Images of Colonialism and Decolonisation in the Italian Media

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Edited by

Paolo Bertella Farnetti
and Cecilia Dau Novelli

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction 1
Paolo Bertella Farnetti and Cecilia Dau Novelli

Part One: Cinema, Radio, Television and New Media

Chapter One 8
Fragile Heritage and Digital Memory in Africa
Livio Sansone

Chapter Two 22
The Warm Sand of the Desert: Italian Colonial Cinema and the Image of Islam
Patrizia Manduchi

Chapter Three 40
Broadcasting the Fascist Empire to Non-Italian Audiences (Ethiopia 1935)
Gianmarco Mancosu

Chapter Four 57
Fascist Propaganda in Albania: Schools, Cinema and Radio
Alessandro Pes

Chapter Five 67
Entertainment, Politics and Colonial Identity in Post-war Italian and British Cinema (1945–1960)
Maurizio Zinni

Chapter Six 81
Decolonisation Will Be Televised: *Anni d'Europa* and the Fall of European Colonialism
Valeria Deplano

Chapter Seven 95
The White Male Gaze in Italian Cine-reportage: Masculinity and Otherness between Colonialism and Decolonisation (1960s–1970s)
Gaia Giuliani

Part Two: Newspapers, Comics, Trading Cards and Photography

Chapter Eight 114
About Ugo Ferrandi: The Ultimate Vanishing Act
Adolfo Mignemi and Maria Giovanna Nuzzi

Chapter Nine 132
Italian Pro-Islamic Politics in the Writings of Enrico Insabato: Between Libya and Egypt
Alessandra Marchi

Chapter Ten 149
The Carmine Iorio (Yusuf el Musulmani) Trial: Photographs and Documents
Alessandro Volterra

Chapter Eleven 169
The Image of Italian Colonial Africa in Comics and Graphic Novels
Silvana Palma

Chapter Twelve 192
Trading Cards: Africa Under the Desk
Gianluca Gabrielli

Chapter Thirteen 211
Italy through British Eyes: Italian Ex-Colonies in British Newspapers (1945–1949)
Eva Garau

Chapter Fourteen 227
The Fascist Empire Strikes Back: Reconsidering the Memory of Colonialism After 1945
Gabriele Proglio

Chapter Fifteen 248
Italy and the Memory of Colonialism in the Seventies
Cecilia Dau Novelli

INTRODUCTION

PAOLO BERTELLA FARNETTI AND CECILIA DAU NOVELLI

The twentieth century saw a proliferation of media discourses on colonialism first and then decolonisation. Newspapers, periodicals, films, radio and later TV broadcasts contributed to the construction of the image of the African "Other" across the colonial world. In recent years, a growing body of literature has explored the role of these media in many colonial societies. As regards the Italian context, however, although several works have been published about the links between colonial culture and national identity, none have addressed the specific role of the media and their impact on collective memory (or lack thereof). This book aims to fill that gap, providing a review of images and themes that have surfaced and resurfaced over time. The volume is divided into two sections, each organised around an underlying theme: while the first deals with visual memory and images from the cinema, radio, television and new media, the second addresses the role of the printed press, graphic novels and comics, photography and trading cards.

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Livio Sansone is Professor of Anthropology at the Federal University of Bahia, Brazil. In his essay about fragile heritage and digital memory in Africa, he deals with the rapid transition from oral culture to mobile phones and then smartphones and the Web, which quickly left behind the written paper culture and its ties with memory. Indeed, it is known that there was a complex relationship between writing and the act of remembering, especially because colonialism in Africa made of the written word and of the more or less imposed usage of colonial languages a great watershed in the exercise of power.

Patrizia Manduchi is Professor of Islamic countries at the University of Cagliari, Italy. Her essay focuses on Italian films set in colonial Libya between the 1920s and the 1940s. Addressing the reconstruction of the

stereotypes related to Islamic culture and religion that were made popular by documentary and feature films in Italy and all over the world at the time of the fascist colonial enterprise, she highlights how the powerful machine of propaganda spread a distorted image of the Arab world.

Gianmarco Mancosu is a PhD student in Italian Studies in the School of Modern Languages and Cultures at the University of Warwick, UK. In his essay about trans-imperial themes in radio broadcasts, he investigates the strategies used by fascist propaganda to inform non-Italian audiences (namely, in the United States, France and the United Kingdom) of the Italo-Ethiopian war in the period between October 1935 and May 1936.

Alessandro Pes is a research fellow in History at the University of Cagliari, Italy. Analysing the process of fascistisation of Albanians during Italian occupation, he delves into the propaganda tools and tactics deployed by the regime, among which were radio programmes, films and documentaries, cultural institutions, and a complete overhaul of the country's education and library systems.

Maurizio Zinni teaches History of Journalism and Mass Media at the University of Roma Tre, Italy. His essay on colonial identity in post-war Italian and British Cinema (1945–1960) traces the common themes in film representations of colonialism, highlighting the prevalence of key concepts such as the supposed humanitarian and modernising nature of colonialism, the celebration of its conquests, and the individual and collective value of sacrifice.

Valeria Deplano teaches Contemporary History of Mediterranean countries at the University of Macerata, Italy. Focusing on the specific role of the new mass media in shaping Italian public opinion about the colonial past and decolonisation, she analyses *Anni d'Europa*, a cultural programme broadcast between the late fifties and the early sixties by RAI, the Italian state-owned television network, and in particular a four-part documentary series titled *Apogee and decline of colonialism*.

Gaia Giuliani is a postdoctoral researcher at the Centre for Social Studies of the University of Coimbra, Portugal. In her contribution, she explores several representations of masculinity and Otherness in Italian cine-reportage between the 1960s and the 1970s. Filmed and distributed during the years of post-war decolonisation, these productions—and the *mondo movie* genre in particular—were clearly aimed at promoting a specific reading of the decolonising/post-colonial South, sometimes in a comparative perspective, other times focusing the attention on a single case/place, but always from an Italian and Eurocentric standpoint.

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Adolfo Mignemi teaches in the Master's program in Public History at the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia, Italy; and Maria Giovanna Nuzzi is an artist and video maker from Novara, Italy. Their essay focuses on the legacy of Ugo Ferrandi, an explorer and colonial official in what today we call Somalia, who during his life amassed an incredible trove of documents, photographs and relics. Unfortunately, most of his heritage has been destroyed, lost, forgotten, or has otherwise disappeared. While part of his photographic documentation has at times emerged (or re-emerged), incompetence and inertia on the part of the institutions responsible for its preservation are painfully clear.

Alessandra Marchi holds a PhD in Anthropology and Ethnology from the School for Advanced Studies in Social Sciences in Paris, France. The controversial figure of Enrico Insabato (1878–1963) is the focus of her contribution, in which *Il Convito/al-Nadi*, the bilingual magazine published by Insabato in Cairo, provides a means to trace the complex framework of relations between anarchism, diplomatic action, fascist politics, patriotic journalism and Islam.

Alessandro Volterra is Professor of African History and Institutions at the University of Roma Tre, Italy, and director of the Centre for Somali studies. The importance of photographs in the study of African history has long been debated by Italian scholars. However, their use as a primary source, as opposed to a mere accompaniment, is still very limited. His essay, on the other hand, offers a rigorous reconstruction of the events surrounding the Carmine Iorio trial through the photographic collection bequeathed by the military lawyer Giuseppe Bedendo, who served in Cyrenaica from 1928 to 1932.

Silvana Palma is Professor of African History at the University of Naples "L'Orientale." Exploring how the colonial past was addressed beyond the confines of academia, and what kind of colonial memory was popularised, she focuses on Italian comics and graphic novels, a genre that initially appealed to children or "reluctant readers" only but over time also to a well-read audience. Long considered a sub-genre, a less "noble" form of expression, comics and graphic novels are interesting because they were supposedly able to do what no literary or journalistic text could afford to, at least in post-fascist Italy: provide an uncensored outlet for public opinion.

Gianluca Gabrielli is a PhD researcher at the University of Macerata, Italy. His essay offers a detailed review of the history of trading cards, which first appeared in Europe in the second half of the nineteenth century, and their impact on children's collective imaginary. Often associated with consumer products, they went through numerous

transformations. From the 1920s onwards, collecting trading cards became a mass phenomenon, and during colonialism (1870–1960) colonial and "racial" cards, especially the ones depicting "human races" and the African peoples' customs, offered a compendium of prejudices and stereotypes that have long accompanied popular and children's culture.

Eva Garau is a PhD in European Studies at the University of Bath, UK. Her essay covers the negotiations on Italy's ex-colonies as portrayed in two British newspapers, the *Guardian* and the *Observer*, between 1945 and 1949. British and American positions over the Italian colonies were indeed quite divergent at that stage and would converge only after a Commission of Investigation was established in November 1947. A common policy began to emerge during the last phase of the negotiations, between September 1948 and November 1949, after years of Anglo-Soviet rivalry in the Middle East and Africa.

Gabriele Proglio, formerly Assistant Professor of Postcolonial Theory at the University of Tunis "El Manar" and research fellow with the ERC project BABE headed by Luisa Passerini at the European University Institute in Florence, Italy, is currently a postdoctoral researcher at the Centre for Social Studies of the University of Coimbra, Portugal. In his contribution, he reconsiders the memory of colonialism in Italy after 1945 and the lasting legacy of the "cultural constructs" deployed by the fascist regime. After reviewing the historical literature, he focuses his attention on several articles published in the Italian weekly *Epoca*, with a view to questioning the validity of the long-established "paradigm" of repressed colonial memory.

Lastly, Cecilia Dau Novelli explores the memory of colonialism in the seventies. For several decades, Italian public opinion and historiography willingly forgot all about Italy's former colonies and managed to turn even more of a blind eye to the position of the former settlers—practically seen as the perpetrators of the original sin—who were conveniently removed from the thoughts of both political parties and politicians. A recent exhibition at the MAXXI, Rome's new National Museum of the 21st Century Arts, actually bore the title *Postcolonial Italy. Removed memory*. This conscious oblivion continued until the seventies, when a new awareness of the Other began to emerge. The times were changing in politics, too. In the summer of 1970, Italian Prime Minister Moro visited the Horn of Africa, stopping off first in Somalia and then in Ethiopia. This was a crucial turning point because Italy's former colonies had been much neglected in the early decades of the new republic. As well as the numerous articles in the daily papers, the event also filled the pages of several prominent magazines, in particular *L'Europeo* and *Epoca*, which

went a long way towards reconstructing a history that was still difficult for Italians.

Much has been clarified over the years. However, there are still many grey areas, which have also come vividly to the forefront in recent times: the Italian military is still not willing to shed light on acts of violence in the colonies, and the law still protects the perpetrators of past massacres. Italy has made leaps forward in democracy and taken backward steps in intolerance, racism, violence, xenophobia—all unworthy of a civilised country. One can only hope that, following the path initiated by Aldo Moro—who was murdered for his ideas of peace and tolerance—a common path to cooperation and dialogue with no further misunderstandings can be found.

PART ONE:

CINEMA, RADIO, TELEVISION AND NEW MEDIA

CHAPTER ONE

FRAGILE HERITAGE AND DIGITAL MEMORY IN AFRICA

LIVIO SANSONE

1. The heritage debate

The period during which African states gained independence following colonial rule spanned the 1950s and 1960s and for former Portuguese colonies lasted to 1975. These were years of hope and optimism for Africa's future, as well as years of nation-building in the former colonies. Inevitably, they were also years of culture wars waged over the question of which aspects of the colonial and pre-colonial past had to be preserved and perhaps celebrated, and which aspects, locations or moments had to be rejected or at least underplayed in the history narratives of each and every newly independent country. Oral history (especially through celebrating and romanticising the character of the *griot*) was used to counterbalance historical accounts too heavily based on one-sided written sources—the lack of "Africanness" of which was added to by the fact that these sources were almost exclusively in Western languages, in Arabic or in African languages transcribed in the Arabic alphabet. Some places became icons of a past to be revered and dealt with as being constitutive of the new country (mostly rather monumental sites such as the island of Gorée and the Ghanaian slave forts); archaeology could show to the outer world the greatness of the African past, and popular culture—especially music, but also street theatre and painting—was called upon to redefine the narrative of the nation.

Of course, things have changed over the last five decades. In what may be called the politics of forgetting and forgiving, each economic and political cycle in postcolonial Africa has developed specific "memory regimes." The first 15-20 years after decolonisation often corresponded to attempts to develop national economies (self-sustained and centred on

import substitution); then came two decades of structural adjustment (with the opening up of trade borders and the end of nationalistic development); and, lastly, a period characterised by a new thrust towards democratisation combined with the full force of globalisation. Each of these three stages has conceived of the Past in different ways, but in the third stage, over the last one or two decades, a number of factors have created a new and often contradictory context for the politics of heritage, patrimonialization, preservation and storage of tangible and, even more so, intangible culture. Now new culture wars are being waged, albeit generally in a less glamorous fashion than in the period soon after independence. The situation now is quite different, since the shadow of colonialism has become less dominant. This has made it possible to imagine alternative narratives. Now the key question seems to be which part of the past and which kind of biographies (as well as whose biographies), locations and archives can be "rediscovered" and even turned into national heritage to assist in the development of narratives and cultural practices that could help a country to move successfully into the future. This has meant a series of attempts to detach collective memory from the colonial past and put other forms of collective memory—and heritage politics—in its place. In new ways the past, cultural traditions, "real Africa," or the "essence of things African" are rediscovered while being refashioned. These are processes that question the future of traditions and heritage, in which nostalgia, rather than being considered poor history and something to be exorcised, ought to be analysed as a tool deployed for very different and even antagonistic purposes.[1]

Critical studies on the silencing of the past[2] have inspired a reflection on a number of projects relating to heritage both from the "inside" and from the "outside." Projects of the former kind include attempts to make cultural heritage a key part of development strategies in the 1990s. Cases in point are the efforts to produce or foster a brand of possible and desirable ethnic tourism in post-Apartheid South Africa—which suggests that tourist visitation, rather than posing a threat to authenticity, can actually buttress cultural traditions and their transmission from the old to the young as well as constitute a source of cash for populations that are

1 William Cunningham Bissel, "Engaging Colonial Nostalgia," *Cultural Anthropology* 20, no. 2 (2005): 215–248.

2 Jacques Depelchin, *Silences in African History* (Dar es Salaam: Mbuki Na Nyoto Publishers, 2005); and Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past. Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Books, 1995).

often quite isolated and otherwise at the margin of a cash flow economy.[3] In this case, the basic question is twofold: which kinds of culture and ethnicity, or ethnic cultures, or dimensions thereof are commercially or touristically viable; and whether and how the local community benefits from this process, and which subgroups are benefiting the most (the young, women, etc.). It is worth adding that South Africa has without doubt the most extensive infrastructure dedicated to the struggle for memory in the continent, in terms of the quantity and quality of heritage projects, museums, archives, monuments and statues, national parks and, last but not least, media interest in biography and autobiography.[4] In South Africa, heritage has indeed turned into a market of its own—what we may call an economics of heritage, to a certain extent. On the contrary, in most of Africa one can speak of "fragile heritage," that is, poor heritage infrastructure that weakens any serious attempt at preserving heritage and turning sites such as museums and public monuments from "temples" into memorials—remembrance sites that double as experiments and research laboratories. Moreover, a rapid scrutiny of most African countries shows that cultural heritage preservation is rarely a top priority for governments. When it is indeed a priority, it is often related to a political election campaign, where a particular element of heritage is then deployed by a jingle, poster or speech. An editorial in the *African Archaeological Review*'s special issue on Africa's Fragile Heritage reads: "Attention to heritage also requires consideration of other interest groups, including the public to whom the past is being presented (both tourists and local communities), the international heritage infrastructure, and politics and priorities of individual countries."[5] For this reason, archaeologists in Africa have started to develop new local-global connections, as part of an attempt to cooperate with local communities in securing the physical and political archaeological sites, while trying to give global exposure to research and its findings.[6] A lack of local tourists, whether due to the relative absence

3 Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, *Ethnicity, Inc.* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

4 Ciraj Rassool, "Heritage and the post-apartheid nation, 1994–2004: the biographic order, the memorial complex, and the spectacle of history," in *The struggle for memory. Biographies, locations/ places, archives, monuments and museums in today's Africa*, ed. Livio Sansone and Claudio Alves Furtado (Liverpool: University of Liverpool Press, forthcoming).

5 Federica Sulas, Stephanie Wynne-Jones, and Kate Spence, "Editorial," *The African Archaeological Review* 28, no. 1 (2011): 1–3.

6 Ibrahima Thiaw, "Slaves without shackles: archaeology of everyday life on Gorée Island," in *Comparative Dimensions of Slavery in Africa: Archaeology and*

of national tourism or the whimsical nature of international tourist flows, can be overcome through global exposure of both the site and the research findings, on the Web as well as at international venues and conferences.

As regards "outside" approaches, one such example is provided by the UNESCO-inspired movements campaigning for the enhancement of intangible heritage and the patrimonialization of the slave routes. The latter, in a somewhat magic twist, is aimed at transforming sites, monuments and cultural artefacts generally associated with shame, sorrow, pain and guilt—inseparable components of the aftermath of slavery—from being a burden to being its opposite, a bonus both for a country and for its people. It should not come as a surprise that such magic has often created tensions between local feelings and universal rules associated with patrimony and its recovery from the past and oblivion. The reality of World Cultural Heritage Sites in Africa as well as in Cuba and Brazil (especially sites associated with the memory of slavery such as Cidade Velha in Cape Verde, the Gorée Island and Saint Louis in Senegal, Cacheu in Guinea Bissau and the historical city centres of Salvador and Recife, or the port area in Rio) shows that visitors from Africa, the black diaspora, and the average tourist have different and often contradictory perceptions and views of these heritage sites.[7]

The former colonial powers' efforts to protect their "shared cultural heritage" with Africa provide another example of an "outside" project. This project suggests that even half a century after decolonisation the former metropolis and its former colonies still have a culture in common, also thanks to the usage of the same (European) language or versions thereof. The general idea behind such vision is that, through quite a variety of means such as promoting associations based on the use of a common language and/or trade tradition or organising powerful museums, archives, research institutions, joint colonial history projects and (traditional and contemporary) art exhibits, Europeans and Africans can come together because of a set of mutual concerns, ideally on a win-win platform, as (modern) artists, musicians, writers or scholars.

In fact, in terms of heritage preservation and promotion in any location in the African continent, people are experiencing a tension between expectations and actual opportunities, which is very properly summed up in a paper on Africa's fragile heritage: "On one extreme, some institutions, such as UNESCO, have absolute authority, whereas, on the other extreme, there is an increased move towards encouraging everyone to remake his or

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Memory. Proceedings of the British Academy 168, ed. Paul Lane and Kevin C. MacDonald (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 147–165.

7 Thiaw, "Slaves without shackles."

her own past. It is clearly necessary to understand that there are different forms of knowledge and that they can play different ways."[8]

It is obviously counterproductive to assume that the abstract historicising assumptions that underpin Western as well as international notions associated with heritage are naturally shared by all, nor does it make sense to insist that these are still only Western epistemologies and neglect to explore the versions devised in other parts of the world as new fusions occurred. This is in part because we still expect community responses and local heritage practices to take a familiar and recognisable form everywhere and at all times. In fact, heritage is now understood in several new forms that subvert previous assumptions. One very good reason why in the overwhelming majority of African countries—as well as in most countries across the Global South—the "heritage sector" works in specific ways that differ substantially from those in overdeveloped countries, where the quest for the past has become an important sector of the economy (such as the UK, the USA and France), is the relative absence of what has been called the modern gentry. Opposite to, say, New York, London and Paris, most African cities, with the partial exception of South Africa and, perhaps, Egypt, lack this specific section of the urban middle class that purchases and consumes cultural traditions and the Past in the guise of museum and art gallery visits, actual purchases of "traditional handicraft" and support, in one way or another, for the revival of what is considered traditional food, music and fashion. In most African countries, various things and artefacts (such as a building, a music instrument, a piece of fabric, a food habit, or just a dish) that in many Western cities are considered ancient or traditional, and therefore deserving of preservation, are in fact regarded as old stuff that can and has to be discarded. Intellectuals, university professors and the middle class generally consume local popular art much less than in most of Europe and are more supportive of cultural projects projected into a modern future—whatever modernity may mean—than of those reinventing and refurbishing the past. As said before, this general lack of modern gentry is not limited to Africa but is quite common across the Global South, where one sees indeed gentrification—processes of exploitation of urban zones and enrichment of a few at the expense of many, which can lead to the actual expulsion of residents from patrimonialized historical city centres, transformed into open-air shopping malls aimed at tourists—without the gentry (an urban upper middle class, fairly aristocratic in style and well-

8 See page 42 in Marie Louise Stig Sørensen and Christopher Evans, "The Challenges and Potentials of Archaeological Heritage in Africa – Cape Verdean Reflections," *The African Archaeological Review* 28, no. 1 (2011): 39–54.

educated, which, because of a social pact between the haves and the have-nots, "consumes" traditions and popular culture and is supportive of heritage conservation and promotion as a national priority).

Another aspect that is relevant in terms of memory and heritage—and central to the purpose of this text—is the storage of knowledge about the past and its accessibility. Generally speaking, Africa scores low in both. Libraries and archives are comparatively poor. In spite of the efforts of librarians and archivists in many countries, public funding is insufficient and contributions from both national and foreign donors are subject to the whimsical nature of the donation process itself. Digital libraries, online journals, digital book projects, digitising of archives as a cheaper alternative to microfilming, and digital or even online archives themselves broaden the opportunities. Digitising is often done in cooperation with foreign donors and archives. It has the advantage of allowing for a combination of local and international expertise. Its great advantages notwithstanding, it calls into question a series of problems associated with the politics of storage: who keeps the original documents and who is in charge of their physical preservation once these are digitised; what is done with the copy; who gets the credit for the work done; who has the technical skills; who has the technology; who gives and who receives; and finally, is it really a win-win project?

There are even more important changes. Just think of how relevant the global coming of multiculturalism is. At its inception in the 1960s, the notion of development was conceived of as a great cultural leveller and homogeniser, which saw it as its aim to turn the rural and the traditional into the modern and the urbanised. Nowadays, in a growing number of contexts, the meaning and evolution of this once catch-all notion have been turned upside down: development needs to be sustainable and has to be kind to cultural traditions. Moreover, it can and should benefit from cultural specificities by turning ethnicity into diversity or even heritage preservation, and handicraft and cultural artefacts into heritage. The UNESCO Intangible Heritage Program,[9] which established its first list of elements to be preserved in 2008, besides creating an original universal dogma—recently mitigated by the statement that "safeguarding does not mean freezing"—has sparked a plethora of state-based or even local projects centred on notions such as "cultural territories," the recovery of diversity and traditions, and the promotion of local aspects of popular culture. Only few cultural elements make it into the UNESCO world list after all, but in the same process many elements make it into the lists maintained by national heritage institutions.

9 http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich.

An additional source of change is the emergence, especially over the last decade, of new South-South circuits (with upcoming global actors such as China, India, Brazil and South Africa) with the political aim of reversing the conventional geopolitics of knowledge—in which the Global South was accorded a marginal role in the making of archives, libraries and museums, and often subjected to unfair treatment. The South-South connection is however still fragile; it tends to be buttressed by progressive governments and restrained by conservative ones—which are either more isolationist or uncritically in line with the Global North, and especially the USA—in spite of the fact that, rather ironically, in the hyper-developed parts of the world isolationism and national-populism are nowadays often on the rise.

Possibly the most important development in the field of heritage infrastructure, however, was related to communication technologies. The revolution in the relationship between time and space, with the acceleration and intensification of flows typical of modern globalisation, would have not occurred without them. New communication technologies have enabled the creation and growth of a fairly new visual culture, which has benefited from the print-to-online transition of news and that of photography from film to digital image—resulting in a proliferation of user-friendly resources for making online filmed self-portraits and visual (auto-)biographies through platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, etc. I dare say that most contemporary African festivities, cultural traditions and of course music genres are nowadays generously represented on social networks. A simple web search of, for instance, the Bissau carnival—the largest of its kind on African soil—done on March 18, 2017, generated 21,900 hits with approximately 200 short films about the actual pageant. Cultural forms that were only a few decades ago relatively out of sight of the general public and only known to the local community and the occasional traveller or anthropologist are now, as it were, over-lit and globally overexposed. Digital photography, now made possible by cheap cameras and, increasingly so, by smartphones, has contributed to the emergence of a new and fast-growing visual culture with an experience of its own. For example, I have been told that nowadays people show a higher willingness to be photographed even in contexts in which taking pictures used to be quite challenging, especially without previous consent (such as I experienced in the Dogon region of Mali in the mid-1980s)—because now they take a lot of pictures themselves. However, it should be noted that digital pictures tend to have a shorter and somewhat more ephemeral life than printed pictures, which were often put on display on the walls of the main room of the home and

left there forever. Furthermore, apps such as WhatsApp have helped to make communication cheaper and thus more intense, well beyond the increase already made possible by the introduction of cell phones. Sub-Saharan Africa is the region of the world, together with Latin America, where the transition just about two decades ago from few and expensive phone landlines (a privilege of the few) to relatively cheap and thus accessible portable phone lines has been most dramatic. We have rapidly moved from a situation in which phone calls were few and perceived as very dear and important to a plenitude of cheaper phone calls that are perceived as less important and are possibly less likely to be remembered. On the other hand, cell phones have made life easier for people of all classes with services such as digital banking, money transfer, health care, and information about public services (in many countries, health services stay in touch with patients through text messaging, becoming in fact a lifeline).[10] Special attention ought to be given to the great protagonists of this technological revolution, that is the notebook, the tablet and especially the smartphone, as well as to the fairly rapid growth of Internet access, originally driven by Internet connections at home and the booming number of cyber cafes, and more recently by cheaper 3G internet rates as well as by the growing number of squares, town centres and other public spaces with free Wi-Fi access even in Africa.[11] The development of blog journalism, extremely popular in Africa where the printed press has almost always had limited circulation, is a very important offshoot of this revolution. Social media have a tremendous impact on a number of fields, such as the electoral context, and in Africa as well as in other continents tend to foster single-theme rather than broad campaigns.

The rapid shift from oral culture to cell phones and then smartphones—quickly leaving the written paper culture behind and lacking a transition through telephone landlines and desktop computers as experienced in the Global North—begs reflection. There was a complex, well-known relationship between writing and the act of remembering, especially because colonialism in Africa made of the written word and of the more or less imposed usage of colonial languages a great watershed in the exercise of power. Leonard Epstein touched on this in his works on new urban ethnicities in the late 1950s in the Copperbelt, but it was Jack Goody who showed the relevance of writing to religious and community

10 Jenny Alker and Isaac Mbiti, "Mobile Phones and Economic Development in Africa," in *Working Paper 211* (Washington, DC: Center for Global Development, 2010).

11 Since approximately 2010, the roll-out of free Wi-Fi in almost every public square has been a tremendous success in Cape Verde.

life: while fostering one single canon and making dogmas more uniform, it enables the making of a new literate elite as well as sparking off new generational frictions. It is not by accident that these are, basically, the main themes in African cinema over the last half century. The relationship between the means (oral, printed, or digital) and the workings and politics of memory is not self-evident and needs to be researched in specific contexts. Does digital writing make things more uniform and carry the same authority as the printed one? Or is it rather similar to the "dirty speech" (already celebrated by Hans Magnus Enzesberger, who welcomed the surge in pirate radios, later renamed community radios, in Western Europe in the 1970s) that enabled lower-class youths to communicate through the radio regardless of their supposedly wrong accent or poor command of the official language?

New communication technologies and, more specifically, digitalisation and digital and online archives have also been discussed over the last years by various scholars based in African universities because of their impact not only on the politics of storage of documentation but also, more broadly, on the politics of the past and of memory as well as on the future of traditions in Africa.

This debate requires very careful consideration if we are to establish new and more equal lines of international cooperation with colleagues based in Africa, trying to stimulate new comparative perspectives among different colonial traditions and new methodologies focused on dialogue and sharing. This concerns a number of established and less established projects of electronic editing and publishing, and begs the question of how much and how freely documents ought to be digitised and made available in this format and possibly online. The key questions are: which is the giving and which is the receiving end in this process, or who holds on to the original document and who gets the digital copy, as well as who earns or pays the most. Different points of view emerge, those of local and visiting scholars, archivists, funders, ordinary visitors to the archive, virtual visitors and so forth. In general, the archivist community is more concerned with conservation, while the research community with access and circulation.[12]

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12 Four scholars have been prominent in this discussion: Premesh Lalu and Ciraaj Rassool (University of the Western Cape), Colin Darch (UCT) and Joel Tembe (director of the Mozambique Historical Archive). The journal *Kronos* of the University of the Western Cape has been an important stage for this debate and is freely available online at http://www.scielo.org.za/pdf/kronos. A number of scholars are starting to develop an outright rejection to indiscriminate and supposedly apolitical digitising, especially when this is done in the direction

2. New opportunities and challenges

The new context, its new actors and hierarchies, as well as the new opportunities it offers for heritage recovery and preservation in the Global South, and especially in Africa, need to be investigated urgently. On the one hand, a lack of political and financial commitment from the part of the state or even private investors, coupled with the scarcity of both tourism and a modern gentry, deeply affects the economics of the heritage sector—for instance, by making weak attempts at renovating dilapidated historical city centres while preserving their colonial or even pre-colonial aura. On the other hand, a set of technological, political and cultural changes have increased, especially across the Global South and thus also in Africa, the opportunities for a new, largely self-taught, and lowbrow rather than highbrow process that is conducive to an authentic heritage revolution from below—in spite of the relative weakness of the traditional heritage infrastructure, which in Africa is properly developed almost only in South Africa. The aforementioned "inside" and "outside" projects relate to a broad range of changes and fields of interest, which affect deeply the heritage sector. More generally, they also have an effect on the politics and practices of museums and archives, and on the process of patrimonialization of tangible culture (associated with subaltern groups) and intangible culture (which tends to mean turning popular culture into heritage). In this respect, important changes have occurred in key fields such as: the biographies of national leaders and/or heroes, as well as the making and unmaking of (national) monuments and heritage sites; old and new national history projects and the making of new national heroes (and villains); the practice and politics of archaeology—what politicians, governments and various interest and population groups would like the archaeologist to be doing (and finding). It goes without saying that the whole gamut of the human sciences is called into question by this process.

Let us now consider a number of concrete examples that relate to my own research experience while trying to develop the Digital Museum of African and Afro-Brazilian Heritage, in fact a network of six digitising stations in five Brazilian and one Portuguese universities that has also established a partnership with a set of African archives and research

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North-South, while arguing that there are political questions at stake that cannot be overseen. See, among others, Valdemir Zamparoni, "Documentos, virtualização, democracia e desigualdade: algumas reflexões," in *Diálogos em trânsito. Brasil, Cabo Verde e Guiné-Bissau em narrativas cruzadas*, ed. Cláudio Alves Furtado (Salvador: EDUFBA, 2016), 107–118.

centres.[13] I posit that the experimental use of new communication technologies for research and outreach projects in the humanities has opened up a new panorama for action.

The first example concerns the exhibition *Africa away from home*, hosted in the Abolition Museum in Recife, Brazil. The exhibition curator, Antonio Motta, asked a group of African students at Brazilian universities to put on display objects, images and sounds that reminded them of their homeland and were mobilised whenever they felt homesick. To the surprise of the curator, the African students deployed a mix of objects such as presents from their parents or grandparents (a watch, a belt, a wallet, or a pen) and an array of memory sticks, SD cards and external hard drives, but mostly links to resources such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, WhatsApp, online newspapers and blogs run by African journalists or activists. All these technological devices and resources enabled them to live a life in Brazil while keeping in touch daily, often in real time, with their African families, friends and socio-political contexts.

Another example is the field of biographical studies. In many countries—and certainly in the case of Guinea Bissau and Mozambique[14]—state or official control on the memory of the liberation war has been questioned by the advent of blogs and social media. There has been a move from state journalism (associated with a paper regime) to blog journalism, which is something of an ego- or self-centred journalism (associated with a digital regime). In fact, (auto-)biographies are on the rise all over Africa, and communication technologies enable more in-depth exploration across a broad variety of archives of entities and actors who created the field of social sciences in Africa during the period of decolonisation. Now is the time to synthesise, compile and compare data from archives and sources that until very recently have had little or no dialogue. I believe that the reconstruction of biographies, especially the highly complex and often contradictory ones around which diverse and even opposing narratives often co-exist, ought to be a collective, collaborative, multi-situated and multidisciplinary endeavour. To this purpose, an experimental digital online platform can and must be developed with the aim of fostering online collaboration between researchers from various countries and with different skills—mostly, though not exclusively, anthropologists, historians, journalists-biographers, literature researchers and artists—as

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13 Livio Sansone, "The Dilemmas of Digital Patrimonialization: The Digital Museum of African and Afro-Brazilian Memory," *History in Africa* 40, no. 1 (2013): 1–17.

14 Paolo Israel, "A Loosening Grip: The Liberation Script in Mozambican History," *Kronos* 39, no. 1 (2013): 11–19.

well as creating effective tools for both crowdsharing and crowdsourcing. That is to say that documents of all sorts could be curated collectively—read and interpreted through different angles, disciplines and locations. Such collaborative biography-making is crucial if we are interested in biographies as metaphors of racist and anti-racist thinking as well as colonial and anti-colonial thinking rather than as accounts of singular and even idiosyncratic lifestyles. Biographies of well-known African leaders such as Eduardo Mondlane[15] are good cases in point, but the biographies of lesser-known or celebrated personalities will also be considered. The platform, to be hosted on our project's website (possibly the website of the Digital Museum of African Heritage), will also cooperate with existing networks and digital resources, such as the e-list H-Luso and other thematic lists. Developing resources for the creation of online exhibits—with galleries containing a variety of audiovisual documents combined with text—is a key part of our efforts. These exhibits may at some point be transformed into physical exhibitions, to be set up within existing physical spaces such as museums and university premises, or can be used in association with existing physical exhibits. It is understood that such collaborative, dynamic and networked websites will also enhance the visibility of both the physical and the digital archives involved at all ends of the project.

The third and last example concerns the use of the "afro" in Africa, and hybrid heritage in general, whereby even a country such as Cape Verde, which defines itself as a Creole and mestizo nation, can embark in heritage politics and preservation of the conventional kind, in spite of the fact that these revolve around notions such as authenticity, uniqueness and autochthony. The case of the process of patrimonialization by UNESCO of the first Western settlement in Sub-Saharan Africa, Cidade Velha on the Island of Santiago, Cape Verde, just a few years ago, shows that a number of cultural traits and artefacts were imported from Brazil to substantiate the claim as well as to "re-traditionalise" the historical site. Both the Internet and the transnational careers of a number of cultural activists were essential to this process of mixing and blending of cultural traits for the purpose of producing an Afro-Atlantic culture narrative around the historical site recognised as world heritage—which would desperately need both national and international recognition and visitors to be

15 I am now involved in research on the rather cosmopolitan intellectual biography of Eduardo Mondlane. See Livio Sansone, "Eduardo Mondlane and the Social Sciences," *Vibrant* (online journal) 10, no. 2 (2014): 85–121.

sustainable.[16] The case shows how, in fact, hybridity, mixing and syncretism can also be part and parcel of heritage promotion and even preservation. In a cutting-edge text on hybrid heritage, De Jong calls attention to the original syncretism of heritage formations and to the "purification" they are subjected to when states and nations contrive to appropriate them. We have to overcome the negative connotations of impurity and value the "original syncretism" that is foundational in all societies. Nowadays, in many contexts and as plenty of scholars have been demonstrating, there is an increasing longing to belong, but in the process of claiming exclusive ownership, hybridity is denied. In fact "Heritage should be curated so as to enable alternative imaginaries of memory [. . .] What is critical to all this is to accept the impurity of the heritage and to conceptualise this impurity as constitutive."[17]

3. New power relations?

More examples could certainly be provided. The ones I have listed wanted to emphasise a number of novelties and support the central idea of this text that concrete investment in digital humanities, such as collaborative biography projects, collective online curatorships and digital museums can help create new connections between scholars in the South and the North and somehow subvert the post-colonial geopolitics of knowledge that are still in place. In terms of communication technology, it is undeniable that these are associated with a new stage in individualisation and de-territorialisation of social life (including the possibility of our life being cohabited by a steadily growing number of virtual visitors, networks and even friendships), but also with an upsurge in identity formation and a growing zeal for genealogy (through heraldry, genetic history and recovering history or the past in various ways). It would make no sense to take once and for all a technophile and technophobic stance, just as it would make little difference to position ourselves, as it were, in favour or against globalisation. The impact of old and new communication technologies on identity formation—and their effects on lasting inequalities, the perception of relative deprivation, and cultural production, especially in the subaltern strata—deserves close scrutiny. The same must be said about the new

16 Livio Sansone, "Culture on the Move. Cape Verde between Africa and Brazil," in *Mobility between Africa, Asia and Latin America: Economic Networks and Cultural Interactions*, ed. Ute Röschenthaler and Alessandro Jedlowski (London: Zed Books, 2017).
17 See page 1 in Ferdinand de Jong, "Editorial," *African Arts* 42, no. 4 (2009): 1–5.

opportunities offered by these technologies: by boosting possibilities for crowdsharing, crowdfunding, digital generosity and collective curatorship as well as the multidisciplinary and multi-situated readings of documents and social facts, they can, as a matter of fact, contribute to giving resonance to social movements as well as to various aspects of the decolonisation of the geopolitics of knowledge. This is particularly important for the study of biographical paths that are as rough and complex as those of many leaders of African independence movements, such as Ben Bellah, Mondlane, Cabral and Nkrumah. Digitising documents and making them available online may not be enough, but it can be a step in the right direction and foster a new relationship between scholars and archives along the North-South and South-South lines.

Equally relevant, in my opinion, is to what extent the set of changes described before create new and maybe better conditions for our collaboration with colleagues that operate from within Africa, not only as a way to give proper value to the knowledge they produce but also as a means to question our knowledge production. How this set of changes affect, or rather, should affect the practices and habits of researchers in Africa—from both inside and outside the continent—as well as the geopolitics of knowledge and scientific authority in general is left to be seen.

CHAPTER TWO

THE WARM SAND OF THE DESERT: ITALIAN COLONIAL CINEMA AND THE IMAGE OF ISLAM

PATRIZIA MANDUCHI

> The Oriental is irrational, depraved (fallen), childlike, "different," thus the European is rational, virtuous, mature, "normal." But the way of enlivening the relationship was everywhere to stress the fact that the Oriental lived in a different but thoroughly organised world of his own, a world with its own national, cultural, and epistemological boundaries and principles of internal coherence. Yet what gave the Oriental's world its intelligibility and identity was not the result of his own efforts but rather the whole complex series of knowledgeable manipulations by which the Orient was identified by the West.
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> —Edward Said, *Orientalism*

1. The cinema of the Empire

The image of Islam (intended as the culture and religion of the majority of populations under Italian colonial rule) in fascist propaganda films, particularly between the late twenties and the early forties, is the focus of this essay. Contrary to what we have been led to believe, stereotyping propaganda in Italy was not driven by the "Arab" ethnic factor. The main target of colonial stereotypes was Islam's religion and culture, or better, the "Muslim"—be it Eritrean, Somali or Libyan.

The powerful tool of cinematography, already a key player in the creation of a collective imaginary and in achieving political and social

consensus in the overseas territories, assumed an even greater importance in the broadening of consensus for the regime. At the same time, it was also essential in the creation of an Italian national identity, not only through the famous *Cronache dall'Impero* (LUCE's newsreels and educational documentaries) but also through fiction films, ranging from melodrama to escapist films and historical epics.

Perceptions about the religious-cultural factors (and their exploitation) played a key part in the development of the imperial ideology and the implementation of fascist colonial policy: in the Orientalist way of thinking, alterity and cultural subordination become—as Edward Said tells us—justification for the colonial undertaking, legitimising its tools, modalities and final goals.

The analysis focuses in particular on Libya[1] for three reasons: first, for its centrality in the fascist empire's Mediterranean project (it was the only North African and Arab country conquered by Italy); second, because it seems the most appropriate example, given that Libyan Islam has a number of peculiar characteristics but far fewer than the other peripheral areas colonised by Italy, such as the Horn of Africa or Albania, which came to represent an Islam far from the original one on account of the influence of strong local customs; third, because

> Libya [. . .] had been the setting for a consistent number of film productions from the onset of Italian control through the slowdown of the Italian industry in the late 1920s. Libya offered a brand of Orientalist scenery made recognisable from Hollywood, French, and other national cinemas, whereas East Africa had no public recall in terms of screen imagery.[2]

The period in question is the one where Fascism attempts a bold and forced, strategic manoeuvre in adopting an ideological approach towards Islam, so as to justify its goals of acculturation in the name of an alleged cultural contiguity; however, references to the Islamic culture-religion are totally absent in escapist films, in melodramas with colonial settings, and

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1 An immense bibliography exists on the Italian presence in Libya. Hence, let us just recall the two obviously essential volumes by Angelo Del Boca, *Gli Italiani in Libia* (1. *Tripoli, bel suol d'amore, 1860–1922*; 2. *Dal Fascismo a Gheddafi*) (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1986–1988); amongst the most recent works: Nicola Labanca, *La guerra italiana per la Libia 1911–1931* (Bologna: Il Mulino 2011); Federico Cresti and Massimiliano Cricco, *Storia della Libia contemporanea* (Roma: Carocci, 2015).

2 Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *Fascism's Empire Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015), xiii.

in the historical epics that found great success in Italy and overseas. On the contrary, what does emerge from these far-fetched plots and stereotyped, exotic settings are all the omissions, misconceptions, distortions and the roughly defined image of Islam Orientalism that was spreading in Italy and elsewhere, and which, to a certain extent, continues to exist today.

The four films examined here are all set in Libya but at different times: the first is the still silent[3] *Kif Tebbi* (1928), one of the earliest colonial films, which in a way marks the transition towards a more conscious and "mature" period of fascist propaganda; the second is the most emblematic example of the feats of the colonial conquest, the famous *Lo squadrone bianco*, shot in 1936, the year of proclamation of the empire in Italian East Africa; the last two, *Bengasi* and *Giarabub*, both from 1942, provide two different viewpoints of the painful epilogue of the Italian colonial adventure in Libya.

2. Fascism and Islam

Following the well-established guidelines of expansion, the fascist regime occupied (or re-occupied) territories that largely belonged to what the Muslims called *dār al-islām*, the Land of Islam.[4] In the early forties, a time when Italy was rapidly expanding her colonial possessions, the fascist empire was substantially made up of populations who, despite being very different from one another, almost all belonged to the same religious and cultural matrix of Islam.[5]

In the fascist way of thinking of the twenties, the idea had spread that after the Peace Conference of Versailles (19 January–28 June 1919) a sense of betrayal and humiliation would unite Italy and the Arab world. The betrayal of the Arab aspirations to independence (they had been

3 About films produced before the thirties and before the advent of sound, see Giorgio Bertellini, "Colonial Autism. Whitened Heroes, Auditory Rhetoric, and National Identity in Interwar Italian Cinema," in *A Place in the Sun. Africa in Italian Colonial Culture from Post-unification to the Present*, ed. Patrizia Palumbo (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 255–27.

4 On Italian Mediterranean policy in the Liberal period, see: Vittorio Ianari, *Lo stivale nel Mediterraneo. Italia, Mediterraneo, Islam: alle origini di una politica* (Milano: Guerini & Associati, 2006).

5 As is widely known, the Italian colonies in Africa were Eritrea (conquered back in 1890), Somalia (1908), Tripolitania (1912) and Italian Ethiopia (1936); the Dodecanese (1912) and Albania (1939) were eventually added in Europe. The Empire of Italian East Africa was proclaimed on 9 May 1936.

promised the creation of an "Arab Nation") could be assimilated to Italy's disillusionment with her so-called "mutilated victory."

Fascism began to mature the idea of a tactical approach, not only to the Arab world but also to culture and popular feelings identified *tout court* with Islam. This mutation in strategic foreign policy was first put into use as a measure against the French and then against the British: control of the Mediterranean and a strong role in the Middle-East would have freed Italy from the unpopular European powers. It is the Duce himself who expresses this interest for the African and Asiatic continents:

> Italy's historical goals have two names: Asia and Africa. South and East are the cardinal points that have to incite the interest and will of the Italians [. . .] These objectives of ours are based on history and geography. Of all the great Western powers of Europe, the closest to Africa and Asia is Italy. A few hours by sea, fewer by air, are enough to link up Italy with Africa and Asia. Let no one misunderstand the magnitude of this secular task that I assign to this and future Italian generations. It is not a matter of territorial conquests, and this must be understood by everyone, near and far, but of a natural expansion, which should lead to a collaboration between Italy and the peoples of Africa, between Italy and the nations of the Near and Middle East. It is a matter of developing the still countless resources of both Continents, particularly Africa, and of introducing them more deeply into the circle of the world's civilisation. Italy can achieve this: her position in the Mediterranean, which is regaining its historical function as a link between the East and the West, confers her this right and lays this duty at her feet. We have no intention of reclaiming monopolies or privileges, but we demand and intend to prevent all those successful, smug conservatives from doing all they can to block the spiritual, political, and economic expansion of Italian Fascism![6]

The Italian expansion project in the Arab-Islamic world led the fascist regime in the twenties and thirties to interweave political-diplomatic relations with several countries—in particular Egypt, Iraq, Yemen, Saudi Arabia (the last one after 1932)—in the attempt to gain a foothold in the Middle Eastern context that was totally dominated by France and Great Britain.

Some contacts were set up with a number of "friendly" regimes, as was the case with the informal alliance and economic relations established in 1926, and renewed in 1937, with the *imām* Yahyà's Yemen; good relations were set up with King Fu'ād of Egypt, with Faysāl Ibn Husayn in Iraq, and

6 The Duce's speech at the Second Quinquennial Assembly of the Regime, Rome, 18 March 1934.

with Ibn Sa'ud in Saudi Arabia, to whom Italy provided aeronautical cooperation in the thirties.[7]

Of the many Arab interlocutors who were cajoled by the Fascists, the best known (and the most criticised in the Western press) is undoubtedly the Great *muftī* of Jerusalem *Hājj* Amīn al-Husaynī (1893–1974).[8] For the sake of brevity, let us just also mention the name of the Emir Shakīb Arslān (1869–1946), one of the main exponents of the reformist stream of the *Salafiyya*[9] and the editor of *La Nation Arabe* (the magazine of the Syrian-Palestinian nation within the League of Nations) in Geneva. For the record, they both practised nationalistic strategies based on one of the oldest rules in foreign policy: "The enemy of my enemy is my friend."

How did the regime manage to explain this rapprochement between a populist and reactionary ideology like Fascism and an old and complex religion like Islam? It did so by searching for points of contact and, when and wherever necessary, inventing them through the establishment of an ideological framework legitimated by academic studies, popular publications and intellectual debates, as well as through frequent contacts with prestigious representatives of the Muslim religious hierarchies: *'ulamā'* (Islamic scholars), *fuqahā*' (jurists) or *qādī* (judges).

It was important to demonstrate that Fascism and Islam could coexist, and that this coexistence was the necessary historical passage that would ultimately lead the Arab and African populations to prosperity and fulfilment.

Furthermore, Fascism was—in an explicit definition given by the Duce—also a religious conception: in the *Enciclopedia Italiana* (vol. 14, 1932), Mussolini himself defines Fascism as:

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7 Renzo De Felice, *Il Fascismo e l'Oriente. Arabi, ebrei e indiani nella politica di Mussolini* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1988), 15–16; Enrico Galoppini, *Il Fascismo e l'Islam* (Parma: All'insegna del Veltro, 2001), 43–50.

8 *Hâjj* Amīn al-Husaynī is the figure who embodies the nearest position to Fascism expressed by the Arab world. He was also one of the most exploited in order to prove the Arab and Islamic world's predisposition for totalitarian ideologies, as compared to the developing Jewish community, which was strongly democratic and had similar ideals to the West. David G. Dalin and John. F. Rothmann, *La mezzaluna e la svastica. I segreti e l'alleanza tra il nazismo e l'Islam radicale* (Torino: Lindau, 2015); Stefano Fabei, *Una vita per la Palestina. Storia del Gran Mufti di Gerusalemme* (Milano: Mursia, 2003).

9 The Salafiyya is a conservative Sunnite stream of thought, which goes back to the Syrian intellectual Rashīd Rīdā (1865–1935), and was developed in Egypt in the second half of the nineteenth century. It takes its name from the Arabic *al-salaf al-ṣaliḥīn* (the pious ancestors) and is characterised by its loyalty to the thought and the practices of the first Muslim generations.

> [. . .] a religious conception where man is seen in his immanent relation with the superior law, endowed with an objective purpose that transcends the individual and raises him to conscious membership of a spiritual society [. . .] Fascism is not only a government system but also and above all, it is a system of thought.[10]

This was why it was essential to engage every useful means in order to improve the more alleged than real knowledge about the culture of the conquered countries. Arabic and Islamic studies were greatly encouraged in the homeland and the number of multicultural initiatives and specific publications multiplied.[11] The great Islamist Carlo Alfonso Nallino had previously written in 1930:

> If our desire is to adopt a good policy, if we wish to draw the Muslim populations of our colonies towards us [. . .] we need to know them better and at a more profound level [. . .] There is nothing worse for those who rule over other populations than not understanding their soul, and not taking stock of their past, their traditions, their hopes and beliefs.[12]

At the same time, the regime was making every effort to encourage relations in several Arab countries through the work of a number of scholars who were acting as mediators between the Islamic world and fascist Italy. Among the Italians that had a role in the pro-Islamic propaganda of this period, three names at least ought to be mentioned: the renowned Arabist Gino Cerbella, who published an important work in Tripoli in 1938, significantly entitled *Fascismo e Islamismo*;[13] Enrico Insabato, head of the Italian-Arabic magazine *Il Convito-An-Nādī,* (Cairo, 1904–19010), one of the most active intellectuals in attempting to connect

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10 In actual fact, the word "Fascism" cannot really be attributed to Mussolini, but was drafted by Giovanni Gentile. When Mussolini talked of a "spiritual society," he certainly could not have known that this definition was similar to the Islamic concept of *umma* (community) that overpowers the definition of individual and which is at the centre of the Muslim social system.

11 Funding for the Oriental Institute (founded in 1921 in Rome), which became the most prestigious centre for the diffusion of knowledge of the Arab-Islamic world; the first "Fiera del Levante" in 1930; the 1933 and 1934 conferences in Rome; the publications in Italian and Arabic of *Italia Musulmana*, *Mondo Arabo*, *L'Avvenire Arabo*; Radio Bari's broadcasts in Arabic inaugurated in 1934. Cf. De Felice, *Il Fascismo e l'Oriente*; Galoppini, *Il Fascismo e l'Islam*; Arturo Marzano, *Onde Fasciste. La propaganda araba di Radio Bari (1934–43)* (Roma: Carocci, 2015).

12 *Oriente Moderno* 10, no. 8 (August 1930): 520.

13 Gino Cerbella, *Fascismo e islamismo* (Tripoli: P. Maggi, 1938).

Fascism to Islam;[14] and Carlo Arturo Enderle,[15] who maintained relations between the fascist government and Syro-Palestinian nationalists—such as the aforementioned Shakīb Arslān, the general secretary of the Pan-Islamic Congress, Sayyid Ziyā ad-Dīn Tabatabaī—and most of all with the above-mentioned Grand *muftī* of Jerusalem, *Hājj* Amīn al-Husaynī.

Lastly, we must remember that these are the years in which fascist ideology begins to have a direct influence on the creation of particular Arab youth movements: Ahmad Husayn's Young Egypt Party (*Hizb Misr al-Fatà*), the Greenshirts (*al-Qumsān al-Khadrā'*) and the Blueshirts (*al-Qumsān az-Zarqā'*) in Egypt; Pierre Jumayyūl's Kataeb Party (*al-Katā'ib al-Lubnāniyya*) in Lebanon, and the Ironshirts (*al-Qumsān al-Hadīdiyya*) in Damascus and Aleppo. These groups, whose political importance should not however be overestimated, undoubtedly modelled themselves on the fascist Blackshirts.

A genuine pro-Islamic strategy appeared especially after the 1935–36 Italo-Ethiopian war and the proclamation of the fascist empire. The time was now ripe for the regime to set about fostering cultural consensus towards colonial policy.

The previously "pragmatic" aim of the pro-Islamism of the Duce's regime soon became an ideological one. The resulting propaganda reached new embarrassing heights, for example, when Fascism was defined "the Islam of the twentieth century,"[16] utilising the *tawhīd* concept of unity and uniqueness with God, whose political equivalent was in the figure of the one and only leader, the Duce. As previously mentioned,[17] this was an "unsteady and contradictory" pro-Islamism and this is clearly shown by the more specific subject of our study, the Libyan case. In 1934, with the birth of Italian Libya in the territories of the so-called "fourth shore," the Libyans were proclaimed "Italian Muslims of Italy's fourth shore," even though very little or nothing was known about Islam. Numerous initiatives were undertaken to support local religious life (the building and restoration of mosques and Koranic schools; the inauguration of the Islamic Culture Secondary School in Tripoli; aid for the pilgrims going to Mecca and donations to religious associations), but this philanthropic commitment seemed a crude attempt at creating public consensus (the "civilising mission"…). In actual fact, it has always been impossible to

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14 See Alessandra Marchi's essay in this present volume.

15 Alì Ibn Ja'far (his Arabic name), born in Rome in 1892 to Muslim and Romanian parents, was Professor of Psychiatry at the Regia University of Rome.

16 The definition was provided by Essad Bey (the pseudonym of Lev Nussinbaum, 1905–1942), in the preface to his *Maometto* (1935; repr., Firenze: Giunti, 1999).

17 Galoppini, *Il Fascismo e l'Islam*.

disguise the fact that all this was basically a means to an end, namely to maintain law and order.

When the old and venerated Omar al-Mukhtār was executed in 1931, the Libyans were forced to accept the hard truth that the occupying regime was anything but close to Islam. The so-called "Lion of the desert," the *shaykh al-mujāhidīn*, the prince of warriors and religious leader of the most important Libyan Confraternity, the Sanusiyya, who till then had courageously fought against Italian penetration into Cyrenaica, was put to death after a sham trial in front of more than twenty thousand Libyans.[18] Like an open wound, this unforgettable event would impair the claims of Libyan independence and also offend the religious sensibility of all Muslims.[19]

3. Islam's sword

The most significant and spectacular moment of Mussolini's pro-Islamic propaganda was his second trip to Libya between 10 and 22 March 1937, passed down through the ages in the hundreds of photographs and

18 It is important to mention that at the time of the creation of Italian Libya, the Islamic religion was traditionally identified with the Islam of the Sufi Confraternities, and in particular with the Sanusiyya. The latter was founded in the middle of the nineteenth century on the Arabian peninsula, based on the preaching of the Algerian Muhammad bin 'Ali as-Sanusi (1787–1859). It spread throughout the Libyan territory from 1843 onwards, the year when the first *zawiya* was built in Cyrenaica. The religious context in the Ottoman province was in a state of decline and the *tarīqa* message spread rapidly and successfully. The nomadic and tribal factors, which had prevented the Ottoman administration from ruling these territories efficiently and undermined the creation of official Islam centres, now turned out to be useful for the propagation of the Confraternity. In fact, they actually became a tool for the Ottoman government, who delegated the administration of the most internal and difficult areas to the Sanusiyya. When the Italians arrived in 1911, the head of the Confraternity Ahmad ash-Sharīf, appointed by the Ottoman Sultan, declared war on the invaders. The legendary Umar al-Mukhtār then led the second phase of the Senussi resistance from 1924 onwards and held his own in Badoglio's counteroffensive until his capture and hanging in 1931. For a recent biography of al-Mukhtar, see al-Salab, Ali Muhammad, *Omar Al Mokhtar, Lion of the Desert (The Biography of Shaikh Omar Al Mukhtar)* (London: Al-Firdous, 2011).

19 And, *inter nos*, we cannot overlook the case of Mustafà Akkad's film *Lion of the Desert* (1981), censored in Italy until 2009 (coinciding with Gaddafi's visit to Italy), which recalls the parallel case of *La battaglia di Algeri* by Gillo Pontecorvo, Leone d'oro at Venice in 1966, banned in France until 1971.

innumerable news reports by the Istituto LUCE.[20] In those days, the official and exalted narration described the Duce as being received with all due pomp and circumstance by the Islamic authorities and with great rejoicing by the huge crowds of poor Libyans. Every last detail had been skilfully staged by Italo Balbo. Mussolini triumphantly visited mosques and sacred places, rewarded pious activities with generous donations and also toured schools and hospitals. He also paid homage at the tomb of Sidi Rafà (one of the most venerated saints in Cyrenaica, who died in the seventh century) and finally, on 20 March, near Tripoli, he received the famous "Sword of Islam" (*sayf al-islām*) from the local notables, who proclaimed him Protector of Islam (*muhāmī al-islām*).[21] As we have already mentioned, this happened a few years after the tragic uprising of the Sanusiyya confraternity in Cyrenaica, which ended with the hanging of Omar al-Mukhtār, an event that certainly had done little to encourage a vision of Italy and the Italians as defenders of popular religious feeling. Moreover, this spectacular visit of the Duce heralded the arrival of a new and massive wave of Italian settlers ("the twenty thousand" of 1938), which led to their occupation of lands and villages, with an increasing impoverishment of the local populations. After receiving the Sword of Islam, the (bogus) symbol of submission, the Duce made an emblematic speech on 18 March, in which he addressed the Libyan populations:

> Muslims of Tripoli and of Libya! Arab Lictor Youth!
> After 11 years, my Augustus and Powerful Ruler HM Vittorio Emanuele III, King of Italy and Emperor of Ethiopia, has sent me once again to this land where the Italian flag is flying, in order to learn about your needs and fulfil your legitimate desires.
> You have offered me the greatest gift: this sword, symbol of power and justice, a sword that I shall treasure and keep in Rome as one of my most important memories.
> As I receive your gift, I wish to tell you that a new era of Libyan history has begun. You have demonstrated your loyalty to Italy, maintaining law and order at the time when Italy was involved in a distant war, and your

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20 See the numerous documents at www.archivioluce.com.

21 The most famous photograph of the regime, with Mussolini riding a magnificent steed and holding his sword proudly aloft was altered in order to erase the Libyan man holding the horse by its halter. The following year, an equestrian statue dedicated to Mussolini was inaugurated in the main square of the Libyan capital. On its base, the inscription: "To Benito Mussolini peacemaker, redeemer of the Libyan land where Islam's sword blazed, the grateful and appreciative people solemnly swear in the name of the Lictorian fasces a loyalty that defies fate." The sword was kept in a glass case in Rocca delle Caminate, the Duce's summer residence. All traces were lost after 25 July 1943.

> thousands of volunteers have made a precious contribution to our victory. Before the onset of the long summer, the valiant warriors who have fought in Ethiopia will return and be welcomed back as heroes.
> After all these ordeals, Fascist Italy intends to ensure the Muslim populations of Libya and Ethiopia that they will have peace, justice, well-being, respect for the laws of the Prophet and, furthermore, She wishes to show her fondness for Islam and Muslims throughout the world. Rome, with her laws, will shortly demonstrate her commitment towards a brighter future.
> Muslims of Tripoli and of Libya!
> Go and spread these words to every house in each of your towns and cities, to each and every last shepherd. You all know that I am loath to make promises, but when I do make a promise, I always keep it![22]

His words are practically echoed in Benghazi by a local notable who, in his best fascist style (far different from Arabic oratory traditions) proclaims:

> Welcome, O Duce to this faithful city and to this ancient temple. The Muslims of this country, who have followed with deep admiration the steps of the triumphal journey made by Fascist Italy under your leadership and who have served at your command with loyalty and devotion, are honoured and grateful for this visit that confirms your fondness for the Libyans and your respect for their religion. At the threshold of this sacred place, in the name of all the people, I feel really proud in reaffirming our oath of loyalty, invoking the Generous Lord Almighty who assists you in leading Italy towards further greatness. May He grant you your desire to bring the country to greater heights in every field, so as to offer the world the example of what Italy can do for the good of the people that she clasps to her bosom under the aegis of the Lictor's fasces, symbol of humanity and justice.[23]

If we go deeper into the matter of this proclamation of the Duce as Protector of Islam, we immediately realise just how far the event was contrived. Not only because just a few years before Mussolini had signed the Lateran Treaty with the Italian Catholic Church, but also because he was invested by a local Berber chief, a certain Yusuf Kerish, who had no religious authority of any kind. Moreover, the sword, with its elaborate decoration of golden friezes, was not an Islamic symbol at all, but

22 Benito Mussolini, *Scritti e discorsi* (Milano: Hoepli, 1938), 11:72.

23 The quotation is from an unsigned article in the *Corriere della Sera*, titled "Mussolini ai pionieri: 'Roma imperiale e fascista vi ama, vi protegge e in ogni circostanza vi proteggerà,'" March 15, 1937. In Galoppini, *Il Fascismo e l'Islam*, 90.

probably commissioned by Mussolini himself from the Florentine Picchiani & Barlacchi Company.[24]

In any case, this marked the moment when the relationship between the fascist and Muslim worlds started to consolidate. As previously mentioned, fascist journalism now shifts from a generic pro-Islamist feeling to the affirmation of a presumed doctrinal similarity between Islam and Fascism.

This is not the place to talk about the ongoing debate of those years, but it is important to underline the cultural and political background, the framework for the colonial film industry, which not only included the pounding and effective voice of the Istituto LUCE[25] newsreels but also fiction films. What emerges from colonial fascist narration, as will be seen more clearly in what follows, is the belief that Islam is really a remissive Islam, which is docile, or better domesticated, pacific and innocent in its simplicity and ingenuity. The good Muslim is a good servant; this is the message that has to be communicated. The essential and simple popular religiosity must be protected from the negative influences of a bad Islam, namely the one belonging to the rebels, like the Sanusiyya, or to the martyr Omar al Mukhtār.

Mussolini, fighting against a religious leader whose martyrdom had made him a cult figure and practically unbeatable, decides to take on the improbable role of a religious leader in order to beat the Libyan rebels at their own game. However, the farce proves to be a failure, the Libyans never forget Omar al-Mukhtār, the Catholic Church is not amused and even the Italian colonists react with ill-concealed hilarity and derision towards the whole manipulated event.

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24 The Picchiani & Barlacchi company received several prestigious commissions from the Italian government, such as the production of all the badges for the Italian Team at the Berlin Olympic Games in 1936 and the production of steel wedding rings to substitute the gold ones, donated to the homeland during the sanctions period. On that occasion, the company also created two wedding rings that were given to Vittorio Emanuele III and Benito Mussolini. The firm still exists today, but the sword is not mentioned on its website in the history section. Furthermore, in reply to my specific question, they stated that they do not know if they really made the sword for Mussolini.

25 Gianmarco Mancosu, "L'impero visto da una cinepresa. Il reparto foto-cinematografico 'Africa Orientale' dell'Istituto LUCE," in *Quel che resta dell'impero. La cultura coloniale degli Italiani*, ed. Valeria Deplano and Alessandro Pes (Milano: Mimesis, 2014), 259–278.

4. Cinema and fascist propaganda

Some preliminary considerations are necessary as regards the theme of the relationship between cinema and fascist propaganda. First of all, we should not forget that colonialism was also a cultural phenomenon, which had a strong effect not only on the sense of identity of the colonised peoples but also on that of the colonisers themselves, since it was a strong component in the process of creation of our national culture, even after the colonial period.[26] In other words, "No colonial project could be realised without some kind of cultural work, which convinced some of their superiority and others of their inferiority."[27]

The case of fascist cinema propaganda is a clear testimony of the irreplaceable role played by the media in the creation and diffusion of a colonial ideology, mostly in the case of the films that have an extraordinary impact on public imagery.

> Nowadays when we ask for fascist cinematography (and the same thing happens with all of the arts) we are looking for films that express the spirit of our people, just as it has been forged by Fascism. Films that cause one to reflect, that deepen the humanity and morality of the spectators, that enlighten the ideals for which today the Italian Population marches together: those ideals of social justice that the Duce has talked about, and which give a superior and noble meaning to our will to power, to our warlike and military spirit.[28]

When we think about fascist propaganda, the Istituto LUCE's newsreels[29] immediately spring to mind, as well as the educational documentaries and

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26 See the contribution by Cecilia Dau Novelli in the present volume.

27 Deplano and Pes, *Quel che resta dell'Impero*, 9. Cf. the entire volume edited by Cecilia Dau Novelli and Paolo Bertella Farnetti, *Colonialism and National Identity* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015).

28 Luigi Chiarini, *Cinematografo* (Roma: Cremonese, 1935), 118.

29 The Educational Cinematographic Union, namely the Istituto LUCE, was set up in 1925 and held the monopoly on information and propaganda until 1938 (reports, newsreels, didactic short films, educational films and mobile cinemas in rural areas, also in the colonised countries). Cf. Christel Taillibert, "Le cinéma, instrument de politique extérieure du Fascisme italien," *Mélanges de l'Ecole française de Rome. Italie et Méditerranée* 110, no. 2 (1998): 943–96. The same lack of historical perspective can be seen in the archives of the Istituto LUCE, also in relation to didactic audiovisuals such as the documentary *Islam 1941*, where the birth of Islam is only shown as the incredible and rapid Muslim military expansion from the Seventh century onwards. See *Islam 1941* (D042801) in http://www.archivioluce.com.

full-length films with colonial themes, filmed (or set) in Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia and Libya.

In our opinion, the fact that the analysis of these films involves a reflection on the description of the Other, who is not just an African or an Arab but also a Muslim, is extremely interesting.

And then, let us not forget that the birth of cinema happened at the same time as the spread of imperialism: in other words all the tools created to film are actually being tested for the very first time at exactly the same moment as the European Powers are setting off to conquer lands overseas.

Each and every regime would consciously employ the new powerful communication tool, mainly for political propaganda. Like all the dictatorships of the twentieth century, Fascism also made abundant use of cinema for its own propaganda, as artfully shown by Ruth Ben-Ghiat in her recent and valuable volume on the *Cinema of the Italian Empire*.[30]

Finally, the camera lent itself very well to narrating classical themes of exoticism, perfect for the audiences of that period, who loved all the clichés of colonial cinema.

> From the early twenties, Hollywood too, apart from having made Rodolfo Valentino play the part of the sheikh's son, starts to feel the charm of exoticism and the Legion, and to rebuild forts and oases with palms in the deserts of Arizona or see its operators leave for faraway and unknown lands in Asia, Africa, South America and Oceania.[31]

In light of the above, it should be pointed out that the cinema was already a fully developed industry when, on 9 May 1936, the colonial empire was proclaimed with the declaration of sovereignty of the Kingdom of Italy over Ethiopia and when the king of Italy assumed the title of emperor of Ethiopia. This was the time of Galeazzo Ciano at the Ministry of Popular Culture (from 1937), and of Luigi Freddi, the fervent Fascist and Hollywood cinema expert, friend of Mussolini and Marinetti, who architected the rebirth of Italian cinema, becoming the head of the General Directorate for cinematography in 1934.

> From June 1936 onwards [. . .] one of the main aims of the film industry was to become a useful tool to describe and celebrate the rise of the Fascist Empire, and all of the important implications of such a historical event were featured. The film industry was given the task of realising an art that

30 Ben-Ghiat, *Fascism's Empire Cinema*.

31 Gian Piero Brunetta, "L'ora d'Africa del cinema italiano," in *L'ora d'Africa del cinema italiano (1911–1989)*, ed. Gian Piero Brunetta and Jean A. Gili (Rovereto: Materiali di lavoro, 1990), 13.

> could be defined "imperial," namely, it not only had to inform national policy but also the actions of each and every citizen.[32]

After a somewhat confused and uncertain debut, during the thirties, the regime's propaganda invested a great amount of energy and money in financing the development of the national film industry. Even though only a dozen Italian full-length films can be considered genuine "colonial films," they provide an insight into the power of the imaginary of an age in which impoverished populations, like the Italian one, develop an awareness of their national identity and begin to perceive Islam as a subordinate culture.

As regards the local element, namely the culture and religion of the indigenous populations, we should first take into account that Italian colonial cinema pays no attention at all to the cultural context where the plot takes place. The stories of the Italian protagonists are the most important element: their difficult lives, the adversity they encountered so far from home in a harsh and dangerous environment—everything else is the background, the scenery, the surroundings. The image of the indigenous populations can be essentially divided into two categories: good and bad natives; enemies and friends.[33]

Four films, all set in Libya but in different periods, provide a good example to support our hypothesis. As in all Italian colonial films, any reflection on the human and cultural context is completely missing, let alone Islam, of which Fascism had declared itself defender. The two topics (Fascism and Islam) proceed along two parallel tracks that will never meet, perhaps simply because it is neither possible nor even necessary, or just because a deeper acknowledgement of the Muslim context would reveal the farcical nature of Mussolini's propaganda…

Mario Camerini's *Kif Tebby* (As you want) (1928),[34] set prior to the Italo-Turkish war of 1911–12, narrates the emblematic story of Ismāʻil, the son of an important Tripolitan notable. On his return home after a trip to Europe, he comes to understand just how violent and backwards Ottoman Libya really is, until the providential arrival of the Italians, who provide a model that allows the young Arab to deepen his moral and cultural awareness. Based on the eponymous novel by Luciano Zuccoli, it is one of the first films partially shot in Tripolitania. The scenes with the Bedouin camps in the endless desert and the widening horizons stretching

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32 Maurizio Zinni, "L'impero sul grande schermo. Il cinema di finzione Fascista e la conquista coloniale (1936–1942)," *Mondo Contemporaneo*, no. 3 (2011): 5.
33 Ibid., 29.
34 In 1925 Camerini had already shot *Maciste contro lo sceicco*, filmed in Tripoli and in Tripolitania.

as far as the eye can see are scenographic elements that contextualise the story of the young Ismā‘il and his tormented formation, which results in him abandoning his own culture in favour of the ruling one.[35] The first *topos* to be highlighted in the analysis of the chosen films is thus the obligatory rejection of the autochthonous culture and reactionary and barbaric religion in the name of the progress embodied in the triumphant Italianness.

During the thirties, only one film is shot in Libya, the famous *Lo squadrone bianco* (The White Squadron) directed by Augusto Genina in 1936, and based on Joseph Peyré's novel *L'escadron blanc* (which was actually set in Southern Algeria). The film, commissioned by the government to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Libyan conquest, won the Mussolini Cup for Best Film at the 1936 Festival of Venice and was a resounding success with audiences and critics alike.

Filming started in Rome but continued in Libya, in particular in the Ghadames Desert, South East of Tripoli. The film tells the story of Lieutenant Ludovici who, after a romantic setback, decides to move to Libya, where a hard military life will relieve his pain. Thanks to an encounter with the hard-boiled Captain Sant'Elia, a man of great experience, greatly admired by Italians and Libyans alike, Ludovici will become a great hero, devoted to the cause of defending Italy's conquered lands. This is the *topos* related to the painful formation of the new Italian, someone who has not been subjected to colonial rule, as in *Kiff Tebbi*, and who distances himself from luxury and bourgeois shallowness to be forged by the hard life of the desert and the war. But it is also the detailed and engaging description of a squadron of Libyan Meharists, who devoutly obey their Italian commander and choose to heroically fight against the rebels, who are actually their brothers, in the name of the Duce and the Italian tricolour. Once again, there are no descriptions of the customs, the ritual practices, the religious impositions of these soldiers, who never pray, never complain, and never show any kind of cultural peculiarity, apart from their impressive skill in riding the *mehari* dromedaries and their knowledge of the endless Sahara. In fact, their only voice and will seem to be that of the Italian commander. The only allusion to a cultural element that touches on local customs is the character of El-Fennek, interpreted by an Italian "blackface": a happy medium between young Ludovici's orderly-mentor and the pious Muslim who, on several occasions, defers to

35 Ben-Ghiat, *Fascism's Empire Cinema*, 28–38; Maria Coletti, "Fantasmi d'Africa. Dal muto al sonoro. Facce, faccette e black face," in *L'Africa in Italia. Per una controstoria postcoloniale del cinema italiano*, ed. Leonardo De Franceschi (Roma: Aracne, 2013), 75–92.

Allāh's intervention to provide the solution to life's torments.

After *Lo squadrone bianco*, in 1942 Augusto Genina shot the film *Bengasi*, a story set during the last months of the Italian colonial presence in Benghazi.[36] The context here is quite different: gone are the barracks and the outpost in the desert, the Italian town is now in danger. The atmosphere of the heroic conquest has disappeared, to be replaced by one that preludes the shattering of an imperial dream.

> The land of Libya to which Genina returns after *Lo squadrone bianco* is no longer the wild and hostile one seen from the Meharist outpost in the desert. There are no longer any rebel ambushes or manhunts in an exotic and suggestive landscape.[37]

The city of Benghazi, rebuilt in Cinecittà, suddenly appears as an elegant and bourgeois Italian town, quite different from the squalid neighbourhoods in which the locals lived. But Benghazi was neither an Italian city nor a Libyan place lacking its own history: it had been a flourishing Ottoman port for the Arab slave trade for centuries, and continued as such until slaving was abolished after the First World War. It was inhabited by a multi-ethnic population: Arabs, Turks, Maltese, Greeks, Jews, Berbers, and Black Africans. It then gradually fell into a slow decline, ending up as one of the poorest provinces in the Ottoman Empire at the beginning of the twentieth century. The city, as well as the whole region of Cyrenaica, was annexed to the Kingdom of Italy along with Tripolitania after the Italo-Turkish war of 1911. Another part of the city's history must not be forgotten: the city was the epicentre of the area with the strongest local resistance movement, which had culminated in the Senussi uprising, and its symbolical value was therefore very important. In the film, nothing about either the immediate or the more distant past emerges. It has been completely removed; the city is an Italian city, and that is the end of the story.

It is 1941, in those tumultuous days when the city is under bombardment by the British and the population is fleeing. The intertwining events are the stories of the Italians, who had settled in Libya long ago and who are now doing their utmost to defend a place that they feel as their own. The indigenous population, though not completely missing, plays a marginal role: suffice it to observe the final jubilant scenes of the Italian crowd, after the British were forced to retreat, as they cheer at the top of their

36 In 1955, the film was remade by the film-maker Carlo Bassoli with the new title *Bengasi anno 1941*.

37 Zinni, "L'impero sul grande schermo," 35–37.

voices and wave the Italian tricolour (and swastikas!). Some Libyans dressed in their white burnooses stand looking on at the side of the road, totally extraneous to the great historical moment. The *topos* here is easy to find: the story narrated by the film is that of the Italians of Libya; Libya is an Italian land.

And finally, we come to Goffredo Alessandrini's *Giarabub,* the film that in 1942, in my opinion, brings this parabola to an end, because it represents the final act of the Italian presence in Libya, dramatised by the personal stories of the soldiers, all so different in accent and regional origin, inside the besieged outpost of *Giarabub*. Every now and then, a few silent, obedient and efficient black servants make an appearance and steal the scene from the Italian protagonists for a few moments.

The film recounts a real military episode: during the Second World War, on 21 March 1941, the small Giarabub garrison was totally isolated by the enemy, during Great Britain's final advance in Libya. A handful of Italian men remained at the mercy of the enemy, refusing to submit to the British ultimatum calling for their surrender, even when very few survivors were left.

5. "The Oriental Stories"

Little more needs to be said about the disconnect between the Duce's propaganda, with all his academics, intellectuals, poets and novelists unrelentingly singing the praises of the Islamic civilisation and stressing the closeness between the hegemonic culture and the subjected one, and, on the contrary, the abyssal distance between the two worlds, which had never actually come together or understood each other in the short but intense Italian colonial adventure. In conclusion, the analysis of the perception of Islam in Italian colonial cinema is part of a broader issue, namely, colonial cinema, as an expression of an iconography that resists a reductive definition as racist, ethnocentric or colonialist, seeing that it is all of these but also much more.

The colonial cinema is a fundamental milestone in the typification and trivialisation process of the Islamic world, which actually started when the Lumière brothers, back in 1897, filmed some scenes called *Algèr*, *Marché arabe*, *Prière du muezzin* in their "Catalogue des vues," and when George Méliès, also in 1897, shot a short comedy film, entitled *Le musulman rigolò*, followed ten years after by *Alì Barbouyou* and *Alì boufa l'huile*. The funny main character and especially his strange habits, odd language and way of dressing are what makes the audience laugh in a good-natured manner. Shortly the mania for exotic and Orientalist cinema breaks out:

stories set in the Arab world (not always filmed on site but often recreated in the studio) were simply "oriental stories" and directors and their troupes were attracted by the exotic and unique atmosphere of the desert that made films like *L'Atlantide* (Feyder, 1920), *Beau Geste* (Brennon, 1926), *Morocco* (Steinberg, 1930), and *Casablanca* (Curtiz, 1942) resounding successes.

Colonial cinema, including the Italian one, does not offer the spectator a vision of the real world but rather the vision of the world as it should be. However, the impression of reality was the essential condition for the functioning of the entire colonial narrative structure.

In all this, if and when a Muslim does appear, he is part of the setting: a fleeting, ambiguous, indefinite character, quite similar to one of John Ford's American Indians, whom the white man resists, in the same way as he withstands the hostility of the natural elements, the windstorms, sandstorms, and the sun. Instead, whenever a Muslim servant appears, he is helpful and accepts his colonised identity with gratitude. Or else, he is the "dissident," someone who has "never submitted," the "crook" (the name the French used to give to the Arabs during the Rif War in Morocco in the twenties). He is the deceitful or disquieting non-hero and his cinematographic role serves to better define the contours of the protagonist, exalting Italian humanity and courage, and cultural and spiritual superiority.

Various forms exist to describe the typical Muslim-European relationship: European-Muslim; soldier-rebel; Muslim man-European woman; European man-Muslim woman—the same old cliché is heard time and time again. The colonial cinema used the same recipe for decades, as a means of responding, on the one hand, to the audience's need for escapism and, on the other, to the imperialist ideology of the Colonial Powers. Local culture and religious practices have been removed, denied and forgotten: their complexity could never have been adapted to a cinema made of stereotypes and appearances. The role of Islamic culture and religion was infinitely less important for the Western directors than the one played by the warm sand of the desert.

Filmography

Kif Tebbi. Directed by Mario Camerini. Roma: Autori Direttori Italiani Associati, 1928.

Lo squadrone bianco. Directed by Augusto Genina. Roma: Roma Film, 1936.

Bengasi. Directed by Augusto Genina. Roma: Film Bassoli, 1942.

Giarabub. Directed by Goffredo Alessandrini. Roma-Venezia: Scalera Film, 1942.

CHAPTER THREE

BROADCASTING THE FASCIST EMPIRE TO NON-ITALIAN AUDIENCES (ETHIOPIA 1935)

GIANMARCO MANCOSU

In late October 1935, during one of the most acute phases of the fascist invasion of Ethiopia, the American journalist Floyd Gibbson, who was embedded with the Italian Army, remarked that "Italians can't understand why the Americans and British condemn Italians for doing the same things which Americans and British did when necessity prompted them."[1] Gibbson tried to represent the invasion as motivated by reasons similar to those that had led the British and Americans to pursue different policies of expansion. While such condoning was not a frequent occurrence in foreign representations of the Italian invasion of Ethiopia, this and other similar statements reveal interesting elements and help to understand how meanings of fascist imperialism were constructed in the mutual exchange between national and supranational discursive dynamics.

The main aim of this chapter is to give an account of some representations that, although very much in tune with the fascist colonial rhetoric circulating in Italy, were not addressed to Italians but to foreign audiences. Rather than providing a detailed overview of the various positions held by non-Italian journalists/press/broadcasts on the invasion of Ethiopia, this analysis will focus on two interrelated aspects. The first

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1 Floyd Gibbson worked for the International News Service. All transcripts of foreign broadcasts quoted in this chapter are stored at the Archivio Centrale dello Stato (ACS) in Rome, collection *Minculpop*, folder 48, subfolder 305 "Ufficio Stampa e Propaganda–Fascicolo Generale," files "Notiziari diramati dall'Ufficio Stampa AO," telegram 461-7/5, 1 November 1935. Attached to this document are the transcripts of several foreign radio broadcasts collected or intercepted by Italian propaganda offices in Asmara. All broadcasts sharing the same file series or class will be quoted using only the name of the speaker/journalist, and the date of broadcasting when available. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

one is the historical account of the devices that produced, spread and censored fascist-mediated information and representations in Italy and further afield. The second revolves around the discursive configurations through which foreign journalists embedded with the Italian Army described the fascist colonial enterprise. Some themes intertwined with a *trans-imperial* cultural space that enforced the discursive roots of the "West" as a bearer of civilisation will be identified. This bifocal perspective aims to develop a theoretical framework for the analysis of the representations that were broadcast to foreign audiences and their use of rhetoric and myths to leverage subtle common traits of Western civilising missions. On the one hand, archive sources, i.e. broadcast transcripts, will be used to reconstruct the events; from a methodological point of view, on the other hand, analytical tools will need to be adapted to decipher the contents of the broadcasts in their imbrication with the trans-imperial rhetorical space.

1. Towards a broader analytical space: trans-imperial rhetoric

Roberta Pergher has noted that Italian colonial and postcolonial studies have been moving beyond nation-based approaches, embracing transnational and comparative perspectives aimed at repositioning the Italian colonial experience in the broader context of European imperialism. This transnational turn makes it possible to assess to what extent colonial themes originated from the Italian colonial experience rather than being connected to ideas of exoticism and a sense of racial superiority—both widespread in Europe.[2]

In his comparative work on interwar imperial propaganda, Matthew Stanard agrees with a growing part of historiography countering the idea that Overseas empires had little bearing on European cultures and everyday life. Nevertheless, Stanard argues that too often that body of literature remains deeply wedded to a nation-state framework.[3] To broaden the horizons of research, Stanard has developed a methodology that

2 Roberta Pergher, "Impero immaginato, impero vissuto. Recenti sviluppi nella storiografia del colonialismo italiano," *Ricerche di Storia Politica* 10, no. 1 (2007): 58–59; see also Sandra Ponzanesi, "The Postcolonial Turn in Italian Studies. European Perspectives," in *Postcolonial Italy. Challenging National Homogeneity*, ed. Cristina Lombardi Diop and Caterina Romeo (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 51–69.
3 Matthew G. Stanard, "Interwar Pro-Empire Propaganda and European Colonial Culture: Toward a Comparative Research Agenda," *Journal of Contemporary History* 44, no. 1 (2009): 28–29.

engages recurring themes and imaginaries that circulated with minimal differences across European imperial cultures.[4] Accordingly, historical processes, and the meanings given to the overseas possessions, can be considered as constructed and signified in the movement and translation of representations, ideas, and discourses across the porous boundaries of imperial nations.

In this essay, a specific component of Stanard's line of reasoning will be developed in order to provide a methodological framework for the analysis of depictions of the Italo-Ethiopian war by non-Italian journalists. This strand deals with the analysis of trans-imperial patterns that were deeply ingrained in the concept of the Western civilising mission. This approach acknowledges the colonial discourse as a powerful tool to understand the interconnection between local, national, transnational, and supranational dynamics.[5] Together with more institutionalised Orientalist practices by which "European culture was able to manage—and even produce—the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively,"[6] colonial discourse involves a vast array of everyday practices that reinforced a Western epistemic supremacy over an imagined East in metropolitan popular cultures.

The imbrication of knowledge and power has constructed epistemologies through which Western nations have represented themselves as able to extend their supremacy over the rest of the world.[7] Accordingly, the trans-

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4 Some of those shared imaginaries about colonialism were: the idea that the empire was a singular and unified entity; the *mission civilisatrice*; the idea that in the colony lay the metropolis' fortune and wealth; and the idea that before the arrival of European powers those areas were in terrible and primitive conditions. These beliefs shaped everyday practices, which contributed to the formation of national colonial cultures. Colonial days, children and youth literature and plays, and exhibitions are examples of transnational practices related to imperialism; see Stanard, *Interwar Pro-Empire Propaganda*, 31–38.

5 Discourse, as theorised by Michel Foucault, is a system of statements within which the world can be known, a field that creates regimes of truth by imposing specific forms of knowledge. See Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 1989); and *The Order of Discourse* (Paris: Gallimard, 1970). In postulating his theories about the ways in which the "West" imposed its supremacy over an imagined "East," Edward Said acknowledged that the Foucauldian discourse was of crucial importance to understanding *Orientalism.* See Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 1977).

6 Said, *Orientalism*, 3.

7 The concept of Western epistemology can be synthesised using the definition provided by the decolonial thinker Ramón Grosfoguel, who described colonial Western epistemology as the "hegemonic criteria to racialize, classify and pathologize the rest of the world's population in a hierarchy of superior and

imperial device will be used in this chapter to pinpoint a cultural space fashioned by the mutual trajectories of nation-based/localised events (in this case the Italo-Ethiopian war) and supranational ideas of Western supremacy and belonging. This trans-imperial framework will help to investigate how nation-based colonial events acquired peculiar meanings in the light of a broader discourse that in turn was fed by and adapted to a vast array of local colonial practices. The ways in which the Italo-Ethiopian war was (re-)presented to non-Italian audiences will be thus regarded as a means of identifying such trans-imperial discursive space, in that those descriptions were called to both justify Italian claims over Ethiopia and reinforce the idea of the Western civilising mission in the late interwar period.

Against this background, the aim of this essay is not to map or quantify what part of non-Italian public opinion supported Italy's claims to Ethiopia. However, an overview of the different positions in the countries where the radio programmes were broadcast seems to be essential to contextualise the following content analysis. As argued in a remarkable part of historiography, public opinion in France, Great Britain, and the United States was mostly negative about the Italian aggression against Ethiopia. In particular, after the failure of the plan drafted by the French and English foreign secretaries, Pierre Laval and Samuel Hoare (November 1935),[8] foreign aversion to the fascist invasion grew stronger.[9] In the United States, the United Kingdom and France only a small part of public opinion overtly supported the aggression,[10] and this support was often motivated by the belief that yielding to the Italian claims was the only possible solution, lest the colonial war degenerate into a full-blown

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inferior races"; see "Decolonizing Post-Colonial Studies and Paradigms of Political Economy," *Transmodernity, Decolonial Thinking, and Global Coloniality* 1, no. 1 (2011): 13.

8 The plan was aimed at dismembering Ethiopia in order to satisfy Italian imperial ambitions; see Eugenio Di Rienzo, *Il gioco degli imperi, La Guerra d'Etiopia e le origini del secondo conflitto mondiale* (Roma: Società Editrice Dante Alighieri, 2016).

9 Nicola Labanca, *Oltremare*. *Storia dell'espansione coloniale italiana* (Bologna: Il mulino, 2002), 188.

10 On the positions pro or against Italy, see Angelo Del Boca, *Gli italiani in Africa Orientale. La conquista dell'impero*, vol. 1 (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1979), 329–334. Eugenio Di Rienzo has recently emphasised the ambiguous position of some members of the League of Nations, and of the United Kingdom in particular, who wanted to impose sanctions that in fact did not affect Italian chances to conquer Ethiopia; see Di Rienzo, *Il gioco degli imperi*, 10–27.

world conflict.[11] This brief overview of the diverse positions towards the Italo-Ethiopian war can help evaluate the target of the broadcasts, which will be analysed with a view to understanding how radio narrations dealt with a trans-imperial discursive space that somehow justified the Italian invasion of Ethiopia in a double process of inclusion. On the one hand, Italians were represented as reinvigorated by fascist cultural reclamation and worthy heirs to the Roman empire, upon which lay the roots of the civilising mission. On the other hand, representations of Ethiopians as backward and oppressed by the Negus's imperial power reveal elusive self-exculpatory elements, which reinforced the idea of the West as the bearer of the universal idea of civilising modernity. However, before proceeding with the analysis of the transcripts, a historical reconstruction of the organisation of the Ufficio Stampa e Propaganda Africa Orientale (East Africa Office for Press and Propaganda, USPAO) is necessary in order to understand how the fascist regime sought to influence and control the narratives through which the Italo-Ethiopian war was presented to non-Italian audiences.

2. Managing the representation of the Italo-Ethiopian war: the Ufficio Stampa e Propaganda Africa Orientale

The analysis of the ways in which pro-fascist foreign representations intended to inform non-Italian public opinion is made possible by USPAO documents containing the transcripts of several radio programmes broadcast from Asmara by foreign journalists, most of them embedded with the Italian Army.[12]

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11 Del Boca, *Gli Italiani in Africa Orientale*, 331.

12 ACS, Roma, *Minculpop*, folder 48, subfolder 305 "Ufficio Stampa e Propaganda–Fascicolo Generale," files "Notiziari diramati dall'Ufficio Stampa AO," document telespresso 461-7/5 (cable), 1 November 1935. The broadcasts are by John Whitaker (*New York Herald*); Floyd Gibbson (International News); Harold Pemberton (*Paris Midi* and *Daily Express*); Emmanuel Jacob (*Le Petit Parisienne*); Sosthène De La Rochefoucauld (*Gringoire*); Vidal De La Blache (*Le Journal*); Marie-Édith De Bonneuil (Conférence Radiophonique); Emmanuel Bourcier (*L'Intransigeant*); Pierre Bonardi (Conférence Radiophonique). A document released by the Direzione generale per i servizi della stampa e propaganda stated that some foreign journalists, and Bonardi and Bourcier in particular, had a very positive attitude towards Italian claims over Ethiopia; see Archivio Storico-Diplomatico del Ministero degli Affari Esteri (MAE), collection *Minculpop*, folder 88, file "Giornalisti per l'Abissinia," 19 September 1935.

By the second half of 1934, with war looming in the Horn of Africa, Italy's propaganda efforts became evident. In particular, the Under-secretariat for Press and Propaganda[13] was tasked with providing a consistent image of the fascist war in Ethiopia: to that end, the East Africa Office for Press and Propaganda was established in late spring 1935[14] to lead and coordinate the whole propaganda apparatus[15] and especially to control and even censor the press and all broadcasts describing the Italian invasion. The USPAO was expected to monitor and report on the activity of Italian and foreign journalists and provide them with draft military dispatches that they would employ in their representations of the war. Moreover, the USPAO was tasked with intercepting all radio bulletins and forwarding the transcripts to the Ministry of Propaganda.[16] All materials produced by Italian and foreign journalists embedded with the Italian Army were reviewed and censored by the USPAO before being broadcast, whether in Italy or abroad.

In a letter to Mussolini in late September 1935, Undersecretary Dino Alfieri wrote that since several foreign journalists were already in Ethiopia, it was crucial that the ones who were in favour of Italy's war effort receive accreditation to properly support the regime's version of events.[17] Mussolini himself backed the plan in a letter to Marshall Pietro Badoglio, urging him to ease censorship on the embedded journalists to quickly

13 He became minister of press and propaganda in late June 1935, and minister of popular culture (Minculpop) in May 1937.
14 ACS, Roma, *Minculpop*, folder 9, file 71 "Ufficio Stampa A.O.," telegram sent by Undersecretary Galeazzo Ciano to Emilio De Bono to inform him about the tasks of the recently established USPAO, 30 May 1935.
15 MAE, collection *Ministero dell'Africa Italiana* (MAI), folder 181/10-883, files "AOI-Attività dell'Alto Commissariato A.O. Stampa e propaganda," sub-file "Ufficio stampa A.O: Costituzione-Funzionamento-Personale-Alloggi del personale e sistemazione uffici," telegram no. 9469, 1 June 1935, in which Ciano wrote that Mussolini had created the USPAO "al fine di coordinare i servizi stampa e propaganda nell'Africa Orientale" (In order to coordinate propaganda and the press in Oriental Africa). According to this document, the USPAO was also tasked with monitoring Italian and foreign press services.
16 ACS, Roma, *Minculpop*, folder 9, file 71 "Ufficio Stampa A.O.," telegram no. 6770, 30 May 1935.
17 MAE, Roma, *Minculpop*, folder 88, file "Giornalisti per l'Abissinia," telegram, 30 September 1935, in which it is stated that 13 journalists were already in Eritrea, and 17 journalists were travelling to the Horn of Africa aboard the steamship Saturnia.

counter anti-fascist positions with ostensibly fair and neutral non-Italian propaganda.[18]

The importance of foreign propaganda in the eyes of the fascist regime can be deduced from several USPAO documents listing the arrangements made to facilitate the work of foreign journalists:[19] they were allowed to follow Italian soldiers to the battlefields and judging by their correspondence, they were treated kindly.[20] However, those arrangements did not prevent the accredited journalists from complaining about the strict censorship. In a telegram to Undersecretary Alfieri, Frederic Von La Trobe, the chief reporter of the *Deutsches Nachrichtenbüro* (the official central news agency of the Third Reich), protested that his reports from Eritrea were arriving in Berlin with great delay and censorship was obviously the culprit; perhaps, he suggested, Nazi Germany could be spared.[21] A more direct accusation came from David Fraser, a *Times* reporter who stated that "it was useless remaining, firstly because of censorship, which does not allow me to cable military news or visit military areas." Remarking that the Italian members of the USPAO had "been so very kind" to him, Fraser stressed that the difficulty of working under the new rules would force him to leave the battlefields.[22] On the same point, J. F. C. Fuller of the *Daily Mail* wrote a long letter to Raffaele Casertano (the head of the USPAO) introducing himself as "a friend of Italy" and complaining about the strict rules imposed on foreign journalists by the Italian Army and the Propaganda Office.[23]

Refuting these allegations, Sosthène De La Rochefoucauld and Pierre Bonardi, who followed the Italian Army to Tigray, praised the fact that foreign journalists could freely report on every phase of the Italian

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18 ACS, Roma, *Minculpop*, folder 47, file 289 "Telegrammi in partenza-A.O," telegram G.11.4.2/1, sent by Mussolini to Pietro Badoglio, 2 January 1936.

19 MAE, Roma, *Minculpop*, folder 88, file "Giornalisti per l'A.O.," document sent by Raffaele Casertano to the Colonial Office, 18 November 1935.

20 ACS, Roma, *Minculpop*, folder 48, file 305 "Ufficio Stampa e Propaganda–Fascicolo Generale," subfile "Notiziari diramati dall'Ufficio Stampa A.O," letters sent by David Fraser (*Times*) to Raffaele Casertano (head of the USPAO), 14 December 1935; and by Major J. F. G. Fuller to Casertano, 16 December 1935.

21 "Nous ne croyons d'ailleurs pas que c'est dans l'intérêt du gouvernement italien que ces télégrammes soient retenus a tel point par la censure." ACS, Roma, *Minculpop*, folder 48, file 300 "Censura Stampa A.O.," telegram dated 15 October 1935.

22 ACS, Roma, *Minculpop*, folder 48, file 305, subfile "Notiziari diramati dall'Ufficio Stampa A.O," letter by David Fraser, dated 14 December 1935.

23 ACS, Roma, *Minculpop*, folder 48, file 305, subfile "Notiziari diramati dall'Ufficio Stampa A.O," letter by J. F. C. Fuller, dated 16 December 1935.

advance without any pressure, somehow trying to ignore or underestimate the activity of Italian censorship.[24]As regards the corpus of radio broadcast transcripts that will be analysed in this chapter, it is worth pointing out that a military radio station had been operational in Asmara since well before 1935: it was called “Radio Marina,” since it was managed and used by the Italian Navy for military purposes. In summer 1935, the radio station came under the wing of the USPAO after upgrade work to provide better coverage of the upcoming Italian invasion of Ethiopia. Radio Marina broadcast to Rome, from where the radio programmes were relayed to both Italian and foreign audiences.[25] All foreign broadcasts had to be relayed through Radio Marina as well: this way they could be intercepted and transcribed.[26]

3. Managing radio broadcasts during the invasion of Ethiopia

Fascist propaganda tried to manage the narrative of the invasion with a twofold strategy: on the one hand, censorship affected the activity and communications of foreign journalists; on the other hand, the USPAO and more generally the Ministry for Press and Propaganda actively promoted their own vision of the colonial war by addressing foreign audiences directly. An example of that activity is provided by Alfieri’s correspondence with the secretary for press and propaganda Galeazzo Ciano (who was on the battlefields of Ethiopia)—and by their guidelines for addressing the

24 Pierre Bonardi, 24 October 1935; Emmanuel Bourcier, 21 October 1935.

25 The practical organisation of radio services is described in different documents stored at the ACS, Roma, *Minculpop*, folder 115, file “Ufficio Stampa e Propaganda in A.O.I–Trasmissioni Radiofoniche,” and especially a report, dated 29 June 1936, describing the previous organisation and future plans for radio services in Italian East Africa. Those documents have been analysed together with other primary and secondary sources that will be quoted. A letter dated 20 December 1935 is also relevant: it was sent to Raffaele Casertano (head of the USPAO) by Galeazzo Ciano, asking to enhance radio services; see ACS, Roma, *Minculpop*, folder 47, file 289 “Telegrammi–Partenza A.O.,” cable sent on 20 December 1935. On organisational and technical aspects of Italian radio services in the Horn of Africa, see Carlo Bramanti, *Con la radio alla conquista dell’impero* (Bergamo: Sandit, 2007). See also http://www.carlobramantiradio.it/stazione_asmara.htm, last accessed 22 February 2017.

26 ACS, Roma, *Minculpop*, folder 48, subfolder 305 “Ufficio Stampa e Propaganda–Fascicolo Generale,” files “Notiziari diramati dall’Ufficio Stampa A.O,” telegram no. 461-7/5, 1 November 1935 (see footnote 1).

American audience.[27] A memorandum states that the Italian military action was to be described as a consequence of intensified military preparation of the Ethiopian Army. Moreover, it was important to stress that air raids targeted Ethiopian military headquarters only; the use of mustard gas on the population was to be firmly denied because "sono stati lanciati solo volantini annunzianti la liberazione" (all we dropped from aeroplanes were leaflets announcing the liberation of Ethiopia). Special emphasis was to be given to the fact that the Ethiopians were eagerly awaiting the arrival of the Italians, who would free them from the "Shewan oppression" of Haile Selassie; to this end, Alfieri recommended highlighting the alleged spontaneous acts of submission through which the people and the Ras of Tigray were paying homage to the Italian troops. Italy needed to appear as the bearer of peace, development and freedom to Ethiopia, and both Ciano and Alfieri remarked the industriousness and enthusiasm of Italian colonisers. Finally, the memorandum asserted that the presence of foreign journalists provided clear evidence of the purity and honesty of the fascist civilising enterprise.

Very similar opinions were shared by Galezzo Ciano in an interview with the French radio newscast *L'Intransigeant*.[28] Ciano claimed that the Italian troops were in very good moral and physical shape, building roads and infrastructure and providing healthcare to the recently "freed" Ethiopians. When asked about alleged tensions arising from the traditional feudal/slave social order, the secretary for propaganda replied that the Italian civilising mission would gradually introduce the former masters to a new colonial economic system, and the former slaves could still work for them as waged employees.

In both documents (the correspondence between Alfieri and Ciano and the transcript of Ciano's interview) two main elements of the narrative supporting Italian imperial endeavours can be traced: the enthusiasm of a nation that was regaining its "place in the sun," and the representation of Ethiopians as a people oppressed by Haile Selassie's tyranny and eager to enter "modernity" thanks to Italian colonial rule. These themes shared common traits with the radio broadcasts from Asmara addressed to non-Italian audiences.

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27 ACS, Roma, *Minculpop,* folder 47, file 289 "Telegrammi–Partenza A.O.," cable dated 27 October 1935.

28 ACS, Roma, *Minculpop*, folder 48, file 305 "Ufficio Stampa A.O.-Fascicolo Generale," subfile "Notiziari diramati dall'Ufficio Stampa A.O.," document 460/7-5, 1 November 1935.

4. The *bonifica culturale* as seen from abroad

Most of the radio broadcast transcripts emphasise that the oversea endeavour is not simply a colonial war but a time in which Italy can prove its unity and strength to the whole world. A case in point is Floyd Gibbson's depiction of the conflict as a "war in the stratosphere," since Asmara is about a mile and a half above sea level;[29] nevertheless, even obstacles and challenges help to highlight the Italian strength, which is reinvigorated by Fascism.

This and other themes, especially Italy's industriousness and the well-being of its colonisers, a good metaphor for a wealthy nation, are employed in several broadcasts. Descriptions of the physical strength of the Italian people suggest the bold and unambiguous will to conquer an empire, since Fascism represents itself as an organic unit in which each part has its function, thus negating any internal and social conflict. The organic fascist state directs all its energy towards the outside, and the imperial enterprise must be shown as a (successful) litmus test for such organic unity.[30] Therefore, the empire can be conquered (or gained back) only after what Ruth Ben-Ghiat has insightfully described as the multifaceted process of reclamation or *bonifica*, an essential milestone in the discourse of fascist modernity. Swamps in Lazio, Sardinia, and Sicily were drained and converted to arable farmland in what was referred to as the *bonifica agricola*, although such land reclamation "merely constituted the most concrete manifestation of the Fascists' desire to purify the nation of all social and cultural pathology."[31] Accordingly, the concept of reclamation can be extended to comprise projects of both human (*bonifica umana*) and cultural reclamation (*bonifica della cultura*), which countered the liberal/democratic and socialist degeneration by radically renewing Italian society. In this cultural scenario, the Italo-Ethiopian war was called upon to testify to the multifaceted *bonifica* that involved both the African landscape and culture, and the Italian bodies. Such "bodily" aspect of the fascist colonial endeavour is well epitomised in the words of the French

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29 Floyd Gibbson (no date).

30 Valeria Deplano has interpreted the organic vision of the fascist state through the lens of fascist colonial discourse; see Deplano, *L'Africa in casa. Propaganda e cultura coloniale nell'Italia fascista* (Milano: Mondadori, 2015), 14. For a more general overview of the ideological roots of the organic state, see George Mosse, *Il fascismo, verso una teoria generale* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1996); Zeev Sternhell, *La nascita dell'ideologia fascista* (Milano: Baldini e Castoldi, 1993).

31 Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities: Italy, 1922–1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 4–8.

journalist Emmanuel Jacob, who worked for *Le Petit Parisienne*. After travelling with the Italian troops and civilians and talking with Galeazzo Ciano, he argues that although war is commonly associated with death, oppression, and cruelty, he has noticed that in Ethiopia "l'indigène, respecté, libre, sans peur, salue avec confiance les nouveaux arrivants"[32]—the Italians, who are described as wealthy troops of a wealthy nation. More worshipping of the colonisers' strong and athletic body as a metaphor for the Italian nation's strength is found in a broadcast by Emmanuel Bourcier, who describes bare-chested Italians turning a dirt path into a paved road and tearing down a mountain.[33] The well-being of Italians is also described by Floyd Gibbson, who has spent a month with the Italian troops and portrays them as well-equipped and well-trained. The Italian Army and the volunteers are over the moon, since "every single one of the quarter of millions of them seem to dominate hearth and soul by one man and one word: that man is Mussolini and that word is *Avanti.*" According to Gibbson, in spite of negative foreign opinion about the Italian invasion of Ethiopia, Fascists blindly believed that Mussolini's "holy crusade" would improve their economic and social conditions. Moreover, the American journalist exalts Italian industriousness—in that he has never "seen white men perform more arduous work over long hours in a rarefied atmosphere"—comparing the Italian Army and workers, renamed "Mussolini's boys," to handsome Olympic athletes. Gibbson thus describes Italy as a huge and close-knit family, reinforcing his claim with the news that Mussolini's sons Vittorio and Bruno, alongside his son-in-law Galeazzo Ciano, were also taking part in the war. The conquest of Ethiopia is a "family affair" concerning every Italian person.

This physical unity towards a common aim is also stressed by Madame de Bonneuil, who describes the Italian conquest of the Northern cities (Adigrat, Adwa, and Axum) emphasising the rapid advance of the Italian Army—which, according to her, was more concerned about the dangerous landscape than about the Ethiopian Army. She is also grateful to Italians for respecting local women, even though such benevolence has been widely questioned and problematised.[34] Her account is imbued with the

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32 "The native, who is respected, freed, without fear, welcomes with hope the newcomers." Emmanuel Jacob (no date).

33 The Italians are described in the act of "au torse nu faire d'un sentier une route et tailler la montagne." Emmanuel Bourcier, 31 October 1935.

34 Pivotal in this context are the works of Gabriella Campassi, "Il madamato in A.O.: relazioni tra italiani e indigene come forma di aggressione coloniale," *Miscellanea di Storia delle Esplorazioni*, 12 (1983): 219–258; Barbara Sòrgoni, *Parole e corpi. Antropologia, discorso giuridico e politiche sessuali interrazziali*

rhetoric of the civilising mission, according to which Italians were freeing local people from centuries of slavery and oppression, thus fulfilling the mission of the Western countries—united by a common past and civilising burden.

5. The myth of Rome and the continuity of the civilising mission

Taken as a whole, the corpus of broadcast transcripts exalts Italian industriousness in conquering and reclaiming the African landscape, thus introducing a form of civilisation that has its roots in the Roman empire. Trans-imperial themes helped to define a "canon" of civilisation and embed fascist colonialism within the broader concept of the Western civilising mission; in so doing, foreign journalists tried to engender empathy and support for the Italian claims among their audiences.

The cult of the *Romanità*, present in Italy well before Fascism, was resurrected to ideologically frame colonial policies in the Mediterranean. Italy's Roman-inspired colonial rule was linked to an "ideological concept of Italian culture as the vanguard in the defence of European culture threatened by 'oriental' decadence."[35] These beliefs received a tremendous boost during the *Ventennio*, and for this reason they are crucial to understanding how fascist imperial discourse was employed both within and outside Italy. As argued by Robert Young, during the nineteenth century the Roman empire was often invoked as a guiding model and moral justification by Western imperialists.[36] Therefore, not only did the descriptions of Fascists as heirs to the Roman empire in foreign broadcasts exalt the qualities of Italian colonisers, but they also normalised the fascist war as an enterprise fully compatible with the Western mission of civilising the "other."

John Whitaker, who was the *New York Herald*'s correspondent in the Horn of Africa, emphasises the similarities between the Roman empire and the fascist one when he states that the Italian Army is advancing in

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nella colonia Eritrea (1890–1941) (Napoli: Liguori, 1998); Giulietta Stefani, *Colonia per maschi. Italiani in Africa Orientale: Una storia di genere* (Verona: Ombre Corte, 2007).

35 Roemke Visser, "Fascist doctrine and cult of the Romanità," *Journal of contemporary history* 27, no. 1 (1997).

36 Robert Young, *Postcolonialism. A Historical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 16. In particular, when referring to the British case, Young writes that "the British preferred to justify their imperial mission by invoking the analogy of the Roman Empire." Young, *Postcolonialism*, 33.

Ethiopia "as invincible as the heavy phalanxes of an earlier Roman empire," and when he compares the work done by the Romans to that of the Italians. Floyd Gibbson remarks that Italians are modernising Ethiopia by building "fine Roman roads." Such modernisation is a form of civilisation that, to use the words of Emmanuel Bourcier,[37] has Latin origins and is so powerful that Ethiopians cannot help but subdue themselves to Italian rule. The journalist Pierre Bonardi, who describes the Northern front of the Ethiopian battlefield as still open, claims that Ethiopians soldiers and civilians are submissive and eagerly awaiting the arrival of the Italians troops, and that Italy is a worthy heir to ancient Rome.[38]

In these accounts, the universal idea of a Western civilisation grounded in the Roman empire is fashioned as a necessary path to the freedom and redemption of the Ethiopians and the domination of the landscape in which they live. Africa is described as an exotic and mysterious place, which, according to Floyd Gibbson, is populated by strange and dangerous animals. Emmanuel Bourcier and Vidal De La Blache also portray an exotic and dangerous environment,[39] in which the human presence of Ethiopians is nestled in the African landscape. The intertwining of geographic and human landscapes reinforces the idea of an immobile and archaic time-space dimension, which rules both people and nature: Ethiopians are depicted not merely as underdeveloped but outside the time of modernity, outside the idea of "history" towards which all converges.[40] Consequently, the war is described not so much as a fight between Italians and Ethiopians but as an "awakening" through which Italians are introducing Ethiopians to a subordinate place within the hierarchy of modernity, a place that was supposedly craved by Africans themselves. Such ideas are well encapsulated in Emmanuel Jacob's words: "Graduellement, en une ascension méditée, les consciences s'adapteront à un état social en évolution constante. Ici, la guerre, [. . .] n'est pas teintée de sang. [. . .] Une civilisation est en marche."[41]

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37 "Je suis entré à Axum, la ville sainte, qui se donna librement à la civilisation latin." Emmanuel Bourcier, 21 October 1935.

38 Pierre Bonardi, 24 October 1935.

39 Vidal De La Blache (no date) tells that "La brousse de ce coté de l'Afrique, c'est a peu près les taillés de la forêt de la Fontainebleu ou seraient lâchés tous les animaux du zoo et d'autres. J'ai vu [. . .] des lions, des girafes, des hyènes. Des najas et des pythons." Emmanuelle Bourcier, 31 October 1935, reports that "J'ai entendu gémis de hyènes, aboyer les chacals et roucouler les tourterelles. Tantôt, le paysage avait un caractère infernal, et tantôt il ressemblait à un jardin."

40 Robert J. C. Young, *White Mythologies* (London: Routledge, 2004), 3.

41 "Gradually, consciences will rise up and adapt themselves to an ever-evolving

These representations give us a controversial image of the African people: on the one hand, they yearn to be freed from both their primitive condition and the oppression of Haile Selassie, somehow actively engaging with and supporting the fascist civilising mission; on the other hand, they are passively incorporated in the exotic landscape that Italians are conquering and reclaiming as they advance. Depicted as backward and weak, Ethiopians do not fight back, and this peculiar "absence of war" is called upon to prove that the invasion of Ethiopia was indeed a civilising enterprise.[42] Mostly, Ethiopians are "lazy and sick,"[43] as reported by Madame de Bonneuil, and thus the first thing Italians did in Axum was to set up an infirmary. She adds that "quand on sait les horreurs subies par les populations abyssines [. . .] on ne peut que rendre hommage à ce geste magnifique de l'Italie."[44] John Whitaker also stresses the miserable conditions of the Ethiopian people. According to him, although the American audience is well informed about the war by newspapers, what Americans are not aware of is "what manner of wild unbelievable country this is," with specific reference to the miserable conditions in which Ethiopians live under the tyrannical rule of Haile Selassie. Paradoxically, he states that "as a Southerner, I can laugh off a lot of propaganda against slavery. It just leaves me cold. But these natives are another thing. They are the low-downdest, dirtiest, most diseased riff-raff short of the very monkeys in the trees,"[45] thus justifying the Italian colonial war as the only means of redeeming Ethiopians from their archaic condition.

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social state. Here, the war is not tainted with bloodshed [. . .] a civilisation is coming." Emmanuel Jacob (no date).

42 In his analysis of the visual construction of the Ethiopian landscape in fascist newsreels, Federico Caprotti has observed that war scenes are almost always absent, or they are employed as "metaphorical images which alluded to war [. . .] This emphasis made the actual violence and destruction of war a side note and highlighted a constructed notion of inevitability and 'progress'"; see Federico Caprotti, "The invisible war on nature: the Abyssinian war (1935–1936) in newsreels and documentaries in Fascist Italy," *Modern Italy* 9 no. 3 (2014): 313.

43 According to Floyd Gibbson, astonished Ethiopians watched Italians "perform labours that no black men could ever do in this country."

44 "When one knows the dreads suffered by the Abyssinian populations [. . .] one can only pay tribute to these magnificent deeds of Italy." Marie-Édith De Bonneuil, 22 October 1935.

45 John Whitaker (no date).

6. Trans-imperial rhetoric, fascist Italy, and the Western burden

"Je ne crois nullement exagérer en vous disant que l'œuvre italienne en Abyssinie est l'honneur de la civilisation européenne en Afrique. Loin d'être hostile à l'Abyssinie, j'ai l'impression que l'Italie est décidée à l'aider rapidement sur la route du progrès, vers les plus hautes formes de civilisation."[46] Marie-Édith De Bonneuil's words encapsulate a large part of the trans-imperial themes addressed in this essay. The exaltation of the fascist cultural reclamation as evidence of a renewed Italian identity, worthy heir to a Latin imperial past, was used to include fascist Italy in the group of countries that were morally compelled to carry the "burden" of civilisation. In this framework, J. F. C. Fuller's reasoning is emblematic and helps to understand the nature of trans-imperial rhetoric, which adapted local events to broader, transnational colonial discourses. Fuller stated that despite not being in favour of the Italian invasion, his newspaper "always upheld your right to settle your own colonial problems in the way you consider best." According to him, the fascist invasion was deplorable not so much for being a violent colonial endeavour but because Italy would be "economically ruined" at a time when it "should remain strong, because it is vital to the balance of power in Europe," thus considering only the European interests and not the implications for the colonised peoples.[47]

In the broadcasts, the process of situating the fascist imperial enterprise within the idea of a "universal" (Western) path towards modernity unfolds in images that somehow made the Ethiopian enterprise *familiar* to non-Italian audiences.[48] Those "familiar" images encompass shared Western colonial policies,[49] the necessities that prompted Italy to engage in a new

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46 "I do not think I exaggerate in saying that the Italian work in Abyssinia is the honour of European civilisation in Africa. Far from being hostile to Abyssinia, I have the impression that Italy is determined to help it rapidly on the road to progress, towards the highest forms of civilisation." Marie-Édith De Bonneuil, 22 October 1935.

47 ACS, Roma, *Minculpop*, folder 48, file 305, subfile "Notiziari diramati dall'Ufficio Stampa A.O," letter written by J. F. C. Fuller on 16 December 1935.

48 On the category of "making familiar" or nearer the exotic landscape of Ethiopia, see Mario Isneghi, who describes how Italian colonial literature worked to "fare l'Africa l'altrove degli italiani, radicare un *esotico nostrano.*" Isnenghi, *L'Italia del fascio* (Firenze: Giunti, 1996), 216–17.

49 Emmanuel Bourcier reported the following statements from Italian officials: Marshall Pietro Badoglio, "Nous appliquons ici les méthodes françaises."; General Maravigna, "J'ai écrit un gros ouvrage pour l'École de guerre sur les armées

colonial endeavour,[50] and the comparison between natural and/or social landscapes.[51] The image of a future Westernised Ethiopia is well synthesised by Pierre Bonardi when he states that Italy will bring to Ethiopia health services, a rational administration, the abolition of slavery, and technologies such as electricity that will light up "les obélisques millénaires et le tombeau des Rois, illuminés à l'électricité, comme le sont chaque soir la Tour Eiffel, la Place de la Concorde et le Sacre-Cœur de Montmartre,"[52] thus praising the fascist aim to turn backward Ethiopia into a civilised and "quasi Western" country.

In these non-Italian broadcasts, a twofold process of inclusion is apparent, which primarily involves the integration of Fascism into the civilising mission that all Western countries felt morally compelled to carry out. As a consequence of this first inclusion, used by foreign journalists to justify the fascist invasion of Ethiopia, a second stage of inclusion engages the Ethiopians: they undergo a process of cultural abjection that depicts them as a backward and weak people, sick, akin to wild animals and lacking socio-cultural structures, hence in need of redemption at the hands of Italy.[53]

The stratification of these trans-imperial discourses encompasses local, national, and supra-national cultural dynamics, which have required a methodological assessment able to investigate the common themes connecting different colonising cultures. This shared perspective, and the related super-structure of knowledge production, reinforced a hegemonic and Western-centric vision of the world in the interwar period, signifying the fascist civilising mission as the natural and universal path towards modernity, which in fact sneakily reproduced the coloniality of Western

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françaises."; Captain Pirzio Biroli, "Vous êtes français, ça suffit. Vous êtes chez vous, chez moi." On 22 October 1935, Pierre Bonardi stated that "Pour la France, je savais que le rôle de ces officiers [. . .] était d'assurer dans la mesure humainement possible la pénétration pacifique des armées. Je sais maintenant qu'il en est de même pour l'Italie."

50 As claimed by Gibbson, "Italians can't understand why Americans and British condemn Italians for doing the same things which Americans and British did when necessity prompted them."

51 John Whitaker compares Northern Ethiopia to a no man's land similar to the Grand Canyon in Colorado.

52 "[. . .] the thousand-year-old obelisks and the tomb of the Kings illuminated by electricity, as are the Eiffel Tower, Place de la Concorde and the Sacre-Cœur de Montmartre." Emanuel Bourcier, 21 October 1935.

53 Loredana Polezzi, "L'Etiopia raccontata agli italiani," in *L'Impero fascista. Italia ed Etiopia (1935–1941)*, ed. Roberto Bottoni (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2008), 300.

power and related epistemologies.[54] Able to cross national boundaries through mass media technologies such as radio broadcasts, the trans-imperial cultural space was employed as a device that allowed the translatability and adaptability of a local event (the Ethiopian war) to a broader discourse called on to constantly reinvigorate the Western civilising mission and supremacy.

54 Walter Mignolo, “Delinking. The Rhetoric of Modernity, the Logic of Coloniality, and the Grammar of De-Coloniality,” *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2 (2007): 450–452.

CHAPTER FOUR

FASCIST PROPAGANDA IN ALBANIA: SCHOOLS, CINEMA AND RADIO

ALESSANDRO PES

1. The unification of Albania with the Kingdom of Italy

On 12 April 1939, Albania agreed to unification with the Kingdom of Italy and Vittorio Emanuele III assumed the title of King of Italy and Albania, Emperor of Ethiopia. According to the treaty, Albanians would maintain their status of citizens and relevant rights and duties. The unification provided for an independent Albania, but just a few days after the agreement was signed the Italian government established two new institutions: the Sottosegretariato di Stato per gli Affari Albanesi (Undersecretariat for Albanian Affairs) and the Luogotenenza Generale per l'Albania (General Lieutenancy of Albania). In spite of the formal existence of an Albanian government, the cabinet was deprived of authority; thus it is safe to say that during unification Albania was to all effects occupied by Italy.[1]

The undersecretary for Albanian affairs, Zenone Benini, was generically responsible for everything to do with Albania—including propaganda, culture and education—and reported directly to the Italian foreign minister. On 23 April 1939, Francesco Jacomoni di San Savino became the general lieutenant for Albania. According to the new Constitution, Albania would maintain its parliament and government, but the prime minister and his cabinet were to be appointed and dismissed by King Vittorio Emanuele III.[2] At the end of April of the same year, Achille Starace, the secretary of

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1 Silvia Trani, "L'unione tra l'Italia e l'Albania (1939–1943)," *Clio* 30, no. 1 (1994).

2 Bernd Jurgen Fischer, *Albania at war, 1939–1945* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 1999).

the Partito Nazionale Fascista, announced the birth of the Albanian National Fascist Party, under the direction of the former.

By establishing the roles of general lieutenant and undersecretary of state, and with the creation of an Albanian Fascist Party, the Italian government built an apparatus that would effectively control Albania's foreign and home affairs. It is therefore clear that the formal union with Albania was, all things considered, an Italian occupation of a foreign country. Fascist education played a central role in this process, as it was one of the tools used by Italians to fascistise Albanians.[3]

2. The fascist education system in Albania

The Italian education system exerted its influence in Albania through Catholic schools well before 1939. Albania had indeed been an informal Italian protectorate since 1925, when a financial and military treaty was signed between the two countries. During the 1920s, Jesuit and Franciscan *licei* (secondary schools preparing students for university) were the means through which Catholic as well as Italian culture spread throughout the country. The situation changed in 1933 when Zog, the former king of Albania, banished foreign-run schools from his kingdom. According to Roberto Morozzo della Rocca, the aim of Zog's decree was to hit foreign schools to keep Italian influence in check.[4] The ban lasted until 1936, when foreign schools were restored.

According to the records published by Bernd J. Fisher, when Italians occupied Albania, 663 elementary schools, 19 intermediate schools and 4 *licei* were founded.[5] Prior to Italian occupation, the Albanian education system counted 1,595 teachers and 62,971 students, most of them attending vocational schools. The first act of the fascist government regarding education was to close all schools and overhaul the entire system. Fascists stepped up a purge on teachers, most of whom were thought to be nationalists, hence potential obstacles to the process of fascistisation of Albanian youths. Moreover, the Italian government opted for the closure of a number of secondary and foreign-run schools.

New syllabi and new teachings were introduced: Italian Language, Italian Culture, and History of Fascist Revolution were made compulsory

3 Alessandro Pes, "Building A New Colonial Subject? The Fascist Education Systems in Albania and Ethiopia," in *Themes in Modern African History and Culture*, ed. Lars Berge and Irma Taddia (Milano: libreriauniversitaria.it, 2013).
4 Roberto Morozzo della Rocca, *Nazione e religione in Albania, 1920–1944* (Bologna: il Mulino, 1990).
5 Fischer, *Albania at war*, 50.

for all students. Albanian language was also taught as a subject, but the new syllabus was unequivocally aimed at the denationalisation of Albanian youths. A case in point, as argued by Giovanni Villari, was the mandatory learning of Italian songs and anthems for all students from elementary school to university, while Albanian patriotic hymns were blatantly ignored.[6] Fascist efforts to direct most students to vocational schools were prompted by two different needs: first the necessity of a specialised working class; second, minimising the risk that the *licei* might produce a generation of native intellectuals.

In October 1939, General Lieutenant Jacomoni gave a speech on the occasion of the opening of the new school year, outlining the main goals of the new fascist education system. According to Jacomoni, fascist schools would preserve Albanian cultural heritage and educate Albanian youths to their new imperial fate.[7]

Fascist youth organisations completed the new education system. The *Balilla*, the *Federazione della Gioventù Albanese del Littorio* and the *Gioventù Femminile del Littorio* were in charge of organising young people's free time, setting up camps throughout the country. In the summer of 1939, the government launched a programme of fascistisation of Albanian youths with a trip to Italy for thousands of young male students.

Fascist values were spread not only through schools but also through propaganda. A special office for propaganda was established by the Undersecretariat in 1939, whose main goal was to promote Italian culture among Albanians.[8] Libraries proved to be crucial to the regime's efforts. According to a report drafted by the Albanian Office for Fascist Propaganda, a significant challenge was posed by the circulation of Italian books throughout the country. Seeing as the aim of this new policy was to "iniziare decisamente l'opera di orientamento degli albanesi aventi qualche nozione d'italiano verso la nostra vita intellettuale," that is to familiarise Italian-speaking Albanians with all aspects of Italian culture, the government decided to build ten identical libraries in the main cities and towns. Each library received three hundred books, selected by the Office for Propaganda with strict criteria: each and every book needed to

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6 Giovanni Villari, "A failed experiment: the exportation of Fascism to Albania," *Modern Italy* 112, no. 2 (2007): 163.
7 Archivio Centrale dello Stato (hereinafter ACS), Roma, Direzione Generale Propaganda, B. 3, "The general lieutenant's speech for the opening of the new school year," 23 October 1939.
8 ACS, Roma, *Minculpop*, Gabinetto, B. 92, report on fascist propaganda in Albania, November 1939.

embody an aspect or attitude of fascist spirit; the ones containing excessive propaganda or loaded with polemical content were considered self-defeating (and hence banned). The Office favoured books with nationalistic and educational content: history, politics, literature, current affairs, military ventures, Fascism, the Italian East African Empire and sports ranked high in the list. As new Italian libraries were built, old Albanian ones were dismantled, so as to get rid of censored books that might jeopardise the regime's fascistisation programme. As a result, "tutte le pubblicazioni straniere non in armonia con lo spirito e le direttive del Regime" (all publications not deemed to be in line with the regime's spirit and directives) were disposed of.

The process of fascistisation of Albanians was not limited to students but also affected the Albanian cultural elite. On 8 April 1940, the Institute of Albanian Studies-Skanderbeg Foundation was created with the aim of boosting knowledge of philology, the arts, literature and history in Albania, as well as promoting cultural exchange between Albanian and Italian intellectuals. All members of the foundation were chosen among Italian or Albanian nationals and appointed by the chief of cabinet.

In January 1939, just before unification, Albanian newspapers announced the opening of the Circolo italo-albanese Skanderbeg, underlining Albanians' and Italians' common origins.[9]

Beetween April 9 and 13, 1940 the Skanderbeg foundation held in Tirana the first conference on Albanian Studies. Former General Lieutenant Iacomoni later recalled in his memoirs that the foundation had played an important role, bringing together the Italian and Albanian intelligentsia. He described the Circolo Skanderbeg as a place where Italian travellers could meet Albanian intellectuals and as a favourable environment for cross-cultural collaboration.[10] In his opinion, the meetings and events held at the club were particularly valuable in that they helped dispel many widespread clichés and stereotypes about Albanians, especially those of Muslim faith.

3. The Minculpop and Albania

Seeing as the fascistisation of Albania was the main goal of the fascist regime, the creation of a local Minculpop was considered a cornerstone of the project. On February 2, 1939, the Ministry of Popular Culture sent to

9 ACS, Roma, *Minculpop*, Direzione Generale Propaganda, Albania, B. 2, report on the Circolo italo-albanese Skanderbeg.

10 Francesco Jacomoni di San Savino, *La politica dell'Italia in Albania* (Rocca San Casciano: Cappelli, 1965), 184.

its cinema, news, theatre and radio divisions a copy of the bill introduced into parliament concerning the establishment of an Albanian Minculpop. Among the main responsibilities of the new ministry were: exerting full control over all publications; controlling and overseeing the activity of the Albanian media; devising and broadcasting popular culture programmes; organising activities for Albanian youths; overseeing and organising tourism in the country; managing any other activity linked with national propaganda. Its goal, as outlined in article 3 of the decree, was to pursue the enlightenment of Albanian public opinion through daily newspapers and magazines. In accordance with the decree, the ministry was expected to collect news about Albania from foreign newspapers and inform the government about every article, reportage or book on internal politics published in Albania.

The ministry was organised into three departments, each overseeing a different aspect of its work: the Direzione della stampa Estera ed Interna (foreign and domestic press), the Direzione della Cultura Popolare e del Turismo (popular culture and tourism), and the Direzione della Gioventù Albanese (Albanian youths). The project for an Albanian Ministry of Popular Culture had been devised well before the unification of Albania with the Italian Kingdom; indeed, the fascistisation of Albania had been high on the agenda of the fascist regime for some time.

As fascist culture and values spread throughout the country, the process of fascistisation moved along.

Newspapers, the radio, and cinema, all controlled by the Minculpop, were indeed among the main tools through which the fascist regime spread its culture in Albania. The daily newspaper *Tomori* was founded on 2 March 1940, and its four bilingual pages were used during unification to disseminate the idea of a strong affinity between Albanian and fascist culture. Most of the articles focused on the fascist political and cultural influence in the country. The paper ran an editorial in the first issue, explaining that "Abbiamo scelto questo nome *Tomori* [. . .] perché ci sembra che riassuma l'aspirazione del popolo Albanese in questo periodo storico, e cioè purezza cristallina e fermezza."[11] After a brief account of the history of the Albanian people, the article claimed that "L'Italia ci ha allora liberalmente offerto di entrare nel suo impero e ha garantito con uno statuto emanato dal Sovrano le nostre caratteristiche nazionali e quindi possiamo guardare, senza le ansie tragiche che tutti i patrioti albanesi hanno sempre provato da un secolo a questa parte, la terribile partita che si

11 "La nostra scelta," *Tomori*, March 2, 1940. "We chose this name, *Tomori* [. . .] because it seems to summarise the aspirations of the Albanian people in this historical period, namely, crystalline purity and firmness."

sta giocando nel mondo."[12] As regards the position of the Albanian kingdom in the Italian empire, the article pointed out that "la saggezza di Casa Savoia [. . .] ha saputo in neppure un secolo portare la sua corona dalla modestia regionale delle valli piemontesi alla dignità nazionale dell'Italia unita, poi alla sovranità sulla Libia, sul Dodecanneso e infine al fulgore dell'Impero Africano, ci è garanzia assoluta di un avvenire di prosperità."[13]

4. Italian radio broadcasts in Albania

Italian radio programmes were broadcast in Albania before unification through Radio Bari.[14] An Albanian-language news bulletin was aired daily from 5:55 to 6:09 p.m. The programme, curated by the local chamber of commerce, was the only one among the foreign-language news reports broadcast by Radio Bari able to escape the control of the Italian Ispettorato per la Radiodiffusione e la Televisione (Inspectorate for Radio Diffusion and Television).[15]

The bulletin was indeed the brainchild of the Italian-Oriental Chamber of Commerce in Bari. An official request for authorization to broadcast was made to the EIAR (the state-run national broadcaster) on 7 November 1933 and motivated by the need to support penetration into the Albanian market. Broadcasts started on 15 August 1933. Most of the bulletin was centred around news provided by Agenzia Stefani, the official news agency of the fascist regime; on special occasions, Benito Mussolini's speeches were also translated into Albanian and broadcast.

However, the Inspectorate for Radio Diffusion and Television did not think of the news bulletin as being in line with fascist propaganda and on

12 Ibid. "Italy has then generously offered us to be part of her empire and acknowledged our national characteristics in a statute promulgated by His Majesty; therefore we can look at the terrible match that is being played in the world without the tragic anxieties felt by Albanian patriots in the last century."

13 Ibid. "[. . .] over less than a century, the wisdom of the Savoy House [. . .] has brought their rule from the regional modesty of the Piedmont valleys to the national dignity of a united Italy to sovereignty over Libya and the Dodecanese to the splendour of the African Empire, an absolute guarantee of a future of prosperity for us."

14 For a detailed account of the history of Radio Bari, see: Arturo Marzano, *Onde fasciste. La propaganda araba di Radio Bari (1934–1943)* (Roma: Carocci, 2016).

15 ACS, Roma, *Minculpop*, Gabinetto, Albania, B. 92, report on radio propaganda in Albania.

11 May 1938 asked the Minculpop to be entrusted with it so as to better organise fascist propaganda in Albania.[16]

On 20 May 1938, in a report addressed to the minister of foreign affairs Gian Galeazzo Ciano, Minister Alfieri outlined his suggestions to improve propaganda in Albania. After a brief account of the events related to Radio Bari's daily bulletins, the minister of popular culture explained his views as to the possibility of establishing an Italian radio station in Tirana. According to the report, the project required three months for completion and the amount of one million Italian liras, but the minister was confident that the radio station would prove to be the perfect tool for Italian propaganda and penetration into Albania. Alfieri also suggested that an Italian movie theatre in Tirana might be useful for spreading Italian and fascist culture through films in the country.

In August 1938, Radio Bari's Albanian-language news bulletins were brought under direct control of the Inspectorate for Radio Diffusion and Television and enhanced with sections dedicated to cultural analysis and Albanian music.

After unification, Radio Tirana became the regime's official radio in Albania. Until July 23, 1940, Radio Tirana was on air for less than three hours daily, then changed its schedule to six hours per day. The programme schedule, which, according to Alfieri's report, was prepared two weeks in advance, was regularly advertised on the *Radio Corriere Italiano*.[17] In the minister's opinion, one of the most successful programmes was *L'ora del dilettante* (The Amateur's Time), in which young Albanians tried to emulate Italian artists during live performances. The Minculpop even considered offering bursaries for the most talented artists to improve their skills in Italy.[18]

Ora Gaia (Happy Time), an equally successful music and prose programme, saw the participation of the artists on staff at Radio Tirana.

On 1 August 1940, Radio Tirana launched a programme dedicated to Albanian farmers. Four segments covered different topics: two ten-minute segments offered general advice about farming practices and hygiene, respectively, and a twenty-minute segment featured Albanian traditional music. They were followed by a "question and answer" segment featuring audience participation.[19]

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16 ACS, Roma, *Minculpop*, Gabinetto, Albania, B. 92, letter from the Ispettorato per la propaganda to the Ministry of Popular Culture, May 11, 1938.
17 ACS, Roma, *Minculpop*, Gabinetto, Albania, B. 92, report on radio propaganda in Albania.
18 Ibid.
19 Ibid.

On 1 August 1940, Radio Tirana launched *Lezioni di lingua*, which was aired three times a week and included grammar and phonetics lessons.

Radio Tirana's weekly schedule also included a youth programme, jointly created with the National Fascist Party, the Italian Ministry of Education, and *Giornale Radio*—a daily news programme. The Minculpop considered *Giornale Radio* the most relevant radio programme for fascist propaganda. Two Albanian and two Italian news bulletins were aired daily; they all focused on internal affairs.

Radio Tirana was regarded as being a valuable propaganda tool; thus, in the spring of 1940 an agreement was signed with the EIAR for the construction of a new radio station with a maximum power of 50 kW and a range of 1,000 km, twice as much as Radio Bari.

5. Fascist propaganda and Italian films in Albania

After unification, the Italian government improved its efforts to spread fascist propaganda in Albania through cinema. Most of the films and documentaries were screened in theatres, but the Minculpop also supplied four mobile units that were employed to reach small towns and regions lacking cinema halls; two more mobile units were available for use by the Albanian Fascist Party.[20]

In 1935, the Italian government began distributing Italian films in Albania. After signing an agreement with the Direzione generale per la propaganda, the Minculpop arranged for the periodical delivery of films and documentaries to the Italian legation in Albania, with the aim of supporting market penetration. Italian films were thus played at the *Casa del Fascio* in Tirana, at the *Dopolavoro* Agip, and in public theatres. The project gathered momentum in August 1936, when a remarkable number of Italian films were sent to Albania to be played in the most important movie theatres. A selection of foreign films with Italian subtitles was also distributed with the added aim of improving Albanians' linguistic skills and thus the spread of fascist propaganda. Distribution-wise, Albania was originally considered part of the Greek film market. Following negotiations between the Italian government and American film producers, it was included in the Italian rental zone and managed by the rental offices in Ancona, Bari, and Trieste. Medin Bego, the former director of the newspaper *Sthypi* and a strong supporter of the promotion of Italian

20 ACS, Roma, *Minculpop*, Gabinetto, Albania, B. 92, report on the activity of LUCE autonomous film division in Albania.

culture in Albania, was assigned the role of liaising between Italian film companies and Albanian movie theatre owners.[21]

As a result of the new distribution agreement, the most important Albanian theatres showed almost exclusively Italian films or foreign films with Italian subtitles.

According to the report sent in June 1939 by the Direzione Generale per la Cinematografia to the minister of popular culture, up until May 1939 more than twenty Italian films had been sent to Albania; among them were: *Luciano Serra pilota*, *Amo te sola*, *Grande appello*, *Condottieri*, *Cavalleria*, *Ettore Fieramosca*, *Scarpe al sole*, *Regina della Scala*, *Mille lire al mese*, *Non ti conosco più*, *Aldebaran* and *Io, suo padre*.

Together with films, the Direzione Generale per la Cinematografia had sent to Albania a huge number of documentaries filmed by the Istituto LUCE, most of which were celebrations of fascist culture and values. Albanian theatres thus featured documentaries such as *Il cammino degli eroi*, *Nella luce di Roma*, *Viaggio del Duce a Tripoli*, *Mussolini*, and *I ventimila sulle quattro sponde*.

In 1939, the Reparto fotocinematografico autonomo LUCE (an autonomous film and photography unit) was established in Tirana and tasked with providing newsreels on current affairs; the division was under the administrative and technical supervision of the Istituto LUCE but ultimately controlled and subject to the political agenda of the Minculpop.

Conclusion

The unification of Albania with the Kingdom of Italy brought with it a widespread campaign for the fascistisation of the country. Albanians had the formal status of citizens, and a formally independent cabinet was in place. This and other features may convey the impression that the Italian occupation did not entail relevant cultural involvement. And yet, analysing the overhaul of the Albanian education system and the cultural projects launched by the Italian government, we can observe the impact of the process of fascistisation on Albanian society—in many ways similar to the one implemented by the fascist regime in the colonies, and Ethiopia in particular.

Although, unlike in Albania, Italian rule in Ethiopia was not marked by extreme racial segregation, there seem to be a number of common features.

21 ACS, Roma, *Minculpop*, Direzione Generale Propaganda, Albania, B. 2, report on the distribution of propaganda films in Albania.

In both countries, the introduction of a fascist education system was aimed at creating a new society, in which local populations were meant to occupy a subordinate position. With this perspective in mind, we can better understand why, during Italian occupation, local students were expected to attend prevailingly vocational schools and prevented from accessing higher education.

Another relevant similarity is that in both countries the fascist regime tried to erase local traditions and culture and impose its own through education. This process should not be seen as an effort to assimilate native peoples but rather as an attempt to erase their identities to better transition them into their new subordinate role within the fascist imperial community.[22]

According to Giuseppe Bottai, the Italian minister of education until 1943, the fascist imperial community could be thought of as forming a system of three concentric circles, organised into hierarchical and racial categories. While only Italians, the fathers of (a new) civilisation, were placed in the first circle, the second one was occupied by other European populations, mainly from the Balkans, including Albanians. The indigenous inhabitants of the African colonies belonged to the third circle, in which Libyans, regarded as being more civilised than Ethiopians and Eritreans, were assigned a different status.[23]

Radio and film propaganda represented one of the most important tools used by Italians to forge the populations of the countries included in the second and third circles. Bottai's plan was clear enough about the fact that only people from the first circle, that is Italians, were to be considered proper citizens.

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22 Pes, "Building A New Colonial Subject?"

23 Davide Rodogno, *Il nuovo ordine mediterraneo* (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 2003), 78–79.

CHAPTER FIVE

ENTERTAINMENT, POLITICS AND COLONIAL IDENTITY IN POST-WAR ITALIAN AND BRITISH CINEMA (1945–1960)

MAURIZIO ZINNI

As can be seen from the by now numerous international productions harking back to the colonies and the fabrication of a collective voice on the theme, fictional cinema is an extremely interesting source of research. Looking at film production across national borders, there are traces of a common ground in terms of the themes and imagery used. This is the result of a shared European colonial identity, so deep-rooted it survived the profound changes that came about during the progressive post-war decolonisation.[1] This is because, at least up to the end of the fifties, cinema

1 Of many there are: Kenneth M. Cameron, *Africa on Film: Beyond Black and White* (New York: Continuum, 1994); Sandra Ponzanesi and Marguerite Waller, eds., *Postcolonial Cinema Studies* (London and New York: Routledge, 2012). On the Italian case, see Patrizia Palumbo, ed., *A Place in the Sun. Africa in Italian Colonial Culture from Post-Unification to the Present* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003); Jacqueline Andall and Derek Duncan, eds., *Italian Colonialism: Legacy and Memory* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2005); Daniela Baratieri, *Memories and silences haunted by fascism. Italian colonialism 1930–1960* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2010). On the British case, see Christine Geraghty, *English Cinema in the Fifties: Genre, Gender and New Look* (Florence: Routledge, 2000), 112–132; James Chapman and Nicholas J. Cull, *Projecting Empire: Imperialism and Popular Cinema* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2003); James Chapman, *Past and Present: National Identity and the British Historical Film* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2005); Jaikumar Priya, *Cinema and the End of Empire: a Politics of Transitions in Britain and India* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006); Wendy Webster, *Englishness and Empire 1933–1965* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

was the main source of entertainment,[2] capable of inducing, and mirroring, an interpretative paradigm of a nation's past, planting an image in the collective mind that stretched far beyond any actual historical chain of events.[3]

From a film point of view, the reality facing Italy and Great Britain during the fifteen years in question was anything but similar.[4] The cinematographic backdrops to the nations' political situation and memories of the recent past were rooted in very different preconditions. For the former, defeat in the Second World War had left more than just physical rubble and scars on society. Italy's new democracy hoped to heal the spiritual hurt by piecing together a collective national consciousness based on the new republican credo and memories of the recent past framed within interpretative paradigms. These were shared in their entirety by the political powers as well as by some of the everyday citizens.[5] On the other hand, Great Britain's victory had left her subjects with a collective conscience and a strong sense of national identity. The latter was entrenched around the role of the monarchy[6] and forced by the new international climate, at least in part, to reinvent itself. In this amalgamated situation, the colonial history of the two nations played no small part in the

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2 For a comparison of audience size, number of cinemas and number of films distributed in the main European markets, see Barbara Corsi, *Con qualche dollaro in meno. Storia economica del cinema italiano* (Roma: Editori Riuniti, 2001), 124–129.

3 On Italian and European colonial cinema and its importance as a historical source for the relationship between Western society and the African continent in the first half of the twentieth century, see Maurizio Zinni, "Terra di passioni, terra di conquista. Note sul rapporto fra cinema europeo e Africa dalle origini alla seconda guerra mondiale," *Mondo contemporaneo. Rivista di storia*, no. 2 (2013): 115–144.

4 On the British post-war film industry, see the part dedicated to this topic in Margaret Dickinson and Sarah Street, *Cinema and State: The Film Industry and the British Government 1927–1984* (London: BFI, 1985). On the Italian industry, see Gian Piero Brunetta, "Cinema italiano dal neorealismo alla dolce vita," in *Storia del cinema mondiale. Vol. III. L'Europa. Le cinematografie nazionali*, ed. Gian Piero Brunetta, 2 vol. (Torino: Einaudi, 2000), 583–612.

5 See Giovanni Miccoli, "Cattolici e comunisti nel secondo dopoguerra: memoria storica, ideologia e lotta politica," in *La grande cesura. La memoria della guerra e della resistenza nella vita europea del dopoguerra*, ed. Giovanni Miccoli, Guido Neppi Modona, and Paolo Pombeni (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2001), 52–54.

6 On the close relationship between imperial legends and the role of the monarchy see Robert Johnson, *British Imperialism* (Gordonsville: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), 212–213.

evolution of a post-1945 identity, and the cinematographic representation of their colonial adventure was to take on shared themes and motifs.

To peg down a historical analysis that swings between cinema and social culture, this research sticks to three points touched on by this public narrative: just how many colonial films were made; how the colonial past was represented and the essentially recollective nature of the theme; Africa and Africans from European domination to independence.

As for the first point, research has brought to light a series of profound differences between the state of affairs in Italy and Great Britain. Between 1945 and 1960, the colonies played only a marginal role in Italian film. This contrasted with fascist cinema of the second half of the thirties, when a series of high budget films set in the colonies had attempted to compete with American and British blockbusters.[7] In the immediate post-war years and those to follow, Italian cinema was only relatively interested in the colonial world, or what was left of it. A series of minor productions failed to stir the hearts of either critics or the general public. The only exceptions to this rule were films about the experience of Italian troops during the Second World War. These started being shot in the mid-1950s as a mix of colonial and wartime memoirs. They were spectacularly compelling and their enormous success gave birth to a genre in its own right, with a wealth of important implications for the nation's collective memory.[8]

Soon after the end of the war, major British film producers went back to churning out films set in various territories of the Empire, very often to considerable public acclaim. Hollywood played a significant role in the return of British cinema to the colonies. Even after 1945, it continued to be one of the main centres for the worldwide dissemination of imperialist mythology. Hollywood also collaborated on films produced in England, such as Terence Young's *Safari* (1955) and George Cukor's *Bhowani Junction* (1956). It did not just limit itself to economic involvement but also contributed stylistically. British cinema was influenced not just by the likes of the Korda brothers but by John Ford too, and Howard Hawks, resulting in creations typical of their genre of cinema. This was particularly apparent in the remodelling of some plots common to westerns, incorporating all the usual stereotypes.

The spectacular component at the heart of British colonial cinema, such as in *Sanders of the River* (1935) and *The Four Feathers* (1939),

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7 See Maurizio Zinni, "L'impero sul grande schermo. Il cinema di finzione fascista e la conquista coloniale (1936–1942)," *Mondo contemporaneo. Rivista di storia*, no. 3 (2011): 5–39.

8 Maurizio Zinni, *Fascisti di celluloide. La memoria del ventennio nel cinema italiano (1945–2000)* (Venezia: Marsilio, 2010), 56–58.

continued to be a characteristic of the genre. This consolidated a psychological universe rooted in imperialism, propped up by a pantheon of heroes and captivating sentiments, capable of bolstering a strictly emotive identification with what made Britain great beyond its natural borders. African-themed cinema in Italy tried to blend, albeit not always successfully, the iconographic *topoi* from across the ocean (much as had been done covertly by fascist cinema) with the documentary feel typical of the first shoots on African soil in the first three decades of the twentieth century.[9] Echoes of the far-off exotic utopia projected then are still very present, but there is also a desire to look at the "African" past and present of Italians in a new light. Apparently, thanks to the seemingly convincing documentary format, the films had the feel of an in-depth investigation and as such were seen as factual, satisfying the political needs of the newborn republic for the "right" collective memory.

Looking at the material on hand, cinematographic memory in both Italy and Great Britain appears to be an expression of its time. This was tied to the political aims of the two nations within the new international balance of power and their relationship to their colonies (or, in Italy's case, her ex-colonies). Films produced by both countries tended to be set in the past, with references to the present. If the plot happened to be set in the present, there was more than one strong reference to the past. The result was a storyline on multiple levels, projecting colonial history as a *continuum*, via a homely image of a consolidated colonial identity and references to the new political and social horizons.

Italian film productions post-1945 appear to follow a straighter and narrower path. The storylines and imagery used are limited and are founded on deep-rooted cornerstones put in place not so much during the twenty years of Fascism as at the start of the century. The picture of the world that emerges from the screen is that of a narrative, spread over decades, which has remained unsoiled by even the slightest negative element. The past flows into the present on an as yet unfinished mission of social progress. Italian colonisation was depicted not so much in the hands of politicians and generals as in those of the common people, willing to give up everything in the hopes of nurturing not just the economic side of these new worlds but also their social conditions. Then, as is still the case, Italians in Africa were portrayed as fine examples of manly virtue in the service of what, more often than not, was depicted as a "divine cause." Good examples of this are the doctors in the leading roles in Carlo

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9 See Gian Piero Brunetta, "L'ora d'Africa del cinema italiano," in *L'ora d'Africa del cinema italiano 1911–1989*, ed. Gian Piero Brunetta and Jean A. Jili (Rovereto: Materiali di lavoro, 1990), 9–18.

Sandri's 1953 film *Tam Tam nell'Oltre Giuba* and Gian Gaspare Napolitano's *Tam Tam Mayumbe* (1955), not to mention the nurse on her medical crusade through Somalia, Kenya and Tanganyika in Adriano Zancanella's *Sotto la Croce del Sud* (1957). They stood as proof of the generosity behind the collective sacrifice, which had been transformed into numerous positive results. These results had even managed to survive the war, challenging both time and adversity as part of a precious heritage. They were not to be whittled away but nourished by the gratitude of the locals for the undeniable past advancements from which they were still benefiting, along with the solidarity of those Italians that had remained in Africa (take Enrico Cappellini's 1953 film *La via del Sud* as an example of this sentiment). It was this corroboration that bridged the gap between history and the present. It was used to encourage, or, at the very least, provide a sense of nostalgia for an active presence of the new democratic Italy in the very same colonies that the collective memory now believed to have been governed so well in the past. In this light, the energetic and industrious activity of the hundreds of Italians still present in Africa was portrayed no longer as that of colonisers but as that of "specialists." They were transmitting their knowledge and skills as part of a new liberal and democratic world order. This was a world order in which a newly republican Italy was playing her full part, distancing herself ever further, in the eyes of the spectators, from her fascist past. The cinematographic depiction of Italian labour in Africa became one of forging (or reforging) the nation's conscience and code of values, introduced by the first Christian Democrat governments in the post-war shambles. It was also a way to provide a key to unravelling the many years of Italian-African relations, played out within clearly defined interpretative coordinates. The question of violence and racism was to be erased from the collective mind and a more paternal image was to take its place, fulfilling the political and economic rationale of the time. This is perhaps even more clear-cut in documentaries and newsreels of the time.[10] The adventures of Italians in Africa were seen as something completely alien to the darkest hours of the nation's recent history. It meant that they could be eulogised without any sense of shame or guilt, and taken as living proof of the valour and spirit of justice born in a people whose aim in those months was to give their nation a new identity.

This identity was to blanket the deep political, social and economical fissures that had opened up during the fascist dictatorship and war years. It was the extreme significance attached to the colonies that made it all the

10 See Maurizio Zinni, "*Una lettera dall'Africa*. Il colonialismo italiano nel cinema del dopoguerra, 1945–1960," *Contemporanea*, no. 1 (2016): 69–99.

harder to accept that the colonial adventure was over. The dialogue and shots from these films strongly evoke the ghost of a situation in which Italy was the aggrieved rather than the aggressor. On this point, it is relevant that Italy did not lose its colonies to local unrest or wars of independence, which would have made it easier to look back critically on its colonial adventure, but instead because of its military defeat at the hands of the Allies. The spirit of the first pioneers and colonists was reborn in the Italian soldiers battling on the African front. That same courage and spirit of sacrifice was found in the troops, immortalised in what was presented as a struggle to defend strips of land that, in spite of everything, were as "Italian" as they come. El Alamein appeared as the forced conclusion of a mutual adventure that had begun not in 1940, but many years earlier. It was yet another page worth commemorating in a narrative that the big screen pushed well beyond its temporal existence, at least in the collective mind. Films like Duilio Coletti's *Divisione Folgore* (1954), *El Alamein* by Guido Malatesta (1957), and *Il cielo brucia* by Giuseppe Masini (1957) did more than just erect a cinematographic monument to the Italian soldier and his commitment on a battlefield in extreme conditions and in the name of the fatherland. Of course, they bore witness to a defeat but, far more importantly, to a moral victory as well. As such, these films became the final piece in a celluloid jigsaw puzzle that was to repaint Italy's role, past and present, in Africa. Her African adventure was to become a story of heroic deeds, men victorious *in spite of* defeat, and a mission steeped in noble principles and ethics. Not only had their symbolic significance outlived the old world centred on Europe, asserting itself in the new world order, but the very uncertainty of the new situation made them even more intense and worthy of attention.

As for British films, plots concerning the colonial adventure are much more articulated, and in some cases problematic. At the heart of the matter in this period was the fact that, though rapidly imploding, the Empire had not yet disappeared, and its demise was not so much the result of foreign intervention—as had been Italy's case—as evidence of the increasing difficulty in keeping regions and their populations under British political control. This meant that both past and present were depicted in cinematic imagery in a gradual series of adaptations, capable of echoing the current state of affairs. The war and subsequent economic restoration, Britain's role in the new bipolar world order, as well as colonial independence are all reflected in the film industry's productions of the time. Plot lines established in the British Empire's cinematographic folklore still persist (the mission to spread civilisation; the legend of a chivalrous British colonialism still shining through in leading roles both old and new; and a

celebration of *Britishness* even in foreign lands) and are now flanked by not always coordinated representations of a British post-war colonial presence. Starting from the early fifties, in Harry Watt's *Where No Vultures Fly* (1951) and the sequel *West of Zanzibar* (1954), the colonies were seen as a place where the new British identity pitted itself against the passing of time, reflected in the birth of a new partnership between coloniser and colonised. The end of the "people's war" in 1945 materialised into the "people's empire."[11] The relationships and pecking order within this multi-ethnic melting pot had inevitably been established years earlier, but in spite of this there were greater liberty and positivity in terms of a mutual coexistence. The Commonwealth was the natural evolution of the Empire. The ties between the mother country and her ex-territories, which still recognised the Queen, were, at least on the screen, painted as an advantageous collaboration aimed at enhancing the ex-colonies' growth within a context that continued to see Britain as its central point of reference. But the war against the Communists in Malaysia and the Mau Mau violence in Kenya rapidly changed this point of view, thrusting the utopian vision of organised and trouble-free growth into second place. The colonies were no longer seen as a place to liaise with the natives and work as a team but as one of danger and violence. Imperial Order went back to being mirrored in its instigators, both civil and military, and synonymous with a patriotism that warded off the economic, social and even moral disorder that the new post-colonial experience had come to represent. In films like *The Planter's Wife* (Ken Annakin, 1952), *Simba* (Brian Desmond Hurst, 1955) or *Safari*, the spectacular nature of American films of the kind is twinned with a vision of the Western presence in the colonies as a last bastion hindering those places' and their inhabitants' retrogression. In this light, a strong undercurrent of uncertainty can be sensed in these films. To different extents they question the stability of the order of the British Empire,[12] if not, in some cases, its very legitimacy (this same uncertainty can even be felt during the Golden Age of British colonial cinema).[13] Take films like *Black Narcissus* (Michael Powell, Emmerich Pressburger, 1947) or *The Heart of the Matter* (George More O'Ferrall, 1953) for example. Here, the

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11 Webster, *Englishness and Empire*, 55. His analysis highlights the changeable and in some ways problematic nature of these public storylines about British colonialism.

12 Chapman and Cull, *Projecting Empire*, 8.

13 Maurizio Zinni, "Visioni da un altro mondo. Il cinema coloniale inglese e francese," in *War Films. Interpretazioni storiche dei film di guerra*, ed. Stefano Pisu (Milano: Sism – Acies Edizioni, 2015), 367.

fragility of the British presence in her colonies is shown from a strictly psychological point of view. The inner weaknesses and uncertainties of the British people are placed centre stage in the face of an unstable and uncontrollable colonial situation. This aspect is seen clearly in films like *Simba* or *Wyndom's Way*. Taken as a whole, the plot evolves as a structured spectacle following simple storylines and hackneyed dichotomies, but the words put into the mouths of the protagonists are anything but mundane when talking of the now and then of a British presence in the colony.

This way of looking at things may well be a (fairly) conscious reflex to a clear-cut realisation of where the challenges of the modern world were to lie, but it is also the result of doubts about the stability of the international scene due to emerging perils and subsequent pessimism about the future. By the end of the fifties, the plot lines of films based on the colonies had fallen in line with those of the thirties. This seems to imply that in the face of the inevitable conclusion of Britain's colonial adventure, her cinema opted for more digestible and comforting imagery, capable of carrying the audience's minds to days gone by—reworked, in many ways, through still very much colonial eyes. Some examples of this evolution were incredibly successful, Jack Lee Thompson's *North West Frontier* (1959) for one. In these productions, an adventurous past is the terrain of explorers and officers of the king (in post-war Britain as in the late 1700s, when the myth of the British hero battling abroad found its roots, these were the real heroes in the collective cultural and social mind about the British Empire),[14] and the colony is a primitive land to be conquered and defended to the death. They did not face natural perils only, including wild beasts, but uprisings as well (here the colonial endeavour is captured from a typically Western standpoint: you cannot help but ponder the similarity between what both the camera and the guns are aimed at in a scene, both pointed at the same possible danger, be it man or beast, or one and the same). It is no surprise that in these films and others set during the Second World War[15] (it was Jack Lee Thompson again that directed one of the war films with the biggest box office success, *Ice Cold in Alex*), centre stage is once again held by the British Army fighting in the colonies as on the other fronts. This process, much like Italian war film productions of

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14 Holger Hoock, *Empire of imagination: Politics, War and the Arts in the British World 1750–1850* (London: Profile Books, 2010), 20–21.

15 On 1950s films about the Second World War, see Fred Inglis, "National snapshots: fixing the past in English war films," in *British Cinema in the 1950s: An Art in Peacetime*, ed. Ian D. MacKillop and Neil Sinyard (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 35–50.

the same period, had recognisable economic incentives. In this period, in which British influence abroad was being drastically reshaped, the public were encouraged to keep in mind and rejoice in the military virtue of their servicemen, radiant in the British ideals that needed to be regenerated into an as yet uncertain future.

The image of the colonies portrayed in these Italian and British films had a fairly uniform cultural backdrop, but this went on to diversify little by little as the details of the plot developed into a defined domestic perspective. As for the relationship between the British and Italians and the colonies, these films reveal a great deal as to how these two societies, and more generally Europe as a whole, perceived the African continent and its inhabitants in the fifties. In the years of the conflict between the blocs and battles for independence, what was projected on the screen was the film industry's version, along with that of a large slice of the population, of how they saw their history, and, by extension, that of the peoples they had once governed and who now stood before them as representatives of their nations, supposedly on a par with them.

In Italian cinema, colonial settlers were the out-and-out leading lights. This comes as no surprise, given the ideology behind the films and their subject. In spite of this, the Africans were not just under-five bit parts within a broader narrative. By taking a closer look at the scenes in which they appear and analysing the choice of imagery and plot lines used to put their characters across, a few repeated elements piece together a very typecast picture of the ex-colonised.

On a broad scale, Africa and its inhabitants are depicted as two timeless elements, and as such without any history. There are endless film references to the continent's unchanging reality, reflected in landscapes of primordial beauty and in its savage inhabitants, interested in nothing more than primal needs for survival. The films *Sotto la Croce del Sud*, *La Via del Sud* and the like paint a picture of the native inhabitants that is primarily ethnographic, along the lines of the travel films of the start of the century. There are two reasons behind this decision to concentrate on the folkloristic side of African life. For one, even after the war, the life and traditions of native Africans were still compulsive viewing for the exotic taste of the audiences back home. Secondly, there was an implicit informative value in these images, especially when placed alongside others showing the achievements of Italian civilisation in those lands.

There is no getting away from a primarily racial stereotype present throughout these documents. Africans come across as incapable of impacting on their surrounding environment, leaving them slaves to nature and the elements. They are seen as ill-suited for work and technology,

given that their character is little disposed towards self-sacrifice. The African, with his way of life and the environment he lives in, never takes his life in his own hands to carve out his own version of events. At the mercy of the seasons and bad weather, he appears destined to remain behind. Only an outside agent can unblock the situation (in this case Italy and the other European powers). This standpoint inevitably induces a total lack of faith in the abilities of these peoples to govern themselves or anyway to achieve by themselves the degree of progress reached when they were a colony. Even in films that are supposedly entirely free of any preconceived bias, it is still possible to find, alongside a more sensitive and conscientious eye for the evolving reality, a portrayal of Africans using an imagery that lingers on, still closely tied to a racist prejudice born in a far-off time.

The most interesting example of this is Giuliano Tomei's *Eva nera* (1953). Split into six episodes, it is a kind of halfway house between documentary and fiction. It aims to describe the life of African women, avoiding all the usual clichés but with plot lines based on western lifestyles. The tales projected onto the screen try to show how there is not much difference between "Black Eve" and her white counterpart. It is their passions, hopes, and desires in love and social life that unite them. However, all of this is illustrated with cinematographic language and plot lines that betray an as yet untethered obsession with all things exotic. Here again, an African woman is seen as sexually promiscuous and morally liberated. The roles played by these lead parts are persistently filtered through European eyes, and it is only when these "alien" characters are dragged within consolidated cognitive and interpretative parameters that they become recognisable. The camera's eye paints a picture of young African women, pure in spirit and sincere of heart, compassionately loving Italian men. But aside from this, there is a world of principles that appears to stifle any long term relationship between the two worlds. When the possibility of staying together rears its head, there is no hope of avoiding destiny and the inevitability of separation, unless the weaker sex, in the best of scenarios, is encouraged to take on western values.

Here, as in other films, the role of the Italian colonial settler is the bass line. That modernisation that had always seemed out of reach of Africans, now, near the masters of civilisation, seemed within their grasp, as long as he or she was open to complete and utter submission to the Italians. A native African could get nowhere without acknowledging his own status in a European world. In this light, the conduct of the *sciumbasci* in *La Via del Sud* is exemplary. He presents himself to the ageing general, as he used to do during his years of military service, offering his services in the

installation of a museum exhibition. The display is to be dedicated to the glorious past of Italy's colonies, and in broken Italian the askari proudly stammers out his loyalty to the mother country, vaunting his entrance into Addis Ababa with the vanguard troops back in 1936.

So it was that colonial films went back to a format that had originated at the beginning of the century, flowing into fascist times. Africans were split into the classic "goodies" and "baddies," depending upon how much they played the underdog to the dominant foreigner. Take Ferruccio Cerio's 1954 film *I quattro bersaglieri-Tripoli bel suol d'amore*, for example. It is a nostalgic stroll down memory lane, harking back to the war in Libya, with the enemy depicted by (ab)using the simplest stereotypes taken from similar adventure films. On the one side there are the *Bersaglieri*, courageous in their deep-rooted Italian sense of being. On the other, cowardly Arab infidels, a picture common to films of the kind ever since the beginning of the 1900s, who would steep so low as to attack a Red Cross convoy and run amok killing women and children in a berserk frenzy, similar to native Indians in early Hollywood westerns.

Similar stereotypes can be found when dealing with current affairs, such as the struggle for independence. The film *Sotto la Croce del Sud* touches a peak of unbridled and unscrupulous excess of reality in its portrayal of the Mau Mau. This depiction of a stereotypical native, savage and feral, hot-blooded and unrestrained, fed off (and fired) the Black Legend that the same media helped to create in those months: the Mau Mau and their violent deeds placed at their door. Also in this case, however, Africans might be given at most the role of antagonists. The only real leading roles in the changes on the African continent, the true motor behind progress and modernisation, depended on other factors.

English cinema may have been in some ways more articulated, but in its essence it too relied on the same iconography and plot lines that Italian cinema used to depict the "others." Even when the fictional element in these films increasingly took a back seat, both Africans and Asians tended to be portrayed as a colourful folkloristic presence in the territories. They were seen as a spectacle that was both captivating and ominous in lands not yet free of the material and figurative dominion of a developed West. In these productions, the characters are often far from rounded. The dividing line between goodies and baddies is decided by their reactions to the British and their ability to take on board and make their own their subservience to them. This does not mean a mere acceptance of their role, but participation and, in some cases, the reinforcement of it. Here we have natives who join the white players in the fight against poachers, savage individuals and rebels. They are shown unwavering in their beliefs and

criticism of their fellow kind. It is a celebration of the success and the advantages associated with British dominion (or influence), demonstrated in both their actions and words. There is no getting away from the fact that these characters hark back to others from the colonial cinema of the 1930s. There is Paul Robeson's Bosambo in *Sanders of the River* or the little Indian prince Azim played by Sabu in *The Drum* (Zoltan Korda, 1938). These stereotypes are often strongly caricatured. Here we have the classic cliché of an obedient and compliant subject who speaks pidgin English and often behaves immaturely. This is a new, and not much updated, version of the gentle westernised savage, whose appearance is often kept for the comic moments of the film.

At the heart of the plot lies the enlightened nature of Britain's dominion and her heroes, as opposed to the total barbarity of the indigenous peoples. Any attempt to sabotage the foundations of the racial coexistence established under Crown Rule is seen as coming from a past that the will and courage of the European peoples had managed to suppress, if only temporarily. Victory for the enemy appears to convey the condemnation of the colony to an inexorable return to being a primitive land with no sense of its past, in which law is dictated by savage violence and the rule of the animal kingdom. The ruthlessness and immorality of the enemies of the Empire (often portrayed along the lines of the most abused stereotypes, similar to those we have also seen in Italian films, such as the Mau Mau of *Simba* or *Safari* and the Moslems in *North West Frontier*) are the clearest proof of the land's unavoidable destiny, if cut free from the benevolent guidance of the mother country. It is not just the colonisers that are aware of this, but their indigenous allies as well. The latter can clearly see that all of their conquests will have been in vain if the Empire were to disappear. In these films there is a tangible pessimism, just as there is in the Italian ones, about the forthcoming independence of these countries. In the mid-1950s liberal thinking films (*Simba* and *Wyndom's Way*), there are doubts over the stability of the Empire and its right to govern in the light of the new process of decolonisation. Even in these, however, there is no ignoring the undercurrent of foreboding over the indigenous and their ability to guarantee prosperity and security in the years to come. It is no surprise that in these films there are characters that in many ways are innovative for the world of cinema of those years. They are educated and modern thinking natives, wanting to shake off the European yoke while contemporaneously criticising the excesses and violence of the rebels. In their eyes, independence is to be won pacifically, while at the same time shutting the door on a past steeped in superstition and primitive beliefs. In the simple and unassailable dichotomies of post-

war colonial films, defeat inevitably awaited these marginal figures and the unusual nature of their political stance alongside that of their European counterparts. The closing scenes of these two films can be taken as a metaphor for what the future holds for these countries who have only recently won independence. They use the family unit, or rather its absence, to mirror the image of a broken society with an uncertain future. Both *Simba* and *Wyndom's Way* close with a shot of a child, in one case an African, in the other a Malaysian. Both children have lost their families in the rebel uprising. They look to the future with fear-stricken eyes, their only protection what little British presence is left in their lands.

The leading role that Anglo-Saxon women play in films like *Simba* and *Safari* shifts the difference between colonist and colonised from a strictly ethical and behavioural level onto a visual plan. The lead female characters are not just pawns within a storyline. They serve as a point of racial reference, the British woman compared to the foreigner. The way that they dress and the whiteness of their skin are exalted in the moments of greatest tension, in clear contrast to the indigenous menace embodied by darkness: the darkness of the assailants' skin and the darkness of the night that shrouds their violent intent. Female roles in colonial cinema at that time were given plenty of room. They often clearly represented a picture of "home" being under attack (the symbolic value of family life and human relationships is at the heart of life in the motherland). This same imagery was projected onto the British Empire as a whole, its colonial identity under siege in Africa and elsewhere.[16] Though not so obvious, this domestic aspect can also be found in some Italian films such as *Sotto la Croce del Sud*. In the same scene mentioned above, the young female lead is dressed in white when the Mau Mau attack her.

Even in an unstable post-war situation, colonised and colonists come to be portrayed as two separate entities. They are governed by a strict pecking order, both racial and political. The right to be there for both is legitimate: the former by right of birth, the latter by right of imperial might. Both in Italy and in Britain, the cinematographic perspective reinforces a colonial identity justifying it with the countries' own existence, in a complete self-referential process. Any such representation of past and present events is closely tied to the significance of a European presence in those parts and to an "us and them" viewpoint. Age-old stereotypical portrayals and racial prejudices persisted even when the hope was to approach the matter from a more comprehensive and egalitarian standpoint. Even though the differences between British and Italian cinema are impossible to hide, both reflected a national identity that

16 Webster, *Englishness and Empire*, 129–135.

continued to see in its colonial history and in the relationship with the *others* the litmus test of its success and distinguishing features. Colonialism on screen becomes the perfect representation of such characteristics, as well as a point of reference at a time when the two countries were caught up in a process of reinterpretation of roles in which an age of well-being was establishing itself. Persistent reference to progress as the benchmark of the colonial adventure evolves into a kind of red string of fate; the past is seen as a utopia of social and economic stability capable of reassuring today's audience in the face of the new challenges laid down by modern times, only apparently free of pitfalls.

In a similar light, across borders, it seems clear that in film the collective memory of the colonial adventure became a means of celebrating a nation's past. The concept was almost theological, providing a means to rework the public narration of the recent past, and as a result remould a nation's spiritual identity following the Second World War. Though by no means similar to official or government papers on the matter issued during the independence years, the cinematic output of colonial films helps to paint a map of the collective imagination on these subjects. The cornerstones of these public storylines dipped into an iconographic and thematic melting pot that stretched way into the past. These portraits of national colonial experience were adapted to the current situation and the collective needs of the day, while remaining faithful to certain basic paradigms. These points of reference can be summed up in the deep-rooted implications of a mission to civilise the world and the ethical and moral significance of that endeavour. Their tale is told through the eyes of the protagonists (single characters for the British, collective for the Italians) and their sacrifice, which can be taken as a word of warning for the future generations.

Both British and Italian cinema shared these topics, but with a difference. Given the difficulties facing the British Empire in those years, the former repackaged the colonial adventure legendising the battles and triumphs, but at the same time looking at these through a problematic point of view due to the current state of affairs. In this way, the colonial identity spread by Italian productions in their return to the imperial past turns out to be cinematographically weaker but ideologically stronger. British films, on the other hand, are visibly more solemn and celebratory, but below the surface they are riddled with uncertainties and a less clear-cut idea of what the future may hold.

CHAPTER SIX

DECOLONISATION WILL BE TELEVISED: *ANNI D'EUROPA* AND THE FALL OF EUROPEAN COLONIALISM

VALERIA DEPLANO

1. Introduction

RAI began broadcasting television programmes in 1954, just a few years after Italy's dreams of making a comeback in Africa were crushed. Although the 1947 Peace Treaty had already forced the defeated country to relinquish its colonial empire, the government and the parliament put forward a claim for an Italian trusteeship of the colonies occupied during the Liberal period: Libya, Eritrea and Somalia.[1] By the early 1950s, however, this project had met with only limited success. The former "motherland" had been appointed by the UN as the Administering Authority in the trust territory of Somalia for ten years, until 1960. As for the other territories, an independent kingdom was established in Libya in 1951, and Eritrea was formally federated with Ethiopia in 1952.
While Italy was the first to experience the loss of its colonial possessions, soon all other European imperial powers were swept by the winds of decolonisation. What looked like a world-wide revolution attracted considerable media attention in Italy: newspapers and news magazines were eager to provide their readers with extensive coverage of the events in Asia, Africa and, of course, the rest of Europe.

Television did not immediately contribute to the debate because the so-called "national" channel was focused mainly on entertainment. Things started to change in 1961, when the launch of the *Secondo Programma* (Second Channel) opened up the possibility of increasing the range and

1 Gianluigi Rossi, *L'Africa italiana verso l'indipendenza* (Milano: Giuffrè, 1980).

variety of programming and addressing a broader target audience: thus, information and current affairs were gradually allotted more screen time.
In this scenario, a new TV programme called *Anni d'Europa* (Years of Europe) debuted in 1962, devoting five episodes to the *Apogeo e declino del colonialismo* (Apogee and decline of colonialism)—a unique occurrence in the Italian public debate on imperialism. Alternating between voice-over narrations and in-studio interviews and commentary, the programme traced the history of European colonialism from the nineteenth century until 1962, largely through documentary clips borrowed from the French Pathé production company.

This essay will analyse the concept behind the programme and its format. Focusing on the last two episodes about decolonisation—a hot topic at the time, when African people were still struggling for independence and European countries were dealing with the end of their imperial history, at times tainted by bloodshed—it will highlight the role of the new medium in urging Italians to address their colonial past, acknowledge decolonisation and above all, reframe their expectations about Europe's future relations with Africa.

2. Talking about colonial empires in post-war Italy

After the end of the Second World War, colonialism and decolonisation caught the attention of several journalists and film-makers who mostly focused on the Italian experience: as pointed out by Daniela Baratieri, colonialism did not disappear from collective memory, nor from public debate.[2] On the contrary, interest in this part of the Italian past was rekindled by newspapers, magazines, films and radio. In most cases, the media were assiduous in celebrating the colonial past of the nation and supporting government policies. Newsreels had already played a major part in fascist and imperialist propaganda during the 1930s, and when the post-war government sought to build a consensus over the trusteeship issue, they proved once again instrumental to the administration's agenda, as argued by Chiara Ottaviano.[3] It was thus decided that they would precede the main feature film in all cinemas as a means of securing approval to the new anti-fascist State and assimilating Italians into a

2 Daniela Baratieri, *Memories and Silences Haunted by Fascism. Italian Colonialism MCMXXX–MCMXL* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2010).
3 Chiara Ottaviano, "Riprese coloniali. I documentari Luce e la 'Settimana Incom,'" *Zapruder* 23 (2009).

common culture.[4] Between 1946 and 1950, the colonial narrative spread by the *Settimana INCOM* (produced by Italy's leading film production company, based in Milan) helped to create the "myth of the good Italian": colonisation was likened to a form of migration, through which the poor had found a job and brought value to African territories. Gianmarco Mancosu has also noted that not a word of condemnation of colonialism was uttered in those recollections "of a glorious past."[5] On the contrary, newsreels credited the "Italian civilisation" with bringing development to Africa. In his analysis of fiction and newsreels, Maurizio Zinni argued that the same paradigm was used both when representing the past and when describing the present circumstances of the former Italian colonies. Colonialism was cleansed of all faults and presented as a national enterprise—a story whose main characters were neither officials nor politicians, but the common people who had worked to bring value to those areas before and after 1945.[6] The reason why the media could get away with such a watered-down version of events is to be found in the way Italian colonialism ended: independence for Italy's colonies was the result of diplomatic efforts, and the country did not have to deal with movements of national liberation after 1945, which made it easier to present a conflict-free narrative. Elsewhere, European countries and their colonial subjects became enmeshed in political controversies, struggles, or even wars. Hence, even in Italy several journalists from the leading newspapers and news magazines covered the violent clashes and the sufferings of the people struggling for independence during the fifties and early sixties. Although colonialism was not entirely and unanimously condemned, the role of Europe, with all its faults and merits, was a topic of debate.[7] Reporters usually teamed up with photographers,[8] whose renditions of events were less likely to be challenged than written texts. For instance, the picture of a man shot in the back by a French soldier changed the narrative of the Algerian war. Even when following the events

4 Peter Gundle and David Forgacs, *Cultura di massa e società italiana 1936–1954* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2007).

5 Gianmarco Mancosu, "The *Settimana INCOM* production about decolonization" (paper presented at the Conference of the Association for the Study of Modern Italy, 2016).

6 Maurizio Zinni, "*Lettera dall'Africa*. Il colonialismo italiano nel cinema del dopoguerra 1945–60," *Contemporanea* 1 (Jan–Mar 2016): 69–99.

7 Valeria Deplano, "Watching decolonisation from the sidelines," in *Colonialism and National Identity*, ed. Cecilia Dau Novelli and Paolo Bertella Farnetti (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015), 178–193.

8 On photojournalism in Italy, see Uliano Lucas and Tatiana Agliani, *La realtà e lo sguardo. Storia del fotogiornalismo in Italia* (Torino: Einaudi, 2016).

on newspapers and news magazines, Italians had the opportunity to see rather than just imagine what was happening.

Thus, by the time RAI decided to devote five evenings to the history of colonialism and decolonisation in the same time slot as *Anni d'Europa*, talking about these issues was no longer a novelty and Italians were used to seeing images of the European occupation and the struggles for independence in the press and on the big screen. Nevertheless, the five-episode series was groundbreaking for several reasons that will be analysed in depth in the following paragraphs. Meanwhile, it is worth pointing out that the programme planned to cover the history of colonial empires up until their demise, featuring original film materials from France rather than the usual footage by Luce or the *Settimana INCOM*. Additional elements of its innovative style and presentation were, on the one hand, the use of new media to develop novel communicative strategies and, on the other, the choice to adopt a European perspective—unlike newspapers and newsreels, which usually focused on Italian affairs—but still in line with the approach of *Anni d'Europa*.

3. A peculiar perspective on Modern Times: The Second Channel and *Anni d'Europa*

The Second Channel started broadcasting in November 1961. As Vanessa Roghi has noted, it was a crucial year for Italian history: while the country marked the centenary of its Unification, Giovanni Spadolini was appointed to Italy's first chair of Contemporary History at the University of Florence.[9] In the same year, Ettore Bernabei became the new managing director of RAI. Journalist, former editor in chief of the Christian Democrat newspaper *Il Popolo* and a member of the party, Bernabei envisioned a programme schedule in which information and culture would prevail over entertainment.[10] The creation of the Second channel played a major role in his project. Managers at the broadcasting company started outlining the features of the new channel at the beginning of the year, especially in its differences to the National one. It was not only a matter of giving viewers a wider range of choices: indeed, one more channel made all the difference when it came to current affairs, as was

9 Vanessa Roghi, "La fabbrica dell'immaginario storico contemporaneo. Televisione e programmi di storia (1961–1994)," in *Televisione, storia, immaginario, memoria*, ed. Daniele Garofalo and Vanessa Roghi (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2015), 109.

10 Giovanni Gozzini, *La mutazione individualista. Gli italiani e la televisione 1954–2011* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2011).

made clear in several stories run by *Radiocorriere TV*—a weekly television and radio programme listings magazine.

In June 1961, the magazine featured a series of interviews with top names in journalism, culture and the showbiz about their expectations for the channel. At the same time, RAI executives unveiled their plans to the press.[11] Perceptions and expectations were varied. Camilla Cederna, a journalist for the *Corriere della Sera* among others, felt strongly that shows should not be boring, but rather suit the tastes of common people. Journalist Brunella Gasperini, instead, felt that caution should be exercised when generalising about "ordinary people" and their tastes: "There are people among the masses who, for example, do prefer jazz to popular songs, modern theatre to TV series, news reports about current events (made by real journalists) and live footage to low-quality films."[12] From a similar standpoint, Antonio Romanò, the recently appointed controller of the new channel, believed that a focus on current events was the strength of the Second Channel, as it meant not only more room for news but a general attention to topical issues and culture. Despite RAI executives trying their best not to present the Second channel as the (boring) antithesis of the National one, as soon as the programme offering was unveiled, the differences between the two became clear. The biggest news was the "cultural show," scheduled at 9 p.m. nightly. For the first time, a cultural programme was given a prime-time slot. A glance at programme listings for the first six months of broadcasting reveals that several historical dramas and documentaries on faraway places (e.g., the United States, Hong Kong, and the Middle East) were aired in that same time slot. Among them, *Anni d'Europa*, advertised in June 1961 as the quintessence of the Second Channel, was the jewel in RAI's crown. Set to focus on the "hours and moments," the people, the nations, and the witnesses to the first sixty years of the twentieth century, the series was expected to split each topic into multiple episodes so as to offer a "real, complete and consistent show." *Anni d'Europa* premiered on Friday, November 17 with an episode titled "Carta d'Europa: confini e popolazioni 1900–1960" (The European map: borders and people 1900–1960). In his review of the show, Francesco Bolzoni wrote that the episode was about the greatness of the European continent "without pessimism or pride, confronting history's

11 Giorgio Calcagno, "Cosa vedremo da novembre sul secondo canale TV," *Radiocorriere TV*, no. 26, 2–3.

12 Vittorio Colonna, "Cosa vorrebbero le giornaliste nel secondo canale TV," *Radiocorriere TV*, no. 26, 4–5.

contradictions."[13] At the same time, he pointed out that the re-enactment of history through live footage and documentary clips from several European archives would give Italians the opportunity to see the past from an original point of view. The same approach was to be applied to all other episodes. The first of two episodes on Hitler's life, directed by Liliana Cavani, aired the following week. As Roghi has pointed out, the episodes already contained "everything we would see about Nazism in the following years."[14] *Anni d'Europa* was then taken off the air until February 1962, when the first episode of *Apogeo e declino del colonialismo* was broadcast.

The series is especially relevant in understanding the role played by colonialism in the public debate of the time. First of all, presenting colonialism—and its end—as a key issue, just like Nazism, was a significant choice. Second, *Apogeo e declino del colonialismo* occupied more space than any historical programme ever had on national television: five one-hour segments across five prime time evenings were devoted to the European occupation of Asian and African territories. To understand both the reasons behind this choice and the perspective provided by the programme, it is necessary to turn the attention to its creators.

4. Apogee and decline of colonialism

All episodes of *Apogeo e declino del colonialismo* were directed by Sergio Spina. Spina's career as a television director began in 1954, the same year RAI started broadcasting, and he continued working in film and television until the new millennium. His name is associated with some of the most significant television programmes about history and current events, as well as some groundbreaking documentaries (e.g., on the funeral of Communist leader Enrico Berlinguer in 1984, and on the preparations for the protests against the 2001 G8 in Genoa).[15] Spina was a leftist, and his choices as a director were guided by his idea of the world: what interested him were the lower classes and their struggle for equity and freedom. Though his position had yet to fully reveal itself, his decision to devote one of the channel's first programmes to decolonisation

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13 Francesco Bolzoni, "Trasmissioni giornalistiche a cura di Vittorio Zincone. Anni d'Europa," *Radiocorriere TV*, no. 46, 54–55.
14 Roghi, *La fabbrica dell'immaginario*, 11. See also Daniele Garofalo, "La Shoah e l'esperienza dei Lager nei documentari televisivi di Liliana Cavani (1961–1965)," *Memoria e Ricerca* 46 (2014): 173–191.
15 Spina was born in 1928 and died in 2017. He co-authored the show *Mixer* with Gianni Minoli. The two documentaries were: *I funerali di Berlinguer* (1984) and *Un altro mondo è possibile* (2001).

represents an early example of what his attention was directed to. At the same time, it explains the relevance of colonialism and decolonisation in the RAI schedule. Spina's interest in these issues was such that in that same year he planned to direct a film on the Algerian war. Featuring a commentary from the French philosopher Jean Paul Sartre, at the time the leading voice of dissent against French policy in North Africa, the film took a stand against France and against colonialism in general. A synopsis of the film submitted to the Ministry of Tourism and the Performing Arts stated that "according to colonial propaganda, all accomplishments were the work of Europeans, but in actual fact, the Algerian masses worked hard for those accomplishments. Algiers is a beautiful, modern city, but Algerian natives are relegated to the kasbah."[16]

While Spina's commitment to anti-colonial struggles certainly helps to understand the choice to address colonialism and decolonisation on television, his point of view did not coincide with that of the programme, which, along with studio commentaries and in-depth reports, was the responsibility of Cesare Zappulli[17]—an economics journalist with the *Corriere della Sera*, who, unlike Spina, was a moderate and would go on to become a member of Parliament for the Liberal Party in the seventies.[18] Despite their different views, both had an influence on the programme, and *Apogeo e declino del colonialismo* set about to make Italians aware of different perspectives on this controversial topic. In line with this approach, a debate in the RAI studios preceded the four-episode documentary. The debate aired on February 2 and featured a panel of five high-profile guests from different anti-fascist backgrounds. Among them were the Dominican Father Enrico di Rovasenda, a renowned scholar in philosophy and theology, and Giuseppe Lazzati, an academic and anti-fascist who had been interned in a Nazi concentration camp from 1943 to 1945. In the fifties, Lazzati had been a member of Parliament for the Christian-Democratic party, and in 1962 he was the director of the Catholic newspaper *L'Italia*. Three historians were invited to join the discussion. Roberto Battaglia was a Marxist scholar and author of the most authoritative work on Francesco Crispi's colonial policy (1958), and the only one to criticise colonialism at that time. Luigi Salvatorelli, a journalist and academic, was an anti-fascist from the ranks of the Partito d'Azione who had written for a periodical published by the Ministry of the Colonies in the thirties and directed *La Nuova Europa* in the forties—a

16 Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Ministero del Turismo e dello Spettacolo, *Il colonialismo* (1962).

17 Vittorio Solito was the editor, and Gino Peguri composed the score.

18 *Treccani*, s.v. "Zappulli, Cesare"; see also his profile on www.senato.it.

magazine whose mission was to reflect on the future of Europe after the war. The debate guest list included Giovanni Spadolini, who not only was the director of *Il Resto del Carlino* but had also recently taken up the first chair of Contemporary History in Italy. Spadolini was a member of the Republican Party, hence all political positions were fairly represented. The panel was moderated by Gianni Granzotto, who had started his career as a reporter while volunteering in the Horn of Africa during the Italian occupation of Ethiopia.[19]

Unfortunately, the recordings are missing from the RAI archives, but newspaper articles covering the event provide a glimpse into the opinions of the guests, and their contrasting views of the European role in Asia and Africa, in what appears to have been a heated debate. While agreeing in principle that colonialism was a thing of the past, the participants disagreed on the extent of Europe's role and responsibility. Battaglia condemned the violent and oppressive essence of colonialism, and compared the struggles for independence to the Russian Revolution of 1917; on the other hand, Spadolini and Lazzati refused to unconditionally condemn Europe, while Rovasenda's comments focused on the role of missionaries bringing progress to Africa. Wrapping up the debate, Salvatorelli stressed the necessity of focusing on the future and enabling Europe to support the political, economic and social liberation of the formerly colonised people.[20] The heated debate reflected the views of various political parties. At the same time, it showed that decolonisation was a topic of broad interest—which challenged the idea of Europe itself and called upon intellectuals, politicians, and Italians in general to remember the past when trying to envision the future—and set the tone for the four episodes that followed.

The first episode aired on February 9 and went straight to the core of the issue: "Africa is no longer represented by primitive artisans or skinny dancers."[21] This was exemplified in the opening images of Abebe Bekila, who had won the men's marathon at the 1960 Summer Olympics in Rome: nineteen years after the end of the Italian occupation in Ethiopia, a soldier of Emperor Haile Selassie was "the king" of the former empire's capital.

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19 A well-known journalist in 1962, he was the creator of the groundbreaking political show *Tribuna elettorale*.

20 Cf. *L'Unità*, February 3, 1962; "Come si potranno riscattare errori e colpe del colonialismo," *La Stampa*, February 3, 1962.

21 Episodes one and two are not available from the RAI video archives. Their contents have been traced through newspaper articles and the programme schedules containing an outline of the films that were broadcast on February 9 and February 16. Teche RAI, C1467 and C1468.

In the next sequence, South African leader Albert John Luthuli was shown in the act of receiving the Nobel Peace Prize for his non-violent struggle against apartheid—a celebration of the birth of the African political class. Finally, African leaders were interviewed on their assumptions regarding future relationships with Europe—indeed, the goal of the programme was to address issues surrounding the relations between Asia, Africa and Europe in the near future. The documentary that followed did just that, starting from the British rule in India and then describing the European scramble for Africa during the nineteenth century. Continuing along the same path, the second episode traced the events from the beginning of the twentieth century to the creation of the fascist empire in the mid-1930s. Because recordings are not available, an in-depth analysis of the discourse employed in the two episodes is not possible, but a selection of the images borrowed from Pathé and comments in newspaper articles can help to point out some elements worthy of attention. First, the episodes tried not to replicate the narrative developed in Europe during colonialism, which tended to deny or drastically underestimate the agency of the colonised people. The documentary mentioned the contribution of the colonies during the First World War, and described the organisation of the pan-Arab movement and the early struggles for freedom. In the pages of *Radiocorriere*, Bolzoni argued that the Mandate System created after the Great War had been rendered meaningless by the colonial powers.[22] On the other hand, it was claimed that Europeans (and the British above all) had started to grant more rights to the colonised subjects in the interwar years. It is worth noting that, in spite of the European perspective, special attention was given to the Italian case. All these elements figured more prominently in the two episodes that followed.

5. Reasons for decolonisation: Europe's merits and faults

Why were empires falling? Was it an unavoidable ending? And above all, how would that revolution reshape the relationship between Europeans and Africans?

In 1962, answering these questions on TV meant trying to help Italians deal with the prospect of a changing world. At the time, television audiences were mostly made of people who had grown up believing in the superiority of whites (a belief that was common to fascist ideology and European culture) and had been assured that it was somehow fair for

22 Francesco Bolzoni, "Per la serie 'Anni d'Europa'. Colonialismo," *Radiocorriere TV*, no. 7, 51.

Europeans to occupy foreign territories and rule over non-European peoples in the name of civilisation, modernity and technology. Any television programme investigating the end of colonial empires necessarily had to deal with the full implications of such mentality or the meanings associated with the words "civilisation" and "modernisation" and how they related to race and rights. The last two episodes tackled those thorny questions. The third episode, which focused on anti-colonial movements before WWII, aired on February 23.[23] The war was described as a turning point in the history of colonialism, the moment when the colonised understood they could and should rise up and fight for their rights. The fourth episode was broadcast on March 1 and addressed different paths towards decolonisation and possible post-independence scenarios.[24]

On the one hand, the ongoing battle for independence in the colonies was openly supported. Unlike African resistance, which had received little attention until the Second World War, India's struggle was given sustained coverage. Gandhi was depicted as a high-profile figure and his fight as noble. Footage of his meeting with Charlie Chaplin in London was used to allude to the legitimacy of the fight against an increasingly industrialised society. Moreover, it was stressed that at a time when Europe was plagued by Fascism, India was already speaking the language of non-violence. The documentary also drew attention to the plight of the African and Asian people, who not only had to endure the everyday consequences of foreign colonial rule but when war broke out also became "the victims of a power struggle, the victims of a European crisis they had nothing to do with." Thus, the righteousness of the anti-colonial cause was openly recognised.

On the other hand, there was constant mention of Europe's positive impact on the colonies. Both the images and the commentary highlighted the miles of rails laid by the British in India, the improvements in farming methods, and the increasing rates of Hindu and Muslim students enrolling in higher education. The documentary's claim that Europe had brought progress to the Sub-Saharan colonies—although, as was explained in the fourth episode, the encounter between the African people's "archaic way of life" and modern technologies had caused a culture clash—suggested the existence of a hierarchical order, according to which Asians and Arabs were "more civilised" than the Sub-Saharan people, depicted as savages.
Europe was said to have provided not only tangible benefits but also immaterial advantages, sharing cultures and ideas that would enable the colonised subjects to organise their anti-colonial fight. Little space was devoted to colonial violence in this narrative. Once again, India was a

23 Teche RAI, C1469.
24 Teche RAI, C1470.

special case: it is worth noting the discrepancy between on-screen images of protests led by Gandhi and the accompanying discourse. While the voice-over described the reactions of the British administration in general terms, the screen showed policemen attacking demonstrators with truncheons, shoving them to the ground or flogging them.

Apart from this, violence was mentioned twice in the last episode. Focusing on the post-war events, it examined the end of empires considering each case separately and approaching decolonisation as a noun to be inflected in the plural. British colonies were said to have gained freedom peacefully because of Britain's "enlightened" policy: colonialism did not fit with the spirit of the times, and the British government was aware of it. The only two exceptions were South Africa and Kenya, whose peoples suffered from the racism and violence of a white minority. France was said to have brought civilisation to its colonies but to have made a "political error of judgement" after 1945. Dating from before the Évian Accords, the documentary depicted French brutality in Indochina and Algeria as a regrettable consequence of France's failure to understand that colonialism was over and done with. On the contrary, violence appeared as an integral part of Belgian and Portuguese colonialism. Their bloody and retrograde colonial rule was held responsible for the rise of anti-European feelings in the Congo and Angola. In particular, the two countries were blamed for failing to fulfil Europe's "civilising mission" and for making Africans "unable to rule themselves," causing instability in the post-war period.

As usual, Italy was described as a fair coloniser. Supposedly, that was the reason why Libya and Eritrea had achieved independence without conflict and the UN had granted Italy the trusteeship of Somalia. Images of the Mau Mau in Kenya or violence in Algeria were contrasted with images of well-dressed Africans in Somalia and Libya; a sequence showing European soldiers was followed by footage of Italians wearing work clothes. Somalia had gained its independence two years earlier: the commentator listed all the benefits (such as schools and roads) bequeathed by Italians in the decade 1950–1960, which was portrayed as a time of prosperity for the country. The Parliamentary Assembly in Mogadishu was shown, and the prime minister was interviewed in a bourgeois setting.

In the end, the colonial narrative employed by the Second Channel was clearly influenced by the debate that had taken place in Europe (and Italy) in the past fifteen years. Criticism towards colonialism coexisted with the belief that it had established tangible and cultural ties between the colonised and the colonisers, and that Africa and Asia had benefited from the encounter with the Europeans. Would those ties be severed now?

6. Decolonisation and the changing relations between Europe and Africa

As with the episode on Nazism, colonialism was also addressed by *Anni d'Europa* in a way that would encourage audiences to reflect on Europe's recent history and present circumstances. In keeping with this goal, after dealing with the colonies' long path to independence, the programme shifted its focus to the impact of colonialism and decolonisation on future scenarios. New strategies were designed to capture the audience's attention, replacing archive materials with fresh footage and interviews, and complementing them with voice-overs and in-studio commentary. The leaders of the independent Asian and African states were presented to the audience as new key players. Before the war, only Gandhi was acknowledged as a man with a personality, a name and a political idea; now, several leaders were at least given some attention. Television made it possible for the audiences to listen to their words and understand their ideas. Nehru in India, U-Nu in Burma, Sukarno in Indonesia, Nasser in Egypt, Nkhruma in Ghana, and Bourguiba in Tunisia were interviewed about their views on Europe. Remarkably, Nasser, who had nationalised the Canal of Suez and was trying to assert himself as a guide for the Arab people, was the only one referred to as a "dictator." On the other hand, Bourguiba, who after independence had chosen not to sever the relationship with France and was the most pro-European leader, was presented as a role model for all African nations.

Adopting the same approach used for RAI investigative reports since the fifties, the programme also included interviews with common people. Among them, a young priest from Tanganyika explained how the missionaries were helping his country by building schools and hospitals, and an African doctor trained in Europe told about the impact of racism on his life. A European doctor working in the Congo, who was said to have taught medicine to the local youth, was also interviewed, along with a white businessman who had employed both black and white workers in his company in Africa. European leaders may have been absent, but Europe was there and it was represented by these people who, once again, were bringing progress to Africa "to set it free."

This was the same core idea suggested by Zappulli in his final monologue: the journalist had the responsibility of concluding the programme with a reflection on what Europe should do next. "Should it step back and let new nations find their own way?" he asked. Obviously, the answer was no. Africa had changed, and Europe would soon complete its transformation too, erasing all traces of colonialism, racism and

superiority from its culture. The new Europe was no longer the one that had occupied and oppressed Africa; it was the one that had joined in the creation of the United Nations, whose principles required that the former colonisers support the formerly colonised. In line with this approach, Zappulli stressed once again that Europe was committed to improving the well-being of the African people and tasked with helping the new nations advance "towards civilisation." His use of the word "obligation" with respect to Europe brought back echoes of Kipling's "white man's burden." This was a crucial point in Europe's relations with Asia and Africa. Still, it was a given that Europe was the model the new independent countries should follow: denying the colonised people's right to self-government was no longer acceptable after 1960, but at the same time Europe did not go so far as to question its supposed superiority over non-European people. The United Nations seemingly agreed with this approach when they asked Europe to take care of the colonised, and it was also shared by some of the founding leaders of the European Community. For example, the Schuman Declaration in 1950 openly stated that "Europe will be able to pursue the achievement of one of its essential tasks, namely, the development of the African continent."[25]

This perspective was also shared by several news magazines and newspapers, as articles and special reports clearly reveal, but it gained ground thanks to television. First of all, a five-episode programme made it possible to develop an in-depth and coherent line of reasoning, with a unique impact on audience. Moreover, a TV programme could make use of different tools and techniques (in-studio debates, video interviews, archive and live footage, and authors participation) to create a completely new and interesting product. Ultimately, the contents of *Apogeo and declino del colonialismo* were less original than they could have been, and the programme seemingly was just a means through which a new hegemonic discourse about post-colonial relations could be presented to Italians. It was not at all a feeble discourse, as it also expressed clear criticism of colonialism and reframed the idea of Europe. After all, it achieved its intended goal of broadly informing Italians about colonial history and contextualising the Italian case, but at the same time its

25 See Giuliana Laschi, "Colonialismo e identità coloniali a confronto. L'Italia e la politica di associazione nei primi anni della Cee," in *Quel che resta dell'impero. La cultura coloniale degli italiani*, ed. Valeria Deplano and Alessandro Pes (Milano: Mimesis, 2014), 371–74. On decolonisation and the creation of the European Community, see also Peo Hansen and Stefan Jonsson, *Eurafrica: The Untold History of European Integration and Colonialism* (London-New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014).

perspective ended up reproducing the European debate with its self-absolving approach and some blind spots, colonial violence and exploitation above all else.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE WHITE MALE GAZE IN ITALIAN CINE-REPORTAGE: MASCULINITY AND OTHERNESS BETWEEN COLONIALISM AND DECOLONISATION (1960S–1970S)

GAIA GIULIANI

1. The white male gaze and the post-colonising world[1]

Between the late fifties and the early seventies, notable Italian film-makers Roberto Rossellini (*India*, 1959), Cesare Zavattini (who directed *Cinegiornali liberi* and *Cinegiornali della pace* and collaborated with Rossellini on *Viaggio in Italia*), Pier Paolo Pasolini, and Giovannino Guareschi ventured into documentaries and cine-reportage—a far-reaching, sophisticated yet extremely popular genre[2] that gained international cult status with Gualtiero Jacopetti's productions in the early sixties. Together with Paolo Cavara and Franco Prosperi, Jacopetti became the best known representative of the *mondo movie* genre, launched in Italy by Alessandro Blasetti (*Europa di notte*, 1959).[3]

This chapter will explore three mondo movies by Gualtiero Jacopetti, Paolo Cavara and Franco Prosperi (*Mondo cane 1*, 1962, after which the genre was named; *La donna nel mondo*, 1963; *Africa addio*, 1966), along

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1 I would like to thank Paolo Noto and Farah Polato for their careful reading of the essay and valuable insights.

2 By the term "cine-reportage" I mean a visual text in which the auteurship of the director—expressed by the voice-over, the rationale behind the assemblage of visual fragments, the juxtaposition of disparate images, and/or the insertion of fictional elements—contributes to making the film more fiction than documentary.

3 Alessandro Blasetti, *Europa di notte*, Italy, 1959.

with Pier Paolo Pasolini's *La rabbia* (co-directed with Giovannino Guareschi in 1963) and *Appunti per un'orestiade africana* (1970).[4]
My selection was based upon cinematic relevance and popularity as well as topics and political motives: clearly, the aim of these productions was to provide a specific reading of the decolonising/post-colonial South from the Eurocentric, Italian viewpoint—sometimes in a comparative perspective (Jacopetti et al., Pasolini and Guareschi), other times focusing on a single case or area (Pasolini's *Appunti*). It was from this perspective that they interpreted the aftermath of WWII (and the Cold War), the geopolitical balance of power, the cultures and the fears within which the decolonising/post-colonial South was framed.

The choice of visual materials and the way these were assembled by the directors, the sound-track (mocking and ironic versus lyrical and dramatic), the tone (ironic/poetic/descriptive) and the linguistic register employed in voice-overs make these works different but similar at the same time: the authorial presence resonates through common structural elements such as the montage of fragments and voice-over, conveying a political stance on post-war societies. Images and comments reflect a distinct ideological take that not only reinforces the visuality-as-the-dispenser-of-self-evident-truth[5] nature of photo/film productions but also, albeit differently in Pasolini, Guareschi and Jacopetti, shares a focus on such relevant topics as cultural massification and memories of the war.

La rabbia was the brainchild of Astra Cinema producer Gastone Ferranti, who commissioned the film from Pasolini only to later shorten his draft screenplay and call in Guareschi. Apparently, neither knew about the other. Both relied on video snippets from the *cinegiornale Mondo Libero*, owned by the Istituto Luce, and in the case of Pasolini, also on archival images from Great Britain, Czechoslovakia, the Soviet Union and Hungary. The documentary flopped at the box office and was quickly pulled from distribution, not in the least because of controversy surrounding the work of two "heretics on opposite sides." The two sections are marked by each author's distinct style: poetic and lyrical for Pasolini—with readings by Giorgio Bassani and Renato Guttuso—

4 Gualtiero Jacopetti, Paolo Cavara, and Franco Prosperi, *La donna nel mondo*, Italy, 1963; *Mondo cane*, Italy, 1962; *Mondo cane 2*, Portugal, 1963. Gualtiero Jacopetti and Franco Prosperi, *Africa addio*, Italy, 1966. Pier Paolo Pasolini and Giovannino Guareschi, *La rabbia*, Italy, 1963. Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Appunti per un'orestiade africana*, Italy, 1970.
5 Tagg noted the significant use of the photographic image as a "regime of truth." John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988).

mocking and grotesque for Guareschi. Pasolini focused on the miserable and "the wretched of the Earth," fighting in hopes of future freedom in Hungary, Algeria, the Congo and Tanganyika. The Cuban revolution and the papacy of John XXIII offered a glimmer of hope, the same hope Pasolini still had in Khrushchev's USSR.

The second section of the film grew out of Giovannino Guareschi's cartoons for the conservative satirical weekly *Il Borghese*. Focusing on a scathing critique of mass society, consumerism, and the perversion of family, professional, private and public values, Guareschi was scornful both of the *miracolo economico*, *miracolo automobilistico*, *miracolo petrolifero*, *miracolo turistico-balneare*, *miracolo edilizio*, *miracolo politico*, *miracolo sessuale* that "turned Rome from the spiritual capital into the capital of sex" and of the "third sex", that is gay people and transvestites—thus revealing his blatant contempt and disdain for Pasolini. His gaze turned then to the expulsion of the British and French from Africa and Indochina and that of the French *pieds-noirs* from Algeria: the latter was described as the defeat of white civilisation, the end of France's future in Africa and of a "peaceful dialogue" between races in post-colonial territories. With the help of background circus music, independence celebrations in the Congo were dismissively described as lacking rationality and discipline, beauty and decorum. Guareschi's anxieties about the moral decline of youth, the disintegration of the (patriarchal) family, consumerism, and the loss of spirituality—along with a sense of self-denial—pervaded the last scenes.

Appunti per un'orestiade africana was released by Pier Paolo Pasolini in 1970. M. D. Usher wrote about the film:

> Five years before his death, Pasolini spent several weeks shooting notes for a film version of Aeschylus' Oresteia to be set in modern Africa. The result is the brilliant but little known and poorly understood work *Appunti per un'Orestiade africana* ("Notes for an African Oresteia"), which was initially conceived for Italian television and released as a film in 1970 (first screened in public in 1973). In his visual notes on the trilogy Pasolini explores the many analogies he sees between the Athens of Aeschylus' time and the situation of post-colonial Africa in the late nineteen-sixties. [. . .] He is fascinated with the faces and physiques of the poor and downtrodden, and his elevation of marginalized persons to mythic, iconic status serves to ennoble their plight. An actual film was never made, and clearly that was never his intention. [. . .] The ensuing footage is accompanied by Pasolini's own running commentary, voiced-over passages from the text of Aeschylus, and, midway through the film, interviews with African students at the University of Rome about the conceptual viability of his project. Agamemnon is tentatively cast as a

> proud but aging Maasai warrior; Clytemnestra as an imposing medicine woman from Uganda; Orestes as a European-clad university student in Dar es Salaam; the Erinyes—in non-human guise—now as giant, forbidding trees, now as a wounded lioness from the bush. Chorus members are drawn from the ranks of the many farmers, tailors, beggars, barbers, old men, women and children that populate the open-air markets of any typical African town. Modern Kampala represents Athens. The university campus and courthouse in Dar es Salaam—still emblazoned with the colonial slogan "For God and Country"—serves as the hypothetical setting for Orestes' trial.[6]

Unlike classicist M. D. Usher, I do not think that the fact that "none of this, however, is sentimental; nor does it romanticise African 'primitivism'" prevented Pasolini from having a colonial gaze. On the contrary, the Western notion of colonial subalternity is reiterated in the interpretation of modern Africa through a Greek classic such as Aeschylus, that is, projecting the very foundations of Western civilisation onto a silent "continent"; in Pasolini's choice to reduce "African" places and people to mere bystanders while his is the only voice heard; and in the idea (regarded as a self-evident-truth) that the so-called Other may be reduced to an ontology, which the director can easily grasp and codify.

Mondo Cane is structured as a series of juxtapositions between Western and non-Western cultures. In the opening scene, the inauguration of a memorial to the late Rodolfo Valentino in Apulia is followed by hysterical female fans mobbing actor Rossano Brazzi in the United States. A parallel is drawn between women's behaviour in the US and Polynesian women hunting men. Jacopetti & Co. devote much of their film to Papua New Guinea's population and habits. The voice-over is accompanied by a mocking soundtrack amplifying the grotesque nature of the images-as-dispensers-of-truth of Southern barbarism (exemplified for instance by the "bestiality" of a woman breast-feeding a child and a pig at the same time). With six million women at the service of the health, beauty, and well-being of four million men, Japan is celebrated for its macho culture, while China and the Chinese community in Singapore are blamed for supposedly being lazy and only into food, gambling, and making legitimate or illegitimate children, "for the sake of celebrating more birthdays at the table." In this consumerist society, the old, the weak and the ill are left behind. Strange barbaric practices of food consumption include the fattening of women in Tabar to supposedly increase their fertility—

6 M. D. Usher, "An African *Oresteia*: Field Notes on Pasolini's *Appunti per un' Orestiade Africana*," *Arion, A Journal of Humanities and the Classics* 22, no. 1 (2014): 113–114.

dismissively depicted by the voice-over as a sign of backward "nonsense." The Spanish *corrida* gets the same treatment, with the difference that Spanish nonsense "belongs" to civilised Europe, while in Papua New Guinea it is a trait of animalised caveman behaviour. This behaviour cannot be civilised but only slightly humanised by New Guineans' conversion to Christianity and worship of the white man as if he were divine. The sequel, *Mondo Cane 2* (1964), is composed primarily of leftover scenes from the first film, also by way of juxtaposition. I will not cover it here because it does not add to nor conflict with the rationale behind *Mondocane 1*.

In 1963, Jacopetti and Prosperi released *Le donne del mondo*, where more than a hint of misogyny underlies the portrayal of women of all races, creeds, sexual orientations and occupations in Israel, France, Papua New Guinea, Italy and Sweden. Lesbians and female transvestites in Paris clubs are depicted as pathetic and sad, while gay and male transvestites are ridiculed and visually represented as grotesque. In Papua New Guinea, the inversion of gender roles (men wearing make up and women performing the heaviest tasks while "Bandiera rossa" plays in the background) is on the receiving end of an equally biased treatment. French nudists are contrasted with Chinese beachgoers who swim fully clothed to keep their skin white, but "just between us, their skin does not tan at all; when exposed to the sun it gets as yellow as a ripe melon" [23:10]. White skin is considered a sign of beauty in Papua New Guinea, too, where women smother their bodies in thick nut-based lotions. An old Neapolitan song is the derisive soundtrack for overweight women in Tahiti, while other local women are described as being more interested in dancing than learning (while the camera indulges on dancing female buttocks for over ten minutes, the voice-over describes dance as "instinctual"). Wannabe starlets in Cannes and Hollywood are portrayed as "whores" who have no skills, while a long segment is devoted to the Westernisation (whitening) of Japanese women through clothing, manners, and cosmetic surgery (eyes and breast). Polyandry in Malay, sexually emancipated female students in Sweden, petting in cars parked along the beach in California, women in Western theme parks in Texas, "window girls" in Hamburg and street prostitutes in Hong Kong are equally mocked and belittled. Similar treatment awaits European women undergoing painful modern dermabrasion procedures, the tattooing of women in Borneo, and Bedouin women at the Algerian-Moroccan border smearing camel faeces on their cheeks. After addressing pregnancy and labour, the film eventually offers the Virgin Mary as the one and only female role model: that is, devotion and subalternity.

In *Africa addio* (1966)—a cine-reportage about the end of colonialism and the beginning of the "end of the Africa we loved, the enchanted Africa of explorers"—soon-to-be decolonised Tanzania, Kenya, Mozambique, Angola, Congo, Uganda, and independent South Africa are viewed through a colonial gaze. The film is a deliberate condemnation of liberation movements and colonial rivals France and Great Britain; Italy, on the other hand, is never mentioned, not even when Ethiopia is shown. The revolutionaries enjoying independence are portrayed as miserable fanatics, ready to disfigure the colonial sense of beauty, kill their fellow man, and devastate and abuse their own land. None of the political speeches delivered by representatives of the African revolutions are dubbed, resulting in a cacophony of sounds that amplifies the idea of a "return to barbarity." To the same purpose, the directors orchestrate visual descriptions of faces, military marches, rituals and speeches. The chaotic cacophony of violent African mobs, portrayed as stupid, gross, pitiless, and incapable of self-government, is opposed to the orderly structure of pre-independence societies and their epic saga—bastions of civilisation as in the case of the Boers in South Africa and the Portuguese in Mozambique. There is no mention of grass-roots or party-led revolutions in Africa, nor of African collective and individual subjectivities: there is only scorn for their leaders, Nyerere and Keniatta. Simply put, the infantilisation of Africa, which is "not ready to be left alone," is accompanied by the deliberate concealment of colonial violence and abuse, and the idea of unwarranted, racial hatred against white people.

2. Male whiteness and the postcolonial world

The persistence of a racialised imaginary and its constant remaking of hegemonic whiteness in post-fascist Italy is the result of two intersecting dynamics of racialisation typical of Western modernity, which the French sociologist Colette Guillaumin has defined as self-referential and hetero-referential racialisation.[7] In the case at hand, self-referential racialisation automatically assigns the hegemonic subject a certain type of "whiteness," namely, a set of positive meanings that grant a specific subject access to full citizenship and to those forms of privilege and power that exclude other "racialised" subjects. This form of racialisation carries over to the linguistic level and continues to be reproduced in mass culture, albeit with fewer imperialist references than during Fascism, through what I have

7 Colette Guillaumin, "Caractères spécifiques de l'idéologie raciste," *Cahiers Internationaux de sociologie* 53 (1972): 247–274.

elsewhere termed de-epidermalisation: a reverse process of the epidermalisation described by Fanon in 1952. I use de-epidermalisation to indicate a form of whitening that allows Italian men and women to be judged more positively (due to the "civilisation" they embody) and to be ascribed only the Mediterranean (non-white, from abroad) traits that are associated with behaviours such as hot tempers, unruliness and excess—traits that are positively interpreted as passion, creativity and exuberance.[8]

In both high and low culture, the positive reappraisal of specific constructions of masculinity and femininity, often associated with the alleged passionate character and "creativity" of the Italian people, have reinforced ideas of Italy's historical and cultural greatness and of its wealth of knowledge and tradition as the repository of a "superior civilisation." This constant reference to a historical past of grandeur (the Roman empire, before Mussolini's) is inscribed within the context of a nation that is deeply immersed in consumerism and Western mass culture. The imperial past has been purged of the fascist stain—as if Fascism had not built an empire steeped in colonial racism; as if the legacy of colonial racism had not carried on—and seems to have lost its racialised and racist significance in favour of a milder benevolent paternalism, fit to be used in the post-WWII era. In line with the national and European institutional approach to "race" and biological racism, mass media discourse has been linguistically purged of the openly inferiorising elements typical of the colonial archive but nonetheless retains a highly racialised reading of the national self and its postcolonial Other. This racialising charge is particularly evident in visual products where whiteness is reproduced through the direct *visual* engagement-opposition with those who are not considered "white," and through the "hiding" of the white looking subject (on this, more in the following paragraph).

Guillaumin refers to this construction of whiteness "through contrast" (through the racialisation of the Other and the neutralisation of whiteness) as hetero-referential racialisation: it reproduces white privilege while simultaneously concealing it by defining those who are excluded from the category and therefore subjected to objectifying, inferiorising and derogatory discursive practices. This is the dynamic that seems to have prevailed in post-war Italy as part of a continuous shifting of "colour lines"—i.e., the progressive inclusion of a range of previously marginalised subjects. Indeed, this period witnessed the progressive integration of women into public space, the world of work, higher education and some (albeit very limited) positions of power; southern

8 Gaia Giuliani, "L'Italiano negro. The Politics of Colour in Early 20th Century Italy," *Interventions. Journal of Postcolonial studies* 16, no. 4 (2014): 572–587.

Italians were likewise gradually included in the political, social and cultural life of the country; and elements of urban marginality as well as mental illness were integrated into urban, healthcare, educational and productive spaces, while the Jewish community was granted space in Italian public life. In this decade, the boundaries of what elsewhere I have called "internal abjection"[9]—that is, the social, cultural and moral inferiorisation of certain marginal subjects within Italian society[10]—rapidly shifted, enabling certain subjects to undergo a process of whitening. This did not apply to the naturalised Roma and Sinti populations living in Italy or, in the seventies, to gay, lesbian and transsexual-transgender people, even though the first self-organised gay and lesbian movements emerged in those years. In this complex landscape defined by the intertwining of lines of colour, gender, class, sexual orientation and geographical origin, the primary opposition as regards hetero-referential dynamics was between whiteness and blackness—a likely legacy of the colonial era—rather than between white and other "colours." In cine-reportage, most of these social elements are recalled in a narrative that, whether legitimising their "inclusion in" or their "exclusion from" Italian society and the broader West (critically or, on the contrary, rightfully), was shaped by a white, male, heterosexual, bourgeois, hegemonic subject/culture. The Holocaust and the Gypsy genocide, and their legacies in terms of social, cultural and/or institutional anti-Semitism and anti-Gypsyism are omitted. I see this omission as arising from both the unspeakable horrors of Europe's largest genocide and the previously mentioned difficulty in dealing with Italian genealogy and the legacy of racism and fascist racial laws.

As I have shown in previous research,[11] in the imaginary woven in the two decades under consideration, the "figures of race" linked to the codification of blackness and the hyper-eroticism of the black, female body played a central role, compared for example to the "fear of the black man," which was foundational to the US hegemonic white imaginary but

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9 Internal abjection must be read from the positioning of the subject who embodies it, at the convergence of lines of gender, race, class, non-disability and geographical origins. See Gaia Giuliani, "Introduzione," in *Il colore della nazione*, ed. Gaia Giuliani (Milano-Firenze: Le Monnier Università-Mondadori Education, 2015b), 1–16.

10 Forgacs focuses specifically on selected examples of marginality from Italian Unification to the present day. David Forgacs, *Italy's Margins: Social Exclusion and Nation Formation since 1861* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

11 Gaia Giuliani, "La razza fuoristrada. Veneri nere tra memoria coloniale e orizzonti globali," in *Visualità e razza*, ed. Elisa Bordin and Stefano Bosco (Verona: Ombre corte, 2017).

remained marginal in Italy.[12] The three figures of black femininity identified by African-American feminist theory, the mammy, the Jezebel and Sapphire (or Angry Woman)[13] can be found in Italian advertising and cinema of the time (especially the first two,[14] and Jezebel in particular in the case of interracial soft porn[15]). Nonetheless, as evident in films by Jacopetti (especially *Mondo cane 2* and *Addio zio Tom*) but also Guareschi (*La rabbia*), the trope of black masculinity as driven by irrational/animal/atavistic/infantile urges re-emerges to testify to the necessity of the colonial guide or, on the contrary, of the greatness of the decolonial effort (in the specific case of Pasolini, *Appunti*). As Liliana Ellena and Silvana Patriarca have argued, black masculinity and the taboo of miscegenation have been represented in neorealist films since the post-war years, focusing on the "alienness" of mixed race children in Italian society without directly reproducing discourses on the "animality" of black men and their desire. The removal of black male sexuality and desire from the visual culture of those days appears to be instrumental in realigning the white male's gaze, intended as the desiring will to know and possess what is seen. While in erotic/exotic soft porn films[16] the white man's desire to possess is made sexual, in cine-reportage it is reduced to the apparently de-sexualised "scopic pleasure" of the white, male looking subject. Here, whether the narrative's political aim is to make room for decolonising/postcolonial cultural "diversity" and national pride (Pasolini) or to blame "inferiority" on European (fascist) standards of cultural, civilisational and historical superiority (Guareschi and Jacopetti), it still entails the "appropriation," domestication, and de-subjectivation of the Other, who is thus disembodied and turned into "knowledge." This is particularly evident in *Le donne del mondo* and *Mondocane 1*, where the supposed habits of Asian women are treated extensively. Here, women are either considered rightful "property of *their* men" or ready to be subsumed

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12 Giulietta Stefani, *Colonia per maschi. Italiani in Africa Orientale. Una storia di genere* (Verona: Ombre corte, 2007).

13 Jeanell Hobson, *Venus in the Dark: Blackness and Beauty in Popular Culture* (London-New York: Routledge, 2005).

14 Vincenza Perilli, "'Sesso' e 'razza' al muro. Il sistema sessismo/razzismo in pubblicità," in *Specchio delle sue brame*, ed. Laura Corradi (Roma: Ediesse, 2012), 91–126.

15 Gaia Giuliani, "Bella e abbronzata. Visualizzare la razza nella televisione italiana 1978–1989," in Giuliani, *Il colore della nazione*, 46–60.

16 Joe d'Amato, *Emanuelle nera – Orient Reportage*, Italy, 1976; *Emanuelle – Perché violenza alle donne?*, Italy, 1977; *Emanuelle in America*, Italy, 1976; *Emanuelle e gli ultimi cannibali*, Italy, 1977. Luigi Scattini, *La ragazza fuoristrada*, Italy, 1973; *Il corpo*, Italy, 1974.

under Western models of whiteness, beauty and consumerism that transform them into grotesque would-be civilised females at the disposal of the hegemonic white heterosexual gaze and desire.

I have defined both the physical and the epistemological take on Otherness as "cannibalistic," making reference to the Latin American critique of the male colonial mentality that "devours" and whitens its object of racialised erotic desire and colonial conquest-possession. Unlike erotic/exotic films, this symbolic cannibalism is less a legacy of the slavery-based construction of the black woman, which reduces her to a mere "body" and thus a marketable object of pleasure, than a re-articulation of the anthropological gaze of benevolent colonial voyeurism. In both cases, the subject that symbolically cannibalises the object of his erotic and exotic pleasure is a white person (usually male) who, in identifying his object of desire, fails to reciprocally grant the latter legitimacy and equality as a "subject of scopic desire." This process is thus not limited to the "scopophilic complex of Italian spectators who consume the body of the black star," identified by Giuliani Caponetto with reference to Fatimah Rony Toning's work *The Third Eye*.[17] Rather, it comprises a dynamic of racialisation that is more pervasive, and which acts to enable the construction of parameters and spatial coordinates for defining whiteness. In the cannibal move, the object of desire remains an object aimed at satisfying the one-directional will to know/possess that the looking/desiring subject expresses in relation to an entire society or culture, which is left with no voice. This is very clear in *Africa addio*—a mockumentary that has been criticised for manufacturing many scenes with the ideological aim of portraying post-colonial Africa as irrationally violent. On the contrary, the only important difference amongst the films I take into account here is to be found in Pasolini's *Appunti,* where a collective of Ethiopian students is asked some crucial questions about colonialism and decolonisation. Nonetheless, in his famous *Le mura di Sana'a* (1971),[18] a short film he made as an appeal to UNESCO, Pasolini devotes twelve minutes to scenes from Yemen's capital where no voice is heard but his own, as if the *paysage* was devoid of valuable lived experience and the population was meant to be part of the background. In this and other films I discuss in this essay, images are designed to describe societies and cultures, while the voice-over sorts out what is unfamiliar,

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17 Rosetta Giuliani Caponetto, "Zeudi Araya, Ines Pellegrini e il cinema italiano di seduzione coloniale," in *L'Africa in Italia*, ed. Leonardo De Franceschi (Roma: Aracne, 2013), 109–123; Fatimah Toning Rony, *The Third Eye. Race, Cinema, and Ethnographic Spectacle* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996).

18 Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Le mura di Sana'a*, Italy, 1971.

awkward or "less aligned" and shapes it into a narrative that repositions the looking subject within the safe zone of the (white, male) modern, Western and colonial subject of knowledge.

In the cannibal move, the white, male, hegemonic culture allows the Other's racialised body to access its space, but only on condition that the black body's subject be configured as a "tame-able" (own-able) object. As long as it is subordinate, in fact, the presence of the black body serves to continuously reaffirm the hegemony of whiteness. This dynamic has been noted in relation to both plantations and colonial territories (by a series of authors from African-American novelist Toni Morrison to Antillean anti-colonial thinker Frantz Fanon), in which the slave owners'/settlers' whiteness and wealth were measured by the number of black bodies "available" to them. In relation to intimacy, as I have argued for erotic/exotic films starring Zeudi Araya and Laura Gemser, the presence of a subaltern and racialised Other reaffirms the "certainty" of the desiring subject's own whiteness[19] even (or perhaps especially) when this whiteness has been historically challenged, as in the Italian case; it also serves to reaffirm male dominance, even (or perhaps especially) when this dominance is constantly called into question. In the case of cine-reportage, the function of reassuring the looking subject about his whiteness and masculinity is not assigned to the erotic/sexual encounter but to the epistemic position he holds through his voice-over comment. The hidden presence of the director behind the camera is unveiled as meaningful through the voice-over, which universalises the viewpoint of the narrator, returning him his normativity and centrality.

This process of "reverse mirroring" (in which racialised Otherness produced by white norms reproduces whiteness itself) does not mean that black bodies such as those shown in Pasolini's cine-reportage do not exercise agency and/or express strong subjectivity. As I will show in the following paragraph, the decolonising/postcolonial Other retains a subjectivity (be it armed or peaceful) that, whether in the narrative that is meant to celebrate it or in the narrative that denies it, cannot be silenced. It is at the same time constrained in its contextual positionality within the universal paradigm of political liberation (Pasolini) and seen as an irreducible, always exceeding (anti-colonial) ontology (Guareschi and Jacopetti). My focus here is on the discursive strategies deployed to interpret, reduce to intelligibility and somehow patronise that subjectivity.

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19 bell hooks, "Eating the Other," in *Black Look. Race and Representation*, ed. bell hooks (Boston: South Ends, 1992), 21–40.

3. White masculinity and post-fascist Italy

A clearer picture of the social and discursive practices underlying the gaze of the "looking subject," hence an analysis of the construction of masculinity and class, is necessary in order to explore those strategies. In this paragraph, I will focus on the structuring of hegemonic (white) masculinities in light of the social changes and tensions that characterised Italy at the time. Amongst those tensions were, on the one hand, the restructuring of male gender roles in the Italian Fordist society and the feminist critique of patriarchy (including the male and heteronormative hegemonic culture that sustained the whole patriarchal apparatus); and, on the other, the rise of many racialised political subjectivities in the West, Africa and Vietnam, breaking the chains of colonially imposed inferiority.

In view of these challenges, the male, heterosexual, "white and Mediterranean"[20] hegemonic culture, which has been subject to scrutiny since the immediate aftermath of World War II, went in search of discursive tools to re-establish its own centrality and realign "the margins"—at both discursive and social level—within the dominant capitalist and patriarchal framework. That is, to realign aspirations for emancipation and forms of radical female subjectivity, as well as those of the "revolution of the miserable" (Pasolini 1963) and "the wretched of the earth" that was taking place both "at home" and abroad.[21]

Two strategies were seemingly at play. First, political and social resistance to legal reforms (from abortion and divorce laws to family law reform and the legalisation of cross-dressing and transvestism), not to mention resistance to relinquishing colonial possessions like Somalia and ideas of imperial grandeur[22] from predominantly male-led post-war parties

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20 Gaia Giuliani, "Per un'analisi intersezionale dell'orientalismo nella televisione italiana contemporanea," in *Orientalismi italiani*, ed. Gabriele Proglio, vol. 3 (Castagnito: Antares, 2013b), 190–208; Gaia Giuliani, "L'italiano negro. La bianchezza degli italiani, dall'Unità al Fascismo," in *Bianco e nero. Storia dell'identità razziale degli italiani*, ed. Gaia Giuliani and Cristina Lombardi-Diop (Milano-Firenze: Le Monnier Università-Mondadori Education, 2013a).

21 On the link between feminist movements and erotic cinema in the seventies, see in particular Rosetta Giuliani Caponetto, "Blaxploitation Italian Style," in *Postcolonial Italy. Challenging National Homogeneity*, ed. Cristina Lombardi-Diop and Caterina Romeo (London-New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 191–203. See also Giacomo Manzoli, "Crisi e mascheramenti della sessualità maschile nel cinema italiano degli anni Sessanta," *Cinergie*, no. 5 (2014): 11–22.

22 Antonio M. Morone, "Il vizio coloniale tra storia e memoria," in *Quel che resta dell'impero*, ed. Valeria Deplano and Alessandro Pes (Milano: Mimesis, 2014),

and institutions. Second, a reassessment of the centrality of the main hegemonic white masculinities in the public sphere.

My assumption is that hegemonic masculinities are many and at times conflicting, and that they have important effects on the way gender roles and ideas of normative femininity are forged. My exploration of articulations of hegemonic masculinities is framed by Raewyn Connell's analysis and concepts and applied to a specific time in Italian history when critiques of fascist patriarchal masculinity stemmed from profound social transformations—the economic boom, the rise of nuclear families, mass consumption of manufactured goods and cultural products, women's entry into the labour market and their increased professional/educational training, economic independence, sexual liberation, and political participation.[23] Men's and women's different positionalities and *gaze* were to be re-assessed in a discursive and political/legal structure that would confirm the centrality of patriarchy without clashing with Fordist imperatives and ideas of progress and mass consumption. A case in point is Jacopetti's *Mondocane* series, where the positionality expressed through the voice-over and choice of images clearly reflects bias and prejudice against those who supposedly did not fit with the preordained model of masculinity and whiteness. In the case of Pasolini, whose political position against women's subordination, pro-divorce, and for a public debate on sexuality[24] exceeded the moralistic view of the Communist Party,[25] the celebration of the Italian hegemonic masculinity is absent and/or criticised. Nevertheless, in *Appunti* as well as in *La rabbia*, his critical gaze does not prevent him from patronising and infantilising black and Algerian women: Algerians are miserable gypsies (*La rabbia* 35:27–36:09), while black girls "cannot do anything but smile" (*Appunti* 7:20).[26]

351–370; ibid., Alessandro Pes, "La Democrazia Cristiana e la decolonizzazione mancata (1946–1950)," 417–438.

23 Raewyn Connell and James Messerschmidt, "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept," *Gender & Society* 19, no. 6 (2005): 829–59.

24 Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Comizi d'amore*, Italy, 1965 and "Il coito, l'aborto, la falsa tolleranza del potere, il conformismo dei progressisti," (published as "Sono contro l'aborto," *Corriere della sera*, January 19, 1975), in *Scritti corsari*, ed. Pier Paolo Pasolini (Milano: Garzanti, 1975).

25 Sandro Bellassai, *La legge del desiderio. Il progetto Merlin e l'Italia degli anni Cinquanta* (Roma: Carocci, 2006).

26 *La rabbia*, YouTube video,
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8ay4IschOBw&t=4682s;
Appunti per un'orestiade africana, YouTube video,
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tjcx8Mhtoxc.

As made evident by Jacopetti's *Mondocane 1* and *La donna nel mondo*, the hegemonic gender culture needed to forge a post-fascist capitalist/consumable set of masculinities in continuity with the traditional notions of virility, family and domestic hierarchy inherited from the past and partially re-processed by fascism—as well as with ideas of sexual liberation, romantic love, and urbanised family that since the late 1950s had proved to be both revolutionary and easily marketable in post-war national and transnational Western societies.

The "traditional" model of masculinity I refer to was constructed on the basis of a heteronormative conceptualisation of private relationships and public life that drew on the fascist icon of a strong, athletic, tanned, prolific and sexually voracious man for its notion of virility, and from the Catholic Church for ideas of morality, sexuality, family and patriarchy. The appeal to passionateness (which I summarise in the term "Mediterraneanness") was proudly supported as part of a discourse of "positive" re-appropriation reclaiming the ostensibly negative characteristics (namely, passionateness, hypersexuality, deceitfulness, unreliability, in a word "backwardness," due to the mix with Hamitic and Semitic bloodlines) that had been assigned to Mediterranean masculinity by the hegemonic culture of central and northern Europe and transformed the meaning associated with them. Nevertheless, the construction of the white, Mediterranean masculinity that took shape between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries had a solid structure but was variously articulated according to discourses about class divisions, territorial belongings, and national and imperial propaganda. The differential inclusion of men into hegemonic masculinity persisted in post-war bourgeois and northern social and institutional cultures. A fine example of this is the portrayal of southern Italian (Apulian) masculinity in the opening scene of Jacopetti's *Mondocane 1.* During the celebrations marking Rodolfo Valentino's birth anniversary, the camera indulges in mocking young Valentino wannabes as if it were referencing the famous Criminal Atlas compiled by the criminologist Cesare Lombroso.

Clearly, in the postmodern late fifties to mid-1970s, the meaning of white Mediterranean masculinity inevitably underwent additional shifts and re-modulations in a context that was also characterised by significant social struggles concerning industrial factory settings and the industrial labour crisis; traditional political party culture and the critiques raised by social movements; the bourgeoisie and the crisis of the bourgeoisie; local horizons and global horizons; feminist and gay movements; and conservative and neo-fascist backlash.[27] Nonetheless, certain meanings

27 Manzoli provides a key analysis of the representation of Italian male identity crisis in films of that period. Giacomo Manzoli, "Italians do it Worse: la crisi della

remained deeply foundational to male self-representations of the day—simultaneously object and subject of consumption within a highly gendered market of global products, and constructed as hegemonic in the cultural and social life of cities and small towns alike.[28] The same issue arises by contrast in Guareschi's musings on femininity, marriage, family and consumerism: masculinity is obscured by women's aspirations to share in the opportunities offered by the Italian "economic miracle" and the ensuing female emancipation from patriarchal time/space restrictions. As a result, men seem to be squeezed or nullified in a "massified" world that traps them between the "modern woman" and "rock 'n' roll."

According to a widely circulating theme in mass culture, Italian colonial rule was above reproach, and its colonial violence was non-existent compared to the main colonial powers.[29] It was a widely held myth that Italian racism had been milder than its French or British counterparts and part of a friendly, civilising colonial project made up of "workers," whose aim was not to conquer but to make the land "productive" for all to benefit. Indeed, as I have discussed elsewhere,[30] this myth resurfaced in films starring Zeudi Araya, who was generally cast in roles replicating the figure of the colonial prey; Laura Gemser's mesmerising poses and glances (*Emanuelle*) served instead to launch Italian masculinity onto the stage of global society and postcolonial touristic adventures.

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mascolinità nella commedia erotica italiana degli anni Settanta," *Valle dell'Eden: semestrale di cinema e audiovisivi* 9, no. 19 (2007), doi: 10.1400/109833. See also Sergio Rigoletto, *Masculinity and Italian Cinema. Sexual Politics, Social Conflict and Male Crisis in the 1970s* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014); Jaqueline Reich, *Beyond the Latin Lover: Marcello Mastroianni, Masculinity, and Italian Cinema* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2014); and Natalie Fullwood, *Cinema, Gender, and Everyday Space: Comedy, Italian Style* (London: Palgrave, 2015). For a socio-historical analysis, see Sandro Bellassai, "L'autunno del patriarca. Insicurezze maschili nel secondo dopoguerra," in *Politica ed emozioni nella storia d'Italia dal 1848 ad oggi*, ed. Penelope Morris, Francesco Ricatti, and Mark Seymour (Roma: Viella, 2012), 191–210.

28 See Erving Goffman, *Gender Advertisements* (London: Macmillan, 1979) and Perilli, "'Sesso' e 'razza' al muro," 91–126.

29 Ellena Liliana, "Geografie della razza nel cinema italiano del primo dopoguerra 1945–1955," in Giuliani, *Il colore della nazione*, 15–31; Vincenza Perilli, "Tammurriata Nera. Sessualità interrazziale nel secondo dopoguerra italiano," in "*La 'realtà' transnazionale della razza*," ed. Tatiana Petrovich Njegosh, special issue, *Iperstoria*, no. 6 (2015): 126–142; Silvana Patriarca, "Fear of Small Numbers: 'Brown Babies' in Postwar Italy," *Contemporanea*, no. 4 (2015a): 537–568.

30 Giuliani,"La razza fuoristrada."

The colonial prey and the uninhibited black hunter are the two faces of the same Jezebel; along with the filmic narratives in which they are deployed, these figures release the male gaze from feelings of guilt for desiring and consuming a black female body. In the case of *Emanuelle*, the allure of post-racial, post-civil rights achievements makes the voyeuristic gaze on Gemser a simple issue of free, consensual, and fully enjoyed (sexual) consumption; in the case of Araya's characters, the trope of colonial decadence—along with the lost sense of superiority—in loving a colonised, racialised (female) subaltern plays a central role. In any case, the white male desire to look at and consume "diversity" has been cleansed of all brutality and any reference to (post-)colonial power relations. The guilt-free reclamation of the male colonial gaze seems to be a recurring feature in Jacopetti's and Guareschi's works. Cases in point are Jacopetti's portrayal of voracious Pacific Islands women hunting men and of Brazzi's fans "going barbarian" on him (*Mondocane 1*); his grotesque depiction of fattened women in Tabar; or Guareschi's close-ups of black women parading to celebrate independence in the Congo (*La rabbia)*, who, in line with fascist beliefs on miscegenation (see the *Codice unico per le colonie 1936–1937*), are perceived as ugly and unattractive—as if they had never been sexually objectified and abused by colonisers, whether Belgian or Italian. In *Le donne del mondo,* Jacopetti & Co.'s guilt-free take on Papua New Guinean women and interracial sexual relations is especially manifest in the scene describing the Scottish "mute and deaf" veteran with a personal army of fifty-two wives and fifty-two children.

The above analysis affords a more accurate picture of the positionality and gendered/racist culture behind the white male gaze through which the recently decolonised or soon-to-be decolonised world was described in Italian cine reportage. When it comes to countries fighting for decolonisation, and even when the standpoint is that of Pier Paolo Pasolini, masculinity and whiteness are concealed behind the camera and softened both through the physical absence of the "desiring male body" and through the presence of a voice-over emulating the mildly reassuring, poetical male voices used in post-war Italian television for educational purposes. Photo-reportage "from around the world," which has filled magazines since the anti-colonial struggles with the (social and sexual) costumes and habits of the "primitive" populations,[31] was often the link between these two apparently distant genres.

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31 Monica di Barbora, "Colonialismo e identità nazionale di genere tra fascismo ed età repubblicana," in Deplano and Pes, *Quel che resta dell'impero*, 191–208.

Conclusion

I have tried to render the cultural complexity of a particular time in Italy's post-war history, linking some cultural visual products to their contexts, but further analytical passages are needed to account for the multiple readings offered by such productions. They can be viewed as akin to open texts, the scope of which cannot be exhausted in a single exploration of texts and contexts. Beside their political manifesto and cultural relevance, the specific symbolic material that has been selected and re-articulated within each author's poetics needs to be analysed. This will be my next step. Although it may seem unusual to consider films such as Pasolini and Guareschi's *La rabbia* and Pasolini's *Appunti per un'orestiade africana* alongside Jacopetti's work,[32] I believe that a parallel reading of these works is made possible by their common attempt at revisiting—in the midst of anti-colonial struggles—knowledge about "distant worlds" through the camera and the director's commentary, whether in his own voice or that of a (male) narrator.

In these examples, the close connection between visuality-as-the-dispenser-of-self-evident-truth, the exoticisation of "Other" contexts (just freed from colonial rule, hence a litmus test for the degree of civilisation achieved not so much by the people themselves as by the former colonial powers) and the re-reading of the colonial archive is at the very foundation of cinematic narration. Racist language is diluted even in the works of openly right-wing directors or fascist nostalgics (Guareschi and Jacopetti), who cast off the semantic apparatus for imposing inferiority typical of the colonial period and of the segregation-era United States. And yet, in the work of both left- and right-wing filmmakers, the images and the commentary invoke the substratum of "barbarism" that is an inherent trait of Other worlds. Indeed, what all these films have in common is the idea that the decolonising/postcolonial "Other" (understood as non-modern and non-capitalist) retains something ontologically "traditional" as opposed to modernity (Pasolini)[33]—evidence of the need to return to colonial rule, lest these "atavistic" peoples abandoned by their "imperial guides" fall back

32 Dalla Gassa has explored this co-occurrence, noting that there are a number of similarities also in terms of style and materials used (documentary footage, fictional film footage, home films, newsreels, animation and interviews), in "'Tutto il mondo è paese'. I mondo movies tra esotismi e socializzazione del piacere," *Cinergie*, no. 5 (2014): 83–95.

33 Zygmunt Barański, "Pasolini: Culture, Croce, Gramsci," in *Culture and Conflict in Postwar Italy*, ed. Zygmunt Barański and Robert Lumley (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1990), 139–159.

into barbarism (Guareschi and Jacopetti). Here, the idea of an exoticised *piccolo mondo antico* (Yemen and Polynesia), which must hold fast in the face of consumerism and homogenising fads (Pasolini and Jacopetti, respectively), is enucleated. Not only does this ancient little world nourish a hegemonic gaze (albeit in "good faith," as with anti-capitalist Pasolini, a supporter of anti-colonial struggles) that is differently white, male, intellectual, "patronising," and in search of an escape route from massification,[34] but it also proves useful to a more classist, sexist, chauvinistic and nostalgic intellectualism that is engaged in the construction of the idea of a superior European and Western Self (Guareschi and Jacopetti & Co. in particular).

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34 This perspective has also been shared by Ernesto de Martino and, more recently, Carlo Levi. See Forgacs, *Italy's Margins*, 141–143. See also David Forgacs, "The Communist Party and Culture," in Barański and Lumley, *Culture and Conflict*, 97–113. See also Shelleen Greene, *Equivocal Subjects: Between Italy and Africa. Construction of Racial and National identity in The Italian Cinema* (New York: Continuum, 2014), 238.

PART TWO:

NEWSPAPERS, COMICS, TRADING CARDS AND PHOTOGRAPHY

CHAPTER EIGHT

ABOUT UGO FERRANDI: THE ULTIMATE VANISHING ACT

ADOLFO MIGNEMI
AND MARIA GIOVANNA NUZZI

In his last will and testament, Ugo Ferrandi (1852–1928)[1] made a surprising request: "all my manuscripts, diaries, memoirs, notebooks or other, all the letters, my diplomas, honours, etc. shall be destroyed by my cousins Gaetano and Giovanni Agnelli. If possible, they will burn everything in Sardinia,[2] and at least one of the two brothers must be present."[3]

During his life, Ferrandi had accumulated an enormous amount of documents, objects, and specimens. An article published in 1943 about his friendship with Arthur Rimbaud describes the Ferrandi family home as follows: "in the semi-dark rooms, books, prints and weapons were piled up in boxes that contained a treasure trove of notes, manuscripts and letters." At the time of writing his testament, Ferrandi was "tired, morally tired, [and] no longer passionate about anything."[4] Thus, he requested that all those "memories, notes, manuscripts, letters, and even the insignia of the ephemeral honours"[5] be burned after his death.

Ferrandi probably thought that his vast library alone was to survive him, along with the collections of objects and specimens that he had donated

1 Francesco Surdich, "Ugo Ferrandi," in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 46 (Roma: Istituto dell'Enciclopedia italiana, 1996).
2 Sardinia was an old farmstead near Novara and also the site of a military bakery that supplied bread to the barracks.
3 Anna Maria Gavello, *Ugo Ferrandi, esploratore novarese* (Novara: Società Storica Novarese, 1975), 131.
4 Ezio Maria Gray, "Rimbaud in Africa nei ricordi di Ugo Ferrandi," *Turismo* 6, no. 4-5 (1943): 43.
5 Gavello, *Ugo Ferrandi*, 131.

over the years to various institutions in Italy, and the civic museum of Novara in particular.[6] However, thanks to the incredible amount of documents he amassed and the multiple copies he made to protect them from accidental loss or destruction, the explorer and colonial official's activities are still traceable in various archives.

The Novara Public Library, for example, has inherited several thousand volumes, which formed in the 1920s perhaps the most comprehensive Italian private collection devoted to colonial issues. After his death, the Patrio Museo Novarese acquired several objects from his African travels to integrate the first collection of *cimeli africani* (African relics) he had donated to the residents of Novara in the late nineteenth century. Yet, the museum was not so much interested in the objects themselves, coming from all over the world, as in celebrating this eminent citizen of Novara through them; interestingly enough, to date the items in this collection still lack basic scientific information.

Ferrandi first arrived in Eastern Africa in 1886 with the explorer Augusto Franzoj, a native of Vercelli. He became an expert in the trade routes connecting the coast and the interior regions of Somalia and in 1890, the Società di esplorazione commerciale in Africa hired him to survey the flows of the Jubba and Omo rivers in light of possible commercial penetration into the area. In 1892, he took part to the first expedition led by Vittorio Bottego, and three years later he was tasked with establishing and managing a trading post in Lugh, 300 kilometres off the coast. His early beginnings in Africa as a traveller and explorer eventually led to a position as colonial official, but he always maintained a close relationship with his home town and the local elites, who had developed over time important networks in the areas where Italy could continue its colonial expansion. Located until the Second Italian War of Independence (1859) on the border between the Kingdom of Sardinia and the Lombardo-Venetian territories of the Austrian Empire, Novara was regarded as being of strategic importance even after the Risorgimento. A number of important military bases were built in the area, resulting in a high concentration of officers who had often trained in the colonies. Despite their economic and cultural ties with nearby Lombardy, Novara residents had limited horizons, and its elites preferred agricultural and commercial profits to industrial investments. Given the local barriers to their entrepreneurial spirit, many officers and professionals left town for the overseas territories.

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6 On the Ferrandi collections in Novara, see: "Tra avventura e colonialismo. Novaresi in Africa Orientale alla fine dell'Ottocento," *Novara CCIAA*, no. 6 (1981).

On his way back from Africa for political, scientific or business affairs, Ferrandi would always stop off in Novara. It was there that he kept his notes, correspondence, objects and the photographic plates he had begun to use in his research. He had adopted oriental habits and loved to put on a show when in the company of friends or to awe the local people, wearing eccentric outfits and especially keeping company with Omar and Mahé—two friends he had "grown up with in Lugh" and who were considered quite exotic in Novara, although they managed to speak a few words in the local dialect.[7] Ferrandi's presence in Novara was a boon to many local newspapers eager to sustain the colonial dream. Even a minor event like a puppet show provided the opportunity to revive Italy's hopes of becoming a colonial power.[8] Likewise, as Ferrandi began donating his *cimeli africani*, the Società pel patrio Museo Novarese promised to use them for educational purposes.[9] Other donations would follow in the coming years, joining the collection bequeathed by Baldassarre Orero, the civil and military governor of Eritrea.[10]

After Ferrandi's death, a series of bequests and gifts by his friends and relatives further enriched the collection. That is how the Ferrandi-Orero Collection came to be and became the Museo Coloniale e del Risorgimento during the years of the fascist empire in Ethiopia. Advertised as a *musée sentimental* or museum of the "bourgeois reason,"[11] it moved from its first site at the Palazzo del mercato (where the courthouse was placed once it left its medieval buildings due to restoration works) to the ancient building of the Broletto, restored in the early 1930s. After the "imperial euphoria"

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7 "Capitano Ugo Ferrandi," *Il Corriere di Novara*, October 24, 1897. The brief article on the front page read: "Omar e il giovane Mahe, originari di Brava, tentano qualche cosa del nostro dialetto novarese." (Omar and the young Mahe, from Brava, try to say a few words in the local dialect).

8 "L'Africa al teatro Farè," *Il Corriere di Novara*, June 20, 1897. The article announced: "Stasera il marionettista Sebastiani darà un altro dramma africano, un'altra battaglia…anzi due: *Coati* [sic] e *Senafè*. È un modo anche questo di istillare ne' *piccoli* il patriottismo!" (Tonight the puppeteer Sebastiani will stage another African tragedy, another battle...or rather two: Coatit and Senafè. That's another way to instil patriotism in the little ones!).

9 Maria Carla Uglietti, "Il museo etnografico Faraggiana Ferrandi di Novara. Storia della collezione," in *Si e no padroni del mondo. Etiopia 1936–36. Immagine e consenso per un impero* (Novara: ISR Novara–Comune di Novara, 1982), 147; Cecilia Pennacini, ed., *L'Africa in Piemonte tra '800 e '900* (Torino: Centro Piemontese di Studi Africani, 1999).

10 "Tra avventura e colonialismo," 62.

11 Marie Louise Plessen and Patrice Bachelard-Daniel Abadie, *Le Musée sentimental* (Paris: Centre G. Pompidou, 1977).

had subsided, and as a result of the vicissitudes faced by museums in Novara through the years, the collection left the Broletto at the end of 1937 and moved between different locations in the following years, until it reached its final destination at the Faraggiana palace, where it was open to the public until the last decade of the twentieth century.[12] This story illustrates how the relations between the local elites and the fascist regime evolved; at the same time, it bespeaks the impact of rivalries between emerging contenders (i.e., Aldo Rossini and Ezio Maria Gray) for political control of the community.[13] Apparently exalted by Fascism's nationalist colonial rhetoric in the 1930s, Ferrandi's cultural heritage was in actual fact completely wiped out. A case in point was the government's decision in 1932 to change the name of Lugh, the Somali town where he had served as colonial official, into Lugh Ferrandi, believing that this was the best way to celebrate his heritage.

In Novara, the Ferrandi-Orero Collection was moved from its original location and replaced by a vast exhibition of paintings donated by a private collector. Meanwhile, *I pirati del Golfo* (Pirates of the Bay), a feature film inspired by the explorer's life, was in the works in Somalia, but production was halted when Italy entered the Second World War.[14] After the war, Remo Fumagalli, honorary curator of the civic museums, completed the first ever inventory of the collection more or less simultaneously with an inspection by the Civic Commission on Museums and Galleries—in search of the donated items that had gone missing between the mid-1930s and the end of the Second World War.[15] However, it is not easy to understand the rationale behind the Commission's list of missing items, which included 117 letters, 2 reports, some sketches drawn by Ferrandi, 5 letters and several newspaper clippings. The inventory carried out by Cesira Filesi in the 1970s seems to suggest that these documents may have been incorporated into the collections of the African Museum in Rome[16]—unfortunately, this hypothesis cannot be tested

12 "Tra avventura e colonialismo," 73–74.

13 On this issue, see Adolfo Mignemi, "Caratteri del fascismo a Novara," in *Novara fa da sé. Atti del convegno di Belgirate 1993* (Novara: Provincia di Novara-Istituto storico della Resistenza di Novara, 1999), 69–87.

14 Filming in Somalia lasted sixteen weeks and was documented by the magazine *Cinema*, directed by Vittorio Mussolini, between April 25 and July 10, 1940. *Cinema* no. 92 (1940): 94–97.

15 "Tra avventura e colonialismo," 17–19.

16 Cesira Filesi, *L'archivio del Museo africano. Presentazione e inventario dei documenti* (Roma: Istituto Italo Africano, 1980), 66–69, 118–127.

because of the archive's current predicament. Aside from these issues, the post-war period was decidedly uneventful.

The Second World War put an end to the colonial era, even for the winners, and yet it introduced new forms of neo-colonial dependence. Together with Germany and Japan, Italy was one of the defeated countries and despite the unquestioned heroism of anti-fascist popular engagement since the 1943 armistice, peace had far-reaching consequences. Borders were redrawn, and Italy lost much of the territory it held in 1940. Thus, the "empire" disappeared before Italians had a chance to represent themselves as rulers and in spite of the troops' and colonisers' acts of brutality in the conquered regions, particularly in Ethiopia, Albania and Libya.[17] Defeat and the loss of the "empire" contributed to the myth of the *Italiani, brava gente*. Colonisers were not only represented as generous builders of towns, villages, roads, hospitals and other essential infrastructure but also as promoting trade as well as agricultural and industrial development[18]—a new take on the national self-portrait proposed by Mussolini in his speech on October 2, 1935, which described Italians as a "Nation of poets, artists, heroes, saints, thinkers, scientists, sailors and migrants." This perspective led to oblivion and denial, putting an end to any possibility of a critical approach to Italian colonial rule. At the same time, it made a scientific reconstruction of colonial events unattainable.

The stereotypical representation was reinforced by the UN decision in 1949 to create the Trust Territory of Somaliland with the aim to lead the former colony towards independence and place it under Italian administration. Despite initial opposition from the United Kingdom and local protests led by the Somali Youth League, which culminated in the January 1948 massacre of Italians in Mogadishu, crucial support came from the United States, and the Amministrazione fiduciaria italiana della Somalia (AFIS), comprising a large part of Somalia's present-day territory, was established. This was a unique case, seeing as at the time Italy was not yet a member of the UN, and was also the only defeated country to be granted such privilege. A structured memory of the colonial experience, such as that which is offered by a museum exhibition, had no place in this context. The history of the African Museum in Rome is exemplary of this attitude: alternating between denial, ideological manipulation, and a fascination with all things oriental, first it denied the existence of an African past, and then it hypocritically proceeded to its reconstruction.

17 Acts of brutality occurred in the "pacified" territories of Libya in the early 1930s, as well as in Ethiopia and later in Albania.
18 Enrico Castelli, ed., *Immagini & colonie* (Montone: Tamburo Parlante, 1998).

This uncertain and unstable context explains the museum's setbacks and its ultimate decline.[19]

The Ferrandi-Orero collection was not an exception. In post-war Italy, cultural institutions in Novara seemed to view Ferrandi's colonial memories and the way Fascism had manipulated his image as an embarrassing legacy: that would explain the fate of the "missing" documents that were never claimed back from the African Museum in Rome. A very short biography of Ferrandi was published in 1949 (the same year as the beginning of the AFIS mandate). After that, the only two significant events between 1950 and the centenary of his birth in 1952 were an article by Enrico Emanuelli, who sought to revive Ferrandi's image focusing on his friendship with the French poet Arthur Rimbaud,[20] and a commemorative wall plaque placed by the Historical Society of Novara in the building where he was born. Yet, the laconic style of the epigraph, "Ugo Ferrandi, explorer and coloniser of Somalia was born here on January 6, 1852,"[21] was very far from the sparkling rhetoric of the plaque placed in 1931 on the facade of the house where he had spent the last years of his life:

> Having tempered the boldness of youth across the seas, he landed on the coast of Somalia, destined to be Italian, and there he laid the foundations for the colonial fortune. He ruled over the souls of those people, who praised him as a divine emissary in their legends, and when the sad flames of Adwa seemed to blaze within the heroic heart of the country, the brightest spark burned in his brave heart, and he consigned the epic page of Lugh to history. [. . .] His whole life was about great deeds of bravery, foresight, and pure Italic faith. He was a precursor and guardian of our prominence overseas.[22]

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19 Francesca Gandolfo, *Il Museo Coloniale di Roma (1904–1971)* (Roma: Gangemi, 2014); Costantino Di Sante, "Il Museo dell'Africa Italiana dal fascismo alla Repubblica," in *Quel che resta dell'Impero. La cultura coloniale degli italiani*, ed. Valeria Deplano and Alessandro Pes (Milano-Udine: Mimesis, 2014), 295–315.
20 Enrico Emanuelli, "Deux lettres d'Arthur Rimbaud," *La Table ronde* (January 1950): 179–183. The article had already appeared in *Inventario*, no. 2 (Summer 1949).
21 "Ugo Ferrandi esploratore e colonizzatore della Somalia qui nacque il 6 gennaio 1852."
22 "Temprata su tutti i mari l'audace giovinezza approdò ai lidi somali destinati all'Italia e vi pose il fondamento della fortuna coloniale. Fu signore dell'animo di quelle genti che lo cantano inviato divino in loro leggende e quando il triste rogo d'Adua parve ardere tutto il cuore eroico della patria, ne accolse la più fulgida favilla nel prode cuore per donare alla storia la pagina epica di Lugh…Tutta la sua

Around 1953, several objects and documents that had belonged to Ferrandi were donated to the civic museums, the Public Library and the State Archives of Novara. The choice to break up the collection revealed once again the desire to obliterate his memory and refrain from analysing his life and deeds and, more generally, the Italian colonial past from a scientific and historical standpoint. On that occasion, for example, part of the original photographic plates were delivered to the local State Archives and then forgotten until May 2016.[23] The remaining plates (two hundred and thirty-six of them) were stored in an armoire at the civic museum and left there until 1982, when I had a chance to briefly catalogue the collection before it was once again made inaccessible to researchers until autumn 2016.[24]

Italian historiography rediscovered Ferrandi in the mid-1970s, when Francesco Surdich from the University of Genoa first analysed his life and work with a scientific approach as part of his research on explorers and Italian colonialism. In the academic year 1973–74, Anna Maria Gavello at the Department of Humanities of the University of Genoa wrote a dissertation on Ferrandi, which was published two years later by the Historical Society of Novara. Meanwhile, the Public Library catalogued the collection of books donated by the local explorer. However, maps and grey literature were not indexed, and no description was made available for the corpus of notes and sketches tucked within the pages of his books. Two more cataloguing projects were launched in the following years, albeit with the same criteria.

In 1982, thanks to an exhibition on local experiences during colonialism promoted by the Istituto storico della Resistenza in provincia di Novara, the books stored at the town's Public Library and thirteen albums of photographic materials were rediscovered.[25] In that same period, the two hundred and thirty-six original plates were found in the storerooms of the civic museums and quickly indexed. Ferrandi and his historical role saw a renewed interest following the exhibition, and important research was conducted by Enrico Marini, Roberto Ribera, Marco Scardigli, Francesco

vita fu di grandi geste luminose d'ardimento, d'accortezza, di purissima fede italica. Precursore, affermatore della nostra grandezza oltremare."

23 Adolfo Mignemi, ed., *Protagonisti dell'arte novarese. I fotografi* (Novara: Consorzio Mutue, 2016).

24 "Tra avventura e colonialismo," 65–72.

25 "Tra avventura e colonialismo," 20–56.

Surdich, and Carlo Zaghi,[26] as well as by Gabriella Campassi with her remarkable doctoral work.[27]

At the end of the 1980s, the Faraggiana palace was closed for restoration, and all its collections were moved to storage. During these works, the museum decided to renovate its natural history collection and radically change the exhibits. Thus, the section devoted to the colonial experience and local travellers was no longer open to the public. In spite of the important scientific contributions following a renewal of interest in the 1980s, this decision prevented any innovative project or reappraisal involving Ugo Ferrandi's and Baldassarre Orero's heritage from taking place. Other notable local personalities were also neglected, such as Alessandro Faraggiana, whose collection is in fact much larger than what is on exhibit today; Guido Boggiani and his collection of artefacts from the Chaco region in Paraguay; Luigi Marzoni Fecia, a native of Cossato who had bequeathed to the museum several Ethiopian musical instruments inherited from General Charles Genè; and finally Eugenia Severina's and Augusto Calpini's collections, the former devoted to the Congo and the latter to the Mesoamerican region.[28] Bureaucratic obstacles also prevented scholars from accessing the collection and carrying out any scientific research on the materials stored at the museum.

In 1998, an exhibition devoted to Arthur Rimbaud in Genoa featured one of the famous letters from his correspondence with Ferrandi.[29] That same year, an important auction house included in its catalogue several documents, letters and diaries that had belonged to Ferrandi. It might be supposed that those items had indeed escaped the destruction ordered in the explorer's will. Yet, no attention was paid to the historical value of the documents, and the auction house chose to emphasise the numismatic value of the numerous stamps on the cards. Several researchers tried to bring back to Novara this remarkable corpus of documents. However, despite the ridiculously low investment required— even lower than the

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26 A complete bibliography of works published at the time is available in Surdich, *Ugo Ferrandi*.

27 Gabriella Campassi, "Una struttura del sapere storico sull'Africa. La biblioteca di Ugo Ferrandi" (PhD diss., Università degli studi di Siena, 1992).

28 Uglietti, *Il museo etnografico*, 147–148; Alessandra Antinori, "1929. Il Museo Etnografico Ferrandi," in *Museo novarese: documenti, studi e progetti per una nuova immagine delle collezioni civiche*, ed. Maria Laura Tomea Gavazzoli (Novara: Istituto geografico De Agostini, 1987), 99; Igor Festari, "Il museo tra passato e futuro," in *Una famiglia per Novara: i Faraggiana* (Novara: Interlinea, 2011), 193–196.

29 Giuseppe Marcenaro and Piero Boragina, *J'arrive ce matin... L'universo poetico di Arthur Rimbaud* (Milano: Electa, 1998), 226–227.

price of one of Rimbaud's letters—all efforts to find a local sponsor failed, as explained by one of the organisers of the Genoa exhibition. In the end, all that was achieved was an official order prohibiting a fragmented sale—which, ironically, recognised the historical importance of the collection.

The vicissitudes of Ferrandi's heritage in Novara did not end here. In 2010, a documentary titled *Un quadro bianco senza immagini, senza niente* was supposed to complete an art installation in the exhibition *Gemini Muse*. According to the authors, the project was eventually abandoned because of the obstacles to accessing the Ferrandi collection that I have described here. The last chapter in the story began when the most recent reorganisation of the collections in the Faraggiana museums had just been completed, and yet it is just as significant as all those that took place throughout the twentieth century. For this reason, we have decided to retrace the events through the impassioned memories and notes of those who were involved with the filming.

1. A white scene with no images, no nothing

"Is there an archive of images?" I asked an employee in the library hallways. A lady walked by, and on hearing our conversation and the employee's negative reply to my inquiry, she corrected him mentioning some photo albums in a strongbox. Seeing as the strongbox was kept in the management office and the keys were not available to all employees, I was asked to schedule an appointment and explain the reasons for my request. Management informed me that I would be allowed to access the records only in the presence of an employee, in a darkened environment, and most importantly that the images were not to be exposed to direct light and should be handled with gloves. The albums were brought to a darkened room in a shopping cart. They gave me five albums with a thick binding, one of which stood out for its small dimensions. Four were numbered and had a title and a name on their cover: Ugo Ferrandi. The cover of the fifth album was conspicuously blank. At first, I looked at them as a whole, trying to figure out what they had in common: subjects, places, years, authors, techniques or even a tonality. I tried to think of other categories, but to no avail. Only the small and anonymous album somewhat paradoxically looked different, its photographs suggesting the presence of a distinct gaze behind the camera. I never stopped taking notes while looking at the images, as all those restrictions caused me to feel a certain anxiety, and at the same time I worried that this would be my first and last encounter with them:

Album #2
–landscapes with short captions;
–large and detailed views of villages and landscapes;
–a man on a camel gives the camera a hard stare;
–heavily faded group photo;
–sequence of miniature portraits, a woman on the top left of a double spread;
–two naked women, one of them posing with her legs slightly open towards the camera: *L'origine du monde* by Courbet. Upon reflection: think infibulation.

As I leafed through those page without the benefit of wording or captions, the tension grew thick. The images seemed to suggest that, contrary to my habit, I simply observe. They seemed to be speaking their own language, one that I did not understand—nor was it the language of the person who had assembled the albums or taken the photographs. They were asking to be heard rather than simply seen or read.

I took refuge in the only publication devoted to the albums, a special issue of the Novara Chamber of Commerce magazine, printed in 1981 and titled *Tra avventura e colonialismo. Novaresi in Africa Orientale alla fine dell'ottocento.*[30] It had been published on the occasion of an exhibition held in Novara and other Italian cities: *Sì e no padroni del mondo. Immagini e consenso per un impero. Etiopia 1935–1936*. While preparing the exhibition, the curator had stumbled upon thirteen of Ferrandi's albums, including the four large ones I was able to inspect. The text is interspersed with reproductions and crowded with captions and codes suggesting authorship: F., N., Z., etc. A vivid, bold-hued imaginary is reflected in the few reproduced images: the bodies striking poses for the camera—naked or barely clothed and wearing ornaments—the portraits, and the closed landscapes call to mind the emerging fields of anthropology and ethnography during the nineteenth century, when the first colonial ventures promoted what would later be defined as scientific research.

What emerged from the pages of the publication were two specific colonial imaginaries: one belonging to the time when such imaginary grew stronger and the other belonging to the time it evoked. Akin to entries in a travel diary, the photographs revealed political and military lines crossed, surpassed or faintly intertwined with what was, or was not, part of the landscape on either side of the front line: subjects and objects, characters, species or figures, whether known or just unearthed. The tension I felt at the sight of those albums made me resolve to remain as close as possible to the images. During conversations with researchers who were familiar

30 "Tra avventura e colonialismo," 20–56.

with his work, I learned that unlike others who took similar paths in the same years, Ferrandi was regarded as someone who considered photography a duty rather than a pleasure. I was also told that other documents stored in the same library, also part of the Ferrandi estate, were crucial to a meaningful reading of his photographs. His collection of postcards and photographs was still unexplored; besides, in the thirty years since their discovery, nothing had been done to preserve the state of his two hundred thirty-six plates.

I wrote to the curator: "Here is the text to go with the image *Nothing personal States of amnesia from U. F.'s Album*. I am sending you the images for the catalogue (fig. 1 and fig. 2), can we publish them both?"

On the same day I mailed these ghost-like images for the exhibition catalogue, I met a representative from the library and asked to see the photographic plates. She invited me to forward the same request by mail to the person in charge of Cultural Heritage at the City of Novara, Museum and Library Department, and I took the opportunity to suggest a meeting. Meanwhile, the planned exhibition was moved to a new venue: a building next to the library. Asking for advice from a friend who was working on similar research, I wrote: "March 16, 2010. On my last visit to the library to work on Ugo Ferrandi's photographs, I asked to see at least part of the 236 photographic plates kept at the Faraggiana Ferrandi Museum in Novara, but my request was refused. The director of the museum has urged me to focus on something else. It looks like the situation has taken an awkward turn, so the first thing I'll do is go see the albums again, hoping they won't veto that, too."

Fig. 1 *Tripoli*, photo by Ugo Ferrandi, undated, Biblioteca Civica, Novara. Fondo Ferrandi, Album no. 4, 82.956.

Fig. 2 *Maha Ali*, photo by Ugo Ferrandi, undated, Biblioteca Civica, Novara. Fondo Ferrandi, Album no. 3, 229.770.

The thought of those prints in the albums, the fading photographs, and the signs of decay made me decide to contact an expert in photo restoration. I expected the museum management to welcome this opportunity. As I worked my way through the maze of bureaucracy, trying to figure out who was responsible for what, those weeks in Novara soon started being more about trips to offices, meetings with directors and representatives, requests, calls, mail, faxes and permits than about Ferrandi's photographs. And that was not the only maze I had to navigate: all across Italy and its myriad institutes, Ferrandi's photographs had left traces of their passing. I was told of the presence of other albums at the Geographical Society in Rome, probably copies of the small albums (the ones with the photographs taken by Ferrandi), and more documents and letters catalogued around 1930–1940, maybe by the IsIAO, and officially "lost."

A question arose from the frequent conversations I was having with the historians: "Were those pages intentionally left blank, or was something missing?" I then did as I had been advised to and contacted Maria Mancini to help plan my visit at the Geographical Society. She had been the head

of the Society's photographic archive[31] but no longer worked there and suggested I should contact the new person in charge. It was a brief phone call. She also insisted on the historical importance, rather than artistic, of Ferrandi's images and said: "as for those *donnine* (loose women)...it was an insignificant attraction." Her words reminded me of a painting—the only one—in one of Ferrandi's albums: *Phryne before the Areopagus*, painted by Jean-Leon Gérome in 1861. There was an apparent lack of logic in the presence of that reproduction, incomprehensible to most of those who had seen the albums. In the days before the trip to Rome, during a short visit to the house of Enrico Alberto D'Albertis in Genoa, now home to the Museum of World Cultures, I stumbled upon another Phryne, a statue this time. What impressed me was not so much the representation of the *hetaira* (whose real name may have been Mnesarete) as Hypereides' gesture of stripping her naked during the trial and the stares of the other men, which kept alternating and mixing in my mind with the women portrayed in the photographs. And above all, in Gérome's painting, Mnesarete covering her face with her arm and standing up to Hypereide, who is left holding her billowing and empty cloth.

The response from the director of the Cultural Heritage office in Novara came by fax on March 22. While thanking me for my interest in the photographic plates, she claimed that there were already "many dissertations and publications by scholars in the History of Exploration"; moreover, she stressed that "restoring the plates was already on the agenda" (yet delayed by "technical and financial constraints") and "moving the originals was not recommended," and besides, there were many "easily accessible reproductions."

The phone call with the Italian Institute for Africa and the Orient (IsIAO), formerly the Italo-African Institute, was instead particularly long. I took some notes: "The author of the photographs is not always mentioned; following the original arrangement, the archive is organised by geographical areas; the images were collected by the administrators of the imperial provinces; there is a subject heading list, where you can search by name—because there is an index by name—yet it would be better to search by content; there is a collection devoted to Ethiopia and Eritrea

31 Maria Mancini, *Obiettivo sul mondo. Viaggi ed esplorazioni nelle immagini dell'Archivio fotografico della Società geografica italiana (1866–1956)* (Roma: Società Geografica Italiana, 1996).

(extensively covered by Silvana Palma in her *L'Africa nella collezione fotografica dell'ISIAO*);[32] there is no database."

I left for Rome on April 7.

At the Geographical Society, I was allowed to inspect a large album and two small ones, similar to the one I had seen in Novara: one of these had the same exact cover, while the other looked like a fair copy—it had an index, and the photographs were numbered. The shots looked like they had been taken by Ferrandi right before or after the ones I had seen in Novara, except for a few that I was seeing for the first time. I wrote down the photograph numbers and made a few sketches to help me remember details and figures; when possible I copied the captions, too. Someone at the Society had assembled all the scattered photographs into the larger album, attempting to organise them by geographic location, i.e. continents, rather than historical periods. I asked to make copies to help me better compare the photographs, but the high price deterred me. To date, such comparison has not been made.

I called Maria Mancini again and asked if the albums may be considered as draft and fair copies. She told me that she did not think Ferrandi had been that meticulous in curating his collection. Photography was much more complex in the day, and that was also the reason why nothing was thrown away—unlike today, she added, when even photographers who are far more skilled than him discard less than perfect work. She had organised the colonial photographic production into three main categories: places visited while travelling, anthropometric photographs, and landscape and military photographs. In 2000, she had published a work on the relation between photography and geography, "from image to territory,"[33] and on the basis of her research she did not consider Ferrandi a specialist: despite his photographic attention to territorial aspects, he used photography mainly to document his activities. At the time, it was not unusual to take classes, study and devote time to research before leaving for the colonies. Photography was also often accompanied by drawing, and painters accompanying explorers were not unheard of.

By then, it was clear to me that Ferrandi's photographs, with all their faults and their being considered documentation materials, did not abide by the false dichotomy between authorship (a photographer's skills and style) and amateurism. Embedded in those faded images, precariously poised between being in-front-of the camera or behind it, were precolonial

32 Silvana Palma, *L'Africa nella collezione fotografica dell'ISIAO: il fondo Eritrea-Etiopia* (Roma: ISIAO, 2005).

33 Maria Mancini, *I geografi dietro l'obiettivo: dall'immagine al territorio* (Napoli: ESI, 2000).

Somalia, trade expeditions, exploration and survey of the territory, which may or may not have been told depending on the sanctioning gaze—a gaze that, it seemed to me at that moment, may have a clear identity and documentary relevance thanks to authorship attribution.

After reviewing the materials at the Geographical Society, I had an appointment with the person in charge of documents and photographic collections at the Istituto italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente (IsIAO). I was told right away that only the materials related to Ethiopia and Eritrea had been removed from the institute's basement and catalogued, and that Libya was a greater priority in the short-term. As for Somalia, no reorganisation was planned and everything was still stored in boxes that were hardly accessible. I asked to see the inventory of the archive of the African Museum in Rome, which included a draft index of the documents found at the IsIAO—among which presumably were the same materials that had been indexed as "Ferrandi's lost documents" in 1982 in Novara (the ones that were lost during the 1930s and 1940s). I was given the second edition, revised in 2002, where I found this information: "File no. 3: #2 albums with photographs by Ferrandi of the Juba region; #9 photographs taken by Ferrandi during the 1892 expedition to Somalia."[34] I asked to see them, but I was told it was not possible at the moment. Little did I know that the IsIAO would soon close off not only the storerooms but the whole building—with all the documents and materials locked inside.

As for the state of preservation of Ferrandi's plates, which I wished to use for the exhibition, upon my return from Rome I received a fax from Novara informing me that the collection held by the Direction of the Public Museums was preserved "as indicated by the Superintendence of the 'L. Pigorini' Prehistoric National Ethnographic Museum of Rome, in accordance with the guidelines set forth by the Superintendence for the Archaeological Heritage of Piedmont." No indication was given regarding their accessibility.

With barely a month to go until the exhibition, whose location was still undecided, this—and a thank-you note from the library for the high resolution copies of Ferrandi's photographs I had sent them—was all I would get from the administration in Novara. I kept chasing photographs, reproductions and plates abandoned in storerooms, basements and boxes, while at the same time examining the reproductions from Novara. Focusing on the tiny details in the photographs, I started drafting a script for the documentary. Every detail, mistake, imperfection or note in Ferrandi's images told a story of its own, engaging people and landscapes from the

34 Cesira Filesi, *L'archivio del Museo africano in Roma. Presentazione e inventario dei documenti*, 2nd ed. (Roma: Istituto Italo Africano-Pioda, 2001).

past in a dialogue with the present. The story was not told from the point of view of the photographer but rather from the photographs', as if they were emerging from a time gap, a hole, and watching us through a lens. The documentary would let this story be told, I thought. The image that most embodied my belief was that of the hollow space: the album's structure making room for the photograph—the historian's hesitation over a space that may be interpreted as an absence, a pause, or the very script of the album.

As the date of the exhibition got closer, it became clear that Novara was not going to be the right place for it. Their last proposed setting was an entrance hall in the building next to the library, with a staircase on one side of the room, large heaters occupying two walls, and a towering glass showcase taking up most of the space on the remaining one. The prohibition of working directly on the moss grey walls and the fact that no technical equipment could be left unattended made the installation improbable. The museum's curator was the one liaising with the local institutions for all aspects relating to the exhibition space, and I never found out what the real problem was, whether my research or other issues. Alessandro Sambini and I found an alternative space in Milan, where at least I could show part of the work. On the opening day, all that was left in Novara was a print from the exhibition catalogue (fig. 3), nothing more.

Fig. 3 Hollow space. From a page of Ferrandi's album.

> 15 September 2014
>
> Hello dear,
>
> The house has been demolished, but I asked the construction workers to cut a small piece of your work. I will know by the end of the week if they managed…

The alternative space where the installation had been set up was also the house where Alessandro was living together with other people and where they organised events and exhibitions. "Time limit" was the name given to the space, knowing that it may not be available for long. The owner was selling it, and in 2014 the new buyer started renovation works to turn it into a youth hostel. The installation was demolished, together with the kitchen wall. Alessandro managed to remove the reproductions of the photographs' details from the nooks in the walls. We knew that sooner or later it would happen, and I intended to document the demolition but was informed when it was all over.

Research for the documentary does not end here, as new elements keep emerging. A case in point is the unfinished film (fig. 4) inspired by Ferrandi's life, *I pirati del Golfo* (Pirates of the Bay, 1939–1940). I recently discovered traces of the actors' and crew's stay at Danane Camp, Somalia,[35] in the diary kept by the camp commander, Eugenio Mazzucchetti. This should make us think. 6,500 people were detained in the camp, founded by Rodolfo Graziani in 1935 and run for six years; many were tortured and suffered from severe hunger, and almost half of them died.[36] The case of Novara—and its relations with the Overseas, which we insist calling Third World or developing countries—illustrates that an in-depth study of Italian colonial history can no longer be deferred. We are at a critical juncture in history, and we cannot respond with collective deliberate oblivion.

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35 Eugenio Mazzucchetti, *Danane. Diario storico 31 ottobre 1935–23 giugno 1941*, transcribed from the original manuscript by Guido Votano, (April 2002), last accessed May 27, 2017, http://docplayer.it/10718817-Danane-diario-somalo-eugenio-mazzucchetti-31-ottobre-1935-23-giugno-1941-trascrizione-del-manoscritto-originale-a-cura-di-guido-votano.html.

36 On this topic see: Matteo Dominioni, "Le fotografie di Danane nel contesto dell'immagine coloniale," *Studi piacentini*, no. 36 (2004): 213–226.

Fig. 4 Poster advertising the filming of *I pirati del Golfo*, in *Cinema. Quindicinale di divulgazione cinematografica*, no. 92 (April 25, 1940): 39.

CHAPTER NINE

ITALIAN PRO-ISLAMIC POLITICS IN THE WRITINGS OF ENRICO INSABATO: BETWEEN LIBYA AND EGYPT

ALESSANDRA MARCHI

Enrico Insabato (1878–1963) remains a controversial figure to this day and must be read within the interesting and complex framework of relations between anarchism, diplomatic and colonial activities, patriotic journalism, and Islam.

Between 1904 and 1910, Insabato published in Cairo the bilingual magazine *Il Convito/al-Nâdî*, which offered extensive scientific information about Islam. The articles were written in Italian and Arabic (and later in Turkish, too) and focused on current events from a historical and doctrinal point of view: many dealt with issues ranging from Islam in the Middle East, the Balkans, Russia and China to Islamic medicine and justice to Muslim women and feminism. Insabato believed that Italy could form alliances with Muslim countries because, unlike other European "monsters" (and Great Britain, in particular), whose colonial policies he openly criticised, it had not been guilty of "colonial horrors." He was to write about this in his other publications, such as *Islâm des alliés. Islâm mystique et schismatique. Le problème du khalifat*[1] and *L'islâm vivente nel nuovo ordine mondiale.*[2]

This essay will describe Insabato's political itinerary through his writings, from his anarchist sympathies to proximity to the fascist regime and, finally, its opposition. He had a political view of the alliance between Rome and Muslim countries such as the new Libya and Egypt, and even

1 Enrico Insabato, *Islâm des alliés. Islâm mystique et schismatique* (Nancy-Paris-Strasbourg: Berger-Levrault, 1920).

2 Enrico Insabato, *L'islâm vivente nel nuovo ordine mondiale* (Roma: L'espansione imperiale, 1941).

admired fascist colonial policy for its efforts to carry out an “almost peaceful occupation of Cyrenaica” before resorting to military intervention, but he never neglected his interest in the Islamic world.

1. Introduction

Since the first half of the nineteenth century, North Africa had attracted many Italians, notably after the 1821, 1830–31 and 1848 patriotic upheavals and wars for independence and, eventually, after Italy’s unification (1861). At first, the majority of these expatriates left Italy for political reasons. On the other shore of the Mediterranean, Italian communities rapidly rose to prominence within Tunisian and Egyptian societies.

When construction of the Suez Canal began (1859–1869), many Italian workers and skilled technicians moved to Egypt, thus changing the social composition of the first wave of rather “elitist” immigrants and contributing to the cosmopolitan character of Egyptian cities.[3] Egypt was never an Italian colony, but Italian engineers, technicians, artisans, intellectuals and artists made a substantial contribution to the “modernisation” of the country, settling down in various Egyptian cities and mixing with other immigrant communities. At a time when Egyptian movements were striving to raise national consciousness, the country’s cosmopolitan culture continued to flourish in its everyday life through the crafts, the professions, the arts and the intellectual community, also thanks to the emergence and spread of the printing press.[4] At the turn of the

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3 Daniele Natili, “Le collettività italiane in Africa nel XIX e XX secolo,” in *Africa-Italia. Scenari migratori* (Roma: Caritas/Migrantes-Edizioni Idos, 2010), 439–474; Anthony Santilli, “Penser et analyser le cosmopolitisme. Le cas des Italiens d’Alexandrie au XIX siècle,” *Mélanges de l’Ecole Française de Rome – Italie et Méditerranée modernes et contemporaines* 125, no. 2 (2013): 1–25, http://mefrim.revues.org/1516; Maria Giovanna Stasolla, “Italiani in Egitto: osservazioni e riflessioni sulla base di materiali nuovi o poco noti,” in *New Asian American Writers and News from UK, Italy and Asia: Literature and the Visual Arts*, ed. Lina Unali (Roma: Sun Moon Lake Telematic, 2006), 64–74, accessed on 14 March 2012; Mercedes Volait, “La communauté italienne et ses édiles,” *Revue de l’Occident musulman et de la Méditerranée*, no. 46 (1987): 137–156.

4 See Marta Petricioli, *Oltre il mito. L’Egitto degli italiani (1917–1947)* (Milano: Bruno Mondadori, 2007); Luigi Antonio Balboni, *Gli italiani nella civiltà egiziana del secolo XIX*, vol. 3 (Alexandria: Società Dante Alighieri, 1906); Lucia Avallone, “Egitto moderno, una storia di diversità. Il modello europeo e la società cosmopolita,” *Kervan, Rivista internazionale di studi afroasiatici*, no. 15 (2012): 5–32.

twentieth century, a large Italian community was living in Egypt, mainly in Alexandria, Cairo, and Port Said, where Italians and Greeks were the most numerous European expatriates.

Egypt became a focal point in the Italian strategy for the colonisation of Libya, notably because of its reputation as a political and cultural centre in the Arabic-speaking world. Before the military invasion of 1911, Italy's strategy was one of "peaceful penetration," with a series of programmes for economic development and cultural propaganda aimed at presenting Italy as a benevolent European power with no imperial ambitions.[5]

In this context, Enrico Insabato's writings and political activity are most helpful in shedding light on the Italian occupation of the future Libya. In this paper I will present an overview of his most important publications, which played a significant role in promoting a pro-Islamic Italian politics, *una politica filoislamica*, first under Giovanni Giolitti's government and then under the fascist regime. Insabato's activities and writings are extremely useful for understanding the still-incomplete history of Italian Orientalism, especially as regards the Arab-Islamic world and Italian colonial rule in North Africa.[6]

2. The Italian press in Egypt and the Libyan occupation campaign

As argued by the Orientalist scholar Umberto Rizzitano (born in Alexandria in 1913), the Italian periodical press of the day provides fundamental documentary materials to "the reconstruction of events connected with the history of the Italian colony in Egypt; it represents a major source for the history of the country during the most intense and exciting time of political, economic and cultural awakening of the Eastern Arabic-speaking region."[7]

In addition to archival and historical sources, the Italian-language press and the body of literature produced by Italian expatriates are an invaluable source of information. From the second half of the nineteenth century

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5 Andrew Heiss, "Manufacturing consent: Italy, the Mutamassirun, Egypt and the invasion of Lybia" (master's thesis, American University in Cairo, 2010), 3.

6 Cf. Marco Demichelis, "L'Orientalismo italiano tra colonialismo e cultura, tra anti-fascismo e asservimento al regime," in *Memorie condivise. Popoli, Stati e nazioni nel Mediterraneo e in Medio Oriente*, ed. Paolo Branca and Marco Demichelis (Milano: Narcissus, 2013), 1:310–331.

7 Umberto Rizzitano, "Un secolo di giornalismo italiano in Egitto (1845–1945)," *Cahiers d'histoire égyptienne* 8, no. 2 (April 1956), excerpt reprinted by ANPIE Edition, Alexandria, 2008, I.

onwards, the local foreign-language press experienced tremendous growth: hundreds of periodicals and newspapers were printed between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, with a huge number of them notably in Italian and French (and, to a lesser extent, also in Greek and English). This European press covered a variety of topics, ranging from politics to society to trade, the arts and literature, to religion and spirituality. Anarchism, the press, and Islam, as well as East/West relationships, thus became common features in the lives of many Italians and Europeans in Egypt.[8] Although the Italian economic and cultural influence in Egypt was gradually replaced by the British and the French, the country rapidly became an ideal base for Italian efforts to promote economic expansion towards the north of the Mediterranean and consequently for political and cultural propaganda, even though Egypt never was a target of Italian colonial ambitions.

The widespread distribution of the Egyptian press made it the ideal means for influencing regional public opinion and contrasting the growing hostility towards Italy following the Italo-Turkish war (1911). The Cairene press enjoyed wide readership throughout the region, and during the war Egyptian newspapers were distributed as far away as Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, as well as in many countries of the Levant.

However, before and during the invasion of Libya, Italy adopted various strategies involving the local and Italian press in Egypt to prevent both the Egyptians from supporting the resistance and the spread of anti-Italian publications in Libya. An attempt was made to gain direct control over the Cairene press, also by funding pro-Italy Arabic newspapers.[9]

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8 In this regard, the role of Italian anarchists within the refugee community in Egypt, and of the anarchist movement at large, was significant. Cf. Anthony Gorman, "Diverse in race, religion and nationality…but united in aspirations of civil progress. Anarchism in Egypt before the First World War," in *Anarchism and Syndicalism in the Colonial and Post-Colonial World, 1880–1940*, ed. Steven Hirsch and Lucien van der Walt (Leiden: EJ Brill, 2010), 7. See also Alessandra Marchi, "La presse d'expression italienne en Egypte. De 1845 à 1950," *RiMe, Rivista dell'Istituto di Storia dell'Europa Mediterranea*, no. 5 (2010): 91–125, http://rime.to.cnr.it/index; Philip Sadgrove, "The European Press in Khedive Ismâ'îl's Press (1863–1866): A Neglected Field" (paper presented at the Second International Symposium, History of Printing and Publishing in the Languages and Countries of the Middle East, BNF, Paris, 2–4 Novembre 2005), http://pagesperso.orange.fr/colloque.imprimes.mo/pdf/PSEO.pdf.

9 Cf. Anna Baldinetti, *Orientalismo e colonialismo. La ricerca di consenso in Egitto per l'impresa di Libia* (Roma: Edizioni Istituto Per l'Oriente C. A. Nallino, 1997).

3. Enrico Insabato and *Il Convito/al-Nâdî*

Thus, Italian-language publications in Egypt were seen as part of the broader Italian policy in the East and were aimed at facilitating the colonial enterprise. In this regard, the figure of the Italian doctor Enrico Insabato (1878–1963) is crucial.

He studied Medicine in Bologna, his home town, but he also had an interest in the Humanities. In 1900, he received a diploma in Colonial Medicine and Surgery from the École Supérieure de Médecine Coloniale in Paris, from where he moved to Cairo in 1902, apparently to attend an international medical conference. Insabato was hired as a private political agent to prime minister Giovanni Giolitti but, contrary to some accounts, he was neither a diplomat nor a "spy"—he was closely associated with the anarchist scene, both in Italy and in Egypt, where he also joined a Masonic lodge.[10] He was also very close to the Sufi *tariqa* Sanusiyya of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica and to the Egyptian society and its religious and political leaders. Insabato's unofficial status as one of Giolitti's agents "allowed him the freedom to associate with an unconventional milieu of anti-British and anti-modernist activists and intellectuals in Cairo, who supported his particular interpretation of Islamic orthodoxy and society."[11]

From 1904 until about 1910, after launching the periodical *Commercio italiano*, Insabato published in Cairo the bilingual magazine *Il Convito/al-Nâdî* (The Banquet), which featured articles in Italian, Arabic and, for a time, Turkish too.[12] Medicine and justice in Islam, Muslim women, feminism and Orientalism were among the topics covered in this original periodical from a historical and doctrinal point of view. Numerous articles covered the situation of Islam in the Middle East, the Balkans, Russia and China, as well as the Italian government's domestic and colonial politics.[13]

10 Ibid. See also
http://bfscollezionidigitali.org/index.php/Detail/Object/Show/object_id/517.

11 Eileen Ryan, "Italy and the Sanusiyya: Negotiating Authority in Colonial Libya, 1911–1931" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2012), 70. See also Carlo Gotti Porcinari, *Rapporti italo-arabi (1902–1930). Dai documenti di Enrico Insabato* (Roma: E.S.P., 1965), 9–10.

12 I was able to access the original collection of *Il Convito* in Rome, at the library of the Istituto Italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente (IsIAO), which was unfortunately closed in 2012 and just recently reopened inside the National Library.

13 Ibid., 21–22. He was in close relations with the Sufi Egyptian milieu, in particular with *shaykh* 'abd al-Rahman 'Ilîsh (his father, Muhammad 'Ilîsh, chief of the al-'Arabiyya al-Shâdhiliyya Sufi brotherhood, was a partisan in the famous 1919 nationalist revolt of 'Urabi Pacha).

Insabato closely collaborated with a friend, the Swedish anarchist Ivan Aguéli (1869–1917), whom he had met in Paris. Aguéli wrote about Islamic mysticism for *La Gnose*—the journal directed by the French metaphysician René Guénon (1886–1951), who had likewise converted to Sufism and lived in Cairo from the 1930s until his death—and became a frequent contributor to *Il Convito*, where he signed his many articles with his Muslim name, Abdul Hadi al-Maghrabi.

In the magazine's first issue, published on May 22, 1904, Insabato explained that his only aim was that of "spreading those ideas that I believe to be correct and true: it does not have an official character, it is not affiliated with any country or government, and it is not beholden to any political or financial interests."[14]

Insabato encouraged the exchange between East and West, opposing those who still wanted "crusades, wars and aggressive conquests." "We do not consider the East a wild region to be colonised in the same manner as Central Africa; on the contrary, we regard it as a country of vast moral and intellectual resources."

After a brief interruption, in 1907 he launched a new series of *Il Convito* and changed it to a monthly format (without the Turkish pages). Insabato was vehemently critical of the colonial policies and occupation carried out by some European states, notably Great Britain, and he came near to provoking a diplomatic incident on more than one occasion. Following a controversy over the construction and funding of a mosque dedicated to King Umberto I, British authorities asked the Italian diplomatic station in Cairo to expel Insabato from Egypt in 1908.[15]

In 1910, the Italian minister for the colonies sent him back to Cairo, in preparation for the occupation of the Libyan coast, where he worked in close association with the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and the Colonies (in spite of several divergences of views on the political strategies to adopt in Libya) and his friend the Marquis Aldobrandino Malvezzi de' Medici, who wrote about Islam in Libya.[16] In 1914, Insabato went on a mission to

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14 "Io ho dunque fondato questo giornale col solo scopo di diffondere queste idee che credo giuste e vere: esso non ha alcun carattere ufficiale, non è al servizio di nessun paese e di nessun governo, e non si presta a nessun interesse politico e finanziario."

15 Insabato was also in favour of building a mosque in Rome. The intellectual debate that followed the construction of a mosque dedicated to a non-Muslim king is noteworthy. Many '*ulema* discussed its orthodox legitimacy, adopting opposite positions. See Baldinetti, *Orientalismo e Colonialismo*, 42–47; *Il Convito*, no. 3–4, 1907.

16 In the immediate aftermath of the conquest, the Marquis Aldobrandino Malvezzi de' Medici, a historian and amateur archaeologist writing for the *Italian*

Constantinople to gather information about Arab-Turkish relations and, after reporting to the government, he was sent to Paris.

Il Convito devoted much space to the Sanusiyya Sufi order and its presence "from Morocco to China." Insabato considered the Sanusiyya a fundamental "civilising" force for stability in the region, whose deep roots in Cyrenaica and other internal Libyan territories could be exploited to advance Italian expansionist projects and ambitions. Prime Minister Giolitti asked the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to find local influentials in Tripolitania, who would then receive copies of *Il Convito* and possibly help to spread Italian influence from Egypt to Tripolitania.

In *Il Convito*, Insabato stressed the necessity for the Italian government to improve its pro-Islamic politics and assert an effective presence in the Islamic world fostering goodwill as well as harmonious relations. He argued that it was necessary to "abandon any ambitions of imperialism and violent colonisation in favour of a policy of uniform action towards Islam, valid for every country and every stratum of the Islamic world."[17] But he wondered whether Italy had the right people (with the right education) to pursue such a policy.

Insabato claimed that the first duty of the government was to demonstrate that Italians were not clericalists, imperialists or violent occupiers, and that only *they* could be loyal friends to the Muslims, thus differentiating Italian colonialism from that of the other European powers.[18] It was definitely appropriate to depict the Italian nation as friendly to Muslim interests, not only in words but also in deeds, because

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Society for the Study of Libya, published a book on Italy's relations with its new colony, where he examined the importance of Islam, *L'Italia e l'Islam in Libia* (Milano: Treves, 1913). Malvezzi believed that for the native population of Libya life had no meaning without religion: in his words, the sense of the "supernatural" dominated the perception of the physical world, and the impulse to contemplate the mystery of God promoted indifference to the material conditions of existence. Cf. Charles Burdett, "Italian Fascism, Messianic Eschatology and the Representation of Libya," *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 11, no. 1 (2010): 3–25.

17 "[. . .] per avere un'azione reale sul mondo islamico, per attirarci le sue simpatie, era necessario lasciare da parte ogni velleità di imperialismo e colonizzazione violenta, per sostituirvi un'azione filo-islamica unica, applicata a tutti i paesi e a tutti gli strati che formano il mondo islamico." *Il Convito*, no. 7, 1904.

18 "Il primo dovere dunque che incombe al governo è [. . .] dimostrare ai mussulmani che noi non siamo né clericali, né imperialisti, né colonizzatori violenti, e che noi soli possiamo essere i suoi amici veri e disinteressati." Signed "Dante." *Il Convito*, no. 7, 1904.

"Nature seemed to have created [Italy] especially to be the only intermediary between East and West."[19]

Furthermore, as recalled by Eileen Ryan in her interesting PhD dissertation on Italian-Senussi relations, Insabato saw his work as a political agent both "as an outreach to potential Muslim allies in the Libyan territories and as part of a broader program to improve Italian relations with the Muslim world at large."[20] He was convinced that the mission of civilising Islam could be a source of modern human progress, a subject that he had studied before the government launched its expansionist project. Thus, since the very first edition of *Il Convito*, his lack of prejudice towards the Muslim religion was clearly evident, as opposed to the prevailing ignorance and misunderstanding in Europe.

4. Italian strategic relations with the Sanusiyya Sufi order

In response to the growing interest in occupation and possible reactions in the decade leading up to the 1911 invasion, Italian experts began to develop their own body of literature concerning the Libyan territories and the Sanusiyya. As argued by Ryan, while French explorers and officials depicted the Sanusiyya as a group of religious fanatics ready to rise up against Christians, Insabato believed that they could help increase Italian prestige and authority in Libya and the Muslim world in general, thanks to their "highly centralised religious organisation" (which, in the eyes of European observers, enjoyed extensive control over a devout population), and the deep spirituality that inspired the Sufi brotherhoods.[21]

The kind of tolerance, virtue and orthodoxy attributed to *al-Tasawwuf* (Islamic mysticism), explains why Insabato and *Il Convito* dedicated so much space to in-depth descriptions of Sufism, which integrated every aspect of life and was believed to help improve and fortify men, their consciousness and their feelings.[22] His journal is indeed a very important

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19 *Il Convito* no. 26, 1905.

20 Ryan, "Italy and the Sanusiyya," 72.

21 Ryan, "Italy and the Sanusiyya," 64.

22 "Noi daremo dunque in questo giornale largo spazio alle manifestazioni del sufismo [. . .]. Poiché ciò che ordinariamente si chiama sufismo contiene tutto ciò che può aumentare e fortificare l'uomo all'interno, espandere la sua coscienza e approfondire il suo sentimento [. . .]. Per parte mia io scorgo nel sufismo una meravigliosa coscienza del cuore umano e delle sue latebre ignote [. . .]." *Il Convito* no. 1, 1904. See also Meir Hatina, "Where East Meets West: Sufism as a Lever for Cultural Rapprochement," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 39, no. 3 (2007): 389–409.

source for the study of Sufism at the beginning of the twentieth century, when it was known to very few scholars or disciples.

Official reports and ethnographic surveys drafted by Italian military officers, based on their direct contact with local opponents of the Sufi *ṭariqa*, presented instead a more critical view, which "rejected Insabato's recommendations and challenged the dominant European characterisation of the Sanusiyya as a centralised political power and civilising force. The military reports pointed to internal and regional divisions as a sign of weakness that could be used to Italy's advantage."[23] Many depicted the Senussi elites, such as the *marabouts* and the Sufi *shuyukh* in general, as parasitic or fanatical organisations that misused the resources of the pious masses for their own material gain, so that Italian intervention was deemed to be "necessary" to save Libya's Bedouin tribes from their influence.[24]

Eventually, in the further development of the Italian colonial administration, the emphasis on methods of indirect rule through an alliance with Muslim elites would clash with the plans for mass colonisation and cultural expansion to make the Libyan territories a fully Italian region, the fascist regime's "fourth shore." Insabato was in Tripoli in 1911 and kept a positive attitude even after reports circulated that the Senussi chief Ahmad al-Sharif, among others, supported the Ottoman war against the Italian occupation. Even when the image of a highly centralised *tariqa* weakened, Italy continued its strategy of negotiations and alliances with its leaders, so as to gain control over the inland populations, hoping they would support Italian rule.[25] Insabato maintained contact with the local Senussi chiefs long after the Italo-Turkish conflict; he went back to Cyrenaica at the end of the 1920s and published a book about the importance of Islam for the new world order, *L'islâm vivente nel nuovo ordine mondiale*, where he stressed the importance of an '*ahd* (pact) between Rome and the Muslim countries for an "authentic Muslim policy."[26]

Although he was not a member of the advisory commission on Islamic issues, in 1920 Insabato produced a study intended for an international

23 Ryan, "Italy and the Sanusiyya," 109.
24 Ryan, "Italy and the Sanusiyya," 109. Cf. Edward Evans-Pritchard, *Colonialismo e resistenza religiosa nell'Africa settentrionale. I senussi di Cirenaica* (Catania: Edizioni del Prisma, 1979); Alessandra Marchi, "*Gihâd* del corpo, *gihâd* dell'anima," in *Dalla penna al mouse. Gli strumenti di diffusione del concetto di gihâd*, ed. Patrizia Manduchi (Milano: Franco Angeli, 2006), 55–100.
25 Baldinetti, *Orientalismo e Colonialismo*, 38; Heiss, "Manufacturing consent," 61–73; Ryan, "Italy and the Sanusiyya," 60–74.
26 Insabato, *L'islâm vivente*, 33–34.

audience, in which he echoed Nallino's criticism of the Ottoman Caliphate as a political artifice. Once again, he described the Sanusiyya as "a civilising force that would work to the advantage of colonial state authorities. He argued that colonial powers could easily prevent" the creation of pan-Islamic movements by cultivating relationships with Sufi orders, hence outweighing "the risk that traditional Islamic elites such as the '*ulema* and *qâḍî* might perpetuate the influence of the Ottoman Sultan or introduce pan-Islamic schemes to local religious, civil, and political affairs."[27] "The Sanusiyya is not a heresy, but there is the latent possibility of hostile attitudes, be they against the Caliph or against the orthodox *ulema*; this is why it is of paramount interest that their potential be known so that they can be used when needed."[28] The religious strength of the Sufi brotherhoods was, according to Insabato, "maybe the only one capable of giving impulse to the masses and guiding them."[29]

However, Italian government officials, local emissaries and public opinion discredited Enrico Insabato's relations with the Senussi (thus affecting his credibility with them), and the Italian Ministry of Colonies forced him to leave North Africa permanently. Although in 1925 he was called to consult on further negotiations with the Senussi elite in Cairo [30] (seeing as his arguments in favour of a Senussi mediation continued to have some influence on Italian colonial officials and regional experts), Insabato would never hold an official position in the Italian administration of the Libyan territories.

Ryan argues that public opinion, together with the Catholic press and a national media campaign, asked for both a stronger Italian presence in international affairs and territorial expansion (long after the defeat of Adwa in 1896) so as to counter a diffused perception of weakness, also linked to Italian mass emigration.[31]

In this regard, the deliberate manipulation and misrepresentation of the African colonial reality has been widely discussed. Italian emigration to North Africa in the nineteenth century was underestimated with the aim of

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27 Ryan, "Italy and the Sanusiyya," 174.

28 Enrico Insabato, *L'islâm et la politique des alliés* (Nancy-Paris-Strasbourg: Berger-Levrault, 1920), 60; Ryan, "Italy and the Sanusiyya," 174–75.

29 "La force religieuse mise en oeuvre par les confréries est peut-être la seule capable de donner impulsion aux masses et de leur imprimer une direction." Insabato, *L'islâm et la politique*, xxiv.

30 Cf. Angelo Del Boca, *Gli italiani in Libia. Dal fascismo a Gheddafi* (Bari: Laterza, 1991), 73. See also Vittorio Ianari, *Lo stivale del mare. Italia, Mediterraneo, Islam: alle origini di una politica* (Milano: Guerini e Associati, 2006), 181.

31 Ryan, "Italy and the Sanusiyya," 63–64.

preserving and protecting the lasting rhetoric of Italian colonial propaganda, whilst encouraging emigration to the African colonies.
In his *Prison Notebooks*, Antonio Gramsci described the wars in Eritrea and Libya, among many others, as “moments of intensely collective and unitary life in the national development of the Italian people.” Speaking about Crispi’s colonial politics, he added: “The Southern peasant wanted land, and Crispi, who did not want to (or could not) give it to him in Italy itself, who had no wish to go in for ‘economic Jacobinism,’ conjured up the mirage of colonial lands to be exploited. Crispi’s imperialism was passionate, oratorical, without any economic or financial basis.”[32]

In a long article published by *Il Convito* in 1907, Italian anarchist Romolo Garbati (1873–1940)[33] had already stressed the need to analyse the reasons for emigration, linking it to the issue of internal colonisation in Italy, where the bourgeoisie was oblivious to the living conditions of Italian immigrants in Egypt. To counter such ignorance, Garbati encouraged an overhaul of the Italian-language press, which he judged as “lacking and addressed to sleeping citizens.”[34] Once again, these pages are filled with harsh criticism of European (particularly French) colonisers, who pursued a capitalist exploitation of poor workers, notably natives or Italian migrants.

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32 Cf. Antonio Gramsci, “Momenti di vita intensamente collettiva e unitaria nello sviluppo nazionale del popolo italiano,” in *Quaderni dal carcere, Q 19*, ed. Valentino Gerratana (Torino: Einaudi, 2014) “Anche la sua politica d’espansione coloniale è legata alla sua ossessione unitaria. In questo seppe comprendere l’innocenza politica del Mezzogiorno; il contadino meridionale voleva la terra; Crispi non gliela voleva dare in Italia stessa, non voleva fare del ‘giacobinismo economico’; gli prospettò il miraggio delle terre coloniali da sfruttare. L’imperialismo di Crispi è un imperialismo rettorico passionale, senza base economico-finanziaria.” In *The Southern Question*, Antonio Gramsci spoke about the great Italian emigration, which gave birth to the idea of a “proletarian nation”; to the intellectual class, the Libyan war seemed to be the beginning of the aggression of the great proletariat against the capitalistic and plutocratic world.

33 Romolo Garbati was born in Cagliari and died in Alexandria, Egypt, where he lived from 1902–03. He published two books in French, *Nous et les Égyptiens: pour la défense des étrangers en Égypte* (Alexandria: Imprimerie A. Procaccia, 1925); and *Mon aventure dans l’Afrique civilisée* (Alexandria: Editions de l’Orient, 1933).

34 Romolo Garbati, “Gli italiani all’estero e il congresso di Roma,” *Il Convito*, no. 5-6, 1907, 158–166.

5. Islam/Islamophilia/Islamophobia

In the beginning, *Il Convito* was openly anti-(Catholic)clerical, but this view was later abandoned by Insabato in favour of a rapprochement between Catholics and the Islamic world. "We would like to let Europe know that Islam is liberal and democratic, both as regards its prophetic vein, the last Semitic gesture, and as regards its prohibition of usury and the complete absence of any kind of clergy."[35] Despite his anti-clericalism, he nevertheless valued universal Christian and Catholic principles, *Romanity* and *Islamism*, in the light of future, common justice and peace.[36] How could these shared values be spread in the midst of an anti-Italian campaign? When he was in Cairo in 1912, he was warned of the existence of a group called *Ikhouan-as-Safaa*, brothers of pure friendship, disseminating propaganda and funding anti-Italian resistance in Libya. He discovered that they were mostly related to Ali Youssouf, the director of the Cairene journal *El Moyad*, who was engaged like others in a "furious Italophobic campaign."[37]

Insabato constantly asserted the need for a pro-Islamic politics, but any government that wished to have a presence in the Orient, he believed, had to know the basics of Islamic doctrine and history. He borrowed his language from the Orientalist and positivist vocabulary of the time: "everything needs to be *Islamicized* [in Muslim countries] and for Italian propaganda to be effective, it is necessary to educate men, politicians, intellectuals, artists, scientists; [they need] to study the issue and act as a spur to the government."[38] Rather than simply a religion, to many observers Islam represented a deterministic way of life and a set of related customs—typical of the indigenous population of Libya and of Muslims in general, and informing every aspect of human behaviour, every feature of a society's political and social organisation.

The same deterministic view is still spread today by the mainstream media, where Islamophobia is at the same time manipulated and criticised. It is worth noting that this concept, which the social sciences have only recently started to study, was mentioned in *Il Convito* in relation to European ignorance, citing the example of Lord Cromer who described

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35 "Vogliamo ugualmente far comprendere all'Europa quanto l'islam sia liberale e democratico, tanto per la sua vena profetica, ultimo bel gesto semitico, quanto per la sua proibizione dell'usura e l'assenza completa di ogni specie di clero." *Il Convito* no. 19, 1904.

36 Insabato, *L'islâm vivente*, 57.

37 Insabato, *L'islâm et la politique*, 101.

38 *Il Convito*, no. 1, year 3, second series, May 1907.

Islam as "a mixture of imagined principles [. . .] to govern a primitive society." *Il Convito* wanted to fight this kind of "Islamophobic statements" and at the same time make its readers aware of many relevant issues about the "Islamic Orient."

An opposition between the Orient (Africa/Islam) and the West (Europe/modernity) characterised this era: the anarchist and Sufi convert Leda Rafanelli, who was in Alexandria at the beginning of the twentieth century, wrote about the "abyss" existing between them in every aspect of life. She was able to judge Mussolini as the Western oppressor because she felt strongly against European colonialism and identified herself with the "most pure and instinctive" Africa, despite being a main source of Islamic knowledge for Mussolini himself, whom she had met in the period around 1912–14. In actual fact, she regularly discussed Islamic issues with Mussolini long before his dictatorship, as we can read in her book *Una donna e Mussolini* (1949).

Until then, such as in his *L'islâm et la politique des alliés* (1920), Insabato had depicted "Islamism" as fixed and immutable in its manifestations but adaptable wherever needed without diminishing its vital force and flexibility. Insabato believed it was possible, within this Islamic framework, to reach religious eclecticism or syncretism.[39]

In his journal, he kept emphasising the need for a clear, consistent, Italian pro-Islamic policy that would be *ethically* useful to the Easterners, *tangibly* useful to Italy, and aimed at harmony between the two. The colonial war in 1911 provoked a wave of anti-Italian protests, thereby resulting in the first tangible defeat of Insabato's forward-looking politics; following this, the fascist administration turned away from alliances with Muslim notables and initiated a series of military campaigns in Libya to gain direct control of inland areas and have them settled by Italian immigrants.

With the second Italian-Senussi war of 1923–32—in the aftermath of Idris al-Sanûsi's self-imposed 1923 exile and the minister for the colonies Luigi Federzoni's declaration putting an end to negotiations with the Senussi family, tribes and military commanders in the region—the Sanusiyya turned into an anti-colonial movement of international proportions, notably

39 "L'islamisme, précis et immuable en ses formes, s'adapte néanmoins aux évidentes necessités; il peut se transformer sans s'amoindrir et, à travers les siècles, rester en pleine possession de sa force vitale et de sa malléabilité. Tout en étant très intransigeant en tant que formes, il atteint à un éclectisme religieux qui confine au synchrétisme [. . .]." Insabato, *L'islâm et la politique*, 155.

coinciding with Sufi resistant Omar al-Mukhtar's hanging in 1931 and fascist repression.[40]

Italian errors ended up increasing the Senussi temporal power, which Sufi leaders had never really wanted before, as Insabato wrote in 1920 in the *Corriere d'Italia*.[41]

6. From a pro-Islamic politics to an Islamic policy?

Archival sources regarding Insabato's activity in North Africa still need to be examined in depth and contrasted with his publications. As mentioned before, recent doctoral studies (i.e., Ryan, Heiss) have already shown more and new details on the varying strategies used by Italy to control Libyan territories and exploit the media to portray itself as being "naturally" closer to the Mediterranean Muslim communities than the other European powers.

Over the course of the decade, fascist Italy concluded its suppression of the Senussi resistance and deployed Muslim troops from its Libyan, Eritrean and Somalian colonies to Ethiopia, employing its "Islamic policy" and expansionist propaganda as part of the "new politics" regime. From 1925 onwards, through its increasing manipulation of the media, fascist Italy gave great prominence to colonial themes—much greater than previous liberal governments ever did.[42]

But what did the fascist rhetoric of Italy as "Protector of Islam" mean in practice? Under Mussolini and the fascist regime, Insabato's pro-Islamic politics seemingly turned into an Islamic policy aimed at legitimating the increasingly aggressive expansion into Africa.

Insabato continued to promote the dialogue with Islam and Muslims for a long time following the fascist colonisation (which he considered a civilising mission), actually contributing to the creation of Italy's first comprehensive, consistent Islamic policy in the framework of a "natural" alliance between Italy and the Muslim world, which continued to stress the idea of an affinity between Fascism and Islam.

In a 1905 report on the best way to "penetrate the Islamic world," Insabato had declared that he would help with any governmental or commercial action Italy might undertake in Kufra, Cairo, Baghdad,

40 Ianari, *Lo stivale del mare*, 208; Marchi, "*Gihâd* del corpo," 73–79; Ryan, "Italy and the Sanusiyya," 237.
41 Gotti Porcinari, *Rapporti italo-arabi*, 176.
42 Burdett, "Italian Fascism."

Constantinople or Tangier.[43] "A wise colonial policy will worry about tribal leaders, Sufi brotherhood chiefs, and the intrinsic value of every *zawiya* chief. The governor's tactics have to be like those of a prefect during an electoral campaign who knows how to exploit influences, personalities, parties [. . .]."[44] Insabato described the Sanusiyya as being not only an Italian "problem" but a French and British one too, since those European powers were finally bound by the same agreement. Yet, in order for those powers to reach a broader agreement and avoid any obstacles to their policies, the main Islamic political issues, such as the *Khalifat*, needed to be dealt with, and areas of influence needed to be equally distributed. This way the three European powers would easily penetrate Central Africa, which was "legitimately destined" to the Mediterranean nations whose "sacred right" was to bring value to and "civilise the black continent."[45] Even if he did declare himself to be against colonisation, which he defined as "almost always a crime,"[46] Insabato continuously stressed the fact that it was indeed a civilising mission, to be achieved through economic and commercial expansion and on cultural grounds, too.

The aim of his book *L'islâm et la politique des alliés*, he said, was not to foster a movement of active Muslim politics but to demonstrate the need for the European nations to adopt a Muslim policy. He mentioned C. Alfonso Nallino and David Santillana to reinforce his argument about Islamic jurisprudence and underline the adaptability of the Muslim principles to any kind of reform, stressing the impossibility of not being involved in what had happened and what would happen in the East. Insabato was aware of the emergence of Arab nationalist movements and ideologies, but he had no trust in them except under Islamic religious unity.[47] He simplified the difference between East and West, and in *L'islâm vivente nel nuovo ordine mondiale*, he wrote about the beneficial alliance between Rome and Mecca in terms of faith and reason; such an alliance only existed between the Christian religion and Muslim mysticism, but something similar could be accomplished on economic and political grounds. What is clearly evident in his language is the persistence of an Orientalist framework dating back to Liberal times, when Islam was first

43 Ianari, *Lo stivale del mare*, 182–92. Together with Giolitti, he also conceived the creation of a (unofficial) Bureau of Oriental Affairs.

44 Insabato, *L'islâm et la politique*, 76–7.

45 Ibid.

46 *Il Convito* no. 1, 1906

47 Insabato, *L'islâm et la politique*, 163, 182–84. "If a social problem arises, the solution will be on the administrative side in Muslim countries, while the only solution for re-establishing social order in the West will be a revolution."

included in the Italian political agenda.[48] Insabato claimed that a better understanding of the structure of Islam's vision—marked by the perennial tradition as well as by openness and adaptability—would benefit Italy as a major political ally and help to make "Rome great again," and accompanied this remark with benevolent expressions of praise for the Muslim civilisation.

Further research could clarify Insabato's position after the fall of the fascist regime, although in the 1940s he still spoke highly of fascist colonial policies, especially as regards the "sense of dignity, security and responsibility" shared by all officials, from ministers to governors to residents, and the "righteous" regime in Libya. New strategies for building alliances with the Senussi elites discredited his work, until finally Italy resorted to military action before definitely "pacifying" Tripolitania and Cyrenaica.[49] Yet, Insabato could not know that his dream of a (fascist) empire, where Catholic and Muslim Italians could live in peace and justice, would never become reality. At some point, he even joined the partisans in Rome; nonetheless, he worked incessantly to accomplish his aim of union and collaboration with the Islamic world until his death in 1963.[50]

The recent academic debate on Italian colonialism has opened new research perspectives, little explored until at least the 1980s, which, together with postcolonial studies, touch on the ever current issue of a collective and plural Italian identity that has also been forged by emigration, and which is again being challenged by the current migration flows.

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48 Not far from Insabato's views, the journalist Giulio Provenzal wrote in 1913 about the Eurocentric attitude towards Muslims people as compared to the need for respect and dialogue to the benefit of both sides. However, the adoption of a neutral politics towards religions, and hence Islam, has since fostered deeper attention to the knowledge of Islam as the main religion in colonial Africa. Ianari, *Lo stivale del mare*, 182–92, 214.

49 Insabato, *L'islâm vivente*, 69–71.

50 Insabato was president of the Centro Mediterraneo (1950); secretary of the Unione Nazionale d'Azione Africana e di collaborazione italo-arabo-islamica e mediterranea U.N.A.F. (1951); appointed by De Gasperi to direct the Centro per le Relazioni Italo-Arabe (1952–55); and director of the Centro Cattolico-Islamico (1955) in Rome. He continued to write and promote Italian-Arab cooperation. In 1950, he published in Italian *La collaborazione italo-araba e il Sudan. Indipendenza per la Libia, lavoro per l'Italia, ricchezza per la comunità mediterranea* (Roma: Danesi-Centro mediterraneo, 1950), http://archivio.camera.it/patrimonio/archivi_privati/ap01/documento/CD3400001205.

Despite the difficulties in finding direct and original sources, the study of foreign-language press in Egypt (just as in Tunisia or Libya) is of growing interest, as it offers valuable insights into the history of Mediterranean relations and the ways in which the West constructed the notions of "Orient" and Islam. Since the pioneering studies of Gotti Porcinari (1965) and Baldinetti (1997), little work has been done on Enrico Insabato's activities and influence on Italian-Libyan relations until recent years.[51] Further archive research on his figure will certainly increase our knowledge and understanding of liberal and fascist colonisation, just as his writings, briefly presented in this paper, represent a major historical source for the study of Arab-Islamic Orientalism in Italy.

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51 Cf. Patrizia Palumbo, ed., *A place in the sun. Africa in Italian colonial culture from post-unification to the present* (Berkeley-Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003).

CHAPTER TEN

THE CARMINE IORIO (YUSUF EL MUSULMANI) TRIAL: PHOTOGRAPHS AND DOCUMENTS

ALESSANDRO VOLTERRA

What is known as the “Military Pacification of Cyrenaica” is no more than a euphemism for the massacre, deportation and exile of several thousand inhabitants of Jabel al Akhdar. From a military, political and legal point of view, it probably stands as one of the most dramatic, tragic and depraved moments in Italian history. As far as research into the events goes, little progress has been made since Santarelli, Rochat, Rainero and Goglia’s *Omar al Mukthar e la riconquista fascista della Libia*,[1] followed by Del Boca’s *Gli italiani in Libia. Dal Fascismo a Gheddafi.*[2] The two volumes tore away many of the veils shrouding the series of events in Libya between 1928 and 1932. But we should not forget that even recently volumes and papers of several historians have focused their attention on this particular field. Research is complicated by a lack of available documents, impeding any accurate and balanced historical reconstruction of the events and any subsequent reflections that could move the debate forwards. The principal research sources are the documents held in the state archives of the Archivio Centrale dello Stato (ACS); the Foreign Office archives at the Archivio Storico Diplomatico del Ministero degli Affari Esteri (ASDMAE), including records from the ex-Ministry for Italian Africa (ASMAI); and military archives in the Archivio dell’Ufficio Storico dello Stato Maggiore dell’Esercito (AUSSME). Taken as a whole,

1 Enzo Santarelli et al., *Omar al-Mukhtar e la riconquista fascista della Libia* (Milano: Marzorati, 1981).
2 Angelo Del Boca, *Gli italiani in Libia. Dal fascismo a Gheddafi* (Bari-Roma: Laterza, 1988).

there is no getting away from the fact that documents relating to this period are few and far between.

1. The Bedendo photographic collection

In Italy, the examination and analysis of photographs as historical documents has been standard practice in African research for many years. Notable cases in point include the pioneering work of Goglia[3] or Palma's praiseworthy contribution[4] alongside that of Triulzi,[5] Zaccaria[6] and other scholars, some not necessarily tied to African studies but still within the group of researchers working on photographic evidence as a source of Africa's history.[7] Over the past twenty years, the process of collecting, arranging and analysing photos has continued,[8] but in publications the times when they are used as a primary source and not just as ancillary content are still too rare.[9]

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3 Luigi Goglia, *Storia fotografica dell'Impero fascista 1935–41* (Bari-Roma: Laterza, 1985); Goglia, *Colonialismo e Fotografia: il caso italiano* (Messina: Sicania, 1989). Any paper on the topics touched upon here is bound to mention Goglia's photographic exhibition; the catalogue is entitled *The martyr Omar al-Mukhtar festival, Catalogue of exhibition* (Benghazi: Garyounis University, 1979).

4 Silvana Palma, *L' Africa nella collezione fotografica dell'IsIAO: il fondo Eritrea-Etiopia* (Roma: Istituto Italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente, 2005); Palma, *L'Italia coloniale* (Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1999).

5 Alessandro Triulzi has written numerous articles and attended several photographic conventions; he was the life and soul of an international convention held in Naples and Rome from September 9 to 11, 1992, as well as editing the published papers. Alessandro Triulzi, ed. *Fotografia e storia dell'Africa* (Napoli: I.U.O., 1995).

6 Massimo Zaccaria, *Photography and African Studies. A Bibliography* (Pavia: Department of Political and Social Studies at the University of Pavia, 2001).

7 Adolfo Mignemi ed., *Immagine coordinata per un Impero. Etiopia 1935–1936* (Torino: Gruppo editoriale Forma, 1984); Angelo Del Boca and Nicola Labanca, *L'impero africano del fascismo nelle fotografie dell'Istituto Luce* (Roma: Editori Riuniti-Istituto Luce, 2002).

8 Paolo Bertella Farnetti, *Sognando l'impero. Modena-Addis Abeba (1935–1941)* (Milano: Mimesis, 2007); Paolo Bertella Farnetti, Adolfo Mignemi, and Alessandro Triulzi, eds., *L'impero nel cassetto. L'Italia coloniale tra album privati e archivi pubblici* (Milano: Mimesis, 2013).

9 Zaccaria recently used photographs as a primary source, see Massimo Zaccaria, *Anch'io per la tua bandiera: il V battaglione ascari sul fronte libico (1912)* (Ravenna: Giorgio Pozzi, 2012). An attempt in the same direction in my articles: Alessandro Volterra, "Disertori e patrioti. Soldati africani tra guerra e passaggi di fronte (1935–1936)," in *Colonia e postcolonia come spazi diasporici.*

The source at the heart of this particular research is, in fact, a photographic archive—Giuseppe Bedendo's collection—which was donated to the Laboratorio di Ricerca e Documentazione Storica Iconografica[10] by his grandchildren, the Lazzerini family. The collection is made up of pictures taken between 1928 and 1932. They focus on court cases and sentences executed almost entirely on Libyan freedom fighters. Bedendo was military judge advocate general in Cyrenaica and using the legal means he had at hand, he played a vital role in the repression of that part of Libya. The courts in which he took part were made up of army officers and members of the Milizia Volontaria di Sicurezza Nazionale (Voluntary Fascist Militia for National Security, MVSN). The members of the court very often had little if any knowledge of criminal law and procedure. In many of the cases mentioned in this work it was Bedendo himself, in his role as reporting judge, who instituted trial proceedings. In others, he was the public prosecutor. This is not the place for a biography of Giuseppe Bedendo, perhaps it is enough to say that he was a hardcore Fascist working in Cyrenaica as judge advocate general, who went so far as to dedicate a few verses to Graziani.[11] There is an abundance of photographs, about four hundred, in the Bedendo archive;[12] several are duplicates, and

Attraversamenti di memorie, identità e confini nel Corno d'Africa, ed. Uoldelul Chelati Dirar et al. (Roma: Carocci, 2011), 209–234; Volterra, "Morì siccome 'n topo. Le fotografie dei processi a Omar al-Mukthar e ai resistenti libici," in *Quel che resta dell'Impero. La cultura coloniale degli italiani*, ed. Valeria Deplano and Alessandro Pes (Milano: Mimesis, 2014), 235–257.

10 The Laboratorio di Ricerca e Documentazione Storica Iconografica was founded and directed by Luigi Goglia in 1998, under the wing of the Dipartimento di Scienze Politiche at the Università degli Studi Roma Tre. It aims to organise and preserve private photographic collections, some of which relate to Italy's colonial period.

11 Giuseppe Bedendo, *Le gesta e la politica del generale Graziani* (Roma: Edizioni generali CESA, 1936).

12 The photographs can be divided up into various types. Most are amateur snapshots, probably by Bedendo himself or some of his colleagues, as can be deduced from the numerous contact prints. Others are obviously the work of professionals, for example those of Gaetano Nascia (photographer and owner of a photo studio in Benghazi). There are also police photos, like the ones of Omar in prison and the dead body of Jusuf bu Rahil. An important point to be made is that Bedondo mounted his photos on leaves of paper in albums so that he could add additional comments and information. This has proved vital for any reconstruction of the trials, giving the date, name of the accused and place of the trial. Not all three are always present together, sometimes there is only the date or place. No matter how limited the information, it has been enough (as we shall see) to compare the data with that found in the written documents.

eighty-two concern the capture, interrogation, imprisonment, trial and execution of Omar al-Mukhtar. Others were taken during some twenty other trials and subsequent executions by the Tribunale Militare Speciale (Special Military Tribunal) and the Tribunale Speciale per la Difesa dello Stato di Bengasi (Special Military Tribunal for the Defence of the State of Benghazi). There was apparently only a fleeting difference between the organisation and roles of these two courts. The first was composed exclusively of servicemen, the second also included members of the fascist militia. Their judgements covered crimes of insurrection and other associated offences.[13] During the period in question, these courtrooms were often referred to as *Tribunali Volanti* (Flying Courts). The name stems from the fact that the Governor (at the time, Pietro Badoglio was governor of Libya and Rodolfo Graziani deputy governor of Cyrenaica) had the right to hear cases in locations other than their institutional court seats (in our particular case Benghazi). The court's mobility justified the appellation "flying,"[14] echoed by the fact that many of the photos in his

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13 On this note it should be pointed out that right from the outset, in 1922, during the reconquest of Tripolitania, there was a gradual but constant increase in the imposition of a state of emergency as well as the institution of Special Tribunals in accordance with the legislation D.G. 17 July 1922, no. 640 and D.G. 5 November 1923, no. 1128 for Tripolitania, and the D.G. 15 May 1923, no. 2030 for Cyrenaica. The latter was not part of the imposition of a state of emergency, but handed the judgement over certain crimes to the Special Tribunal, such as: attempts on state security, setting up armed bands and theft of weapons and ammunition. See Adalgiso Ravizza, *La Libia nel suo ordinamento giuridico* (Padova: Cedam, 1931), 110; and Ravizza, "I Tribunali speciali della Libia e i ricorsi per nullità contro le sentenze da essi pronunziate," *Rivista penale di dottrina, legislazione e giurisprudenza* 101, no. 1 (1925): 92–93.

14 Del Boca says it was Graziani that set the operation in motion: "It is also thanks to him that we have the 'Flying Courts,' that is to say a special Courts-Martial, which can be flown from one spot to another in the colony, setting an image of prompt, efficient and permanent justice," in Angelo Del Boca, *Gli italiani in Libia. Dal fascismo a Gheddafi* (Bari-Roma: Laterza, 1988), 166. The military lawyer Olivieri (who often appears in Bedendo's photos) describes the operation in this way: "The moment news comes that somebody has been arrested red-handed, Justice descends from the heavens. This has become such a part of daily life that when the motor of an aeroplane is heard, a buzz goes through the camp: 'tribunal.'" In Rodolfo Graziani, *Cirenaica pacificata* (Milano: Mondadori, 1932), 139; now *Relazione Olivieri*. The full report is published in Bernardo Olivieri, "La giustizia militare nella repressione della ribellione Cirenaica" (proceedings of the conference held on 7 June of the ninth year of the Fascist Era "E.F.IX, 1931" at the Palazzo del Littorio in the presence of HE Lessona and HE Graziani), in *Governo*

collection show Bedendo actually aboard aeroplanes, and even hearing cases in airports.

2. The missing legal documents from the Cyrenaica trials

There are several interesting legal and judicial sides to the military "pacification" of Cyrenaica. The obvious starting point for any analysis is the written record. A history of the judicial train of events can be pieced together from a series of documents mapping out the new regulations and dates as they were put in place. The application of a series of laws and decrees evolved into a complex and articulated administrative legal system, which in a matter of only a few years turned into a tool of repression. Analysis of individual legal cases brought against anti-colonial resistance fighters is a completely different matter. In this case, the Bedendo photographic collection brings to life the high number of trials and executions carried out in the years 1928–1931, which would otherwise have remained just that, a number.[15] The principal source of information could have been the collection of court rulings. However, at the time of writing, they do not appear to be in the archives where they should be housed. The sentences passed by the Cyrenaica Military Tribunal were consigned by the military prosecutor's office to the Archivio Centrale

della Cirenaica, Organizzazione marciante (Bengasi: Stab. Tip. F.lli Pavone, 1931), 65–83.

15 "Statistics show the importance of the work to date (by the tribunals): from April 1930 to all of March 1931, in Cyrenaica there were 520 requests for prosecution with a total of 809 defendants; 400 cases were brought against 700 defendants. 133 were condemned to death, of whom 119 were actually executed. 117 were otherwise condemned. The rest were acquitted. This data goes to show that in fact, in crushing the uprising, the actual number of those condemned to death was relatively low," in Angiolo Piccioli, *La nuova Italia d'oltremare* vol. 2 (Milano: Mondadori, 1933), 1255–1256. In the same vein, the Carabinieri's yearly report on activity in Cyrenaica states: "Conspicuous efforts were made by the Carabinieri force monitoring political activity to crush both open and clandestine hives of rebellion. During the year [1931] the Military Judicial system, in its capacity as a Special Tribunal for the defence of the State, has processed 168 requests for prosecution, which, taken together, clearly show the intense and difficult work undertaken by our servicemen to carry out their orders, bearing in mind the seriously difficult natural environment, as well as the stubborn nature of the locals inclined to maintain a code of silence and their unsympathetic behaviour, decidedly hostile to our cause." Archivio Museo Storico dell'Arma dei Carabinieri, *Atti dall'anno 1931 al 1936*, "Azione svolta in Cirenaica dalla Divisione Autonoma Carabinieri Reali – Anno 1931," 90.

dello Stato, but they cannot be found, either there or in the Archivio dell'Ufficio Storico dello Stato Maggiore dell'Esercito, where they might accidentally have been stored. The same is true of the procedures of the Tribunale Speciale per la Difesa dello Stato di Bengasi. These, too, have seemingly disappeared in spite of being housed in the above mentioned archives.[16] They are also absent from the list published by the Ministry of Defence.[17]

The only possible explanation for this conspicuous void is the removal, loss or destruction of the documents in some unknown time and place. Other documents recording the proceedings of these courtrooms are available to scholars. Researchers can access documents concerning the trials of Italian antifascists just as they can those of the proceedings of military tribunals against Ethiopian partisans. Almost everything is available for analysis, except for the judicial documents referring to the Italian colonial repression of Cyrenaica[18] between 1930 and 1931. Indirect references to sentences passed in Cyrenaica can be pieced together. A case in point is the Carabinieri record of the arrest and sentencing of eighteen freedom fighters in Tobruk and Bu Abdelkerim in Porto Bardia.[19] The folder containing the details of Aissa ben Abdussalam el Uakuak's court case has come down to us by pure chance. Rahiem ben Gibrin, a comrade arrested with him, was tried and sentenced to death. The verdict was commuted to life imprisonment. When he applied for a pardon, the offices

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16 For an overall view of judicial affairs relating for the most part to Tripolitania, see Mario Missori, "Una ricerca sui deportati libici nelle carte dell'Archivio Centrale dello Stato," in *Fonti e problemi della politica coloniale italiana. Atti del convegno Taormina – Messina, 23–29 ottobre 1989*, vol. 1 (Roma: Ministero per i beni culturali e ambientali, 1996), 257–258. As for other archives, the Archivio Ufficio Storico dello Stato Maggiore dell'Esercito's file F19 "Giustizia Militare" holds some of the court hearings from the Tribunali Militari Territoriali di Guerra, especially box 13, from 1931, which documents 55 court cases of the Tribunale Militare di Guerra di Bengasi. Most of these sentences are against Libyans and, interestingly, all the cases were dropped either for lack of evidence or because the crime did not exist.

17 See Ministero della Difesa, *Tribunale Speciale per la Difesa dello Stato. Decisioni emesse* [dal 1927 al 1943], 19 vols. (Roma: Ufficio Storico Stato Maggiore dell'Esercito, 1980–1999).

18 Similar documents covering Nazi-Fascist retaliatory slaughter are also missing, which is enough to make some people believe that this case, too, is no mere accident. See the fine volume by Franco Giustolisi, *L'armadio della vergogna* (Roma: Nutrimenti, 2004). In this case, research was also focused on the archives of the Procura Militare Generale, though to date in vain.

19 See *Azione svolta in Cirenaica dalla Divisione Autonoma Carabinieri Reali – Anno 1931*, 90–92.

designated with his case lumped together his and his co-defendants' paperwork, from the Carabinieri interrogations to the court judgements to the death reports following the executions,[20] and that is the folder we can consult today.

3. The Carmine Iorio affair

In film and literature, a special kind of aura engulfs renegades who renounce their original ideals and embrace a new cause. It is a kind of aura that could be defined as boundless, unrestrained by time or place or even culture and beliefs, be it barbarians embraced by civilisation or the enlightened turning their back on their culture. One such example is Benedetto Croce's depiction of the human side of the warrior Droctulft,[21] elaborating the story from Paul the Deacon's *History of the Lombards*. He is such a twisted and, needless to say, fascinating character that Jorge Luis Borges revamps him in his "Story of the warrior and the captive" in his short story collection *El Aleph*.[22] Borges compares the traitor (or, for some, convert) Droctulft's decision to die in defence of his new faith with the destiny of an Englishwoman who, following her initial abduction by an indigenous tribe, had grown to live as one with them. Another such example is the famous North American legend of Pocahontas, recycled in several fanciful variations on a theme, from *Dances with wolves* to *Avatar*.

So it is with the traitor (or convert) Carmine Iorio, a story that cannot help but fascinate anyone who stumbles across this historical anecdote. Iorio, perhaps through a series of unfortunate events, was to become one of the key players in the anti-Italian resistance in Libya during its colonial period. There are gaps in the story but, even so, it is so compelling that it inspires an irresistible desire, to a certain extent, to justify his disloyalty. In 1950 a long article was published, spread over two editions of *La Settimana Incom illustrata*. Following its publication, an eye witness to the events sent a letter in reply to the article.[23] Forty years later, in 1990,

20 Archivio Centrale dello Stato (hereinafter ACS), Roma, *Tribunale Speciale per la Difesa dello Stato*, "Miscellanea Libia," b. 17, f. 682 Rahiem ben Gibrin, and b. 8, f. 1665.

21 Benedetto Croce, *La Poesia. Introduzione alla critica e storia della poesia e della letteratura* (Bari: Laterza, 1953), 286–287.

22 See Jorge Luis Borges, *L'Aleph* (Milano: Mondadori, 1991), 804–808.

23 Francesco Maratea, "Un italiano guidò la rivolta dei senussi. Per sfuggire alla forca tradì la bandiera," *La settimana Incom illustrata*, September 2, 1950; Maratea, "Un italiano guidò la rivolta dei senussi. Non tradite mai la patria e la

Salvatore Bono published a short piece following the discovery of some documents in the archives of the Ministry of Italian Africa.[24] Just recently, thanks mostly to Ennio Scannapieco's[25] historical research and Paolo Tesauro Olivieri's important contribution,[26] it has been possible to piece together the chain of events surrounding Iorio. In Gian Antonio Stella's novel, which draws from the research of the two scholars, Iorio is renamed Carmine Pascià, "who was born a *Buttero* and died a Bedouin."[27] In this, as in other works and articles, while not condoning the behaviour of "one of ours," "an Italian, to boot," the authors' remarks may lead the readers to, at least in part, justify some of his actions and the reasons behind them.

The court-martial sentenced Iorio to death twice, once in his absence in 1916, and a second time after his capture in 1928. By then, he was known as Yusuf el Musulmani. The court's ruling does not go into details as to the role Yusuf played in the Cyrenaican resistance. To sum it up, we know that he deserted at Tocra on the morning of July 14, 1916. He had escaped from the camp prison where he was being held. He joined the rebel camp of El Abiar before moving on to Gedabia's[28] rebel band. In 1922, he was living in Cufra with his wife and children, working as a gunsmith. There are important details in the court papers from his trial in 1928. Yusuf admits that to escape death he had followed blindly every request of the rebel chiefs; by standing by their side he had also hoped to receive a more humane treatment. He claimed that his prime concern had always been to take advantage of the first opportunity to hand himself over to the Italian authorities, but that chance never came. The rebels feared he might be a spy and had kept him under close surveillance for about three years. He admitted to being made a "lieutenant" by Sidi Redà and "captain" by Mohamed Sadigh as a reward for having fired on an Italian military searchlight in Soluk and for helping to collect tithes. In his role as an officer he had enlisted armed men to fight with the rebels against the

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bandiera," *La settimana Incom illustrata*, September 9, 1950; Germano Venier, "E questa fu la sua ultima ora," *La settimana Incom illustrata*, September 15, 1950.

24 Salvatore Bono, "Un italiano al fianco di Omar al-Mukhtār. Carmine Iorio divenuto Yusuf el Musulmani," *Islàm Storia e Civiltà* 9, no. 1 (1990): 27–31.

25 Ennio Scannapieco, "Da Altavilla Silentina al deserto libico: Carmine Iorio (1892–1928) il disertore salernitano che divenne un capo dei ribelli senussi," *Clio* 43, no. 3 (July– September 2007): 489–507.

26 Paolo Tesauro Olivieri, *La triste storia di un fante del Mezzogiorno d'Italia in Cirenaica 1916–1928* (Salerno: s.e., 2005).

27 Gian Antonio Stella, *Carmine Pascià (che nacque buttero e morì beduino)* (Milano: Rizzoli, 2008).

28 ACS, Roma, *Tribunali Militari*, *Tribunali Militari Coloniali*, "Bengasi 1916," sentence 308.

Italian forces. He himself had never fought against the Italians but had been present, unarmed.

The picture that emerges is that Yusuf did actually command a band of about twenty rebels operating in the territory around the town of Jadu. He went on to serve alongside Omar al Mukhtar, frequently skirmishing with Italian forces.[29] The court papers sketch a dry legal version of the trial, whereas Tuninetti's eyewitness newspaper account gives us a more human side: "His self-control, both during the trial and after his conviction, was particularly manly; once found guilty, he did not cry out for compassion or beg mercy. When asked if he wanted to die as a Christian [. . .] he first reflected and then declined. As an explanation, he said that his children needed to live happily with their Arab neighbours, who would certainly not feel inclined to help them if they came to hear that their father had defected again."[30] Yusuf el Musulmani had probably accepted his fate, in the words of Bono, "with absolute devotion to what had become his Homeland."[31] The Carmine Iorio affair stands apart from the routine judicial processes put in place to suppress the Senussi rebellion. It is one of the few cases where the documents at hand cover the whole judicial process (uniting court proceedings with archive documents). In the majority of cases the archive evidence, if any, is very thin. Bedendo's photographic record of this trial can be found in the appendix.

4. The importance of comparing sources

Other court cases present in the Bedendo collection have also been tracked down, with an important series of documents referring to death sentences imposed by the colonial government of Benghazi. It was probably because of the highly political nature of the Special Tribunal that Graziani, vice governor of Cyrenaica, kept the Ministry for the Colonies so well-informed. A folder housed at the Archivio Storico Diplomatico del Ministero degli Affari Esteri[32] contains several reports on trials and

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29 ACS, Roma, *Tribunali Militari*, *Tribunali Militari Coloniali*, "Cirenaica Sentenze Bengasi 1928." These are sentences passed by the Tribunale Militare [Territoriale] della Cirenaica. At present the list is held in the records office of the Tribunale Speciale Dello Stato della Tripolitania, Sentenze 1927–1939, but will be moved.

30 Dante Maria Tuninetti, *Il mistero di Cufra* (Bengasi: Stab. Tip. F.lli Pavone, 1931), 65–66.

31 Bono, *Un italiano*, 30.

32 This is dossier no. 124 (death penalties 1922–1931) housed in the ASMAE, *ASMAI*, *Libia*, b. 150/27.

executions[33] written by Graziani. This gives us a chance to compare the two sources on hand—the images of Bedendo's photo collection and the written documents sent to Rome by Graziani (sometimes by his aide Emilio Moretti, secretary general of the Government of Cyrenaica)—giving them a whole new sense. Instead of a dry bureaucratic list of capital punishments[34] or a bundle of anonymous photographs of tried criminals facing the death penalty,[35] taken together they offer a better overall view, with a deeper and clearer understanding of the string of events.

An interesting ancillary, but by no means marginal aspect emerges from an examination of the photographic collection. Apparently, there was an explicit ban on taking photographs of actual executions.[36] Our judge

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33 Thanks to Bedendo's photos and the written records it has been possible to piece together the cases against: Said bu Brahim, Saleh bu Omar el Dabha, and Abdessaied bu Dabha, tried on 14 August 1930 in Rdanu (Tolmeta); Suleiman ben Said and nine others, tried on 21 August 1930 in Tolmeta; Nasib bu Lauasc, tried on 2 March 1931 in Apollonia; Mohammed bu Jùnes, tried on 17 March 1931 in Tolmeta; Abd el-Aziz ben Gibeli, tried on 18 March 1931 in Barce; Keiralla Haleil and Aied Gedalla, tried on 9 April 1931 in Lectafia (Agedabia); Hamed ben Sciaib, tried on 8 July 1931 in Uadi Lestata (Gebel); Dris Musa, tried on 8 September 1931 in Barce; Omar Bubaker, tried on 10 September 1931 in Marsa Brega; Sciamata bu el Mabruk, tried on 17 September 1931 in Soluk; Bubaker ben Saad and Bescir ben Saad, tried on 30 September 1931 in Agedabia; Abderrabba bu Aghila, tried on 11 and 12 November 1931 in Agedabia.

34 Given the very nature of the reports held in dossier no. 124, and despite citing them, Del Boca referred to the executions in Cyrenaica using these documents as examples, see Del Boca, *Gli italiani in Libia*, 213n120.

35 This is true of the photos published in Nicola Labanca, ed., *Un nodo. Immagini e documenti della repressione coloniale italiana in Libia* (Manduria: Lacaita, 2001), 47–65.

36 The question of surveillance by the colonial authorities over how and by whom images of the corpses of those killed in action or executed should be distributed is a common theme in Italian East Africa as well. It is worth remembering that between the two World Wars photography had become an increasingly widespread phenomenon thanks to more and more people having their own personal camera. An increasing number of cameras were to be found among the military ranks, both officers and enlisted personnel. There were a variety of reasons for this: they were cheaper, smaller, lighter and more robust, which meant they could be carried around far more easily and securely. Evidence that there was some form of control can be found in a letter from High Command A.O. (East Africa) – Stato Maggiore – Ufficio Ordinamento sent to the Commandant and all units of the III Corpo d'Armata, prot. 06837, Samré 22 March 1936, subject: Photographs of Abyssinian atrocities exposed to a curious public. "The Ministry for the Colonies signals that servicemen, especially officers who have served in East Africa, carry about on their person photographs of the atrocities committed by Abyssinians on the corpses

advocate general's photos follow the trial but usually stop just before the actual execution. Photographs of the condemned men on the gallows are few and far between.[37] The numerous photos of Omar's hanging are an exception to the rule. We can deduce that in spite of the weight of Bedendo's rank, this explicit censorship prevented him from recording the actual executions. It was probably thanks to his place on the military judicial bench that Bedendo was allowed to put together his extraordinary collection.[38] In spite of the ban though, a kind of black market trade of photographs of rebel Senussi executions did exist.[39] In the summer of 1931, a photograph of the hanging of twelve Cyrenaic freedom fighters appeared in a French magazine. This did not go down well with Graziani, who announced in a cable to his subordinate commanders: "The July issue of *L'Afrique Française* features a photograph of a hanging in Colonia, pointing out that it was taken by the hand of an Italian. A cowardly hand whose just deserts would have it chopped off. All the authorities under my command know that *it is expressly forbidden to photograph executions*, and as such the moral responsibility for such a crime against the Nation falls on he who, through weakness, incompetence, misconception of duty cannot enforce such a vital order. Vice Governor Graziani."[40] Graziani's overblown statement implies that hangings and corpses should be kept as

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of our soldiers: some of them exhibit said photographs in public places to slake the curiosity of their companions. The bodies this is sent to are requested, when possible, to confiscate said photographs and at the same time attempt to dissuade demobilised troops under their command from circulating any photographs that might be in their possession once home. Signed Gabba." In Archivio Ufficio Storico Stato Maggiore Esercito, D5, b. 164, f. various.

37 Photographs of the corpses of resistance fighters killed in action are another example. The photo of the corpse of Jusuf bu Rahil, who replaced Omar al-Mukhtar at the head of the resistance, or that of Fadil bu Omar (one of Omar's most important and respected subalterns) appear to be police photographs following the guidelines of forensic scientists.

38 Some of the photographs are identified on the reverse side with the circular stamp of the "Direzione di Polizia-Bengasi," so we are 100% certain of their provenance.

39 The same is true of Raffaele Tartaglia's collection of execution photos. He was an engineer in Libya between 1921 and 1931. Given his skills as a joiner, it was he who constructed the gallows. See the photos of the hanged in Labanca, *Un nodo*, 52–65.

40 Telegram no. 1811 of 12 August 1931 to the Benghazi command, Agedabia, Tobruk, Bardia, Kufra, to the chiefs of the Carabinieri divisions, the Gebel commissariat in Barce. In ASMAE, *ASMAI*, *Libia*, b. 150/27, f. 124. The italics are mine.

far out of the spotlight as possible,[41] in spite of the fact that death penalties were passed by State Tribunals. A Carabinieri investigation was launched as an upshot of the publication of the photograph. The final report[42] was drawn up by the commandant of the autonomous Cyrenaic division, Lieutenant Colonel Raffaele Castriota. Some interesting details, relating to this research, emerge.

The first concerns the identification of the photo. Castriota states that he has "[. . .] carried out extensive research into the photograph in the July issue (1931) of *L'Afrique Française* portraying the hanging of 12 natives at Barce.[43] I managed to ascertain that it was of an execution—in said location on June 21 of the previous year (and not in September 1930) and in accordance with a regular sentence passed by the Tribunale Speciale—of subjugated Abid locals guilty of firing on our reconnaissance aircraft, and that several photographs were taken of the condemned men in said circumstances, by both civilians and servicemen."[44] Not only did the investigation uncover who was in the photo, but also that both civilians and servicemen had captured the event for perpetuity.

Castriota's next move regards the photographs themselves: "I found and confiscated the photographs in question, along with the negatives, but I could not lay my hands on the published ones, despite extending my enquiries to Benghazi's photographic studios, where they had been developed and printed. The inconvenience, in all its gravity, of photographs being taken and then put on sale to the public, who, given that this was the first public execution in Cyrenaica, were drawn with almost morbid curiosity, is mainly due to the lack of explicit orders to prohibit it, at the time, by the 'local Political Authority,' as well as the tolerance of the same of the circulation of such delicate documents without the

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41 In March 1931, the military commandant of Gebel, Giuseppe Malta, writes to the battery commanders: "Resilience is needed to persevere in this guerrilla warfare, *silent*, *unspoken of* but real enough and well present in the minds of our superior officers." See attachment no. 3 (letter 1711 of 6 March 1931 from the general military command at Gebel to unlisted recipients [all battery commanders], subject: Improvement of training techniques and deployment of scouts, p. 6), in *Relazione Malta*. The italics are mine.

42 Letter, register 125/3, confidential, Benghazi, 21 August 1931, to the vice governor of Cyrenaica, subject: Photograph portraying the hanging of twelve natives in Barce. This report, undersigned by Graziani himself, was forwarded to the Ministry for the Colonies. In ASMAE, *ASMAI*, *Libia*, b. 150/27, f. 124.

43 The photo was published in *L'Afrique Française* 41, no. 7 (July 1931): 433.

44 Letter, register 125/3, confidential. In ASMAE, *ASMAI*, *Libia*, b. 150/27, f. 124.

slightest qualm."[45] Thus, in-depth enquiries had been carried out in Barce and Benghazi and prints and negatives confiscated. This can only add further historic value to the Bedendo collection. An interesting detail is the veiled criticism of the "lack of explicit orders" and "tolerance" of the "local Political Authority," none other than the Gebel Commissariat.

The second part of the investigation focused on who could have actually passed on the photos to the French magazine. Castriota drew a blank: "As for who produced said document I have not been able to come to any firm conclusions, which is perfectly easy to understand given that copies of said photographs had circulated all over Barce, even in the house of tolerance, where at the time and to this day, several French prostitutes plied their trade."[46] There was a new twist to the tale, an element that was missing from Graziani's original telegram: the possibility that a foreigner, to be precise a French national, may have sent the photo to the magazine. This suspicion is reiterated at the end of the report: "as I say, there was a widespread diffusion of such photos as well as a presence in Barce, as in Benghazi, of numerous French subjects who may have come into their possession. Summing up, I add that the matter must have come to the ears of Signor Renaud Emilio, who ran the French Consulate from May 21 to August 1 of this year, bearing in mind above all the particular political activity he was involved in, of which I have already informed Your Excellency."[47] Apparently, Castriota believed that the French consul in Benghazi was up to no good.

The thorough Carabinieri investigation, which included searching Benghazi's photographic studios and the confiscation of prints and negatives, took place about a month before Omar al-Mukhtar's capture. It is possible that, along with the explicit ban mentioned in Graziani's telegram, such intensive enquiries may have gone on to create such an oppressive atmosphere in the colony that not a single photo of the capture, trial and execution of Omar al-Mukhtar landed on a newspaper's editing desk. This in spite of the fact that his capture made international headlines, especially in the Arab world[48] and Italy itself.[49]

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45 Ibid. A photograph of the twelve hanged at Barce, echoing the words of Castriota about the diffusion of prints of this execution, is published in Labanca, *Un nodo*, 64.
46 Letter, register 125/3, confidential. In ASMAE, *ASMAI*, *Libia*, b. 150/27, f. 124.
47 Ibid.
48 On reactions from the Arab world, see Del Boca, *Gli italiani in Libia*, 222–226.
49 On the Italian press, see Luigi Goglia, "La cattura, il processo e la morte di Omar Al-Mukhtar nella stampa italiana," in Santarelli et. al, *Omar al-Mukhtar*, 279–330.

Summing up, photographic sources have proved themselves of fundamental importance for any reconstruction of the string of political judiciary events in Cyrenaica between 1928 and 1931. This paper is just part of a more detailed research project, and it is probably best to draw it to a close here before it blooms into something bigger. The systematic piecing together of individual trials and an evaluation of the sentences and sentenced will provide a more detailed understanding of the events during the period in question. This will involve research into such themes as deportation and prison camps, the trials and tribulations of those banished from the region, the logistical situation for the Senussi groups after the new borders were put in place, and the complex and ambiguous role played by informers.

Iconographic appendix

The photographs of the trial and execution of Carmine Iorio can be found, along with those of all the other court hearings that Giuseppe Bedendo attended, in small albums. They are stuck to slips of brown paper (17.4 x 25.2 cm) mounted by Bedendo himself, with footnotes added by the same. The photos are all 6 x 10.4 cm. There are fourteen photos from this trial. Some are very similar, thus only a selection has been chosen (also to cut down on space). On the first page a note reads: "An Italian renegade and traitor, Iorio Carmine (Iusuf el Musulmani) born in [. . .] on [. . .], sentenced to death by shooting in the back by the Tribunale Straordinario di Guerra Gialo." The photographs are accompanied by Bedendo's original notes, and in some cases additional information is provided in brackets.

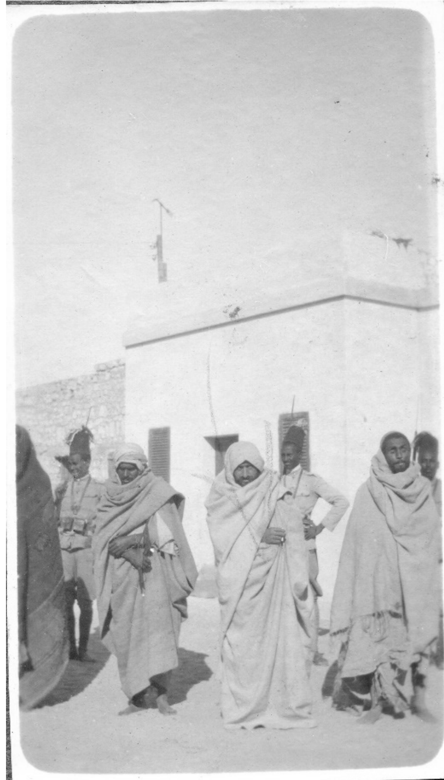

Fig. 1 Carmine Iorio in Gialo (seen here with Abdalla Digiaui Brahim, Abdalla bu Saleh and Said ben Musa, all tried together. One of the three is only partially visible on the left). Photograph from Giuseppe Bedondo's collection.

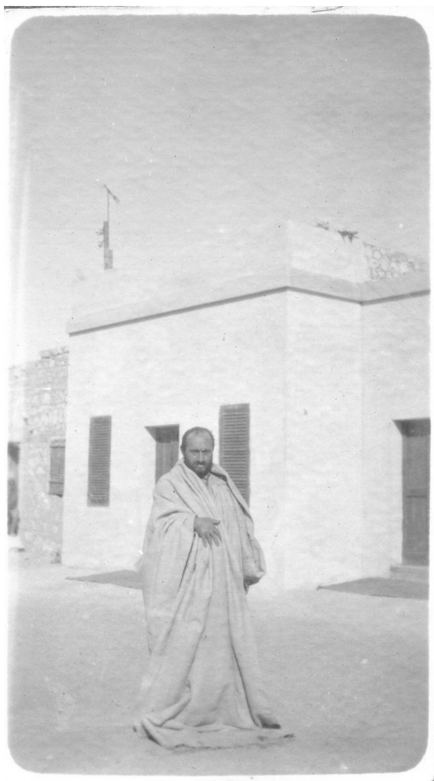

Fig. 2 Carmine Iorio. Photograph from Giuseppe Bedondo's collection.

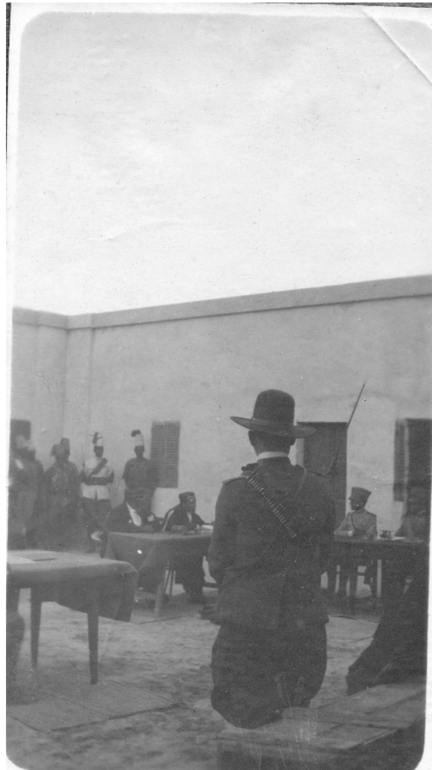

Fig. 3 The Courtroom. Photograph from Giuseppe Bedondo's collection.

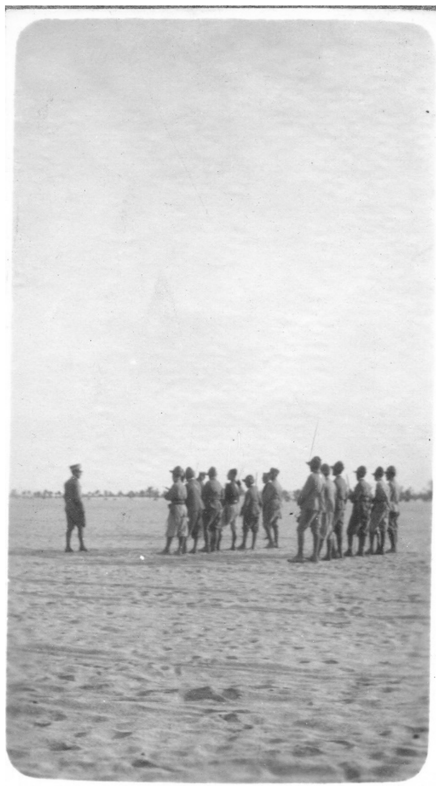

Fig. 4 The firing squad. Photograph from Giuseppe Bedondo's collection.

Fig. 5 Carmine Iorio's execution. Photograph from Giuseppe Bedondo's collection.

Fig. 6 Crowd of askaris witnessing the execution. Photograph from Giuseppe Bedondo's collection.

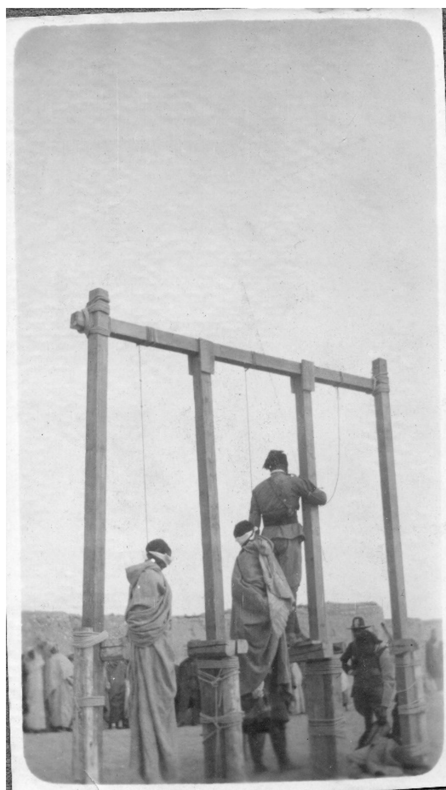

FIG. 7 Iorio's companions. The photo was taken moments before the death of the third convicted criminal. Unlike Iorio, who as a deserter faced a firing squad, the three "rebels" were sentenced to be hanged. See sentence no. 132 of 17 December 1928, ACS, Roma, *Tribunali Militari*, *Tribunali Militari Coloniali*, "Cirenaica Sentenze Bengasi 1928." Photograph from Giuseppe Bedondo's collection.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE IMAGE OF ITALIAN COLONIAL AFRICA IN COMICS AND GRAPHIC NOVELS

SILVANA PALMA

Italy lost its colonies following defeat in World War II, rather than through a negotiated process of decolonisation or armed conflict, and for a long time its colonial past was a missing topic in historical studies, mentioned at most in association with the self-congratulatory narrative of the colonial period or the self-absolving one of the following years.

It was only in the 1980s that a new generation of scholars took steps to overcome the delay and address the gaps in Italy's collective memory, eventually leading to a remarkable renewal in the scope and content of research fields. Today, there is no longer room in Italian historiography for the myths and misconceptions that fed the construction of the country's collective identity. However, very few studies have investigated whether and how the Italian colonial past was addressed during and after the colonial era in popular literature, normally intended for much broader audiences than academic papers.

This essay aims to explore how Italy's colonial past was represented and what kind of colonial memory was popularised beyond the confines of academia. It will focus on Italian comics and graphic novels, a genre that at first appealed to children and "reluctant readers" only, but over time also to a well-read audience. Long considered a minor genre, a less "noble" form of expression, comics and graphic novels are especially interesting in that they were supposedly able to do what no other literary or journalistic text could do: provide an uncensored outlet for public opinion. Or at least they were in post-fascist Italy.

Colonial imagery is a particularly exciting topic and one that embodies all the best ingredients of adventure fiction. Thus, this essay will offer a glimpse into what and how much space the Italian colonial experience has

occupied in comics to date, and what kind of public memory it has helped to build or perpetuate.

1. Africa and the birth of Italian comics

Volto nascosto (The hidden face), a graphic novel series of fourteen booklets published between 2007 and 2008[1] and set between late nineteenth-century Rome and colonial Africa, was meant to offer Italian readers a "comic feuilleton," in the author's own words, in which the lives of three Italians unfold against the backdrop of the significant events in Rome, East Africa, Italy and Menelik's Ethiopia leading up to the dramatic Italian defeat at Adwa in 1896. Despite the title alluding to a mysterious Islamic warrior with a silver mask, the novel's main characters were indeed Italian. And yet amid the passion, intrigues and murders in the style of popular fiction of yesteryear, the tragic story emerged of Italy's early colonialism—a story never fully told, not even in history textbooks.

It is surely no coincidence that the publication was welcomed as a remarkable novelty, building a following of readers who were largely unfamiliar with the comics genre. *Volto nascosto* was indeed such a novelty that a radio interview with the series' author G. Manfredi was broadcast on the Web by *La Repubblica*, Italy's most widely read newspaper.[2] In the interview, Manfredi himself recalled receiving letters and feedback from a "completely new and unexpected"[3] audience comprising for the first time scholars, military pundits, and army generals to boot.

As a matter of fact, not a single article on the memory of Italian colonialism in recent years has failed to mention even cursorily "the event." And an event it was: it had taken over a hundred years for this page of colonial history, albeit only part of it and as a mere background, to attract the attention of a cultural enterprise such as the Italian comics industry, which, unlike in other European countries, had all but expunged the historical sub-genre from its offerings, and colonialism in particular. The notable omission is not too dissimilar to that which has affected the Italian experience in Africa since the end of World War II on various levels—

1 Written by Gianfranco Manfredi for the publisher Bonelli, the series debuted in November 2007 and ended in October 2008.

2 http://roma.repubblica.it/multimedia/home/2265904, last accessed December 2016.

3 Ibid.

political, historiographical, and social.[4] A great deal of research, as well as historical and iconographic investigation, went into the making of *Volto nascosto,* as is evident from the re-enactments of scenery, views and settings of *fin-de-siècle* Italy and Ethiopia. Even the panels depicting Negus Menelik, Queen Taytu, the *rases*, and the Ethiopian armies bring back faces, clothing and poses from photographs taken at the end of the nineteenth century. Signalling the author's intent to evoke a legendary character of Ethiopian "mythology," the title conjures up images of adventure and exotic lands, a long-standing feature of comics. In fact, it conveys the essence of comics, which, especially since the end of World War II, have offered adventures and escape into the extraordinary through characters with secret or hidden identities, heroes and masked avengers. *Volto nascosto* stands out because of its characterisation of Africa and Africans, quite different from the way in which they have been depicted in Italian cartoons until very recent years.

The birth of comics in Italy is indeed closely related to the representation of Africa. The *Corriere dei Piccoli* debuted in 1908 as a weekly children's magazine, and thanks to its illustrations, it was soon regarded as the more "modern" among the publications targeting a younger audience. Published in Milan as the Sunday supplement of the daily *Corriere della Sera*,[5] it was aimed at the children of the growing Italian middle class. It was only with time that comic strips made their appearance in the pages of the *Corrierino*—as the magazine was called back then—since they were considered to be morally harmful. At first, only four of the magazine's twenty pages were devoted to comics, in addition to the feature on the cover page. The panels showcased nursery rhyme couplets instead of speech bubbles—which were actually the most innovative feature of this new literary genre—and for a long time the stories and characters were derived from US strips, albeit reworked and adapted even in the names of heroes for Italian readers.

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4 There is a vast bibliography on the subject. For a recent critical review presenting scientific contributions from several authors, see Paolo Bertella Farnetti and Cecilia Dau Novelli, eds., *Colonialism and National Identity* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015).

5 With a 10 ¢ cover price, the first issue had a print run of 80,000 copies. It soon became one of the most popular magazines among Italian children and teens, with a print run of up to 700,000 and several well-known writers and artists among its contributors—among them Hugo Pratt, whose work is discussed in this chapter. It was published without interruption until August 1995. Cf. *La grande avventura del Corriere dei Piccoli* (Muggiò: Associazione Franco Fossati, 2003); Fabio Gadducci and Matteo Stefanelli, *Il secolo del Corriere dei Piccoli* (Milano: Rizzoli, 2008).

Italian comics' first character was an African child created by the pencil of Attilio Mussino, who made his first appearance on the pages of the *Corriere dei Piccoli* on December 27, 1908.[6] *Bilbolbul*,[7] a *negretto* (piccaninny) in the common parlance of the day, was regularly off on surreal adventures in which he was the victim of metaphors (changing colour and turning green with rage or red with shame; literally wearing wings on his feet or walking on air when any of these expressions were used in the text; see fig. 1). As he embodied an Africa where unreal, strange, or out of the ordinary things would happen, his debut represented a continuity with the fabled Africa of previous centuries, when the continent was traditionally seen as the realm of fantasy, the epitome of "elsewhere" and home to *monstra* and mysteries[8]—and hence the object of amazing tales drawing on a repertoire of unusual and never-before-seen images. A *topos* that is still alive and well today.

In keeping with racial representations of the time, *Bilbolbul*'s Africanness was rendered through stylised graphics: his nudity was barely concealed by a loincloth, and his lips were large and painted red to emphasise their size on his little black face. However, this characterisation did not imply a subordinate role, nor was its content openly racist like in the fascist-era representations of African people: *Bilbolbul* was not so much the target of inferiorisation practices as an extra-terrestrial, extra-ordinary inhabitant of the "elsewhere" epitomised by Africa and an exemplary representative of the African "oddities" and "wonders" already mentioned in Pliny's works. His adventures were a staple for Italian children and teenagers on and off until 1958, well beyond the end of Italian colonial rule.

The choice of an African protagonist was certainly prompted by the overwhelming appearance of Africa—progressively carved into colonies—in the imaginary of the time, where it was attracting growing attention.

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6 Franco Fossati, *Fumetto-characters e disegnatori*, ed. Luigi F. Bona (Milano: Electa, 2005).

7 His name is linked to a renowned comics festival, *BilBOlbul festival internazionale di fumetto*, and a popular chocolate cake—a favourite of kids and adults alike.

8 Pliny's exemplary statement in *Naturalis historia*: "Ideo multiformes ibi animalium partus [. . .] unde etiam vulgare Graeciae dictum semper aliquid novi Africam adferre." (Thus there are many varieties of hybrid animals in that country [. . .] hence the origin of the popular Greek saying that Africa is always producing some novelty). Cf. Plinio, *Naturalis historia*, 8, 16, 42.

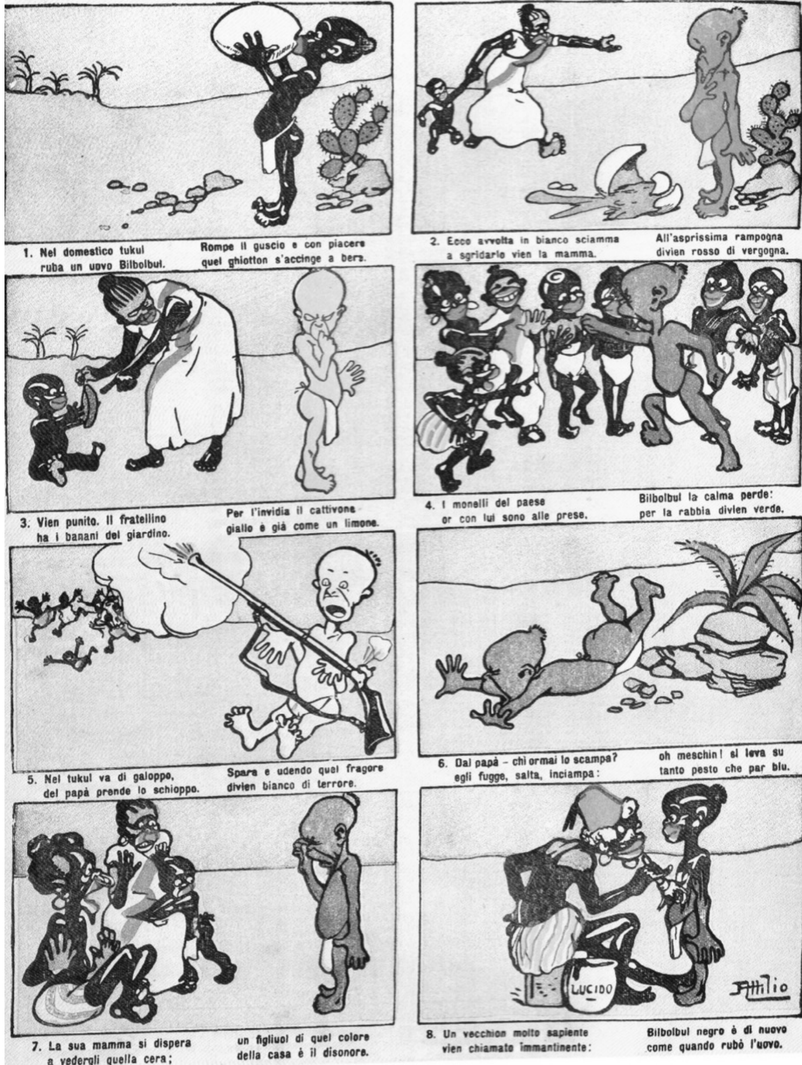

Fig. 1

At a time in which patriotism and the values of the Risorgimento permeated children's literature,[9] ruling out the possibility of reading for pure entertainment in favour of educational and instructional content (a trend that lasted until the 1960s), colonial pedagogy started targeting the world of childhood, also as a means of promoting the construction of a still fragile "Italianness" built by contrast with the Other. Africa and Africans provided a peculiar representation of Otherness, one in which physical traits and moral character ended up overlapping, according to anthropological interpretations of the time.

With the Italo-Turkish War (1911–12), the *Corriere dei Piccoli*'s comics became the instrument of the first significant national, patriotic mobilisation of children. The war ushered in a new "historical" era, marked by an attempt to have young people engage with society and the state through childhood literature—hence comics, too—Scouting, and schools.[10]

Three new heroes, also created by A. Mussino, made their debut in the *giornalino* (comic book): *Gian Saetta*, a *bersagliere* (Italian light infantryman) handling somewhat lazy and goofy Bedouin hordes in the Libyan desert all by himself and without bloodshed; *Nello*, a brave child coming up with ever more creative, albeit unsuccessful, ploys to embark for Tripoli and make a contribution to the conquest war; and *Schizzo*, who appeared in September 1912, when the war was drawing to a close, and Italians' initial enthusiasm for what many had thought would be an easy win was wearing off. Unsurprisingly, *Schizzo* was a pacifist who included the Bedouins in his celebrations for the peace treaty with Turkey in light of the fact that they had been "freed" from the Ottoman yoke by the Italians.

Wars in which Italy was involved provided the opportunity for comics to turn more and more into instruments of propaganda and mobilisation, marking a surge in their production and distribution. Not surprisingly, after the Italian defeat at Caporetto in World War I, the army's propaganda unit had resorted to comics in the attempt to rouse patriotic sentiment, especially in the masses of poorly literate soldiers.[11] What is relevant here is that anti-German comics created in those years for the fighting troops and published in news-sheets such as *La Tradotta* (the Third Army's weekly) or *La ghirba* (the Fifth Army's periodical) resorted to African

9 Giovanni Genovesi, *La stampa periodica per ragazzi da Cuore a Charlie Brown* (Milano: Mondadori, 1971).
10 Juri Meda, "Il Corriere va alla guerra. L'immaginario del Corriere dei Piccoli e le guerre del Novecento (1912–1943)," *Storia e Documenti* 6 (2001).
11 Roberto Bianchi, "Fumetti di guerra," *Liber* 101 (2014): 28–33.

settings and overtly racist content to highlight the inferiority, barbarism, incivility, or ineptitude of the German enemy. And the cannibal, savage, and far from being civilised "Negroes" of Africa provided just the perfect setting.

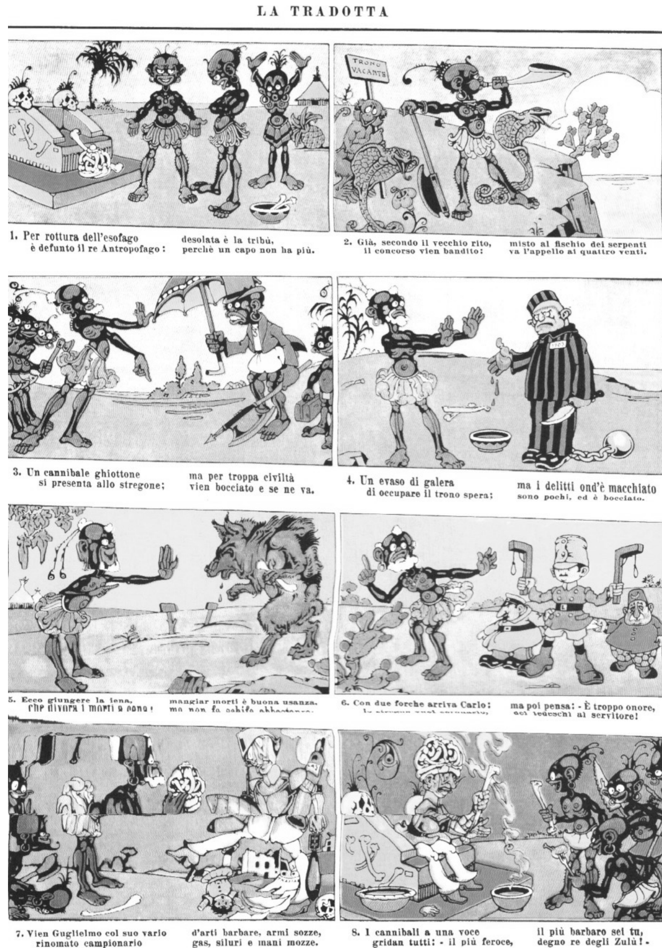

Fig. 2

Thus, in issue no. 2 of *La Tradotta* on March 31, 1918, the sorcerer sees Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany as the most barbarian, cruel, and hence suitable candidate to succeed the anthropophagous king of the Zulu. The

rhyming couplets and especially the images, hyper-simplified yet loaded with significant references (see fig. 2; the throne decorated with skulls and bones; the arid environment where only cacti would grow; and two gnawed bones in a bowl that does not lack a certain royal cachet), reveal how a certain idea of "Africa" was already deeply rooted in the Italian collective imaginary.

2. "as soon as they arrive, Italians lay on the ground roads and light bulbs"

Yet, it was only with the advent of Fascism that Africa started playing an increasingly significant role in the nationalist project and became an instrument of the regime's propaganda. African culture and customs were presented to the readers in the form of coded caricatures—specimens of an almost irreducible Otherness. Africans were made to look like in-between beings, halfway between two entities which are, in fact, clearly defined: the white man and the animal.

Like other forms of visual translation of Otherness, comics became instruments of knowledge of "reality" in which representation *is* interpretation. The wildness of the landscape went hand in hand with and was reinforced by the animalisation of its inhabitants. Blacks would speak "foreigner talk," what the French call *petit nègre*: their simplified, broken, ungrammatical Italian, with verbs in the infinitive form and wrong consonant sounds (e.g., b instead of p or d instead of t), exposed them to ridicule and stigmatisation, thus widening the social distance and making it harder for them or downright impossible to bridge the cultural divide and "rise," at least linguistically. The weekly *Topolino*[12] appeared particularly prone to churning out images and dialogues of the sort and continued to do so for decades, well beyond the end of the colonial venture.

In the 1920s and 1930s, comic books conveyed, reinforced and disseminated the country's racist social dynamics. Besides, racism and inferiorisation of African people significantly predate colonial rule and go back to the slave trade, when their commodification was supported and justified by theories that, whether on biblical or "scientific" grounds, were aimed at proving diversity as inferiority and Africans as closer to the animal than to the human world. Comics offered light-hearted, fun (hence easier to internalise) renditions of this distorted image for the general

12 The Italian version of Walt Disney's *Mickey Mouse*. The first issue of the weekly comic book, initially published by Nerbini, was released in 1932.

public, adding to the arsenal of stereotypes, prejudices and constructions of the self and the other that, more or less coarsely framed and largely unchanged to this day, have been perpetuated through silence and a lack of reflection on colonialism, not only in comics but also in Italian politics, literature, and history textbooks.

The Italo-Ethiopian war (1935–36) and its well-orchestrated media coverage enabled the fascist regime to reinforce and deploy the more explicitly racist message already present in comic strips set in Africa. As the war progressed, magazines and stories in support of the conquest rapidly mushroomed, featuring fictionalised and decidedly nationalistic accounts of old explorers' tales, along with the latest events involving soldiers and civilians—engineers for the most part—always victorious over the challenges posed by the African landscape and its inhabitants.

Despite the Ministry of Popular Culture (Minculpop)[13] enforcing the de-Americanisation of comics[14]—in opposition to the "foreign morally harmful stories featured in comic books" and in support of an autarkic production exalting fascist myths and Blackshirt heroes—around twenty-seven comic titles were published weekly, some with a circulation of 300,000. Towards the end of the 1930s, comics sold 1,900,000 copies weekly (total readership was actually much higher, due to young people's habit of sharing and swapping comic books). The popularity of comics in Italy was considerably fuelled by *Il Vittorioso* (1937–1970). The periodical was published by AVE, a direct offshoot of the Italian Catholic Youth Society, and sold not only at news-stands but also through parishes, parish youth groups, and boarding schools, thus reaching regions, towns or social groups that otherwise had no access to comics through standard distribution channels.

The regime's censorship and the heavy constraints imposed by the Minculpop's directives are a clear sign of the perceived importance of comics in disseminating information and as a communication tool—hence the attempts at fascistisation and the sudden disappearance, amid a chorus of bitter complaints, of stories and characters of American origin (such as

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13 The Minculpop's directive banning the sale of American comics was dated November 26, 1938, at the height of totalitarian rule. Racial laws had been issued ten days earlier. ("Provvedimenti per la difesa della razza italiana," R.D. 1728, November 17, 1938).

14 With the exception of *Topolino*, a favourite of the Mussolini family. See Fabio Gadducci, Leonardo Gori, and Sergio Lama, *Eccetto Topolino. Lo scontro culturale fra fascismo e fumetti* (Salerno: Nicola Pesce, 2011). Mussolini was also fond of Walt Disney, a personal friend of his, with whom he shared a dislike of President Roosevelt and his New Deal policy.

Jungle Jim, *Cino* and *Franco*, *Mandrake* and *Flash Gordon*) that had won over legions of passionate readers.

And so it was that swarms of colour-pencilled *balilla* and avant-gardists[15] filled Italian Africa, working hard at cultivating the myth of race and Empire in the continent. Appearing alongside them were white renegades and ruthless exploiters, preferably British or, failing that, French—the main rivals in Africa and above all responsible for imposing "unfair sanctions" on fascist Italy at the time of the Italo-Ethiopian war. As has already been said, colonial comics were filled with children and young Blackshirts, whose mobilisation was part of a scheme devised at the time of World War I[16]and aimed at encouraging their full involvement (through schools, advertising, trading cards and even toys). Children were burdened with new responsibilities, no longer related to family or school but to the homeland and the nation and eventually coinciding with Fascism.

The *Corriere dei Piccoli* saw the birth of new characters such as twin *balilla Romolino* and *Romoletto*, whose names were a clear reference to ancient Rome and, inevitably, to the glories of Empire repeatedly evoked by Fascism. From 1935 to 1937—roughly in the same years as the Italo-Ethiopian war—the twins were busy "civilising" Ethiopia, where they won by deceit without shedding a drop of blood, all the while managing to make fools of hordes of Ethiopian enemies, always portrayed as not too bright and poorly armed. War was depicted as a pleasant outing and inferiority as being the same as lack of intelligence. The stories of the two little fascist "heroes" undoubtedly gave lessons in racist and domineering practices—the dominance of the strong over the weak.

For their part, Italian children appeared to be fully supportive of the colonial undertaking, as is evident for instance from the letters they sent to *L'Azione coloniale*. The magazine, founded in 1931 and placed under joint control of the Ministry of Popular Culture and the Ministry of Italian Africa, strived to involve young Italians in the colonial enterprise through a number of projects. One such endeavour was the letter-writing initiative *L'impresa africana nel cuore dei bimbi d'Italia*, a regular column launched on the eve of the Italo-Ethiopian war and devoted to letters addressed by Italian children to the deployed troops. In the letters, the assimilation of fascist propaganda in support of the war effort, heavily promoted in school curricula, was apparent in the widespread

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15 During the fascist era, *balilla* was the name given to young boys aged 8–14; 14–18 year old young men were called *avanguardisti* and usually recruited in paramilitary forces (Opera nazionale balilla and Gioventù italiana del Littorio).

16 Antonio Gibelli, *La Grande Guerra degli italiani. 1915–1918* (Milano: Sansoni, 1999).

animalisation and inferiorisation of blacks and "Abyssinians," who were generally referred to as: "they are all animals" (May 30, 1935); "shady coons [. . .] marauders [. . .] headhunters" (July 11, 1935); "cruel and thieves" (May 16, 1935); "savage [. . .] barbaric and cruel" (June 6, 1935).

For its part, *Topolino* did not hesitate to use gas warfare to defeat them. A full-colour panel featured on issue no. 138 of August 18, 1935, "Al fortino somalo" (The Somali blockhouse; see fig. 3), shows a band of African marauders put to flight by "our" men thanks to toxic gas. There is a clear reference to the Walwal incident of 1934, which would serve as a pretext for the Italian invasion of Ethiopia. What is surprising, though, is that despite international conventions banning the use of chemical warfare, the solution devised by *Topolino* would go on to be massively adopted during the war, only to be stubbornly denied by republican Italy up until the nineties, essentially because it collided with the myth of the uniqueness and humaneness of Italian colonialism.[17]

Other comic strips, such as "La barbarie abissina" (Abyssinian barbarism) featured in the *Corriere dei Piccoli*, were mostly prompted by the Italian aggression to Ethiopia and aimed, among other things, at instilling a militarist ethic in the younger generations—already indoctrinated in schools and recruited by the Opera Balilla.

The negative image of Ethiopians portrayed by the fascist regime was largely rooted in the stinging defeat at Adwa in 1896 (along with the battle of Dogali in 1887), which forced Italy alone among European powers to forgo its dreams of expansion. Forty years later, as the "revenge" and "reconquest" ordered by Mussolini were underway, Ethiopians were persistently represented in comic strips as savages, treacherous traitors, slavers and torturers, whilst notables, *rases* and partisans were turned into marauders—part of a scheme plotted by the fascist regime that also involved ingenious falsification of photographs.[18]

Among Africans, the askaris fighting *with* and *for* Italians, whose desire to assimilate added lustre to Italy's civilising mission, were the only ones spared. On this, the story of the "negro balilla" *Nasi-Ulè* is exemplary: an enslaved child, urged by his dying mother to escape his sad reality, joined the Italian troops marching to the conquest of Addis Ababa to free

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17 The long quarrel eventually resulted in a parliamentary question in 1996. See Angelo Del Boca, *I gas di Mussolini. Il fascismo e la guerra d'Etiopia* (Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1996).

18 Silvana Palma, "The seen, the unseen, the invented. Misrepresentations of African 'otherness' in the making of a colony. Eritrea, 1885–1896," *Cahiers d'etudes Africaines* 177 (2005): 50–53 in particular.

Fig. 3

the whole of Ethiopia from slavery.[19] On the same topic, in June 1938, the Florentine publisher Nerbini released a comic book, titled *La fiamma della rivolta* (The flame of revolt), about Italian legionaries freeing the Negus's slaves. Italian children embraced the war effort, asserting that after the

19 "Nasi-Ulè piccolo schiavo," *Corriere dei Piccoli*, August 31, 1935, 35.

conquest of Ethiopia, there would be "no more slaves."[20] Once the war was over, the image of the fierce Abyssinian would fade to that of the naive, tameable, civilisable African.

Unlike in the nineteenth century, by the time the Italo-Ethiopian war started, Africa was no longer seen as an exotic and mysterious place, but as a civilised land in which wildness and barbarism had been eradicated by Fascism—turning swords into ploughshares and now opening up new opportunities for Italian workers and Africans as well. Italy was touted by comics and propaganda as the saviour of Ethiopia, having freed it from hunger and bondage. The representation of Italian soldiers feeding the "enemies" (see fig. 4) or breaking bread with them, introduced by the illustrated press at the time of the first colonial incursions,[21] became a *longue durée* image that lingers on to this day. Not only is it deeply rooted in the collective imaginary, it also continues to be evoked by the Italian military, such as during the recent "humanitarian wars."

From this perspective, the military aggression against Ethiopia—in many ways hard to explain and not only because it happened on the eve of African decolonisation—became acceptable and was met with almost unanimous approval. The good-natured side of Italian colonialism was perfectly embodied by the balilla *Venturino* introduced by the *Corriere dei Piccoli* in 1935, the year of the aggression against Ethiopia. After subduing Africans with the help of enlisted askaris, *Venturino* ended up teaching them to read and write, along with the virtues of cleanliness and work. And that is how, in the eyes of Italian children, Ethiopia ended up being the land where "as soon as they arrive, Italians lay on the ground roads and light bulbs." [22]

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20 Bruno Rossi and Paola Pastacaldi, eds., *Hitler è buono e vuole bene all'Italia. La storia e il costume nei quaderni dagli anni '30 a oggi* (Milano: Longanesi, 1992), 2

21 Silvana Palma, *L'Italia coloniale* (Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1999), 26.

22 Literal translation of the Italian original quote in Rossi and Pastacaldi, *Hitler è buono*, 17.

Fig. 4

3. "...but Italians treat you like a man"

At the end of World War II, the colonies were gone and, despite being the source of "some of the most intense feelings of excitement for

Italians,”[23] the Overseas almost disappeared from the Italian social, political and historical scene and from children’s publications as well.

A long-term “memory gap” ensued—spanning not only the years of the fascist regime but all things colonial—and it was not by chance, as became apparent in 1978 when the publisher Rizzoli released a ten-volume collection of the “best” strips from the *Corriere dei Piccoli*.[24] And yet, there was no trace of the Italo-Ethiopian war, either written or drawn, in Volume 7—devoted to the years 1933–1936, when the war was embarked upon and waged—despite the fact that the *Corrierino* had been one of the key outlets for the promotion of Italian colonial conquests. In the 1940s, writers and artists constructed plots, at times set in Africa, which were aimed at disseminating overtly racist images of the enemies, and of the British in particular. Explorers’ and missionaries’ accomplishments were also popular, albeit confined to Catholic-oriented comic books.

With rare exceptions, in the post-war period colonial history disappeared from national literature. The settlers disappeared too, along with the colonies, but nobody thought it appropriate to draw young people’s attention to the issue of Italians returning from the ex-colonies or their stories—these were hot topics at the time, and they were likely to have a negative impact on sales. Some of the more overtly self-congratulatory stories, such as “Il tricolore in Somalia” in 1953, were featured mainly in the *Corriere dei Piccoli*.

In 1958, the *giornalin*o featured a new strip starring explorer *Romolo Gessi*, also known as the “Garibaldi of Africa” with a clear reference to the Italian Risorgimento, and the thirty-three-issue series *Il tamburino dell’Amba Alagi* (The little drummer of Amba Alagi)—probably the last comic containing direct references to the colonial past. Italian audiences, both children and adults, were familiar with the figure of the little drummer, as it too was linked to the feats and myths of the Risorgimento. On the background of the Italian revolution of 1848, a little *tamburino sardo* (a drummer from Sardinia) had performed an act of heroism, celebrated by Edmondo De Amicis in the novel *Cuore*,[25] and lost his leg

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23 Nicola Labanca, *Oltremare. Storia dell’espansione coloniale italiana* (Bologna: il Mulino, 2002), 219.

24 *Il meglio del Corriere dei Piccoli*, 10 vols. (Milano: Rizzoli-Corriere della Sera, 1978).

25 Published by Treves in 1886, *Cuore* was aimed at instilling civil virtues in the newborn state’s young people. It is by far the best-known Italian novel, for a long time required reading in school curricula. Several films and TV series were inspired by the book between 1948 and 2001. It still draws attention, though at times with bitingly satirical musical, stage or literary adaptations.

while on duty. The comic's title visibly alludes to that tale: in the African version, a young Eritrean child by the name of *Andalù*[26] followed Prince Amedeo, Duke of Aosta, first to Libya in 1930, and then to East Africa, where he joined the askaris. During World War II, he fought alongside the Duke's troops at Amba Alagi in a last heroic attempt to fend off the British, and lost a leg in the battle. Ten years later, *Andalù* visited the Italian war cemetery in Nyeri to pay his respects at the Duke's grave and, much to his delight, ended up being appointed "cemetery caretaker": all metaphors aside, a witness and a keeper of Italian glory and bravery. The nostalgic recollection of African memories and of the myth of "the good Italians" through a tribute by the faithful askari was not a casual choice on the part of the *Corrierino*. Indeed, during colonial rule and Fascism, Italy celebrated itself and its civilising power through the figure of the askaris—the tamed savages who fought *alongside* Italians—and, for that matter, has continued to do so until very recently.[27] The little drummer's story was wrapped up in February 1959, on the eve of what would be known as "the year of Africa" (1960), in which many states became sovereign and, above all, right before the end of the Italian Trusteeship administration in Somalia (Amministrazione fiduciaria italiana della Somalia, AFIS 1960)—a self-congratulatory, yet sad and nostalgic way of marking the conclusion of the Italian colonial adventure.

Besides these rare glimpses into colonial events, it should be noted that from the end of the Second World War up to the 1950s and 1960s, reading what were dismissively called *giornaletti* (rags) was generally disapproved of in Italian families, as well as by educators, the clergy and politicians. Considered morally harmful by Catholics and conservatives as well as by Communists, comic books have long been at the centre of political-cultural debates. No less significant was the rift between Palmiro Togliatti, the general secretary of the Italian Communist Party, and the writer Elio Vittorini, who was in part forced to close down the magazine he managed, *Politecnico* (1945–1947), because it featured comics. The inclusion of

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26 The name clearly alluded to Andalù, the askari assisting presenter Angelo Lombardi in the popular show *L'amico degli animali*, which had aired for two years on the Italian TV's only channel.

27 In September 2004, revanchism was revived by an impressive photo exhibition held at the Vittoriano in Rome, where the myth of Eritrean askaris and a "fictionalised" account of their relations with the Italian military were presented to an Italian audience that was mostly unfamiliar with the country's colonial history. Cf. Silvana Palma, "Il ritorno di miti e memorie coloniali. L'epopea degli ascari eritrei nell'Italia postcoloniale," *Afriche e Orienti*, no. 1 (2007): 57–79.

American comics (e.g., *Popeye*) in the magazine was indeed the reason for a major clash between the two.[28]

In 1951, while the Chamber of Deputies was discussing a draft bill on the moralisation of comic books, Nilde Jotti's[29] strong argument against its usefulness on the pages of *Rinascita* did not fail to stir up controversy over the subculture represented by such publications:

> Young people who feed off comics are non-readers, and this lack of reading in the proper sense of the word is not the least of the reasons for restlessness, absence of reflectiveness, little contact with the surrounding world, and hence a tendency to violence, brutality, acts of lawbreaking and lacking solidarity towards one's own fellows. [. . .] Why do comics have a preference, actually, an exclusive preference for horrifying stories about people having adventures filled with violence and brutality, who continually turn against their own kind, trying to settle all disagreements with deceit, a punch on the solar plexus, or the gun, and lack the time to nourish their feelings, carefully evaluate, and reflect?[30]

Despite the United States being the main target—"a world dominated by the concern for material well-being that makes it possible to live well and not give a hoot about anything else"[31]—criticism of comics influenced public opinion and was met with substantial agreement from both the Left and the Right. After all, it was in line with the ostracism faced by American comics in the fascist era, when they were accused of conveying a corrupt culture.

From this point of view, then, Italy was probably one of the last countries to acknowledge the cultural significance of comics; on the other hand, it was also among the first to promote a debate on the issue and, starting with the monthly *linus* in the mid-1960s and the authoritative opinions of Umberto Eco and Roberto Giammanco, finally acknowledge comics as a legitimate literary art. The sixties marked a break with the distrust and disapproval expressed thus far by political and educational institutions; comics were finally regarded as equal to other forms of literature and suitable for readers of all ages. Italy was among the first

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28 Annalisa Stancanelli, *Vittorini e i fumetti del Politecnico* (Tricase: Youcanprint, 2015).

29 One of the most influential Italian political leaders, elected to the Constituent Assembly and a member of Parliament on the ticket of the Italian Communist Party.

30 *Rinascita* 8, no. 12 (1951): 584–85.

31 Ibid.

countries to herald the appearance of graphic novels, targeting adult audiences with a medium-high level of education.

By the end of the 1950s, Italian comics sold about 4 million copies weekly[32]: the nation's literacy rate had greatly improved, and young people were an increasingly important demographic in politics as well as in the consumer market. Those were the years of the "boom," the economic miracle, and Italy was undergoing steady modernisation marked by, among other things, the first youth protest movements. Comics, for their part, started diversifying their offerings based on readers' age and socio-economic status. Gradually, drawings looked less childish, and real scripts appeared where none had been before.

In the 1960s and up until the mid-1970s, the western genre was very popular in Italy, both in films and in comics. In stark contrast to this trend, in June 1975 the publisher Bonelli introduced a new character created by Sergio Bonelli himself: *Mister No*, an American pilot and anti-hero, or better, "an unwilling hero" whose adventures were mainly set not in the fashionable Old West, but in the Amazon rainforest of the 1950s. *Mister No* became an overnight success—so much so that, initially planned as a summer mini-series, it ran instead until December 2006 (issue no. 379). As many as twenty-nine issues had an African setting, but none were set in a former Italian colony. His adventures took *Mister No* on a journey across the Sahara and in the jungle by way of rather unlikely locations such as the "Island of the Skeleton," in a continent still inhabited by "The Beautiful Voodoo Witch"; the titles alluded to same old stereotyped Africa, in a clever mix of old clichés and modern settings.

And yet there was something new emerging in Italian comics, both in *Mister No*'s stories and in others that debuted in those years. African settings were finally void of the more sloppy, crass stylistic features, and, with few exceptions, strips were no longer replete with caricatures of black people. The insurmountable distance (or inferiorisation practices) that for decades had purposefully characterised the representation of Africa and Africans was especially shortened in Hugo Pratt's strips, although, oddly enough, in his early works such as *Anna nella giungla* (Ann in the jungle), black people were still depicted as ridiculous savages, and the visual rendition of their wildness was not too dissimilar to the scornful representations of the fascist period, with bones in their hair and clocks hanging from their necks. In keeping with the racist stereotypes of the past, they were cannibals and used verbs in the infinitive or gerund (fig. 5). A

32 Silvio Lanaro, *Storia dell'Italia repubblicana. Dalla fine della guerra agli anni Novanta* (Venezia: Marsilio, 1992), 192.

few years later, in *Vanghe dancale*, Pratt changed his tune and had a medical officer at the Italian stronghold use verbs in the infinitive form (many Italians did this to mock Africans or thinking they would be more easily understood), until at some point Ibrahim, an indigene, asked: "Why do you speak broken Italian? What's wrong with you, doctor?"

Fig. 5

Regarded as one of the world's leading comic artists, Hugo Pratt (1927–1995)[33] lived during a time of revival in the fortunes of comics and their full rehabilitation. He introduced a new narrative model aimed at adult audiences with a medium-high level of education and based on sophisticated stories that he both wrote and drew; his strips could be read on multiple levels and contained references to the great adventure novels written by the likes of Melville, Dumas, Conrad, and Stevenson.

Pratt's *Una ballata del mare salato* (The ballad of the salt sea, 1967), the first Italian graphic novel, marked a turning point in the history of art comics not only in Italy but also in other nations, and the author himself eventually came to identify with the leading character, sea captain and globetrotter Corto Maltese—a laconic anti-hero whose physical and psychological traits call to mind the protagonist of Lord Jim. The South Sea, South and Central America—from the Caribbean to Argentina—but also China, Ireland and other European countries provided the backdrop to his adventures in the years preceding the First World War. Enjoying great popularity to this day, fifty years after his first appearance, Corto Maltese is a legendary character who has attained a cult status even among non-comic-book fans.

Pratt's works were shaped by his complicated, meandering life as well as by his vast readings in his youth, despite his lack of formal education. In 1937, at the age of 10, he moved to Ethiopia with his parents. At the

33 Silvina Pratt, *Con Hugo. Il creatore di Corto Maltese raccontato dalla figlia* (Venezia: Marsilio, 2008).

beginning of World War II in 1940, his Blackshirt father persuaded him to enlist in the Italian Africa Police Corps (PAI). Following the defeat of the Italian Army and the fall of Italian East Africa, the Pratt family was detained at the Dire Dawa Allied internment camp, in Ethiopia, where Pratt's father died in 1942. In 1943 Hugo returned to Italy, where he became a member of the Italian Social Republic and the X-MAS unit.[34] After trying in vain to leave Italy, he joined the partisan brigades, and then worked as an interpreter for the Allied forces. At war's end he moved to Argentina and eventually returned to Italy in the sixties.[35]

His first full comic, titled *Anna nella giungla* (Anna in the jungle),[36] was also the first of four series created in different periods and set in Africa. In the second series, which critics renamed *Le Etiopiche* (The Ethiopian),[37] Corto Maltese's adventures were set in 1918 French Somaliland, Ethiopia, Yemen and Tanganyika. This is where Cush, a Muslim and Marxist Beni Amer warrior, one of Pratt's most successful characters and something of an alter ego for Corto Maltese, made his first debut. The third series, *Gli scorpioni del deserto* (The scorpions of the desert),[38] commonly considered Pratt's masterpiece, was set in Eastern Africa, where the Long Range Desert Group, a unit of the British Army whose badge was a black scorpion, fought against the fascist occupation forces between 1940 and 1941. The last series, *Cato Zulù*, was set in Zululand in 1879.[39]

However imbued with his intense childhood experiences in Africa, Pratt's works significantly made little or no mention of the events related to Italy's colonial history. And yet when they did, the tone was unreservedly forgiving. A case in point is his brief mention of the Italian defeat at Adwa to emphasise that it was also the work of the great Abyssinian sorcerer Shamaël, the evil "son of death and the devil" who "always existed" (*Le Etiopiche*, issue no. 3). On that account, the outcome of the battle was not the result of Italian faults and inexperience, but was

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34 Unit of the National Navy of the Italian Social Republic, which acted in coordination with the German troops to counter the advance of the Allied Forces and Italian resistance.

35 Hugo Pratt and Dominique Petifaux, *Il desiderio di essere inutile. Ricordi e riflessioni* (Roma: Lizard, 1996).

36 Miniseries of four episodes, two of which were published in Argentina in 1959, and in the *Corriere dei Piccoli* between 1963 and 1966.

37 The four issues were featured in different magazines between 1972 and 1973.

38 Five stories were published between 1969 and 1992. Two more stories, drawn by other artists, were published in 2005 and 2007.

39 The two issues were featured in *Corto Maltese* (a monthly magazine published between 1983 and 1993) in 1984 and 1988.

rather caused by supernatural forces too powerful to be defeated by humans.

Pratt's characters were clearly inspired by the women and men he encountered in his eventful life. His stories were based on his experiences, mostly tied to a military environment in which war, in all its senselessness, faults and ruptures, cowardly acts, foolhardiness and dramas, was in many ways the main theme. Imagination and historical reality blended in his plots, and Pratt's often detached demeanour suggests his unwillingness to take a position. In fact, he continued to perpetuate, albeit in a very nuanced and seemingly accidental manner, such die-hard myths as the uniqueness of Italian colonialism.

Pratt gave a new rendering of the myth, more sophisticated than in the comics of the colonial period and more effective, too. In *Vanghe dancale*, it was indeed Ibrahim, a Somali *dubat* (the so-called Somali askaris; literally "white turban"), who vouched for its truth, all the while indoctrinating a fellow countryman as well as the readers: "Do you believe that the British will treat you better than the Italians? Listen, Ahmed. When I was young, I fought with the Turks. They would despise you, steal your woman, and treat you like a dog. Then, I fought with the British. They would despise you, they would not steal your woman, but they would treat you like a horse. Finally, I fought with the Italians. They call you names, sometimes they steal your woman, but they treat you like a man."

And if Africans sided with Italy's enemies, it was certainly not motivated by political-ideological considerations, but rather by greed, as was made clear by Hassan Beni Muchtar (a nephew of Omar al-Mukhtar, the Libyan hero who led the anti-Italian resistance), described by Pratt as a mercenary, reluctant to accept the leadership of the Senussi and on the British payroll in 1940 only because "They pay me much more than the Italians," and he had "expensive vices" (*Gli scorpioni del deserto*, issue no. 1).[40]

Just like Pratt, Attilio Micheluzzi (1930–1990)[41] lived in Africa, and namely in Libya, from where he was expelled after Gaddafi's rise to power. A practising architect, he came to comics late. In 1986, he authored the graphic novel *Bab-el-Mandeb*,[42] featured in the monthly *Corto Maltese* and awarded the Heritage Essential prize at the 2011 Angoulême

40 In the same issue, Pratt erroneously stated that obtaining access to Libyan oilfields had prompted Britain's decision. In fact, Libyan oilfields were discovered after the end of World War II.

41 Luca Boschi, ed., *Attilio Micheluzzi. Architetto di avventure* (Bologna: Black Velvet, 2008).

42 The collection was published by Milano Libri in 1987.

International Comics Festival. It is a complex, incredible story about the opposing interests of Britain and Italy on the eve of the Italo-Ethiopian war, featuring an Italian anti-fascist transient, a British Army deserter, an Egyptian dancer, a noble, pro-fascist Englishwoman and other minor characters—some of them bearing the names of real people. The four set out on an epic journey from Egypt to Ethiopia, trying to deliver two stolen British armoured cars to be used against the Italian invasion, with no luck. The story is told in the form of a diary written by a reporter; significantly, it opens with these words: “Some claim that Mussolini’s attack on Ethiopia was an infamous and deplorable act, unworthy of a civil nation. Now, I have my own views about this, but I care about the family jewels and I don’t care that much about people’s curiosity; therefore I won’t share my opinions, but a mere chronicle of events.” As a matter of fact, despite this announcement, the only “infamous and deplorable act” in the story is the beheading and castration of an Italian by the Ethiopians.

Recently, two more graphic novels have addressed the Italo-Ethiopian war, both published by Bonelli. The first one is “La rosa d’Abissinia” (The Abyssinian rose),[43] third issue of the series *Angeli d’acciaio* (Angels of steel). A German nun is the only character speaking a broken Italian with a caricature accent, and the only unlikely one, in this (obviously) adventurous story whose rendition of facts, people and events is definitely void of indulgence and nostalgia. It is no coincidence that this graphic novel was the work of two influential foreign names, the writer and journalist Victor Mora (1931–2016) and the artist Victor de la Fuente (1927–2010). The second one is “Abissinia!”, published in 2015 as part of the collection *Le storie*, where, in spite of an exhaustive introduction by Gianmaria Contro, Ethiopia and the war are a faint backdrop to a banal story of love and war.

Finally, another work that should at least be mentioned here is the comic history of Italy modelled on a similar French initiative and edited by Enzo Biagi,[44] where, unfortunately, not only were the colonies given too little space, but speech bubbles were also crowded out by excessive captions—not to mention the historically false motives given for the battle of Adwa.

Whether as an instrument of propaganda in the past or as a means for reflection on social issues (and even historical knowledge) today, comics have traditionally been attentive to contemporary events and issues,

43 Victor Mora and Victor De La Fuente, “La Rosa D’Abissinia,” in *Angeli d’acciaio – Gli Albi Orient Express*, vol. 42 (Milano: Bonelli, 1989).
44 Enzo Biagi, *Storia d’Italia a fumetti*, 3 vols. (Milano: Mondadori, 1978–1980).

meanwhile making undeniable progress both in terms of cultural awareness and from a technical and professional point of view.

Yet, Italian colonial history does not seem to have benefited much from these developments, continuing to be a secondary theme in comics and, not infrequently, the subject of representations that are either indulgent, evasive, or influenced by old clichés and *topoi*—albeit rendered with much more sophisticated graphics and modes of narrative. The same cannot be said for the standard African settings in comics. Indeed, Africa is no longer portrayed as inferior, be it animal-like—and hence repulsive or inviting derision—or docile and obediently submissive to whites, and this is undoubtedly a distinctive postcolonial innovation. For decades, comics have been entrusted with transmitting the memory of Italian colonialism. This memory is still waiting to be fully decolonised.

CHAPTER TWELVE

TRADING CARDS: AFRICA UNDER THE DESK

GIANLUCA GABRIELLI

1. Trading cards in the collective imaginary of children

The contemporary collective imaginary of children is a complex social and cultural product that has been historically determined by the various factors encountered during childhood. Family and the formal education received at school are influential agents in the production of this imaginary. However, the decisive context that furnishes many of the elements that influence both family and school is the more general social environment in which these pillars of society operate, together with the surge in mass communication.

In fact, ever since the second half of the nineteenth century, the world of manufactured goods has targeted children, with an increasing number of objects being specifically produced *for* boys and girls or especially created with these young people in mind. Children's imaginary is therefore increasingly conditioned by consumerism, with which the agency of school and family must necessarily come to terms. Consumer products make their way across environments, they enter school and family life and act as a go-between that modifies the meaning of learning, family education, and formal and informal communication.

This is all too evident in the modern world. Hence, any study that attempts to analyse children's knowledge and interests cannot just consider the school and family spheres and turn a blind eye to the multitude of school bags, accessories, TV channels, cartoons and toy-filled catalogues.

A similar phenomenon occurred in Italy's recent past when, around the turn of the twentieth century, primary school education was in gradual expansion, and a series of consumer products specifically designed for the

sons and daughters of the bourgeoisie steadily invaded the environment in which these children were growing up, modifying the dynamics of family-school-education.

Some of the most studied and important of these products were the illustrated magazines, the publications for children that began to be published in the late nineteenth century and became extremely popular in the first decade of the twentieth. The birth of the *Giornalino della domenica* (Sunday Children's Paper) (1906) and the *Corriere dei Piccoli* (Children's Courier) (1908) certainly marked two crucial steps in the establishment of this "informal curriculum" that emerged alongside the formal school one and had an effect on its reception.[1]

Exercise books with illustrated covers were another important element, since they were, and still are, a basic tool in schooling that also provides a link with the family. They had already started to become popular with schoolchildren in the late nineteenth century, gradually increasing their circulation and influence until the period of the fascist regime of the 1930s, when they became zealous instruments of the propaganda carried out by the printers who marketed them.[2]

And we could mention plenty of other elements of indubitable importance and impact, which thus also deserve to be the object of integrated studies, such as toys, children's songs, cinema, recreational reading, etc. In short, at this time, the minds and hands of boys and girls came into contact with new products that acted as a catalyst for their imagination and interacted with the imaginary that was transmitted by school and family. Thus, we have an informal curriculum that can be studied in parallel with the developments of the official school curriculum.[3]

The aim of this essay is to take a first look at "trading cards," namely, the multicoloured cards or small pieces of paperboard whose popularity continued to increase after they first came out in the second half of the

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1 See Juri Meda, "Per una storia della stampa periodica per l'infanzia e la gioventù in Italia tra '800 e '900," in *I bambini e la guerra. Il Corriere dei Piccoli e il primo conflitto mondiale (1915–1918)*, ed. Fabiana Loparco (Firenze: Nerbini, 2011).

2 Juri Meda, Davide Montino, and Roberto Sani, *School Exercise Books. A Complex Source for a History of the Approach to Schooling and Education in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (Firenze: Polystampa, 2010).

3 For this research I have consulted the collections at the *Museo della figurina* (The Trading Card Museum) in Modena; many reproductions are also available at the *Museo virtuale della figurina* (The Trading Card Virtual Museum, http://www.cartesio-episteme.net/figurine.htm). Trading cards or "cards" (but also "cigarette cards") are called *figurine* in Italy, *cromos* in Spain, *Bilder* in Germany, and *chromos* in France.

nineteenth century and that still exist today even in this digital era. Particular attention will be paid to colonial and "racial" trading cards and those showing African people, directly linked to the subject of this volume.

2. History of trading cards: from a prized image to a consumer item

The birth of trading cards around the 1860s was closely linked to two factors: on the one hand, the invention and spread of lithographic and chromolithographic printing processes and, on the other, the development of commercial advertising.[4] In fact, this period was characterised by a strong growth in trade in the major European and US cities and the formation of a middle class who were in search of an increasing amount of targeted purchases and who thus were of particular interest to manufacturers.

This was the context in which department stores and the manufacturers of some of the products for middle-class consumers sought to overcome the competition and corner the market through the use of advertising (*réclame*), also in the form of small colour prints that depicted all kinds of subjects. Thus, although trading cards were originally indistinguishable from the advertising cards for shops or commercial products, they started to take on a more distinct character in around 1865–1867. Trading cards in Europe were mainly used by large department stores like Bon Marché (1867), whilst in the United States they were associated with products such as cigars, household detergents and food (chocolate, chewing gum, etc.).[5]

One of the most famous examples were the trading cards produced by the Liebig Company to advertise its meat extract, because almost all the sets were regularly issued in more than one country. The first series became popular around 1872 and continued to be published and circulated until 1975, printed in several languages for markets in different countries.[6] Even though there was initially a close link between the illustrations and the advertised product, this connection was soon broken in the attempt to catch the customer's eye. Thus, the spread of these cards constitutes a genuine circulating catalogue of the imaginary of this era. This imagery includes icons that catalysed the emerging interest in geography and the

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4 Massimo Albertini, *Figurine. Un collezionismo fra storia e costume* (Milano: Mursia, 1989), 17.

5 Albertini, *Figurine*, 19–20. See also Massimo Albertini, *Figurine! Pubblicità, arte, collezionismo e industria 1867–1975* (Modena: Edizioni Panini, 1989).

6 *Catalogo Sanguinetti Figurine & menù Liebig*, 13th edition (Gallarate: EP, 2016).

military, and was elaborated with the mental horizon of bourgeois families in mind, or rather, the social group targeted by advertising.

Three different periods can be distinguished as regards the theme of this essay, which sees trading cards as an element that, together with the images produced by the school system, had a synergistic-competitive influence on the collective imaginary of children. In the first period that stretches from the last twenty years of the nineteenth century to the first decade of the twentieth century, Italy lagged behind other European countries like France and Belgium in terms of the development of consumption. The processes that included children and children's products in the consumer space were still in embryo, and the first experiments, like the "children's periodicals," were addressed to the sons and daughters of upper and middle class families. A series of niche trading cards were now produced just for the upper classes that probably first became popular with adults and only reached children indirectly; in this sense, trading cards were a sort of sophisticated game for the young bourgeoisie, but had yet to be ranked as a favourite pastime alongside other forms of popular games.

From the 1920s onwards, with the increase in consumption, more and more copies of trading cards started being circulated and collected and even found their way into the hands of lower middle class children, as a familiar, highly-prized and widely diffused product. Most sets of trading cards featured subjects like sports champions (football players, cyclists) and film stars, subjects of interest to both children and their parents who, after all, were the ones actually buying the product. The 1930s represented the boom in trading card collecting as a pastime linked to competitions offering consumer products in exchange for complete collections of images.[7]

After a decline in popularity linked to the Second World War and reduced consumption, trading cards started to take off again in the 1950s. This time, however, they were no longer associated with products as an

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7 The competition launched by Buitoni and Perugina was an extremely famous example. In 1936, their products were accompanied by trading cards designed by Angelo Bioletto, which featured characters from the extremely popular radio programme *I Tre moschettieri* (The Three Musketeers). The fact that collectors could also win a Fiat Topolino in exchange for 150 albums, and that the *Feroce Saladino* (Fierce Saladin) card was extremely rare, since so few copies had been printed, made the collection a great favourite with the public that spawned many imitators. This brought the regime to enforce regulations for these kinds of competitions, ensuring that the same number of copies were printed for each card. It is also a well-known fact that the character of the *Fierce Saladin*, who had become so famous and difficult to find, was instinctively likened to the "Negus," the enemy of the fascist armies who were fighting in Ethiopia in those months and who had actually escaped by taking refuge in England.

advertising medium, but were an object of consumption themselves, sold at news-stands together with an album to collect them in and targeted directly at boys and girls. The main topics were still sports and the world of cinema, but there were also "educational" collections dealing with historical events, geography, and even mini encyclopaedias, a cheap and simplistic solution that tried to partially meet the demand for acculturation that had grown dramatically with the 1960s economic boom.

3. Colonial images in Italy

In 1887, Liebig published and circulated the first series of *Moretti dalla testa grossa* (Big-headed Blacks) in Italy and the other countries involved in imperial expansion. The cards showed black-skinned characters with African features, all of whom had over-sized heads and were dressed in flashy occidental clothes (based on the popular schema of eccentric Afro-Americans in the USA) These *Moretti* were the main characters in cartoons that advertised the meat extract in a ridiculous manner.[8] Other series were to follow, first of all *I moretti e il furto dell'estratto* (The Blacks and the meat extract robbery), in which the meat extract was stolen from gullible people whose skin was black and who slurred their speech.[9]

The next series, entitled *Moretti scherzosi* (Fun-loving Blacks), saw the awkward attempts of the *Moretti* to take part in concerts, duels and all sorts of other situations, always with the most ridiculous results. Thus, in the same year as the Dogali battle, this paperboard format was the first medium to put Africans "in the limelight" and circulate their image along with a food product, giving them their own small role in promoting interest and the popularisation of stereotypes from overseas.

This grotesque genre that derides the idea of primitive black people was soon flanked by an ethnographic theme in which pictures of adults or children representing the different continents evolved into descriptive images of the various activities they carried out and examples of their "exotic" daily lives (hunting, housing, etc.), with particular emphasis given to anything that was unusual from a European point of view.

The third genre, which appeared alongside the others in the first decade of the new century, openly commemorated imperialist appropriation, with cards recalling the explorers and several sets describing Germany's and

8 Sanguinetti, *Figurine & menù Liebig*, series 202.
9 Sanguinetti, *Figurine & menù Liebig*, series 220.

France's colonial possessions, as well as the various colonial powers and last but not least, images dedicated to Italy's conquest of Libya.

The cards with an ethnographic theme depict Africa as a place where the locals live in abundance and happiness. The *In Abyssinia* series produced in 1906 shows scenes of court life. The men and women pictured are poles apart from the European way of life and the colour lithographs accentuate the orientalising tones (the queen is shown sitting on colourful rugs and cushions, a servant fanning her with an enormous fan, another page holding a steaming bowl) even though they do project a dignified and prestigious image.[10] In the *Africa Orientale 1°* (Eastern Africa 1st) series (1907),[11] the lithographs produced by the Gebrüder Kligenberg company portray a happy and colourful Africa: the natives, dressed in flamboyant costumes or leopard skins, are shown resting on their spears, as they pick cobs from towering sweetcorn plants, while the women gather the harvest in large skin bags and the children play happily amongst the harvested stalks; a smiling group of Masai warriors moves through the savannah along with women, children, sheep and mules laden with household goods; merchants haggle with the people from a village of huts, amidst animals and children in an idyllic scene.[12]

Whenever signs of European domination overlap the ethnographic description, the exotic image is framed by white soldiers and the flag. The *Colonie Germaniche* (German colonies) series, published in Italy in 1900, is a prime example, showing white soldiers and settlers in both market scenes and images of the New Guinea railroad, as well as the natives assigned to the colonial troops in Cameroon. And then there is the *Colonie delle potenze europee* (Colonies of the European powers) series, in which the card dedicated to Italy shows a soldier dressed in white, an Eritrean dignitary, a Somali woman, the inevitable shield and spear, the Italian flag, and a view of "Assab on the Red Sea."[13]

The series dedicated to the Italo-Turkish War, published in 1912, seals the first period; all the cards refer to the conquest, and the images focus exclusively on Italian soldiers, riflemen and sailors, who are shown landing, advancing and hoisting flags. The only signs of any Turkish soldiers at the scene of a pitched battle are a few caps and rifles left behind as they made their hasty escape, while a group of diplomats are

10 Sanguinetti, *Figurine & menù Liebig*, series 232–233.

11 Sanguinetti, *Figurine & menù Liebig*, series 877.

12 Ilaria Pulini Battistini, *People: il catalogo degli umani tra '800 e '900* (Modena: F. C. Panini, 2009), 90, 232–3.

13 Pulini Battistini, *People*, 230–1.

represented in the act of receiving the Italian ultimatum. In another image, Arabs are pictured lying face down in an act of submission.

4. The fascist period

A meaningful comparison can be made if we move on to the 1920s, when in 1922–1923, Liebig produced a different series of images regarding East Africa. Gone are the smiling faces of an idyllic life in the fields, the locals are now pictured carrying out much more unromantic tasks. For example, they are shown picking cotton in a field with a farm with European-style buildings in the background, or intent on clearing the path for a future railroad track, or, finally, haggling with a European settler over their "recruitment [. . .] as farmers" within the highly industrious and modern setting of a port. In short, the idyll has come to an end, and the colonies are depicted in these images produced for all the colonial powers as a place where the natives are put to work at the service of the white man. This is the period when the colonies were considered as important assets.[14]

In Italy, however, this European periodisation was undermined by the revival of Fascism's imperial plans. When Ethiopia was invaded in the 1930s, the media started a new campaign that promoted imperialist imaginary, in sharp contrast to what was happening in the other countries with overseas possessions.

Trading cards also enjoyed a significant increase in production at this time. They began to be linked with all kinds of consumer products, even those of little value, on account of a reduction in the cost of coloured images (which also had an effect on school exercise books with illustrated covers) and also because of the growth in advertising competition. Moreover, the exaltation of nationalism and the importance of the home front in countering the sanctions imposed by the League of Nations were other factors that contribute to explaining this proliferation of images of fascist Italy's colonial war.[15]

At least ten of these sets certainly still exist,[16] but it is extremely likely that some have been lost, while others were reprinted on more occasions

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14 Pulini Battistini, *People*, 91; *Nell'Africa Orientale*, series 1132.

15 In Germany, a nation that had lost the African colonies at the end of WWI, a collection of 270 trading cards was published in 1936, devoted to the lost empire and titled *Deutsche kolonien*—an effect of the increasing revanchism in foreign politics and of the renewed expansionist ambitions.

16 See Gianluca Gabrielli, ed., *L'Africa in giardino. Appunti sulla costruzione dell'immaginario coloniale* (Anzola dell'Emilia: Grafiche Zanini, 1988), 47, 54–55.

and had a wider circulation depending on which products had acquired a licence for their use as advertising materials.[17] Such was the case for the Canobbio company's *Abissinia* (Abyssinia) series of 95 cards designed to advertise their Texas condiment.[18] These cards were apparently also published elsewhere with changed numbers and order, seeing that the same pictures numbered differently have turned up in other collections.[19] Let us now take a look at some examples.

5. The Empire trading cards

The first cards in the *Abissinia* set depict the daily life of the Ethiopian people, whereas the second part follows the various stages in the Italian conquest, divided into a parade of full-length images of enemy leaders and half-length portraits of Italian commanders.

The picture that emerges in these images is of a primitive Ethiopian society that dominates the weak. This was a result of a national backwardness in anthropological knowledge and the increase in racist warfare typical of fascist colonialism. The first card in the collection is titled "Abyssinian brigands" and shows a brawny African dressed in a loincloth, gun in hand, dragging a naked child behind him (fig. 1).

Likewise, the enemy society is portrayed as one of oppression and violence on the "Abyssinian raiders" and "Slaves in Chains" cards, as well as on numerous others. In other words, this is a society in which a few crooks rob and plunder the rest of the population who are waiting to be liberated. The second characteristic feature is superstition: "Magic Dance" or "Witchdoctor invoking Spirits" are the images that reveal the local beliefs considered as the foolish superstitions of a society at the antipodes

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17 The main series were: *The Italo-Turkish War*, Cioccolato-Cacao Costanzo Decri (Genova, 1912?); *Le nostre colonie in Africa Orientale*, Cioccolato La Filarete, (Milano, 1930s); *Viaggetto in A.O.*, R. Seveso e Co., with album, (Milano, 1930s); *Foto A.O. Italiana – Cine – Sport. Per la raccolta di fotografie di grande attualità dell'Abissinia, dei campioni di tutti gli sport e degli astri dello schermo*, Cioccolato Zàini, with album, Milano (1935?); *L'Italia e il suo Impero Coloniale*, series 1, Gustavo Dufour e figli, free with candy San Giacomo, with school album (Cornigliano, 1936); *Abissinia*, series 1 and 2, La Felsinea, free with Marte pastilles (Bologna, 1936–1937?); *Raccolta di fotografie Africa Orientale Italiana*, 4 series, Dahò, free with foods, (Milano, 1936?); *Folclore Etiopico*, 50 trading cards, Guglielmone e Cademartori (1937); *Abissinia*, Saiwa (Genova, 1936?).

18 *Abissinia*, 95 trading cards, Canobbio, free with Texas food condiment (Milano, 1936), http://www.cartesio-episteme.net, last accessed December 2016.

19 See for instance the image "Briganti abissini," cards no. 1 and no. 52, series 3; *L'Africa in giardino*, 47.

of European rationality. In the same way, the justice system is described as barbaric, and thus profoundly unjust and inhumane: “Open-air Court” and “Abyssinian justice (Human Torch)” are the two images that provide tangible evidence for this aspect (fig. 2).

Fig. 1

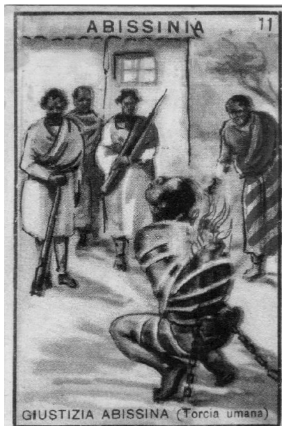

Fig. 2

This set of twelve images make up more than a third of those describing Ethiopian society (27) and they serve to convince Italian boys and girls that the fascist war was essential to bring “freedom and justice.”

Apart from these cards, others in this set show features of everyday life mixing elements of normalcy with other aspects that underline the diversity and exotic charm of the people. Such aspects had also been pointed out to teachers in teaching magazines published at the onset of the conflict.[20] Thus, the “Hunting with a Blowpipe” or “Spear fishing” cards show aspects of the adventurous life that young Italian males dreamed of, while the “Galla hairdresser” doing people’s hair outside a *tukul* or the “Housewives at the River” collecting water allude to the primitive life of these people, while simultaneously reaffirming the subordinate role assigned to women.

The next set concerns reports of the conquest and presents the fundamental stages of the public narrative of the war. In fact, the sanctions and gifts of faith on the home front are never depicted, nor do we find any record of the speeches on May 5 and 9, or even Mussolini himself. The cards offer a narrative of war centred on battles and on military aspects that underlines the epic encounters and the various kinds of weapons in use. The most highlighted aspect is Italian technological power and we find airplanes, “Bombers destroying an Abyssinian encampment” and five other similar pictures; tanks (“Tanks, the terror of the Abyssinians” together with three others), and also machine guns, trucks and radios. There is no shortage of images that illustrate acts of heroism in the “old style” of war, such as “Bayonet assault” and “Alpine troopers and Blackshirts ascend the Uork Amba,” but the number of the former kinds of cards leaves little room for doubt that it is Italy’s superior and overwhelming technology that has resulted in victory (fig. 3).

Fig. 3

20 “Il maestro e l’impresa etiopica,” *I diritti della scuol*a, no. 3 (October 20, 1935).

The colonial troops are always portrayed on the front line of battles and in second line in the triumphal entry into the various towns. On two occasions they are even the cards' main characters: "Our Dibat entrenched beyond Neghelli" and "Askari counterattack." The enemies fight with rifles and machine guns and are only featured as protagonists when they suffer defeat: "Abyssinian soldiers surrendering" and "Abyssinian Chief swears loyalty to Italy."

In 1937, the Milanese shoe company Santagostino launched its *Supergara* (Super Competition), which was a collection of 50 trading cards paired with a sort of *gioco dell'oca* (Game of the Goose) dedicated to the Ethiopian War.[21] The main characters were two children, *Scalfarotto* and *Niguardina* (and their faithful dog *Bobù*), already used in the company's previous advertising campaigns and the young heroes of Lucilla Antonelli's *Cuore e fuoco* (Heart and Fire) novel dedicated to the Ethiopian war. This coordination between a game, card collecting, possible prizes and a children's novel shows just how far advertising strategies had come with regard to products marketed for adult buyers with children. Santagostino's socks were a clear example with lines such as "Legionnaires socks," "supersocks," etc., which guaranteed "a card for every product" and worked in synergy with other items designed for similar kinds of customer. For example "In the packets of Lazzaroni's exquisite Salubrino biscuits; in Suchard's Super-vetta chocolate bars; in the painted boxes of Giotto crayons and in the Fila sets of watercolour tubes."[22]

The two main characters behaved like small adults and were perfect representations of the gender models of the time and particularly of the fascist world: the little boy is a fearless fighter, while the little girl is a caring nurse. In fact, the fifty cards in the collection include four images that show the little boy ("Scalfarotto the Blackshirt," "Scalfarotto's heroic deed," "Scalfarotto is wounded," and "Scalfarotto receives a medal"), whereas only the "Niguardina nurse" card is dedicated to the little girl. Just as in the *Abissinia* collection, the underlying theme is the campaign in Ethiopia, and in this case, scenes from the home front are also portrayed (no. 10: "Penalties"; no. 11: "Day of Faith"; no. 50: "5 May XIV"). Along the route towards Addis Ababa, coloured drawings of the battles and conquests of the "glorious" present alternate with images that look back into the past and build a unified path with the pre-colonial past of explorers and missionaries and the pre-fascist colonial past. Although there is still a strong emphasis on technology, it is far less blatant in this

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21 The Giro d'Italia was created in 1933 with the aim of discovering Italy's towns and regions.

22 *Supergara*, trading cards, Santagostino (Milano, 1937).

collection (among other things, there are more tanks than aircraft) and some cards have an almost surreal appeal, such as the "Aerial drop," which shows a herd of live cows being parachuted to the earth. Images of enemy fighters are hard to find, since they are always depicted in the distant background, whilst several cards show the African soldiers assigned to the Italians, such as "Askari," "Dubat," "Soldier in the Armed Forces," and "Spais."

A third set of cards are the ones published by the Liebig Italia company (founded in 1934), which for the first time ever were designed with imperial Italy in mind.[23] The titles of the first two series describe twelve scenes of areas that were part of the empire's territories and range from the "Addis Ababa Market" to the "Funeral fantasies of Abyssinian women." The images maintain the austere style of the Liebig series mentioned earlier: no Italians, and certainly none recognisable as Fascists, ever appear, while the landscapes are populated by indigenous peoples, and there is no hint of the recent conquest which, as far as one can see, might very well have never happened. As Mignemi points out, some of the drawings are based on recent photographs or even images from the late nineteenth century, published between 1935 and 1936 in the *Illustrazione italiana* magazine.[24] However, although there is a slight reference to a common European feeling, the captions clearly pay homage to a Eurocentric and racist vision and the final sentences, typically full of hyperbole and references to the fascist conquest, openly refer to the tasks to be undertaken by the Italian civilisation. Here are a few lines from card no.1, "Addis Ababa Market," in which the description of the market and verdicts on the primitive nature of the populations are intertwined until we find the final comments about the tasks of the civilising nation, an editorial tribute to the recent conquest:

> For primitive peoples, even more so than for nations [with an] advanced economy, the market is the place where you buy and sell and where, above all, the mercantile pretext becomes a huge exchange of chitchat, news, gossip, slander, in a colourful hubbub of men, animals, things, rags [. . .] Everything and anything can be sold there [. . .] Everything and anything is marketable because even the most unlikely object can be useful to those

23 See "Il feroce Saladino. Politica, consenso e sistema della pubblicità," in Mignemi, *Immagine coordinata per un impero*, 135–142, 146–149. See also Sanguinetti, *Figurine & menù Liebig*.
24 Mignemi, *Immagine coordinata per un impero*, 141.

> who live on the margins of civilisation. This is also an area in which the Italian civilisation will have its hands full.[25]

Likewise, the images of the third series, dedicated to the economic aspects of the occupied territories, do not mention the fascist nature of the empire: the colonisers are either portrayed in white or khaki uniforms and pith helmets or bare-chested as they work on the roads alongside the natives. The latter was an unusual image for the iconography of the time, which tended to separate images of white and black workers. Once again it is left to the captions to propagate the role of Fascism:

> With the Italian conquest, with the advance of the victorious armies, numerous road networks have been laid out with miraculous speed, almost all of these are suitable for heavy vehicles and have built with unheard of wisdom and a genuinely Roman method by our soldiers and our wonderful workers who followed them in the advance.[26]

6. The period after the Second World War

Trading cards came back into fashion after World War II. In the period between the years of reconstruction and the economic boom, Italian society was gripped by an increasing thirst for knowledge, linked to the expansion of mass education and the desire of the petty bourgeoisie and then the popular classes to sustain the improvement in living standards with cultural growth. The prime example of this process was the boom in the 1960s in the sale of children's encyclopedias payable in instalments. This tendency is also found in the world of trading cards, which saw an increased production of series aimed at filling these cultural needs, alongside those dedicated to sporting or cinema stars.[27] These are simple products, whose function is to provide a functional, unpretentious subaltern acculturation, a patina of knowledge that repeated clichés accrued in historical moments already long past. These collections are printed and sold because they are not subject to any need for critical

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25 "Il mercato di Addis Abeba," series *Impero Italiano (A.O.I.)*, card no. 1, Compagnia italiana Liebig S.A. (Milano, 1937).

26 *Strade romane*, mentioned in Mignemi, *Immagine coordinata per un impero*, 141.

27 By then trading cards were no longer connected to commodities for sale but had become commodities themselves. See Paola Basile and Maria Giovanna Battistini, eds., *Figurine di Sapere. Album didattici ed enciclopedici degli anni cinquanta e sessanta* (Modena: Museo della figurina, 2007), and especially the article by Roberto Farnè.

appraisal, and they spontaneously strike a chord in the minds of parents who had grown up in the 1930s.

For example, the colonial enterprises illustrated in the 1955 Lampo editions of the *Storia d'Italia* (Italian history) still seem to be completely immersed in the vocabulary and imperialist ideology of Fascism, even though any direct reference to the regime is carefully avoided. Every new phase of colonial conquest is justified in the eyes of the reader by its link to past episodes: the massacre of members of national geographic expeditions (the first African campaigns); the killings of Father Justin in Derna and Gustavo Tirreni in Homs (the Libyan conflict); disturbances on the border with Somalia (fascist conquest of the "still uncivilised Abyssinians"). The proud celebration of the colonial epic is also clearly evident in *Albo della Gloria* (Hall of fame),[28] a history of Italy from the time of ancient Rome, which says nothing about the fascist period but includes fifteen images of the first African war, two of the expedition to China in 1900 and seventeen of the war in Libya. However, geography is probably the most striking sphere of interest, since curiosity was growing about the world beyond the national borders. This childlike curiosity was satisfied in ways that often mixed legends and popular credulity and wondrous or disturbing aspects with verified facts. For example, in 1951 the *Albo delle meraviglie* (Book of Wonders)[29] series came out, in which cards showing "Masai Warriors" were published alongside ones portraying a "Giant Lizard" or "Flying Fish." Africa is represented by "Pygmies" and "Watussi Blacks" and we also find images of Australian savages and one of the "Monkey Men" from New Guinea who live among the trees swinging from branch to branch.

Le razze e i costumi (Races and customs) series was also published in the same year. This was a typological overview of the world's population that mixed elements of racial anthropology with an ethnographic curiosity regarding the most picturesque aspects.[30] It goes without saying that the peoples of territories under colonial domination were described in openly derogatory tones (for example, "Sudanese Savage" and "Wild Bushman"; the introduction to Africa states that "wherever Europe has brought its civilisation [. . .] the natives themselves have been influenced by these new contacts and their ferocity has diminished or even disappeared"). The *Enciclopedia tascabile* (Pocket Encyclopedia, fig. 4)[31] also states: "The

28 "Albo della Gloria," *Corriere dello scolaro*, no. 1 (Milano-Treviso: Barigazzi, 1952–53).

29 *Albo delle meraviglie* (Milano: Tomasina, 1951).

30 *Le razze e i costumi*, (Milano: Carroccio, 1951).

31 *Enciclopedia tascabile*, vol. 1 (Milano: Torelli, 1951).

African civilisation [. . .] is still at a primitive state: just imagine that not only have some of the negro tribes from the interior never come into contact with white men, but that they also still live a life similar to that of our most ancient ancestors."

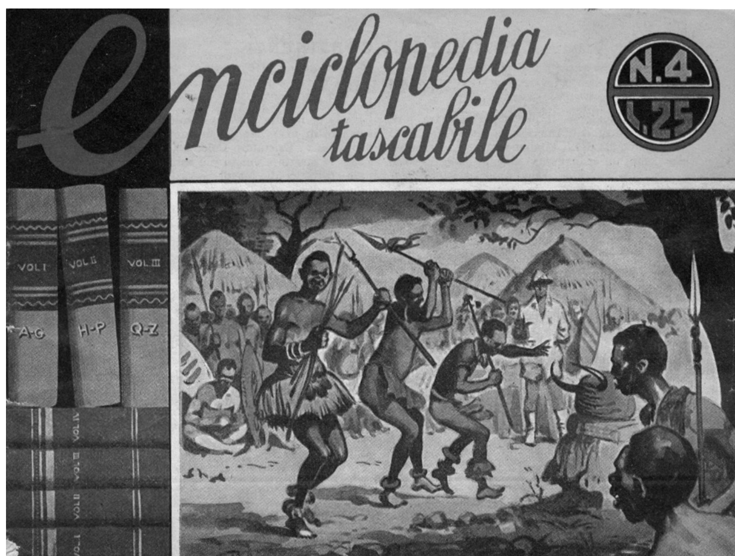

Fig. 4

However, the most important collection that focuses on mankind's "racial" identity is certainly *Razze umane* (Human Races), which came out in 1956 (fig. 5)[32] and was the Italian version of a Spanish collection that had appeared the previous year (1955).[33]

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32 *Razze umane* (Milano: editoriale Lampo, 1956).
33 *Razas humanas* (Barcelona: Bruguera, 1955). For information on the 2011 reprint and an interview with the illustrator Miguel Conde, see www.rtve.es/noticias/20110310/ediciones-reedita-albumes-cromos-bruguera-anos-50-espejo-historia/415602.shtml, last accessed December 2016. The topic of race had already been brought up in series published in other European countries, such as Switzerland. See *Les merveilles du monde*, published by Nestlé, Peter, Cailler, Kohler in 1929. On this, see Patrick Minder, *La Suisse coloniale. La répresentation de l'Afrique et des Africains en Suisse au temps des colonies (1880–1939)* (Berne: Peter Lang, 2011), 192–196 and appendix no. 3. See also Gianluca Gabrielli, *Il curricolo "razziale". La costruzione dell'alterità di "razza" e coloniale nella scuola italiana (1860–1950)* (Macerata: Eum, 2015).

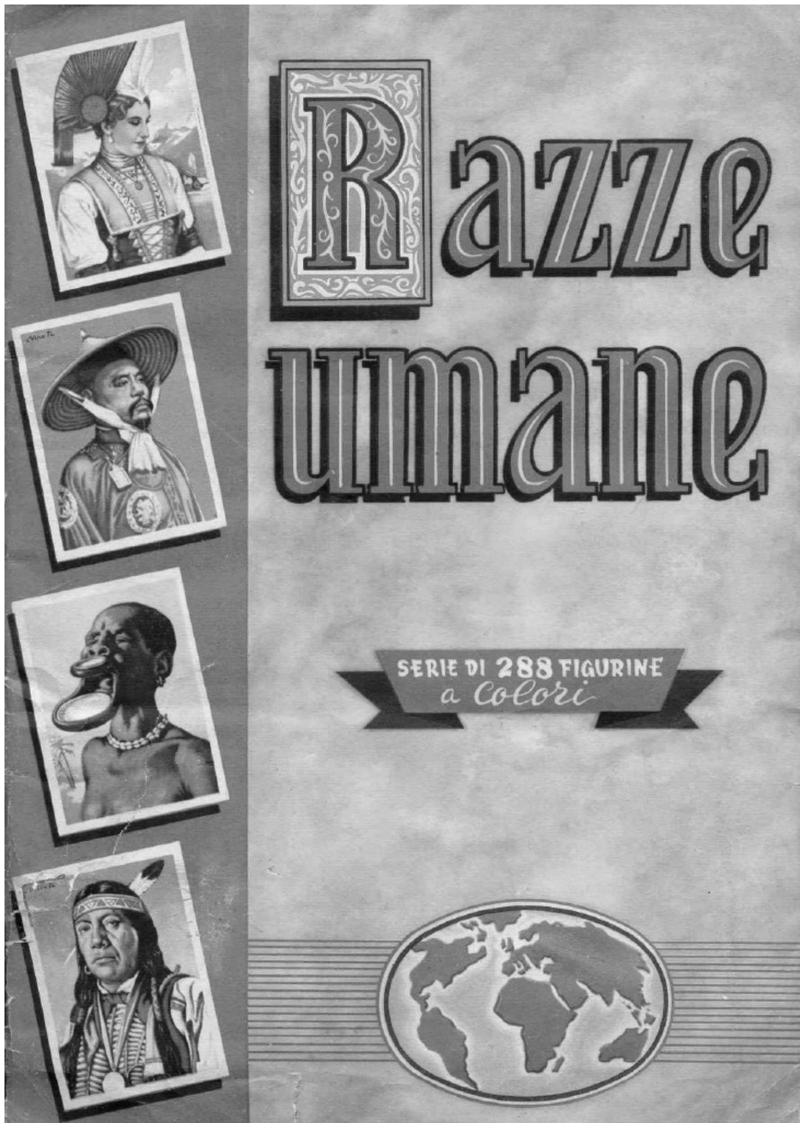

Fig. 5

The collection has 288 colour cards, most of which show the face and half-bust of people described as belonging to all the “races” and peoples of

the world. Particular attention is paid to the strangest populations with their unusual costumes or to "barbarians," but there is also a significant interest for Europeans and the alleged somatic differences and customs within the Italian population. Other cards make up thematic maps of the existing continents, whilst two or three others grouped together show scenes of the everyday life of these populations. What is most striking about this collection is the functionality of the "human race" category. In 1956, this was a chaotic but coherent melting pot that comprised both the "racial" differences inherited from the anthropological racist tradition and the cultural differences at the basis of provincial identities, but was also able to satisfy people's morbid curiosity about all those little-known populations, briefly visited by explorers and then ignored, crushed or transformed by the colonial presence. All three aspects coexist in the collection classified by the various continents into which the album is divided. A glance through the introductory texts and the captions makes it easy to see that every card shows evident signs of notions of racially-oriented physical anthropology mixed with the search for and description of bizarre, grotesque or morbid aspects.

For example, after mentioning the unity of the human family, the Italian introduction goes on to describe "one of the rare races," the Phi Tong Luang:

> These men are extremely childish and are completely unlike any other races known to man. The Phi Tong Luang have yellow skin, big eyes, slightly wavy black hair. They have their own language, but quite often communicate in different kinds of grunts accompanied by gestures. They do not have signals. They have no signs of greeting. They are tireless nomads who live without even building a hut. Endowed with scarce imagination, they are unable to think beyond their immediate needs, and intelligence is of no importance to them. What really matters to them, however, is the ability to find edible roots, which is the only food they eat.
> This is how these survivors of the prehistoric era live, like strays in the jungle, perpetually afraid of beasts and the men who hunt them, who are thus considered as evil spirits. Just how these people have managed to survive to the present day will always be a mystery, one of the best-kept secrets of the so infinite and so impenetrable jungle.[34]

The description of these people as being "childish," with "scarce imagination" and "unable to think beyond their immediate needs" portrays a population who, physical traits aside, are more animal than human, who communicate in grunts despite having their own language. The emphasis

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34 *Razze umane*, 2.

on these "anomalies" evokes the mysteries of the "infinite and impenetrable" jungle that promises morbid curiosities and thrilling moments to the young collectors of these cards. In the texts about Africa and Oceania, little attention is paid to physical traits, which seem to be taken for granted, but the descriptions focus more on general data, cultural facts and everyday life, albeit with highly judgemental tones. Thus, some aspects of what is described as the typical "character" of the "black race" are said to be the explanation as to why these people are so primitive and barely civilised:

> Blacks are poorly civilised and generally live in the primitive state, practising crude fetishism as a religion. Even after more than half a century of constant explorations, the Dark Continent has yet to be fully discovered. The Negroes are generally cheerful pranksters, but their indolence and superstition are due to their backward state of civilisation, as is clearly shown by their huts, their frequent lack of clothing and the primitive weapons they still use, such as spears, bows, and clubs.[35]

In the 1960s there was more control over the production of trading cards and the more grotesque aspects disappeared, even though a certain number of elements did remain that characterised the colonial and "racial" tradition of the Italian view towards the other continents. Many collections are explicitly presented as resources for "school projects." The Lampo company, for example, renamed some of its past products "Lampo scuola" and reassembled previously printed materials into new series such as *Naturama* or *Vita e Colore* (Life and Colour). In these campaigns, primary school children were given an empty album and a packet of trading cards as they went into school. The 1968 *Naturama* collection starts with flowers, followed by seven sections of animals ranging from *Protozoa* to *Mammals*, then *Human Anatomy* and finally *The Inhabitants of Africa and Oceania.* The evolutionary logic is juxtaposed with aesthetic (flowers) and ethnographic curiosities; the "races" (a term still widely used in the captions) come from a geographical area (almost always respecting scholastic fields of study) and then move into the scientific one. Although there are echoes of the struggles for emancipation from racism and colonialism, the approach is always paternalistic: the purpose of the collection is "to raise awareness of the characteristics of the 'past life' of those peoples from far away who are taking giant steps in conquering freedom, equality and social emancipation." The texts accompanying the images are no longer those of the fascist era, nor those of the immediate

35 *Razze umane*, "Africa."

post-war period, but still contain certain stereotypes that are indicative of a "racial" and "primitivist" outlook that shows no signs of faltering. The "white race descends according to the Bible from the white race of Shem and Japheth" and it is assumed that amongst the men from New Guinea there are "wild men [. . .] who are addicted to cannibalism and who hold great feasts, where they devour the flesh of captives from enemy tribes"; that the Maori "used to wear bones in their noses and showy amulets on their chests but when the British colonised their territory [. . .] they partly abandoned their primitive customs"; and that the Mangbetu "are still very wild since, apart from the Niam Niam, no other tribe in Africa can compare with the Mangbetu people in terms of cannibalism."[36]

The fact that at the end of the 1960s card collections still contain this colonial and "racial" imagery certainly indicates that Italian culture and society had failed to come to terms with this part of the nation's history. However, this is also flanked by the typically tacky kind of cultural content found in these products for children, the outdated relics of long-gone eras, the nostalgic images that winked at the imagination of parents who were ready to fork out money to buy them, and old iconography that is refunctionalised to be used in pseudo teaching. Thus, if we revisit trading cards today, we are faced with a compendium of persevering prejudices and stereotypes that continued to circulate in popular and children's culture long after they had been eliminated from high culture. It could certainly be worthwhile for history scholars to also consider these "low-level" but powerful dimensions of life and the movement of concepts in the world of childhood.

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36 *Razze umane*, Trading cards no. 342, 347, 351 and 369.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

ITALY THROUGH BRITISH EYES: ITALIAN EX-COLONIES IN BRITISH NEWSPAPERS (1945–1949)

EVA GARAU

In a telegram sent from the British Foreign Office to Cairo and Washington on April 27, 1946,[1] Ernest Bevin, the British foreign secretary, reported on a recent exchange with James F. Byrnes, U.S. secretary of state, over the Italian Peace Treaty. At the heart of their concern was the destiny of the former Italian colonies, the Great Powers' spheres of influence in the Mediterranean and the "Soviet threat." Great Britain and the United States took divergent positions over the Italian colonies at that stage—their positions would converge only after the Commission of Investigation for the Former Italian Colonies was set up in November 1947, and they would agree on a common policy during the last phase of the negotiations, between September 1948 and November 1949, after years of Anglo-Soviet rivalry in the Middle East and Africa[2].

The precarious balance in the debate over the disposal of the Italian ex-colonies, on which there exists today a broad literature, was reflected in a series of articles published in *The Manchester Guardian*[3] and *The Observer* between 1945 and 1949.

The *Guardian* had been devoting its attention to the reports on the Peace Treaty published in Italian newspapers since the London Council of

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1 *Italy: Italian Colonies. Conversation between S/S and Mr. Byrnes on the disposal of the Italian colonies and the British desire for the trusteeship of Cyrenaica in view of the evacuation of troops from Egypt* (TNA FO 141/1135). Unless otherwise noted, all translations from Italian are my own.

2 Saul Kelly, *Cold War in the Desert. Britain, the United States and the Italian Colonies, 1945–52* (London: MacMillan, 2000).

3 Hereinafter referred to as the *Guardian*, as it was renamed in 1959.

Foreign Ministers (CFM) in September 1945. In Italy, commentators still showed a degree of optimism, rejecting "the view that the terms will be 'hard' and may involve the loss of all her former colonies. They believe that Libya will be put under international mandate with Italian participation." The disposal of Eritrea, on the other hand, was going to be "a bitter pill to swallow."[4] Italy was considered "bankrupt" and not capable of handling her own country's rehabilitation, let alone the cost of overseas land. While the Italian press held that the coming peace would be entirely "dictated," the British maintained that not Communism but nationalism could be a problem, with all parties except the PCI (the Italian Communist Party) "asking for the national integrity of Italian soil to be respected."[5] The issue at stake at the London CFM meeting was how to avoid further competition between national powers in the allocation of the former Italian territories, a competition aggravated by Russia's candidature for an administering role. The difficulties in the negotiations, the *Guardian'*s diplomatic correspondent explained, were the result of a lack of clarity when the issue had first been raised at the Potsdam Conference.[6] The British suspicion towards a solution that would favour Italy emerged in most articles published between 1945 and 1947. Two reasons for the U.S. supportive attitude towards Italy were identified: the attempt to win the support of Italian-American voters before the 1946 Congress elections,[7] and the cultural affinity between the two countries—owing to their close ties with the "Roman Catholic bloc." Moreover, by assigning most of the old colonies to Italy, the U.S. would pave the way for American economic penetration. An Italian trusteeship, hotly disputed and finally rejected by the UN, was criticised on the basis of "the memory of the British heavy losses sustained in the British conquest of the Italian Empire."[8]

Although the British bloodshed in the 1940–1943 military campaigns in Ethiopia, Eritrea, Libya and Somalia was mentioned in most editorials, "more humanitarian" reasons were provided to justify the rejection. The defence of the interests of "the Arabs and the Berbers of Libya and the

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4 "Italy to lose colonies? The Peace Treaty. Much at Stake in Eritrea," *Guardian*, September 8, 1945.

5 Ibid.

6 "Russia Stakes Her Claim in the Mediterranean. Italian Colonies and Dodecanese?," *Guardian*, September 19, 1945.

7 This charge was rejected by Dulles in an interview with *La Stampa*. "Italian colonies. Mr. Dewey's statement: 'Not election move,'" *Guardian*, August 30, 1948.

8 "Making Italy Trustee of her Colonies? British View on the Plan. Too much of a Return to Pre-war Position," *Guardian*, September 18, 1945. See also: "Italy's Empire," *Guardian*, September 18, 1945.

Abyssinians of Eritrea who suffered so sorely during Fascist domination,"[9] and the British wartime pledge to the Senussi sect in Cyrenaica[10] were at the forefront of anti-Italian rhetoric. Dealing with the problem of the Italian ex-colonies also meant outlining the boundaries of a new peaceful Europe.[11] A united Italy, General de Gaulle claimed, was a "European necessity": acknowledging the Italian effort in rebuilding the country on a democratic basis "in spite of the greatest difficulties"[12] meant recognising her right to maintain the territories conquered before Fascism.

In February 1946, the U.S. State Department sent a note to France, Britain and Russia suggesting a revision of the Italian armistice terms. While proposing the "removal of the last remaining controls and restrictions from Italian sovereignty," Americans were growing more pessimistic about the conclusion of the negotiations, and there was widespread scepticism in diplomatic circles about the chances of achieving a solution in time for the Paris Peace conference. The CFM representatives had made very little headway and the "deadlock" of the negotiations on the Italian colonies continued to be "the thorniest matter on the table."[13] Although during the Moscow conference Russia had restated its claims over Tripolitania and Eritrea, such ambitions were firmly resisted by the British[14] and did not gain support from either France or the U.S. The American proposal for an international trusteeship under the supervision of the UN with a seven-member advisory board[15]—already put forward at the London conference but in need of further refinement—was backed by Britain and France. The Paris conference in April 1946 was the first turning point in the British view of African territories. While recalling the opinion of the Foreign Office, the British correspondent mentioned for the

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9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

11 The decision on the Italian territories is of central importance in relation to the construction of a "European federation" and also to "European security and prosperity" in a number of articles throughout the period taken into account. See "Italy's colonies. Russia agrees to Conference," *Guardian,* May 28, 1947.

12 "Gen. De Gaulle defends the 'Western spirit'. Views on the London Negotiations. No objection to Italy keeping her colonies," *Guardian*, October 13, 1945.

13 "Conflicting views on Italian reparation. Russia wants machinery and money. U.S. says Western Allies would have to pay," *Guardian*, February 15, 1946.

14 Britain could "not see a legitimate reason for such a 'cut across the throat of the British Empire.'" "U.S. wants Italy terms revised. Soviet demands resisted," *Observer*, February 10, 1946.

15 The Unites States, Russia, Britain, France, Italy plus one European and one non-European inhabitant of each territory.

first time the only two solutions available to those territories that were not yet ready for independence and compatible with the Atlantic charter: an international administration under the UN or individual trusteeship, in which case neither Russia nor Britain could be the trustee—but Italy itself.[16] Such overtures were officially justified by the idea that Italy was "no longer a Great Power" (and therefore a far less dangerous competitor than Russia) and "given time, she might prove worthy of the trust."[17]

With the temporary rehabilitation of Italy as a democratic nation, albeit included among the "small countries," Britain was trying to solve the rivalry with Russia while compromising with the U.S. This, and the awareness of the slow progress in the negotiations, determined a shift in the Russian attitude too, from a "stubborn" to a more "conciliatory" stance.[18] At the CFM meeting on 10 May 1946, "the first gleam of hope emerged that the conference might produce some positive results," although only three days later, it was admitted that "the hopes aroused on Friday [. . .] have now been proved so unfounded."[19] The unexpected Russian approval coupled with traditional French support of an Italian administration forced Bevin to retreat into isolationism, as he insisted on the impossibility for Britain of allowing an Italian return to Cyrenaica. While Americans asserted the sovereignty of the Big Four and the British opted for a UN limited trusteeship until (early) independence, both Bevin and Byrnes asked Italy to renounce all claims immediately[20] and suggested postponing the discussion for twelve months, after which time the matter would be left in the hands of the UN General Assembly.

Apart from this, the Paris conference was portrayed as "a spectacular failure."[21] As regards Italian opinions on the decision to postpone the discussion, the *Guardian*'s Rome correspondent reported that the proposal had made it into the headlines of all Italian newspapers, to the extent that "it has [. . .] hardly been possible to pick up an Italian newspaper [. . .]

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16 "Italy first," *Guardian*, April 27, 1946.
17 Ibid.
18 "Agreement on Trieste and Italian colonies. Foreign Minister's big advance. Only reparations holding up the peace conference," *Guardian*, July 4, 1946; "Towards compromise on Italian colonies. British and Russian offers. Moscow abandons claim to Tripolitania. Progress at last in Paris," *Guardian*, May 11, 1946.
19 "Still stuck on Italy. New colonies plan. Germany coming up tomorrow," in *Guardian*, May 14, 1946.
20 Ibid.
21 "No secrecy in Paris. Italy and colonies. Delaying the decision for a year," *Guardian*, June 21, 1946.

without finding some exceedingly bitter comment on the news."[22] The "moderate" newspaper *Tribuna* reported that "even abroad people are beginning to say that probably Italy will not sign a peace treaty that deprives her of her pre-fascist colonies. We [. . .] are tired of taking account of the differences that divide the Great Powers, and we are not drawing advantage from their disagreement, for they have thrown the Atlantic Charter to the winds," meaning that the negotiations on the Italian issue were being exploited by the Great Nations to expand their influence in the Mediterranean. With the only exception of Communist newspapers, the Italian press was described as "beginning to harden." Things were expected to take a turn for the worse at the first meeting of the Constitutional Assembly, which would also review any foreign agreement concerning Italy.[23] The Italian complaints on the Peace Treaty were summarised in the notes sent by De Gasperi to the CFM and duly reported by the British press, where the Italian government was reported as being "agreeable to the postponement of decisions" on the condition that any demand of renunciation to sovereignty "should cease"[24] and that those awaiting to return should be allowed to do so, especially in Cyrenaica and Eritrea.[25]

Over the summer of 1946, the Italian political committee on the future of the Italian colonies continued discussions to decide the official position to be presented at the Paris conference in late September. During the summit, former Prime Minister and conference delegate Bonomi argued that Italy had Libya, Eritrea and Somalia decades before Mussolini's rise to power and rhetorically asked the delegates: "Can a peace agreement that further exacerbates Italy's already desperate economic situation [. . .] be considered constructive?" Italy, he believed, had to be granted a trusteeship that was compatible with the principles of the Atlantic charter, not for "the return of colonies" but "for the honour and responsibility of assisting the population [. . .] towards self-government." Asking Italy to renounce "what is ours by right" would mean denying her "thousand-year-

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22 "Big democracies' first compliment to our new Republic; Fascism gave us pact of steel: the Four give us a steel nose; Bitter feelings in Italy on the colonial question," *Guardian*, June 22, 1946.

23 Ibid.

24 In the case of postponement of the decision for a year, Bonomi demanded that Italy maintain administrative responsibility for the ex-colonies even under British military occupation. He called the request to renounce sovereignty tout court as "unfair, senseless and unpractical." "Claims to Italian colonies. Italy asks for trusteeship," *Guardian*, September 24, 1946.

25 "Italy asks for reassurance on colonies. Two notes to the Foreign Ministers," *Guardian*, June 24, 1946.

old traditions of friendly political, economic and cultural relations with the people of the East and of Africa" and preventing those populations from achieving "human progress and civilisation."[26] Most articles published in September 1946 mentioned that negotiations were stalled, the only novelty being the idea of appointing a commission of investigation that would report to the CFM, while emphasis was placed on the will of the inhabitants of the territories.[27] The *Observer*'s correspondent summarised both the Italian reactions to the *status quo* and the British perspective on the Italian criticism of the negotiations in March 1947, when Italy was awaiting the imminent signature of the final draft of the treaty with a mixture of ambition and anxiety. Moorehead described the Italian views as follows:

> In 1939, ours was the third empire of the world [. . .] In 1947, our empire still stands third in importance [. . .] The victorious Allies have now decided to demolish all this. Well, to some extent we must accept. But [. . .] [I]n those parts of the empire established by the democratic pre-Mussolini government, Italy still has a legitimate interest.[28]

The idea that the British were deliberately impoverishing the colonies so that they could keep them for themselves was judged to be "demonstrable nonsense," a sign that in Italy "the pride of the empire dies hard" and that Italians were going to put up a strenuous fight to retain as much of their empire as they could, even though they would never recover Tripolitania.[29] Italy's application for membership of the UN was itself considered by the British press as motivated by anxiety over the future of the African ex-colonies rather than by the aim of regaining a place among the nations.[30]

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26 "Claims to Italian colonies. Italy asks for trusteeship," *Guardian*, September 24, 1946.

27 "New declaration on colonies," *Guardian*, September 24, 1946. See also: "Discussions on the colonies," *Guardian*, September 12, 1946; "Left over for a year. Big Four agreement on Italian colonies accepted," *Guardian*, September 26, 1946.

28 Alan Moorehead, "An Empire without an owner," *Guardian*, March 16, 1947.

29 Ibid. "They are least likely to succeed in Cyrenaica [. . .]. Whether or not Marshall Graziani as a punitive measure actually threw one of the Senussi chieftains out of an airplane is beside the point: the Senussi believe he did and they will not forgive [. . .] Tripolitania is a much contentious problem."

30 "Italy prepared for sacrifices to keep share in colonies," *Guardian*, May 11, 1947. The period between the first informal application and her admission in 1955 favoured the feeling that two years as co-belligerent had not contributed to the rehabilitation of the country. See Enrica Costa Bona and Luciano Tosi, *L'Italia e*

While outlining the Italian claims expressed in the "four points" drafted by De Gasperi's cabinet, the *Guardian*'s Rome correspondent reflected on a number of seemingly "minor" facts influencing public opinion, such as a colonial exhibition in Rome "in which great emphasis is laid upon Italy's legal right to its pre-fascist African colonies." The fact that all parties, now including the Communists, were supporting the claims with equal vigour was judged to be "worth nothing," while a cabinet crisis that would set the country further back economically and politically was deemed to be impending.[31]

On 3 October 1947, a new meeting took place in London. A final agreement had to be reached by September 15, 1948, as established by article 17 of the Italian Treaty.[32] In the twelve months between the London conference and the final meeting of the CFM, the *Guardian* reported on the various occasions in which Italian journalists met British political representatives and questioned them on British policy over the colonies.[33] As the deadline approached, the opinions expressed in the Italian press acquired a new prominence in the *Guardian*, with daily reports on the subject. Major emphasis was given to an editorial from the *Corriere della Sera*, written by "an authoritative person" under the pseudonym "Diplomaticus."[34] According to the anonymous contributor, "Italians are romantic and sentimental and become realistic only when faced with bitter realities." He argued that there were friendly feelings for Italians in the

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la sicurezza collettiva. Dalla Società delle Nazioni alle Nazioni Unite (Perugia: Morlacchi, 2007).

31 Ibid.

32 "Italy's colonies. Four-Power discussions open in London," *Guardian*, October 4, 1947. On the details of nations allowed to express their views see: "Future of Italian colonies," *Guardian*, October 7, 1947; "Italy's colonies. 23 nations to be consulted," *Guardian*, October 8, 1947; "Italy's colonies. Consultations, but when?," *Guardian*, October 9, 1947; "Progress on Italy's colonies," *Guardian*, October 11, 1947; "Italy's former colonies," *Guardian*, November 1, 1947; The Italian case was presented in November by Ambassador Gallarati-Scotti to the CFM deputies for the Italian colonies. "Italy's claim to colonies. Her case presented," *Guardian*, November 20, 1947.

33 See Lord Chancellor Jowitt's press conference in Rome in March 1947: "Lord Jowitt parries questions on Italian colonies. 'Gruelling' two hours in press conference," *Guardian*, March 4, 1948; and Labour MP Ivor Thomas' address at a Socialist rally in Rome: "Italians cheer Labour M.P. Hint about colonies," *Guardian*, March 31, 1948.

34 See also: "Italian views on future of former colonies. The great problem of unemployment," *Guardian*, August 9, 1948. See also: "Evatt asks for wider talks on Italian colonies," *Guardian*, August 8, 1948.

colonies and that Italy intended to go back "with no other purpose than to [. . .] lead the local people to independence." Diplomaticus' idea that the London conference had the responsibility of making a decision that would have consequences on Euro-African relations was interpreted by the British correspondent as a sign of that anti-British criticism by then shared by most Italians and expressed to him in Rome by an interlocutor whom he left anonymous:

> [. . .] it is madness and stupidity to think that Italians can be excluded from Africa. If you exclude them from useful tasks in the former territories [. . .] you cannot keep the Italians from spreading over the Middle East with feelings of lasting resentment at least as great as your own Protestant, unforgiving hatred of the Italy that fought you. [. . .] You need Cyrenaica, perhaps, for bases. Why not say so?[35]

In the month preceding the Paris conference of September 1947, the newspaper reported on the (lack of) progress of the CFM, occasionally arguing that the main obstacles to an agreement were in Europe rather than in Africa due to fear and jealousy on the part of the Powers involved in the negotiations. The main step forward in the process was represented by the "encouraging" (albeit patronising in tone) reports of the commission, as "for the first time since the end of the war, a fact-finding commission including representatives of both East and West have found the same facts."[36] Nevertheless, no agreement was to be reached at the London conference, and especially not on Tripolitania, and the matter fell under the jurisdiction of the UN. The *Guardian* went as far as suggesting a solution, widely reported in the Italian press: placing the ex-colonies under international trusteeship of the sixteen member nations of the Western Union, Italy included. The Italian Foreign Office replied that Italy would pursue her policy—Italian trusteeship under the UN—through diplomatic channels in London.[37] By mid-August, the British correspondent claimed, the Italian press had lost interest in the negotiations, as explained by "a

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35 Ibid.

36 "The Italian colonies," *Guardian*, August 10, 1947. Libya, Somalia and Eritrea were portrayed as semi-desert lands with a "backward population." None was considered self-sufficient. Their future could only rely on the restoration of the impoverished soil. The locals were "technically ignorant and politically immature," which made it "impossible" to even think about self-government. The commission reported on general feelings against the return of Italians, especially in Libya, but also against the British. Ibid. See also: "Italy's colonies. Libya not ready for self-government," *Guardian*, July 28, 1948.

37 "Italy's policy reaffirmed. Future of the colonies," *Guardian*, August 11, 1947.

student of these questions" in the pages of *Risorgimento*. Zanetti, that was the name of the "student," argued that Italy had to "examine whether it is worthwhile 'receiving a gift of any of the colonies from England and America at the price of a close alliance, when by far the biggest majority of Italians want to stay neutral.'" Apart from the nationalists, "who feel offended that Italy's efforts in Africa since 1885 should be so lightly discarded," and those who wanted to return to their homes in Africa, "these problems do not excite most Italians." The British correspondent did not comment on the fact that the article published by *Risorgimento* was profoundly different in tone and content from the editorials published in Italian mainstream newspapers, only acknowledging that it was followed by an editor's note distancing the paper from the contributor.[38]

The opening of the Paris conference on 13 August was characterised by an immediate sense of failure,[39] the attitudes towards the case of Libya being representative of the divergent positions: Britain and the United States approved of a Senussi Emirate in Cyrenaica under British trusteeship, leaving Tripolitania and Fezzan under British occupation for another year; the Russians suggested an Italian trusteeship, and France requested to further postpone the decision, albeit allowing the "Italian colonists" to return to Eritrea and Tripolitania. The same lack of common strategy emerged in relation to Eritrea and the result was a much feared deadlock marking the definitive failure of years of negotiations.[40] Awareness that no agreement could be envisaged after two years of regular debates led to the formulation of a more realistic proposal for evaluation by the United Nations: direct international control of the former colonies.[41] The *Guardian*'s correspondent in Tripoli listed the objections raised by the deputy ministers, from the fact that too many opinions were expressed, which delayed progress, to the fact that "these territories become a platform for power politics and the people [. . .] because each Power tends to collect its own little coterie of supporters."[42]

A tendency to look at Italian settlers in a more positive light, after years of remarking on the tragic fascist colonial experience, became apparent. The Italian government started being depicted as capable of improving "these communities by investing in exports as well as employing

38 "Italian holidays and after. Outlook for autumn," *Guardian*, August 16, 1948.
39 "Italy's colonies. Differing plans of Four Powers," *Guardian*, September 14, 1948.
40 Ibid.
41 "The Italian colonies. Is International control possible?," *Guardian*, November 26, 1948.
42 Ibid.

international additional subsidies." The editorials' change of tone extended to the relationship between Italy and Britain, with the latter dismissing the intransigent attitude that had characterised the 1945–1948 period and arguing that Britain could guarantee its support to an Italian administration of the territories. Indeed, an Italian administration under British control would allow the displaced settlers to return to their homes and civil personnel not to be perceived as "alien" by the locals.[43] For the first time ever, the paper was critical of the British habit of "confusing the basis with political domination." The correspondent in Tripoli went so far as listing the mistakes made by the British in the East and in Africa, from Egypt to Iraq to Transjordan. Nevertheless, this turn of events should also be read as an attempt to secure national interests and offset Russia's advantage following the CFM's failure to find an agreement. However, a problem was still unsolved. Even if Italy were to agree on the British claims to Cyrenaica and Eritrea, which Count Sforza seemed to be ready to avail, the return of Italian administrators "would weaken the Allied position in the territories." The paper reported that most Powers feared that the General Assembly's approval of the Anglo-American plan would lead to political chaos in Italy—including the resignation of Sforza, to be replaced by a "neutral" foreign minister, and an upsurge of Communism. France was most concerned about this scenario, fearing that "the international weakening of the Italian government and turn of Italy towards a neutral foreign policy might cause a fatal setback in Western European consolidation." According to the French delegate in Paris, the British attitude represented "a victory of Britain's imperial interests over the Western Union policy," which increased French suspicion that Britain was not serious in her plans for the Western European Union.[44]

In Britain, interest on the issue of the colonies faded during the last months of 1948, when all decisions were in the hands of the General Assembly, and the *Guardian* and the *Observer* would only occasionally mention Italian politics or feature articles relating to the future of the colonies. The *Observer*'s Rome correspondent, Cecile Sprigge, reported in late November on the work of the Italian cabinet "to hammer out an agreed statement on foreign policy on which to meet the Chamber on Tuesday, when Signor Nenni, the Left-wing (Opposition) Socialist leader introduces a censure motion denouncing the Government for preparing

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43 Even the suggestion of adopting Italian language, in recognition of "what Italy has done and can still do in the territories," says something about this change of opinion.

44 "Open split with France over Italian colonies," *Guardian*, November 28, 1948.

Italy's 'entanglement in the Western military bloc.'"[45] Nenni's motion was caused by De Gasperi's decision to commit the country to a Western bloc following US Secretary of State Marshall's trip to Rome. Adding to public outrage over British policy on the colonies, fractures emerged in political parties and several Christian Democrats and Socialists were united in their growing discontent with the state of affairs. What was "truly notable," Sprigge wrote, was "that Signor De Gasperi not only refrained from any anti-British comment but found occasion at Brussels to repeat his admiration for the leadership in the war given by 'Glorious old England.'" Since at that stage Britain was the main obstacle to a successful outcome of Italian claims, the correspondent concluded that the exaltation of "Glorious old England" must be read as reflecting "a strong determination on the Premier's part to overcome the present unwholesome tension."[46] The collaborative turn in the Anglo-Italian relationship was also apparent in the titles of the articles published since the beginning of the year, such as, among others, "Italo-British relations. Sforza optimistic" and "Desire for an agreement with Britain." The former, written by the Rome correspondent, described an interview with Foreign Minister Sforza, who had declared that Italy's internal divisions would not prevent the government from pursuing a firm foreign policy and that he was confident that all conflicts with Britain and "any remnant suspicion would disappear."[47] According to the minister, Italy looked divided but it was not so; as he claimed, "those who know the recent history of Italy know that I am not unreasonably optimistic. In 1860, the whole of Italy enthusiastically proclaimed itself in favour of unity, and only one year before the most important personalities in Europe were saying that the unity of Italy was a myth."[48] As for Italy's role in the global scenario, Sforza blamed the problems with Britain on a series of misunderstandings that Ambassador Scotti-Gallarati, who had just left Italy for London, would correct. Count Sforza asserted that Europe was "already a reality," arguing that finding a way to manage the African territories was the main issue and that the task would be successfully completed only with an

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45 C. Sprigge, "Rome cabinet effort to agree on West Union," *Observer*, November 28, 1948.

46 Ibid. See also: "Italian colonies. UN Assembly decides against debate," *Guardian*, December 9, 1948; "Italy's colonies. Rome denies reports," *Guardian*, December 15, 1948.

47 "Italo-British relations. Sforza optimistic," *Guardian*, January 8, 1949. See also: "Italy's colonies. Desire for an agreement with Britain," *Guardian*, January 12, 1949.

48 Ibid.

agreement between Italy and England, as "the problem is much larger there than provisional flags." The novel perception of Italy as a democracy to be included in the number of allied Western powers and in a future European federation was reinforced by a number of editorials published in the two newspapers in early 1949.

A year after the general election, the British press drew a balance of twelve months in which Italian internal affairs had been followed by the Western Powers with "feverish attention," their anxiety shifting from the "Communist threat" at the 1948 elections to where Italy would turn if left alone. According to British MP Maclean, Italy had wasted no time in re-establishing her role among the council of the nations, and hence she should be invited to become a founder-member of the new Council of Europe.[49] The idea that the Italian "natural gift for diplomacy" could be a resource for the rest of Europe was matched by the awareness that Britain could not forgo the alliance with Italy and "see her fall into the hands of an enemy."[50] In the struggle between East and West, the allegiance of Italy, "lying [. . .] on the borders separating two contending worlds" had become a factor of first-rate importance, let alone that, since the end of the war, her former enemies had been vying with each other to win her favours, although Italians "are realists, not to say cynics" and equipped to resist the "Soviet blandishments." If Italian ties with the West had been favoured by a number of factors, such as American aid, French support and Russian "ruthlessness," which all served the end of encouraging Italy to dismiss her neutrality and enter the Western bloc, the disposal of the former colonies persisted in being the most pressing issue preventing full cooperation. Since the opening session of the General Assembly conference at Lake Success, the British press had focused on the terms of the negotiations and the debates on whether to opt for international trusteeship of colonial territories or single national administration, or leave the responsibility to a joint effort of the Big Four plus Italy and local representatives. Leaving aside the different proposals[51] and the meetings between Italian Foreign Minister Sforza and international delegates,[52] what it is interesting is the revival of Italian suspicion towards Britain that occasionally re-emerged in the Italian press and was reported on in the British counterpart. After US Secretary of State Dulles' proposal that Libya should be placed under British trusteeship, which was received in

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49 F. Maclean, "Italy and the West," *Observer*, February 13, 1949.
50 "Italian colonies," *Guardian*, March 28, 1949.
51 On Tripolitania see: "Dividing Italy's colonies. Anglo-U.S. plan," *Guardian*, April 7, 1949.
52 "Washington talks on Italian colonies," *Guardian*, April 4, 1949.

Italy "as a blow," the tone of the articles published in the *Guardian* reverted to the firm condemnation of fascist Italy. In April, the Rome correspondent wrote that: "The Ministry of Italian Africa here [. . .] has never recognised the real defects of the Fascist administration, although he concedes that Sforza 'is not Badoglio, nor Graziani' and that 'Italy today is not Mussolini's Italy.'"[53]

Regular summaries of the reactions of Italian newspapers to the negotiations at the UN continued to appear in the pages of the British papers, whereby the Communist press was presented as "laughing at count Sforza" and printing columns of comments on "the poor results" of the Anglo-American alliance. The bitterness expressed in the Italian press was mainly directed at Britain, as shown in an article published in the *Giornale d'Italia*, which argued: "England has decided not to forgive Italy [. . .] England wants to be safe in the Mediterranean [. . .] England wants to humiliate Italy for having declared war on her? Britain, it is claimed, wants Cyrenaica, 'but Cyrenaica is not enough. Britain wants everything.'"[54] As the meeting of the General Assembly at Lake Success went on during the month of April,[55] pressure from Italy increased, with constant reports appearing "in every wireless news bulletin" on the progress of "Count Sforza's battle."[56] These included calls for action addressed to Italian citizens, such as the idea launched by *Il Tempo* to send postcards to President Truman in order to persuade him to reconsider the American position, which had caused "persistent indignation" in the country. However, the idea that the fate of the colonies only mattered to nationalists while most Liberal or Social Democratic Italians were not concerned with the issue was often restated. The role of the Church was assessed for the first time in relation to the fact that the growth rate of the Italian population (half a million a year), which turned African territories into much-needed "outlets," was due mainly to its condemnation of birth control in Italy. The example of a Neapolitan doctor summoned to appear in court after publishing a pamphlet on birth control was interpreted as an attempt to "please the Church after the Lateran Treaty."[57]

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53 "Italian alarm at plan for colonies," *Guardian*, April 8, 1949.
54 Ibid.
55 See: "Suggestions for future of ex-Italian colonies, Libya independent in five years. International advisory councils for UN administrators," *Guardian*, April 19, 1949.
56 "Pressure from Italy. Criticism of British-America ideas," *Guardian*, April 19, 1949.
57 Ibid.

The idea that Britain and the United States were "seeking to dismember Italian former African colonies in order to allocate one fragment to Britain, one to the U.S. and give some crumbles to Italy" was also reinforced by the Russian claim that the two were intentionally blocking any agreement.[58] On the same line, although more moderate in tone, were the allegations advanced by Count Sforza in the *Corriere della Sera*. In a dispatch from New York the Italian newspaper suggested that Sforza had accused England (albeit without mentioning her) of hypocrisy. As recalled by the *Guardian*'s Rome correspondent, "according to the [Italian] correspondent, Count Sforza said that 'among those who accused Italy in the name of a new anticolonialism there were some hypocrites who had not renounced the benefits of colonialism.'"[59]

Once the Bevin-Sforza plan was officially presented at the General Assembly, on 10 May 1949, the anti-British comments in the Italian press seemed "more restrained," or so the *Guardian* reported, offering a number of examples ranging from *La Stampa* to the *Corriere della Sera*. While the first newspaper, representing "the more moderate elements in Italy," hoped that "Britain and Italy will now begin a fruitful collaboration," the Milanese daily published an editorial with a revealing title: "Utility of a compromise," which "administered a strong dose of medicine to the nationalists of Italy."[60] It stated that despite the "murmurs of fascist flavour" the agreement was the best possible outcome in the dialogue between the two foreign ministers[61] and that such a solution would benefit the Budget and create resources to develop Southern Italy. However, the Italian Cabinet expressed regret for the lack of recognition of Italian full claims "despite the work of civilisation she has done and her desire to give independence to the native population."[62] The Italian reference to "the civilisation mission" was defined by the British as an "old-fashioned Jingoism," alternated "with fear of humiliation and complaints of lack of gratitude."[63] The rejection of the Bevin-Sforza plan, backed only by fourteen nations, was met in Italy with renewed bitterness. The *Guardian*'s diplomatic correspondent reported on the radical views

58 "Britain and U.S. aiming at colonial expansion. Mr. Gromyko's allegations. Western Powers defend their policy in Italian Africa," *Guardian*, April 22, 1949.
59 "Sir Strafford Cripps will face storm," *Guardian*, April 22, 1949.
60 "Italian second thoughts on colonies. Guarded approval for Bevin-Sforza plan," *Guardian*, May 11, 1949.
61 See also: "Italy's probation. Sir A. Cardogan defends colonies plan," *Guardian*, May 18, 1949.
62 Ibid.
63 "Italian colonies," *Guardian*, May 12, 1949.

expressed in the columns of *Il Giornale d'Italia*, according to which: "we have many more [. . .] enemies that we never dreamt of."[64] Italian frustration was at that point directed also at the "Senussi agitators" who, according to Italian correspondents, used the press "to propagate a 'monstrous picture of Italian colonial imperialism,'" while "sipping British hospitality."[65]

The ratification of the Atlantic Pact on 30 July did not bring to an end Italy's resentment at the decision on the African territories. De Gasperi's statement represented the strongest protest about colonies coming from "official Italy" and was perceived by British newspapers as "carrying more than the usual weight."[66] At that point, according to the *Guardian*'s correspondent, most of the non-Communist press expressed the view that "purely strategic interests dominated Anglo-American arrangements in North Africa."[67] While Count Sforza suggested awaiting the results of "a secret vote which will make history [. . .] with confidence and without bragging," a strong burst of anti-British feeling was reported to have become manifest in the Italian press, starting with the opinion of *Il Giornale d'Italia*'s editor. From the front page, Savarino accused Britain and the U.S. to have used the Atlantic Pact "exclusively for their own defensive purposes," while another article published the same day reported on the British "devilish plan" for dislocating the economic life of Tripoli to damage Italian administration.[68]

Until then British newspapers had focused on the opinions expressed by the Italian press, but once the negotiations were over, they started reporting on "British mistakes" in dealing with Italy and her ex-colonies as they had been covered in the Italian dailies. In a twist that says a lot about their reciprocal influence, in November 1949 the *Guardian* published an article on the "publicity [given by Italian newspapers] to leading articles on the subject both in *The Manchester Guardian* and in *The Times*."[69] The

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64 "Bevin-Sforza plan rejected. Problem of Italian colonies for autumn session of UN," *Guardian*, May 19, 1949.
65 Ibid.
66 De Gasperi said: "It is my duty to express to the Senate great bitterness for the scanty comprehension of the Allies, and in particular England, towards the modest Italian claim in the matter of our interests in Africa." In "Italy in pact but resentful. Protest on colonies," *Guardian*, August 1, 1949.
67 Ibid.
68 "Count Sforza and the ex-colonies," *Guardian*, October 15, 1946. The same article reports on "Signor Saragat's" anti-British outburst on the alleged interference of the Labour Party in Italian Socialist affairs.
69 "The Italian colonies. 'England aware of her disastrous policy,'" *Guardian*, November 16, 1949. *Il Giornale d'Italia*, for instance, was reported to have written:

shift in the British attitude towards Italy, from intransigent to accommodating to critical again, as well as Italian suspicion of Britain throughout the process were thus described by the British from an Italian perspective, which towards the end of the negotiations included, in turn, the Italian journalists' analysis of the British press.

"Truth will out. The British are beginning to be aware of their disastrous policy [. . .] Today, the *Times* fears that these territories are too backward for independence [. . .] We, who have been called Anglophobe in these columns, have never ceased to advocate Anglo-Italian cooperation."

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE FASCIST EMPIRE STRIKES BACK: RECONSIDERING THE MEMORY OF COLONIALISM AFTER 1945

GABRIELE PROGLIO

> Pass on what you have learned, Luke.
> There is...another...Sky…walker.
> —Yoda

The "cultural constructs" of colonialism deployed during the fascist period left a lasting legacy in the Italian public sphere after 1945. After reviewing the historical literature on the memory of Italian colonialism, I will focus my attention on several articles published in the Italian weekly *Epoca*, with a view to questioning the validity of the long-established "paradigm" of repressed colonial memory.[1]

1. The paradigm of memory repression

Beginning in the late 1970s, a few isolated voices within the historiographical debate began calling for an inquiry into Italy's colonial past and its public and private memory. Although Italian historiography was lagging behind that of other European countries,[2] the new research provoked a fierce backlash.[3] What I will call the "paradigm of memory repression" unfolded as a political response, as well as historiographical

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1 Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.
2 Angelo Del Boca, *La guerra d'Abissinia, 1935–1941* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1966). On the same topic, see monographs by Battaglia, Hess, Marcus, Pankhurst, Wright, and Evans.
3 For a detailed account of Del Boca's experience, see Angelo Del Boca, *Un testimone scomodo* (Domodossola: Grossi, 2000).

interpretation, to the country's lack of interest in Overseas affairs. In *Gli italiani in Africa Orientale. La caduta dell'impero*, Angelo Del Boca pointed out that, as regards the memory of colonialism, Italy went from silence in the immediate post-war period to a heated debate, followed in turn by a time of regret.[4] This was because for a long time "Africa was no longer fashionable," evoking as it did memories of "defeat, sacrifice and disappointment. Africa was synonymous with shame, lack of preparation, amateurishness."[5]

Despite the proliferation of colonial studies,[6] colonial memory became a topic of debate only in 1991, when Laterza published *Le guerre coloniali del fascismo*, edited by Angelo Del Boca. The book grew out of a failed attempt to hold a major conference in Piacenza in the spring of 1989. In view of the almost complete removal of "the phenomenon of colonialism with all its concomitant arbitrary acts, abuses of power, crimes and genocides" from the country's culture and memory,[7] the conference was aimed at presenting the state of the art in colonial studies and broadening the debate to include the layperson and the general public. However, on account of a number of private and public institutions eventually withdrawing their financial support, it never took place. Hence, the idea of disseminating the papers submitted by registered participants—first in the journal *Studi Piacentini* and then in a book published by Laterza—came into being. In his introduction to the book, Del Boca remarked:

> Once again, we were faced with a conscious or unconscious desire to repress the past and prevent the debate on one of the darkest (though no less worthy of scholarly attention) chapters in our nation's history. Once again, the matter was hushed up with trivial excuses or pretexts. However, we came to realise that, at least on that occasion, we had not been silenced "for the love of our country." Definitely an improvement from the past.[8]

The term *rimozione* (memory repression) was then used to describe the attempt to silence some historians' inconvenient voices—and keep them

4 Angelo Del Boca, *Gli italiani in Africa Orientale. La caduta dell'impero* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1982), 592.
5 Angelo Del Boca, *Gli italiani in Africa Orientale. Nostalgia delle colonie* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1984), 5.
6 Ibid., 235. Cf. Luigi Goglia and Fabio Grassi, *Il colonialismo italiano da Adua all'Impero* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1981); Angelo Del Boca, *Gli italiani in Libia* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1986).
7 Angelo Del Boca, introduction to *Le guerre coloniali del fascismo* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1991), vii.
8 Del Boca, introduction, vii.

silent. Mario Isnenghi, too, spoke of "years of repressed memories"[9] in his essay on Libya, and Giorgio Rochat claimed that "Italy has never come to terms with its past."[10] In the conclusion to his essay on fascist crimes in the colonies, Del Boca himself returned to the subject of repressed memory:

> A lack of punishment for such serious crimes has led the majority of Italians to an utterly blurred or distorted view of the events in Africa. Yet, it is perhaps more accurate to speak of a nearly complete removal, from our country's memory and culture, of the phenomenon of colonialism with all its concomitant arbitrary acts, abuses of power, crimes and genocides [. . .] The repression of those memories is primarily due to the fact that in Italy, unlike other countries, a serious, coherent and exhaustive debate on the phenomenon of colonialism was never encouraged. Rather, some state institutions have attempted to muddy the waters with the deliberate intent of preventing the truth from ever emerging, while moderate or revisionist historiography clearly favours the denial of colonial faults.[11]

Del Boca's *L'Africa nella coscienza degli italiani* devoted a chapter to the memory of colonialism after 1945. Postwar historians, he wrote, managed to "paper over the cracks with a steady stream of myths and legends,"[12] such as that of the "good-hearted Italians." Italy was not able to get rid of myths and legends due to the lack of "a serious, comprehensive and well-defined debate on the phenomenon of colonialism."[13] At times it was the officials themselves who resorted to the mystification of Italian past endeavours, in a costly effort to hamper the search for truth: a case in point is the forty-volume set of *L'Italia in Africa*, with its "cooked-up account"[14] of colonisation.

The centenary of the Battle of Adwa was the occasion for an article by Nicola Labanca in *Italia contemporanea*. Reviewing past academic efforts to speak of the 1896 battle, he returned to the topic of memory repression arguing that despite innovation in colonial studies and the ensuing change in the research landscape, the resources deployed in this field were still

9 Mario Isnenghi, "Il sogno africano," in Del Boca, *Le guerre*, 50.

10 Giorgio Rochat, "Le guerre coloniali dell'Italia fascista," in Del Boca, *Le guerre*, 173.

11 Angelo Del Boca, "I crimini del colonialismo fascista," in Del Boca, *Le guerre*, 251–252 (232–255).

12 Angelo Del Boca, "Il mancato dibattito sul colonialismo," in *L'Africa nella coscienza degli italiani. Miti, memorie, errori, sconfitte*, ed. Angelo Del Boca (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1992), 112–113.

13 Del Boca, *L'Africa nella coscienza*, 114.

14 Del Boca, *L'Africa nella coscienza*, 114.

few and far between. Moreover, enduring nostalgia for the past, outdated interpretations and exotic fantasies owed to the fact that "Italians were not given the means to reflect on those dreams that had nonetheless mobilised previous generations."[15] As regards the post-war period, Labanca later wrote:

> This is the stage when the colonial past fails to be dealt with, this is where the blame for a "lack of debate on colonialism" lies. The absence of such debate has allowed remnants of the past, appropriate to the liberal or fascist stage, to coexist with democratic Italy: sometimes invisibly (hence the impression of 'amnesia' mentioned by Triulzi), other times characterised by conflict, often depending on the rise of democratic awareness in the country.[16]

The "repression of colonial guilt," Angelo Del Boca argued in *Italia contemporanea*, generated "misunderstandings, endless petty haggling, humiliating vetoes and flagrant non-compliance."[17] According to the historian, the reasons for this state of affairs are to be found both in the attitude of "the ruling class, which was still [after the war] feeling the pressure of the colonial lobbies,"[18] and in a "lack of debate" on colonialism, including "the positive and negative aspects, the values to be preserved and the myths and legends to be relegated in the attic"[19]; the "failure to condemn its most brutal aspects,"[20] along with its primary and secondary culprits; the persistent "myths and legends that emerged in the past century and the first decades of the twenty-first century"[21]; the impossibility of accessing the colonial, diplomatic and military archives. Del Boca spoke of repression in yet another sense of the term, namely as the result of a process that involved the public sphere.

Posti al sole, an analysis of the diaries written by the *petit blancs* (white folk of low social status) in Libya and the Horn of Africa, also

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15 Nicola Labanca, "Né esecrare né commemorare. Il centenario di Adua in Italia," *Italia contemporanea*, no. 40 (1996): 99.

16 Nicola Labanca, "Memorie e complessi di Adua. Appunti," in *Adua. Le ragioni di una sconfitta*, ed. Angelo del Boca (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1997), 411.

17 Angelo Del Boca, "Il colonialismo italiano tra miti, rimozioni, negoziazioni e inadempienze," *Italia Contemporanea*, no. 212 (September 1998): 593 (585–605). Del Boca reiterated his line of arguments in other works, such as Enzo Collotti, ed., *Fascismo e antifascismo: rimozioni, revisioni e negazioni* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2000).

18 Ibid.

19 Del Boca, *Il colonialismo italiano*, 590.

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid., 591.

bears traces of this debate. In the book, Nicola Labanca argued that, on the one hand, first colonial Italy and then the republic forgot the colonists; on the other hand, silence made it "easier to remove that embarrassing chapter in the nation's history."[22] While the veterans wanted and had to forget,[23] the next generation saw a shift from silence to lyricism. According to Labanca, forgetfulness—which might have been conducive to near oblivion or partial remembrance[24]—had specific reasons and cannot be absolutised. Sometimes it was related to historians themselves and their research interests; other times it arose from the laws governing refugees from Africa; finally, it may have involved the individual choice not to remember—along with a variety of feelings ranging from animosity to self-pity and shame. The colonists' voice was weak and had no impact on the "national collective memory"; nonetheless, forgetfulness was not the same as "total amnesia."[25]

In *Oltremare*, Labanca argued that for Italians, just as for the character in Ennio Flaiano's novel, "the time to heal came after the time to kill, thus suppressing all memories of the past," adding that "not without reason there has been talk of 'repression' of the colonial past on the part of Italy and Italians."[26] Here, Labanca added yet another meaning to the term repression, one that is synonymous with suppression, remarking that certain political and social circles apparently had much to gain from erasing responsibility for the events overseas.

After describing the main factors affecting the path of colonial memory,[27] Labanca outlined three phases: the first occurred in the forties and fifties, when resentment at the loss of the colonies was still keenly felt among ex-colonists; the second, in the sixties and seventies, may be described as the pivotal point in the process of forgetting the African past. The third phase, which began in the eighties and lasted through most of the nineties, was marked by two opposing trends: while the former colonies had all but faded into oblivion, an attempt was made to acknowledge responsibility for the country's colonial past.

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22 Nicola Labanca, *Posti al sole. Diari e memorie di vita e di lavoro dalle colonie d'Africa* (Rovereto: Museo storico italiano della guerra, 2001), xi.

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid., xvi.

26 Nicola Labanca, *Oltremare* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2002), 426.

27 According to Labanca, these factors were: the small size of the Overseas; difficulties in identifying the culprits (p. 428); a challenging decolonisation process (p. 429); a defeat at the hands of other whites (p. 429); the lack of an African Nuremberg (p. 437); a lack of debate on the Overseas (p. 437–8); the self-serving myth of the "good-hearted Italians" (p. 438).

Not only did memory repression produce the image of the "good-hearted Italian,"[28] but it also threw a long-lasting blanket of silence over the matter.

> It is necessary to overcome this silence on the colonial past—or this discourse of feeble, disjointed voices. And not so that we can satisfy scholarly curiosity. The fact is, that colonial past is not over, or rather, it is still [part of] contemporary history in the sense that it lies at the heart of the problems of contemporary society, politics, and life.[29]

In 2010, Longanesi published Angelo Del Boca's *La guerra d'Etiopia: ultima impresa del colonialismo.* The book illustrates in great detail the colonial period, retracing the events leading up to the Italian occupation of the Horn of Africa country. Del Boca devoted the last pages to the very role of memory: memory repression was in this case the latest strand in a tangled web of historical, social, political and economic processes. More to the point, he wrote:

> The Ethiopian imperial government tried in vain to take Badoglio and Graziani to court, along with hundreds more war criminals. Every possible pressure was brought to bear on the emperor by officials in both London and Washington trying to dissuade him from establishing, as was right and legitimate, an African Nuremberg. Silence and repressed memories thus marked the end of one of the greatest tragedies in history.[30]

Nicola Labanca has recently addressed the process of recollection of past events in the final chapter of his latest book, *La guerra d'Etiopia, 1935–1941*. Some interpretive elements are derived from his previous works, among others a shift from *memory* to *memories* to indicate plurality. What is new, however, is the introduction of a socio-historical frame: Labanca states that "collective memory needs a macro-memory (a reference, a frame) within which to store that specific item"—for the Ethiopians, it was the new-found independence; for Italians, that frame was Fascism. In his view, after 1945 this macro-memory "became unusable"[31] in Italy. The reasons were many: the lack of an African Nuremberg; the age of the soldiers deployed to Ethiopia; the roles they had played in the war; an oversight on the part of historians. Labanca explains: "The silence that fell upon it [that memory] was therefore not

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28 Labanca, *Oltremare*, 12.
29 Ibid., 13.
30 Angelo Del Boca, *La guerra d'Etiopia: ultima impresa del colonialismo* (Torino: Longanesi, 2010), 253–254.
31 Nicola Labanca, *La guerra d'Etiopia, 1935–1941* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2015), 220.

merely the result of the repression stubbornly pursued by some who had been involved to a greater degree in the crimes or in accumulating ill-gotten wealth in the course of that experience: that was obviously part of it, but not the whole picture."[32] While these words describe the phenomenon of memory repression in veterans of the Italo-Ethiopian war, on the next page a passage reads: "the combination of its [ex-fascist Italy's] peculiar decolonisation and London's (opportunistic) pardon enabled if not memory repression, then silence on the colonial past of Italians."[33] After analysing the "collective memory" of the Horn of Africa, Labanca turns his attention to Italian memories. He employs a specific periodisation scheme in four stages: a first phase of silencing from the postwar period to 1960; a second phase marked by a more critical stance and coinciding with the publication of *Guerra d'Abissinia* by Angelo Del Boca; a third phase, from the eighties through the end of the nineties, which saw a flourishing of research and publications; finally, a last phase that he notably defines *postcolonial*. Labanca writes:

> Those who approached the definition of postcolonial from the most radical perspective, theoretically and politically, have argued strongly that not only was the past of the Italian nation a colonial one, but the very identity of Italians was and still is steeped in colonialism. The more rigid the postcolonial approach, the more likely it is that Italians of yesteryear appear staunchly colonised in their imaginary and today's Italians still entrenched in their colonial roots. In fact, the acute postcolonial analysis can see modern residues of the colonial past almost everywhere: in politics, for the way it treats migrants today; in the media, for the way they convey and multiply the clash of civilisations; in the minds of Italians, for they are still imbued with stereotypes and racial prejudice, a clear legacy of colonial times.[34]

2. Reinterpretations in the nineties and beyond

Since the nineties, a new generation of scholars has began studying colonialism through race[35] and its interaction with gender.[36] Jacqueline

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32 Ibid., 221.
33 Ibid.
34 Ibid., 242.
35 After the workshop held in Bologna by Alberto Burgio and Luciano Casali, Franco Cuomo's, Giorgio Israel's and Pietro Nastasi's works paved the way to a detailed analysis of the relation between colonialism and new forms of racism, that is, how the legacy of colonialism propagated, in terms of cultural constructs, after 1945. For a chronological list of authors and works on race and racism, see my

Andall and Derek Duncan's *Italian Colonialism: Legacy and Memory* has reinterpreted the notion of memory repression in psychoanalytic terms, namely, as an amnesia triggered by the emotional burden of remembering.[37] Giulietta Stefani has adopted a post-colonial approach to the analysis of journals kept by soldiers deployed Overseas, sparking a strong reaction from Giampaolo Calchi Novati—who questioned whether her work in *Colonia per maschi* should be regarded as "history."[38] An article by Luisa Passerini, though, has explained the relevance of subjective sources—and of the approach adopted by Stuart Hall and Leela Ghandi—to the study of colonialism.[39] Andall and Duncan's *National Belonging*[40] and *Zapruder*'s special issue,[41] edited by Elena Petricola and Andrea Tappi, have sought, albeit in different ways, to overcome the obstacles of the paradigm of repression problematising the issue of memory. Daniela Baratieri's work has attempted to deconstruct the silence and memories surrounding colonialism.[42] Taking yet another path, Alessandro Triulzi has described the return of colonial memory to the

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contribution: Gabriele Proglio, "Appunti per una ricostruzione degli studi culturali italiani sulla razza," *Studi Culturali* 2 (August 2013): 323–343.

36 Giulia Barrera, *Dangerous liaisons: colonial concubinage in Eritrea, 1890–1941* (Evanston: Northwestern University, 1996); Barrera, "Sessualità e segregazione nelle terre dell'impero," in *L'impero fascista: Italia ed Etiopia*, ed. Riccardo Bottoni (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2008), 393–414; Barbara Sorgoni, *Parole e corpi: antropologia, discorso giuridico e politiche sessuali interrazziali nella colonia Eritrea, 1890–1941* (Napoli: Liguori, 1998); Bottoni, *Etnografia e colonialismo: l'Eritrea e l'Etiopia di Alberto Pollera (1873–1939)* (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 2001); Nicoletta Poidimani, *Difendere la 'razza': identità razziale e politiche sessuali nel progetto imperiale di Mussolini* (Roma: Sensibili alle foglie, 2009).

37 Jacqueline Andall and Derek Duncan, "Memories and Legacies of Italian Colonialism," in *Italian Colonialism: Legacy and Memory*, ed. Jacqueline Andall and Derek Duncan (Bern: Peter Lang, 2005), 9–10.

38 Ibid.

39 Luisa Passerini, "La dimensione postcoloniale della soggettività," *Il Manifesto*, June 28, 2007.

40 Jacqueline Andall and Derek Duncan, "Introduction: Hybridity in Italian Colonial and Postcolonial Culture," in *National Belongings. Hybridity in Italian Colonial and Postcolonial Cultures*, ed. Jacqueline Andall and Derek Duncan (Bern: Peter Lang, 2010), 1.

41 Elena Petricola and Andrea Tappi, "Orientalismi all'italiana," *Zapruder*, no. 23 (2010): 3.

42 Daniela Baratieri, *Memories and Silences Haunted by Fascism* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2010).

postcolonial condition.[43] Not only was the colonial past repressed, he has argued, but the role it played in the construction of new categories of subjectivity has not been thoroughly analysed and deconstructed. Moreover, he has later argued that "it is the very presence of a large number of immigrants in Italy, some of whom come from former colonies or even former Italian colonies, that urges us to acknowledge this past,"[44] claiming that there are obvious links between "the failure to process the colonial past and today's rising racism in Italy."[45]

This view is shared by Paul Jedlowski, who in a paper published in the digital journal *Storicamente*, has described public memory as a set "of images of the past that circulate in the public sphere": public speeches but also narratives in books, television, and the press. According to Jedlowski, "public memory [of the nation's colonial past] has long been absent in Italy, as if this past were irrelevant"[46]; moreover, "from the end of WWII until recent years, it all faded into oblivion (or, as some have said, into a sort of national unconscious)."[47] His analysis of Italian cinema, for instance, suggests that in the postwar period the memory of colonialism came to be missing.[48] In his view, only in very recent times, with an influx of topics debated in migration literature, has the process of public memory reconstruction began—possibly leading to the thematisation and self-critical reassessment of the colonial past by means of an open debate on responsibilities.[49]

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43 Triulzi had problematised this issue in earlier works. Cf. Alessandro Triulzi, "Il ritorno della memoria coloniale," *Afriche e orienti: rivista di studi ai confini tra Africa, Mediterraneo e Medio Oriente* 9, no. 1 (2007); Triulzi, "Ritorni di memoria nell'Italia postcoloniale," in *L'impero fascista: Italia e Etiopia, 1935–1941*, ed. Riccardo Bottoni (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2008).

44 Paolo Jedlowski, "Passato coloniale e memoria autocritica," *Il Mulino*, no. 2 (March-April 2009): 227.

45 Ibid., 223.

46 Paolo Jedlowski, "Memoria pubblica e colonialismo italiano," *Storicamente* 7, no. 34 (2011), doi: 10.1473/stor113.

47 Ibid.

48 On the same topic, see Gabriele Proglio's different interpretation: "Memorie di celluloide in controluce. Politiche del ricordo, rimozioni e immaginari del colonialismo (1945–1962)," in *Quel che resta dell'Impero*, ed. Valeria Deplano and Alessandro Pes (Milano: Mimesis, 2015), where I demonstrate the continuity of colonial representations in Italian cinema after 1945.

49 Jedlowski, "Memoria pubblica."

Among the valuable contributions to memory studies are several publications by InteRGRace members, Barbara Spadaro,[50] Lilliana Ellena,[51] Cristina Lombardi,[52] Caterina Romeo,[53] and the collective volume edited by Valeria Deplano and Alessandro Pes.[54]

3. *Epoca* as research field

At the SISSCO conference in Cagliari, in July 2015, I presented a paper that attempted to challenge the paradigm of memory repression through a new approach based on "re-signifying" or "reformulating" the colonial cultural constructs. In the past year, I have had the opportunity to further refine my thinking and understand that memory processes take on a variety of forms. Before reviewing some, I would like to quote an article by Nicola Labanca on the positions taken by Italian illustrated magazines during decolonisation. Labanca mentions the reappearance of Africa in the press in the late fifties and early sixties associating, however, the resurgence of colonial discourse to a historical period, namely the recent (at the time) wave of decolonisation in Africa. Contrary to what Labanca claims, I argue that Italy did not hope to represent "another Europe"[55] at that time. A process of reassessment of colonial memory had in fact been

50 Valeria Deplano, "Senza distinzione di razza? Razzismo in controluce nel discorso pubblico italiano tra anni Cinquanta e anni Settanta," *From the European South* 1 (2016): 95–102; Vincenza Perilli, "Relazioni pericolose. Asimmetrie dell'interrelazione tra 'razza' e genere e sessualità interrazziale," in *Il colore della nazione*, ed. Gaia Giuliani (Milano: Le Monnier Mondadori, 2016), 143–157; Tatiana Petrovich Njegosh, "La finzione della razza: la linea del colore e il meticciato," in *Il colore della nazione*, 215–229; Barbara Spadaro, *Una colonia italiana. Incontri, memorie e rappresentazioni tra Italia e Libia* (Milano: Le Monnier, 2013).

51 Lilliana Ellena, "Geografie della razza nel cinema italiano del primo dopoguerra 1945–1955," in *Il colore della nazione*, 17–32.

52 Cristina Lombardi, "Teoria e grammatica della razza. Il passato prossimo del razzismo coloniale," in *Presente imperfetto. Eredità coloniale e immaginari razziali contemporanei*, ed. Giulia Grechi and Viviana Gravano (Roma: Mimesis, 2014), 45–55.

53 Caterina Romeo, "Racial Evaporations," in *Postcolonial Italy. Challenging National Homogeneity*, ed. Cristina Lombardi-Diop and Caterina Romeo (London: Palgrave, 2012), 221–236.

54 Valeria Deplano and Alessandro Pes, eds., "Introduzione," in *Quel che resta dell'impero. La cultura coloniale degli italiani* (Milano: Mimesis, 2014), 10.

55 Nicola Labanca, "L'Italia repubblicana fra colonialismo e post-colonialismo," *AFT*, no. 31-32 (2000): 100.

taking place in the country for quite some time, that is since the early fifties, as is apparent from the analysis of *Epoca*—the weekly magazine founded by Alberto Mondadori on October 14, 1950.

Printed in the US tabloid format, the magazine featured full colour prints and photo essays. Enzo Biagi, Giovanni Spadolini, Cesare Zavattini and Oreste Del Buono were among its first contributors; just below the masthead, its subtitle read "a weekly magazine of politics and news." With a cover price of 100 liras and a circulation of 500,000, it was one of the most popular and influential illustrated magazines of its time. In the following pages, I will use early issues of *Epoca* to show how colonial memory operated.

4. Visual memories

A visual reading of the legacy of colonialism allows us to study the workings of the colonial archive in the magazine's pages. Sometimes, as on the cover of the November 18, 1950 issue (fig. 1), the magazine features representations of iconic tropes of the Italian colonial experience: the image of the colonised woman with a baby in her arms symbolises the Eritrean territory (the woman) and its people (the baby).[56] In a similar manner, in the March 22, 1952 issue (fig. 2) Tripolitania is represented by a woman wrapped in a coloured *shemma.*[57]

Other times, as in the case of an ad for Martini vermouth (fig. 3), the image of a shirtless black man is used to imply that African countries in the southern hemisphere are facing a drought.[58] While in the first two cases the images clearly reintroduce elements of the colonial visual archive, the art directors at Martini & Rossi—who must have been familiar with the company's advertising campaigns during colonialism—obviously knew that Italy was no longer a colonial power in Africa. Thus, this ad employs visual memories of colonialism to narrate how dominance over those African territories, and over those bodies, was redefined after 1945. While local populations reverted to the status of "aboriginals," hence a pre-colonial condition, Martini & Rossi—ambassadors of Italianness to the world and clearly in favour of the fascist colonial venture—continued their conquest (of the markets)

This case is not unique; in fact, the legacy of colonial memory is visible in many other advertisements. A case in point is that of Piaggio, makers of the military ground vehicles and aircraft used in the fascist

56 *Epoca*, November 18, 1950, 1.
57 *Epoca*, March 22, 1952, 23–27.
58 *Epoca*, June 21, 1952, 6.

invasion of Ethiopia. The first prototype of the Vespa was built in 1946; the scooter was the brainchild of Corradino D'Ascanio, the aeronautical engineer who had played a key role in the design of Piaggio's military vehicles. The tag line (fig. 4) reads "the whole world rides a Vespa."[59] The sketch on the left illustrates what is happening in Italy, where customers are standing in long lines to pre-order the scooter. On the right, Earth's orbit becomes a road travelled by stereotypical representations of different races: American, British, Italian, Chinese, Arab and African. Skin-colour is a recurring theme, especially in beauty products advertisements,[60] and once again visual memories take different directions: on the one hand, the woman as mother is associated with the concept of whiteness (a synonym for purity, integrity, compliance with paternalistic values, and submission to her husband). An advertisement for Lauril soap (fig. 5) features the tag line "Use tomorrow's soap, today" above a white sheep—a symbol of docility, purity and innocence—and a smiling newborn representing the next generations of Italians or the "progeny," as it would have been called during Fascism.[61] The same is true of the advertisements for Formaggini Mio (fig. 6),[62] Palmolive soap bars (fig. 7),[63] Binaca toothpaste (fig. 8)[64] and, for a "healthy complexion and natural glow," Cirio preserves (fig. 9).[65] The advertisement for Vasenol, a body and face powder (fig. 10),[66] shows that the concept of whiteness is rooted in a complex colonial discourse that certainly cannot be reduced to the Italian experience alone. With a pointed finger, a black man warns the reader: "No more talc and a powder, only Talcocipria Vasenol." The legacy of a certain colonial memory is quite evident here: Italians' fear of becoming or going back to being "black" in the eyes of Europe and the West.

5. Textual memories

The articles contain a myriad of direct and indirect references to the legacy of colonialism. In the introduction to the above mentioned feature story on Eritrea, American journalists William Demby and Marjory Collins make it clear that even if the colonial chapter in Italy's history is now

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59 *Epoca*, November 8, 1952, 63.
60 See Giuliani, *Il colore della nazione*.
61 *Epoca*, June 21, 1952, 6.
62 *Epoca*, June 21, 1952, 25.
63 *Epoca*, June 21, 1952, 18.
64 *Epoca*, July 5, 1952, 83.
65 *Epoca*, July 19, 1952, 42.
66 *Epoca*, May 10, 1952, 65.

closed, "nine years later, the achievements of the Italian administration, the civil works and a renewed meaningfulness of work in the former Italian East Africa are still visible."[67] The words of the magazine's contributors offer glimpses into the myth of the "good-hearted Italians" bringing civilisation and progress to the African continent. The Italian translation of the feature story contains elements of the Italian colonial imaginary, from the myth of Rome to Asmara as a sick city and the Eritreans as "patients in the courtyard of a psychiatric hospital,"[68] pouring out of their huts like animals—a nation of outlaws (the Shifta) who, just like those in Southern Italy, undermine national security. Another narrative in the same story describes the end of colonialism in apocalyptic terms, as a constant state of war and conflict in which the former colonies "turn against the Italians, against their trusting and fatherly guardians."[69] Once again, Eritreans are narrated as "indigenes": "they are like children," they used to be happy and love Italians as children love their fathers; now they want to kill them because they are being instigated by the British.[70] One photograph, in particular, combines the narrative of the myth of Rome with the idea of Eritrea as a madam: it portrays a woman lying (perhaps asleep) on a sofa at a nightclub (fig. 11). The caption reads: "Cleopatra is waiting. A lonely regular who goes by the name of 'Cleopatra' awaits the arrival of any Antonio at Asmara's most popular nightclub. Four regular guests 'work' at the club, but they all want to leave Asmara to seek their fortune."[71] Mixed race people are called "half-breeds." One article tells the story of Count Stefano Marazzani Visconti, the son of "a 'gentleman pioneer' and a native woman"[72] who runs a farm near Asmara, rhetorically describing him as the emblem of the ongoing colonising mission based on the idea of progeny/race. Despite being of mixed race, he has just enough Italian blood in his veins to revive the myth of Italians bringing civilisation to the country. In much the same way, other articles mobilise colonial memories to describe the former Overseas territory.

Sometimes, as in the 1952 article "The art of looking like whites,"[73] by Gino Raccà, colonial discourses are used to explain social phenomena that have little do to with Africa. A ball at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel in New York provides the opportunity to discuss how both in the Big Apple and

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67 *Epoca*, November 18, 1950, 19.
68 *Epoca*, November 18, 1950, 20.
69 *Epoca*, November 18, 1950, 21.
70 Ibid.
71 *Epoca*, November 18, 1950, 24.
72 *Epoca*, November 18, 1950, 28.
73 Gino Raccà, "L'arte di somigliare ai bianchi," *Epoca*, June 21, 1952, 51–56.

elsewhere in the US, there is a "black press" intended for black readers, "including the many citizens of mixed blood." Several magazines such as *Ebony* are mentioned in the article, as well as social events that bring together the entire black community, sometimes with the intention of taking a stand against racist violence. Nonetheless, the notion of white superiority comes up again at the close of the article. Commenting on the advertisements for skin lightening creams and anti-frizz hair products, Raccà writes "The feminine ideal is almost always represented by a figure that looks as much as possible like a white brunette."[74] The article's subtitle is key to understanding his point of view: "Blacks have their own press that helps them to overcome the old complex: dark skin and frizzy hair."[75]

A preliminary conclusion

I believe that the origin of the repressed memory paradigm can be explained, among other things, in terms of the challenging scientific, social and political context in which a few historians operated. As we have seen, memory repression appears to have had a multiplicity of meanings: at least as many as the walls that were erected against scientific research and its aim to investigate Italy's colonial faults. In his article on illustrated magazines, Labanca takes for granted the existence of the "paradigm of memory repression" and reasons, philologically speaking, in terms of ruptures in history: first colonialism, then a long period of silence, and finally decolonisation—when several colonial themes came back to the fore. In my brief review of articles and advertisements from the weekly *Epoca*, I have shown that the colonial theme was present well before 1960. I do not intend to claim that no segments of Italian society ever experienced memory repression: that would be impossible to say, and common sense suggests that depending on their identity and the roles they played during the colonial period, some subjects may have repressed those memories.

A reversal of viewpoint or gaze was the point of departure of my investigation. Early issues of magazines such as *Epoca*—or even *Europeo*, *Il Mondo*, *Oggi*, *Tempo*—show that after the end of colonialism, the colonial theme was far from repressed in popular culture. I chose to highlight "textual" and "visual" representations, simplifying and dividing fields that would be in fact deeply connected and interdependent in a

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74 Ibid., 52.
75 Ibid., 51.

historic reading of the magazines—my sources. This distinction was aimed at demonstrating that the processes of recovery or transformation of colonial memory are dependent on the type of media used. In addition, memory rewriting can take many forms: from the reproduction of the colonial stylistic features to the re-signification of old themes in new contexts (e.g. Martini's advertisement). Memories are sometimes recovered not with a repetition of the same representation (the fascist white woman) but through the application of the hegemonic system of whiteness to other bodies and in new social conditions (household and beauty products are a case in point). The cultural memory of colonialism recovers not only images from the past but also imaginaries. The latter should be regarded as archives of cultural memories, that is discourses and representations, myths (Rome) and emotions (fear of violence at the hands of the colonised) but also practices of dominance. Think of the Eritrean woman construed as representing either the body of the country to be conquered—the flesh from which the Eritrean people were born—or a prostitute who, just like Cleopatra, is eager to seduce an Italian Antonio. Finally, memories of colonialism or related experiences are sometimes used to explain phenomena that have nothing to do with Africa, as is the case with black people's supposed inferiority complex towards white people.

In conclusion, I believe that analysing the many forms taken by colonial memory is crucial to understanding that not only was there no memory repression in the discourse of illustrated magazines, but new genealogies of power in terms of race, gender, colour and religious identity emerged during that time—a time that bridged the colonial period with the racist discourses of the sixties and seventies, inaugurating a huge public archive that would eventually foster the xenophobic discourse surrounding the Mediterranean migration to Italy.

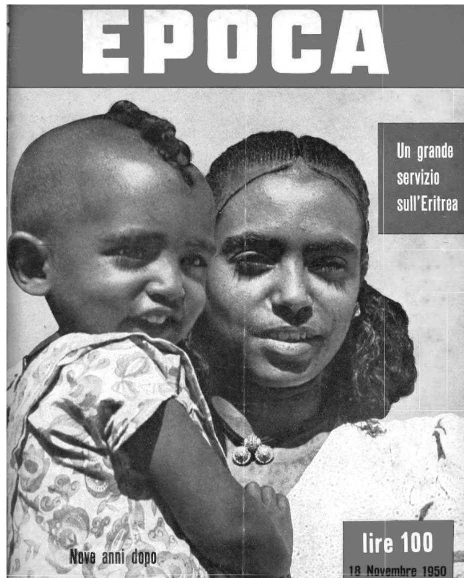

Fig. 1

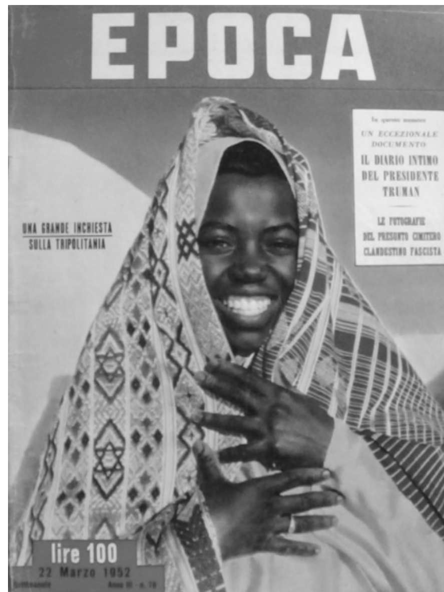

Fig. 2

Fig. 3

Vespa

TUTTO IL MONDO IN VESPA

OLTRE 500 VESPA AL GIORNO ESCONO DAGLI STABILIMENTI DI PRODUZIONE PER IRRADIARSI SULLE STRADE DI OGNI CONTINENTE.

QUESTO SUCCESSO MONDIALE CONFERMA CON L'ELOQUENZA DEI FATTI

La genialità tecnica e l'alta qualità costruttiva della

"PICCOLA VETTURA A DUE RUOTE"
CHE HA RISOLTO IL PROBLEMA DELLA LOCOMOZIONE ECONOMICA UTILITARIA

PRENOTATELA SUBITO EVITANDO LUNGHE ATTESE

Con l'acquisto della Vespa capitalizzate il danaro. Alla costanza del tipo è unita quella del prezzo di L. 168.000 da 4 anni invariato.
Chi prenota la Vespa può fissare la data del ritiro con la garanzia che il prezzo di prenotazione verrà mantenuto alla consegna.

Vendite rateali in 12-16-20 e 24 mesi

P PIAGGIO

Fig. 4

Fig. 5

Fig. 6

Fig. 7

Fig. 8

Fig. 9 (left)

Fig. 10 (right)

Cleopatra attende. Una frequentatrice solitaria chiamata « Cleopatra » attende invano qualche Antonio nel miglior locale notturno dell'Asmara, il Copa Cabana. Il coprifuoco e la disoccupazione hanno distrutto la vita notturna. Solo durante la permanenza della commissione dell'O.N.U. sono riapparsi un po' di clienti al Copa Cabana. E sembrava allora di essere ritornati ai bei tempi dell'Amministrazione italiana. Quattro ospiti fisse « lavorano » nel locale, ma tutte quante vogliono andarsene dall'Asmara, in cerca di fortuna.

Fig. 11

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

ITALY AND THE MEMORY OF COLONIALISM IN THE SEVENTIES

CECILIA DAU NOVELLI

1. The appearance of the Other in the Nation-State crisis

The nineteenth century saw Western European countries engaged in a process of nation-building that led to the expulsion of the Other as extraneous to national identity. The common denominator in becoming a Nation was the progressive search for a national identity. Fighting for one's country, speaking the same language, having the same culture had become symbols of identity, a sort of modern collective consciousness, created by overcoming local constraints and recognising national ones. In the last two decades of the twentieth century, however, quite the opposite occurred and a process was set underway that led to the crushing and dispersal of identity. Many factors triggered this off: the eclipse of the twentieth century ideologies that had crystallised relations, the crisis of the Western development model, and the rise of alternative and marginalised groups as opposed to ordinary citizens. Alongside increasing globalisation, the emergence of a global market and the spread of satellite communications had led to what Habermas defined as "regulatory deconstruction." The crisis of the nation-state in particular had brought an end to exclusive citizenship in favour of the inclusion of the Other, no longer necessarily seen as a threat but as an asset. "And at this point, let every man also take responsibility for the *foreigner*, that is for someone whose identity has taken shape in a totally different life context, and hence, whose self-understanding is in light of traditions that are not our own."[1] Already back in the mid-1990s the German philosopher had outlined one of the main themes of the contemporary world, that is the inclusion of the Other, the

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1 Jurgen Habermas, *L'inclusione dell'altro* (1996; repr., Milano: Feltrinelli, 2008), 43.

integration of the foreigner, within societies that were inevitably forced to reinterpret themselves as open systems.

The roots of this new and different way of considering state and citizenship must be sought in the process of decolonisation that had given a key role to hitherto occupied countries; in the youth and feminist protest movements of the 1960s, and in the revolt of Black Americans as they attempted to conquer their rights.

Even Italy witnessed a decisive change of course. Terrorism, the economic crisis, and the first financial scandals shook the certainties that had been the bedrock of the 1950s. And NATO itself was set to lose its original defensive character. Moreover, our practically non-existent policy for the Mediterranean underwent a transformation that led to Italy becoming discreetly involved. If in 1951 Ambassador Pietro Quaroni had affirmed that "our Arab policy would be better off without one,"[2] twenty years later saw Enrico Berlinguer express his hope for a new phase of cooperation with the southern Mediterranean. "As regards the entire Arab world, we must put aside what remains of our colonial mentality, the attitude of a so-called civilising power à la Mussolini. These ideas are simply dangerous." It was time instead to begin a new phase of collaboration—he affirmed in 1970—whose starting point was the awareness that these countries had started a process of liberation and independence.[3] Although still deputy secretary of the Communist Party, Berlinguer was already a free spirit. While he was in Moscow, he had dared to criticise Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia and now he was voicing his opinion about Italy's allegiance to the Atlantic Alliance.

It had taken more than thirty years to move past "the fatal hills of the Empire" and to try and create peace and security in the Mediterranean, but a detailed and serious reflection on our colonial past and the postcolonial present was still lacking. In the 1950s and 1960s Italy was juggling her dismal legacy of the past with current decolonisation and post-colonial relations, with regional conflicts such as the Arab-Israeli issue, and economic problems. All of which risked posing a challenge for the promising destiny of future Italian economic development. And then there was the burdensome awareness of a colonial identity that had left a sort of lingering foul and putrid stench in its wake, most difficult to shake off.

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2 Quoted in Giampaolo Calchi Novati, "Mediterraneo e questione araba nella politica estera italiana," in *Storia dell'Italia Repubblicana*, ed. Francesco Barbagallo (Torino: Einaudi, 1995), 2:205.

3 Enrico Berlinguer, "Sulla fiducia al Governo Colombo, 11 Agosto 1970," in *Enrico Berlinguer. Discorsi parlamentari (1968–1984)* (Roma: Camera dei Deputati, 2001), 44.

This was Flaiano's painful confession—one that lasted twenty years from when he wrote his only novel *Time to Kill* straight off in 1947, until 1968 when he worked on the last revised reprint. An admission of guilt and the recognition of the persistence of memory. The officer to whom the protagonist is talking on the last night had on "an awful ointment, which had a sickly smell in the heat of the valley; it had the putrid smell of long decayed flowers, a poisonous breath. I quickened my pace, but the wake of that stench preceded me." It almost seemed as if this malodorous memory would persecute the Italians forever.[4]

2. Denial of Decolonisation

During the debate at the Constituent Assembly on the ratification of the Peace Treaty, Alcide De Gasperi had defended his choices, expressing his hope that the Italians would not be excluded from administrative control of the ex-colonies, seeing that they had made so many sacrifices. "Who better than us could be entrusted with the administration of the pre-fascist colonies, under the control of the United Nations, if not those who have generously given so many men, so many resources, so much work, and who have the manpower available to resume work?"[5] Rhetoric aside, it must be said that the prime minister felt completely alienated from the policy of robbery and violence imposed by the fascist regime on the colonies. In the name of a work ethic he claimed the Italian people's right to administer their former colonies. "Yesterday I spoke with a settler who had just got back from Somalia, and he told me about the work that is being done, and how common misfortune has united Italian settlers and Somalis; the former have understood that they must treat the Somalis as they were treated before Fascism, while the latter have realised that the Italians are now another nation, a true democracy, ready to work with them to return prosperity to the colonies."[6]

In reaffirming Italy's democratic right to help its ex-colonies, De Gasperi, who defines himself as a "democratic and antifascist," recalls Mazzini, who had invoked the "universalist conceptions of Christianity and the internationalist hopes of the workers." Even now, halfway through the twentieth century, the only way Italy could cooperate with the African countries was still in the name of these ideal values. In fact, in 1871

4 Ennio Flaiano, *Tempo di uccidere* (Milano: Rizzoli, 2013), 285.
5 Alcide De Gasperi, "La pace mondiale, l'interesse del popolo italiano esigono questo sacrificio" (speech to the Constituent Assembly, 31 July 1947). In Calchi Novati, "Mediterraneo e questione araba," 275.
6 Ibid.

Mazzini had asserted Italy's right to conquer Tunisia: "In the unavoidable insurgency that calls on Europe to civilise the African regions, Italy can clearly lay claim to Tunis—the central key to the Mediterranean, connected to the Sardinian-Sicilian system and twenty-five leagues from Sicily."[7] Moreover, the history and culture of Tripoli and Cyrenaica, where Rome's flag had once flown and which overlook the "Mediterranean called our Sea," were close to Italian tradition.

In actual fact, the situation in the Horn of Africa was probably not quite so rosy, if it is true that in January 1948, clashes broke out in Mogadishu itself between nationalist Somalis and those Italians who desperately wanted to prove that the ex-colony wished to maintain its connection to Italy. The conflicts ended in a bloodbath: more than fifty Italian civilians were killed, and the Italian press accused the local British military authorities of having done little to defend their fellow-countrymen and women.[8] Following the breakdown of agreements with Great Britain, De Gasperi and his foreign minister Carlo Sforza became convinced of the need to abandon any attempt to control the colonies, which were to be granted total independence. Although this forward retreat was frowned on by Great Britain and France—who were anything but in favour of granting independence—it was ratified by the UN in October 1949.[9] Only Somalia, the poorest of the ex-colonies, was to remain under Italian administrative control until 1960.

As a whole, this represented a defeat for De Gasperi's policy, seeing that he had staunchly defended Italy's right to maintain a role in the civilisation of colonial territories. This extremely low-profile solution almost completely eliminated Italy from the lands it had conquered over a sixty-year period. True to say that this was a somewhat futuristic choice, already projected towards an independent Africa, while France and Great Britain were still entrenched in defending their possessions. However, this decision was not triggered by any internal debate, but resulted from the imposition of choices made by the UN, of which Italy at the time was not yet a member. Furthermore, it also marked the defeat of everything that had been achieved through much hard work but with so few resources.
All told, this was the beginning of an incomplete and unfinished phase of decolonisation of which there was never a full awareness, just as the

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7 Giuseppe Mazzini, "Politica internazionale, 1871," in *Cosmopolitismo e nazione* (Roma: Elliot, 2011), 293.
8 Gianluigi Rossi, *L'Africa italiana verso l'indipendenza (1941–47)* (Milano: Giuffrè, 1980).
9 Giuseppe Mammarella and Paolo Cacace, *La politica estera dell'Italia* (Bari: Laterza, 2006), 183–86.

importance of the Other was never truly recognised, and respect for the independence process was always lacking.

3. The long road to recognition of the identity of others

The centrality of *Mare Nostrum* came to a head in the late 1960s and early 1970s. There were three underlying causes: the energy crisis, the shifting southwards of the centre of gravity of international politics, and the perception of the bipolar crisis. A perception that was further confirmed by the emergence of "progressive" and non-aligned Arab states. The Mediterranean became the metaphorical place to try and draw up an alternative policy with respect to the imperialism of the two superpowers.[10]

A year before Berlinguer, Aldo Moro, the then foreign minister, had also affirmed the need to set aside years of scepticism and distrust in favour of a new policy of peace in the Mediterranean. "The countries that gravitate in the Mediterranean cannot but be aware of the fact that this sea has to reacquire its function as a main artery of maritime traffic and as a meeting point for the peoples of Europe, Asia, and Africa." And then he launched into a description of Libyan events, speaking of a cautious optimism towards the recently inaugurated modernisation process: "So far the new Libyan leaders have given the impression of wanting to work for the welfare of the nation, which leads us to entrust them with the work aimed at renewing old social structures, to accelerate the process of economic development in the country and achieve a more equitable distribution of wealth."[11] Of course, this was just the beginning; Muammar Gaddafi had just deposed the corrupt Libyan monarchy and had not yet expelled any Italians. This only came about in May 1970, after he had confiscated all their property. And yet, there generally seemed to be a certain positive predisposition towards the Arab world as a whole. And Moro continued to promote his customary moderation, even after this expropriation of Italian property, to try and maintain friendly relations with the Libyans.[12]

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10 Elena Calandri, "Il Mediterraneo nella politica estera italiana," in *Tra guerra fredda e distensione. L'Italia repubblicana nella crisi degli anni Settanta* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2003), 365–368.
11 Aldo Moro, "Sulla politica estera italiana, 21 Ottobre 1969," in *Aldo Moro. Discorsi parlamentari (1963–1977)* (Roma: Camera dei Deputati, 1996), 2:1401.
12 Paolo Borruso, "L'Italia e la crisi della decolonizzazione," in *Tra guerra fredda e distensione* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2003), 398–400.

He had voiced the same idea to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in October 1970, when, referring to a conversation with Nixon, he stated that our country should never be obliged to sacrifice its ties to the Arab world even within the Western alliance. “As for Italy, the Atlantic Alliance cannot in any way be virtually opposed to countries in the Arab world.” Indeed, these countries were to be brought closer to the West. “It is of fundamental importance that friendly relations with the West constitute a viable option for the Arab world.”[13] Already back in 1969, as newly-appointed foreign minister, he had tried to reconsider the matter of the former colonies, forgotten for decades by Italian public opinion and historiography. And even more so, the position of the former settlers—practically seen as the perpetrators of the original sin— had been removed from the thoughts of politicians and political parties.

Attempts at a détente on Italy’s part, especially towards the Horn of Africa, had received a boost when Aldo Moro was nominated minister for foreign affairs. In fact, as noted by Del Boca, despite Moro’s reputation for being somewhat lazy and rather too tied up in Italian politics to have much interest in other matters, he did actually make a deliberate effort to try and solve a number of rather thorny international questions starting with the Ethiopian problem.[14] As soon as he was nominated minister in August 1969, he started to draw up the outline for what has been called an authentic “Italian doctrine for peace.”[15] The doctrine states that in view of the crisis resulting from this bipolar system, other countries, like Italy, should also take on leading roles in defending peace, by helping in the development of poor countries. Italy’s main directive should have been towards her former colonies, with which our country had an outstanding moral and material debt. As he affirmed in one of his first speeches to the Chamber, since Italy had been completely relieved of the burden of any colonial leftovers, her interest was clearly based on the respect, the integrity, and the independence of every nation. “No residual of the last century’s colonialism remains in our hearts and we are pleased that this is known and recognised by others. Our policy is based on respect and cooperation and we sincerely wish to see it through.” This also had to do with the fact that Italy was certainly no longer ranked as a world power, let

13 Mario N. Ferrara, *La politica estera dell’Italia libera* (*1945–1971)* (Milano: Pan, 1972), 243.
14 Angelo Del Boca, *Gli italiani in Africa Orientale,* vol. 4, *Nostalgia delle colonie* (Bari: Laterza, 1984), 518.
15 Giampaolo Malgeri, “Aldo Moro, La politica estera italiana e il Corno d’Africa (1969–1976),” in *Aldo Moro nell’Italia contemporanea* (Firenze: Le Lettere, 2011), 671.

alone a military one, and could only count for something in terms of her traditions, culture, and history.[16] This decisive change of pace for Moro, the foreign minister, was also noted by the Italian opinion pages, which gave due mention to the Italian statesman's new international prominence. "Aldo Moro has never travelled as much as he has done recently. His foreign policy seems to regard several issues relating to peaceful coexistence and international détente."[17]

Between 1970 and 1971 Moro made several trips to the former colonies but also to Kenya, Senegal, Ivory Coast, Nigeria and Congo, where he set up bilateral relations based on equality with the new Central African states. Whenever Italy lacked capital, she offered technical assistance and training.[18]

4. The recognition of Ethiopia

To strengthen this new direction in policy, Moro visited the Horn of Africa in the summer of 1970, stopping off first in Somalia and then in Ethiopia. This was a crucial turning point because our former colony had been much neglected in the early decades of the Republic. Another problem was the return of the Aksum Obelisk—so dear to the Ethiopians—which was a matter yet to be resolved. A decisive step forward was made in April 1969, when the Lion of Judah statue was returned to the city of Addis Ababa.[19]

This was the first time—after the disastrous colonial adventure—that an Italian minister had set foot on Ethiopian soil. According to the Italian Ambassador Giulio Pascucci Righi, Moro had every intention of opening a new phase in relations, and the Ethiopian authorities were also clearly ready to cooperate. Also because Ethiopia risked remaining isolated, seeing that it was hemmed in by the revolution in Somalia on the one hand and Eritrea's desire for independence on the other. In fact, Moro's trip to the country provided the opportunity for the Ethiopian information minister to express his strong concern about Soviet penetration into the Horn of Africa. There was a real threat that the existing Russian-funded Eritrean Liberation Front could also establish itself on the other side of the

16 Moro, *Sulla politica estera italiana*, 1405.

17 "Che cosa succede, La valigia pronta del mediatore Moro," *Epoca*, June 28, 1970, 24.

18 Ferrara, *La politica estera dell'Italia libera*, 246.

19 Massimiliano Santi, *La stele di Axum da bottino di guerra a patrimonio dell'Umanità. Una storia italiana*, with an introduction by A. Del Boca (Milano: Mimesis, 2014), 129ff.

Red Sea. Indeed, a great source of concern was the "Muscovite obedience" of the People's Republic of Yemen.[20]

The visit was a great success. Moro perceived the favourable attitude of the Ethiopian authorities and prolonged his stay, despite the sudden worsening of the political crisis in Italy. For his part, during a lunch at Villa Italia, the Negus emphasised the fact that there was every reason to move forward to a more concrete phase of cooperation between the two countries.[21] Even so, there was always some tension between the two, as demonstrated for example by the notorious episode regarding the commentary on the 1970 World Cup: after a formal protest from the African Embassy, Nicolò Carosio had been hastily shown the door for having supposedly called the Ethiopian linesman a "blacky." In actual fact, Carosio had only said "Ethiopian," but this had been enough to cost him his job as a commentator.[22] In this increasingly favourable climate, the Emperor finally accepted an invitation to make a long overdue visit to Italy, carrying out an official state visit between November 6 and 9, followed by a private tour that went on until November 14. The Negus's visit to Italy had been on the cards since the early 1960s, but had always been put off under various pretexts.[23]

This warming of relations between Italy and Ethiopia also saw the publication of several articles in favour of the return of the Aksum Obelisk to the Ethiopians. One of the most authoritative of these voices was Indro Montanelli's, who had personally experienced the purloining of this monument that he defined as "the rape of the obelisk." Writing in the *Epoca* magazine, in reply to a reader who was contrary to its restitution, he stated that nowadays, even wars have rules that must be respected. And this was why you could not compare Napoleonic thefts to more recent ones. "And these rules also include respect for artistic heritage." And I

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20 "Che cosa succede, L'Eritrea si ribella all'Etiopia," *Epoca*, July 26, 1970, 17.

21 Malgeri cites a number of telegrams that pertain to the meeting, *Aldo Moro*, 685ff.

22 "Che cosa succede, Carosio: non l'ho chiamato negraccio," *Epoca*, July 5, 1970, 14.

23 Between 1958 and 1971 there was a wealth of correspondence between the Italian Embassy in Addis Ababa and the Ministry of the Imperial Palace, which bears witness to several missed appointments until the visit in November 1970. Cf. National Archives of Ethiopia, Addis Ababa, Ministry of the Imperial Palace, vol. 1, *Italy diplomatic correspondence between the Imperial Palace and the Italian Embassy.*

would add respect for the memory that needs to be returned, so that a new peace process with Ethiopia could take place.[24]

5. The complex return of memory

The Negus's visit also received a positive response both in the media and at a political level. Haile Selassie had already visited Italy in 1924 in the early years of the regime, when he was still Ras Tafari Makonnen, Regent of Ethiopia. In June 1924, in light of the growing threat, he had met with the minister for the colonies, the war minister, King Vittorio Emanuele III, and finally Il Duce, president of the Council of Ministers. He had travelled through the jubilant crowd in a carriage and in a car with the King, and he had also visited the Terni steelworks and the Colonial Museum. Images of the time show him as still quite young, with a decidedly worried look on his face (fig. 1).[25]

Fig. 1

Forty-six years later, it was now time to finally heal the wound. He was received with great pomp and ceremony in what was apparently a similar setting to that of 1924, but which really bore little comparison. In 1924, the winds of war had been blowing, while now the time was ripe to formalise not only peace but also a possible reconciliation. During the

24 Indro Montanelli, "Italia domanda, E' giusto restituire all'Etiopia l'obelisco di Axum," *Epoca*, November 8, 1970, 11.
25 *L'Osservatore Romano*, June 18–25, 1924.

official lunch at the Quirinal Palace, which the emperor had already visited, the president of the Republic Giuseppe Saragat recognised the serious crimes committed by Fascism in the attack on Ethiopia, but stressed how things had changed with this new democratic and pacifist Italy. What is more, he gave special thanks to the Negus, who had shown such a welcoming and understanding attitude towards the many Italians who had remained in Ethiopia.[26]

Selassie's speech was also extremely even-tempered and shied away from making any recriminations. In addition, he also achieved a notable economic success, returning home with about fifty million dollars of export credits. Despite the many criticisms, especially of a political nature, which reprimanded the Italian government for not having dealt with the Eritrean question, the visit was extremely important.[27] This was not only because of the great media coverage, but also because it represented Italy's first, albeit rather late, attempt to allow Ethiopia to regain her image and memory.

As well as the numerous articles in the daily papers, the event also filled the pages of several prominent magazines, in particular *L'Europeo* and *Epoca*, which went a long way to reconstructing a history that was still a sore point for us as Italians. *L'Europeo,* founded in 1945 by Arrigo Benedetti, was an extremely popular weekly whose sales reached 230,000 copies in the early part of the 1970s. It could count on contributions from some of the most famous names in Italian journalism, from Giorgio Bocca to Lietta Tornabuoni, from Camilla Cederna to Ugo Stille.

To mark the emperor's visit to Italy, Giuliano Ferrieri, the editor-in-chief, signed a long article in which he reinterpreted the conquest of Ethiopia. Ferrieri was an antifascist and partisan and authored a truthful review—giving voice to Angelo Del Boca—in which he denounced the use of chemical gases and genocide against the Abyssinians. Even though Ethiopia actually possessed a larger military force, she had been defeated thanks to these chemical weapons, without the Italian people even knowing that they had been used. This was perhaps the first time that the general public came to hear about the horrors of the war against the Ethiopians, which could now be talked about openly and remembered for the first time in history. "The shores all round Lake Ashenge are piled with corpses: men wounded and scorched with thirst, who dragged themselves to the lakeside and drank water contaminated with mustard

26 Borruso, *L'Italia e la crisi della decolonizzazione*, 410–413.
27 As regards the Eritrean question, cf. Angelo Del Boca, *L'Africa nella coscienza degli italiani. Miti, memorie, errori, sconfitte* (1992; repr., Milano: Mondadori, 2002), 225–76.

gas."[28] This was an eye-opener for the Italians who were used to seeing themselves as "good people," and it became rather more difficult to blame it all on fascism. What is more, the colonial conquests had taken place with the connivance of many, who—be they industrialists, the church, army or king—had all applauded the undertaking.

Epoca tried to go further by restoring images and memories to Ethiopia and her Negus. This important magazine had been launched in 1950 in the style of American illustrated weeklies, such as *Life*. Its glossy, cleverly designed pages placed great importance on the use of photographic images and offered exclusive coverage, as well as contributions from renowned photographers. In its heyday, midway between 1965 and 1975, in addition to all the articles by prestigious journalists, its legendary staff could also boast famous photographers like Walter Bonatti, Sergio Del Grande, and Elio Sorci. November 1970 saw the publication of a special edition entirely dedicated to the Negus's visit, whose photographic images restored the emperor with everything that he had been deprived of way back in 1924 (fig. 2).

In a certain sense, this restitution of memories was an attempt to settle old debts with Ethiopia. The emperor was defined as an intelligent, brave and courteous man, even though the Far Left criticised him for being too conservative, while the Right attacked him as a supporter of slavery. These were criticisms that did not take account of the situation in Ethiopia in the 1930s. On the contrary, Pope Paul VI called him a "noble and good gentleman" who had been an intermediary for the friendship between Ethiopia and Italy. And, in fact, he always protected the Italians who had stayed in Africa from retaliation and revenge. Nino Amadori's article also quotes the memorable speech he gave in Geneva at the headquarters of the League of Nations. He refused to be crushed by the golden exile he was offered by Mussolini and denounced Italy's crime in attacking a free country before the world: "Are the states going to set up the terrible precedent of bowing before force?" In 1936, he had already realised that the fragile European peace was falling apart.

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28 Giuliano Ferrieri, "La guerra d'Etiopia vista dalla parte del Negus. Per Hailè Selassiè l'impiego dei gas fu l'elemento determinante che portò alla vittoria italiana nel conflitto del '35," *L'Europeo*, November 19, 1970, 68–73.

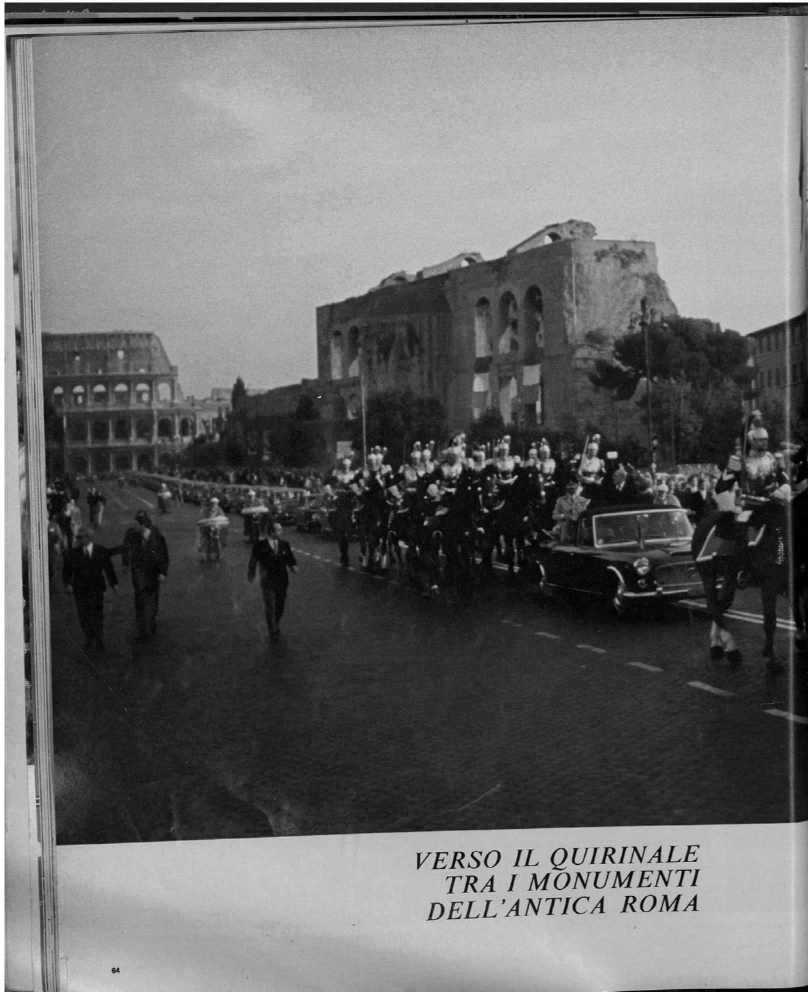
VERSO IL QUIRINALE
TRA I MONUMENTI
DELL'ANTICA ROMA
64

Fig. 2

He reappeared in 1970, when he took a leading role in the Organization of African Unity. The magazine described him as "a small immovable steadfast monument," himself a symbol of the Ethiopian resistance that

had refused to submit to Italian occupation.[29] If we put the photos from 1924 and 1970 on top of each other, although the setting is exactly the same, their content is radically different. In 1924, there was a newly established dictatorship that already had plans to attack the Ethiopian Free State to satisfy its thirst for power. The empire rose up in Rome, its natural birthplace framed by the "fatal hills." In 1970, the Democratic Republic that welcomes the Negus with so much pomp and ceremony is a different country that "repudiates war as an instrument of aggression against other peoples"[30] while trying to come to terms with its own past.

The young Haile Selassie, still to become Negus, wears a worried expression as he stands next to King Vittorio Emanuele III. In 1970, however, he is a victorious sovereign to whom the Italians have restored dignity. And Ethiopia has had its image restored as a country that refused to come to terms with the occupiers. Haile Selassie's kingdom was not destined to last long—brought to an end, as we know, by a coup in 1974—mainly because of the shortcomings of his social reform programme and the military rebellion.[31]

6. Africa unveiled

Moro's openness and clear thinking were put to work again a few years later in October 1973, when Italy assumed an impartial position as regards the latest Arab-Israeli conflict, when Israel was attacked on several fronts during the Yom Kippur War. Despite Italy's obvious Atlantic position, Moro, still foreign minister, sought to defend Palestinian interests, without showing prejudice to the State of Israel's right to exist. "The objective to be pursued is the coexistence of the Arab States and Israel, under conditions of truly reciprocal security, which implies finding a solution to the Palestinian question that is not only an economic and social problem but also a political one."[32] His speech, only applauded by the Centre-left, reflected the end of the certainty that a miracle would happen but also a different awareness of the Arab world. The energy crisis was of course just beginning, due to the reduction in imports of crude oil, but there was also the fear that the conflict could extend to the whole of the Mediterranean

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29 Nino Amadori, "La visita del negus in Italia, è tornato da amico," *Epoca*, November 15, 1970, 63–72.

30 *Costituzione della Repubblica italiana*, art. 11 (Milano: Mondadori, 1976), 62.

31 Andrea Lo Bianco, "Le élite politiche di Addis Abeba (1855–1974)," *Élite e storia* 4, no. 1 (2004): 120–21.

32 Aldo Moro,"Sul conflitto nel Medio Oriente, 17 Ottobre 1973," *Aldo Moro. Discorsi parlamentari (1963–1977)* (Roma: Camera dei Deputati, 1996), 2:1472.

area, involving us directly. And this would inevitably have led to a revival of the "competition between the two great powers." There were still too many memories of the Cold War, and Aldo Moro was all too aware of the need for "a lasting and genuine peace" to worry too much about having to use your bike for a couple of Sundays.

Beyond the crisis of the two super powers, Moro tried to weave a network of bilateral relations with the non-aligned countries, since he was anxious not to lose control over issues such as the Middle East, the Suez Canal, the oil problem, and Mediterranean security. However, this new politics of presence was not adequately supported by Europe, which had yet to realise the importance of the Mediterranean for the continent and was generally still too weak to express a common foreign policy.

The truth of the matter is that Sixty-eight, the "Mediterranean vocation," and the beginning of a new perception of the Other had already come about. Admittedly, for a country that had been going all out since the end of the war, austerity measures had come as quite a shock in November 1973— reduced speed limits, a traffic ban on Sundays and public holidays, early closing at 11 p.m. for cinemas and theatres, reduced street lighting: it almost seemed as if Italy was collectively about to hit the wall. The oil crisis also marked the beginning of something new, a sort of rude awakening from the miracle myth. The loss of innocence, the end of uncontrolled growth that brings development into question. Sundays spent walking and cycling were a chance to rediscover the town, while the new and only recently emerged concept of Arabs was at odds with the rise of terrorism. The Palestinian terrorist raid at the Munich Olympics in 1972, followed one year later by the assault on a plane on the tarmac at Fiumicino airport—right on our doorstep—placed public opinion under enormous strain.

However, despite all the misgivings, a new concept of diversity was starting to take shape, in the sense of the expression of a different culture, which could sometimes be marginal, but was certainly of no less importance. It is no coincidence that the 1970s saw the approval of the famous Law 180 abolishing mental asylums. Although the law only came into effect in 1978, it characterised the whole decade. It was Moro yet again, who on May 25, 1972, on the occasion of Africa Day recognised the value of these other traditions. "Europe today under the pressure of new forces has looked beyond the great civilisation born on the shores of the Mediterranean and has discerned other civilisations, understanding their significance in a wider historical perspective, appreciating their traditions, knowing their needs and

supporting their well-founded demands for the end of racial discrimination and a genuine independence."[33]

While Berlinguer had talked about eliminating all the "residues of colonial mentality," Moro dared to look South beyond the borders of the Roman Empire that had so fascinated the Fascists, to try and appreciate the novelty expressed by the ancient African civilisations. Together, the two most far-sighted politicians of post-war Italian politics made the discovery of a different but no less significant Other World. This was also the moment when the politics of fascist power and racial obsession, of the Roman and fascist Empires, of colonial occupation and the askaris and Abyssinia were left behind, perhaps once and for all. For thirty years nothing had been said about all this, be it for shame or nostalgia. Now it was time to come to terms with the past, the colonies, and racism, even though society was perhaps not quite as forward-thinking as one might have hoped.

7. Italian racism today

In the early 1970s, the racism that had permeated fascism was still a dominant factor in Italian society, much more than was openly admitted. Even at the time of the regime, it was a far more pervasive phenomenon than the mere persecution of the Jews and colonial segregation. The defence of the "Italian race" had given rise to a series of acts of intolerance and violence against every diversity. And there reigned a general consensus that went far beyond merely obeying the law.[34]

And although popular belief has always maintained that the country was essentially anti-racist, the facts demonstrate a far more complex situation that lasted way beyond the fall of fascism. In the 1970s there was still an underlying, strongly persisting feeling of hate for the Other. This did not necessarily result in hostility to blacks, seeing that they were so few, but led to a distrust for anyone different, for the marginalised groups who more often than not were Southern Italians and not foreigners at all. One of the principal news magazines of the 1970s *L'Europeo* dedicated a number of articles to exploring the issue.

You could see a few black faces around, "*negroes*"—as they used to say—descendants of the allied troops and hence in their early twenties. In 1968 Fausto Leali had sung "Painter please make me a negro angel," but

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33 Quoted in Borruso, *L'Italia e la crisi della decolonizzazione*, 419.
34 Gianluca Gabrielli, "Razzismo," in *Dizionario del fascismo* (Torino: Einaudi, 2003), 2: 472.

to no avail.[35] In 1970 everything seemed to be fine: "The negro problem does not exist here. There are few negroes in Italy and there can be no conflict between negroes and whites."[36] Then, real discrimination started to raise its ugly head, such as the problems of going out with a white girl: "It's different for me—says Mauro Pescaglini from Livorno—if a girl says no to me, it is not because she doesn't like me, but because I am black."[37] Or playing with other children: "I realised I was a negro—says Giovanni Calabrò from Livorno—that negro or mulatto is all the same, when I was five. I was playing with a little girl when her mother came and said let that negro be."[38]

The same kind of racism was also extended to Italian Southerners: your real Italian negroes. In fact, in the letters written by a group of Italians from the Puglia region, they describe themselves as being the true target for discrimination. "We are Italy's real negroes, we from the South who work in the North."[39] And another letter reads: "Even today as we are getting back to normal, we feel that those from the North consider us second- and third-rate Italians. We are the white negroes. Racism exists. If our skin happened to be black, we'd be worse off than the negroes in America."[40] So much for all those who had always maintained that the Italians were not racist.[41]

All this was confirmed by a social worker from Turin who admitted: "The problem exists and there is marginalisation of immigrants by the people from Turin. It's true, Turin cannot shake off the shadow of racism. It needs to convince itself that it is a different city to the one it was in 1950."[42] At that time during the great migration from south to north, the prevailing climate of mistrust and suspicion was almost a foregone conclusion. These Southerners or *terun* in Milan and *tarun* in Piedmontese were confined to Milan's notorious Coree and Rome's *borgate* (peripheral slums) and were the object of scorn and ridicule. The phenomenon should have been on its way out in the seventies. If nothing else, at the cultural level, it was now considered "politically incorrect" to address somebody

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35 Fausto Leali, "Angeli negri," 1968.
36 Aldo Santini, "Nascere negro in Italia," *L'Europeo*, November 13, 1970, 42.
37 Ibid., 44.
38 Ibid., 43.
39 Aldo Santini, "Settentrionali contro meridionali," *L'Europeo*, November 28, 1970, 78.
40 Ibid., 79.
41 As regards the "new whites," cf. Cristina Lombardi-Diop, *L'Italia cambia pelle. La bianchezza degli italiani dal Fascismo al boom economico* (Firenze: Le Monnier, 2013), 107–116.
42 Ibid., 83.

with the term *negro*. Berlinguer and Moro had tried to approach the issue of the Other in a different way. In actual fact, prejudice against diversity was still solidly rooted in Italian society.

Others, Southerners, blacks, immigrants, and marginalised groups were still the sign of a racism that was deeply polluting Italian society. And this was also the decade that Italian society itself underwent a change. As is common knowledge, Italy was a country of emigrants, and although the number of people leaving the country continued to be high until 1976, the migration balance in 1973 already showed a positive value. Even if by only one person: 101 people entering the country compared to 100 leaving. And although the majority were still Italians returning home, by the end of the decade, the number of foreigners entering the country was impressive. For the first time ever, the 1981 ISTAT census also included foreigners in its count.

These mass landings were also the trigger for the intolerance and racism that the so-called respectable Italian society had never really put to rest. And likewise, a handful of amnesty laws for undocumented workers were enforced and endless discussions about granting citizenship were undertaken. Of course, we all know that back in the time of the Republic and the Roman Empire, this was a far more open process, seeing that the acquisition of new citizens was considered something positive. In Italy today, “the inclusion of the foreigner” in the construction of an open society—as defined by Habermas—is still extremely complex. And it is hampered by qualms of mistrust, prejudice, and fears for one’s safety, which have polluted society from the times of Fascism, and which are far more difficult to get rid of than one might like to think We are still discussing the preponderance of *ius sanguinis* over the *ius soli,* and many children who were born in Italy, who speak Italian perfectly and play football, are being denied their legitimate citizenship.

There are still many grey areas, which even in recent times have risen to the forefront once again: from the army and its reluctance to shed light on the violence it used in the colonies, to the Italian Right who continue to defend the perpetrators of the massacres and refuse to recognise the Italianness of so many immigrants who are now completely integrated, whatever the colour of their skin. Italy has made leaps forward for democracy and backward steps in intolerance, racism, violence, and xenophobia, all unworthy of a civilised country. One can only hope that, following the path initiated by Aldo Moro—who was murdered for his ideas of peace and tolerance—a common road of cooperation and dialogue with no further misunderstandings can be undertaken.