesn't even know socio-cultural differences, aggressors and victims may belong to any social class. (Almateatro, 2009, author's translation)

The performance "Feminine, plural" is also described as being aimed at "creating opportunities to reflect on and discuss equality between women and men in our culture and others" (Almateatro, 2004). Following this general approach, in two cases Almateatro's performances establish a specific comparison between practices that are detrimental to women in non-Western countries as well as in western countries: "Chador and Other Veils", as already described, and "Who Is The Last One?" which I focus on in the next section.

7.2.1 Comparison between Female Genital Mutilations and Aesthetic Vaginal Surgery

In this section, I focus on the performance "Who is the last one?" as another example of work that can enhance a notion of intercultural feminism by establishing a comparison between different situations that are detrimental to women. As for the issue of the Islamic veil in "Chador and Other Veils", in this case the issue of FGM is also not analysed in its own right but is instead inserted into a broader context of discrimination against, and oppression of, women. The performance is part of a project opposing FGM and aimed at promoting awareness among the migrant population of the law, approved in Italy in 2006, forbidding FGM. Interestingly, however, the performance inserts this issue into a broader framework and aims at promoting a general reflection on societal norms that women have to conform to in different cultures in order to be accepted and respected. More specifically, it establishes a comparison between FGM and aesthetic vaginal surgery. The performance represents a discussion between three women: two from Africa, (Idia from Nigeria and Asha from Somalia) and one Italian-born woman (Milly) who are in a doctor's waiting room. The women's discussion focuses initially on women's aesthetic surgery as Milly talks about her desire to modify some parts of her body because she doesn't like the way she looks. She then starts to read a catalogue with a list of possible surgeries, with prices, that includes vaginal surgery. At that point Idia interrupts Milly stating:

this is done on eight day old girls, or to women before marriage or before giving birth so that they are clean [...] they say, "to make them clean" ... cleaning girls ... cleaning women ... as if women were dirty.

[...] They say ... this practice has never hurt anyone ... please stop those who sew, those who infibulate girls ... [...]

They say: I do not know why it is done anymore ... it is a very old practice ...

They say we grew up like this ... so why should we change?

They say: why do you talk about our traditions and want to take them away? Women are cut to become more beautiful in other places ...

To me it is the same ... The body is built by someone else ... shaped, altered, mutilated, closed [...] (Bordin, 2008: 12, author's translation)

With these words Idia, while questioning the reasons to perpetuate FGM, also underlines the similarities between these practices and vaginal aesthetic surgery ("women are cut to become more beautiful"). She underlines how in both cases "the body is built by someone else". Idia also reminds us that FGM was also practised in Europe until the middle of the twentieth century to "cure" girls. She states:

If you read medical journals you will be amazed ... The "Great Doctors" have spent a lot of energy to control, close, stifle the bodies of those poor girls ... who sometimes simply masturbated ... which was considered a mental disorder [...] (Bordin, 2008: 15, author's translation)

By reminding the public of these occurrences, which are generally not well known, Idia aims to demonstrate how FGM, which is considered to be mainly an African practice, was also practised on European girls, supposedly for medical reasons. By describing this practice as aimed at "controlling, closing, stifling" the bodies of the girls subjected to it, she indicates that the rationale for practising it was similar to the one for which it is carried out in Africa. As FGM is often depicted as "barbaric" in western literature, with this account Idia appears to reverse this depiction by locating the barbaric activity within Europe, ironically being propagated by those who are called 'Great Doctors'. She then lists the efforts by African women to eradicate this practice and the legislative measures that have been adopted. She underlines how, in Africa, there are many women that have spoken out against men, and indeed everyone who said that FGM was a practice that cannot be changed.

In the section of the performance entitled "The Price To Pay", the narrative about FGM, and the supposed reasons why it should be practised, are alternated with the description of the desire to stop the ageing of the body and the impossibility to accept its modification. On the one hand Idia states:

I will pay what is needed ... clean ... clean ... clean ... I will pay what is needed ... my daughter will be clean ... I'm a good mother and she will be a good wife and a good mother ... she will not feel the desire for other men except her husband and she will be close to her children ... good wife, good mother ... (Bordin, 2008: 13, author's translation)

On the other hand, Milly states:

I'm afraid of me in the future ... what I will become. [...] When I was a girl I dreamed of dying young ... I went to the cemetery to look at the photograph of a girl who died at the age of 16; she was dark and beautiful, with a low-cut dress, and everyone will always remember her like this ... There is no dignity in any of this, I would say it is indecent ... no! no! ... I know that sooner or later I'll have to give up ... but for the moment let me fight against time ... I will pay what is needed [...] (Bordin, 2008: 14, author's translation)

Through this narrative the performance underlines that, even if it is a different price, women always have a price to pay to conform to social norms about womanhood and to be accepted in their society. Idia underlines how in order to be a good mother, according to the societal norms of her group, she has to subject her daughter to FGM so that “she will not feel the desire for other men except her husband”. Milly instead, is obsessed by the idea of ageing to the point that she envies a girl who died at the age of 16 when she was still young and beautiful. In this case, the protagonist shows herself to be deeply influenced by the expectations of western societies, which put great emphasis on women’s physical appearance, while stigmatising the signs of ageing. In both cases, women are ready to pay a material as well as a symbolic price in order to conform to the differing and yet similar norms imposed by their society.

The protagonists also talk about the value placed upon virginity in different contexts. Milly is astonished by Idia’s story that FGM was and is practised in order to preserve virginity. However she finds similarities with her father’s values. She states:

Ah virginity ... if my dear departed father could hear you ... maybe he would almost agree with these practices ... he was obsessed ... I remember it like it was yesterday ... he wanted the separation of men from women ... I had to get married in order to leave home and have my own life [...] (Bordin, 2008: 14, author's translation)

Milly and Aida share the view that many limitations, as well as abuses, have been imposed on women in order to preserve virginity. Asha does not agree with this view. For her, virginity is a virtue. She states:

It's a respect I have for myself ... I feel bad, uncomfortable ... in my country we do not talk about the body like this ... it is a taboo ... it is sacred [...] (Bordin, 2008: 15, author's translation)

All the women agree that it is not like this anymore for their daughters in Italy. However, they are also afraid for them because they see that they are surrounded by a lot of violence. Therefore the performance not only compares different forms of oppression of women in different societies but also aims at underlining the limitations of the current model of women's emancipation in western society. Finally, the body - and control of it - is described as the central concern for women irrespective of their country of origin. In line with much feminist literature, the question of who possesses the body and who can dispose of it is posed:

*Whose is this body? whose is it?
My body is a journal and whose is it?
Who writes on my body?
what do they write?
I write on my body,
What do I write?
Can I write about me?
Shall I hand it over
to other hands?
signs signs signs,
of the remote past,
of the present,
of a future without control [...] (Bordin, 2008: 13, author's translation)*

The performance ends with the protagonists asking in the strongest possible terms 'who will be the last woman to suffer violence and discrimination?'

The issues addressed in the performance had been long discussed within *Almateatro* as well as in the larger association *Almaterra*. In particular, the debate centred around what counts as practices detrimental to women, the possibility of having some form of global consensus around those issues and on the risks of slipping into a position of cultural relativism. In relation to such questions, Anna explains:

We had a discussion group among the women ... where we also discussed genital mutilation and there were some women, the feminists from '68 in fact, saying: "Oh no you mutilated, you have to stop with this practice". So in that case there was a form of imposition without asking for the reasons for the practice. I mean it is not something that can be excused, but we need to understand the reasons because if you do not go to the roots ... And I said "yes yes ... but in the meantime why do we have to call them mutilations?" ... because for Somali women it was offensive to hear that ... "I am mutilated". Mutilation is a term that has been given by others because these practices have specific names ... So I said, we western women are also psychologically maimed, ... and I raised the example of eating disorders, the perennial non-acceptance of one's body because it has to meet the image of Barbie ... and so on [...] (Anna, IBW)

In this account Anna describes a situation of conflict between some Italian-born women, who she defines as the “feminists from ‘68”, who simply ask for the end of FGM and another group of women, including her, who argue that this practice should not be justified but it needs to be understood. In this context, Anna adds that attention should also be paid to the language and she makes the example that Somali women are offended to be called “mutilated”. Subsequently, in the interview, she defines the practice as “female genital alterations”. The issue of the terminology defining these practices is a longstanding problem. However, it would be wrong to state that the definition “female genital mutilation” is not used by women who come from countries where this practice exists as this terminology is used in many campaigns led by African organisations. For example the Inter-African Committee on Traditional Practices uses the term “female genital mutilation” according to the definition given by the World Health Organisation.

Anna then introduces a comparison between female genital mutilation and the fact that western women are “psychologically maimed” due to their obsession with their physical appearance. She adds that this is proven by the prevalence of eating disorders, particularly among young women. She then goes on to explain how this comparison is made explicit in the performance “Who Is The Last One?” where:

The violence on the body of women, who suffer genital alterations compares to the suffering and violence that western women seem to suffer after voluntarily surgery ... “ah, but you can choose the surgery” ... “yes, of course you can choose the surgery, however, the fact is that a woman always feels inadequate ... so find a woman who does not say something like, “ah I would like to be like that” [...] yesterday I discovered that, in Italy, the leading cause of death among girls of between 12 and 25 is from eating disorders ... so that tells you everything. (Anna, IBW)

Anna criticises the idea that aesthetic surgery is the result of a free choice on the basis of the fact that almost all women feel inadequate about their physical appearance. Her implicit conclusion is that western culture leads to women not accepting their body as it has to conform to impossible standards. Similarly with regard to the comparison between FGM and aesthetic surgery, Karen said “we have physical mutilations and you have psychological mutilations” and she added:

Why do we have infibulation? It is because there is a culture that says a woman should not have sex before marriage. It is something to do with men, a woman must be beautiful; it is always something to do with men, anyway [...] everything that you do is related to giving pleasure to men or pleasing the world or earning money from women. (Karen, MW)

As with the comparison between women models and women wearing the *burqa*, Karen remarks that social norms concerning women's bodies, even if they take different forms, all have as a common factor that they derive from men's expectations or have the aim of "earning money from women". Similarly, in relation to some workshops carried out in schools on this issue entitled "the imaginary of the image", Karen states:

We reflect on these issues with the students starting from the body as a theatre, using the body and then we finish with a section about beauty. We say we suffer, but our suffering is linked to a culture, while the suffering of the women who wear the veil is linked to religion. Women who die from anorexia or bulimia that is connected to some aspects of culture or the western ideal of physical beauty. We examine all this and we find that women are not free wherever they are in the world, they are not free and they are used. (Karen, MW)

Once again Karen underlines how "women are not free" in different parts of the world and she highlights how all the different discriminatory practices derive from culture. In this way she refuses the idea that the notion of cultural practices should only be used with reference to non-Western practices. In this she endorses the point made by Phillips (2007: 63-64) when she notes with concern that the language of culture and cultural tradition is currently used almost only with reference to minority non-Western populations.

On the contrary, taking an opposing position to Anna and Karen, Ada criticises the idea of comparing FGM and aesthetic surgery as she states:

And then there was another thing that lasted for a while, mutual tolerance. "Oh well ... they get infibulated, we reshape our breasts". [...] Intolerable, because if you reshape your breasts, a law is now being passed that you have to be an adult, a stupid one, but an adult. Hopefully they are fully informed about their decision. A child, on the other hand, is not able to refuse." (Ada, IBW)

According to Ada the comparison between different practices that are detrimental to women is not helpful in understanding each other's forms of discrimination, but is just regarded as "mutual tolerance". Ada defines such comparison as "intolerable", and emphasises the voluntary nature of aesthetic surgery as this is a choice made by adults, albeit stupid ones, whereas FGM is practised on children. In the next section, I draw some concluding remarks on the value of cross-cultural comparisons on practices detrimental to women in relation to the building of forms of intercultural feminism.

7.2.2 Avoiding Feminist Fundamentalism and Cultural Relativism

In the previous section, I described how the work of *Almateatro* aims to compare different cultural practices that are detrimental to women such as FGM and aesthetic surgery. However, such a comparison engendered a debate within the organisation in which different points of view were espoused. This debate leads us to question the value of cross-cultural comparisons about practices detrimental to women as a facilitating factor to create forms of intercultural feminism. Using Anthias' comparison, we can conclude that such a process goes in the direction of avoiding the "Scylla of feminist fundamentalism", but we also need to ask ourselves if it also avoids the "Charybdis of cultural relativism" (Anthias, 2002).

Some feminist post-colonial authors advocate precisely for the need to set a relative value on the different kinds of oppression that women face in different cultures. For instance, as indicated in Chapter 3, bell hooks (2000) and Mendoza (2002) refer to the need to relate discriminatory practices that are present in non-Western countries with forms of oppression that are prevalent in the West. hooks (2000: 46-47) explicitly acknowledges the need to analyse how practices that involve women's bodies are globally linked. In particular, she refers to linking FGM to life-threatening eating disorders or aesthetic surgery which derive from the imposition of cultural norms about thinness. Mendoza (2002) focuses on the issue of "who sets the agenda" in international forums and underlines that it would be interesting to see if women from the South could raise issues concerning women from the North - such as anorexia or sexual objectification of women in the media - in the same way as women from the North talk about FGM or the Islamic veil.

Feminist post-colonial authors have often highlighted the necessity of establishing similar comparisons in order to overcome the image of Third World women as necessarily less emancipated than western women, as well as to identify a number of practices detrimental to women that are prevalent in the West but which are normally not considered to be so, but simply as the result of free choice. For instance, Mohanty (1984) criticises the representation of the 'third world woman' as a homogenous and monolithic subject and the assumption of the West as primary point of reference. Sara Ahmed (2000) also criticises any linear representation of a progress from a state of subordination to one of emancipation by western women that Third World women would be called to imitate.

Therefore those comparisons can be regarded as useful when trying to avoid a position of “feminist fundamentalism” (Anthias, 2002), as well as feminist imperialism. The next question is whether those types of comparisons, however, may promote forms of cultural relativism with the result, as addressed in Chapter 3, of again giving precedence to a reified notion of culture over women’s rights. This risk could be associated with putting practices which have some important degrees of difference on the same level, such as a practice chosen by an adult woman and one imposed on children. However, the performance “Who Is The Last One?” does not aim to convey the message that both sets of practices should be tolerated, but quite the opposite: that none should. The performance also refers to the efforts undertaken by women in Africa in order to eradicate FGM as well as to the international legislative framework prohibiting those practices. The same cannot be said about aesthetic vaginal surgery, as very few steps have been taken in order to legislate on this matter.

I argue that in relation to a project founded on intercultural feminism, the most important value of a cross-cultural comparison between different practices detrimental to women, such as that operated by *Almateatro*, is to contribute to stripping away the mask of ‘free will’ that hides detrimental cultural practices towards women in western countries. Another important contribution is that of not reproducing racist and imperialist views when addressing cultural practices such as FGM (hooks, 2000). Such a preoccupation is linked with the different relevance that the concept of culture plays in the description of the lives of women in the North and the South of the world and notions of modernity *versus* tradition. As explained by Phillips, there is a tendency to overestimate the importance that culture plays for minority groups while underestimating it for the majority, with the consequence that: “This feeds, in worrying and unintended ways, into an opposition between traditional and modern” (Phillips, 2007: 64). This is another reason why a comparison between supposedly modern practices, such as aesthetic surgery, and traditional ones, such as FGM, proves useful in bringing about the discussion of such a distinction in relation to women’s positions. In relation to this, Michela Fusaschi (2011) states that two very different images of women and of femininity are constructed. In the case of “artisanal” female modifications, we believe that women are victims of culture, whereas in the case of “technological” modifications, we believe that women are the protagonist of culture. All those concerns are very well summarised by Honig when she underlines the importance of the fact that:

[...] Western feminists [...] hold their own practices up to the same critical scrutiny they apply to Others, to hear plural voices of women everywhere and to learn from them, while also refusing to prejudge the merits of practices that are unfamiliar or threatening to those of us raised in bourgeois liberal societies. (Honig, 1999: 40)

She then concludes that:

For the sake of a future solidarity of women as feminists, the question of what constitutes gender (in)equality must be kept disturbingly open to perpetual interrogation. (Honig, 1999: 40)

Such admonition is to be considered as a guiding principle when aiming to articulate a project of intercultural feminism founded on a notion of reflexive solidarity.

In conclusion, it can be argued that operations like the one carried out by *Almateatro* based on cross-cultural comparison of practices detrimental to women, are certainly useful in order to promote the abandonment of an attitude based on feminist fundamentalism. At the same time it can be argued that if they aim not only at analysing but also at overcoming those practices, they can avoid the risk of promoting forms of cultural relativism that tend to justify violence against women in the name of culture and tradition.

7.3 Concluding Remarks

In this chapter, I have analysed how issues of identity, difference and otherness are dealt with in the public/political arenas relating to a number of cultural practices, including the Islamic veil and FGM, in the contexts of intercultural feminist practices. I have illustrated how the latter have proved to be, in the experience of some associations, an important instrument in deconstructing hegemonic discourses on cultural difference that see migrant women as necessarily less emancipated than Italian-born ones. This process has been carried out in particular through cross-cultural comparisons that put cultural practices that are prevalent in non-Western countries, such as FGM, in a comparative framework with those that are common in western countries, such as vaginal aesthetic surgery. This does not equate to saying that in intercultural settings, cultural difference is unproblematic, as I have shown in relation to the meaning attributed by young Italian-born women to the issue of the Islamic veil. The point that I would like to stress here is that an intercultural work, based on cross-cultural comparisons on practices detrimental to women, lends itself very well to the potential of deconstructing hegemonic discourses around the idea that western women are necessarily more emancipated than those coming from non-Western

countries. I have argued that this process has proved very useful in order to contrast forms of “feminist fundamentalism” and can avoid the risk of falling into a position of cultural relativism, if it not only addresses different cultural practices involving women, but also aims at combating them. However, when confronted with the necessity of taking a position on policies, intercultural practices founded on cross-cultural comparisons might prove less effective. For instance, as regards the issue of the Islamic veil, only in one specific case was an association, *Trama di terre*, confronted with the need to express an opinion on a policy on this issue. In this case intercultural dialogue proved helpful in order to arrive at a common position. In Chapter 9, I will return to this question and to how some associations have developed the agenda of intercultural work by dealing with the issue of specific forms of cultural difference at a policy level.

Chapter 8

Challenges to Power Relations and Organisational Practices in Intercultural Associations

In this chapter, I address the main barriers to the achievement of equal relationships and mutual exchange that emerge in the context of organisational practices within the selected associations. I first focus on structural inequalities between Italian-born and migrant women and how those intertwine with differences of treatment within the associations that can be argued are due to forms of prejudice and racism. In the second section, the issue of power-sharing and decision-making mechanisms within the associations is addressed as a crucial element in establishing equal relationships. In this framework, I also analyse to what extent policies of “positive discrimination” addressed to migrant women may prove helpful or just tokenistic in the achievement of a real power-sharing with Italian-born women. I then analyse the specific experience of *Almaterra*, as within this association the issue of power sharing intertwines with the topic of the different strategies for women’s empowerment put forward by Italian-born and migrant women. In the third section, I investigate how the issue of racism is addressed by the associations and how this impacts on the potential for achieving forms of feminist solidarity within intercultural settings. More specifically, I examine the different forms of racism that emerge from the interviews including mechanisms of patronising and what has been named “reverse discrimination” and I investigate to what extent they represent a barrier to the achievement of forms of feminist solidarity. I also address the issue of prejudices among migrant women asking if those can be counted as racism or not. In the fourth section, I focus on the topic of whiteness as a position of privilege and as an unacknowledged ethnicity by analysing to what extent belonging to intercultural settings facilitate a reflection by Italian-born women on their positionality and on white privilege. In particular, I investigate to what extent Italian-born women have been able to go through a process, named by Gilroy, as moving from guilt to recognition to reparation.

8.1 Asymmetries Between Migrant and Italian-Born Women

As I have detailed in Chapter 5, the central concept of all the associations' mission statements is the concept of bringing migrant and Italian-born women together with the aim of giving value to differences while working together in the pursuit of women's rights. In this section, I compare these official discourses with the challenges to the possibility of working together on an equal footing as emerges from the interviews. In the previous chapter, I focused on issues of identity and questions of different forms of solidarity among women who occupy different positions. In this chapter, I focus on the circumstances when specific kinds of differences are experienced as barriers to the enactment of a notion of feminist reflexive solidarity within intercultural settings. In various cases women interviewed, while acknowledging that working on an equal footing is the aim to pursue, state that there are a number of obstacles to the achievement of this objective. Relationships among Italian-born and migrant women are seen to be problematic because there are a number of structural differences in women's positionalities that intertwine with differences of treatment within the associations - which in turn can be argued are due to forms of prejudice or racism.

In chapter 1, I presented the most relevant statistical data profiling the position of migrant women in Italy according to the statistical data available and to the relevant literature. On the basis of that information, in this section I focus on the most relevant structural differences between Italian-born and migrant women identified from the interviews. They relate to: legal status (not having Italian citizenship and the rights that are attached to this); lack of knowledge of the language and of the country, especially in the early years spent in Italy; and the extreme difficulty in having one's own educational/professional attainments recognised. As a consequence of this last point, another major difference relates to the low number of job opportunities in skilled labour and the predominant insertion of migrant women into the care and domestic sector, to which I return in the next chapter. As I have acknowledged in Chapter 1, not having Italian citizenship renders migrant women more vulnerable in relation to the enjoyment of a number of rights. In particular, they are often under pressure because their residence permit is linked to having a job. This renders them particularly vulnerable to situations of exploitation in the job market. Linda states:

It is a disadvantaged condition, because to me the immigration law itself is discriminatory. Let's start from here. Why is it that in all the rich countries a certain group of people have fewer rights and more duties? [...] The law is discriminatory, not to say racist, because they [migrant women] are always under a blackmail to remain without a job. Being unemployed

means ending the residence permit, running out of that money that allows your children to study and to eat properly. (Linda, MW)

This is why Linda proposed to the local authorities, through her association, measures of positive discrimination for migrant women. In particular, she proposed migrant women to be given the opportunity to live in apartments on a temporary basis in circumstances when they lose their job while waiting to find another occupation. This is especially relevant for women employed as live-in domestic workers when they lose their job, for example because the older person, who they are assisting, dies. Linda also reports situations of real exploitation that women accept under the pressure of the residence permit. In particular she recounts the situation of a woman who was treated like a slave by the family employing her but kept the job as she needed the money to support her daughter. This testimony highlights how migrant women are often forced to accept exploitative work conditions in order to support their family.

Still in the field of work, another asymmetry between Italian-born and migrant women relates to the issue of pensions. While Italian-born women who have a stable job can expect to have a pension in their old age, this is not normally the case for migrant women. The latter often do not have sufficient number of years of contribution in order to have a pension, either because they have not worked in Italy for many years or because they have worked without a regular contract. In relation to this Patricia states:

If there wasn't a significant amount of money coming from foreign workers, it would have not been possible to have part of the money required for pensions for Italians, because for us it is difficult, almost impossible that we will get a pension. (Patricia, MW)

She then adds that, in this situation, she might have to go back to her country of origin in old age, even if she would not like to do that because she is not one of those migrants who dream of returning to her homeland. It would be inaccurate, however, to position Italian-born and migrant women in two opposite groups in relation to working conditions as other dimensions also prove important such as class and age. In particular, young Italian-born women often share with migrant women, a situation of unemployment or precarious employment which also makes it difficult for them to access a pension in their old age. As a consequence, it often emerges within the associations that young Italian-born women feel closer to migrant women than to older Italian-born women in relation to their job situation.

Differences in job position also have a consequence on the availability that women have to work as volunteers in the associations. Because older Italian-born women normally have a paid and permanent employment, it makes it possible for them to work as volunteers in the associations. Conversely, migrant women often have more limited time available because they have unstable jobs which often imply irregular work-shifts (in particular for those employed as domestic and care workers) or in order to work in the association, they need to be paid. For instance Bianca, a migrant woman, states:

The other difficulty is that many Italian women asked foreign women, for example, for voluntary work, ... a lot of time to give, when the lives of foreign women at that time were something different [...] If you're already retired, the time that you can give is different than if you are a woman rearing children. (Bianca, MW)

Also Anna, an Italian-born woman, acknowledges this difficulty, when she states:

In the end both cultural models of knowledge and economic autonomy were imposed ... as there were those who could do volunteer work, while there were those who could not because they had to maintain the family and this created friction. (Anna, IBW)

The unequal situation between Italian-born and migrant women in relation to job situation and to citizenship rights, also leads in a number of cases, to the assigning of a different role within the association. As already stated, Italian-born women often have a paid job outside the association and are in a position to consider the value of working as volunteers in the association. On the contrary, migrant women often see the association as a source of paid work and sometimes complain about its precarious nature. For instance, Patricia states that over the last period, due both to internal and external difficulties, including the economic recession, associations are no longer able to provide job opportunities and consequently they also have reduced their social role. Another asymmetry that is present among migrant and Italian-born women relates to the knowledge of the territory and lack of networks. For example Bianca states:

The other problem is that migrant women never had a network or ... there wasn't anyone with whom we went to high school or to college together [...] we were alone [...] obviously this is not the fault of the association, however, it is a handicap that foreign women have to face, so there are real difficulties, that either you acknowledge and try to find a solution, or we go on without looking at things very much and, in the end, this creates problems. (Bianca, MW)

Bianca underlines that inequalities between Italian-born and migrant women do not only relate to the material sphere of work, but also to the sphere of social networks. This proves particularly

relevant in the Italian context where personal relationships are very important in accessing the job market. Bianca remarks that even if this situation is not the fault of the association, it should be taken into consideration and specifically addressed, while in practice this is not often the case.

In conclusion, it emerges that structural asymmetries between Italian-born and migrant women are particularly relevant and they concern mainly citizenship status, the lack of recognition of educational and professional attainments, the access to job opportunities and the knowledge of the country and people. Addressing those asymmetries in the work of the associations is therefore a crucial element that I analyse in the next sections.

8.2 “Knowledge Is Power”: Asymmetries in the Associations’ Management

8.2.1 Lack of Recognition of the Skills of Migrant Women

Structural differences described in the previous section intertwine with differences in treatment that can be argued are the result of forms of racism and prejudice. In this section, I focus in particular on how women’s asymmetries are reflected in power-sharing and decision-making mechanisms. Notwithstanding the fact that one of the associations’ primary aims is avoiding any approach that sees migrant women as necessarily needy, deprived and incompetent, the risk that these attitudes surface in the associations’ work is still present. This is evident above all in power-sharing and decision-making mechanisms. In particular, a number of migrant women state that their skills are not acknowledged and that they are not considered competent enough to occupy the most relevant roles in the association. Conversely, in other cases Italian-born women state that migrant women delegate too much work to them on the basis that they have competencies and knowledge that migrant women do not possess.

On the first point, Patricia comments that, as migrant women, they were willing to accept that, in the early years, following their arrival they were lacking the linguistic competencies and specific knowledge about the country required for leadership roles within the association. However, this was not the case after they had been settled in Italy for many years. She states:

The main issue in the first number of years is the language, and also how you manage the work; you cannot improvise, it is very difficult. For the language you need about 5-10 years. Luckily the association offered Italian language courses. After having spent years studying,

cooperating with the association, following projects, bringing in new ideas, then you do not understand why a different recognition is not taking place. (Patricia, MW)

In this account, Patricia describes a situation in which initial objective differences regarding the knowledge of the language and of the country become hierarchical once the material differences are overcome. She then continues:

We, the girls, became mothers, wives, and women in their fifties. Something had to be changed; they could not always treat us as if we had just arrived. “We do it because we have the knowledge”, of course that knowledge is power, obviously with our trajectory we will never get there. (Patricia, MW)

Patricia is aware that “knowledge is power” but she reiterates that, even on the basis of this principle, they reject being treated in the same way after having spent a number of years in Italy, precisely because at that stage they had acquired the necessary knowledge to take a leading role in their association. Patricia then links this attitude by some Italian-born women within the association to the attitude of Italian feminism, emphasising the lack of an intergenerational handover within the feminist movement in Italy. I will return to this point later on in this chapter. Gloria, another migrant woman, states:

In general, immigrant women have complained that their skills were not recognised, they were always seen as being in a fragile situation. In fact, one of the claims when speaking about ‘native’ and migrant women was that it was hard to say “we do not talk about this division, we talk about women in general”. To speak of women in general means, in practice, to give the possibility to migrant women of being realised. There are a few problems with this. (Gloria, MW)

Both Patricia and Gloria argue that migrant women’s competencies are not recognised. As opposed to the testimonies presented in the previous chapter, Gloria states it is difficult for them to no longer categorise women as migrant or Italian-born, by simply referring to “women in general”. At the same time, she briefly gives a very insightful roadmap to this end, namely creating the conditions through which migrant women can be recognised. Such an affirmation implies that until such time as migrant women have opportunities equal to Italian-born women and are recognised on the basis of their competences, division between these two groups continues to be highly relevant. Gloria gives one example of these inequalities; namely the fact that, within the association, while those who work in contact with the public, in the mediation services, are migrant, those who work in administrative positions are all Italian-born. She explains:

Some of the migrant women who spent some time doing an internship in the office, however, are expected to be perfect. The problem is that women with skills have been very critical ... but always because there is this idea that the migrant woman is fragile ... you can see it here [in the association], outside it is even more evident. (Gloria, MW)

Here again it is underlined that, even within the associations, migrant women are seen as less competent and subordinate. Karen, a migrant woman, describes a situation characterised by patronising relations whereby migrant women feel treated like children. She attributes this to the fact that many intellectual foreign women decided to leave the association in these circumstances. She states:

There is a group ... old stories ... that believe that only they can manage the centre and we must follow. Many intellectual foreign women left [...] not really because of a conflict, but because we didn't like to be treated ... like children who never grow up, so we left [...] (Karen, MW)

Bianca, a migrant woman, reflects on the relationship between Italian-born and migrant women by stating:

The question is always who has the decision-making power within the association [...]. There have been moments when foreign women have proposed projects ... sometimes, but not always, it worked, and when it didn't, there have been some issues within projects with people who have felt used, there have been some difficult times in the relationship and the reason was always a bit like that. (Bianca, MW)

Bianca identifies the issue of "decision-making power" as the central point to address if the aim of equality is to be pursued. With this analysis Bianca goes to the core of the problem about asymmetries between Italian-born and migrant women.

Some migrant women however underline that it is also up to them to be recognised as equal by showing that they are strong and competent enough. For instance Dorothy states:

We are looking for equality but equality is not always that simple ... you get it with strength [...] It depends on the character of the people ... depends on the people, by the recognition of the one in front of you and the skills you have to achieve equality. (Dorothy, MW)

Similarly Gloria affirms:

I'm here for a long time and one of the fights that we have, even me as an immigrant, and other colleagues, was the empowerment of women ... I tell you on a personal level I didn't have problems ... because it must also start from ourselves, to feel up to the level [...] (Gloria, MW)

These accounts show how migrant women are aware that they have to counter a general perception that they occupy a subordinate position in society, and that they have to show that they are “up to the level”. This reveals how racialisation processes work, whereby personal attitudes and behaviours are not only evaluated at a personal level, but assume a general relevance for an ethnic group or the category to which the person is considered to belong, in this case the category of migrant women. It also shows how these processes may be reproduced in the contexts of association work, notwithstanding mission statements that refer to the value of anti-racism. From the point of view of the Italian-born women, Elisabetta states:

This is not a place where we “look after” people, migrant women are themselves equal protagonists with us ... even though, you know, you can never be on a truly equal footing because, for example with the refugees of today how can you be on an equal footing? You will never be, so you have to recognise that there is an asymmetrical situation. (Elisabetta, IBW)

She then says that migrant women are managing the association with the Italian-born women and she specifies:

[...] certainly not all of them, not those who have arrived here within the last month or a year; but the women who trained with us or with others to be mediators, who have a diploma or who graduated here in Italy would be. (Elisabetta, IBW)

Elisabetta first recalls the general philosophy of the association stating that “migrant women are equal protagonists” with Italian-born women. However, she then moves from a theoretical to a practical level and recognises that, with some migrant women, equality is impossible due to inherent asymmetries. She uses the example of a group of Somali refugee women who do not know the Italian language, some of whom are illiterate, to state that, in certain cases you can never be on an equal footing. In this case, issues of ‘race’ and ethnicity intersect with class and education. She then specifies that in certain circumstances, migrant women can share the management of the association with them. Such affirmation can reflect patronage as it puts Italian-born women in a central position where they have the power to decide who is “of a standard” to have leading roles in the association.

In contrast to the previous testimonies that see Italian-born women in a privileged position within the association, in some instances the latter state that migrant women tend to delegate too much to them, as they have competencies that migrant women do not possess. Some Italian-born women argue that this situation is unsustainable because they are all volunteers. Moreover, they

do not feel that their efforts are sufficiently recognised by migrant women. For instance, Francesca states:

Lately I've been a bit tired for two reasons: the first is that perhaps I didn't have that recognition that I would have liked from the members of the association, giving value to my hard work, because one needs to work to live, and this was and still is voluntary work. Seeing things through with professionalism, even on a voluntary basis, involves spending significant time and resources. Sometimes I felt ... that my efforts were not recognised, not out of malice or in order to blame anyone, but then again sometimes you don't realise how much work goes on behind the scenes. (Francesca, IBW)

Francesca states that her dedication to the work of the association is not given sufficient value by other women, meaning migrant women. Even if, elsewhere in the interview, she recognises their different positionalities and also her privileged situation in comparison with migrant women, she emphasises here the lack of recognition of the relevance of the work that she does on a voluntary basis, outside of her paid job. More straightforwardly, Flora identifies the fact of being Italian-born as a "limitation" in terms of workload within the association stating that migrant women delegate too much work to Italian-born women. She also adds:

[...] but they have benefitted here, they got trained, we did everything for them and then in the end ... it is not that they are not grateful, but in the end they take it for granted ... And then in the end, "what is left for us?" At this point the issue of the meetings was that we want to enrich ourselves through dialogue with them. I do not care, I am not interested, we are not interested in money or having God knows what, but there must be something human, at least, that we share [...] at times we thought we were the ones who had offered them a job, their employers, you know? That created a strange situation, where you run, run, run, but at some point you say, "but why are you doing this?" First it was to give them the opportunity ... but now ... it became very unidirectional at a certain point. (Flora, IBW)

In this account Flora questions the reasons for her participation in the association. In her description, the balance of the benefits of participating in the association is in favour of migrant women as, in her words, the Italian-born women provided them with training and also with a job. According to Flora this was their task initially, in order to provide migrant women with opportunities. The central concept is that the association is a place of empowerment for migrant women, granting opportunities that they would not have elsewhere. However, the question of the benefits for Italian-born women in participating in the association is posed. Flora emphasises that their interest is in an enriching intercultural dialogue. On this, as I have explained in Chapter 2, Lugones writes that western women should verify the reasons for their interest in working with women who were previously marginalised as "others". She sees as negative the idea that the

reasons for such an interest are found to be a desire to expand one's own knowledge or, even worse, to come from a sense of duty. In Flora's words, the desire to enrich oneself appears similar to that of expanding one's knowledge. Lugones (1983) judges this attitude to be negative because western women continue to take advantage of non-Western women, even if only symbolically. This attitude echoes the idea of 'appropriating difference' described by Ang (1995) and hooks (1992). As detailed in Chapter 2, these scholars provide examples of how western women have appropriated difference to their own advantage expressed by women of different 'races' or ethnicities. However, elsewhere in the interview Flora states that, for her, the greatest value in belonging to the association is friendship. This leads us to reflect on the fact that, in the associations' practices, contradictory attitudes are often present; for instance patronising attitudes sometimes go together with a desire to establish friendship.

In conclusion, my research shows that, where the lack of recognition of migrant women's skills by Italian-born women is prevalent and where Italian-born women show patronising attitudes, there is a significant barrier to the achievement of a situation of mutual recognition. At the same time, in some circumstances, Italian-born women state that they have a much larger workload within the association and question their reasons for participating in it. I continue to explore these questions in the next section focusing on power sharing and decision-making mechanisms.

8.2.2 Power Sharing and Decision-Making Mechanisms

As I explained in the previous section, the issue of power sharing emerges as a crucial element in the relationship between migrant and Italian-born women and is related to the internal organisation of the associations and their decision-making mechanisms. As I detailed in Chapter 5, some organisations adopted a policy, whether formally or informally, of what has been defined as "positive discrimination" or "affirmative action" that favours the placement of migrant women into leading roles, in particular as presidents of the associations. The underlying principle of "positive discrimination" or "affirmative action" is that, in society, we do not all start from a position of equality as a number of groups are disadvantaged for historical reasons, such as discrimination on the basis of 'race', ethnicity, sex, disability and sexuality. These policies are therefore designed to redress those inequalities by ensuring specific access to the members of disadvantaged groups; this is particularly the case in some fields, such as education and

employment in the public sector. These kinds of policies are also supported by treaty-monitoring bodies of the United Nations human rights system.⁴⁰

In this section, I analyse to what extent policies based on the principle of “positive discrimination” or “affirmative action” enacted by the associations really achieved their expected outcomes or, conversely, whether they proved to be mainly tokenistic. More specifically, I analyse what the migrant women interviewed thought about these policies in relation to their stated aim of alteration of the distribution of power within the associations. The evaluation of these policies differs depending on the specific history, role and size of each association. For instance a first migrant woman, states that from her personal point of view the fact that she has been able to be president of the association has been an important, unique experience even though it involved a lot of effort and she states that:

In any case the fact that we have managed projects and we have created things, and the fact that if it went ok, it was fine and if it didn't, they were there to protect us, in some way created a dynamic of challenge and interaction, and this served us well in our journey through life. (MW)

She emphasises the positivity for them, as migrant women, of being in these positions of power, and in knowing that, if something went wrong, the more experienced Italian-born women would protect them. In this case, the situation is not felt to be patronising but to be empowering, and the relationship with the more experienced Italian-born women is regarded as protective. However, in other parts of the interview, she also emphasises that there was a problem in the sharing of knowledge within the association as some of the Italian-born founding members were very reluctant to do this. A second migrant woman is even more critical. She states that the extent to which they, as migrant women, were allowed to hold relevant roles within the association was always decided by a group of Italian-born founding members. When she was elected as President,

⁴⁰ For instance the United Nations Human Rights Committee states that “the principle of equality sometimes requires States parties to take affirmative action in order to diminish or eliminate conditions which cause or help to perpetuate discrimination prohibited by the Covenant. For example, in a State where the general conditions of a certain part of the population prevent or impair their enjoyment of human rights, the State should take specific action to correct those conditions. Such action may involve granting for a time, to the part of the population concerned, certain preferential treatment in specific matters as compared with the rest of the population. However, as long as such action is needed to correct discrimination, in fact, it is a case of legitimate differentiation under the Covenant” (United Nations Committee on Human Rights, General Comment 18 on Non-discrimination, Paragraph 10).

she was flattered that so many women had voted for her. However, after a period of time, she realised that she couldn't really influence the core policies of the association. She states:

However, I realised that this position of "foreign woman president" was very tokenistic, as in the end you were not able to direct policy in the way that maybe you aimed to [...] (MW)

Yet she also recognises that, when some migrant women criticised the management of the association, other migrant women did not necessarily support them. She attributes this to fear of losing their positions within the association.

Some migrant women indicate that they could understand the position of Italian-born women who were afraid that migrant women would not be able to manage the complexities of handling projects, and so were concerned that everything would fall apart. However, their main criticism concerned the fact that the Italian-born founding members wanted full control of the association's management. For example a migrant woman comments, with reference to the composition of the Board:

Where is the problem? Sometimes they [some Italian-born founding members] were afraid that everything would fall apart because they had obvious, even justified, concerns. They could not choose all migrants because they were afraid that they wouldn't be able to cope. And when they did, it was always in a way that allowed them to control the situation. (MW)

However, Patricia also specifies that this problem was not only about a divide between Italian-born women on the one side, and migrant women on the other. It was a broader issue relating to power sharing within the association. For instance, she cites the example of some young Italian-born women who did not agree with the group of older Italian-born founding members' point of view but who were unable to oppose it, even though they themselves were on the Board. She states that, independently from the role of the Board, it was always a small group of Italian-born women that decided, while critical points of view were not really welcomed. She argued that this was also linked to the possibility of securing funds for the projects. However, she also states that, in some cases, there had been what has been defined as "reverse discrimination" in favour of migrant women.

Conversely Ada, an Italian-born woman, argues that the policy of "positive discrimination" enacted by the association was successful as it provided migrant women with the opportunity to acquire experience which they would not easily obtain in other circumstances and which they would then be able to use in other contexts. She states:

This place was supposed to be an incubator, aimed at promoting a process of empowerment that it is unlikely that migrant women could have found in other ways and in other places. This really happened because many women, especially those who have had leadership roles ... have all had interesting life trajectories. Some have set up their own associations, or found employment derived from the networks that they somehow had been able to establish [...] Also for migrants this is a place where you are able to interact with the institutions [...] many involve themselves in politics, becoming district councillors, I think specifically of one Somali woman. (Ada, IBW)

Ada describes the role of the association as that of an “incubator” where migrant women are given the opportunity to undertake leadership roles and also to form relationships with institutions. The association is not described as an aim in and of itself, but more as a place where women can access training in order to establish their own life trajectory. In saying this, Ada notes the central role of Italian-born women as trainers of migrant women, given that in the general Italian context it would be difficult for migrant women to find such opportunities elsewhere. The association’s role in relation to training is also acknowledged by some migrant women, even by some of those who have left the association. For instance Isabel states that:

I left the association and I did not know what would happen to me, but I found myself very strong, I found myself very capable and I found myself very well able to progress in my field.
(Isabel, MW)

Even though Isabel reports that she has left the association, she confirms its empowering role in her case. This is a point of key importance and reflects the mission statement of the association that refers to women’s self determination and the valorisation of the skills of migrant women. At the same time there is a tension between associations’ stated goals and the possibility of accomplishing them. It can be argued that such distance relates to both the inherent limitations of what an individual organisation can accomplish, considering the broader picture of structural inequalities, as well as possibly an incomplete awareness about how racialisation mechanisms may play out also within the association itself. A consequence of the difficulties arising from power sharing within the association is also reflected in the experiences of communication between migrant and Italian-born women. On this, Patricia refers to different modalities of communication, between migrant and Italian-born women that sometimes lead to conflicts which are then difficult to overcome. When referring to conflictive situations, Patricia implicitly raises the broader issue of “anger”. This point has been addressed by a number of post-colonial and black feminists. For instance Lorde states:

Any discussion among women about racism must include the recognition and the use of anger. This discussion must be direct and creative because it is crucial. We cannot allow our fear of anger to deflect us nor seduce us into settling for anything less than the hard work of excavating honesty [...] (Lorde, 1984: 128)

She then adds that:

[...] for Black women and white women to face each other's angers without denial or immobility or silence or guilt is in itself a heretical and generative idea. (Lorde, 1984: 129)

Whereas Lorde calls for the necessity of allowing anger to be expressed as this leads to creativity and honesty, in the situation described by Patricia, anger and conflict emerge as an obstacle to the relationship. Therefore Patricia concludes that it might be counterproductive for migrant women to express anger as they risk being described as conflictive people who are unable to engage in dialogue.

Policies founded on the principle of "positive discrimination" are evaluated differently in other circumstances when the post of president of the association assigned to migrant women is not described as a tokenistic policy. On the contrary, it emerges as corresponding to real power to influence the association's policy.

In conclusion, the issue of power sharing within the associations affirms the pursuit of equal recognition for members as fundamental. To achieve this aim, most associations have enacted policies of "positive discrimination" in favour of migrant women. However, these policies have not always been recognised as leading to a real alteration of the power structure, as in some instances they have been regarded as tokenistic due to the fact that the core policies of the association continue to be shaped by Italian-born women. In other cases, the migrant women have a real say in devising the policies of the association, and this appears to contribute to the realisation of more equal relationships among Italian-born and migrant women.

8.2.3 Feminist Ethnocentrism?

In this section, I focus on the specific experience of *Almaterra* as, within this association, the issue of power-sharing between Italian-born and migrant women intertwines with the question of different visions of feminism and strategies to promote women's positions put forward by the two groups. *Almaterra*, being the largest association and that one that was first set up, has also engendered a larger reflection on feminism and different trajectories of women's empowerment.

Migrant women have argued in a number of cases that Italian-born women founders of the association have proposed their specific model of feminism without being able to broaden the scope of their vision, based on encounters with other strategies of women's empowerment proposed by migrant women. They have acted on the basis of their conviction that their own feminist experience is valid for all women, and therefore they have positioned themselves as mentors and tutors of migrant women. This point is also addressed in the report of an action research project⁴¹ carried out in order to better identify and possibly overcome a number of difficulties encountered by the association. The text reads:

The 'natives' talk of historical figures who have made feminist and women's history in Italy. They refer to them as if their path was the only one and was applicable to all. No one wants to undermine the importance of the feminist process, but it is one that occurred in particular historical, geographical and political circumstances in this country, and immigrant women cannot be asked to adhere to it completely. We cannot give as a present or lend our own history to others, no matter how much we like it. (*Almaterra*, 1999: 123, *author's translation*)

Migrant women point out the importance of contextualising one's own specific life direction when they state that the western feminist experience occurred in specific historical, geographical and political circumstances.

However, some Italian-born women also acknowledge this difference in the consideration given to feminist visions. For instance Anna states:

In *Almaterra* there was definitely an encounter/clash between different feminisms where there was an attempt to make the 1968 model prevail. The women who wanted to impose that model have attempted to impose one form of feminism that, after all, is just one amongst many ... in any case there has been an attempt to impose a form of ethnocentrism of feminism, and in fact this has created a lot of friction. (Anna, IBW)

Anna defines the attempt of a group of Italian-born women to impose their model of feminism as the only one as a form of "ethnocentrism of feminism." In saying this, she suggests that this kind of feminism was based only on western experiences and did not take into account the experiences of women from different countries. On this point Merrill, who conducted research on *Almaterra*, also argues that:

⁴¹ The action-research was carried out in the framework of the project *L'impresa di essere donna* ("The enterprise of being women") by the non-governmental organisation COSPE. The action-research was supervised by COSPE researchers but it included the active participation of various women belonging to *Almaterra* according to a double modality: the internal circle and the external circle. The first was composed of a limited number of members of the association who actually carried out the research, while the second was composed of a larger number of members and had the aim of validating the results of the internal circle.

Turin feminists have self-consciously sought to help empower migrant women in Europe, but coming out from a history in which class power and patriarchy were the object of struggle, they do not always meet on the same ideological terrain as the newcomer and especially younger immigrant women. (Merrill, 2006: 180)

At the same time Isabel, a migrant woman, situates this issue in the wider picture by stating:

But it is not a problem with *Almaterra*, it is a problem with the old form of feminism, sometimes I think it is also a fear to cover one's own efforts. We make our own homes and families out of places and spaces, and to allow someone else to come and make our home a piece of their home is certainly difficult. So there has been a little bit of difficulty in recent years from this point of view, politically, economically and as regards the transfer of knowledge between different generations of women. (Isabel, MW)

Isabel emphasises how the transfer of knowledge that should have occurred within the association stopped at a certain point. She considers this a general problem with Italian feminism, which, she argues, has not been able to realise this intergenerational transfer of knowledge. This point is confirmed by the literature. A number of studies have shown how, in Italy, after the feminist movements of the '70s, younger generations generally did not consider themselves to be feminist. However a form of so-called "diffused feminism" existed; this involved the sharing of a number of beliefs about women's rights, without specifically naming this feminism (Cacace, 2004). Isabel also emphasises the great emotional investment made by the women who set up the association, which they then came to regard as a house and a family. She considers this perception as a possible reason for the difficulty in realising the transfer of knowledge, as it may have been difficult to allow other women enter "one's own house".

This initial investment by the Italian-born founders of the association is also recognised by another migrant woman, Maria Viarengo who also contributed to the founding of the association. In a published article, she states:

If some Italian women had not acted as guarantor, *Alma Mater* would have not been set up, because no bank or institution would have trusted foreign women. Even today, for me the fact that Marité and the others have done this is something that moves me, and I wish that the younger generations knew about it. However they tend not to talk about it, out of a form of modesty, which is understandable. But I think that what they did has great value. They took a personal gamble, even a risk, in almost an entrepreneurial style, in the sense that they took their own risks. And then it was a challenge by women for women, and this continues to move me. I do not know if I would have done it, I do not know [...] (Bertoncin et al., 2007, *author's translation*)

Maria Viarengo emphasises the generosity of the Italian-born founders of the association that permitted the creation of the organisation, and highlights that the underlining mission was “a challenge by women for women”.

The main points of contention between the feminist vision of the Italian-born founding members of *Almaterra* on the one hand, and migrant women (and, in certain cases, also younger Italian-born women) on the other, concern the issues of other grounds for discrimination beyond gender, and the role of men and family. On the first issue the report states:

Does the gender struggle come first, together with or after the fight against racism? Immigrant women, before equal opportunities with men, have to claim an equal opportunity with society, a kind of equality that does not even touch the ‘natives’. (*Almaterra*, 1999: 122, *author’s translation*)

This question appears to revisit the long-standing debate about which form of discrimination is primary, racism or sexism, as I have detailed in Chapter 2. In this case, the answer clearly favours racism as the primary form of discrimination that migrant women have to face. Significantly, the report comments that this kind of discrimination doesn’t involve ‘natives’ at all. As argued by Merrill:

[...] many postcolonial migrant women claim that their problems do not necessarily involve male hegemony, but rather European structures of hegemony that stereotype people from developing countries, exploit their labour power and resources, and relegate them (along with their counterparts) to marginal forms of employment and social status. (Merrill, 2006: 180)

Concerning the second point about the relationship with men and the role of the family, the idea of feminism as a theory against men emerged in various interviews and was among the reasons that led some migrant women not to subscribe to it, as I already pointed out in Chapter 5. For instance, Karen states:

Women of 60 and older are too strict about feminism, so we cannot be the same; and no, of course they have not taken a piece of our culture and have failed to transmit [theirs] to us, because starting from the idea “Men cannot enter here [in the association]”, they have not been able to transmit us their feminist theories. A man is my husband, my brother, my friend ... I have another costume, it scares me ... in fact at the beginning it scared me at *Alma Mater* that when a man came in, all [the women] got nervous, running here and there ... “A man has come!” “And so if a man entered what is the problem?” And I did not understand at first, then I got to know, to see, and I disagree. [...] So how do you fight for your rights if you close yourself in with four walls? By opening up you can explain why, and beat prejudices, but it’s no use to close yourself in with four walls. (Karen, MW)

From this account it emerges that the different ways of relating to men are a source of major division, as Karen confirms later on in the interview. Even if she now understands what she couldn't initially, she still disagrees with the idea of having separate spaces where men cannot enter. For her, the idea of separatism equates to "close yourself in with four walls" and prevents the possibility of "fighting for your rights" and "beating prejudices". Karen is convinced that, in order to have their rights respected, women have to confront men directly and she does not see the value of having spaces that are clearly separate. Also Bianca criticises the kind of feminism expressed by some Italian-born women within the association as being too rigid:

I am a very open person, and certain discourses seemed very rigid to me, for a long time I thought maybe it was a cultural issue, this rigidity, as Latin-American people are much more flexible [...] So I could not understand some rigidities, like this feminism a bit old-fashioned shown by some people that I do not agree with, absolutely not ... I love men ... (Bianca, MW)

By describing Italian feminism as "old-fashioned" Bianca appears to reverse the idea that western countries represent modernity, while the rest of the world is characterised by tradition. She then compares "this rigidity" to Latin American society which is "much more flexible", and therefore, one could say, modern.

Interestingly the issue of the relationship with men is described in a rather different way by the Italian-born women founding members of the association. For instance Elisabetta states:

Then with respect to the relationship with men, we agreed among ourselves that this should have been a place for women. Not all migrant women accepted this; in fact they are more in favour of the family, the mother, the Mother's Day, the many children that are a part of them. Coming from the Women's House, where a man could not enter even to fix a pipe, we had to give up, but without a lot of sacrifices. (Elisabetta, IBW)

She then explains that while women manage the association in all its aspects, if they organise an event both women and men can attend. According to Elisabetta then, the group of Italian-born founders of the association had already compromised on their convictions. At the same time she emphasises that migrant women have agreed with them, at least to some extent. She gives the example of the fact that when a woman approaches the judicial counselling service accompanied by a man, the man is asked to stay outside; this is so that the woman can speak freely. From this she concludes that:

The mediators have internalised this, this is clear for them, they have understood the importance of women's freedom, that they have to be alone when they are listened to. So they are practising what we have always preached. (Elisabetta, IBW)

By using the words “they are practising what we have always preached” Elisabetta places herself in the position of the person with the experience. It is also interesting to note that in a sort of reciprocal gaze, Elisabetta and Karen make fun of each other’s position as regards the different attitudes towards men. Karen jokes about the fact that the Italian-born feminists are so worried when a man enters the association, while Elisabetta emphasises in a humorous way how much migrant women value the family, the mother and Mother’s Day. As acknowledged in the section about the Islamic veil, however, it is not possible to consider these two positions to be on the same level, as Italian-born women are in a power position in relation to migrant women, being part of the majority population.

Ada also reflects on this different attitude towards men, and recalls the first exchanges that took place in the association on this theme. She states:

There was an initial encounter-clash with the women of black Africa on the subject of feminism. On the basis of Toni Morrison’s discourse, they said, “you worry too much about work, you exclude men, they are our allies however because they are also victims of racism, etc.” ... Little by little the positions have changed, partly with the evidence of facts, when you point out that in mixed associations, even those with a large number of women members, the presidency, the prestigious positions are all held by men [...]. So gradually positions have changed, in the sense that we became a bit more tolerant and they became much more aware, as, being feminists, we had a few more certainties. (Ada, IBW)

Ada is aware of the theoretical framework of black feminism in which men are seen, in certain circumstances, as allies as they share the situation of racial discrimination with black women. She explains how the encounter between African and Italian-born women led to some changes on both sides. However, she doesn’t appear to reflect on how the fact of being white women put them in a different power position in relation to black women. She summarises the change that this encounter/clash produced by saying “we became a bit more tolerant and they became much more aware”. The word “tolerant” indicates a situation that does not produce real equal exchange but more a passive acceptance of a different position from yours. The change that occurred in African women is instead described in terms of an increase of awareness. Ada then specifies that this did not apply to all migrant women as some of them were already feminists, in her view.

However, this research does not identify feminism as a necessarily divisive issue, setting in opposition Italian-born women on the one side, and migrant women, on the other. The already recounted experience of Maria Viarengo is significant in this regard. In a published interview with Maritè Calloni, one of the Italian-born women founders of the association, she states:

Maybe because I was the one who lived here for a long time and somehow I understood both cultures, I was viewing this in a bit of a cross-eyed way and I saw the reasons for both positions. I also felt that this debate should not be ignored, because it had so many implications. On the one hand I felt it was important to show how African women were also fighting for their autonomy and independence, but in a completely different way; on the other I asked other Italian women to talk about what feminism is. One of the problems related to the fact that those who, like me, came from a country in which men and women together had fought for independence for thirty years resisted the idea of keeping men out of the association - which symbolically was also to keep them out of our lives. (Bertoncin et al, 2007, *author's translation*)

Maria Viarengo defines her ability to understand both positions as “viewing this in a bit of a cross-eyed way”, an expression that appears to underline the difficulty of such a position, but she also emphasises the importance of not ignoring this debate for its many implications. She emphasises the importance of mutual knowledge of the different trajectories followed by women in different countries and geo-political contexts in order to affirm their own empowerment.

Furthermore, the age factor also emerges as crucial in different evaluations of feminism. As regards men’s involvement, Ada states that they are now a bit “fed up” with the continuation of this discussion in relation to young Italian-born women who have recently joined the association as “in one way or in another they always insert their male friends, their male partners”. On this point Chiara, a young Italian-born woman, states that it is more difficult for her and other young Italian-born women attending the association to use the word “feminism” than for some young migrant women. For instance Chiara explains that, in *Almaterra*, they decided to hold some meetings, coordinated by the younger women within the association, in which the older women were invited to recount their experience of belonging to the feminist movements of the ‘70s. Chiara comments that it has been very beautiful to hear about older women’s life-directions directly from them without having to read about them in books. However, she feels the need to distance herself from these life directions by saying:

I cannot use this word [feminism] except in relation to a particular historical period, not because it is a word that I dislike but because it is a word that I find it difficult to relate to me, and I don’t think I am the only one with this problem, I think it relates to the whole group of young people with whom I am confronted here. (Chiara, IBW)

Chiara then comments that young migrant women who attended the meetings had different reactions from theirs as young Italian-born women. She cites the example of a young migrant woman from Latin America stating that she had no problem in recognising herself as feminist. The explanation that she gives is that, for young migrant women, it can be a way to inspire themselves

for the fights that they still have to undertake. She concludes that:

It was great to confront us young people all together and to reflect on these meetings because, while for us Italians it was more of a way to meet people, for others, the migrant women, it was also a way to inspire them for struggles to come, because they feel it more in this way, the fact of having to assert themselves, having to find their place, needing to be recognised. At least that's my perception, you need more certainties [...] (Chiara, IBW)

Chiara differentiates clearly between her situation, as an Italian-born woman, and that of migrant women who, according to her, still have to fight a number of battles that have already been won in western countries. Even if it may be argued that some countries still have a number of legal and social battles to fight in relation to the position of women, to argue that Italy doesn't have challenges to address on this topic would appear rather simplistic.⁴² On this point scholarship has shown how in Italy young women tend not to realise the persistence of women's disadvantaged status in society until they enter a relationship, have children, or when they enter the workforce (Cacace, 2004). Finally, Chiara appears to reverse the contraposition between Italian-born and migrant women in relation to feminism as she concludes that young migrant women more easily identify themselves with the feminist struggle than young Italian-born ones.

Linked to the issue of the relationship with men, one of the other main dividing points is that of family and of maternity that was addressed in a number of meetings dedicated to women's health. In some cases, migrant women, even acknowledging the struggles of Italian-born women for equal rights with men, questioned whether this trajectory led them to lose their role as mothers (Almaterra, 1999: 120). The idea that women's rights have to go together with the idea of the family is well exemplified by Dorothy when she says:

⁴² Just to cite a few international documents the World Economic Forum in its Global Gender Gap Report 2012 (http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GenderGap_Report_2012.pdf, consulted on 21st January 2013) ranks Italy only at 80th place out of 135 countries. The UN CEDAW Committee in its Concluding Observations to the Italian Government states among other points: "the Committee regrets that the State party has not developed a comprehensive and coordinated programme to combat the widespread acceptance of stereotypical roles of men and women, as recommended in the Committee's previous concluding observations. The Committee remains deeply concerned about the portrayal of women as sex objects and the stereotyped roles and responsibilities of women and men in the family and in society. Such stereotyping, including in public statements made by politicians, undermines women's social status, as reflected in women's disadvantaged position in a number of areas, including in the labour market and in access to political life and decision-making positions, affects women's choices in their studies and professions and generates unequal results and impacts of policies and strategies on women and men." (CEDAW/C/ITA/CO/6, par. 22)

I did not know this “hard” version of feminism. Feminism for me was a way for women to look after their rights, but also to respect the rights of everyone, not just the woman, and at the same time respect the value of the family. So marrying these two ideas is not easy, [...] it is not that feminism means that I have to be without a family or against men. (Dorothy, MW)

Dorothy then concludes that she has acquired skills and knowledge on this subject, while leaving out the parts that she didn't like.

However, from the women's accounts it does not emerge that Italian-born women and migrant women hold opposite views on the subject of the family, and of the role of women. For instance Maria Viarengo explains, once again that, as a celebration of the 8th March, one woman wrote a proposal for a “Day for women and for the family”; this caused Maria to protest about the equation of the two. They had an animated discussion on this and, in the end they reached a consensus that women can get married and have a family or not as they choose, and she regarded this as a victory. On the other hand Anna, an Italian-born woman, states:

Of this association *Produrre e riprodurre* (Producing and Reproducing) many women who are in the *Alma Mater* are more or less those women in their seventies who ... almost none of them had children because the choice was between produce and reproduce and that is not good ... I mean it's fine if you want to do it ... but it's also not the only answer as we would all be extinct [...] (Anna, IBW)

Anna refers to the fact that many of the older women in *Almaterra* were members of a feminist association called *Produrre e riprodurre* that opposed the two concepts of producing and reproducing. She comments that it is not by chance that the majority of those women decided not to have children. Anna respects this as a personal choice, but not as an option to be generally applied because humanity would soon be extinct. Those choices raised similar questions among migrant women, such as when Maria Viarengo asks: “Why do most of you not have children? Or why are you not married? Not that it is necessary, but why so many in such a small group?” (Abedu Viarengo & Scagliotti, 1999: 22, *author's translation*). To those questions, Laura Scagliotti, an Italian-born founder of the association, answers that they were not looking for the exclusion of men but for a relationship on an equal basis. She describes how for young women this meant breaking away from men with whom they had significant relationships, which brought about a lot of suffering, while later it was not easy to find men who would be willing to accept how they had become stronger and more self-confident. (Abedu Viarengo & Scagliotti, 1999)

Finally, notwithstanding the difficulties that I have described, the association still facilitated forms of exchange between different strategies for the empowerment of women. First of all migrant women have posed the question of the other grounds of discrimination that they face beyond that of gender, as indicated in the report of the action-research:

Perhaps, in the words of bell hooks, white feminists gradually begin to move away from the notion of “gender” as the one and only experience that defines the lives of women. Maybe we begin to understand that being women makes us being in solidarity, but not equal, and that the color of the skin, the cultural background, the social class have a weight. (*Almaterra*, 1999: 119)

Migrant women also put under discussion some certainties of the Italian-born founding members, even if this lead to a sense of disorientation on their part. On this point the action-research states:

Perhaps, however, in recent years foreign women have brought about a discussion (crisis?) in the perhaps a little rigid feminism of Italian women. “I do not know who I am, nor do I know if here in *Alma Mater* we practice feminism. Nor do I know what is this new thing is that I am confronting,” said one of the founding members. (*Almaterra*, 1999: 123)

This sense of disorientation also emerges in one interview about the importance of having an association composed solely of women. In it Ada states:

I don't know it anymore, because things have changed a lot. While the feminism I was practicing read: “men have no right to speak on women's issues”, now, instead, there is a continuous invitation to men to speak out, even from me ... so I don't know what is important anymore [...] (Ada, IBW)

In this account Ada shows a sense of bewilderment, as if the theoretical frame of reference had changed.

In conclusion, the experience of *Almaterra* shows that, where the specific feminist trajectory experienced by Italian-born women is proposed as the one that everyone must follow, it creates tensions and impairs the potential for reaching situations of mutual exchange on an equal basis. The lack of acknowledgement of different strategies for the empowerment of women leads to a situation where Italian-born women act only as tutors and mentors of migrant women thus assuming a patronising attitude. At the same time it would be wrong to state that the encounters between women who are different in terms of ‘race’, ethnicity, legal status/citizenship, class and age did not lead to any exchange of differing strategies for women's empowerment. However in

this section, I have shown how the implications of those different strategies still need to be fully explored in terms of feminist work, beyond the everyday work carried out by the association.

8.3 Racism as a Barrier to Equal Relationships

In this section, I reflect on how the issue of racism is dealt with within the associations and to what extent this influences the potential for achieving forms of feminist solidarity within intercultural settings. Focusing on racism is of key importance in order to go beyond an analysis which simply takes into consideration the element of 'race' but does not address the issue of racism. As indicated by bell hooks:

We now have much published work that looks at race and gender but not from a standpoint that is feminist or anti-racist. This is a very disturbing trend. (hooks, 2013: 7)

Similarly, Hill Collins (1990) warns us against using intersectionality only in order to analyse the intersections between different forms of discrimination, without aiming to end the structures of domination.

As detailed in Chapter 3, racism can be defined in different ways. Therefore, I reflect here on the various forms of racism that emerge from the women's testimonies - from patronising to what has been called "reverse discrimination" and prejudices. I reflect on how they challenge the potential for establishing forms of feminist solidarity. Overt forms of racism do not often emerge in the women's interviews. This situation is consistent with what Kilomba observes when she states: "the difficulty in identifying racism is not only functional to racism, but also a very part of racism itself" (Kilomba, 2010: 98). It is possible, more frequently, to identify instances where patronising attitudes create a barrier to the formation of equal relationships. In this section, I also address the issue of the prejudices between migrant women, reflecting on the question of whether they amount to racism or not, and to what extent they may also represent a threat to the achievement of forms of feminist solidarity within intercultural settings.

8.3.1 Handling Racism within the Associations

Racism affects the associations at a number of intersecting levels. In the majority of cases, associations pursue their anti-racist aims by carrying out a series of intercultural activities. These are generally aimed at promoting the knowledge of different countries through seminars and

cultural events. In some cases, associations have dedicated more explicit attention to anti-racist activities: in particular *Punto di partenza*, through its specific seminars on the issue of racism and sexism in policies and economic relations and *Le Mafalde*, through a course on racism and sexism, as well as by performing the functions of the UNAR, the National Office against Racial Discrimination. It emerges that the attention of the associations is mainly directed at contrasting racism in the wider society, more than at addressing how racism may play out within the association. There is an unspoken presupposition that by the very nature of intercultural associations, racism should not operate within them. *Punto di partenza* partially differs from the other associations in that it prompted a reflection on women's asymmetries both at a geopolitical and at a personal level.

In the interviews, racism emerges as a significant problem in Italian society, whilst cases of racism within the associations are rarely reported. In the interviews, migrant women generally do not talk about the episodes of racism that they suffer. More often migrant women talk in a general way about racism in Italian society, or Italian-born women within the associations make reference to it, as in the case of Flora and Francesca. Flora states that all the migrant women who attended a course organised by the association reported that they had suffered discrimination and racism. She comments that they showed signs of depression for this reason and emphasises the important role of the association in providing migrant women with the potential for establishing relationships among themselves and with Italian-born women that help them to overcome this.

Francesca states that there have been several exchanges between them on this issue and migrant women have asked them for advice on how they should react. She reports an episode of racism that one of the association's members suffered:

In particular, I remember the tension of one of the members of the association, when she told us about something that had happened to her in the market, her tension was still palpable, perhaps because it had just happened ... it was beautiful because she shared this with us, she asked us for advice "what would you have done?"... in addition to helping cheer her up, it was also a way to share and to ask myself, "What would you have done if you were in her place?" It was a two-way exchange, because maybe I would never have thought about such an episode if she hadn't told me with such pathos. The episode was that ... just because she had black skin and the *hijab* on her head, she had been accused of stealing something in the market, when in fact she hadn't. She was interrogated by the municipal police; the policeman himself took for granted that she was wrong and that the lady who accused her was right. She felt insulted twice, once for being accused of a crime and the second time because the person who was supposed to protect her didn't. This is an episode that I will always keep in my heart... (Francesca, IBW)

Francesca describes the discussion with the member of the association who had been victim of racism as a two-way exchange because, on the one hand, the migrant woman asked for their advice and on the other hand, Francesca is forced to imagine herself in the situation that the other woman found herself in. However, this exercise proves rather theoretical as Francesca, being a white woman, and a member of the majority population of Italy, is unlikely to be a victim of racism. Furthermore, she describes the dialogue with the migrant woman as “beautiful” because she interprets the fact that the other woman has told them about this episode as being a sign of trust on their part, therefore indirectly excluding them from the general racist populace. In this way, Francesca can enjoy a position of double advantage because, while being part of the majority population, she does not have to feel the discomfort of being part of the privileged population as she has been approached by the migrant woman for guidance. Such a position prompts a reflection on the challenge for Italian-born women to move from simply acknowledging the presence of racism in society to questioning their own position of racial privilege.

On this point, as I have indicated in Chapter 3, hooks (2013) emphasises the necessity of going beyond an attitude that addresses racism by only focusing on discriminatory acts by white people towards black people in favour of considering the wider framework from which those acts derive, namely white supremacy and white privilege. Such a shift appears useful not only for black people but also for white people who want to challenge racism. While focusing on specific acts of racism normally does not challenge the personal responsibility of white people who are active in intercultural associations (as generally they would not identify themselves as racist), thinking in terms of white supremacy, as well as white privilege, and how this benefits all white people involves a larger sense of responsibility.

The issue of racism taking place within the associations does not emerge very often. Elisabetta, an Italian-born woman, states: “There is maybe some latent racism ... among women who choose to come here ... Italian ones, they are a little racist even though they should not be.” She also makes a distinction between Italian-born women on the basis of their regional provenance:

I want to clarify that the women who founded the Alma Mater and the current Italian volunteers are almost all from Piedmont, in fact southerners are much more racist because it seems to them that the arrival of immigrants has taken many of their ‘rights’, such as the right to have a house, a job, to have their children included in kindergartens, nursery schools [...]
(Elisabetta, IBW)

This account reveals a particular situation taking place in Italy. As I have acknowledged in Chapter 3, in Italy, historically, people from the South have been 'othered' in ways that can be regarded as similar to those taking place in Orientalist processes, as recognised by a number of scholars (Schneider, 1998). As already acknowledged in Chapter 5, there is a risk that, paradoxically, Italian-born women, who are involved in contrasting stereotypes against migrant women, endorse commonly held stereotypes against the Italian southern population. Elisabetta then comments about episodes of racism among migrant women:

Often relationships are also difficult between sub-Saharan African women and women from Maghreb and there is very strong racism by the people from Maghreb against people who have dark skin, it is a real problem. Indeed we have a [black] girl here who comes daily and she told me that she feels marginalised, that there are people who treat her differently from others. (Elisabetta, IBW)

Once again, in Elisabetta's account, racism is always attributed to others, while there is no evidence of reflection on her own positionality.

8.3.2 Patronising Mechanisms as an Obstacle to Equal Relationships

In this section, I focus on the issue of patronising mechanisms and I show that these attitudes represent an important obstacle in the establishment of equal relationships and mutual exchange. This happens, for example, when Italian-born women see themselves only in their role of guides and mentors to migrant women impeding the establishment of a relationship on the basis of an equal exchange. Bianca, a migrant woman, explicitly refers to a paternalistic attitude in her interview when she states:

There has always been an issue about what foreign women need from Italian women and this has always created difficulties in the relationship, in the sense that you can find a foreign woman with a cultural background, beyond the problem of language, which is, suffice to say, something we have all overcome ... Within relationships that could be either paternalistic something I cannot stand is when someone says to you "ah but you are rather good" ... "no I'm not rather good, you know, I'm using my own skills ... do not tell me 'rather good' as this is disrespectful." (Bianca, MW)

Bianca, who was a professional before coming to Italy, describes a situation in which migrant women are treated as if they were not skilled just because they are migrants, independently from their background and their employment in their country of origin. She also adds in the interview that this attitude demonstrated by some Italian-born women creates problems in their

relationship. However, she also specifies that such problematic relationships were not only evident between Italian-born and migrant women but also between migrant women themselves.

So paternalism exists to a point there, or at least there was a fight to combat stereotypes that still existed, not only between Italian and foreign women, but also among foreign women ... especially because maybe I am culturally closer to the Italian culture than I can be to the culture of some North African women ... my cultural background is western [...] (Bianca, MW)

Bianca describes her situation as being between two sides. On the one hand, she does not feel recognised for her skills and professional background by Italian-born women who show a patronising attitude towards her and, on the other hand, she does not necessarily identify herself with the culture of some migrant women as she considers her background to be western.

Paternalistic attitudes also emerge in Flora's account when she refers to her relationship with migrant women.

And sometimes they are really not reliable. Sometimes you say something to them and sometimes they say: "Yes ok I'll go, I'll do it", then eventually she says: "no I cannot". I said: "No, you cannot do that." Then I am the one who gets angry at them, you know? So strange dynamics have meant that you are the one that gets angry at them [...] (Flora, IBW)

Later on in the interview Flora explains that there are objective differences in their life circumstances, such as the fact that often migrant women are obliged to do jobs where they are exploited or that they lack a family network to help them rear their children, so that often they cannot work for the association. However, Flora shows a judgemental attitude towards migrant women when she states that "they are not reliable" and she is aware of the fact that this situation has created an imbalance between them in which she also feels uncomfortable as she has become the one who "gets angry at them".

As I have addressed in the previous section, such an attitude by Italian-born women led in some cases to the situation where migrant women - even when they were formally entrusted with the post of President or member of the Board - could not really influence the policies of the association. The explanation for this given by Patricia is very clear-cut. She states:

In the West there is always the idea that those who are coming from another place here they must learn ... Absolutely you have nothing to learn as a native, you only have to teach, to give, that's what we feel [...] (Patricia, MW)

Later on she comments that if you ask Italian-born women, they will certainly tell you that they have learnt something from migrant women, but in reality this process of learning only concerns minor issues. Patricia goes to the roots of patronising mechanisms. She argues that they originate from the fact that western women (Italian-born in this case) do not really believe that they have much to learn from women from other countries. Even if formally the association's mission statement refers to valuing migrant women's competences, and notwithstanding the fact that Italian-born women may say that they have gained something from the experience of migrant women, Patricia feels that in reality the attitude of having more to teach than to learn remains prevalent among Italian-born women. Where this attitude prevails, it becomes a serious barrier to the achievement of forms of feminist solidarity, especially when migrant women involved have a good education, skills and a profession. This is confirmed by the fact that in various cases migrant women decided to leave the association because, as Karen states: "we didn't like to be treated... like children who never grew up, so we left [...]"

In another study, a migrant woman interviewed by Merrill confirms the idea that migrant women put in crisis the knowledge of the Italian-born:

In *Alma Mater* it's the immigrant women that challenge the Italians to change, to think about who they are, to admit that they don't understand others, which they have great difficulty admitting. Italians think they're not racist, and they think that they know all about "others". They don't think they have a lot to learn from foreigners – they think they know, and to challenge them to recognise that they don't know is very upsetting to them. So the immigrant women have this power of knowledge and the ability to put the Italians into a crisis about their knowledge and way of life. (Merrill, 2006: 182)

This testimony confirms the idea that Italian-born women do not think they have much to learn from migrant women, but she allows more power to migrant women by identifying their ability to put into crisis the "knowledge and way of life" of Italian-born women.

Patronising mechanisms can also become an obstacle to the establishment of equal relationships when they take the form of what has been defined as "reverse racism", which was mentioned in a few cases by interviewees. For instance Ada states:

I've learned from my Somali friend to stop saying: "I will give you a break just because you come from far away". She says "if she [the person speaking] was an Italian, you would immediately specify your point of view...while since she is a migrant you tolerate much more" and she says this is called "reverse racism". So from that I learned to consider migrants on an equal level [...]. (Ada, IBW)

This concept is similar to the one expressed by a migrant woman leader during a seminar in which she stated that if, on the one hand, some people discriminate against her because she is black, on the other some people would subscribe to everything she says just because she is black.⁴³ In these accounts, such an attitude is also perceived to be discriminatory because migrant women and women from ethnic minorities do not feel treated as equals. Such a process of idealisation is described by Kilomba when she writes:

After one is de-idealized, one becomes idealized, and behind this idealization lies the danger of a second alienation. In both processes one remains a response to a colonial order. The idealized images emerge as an inversion of the primary racist images. (Kilomba, 2010: 120)

Then referring to a woman she interviewed, Kilomba adds:

Kathleen wants to be reflected in her complexity as both good and bad, strong and weak, bitter and sweet – that is, as a subject. (Kilomba, 2010: 120)

Similarly, interviewed women also want to be regarded as complete subjects with whom Italian-born women can relate to as equals. This concept is also strongly advocated by Isabel when she describes the foundation of an intercultural work:

[...] I work with migrants and I argue with migrants, ... we think together and if we do not agree we may also send each other quietly to hell, that's okay, but it is "with", not "for". I think this is a substantial difference. (Isabel, MW)

Once more Isabel underlines the need to create an equal relationship between migrant and Italian-born women, one which includes serious discussion and disagreement. All of this is regarded as part of a normal dialectic among people who relate to each other as equals, whereas contrastingly working "for" migrant people presupposes a patronising attitude.

8.3.3 Prejudices among Migrant Women

In the previous sections, I focused on different forms of racism experienced by migrant women from Italian-born women and I reflected on how these represent a barrier to the achievement of forms of feminist solidarity. In this section, I focus on the issue of prejudices among migrant women as this topic emerges frequently from the women interviewed. As I have detailed in Chapter 3, in this respect scholarship is divided about what counts as racism. According to some

⁴³ Intervention during the Seminar organised by University of Ferrara on "Feminisms in Italy today: the new claims and the activism of migrant women" held in Ferrara on 2nd December 2011

scholars (Knowles, 2004; hooks, 2013; Kilomba, 2010) racism can only be performed by white people, whereas among other peoples it is only possible to refer to 'prejudices'. Other authors have opposed such a clear-cut opposition view, for instance Rattansi (2007).

In the context of this research, various migrant women report that one of the main difficulties is the need to overcome reciprocal prejudice and they underline that all cultures have this tendency. For instance Ellen, when referring to the relationship between women members of the association, states:

The most sensitive difficulty is getting beyond the typical small prejudices [...].Every culture has its own, so [we need to] go beyond that ... Albanians are like that and they insist, so you think like that [...] so overcoming this is the hardest thing [...] understanding ... why has that prejudice come about? It is negative but at the same time it helps you to grow, because you discover that it's a fantasy ... all cultures have it, all countries have it [...] (Ellen, MW)

Ellen highlights more than once that all cultures and countries have prejudices towards people of other populations or groups and she attributes this to the media that portrays stereotypical images of national groups. She does not define these attitudes as racist, but she does describe them as "the most sensitive difficulty" that they have in their relationships and she includes herself in this image. Similarly, another migrant woman, Isabel, recognises that prejudices are "a part of us" but she also makes an important reflection on how to handle them:

Then the prejudices are part of us, we always have prejudices, but this is good because they are helpful to protect ourselves in some ways, if we manage them, it's all right, if we let them dominate, as it is happening in Italian politics in relation to immigration, it becomes more than a stereotype, terrorism, then of course we find ourselves in the situation that we are in [...] (Isabel, MW)

Isabel states that the problem is not so much with prejudices themselves, which to some extent may protect people, but with the fact that they are not managed. She describes the way in which migrants are perceived and treated not as the result of prejudices, or racism, but "terrorism", given the current public discourse about migration. Ellen, instead, concludes her reflection stating that, given the fact that people's differences on the basis of their origins can become problematic, she wishes that there could be "perhaps a unique identity card for everybody, as a person, a human being".

In conclusion, in this section I have shown how being part of an intercultural association does not exempt women from having to confront various forms of racism. In particular patronising

mechanisms prove to be a significant barrier to the achievement of equal relationships. This goes to the roots of the challenge posed by post-colonial scholarship, namely to move beyond western-centric colonial legacies that perpetuate power relations towards migrant women and more generally people coming from previously colonised countries. At the same time prejudices among migrant women also emerge as an important obstacle in the achievement of equal relationships among women.

8.4 Whiteness under Discussion

As explained in Chapter 3, a critical consideration of the concept of whiteness appears fundamental for any project based on the concept of reflexive feminist solidarity. Post-colonial scholarship and critical studies on whiteness have shown how whiteness is a socially constructed concept that indicates the invisible “norm”. Whiteness functions as an invisible marker of privilege and an unacknowledged ethnicity (McIntosh, 1988, 1990; Frankenberg, 1993a, 1993b). Feminist post-colonial scholarship also shows how white women should acknowledge this position of privilege before forging alliances with women previously considered as ‘others’. In Chapter 3, I also specified how critical studies on whiteness need to be contextualised in the specific Italian context. In this chapter, I address the question of to what extent belonging to intercultural settings facilitates a reflection on whiteness as a position of privilege and as an unacknowledged ethnicity.

8.4.1 Reflection on Self-Positionality by Italian-Born Women

In some cases, belonging to an intercultural setting facilitated a reflection by Italian-born women about their privileged position, especially in relation to the material aspects of everyday life in comparison with migrant women. For instance Ada states:

I am in an easier position, of course, because I worked for 30 years, I am retired, they still have to work and do not know if they're going to get a pension. (Ada, IBW)

Francesca affirms:

It made me think a lot about these issues, mostly at the beginning it made me become aware of how lucky I am in being Italian and living in a country like Italy, without having to suffer harassment, or being a victim of episodes of racism, on the fortunes tied to the possibility of having a house, or even only to understand how to move within the public administration [...]. It taught me not to take these things for granted [...] (Francesca, IBW)

Francesca describes elements of everyday life and she underlines how the contact with migrant women taught her not to take these things for granted. She then goes on to recognise that concerning her employment situation she finds herself in an easier position than migrant women. However, she underlines that their aim within the association was precisely that of supporting migrant women searching for a job, but that, in her view, not all of them have acquired a clear awareness about this.

There are always those who say “but you have a job and we do not” ... I always tell them: “we have tried to give you the tools to make you aware that you can also succeed.” For me it is not easy to find a job ... at the moment I am unemployed, I’m working on it ... “like me, you have to do it too, without expecting someone else to do it for you.” Not all of them have this thing clear [...] (Francesca, IBW)

On the one hand, Francesca recognises that there is an asymmetrical situation between them as Italian-born women and migrant women. On the other, she also emphasises that in the association they precisely aimed at providing migrant women with the tools to find a job but that migrant women do not always have this aspect clear.

Also Flora highlights that there are clear asymmetries between them, as Italian-born women, and migrant women especially as regards their working condition, as well as their knowledge of the Italian administrative system.

[...] my time, my availability were different and are different from theirs because in any case I have a job and they do not. I also have knowledge of a certain kind, also on immigration, and regulations and so on, so this puts me in a different position to theirs. (Flora, IBW)

However, as already underlined in the previous section, she also states that this renders it impossible for migrant women to ensure the same amount of time to devote to the association as Italian-born women.

[...] an immigrant woman often does not have a network of relatives who can look after her child and ... there is none who can help them economically in some periods, so sometimes they have to do some crazy jobs to earn something, while Italian women either have a relative ... or someone who can give them money or can look after the kids ... So there is a really great disparity and even in commitment [...] (Flora, IBW)

The previous accounts, however, only refer to aspects of privilege in everyday life deriving from the fact of being Italian citizens, but they do not reflect on how those different positionalities have

originated. In particular, there is no reflection on how whiteness was formed and on the relationship with the colonisation process, on which I will focus in the next section.

8.4.2 From Guilt to Recognition: Whiteness under Discussion

In this section I analyse, beyond self-reflection, on the privileged position of living in a richer country, to what extent participating in intercultural activities facilitates a deeper consideration on how whiteness became the unacknowledged norm and how this relates to the colonial experience. I use Gilroy's description of the defence mechanisms enacted by white people as a framework for the analysis of 'whiteness': "denial/guilt/shame/recognition/reparation" (Speech by Gilroy as cited in Kilomba, 2010: 22). Some of those mechanisms clearly emerge in the interviews, as well as in the seminars organised by *Punto di partenza*. Reflections on the concept of guilt are most frequent. For instance Flora, who attended those seminars, states:

I felt uncomfortable, I felt a sense of guilt because it was all a discourse on neo-colonialism ... I felt a bit guilty. I did not know how to relate to these immigrant women, though in this I've grown a lot, [now] I do not feel guilty about anything, ... I feel just fine. I'm different, I feel that I am different from those who have colonised them, different from those who exploit them ... because I have strong friendships with them, so it helped me a lot in my growth, and in no longer feeling a bit inhibited in these situations [...] But it helped me a lot in my growth, from the point of view of feeling in an uncomfortable position because they have suffered, ... because you come from coloniser countries. (Flora, IBW)

In Flora's account there is a clear willingness to be freed from the uncomfortable feeling of guilt. Significantly, she states that the discussion on neo-colonialism carried out in the seminars organised by *Punto di partenza* – to which I will return later on in this section – made her feel guilty and therefore uncomfortable. Many post-colonial scholars have actually referred to the uselessness of guilt and have argued for the necessity to transform it into a situation leading to recognition, reparation and a real alteration of power structure (Lorde, 1984; Kilomba, 2010).

In Flora's account the first defence mechanism put in place to overcome her feelings of guilt is an affirmation of her difference from those that exploit migrant people. Such an act of distancing seems to be in opposition to the mindset requested by Kilomba when she argues for the necessity of recognising one's own racism:

Recognition follows shame; it is the moment when the *white* subject recognizes its own whiteness and/or racisms. It is, therefore, a process of acknowledgement. (Kilomba, 2010: 23)

Secondly, in Flora's account the feeling of uneasiness diminishes thanks to a process of getting closer to others through friendship, as well as through work within the association. In other words, the issue of asymmetry is resolved through individual acts, as well as through common political commitment. This raises the question of "to what extent it is possible to renounce 'race' privileges". As noted in Chapter 3, in answer to this, Frankenberg (1993b) concludes that it is not possible to renounce 'race' privilege as our lives are embedded in a political and social system on which it is founded, whereas McIntosh (1988) puts a stronger emphasis on individual decisions. In both experiences, relationships are described as a facilitating factor. In conclusion, Flora's account describes a willingness to establish friendships with migrant women, even though there is no recognition of her possible racism.

The defence mechanism of guilt emerges also in the account by Annina when she talks about the experience of another woman in the association.

[...] we have also discussed this with the girls on the Italian course, I think that there's always this sense of guilt ... "I can go to the mountains at weekends, they cannot." And there was a girl, an Italian teacher who talked about this uneasiness about giving classes on Monday, ... they discussed what they had done that weekend and one had gone to the park, one had been locked in the house, as she was a family assistant, and she said "I went to the seaside ... I felt guilty", but in reality this thing was solved in the sense that after a while, she did not feel judged by the others over the fact that "you're lucky, you went to the seaside", on the contrary there was more of a desire to know, to ask "tell us what you did". (Annina, IBW)

In Annina's account, the Italian-born girl faces much uneasiness in relation to her privileged situation. In this case the situation is addressed through dialogue with migrant women. However, the asymmetry is not described as resulting from an unequal geo-political situation, but as a result of personal luck. Annina gives a possible explanation by linking this to the fact that, she argues, many migrant women involved with the association are attracted by the possibility of gaining access to a consumer society and to her this is a distancing factor.

The criticism of the current economic and political model and, as a consequence the asymmetries among women, was specifically addressed by *Punto di partenza*. This association considered the acknowledgement of these asymmetries as the starting point of their work. This fact led them to organise a number of seminars addressing the themes of economic inequality, racism and colonialism where the invited speakers - whom they called "teachers" - were women from the southern hemisphere working at different levels on economic and social issues in such topics as

academia, governments, and NGOs.⁴⁴ The issue of the guilt of Italian-born women and how to transform it into responsibility was one of the most important addressed by the seminars. For instance, one Italian-born woman participating in the seminars reflected on the complexities of the defence mechanisms put in place by western women. She referred to a time when they were discussing the impoverishment of the southern hemisphere and at a certain point one Italian-born woman framed the issue in the following terms:

“Ah yes you are poor, impoverished countries, there is no work ... but we also suffer with our cultural misery, our moral misery and our depression [...]” and there the circle closed and we didn’t address what we were trying to. [...] so the risk is that of not addressing the problem of asymmetries because everything is flattened while our differences must be kept because it is the positioning which is different. (Moccagatta, 2005, *author’s translation*)

In Gilroy’s classification, the first attitude described could fall into the category of denial in the sense that, even though the privileged positioning of western people is recognised at an economic level, it is counterbalanced by the identification of “moral misery” in the West. Another Italian-born woman, reflecting on the fact that only a few of them had intervened during the seminars, stated:

I feel that I am on the other side of the barricade wanting to present an image: a coloniser. I found it difficult these days to understand in what way I can take responsibility for my history as a coloniser, given that I was not one ... but I belong to the colonial world ... the sense of guilt etc. ... turn it into a political direction, and here the question is addressed to others, the so-called colonised, to transform it into a possible alliance, into a strategy that changes the way that these power relationships that are now expressed as such are perceived. (Sampieri, 2005, *author’s translation*)

In this account, the central point is how to transform guilt into responsibility and reparation. On this point Kilomba states that this is possible “by changing structures, agendas, spaces, positions, dynamic subjective relations, vocabulary, that is giving up privilege” (Kilomba, 2010: 23).

However such a task appears to be particularly challenging for Italian-born women, who express a certain degree of disorientation in relation to it. *Punto di partenza’s* seminars identified some possible trajectories that could be followed. First of all, regarding the Italian experience of

⁴⁴The main objectives of the seminars in the work of *Punto di partenza* were: to support the economic, social and cultural trajectories self-defined by the women in the south of the world in the identification of another possible economic model; a re-reading of daily economics of the women in the north of the world that is able to welcome the contributions by the women from the south; contributing to modify approaches and initiatives in the area of the flux of knowledge and competences giving a concrete space to the contributions of women from the south. [From the CD-Rom]

colonialism, the necessity of taking responsibility for a historical process that is not a part of the collective memory, was emphasised. On this, one participant stated:

I think we subscribe to the myth of the good Italian colonialism, so we have to take responsibility. And then remove all possible complicity when we understand it, knowing that there is a lot of ignorance. (Baronti, 2005, *author's translation*)

Such an objective was explicitly proposed by one of the invited teachers, Chantal Spitz who said:

[...] producing research, information, material, through all possible means in order to build your history as colonisers. It is from there that awareness comes, and, with it, the assumption of responsibility. It is you who must act. (Spitz, 2005, *author's translation*)

Secondly, another objective was identified as the need to unmask the rhetoric of saving Third World women as a justification for military interventions. On this point a participant affirmed:

I think we have to go a long way to see that this is using women as a decoy, it is not only yesterday's tactic but today's too, western powers have used the big lie of freeing women from the so-called burka as an excuse for their actions in Afghanistan. So on this, especially as women, we must not be complicit. (Baronti, 2005, *author's translation*)

As I showed in Chapter 3, this point is also raised by feminist post-colonial scholarship (Riley et al., 2008; Brah and Phoenix 2004).

A number of concrete proposals were then identified, ranging from economic action, to changes to the immigration law, to promoting awareness about the colonial experience in schools and institutions. Notwithstanding the elaboration of these proposals, it emerged that, for a number of Italian-born women, it was too distressing to see themselves as "the daughters of colonisers". On this point Giovanna, one of the Italian-born women founders of the association, states in her interview:

Most Italian women who participated in this part of the debate, could not stand it, there were situations similar to a psycho-drama, so that "I am not racist, I am not responsible, I do not want to feel guilty", that was a completely wrong scenario and modality. (Giovanna, IBW)

She then commented that such a reaction was a paradox according to them. She also reports that during one seminar she said in a provocative way that it was as if the person who had raped a woman asked her to stop her complaints because this made him feel bad. She added:

In that case there were individual responsibilities, while here there are historical responsibilities, so this should already alleviate ... on the one hand it is worse because it means that I belong to a culture that has, as one of its bases, this expropriation of the other's individuality, colonialism, but on the other ... so first of all this incapacity to distinguish responsibility from guilt, secondly to distinguish historical from individual responsibility [...] So it's not that women of immigrant origins at some point said stop, but them and us of the association surrendered, with a lot of suffering, to the fact that times were not ready, that these women were not ready to stand this pure truth that there some nations, countries and cultures that developed a certain role, and others that found themselves in another, and that everyone has her own responsibilities. (Giovanna, IBW)

Giovanna further comments that while a majority of Italian-born women were not ready to assume the responsibilities arising from belonging to colonising countries, migrant women did not have problems in admitting the complicity of their countries in the colonisation process. In this way they showed deeper competence of analysis and reflection as well as a larger ability in their personal and emotional trajectory.

To my question about how the group of the founding members continued to act in the direction of the assumption of responsibilities, Giovanna answered that it was mainly through "practices and relationships" founded on the recognition of the different positionalities. She gave this example:

So I cannot say we are sisters, in fact I would never say it: "we are sisters because we are friends and we share a political commitment." We are friends, we share a political commitment, but I have a passport, you are Somali and you don't have a passport; if your father dies, you can't visit him, because you don't even know who should issue the passport. If I have a problem, I have a network, in the worst case scenario my school mates, or my family of origins, you don't. (Giovanna, IBW)

Giovanna emphasises very clearly how different positionalities have consequences in everyday life that cannot be ignored nor cancelled by personal relationships. This is why she concludes that under these circumstances it is not possible to talk about sisterhood. At the same time, she identifies in the elements of "practices and relationships" the direction to follow. Her conclusion is that practices need to be informed by relationships because otherwise the risk is to continue to exclude one subject from the elaboration of knowledge.

In conclusion, my research shows that the recognition of one's dominant and privileged position often entails a difficult self-examination on the part of Italian-born women, one which, in a number of cases, lead to a state of denial or defensiveness; there are only a few cases where progress from guilt to recognition to responsibility and reparation are explicitly visible. However, such a process emerges as fundamental in order to challenge white privilege and set the basis for

a process of mutual exchange where the different positionalities of women and the consequences of them are explicitly recognised.

8.5 Concluding Remarks

In this chapter, I have examined how associations deal with dynamics of power relations both in personal relationships and in organisational practices. I have illustrated how the most relevant challenges originate both from structural inequalities between Italian-born and migrant women and from the persistence of ethnocentric attitudes by Italian-born women. Structural inequalities emerge as a particularly relevant obstacle in the achievement of forms of mutual exchange and they concern mainly citizenship status, lack of recognition of educational and professional attainments, access to job opportunities, knowledge of the country and people and lack of networks that include dominant groups. Concerning organisational practices, in which migrant women's competences and skills are not acknowledged, this also emerges as a significant barrier in the development of feminist solidarity. Moreover, power sharing within the associations is regarded as crucial to the attainment of equal recognition. In relation to this point, most associations have implemented policies of "positive discrimination" which in some instances have worked towards a more egalitarian sharing of power within the association. However, in other cases these policies have been regarded by some migrant women as "tokenistic", as they have argued that decision making power has remained in the hands of Italian-born women.

In relation to the issue of racism, I have illustrated how associations have to confront this issue internally. In particular when Italian-born women have acted only as mentors of migrant women, leading to the endorsing of patronising attitudes - this has been regarded as a significant obstacle in the development of intercultural feminist practices. These behaviours reveal the persistence of an ethnocentric attitude, which is one of the main elements in the critique put forward by post-colonial feminism to mainstream western feminism. Ethnocentrism also emerges as a barrier for an exchange on different strategies to promote women's rights. This happens in those instances when specific feminist trajectories followed by Italian-born women are proposed as valid for all women. At the same time, prejudices among migrant women, independently of whether they can be regarded as a form of racism or not, have also been considered as an obstacle for intercultural work.

Finally, I have explored to what extent intercultural feminist practices have fostered recognition by Italian-born women of how whiteness functions as an invisible norm, and as an unacknowledged ethnicity which grants white privilege. I have illustrated how the acknowledgement of their own positionality emerges as a difficult task for Italian-born women. It often engenders a feeling of guilt which is not often translated into a situation of recognition and responsibility. However this passage emerges as crucial for the development of an intercultural work based on a clear acknowledgement of women's different positioning and structural inequalities.

Chapter 9

Progressing the Transformative Agenda Underpinning Intercultural Feminist Work

In this chapter, I focus on two specific areas of policies addressed by the associations that are particularly significant in order to progress the transformative agenda of intercultural feminist work, namely policies on cultural practices that have been defined as “multicultural” and policies on domestic and care work. As regards the first issue, I focus on the work of *Trama di terre* as this association has dedicated specific attention to the issue of multiculturalism in relation to the enjoyment of women’s rights. I also address the critique by *Nosotras* to cultural relativism in relation to FGM. Concerning the second topic, I analyse the associations’ policies in comparative perspective. More specifically I ask to what extent women’s intercultural associations provide a space for reflection on women’s inequality in relation to domestic and care work and on the possibility of creating forms of feminist solidarity on this specific issue.

9.1 *Trama di Terre’s Critique to Multiculturalism in the Name of Women’s Rights*

In this section, I investigate how the association *Trama di terre* came to formulate a critique to multiculturalism in particular in relation to cultural practices involving women. I analyse that position in light of feminist scholarship on the relationship between multiculturalism and women’s rights, as described in Chapter 3. I investigate how multiculturalism is understood and why it is considered to be negative for the enjoyment of the rights of migrant women and how this relates to the possibilities of achieving forms of feminist solidarity within intercultural settings. I also illuminate the possible tensions between a certain form of feminist commitment and anti-racist values that underpin this work. In this section, I refer to data from both the interviews with women in these organisation and organisational documents and initiatives in which I participated.

9.1.1 “Why Are You Not Doing Anything?": *Trama di Terre's* Focus on Multiculturalism

In 2007, *Trama di terre* organised a conference entitled “Is multiculturalism bad for women?”⁴⁵, which clearly echoes the text by Okin (1999), discussed in Chapter 3. In a similar manner to the question posed by Okin, the conference aimed at addressing the question of whether multicultural policies can be detrimental to the enactment of the rights of migrant women and women from ethnic minorities. Multiculturalism is understood by the association as referring to those policies, but more generally to institutions’ behaviours and attitudes, that on the basis of the principle of respect for cultural differences, promote the idea of non-interference in cultural practices that are detrimental for women, as for instance with forced marriages. Such an attitude is not necessarily codified in any written policy or specific agreement, but it is more to be considered a general attitude of non-intervention that institutions can adopt even in cases of violence against women and domestic violence. In particular, the conference emphasised that, in a number of circumstances, cases of domestic violence against migrant women are dismissed or not given sufficient attention by social workers or courts on the basis of the assumption that they are ‘family matters’ that pertain to ‘different’ cultures than the western one. Such an understanding of multiculturalism may be seen to be related to the critique of cultural relativism, whereby in the name of respect for cultural practices and traditions, non-Western cultural practices that are harmful to women and violence against migrant women and women from ethnic minorities, are not addressed by State institutions. Such interpretation appears more in line with a liberal concept of multiculturalism than with reflexive or critical multiculturalism (Anthias, 2002: 279). Liberal multiculturalism is regarded as giving priority to community issues over women’s human rights and for “working with fixed and static notions of cultural preservation or reproduction” (Anthias, 2002: 279).

At the conference, the president of the association, Tiziana Dal Prà, underlined the fact that only a few years earlier they would not have organised a seminar with that title for the fear of being judged racist. Today, however, she affirmed that when they are accused of having a western outlook on migrant women and told that they should not enforce western values on them, she would like to answer “we don’t want them to have a lifestyle as dead women, we want them to

⁴⁵ I participated in that conference as a representative of Amnesty International Italy and I intervened on the campaign “Stop violence against women”. I explain more about this point in Chapter 4 focusing on the research methodology.

have a life style as alive women” (Dal Prà, 2009: 5). In the presentation of the seminar’s proceedings, we can read the following statement by the association’s President:

I have been asking myself these days what is it that prevents us from taking a public position? [...] Are we afraid of being judged colonialist? In any case I believe that we need to emerge from this *impasse*. We want to continue to welcome, listen to and alphabetise migrant women, but we want to do this working together for a common future. We want to take the responsibility of defining the intertwining of patriarchy and religious fundamentalism, and of racism and sexism. We want to do this with our colleagues in the WLUML, South Hall Black Sisters, Rafir from Paris and with the associations of Moroccan women in Morocco and in Italy. We owe this to Hina, Sanaa, Marinella and all the women who suffer abuse and violence and for those who continue to fight for their freedom. (Dal Prà, 2009, *author’s translation*)

With this statement, the president of the association underlines that they want to continue their work in support of migrant women, but in order to do this they want to have a common framework of reference. In particular, she calls for the necessity of speaking publicly about “the intertwining of patriarchy and religious fundamentalism and of racism and sexism” and attributes the fact that they still haven’t done that to their fear of being judged colonialist. She also locates their position by referring to the work of other women’s associations, such as WLUML and SBS, both invited to speak at the conference. These associations operate both at international and national level and have addressed those issues by criticising multicultural policies. By cooperating with these associations, *Trama di terre*, aims at strengthening its position by taking advantage of the experience of organisations that have been working on these issues longer.

Concerning the decision to address the specific situation faced by migrant women in relation to multicultural policies, Michelle, an Italian-born member of the association, explained in her interview how this came about as the association went through some key turning points. One such turning point was when the association organised a series of seminars called “women with luggage” in which migrant women members of the association were asked to talk about their country from a gender perspective. During one of these meetings an Albanian woman described the situation in her own country where women were abused and sold by their relatives; she finished with a question addressed to her Italian audience, “why are you not doing anything about this?” Michelle commented that in that moment she understood that, out of fear of being judged a racist, she was not protecting the rights of migrant women in the way that she thought she was. She said that, as Albania was regarded in Italy as the criminal country *par excellence*, they were afraid of being judged as racist if they attempted to tackle the specific circumstances of migrant Albanian women, victims of violence by their relatives. She also underlined how it was necessary

to go beyond what she defined a “neutral anti-racism”, namely an anti-racist attitude that does not make gender distinctions and that refuses to see the problems related to women’s rights that are present in the migrant population. Such a position appears in line with the critique by Pragna Patel, of the SBS, when she writes about “the silence on gender and other forms of inequality within anti-racist debates” (Patel, 2002: 128).

Another turning point in the decision to focus on the shortcomings of multiculturalism is identified by the news of the killing of his daughter by a migrant Pakistani man due to the fact that she was conducting a life style that was judged to be too ‘Westernised’ by her father. That day the association’s President, Dal Prà, decided that it was no longer possible to remain silent and drafted a document entitled “Freedom for Migrant Women” in collaboration with the representatives of two other women’s associations the review *Marea* and Association *Daris* (of Arab women in Italy). The document states that many migrant women that live in Italy and follow a strict tradition, lose even the rights that have become law in their countries of origin. On the one hand, the document warns against the risk of exploiting this episode to reinforce racism, clearly opposing the attitude of those people who want to build a new campaign against migration upon this tragic episode, and expressing the wish to live in a country, where citizenship is a right for everyone, regardless of their geographical origin. On the other hand, the document emphasises the necessity to avoid any justification based on culture:

There will be people who invoke the double standard according to which all traditions must be respected, all cultures should be followed without any criticism. We say that neither religion, nor tradition can be used as a weapon against anybody. [...] Too often, when it comes to women's rights, especially in respect of sexuality, the body, and relationships between men and women, advocacy of human rights gives way to plenty of 'ifs' and to endless 'buts' according to cultural relativism, all in the name of democracy and tolerance. (*Trama di terre*, 2010)

With these words *Trama di terre* clearly advocates the need to fight against any form of cultural relativism and it condemns any attempt to soften human rights standards in relation to women’s situation in the name of respect for cultural difference. This approach is consistent with international human rights standards that have recognised that States should never condone acts of violence against women on the basis of cultural or religious justifications. Within this general approach, the association decided to dedicate particular attention to the issue of forced marriage as I describe in the next section.

9.1.2 *Trama di Terre's* Work on Forced Marriages

On the basis of the positions described in previous sections, *Trama di terre* formulated a number of proposals in order to change aspects of the Italian legislation regarded as discriminatory and also decided to focus on the specific topic of forced marriages. As regards the first aspect, the association drew the attention of the Italian institutions to the fact that women's rights are often enacted differently if they are the rights of Italian-born women rather than of migrant women as migrant women are too often treated as if they were minors and as an annex of their husbands. On these issues, the association organised a seminar entitled: "Religions and traditions: to what extent do they interfere with the implementation of women's rights?" The aim of the seminar was to devise strategies for the protection and enforcement of women's rights in conflict situations shaped by discriminatory cultural and religious traditions.

Within this framework, the association dedicated a specific project to the issue of forced marriages. The project came about because some of the migrant women who addressed the association were living in forced marriages and were asking for help from *Trama di terre* in order to escape it. The president recalls a situation in which the association was called by the police to take in a girl of Pakistani origin who was at risk of being murdered by her father because she did not want to accept a forced marriage. However, because the girl did not want to break with her family, the association was called to act as mediator. The president commented that this was one of the most difficult situations they ever had to face and added "we are alone in front of enormous problems and [...] thus we are also afraid of committing mistakes" (Dal Prà, 2009: 39, *author's translation*).

The association already started to address problems related to family law in 2007 when it organised a seminar on the issue of women's rights and Family Codes in Morocco. In 2009, it convened three seminars on the issue of multicultural societies and inter-legality starting from the Islamic context. Furthermore, the association commissioned research on forced marriages through a University in order to verify the size of the phenomenon in the area and to identify suggestions on possible methods of public intervention on the issue. The research identifies a difference between forced and combined marriages, even if this is not always clear-cut. The research report poses the question of the distinction between arranged and forced marriages by asking if, on the basis of the daughters' subjectivity the impositions are lived as such, or accepted as part of the

education, adopted in the construction of their own female identity (Danna, 2010: 6). The report concludes that:

For the purpose of public action, violence is what is subjectively perceived as such, while the moral evaluation of the effective conditions of the choice remains open to discussion and should be handled in the cultural debate. The border between imposed marriage and combined but accepted marriage must be delineated by the same person who realises to have been subjected to an imposition or accepts the marriage proposal. (Danna, 2010: 13-14)

Such distinction appears important to consider in avoidance of a patronising attitude. This difficulty is acknowledged also by Phillips when she states that:

The question, rather, is at what point do the familial and social pressures that make arranged marriage a norm turn into coercion [...] Differentiating between choice and coercion is central to solving this problem. This means understanding cultural pressures, but not assuming that culture dictates. (Phillips, 2007: 41)

The report also indicates the importance of identifying some predictive factors in relation to forced marriages such as the nationality of the girls (or the boys who are also involved in this phenomenon) as well as other elements such as those of coming from a rural or urban area, or from specific areas of a country, the social class or caste, and the level of education. Moreover, the research also underlines that whereas in the countries of origin, women's position generally improves with education and access to work within capitalistic economics, women who migrate may find more backward points of reference within their own ethnic group or points of reference that have become radicalised by adopting the most conservative forms of religion.

Trama di terre also carried out some awareness-raising activities on the issue. More specifically it convened two seminars: "Not by force, but by love" (*Trama di terre*, 2011b), and "A choice of law: if I get married it is for love" (*Trama di terre*, 2012) held in 2012. To the first seminar were invited, as well as national experts on the issue, also representatives of the SBS to present the experience on forced marriage in the UK, as well as representatives of two Moroccan women's associations, the *Association Democratique des femmes du Maroc*, and the association INSAT for women victims of violence and single mothers to talk about early marriages in Morocco and the actions undertaken by women's associations. As a result of the seminar, the association produced a press release in which the president Dal Prà asked for a regional consultation forum and plan for the prevention of and fight against forced marriages that would be the first ever established in Italy. The regional consultation table would have the aim to create awareness-raising, prevention and

protection measures, also following the indications present in a number of European and international human rights documents.⁴⁶ In the press release (*Trama di terre*, 2011a) the practice of forced marriages is described as linked to patriarchal traditions that have long survived in Italy as well and one that always has dramatic consequences on the lives of those young women: physical and psychological violence, segregation, rape, psychological and health problems, kidnapping and forced repatriation to the countries of origin and sometimes death. The petition also requests that those women who ask for protection but do not have a residence permit should be issued with one on humanitarian grounds.

The second seminar held in 2012 was dedicated to the case of Amina Filani, a Moroccan girl aged 16 who committed suicide after having been raped and forced to marry the man who raped her in Morocco. The case created an enormous outcry of protests in Morocco and rapidly became known internationally. In the document, a comparison is made with a famous case that happened in Italy in 1965 of a woman called Franca Viola who refused to marry the man who raped her. The document also recalls that it was only in 1981 that Italy abolished the article of the Penal Code about the so-called “reparatory marriage”, by which the crime of rape was cancelled if the man who had committed it, married the woman or even a girl under 18 years of age. The fact of drawing a parallel, in the petition, between the Moroccan and Italian situations clearly serves the purpose of avoiding racist reactions towards Moroccans and more generally the migrant population. However, keeping feminism and anti-racism together does not prove to be an easy task especially when dealing with specific cultural practices detrimental to women that involve the migrant population, as I discuss in further detail in the next section.

9.1.3 Keeping Feminism and Antiracism Together

As already emphasised, keeping feminist and anti-racist aims together may entail specific challenges in some circumstances. In particular when multicultural policies are criticised for having a negative effect on the enjoyment of the rights of women belonging to minority groups, and when specific cultural practices of minority groups are regarded as detrimental for women, specific attention should be paid to the risk of indirectly promoting racism. This issue is a central

⁴⁶ Reference is made to article 15 of the CEDAW Convention (United Conventions on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women); to article 16 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; to article 12 of the European Convention on Human Rights as well as to Resolution 1723/2005 of the Council of Europe and Resolutions 1486/2005, 2006/2010, 1662/2009 of the European Parliament.

concern for any project aiming to achieve forms of feminist solidarity within intercultural settings. In this section, I therefore investigate how *Trama di terre* addressed this challenge. Contradictory remarks emerge on the issue. On the one hand the President declared:

While we recognise all the atrocities committed in the Italian context [against migrants], we are also aware of this problem and we would like to address it without being judged as racist. We deserve this after years and years spent beside these [migrant] women. (Dal Prà, 2009: 6, *author's translation*)

This position was confirmed during the interviews I carried out. For instance, when I asked Michelle if they had decided to adopt some specific strategies in order not to be judged racist by the general public, she answered in the negative. She emphasised that the association's door is always open and that they had been centrally involved with promoting intercultural activities in the city. In relation to this, also Annina, another Italian-born woman member of the association, underlined that the accusation that the association may receive of being colonialist does not affect her. She stated:

It's not that we didn't discuss our position, but the fact is that we are now in a phase beyond colonialism. There has been colonialism, there has been the criticism of being colonialist, there has been the fear of being regarded as colonialist, which has meant that everything could go in the name of anti-colonialism. Now there is the fact that we can speak publicly ... I think that it is colonialist to think that freedom is a western thing, this is arrogant as it implies that freedom belongs more to one culture than to another ... throughout the world women have stood against male power, maybe they didn't call themselves feminist, but they acted even in the most remote parts of the world. (Annina, IBW)

Annina is aware of the reaction which the position of the association may cause, but she strongly advocates for the need to go beyond a situation of cultural relativism. She states that because women all over the world have opposed male power, even if they might not refer to themselves as feminists, it would be colonialist to say that freedom is a western concept. On this basis, the association feels legitimate to act in defence of women's rights when these clash with specific cultural practices, such as forced marriages.

However, in some cases the president explicitly addressed the difficulty of keeping the values of feminism and anti-racism together. For instance, during an internal training seminar she stated that if they were to reveal information about specific cases of violence involving the migrant population that they handled, they would promote an enormous outcry of racism. Therefore, she asked to the representatives of the SBS who had been invited: "how is it possible as a feminist,

anti-fundamentalist and anti-racist association to hold all these values together?” (Dal Prà, 2012) In response to this question, representatives of the invited associations underlined first of all that human rights should not be considered a western concept because in the Southern hemisphere there are a great number of women’s associations that work in order to promote women’s rights. On this point also the *Association démocratique des femmes du Maroque* (Democratic Association of Moroccan Women) emphasised how the issue of cultural specificity is instrumentally raised only where women are concerned. In contrast, it is never referred to when dealing with economic or business issues. Secondly, in relation to the issue of racism, the representatives of SBS specified that they always repel policy and legislative measures that they consider to be racist. For instance, when a man is found guilty of domestic violence, they take care of the woman and the children; they do not, however, support the State’s deportation policy. Moreover, they denounce the fact that immigration laws reinforce patriarchy because migrant women who come on family reunification grounds, are dependent on their husbands’ residence permit. So the way followed by associations such as the SBS appears to be that of fighting against both “community cultural orthodoxy” and “mainstream prejudice” (Kalra et al.: 2005: 58). As already indicated, this attempt however may prove more difficult for an association as *Trama di terre* that is not composed only by women from ethnic minorities and where the role of Italian-born women in devising the policies of the association is prevalent.

The actions promoted by the association that appear to counter most the risk of indirectly promoting racism towards minority groups, are those of working on violence against women as a general issue and of cooperating not only with international networks but also with women’s associations of some countries of origin, such as Morocco and Pakistan. Concerning the first aspect, the association has long been working on the issue of violence against women. It organised a number of training seminars in which violence against women was presented as a transcultural phenomenon and participants were asked to identify in the different cultures those elements that both promote or counter discriminatory and violent attitudes towards women. During public events and meetings, the association often underlined the pervasiveness of domestic violence in Italy and tried to deconstruct the prejudice that identifies migrant cultures as those mainly violent against women. Furthermore, as already recalled, because the local anti-violence centre closed, it decided to take on this role in 2013. Therefore, the topic of violence against women can certainly be considered as a bridging one between migrant and Italian-born women. Concerning the second aspect, the cooperation with associations like the SBS and WLUML provides a theoretical

framework for the actions undertaken by *Trama di terre*. Collaboration with women's associations in origin countries, instead, is seen as crucial especially in order to solve specific situations of migrant women involved in family law cases.

9.1.4 The Importance of Language for Anti-Racist Aims: the Case of the 'Honour' Category

Regarding the challenge of how keeping feminist and anti-racist values together, a key issue is also that of the language used especially with reference to the categorisation of the forms of violence against women. One such example is the use of the word 'honour' and in particular the reference to honour crime. Abu-Lughod states that the use of this term is the one that:

[...] poses perhaps more starkly than any other contemporary category the dilemmas of feminist scholarship and rights activism in a transnational world. It is marked as a culturally specific form of violence, distinct from other widespread forms of domestic or intimate partner violence, including the more familiar passion crime. Neither values of honor nor their enforcement through violence are ever said to be restricted to Muslim communities, and honor crimes are not condoned in Islamic law or by religious authorities. Nevertheless, their constant association with stories and reports from the Middle East and South Asia, or immigrant communities originating in these regions, has given them a special association with Islam. Anyone concerned with representations of Muslim women, with the lives of actual women in the Muslim world, and with the enterprise of "saving Muslim women" must examine this category closely. (Abu-Lughod, 2011: 17-18)

The reference to the category of 'honour' is indeed present in the work by *Trama di terre*. For instance a seminar convened in 2012 and specifically devoted to the issue of violence suffered by girls of the so-called "second generation" of migrants was entitled "Between your honour and my freedom. Fighting violence against women through an intercultural approach" (Trama di terre, 2012b). I refer here to this seminar as an illustration of the issues at stake in this discourse. More specifically, I pose the question if the reference to violence committed in the name of honour is helpful to address a specific phenomenon, and thus protecting the women involved, or if there is the risk of making this typology of violence conceptually different from violence against women and thus stigmatizing only certain ethnic groups.

In the seminar's brochure, violence suffered by migrant girls is located in the broader framework of violence that involves every woman independently of her culture, religion, social class or colour of her skin. Moreover, the same document also refers to the recommendation of the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women to Italy stating that Italy is late in protecting women from violence and in punishing the perpetrators. However, when dealing with the violence suffered by

the so-called “second generation” girls, there is a reference to a specific set of values in their families based on honour.

Since 2006, after the brutal assassination of Hina Saleem, up until today there are many young women who claim freedom and rights in our country in order to escape the patriarchal rules of their families of origin. However, many of them have been killed by their father and brothers in the name of respect of an “honour” which is deemed as being more important as their own lives. (*Trama di terre, 2012b, author’s translation*)

Also the interventions made by the speakers at the seminar alternated between these two approaches. Some of them focused on the general issue of how to enact an efficient system of prevention of violence against women while others addressed the position of second generation girls underlining a number of specific situations, from restrictions on freedom imposed on female students by their parents, to forced marriages, to ‘honour crimes’. Significantly, one of the speakers was a journalist who wrote a book (cited in the seminar’s brochure) about the murder of Hina Saleem, a Pakistani girl killed by her father. This was a case that had great resonance in Italy and was taken as the paradigmatic ‘honour killing’ in the country. In the journalist’s statement, on the one hand there was no contraposition of western and other ethnic groups and pointedly he underlined that in Italy the provision of an ‘honour crime’⁴⁷ was only repealed in 1981. On the other hand the concept of ‘honour’ was central in illustrating the causes of the murder that was in fact described as following the rituals of the ‘honour killing’. He also showed the video of an interview with the girl’s father in prison where he affirmed that he had buried the daughter’s body in the garden of the family home because in that way she had finally come home. This interview was taken as exemplary in explaining the desire for the possession of the body which is at the heart of the concept of ‘honour’. In response to the journalist’s statement, the director of a local women’s anti-violence centre made a very insightful comment that goes to the point of this reflection. She affirmed that the very simple and direct words of Hina’s father explained precisely the general mechanisms behind violence against women. She added “we call this ‘honour crime’, but what is the murder by a man who kills her partner because he feels that his prestige has been wounded?”⁴⁸ She then continued by stating that while the media refer to the first instance as an ‘honour crime’, they often describe the second as a ‘love murder’; however in both cases it is always when women decide to enact their freedom and self-determination that violence occurs.

⁴⁷ Defined as the “murder committed by a man in a state of anger because he found his wife, daughter or sister in a carnal relationship”.

⁴⁸ Intervention by the director of the Reggio Emilia anti-violence centre, from the recorded audio-file of the seminar.

She also affirmed that even if we don't have combined marriages anymore, they are still often difficult to dissolve, as women who leave relationships are often at risk of violence.

Finally, regarding the issue of language, what I have illustrated shows that this remains problematic when addressing violence suffered by women belonging to minority groups. If on the one hand, there is a need to address and respond to specific cases of violence suffered by these women, on the other hand special attention should be devoted to the kind of language used in order not to stigmatise specific groups of populations. In particular, the use of expressions, such as the reference to the concept of 'honour', should be balanced against the risk of promoting an artificial hierarchy in the kinds of violence suffered by western women and migrant women or women from ethnic minorities.

9.1.5 Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, the critique to multiculturalism expressed by *Trama di terre* is to be seen as the result of a position of strong secularism endorsed by the association that highlights the potential negative effects of all cultural traditions on women's freedom. It also comes as a response to a number of specific requests by migrant women to address situations of violence in which they were involved including specific cultural practices, such as forced marriages. From this point of view it can be argued that it represents a possible form of feminist solidarity. However, this research also shows the challenges faced by the association in order to keep feminist and anti-racist values together. Even if conscious of these challenges, the association clearly decided that the balance was to be struck in favour of a feminist commitment. In its position, the association is certainly influenced by the theoretical approaches adopted by associations and international networks, such as SBS and WLUML. However, differently from those organisations, in *Trama di terre* the role of Italian-born women is prevalent and this puts the association in a more difficult position as to the challenge of balancing feminist and anti-racist values. The way *Trama di terre* has tried to counter this risk is based on two policies: firstly focusing on gender violence as a general issue also involving Italian-born women; this aspect has been strengthened by the recent opening, in 2013, of an anti-violence centre addressed to all women. Secondly, cooperating with international and national organisations composed of migrant women and women from ethnic minorities, as well as with women's associations in some countries of origin of migrant women such as Morocco and Pakistan.

9.2 *Nosotras's* Critique of Cultural Relativism in Relation to Female Genital Mutilations

In this section, I focus on the policies of *Nosotras* regarding the prevention and fight against FGM. I argue that the association frames its policies around a concept of FGM as a human rights violation and on the basis of a critique of the cultural relativist argument on this issue. *Nosotras* has given particular attention as well as developing a specific expertise on the issue of FGM. The association is co-founder of EuroNet, a European network on FGM, and has carried out many awareness-raising, training and research activities on the issue addressed both towards the local migrant population as well as towards professionals, doctors, social workers and teachers. After Italy, in 2006, adopted a law sanctioning FGM at a penal level⁴⁹, the association advocated the need to consider the penal sanction as an extreme solution to be used only following preventive measures. More specifically, it created a signalling system whereby anyone who suspects that a girl may be about to undergo FGM can contact the association so that, together with the Centre for the Prevention and Treatment of FGM located in the local hospital, it can start a monitoring process.⁵⁰ *Nosotras* produced some recommendations that identify FGM as a human rights issue that needs to be addressed through women's empowerment. At the same time, the association emphasises that:

It would be a particularly detestable form of racism to think of cultures and traditions that are different from the western ones as fixed and monolithic structures and not as complex social forms that are also in constant evolution and above all to answer to fundamental moral instances. (*Nosotras*, 2010: 14, *author's translation*)

Within this general approach there was one specific circumstance in which the association expressed itself strongly against any so-called "alternative rite" of FGM. This happened in 2004 when a Somali doctor, Omar Abdulkhadir, put forward the proposal of an alternative rite of FGM. Abdulkhadir, Director for the Centre for the Prevention and Treatment of FGM in the Florence public hospital proposed the so-called "soft *sunna*" by which the girl was to be brought to the hospital where the doctor would have punctured her clitoris with a needle, causing a small amount of bleeding. The underlying idea, according to Abdulkhadir, was to preserve the rite, as

⁴⁹ Law 7/2006 "Provisions on prevention and prohibition of practices of female genital mutilations".

⁵⁰ If there are reasonable grounds to believe that a girl is at risk, the association is able to activate a network of professionals composed of social workers, pediatricians, gynecologists and psychologists. The association will act as mediator with the involved family and, only if the family declares its intention to submit the girl to FGM, regardless of the preventative activities of the association, will it go to the juvenile court.

many families were asking him, without making any permanent physical injury to the girl's body. The proposal soon became the object of heated debates at regional and national level, especially because initially the Regional bioethical Committee agreed to discuss the possibility of introducing the practice in public hospitals.⁵¹ Feminist intellectuals generally opposed the proposal, but there was no homogenous position. At regional level the "alternative" rite was supported by the representatives of migrant communities from some African countries, while *Nosotras* was at the forefront of the opposition that eventually led to the rejection of the proposal by the relevant bodies. Diye Ndaye, a Senegalese woman and member of *Nosotras* declared:

The leaders of our communities signed an agreement on the alternative project with the doctor Abdulkhadir. They did it without asking for our opinion. If they had consulted us, we would have said no and explained why. (Chiari, 2004: 11, *author's translation*)

Another member of *Nosotras*, Ghanu Adam, declared:

Women like me fled from the guns of the war in Somalia, but couldn't escape from infibulation. Now we live in Italy, in a civilized country. And we don't want anything of that rite to survive, not even on a symbolic level because we teach our daughters that we don't have to practice it and that's it. (Chiari, 2004: 11, *author's translation*)

The President, Laila Abi, explained that *Nosotras's* policy is in favour of a total eradication of FGM practices and opposes any medicalisation process, because this has already been tested in African countries and proven not to work (Abi, 2005: 164). She opposes the traditional idea that the girl's body is purified through FGM and she defines FGM as a means to control women's sexuality and to enforce their subordinate position in society (Abi, 2005: 167). As a consequence, she argues, there is no sense in preserving the meaning of these practices. On the contrary, the values that need to be preserved are those of physical and psychological integrity for women and girls (Abi, 2005: 168). Moreover she describes the practice as discriminatory and racist and she asks "what if there was the health of Italian girls at stake, would such a proposal be accepted?" (Abi, 2005: 165). Finally Abi states with reference to cultural relativism:

Such an attitude ends up coinciding with the racism of those who accuse us with disdain of 'barbarism' and incivility because it negates the evolution process of our societies, both in our countries and in the immigrants' communities; it negates the fights and the resistance, it

⁵¹ At political level, it is important to remember that the Tuscany Region has traditionally been left-leaning politically and demonstrated some sensitivity about migrant policies. As a consequence the debate about the proposal also became a political battle ground where some right wing parties, especially the *Lega Nord*, accused the Tuscany Region of permitting barbaric acts in the name of tolerance for other cultures.

proposes a simplified picture and it contains us within only one culture that is defined precisely by its worst aspects. (Abi, 2005: 172, *author's translation*)

With these words *Nosotras's* President speaks out against cultural relativism, which is regarded as an indirect way to promote racism. By emphasising that culture is not a fixed concept, and that African countries are going through great changes, Abi seems to adhere to a social constructivist idea of culture. As explained in Chapter 3, this approach emphasises the dynamic nature of culture, as well as its internal conflicts. In order to defend its position, the association also proved ready to speak publicly against the opinions of the people who are considered to be the leaders of the immigrant groups from some of their countries of origin. Interestingly, the association claimed that its right to have an opinion on this issue was not only based on the fact that it is composed of women coming from the countries where FGMs are practised, but also because it is a women's intercultural association. Abi writes that, as women coming from many different countries, including Italy, they felt that the proposal was an aggression towards them all:

[...] as women who are active in the movement, we are aware of the transversality of problems that emerge from gender relations and we know that if there is a problem that concerns women, it is a problem for all, be it that we come from Europe, America, Africa, Australia or Asia. (Abi, 2005: 162, *author's translation*)

Abi also notes that these are hard times for women's freedoms and she cites as an example the Italian law on assisted procreation⁵². She concludes by saying that as *Nosotras* is protesting against this law, similarly:

Italian women should feel that the proposal for an 'alternative rite' to FGM does not only concern the girl children of 'other cultures' but indirectly affects them and their daughters. (Abi, 2005: 162, *author's translation*)

Such a position entails a strong concept of feminist solidarity that is based on the awareness of the transversality of gender discrimination across countries and cultures and that asks for a demystification of cultural explanations that condone violence against women. This position is also consistent with that of the Global Movement for Women's Human Rights that has successfully advocated for the consideration of violence against women as a human rights issue. This has been acknowledged in international declarations and by human rights treaty monitoring bodies in

⁵² The law on assisted procreation - approved in 2004 - was particularly restrictive and the procedures involved were more prejudicial to women's health than those made possible by the laws of other countries. For this reason it sparked many protests from women's and human rights organisations that recently led to some improvements in the text of the law.

particular since the 1993 United Nations Conference on Human Rights and the 1995 United Nations Conference on Women which declared that women's rights are an integral part of human rights and that violence against women should never be justified in the name of cultural traditions.

9.3 Addressing Women's Inequalities in the Policies of the Associations: the Case of Domestic and Care Work

In this section, I address another issue which emerges as a key challenge for intercultural feminist practices based on reflexive solidarity, namely that of domestic and care work. A number of scholars (Ehrenreich & Hochschild, 2002; Hondageu-Sotelo, 2001; Lutz 2002a; Parreñas, 2001) have argued how in this field migrant and western women are situated in an asymmetrical relation as migrant women are providing for the domestic and care work that was once performed by western women. Some scholars (Ehrenreich & Hochschild, 2002; Sassen 2002) also argue that the same can be said for work in the sex industry. For instance Saskia Sassen (2002) refers to a "counter geography" of globalisation that is based on the services provided by migrant women not only in the domestic sector, but also as sexual workers and in the black economy that was once provided by women for free. These scholars further argued that western women's emancipation is taking place thanks to, and at the expense of, migrant women who in many instances sacrifice the care needs of their own families to work in western countries. On this point Anthias states:

Women exploit other women as in the experience of domestic maids from Eritrea, Somalia, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Latin America and so on. Women from poorer countries are used by women of richer countries. Whilst this represents the growth of women's participation in the West in the public sphere of work, this is dependent on the exploitation of migrant women. (Anthias, 2002: 278)

From the point of view of migrant women workers, this job involves the denial of real citizenship rights as it is often impossible to proceed with family reunification or of having children while working as live-in domestic workers. In other cases, migrant women who migrate to take care of children, elderly people and persons in need of care in Italy, must also delegate the care of their children and relatives to other women of the family remaining in their country of origin. This phenomenon has been defined as the "global care chain", a term first used by Arlie Hochschild to refer to: "personal links between people across the globe based on the paid or unpaid work of caring" (Hochschild 2000: 131). According to Nicola Yeates (2012), the way Hochschild describes the concept of the 'global care chain' is:

[...] driven by a woman living in a rich country (the USA) with one or more dependent children who finds herself unable to fulfil her 'domestic duties' without working a 'second shift'. To free herself from this additional labour, she recruits another woman to do it on her behalf. This other woman is drawn from a poorer household, increasingly it is suggested, from abroad (Philippines). By migrating to take up paid domestic labour, the migrant woman finds herself unable to discharge her own 'domestic duties' because she is geographically distant from her children and her home, creating a need for someone else to do so. That person – often another woman – is drawn from an even poorer household in the sending country or she may be a member of the migrant woman's own family. (Yeates, 2012: 137)

Yeates further adds that the more we move towards the end of the chain, the more the value of the care work decreases or can be also unpaid.

As anticipated in Chapter 5, also in relation to the specific Italian context, a number of studies emphasised the situation of evident inequality between Italian-born and migrant women in this area. Rhacel Parreñas, (2001), in her study carried out in Rome and Los Angeles, refers to migrant women involved in domestic and care work as "the servants of globalization" and she describes a very unequal situation between them and Italian-born women. Andall (2000) - who conducted a study in Rome - states in relation to the large prevalence of migrant women being employed in the domestic work that this witnesses the peculiar model of Italian women's emancipation. She links this with the enduring familistic model that preserves gender roles unaltered and which has its roots in the Italian Catholic subculture. She also highlights that the attachment shown towards the family apply only to Italian-born and not to migrant people, as live-in domestic workers are often prevented to become mothers. Andall concludes that this model is "a regressive strategy for all groups of women" (Andall, 2000: 292). She also states, by citing Brah, that strategies to improve women's position should not reinforce or reproduce existing inequalities and that the current division of care work is counterproductive for all groups of women. Andall concludes that:

[...] inclusive feminism projects will prove problematic within Italy precisely because the use of migrant women's labour has provided some Italian women with possibilities of increased autonomy while simultaneously reproducing inequality for Black women. (Andall, 2000: 292)

Francesca Scrinzi (2004) emphasises that in the domestic work the relationship between the employer and the employee is often a relationship between women. According to Scrinzi, in this asymmetric relationship, in order to legitimise inequality or even abuses, an appeal is made to the stereotype of female benevolence or even complicity in the desire to ensure the reproductive work in the house. Scrinzi argues that in immigration policies regulating the sector, the needs that are addressed are those of Italian-born women, while no place is assigned to the personal,

economic and political demands of migrant women. She concludes that voices of migrant women encourage feminist theories and praxis to reopen the debate about the sexual division of work and integrate in it an analysis about 'race'.

More recently, however, some scholars advocated for the need to revise the concept of 'global care chain'. For instance Kofmann (2012) argues for the necessity to unpack the concept of care and its different dimensions and to connect together the scholarship on 'care chains' with that on social reproduction. With reference to the Italian context, Campani & Chiappelli (forthcoming) criticise the argument that the employment of migrant women in the care sector enabled Italian-born women to enter the job market and to acquire a more equal role in relation to men. They cite data that indicate how women's position in Italy is still much discriminated; for instance, the already recalled, 2013 Global Gender Gap Report only ranks Italy in 80th place. According to them, the employment of migrant women in the domestic and care sector largely substituted the absence of welfare measures addressed to an ageing population, while live-in domestic workers have been employed for the ordinary domestic services only in the upper class families. They conclude that:

Structural characteristics of the economic system and the welfare regime block the professional status of migrant women, while, at the same time, keeping Italian women away from the labour market. (Campani & Chiappelli, forthcoming)

Moving from those debates, I analyse how women's intercultural associations frame their policies around domestic and care work. More specifically, I analyse the extent to which women's intercultural associations provide a place for an interrogation about the current international division of care work or whether they concentrate mainly on improving the work conditions of migrant women. I also investigate to what extent associations provide a space to reflect on women's inequalities and on the possibility of creating forms of feminist solidarity in relation to this specific subject.

9.3.1 The International Division of Domestic and Care Work

In relation to the issue of the international division of domestic and care work as the result of inequalities among women, the associations that have focused mostly on this point are *Punto di partenza* and *Almaterra*. As I pointed out in previous sections, *Punto di partenza* started its reflection from the acknowledgement of asymmetries among women. As a consequence of this

recognition, among other things it decided to carry out specific research on domestic and care work⁵³ that emerges as a result of a series of seminars dedicated to the issue of the relationships among Italian-born and migrant women in the field of care and domestic work, the international ethnic and gender division of care work; and the lack of action by the State in this field (Battaglino et al., 2004: 6). Even if the research focuses on the issue of the work conditions of migrant women, the international dimension of the phenomenon is underlined. In relation to this, Frias states in the introduction:

If the discourse is centred on immigration, this is due to the asymmetry between emigration and immigration countries. In particular it is starting from this asymmetry that immigrant people are taken into account in relation to the social and economic dynamics of the country of arrival, totally ignoring their history, their starting conditions and geo-political relations that determine these conditions. (Battaglino et al., 2004: 6, *author's translation*)

Similarly, in one report carried out by *Almaterra*, reference is made to domestic and care work in the framework of the globalisation process by stating that:

The process of globalisation also largely involves the sphere of domestic and care work involving or disrupting the lives of millions of women in poor countries who are forced to migrate to western cities or countries and end up supporting life strategies of wealthier women. (*Almaterra*, 2000: 68, *author's translation*)

The report also adds that:

[...] the situation of the labour market confronts daily life strategies of migrant women, who find paid employment almost exclusively in the field of care and domestic work, and Italian women who in order to remain in the job market, delegate migrant women some of their family responsibilities. All of this points to the fact that reproduction and care has remained an essentially female area, with a very low percentage of sharing by male partners. (*Almaterra*, 2000: 67, *author's translation*)

In this report, *Almaterra* does not only regard the employment of migrants in the domestic and care sector as a result of global inequalities, but also as a result of the lack of sharing responsibilities for this kind of work by men. The fact that domestic and care work is still largely seen as a female task leads to a situation whereby Italian-born women do not look for more equal sharing with their male partners but for the help of another woman.

⁵³ The research was carried out also by migrant women who had been themselves employed in the sector and who conducted interviews with the employer families and with migrant women workers, as well as with public and not for profit sector bodies in the field.

Furthermore, a very clear position on this point is endorsed by *Migranda*, a network composed of migrant women associations including *Trama di Terre* and *Le Mafalde* that drafted a public petition stating:

The *Bossi-Fini* law⁵⁴ reproduces on a transnational scale the sexual division of reproductive labour. Domestic and care work is always aimed at women, whether migrants or Italian, even if some of the women managed to get rid, at least partially, of this “domestic destiny” by paying another woman. As long as migrant women are recognised only as “roles” (wives, prostitutes who can only redeem themselves as victims or as domestic and care workers on which the new private welfare relies and is paid by women) freedom for all women is under attack. (*Migranda*, 2011, *author’s translation*)

Once again, it is underlined how the present international care division is based on the assumption that care work has to be carried out by women. In this petition, migrant and Italian-born women’s roles are not played against each other. Similarly to what Andall (2000) states, it is underlined that if migrant women are recognised only in their roles of wives, sex-workers or domestic and care workers, this is to the detriment of all women.

The association *Nosotras* instead refers to the issue as arising from the difficulties of local institutions in providing for the needs of the elderly people and from the difficulties faced by families in taking care of them (*Nosotras*, 2011: 11). In its recent project *NeroArgento*, addressed at enforcing the rights and dignity of the women employed in the care sector, *Nosotras* concentrates its efforts on the improvement of working conditions for migrant women as well as on countering the discrimination suffered especially by specific groups, such as black women and Muslim women wearing a veil. The association’s policy is well reflected in a theatre performance it produced entitled: “Eating, Drinking, Sleeping. Stories of *Badanti and Badati*”⁵⁵. The main idea of the performance is to represent a number of stories of migrant women and to make the public aware of the reality and the importance of domestic and care work. The performance does not refer to domestic and care work as a result of injustice and inequalities among women on a global scale. Rather, the decision by the women to migrate is described as resulting from the geo-political situation of specific countries (poverty, wars, change of political regimes) and often driven by the necessity to support children left in the countries of origin. The difficulties of domestic work are described, but not overemphasised, as well as the discriminatory attitudes by Italian-born people.

⁵⁴ The *Bossi-Fini* law is the law regulating migration.

⁵⁵ As stated in Chapter 5, the term “badante” has become commonly used to refer to the person, normally a migrant woman, who looks after an elderly person in need of care. However this term has a derogatory connotation. The term “badati” refers to those who are looked after.

What is mostly emphasised is the encounter between different needs (of care by elderly people in Italy and of work by migrant women), the value of domestic work and the encounter of different worlds taking place in the house. In some cases, the performance emphasises that migrant women had received a high education and/or had carried out important jobs in their countries of origin. Only in one story is the relationship between the woman employer and the woman employed specifically described as problematic, whereas great emphasis is put on describing the strength and personal capacities of migrant women. The main message that *Nosotras* aims to convey through the performance is that of the value of the work carried out by migrant women in this field.

9.3.2 Spaces for a Migrant Women's Agency?

Given that domestic and care work is, in many instances, the only available job to migrant women, often it does not correspond to the choice of migrant women. In this section, I analyse whether under these circumstances there are still spaces for a migrant women's agency and to what extent associations are supporting these trajectories. First of all, since this kind of work often entails important limitations to women's lives, especially as regards the care needs of their own family, in some circumstances the associations discourage women from it. Linda states that:

To many women we have not recommended it because it is heartbreaking for a woman who has just had a baby to leave him/her [...] We have done a lot to discourage [women] from doing this [work]. [...] We also carried out self-help groups to inform them about their rights. (Linda, MW)

Linda further explains that they have carried out a number of awareness-raising activities, also in relation to maternity rights for migrant women, as well as advocacy activities aimed at the regional government in order to obtain support measures for migrant women when they lose their job.

Yvonne underlines the difficulty for some women to accept this kind of work, especially those with high qualifications. She states:

For some of them it was really very difficult to accept, they still lived the work with difficulty, but at the same time they are people who do this work with great care [...] Then we talked about this acceptance, this change as they would have never imagined to be doing this kind of work, but then they found themselves doing it and they continue to do so, because they have no other option, because most diplomas from countries like Senegal, Ivory Coast rather than Eritrea or Ethiopia, but also Albania, are rarely officially recognised ... and these people do not have the opportunity to practice their profession. (Yvonne, MW)

Yvonne explains very clearly that often even for women who are very well qualified there are no job opportunities outside the sphere of domestic and care work because they don't have the possibility of having their education titles recognised.

From the associations' practices it emerges that in order to guarantee spaces for a woman's agency, two conditions are central. Firstly, the valorisation of care in terms of social value that can be attained through fair conditions of work and the establishment of a good relationship with the employer family. Secondly, the necessity to break the professional segregation of migrant women. This condition is what has been described as a "frozen professional destiny" for migrant women (Campani & Chiappelli, forthcoming). This last point is certainly the most difficult to be addressed and even more so in times of economic recession. With reference to the first point, such necessity emerges clearly from the fact that in many cases migrant women themselves do not give much value to this kind of work, or even feel ashamed of it. For instance Marta states:

I myself ... worked for many years with elderly people and I am now more convinced that it is essential to do this work in a conscientious manner and that it is also valued by society ... I think that we really need to be aware of what we are doing for the other person as a human being ... because in almost all cases we accompany people until the moment of death. It is very delicate and difficult work because ... living with people you cannot help but get affectionate towards them because otherwise you cannot assist them with the right humanity that there has to be, that there must be. I've never seen this just as a job ... so I think that this work should be valued because we all become old and having someone who takes care of us ... in a delicate way, in an appropriate manner, with humanity, with sensitivity and responsibility, I think it is very important. (Marta, MW)

This is why *Almaterra* stresses that domestic and care work should not be considered as a possible occupation for all migrant women, but should be carefully evaluated on the basis of women's skills, expectations and attitude towards this kind of job. For instance, the association does not include anyone who asks to participate in the training courses to become "family assistant". Women who are not interested in working in the domestic and care work, or who are not considered suitable for it, are addressed to another kind of training. This training includes a series of meetings in which women are helped to identify their competencies, draft their *curriculum vitae* and look for a job. Those meetings are regarded as very useful both in terms of acquiring specific skills and in terms of strengthening the women's self-esteem.

The association *Nosotras* has specifically focused on the issue of giving value to domestic and care work, especially through its recent project *NeroArgento*. This project is aimed to promote the

rights and dignity of migrant women employed in the sector, in particular through an awareness raising campaign and the production of a manual of good practices addressed to families who employ a family assistant. The campaign included a television ad. in which the discrimination suffered by specific groups of migrant women (black women in this case) is portrayed in an ironic way. During the presentation of the project this was described as a specific choice of the association as in other campaigns the situation of migrant women employed in this sector is described in a very dramatic way. In contrast, through this ad., the association aims to describe how the direct knowledge between the migrant woman and the Italian family, may lead to the elimination of 'racial' prejudices. The ad. starts with the following request that was really advanced to the association, by an Italian-born woman: "I would like a *badante* for my father, but please she shouldn't be black, because you know my father is not able to see anymore ..." (*Nosotras*, 2011, *author's translation*). The ad. then describes how 'racial' prejudices are easily overcome once the black woman is inserted in the Italian family. Representatives of the association also stated that when they receive racist requests such as this one, they adopt counter strategies, such as sending a white family assistant accompanied by the association's president, who is a black woman.

As regards the possibility of breaking the professional segregation of migrant women, this also emerges as the most important point in the research carried out by *Punto di partenza*. The underlying idea is that this work can be effectively chosen and experienced as a career journey. To this end a series of proposals are put forward including: the strengthening of the rights of women employed in care work not only in relation to the contract, but also to personal and social needs of time and place, and individual training schemes; the experimentation of organisational models that take charge of the growing need for care work 24 hours a day; and the inclusion of the network of local services to support the care work (Battaglino et al., 2004).

This point is recognised as crucial also by *Almaterra* that has invested a lot energy in creating qualified job opportunities for migrant women. Since 2000, about one hundred women were first trained and then inserted in banks, and private companies. These projects were aimed to:

[...] break migrant women's segregation in the work sphere, support them for the insertion in qualified jobs, identify job opportunities that may give a different and positive visibility to migrant women and valorise the education and skills they acquired in their countries of origin. (*Almaterra*, 2000: 64, *author's translation*)

The aim that *Almaterra* assigned to these projects is two-folded: on the one hand to give migrant women the opportunity to valorise their skills, on the other to promote a different visibility of them in society in order to go beyond the often held assumption that migrant women are only suited to be domestic workers, or sex-workers. This intention worked in some cases, for instance the manager of a big company, such as Ikea declared that after this experience they had overcome the problem of access in selection procedures and stated: “now it is natural to do an interview with anyone, independently from their place of birth. This is the change that happened” (Isastia & Neves, 2004: 79, *author’s translation*).

Almaterra’s projects addressed the creation of qualified job opportunities for migrant women and proved to be very positive for those women who had the opportunity to be placed in them. Nonetheless a number of critical factors emerged. Some of the women still had to make a compromise with their education as they were trained for intellectual jobs. Most of all, in recent years these projects proved to be very difficult to be replicated due to the current economic crisis and the decrease in public funding as well as in the political support enjoyed by the association. For instance, Marta states that the previous year they trained a group of 12 women for qualified jobs and only 6 of them found a job and not even in the specific sector they had requested, while the other 6, notwithstanding the great efforts they put into it, are still unemployed. She concludes:

It is a nice dream, perhaps many years ago there was still a market and foreign women who put an effort into doing what she was able to do, could have an open door, but right now I think it’s very difficult. (Marta, MW)

In relation to this, some migrant women also expressed criticism of the way the association had been handled and were convinced that with a different kind of management it would have still been possible to create new job opportunities. For instance Patricia referred to the possibility of creating both new cultural and commercial projects if the association had been managed in a different way.

In relation to the possibility of promoting skilled labour, Yvonne from *Nosotras* states that:

The steps in this direction are very hard, the association can do little as the recognition of diplomas and professional qualifications is something that goes from Ministry to Ministry ... and practices are long, complicated and very expensive, so that one does not even try. (Yvonne, MW)

Once again, the issue of lack of recognition of educational qualifications proves to be one of the most relevant difficulties in breaking the professional segregation of migrant women on which associations cannot intervene. Yvonne then explains that the association provides these people with training and welcome services and that sometimes these people start to cooperate with the association and this is the way through which they find some form of compensation and satisfaction.

Finally, this research shows that the possibility for migrant women employed in the care and domestic sector to have spaces for an agency varies greatly depending both on the work conditions and on the women's education and professional journey. In some cases, where fair work conditions are guaranteed and where the person assigns value to this job, there can be a space for the woman's agency and domestic and care work is also regarded as a way to promote intercultural relationships. For instance, a letter written by a family assistant and published by *Nosotras* states:

I am the foreign *badante*, the one who suddenly enters your house in order to be next to you or to replace you in the care that you cannot give to your beloved ones. However, just in this specific work of care that I do in your house, a new possibility for change exists ... As *badare* is not only to work but also to love ... it is also friendship and knowledge of other worlds. It is also giving together some more sense to oldness, to illness and to death ... (*Nosotras*, 2011: 67, *author's translation*)

A similar description can also be found in the results of research conducted by *Almaterra*:

It is two worlds that meet and build from now on a piece of future, the future of both people, even if one gives her work and the other receives it, but it is a future that changes, not only for the two people, but also from an intercultural point of view. (Miceli, 2003: 28, *author's translation*)

From these descriptions, a clear understanding emerges of care work as an activity which goes beyond the pure meaning of a job. There is also a clear sense of pride in participating in the construction of an intercultural society.

Moreover, for a number of women the possibility to be employed in the domestic sector entails an enlargement in terms of the possibility to exercise their rights as women. Gloria says:

There comes a time when the person says "it's true, I left, perhaps with the excuse that I had to improve my family, my children, but I was sick of my husband, I was sick of his pressures, his *machismo*, that he always decided for me and I realise that now I am a person who commands from here, my life and partly also the lives of my children"... because you know that the

person who migrates acquires a very strong role in her family. Before the woman in her country was a weak person, one with a role dependent on her husband, the family was sometimes patriarchal, but when this person leaves, she demonstrates the ability to move, the ability to have skills to find a job, to keep the job, and then preserves and maintains life ... because many send remittances to their countries and this is something that makes them feel proud of themselves. (Gloria, MW)

In the description of Gloria, some migrant women employed in the domestic and care sector acquire a position of self-determination and also a more authoritative position in relation to the families they left in their countries of origin. She also specifies that these women manage to at least partially decide about their children's lives. This description presents some important differences with the way 'global care chains' have been described by the scholarship as it also assigns a more active role to migrant women in relation to the possibility of maintaining a parental role in the lives of their children, as well as to their own personal empowerment.

Conversely, in other cases, domestic and care work is seen as the first occupation that migrant women can easily find when they arrive in Italy, but that they are not willing to carry out anymore after some time, either because they have other qualifications from their education and work experience in their country of origin or because they attended training courses in Italy. For instance Patricia states:

I cannot go back to care for the elderly, I did not come to Italy for this, with all the respect for a job that is extremely complex, difficult and serious and that also offers a good salary, though never as much as it should ... I'm not going to do this work because many of the jobs that one does in the first few years were fine, there was no problem, but it was a first step, it's not that anyone who comes here, has to content herself to work for the elderly until she is 80 [...]
(Patricia, MW)

Similarly Flora, an Italian-born woman, reports the expression of a migrant woman: "I'd want to be really desperate before going back to do that job [care work]". These accounts confirm that it is clearly not possible to homogenise migrant women into a unified category but it is necessary to differentiate on the basis of personal expectations, education and class, as well as age.

9.3.3 Spaces for Feminist Solidarity?

This analysis has shown so far how the issue of domestic and care work remains problematic as regards the possibility of establishing forms of feminist solidarity. Associations are aware that this kind of work has significant shortcomings for migrant women especially as regards live-in domestic workers and when women have to leave their children in the countries of origin. In some cases,

these associations have discouraged women to take this job, however they are also aware that this is the most significant source of paid employment for migrant women. As a consequence, they have devoted much attention to promote fairer conditions of work for those employed in this sector. Regarding the issue of women's inequalities in this area, whereas all associations invite the employer families to respect the rights of family assistants and to establish a relationship of trust and care towards them, normally the reference is to a relationship between the migrant woman and the family, not between the woman employer and the woman employee. However, in some instances associations have specifically addressed this point either in public seminars or in internal discussion groups. More specifically, *Punto di partenza* dedicated seminars and research to the issue, containing a number of concrete proposals to improve the working conditions of migrant women. Furthermore, regarding women's relationships in this area, Frias states in the research:

Women should be able to interrogate themselves - and not only in private - in order to put these issues on the political agenda as cultural and structural issues relating to relationships between the sexes. The aphasia that we found, not being able to speak, and the guilt that accompanies the inability to cope with multiple responsibilities have to be replaced by public acknowledgment. We need words, analyses, relationships, exchanges, a new political thought to change relationships between genders and asymmetries among women. (Battaglino et al., 2004: 61, *author's translation*)

In this statement, Mercedes Frias focuses on the feeling of guilt by Italian-born women - that emerges as a crucial point in relationships between Italian-born and migrant women, as I have shown in Chapter 8 - and advocates for the need to replace it with a public analysis and a new political engagement. The conclusion reached by *Punto di partenza* is about the need to place the issue of domestic and care work as one that needs to directly interrogate policies. Only in this way will it be possible to change the current situation of inequality among genders and among women.

The reflection carried out in other associations points more to the need of establishing a good relationship between the woman employed and the family/woman employer as in various circumstances migrant women have reported very harsh work conditions. For instance, Linda states:

The person is a person and should be seen as such, not as a machine: "I delegate you this and that, and you have to be like a slave" ... because we also supported women who were really treated like slaves. (Linda, MW)

On this point Gloria explains that:

A woman who is also a feminist could in a moment accept a migrant woman to do this job, but she should not do it with an indifferent attitude of a person who says "Fine, I'll look for a woman and delegate everything to her, forgetting about her and leaving her there and maybe without even respecting her rights"... we imagine that a woman can be in need of help from outside, but this family assistant ... should tell us, "this is a good person because she also takes care of me, she respects my rights, I feel satisfied because there is a peaceful relationship." We have accepted ... that Italian women take care of the family assistant because she is taking care of their parents. (Gloria, MW)

In relation to women's inequalities, Gloria states that, as migrant women, they have accepted the idea that an Italian-born woman can find herself in a situation in which she has to rely on the help of another woman. However, a woman who considers herself a feminist and employs another woman should establish a relationship with her by taking care of her needs as the family assistant is taking care of her parents. Such a request can be seen as adding a further dimension to the concept of 'global care chain', but one which goes in the direction of reducing the inequalities among the women.

In conclusion, my research shows that in the Italian context, the possibility of creating spaces for feminist solidarity in relation to the issue of the large-scale employment of migrant women in the sector of domestic and care work, lies at different levels. The first level concerns the promotion of fair conditions of work which also include a care relationship by the Italian-born woman employer. A second level is that of breaking the professional segregation of migrant women by promoting their access to skilled and qualified sectors of employment. This point is particularly problematic due to some structural factors, such as the current economic crisis and the difficulty of establishing the recognition of most education and professional attainments of migrants, a form of institutional discrimination common across western economies. The third level aims at putting the issue of care and domestic work on the political agenda. It emphasises that this area should not be regarded as a private matter to be dealt by women, but a public concern that needs to be addressed through welfare state systems - to a much greater extent than it is currently. This third level is perhaps the most challenging, but it emerges as the only one that has the potential to radically address this issue, together with the necessity for a much larger share of domestic and care work to be carried out by men. This necessity also stems from the fact that in Italy the large scale employment of migrant women in the field of domestic and care work is accompanied by a low labour market participation rate by Italian-born women. On this basis, Italian-born and migrant women need to jointly put forward the issue of domestic and care work as a public problem that needs to be addressed at a societal level. More broadly, they should join in a

common fight on the basis of their subordinate, although differing and unequal, positions in the Italian society.

9.4 Concluding Remarks

In this last chapter I have identified two areas of policies that are particularly relevant in order to progress the transformative agenda underpinning intercultural feminist work, namely policies towards cultural practices and policies on domestic and care work. In relation to the first point, I have illustrated how cultural policies are at the centre of the debate in some associations, in particular within *Trama di terre*. I have shown how this organisation has identified a tension between multicultural policies and the enactment of women's rights. The association's critique of multicultural policies and practices is based on a strongly secularist position that identifies all cultural and religious traditions as potentially limitative of women's rights and freedom. In relation to the Italian context, this critique is founded primarily on the lack of intervention by the Italian institutions in cases of violence against migrant women or, cultural practices involving migrant women, such as forced marriages.

Within this critique, I have explored the possible tensions between feminist and anti-racist values, in particular when addressing cultural practices that specifically involve the migrant population. I have shown how the association has dealt with this challenge, mainly by cooperating with international networks, and women's associations from some countries of origin of migrant women. I have also illustrated how language plays out within this context, in particular in relation to the notion of 'honour' and the category of 'honour crimes'. On this point, I have explained the risk of stigmatising a specific part of the migrant population and of ethnic minorities, thus potentially creating an artificial hierarchy in the acts of violence suffered by western women, on the one side, and migrant women and women from ethnic minorities, on the other. Still in relation to a critique of cultural relativism, I have shown how the association *Nosotras* has clearly framed its policy against FGM around this concept. This emerged, in particular, when it was confronted with the proposal for an alternative rite to FGM, that still involved a minor manipulation of female genitals, and that the organisation rejected.

The second area investigated in this chapter as crucial in order to progress the agenda of intercultural feminist work is that of domestic and care work. I have shown how scholarship on the "global care chain" has identified clear inequalities between western women and migrant women.

In relation to the Italian context, recent scholarship has shown how the professional segregation of migrant women in this field, in particular in the provision of care of elderly people, goes together with a low rate of participation in the labour market of Italian-born women. On this basis, I have argued that migrant and Italian-born women should jointly interrogate the lack of State policies in this field that would potentially broaden choices and opportunities for both. Activities undertaken by associations in this area refer to the improvement of working conditions of migrant women, the valorisation of care work itself and the promotion of skilled jobs for migrant women wishing to pursue a different career path. However, efforts relating to this last point have proved particularly difficult due to the lack of recognition of educational and professional attainments of migrant women as well as structural constraints of the labour market. As a consequence, the possibility of achieving forms of feminist solidarity in relation to domestic and care work emerges as problematic and needs new policies at State level. I have argued that this aim cannot be pursued unless the condition of migrant women is recognised in itself, and also as stated by Andall (2000), as indicative of the more general subordinated condition of women in Italy.

Conclusions

This chapter draws together key insights that have emerged from this study on the complexities, contradictions and challenges of intercultural feminist practices, within the framework of selected intercultural settings bringing together migrant and Italian-born women in Italy. The implications of these findings are reflected on in relation to the scholarship, as well as to organisational strategies and practices. It also addresses the parameters of this research and suggests some directions for further research.

Starting from a feminist post-colonial critique of the notion of “global sisterhood”, this thesis has posed the question as to whether there is still a place for a common engagement among women, on what grounds it could engage and what are the challenges it poses. I have named this project “intercultural feminism based on a notion of reflexive solidarity” on the basis of the perspectives of selected feminist post-colonial authors (Mohanty, 1984, 2003; Brah, 1996; Yuval Davis, 1997, 2006a, 2006b, 2010; Ahmed, 2000) who have proposed forms of common political engagement among women positioned differently and unequally, based on concepts of solidarity and dialogue. I have also drawn on intersectionality theory (Hill Collins, 1990; Crenshaw, 1991; Lutz, 2002b; Yuval Davis, 2006a; Anthias, 2013a, 2013b) and argued that the most relevant differences that emerge in this project are those of ‘race’, ethnicity, legal status/citizenship, class and age.

Key Insights

Within the explored settings, the possibility of having a common political engagement among women who have different and unequal positions in terms of ‘race’, ethnicity, legal status/citizenship, class and age is recognised as an important aim to pursue. However a number of specific challenges and obstacles to its realisation are identified. More specifically, this research has explored the challenges and dynamics of feminist solidarity by investigating dynamics of identity and otherness and by analysing power relations and organisational practices in chosen intercultural associations in Italy. A number of situations are explored that act as a bridge among Italian-born and migrant women, such as the contesting of the division of women into rigid categorisations on the basis of nationality or ethnicity. The idea of sharing “a starting point a bit displaced” (Annina, IBW) emerges, as well as highlighting the idea that all identities and cultures are hybrid in practice. I argued that these situations involve both the potential for functioning as a

bridge among women positioned differently, while also risking the concealment of structural power differentials. For this reason, I have confronted these concepts with the notion of 'colour-blindness' as well as white privilege. This research also interrogates the notion of intercultural feminism, that I have defined as an exchange among women who are different (especially in terms of 'race', ethnicity, legal status/citizenship, class and age) which is aimed at identifying how different cultural norms impact on women's lives and what kind of strategies may be adopted to address them. Within this framework, the value of cross-cultural comparisons that confront, for instance, the practice of FGM and that of aesthetic vaginal surgery are explored. This kind of comparison raises the issue of what counts as practices detrimental to women, whether it is possible to have some form of global consensus and the related risks of cultural relativism.

Specific attention is then focused on migrant Muslim women as in dominant discourses, Muslim women, especially veiled ones, have been represented as bearing values that are irreconcilable with western ones. The extent to which selected intercultural associations have been able to counter these 'othering' attitudes is argued as crucial to establishing or developing solidarity. In the interviews with Italian-born women the question of the veil is sometimes regarded as an issue of personal choice and freedom, especially from older women who have discussed it since their initial years of belonging to the association. In contrast, for younger women it remains, to some extent, a divisive issue. In some cases the wearing of the veil is seen as being in opposition to considering oneself a feminist. In other instances, the veil is regarded as a barrier to intimacy and friendship among women or, as a denial of the right to vanity. This research has further illustrated that when 'othering' attitudes prevail on the part of non-veiled women, especially by young Italian-born women, intercultural dialogue is under threat. At the same time, it also emerged that in some instances there is a reciprocal gaze between young Italian-born women and Muslim women in which one judges the other as different, and not conforming to the norms of femininity prescribed by their own society. This illustrates how 'othering' processes exist in both directions, even if they are enacted by women who are in different power positions. Italian-born women, being part of the majority population, are in fact in a position that enables them to render non-Italian-born women "other", whereas Muslim women, being part of the minority, do not have that same power. In other instances, as in the work by *Almateatro*, the issue of the Islamic veil is taken as a starting point for a broader reflection on women's constraints in different countries, such as for instance the fact that women in western countries are subjected to the "dictatorship" of the 'size 6'. I have argued that this goes in the direction of facilitating forms of intercultural feminism.

However, this cross-cultural comparison is not exempt from contradictions. This operation starts from the understanding of Islamic veiling practices as a boundary and limitation, thus failing to fully acknowledge those instances where the wearing of the Islamic veil is endorsed as a symbol of women's freedom and modernity. At the same time, this research has also addressed the complexities and contradictions around policies on Islamic veiling practices. On this point, I have argued that avoiding an Orientalist gaze based on 'othering' attitudes should not lead to disregarding the situation of women living in Muslim countries who consider the veil as an imposition and fight for the right not to be forced to wear it. Moreover, it should also be possible to distinguish between different typologies of veiling practices, as emphasised by Lewis (2004) in her effort to get away from the idea of "the veil" as such. In relation to the dynamics and challenges of power-relations and organisational practices in intercultural associations, this thesis emphasised how the most relevant issues derive from both structural asymmetries as well as from the persistence of ethnocentric attitudes on the part of Italian-born women.

Structural asymmetries between Italian-born and migrant women concern mainly citizenship status, recognition of educational and professional qualifications, access to networks facilitating job opportunities, and knowledge of the country and people. The research also revealed how different forms of racism, such as patronising mechanisms and forms of "reverse discrimination", remain one of the most important obstacles to the achievement of a situation of mutual exchange, itself a precondition for effective feminist solidarity. In particular, this research has shown that where the lack of recognition of migrant women's skills by Italian-born women is prevalent and where Italian-born women show patronising attitudes, this represents an important obstacle to the achievement of a situation of mutually transforming relationships. Relationships between Italian-born and migrant women also brought up the issue of different modalities of communication whereby migrant women are sometimes accused of being unable to dialogue. This raises the broader issue of anger that, according to feminist post-colonial authors (Lorde, 1984) has to be addressed and allowed, in order to face the issue of racism. Moreover, accounts by migrant women who emphasise how they have to show that they are "up to standards" in the work of the association, show how racialisation mechanisms work. Individual behaviours and attitudes are not evaluated at a personal level, but are taken as representative of the ethnicity to which the person belongs, or in this case of the category of migrant women. Even if on a different level, prejudices among migrant women also emerge as an obstacle in the achievement of equal relationship among women.

In relation to the issue of a recognition of different trajectories of the empowerment of women, this research showed how - where Italian-born women have assumed their specific feminist trajectories as valid for all women, without really engaging in an exchange with other forms of women's empowerment - this has generated division and tension. It was also perceived as a form of patronising by Italian-born women. The main points of contention related to the lack of consideration of other grounds of discrimination beyond gender, in particular 'race', and the different consideration of relationships with men, family and maternity. This doesn't mean that associations have not provided space for a mutual exchange on different forms of women's empowerment. However, it emerges that, especially for those organisations that are involved with the everyday running of service provision, there is less space for engaging in an in-depth reflection on possible exchanges of different strategies for the empowerment of women. In contrast, associations engaging in political and cultural work have shown greater opportunities in this area. Regarding the issue of power-sharing within the associations, the role of policies of "positive discrimination" aimed at migrant women is investigated. The research showed how, in some cases, they have led to a more egalitarian situation of power sharing within the associations, while in other instances they have not led to a real alteration of the power structure and they have been regarded as tokenistic.

In contrast to accounts criticising rigid categorisation of women described in Chapter 6, in relation to issues of power sharing and structural asymmetries among women, this research shows the persistence of the division of women into two distinct groups, Italian-born and migrant women. The accounts of migrant women state that until they have the same opportunities as Italian-born women and their competencies are recognised, it will not be possible to generally refer to the category of 'women'. As recalled by Pojmann (2008: 199), with reference to migrant women: "It was clear that without basic rights, inequality would always frame their relationships with Italian women". In relation to an exploration of how whiteness plays out in intercultural feminist practices, this study has shown that the recognition of one's dominant and privileged position often entails a difficult self-examination on the part of Italian-born women. There are only a few cases in which addressing racism is explicitly visible in a progression from guilt to recognition to responsibility and reparation, while a reaction of denial or defensiveness is not uncommon. Such a passage can be regarded as a key test of the awareness of the need to challenge the colonial legacy as well as a critical reflection on 'whiteness'. As recalled by one interviewee (Giovanna,

IBW): “if in the meeting there is the recognition of this experience, this different positioning ... there can be space for mutual recognition.”

Finally, this research analysed two areas of policies that are particularly relevant for progressing the transformative agenda underpinning intercultural feminist work, namely policies on women’s human and cultural rights, and on domestic and care work. On the first issue, a number of critiques of multicultural policies from a perspective of women’s human rights are explored, in particular within the association *Trama di terre*. The research also investigates the possible tensions between a feminist and anti-racist commitment especially when cultural practices that involve the migrant population are addressed, such as forced marriages, within settings in which Italian-born women are dominant. Measures undertaken by the association as a counterbalance are also explored, for instance by focusing on violence against women as a general issue and cooperating with international and national associations, including those composed of migrant women and women from ethnic minorities, as well as with women’s associations in the countries of origin of migrant women. The issue of language is also explored, in particular with reference to the concept of ‘honour’ and ‘honour crimes’. It is argued that the reference to this notion should be balanced against the risk of promoting an artificial hierarchy in acts of violence suffered by western women and migrant women or women from ethnic minorities. In analysing the work of *Nosotras* on FGM, it is shown how the policy of the association is framed around a rejection of cultural relativism, which is regarded as a form of racism. A strong concept of feminist solidarity also emerges, based on the awareness of the transversality of gender discrimination across countries and cultures, that asks for a demystification of cultural explanations that condone violence against women.

In relation to domestic and care work, the asymmetrical position of migrant and Italian-born women remains one of the main challenges to the enactment of a project on feminist solidarity. This research confirms large employment of migrant women in the field of domestic and care work and, in particular, in the care of elderly people in Italy. While it is shown in the statistical profile that the rate of participation in the labour market of Italian-born women is low in comparison with other European countries, it also confirms the professional segregation of migrant women in this field. Efforts put in place by associations to counter this situation proved especially difficult because of the lack of recognition of educational and professional attainments of migrant women. Given these discriminatory conditions, this research poses the question of the possibility of the enactment of forms of feminist solidarity based on a migrant women’s agency. Concerning the

first point, this varies considerably in relation to work conditions, the social value given to domestic and care work as well as on the basis of personal expectations, class, education and age. As regards the possibility of developing forms of feminist solidarity, this research suggests that as well as actions of advocacy, seeking fair conditions of work and access to more skilled jobs for migrant women, there is a need to address the broader issue of the provision of domestic and care work at the level of State policy.

Implications for Scholarship and Practice

This research posed the question of how it is possible for women, who have unequal positions within society, to share a common political goal. I had initially named this project as based on a notion of “international feminist solidarity”. However, during the course of the research I have come to realise that what I was exploring was intercultural practices in a national context, although within the global framework of migration. To refer to such a project as ‘international’ because of the presence of migrant women, would run the risk to “other” those women who live in the same territory as Italian-born women. At the same time, the insights that emerge from my analysis on feminist intercultural practices, as indicated below, can also be helpful to illuminate the challenges posed by the concept of international feminist solidarity. Exploring intercultural feminist practices at an organisational level within a given national framework has the additional advantage of providing a framework of analysis at a *micro* level. Dynamics of identity and otherness, racism and white privilege as well as the possibilities for a feminist reflexive solidarity can therefore be analysed at an in-depth level. Analysing intercultural practices within given organisations provides the possibility of exploring daily relationships among women positioned differently, whereas at an international/global level, such as UN forums or transnational networks, interactions may be less regular and therefore dynamics of otherness, racism and white privilege may be more difficult to identify. To conclude on this point, the critical issues that emerge in this research in relation to intercultural feminist practices can represent a useful roadmap to evaluate the possibilities of reaching forms of solidarity also at international and global level. This could form the basis for a future study.

One of the central issues raised by feminist post-colonial scholarship in relation to the possibility of building a common project among women who hold unequal positions in society, is the importance of shifting from identity politics to a politics of identification on the basis of common

struggles (Brah, 1996; Yuval Davis, 1997, 2006b). This shift is confirmed in the experiences of the women interviewed. The crucial issue is not one of sharing a common identity, but rather of sharing a common objective and a common struggle. The very fact of migrant and Italian-born women being together is often felt by migrant women to be something “natural”, because Italian-born and migrant women share the same territory, as well as a concern about the position of women in society. However, this research has also emphasised a number of differences or specificities in the practices of women’s intercultural associations in relation to current scholarship. For instance, Yuval Davis (1997, 2006a, 2006b, 2010) refers to transversal politics based on the practice of ‘rooting’ and ‘shifting’. Differently from this concept, based on the idea that people start from clear distinct positions (‘rooting’) from which they should be seen to shift, this research shows that, in some cases, what unites women is sharing a “starting point a bit displaced”, the sharing of a sense of estrangement from the dominant culture and the contesting of the division of women according to rigid categorisation criteria. Such a feeling is often described as common among both migrant and Italian-born women. Moreover, Yuval Davis (1997) identifies the conditions for working together in sharing common values. In the intercultural organisations that I have chosen, the conditions for working together are sometimes identified in common values, but also in feeling equal and in showing respect for the views of others. In some cases, there is an emphasis on going beyond national divisions and on highlighting the fact that women from different countries belong to larger categories of “women” and “people”. This is sometimes regarded as a precondition for working together which arises from a need to overcome discrimination against migrants or minorities. This also poses the need to contest rigid definitions of categories, and of fixed boundaries for instance, between the category of “migrant” and “Italian-born”. In describing the factors that facilitate working together, emphasis is placed on doing things together, as well as on the sharing of materiality, of daily life. In some instances, it is also underlined how, among women, there is always the possibility of finding some commonalities which go beyond specific differences, as among women, “dialogue doesn’t stop” (Ellen, MW). Commonalities are identified as the ability to listen and care, and the ability to provide for the others. The fact that, in most cases, these associations work to support other (migrant) women is also regarded as a unifying factor. Agreement is thus created through working to support other women. It is also emphasised that it is in the actual working together that it is possible to find solutions to different views, experiences and perspectives, and when it doesn’t come to pass then

everything becomes more complicated. The current economic crisis is often highlighted as an obstacle to reaching agreement because it leads to tensions over scarce funding and resources.

Another element that emerges as facilitating the process of working together is that of personal relationships within the associations, which are sometimes described in terms of loving and caring friendships. This study shows how the sharing of a common aim and a common struggle is fundamental, but it also illustrates how the pleasure of belonging to a collective female space emerges as a crucial part of the decision to take part in, or to remain within, an association. This aspect is important not only for migrant women who, in many instances, refer to the fact that they feel welcomed and at home within an organisation, but in several cases Italian-born women cite it as significant as well. The distinct character of a female-only space is often acknowledged. Women's intercultural associations combine collective spaces of belonging, creating the freedom for women to not have to conform to their national group, or more generally, to societal pressures. In this sense, intercultural settings are felt to be a "neutral space" (Ellen, MW) that women are also free to leave. I argue that, while some scholarship has emphasised the importance of friendship among women positioned differently (Lugones, 1983), the issue of how personal relationships, friendship and affection play out within a collective female-only political space has not yet been sufficiently addressed and is worthy of further research. At the same time, this research also shows how the pleasure of belonging is undermined when patronising mechanisms prevail and when there is a lack of power-sharing between migrant and Italian-born women. Moreover, friendship can also become a shield behind which Italian-born women risk hiding themselves in order not to engage in a process of recognition and reparation in relation to one's privileged position.

The idea of closer encounters through dialogue and of the work we need to do "in order to get closer to others, without simply repeating the appropriation of 'them' as labour or a sign of difference" (Ahmed, 2000: 180) is a useful roadmap. However, this awareness appears explicit only in some cases, such as when a specific reflection on colonial experience and the colonial legacy has been undertaken. As "postcoloniality is impossible to grasp in the present" (Ahmed, 2000: 14), I argue that, in order to have "closer encounters" (Ahmed, 2000), those that occur only in the present are necessarily not sufficient. Awareness of the colonial past is necessary in order to understand and address the implications of present encounters. I have argued that this is also valid in the Italian context where the colonial experience, even if more limited than for other

European countries, has been largely removed from, or at least diminished, within the collective memory (Poidimani, 2009). The research has shown how this facilitates patronising relationships. These occur because the focus of attention is mostly on the migrant subject, whilst there is little questioning of ethnocentrism, whiteness and privilege. In continuity with a colonial mind-set, the “problematic” subject remains the ‘Other’, while the subject that remains central is the westerner.

Following on from this, this research has shown the need to problematise the concept of culture and its use in intercultural settings. Post-colonial authors (Brah, 1996; Yuval Davis, 1997), as well as a post-structuralist understanding of culture (Benhabib, 2002), have largely illustrated how culture is not fixed, but is constantly evolving, as well as influenced by power relations and the status of its interpreters. However, as acknowledged by Phillips (2007), not enough attention is given to the fact that, particularly in current discourses on migration, integration and multiculturalism, the notion of culture is largely equated with non-Western culture. This is particularly the case for women’s cultural practices where the discourses refer to non-Western traditional practices. As suggested again by Phillips: “This feeds, in worrying and unintended ways, into an opposition between traditional and modern” (Phillips, 2007: 64). This consideration of culture is consistent with what has been argued in critical studies on whiteness. These studies have shown how whiteness is not regarded as an ethnicity, but as the norm against which all other behaviours and cultural practices are evaluated (McIntosh, 1988, 1990; Frankenberg, 1993; Knowles, 2004).

This research has shown how a concept of intercultural feminism can challenge, to some extent, such a conception and use of culture. This has been done particularly through cross-cultural comparisons uncovering western cultural practices that are detrimental to women, but which are not normally regarded as such. For example, an attempt in this direction has been carried out by comparing the practice of female genital mutilation and aesthetic vaginal surgery or by addressing the issue of the Islamic veil as a starting point for reflection on women’s bodily constraints across countries and cultures. These examples illustrate how the body is central in discourses around the emancipation of women and yet how those discourses are framed differently whether it is the bodies of western women, or the bodies of women coming from other countries, that is examined. They show that there is a hierarchy of emancipation, in which practices that are detrimental to women are valued according to different standards, whether they are prevalent in the West or not. Therefore, these cross-cultural comparisons are especially useful in that they allow western

feminists to “hold their own practices up to the same critical scrutiny they apply to Others” (Honig, 1999: 40) as well as how they oppose the image of Third World women as necessarily less emancipated than western women. Also, following the invitation by Honig (1999) what constitutes gender inequality should remain an open question.

At the same time, I argue that an emphasis on culture may reproduce a focus on the ‘ethnic other’, or what Ahmed (2000: 1) has defined as “stranger fetishism”. For instance, this study has illustrated how intercultural work may risk promoting ethnicisation and exoticisation by looking primarily at folkloric aspects of the cultures of ‘others’, thus perpetuating the legacy of colonialism and Orientalist attitudes. Also, in relation to notions that underline the hybrid nature of all cultures, this research has shown how such an emphasis, while on the one hand can act as a powerful antidote to racism, on the other hand, can serve to conceal power differentials. In this analysis, it is also important to consider that an understanding of intercultural work that includes an exchange about the folkloric aspects of cultures has been largely used over twenty years in intercultural work in Italy. This emerges both from the interviews and the literature (Campani, 2002b). For these reasons, I argue that within intercultural feminist practices, there is evidence of the potential usefulness of a shift from a focus on culture to one on citizenship rights. Such a shift would be a step towards providing a more inclusive framework.

In this research, two intersecting dimensions emerged as crucial: a discursive and a material one. It emerged that some associations have been relatively successful in addressing issues at the discursive level. For instance, in relation to issues related to cultural difference, even if there are still a number of divisive issues among women in this area (as discussion around the Islamic veil and to a lesser extent the comparison between FGM and aesthetic vaginal surgery show) this research illustrates how those issues rarely impede a dialogue and the possibility of working together within the associations. In contrast, at material level, there is a persistence of structural asymmetries relating to citizenship rights, as well as obstacles in power sharing within the associations, that emerge as particularly difficult to tackle.

I also argue that this point goes hand in hand with the necessity to move beyond a framework that sets Italian-born and migrant women in opposition to each other. In the introduction, I have explained the reasons why I have chosen to refer to Italian-born women on the one hand, and to migrant women on the other. This necessity originated from the need to identify the basis of power relations, as well as possible alliances, between these two groups of women. It is also

reflected in the mission statement of these associations, namely that of bringing together migrant women and what are referred to as 'native' women. At the end of this research journey, while still considering this distinction as relevant, especially in terms of citizenship rights, I see the necessity to move beyond that framework. Notwithstanding their mission statement, intercultural associations, by the very way they are constructed, risk reproducing a hierarchy because there is an implicit focus on migrant women as the most vulnerable category. In order to promote a concept of feminist reflexive solidarity, there is a need for a more egalitarian setting, one that while focusing on the specific situation of migrant women in terms of citizenship rights, moves away from regarding them a homogenous category and broadens the scope of its action. On the basis of the findings of this research, I argue that this could be done in a number of ways: first, by addressing the structural inequalities imposed on migrant women, in particular those relating to citizenship rights, including access to paid employment. A second way would be to shift from a categorisation of Italian-born and migrant women, to one that focuses on ethnicity, which would include whiteness. Thirdly, a further way would be to analyse the different positions of marginality and address the issue of citizenship for all women living in one specific territory - Italy in this case. Similarly to what Anthias et al. (2013a: 9) argue, there is a need to address the concept of integration in relation to all members of society, in order to avoid a "symbolic ghettoization of migrants". The trajectory taken by *Trama di terre* with the recent opening of an anti-violence centre, as well as a number of initiatives addressed to all women, appears to go in this direction. Therefore, it would be interesting to study how these projects change the dynamics between migrant and Italian-born women within the association.

Such an approach is also useful in relation to the issue of domestic and care work. On this point, studies on the concept of the "global care chain" which emerged in the early 2000s (Andall 2000; Hochschild 2000; Hondageu-Sotelo, 2001; Parreñas, 2001; Herenreich and Hochschild, 2002; Lutz 2002a) have set in opposition the positions and interests of western women and those of migrant women, by suggesting that the emancipation of western middle-class women has taken place at the expense of migrant women. However, in the Italian context, an over-representation of migrant women in the field of domestic and care work goes hand-in-hand with a relatively low labour market participation rate by Italian-born women. As argued by recent studies (Campani and Chiappelli, forthcoming), in Italy the characteristics of the economic system and the welfare regime block both the professional status of migrant women - described as a "frozen professional destiny" - and also keep significant proportions of Italian-born women out of the labour market. As

stated by Andall (2000), the condition of migrant women is indicative of the more general subordination of women in Italy. This is why Italian-born and migrant women should jointly put forward the issue of domestic and care work as a public problem that needs to be addressed at public level. More broadly, they should join in a common fight on the basis of their subordinate, although differing, positions in the Italian society. This point becomes even more relevant when considering the so-called “second generation” of migrants, a question that needs further research. In relation to intersectionality theory, this research has illustrated the importance not only of analysing the intersections between gender and ‘race’, but also, as argued by hooks (2013) and Hill Collins (1990), the structures of domination, such as sexism and racism. In particular, this research has shown the importance of feminism and anti-racism going hand-in-hand. The experience of the intercultural settings analysed shows that, if a feminist commitment does not take into account the issue of power relations based on ‘race’ and colonial legacy, it risks being patronising and leading to forms of “feminist fundamentalism”. On the other hand, if anti-racism does not take gender discrimination into account, it risks leading to forms of cultural relativism which leave unaddressed fundamental issues of practices detrimental to women. Furthermore, in relation to intersectionality theory, this research shows that beyond the grounds of gender, ‘race’, ethnicity and class, which are normally always included in intersectionality theory, and the grounds of legal status/citizenship which are relevant for migrant women, the age factor has emerged as significant. Differences in age reveal significant differences in both feminist experiences and identifying priorities for action. For instance, young Italian-born women have shown difficulties in identifying with the feminist movement, though they still shared many of its objectives. At the same time, the importance of maintaining a common project and of binding together the different experiences of ‘race’, class and age emerged as crucial.

Finally, moving away from a focus on the ‘ethnic other’, the specific experience of migrant women should instead be considered in relation to their positioning which derives from coming from post-colonial countries. Such positioning places them in a situation to develop a better ability to understand power dynamics, as argued for instance by Sandoval in relation to the concept of “oppositional consciousness” (1991; 2000). This emerges, in particular, from the reflection on women’s asymmetries carried out by *Punto di partenza* as well as in some performances of *Almateatro*, for instance in “Hidden Stories”, in which migrant women are described as being in a privileged situation to reach a condition of nomadism, which is based on the abandonment of rigid definitions of identity and on the ability to transform themselves.

Parameters of This Study and Future Research Directions

As I have indicated in the methodology chapter, this research journey led me to reflect on the pervasiveness of the colonial legacy. In particular, the reading of feminist post-colonial studies made me realise how this point is particularly relevant in relation to the issue of knowledge. This has been referred to as the “colonial order of knowledge”, namely the fact that populations coming from previously colonised countries have generally been described, represented and researched by those who have colonised them. There is still a legacy of this today, evident in the fact that some marginalised groups of people, such as migrants and ethnic minorities, have been over-researched. Even if this is not a study on migrant women as such, but on the dynamics of their encounter with Italian-born women in intercultural settings, at the end of this research journey, I would give more direct consideration to migrant women and to how they see whiteness.

As already emphasised, since whiteness is the unacknowledged ethnicity and regarded as the norm in dominant discourses, it is consequently difficult to be revealed. This difficulty emerged also in this study and this is even more so, as I am myself a white woman. Moreover, critical studies on whiteness have only just started in Italy. For these reasons, further studies focusing on how white privilege works and the responsibilities that white women active in intercultural settings have to confront it, are particularly relevant. Moreover, a study on how women from ethnic minorities see and represent whiteness would be particularly relevant. As an aspect of this, it would also be worthwhile to further explore what Anthias calls “the acid test of hybridity” (Anthias, 2001: 630), namely whether, in a hybridisation process, the majority population is willing to change or abandon some of its cultural practices. This would contribute to shifting the focus of attention from the notion of the ‘ethnic other’. Moreover, in the Italian context I have also alluded to the issue of the presence of Orientalist attitudes towards the people of southern Italy (Schneider, 1998). I agree with the perspective of Capussotti (2012) that, although it is not a focus of this study, it is important to investigate how the dimension of racism towards migrant people in intercultural settings intersects with that of racism towards the southern Italian population.

As emphasised in the previous section, the role played by the “emotional” component of relationships, friendship and affection within a political commitment among women who hold unequal positions in society, would also be worth further exploration. Moreover, as already indicated, I did not have the opportunity to focus on how intercultural feminist practices would be articulated within the context of so-called “second generation” of migrants. This group of women

only forms a small part of the membership of my chosen organisations. It would certainly be interesting to investigate how the challenges and characteristics of a project on intercultural feminism based on reflexive solidarity vary in the context of a prevalence of “second generations” of migrants or ethnic minorities.

Finally, at a personal level, this thesis has provided me with the opportunity to go on an incredible journey. Feminist scholarship on “situated knowledge” (Harding, 1993, 2007; Haraway, 1988; Hesse-Biber, 2007) and “standpoint theory” (Hartsock, 1998; Hesse-Biber, 2007) emphasises how the positionality of the researcher influences what is being studied, and how it is researched. In the introduction and methodology chapter, I have illustrated how my biography led me to research the issue of intercultural feminist practices. In turn, researching this issue has changed my understanding of concepts of ‘gender’ and ‘race’, and their intersections, as well as my understanding of the relationship between feminist and anti-racist commitment. It has also led me to question a number of attitudes and behaviours originating from my engagement as a human rights activist which I now see, at least partially, in a different light. I am more aware of power relationships and of the risks of patronage when focusing on marginalised groups. Furthermore, beyond the specific topic of this thesis, and as acknowledged by Ahmed (2012: 13) “feminist theorists offer critical insights into the mechanisms of power as such ...”; this has helped me to see my own positionality within a matrix of power relationships, where I am sometimes located in a position of power and sometimes in a position of marginality. Above all, it has led me to reflect on ways to counter these power relationships and led me in the direction of developing more egalitarian and mutually transforming ones.

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ANNEXES

Annex 1: Letter to Associations



UNIVERSITY COLLEGE DUBLIN

9th February 2012

Object: Request of interviews for PhD research

Dear President ...,

I am writing to you out of an interest for the association that you chair.

In the last years I have been working in the area of children's rights and I have volunteered for human rights organisations focusing specifically on the issue of women's rights and violence against women. Since many years, women's rights have been at the core of my personal interest and of my involvement as an activist. On the basis of such interest, I am currently doing a Phd in Women's Studies on the issue of women's intercultural associations at the University College of Dublin in agreement with the University of Florence. My thesis aims at investigating how women's intercultural associations may provide a place where women coming from different countries may articulate a common project on the basis of a feminist commitment. More specifically I would like to focus on some of the most significant women's intercultural associations in Italy.

For this reason I have selected your association as important for this research. Therefore I would be really grateful if I could interview three or four people who hold key roles in your association including you. The interview would be about the history of the association and your personal involvement in it, the activities you carry out and the challenges you have to address in the association's work.

Hoping that you will be interested in participating in this research, I will follow up this letter with a phone call, so that I can better explain you about the interview process.

If you wish to contact my supervisors here are their details:

At the University College of Dublin: Ursula Barry, Head of Women's Studies Programme, email: ursula.barry@ucd.ie, phone: 00 353 1 7167329

At the University of Florence: Prof. Giovanna Campani, Dip.to Scienze dell'Educazione e dei Processi Culturali e Formativi, Facoltà di Scienze della Formazione email: campani@unifi.it, phone: (+39) 055 2756159.

Thanking for your kind attention, I send you my best regards.

Erika Bernacchi

Annex 2: Information and Consent Form



UNIVERSITY COLLEGE DUBLIN

STUDY TITLE: **The Challenges to Feminist Solidarity in the Context of Women
Mobilising in Intercultural Settings**

The purpose of this consent form is to provide with the information about the research and your rights as participant. I would like to ask you to read this form carefully so that you can decide whether to participate in this study. My name is Erika Bernacchi, Ph.D candidate in Women's Studies, School of Social Justice, University College Dublin in agreement with the University of Florence.

Information about the research's focus and procedures

The research aims at investigating how women's intercultural associations may provide a place where women coming from different countries may articulate a common project on the basis of a feminist commitment. The study will analyse some of the most important women's intercultural associations in Italy. The research will include interviews to women who carry out key roles in these associations.

Information on your participation in the research

If you decide to participate in the research you will be invited to an interview. The interview will be about the history of the association and your personal involvement in it, the activities you carry out and the challenges you have to address in the association's work. The interview will last about 1 hour and a half and it will take place in a location of your choice. The interview will be audio-taped with your permission and you can ask the interviewer to stop the taping at any time or even have the tape completely erased. The tape of the interview will be typed out and you will be given a copy. If you wish you will be able to make changes to the transcription or to give further information in a second moment.

Your participation is voluntary (it is your choice to participate or not). You are free to withdraw from the research at any time without any disadvantage for you.

Information on data's use

The data collected will be used for my PhD thesis and may be used for future essays, books, etc

Confidentiality (how will your privacy be protected)

The content of the interview will remain confidential.

A series of procedures will be used to ensure the security of the information that you provide to us:

- 1) No personal identifiers (name, date of birth, residence address, work address, email, etc) will be recorded unless you specifically direct us.
- 2) Audio-tapes and transcripts will be labeled with code numbers and not with your name or other personal identifiers
- 3) The interviews will be made public only in the manner to which you agree and you may change your mind about public access at any time.

There may be occasions in which you wish your name to be associated with specific declarations. Only in those cases will your name be acknowledged

Contact details for further information

If you have any questions about the research as well as its result, you can contact me at:

Erika Bernacchi, erika.bernacchi@gmail.com

If you wish to contact my supervisors here are their details:

At the University College of Dublin: Ursula Barry, Head of Women's Studies Programme, email: ursula.barry@ucd.ie, phone: 00 353 1 7167329

At the University of Florence: Prof. Giovanna Campani, Dip.to Scienze dell'Educazione e dei Processi Culturali e Formativi, Facoltà di Scienze della Formazione email: campani@unifi.it, phone: (+39) 055 2756159.



DECLARATION
Voluntary Participation

I have read this information sheet. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have received satisfactory answers.

I understand that my participation is voluntary (it is my choice) and that I am free to withdraw from the research at any time without disadvantage.

I understand that my name will not be identified in this study, unless I explicitly request that and I agree that the data can be published.

I understand the purpose of the study and research procedures.

I understand that I will receive and may keep a copy of this information and consent form.

I agree to participate in the study having understood the information of this consent form.

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: / /

Annex 3: Interview Guide

A. Biography, History, Mission and Values

1. How did you come to be involved in the association?
2. Can you tell me how the association was established?
[How was the association's name chosen?]
[How important is it to you that the association is composed only of women?]
[How important is it to you that the association is composed of migrant/ethnic minority and Italian-born women together?]
3. On the association's website, you refer to the following mission and values of the association [...]. What do you personally find most important?
Regarding those specifically about the promotion of the condition of women (e.g. women's self determination) can you tell me what this term means to you?
4. What kind of roles have you played in the association?
5. What does the association represent to you?

B. Issues, Activities and Role of the Association

6. Can you tell me how the organisation came to choose those issues and how they have changed since the early years? [What are the most significant activities that the organisation is carrying out on those issues?]
7. Which are the main obstacles that you had to face?
[How have changes in the overall economic/political situation impacted on your work since the setting up of the association?]
8. How does the association balance the advocacy role with the service role?
9. How important are relationships with other women's associations in Italy for the work the organisation carries out?
10. How important are relationships with other migrant/intercultural associations in Italy for the work the organisation carries out?
11. How important are relationships/projects with the countries of origin of the women who participate in the association?
[Questions 8, 9 and 10 on the basis of the information provided in the associations' form]

C. Challenges

12. How would you describe the relationship between the women in the association?
13. Personally, what do you find most interesting in working with women from different countries and what do you find most challenging?
14. Since you all had different migration experiences and the Italian women did not go through the same journey, how do you bring this together within the organisation? / How do you come together in order to formulate goals and a plan of activities?
[Since you have been involved in the association, have you been aware of disagreements or different ideas among the women participating in the association about the issues and activities to address?]
15. On the basis of your experience in the association, to what extent do you think that IBW and MW/women from ethnic minorities share common interests/purposes? (problems/priorities?)
16. Do you think that there's scope in the association for effective solidarity between IBW and MW/women from ethnic minorities?
17. Do you see the association as feminist?
18. How has working together with women from different cultural backgrounds changed your thinking about priorities to pursue to promote the position of women?
 - For IBW: has your experience in the association made you reflect about your economic, social and ethnic position compared to MW/women from ethnic minorities?
 - For MW/women from ethnic minorities: to what extent does the association provide a framework in which MW can work with other MW/women from ethnic minorities and with IBW on an equal footing? [What would be required in order to develop this better?]
[Do you feel that MW/women from ethnic minorities are sufficiently represented at all levels in the association?]
19. With reference to the mission and values of the association, which are the areas in which you think you have succeeded most? Is there any area in which you would like to have better results?
20. Any other issue you would like to raise about your experience in the association?

Annex 4: Associations' Form

Association's name: _____

1. Composition

- Number of members: _____
- Number of paid employees: _____
- Number of voluntary staff: _____

2. Role of the organisation

Does the association carry out activities for rights promotion and awareness-raising?
Which?

Does the association have a service role? Which kinds of services does it provide?

Does the association carry out advocacy activities by looking for change in legislation and policies?

3. Internal organisation and funding

Decision making process and internal charges: how are decisions taken?

Is there any mechanism to assign charges between IBW and MW or women from ethnic minorities?

Internal organisation (e.g. how is the structure organised? Are there working groups? Are the meetings addressed at organising the projects or are there also meetings to discuss general topics of interest among the women?)

4. Funding and relationships/collaborations

How is the association funded?

Relationships with national/local public institutions:

Relationships/collaborations with other women's associations:

Relationships/collaborations with other intercultural/migrant associations:

Relationships with international organisations/networks:

Participation in EU projects:

Relationships with the countries of origin of the women who participate in the association:

Development cooperation projects:

Annex 5: Template of Analysis

General Objective 1 - Level of Solidarity Among Migrant and Italian-Born Women			
Theoretical Questions	Indicators	Interview/Ass. Form/Doc. Analysis	Association's Analysis
Feminist solidarity	1.1 Themes addressed by the association (e.g. domestic and care work identified as a result of structurally unequal relations between the North and the South of the world).	-Can you tell me how the organisation came to choose those issues and how they have changed since the first few years?	
	1.2 Perception of the association as a place where there can be effective solidarity between IBW and MW.	-Do you think that in the association there is scope for effective solidarity between IBW and MW/ women from ethnic minorities. -To what extent does the association provide a framework in which MW/women from ethnic minorities can work with IBW on an equal footing? -How important is it to you that the association is composed of MW/women from ethnic minorities and IBW together?	
	1.3 Work with countries of origin.	[FORM] Does the association have a particular focus on the countries of origin of the women who participate in the association?	
	1.4 Development cooperation projects.	[FORM] Does the association carry out development cooperation projects?	
	1.5 Balance between the advocacy role and the service role.	[FORM] Question on typology of activities.	

General Objective 2 - Level of Impact of the Political and Economic Context on the Possibility to Achieve Solidarity			
Theoretical Questions	Indicators	Interview/Ass. Form/Doc. Analysis	Association's Analysis
Feminist solidarity	2.1 Differences in job status between IBW and MW/women from ethnic minorities.	- Response derived from interview as a whole.	
	2.2 Problems related to the migration status of migrant women.	- Response derived from interview as a whole.	
	2.3 Decrease in funds.	- How have changes in the overall economic/political situation had an impact on your work since the setting up of the association?	
General Objective 3 - Relationship Between Italian-Born and Migrant Women - Level of Patronising			
Theoretical Questions	Indicators	Interview/Ass. Form/Doc. Analysis	Association's Analysis
<p>- To what extent do IBW have a patronising attitude towards MW/women from ethnic minorities in the association?</p> <p>- More specifically: Is there an assumption that MW/women from ethnic minorities should go through the same trajectory of emancipation as western women? (see "fantasy of proximity", Ahmed)</p> <p>- Are MW/women from ethnic minorities unified into a single category in opposition to western women? (see "fantasy of distance", Ahmed)</p>	3.1 Assumption that MW/women from ethnic minorities are less emancipated and less skilled than IBW.	<p>- Response derived from interview as a whole (from the way IBW talk about MW/women from ethnic minorities).</p> <p>- What do you find most interesting in working with women from different countries and what do you find most challenging?</p>	
	3.2 Assumption that MW/women from ethnic minorities should go through the same trajectory of emancipation as western women.	<p>-Response derived from interview as a whole (from the way IBW talk about MW/women from ethnic minorities).</p> <p>- What do you find most interesting in working with women from different countries and what do you find most challenging?</p>	
	3.3 Homogenisation of MW/women from ethnic minorities into a unified category.	- Response derived from interview as a whole (from the way IBW talk about MW/women from ethnic minorities).	

	3.4 Association seen only as a way to advance the position of MW/women from ethnic minorities .	In the association's website you refer to the following mission and values of the association [...] What do you personally find most important? [if they answer only referring to MW/women from ethnic minorities, ask how is the association promoting women's self-determination for all the women of the association including IBW?]	
General Objective 4 - Relationship Between Italian-Born and Migrant Women - Level of Othering [Linked to Level of Patronising]			
Theoretical Questions	Indicators	Interview/Ass. Form/Doc. Analysis	Association's Analysis
- To what extent is the legacy of colonialism in terms of "othering" processes challenged or not being challenged in the association?	4.1 Way in which IBW talk about MW/women from ethnic minorities (e.g. how they refer to specific symbols of cultural difference, such as the Islamic veil).	- Response derived from interview as a whole (from the way IBW talk about MW/women from ethnic minorities).	
General Objective 5 - Relationship Between and Among Italian-Born and Migrant Women – Level of Sense of Shared Belonging/Commonality			
Theoretical Questions	Indicators	Interview/Ass. Form/Doc. Analysis	Association's analysis
- Is the category of sisterhood mobilised? If yes is it understood as a "sisterhood of friendship" or a "political sisterhood" (Tong)? Or both?	5.1 Use of the category of sisterhood (political sisterhood or sisterhood of friendship).	- Documentary analysis. - Use of the word "sisters"/"sisterhood" in the interviews. - Use of the word "friends/friendship" in the interviews.	
	5.2 Recognition of the association's mission and values.	On the association's website you refer to the following mission and values of the association [...]. What do you personally find most important?	

General Objective 6 - Level of Agreement in the Definition of Feminist Strategies / Strategies for the Advancement of the Position of Women

Theoretical Questions	Indicators	Interview/Ass. Form/Doc. Analysis	Association's Analysis
<p>-Are there competing versions (or different priorities) in the kind of feminism expressed by IBW and MW/women from ethnic minorities and across these categories (e.g. in terms of 'race', ethnicity, class, citizenship status, age)?</p> <p>-Is there an explicit use of the word "feminism" to describe the aims of the association or is this a contentious issue? Are other notions used to refer to the promotion of the position of women?</p>	6.1 Definition of the association's mission in relation to the promotion of the position of women (e.g. women's self-determination)	-On the association's website, you refer to the following mission and values of the association [...] Regarding those specifically about the promotion of the position of women (e.g. women's self-determination) can you tell me what this term means to you?	
	6.2 Identification of the association as feminist.	-Do you see the association as feminist?	
	6.3 Disagreement over themes to address.	-Can you tell me how the organisation came to choose those issues and how they have changed since the first years? What do you personally find most important?	

General Objective 7 - Construction of Common Strategies (Working Across Difference)

Theoretical Questions	Indicators	Interview/Ass. Form/Doc. Analysis	Association's Analysis
<p>- What is the basis on which working across differences is made possible? E.g. "Transversal politics based on the practice of 'rooting' and 'shifting'" (Yuval Davis), "politics of identification based on the formation of coalitions as opposed to one of identity" (Brah), "closer encounters" through dialogue (Ahmed).</p>	7.1 Organisational procedures.	[FORM] Questions about internal organisation and internal charges.	
	7.2 Creating an agreement on goals and a plan of activities.	-Since you all had different migration experiences and the IBW did not go through the same journey, how do you bring this together within the organisation? / How do you come together in order to formulate goals and a plan of activities ?	

	7.3 Identification of themes to address.	-Can you tell me how the organisation came to choose those issues and how they have changed since the initial years?	
General Objective 8 - Level of Conflict/Disagreement (About Mission, Values and Agenda)			
Theoretical Questions	Indicators	Interview/Ass. Form/Doc. Analysis	Association's Analysis
Addressing difference.	8.1 Presence of conflicts/disagreements.	- Since you became involved in the association have you been aware of disagreements or different ideas among the women participating in the association about the issues and activities to be addressed?	
	8.2 Formation of separate associations/groups.	- Documentary analysis. - Since you became involved in the association have you been aware of disagreements or different ideas among the women participating in the association about the issues and activities to be addressed?	
	8.3 Presence of "crisis" (to check that it is not due to practical reasons).	-Use of the word "crisis" (or similar) in the text of the interview.	
	8.4 Reduction/exhaustion of activities (to check that it is not due to practical reasons).	-Documentary analysis. - Response derived from interview as a whole in the interview.	

General Objective 9 - Level of Transnational Feminism			
Theoretical Questions	Indicators	Interview/Ass. Form/Doc. Analysis	Association's Analysis
- Can the association's activities be described as an example of transnational feminism?	9.1 - Belonging to international networks.	[FORM] Does the association have relationships with other associations internationally?	
	9.2 Participation in international/EU projects.	[FORM] Participation in international/EU projects.	
General Objective 10 - Level of Intercultural Feminism			
Theoretical Questions	Indicators	Interview/Ass. Form/Doc. Analysis	Association's Analysis
- To what extent is intercultural dialogue facilitating a reflection resulting in changing ideas and practices about strategies to advance the position of women?	10.1 Presence of exchange and mutual learning on how to advance the position of women.	- How has working together with women from different cultural backgrounds changed your thinking about priorities to pursue to promote the position of women?	
- To what extent is intercultural dialogue helpful to unveil deeply ingrained norms and practices that constrain women in assigned and subordinated roles across different countries and cultures? (hooks, Mendoza)	10.2 Presence of exchange and mutual learning about personal understanding of feminism (or related issues) including the presence of deeply ingrained norms and practices that constrain women into assigned and subordinated roles across different countries and cultures.	- How has working together with women from different cultural backgrounds changed your thinking about priorities to pursue to promote the position of women?	
General Objective 11 - Level of Addressing Difference			
Theoretical Questions	Indicators	Interview/Ass. Form/Doc. Analysis	Association's Analysis
- How is difference addressed in the work of the association? "How are the boundaries of difference constituted, maintained or dissipated"? (Brah)	11.1 Addressing the issue in the internal meetings versus lack of opportunities for discussion.	[FORM] Are the meetings addressed at organising the projects or are there also meetings to discuss general topics of interest among the women?	

<p>- Is difference addressed or concealed in the work of the association? (Ang, 1995)</p> <p>- Has the association worked out a way to value difference without appropriating it?</p>	<p>11.2 Consideration of different points of view in the choice of the issues to address.</p>	<p>-Can you tell me how the organisation came to choose those issues and how they have changed since the initial years?</p>	
<p>General Objective 12 - Level of Addressing Cultural Difference</p>			
<p>Theoretical Questions</p>	<p>Indicators</p>	<p>Interview/Ass. Form/Doc. Analysis</p>	<p>Association's Analysis</p>
<p>- How is the notion of cultural difference - including the issue of visible signs of cultural difference (e.g. the Islamic veil) - addressed in the association?</p>	<p>12.1 Inclusion of issues related to cultural difference in the themes addressed by the association (e.g. FGM, forced marriages).</p>	<p>-Documentary analysis. -Can you tell me how the organisation came to choose those issues and how they have changed since the initial years?</p>	
	<p>12.2 Addressing the issue in internal meetings /discussions.</p>	<p>[FORM] Are the meetings addressed at organising the projects or are there also meetings to discuss general topics of interest among the women?</p>	
<p>General Objective 13 - Level of Centrality of the Experience of Subordinated People</p>			
<p>Theoretical Questions</p>	<p>Indicators</p>	<p>Interview/Ass. Form/Doc. Analysis</p>	<p>Association's Analysis</p>
<p>-Is there any elaboration on the possibility that migrant women - because of their less privileged status in society - may be those best suited to develop a methodology that interrogates the concept of power? (Sandoval)</p> <p>-Who speaks for whom? And who gets to be heard?</p>	<p>13.1 Presence of MW/women from ethnic minorities in the key roles of the association.</p>	<p>[FORM] Internal roles (Is there any mechanism to assign roles between Italian-born and migrant women?)</p> <p>- What kind of roles have you played in the association?</p> <p>- Do you feel that MW/women from ethnic minorities are sufficiently represented at all levels of the association?</p>	
	<p>13.2 Ability of MW/women from ethnic minorities to affirm their agenda and strategies to achieve it.</p>	<p>- For MW/women from ethnic minorities: to what extent does the association provide a framework in which MW/women from ethnic minorities can work</p>	

		with other MW/women from ethnic minorities and with IBW on an equal footing?	
	13.3- Representation of the association in public events.	- What kind of roles have you played in the association?	
General Objective 14 - Level of Awareness of Own Positionality in Terms of Personal and Geo-Political Power Relations			
Theoretical Questions	Indicators	Interview/Ass. Form/Doc. Analysis	Association's Analysis
-Is there a questioning on the part of IBW, of their own positionality in terms of personal and geo-political power relations? -To what extent is intercultural dialogue fostering an acknowledgement of whiteness as a position of privilege?	14.1 Self-reflection about own privileged positionality by Italian-born women (whiteness as a position of privilege).	- Has your experience in the association made you reflect about your economic, social and ethnic position towards migrant women?	
General Objective 15 - Prevalence of Anti-Racist Aims and Activities			
Theoretical Questions	Indicators	Interview/Ass. Form/Doc. Analysis	Association's Analysis
- How is the issue of racism dealt with in the association? - Is it articulated in terms of social disadvantage or in terms of white privilege?	15.1 Presence of antiracist aims in the mission of the association.	- Documentary analysis. - In the association's website you refer to the following mission and values of the association [...] - What do you personally find most important?	
	15.2 Activities undertaken on this issue.	- Documentary analysis. - Questions on themes and activities.	
	15.3 Addressing the issue inside the association.	- For IBW: has your experience in the association made you reflect about your economic, social and ethnic position compared to MW? - For MW/women from ethnic minorities: to what extent does the association provide a framework in	

		which migrant women can work with other MW/women from ethnic minorities and with IBW on an equal footing?	
General Objective 16 - Relationship Between Racism and Sexism			
Theoretical Questions	Indicators	Interview/Ass. Form/Doc. Analysis	Association's Analysis
- How is the relationship between racism and sexism articulated?	16.1 Inclusion in the mission.	Question on mission.	
	16.2 Activities undertaken on this specific issue.	Questions on themes and activities.	
General Objective 17 - Representation of Whiteness			
Theoretical Questions	Indicators	Interview/Ass. Form/Doc. Analysis	Association's Analysis
- How do MW/women from ethnic minorities see and represent whiteness?	17.1 Way in which MW/women from ethnic minorities refer to IBW.	- Documentary analysis. - Response derived from interview as a whole (about the way MW/women from ethnic minorities refer to IBW).	

Annex 6: Code System

A. Feminism		
1. Collaboration women's associations		Collaboration with women's associations.
2. Cultural difference reflection		Personal reflections or discussions about cultural difference.
3. Feminism		As a general topic emerging in the interview.
4. Intercultural feminism		Presence of exchange and mutual learning on how to advance the position of women and about personal understanding of feminism.
5. Mission on women's promotion		Definition of the association's mission in relation to the promotion of the position of women.
	Critique of multiculturalism	Critique of the way multicultural policies may impact negatively on women's rights.
	Feminist association	Whether they identify the association as feminist.
	Diffused feminism	Absence of explicit feminist strategies, but reference to general strategies of promotion of the position of women.
	Recognisable feminist strategies	Presence of recognisable feminist strategies in the association.
6. Relationship		Description of the relationship between the women in the association.
	Sisterhood	Use of the category of "sisterhood" – "political sisterhood" or "sisterhood of friendship".
7. Themes		
	Women's rights	Themes that can be generally referred to as the promotion of women's rights.

	Racism -sexism	Inclusion in the mission; activities undertaken by the association on the relationship between racism and sexism.
	Cultural difference themes	Inclusion of issues related to cultural difference in the themes addressed by the association - e.g. FGM, forced marriages.
	Violence against women	Violence against women as a theme addressed by the association.
8. Transnational feminism		Collaboration with international associations or networks.
9. Women-only		How important it is that the association is composed only of women.
B. Solidarity		
10. Agreement creation		How the agreement on the agenda to pursue and themes to address is created within the association.
11. Collaboration migrant/ anti-racist associations		Collaboration with migrant or anti-racist associations.
12. Common agenda		Common agenda between Italian-born and migrant women.
13. Intercultural association		How important it is that the association is composed of MW/women from ethnic minorities and IBW.
14. Migrant women role		Presence of migrant/ethnic minority women in the key roles of the association; ability of migrant women to affirm their agenda and strategies to achieve it; representation of the association in public events.
15. Reflection on migration policies/issues		General reflection on migration policies or specific issues dealing with migration.
16. Reflection on racism		General reflection on the issue of racism.

17. Solidarity perception		Perception of the association as a place where there can be effective solidarity between MW/women from ethnic minorities and IBW.
18. Themes		
	Migration - rights	Activities that are generally related to the promotion of the rights of migrant people or awareness-raising activities about migration.
	Interculturalism	Activities that promote the concept of interculturalism.
	Anti-racism	Presence of anti-racist aims in the mission of the association; anti-racist activities; addressing the issue inside the association.
	Domestic and care work	As a theme addressed by the association or as a topic in the biography of MW.
19. Choice of themes		How themes to work on are chosen.
20. Work with Southern countries		
	Development cooperation	Development cooperation projects carried out by the association.
	Origin countries	Work carried out by the association with the countries of origin of migrant/ethnic minority women.
C. Difference		
21. Advancement		Association seen only as a way to advance the position of migrant/ethnic minority women.
22. Class		Differences in position and opinion about the association's mission that are due to a difference in class among the women belonging to the association.
23. Age		Differences in position and opinion about the association's mission that are due to the age difference among the women belonging to the association.
24. Colonialism		Reference to the issue of colonialism and postcolonialism.

25. Crisis	Use of the word crisis; reduction/exhaustion of the association's activities.
26. Homogenisation	Homogenisation of MW/women from ethnic minorities into a unified category.
	Countering homogenisation
27. Internal Conflicts	E.g. conflicts over the association's policies and formation of separate associations/groups.
28. Intersectionality	Presence of activities that can be related to the concept of intersectionality.
29. Othering	Way in which IBW talk about MW/women from ethnic minorities - e.g. how they refer to specific symbols of cultural difference such as the Islamic veil.
	Countering othering
30. Patronising	Patronising attitude by IBW towards migrant women.
	Countering patronising
31. Reflection on identity	Reflection on the concept of identity.
32. Self-reflection	Self-reflection about own positionality; reflection on the terminology to refer to Italian-born and migrant/ethnic minority women.
33. Western emancipation	Assumption that migrant/ethnic minority women should go through the same trajectory of emancipation as western women.
34. Whiteness	Way in which MW/women from ethnic minorities refer to IBW.
35. Working on an equal basis	Working on an equal basis between MW/women from ethnic minorities and IBW.
36. Working together	What do you find most interesting and most challenging in working with women from different countries?

D. Personal involvement		
37. Association evaluation		Regarding the association's mission, which are the areas in which you succeeded most and those in which you would like to improve?
38. First involvement		How the interviewee started to be involved in the association.
39. Mission identification		Recognition in the association's mission and values, name and logo.
40. Personal meaning		What does the association represent to you?
	Working place	Association is seen mostly as a place of work.
	Learning place	Association is seen mostly as a place of learning.
	Political visibility	Association is seen mostly as a place where women can acquire a "political" role and visibility and as a substitute for general political lack of visibility.
	Contacts and friendship	Association seen mostly as a place where it is possible to share with other women.
41. Personal role		Role carried out in the association.
E. Context and organisation		
42. Association history		History of the association; how the association was created.
43. Association role		What is the main role of the association and how does the association ensure a balance between the advocacy role and the service role?
44. Decision making and working processes		How decisions are taken in the association.
45. External evaluation		How the association is evaluated and judged externally.

46. External obstacles	Main obstacles arising from external factors, including funding.
47. Internal obstacles	Main obstacles within the association, including work constraints in the work process that are due to the nature of civic organisations.
48. Political context	Political context having an influence on the work of the association.
