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DECOLONITALY

DECOLONIZATION AND NATIONAL IDENTITY IN POST-WAR ITALY 1945–1960

BY

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Declaration

This thesis is the candidate's own work.

This dissertation does not include material used before or which the author has published.

This thesis has not been submitted for a degree at another university.

Abstract

This dissertation examines the cultural results of Italian decolonization in the process of national reconstruction which followed WWII (1945–60). It dialogues with recent scholarship investigating colonial legacies in modern Italy, although it presents some innovative insights concerning both the methodology adopted to dissect the formation of those legacies and the corpus of representations that will be considered. As far as the first element is concerned, this thesis will define a critical approach enabling the exploration of the ways in which film contents offered a renewed sense of national belonging — or *Italianità*. Not only does this work shed new light on the transition from Fascism to the Republic according to critical and postcolonial perspectives (chapter 1), but it will offer a systematic examination of a film corpus that has almost been neglected by previous scholarship, that is newsreels and documentaries about the Italian former colonies produced between the 1945 and the 1960. The political interferences which characterised the production of that footage will be dissected thanks to the study of original archival findings combined with the review of scholarship on the topic (chapter 2).

The analytical chapters will tackle the extent to which the memory of the colonial past was either repressed or selectively recollected in order to redefine the discursive geography of national belongings (chapter 3) and the intrinsic benevolence of Italians working abroad (chapter 4). The following chapters will deal more specifically with the formation of an aphasic and a-grammatic form of postcolonial memory (chapter 5), and with the resilient ways through which uncomfortable recollections of that past were re-articulated in a new and positive presence of Italy in Africa (chapter 6). In so doing, this work suggests that the ambiguous connection between de-Fascistization and decolonization engendered unproblematic narratives and memories about the colonial period that reverberate in contemporary Italian society.

List of abbreviations

AAMOD	<i>Archivio Audiovisivo del Movimento Operaio e Democratico (Rome)</i>
ACS	<i>Archivio Centrale dello Stato (Rome)</i>
AFCB	<i>Archivio Film Cineteca di Bologna</i>
AFIS	<i>Amministrazione Fiduciaria Italiana della Somalia</i>
AGA	<i>Archivio Giulio Andreotti (Rome)</i>
AOI	<i>Africa Orientale Italiana</i>
ASL	<i>Archivio Storico dell'Istituto LUCE (Rome)</i>
ASILS	<i>Archivio Storico Istituto Luigi Sturzo (Rome)</i>
ASMC	<i>Archivio Storico Museo del Cinema (Turin)</i>
BMA	British Military Administration
CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
CDPCM	<i>Centro di documentazione Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri</i>
CIAC	<i>Compagnia Italiana Attualità Cinematografiche</i>
CRIE	<i>Comitato Rappresentativo Italiani in Eritrea</i>
CSC	<i>Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia.</i>
DC	<i>Democrazia Cristiana</i>
DHA	Discourse-Historical Approach
ENIC	<i>Ente Nazionale Industrie Cinematografiche</i>
fol.	<i>Folio</i>
INCOM	<i>Industria Cortometraggi Milano</i>
INPS	<i>Istituto Nazionale Previdenza Sociale</i>
IsIAO	<i>Istituto Italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente</i>
LUCE	<i>L'Unione Cinematografica Educativa</i>
MAE	<i>Ministero degli Affari Esteri</i>
MAI	<i>Ministero dell'Africa Italiana</i>
MINCULPOP	<i>Ministero della Cultura popolare</i>
PCI	<i>Partito Comunista Italiano</i>
PCM	<i>Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri</i>
PdL	<i>Partito del Lavoro</i>
PdA	<i>Partito d'Azione</i>
PSI	<i>Partito Socialista Italiano</i>
PSIUP	<i>Partito Socialista Italiano di Unità Proletaria</i>
RD	<i>Regio Decreto (Royal Decree)</i>
RAO	<i>Reperto Fotocinematografico 'Africa Orientale' LUCE</i>
SYL	Somali Youth League
UN	United Nations

Introduction. DecolonItaly

L'Italia ha così bisogno di un impero coloniale per poter espandersi, perché la popolazione non può più essere mantenuta nella sua superficie, e per poter avere materie prime. Perciò oggi le nostre truppe sono andate a piantare il tricolore nei campi di battaglia dell'Etiopia
L. P. (1936)

*Nel cielo vanno i cori dei soldati contro Al-Mukhtar e Lawrence d'Arabia
con canti popolari da osteria.
Lo sai che quell'idiota di Graziani farà una brutta fine.*
G.R. & F. B. (1981)

This dissertation aims to expose the political and cultural processes which contributed to the eradication of uncomfortable memories of the Italian colonial past during the period of national reconstruction which followed WWII. The principal assumption on which this thesis is based is that the ambiguous decolonization process did not simply erase the most shameful side of the Italian presence in Africa. Rather, the end of the Fascist empire drew heavily on previous colonial rhetoric, desires, and discourses to offer narratives and representations which could help build a renewed sense of national unity. The explanation of the significance of such research, and its original contribution to the thriving fields of Italian postcolonial and media studies, will be presented in this introduction. However, I will begin with a more subjective account of my engagement with this topic, which will enable me to summarize the critical points and historical context that will be investigated over the following pages.

Exactly ten years ago, in late springtime 2009, I was spending a weekend in my birthplace, Domus de Maria, the southernmost village of Sardinia. I had reluctantly agreed to sort through my late grandfather's cellar. Amidst the rusty harvest tools, dusty bric-à-brac and the crinkled books and newspapers that he had collected over the decades, the yellowed covers of a set of notebooks suddenly captured my attention. *Piddiu Lazzaro Francesco. Classe 2a Complementare*. In 1936, *nonno* Lazzaro was eighteen years old and he was attending the *scuola complementare fascista*, a practical education initiative which

aimed to train a class of artisans and workers even in the remotest villages of Italy.¹ Grandpa was neither a *camicia nera*, nor had he participated in any of the Fascist colonial wars. Nevertheless, in one of the essays he wrote in a notebook, I read the epigraph cited at the start of this thesis. An enthusiastic portrait of the Fascist Empire emerged from the lines of his neat handwriting, and similar sentiments recurred in other composition. I was fairly surprised in the first instance. Soon that surprise turned into a gnawing curiosity about how Fascist colonial propaganda could have pervaded the everyday life of a village which was literally in the middle of the nowhere.

Given my forthcoming exam in colonial history, my mind, eyes, and ears became increasingly receptive to the not-so-rare yet subtle instances in which the everyday life of people who never set foot *oltremare* could have been exposed, whether consciously or not, to colonial narratives, images, songs, and commodities. The illumination arrived when I was listening to Giuni Russo and Franco Battiato's *Lettera al governatore della Libia*. The synth-pop song, despite its charming violin melody and some new-wave nuances (it was released in 1981), features a lyric which refers to Rodolfo Graziani as an *idiota*: a fairly rare occasion of a popular song critically commenting on Italy's colonial history. Considering what Graziani — also dubbed 'the Butcher of the desert' — did in Libya, Somalia, and Ethiopia, Battiato and Russo has been far too kind.²

In those very months (summer 2009), Muammar Gaddafi met Silvio Berlusconi in Rome with a picture of the anticolonial leader Omar al-Mukhtar pinned to his chest; colonial history and its legacies took over the headlines of newspapers and television broadcasts. Though it was a flash in the pan, talking about Italian colonialism was easier than in the past. The usual sequence of reactions when I told close friends that I was thinking about writing my MA dissertation on Fascist imperial propaganda was a blank stare followed by a flash of recognition and by sentences like 'ti ricordi *tziu Attiliu*, lui è stato in Libia', 'mio nonno è stato in Etiopia, cacciava i cinghiali pure lì', 'zio Giuseppe

¹ Richard J. Wolff, 'Italian Education During World War II. Remnants of Failed Fascist Education, Seed of the New School', in *Education and the Second World War: Studies in Schooling and Social Change*, ed. by Roy Lowe (New York: Routledge, 2012), pp. 73–83 (p. 74).

² Rodolfo Graziani was one of the most brutal Fascist officers who ordered indiscriminate violence against civilians and military practices forbidden by international treaties, first in Libya and then in Ethiopia. He was appointed as viceroy of the *Africa Orientale Italiana* (AOI) from July 1936 to December 1937, see Romano Canosa, *Graziani. Il Maresciallo d'Italia dalla guerra d'Etiopia alla Repubblica di Salò* (Milan: Mondadori, 2005); Angelo Del Boca, *Gli italiani in Libia*, 2 vols (Milan: Mondadori, 1997); Richard Pankhurst, 'Italian Fascist War Crimes in Ethiopia: A History of Their Discussion, from the League of Nations to the United Nations (1936–1949)', *Northeast African Studies*, 6:1/2 (1999), 83–140. See also 'Rodolfo Graziani', <<http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/rodolfo-graziani/>> [accessed 13 September 2019].

Putzu ha costruito un impianto d'irrigazione in Africa' (these are some of the more neutral comments, because *faccetta nera* was also mentioned). My dad could not provide any further points of reference in this unpretentious map of family memories of colonialism. He did, however, describe the rampant enthusiasm provoked by the noise of the truck that came monthly with new film reels to be projected in the small cinema of Domus de Maria. At the end of the 50s, one of the most immediate, albeit still frail, ways to be in contact with Italy — to *belong* to the nation — for people leaving in a remote village was through mass media: newspapers, cinema, television (rarely) and especially radio played a crucial role in fashioning their idea of Italy, and therefore in delineating new subjectivities and identities, new forms of consumption, new ideologies and desires in a world which was changing rapidly and inexorably.³ When I asked my mother and father if they remembered any specific event, film, book, or broadcast about the former colonies, they answered 'non mi pare'.

Every historian has their own story, and this subjective personal chronicle does not aspire to be scientifically and methodologically exhaustive. I share it here with the aim of illuminating the positionality of the author within the research path that this introduction will present, and of reflexively broaching the themes this thesis will deal with. Mass media, colonial memories, and the re-construction/representation of national belonging are the cardinal points triangulating the critical endeavour of this doctoral dissertation, whose primary goal is to investigate the extent to which the end of Italian colonialism offered narratives which helped anchor post-war Italian identity. I will explore how representations of, and practices related to, Italian decolonization fashioned collective memories about the colonial past as well as images able to convey a renewed sense of *Italianità*. To do so, the focus will be on an almost-neglected body of visual documents, namely Italian non-fiction films produced between the 40s and 60s.

My contribution is positioned within the fields of Italian colonial/postcolonial studies as well as in that of cultural and media history. As far as the former is concerned, historiography and critical approaches devoted to the study of Italian colonial histories, cultures, and legacies are now consolidated, despite the fact they have had to combat against a widespread reticence on the subject. Such reluctance to openly engage with

³ David Forgacs and Stephen Gundle, *Mass Culture and Italian Society from Fascism to the Cold War* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2007), pp. 1–28 and pp. 53–62.

Italy's colonial past was motivated by a variety of historical reasons which constrained the development of social and academic reflection regarding the colonial period in its immediate aftermath.⁴ It is true that Italy did have a smaller and less relevant empire when compared with other European countries. Nevertheless, overseas expeditions and nation-building are peculiarly intertwined, and the end of the colonial presence in Africa was anything but irrelevant since it occurred during Italy's transition from Fascism to the Republic after WWII, a shift which shattered and divided the country.⁵

The paradigm of delay, which characterizes almost every work dealing with Italian colonial history and culture, is a useful way of indicating the late rediscovery of one of the most controversial periods of national history. However, the reference to the mantra of silence and delay has nonetheless tended to limit the study of the tangible occasions which contributed to the deferral of that critical assessment at a scholarly and societal level.⁶ For this very reason, Italian decolonization is proposed as the crucial moment in which artificial silences and self-exculpatory narratives about that past were crafted. Furthermore, the peculiar end of Italian colonialism urges us to reconsider and attune the critical and methodological tools employed to read Italian postcolonial society, by recovering a critical-historical dimension to dissect that ambiguous passage and its enduring results. In so doing, this thesis intends to avoid to 'dilatare all'infinito il concetto di colonialismo, finendo per svuotarlo di un chiaro significato storico'.⁷ Instead, the objective is to investigate the specific historical configuration of Italian decolonization against the background of national reconstruction as well as of the global decolonial momentum.

The rediscovery of colonial history and legacies in Italian studies can be roughly divided into five historiographical phases. In the immediate aftermath of decolonization (end of the 40s – early 60s), a *nostalgic* interest in the presence of Italy in Africa was

⁴ Jacqueline Andall, Charles Burdett, Derek Duncan, 'Italian Colonialism: Historical Perspectives. Introduction', *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 8:3 (2003), 370–74; Paolo Jedlowsky, 'Memoria pubblica e colonialismo italiano', *Storicamente*, 7 (2011), 1–4 <http://storicamente.org/jedlowski_colonialismo> [accessed 23 June 2019]; Roberta Pergher, 'Impero immaginario, impero vissuto. Recenti sviluppi nella storiografia del colonialismo italiano', *Ricerche di storia politica*, 1 (2007), 53–66.

⁵ *Quel che resta dell'impero. La cultura coloniale degli italiani*, ed. by Valeria Deplano and Alessandro Pes (Milan: Mimesis, 2014).

⁶ Massimo Zaccaria, 'Rimuovere o riscrivere il colonialismo? Il lavoro degli italiani in Africa', in *La fine del colonialismo italiano. Politica, società e memorie*, ed. by Antonio M. Morone (Florence: Le Monnier, 2019), pp. 83–110 (pp. 83–86).

⁷ Antonio M. Morone, 'Introduzione. Quando è finito il colonialismo italiano', in *La fine del colonialismo italiano*, ed. by Morone, pp. 1–27 (p. 4).

motivated by the need to offer a positive recollection of that past. That is because of two interconnected reasons, which will be systematically addressed throughout this research (especially in chapters 1 and 2): Italy maintained political and economic interests in the former African territories and, more importantly, an open confrontation with the most shameful aspects of the country's colonial and Fascist past could have weakened the still fragile social fabric of the post-war nation.⁸ As we shall see, specific political decisions limited access to the records of imperial policies to historians with a positive bias toward colonialism. The indulgent and positive image of the impact Italians had in Africa, which was crafted in those years, might be cogently ascribable to the motto 'Italiani brava gente'.⁹ Such political strategies created a specific 'conspiracy of silence', which inhibited the articulation of a thorough and consistent decolonial discourse.¹⁰

Two decades on, when the colonial past seemed almost dead and buried, a paradigm shift occurred. Some military and colonial archives were opened, and historians such as Angelo Del Boca, Giorgio Rochat, Richard Pankhurst, and Alberto Sbacchi started to openly question the assumption of the benevolent impact of Italy in Africa.¹¹ During that *critical* phase, Italian culture and historiography, for the first time, countered the rhetoric

⁸ Nicola Labanca, 'History and Memory of Italian Colonialism Today', in *Italian Colonialism. Legacies and Memories*, ed. by Jacqueline Andall and Derek Duncan (Bern: Peter Lang, 2005), pp. 29–46 (pp. 31–36).

⁹ Antonio M. Morone, 'I custodi della memoria. Il comitato per la documentazione dell'opera dell'Italia in Africa', *Zapruder*, 23 (2010), 25–38; Angelo del Boca, *Gli Italiani in Africa Orientale. Vol. 4. Nostalgia delle colonie* (Rome and Bari: Laterza, 1984); Angelo Del Boca, *Italiani brava gente?* (Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 2008); Charles Burdett, 'Colonial association and the memory of Italian East Africa', in *Italian Colonialism: Legacies and Memories*, ed. by Andall and Duncan, pp. 125–40.

¹⁰ Dietmar Rothermund, 'Introduction', in *Memory of Post-imperial Nations. The Aftermath of Decolonization*, ed. by Dietmar Rothermund (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 1–17. That deafening silence reverberated through the following decades, also due to the lack of space granted to the voices and bodies of migrants coming from the former colonies that would have questioned the positive portrayal of Italians in Africa, see Cristina Lombardi-Diop and Caterina Romeo, 'The Italian Postcolonial. A Manifesto', *Italian Studies*, 69:3 (2014), 425–33; Michele Colucci, *Storia dell'immigrazione straniera in Italia. Dal 1945 ai nostri giorni* (Rome: Carocci, 2018), pp. 36–43. Angelo Del Boca has described the sporadic arrival of young Ethiopian and Somali students sent to study in Italian universities, see Del Boca, *Gli italiani in Africa Orientale. Vol. 4. Nostalgia delle colonie*, pp. 77–79; see also Valeria Deplano, 'L'impero colpisce ancora? Gli studenti somali nell'Italia del dopoguerra', in *Quel che resta dell'impero*, ed. by Deplano and Pes, pp. 332–50.

¹¹ Richard Pankhurst, 'Ethiopia and the Loot of the Italian Invasion: 1935–1936', *Présence Africaine*, 72 (1969), 85–95; Giorgio Rochat, *Il colonialismo italiano* (Turin: Loescher, 1973); Giorgio Rochat, *Militari e politici nella preparazione della campagna d'Etiopia. Studi e documenti 1932–1936* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1971); Angelo Del Boca, *Gli italiani in Africa Orientale. Vol. 1. Dall'unità alla marcia su Roma* (Rome and Bari: Laterza, 1976); Angelo Del Boca, *Gli italiani in Africa orientale. Vol. 2. La conquista dell'impero* (Rome and Bari: Laterza, 1979); Alberto Sbacchi, *Il colonialismo italiano in Etiopia, 1936–1940* (Milan: Mursia, 1980).

of the ‘Italiani brava gente’ by revealing the existence of concentration camps, gratuitous violence against civilians, mustard gas, institutional racism, and systematic practices of racial and sexual abuse. Although these ground-breaking contributions exposed the effective involvement of Italian governments in shameful brutalities, colonial history and its legacies remained ignored by mainstream Italian society and culture.

Since the end of the 80s, the gradual opening of state and private archives has consolidated and expanded the historiography about the Italian colonial past.¹² At the same time, the visible growth of the migratory phenomenon stimulated a new momentum in Italian colonial studies. Migrant flows increased in the early 90s as a consequence of the fall of the USSR and of the Yugoslavian wars, fashioning a progressively heterogeneous and multicultural environment.¹³ Since that moment, and significantly later than other former empires in Europe, Italy and Italians have started to face ‘the wreckage of their colonial extensions and the injustices of their inconsistent responses to immigration’.¹⁴

The political and economic relationships with the former colonies, the civil wars in Somalia and Ethiopia of the 90s, the growing number of migrants coming to Italy from the Horn of Africa have definitely contributed to the revitalization of some debates about the colonial past which have not been fully problematized.¹⁵ These ‘ambigui ritorni di memoria’, as Triulzi puts it, promoted a more culturally-grounded reflection upon the mechanisms which inhibited the spread of a postcolonial awareness in Italy, which was stimulated also by the translations of key works in postcolonial studies by Said, Spivak, and Bhabha.¹⁶ Several events contributed to that conceptual change: the aforementioned flows of migrants, often arriving from and via the former colonies; the repatriation of the Aksum obelisk from Rome to Addis Ababa; the Italian President Oscar Luigi Scalfaro’s visit to Addis Ababa and his official apology in 1997 for Fascist crimes in Ethiopia; the 2008 agreements between the governments of Italy and Libya; the debate about the

¹² Patrizia Ferrara, ‘Recenti acquisizioni dell’Archivio centrale dello Stato in materia di fonti per la storia dell’Africa italiana: Ufficio studi e propaganda del MAI’, in *Fonti e problemi della politica coloniale italiana. Atti del convegno Taormina-Messina, 23-29 ottobre 1989*, ed. by Paola Carucci and others (Rome: Ministero per i beni culturali e ambientali, Ufficio centrale per i beni archivistici, 1996), pp. 77–86.

¹³ Enrico Pugliese, *L’Italia tra migrazioni internazionali e migrazioni interne* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2006).

¹⁴ Paul Gilroy, *After Empire. Melancholia or Convivial Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 109.

¹⁵ Graziella Parati, *Migration Italy. The Art of Talking Back in a Destination Culture* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005); Lombardi-Diop and Romeo, ‘The Italian Postcolonial. A Manifesto’, pp. 425–29.

¹⁶ Nicola Labanca, ‘Italiche colonie senza Said’, *Contemporanea*, 8:4 (2005), 711–17.

construction of a memorial to Rodolfo Graziani.¹⁷ These are just a few examples of some of the events that evoked a distant colonial past and elicited cultural connections with its enduring effects in Italian society.¹⁸

The reappearance of colonial memories has encouraged cultural and social reflection upon the mechanism through which the legacies of the empire are latently present in modern and contemporary Italy. That *cultural* turn, which flourished in early 2000s, emerged mostly in locations beyond the ‘traditional’ History and Politics/International departments. Perspectives informed by Anthropology, Sociology, Critical Theory, Modern Languages, Literature, Film and Media Studies have been crucial to fostering a renewed interest in the period of the *oltremare*.¹⁹ Furthermore, a growing academic relationship with Ethiopian, Eritrean, Somali, and Libyan scholars and universities contributed to the expansion and integration of the study of Italy’s colonial past with critical voices from the formerly colonized world.²⁰

The fourth and properly *postcolonial* phase, which came in the wake of the previous *cultural* one, aims to expose cultural and social legacies of the empire in contemporary Italian society and culture. Such a postcolonial turn has been inspired by writers coming from the formerly colonized world and by second-generation migrants. Their literary production tackles experiences of post-colonial mobility, colonial memories, cultural translation, hybrid identities as well as subjectivities; in so doing, it questions the artificial

¹⁷ The ‘Stele di Axum’ was an item of war booty plundered by the Fascist army in Ethiopia and re-erected in 1937 in Piazza Capena (Rome). It was only returned to Ethiopia in 2008, see Luca Acquarelli, ‘Sua altezza imperiale. L’obelisco di Axum tra dimenticanza e camouflage storico’, *Zapruder*, 23 (2010), 59–73. In 2012, the City Council of Affile (Lazio) decided to build a mausoleum honouring Rodolfo Graziani; that decision sparked a wave of indignation, see Giuliano Santoro e Wu Ming 2, *La guerra razziale. Tra Affile e il colonialismo rimosso*, <<http://www.wumingfoundation.com/giap/2012/11/la-guerra-razziale-tra-affile-e-il-colonialismo-rimosso-santoro-wu-ming-2/>> [accessed 12 September 2017].

¹⁸ Alessandro Triulzi, ‘Premessa’, *Quaderni storici*, 37:1 (2002), 3–20; Alessandro Tirulzi, ‘Displacing the Colonial Event. Hybrid Memories of Postcolonial Italy’, *Intervention*, 8:3 (2006), 430–43.

¹⁹ Nicola Labanca, *Oltremare. Storia dell’espansione coloniale italiana* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2002); *A Place in the Sun. Africa in Italian Colonial Culture from Post-Unification to the Present*, ed. by Patrizia Palumbo (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003); *Italian Colonialism. Legacies and Memories*, ed. by Andall and Duncan; *Italian colonialism*, ed. by Ruth Ben-Ghiat and Mia Fuller (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Charles Burdett, *Journeys Through Fascism. Italian Travel Writing Between the Wars* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books: 2007).

²⁰ Bahru Zewde, *A history of modern Ethiopia, 1855–1974* (Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press, 1991); Irma Taddia, *Autobiografie africane: il colonialismo nelle memorie orali* (Milano: Franco Angeli, 1996); *L’Africa Orientale Italiana nel dibattito storico contemporaneo*, ed. by Bianca Maria Carcangiu and Tekeste Negash (Rome: Carocci, 2007).

construction of national homogeneity.²¹ Cristina Lombardi-Diop and Caterina Romeo pinpoint two main tendencies describing the relationship between Italian contemporary literature and colonial memories. The first one concerns authors born in (or who have direct link to) the former colonial space, such as Erminia Dell'Oro, Shirin Ramzanali Fazel, Marta Nasibú, Gabriella Ghermandi, Igiaba Scego. The counterpart of that mostly female literary production is from Italian (male) writers such as Andrea Camilleri, Carlo Lucarelli, Enrico Brizzi, and Wu Ming, who have set some of their novels during the Italian presence in Africa.²²

The thriving postcolonial and transnational turn that has occurred in contemporary Italian Studies goes hand in hand with cultural and artistic practices through which artists, practitioners, writers, and musicians are engaging with colonial legacies as the roots of current intolerance toward migrants, but also to advocate substantial reforms concerning civil, social, and citizenship rights.²³ As a corollary thereof, the *critical*, *cultural*, and *postcolonial* phase might be best regarded as protean categories which intermingle to provide a critical reading of contemporary Italy. It seems that the majority of Italians still remain unaware of the surreptitious ways in which the colonial past has silently shaped the perception of national belonging. Furthermore, a superficial and uncritical interest in the colonial past has emerged in some right-wing forums and environments. Here, we see a sense of nostalgia for the empire reframed so as to obliquely juxtapose the recollection of

²¹ Gaia Giuliani, *Race, Gender, and Nation in Modern Italy* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), pp. 209–40.

²² *Mediterranean Crossroads: Migration Literature in Italy*, ed. by Graziella Parati (Madison and Teaneck: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1999); *Borderlines: Migrazioni e identità nel Novecento*, ed. by Jennifer Burns and Loredana Polezzi (Isernia: Cosmo Iannone, 2003); Sandra Ponzanesi, 'The Postcolonial Turn in Italian Studies. European Perspectives', in *Postcolonial Italy. Challenging National Homogeneity*, ed. by Cristina Lombardi-Diop and Caterina Romeo (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 51–69; Jennifer Burns, *Migrant Imaginaries: Figures in Italian Migration Literature* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2013); Daniele Comberiati, *Scrivere nella lingua dell'altro. La letteratura degli immigrati in Italia (1989–2007)* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2010).

²³ Emma Bond, 'Towards a Trans-national Turn in Italian Studies?', *Italian Studies*, 69:3 (2014), 415–24; *Destination Italy. Representing Migration in Contemporary Media and Narrative*, ed. by Emma Bond, Guido Bonsaver, Federico Faloppa (Bern: Peter Lang, 2014); Leonardo De Franceschi, *La cittadinanza come luogo di lotta. Le seconde generazioni in Italia fra cinema e serialità* (Rome: Aracne, 2018); Charles Burdett, 'Transnational Time: Reading Post-War Representations of the Italian Presence in East Africa', *Italian Studies*, 73:3 (2018), 274–88.

the Italians' allegedly good impact in Africa with that of migrants who, they claim, would ruin Italian culture.²⁴

Such a resurgence of nostalgia, and especially Italy's persistent inability to articulate a thorough critique concerning the ghosts of the empire nestling in contemporary society, indirectly advocate a new *decolonial* phase. This is concerned with the very moment in which those artificial silences and self-exculpatory narratives were crafted, that is the troubled decolonial transition. Recent contributions, mostly pertaining to the field of contemporary history, are focusing on the end of the Italian empire, by highlighting the effort that post-war governments made to maintain a hegemonic role in former colonies, issues related to former settlers and to former subjects, and the production of representations which had to recast a sense of *Italianità* by re-projecting Italy in Africa.²⁵

This thesis is positioned within this last critical phase, even though its methodologies and scope intend to go beyond a historical account of the results of decolonization. The title 'DecolonItaly' synthesises the critical-historical nature of a project intending to retrace the genealogies of the ambiguous threads composing the texture of Italian modern and contemporary society. This *decolonial* ethos critically amalgamates the five historiographical approaches discussed above; aiming to expose why *nostalgia* could thrive, it adopts a *critical*-historical perspective to investigate the material origins of colonial legacies in Italian society. Political, social, and cultural legacies are dissected by drawing heavily upon the *cultural* turn which occurred in late 90s and early 2000s, and this approach of course relies upon a political and ethical *postcolonial* reading

²⁴ Valentina Celi, 'La Nostalgia e l'Amnesia: le due facce del colonialismo italiano' <<http://www.italoeuropeo.com/2016/05/18/la-nostalgia-e-l-amnesia-le-due-facce-del-colonialismo-italiano/>> [accessed 25 July 2019]; here some examples of webpages with nostalgic contents about the Italian empire: <<https://www.facebook.com/FaroFrancescoCrispiCapoGuardafuiSomalia/>> [accessed 21 June 2019]; <<https://www.facebook.com/laltrafacciadelcolonialismoitaliano/>> [accessed 21 June 2019]; <<https://www.facebook.com/RomanamenteItaliaInAfrica/>> [accessed 21 June 2019]; <<https://italiacoloniale.com>> [accessed 26 July 2019].

²⁵ *Quel che resta dell'impero. La cultura coloniale degli italiani*, ed. by Deplano and Pes; Valeria Deplano, *La madrepatria è una terra straniera. Libici, Eritrei e somali nell'Italia del dopoguerra (1945–1960)* (Florence: Le Monnier, 2017); Alessandro Pes, 'Il lavoro italiano in colonia nel dibattito politico tra il 1946 e il 1949', *Il politico*, 82:3 (2017), 160–75; *La fine del colonialismo italiano. Politica, società e memorie*, ed. by Morone; Michele Pandolfo, 'Gli italo-somali dell'Amministrazione Fiduciaria Italiana della Somalia (AFIS)', *Diacronie*, 30:2 (2017), 1–15 <<http://journals.openedition.org/diacronie/5651>> [accessed 29 June 2019]; *Colonialism and National Identity*, ed. by Paolo Bertella Farnetti, Cecilia Novelli (Newcastle upon Tyne: CSP, 2015); Neelam Srivastava, *Italian Colonialism and Resistances to Empire, 1930–1970* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

of contemporary Italy, yet in a way which addresses more specifically the epistemic limits of decolonization of culture and society.

Exploring the intermingling of political, social, and cultural results of Italian decolonization means tackling the nature of the troubled passage from Fascism to the Republic from a peculiar vantage point. Such an investigation needs to be conceptually and methodologically implemented via a theoretical framework able to embrace colonial and postcolonial studies, cultural and media history, critical theory, film studies, and discourse analysis. Nevertheless, a critical and methodological trimming down of this rather ambitious research endeavour seems essential in order to focus more sharply the original intervention this thesis will offer to the fields of Italian cultural history as well as of media and postcolonial studies. I will therefore concentrate specifically on the use of films produced in the aftermath of WWII, which aimed to re-articulate a new sense of *Italianità* through their representation of the loss of the colonies.

Italian decolonization, like the end of several other empires, was a fundamentally ambiguous process that was not merely a political transition. Rather, it was responsible for generating cultural spaces to re-envision the national identity of post-imperial nations. As a whole, this thesis will tackle the intricate chronologies and processes that passage entailed, which in fact mirrored the dramatic socio-cultural changes occurring in post-WWII Italy. Different research approaches — historical and archival research, critical theory, and film analysis — will be combined to explore how far images and sounds about the end of the Italian empire fed discourses about Italian collective identity. It thus offers an innovative contribution in terms of critical perspective, methodological framework, and source material, as it will examine a film corpus almost entirely neglected by previous scholarship.

The first element of innovation relates to the critical perspective assumed to dissect decolonial representations. Decolonial issues will serve to decipher the post-war transition, and not vice-versa. The borders of national belonging, understood either culturally and geographically, will always be at the fore; the thesis will address the physical and discursive spaces which used to constitute the former empire, and which then enabled the projection of a transnational idea of *Italianità*. Therefore, colonial memories and legacies surfacing from films will be addressed not merely in terms of their connection with that past, but for their ability to shape a given image of the present and future of post-war Italy. Chapter 1 will provide an overview of these historical and theoretical perspectives. It will

begin by defining the tools employed to explore methodologies and key concepts concerning the relationship between colonialism, decolonization, nation-building, and Italian identity. The second part of chapter 1 will address decolonization from a more critically-oriented perspective, which will interrogate the inhibition of a thorough evaluation of the colonial past in post-war Italy.

The main pivots around which this thesis revolves are the memories of the colonial past and the new position of Italy in the post-war context, whose representations acquired specific meanings according to diverse political and cultural goals. As a result, a specific strand of Critical Discourse Analysis, that is Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) is adopted in the thesis. Through DHA, it aspires to uncover the hidden mechanisms that made some cultural objects and representations meaningful in Italian society by exposing the ideological structures they conceal within them. The DHA-inspired framework seems particularly salient to the study of Italian decolonization: the practical absence of counter-voices from the former colonies made it easier to disseminate self-exculpatory narratives about the past and to reframe a hegemony over Africa in the new guise of Trusteeship administration.²⁶ The argument for a return to Africa could be thus based upon a *historical* discourse about Italian qualities abroad, which started to be portrayed as simply interrupted by the Fascist parenthesis.²⁷ Moreover, DHA will reveal the interdiscursive relationship among different texts, sources, and narratives about the former colonies, and the ways in which a given text became part of an intertextual chain composing the discourse about decolonization.²⁸ This thesis will therefore connect the content of films to the political, social, and cultural context in which the footage was materially produced and signified in two ways. On the one hand, the use of DHA will address how films could have been influenced by, and in turn reproduced, specific discourses pertaining to national identity (chapter 1); on the other hand, it will underpin the analysis of the context in which films were materially produced and signified (chapter 2).

The film corpus this thesis deals with has much to offer to current debates about Italian colonial and postcolonial studies as well as media history. For this reason, a detailed

²⁶ Labanca, *Oltremare*, p. 431–37.

²⁷ Jo Angouri, Marina Paraskevaïdi, Ruth Wodak, ‘Discourses of Cultural Heritage in Times of Crisis: The Case of the Parthenon Marbles’, *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 21:2 (2017), 208–37 (p. 222).

²⁸ Norman Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language* (Harlow: Longman, 2010), pp. 7–8.

description of the nature of those films in relation to colonial visibility and film theory will feature in chapter 2, which will then develop an overarching historical account of the context of their production and consumption. The choice to focus on this rather neglected corpus of short films is motivated by their claim to represent a given reality. The mediated gaze on the former colonial world they offered can significantly help us to understand the articulation of colonial memories. Furthermore, these films directly reflected the political and social changes occurring in Italy as well as a shifting balance between propaganda and the formally independent perspectives through which they envision Italian and global post-war realities.

In all likelihood, when one thinks of non-fiction films and Italian colonies, the first item that comes to mind is the footage produced by the Istituto LUCE during the Ethiopian War and the following period of the *Africa Orientale Italiana* (1936–41). The history of the Istituto LUCE and its prime role within the Fascist system of propaganda have been acknowledged since the end of the 70s.²⁹ Nevertheless, only recently has systematic attention been paid to its colonial production.³⁰ The vicissitudes of Fascist colonial footage are significant: as we shall see throughout this thesis, the use of Fascist footage to craft decolonial documentaries was a common practice, explaining the substantial continuity between Fascist and post-war films identified by the majority of scholars who have worked on decolonial newsreels and documentaries.³¹

Despite the undeniable stylistic and structural continuity between these sets of films, this thesis will reveal some significant differences which render decolonial footage worthy of specific analysis. Previous scholarship on Italian colonialism and film has addressed non-fiction films about the end of Italian empire fleetingly, and almost always

²⁹ Massimo Cardillo, *Il duce in moviola: politica e divismo nei cinegiornali e documentari 'Luce'* (Bari: Dedalo, 1983); Mino Argentieri, *L'occhio del regime. Informazione e propaganda nel cinema del fascismo* (Florence: Vallecchi, 1979); Ernesto G. Laura, *Le stagioni dell'aquila: storia dell'Istituto Luce* (Rome: Ente dello Spettacolo, 2000); Daniela Calanca, *Bianco e nero. L'istituto Nazionale Luce e l'immaginario del fascismo (1924–40)* (Bologna: Bononia University Press, 2016).

³⁰ Gianmarco Mancosu, *La LUCE per l'impero. I cinegiornali sull'Africa Orientale Italiana 1935–1942* (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Cagliari, 2014); Giuseppe Fidotta, *Un impero cinematografico. Il documentario in Africa Orientale Italiana 1935–1941* (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Udine, 2015); Marie-France Courriol, 'Documentary strategies and aspects of realism in Italian colonial cinema (1935–1939)', *The Italianist*, 34:2 (2014), 122–41.

³¹ Daniela Baratieri, *Memories and Silences Haunted by Fascism. Italian Colonialism MCMXXX–MCMLX* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2010); Chiara Ottaviano, 'Coloniali. I documentari LUCE e la Settimana INCOM', *Zapruder*, 23 (2010), 9–23; Maurizio Zinni, 'Una lettera dall'Africa Il colonialismo italiano nel cinema del dopoguerra, 1945–1960', *Contemporanea*, 19:1 (2016), 69–99.

in relation to something else, whether this be feature films, previous Fascist productions, or other cultural products.³² This thesis instead will centre specifically, and as thoroughly as possible, on those short films, on their equivocal relationship with hegemonic actors (the government, but also industrial groups and foreign institutions), and on the postcolonial reality they conveyed during the few minutes of their screening. As such, this research dialogues with the growing attention paid by media history scholars to decolonial documentaries and to the controversial results of decolonization in the filmic cultures involved in that process.³³

The majority of documentaries and newsreels analysed were produced by the *Industria Cortometraggi Milano* (INCOM), a private company de facto controlled by the Christian Democrat governments. There is only one book-length analysis of INCOM, edited by Augusto Sainati and published almost twenty years ago.³⁴ Few other contributions have examined INCOM films as part of broader studies, also because archival records about non-fiction films produced in post-war Italy have been difficult to access for various reasons.³⁵ Consequently, this thesis will present some previously unexplored archival records in order to retrace the material history of that footage. First of all, some files held at the Archivio Centrale dello Stato (ACS, Rome), at the Archivio Storico Diplomatico del Ministero degli Affari Esteri (MAE, Rome), and at the Archivio Giulio Andreotti – Archivio Storico Istituto Don Luigi Sturzo (ASILS-AGA, Rome) will shed light on the relationship between institutions involved in decolonial issues and film production (mainly the Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri, the Ministero degli Affari Esteri, and the Ministero dell'Africa Italiana). A more film-oriented analysis about the

³² Ibid.; Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *Italian Fascism's Empire Films* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2015), pp. 297–301; Giulia Mazzarelli, *L'Italia del secondo dopoguerra attraverso i cinegiornali della settimana INCOM (1946-1948)* (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Cagliari, 2010).

³³ Ian Aitken and Camille Deprez, 'Introduction', in *The Colonial Documentary Film in South and South-East Asia*, ed. by Ian Aitken and Camille Deprez (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), pp. 1–26; Frank Ukadike, 'Africa', in *The Documentary Film Book*, ed. by Brian Winston (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 217–27; Peter J. Bloom, *French Colonial Documentary: Mythologies of Humanitarianism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008); Neepta Majumdar, 'Film Fragments, Documentary History, and Colonial Indian Cinema', *Canadian Journal of Film Studies*, 16:1 (2007), 63–79.

³⁴ *La settimana INCOM. Cinegiornali e informazione negli anni '50*, ed. by Augusto Sainati (Turin: Lindau, 2001).

³⁵ Maria Adelaide Frabotta, 'Il cammino dei cinegiornali italiani nel Paese e in Europa', in *Identità italiana e identità europea nel cinema italiano dal 1945 al miracolo economico*, ed. by Gian Piero Brunetta (Turin: Edizioni della Fondazione Giovanni Agnelli, 1996), pp. 173–91; Paola Frandini, *Il teatro della memoria. Giacomo Debenedetti dalle opere e i documenti* (Lecce: Manni, 2001).

significance of newsreels and documentaries in Italian mass culture will combine a review of secondary literature with primary sources, which were mainly studied at the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia – Biblioteca Luigi Chiarini (CSC, Rome), at the Archivio Audiovisivo del Movimento Operaio e Democratico (AAMOD, Rome), as well as at the Archivio Storico dell'Istituto LUCE (ASL, Rome). This last archive is central because it is also home to the reels of footage of almost the entire film corpus examined here, which are available online.³⁶ Other original versions of some rare films have been studied at the Archivio Film of the Cineteca di Bologna (AFCB).

The archival and theoretical contextualization offered by chapters 1 and 2 serves two objectives: on the one hand, the in-depth historical account of actors, practices, and institutions involved in these non-fiction films will expose the ambiguous scenario in which films were produced. On the other hand, a theoretically driven contextualization will apprehend the significance of those products in re-imagining post-colonial national identities. As a result, these first two chapters will underpin the analysis of films which will develop in the following chapters dedicated to analysis of the primary material.

Since the first military explorations of the Red Sea, which happened soon after national unification in the second half of the nineteenth century, colonial enterprises contributed to the articulation of a discourse about national identity which revolved around the myths of a glorious past and of an even greater future.³⁷ The positioning of modern Italy within a history that originates in the Roman Empire and which leads to modern colonialism went hand in hand with the spatial definition of the borders of the nation, as well as with the assertion of its prime role in the Mediterranean Sea.³⁸ For these interrelated reasons, the investigation of the cultural results of the decolonial process will centre on the footage which reframed national qualities yet also conveyed Italy's aspiration to be re-inserted into the Western world after Fascism. The critical dissection of such an allegedly positive history of Italy in Africa, and its instrumentality in re-centring a sense of *Italianità* in-between the Mediterranean Sea and Europe, will be addressed in the analytical chapters. Each of these chapters will deal with the discursive map of national belonging by tackling

³⁶ <<https://www.archivioluca.com>> [accessed 28 July 2019].

³⁷ Giuseppe Finaldi, *A History of Italian Colonialism 1860-1907* (London and New York: Routledge, 2017); Silvana Patriarca, *Italianità. La costruzione del carattere nazionale* (Rome and Bari: Laterza, 2010).

³⁸ Giuseppe Finaldi, 'Culture and Imperialism in a "Backward" Nation? The Prima Guerra d'Africa (1885-96) in Italian Primary Schools', *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 8:3 (2003), 374–90.

either temporal or spatial coordinates; the repositioning of Italy in a geo-political sense (chapter 3), the geographical as well as cultural borders of the nation in relation to the myth of *lavoro italiano* (chapter 4), the complicated memory of the *oltremare* (chapter 5), and the resilient persistency of colonial discourses in a post-colonial context (chapter 6).

In chapter 3, the physical and cultural space in which Italians were supposed to bond together will be studied by paying attention to the intersecting liminalities of post-war Italy. Socio-anthropological and postcolonial perspectives will be mobilised to address the intersection of time (post-Fascism, post-colonialism) and space (the Cold War, the former colonial space) which configured a suspended geography of national belongings.³⁹ Such a liminal condition, however, did not destabilize the dichotomy that characterized the status of former settlers and of former subjects. That is because the footage often resorted to film tropes and to a *mise-en-scène* which arranged the visual space according to the need to display the beneficial effect of the Italian presence in Africa. In so doing, the films exorcized the physical and cultural *in-betweenness* of Italy by rebuilding a consistent image of *Italianità* anchored to the Western/Atlantic world.

Similar discourses concerning the spatial dimension of *Italianità* will also feature in chapter 4. Here, the assessment of an expanded geography of Italian qualities that goes beyond the peninsula will be tackled by looking at the myth of the *lavoro italiano*, which was the prime rhetorical device through which post-Fascist political forces sought to justify the desirability of a return to the former colonies.⁴⁰ The praise of Italian industriousness was meant to support a renewed form of transnational mobility which would continue the Italian civilizing mission and help ‘backward’ people in reaching political independence, which was nonetheless led by former colonizers. Furthermore, the transnational nature of Italian industriousness came to conceive of Italian belonging in biological terms.⁴¹ The films substantiated such an organic understanding in the frequent use of physical as well as surgical metaphors about the suffering of the Italian nation, whose territorial limbs were amputated by supposedly unfair international decisions. As far as the stylistic choices are concerned, chapter 4 will pay specific attention to the re-contextualization of the images

³⁹ Laura Chrisman, *Postcolonial Contraventions. Cultural Readings of Race, Imperialism and Transnationalism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), pp. 5–7.

⁴⁰ Pes ‘Il lavoro italiano in colonia’, 160–65.

⁴¹ Jacqueline Andall and Derek Duncan, ‘Introduction. Hybridity in Italian Colonial and Postcolonial Culture’, in *National Belongings. Hybridity in Italian Colonial and Postcolonial Cultures*, ed. by Jacqueline Andall and Derek Duncan (Bern: Peter Lang, 2010), pp. 1–19 (pp. 7–9); Rhiannon Noel Welch, *Vital Subjects. Race and Biopolitics in Italy, 1860–1920* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2016).

of the colonial past. This re-articulation was enacted not only via visual tropes and narratives, but also in the use of the very same footage produced under Fascism; we will see how old celluloid was re-edited and then reinserted in a different social context and according to new political goals.

The discursive position of Italy within the geography of Western modernity is crucial to an exploration of how the domination and classification of non-European alterity was re-articulated under the new guise of trusteeship, developmental cooperation, economic support. Together with this spatial understanding, we will also see how the complex temporalities evoked by these films are pivotal elements in assessing the process through which Italy detached from, or reworked, its colonial past. Ambiguous chronologies reflected the need to re-anchor the discourse about national identity to a pre-Fascist phase, by showing the substantial positive impact of Italy in Africa and, therefore, the righteousness of the new claims over the former colonies.

The modalities through which non-fiction films addressed the dispersed trauma of Italian decolonization and the peculiar silences it provoked are central to this study. Chapter 5 will explore how Italian culture and society somatized that traumatic loss. The films configured a particular form of self-exculpatory memory which disabled thorough critique of the colonial period or rendered it unintelligible.⁴² It seems to be a case of aphasia rather than amnesia, insofar as it became impossible to articulate an intelligible discourse tackling the most brutal side of Italy's overseas expansion: this paradigm addresses not an absence, but the inability to comprehend and articulate an in-depth decolonial discourse. The aphasic configuration of Italian colonial memory will be tackled through close reading of the role of voice-over and commentary — key formal traits of non-fiction films produced between the 30s and the late 50s.

While chapter 5 deals with the ambiguous memory of the colonial past, chapter 6 will address the future presence of Italy in Africa. A multifaceted understanding of 'resilience' will serve to conceptualise the extent to which the films provided a positive interpretation of the colonial past as well as new narratives about the projection of *Italianità* beyond the peninsula. Together with a rather traditional understanding of resilience in relation to the recovery from decolonial traumas, an environmental and ecological perspective will investigate the modalities through which the footage coped

⁴² Ann Laura Stoler, *Imperial Debris: On Ruins and Ruination* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013), pp. 1–38.

with the ‘adversity’ of the colonial loss and new projections of the Italian presence in Africa. Such a standpoint will prompt reflection upon the aural dimension of the films (soundtrack, noises, sound effects), which plays a major role in expressing a renewed exotic desire and reveals intriguing memories about the former colonies.

This overview of the methodological and analytical path of the thesis has not yet explicitly mentioned what is perhaps the most important feature of any analysis concerned with the past, that is the time span. The focus will be on a corpus of 59 short films produced between 1946 and 1963. Chapter 1 and 2 will explain in depth the reasons behind this choice; for now, it is important to mention that in 1946 the first post-Fascist newsreel regarding the issue of the former colonies was produced. In 1963, when the last film analysed in this thesis was released, the issue of the former colonies seemed definitively forgotten while a new interest in ‘other’ decolonization processes was arising.⁴³ Furthermore, in the early 60s the golden age of newsreels was coming to an end — the *Settimana INCOM* series, which almost monopolised the market, released its last service in 1964. Even more importantly, the official and institutional connection between Italy and one of its former colonies ended on December 1960, when the *Amministrazione Fiduciaria Italiana della Somalia* was disbanded.

The films will not be analysed in chronological order, but constantly cross-referenced within each chapter and throughout the thesis. This approach is fully consistent with the critical and intertextual analysis of decolonial footage prompted by DHA; the main purpose is to focus on the modalities through which a given image could have been interpreted and what it may have signified according to several, often contradictory, goals. This explanation of the decision to intersect aims and chronologies of the film corpus raises another methodological and stylistic choice pertaining to three extremely recurrent words: post-colonial, postcolonial, and (post)colonial. ‘Post-colonial’ (hyphenated), as with other words prefixed with ‘post-’ (like post-Fascist, post-war), will be used to indicate a temporal fracture, in this case the period which comes after the formal colonial presence. ‘(Post)colonialism’ (with the prefix in round brackets) will instead designate the continuity of political and cultural processes which started during the colonial season and which

⁴³ Daniela Baratieri maintains that Gillo Pontecorvo’s *La battaglia di Algeri* epitomized such a paradigm shift, see *Memories and Silences*, p. 28; see also Neelam Srivastava, *Italian Colonialism and Resistances to Empire*, pp. 234-38. On the different temporalities to understand Italian decolonization, see Morone, ‘Introduzione. Quando è finito il colonialismo italiano’, pp. 12–13.

continued in its aftermath. Postcolonialism/postcolonial (not hyphenated) refers to the political, ideological, and scholarly critique of colonial history, practices, and knowledge, whose temporalities may or may not be consistent with the political events which brought about the end of the empires.⁴⁴

The aforementioned label ‘decolonial footage’ will indicate a vast array of films which, for the purpose of clarity, may be grouped under the umbrella terms ‘newsreels’ or ‘documentaries’. In the chapters comprising the main body of this thesis (2–6), the format and the stylistic traits of the footage will be set against the background of debates in documentary theory. Though the label decolonial footage entails adopting a fluid and tautological understanding of the stylistic boundaries according to which the films are classified, it is undeniable that newsreels had a rather distinguishable format. Chapter 2 will pay specific attention to the theoretical implications of this. However, as a methodological note, it is worth pointing out here that, as far as the reference of these films is concerned, they will be quoted in the footnotes in a way similar to newspaper articles. That is mostly because of their serial nature, and for the very frequent absence of an identifiable author/director.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Andrea Medovarski, ‘Unstable post(-)colonialities: Speculations through punctuation’, *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 39:2 (2001), 84–100; Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffith, Helena Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back. Theory and Practices in Post-colonial Literatures*, 2nd edn (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 197–98; Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (London: Routledge, 1998).

⁴⁵ Following the MHRA style guide, newsreels will be quoted as follows: name of the single service in single quotation marks, name of the series italicised and identificatory number of the film (when available), producing house and date in parentheses: e. g. ‘Brusasca in Africa’, *Settimana INCOM* 638 (INCOM; 31 August 1951).

1. Decolonization and National Identity in Post-WWII Italy

1.1 Decolonial moments: The troubled end of the Italian empire

It is undeniable that almost any line of reasoning in a discussion of Italian decolonization needs to deal with chronological and political fractures. Such an awareness paves the way for a dissection of the discrepancy between the political and the cultural results of Italian decolonization, and the conflicting temporalities unfolding in that process. Dates and time spans will be at the forefront of this investigation. This because the passage from a colonial toward a post-colonial setting intersected the most significant turmoil occurring in modern Italy, that is the fall of Fascism and the national reconstruction following WWII. Therefore, far from being addressed as a mere political transition, the loss of the Italian colonies will be tackled as an original vantage point to observe some broader changes that occurred in Italy during the 40s and the 50s.

The process of political decolonization of the countries which composed the Fascist empire went well beyond WWII. There are some formal and broadly acknowledged dates which might serve as points of reference to delimit the temporal span of the end of Italian colonialism. The most symbolic event happened in the morning of 5 May 1941. Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia returned to Addis Ababa, escorted by the English troops which had defeated the Italian army in the previous weeks.¹ The *Negusa Negast*, or King of Kings, had spent the last five years in Bath, and the date he chose to recapture his throne had strong symbolic implications for the end of the Fascist imperial myth: it was five years to the day after the Fascist commander Mario Badoglio had seized the city.

Italy was defeated in Ethiopia, Somalia, and Eritrea by Allied troops between February and November 1941. Libya was one of the biggest African battlefields of World War II: the epilogue of the El-Alamein battle (November 1942) saw British forces to seize control over the Mediterranean regions of Cyrenaica and Tripolitania, while the desert

¹ Asfa-Wossen Assefate, *King of Kings. The Triumph and Tragedy of Haile Selassie I of Ethiopia* (London: Haus Publishing, 2015), p. 176; Angelo Del Boca, *Il Negus. Vita e morte dell'ultimo re dei re* (Rome and Bari: Laterza, 1995).

region of Fezzan fell under the authority of France. The Italian government led by Prime Minister Pietro Badoglio stipulated the surrender of Italy to the Allies through the Cassibile armistice on 8 September 1943. As a result, Albania, the last remaining colony — which had become part of the Fascist empire in 1939 — was then invaded by Nazi armies.

Following the imprisonment of Benito Mussolini (25 July 1943) and the Cassibile armistice, Italy became a divided country.² The North was a puppet state (*Repubblica Sociale Italiana* or *Repubblica di Salò*) ruled by the Nazi Army whereas the South remained under the rule of the monarchy and controlled by the Allies. From end of 1943 to mid 1945, a civil war between anti-Fascists and Fascist forces devastated Italy. Northern Italy was liberated from the Nazis at the end of April 1945, bringing to an end twenty-three years of Fascist dictatorship (conventionally called the *Ventennio*) and almost five years of war. The date of 25 April marked the beginning of the path toward democracy; in a referendum held on 2 June 1946 Italians opted for a Republican system and elected the members of the assembly who would draft the new democratic Constitution of the Republic, then adopted in 1948.

The momentous passage from Fascism to the Republic and the de-Fascistization of political and social institutions was anything but straightforward. The civil war destroyed the material and, more seriously, economic, social, and cultural fabric of Italy. The destiny of those territories which were part of the former Fascist empire, and of those Italians still living there, were at the centre of such processes. The anti-Fascist *Governi d'unità nazionale*, the alliance of political forces which led the transition, aimed to introduce democracy and to affirm Italy's role in a new international system in which old empires like France and Great Britain started to waver under the pressure of anticolonial movements, while a new superpower-based system (USSR and the USA) was emerging.³

² Claudio Pavone, *Una guerra civile. Saggio storico sulla moralità nella Resistenza* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1991); John Foot, *Italy's Divided Memory* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Stanley G. Payne, *Civil War in Europe, 1905–1949* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 193–214; Philip Cooke, *The Legacy of the Italian Resistance* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

³ The *Governi d'unità nazionale* comprised anti-Fascist forces with different political orientations. On the one hand, Liberal, Conservative, and Christian-Democrat parties: *Democrazia Cristiana* (DC), *Partito Liberale Italiano* (PLI), *Partito Democratico del lavoro* (PDL); on the other hand, left-oriented parties: *Partito Comunista Italiano* (PCI), *Partito Socialista Italiano d'Unità Proletaria* (PSIUP), *Partito d'Azione* (PdA), see Gabriella Fanello Marcucci, *Il primo governo De Gasperi (dicembre 1945–giugno 1946). Sei mesi decisivi per la democrazia in Italia* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2005); *L'Italia dal fascismo alla repubblica. Sistema di potere e alleanze sociali*, ed. by Massimo Legnani (Rome: Carocci, 2001); Antonio Varsori, 'La dimensione internazionale della transizione postbellica in Italia (1943–1949)', *Il politico*, 82:3 (2017), 124–59 (pp. 140–46).

The interweaving of events like Fascism's collapse, Italy's military defeat and consequent loss of colonies, the anti-Fascist formation of the new Italian political forces, and the changing international situation could lead us to think that the brutal crimes and usurpation which characterized the Fascist colonial period would have been promptly questioned. In spite of the genuine anti-Fascist and democratic ethos inspiring the parties composing the *Governi d'unità nazionale*, and notwithstanding the feeble international role of Italy, the new Italian government curiously requested that those colonies acquired before Fascist colonialism be returned to Italy under new forms of direct influence.⁴ The backbone of this diplomatic strategy, motivated by quite a pretentious understanding of Italy as a regional Middle Power, was the myth of a 'Grande Italia' as the central force of the Mediterranean. Historiography is providing original and comprehensive accounts about the political as well as rhetorical strategies through which anti-Fascist parties, ranging from the *Democrazia Cristiana* (DC) to the *Partito Comunista Italiano* (PCI), called for Italy to being entrusted with the direct administration of Libya, Eritrea, and Somalia at least until late 1947.⁵ These claims were motivated by a discourse gravitating around the myth of Italian industriousness, which entailed a positive recollection of Italian endeavours in Africa and highlighted the necessity of territories in which the overabundant population of the peninsula could settle.⁶

Other Western countries had interests in the territories composing the former Italian empire. The British Military Administration (BMA) had seized control over Eritrea and

⁴ Giampaolo Calchi Novati, 'La sistemazione delle colonie italiane dell'Africa Orientale e i condizionamenti della Guerra Fredda', in *Le guerre coloniali del Fascismo*, ed. by Angelo Del Boca (Rome and Bari: Laterza, 2008), pp. 519–48.

⁵ Overviews of political debates on the loss of Italian colonies after WWII include: Gianluigi Rossi, *L'Africa italiana verso l'indipendenza* (Milan: Giuffrè, 1980); Pietro Pastorelli, *Il ritorno dell'Italia nell'occidente. Racconto della politica estera italiana dal 15 settembre 1945 al 21 novembre 1949* (Milan: LED, 2009); Angelo Del Boca, *Gli Italiani in Africa Orientale. Vol. 4. Nostalgia delle colonie* (Rome and Bari: Laterza, 1984). Alessandro Pes, Paolo Borruso, Andrea Ungari, and Silvio Berardi have explored how anti-Fascist parties addressed the issue of the former colonies, see Alessandro Pes, 'Coloni senza colonie. La Democrazia Cristiana e la decolonizzazione mancata (1946-1950)', in *Quel che resta dell'impero. La cultura coloniale degli italiani*, ed. by Valeria Deplano and Alessandro Pes (Milan: Mimesis, 2014), pp. 417–37; *L'Italia in Africa. Le nuove strategie di una politica postcoloniale*, ed. by Paolo Borruso (Padua: Cedam, 2015); Andrea Ungari, 'I monarchici italiani e la questione coloniale', in *Quel che resta dell'impero*, ed. by Deplano and Pes, pp. 393–415; Silvio Berardi, 'Le colonie italiane nel secondo dopoguerra. Il Partito Repubblicano e la questione somala', *Mondo Contemporaneo*, 1 (2012), 91–118.

⁶ Varsori, 'La dimensione internazionale', p. 143; on the connection between overpopulation and emigration, see Mark I. Choate, *Emigrant Nation. The Making of Italy Abroad* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2008); Donna Gabaccia, *Italy's Many Diasporas* (London: UCL Press, 2000).

Somalia in early 1942 and was awaiting the decision of the WWII victors (USA, USSR, France, Great Britain) and the United Nations about the future rule of these regions. The Mediterranean regions of Libya had likewise been controlled by the BMA since 1943.⁷ In all these countries, anticolonial movements started to arise; nevertheless, the fact that both Italy, Great Britain and, to a lesser extent, France had an interest in keeping a form of direct control over them made the decolonization of the Italian colonies at the very least peculiar. This because the military defeat Italy suffered in its overseas territories did not directly lead to the independence of Libya, Eritrea, and Somalia. Rather, the usual dialectic between the former colonizers and the formerly colonized, which characterizes almost any decolonial passage, was deferred and internationalized, in that the four victorious powers and then the UN retained the prerogative to decide the future of those countries.⁸

Italian, British, and French interests in the former colonies unfolded in some of the plans of trusteeship administration. Although the projects proposed by these countries shared a common determination to re-articulate a colonial-like setting in terms of authority and control of African societies, they diverged in their envisaged modalities of implementing the trusteeship system. This most likely because the United Kingdom and France were already experiencing some structural changes in the management of their empires. The idea of the development of colonized societies was slowly yet inexorably acknowledged by those countries, and there were calls for structural reform of imperial relationships. Italy, instead, vehemently opposed the idea of reforming the colonial relationships between 1945 and 1947,⁹ despite the fact that the country did not claim any role in Ethiopia and eventually acknowledged Haile Selassie as the rightful authority in the country.¹⁰ Italy's diplomatic efforts aimed instead to regain a form of direct influence over Libya, Eritrea, and Somalia, though their results fell far below Italian expectations. On 10 February 1947, Italy signed the Treaty of Peace, formally ending hostilities. Article 23 established that Italy had to renounce to its former colonies, though without defining the future arrangement of those territories and the precise modalities of their decolonization. Such practical decisions were devolved to the four victorious powers,

⁷ Giampaolo Calchi Novati, *L'Africa d'Italia. Una storia coloniale e postcoloniale* (Rome: Carocci, 2011), pp. 409–12.

⁸ Antonio M. Morone, 'Introduzione. Quando è finito il colonialismo italiano?', in *La fine del colonialismo italiano. Politica, società e memorie*, ed. by Antonio M. Morone (Florence: Le Monnier, 2019), pp. 1–27.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 7–8.

¹⁰ Bahru Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia 1855–1991*, 2nd edn (Oxford: James Currey, 2001), pp. 178–89.

which were assigned one year to establish the future assets of Libya, Eritrea, and Somalia. They failed, however, to reach an agreement, and between February 1947 and September 1948 the Italian government still claimed the right to ‘return to Africa’.

The ultimate decision was eventually transferred to the United Nations. The UN General Assembly had hitherto rejected a plan drafted by Italian and British Foreign secretaries Carlo Sforza and Ernest Bevin, according to which the former colonies would have been assigned to Italy, the United Kingdom, and France.¹¹ Due to that deadlock, Italy realised that its original aim of securing direct control of the pre-Fascist colonies was unfeasible. At that point, in 1949, the Italian diplomatic strategy suddenly changed: Italy supported the immediate independence of Libya, Eritrea, and Somalia — after a transitory period of trusteeship administration — a complete change in decision which was motivated by the attempt to articulate a new and indirect hegemony in Africa, rather than by a truly decolonial ethos.¹²

The UN’s final decision about Eritrea established that, from September 1952, it would be merged with Ethiopia in a federal system, by default excluding any role of Italy in that transition as with the case of Libya, which became fully independent on December 1951 under King Idris al-Sanusi.¹³ Eventually, Italy was appointed as trustee administrator of Somalia (UN Resolution n. 289, 21 November 1949). The ten-year long *Amministrazione Fiduciaria Italiana della Somalia* (AFIS, 1950–60) was meant to prepare the country for independence. Nevertheless, as we shall see throughout this thesis, the AFIS did not move far away, either conceptually or practically, from the previous colonial setting.¹⁴

¹¹ Libya would have been divided in three areas (Cyrenaica, Tripolitania, Fezzan) to be assigned to three trustee administrators: respectively the United Kingdom, Italy, and France. Italy would have had complete trusteeship over Somalia. Eritrea would have been annexed to Sudan, see Antonio M. Morone, ‘La fine del colonialismo italiano tra storia e memoria’, *Storicamente*, 12 (2016), 1–31 (pp. 8–11).

¹² Rossi, *L’Africa italiana*, pp. 289–300; Morone, ‘Introduzione. Quando è finito il colonialismo italiano’, p. 2.

¹³ Calchi Novati, *L’Africa d’Italia*, pp. 358–63. The UN Resolutions about Libya was the n. 289 (21 November 1949), the same that established the Italian trusteeship of Somalia. The Resolution concerning Eritrea was the n. 390 (2 December 1950).

¹⁴ Antonio Morone maintains that AFIS trusteeship, despite being under the aegis of the United Nations, was in fact a form of direct administration which presented strong continuities with the old colonial power in terms of political and social practices, see Morone, ‘La fine del colonialismo italiano’, pp. 1–3.

1.2 Decolonization and national identity: A preliminary assessment

The political and diplomatic passages through which the Italian empire was dismantled indicated the prolonged nature of this process. The specific complexities we have observed make the definition of a consistent temporality to read the transition from a colonial to a post-colonial setting rather difficult. The political aims and cultural strategies of this transition were not consistent: as such, it seems more appropriate to refer to ‘manifold decolonizations’ according to the various political, geographical, and theoretical perspectives adopted.¹⁵ Italian colonialism formally ended in Ethiopia in 1941; Libya and Eritrea were freed by the Allies during WWII but their independence was formalised only at the beginning of the 50s, when huge Italian communities still played a pivotal role in the economic and social life of these countries. The ratification of the Peace Treaty of 1947; the 1949 diplomatic U-turn through which Italy accepted the trusteeship of Somalia and renounced further claims; the fact that the Ministero dell’Africa Italiana (MAI) was only disbanded in 1953 and the people practically responsible for decolonial issues were the same people who had been responsible for the former colonial institutions;¹⁶ the end of the AFIS in 1960: these are just some of the scattered pieces composing the inconsistent puzzle of Italian decolonization.¹⁷

The results of such a proliferation of events and practices did not pertain exclusively to the field of political decisions. This is because the end of Italian colonialism could be easily depicted as ‘una sconfitta militare, subita da “bianchi” ad opera di altri “bianchi”’.¹⁸ This sentence by Nicola Labanca encapsulates the attitude of both the Italian governments and pro-colonial milieux, who deliberately avoided questioning the most brutal sides of Italy’s colonial past in order to substantiate the claims for a return to Africa. Such an approach engendered a peculiar conspiracy of silence, which repressed any form of public repentance for the colonial crimes.¹⁹ Furthermore, these claims rested on the

¹⁵ Nicola Labanca, *Oltremare. Storia dell’espansione coloniale italiana* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2002), p. 434.

¹⁶ Chiara Giorgi, *L’Africa come carriera: funzioni e funzionari del colonialismo italiano* (Rome: Carocci, 2012).

¹⁷ Ennio Di Nolfo, ‘La persistenza del sentimento coloniale in Italia nel secondo dopoguerra’, in *Fonti e problemi della politica coloniale italiana. Atti del convegno, Taormina-Messina, 23-29 ottobre 1989*, vol. 2, ed. by Paola Carucci and others (Rome: Ministero per i beni culturali e ambientali, Ufficio centrale per i beni archivistici, 1996), pp. 1259–71 (pp. 1263–68).

¹⁸ Labanca, *Oltremare*, p. 435.

¹⁹ Dietmar Rothermund, ‘Introduction’, in *Memory of Post-imperial Nations. The Aftermath of Decolonization*, ed. by Dietmar Rothermund (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 1–17 (p. 5); Antonio M. Morone, ‘I custodi della memoria. Il comitato per la documentazione dell’opera dell’Italia in

supposed benevolence of the Italian presence in Africa, and on the assumption that the formerly colonized population were willing to accept it, despite the fact that anticolonial parties and movements in Somalia, Eritrea, and Libya had flourished both during and after the period of colonial administration.²⁰ All these points highlight the need to examine more closely the process of decolonization and the missed opportunities for critique of the Italian colonial presence in Africa.

The silencing of the most shameful elements of the colonial past went hand in hand with the fact that Italian society started to be less interested in the destiny of the African territories.²¹ These matters became increasingly marginal compared with the attention they received just some years before, during the Fascist invasion of Ethiopia and the season of the *Africa Orientale Italiana* (AOI, 1936–41). Nevertheless, a growing number of studies from diverse methodological and critical perspectives argue that the colonial past and the process of decolonization were neither completely erased, nor relegated to the political and diplomatic sphere.²² Massimo Zaccaria clearly summarises this attitude when he writes that ‘ormai è chiaro che nel dopoguerra di colonie e Africa si parlò, e si parlò anche tanto’.²³ This because the government’s agenda as well as the destiny of those Italians who remained in former colonies still found a place in public debates and in related cultural production. However, these elements alone do not fully explain the stubbornness of images, rhetoric, and practices coming from the colonial past nor how they were used to re-articulate the Italian presence in Africa.

Explaining the persistence of colonial discourses thus requires digging into a richer field of investigation. The challenge is to expose the extent to which a political event like

Africa’, *Zapruder*, 23 (2010), 25–38; Paolo Jedlowsky, ‘Memoria pubblica e colonialismo italiano’, *Storicamente*, 7 (2011) 1–4 <http://storicamente.org/jedlowski_colonialismo> [accessed 13 June 2019].

²⁰ Very briefly, the most important anticolonial movements born during and after Italian colonialism were the Somali Youth League (SYL) in Somalia, the Libyan Senussi, the Eritrean Liberation Front (which gained momentum in the second half of the 50s), see Calchi Novati, *L’Africa d’Italia*, pp. 408–17.

²¹ Labanca, *Oltremare*, p. 348; Jacqueline Andall and Derek Duncan, ‘Memories and Legacies of Italian Colonialism’, in *Italian Colonialism. Legacy and Memory*, ed. by Jacqueline Andall and Derek Duncan (Bern: Peter Lang, 2005), pp. 9–27 (p. 9).

²² *A Place in the Sun. Africa in Italian Colonial Culture from Post-Unification to the Present*, ed. by Patrizia Palumbo (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003); *Italian Colonialism. Legacy and Memory*, ed. by Andall and Duncan; *Italian colonialism*, ed. by Ruth Ben-Ghiat and Mia Fuller (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Daniela Baratieri, *Memories and Silences Haunted by Fascism. Italian Colonialism MCMXXX–MCMLX* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2010); *Quel che resta dell’impero*, ed. by Deplano and Pes; *La fine del colonialismo italiano*, ed. by Morone.

²³ Massimo Zaccaria, ‘Rimuovere o riscrivere il colonialismo? Il lavoro degli italiani in Africa’, in *La fine del colonialismo italiano*, ed. by Morone, pp. 83–110 (p. 84).

decolonization contributed to the crafting of self-exculpatory narratives about the past as well as the projection of national qualities within and beyond the geographical borders of Italy. In terms of re-imagining the Italian national community, both the explicit occasions on which decolonial themes were addressed and the conspicuous silences when they were not, can be hence regarded as two sides of the same coin.

This preliminary outline of the end of Italian colonialism has pointed out the main research questions that will be tackled throughout the thesis. Such key points relate to three intertwined areas of enquiry, which are going to be explored in the present chapter: the connection between colonialism, decolonization and nation-building/rebuilding; the meaning of decolonization beyond a strictly political definition; the cultural geography of Italian modernity and belonging between Europe and the Mediterranean Sea. These analytical categories enable us to consider a vast array of heterogeneous elements and sources. In so doing, the aim is to uncover the intermingling of political, social, and cultural results of the lengthy decolonization process. The in-depth study of this ambiguous process will, in turn, offer an original perspective on the construction of modern and contemporary Italy. Film representations about the loss of the colonies, whether directly or indirectly backed by the Italian governments, will be therefore addressed as part of a broader discourse about post-war national identity which combined the exaltation of the past, the erasing of the *Ventennio*, and total confidence in the future of Italy. To make operational such a critical perspective, the following paragraphs will explain the methodological tools used to read stories and representations against the background of the socio-cultural context in which the film were produced. I will begin by outlining of the relationship between colonialism and nation-building. This will provide a basis to assess the decolonial process as a discourse through which national identities and belongings were reimagined.

1.3 What is national identity?

The connection between European nation-building and modern colonialism persistently marks a way of belonging to a given metropolitan community. This means that the states which had imperial ambitions often used their overseas endeavours, and the correlated processes of *othering* the colonized cultures, in order to define their cultural homogeneity and affirm their geographical borders. Such a standpoint builds on a fundamental understanding of national identities as a set of narratives, representations, and practices

about shared experiences or founding myths connecting people living within the same geographical space and under a common institutional framework.²⁴

National identity is a construct built on an imaginary sense of homogeneity and belonging which uses essentialised common-sense inferences of symbols, conventions and simplified representations.²⁵ Using Stuart Hall's words, national culture is 'a way of constructing meanings which influences and organizes both our actions and our conception of ourselves'. Therefore, the belonging to a distinctive ethnic, racial, linguistic, religious and above all, *national* culture is a discourse structuring the perception of the collective identity and of the 'outer' world. Even though members of the same national community can differ in terms of class, gender, or race, such a discourse puts them into a unified cultural framework by representing them all as members of the same national family.²⁶

The discourse about national belonging appears protean, vulnerable, and often inconsistent in that it synthesizes disjunctive elements in terms of the diverse languages, cultural backgrounds, ethnicities, and social and economic conditions that can be found within the geographical borders of the state.²⁷ In order to sublimate such complexity, the cultural construction of identities tries to establish a 'national habitus' which positions people's belonging in space and time. The national habitus relies on shared narratives and social practices referring to an (allegedly) common history, which is collectively internalized and externally exhibited.²⁸ At the same time, it constructs and ritualises the praise of national *sameness* via its distinction from the representations of exogenous *otherness*.

²⁴ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London and New York: Verso, 1982); Herbert Kelman, *Nationalism, Patriotism and National Identity: Social-Psychological Dimensions* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall Publishers, 1997), pp. 171–73.

²⁵ Jo Angouri, Marina Paraskevaïdi, Ruth Wodak, 'Discourses of Cultural Heritage in Times of Crisis: The Case of the Parthenon Marbles', *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 21:2 (2017), 208–37 (p. 210).

²⁶ Stuart Hall, 'The Question of Cultural Identity', in *Modernity. An Introduction to Modern Societies*, ed. by Stuart Hall, David Held, Don Hubert, Kenneth Thompson (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1996), pp. 595–634 (p. 613).

²⁷ Rudolf De Cillia, Martin Reisigl, Ruth Wodak, 'The Discursive Construction of National Identities', *Discourse and Society*, 10:2 (1999), 149–73; David McCrone and Frank Bechhofer, *Understanding National Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 6–17.

²⁸ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990); De Cillia, Reisigl, Wodak, 'The Discursive Construction', pp. 153–54; Angouri, Paraskevaïdi, Wodak, 'Discourses of Cultural Heritage', p. 210.

The notion of a national habitus which rests upon shared narratives builds upon the notion of collective memory as defined by Maurice Halbwachs.²⁹ He maintains that the recollection of past events happens not simply individually but also collectively, and that this social moment is instrumental in defining a sense of common belonging within a group. Given this premise, Halbwachs aims to reveal the ‘subjective discursive construction of national identity, especially regarding the question of which “national history” is told by a nation’s citizens, what and how they recollect, and between which “events” they make a connection in their subjective “national narrative”’.³⁰ Such a social function of collective memory aims to freeze the past in the present and to place individual memories against the background of a broader and older mnemonic dimension, a process which artificially emphasizes the origins, continuity and durability of the traditions and traits of a given group.

Jan Assmann has further developed a critical understanding of collective memories as the fulcrum around which discourses about identities revolve. While delineating the underpinnings of cultural memory, he addresses national cultures as a set of conditions enabling the creation of shared meanings about the past. Therefore, cultural memory acts as the signifier of the ‘store of knowledge from which a group derives an awareness of its unity and peculiarity’ through a vast array of practices that express an ‘identificatory determination in a positive (“We are this”) or in a negative (“That’s our opposite”) sense’.³¹

Though this understanding of cultural memories is concerned with the construction of a national temporality ostensibly separated from ‘other’s’ histories and memories, it also takes into account a spatial understanding of the discourse of national identity. This is because unifying narratives of the past serve to strengthen the bonds within the imagined community of the nation-state while simultaneously excluding those subjects, groups, spaces, and narratives which are outside those stories and memories. As a result, physical and cultural geographies are intertwined in the discursive construction of the borders of sameness, which delimit the space where material and cultural common practices and narratives operate.

²⁹ Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, trans. and ed. by Lewis Coser (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992).

³⁰ Ibid., pp. 46-51; De Cillia, Reisigl, Wodak, ‘The Discursive Construction’, p. 155.

³¹ Jan Assmann, ‘Collective Memory and Cultural Identity’, *New German Critique*, 65 (1995), 125–33 (p. 129).

The intermingling of spatial and temporal coordinates becomes even clearer in contexts where the porosity of the geographical, social, and cultural borders of the national community is especially evident. Wars, migration, colonialism, trade, globalisation are examples of processes which might reinforce or threaten the perceived unity of collective identity, inasmuch as they question the correspondence between geographical and cultural borders where an allegedly consistent national group exists. The colonial experience in particular highlights a disconnection between the political borders within which the state exerts its power and the imaginative border delimiting the national community. Accordingly, the empire was simultaneously within the state but outside the national community, an adjacent (discursive) space allowing the homogeneity of the metropolitan centre to be exhibited to the extent that the related colonized cultures were defined as different, backward, and exotic.³²

1.4 Coloniality-modernity and Italian nation-building

Modern colonialism can be undoubtedly regarded as one of the most crucial episodes shaping the world in which we live.³³ This is because the concept of modernity and the related nation-state apparatus, which are still one of the primary means of understanding subjectivities and identities notwithstanding the effects of globalization and a growing transnational awareness,³⁴ are deeply entangled with forms of colonial expansion. Enrique Dussel refers to modernity as an essentially European phenomenon that appeared ‘when Europe affirms itself as the centre of a *World History* that it inaugurates’.³⁵ This phenomenon coincided with political as well as cultural processes such as the Renaissance,

³² Laura Chrisman, *Postcolonial Contraventions. Cultural Readings of Race, Imperialism, and Transnationalism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), pp. 23–27; Stephen Foster, ‘Exoticism as a Symbolic System’, *Dialectical Anthropology*, 7 (1982–83), 21–30.

³³ Rupert Emerson, ‘Colonialism’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 4:1 (1969), 3–16 (p. 3).

³⁴ Stephen Vertovec, *Transnationalism* (London: Routledge, 2009). ‘Transnational’, in this thesis, will refer to the perspective that encourages us ‘to think in terms of longer temporalities and to perceive the entanglement of cultures, to become aware of forms of connection stretching across the boundaries of apparently stable imagined communities, to see ideas — with their material consequences — circulating in different directions, and to interpret cultures [...] as alluvial plains that are traced by the intermingling of the multiplicity of practices that is the inevitable consequence of human mobility’, as put by Charles Burdett, ‘Transnational Time: Reading Post-war Representations of the Italian Presence in East Africa’, *Italian Studies*, 73:3 (2018), 274–88 (p. 275); see also Emma Bond ‘Towards a Trans-national Turn in Italian Studies?’, *Italian Studies*, 69:3 (2014), 415–24.

³⁵ Enrique Dussel, ‘Eurocentrism and Modernity (Introduction to the Frankfurt Lectures)’, *Boundaries*, 20:3 (1993), 65–76 (p. 65).

the defeat of the Moors in Spain (1492), the trans-oceanic expeditions of Cristoforo Colombo, Vasco da Gama, Giovanni Caboto, Pedro Álvares Cabral and the related partition of the world according to European interests. 1492 might be thus regarded as the symbolic point from which Europe ceased to regard itself as part of a complex and polycentric world and started to put itself at the centre of the new global order it was imposing.³⁶

This process presented an arrangement of the world based on the articulation of supposed hierarchies of knowledge, race, and culture instrumental to Western expansionism. Walter Mignolo has described this process as inspired by the *rhetoric of modernity* and the *logic of coloniality*, a combination that universalised ‘intersecting global hierarchies in terms of race, class, gender, sexuality, spirituality, economic system, and geography’ and that organized ‘bodies into complex hierarchical social organizations’ within the colonial matrix of power.³⁷ Accordingly, more than addressing the dichotomy between colonizers and colonized, the entanglement of coloniality and modernity allowed the European colonizers to represent colonial ‘otherness’ within the universal and ‘rational’ order they were imposing, hence naturalising the subordinate position of non-European cultures.

Modernity and coloniality are two sides of the same coin or, paraphrasing Walter Mignolo, coloniality is the darker side of modernity.³⁸ That is because the geographical — and subsequently political, economic, and cultural — universalisation of Western tenets and knowledge happened when European countries were consolidating themselves as modern nation-states. The entanglement between modernity and coloniality thereby allowed the metropolitan centres to constitute themselves as a ‘unified ego exploring,

³⁶ According to Dussel, since the defeat of Moors and the transatlantic endeavour by Colombo, Europe has ceased to be a periphery of a more developed Islamic world and has started to regard itself as the centre of the global world, see ‘Eurocentrism and Modernity’, pp. 66–67.

³⁷ Jeannie Kerr, ‘Western Epistemic Dominance and Colonial Structures: Considerations for Thought and Practice in Programs of Teacher Education’, *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, 3:2 (2014), 83–104 (p. 88). The intersecting hierarchies of race, gender, economic system and knowledge promote the so-called colonial matrix of power, which expresses itself in the tangible results related to the rhetoric of modernity (progress, development, growth) and the logic of coloniality (poverty, misery, inequality), see Walter Mignolo, ‘Delinking. The Rhetoric of Modernity, the Logic of Coloniality, and the Grammar of De-Coloniality’, *Cultural Studies*, 21:2 (2007), 449–514 (pp. 453–63); Gurinder Bhambra, ‘Postcolonial and Decolonial dialogues’, *Postcolonial Studies*, 17:2 (2014), 115–21 (p. 119).

³⁸ Walter Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), p. XIV.

conquering, colonizing an alterity that gave back its image of itself'.³⁹ According to this long-lasting relationship, European colonialism and the establishment of modern nation-states can be explored as entwined processes unfolding within a complex set of material and discursive conditions, which enabled specific representations of national identities to emerge.

Though the entanglement of coloniality and modernity conceives the emergence of the modern nation-state and that of imperialism as intimately correlated, 'empire' and 'nation' are, in theory, quite contradictory categories. The former is based on territorial expansion which includes and maintains differences, and builds its legitimation on a universal responsibility for humanity.⁴⁰ This definition is rather at odds with the understanding of modern nation-state provided by Max Weber, which rests on the successful monopolization of the legitimate use of violence within a given territory.⁴¹ This also implies a distinctive national identity, based on ideas of a common territory, language, history, religion, and art. Its founding narratives often refer to heroic acts of self-liberation and to the breaking away from larger continental entities, such as empires, that had lost their cohesive power.⁴² Nevertheless, the neat dichotomy between empire and nation seems to be mostly theoretical, because in practical terms overseas expansion enabled European states to enforce and naturalize ideas of cultural, moral, and racial superiority: the empires, in other words, started to be regarded as a means to consolidate the national *ethos*, wealth, and prestige at home and to disseminate modernity and civilization abroad.⁴³

The fact that the dismantling of old imperial units existing in Europe occurred almost simultaneously with the overseas expansion of new states invites us to take into account the ambiguous modalities through which national identities and empires could have been connected. For instance, Ian Baucom characterizes the relationship between English identity and England's continental or overseas domains between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries as 'schizophrenic'. Though linguistic and cultural ideas of

³⁹ Dussel, 'Eurocentrism and Modernity', p. 66.

⁴⁰ Anthony Pagden, *The Burdens of Empire. 1539 to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 1–4.

⁴¹ Max Weber, *Weber's Rationalism and Modern Society*, trans. and ed. by Tony Waters and Dagmar Waters (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp. 129–36.

⁴² Aleida Assmann, 'Memories of Post-imperial Nations', in *Memories of Post-Imperial Nations*, ed. by Rothermund, pp. 171–80 (pp. 171–72).

⁴³ Jennifer Pitts, *A Turn to Empire. The Rise of Imperial Liberalism in Britain and France* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), pp. 239–43.

Englishness emerged in contrast to the continental Latin-Romance influences, they started to be menaced by the cultural exchange inherent to such substantial imperial expansion. At the same time, however, the imperial project served to secure ‘the Englishness of the colonist and to ensure the Anglicization of the colonized’.⁴⁴

In Italy’s case, the relationship between empire and national identity seems particularly ambivalent, though by no means insignificant. The unification process (1848–70) was a rebellion against the Habsburg empire and thus, in essence, anti-imperialist. For this reason, several intellectuals and politicians were rather sceptical about the possibility of overseas expansion, whereas others regarded the colonial endeavours in the Mediterranean as a way to gain international prestige.⁴⁵ However, both those who supported overseas expansion and its opponents shared the determination to define Italy as a European and Mediterranean country, since ‘what was at stake was precisely the position of the country in the geography of civilization: Italy was indeed a Mediterranean periphery within Europe and not, more worryingly, outside of it, and abutting upon the uncivilized East’.⁴⁶

The Italian struggle not to be defined as a periphery of Western modernity indirectly refers to the Eurocentric idea of modernity whose roots lie in the Greek and Latin traditions. Its trajectory has followed the diffusion of Christianity and the Renaissance, heading toward Northern Europe. Here, the path of modernity settled in the scientific revolution, in the Enlightenment, in the modern nation-state, and in the white man’s burden, processes which all alluded to a universal dimension. Such a trajectory created several peripheries of which, of course, the colonized countries are prime examples.

⁴⁴ Ian Baucom, *Out of Place. Englishness, Empire, and the Locations of Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), pp. 24–77.

⁴⁵ This standpoint makes the assessment of the connection between the *Risorgimento* and colonial expansion more complex than scholars such as Emilio Gentile and Federico Chabot have underlined, see Emilio Gentile, *La Grande Italia. Il mito della nazione nel XX secolo* (Rome and Bari: Laterza, 2006), pp. 51–53; Federico Chabot, *Italian, Foreign Policy. The Statecraft of the Founders* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); *Mare nostrum: percezione ottomana e mito mediterraneo in Italia all'alba del '900*, ed. by Stefano Trinchese (Milan: Guerini, 2005). According to Christopher Duggan, the failure of traditional parties (*Destra Storica* and *Sinistra Storica*) to fulfil the ideals which inspired the *Risorgimento* paved the way for the rise of Francesco Crispi, whose disproportionate imperial ambitions led to the worst defeat ever inflicted on a colonial power in Africa (Adwa, 1896), see Christopher Duggan, *The Force of Destiny: A History of Italy since 1796* (London: Penguin, 2007), pp. 345–48.

⁴⁶ Maurizio Isabella, ‘Liberalism and Empires in the Mediterranean: The View-point of the *Risorgimento*’, in *Risorgimento Revisited. Nationalism and Culture in Nineteenth-Century Italy*, ed. by Silvana Patriarca and Lucy Riall (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 232–54 (p. 247).

However, over the course of the following centuries, even Mediterranean countries like Spain or Italy — which had ignited the process entangling coloniality and modernity during the Renaissance — came to be seen as peripheries of the very paradigm they had helped create. Accordingly, overseas expansion and the civilizing mission started to be seen as a way to prove the wealth of Italy, its historical predisposition to colonization, and hence to connect it to the ‘more civilized’ countries of Northern Europe.

After unification, the Italian colonial endeavours had neither an organic political project nor economic reasons to justify them.⁴⁷ The hesitant early projects of settlement in the Red Sea culminated in a stinging defeat at Adwa (1896), where the emperor Menelik II fended off the Italian army as it attempted to seize control over northern Ethiopia.⁴⁸ Despite this defeat, during the time frame between that *prima guerra d’Africa* and the war in Libya (1911–12) the instrumental use of colonial rhetoric to shape a specific configuration of Italian belonging became blatant. Expansionist perspectives regarding the Red Sea and the Mediterranean helped unite Italy despite the significant regional and social differences which characterized the first decades following the unification.⁴⁹ Accordingly, Italy sought to define its role in the world through a discourse imbued with obsessive references to its Roman heritage, to the idea of the Mediterranean Sea as the *mare nostrum*, and to its duty to spread civilization abroad: depicting itself at the level of other imperial powers, and pushing further south the discursive border of European modernity and belonging.⁵⁰

Though more aggressive in tone, the same rhetorical devices also characterized Fascist expansionism. During the Libyan (1928–31) and especially Ethiopian (1935–36) colonial campaigns, the *regime*’s level of internal consensus peaked, no doubt due to the

⁴⁷ Gianluca Podestà, *Il mito dell’impero: economia, politica e lavoro nelle colonie italiane dell’Africa orientale 1898–1941* (Turin: Giappichelli, 2004).

⁴⁸ Calchi Novati, *L’Africa d’Italia*, p. 82.

⁴⁹ Isabella, ‘Liberalism and Empires in the Mediterranean’, p. 234; Vittorio Daniele and Paolo Malanima, ‘Falling Disparities and Persisting Sualism: Regional Development and Industrialisation in Italy, 1891–2001’, *Economic History Research*, 10:3 (2014), 165–76; Alberto Mario Banti, *Il Risorgimento italiano* (Rome and Bari: Laterza, 2004).

⁵⁰ Alessandro Triulzi, ‘La costruzione dell’immagine dell’Africa e degli africani nell’Italia coloniale’, in *Nel nome della razza. Il razzismo nella storia d’Italia 1870–1945*, ed. by Alberto Burgio (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1999), pp. 165–81; Giuseppe Finaldi, ‘Culture and Imperialism in a “Backward” Nation? The *Prima Guerra d’Africa* (1885–96) in Italian Primary Schools’, *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 8:3 (2003), 374–90 (p. 388); Gabriele Proglia, *Libia 1911–12. Immaginari coloniali e italianità* (Florence: Le Monnier, 2016).

strengthened narratives of national unity and Fascist utopias.⁵¹ The imperial propaganda triggering that consensus, however, assumed a particularly chauvinistic and autarchic nuance, setting Italy against the countries dubbed as ‘plutocratic’ by Fascism (in particular France and the United Kingdom), which sought to limit Italy’s imperial ambitions. As Ruth Ben-Ghiat explains, ‘the consolidation of the country’s power-bases in the Adriatic, Mediterranean, and Red Seas would allow it to emerge from marginality by positioning it as the crucial bridge between Europe and Africa’, hence reinforcing the paradoxical positioning of Fascist Italy as simultaneously within, but fighting against, the geography of Western modernity.⁵²

By focusing on the connection between nation-building and overseas expansion, we start to gain an idea of the contribution colonial projects made to fashioning self-representations of Italy as a ‘civilizing’ and ‘civilized’ modern country. These political as well as cultural processes peculiarly returned in the period subsequent to WWII. In those complicated years, Italian society needed myths and images to anchor its unity back to an imaginary, idyllic pre-Fascist past around which it could rebuild a collective identity. As a result, the triangulation of the loss of the colonies, the selective recollection of that experience, and the need to reframe a form of political hegemony over the former *oltremare* could be inscribed within the broader attempt to depict post-Fascist Italy as a custodian of a great cultural tradition whose essential traits had not been corrupted by Fascism. While explaining this perspective, Silvana Patriarca refers to Benedetto Croce’s line of reasoning, according to which Fascism was an unfortunate parenthesis within the history of Italy. The intermingling of such processes allowed Fascist colonialism to be

⁵¹ On popular consensus toward imperial endeavours in Fascist Italy, see Renzo De Felice, *Mussolini il duce. Gli anni del consenso 1929–1936* (Turin: Einaudi, 1974), pp. 758–64; Angelo Del Boca, *Gli italiani in Africa orientale. Vol. 2. La conquista dell’impero* (Rome and Bari: Laterza, 1974); Simona Colarizi, *L’opinione degli italiani sotto il regime* (Rome and Bari: Laterza, 1991); Patrizia Caccia and Mariella Mingardo, *Ti saluto e vado in Abissinia: Propaganda, consenso, vita quotidiana attraverso la stampa periodica, le pubblicazioni e i documenti della Biblioteca Nazionale Braidense* (Milan: Vienneperre, 1998); Enrica Bricchetto, *La verità della propaganda. Il ‘Corriere della Sera’ alla guerra d’Etiopia* (Milan: Unicopli, 2004). Paul Corner argues that during the months of the Ethiopian campaign the widespread internal consensus enjoyed by the *regime* was *part of* Fascism’s programme, and not simply a consequence of its propagandistic actions, see Paul Corner ‘L’opinione popolare italiana di fronte alla guerra d’Etiopia’, in *L’impero fascista 1935–1941*, ed. by Roberto Bottoni (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2008), pp. 167–86. On Fascist imperial utopia, see Charles Burdett, ‘Italian Fascism and Utopia’, *History of the Human Sciences*, 16:1 (2006), 93–108.

⁵² Ruth Ben-Ghiat, ‘Modernity is just over there. Colonialism and Italian National Identity’, *Interventions*, 8:3 (2006), 380–93 (p. 388); Roger Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism. The Sense of Beginning Under Mussolini and Hitler* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 219–49.

regarded as an uncomfortable digression that simply suspended the deep-rooted transnationalization of Italian qualities, but which did not alter the teleological path toward the fulfilment of Italy's destiny as a bearer of civilization and as a Mediterranean power.⁵³ Such a cultural understanding went hand in hand with the attempt to maintain, albeit in a new guise, hegemonic control over the former colonies: as a whole, Italian decolonization may be therefore interpreted as a complicated yet incomplete passage. Though it signified the end of a *formal* colonial presence, in practice it barely eroded the discursive order imposed during the empire, which was selectively referenced as a piece of evidence to claim a new role in Africa.

1.5 Defining decolonization: Political categories and critical projects

The quintessential ambition of decolonization is to undo colonial systems. Accordingly, it should have offered an overarching critique of empires in their political, social, and cultural effects. In practical terms, however, decolonization seems to be characterized by incompleteness due to a discrepancy between official political procedures and the practical cultural dismantling of imperial structures and knowledge. The word 'decolonization' was coined in 1931 by the German economist Moritz Bonn, but the term entered into widespread use in relation to the processes through which Asian and African colonies liberated themselves from imperial structures during and especially after WWII.⁵⁴

A series of significant events including India gaining its independence in 1947, the French wars in Indochina (1946–54) and Algeria (1954–62), the Egyptian revolution (1952), the Suez crisis (1956), and several African countries gaining their independence (60s) marked the history of decolonization.⁵⁵ Such a momentum culminated in an institutional turning point at the Bandung Conference (1955), which brought together a significant number of formerly colonized countries. As Robert Young points out, the conference was a seminal moment in the formation of a postcolonial awareness, since it

⁵³ Silvana Patriarca, *Italianità. La costruzione del carattere nazionale* (Rome and Bari: Laterza, 2010), pp. 213–23.

⁵⁴ Moritz Bonn, *The Crumbling of Empire. The Disintegration of World Economy* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1938), p. 101.

⁵⁵ Raymond Betts, *Decolonization (The Making of the Contemporary World)*, 2nd edn (New York: Routledge, 2003).

made tangible a tricontinental world system beyond the arising Cold War dichotomy between capitalism and communism.⁵⁶

Although decolonial events and processes may be described and related to precise dates and time spans like those just mentioned, Raymond Betts underlines the substantial fallacy of a merely political understanding in that the empires were ‘as much stage performance as military engagement, as much the presentation of arms as the firing of them’.⁵⁷ Accordingly, decolonization is not a series of organized events in which anticolonial movements and anticolonial thought created a consistent path to overcome the colonial order. Rather, it stands out as a string of incoherent political activities, chaotic occurrences, inconsistent representations, and multifaceted practices which can hardly be located in precise places, or mapped as a consequential sequence of actions.⁵⁸ The congress rooms and parliaments that hosted political debates, the city squares where anticolonial demonstrations took place, the streets and mountains where wars of liberation were fought, the universities, symposia, books, manifestos, bulletins, newspapers, films, songs: this plethora of locations and cultural products may be regarded as a discourse through which reimagining post-colonial subjectivities, identities, and institutions *both* in the former metropolitan centres and in the former colonies.

The connection between national identity and colonialism explored above henceforth alludes to the substantial incompleteness of a thorough dismantling of imperial histories and knowledge, because colonial discourses still contributed to defining the collective identities of nations involved in decolonial processes. This standpoint resonates with Edward Said’s original revelation of how ‘European culture was able to manage – and even produce – the ‘Orient’ politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period’ via the orientalist discourse.⁵⁹ Though the post-structuralist underpinnings of Said’s pioneering assumptions have been criticized for their germinal complicity with the epistemic system they seek to

⁵⁶ Robert Young, ‘Postcolonialism: From Bandung to the Tricontinental’, *Historien*, 5 (2005), 11–21.

⁵⁷ Betts, *Decolonization*, p. 3.

⁵⁸ Dates and locations might instead assume an important symbolic role in crafting a *narrative* about decolonization on which some of the post-colonial countries based their unity. Liberation days and monuments are clear examples of this process, see Robert Aldrich, ‘Commemorating Colonialism in a Post-Colonial World’, *E-rea* 10:1 (2012), 1–14 <<https://journals.openedition.org/erea/2803>> [accessed 20 June 2019].

⁵⁹ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 1977), p. 3.

dismantle,⁶⁰ and for an excessive polarization of ‘us’ and ‘them’ in the description subjectivities and cultures,⁶¹ the methodological cogency of Said’s conceptual framework remains effective. Accordingly, *Orientalism* enables a critical analysis of the body of knowledge through which specific ideas of East/South/Otherness were not merely fashioned,⁶² but also re-articulated in new cultural forms instrumental to sustaining Western hegemony even after the end of the empires.

Said has further developed such ideas in *Culture and Imperialism*, stating that ‘just as culture may predispose and actively prepare one society for the overseas domination of another, it may also prepare one society to relinquish or modify the idea of overseas domination’.⁶³ As this thesis will illustrate, colonial discourses still populated the modalities through which post-colonial metropolises defined their imagined unity. Furthermore, such modalities were implicitly or explicitly negotiated and appropriated by formerly colonized countries, which have often built their post-colonial future by using the same epistemic and institutional frameworks introduced by the former colonizers. On this point, Gyan Prakash observes that anticolonial nationalisms, in their attempts to channel colonial opposition, transgressed colonial polarity in order to produce an essentialized post-colonial national unity. Such a national unity was depicted as able to overcome both the rulers’ *divide et impera* strategies and the social, regional, and ethnic differences characterizing colonized societies.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ Robert Young, *Postcolonialism. An Historical Introduction* (Blackwell: Oxford, 2001), pp. 414–23. According to Young, *Orientalism* is a project of transformation from *within* the epistemic space of Western modernity because Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan, Jacques Derrida have been acknowledged as fundamental influences on informing the ‘holy trinity’ of postcolonialism, namely Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, and Homi Bhabha. On the other hand, decolonial scholars have suggest rethinking the emancipatory ideals of modernity by referring to other sources (Waman Puma de Ayala, Mahatma Gandhi, Amílcar Cabral, Frantz Fanon) coming from the colonized world, who have inspired the project to delink the entanglement between coloniality and modernity, see Mignolo, ‘Delinking’, pp. 450–53; Ramón Grosfoguel, ‘Decolonizing Post-Colonial Studies and Paradigms of Political-Economy: Transmodernity, Decolonial Thinking, and Global Coloniality’, *Transmodernity: Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World*, 1:1 (2011), 1–38 <<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/21k6t3fq>> [accessed 23 June 2017]; Aníbal Quijano, ‘Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality’, *Cultural Studies*, 21:2/3 (2007), 168–78.

⁶¹ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994); Bart Moore-Gilbert, *Postcolonial Theory. Contexts, Practices, Politics* (London: Verso, 1997), pp. 193–95.

⁶² Robert Young, ‘Foucault on race and colonialism’, *New Formations*, 25 (1995), 57–65.

⁶³ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), pp. 199–201.

⁶⁴ Gyan Prakash, ‘Introduction’, in *After Colonialism. Imperial Histories and Postcolonial Displacements*, ed. by Gyan Prakash (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), pp. 3–17 (p. 9).

The Western idea of the nation-state was a powerful vehicle for channelling anticolonial energy in colonized countries. Considering that the ‘European template of the nation-state’ was widely adopted by the former colonies,⁶⁵ the anticolonial movements ‘confirmed their complicity with the modernity of their rulers when they translated the terms of their national liberation back into the very same moral economy with which Europe’s colonial order has understood its own state-building adventures and imperial enterprises’.⁶⁶ This is a telling piece of evidence of the pervasive relationship between nation-building and colonial discourses which transgresses the temporal caesura separating the colonial season from its formal end. The persistence of colonial discourses makes an assessment of decolonization as a mere transfer of power complicated, if not impossible: the nation-state template might entail concepts such as rationality, modernity, civilization, development, democracy, socialism which were appropriated by formerly colonized population though they stem from, and were ingrained with, the Western idea of modernity.⁶⁷

1.6 Relocating decolonization. The ‘colonial archive’

The intermingling of political and cultural elements in decolonial processes requires a framework able to expose and dismantle the ‘hidden aspects of those institutional and cultural forces that had maintained the colonialist power and that remain even after political independence is achieved’.⁶⁸ The adoption of such a critical toolbox will bring to the fore practices, narratives, and knowledge coming from the colonial period, the ways in which they were re-articulated, and the extent to which such colonial legacies could have stimulated or inhibited postcolonial criticism.

Though the loss of the colonies could have undermined the very basis of the myths of Western modernity, the political and epistemic categories which sustained the colonial power were peculiarly re-articulated both by the former colonizers and in formerly colonized societies. This invites us to erode the methodological divide separating (former)

⁶⁵ Dietmar Rothermund, *The Routledge Companion to Decolonization* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 256.

⁶⁶ Paul Gilroy, *After Empire. Melancholia or Convivial Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 11.

⁶⁷ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, Helen Tiffin, *Postcolonial Studies. The Key Concepts*, 2nd edn (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), pp. 36–37.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

colonizers and formerly colonized insofar as they drew on a shared trans-imperial colonial archive to envision and articulate their respective post-colonial futures.⁶⁹ On the one hand, the metropolitan centres had to face the loss of their imperial status and aimed to protect their collective memory from the violence and exploitation proper to the colonial rule, which was challenged by anticolonial movements. To do so, former colonizers refashioned old paradigms like the civilizing mission or the inability of formerly colonized societies to manage their independent future. These narratives were recast in the guise of Trusteeship administrations, developmental cooperation, financial aid and global partnerships. On the other hand, concepts such as civil and political rights, nation-state, democracy, and development were adapted and appropriated by former subjects in their claims for independence. Accordingly, more than an overarching critique of the colonial system, decolonization often denoted a radical appropriation and negotiation of values; as such, the critique of the imperial order is a project that should involve both colonizers and colonizers cultures.⁷⁰

Suspending the divide between metropolis and colony to study the archive of knowledge structuring post-colonial discourses is a methodological endeavour which owes a debt much to Robert Stam and Ella Shohat, whose ground-breaking contribution aimed to dismantle the subtle yet deep-rooted Eurocentric nature of Western popular culture.⁷¹ Their line of reasoning tackles the intricate visual regimes and cultural archives from which both colonizers and colonized cultures have drawn in order to envision their own national belongings. Such a polycentric perspective multiplies the locations from which to study decolonial processes and permits a repositioning of the analytical focus on the culture of the former metropolitan centre. Jean-Paul Sartre describes a similar attempt in his introduction to *The Wretched of the Earth* by Fanon, when he boldly writes ‘we in Europe too are being decolonized: that is to say that the settler which is in every one of us is being

⁶⁹ Imperial structures and policies did not exist in isolation since empires have always shared fluxes of people, ideas, and technologies; they imitated each other’s practices and competed with one other, see Matthew G. Stanard, ‘Interwar Pro-Empire Propaganda and European Colonial Culture: Toward a Comparative Research Agenda’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 44:1 (2009), 27–48. On the use of the term ‘trans-imperial’, see Simon J. Potter and Jonathan Saha, ‘Global History, Imperial History and Connected Histories of Empire’, *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History*, 16:1 (2015), 1–36; Nathalie E. Rothman, *Brokering Empire: Trans-Imperial Subjects between Venice and Istanbul* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012).

⁷⁰ Graham Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic. Marketing the Margins* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 28.

⁷¹ Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (London: Routledge, 1994).

savagely rooted out'.⁷² Such an inspirational — and perhaps overly optimistic — standpoint exhorts us to unpack the intertwined histories of 'decolonization' and 'identity re-building' by elucidating what might be 'specifically colonial about the image-making technologies, practices, and subjectivities encountered' in decolonial practices and representations produced in a former metropolitan centre.⁷³

The notion of colonial archive is crucial to dissecting the persistence of colonial discourses in post-colonial Italy. Drawing on the work of Ann-Laura Stoler and Gloria Wekker, the colonial archive may be defined as a site of knowledge production and a repository of memories and codified beliefs about the colonies.⁷⁴ It 'silently cemented in policies, in organizational rules, in popular and sexual cultures, and in common-sense everyday knowledge, and all of this is based on four hundred years of imperial rule' which continued to operate notwithstanding the official end of colonialism.⁷⁵ This archive is latent, and it is reactivated when former colonial countries have to cope with 'the pain and the gains that were involved in imperial adventures and upon the [...] residual but potent effects of lingering but usually unspoken colonial relationships and imperial fantasies'.⁷⁶ Therefore, it might be regarded as the metaphorical black box which contains the back-up files of discursive utterances and the self-projections proper to overseas expansion, which survived the collapse of imperial institutions. Dealing with the colonial archive hence means critically tackling such a store of 'memories, knowledge, and affects with regard to race and colonialism that are still deposited within metropolitan populations', and which are reworked to legitimate national unity, homogeneity, and even a new presence in the former colonial world.⁷⁷

⁷² Jean-Paul Sartre, 'Preface', in *The Wretched of the Earth*, by Frantz Fanon (New York: Groove Press, 1963), pp. 5–30 (p. 23).

⁷³ Sumathi Ramaswamy, 'The Work of Vision in the Age of European Empire', in *Empires of Vision. A Reader*, ed. by Martin Jay and Sumathi Ramaswamy (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), pp. 1–22 (p. 2).

⁷⁴ Ann Laura Stoler, 'Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance', *Archival Science*, 2:1/2 (2002), 87–109; Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), p. 49.

⁷⁵ Gloria Wekker, *White Innocence. Paradoxes of Colonialism and Race* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), pp. 11–19.

⁷⁶ Gilroy, *After Empire*, p. 109.

⁷⁷ Wekker, *White Innocence*, pp. 25–26.

1.7 Criticizing (post)colonialism: Western peripheries and ‘white mythologies’

The dissection of the political and cultural consequences of Italian decolonization necessitates an analysis of the colonial archive which queries the extent to which ideas of national *and* Western identity were re-articulated after WWII. A critical reading of the ambiguous relationship between post-WWII national rebuilding and decolonization will illuminate the extent to which the ‘country [...] aimed at defending the “home” from a potential anabasis’ via narratives and representations which fashioned both the memory of the colonial experience, its surreptitious debris, and their resulting (missed or late) critique’.⁷⁸ These words by Graziella Parati make clear the triangular connection between the peculiar configuration of Italian decolonization, images and narratives about Italian national identity, and the fact that colonial discourses were neither politically nor theoretically challenged in the post-colonial context.

By broadening the analytical horizon, Paul Gilroy delineates the contradictory scenario which allowed racism and colonial legacies to survive the formal end of European empires. He highlights, for instance, the incongruity of UN actions, which supported colonial-like trusteeship administrations while adopting the ‘Universal Declaration of Human Rights’. Other forms of resistance to an overarching decolonial process were the attempts by Western powers to hold on to their hegemonic positions in Algeria, Indonesia, Malaya, Aden, Madagascar, Indochina, and East Africa.⁷⁹

Italy’s troubled passage from a colonial to a postcolonial condition occurred at the same time as the global shifts outlined above and against the background of the more obviously noteworthy transition from Fascism to the Republic. As a result, the critique of the colonial order encountered resistance from different perspectives: as we shall see throughout this thesis, the colonial past, rather than being explicitly questioned, was either silenced or selectively recollected to fortify the ostensible national qualities.⁸⁰ This particular process has shaped a very unusual postcolonial landscape in which latent colonial memory is accessed in moments of perceived threats to monolithic representations

⁷⁸ Graziella Parati, *Migration Italy. The Art of Talking Back in a Destination Culture* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), p. 31.

⁷⁹ Gilroy, *After Empire*, p. 16.

⁸⁰ Daniela Baratieri, ‘Bengasi-Bengasi anno 1941. The Evidence of Silences in the Transmission of Memory’, in *Italian Colonialism. Legacy and Memory*, ed. by Andall and Duncan, pp. 75-98 (p. 82).

of *Italianità*.⁸¹ The end of Italian colonialism in Africa was perceived and represented as caused exclusively by WWII, hence limiting and deferring the critique of colonial discourses which therefore reverberated during and after decolonization. Such an interruption of postcoloniality ultimately contributed to the sprouting of monolithic and uncritical ideas about national belonging, preventing Italian society and culture from comprehensively exposing and obliterating colonial debris.⁸²

The Italian (post)colonial context has been frequently compared to experiences which have received more scholarly attention through concepts of marginality, delay, inconsistency. It is unquestionable that Italian colonial endeavours were lesser and later than those of other European empires, as it is likewise obvious that the nature of the decolonial process has compromised a prompt and thorough assessment of (post)colonial legacies in Italian society.⁸³ However, is the very nature of this lateness which deserves further attention. Like any delay, it presupposes a chronological *and* theoretical point of comparison referring not merely to the Italian decolonial process per se, but also to the ways through which larger and older (post)colonial experiences faced the loss of their empires and criticized the former colonial order. Against this background, reading the ‘absence of’ or ‘late’ postcolonial critique of Italian colonial legacies through the uncritical adoption of paradigms born in other contexts is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, maintaining a common approach can help to address post-colonial configurations as culturally and politically entangled. Furthermore, it can assist a critical assessment of how far Western post-colonial cultures are still underpinned by the trans-imperial discourses and intersecting colonial archives which operated across the borders of empires and re-articulated a cohesive idea of the West as the bearer of civilization.

On the other hand, all-embracing paradigms can be excessively detached from the specific events and historical processes they seek to tackle. Furthermore, the universal applicability of postcolonial theories may indirectly refer to the unifying paradigm of

⁸¹ Alessandro Triulzi, ‘Displacing the Colonial Event. Hybrid Memories of Postcolonial Italy’, *Interventions*, 8:3 (2006), 430–43.

⁸² Cristina Lombardi-Diop and Caterina Romeo, ‘The Italian Postcolonial. A Manifesto’, *Italian Studies*, 69:3 (2014), 425–33; on colonial debris, Ann Laura Stoler, ‘Imperial Debris. Reflection on Ruins and Ruination’, *Cultural Anthropology*, 23:2 (2008), 191–219; Ann Laura Stoler, *Imperial Debris: On Ruins and Ruination* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013), pp. 1–38.

⁸³ Nicola Labanca maintains that the most significant reasons inhibiting the diffusion of postcolonial studies in Italy are the absence of a strong and relevant colonial literature produced during the period of overseas expansion, and the belated academic discovery of the work of Edward Said (translated into Italian only in 1991), see Nicola Labanca, ‘Italiche colonie senza Said’, *Contemporanea*, 8:4 (2005), 711–17.

‘Western History’ (with capital H) as the vanishing point toward which local decolonial histories and practices should converge. In locating the genealogy of the holy trinity of postcolonial studies (Said, Bhabha, Spivak) within the European philosophical tradition, Robert Young offers a systematic investigation of the historicist trait of such a ‘White Mythology’. In so doing, Young has paved the way for further reflections aiming to dismantle Eurocentrism and to de-universalise its related knowledges and practices.⁸⁴ Moving away from such a historicist perspective means questioning the teleological organization of colonialism, decolonization, and postcolonial awareness in a clear trajectory which originated in early modern Europe and ends in anticolonial nationalism, decolonization, and postcolonial critique.⁸⁵ As a result, the adoption of a polyphonic and centrifugal critical awareness promotes the investigation of the conceptual and political conditions according to which a postcolonial awareness might or might not have spread.

This latter vantage point applies to the Italian decolonization: though Italian colonialism had a smaller geographical and temporal extension than other empires, its postcolonial experience should not be understood as ‘minor’ or ‘belated’. Instead, the fact that it operated at ‘the margins of dominant structures and hegemonizing discourses, including other dominant discourses on postcolonialism such as the French and the British ones’ might be revealing of the extent to which a peripheral colonial experience reframed the borders of the ‘first world’ politically and theoretically.⁸⁶ This is because Italy, for a long considered ‘peripheral’ in the geography of Europe, rearranged some representations of its national identity as part of its attempt to re-join Western modernity and the Atlantic political sphere after the Fascist parenthesis. As a result, the attempt is to ‘decolonize’ the Italian postcolonial landscape not only from colonial debris, but also from the uncritical use of theoretical paradigms which germinated in other postcolonial contexts and which may not match the peculiarities of Italy’s particular and ambiguous decolonial process.

⁸⁴ Young, *Postcolonialism. An Historical Introduction*, pp. 411–19; Shohat and Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism*, pp. 13–15; Grosfoguel, ‘Decolonizing Post-Colonial Studies’, pp. 4–5; Quijano, ‘Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality’, pp. 171–72.

⁸⁵ Young, *White Mythologies*, p. 3 and pp. 89–95. Young takes into account Althusser’s reflection on how both Marx and Sartre interpreted history as an emancipatory process of self-realisation: in this light, historicism is ‘an abstract philosophical scheme that imposed an overall process of transformation upon historical events’ (p. 89). On the same point, Prakash, *After Colonialism*, pp. 4–5.

⁸⁶ Sandra Ponzanesi, ‘The Postcolonial Turn in Italian Studies. European Perspectives’, in *Postcolonial Italy. Challenging National Homogeneity*, ed. by Cristina Lombardi-Diop and Caterina Romeo (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 51–69 (p. 56).

The imbrication of such theoretical passages means that the study of the end of the Italian empire is not concerned exclusively with the chronological passage of the transition from a colonial to a post-colonial setting, as well as from Fascism to the Republic. This is because Italian decolonization lends itself to an understanding related to Italy's manifold liminalities as a nation located in-between 'Mediterraneanness' and 'Europeanness' both geographically and culturally. Images, narratives, and practices about the loss of the empire might hence reveal the coordinates of a shifting discourse about national belonging which encompasses the will to re-join the paradigm of Western modernity after the Fascist parenthesis, the fluid space of the Mediterranean Sea as a crossroads of diverse histories and cultures, the complex political scenario of Italy within the global arrangement of the aftermath of WWII, and the deferral of the coming to terms with a problematic past.⁸⁷

1.8 The connection between (film) texts and context

The uneven renegotiation of the coordinates defining national belongings during Italian decolonization became visually and aurally tangible on several occasions, whose significance is acknowledged by an increasing number of scholarly works.⁸⁸ This thesis is going to tackle a specific visual corpus of documents, which have been dealt with only partially by colonial and postcolonial film studies.⁸⁹ Chapter 2 will offer a detailed description of the film corpus in light of original archival documents. The key point to bear in mind at this stage is that newsreels and documentaries about the Italian claims over the former colonies, though officially produced by private companies, were in fact tied to Italian governments.

These educative and news films were pivotal tools pervading the everyday life of population. In so doing, they contributed to enhancing and maintaining hegemonic

⁸⁷ Jacqueline Andall and Derek Duncan, 'Introduction. Hybridity in Italian Colonial and Postcolonial Culture', in *National Belongings. Hybridity in Italian Colonial and Postcolonial Cultures*, ed. by Jacqueline Andall and Derek Duncan (Bern: Peter Lang, 2011), pp. 1–19 (p. 4); Ben-Ghiat, 'Modernity is Just Over There', pp. 385–89.

⁸⁸ See the aforementioned books *Italian Colonialism. Legacy and Memory*, ed. by Andall and Duncan; *A Place in the Sun*, ed. by Palumbo; Baratieri, *Memories and Silences*; *Quel che resta dell'impero*, ed. by Deplano and Pes.

⁸⁹ Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *Italian Fascism's Empire Cinema* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2015), pp. 299–301; Chiara Ottaviano, 'Coloniali. I documentari LUCE e la Settimana INCOM', *Zapruder*, 23 (2010), 9–23; Maurizio Zinni, 'Una lettera dall'Africa. Il colonialismo italiano nel cinema del dopoguerra, 1945–1960', *Contemporanea*, 19:1 (2016), 69–99; Baratieri, *Memories and Silences*, pp. 37–44 and pp. 115–38.

exercises of power within the national community.⁹⁰ They were thus part of a ‘conglomeration of media text’ which determined the nature and function of the images about the imperial past and about the current presence in the former colonies. They did not transport discourses innocently, but filtered and circumscribed how Italians should recollect the *oltremare* according to their current and future projection of national belonging.⁹¹

There is little doubt that modern mass media have played — and continue to play — a fundamental role in defining popular imagination and identity practices in modern and contemporary societies. Agnes Schneeberger maintains that discourses conveyed by media make societies more visible and audible to their own members who, in turn, construct their collective identity according to a *mediated* difference.⁹² Following this rationale, national belonging may be considered as ‘shaped and reshaped through communicative processes’.⁹³ An instrumental survey of how such communicative processes could have shaped subjectivities and collective identities between Fascism and the Republic has been provided by Stephen Gundle and David Forgacs. According to their analysis, mass media diffusion had a prominent role in integrating Italian people into a shared cultural experience while, at the same time, it contributed to disintegrating traditional values by creating a wedge between generations, social groups, and geographical poles.⁹⁴ Mass media were thus key to spreading common identificatory meanings among national audiences insofar as they fashioned a certain image of the past and simultaneously projected the national community into the future.

The choice to focus on non-fiction films here is related to their ability to produce and re-articulate hegemonic — and even racist — visions concerning the relationship between *Italianità* and the colonial themes through an informative style. Though

⁹⁰ Michel Foucault, ‘The Confession of the Flesh’, in *Power/Knowledge Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, ed. and trans. by Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), pp. 194–228; Giorgio Agamben, *What is an Apparatus? And Other Essays* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009).

⁹¹ Laura Basu, ‘Memory *dispositifs* and national identities: The case of Ned Kelly’, *Memory Studies*, 4:1 (2011), 33–41 (p. 34).

⁹² Agnes I. Schneeberger, ‘Constructing European Identity Through Mediated Difference: A Content Analysis of Turkey’s EU Accession Process in the British Press’, *PLATFORM: Journal of Media and Communication*, 1 (2009), 83–102 (pp. 83–84).

⁹³ Helena Sjørnsen, *Questioning EU Enlargement: Europe in Search of Identity* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 14.

⁹⁴ David Forgacs and Steven Gundle, *Mass Culture and Italian Society from Fascism to the Cold War* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2007), pp. 1–5.

seemingly educative and unbiased, such images about the Italian presence in Africa championed a positive understanding of Italian identity and qualities operating within and beyond the peninsula. The map of Italian belongings these films invoked alludes to a complex scenario in which the representations of the Italian colonial past and of decolonial issues acquired specific meanings in relation to the redefinition of national identity.

The analysis of the mechanisms of film production (chapter 2) and the social-cultural signification of their contents is undertaken simultaneously by means of the adaptation of a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach. This methodology aims to expose the discursive forces which fashioned the gaze of Italians on the collective self, on the soon-to-be former colonial other, and on the shifting global context of the Cold War. This theoretical perspective involves analysing films against the background of the socio-cultural scenario in which given meanings about the *oltremare* emerged. Following Kracauer, this section will therefore examine which society, which discursive constellation, and which social and political situation produced the particular wish to return to former colonies that the filmic representations expressed.⁹⁵

The main pillar of CDA maintains that the analysis of any discursive system encompasses an interrelated set of cultural objects, statements, practices of production, dissemination, and reception that bring into being both subjects, the social bonds among them, and their material experience.⁹⁶ Foucauldian echoes in this perspective are easily detectable: understood as a knowledge-system, the discourse may support or challenge power relations and inequalities lurking in cultural objects and social practices bonding people together. Therefore, the ‘discourse’ is regarded not as much as a generic object to be analysed, but as an apparatus which enables the critical exploration of the arrangement of power as it surfaces from social relations and from cultural representations.⁹⁷ Michael Meyer’s scheme (figure 1) synthesizes the circular and malleable development of a CDA-

⁹⁵ Siegfried Kracauer, ‘The Little Shopgirls go to the Movies’, in *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, ed. by Siegfried Kracauer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), pp. 291–304.

⁹⁶ Ian Parker, *Discourse Dynamics* (London: Routledge, 1992).

⁹⁷ Norman Fairclough, *Analysing Discourse and Text: Textual Analysis for Social Research* (London: Routledge, 2003); Ruth Wodak, ‘Critical Discourse Analysis: History, Agenda, Theory, and Methodology’, in *Methods of Critical Discourse Studies*, ed. by Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer, 2nd edn (London: Sage, 2009), p. 1–33.

inspired approach; in this scheme, theories that shape methodologies are in turn moulded by the practical unfolding of the discursive analysis of texts and representations.⁹⁸

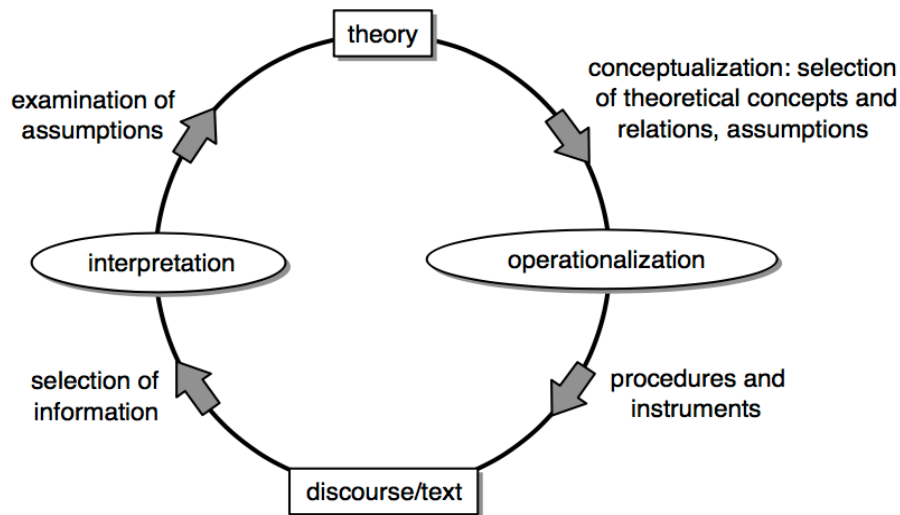


Figure 1: Michael Meyer's CDA circular methodology

Addressing the ways in which texts and context are connected and made meaningful in society entails dissecting the extent to which political, social, and cultural practices might construct and reproduce hegemonic, epistemic, and material inequalities.⁹⁹ Therefore, the adjective 'critical' becomes crucial. This is because CDA's ultimate purposes is to reveal the opaque as well as 'transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control as manifested in language', by promoting social awareness through critical understanding. Norman Fairclough outlines three main proprieties which characterize CDA-oriented approaches.¹⁰⁰ First of all, CDA is a *relational* form of research because it does not focus on single entities or individuals. Rather, its interest lies in the connection between people within a group, between different human groups, and between groups and a vast array of cultural objects ranging from material and tangible communicative events (e.g. conversations, newspapers, mass media in general) to more abstract objects such as language, texts (e.g. written, visual, audio), and collective

⁹⁸ Michael Meyer, 'Between Theory, Method, and Politics: Positioning of the Approaches to CDA', in *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*, ed. by Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer, (London: Sage, 2001), pp. 14–31 (p. 19).

⁹⁹ Terry Locke, *Critical Discourse Analysis* (London: Bloomsbury, 2004), p. 38; Norman Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language*, 2nd edn (Harlow: Longman, 2010), pp. 92–93.

¹⁰⁰ Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis*, pp. 4–6.

memories. The interactions among members of the nation are thus regarded as shaped by discursive patterns that, in turn, are reproduced by those relations.

The critical dissection of such patterns implies that the discourse of national belonging is *dialectical* as far as it unfolds within social connections mediated by communicative and representational practices. Both these *relational* and *dialectical* dimensions take into account a further methodological standpoint: the *transdisciplinary* nature of this approach, which encourages an open dialogue between disciplines, theories, and frameworks. Accordingly, ‘we might best see CDA as a problem-oriented interdisciplinary research movement, subsuming a variety of approaches, each with different theoretical models, research methods and agenda’, rather than as a discrete and rigid method of investigation.¹⁰¹

1.9 Studying the discursive re-articulation of the past

Critical Discourse Analysis is thus a particularly appropriate means to investigate how colonial images and narratives were either maintained or challenged through texts, narratives, and practices during decolonization. It will enable us to unravel the process according to which previous colonial tropes or *topoi* — narrative shortcuts referring to an already established knowledge — were *re-articulated/re-contextualized*.¹⁰² The words in italics will be extremely significant throughout this thesis, as they belong to the specific lexicon proper to a variant of CDA: Discourse-Historical Analysis approach (DHA), which is mobilised in order to integrate within a common analytical agenda a large quantity of available ‘knowledge about the historical sources and the background of the social and political fields in which discursive “events” are embedded’.¹⁰³ Such an approach thereby aims to discover the historical genealogy of discursive practices and the ways in which they are subject to diachronic change.

Though DHA shares the fundamental principles of CDA, it is more specifically oriented to explore the historical context and genealogies permitting the reconstruction of

¹⁰¹ Norman Fairclough, Jane Muldergig, Ruth Wodak, ‘Critical Discourse Analysis’, in *Discourse Study. A Multidisciplinary Approach*, ed. by Teun Van Dijk (London: Sage, 2011), pp. 357–58.

¹⁰² Martin Reisigl and Ruth Wodak, ‘The Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA)’, in *Methods for Critical Discourse Analysis*, ed. by Meyer and Wodak, pp. 87–121.

¹⁰³ Ruth Wodak, ‘Critical Discourse Analysis, Discourse-Historical Approach’, in *The International Encyclopaedia of Language and Social Interaction*, ed. by Karen Tracy, Cornelia Ilie, Todd Sandel (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2015), pp. 275–88 (p. 278)

the processes linking texts and context over time. Furthermore, it tackles the protean nature of discourses reproducing racial, cultural, and social discriminations and the ways in which they are ‘obscured and acquire stable and natural forms: [how] they are taken as “given”’.¹⁰⁴ The focus on the historical dimension of discourse formation foregrounds an ‘interest in identity construction and in unjustified discrimination’ which denaturalises the production and re-articulation of ‘non-inclusive and nonegalitarian structures [and] the social conditions in which they are embedded’.¹⁰⁵ On those grounds, such an approach seems particularly suitable for tackling how the (colonial) past was re-contextualized to accommodate the new decolonizing process, hence becoming the compass between past and present and serving to reaffirm given national values and symbolic references.¹⁰⁶

The ethical and political stance of a DHA-inspired approach should not imply a universally positive understanding of the values at stake in the current research (like ‘freedom’, ‘democracy’, ‘independence’). Rather, the radical decolonial critique discussed previously questions the universal applicability of any given methodology while exploring colonial and postcolonial contexts. Accordingly, DHA may help to locate the cultural geography and the diachronic evolution of those Western values/disvalues, in order to assess how they were used by former colonizers to strengthen their metropolitan identity.¹⁰⁷ This being said, such an awareness will not constrain the applicability of DHA. It may instead enable an even sharper tuning of its critical framework, so as to expose how racial and colonial epistemologies have sustained the articulation of post-colonial collective identities. In other words, this method will contribute to the identification of the cultural geography and the diachronic evolution of given values/disvalues which were used by former colonizers to strengthen their metropolitan identity.

The theoretical premises of DHA and the practical methods it promotes constitute a flexible framework which is particularly salient to the study of this film corpus. Although CDA/DHA approaches have dealt mostly with written texts, films can definitively be

¹⁰⁴ Ruth Wodak, ‘What CDA is About – A Summary of its History, Important Concepts and its Developments’, in *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*, ed. by Meyer and Wodak, pp. 1–13 (p. 3).

¹⁰⁵ Wodak, ‘Critical Discourse Analysis, Discourse-Historical Approach’, p. 275.

¹⁰⁶ Angouri, Paraskevaidi, Wodak, ‘Discourses of Cultural Heritage’, p. 215.

¹⁰⁷ Johannes Angermüller, Dominique Maingueneau, and Ruth Wodak acknowledge the study of discourses is the result of the convergence of a number of theoretical and methodological currents originated in Europe and North America, see ‘Introduction’, in *The Discourse Reader. Main Currents in Theory and Analysis*, ed. by Johannes Angermüller, Dominique Maingueneau, Ruth Wodak (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2014), pp. 1–14 (pp. 1–2).

regarded as multisensorial texts reflecting the hegemonic forces at play in the context of post-WWII Italy. With this in mind, film analysis will reveal how iconic power unfolds in society and how it might reproduce and naturalize racial, social, and cultural inequalities relating to colonial discourses and epistemologies. Moreover, the account of the discursive circumstances in which the footage was materially produced and signified avoids the pitfall of focusing on visibility alone while studying the representations of the complex processes of de-Fascistization/decolonization.¹⁰⁸

Ruth Wodak and Martin Reisigl conceive of DHA as a three-dimensional framework which embraces the study of the topics of a specific discourse, textual and contextual analysis, and the examination of the conditions making those texts meaningful in a given context.¹⁰⁹ This principle of analytical triangulation requires taking into account a broad range of empirical observations, theories and methods as well as background information.¹¹⁰ In this case, the methodological pathway will link film analysis with the examination of the historical conditions under which those images were materially produced and spread, and the discursive patterns articulating their signification according to hegemonic visions and ideological aims (figure 2).

Three discursive dimensions (text, sociocultural practices, discursive practices) are interconnected with analytical processes (text analysis, interpretation-contextualization, explanation according to context). On a micro-level, the text analysis constitutes an extensive examination of filmic elements (frames, camera-angle, *mise-en-scène*, editing, voice-over and commentary, music and sounds). The interpretation and contextualization of such stylistic traits, and the film narratives sprouting from them, will be read against the socio-cultural context of production, distribution, and consumption; this intermediate level is concerned with how social meanings are fashioned. Such sociocultural practices are eventually traced back and deciphered according to the macro-level of investigation, which will reveal how cultural objects and narratives support ‘a particular kind of discursive hegemony’ while asking ‘does it serve to reproduce particular social and discursive practices, or are there transformative impulses in the text?’.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ Antonia Schmid, ‘Bridging the gap. Image, Discourse, and Beyond. Towards a Critical Theory of Visual Representation’, *Qualitative Sociology Review*, 8:3 (2012), 76–89 (p. 88); Federico Caprotti and Maria Kaïka, ‘Producing the Ideal Fascist Landscape: Nature, Materiality and the Cinematic Representation of Land Reclamation in the Pontine Marshes’, *Social and Cultural Geography*, 9:6 (2008), 613–34 (p. 616).

¹⁰⁹ Reisigl and Wodak, ‘The Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA)’, p. 89.

¹¹⁰ Angouri, Paraskevaidi, Wodak, ‘Discourses of Cultural Heritage’, p. 211.

¹¹¹ Locke, *Critical Discourse Analysis*, p. 43; see also Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis*, p. 133.

The political, critical, and theoretical debates of the current chapter — the macro-analytical level — thus pave the way for the film analysis undertaken in chapters 3 to 6 and for the contextualization of the film corpus in chapter 2. In this way, chapter 2 offers an intermediary bridge from the macro- to the micro-level: it will explore the socio-political context which enabled these films to reproduce colonial tropes and narratives. Within this methodological pathway, film representations will be deemed not as mere ‘illustrations or passive reflections of something already established elsewhere’,¹¹² but as part of an intertextual chain which fashioned the ambiguous discourse about the past and future presence of Italy in Africa.

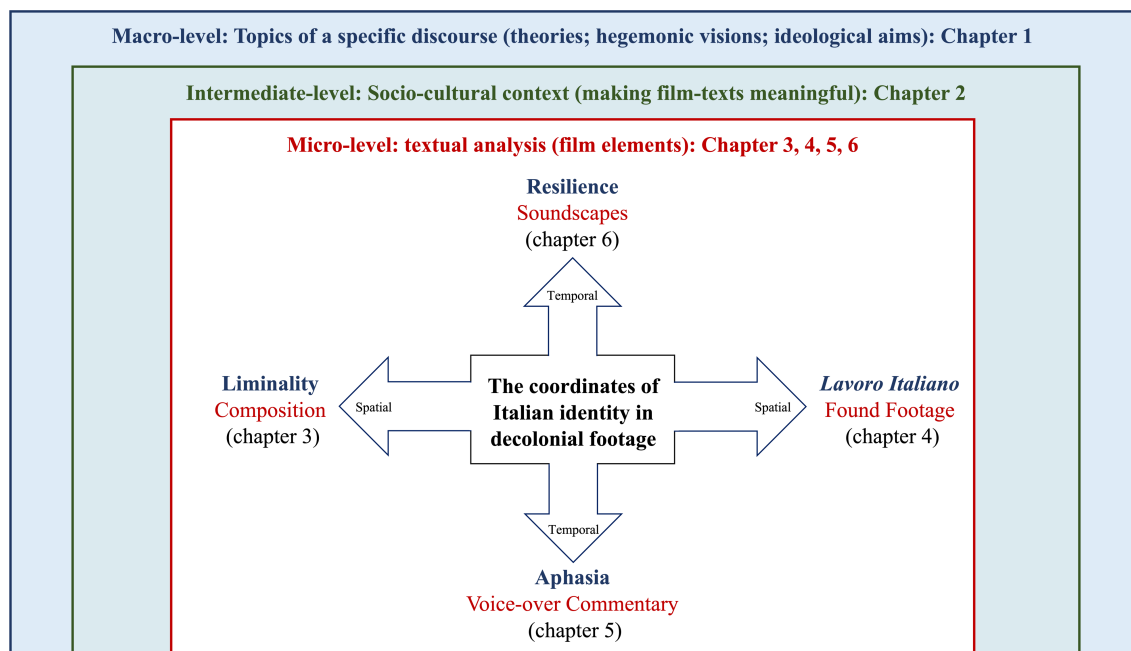


Figure 2: Studying non-fiction films on Italy's decolonization through DHA

1.10 Temporalities and geographies of post-war *Italianità*

The fall of Fascism and the subsequent violent conflict between the Republic of Salò and the Resistance movements — and between Nazi and Allies troops — divided and debilitated Italy. Such a running sore and the ascending Cold War tension characterized the post-war years.¹¹³ In this context, non-fiction films aimed to even out the differences

¹¹² Ramaswamy, 'The Work of Vision in the Age of European Empire', p. 3.

¹¹³ Paul Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy: Society and Politics, 1943–1988* (London: Penguin, 1990); Renzo De Felice, *Mussolini l'alleato. La guerra civile* (Turin: Einaudi, 1997); Roberto Battaglia, *Breve Storia della Resistenza Italiana* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1997). On divided memories in WWII's aftermath, see Foot, *Italy's Divided Memory*, pp. 7–51.

among Italians in terms of socio-economic and cultural background, geographical areas, and political allegiance. As commonly occurs when the idea of ‘the nation’ appears under threat, these cultural products tried to offset the instability of discourses of national identity by crafting representations which championed national history, homogeneity, and international differentiation.¹¹⁴ In so doing, they helped define a specific ‘national habitus’ which serves to reinforce people’s belonging geographically, chronologically, and socially, and which secures the national unity to narratives alternating the self-exculpatory and nostalgic recollection of the past with positive imaginings of the future.¹¹⁵

This understanding of national identities as an ever-changing set of narratives and practices entails the exploration of intersecting temporal and spatial discursive coordinates and representations.¹¹⁶ Rudolf De Cillia, Martin Reisigl, and Ruth Wodak have outlined such coordinates by adapting Stuart Hall’s definition of national identity to the detailed features analysed by Leszek Kolakowski.¹¹⁷ The common points they identify are the essentialised idea of a national spirit; the use of a collective memory from which a group may retrace its imaginative history and foundations; the anticipation of future orientations; the reference to a metaphorical national body manifested in discussion about territories, borders, and landscapes.¹¹⁸

The creation of a discursive geography of Italian belongings implies the existence of imagined ‘others’ standing outside the geographical and cultural border of national identity; therefore, ‘inclusion and exclusion are [thus] comparable to two sides of one coin that both form essential parts of the identity formation process’.¹¹⁹ Chapter 3 and 4 are concerned with this spatial understanding of *Italianità*; they will examine how the films presented and re-contextualized what/who should be entitled to be part of an allegedly homogeneous national community. Chapter 3 deals with composition and *mise-en-scène*, and will take into account images and tropes related to spatial, territorial, and local dimensions (borders, expansion, identificatory buildings and landscapes), examining their

¹¹⁴ Ángela Alameda Hernández, ‘Discursive Strategies in the Construction of National Identity: A Critical Discourse Analysis of the Gibraltar Issue in the Printed Media’, *National Identities*, 10:2 (2008), 225–35 (p. 229).

¹¹⁵ Angouri, Paraskevaïdi, Wodak, ‘Discourses of Cultural Heritage’, p. 210.

¹¹⁶ De Cillia, Reisigl, Wodak, ‘The Discursive Construction’, p. 153.

¹¹⁷ Hall, ‘The Question of Cultural Identity’, pp. 613–15; Leszek Kolakowski, ‘Über kollektive Identität’, in *Identität im Wandel*, ed. by Krzysztof Michalski (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1995), pp. 47–60.

¹¹⁸ Ruth Wodak et. al., *The Discursive Construction of National Identities* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), pp. 16–23.

¹¹⁹ Schneeberger, ‘Constructing European Identity Through Mediated Difference’, p. 87.

significance in dispelling the intrinsic instability and liminality of national belonging in moment of transition and crisis. Chapter 4 focuses instead on the use of pre-existing footage: it will consider how the space of *Italianità* addresses the myth of the proletarian industriousness of Italian people as opposed to the capitalist nature of other colonial experiences. It will argue that such discourse was particularly accentuated during oversea expansion/migrations, when Italians needed to define and claim their identity and qualities.¹²⁰

An excessive stress on spatiality and on visuality may underplay the role of narratives about Italy's peculiar colonial memory and the future projection of Italy in Africa, as well as the particular importance of the aural narratives featuring in non-fiction films (voice-over, music and effects). To counter this risk, the second half of the thesis is concerned with sound and with temporality; chapters 5 and 6 focus on the sonic dimension of these films to explore how they envisioned and articulated a flawless continuum that spans from ancient Rome to modern and future Italy. Chapter 5 offers a textual and stylistic examination of the voice-over commentary, and will argue that the aphasic inability to articulate a truly postcolonial discourse went hand in hand with the transmutation of the colonial loss into an occasion to reimagine a positive future for post-Fascist Italy. This narrative, and the related exaltation of the timelessness of Italian qualities, will be tackled in chapter 6 through the concept of resilience. This final chapter will shed light on the modalities through which soundscapes helped the somatization of decolonial trauma by simultaneously rearranging the aesthetic domination over the former colonial landscape.

¹²⁰ Joshua Fishman, *Handbook of Language and Ethnic Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 447; Wodak and others, *The Discursive Construction of National Identities*, pp. 23-27.

2. Assessing Italian Decolonial Footage

*When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain,
they gathered around Aaron and said, 'Come, make us gods who will go before us.
As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt,
we don't know what has happened to him'.
Aaron answered them, 'Take off the gold earrings that your wives, your sons and your
daughters are wearing, and bring them to me'.
So all the people took off their earrings and brought them to Aaron.
He took what they handed him
and made it into an idol cast in the shape of a calf, fashioning it with a tool.
Then they said, 'These are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt'.*

This passage from the Exodus recounts the people of Israel yearning for a visually tangible idol in place of the invisible and almighty God who freed them from slavery in Egypt.¹ It might therefore be seen as an epitome of the atavistic attraction human beings have for images. Visuals permeate and represent individual and collective experiences, they challenge the transience of the human condition and have helped societies to envision immaterial concepts such as truth, beauty, power, supernatural realities, and myths. Images thus stand as a pivotal element in tackling the configuration of power relations of a given context, and in understanding how people envision their condition, cosmologies, beliefs, and belonging. History, art history, philosophy, anthropology, and more recently film and media studies have developed several methods to account for the power of pictures in the human experience by addressing their materiality, the aesthetic order they present, the iconic power they possess, and by putting them in relation to historical, economic, social, and cultural patterns.²

¹ Exodus 32. 1–4.

² *Vision and Visuality*, ed. by Hal Foster (New York: New York Press, 1988), pp. IX–XIV; Christian Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1982); Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes. The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993); Nicholas Mirzoeff, *How to See the World* (London: Penguin, 2015).

A specific configuration of the relationship between power and images has imposed a pervasive way of seeing and arranging the world since the fifteenth century, when European countries started to construct a modern form of spiritual, epistemic, and material superiority over imagined colonial others.³ This thesis will examine the ability of images and especially of filmic representations to produce and reproduce hegemonic visions in relation to the end of colonial endeavours in the former metropolitan centre.⁴ Such an effort requires contextualizing film narratives within the specific socio-cultural environment of post-war Italy, in order to pinpoint the discursive patterns indicating what belongs, or what does not, to this national community. This chapter will therefore offer a theoretical and historical contextualization of the film corpus. It aims to reveal how images acquired specific meanings in the context of the aftermath of Fascism and how films, in turn, articulated ideological visions of *Italianità* within and beyond the peninsula.

This chapter provides the intermediate analytical level of the Critical Discourse Analysis/Discourse-Historical Analysis approach (CDA/DHA) explained in the previous chapter. It investigates the political, social, and cultural context in which the contents of these films were produced and signified. The concept of colonial visibility will be used to reflect upon the modalities through which visual discourses about decolonial topics were produced, reproduced, and re-articulated through film contents. I will present a two-fold contextualization of the film corpus which combines the analysis of original archival findings with the account of secondary literature. Firstly, a more theoretical contextualization will place documentaries and newsreels within the field of colonial/postcolonial film studies. Subsequently, an in-depth account of the actors, practices, and institutions that crafted and disseminated these films will reveal the ambiguous political setting which oriented their production.

2.1 Visibility and colonial interactions

The material production of films about Italian decolonization, their socio-cultural signification, and their dissection against the background of the restructuring of national identity are kept consistently together by adapting the Discourse-Historical Analysis

³ bell hooks, *Black Looks. Race and Representation* (Boston, South End Press, 1992), pp. 2–3.

⁴ Martin Jay, ‘Scopic Regimes of Modernity’, in *Vision and Visibility*, ed. by Foster, pp. 3–23 (pp. 3–4); *Empires of Vision. A Reader*, ed. by Martin Jay and Sumathi Ramaswamy (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014).

approach; it is concerned with the investigation of mechanisms that make cultural objects and representations meaningful in society. This critical perspective enables the investigation of how practices, events, and texts ‘arise out of and are ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggles over power’.⁵ Accordingly, it illuminates the opaque nature of the relationships between discourse and society by tackling the factors which secure and naturalise configurations of power and hegemony in practices and representations.

Studying the specific configuration of visual cultures through DHA allows us to retrace the genealogies of the representations populating the world in which we live in and the ways in which those representations acquire different meanings according to the context in which they operate. Scrutinizing filmic texts can reveal their ability to reproduce or challenge a particular configuration of power relations in society. Accordingly, images are understood not as mere illustrations of what is already known from other sources like written or spoken texts. Rather, they are regarded as fundamental devices in building and representing modern and contemporary societies.⁶ This standpoint develops from the ‘visuality’ turn of the 80s, when historical, film studies, poststructuralist, and philosophical perspectives combined to address the increasing importance of visuality as a constituent element of contemporary societies and collective identities.⁷

Visuality can be regarded as a social technique for ordering based on the modern primacy of vision.⁸ Such a definition encompasses the cultural and social components which construct meanings about the physical activity of seeing. It thus addresses the moment in which that physical activity of seeing (vision) is signified, by enabling us to see and know the world in a certain way. Reading visuality through a DHA-inspired approach entails analysing the discursive components ‘that factor in the specific logic of pictures and images, while at the same time looking at the relation between pictures and their

⁵ Norman Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language* (Harlow: Longman, 2010), pp. 92–93.

⁶ Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes. The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 1–15; *The Visual Culture Reader*, ed. by Nicholas Mirzoeff (London and New York: Routledge, 1998).

⁷ Martin Jay, ‘That Visual Turn’, *Journal of Visual Culture*, 1:1 (2002), 87–92; Nicholas Mirzoeff, ‘What is Visual Culture’, in *The Visual Culture Reader*, ed. by Mirzoeff, pp. 3–13 (p. 3); Timothy Mitchell, ‘There Are No Visual Media’, *Journal of Visual Culture*, 4:2 (2005), 257–66.

⁸ Tamara Shepard, ‘Mapped, Measured, and Mined: The Social Graph and Colonial Visuality’, *Social Media + Society*, 1:1 (2015), 1–2 (p. 1).

context’.⁹ Indeed, the discursive contextualization of film texts happens according to the hegemonic and ideological forces at play in society, which orient collective gazes and define what is properly ‘visible’ in a given circumstance. Contextualizing the discourse of these films will show how colonial visibility was embedded in the process of rebuilding Italian national identity in the aftermath of WWII.

Visibility, when associated with colonial interactions and related representational practices, might refer to the construction of colonizers’ hegemony over colonized subjects. This standpoint draws on Nicholas Mirzoeff’s fundamental line of reasoning, according to which visualizing is a skill born in modern Europe allowing Europeans to represent a specific arrangement of the world, by conquering it and being able to intervene in it.¹⁰ The ability to visualize fashioned and eased the imposition of Western imperial rule, as Western colonizers were able to envision and shape hegemonic human and cultural relationships according to their epistemic and political agendas. It is no coincidence that Mirzoeff cites the Berlin Conference (1884–85) as the key moment in which the process of visualizing supported the material unfolding of colonial power. On that occasion, European empires drew a new and arbitrary map of African dominions based on artificial borders, which matched colonial interests rather than local specificities. The consequences of that arbitrary division are still affecting the world today, evident in the many border conflicts involving former colonial countries, but indirectly also in the Western patronising gaze on the political and social situation of Africa.¹¹

The Berlin Conference is exemplary of the ways in which the colonial order was substantiated by being related to the elaboration of modern forms of representation and knowledge’.¹² Focusing on visibility can hence reveal the extent to which subjects and groups involved in colonial interactions imagined and visualized their subjectivity and their homogeneous belonging according to colonial discourses, and how such visual discourses materialised in social, political, and cultural practices. This critical perspective is not limited to the significance of colonial visibility in the nation-building process of (former) metropolitan centres. Rather, it can also shed light on how formerly colonized

⁹ Antonia Schmid, ‘Bridging the gap. Image, Discourse, and Beyond. Towards a Critical Theory of Visual Representation’, *Qualitative Sociology Review*, 8:3 (2012), 76–89 (p. 78).

¹⁰ Mirzoeff, *How to See the World*, pp. 102–05; Nicholas Mirzoeff, ‘On Visibility’, *Journal of Visual Culture*, 5:1 (2006) 53–79.

¹¹ Mirzoeff, *How to See the World*, p. 106.

¹² Timothy Mitchell, ‘Orientalism and The Exhibitionary Order’, in *The Visual Culture Reader*, ed. by Mirzoeff, pp. 293–303 (p. 293).

countries imagined their unity and belongings in the aftermath of colonialism by using images and narratives created during the colonial relationship. This is because (post)colonial visibility is not simply a static set of representations that oppressed those who appeared in front of a camera, but it ‘really consists of a set of ideas associated with Africa’ (and, more generally, with colonized cultures) that have changed over time according to settler needs and to the negotiations between colonized and colonizer cultures.¹³

Shifting the focus to the archive of colonial visibility can help explain the negotiation/hybridization of imaginaries that happened during decolonization. During the transition process, formerly colonized countries often adapted Western political and aesthetic categories to claim their own independence and to build their national unity.¹⁴ Particularly pertinent to this thesis is the way colonial visibility enables a dissection of the colonizing gazes produced in the metropolitan centres by questioning both their universalizing practices and the social arena in which post-colonial visibility was fashioned. As a result, the aim is not to explain the construction of colonial otherness in the visual culture of the colonizers once colonialism ended, but to explore the diachronic evolution of certain visual tropes related to the former colonies as well as their re-contextualization in a post-colonial context.

2.2 Films and empires

Bernard Cohn and Nicholas Dirks argue that colonial states employed a vast array of social and cultural technologies to legitimate their power, to make it visible and to convey specific ideas of colonial modernity. Cinema can undoubtedly be considered one of the crucial socio-cultural and technological devices of Western expansion since the end of the nineteenth century.¹⁵ As such, there exists a large body of scholarship exploring the

¹³ Paul S. Landau, ‘Introduction. An Amazing Distance: Pictures and People in Africa’, in *Images and Empires. Visibility in Colonial and Postcolonial Africa*, ed. by Paul S. Landau and Deborah D. Kaspin (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), pp. 1–40 (pp. 2–5).

¹⁴ For instance, an exhibition held in 2016 in London focused on how Socialist imaginaries were appropriated to build the national ethos of African countries as they gained independence, see Mark Nash (Curator), ‘RED AFRICA. Things Fall Apart’, London, Calvert 22 Foundation (2016) <<http://www.osaarchivum.org/events/Red-Africa-Things-Fall-Apart>> [accessed 4 March 2019]; see also chapter 1, sections 1.5 and 1.6 (pp. 52–58).

¹⁵ Bernard S. Cohn and Nicholas B. Dirks, ‘Beyond the Fringe: The Nation State, Colonialism, and the Technologies of Power’, *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 1:2 (1988), 224–29 (p. 225).

modalities through which films elaborated discourses, influences, and legacies born in the context of colonial interactions. One of the most significant strands of this field investigates the cinema of the colonizers, and in particular how it articulated images and spaces of consumption both in the metropolitan centres and in the colonies.¹⁶ Moving images for and about the empire may therefore be deemed primarily as practices which convey and aesthetically materialize ‘the planned epistemic violence of the imperialist project’, as proposed by Spivak.¹⁷ Frank Ukadike maintains that ‘cinema came to Africa as an integral partner of colonialism, so diverse types of films that the colonizers made or brought to show to African people served to ensure the ideological prerogatives of the colonial agenda’.¹⁸ It is no coincidence that just a few months after the Lumière brothers projected the first film shows for a paying audience at the Grand Café in Boulevard des Capucines in Paris, one of their cameramen, Felix Mesquich, was sent to organize film shoots and screenings in African countries. Since then, the *cinématoographe* has been used not simply to project films, but also to capture ‘far-away’ people, whose image soon became a widespread commodity for metropolitan audiences.

Alongside this fairly predictable definition of the function of imperial cinema, another scholarly approach emphasizes colonial visibility as stemming from the connection between colonizers and colonized cultures; a perspective which favours a more flexible and broader understanding of (post)colonial film studies. Though it is unquestionable that empire films ‘orchestrated sensations of visual mastery’ and hence facilitated and legitimated the domination of metropolitan centres over colonial peripheries, they were also a vehicle through which colonial power could potentially be undermined. The study of (post)colonial cinema may therefore illuminate the processes of appropriation, mimicry, and negotiation of the colonizers’ values that formerly colonized subjects engaged in.¹⁹

¹⁶ *Empire and Film*, ed. by Lee Grieveson, Colin MacCabe (London: British Film Institute, 2011); Tom Rice, *Films for the Colonies. Cinema and the Preservation of the British Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2019); David Henry Slavin, *Colonial Cinema and Imperial France 1919–1939* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkin University Press, 2001); Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *Italian Fascism’s Empire Cinema* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2015); *Empires of Vision*, ed. by Jay and Ramaswamy.

¹⁷ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, ‘Rani of Simur. An Essay in the Reading of the Archives’, *History and Theory*, 24:3 (1985), 247–72 (p. 253).

¹⁸ Frank Ukadike, ‘Africa’, in *The Documentary Film Book*, ed. by Brian Winston (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 217–27 (p. 218).

¹⁹ Homi Bhabha understands mimicry as the attempt, carried out by the colonial subject, to appear like the colonizer. This process might de-stabilise colonial dichotomy, see Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 85–92. Regarding Italian postcolonial cinema, Derek Duncan points out that

Such a perspective furthermore emphasizes the hybrid nature of any representational regime arising from the confluence of manifold intersections between film cultures of the colonizers, of the colonized, and transnational cinema practices.²⁰

Colonial/postcolonial film studies are therefore less concerned with addressing an insurmountable divide between colonizers and colonized, and more related to acknowledging how ‘instances of colonialism and postcolonialism are interconnected, often overlapping, and continuously interacting’ both in film texts, in production mechanisms, and in audience practices.²¹ Adopting such a perspective hence requires to address a variety of neglected case-studies, actors, time-frames, geographical and cultural spaces beyond any taxonomic classification in terms of style, genre, and themes.

2.3 Screening colonial realities

The documentary and newsreels in question claimed to represent the reality of Italian former colonies as truthfully as possible. As such, they will be regarded as privileged tools to address the relationship between historical events and their filmic representation, but also to expose the discursive patterns that envisioned decolonial happenings according to a renewed sense of national unity.

Instead of using the umbrella terms ‘(post)colonial documentaries’, the label ‘decolonial footage’ seems a more appropriate description of this corpus of films representing the uncertain process which led to the loss of the Italian colonies. The use of the term ‘decolonial footage’ is meant to avoid a strict stylistic understanding of this format by emphasising instead the raw function those films had in shaping narratives and beliefs about the loss of the colonies. Different film genres like ‘newsreels, [...] nature, educational, informational and promotional films; official, public relations, sponsored and propaganda films, and also travelogues’ and eclectic practices, discourses, and styles will

some postcolonial movies show the peculiar ‘failure of mimicry to approximate its object function as an aspiration of control rather than ambivalence’, see Derek Duncan, ‘Italy’s Postcolonial Cinema and its Histories of Representation’, *Italian Studies*, 63:2 (2008), 195–211 (p. 203).

²⁰ Will Higbee and Song Hwee Lim provide an operational definition of transnational cinema as ‘a means of understanding production, consumption and representation of cultural identity (both individual and collective) in an increasingly interconnected, multicultural and polycentric world’, Will Higbee and Song Hwee Lim, ‘Concepts of transnational cinema: towards a critical transnationalism in film studies’, *Transnational Cinemas*, 1:1 (2010), 7–21.

²¹ Sandra Ponzanesi and Marguerite Waller, ‘Introduction’, in *Postcolonial Cinema Studies*, ed. by Sandra Ponzanesi and Marguerite Waller (London: Routledge, 2012), pp. 1–16 (pp. 5–8).

be mobilised to tackle the process which constructed and reproduced the visual imaginaries feeding the colonial archive of the metropolitan centre.²²

Focusing on non-fiction films does not necessarily mean that the archetypal subdivision between fiction and non-fiction films loses cogency. Rather, the label ‘decolonial footage’ urges us to embrace different kinds of films by taking into account their material production, their social function, and their claims of truthfulness which functioned to support the narratives they proposed. Such a reflexive and even functionalist interpretation can be better understood when contextualized within theoretical debates about the relationship between non-fiction and fiction films; below I offer such a contextualization and reveal the strong connection between colonial knowledge and the documentary format whose quintessential ambitions is to represent a given reality.

With the appearance of Robert Flaherty’s *Nanook of the North* (1922) first, and subsequently with the Griersonian Documentary Film movement of the mid-thirties, the documentary format started to be regarded as the ‘creative treatment of actuality’,²³ a definition which entailed the establishment of an almost dichotomous relationship between fiction and non-fiction film production. This dichotomy was cemented during the 60s by the *cinéma vérité* (direct cinema) movement, which was at entirely odds with the propaganda-driven footage widely disseminated between the 30s and the 50s. According to the principle of direct cinema, any artificial intromission (e.g. extra-diegetic sounds, perfectly crafted framings) would corrupt the search for authentic realism. Therefore, any documentary ought to aspire to truthfully capture reality and, in so doing, to question the relationship of reality with cinema.²⁴ For this reason, fiction and non-fiction films started to be appraised as intrinsically different in terms of stylistic traits and purpose.

In spite of the undeniable difference between feature and non-fictional films, Stella Bruzzi highlights that early practitioners and founding fathers of modern documentary such as John Grierson, Dziga Vertov, and Paul Rotha were ‘far more relaxed about documentary as a category than we as theorists have become’. For instance, forms of fictionalization and re-staging, which were later regarded as corrosive to film’s claim of

²² Ian Aitken and Camille Deprez, ‘Introduction’, in *The Colonial Documentary Film in South and South-East Asia*, ed. by Ian Aitken and Camille Deprez (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), pp. 1–26 (p. 4).

²³ John Grierson, ‘The Documentary Producer,’ *Cinema Quarterly*, 2:1 (1933), 7–9.

²⁴ Brian Winston, ‘Introduction: The Filmed Documentary’, in *The Documentary Film Book*, ed. by Winston, pp. 1–29 (p. 3).

truth, were broadly accepted between the 20s and the 50s.²⁵ Accordingly, non-fiction films can be best identified according to the *function* they perform to a given audience, rather than according to a taxonomic definition based on a binary relationship with featured films. Charles Musser neatly sums up this theoretical ‘liberation’ of documentary from the dichotomy with feature films. He points out that ‘documentary evidence’ or ‘documentary value’ were terms used well before the birth of cinema to indicate a vast array of visual phenomena that may provide evidence to support certain positions and to represent events.²⁶ Therefore, the documentary function is something older, and broader, than a mere flip side to feature films.

Defining the films according to their function rather than according to formal traits means adopting a broader understanding of the mainly chronological subdivision of the documentary genre proposed by Bill Nichols. Nichols originally indicated five categories of documentary: expository, observational, participatory, reflexive, and performative. He subsequently amended those categories, explaining that ‘none of these modes expel previous modes; instead they overlap and interact. The terms are partly heuristic and actual films usually mix different modes although one mode will normally be dominant’.²⁷ This last sentence paves the way for an ever more fluid understanding of the nature of non-fiction films, because it implies that any documentary has a certain degree of performativity.²⁸ In view of this, Brian Winston’s definition of documentary as ‘the narrativized recorded aspects of observation received as being a story about the world’ seems to be a helpful synthesis of these debates.²⁹ These interpretations allow us to stress the process that ‘narrativizes’ reality, and hence the discursive patterns which transformed images in allegedly truthful representations. This standpoint is underpinned by Dai Vaughan’s line of reasoning, in particular when he states that ‘to see a film as documentary

²⁵ Stella Bruzzi, *New Documentary*, 2nd edn (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 8.

²⁶ Musser points out that fiction films may also function as ‘documentary evidence’ or ‘documentary value’, together with several pre-cinema practices that have existed since the seventeenth century such as the illustrated lecture, the Phantasmagoria Lanterns, and photographic lectures about geography, astronomy, and natural history see Charles Musser, ‘Problems in Historiography. The Documentary Tradition Before *Nanook of the North*’, in *The Documentary Film Book*, ed. by Winston, pp. 119–28.

²⁷ Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts of Documentary* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991); Bill Nichols, *Blurred Boundaries. Question of Meaning in Contemporary Culture* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. 95; Bill Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary*, 3rd edn (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2017).

²⁸ Bruzzi, *New Documentary*, pp. 3–5.

²⁹ Winston, ‘Introduction’, p. 24.

is to see its meaning as pertinent to the events and objects which passed before the camera: to see it [...] as a signifying what is appears to record'. In other words, 'what makes documentary is the way we look at it'.³⁰ This perspective therefore endeavours to transcend any given categorization of the non-fiction format, avoiding the labyrinth of exceptions encapsulated in the process of identification according to stylistic criteria.

The narrativization of reality is especially accentuated when dealing with newsreels, a series of individual items (or services) compiled into one continuous film text of variable length.³¹ In their first conception, newsreels were screened, usually on a weekly basis, both in cinema theatres and in mobile shows projected by movie trucks. They presented a wide range of news and topics dealing with politics, technological developments, society, glamour, sports, foreign societies and cultures.³² Films were shot by a mobile camera/sound team and sent to a studio, where the raw footage was edited. Since the end of the 20s, an appropriate score, archival sound effects, and an authoritative voice-over were all added during the editing. The resulting newsreel was 'packaged with a feature film and distributed to theatres throughout a target market, which may or may not coincide with national boundaries'.³³

These short films, which represent a significant proportion of the corpus analysed in this thesis, have received far less scholarly attention while compared either to feature and to documentary films. They have largely been deemed to be a documentary sub-genre with a more realistic form than the more accentuated constructiveness of documentaries.³⁴ It is unquestionable that, like documentaries, newsreels 'bear a highly indexical relationship to the events they represent' while they likewise 'tell an engaging story, make a compelling case, or convey a fresh, poetic perspective that promises information and

³⁰ Dai Vaughan, *For Documentary: Twelve Essays* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), p. 84.

³¹ Raymond Fielding, *The American Newsreel: A Complete History, 1911–1967*, 2nd edn (Jefferson: McFarland, 2006).

³² The most common example of interwar newsreel series is the US-made *The March of Time*, a monthly film magazine aired from 1935 to 1951. *The March* offered 'a viewer's digest of a cycle of events that had already reached a conclusion, and within this strict, instructional framework its booming, relentless voice-over ("Time marches on!") inevitably took on the role of teacher', see Bruzzi, *New Documentary*, p. 49

³³ James Deaville, 'Pitched Battles: Music and Sound in Anglo-American and German Newsreels of World War II', *Journal of Musicological Research*, 38:1 (2019), 32–43 (p. 33).

³⁴ Yingchi Chu, *Chinese Documentaries: From Dogma to Polyphony* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), pp. 69–70; Clifford M. Kuhn, 'A Historian's Perspective on Archives and the Documentary Process', *American Archivist*, 59:3 (1996), 312–20, (p. 314).

knowledge, insight and awareness'.³⁵ The authoritative role of the voice-over (the so-called 'voice-of-God') which addresses the audience directly, and their ultimate didactic purpose, made these news films similar to fragments of narration-led documentaries, insofar as they blended

omniscience and intimacy, they address the spectator directly; they set out an argument (thus implying forethought, knowledge, the ability to assimilate); they possess a dominant and constant perspective on the events they represent to which all elements within the film conform; they offer a solution and thereby a closure to the stories they tell.³⁶

Though such a vantagepoint leads us to classify newsreels under the umbrella of the documentary genre, their episodic nature precludes the development of a unifying narrative, making it problematic to consider them as documentary films. Nevertheless, the subtle difference between newsreel and documentary films does not mean that the former genre presents events more accurately, reliably, or truthfully than the latter. Although newsreels consisted of filmic material ostensibly taken from real life, and they emphasized the impression of objectivity, they were fashioned as a media form that, like other films, 'relied upon the work of editors, who sifted and arranged the raw footage, added graphics and music, and shaped it all into a believable narrative'.³⁷ The edited image of reality they offered, especially when manipulated by state powers, led them to be used as leading propaganda vehicles during and after the interwar period. Newsreels can be therefore deemed as 'governmentality' techniques, to use Foucault's suggestion, which aimed not simply to repress or indoctrinate. Rather, they sustained a specific configuration of power which permeated the everyday life of the population by educating citizens according to new political, economic, social and cultural categories.³⁸

³⁵ Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary*, pp. 25–27.

³⁶ Bruzzi, *New Documentary*, p. 49.

³⁷ Deaville, 'Pitched Battles', p. 34.

³⁸ Paola Bonifazio, *Schooling in Modernity. The Politics of Sponsored Films in Postwar Italy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014), p. 8, drawing on Michel Foucault, 'Technologies of the Self', in *Technologies of the Self. A Seminar with Michel Foucault*, ed. by Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman, Patrick H. Hutton (London: Tavistock, 1988), pp. 16–49.

2.4 Italian colonial footage

During the interwar period and until the late 50s, non-fiction films — especially newsreels and informative documentaries — had their golden age. This period also coincided with the apex of modern imperialism: the territorial rearrangements following WWI and the belated expansionism of Italy and Japan were the last gasps anticipating the end of modern empires.³⁹ The final phase of modern colonialism and the refinement of non-fiction/propaganda films might thus be regarded as peculiarly intertwined phenomena.⁴⁰ Both fiction and non-fiction cinema had spread Western-crafted forms of alterity and exoticism in Europe since the very end of the nineteenth century, when they became very popular: they later branched out into sub-genres such as geographical explorations, African Safari, the travelogue about Africa, Americas, Asia.⁴¹ Since the practice of documentary film-making in and about Africa virtually dates back to the ‘invention’ of cinema, non-fiction films made an instrumental contribution to the colonial archive of metropolitan centres with racial and exotic narratives.⁴² Peter Bloom has shown how visual technologies were used to measure and classify the difference that is ‘inscribed into the very foundation of the [...] colonial encounter’;⁴³ in the highly mediated relationship between metropolis and colonial space, non-fiction films were thus crucial in performing this role while simultaneously envisioning a colonial reality consistent with the colonizers’ goals.

If colonialism encouraged the development of documentary films, then the World Wars might be regarded as crucial moments when the propaganda function, especially of newsreels, was enforced. For instance, during the Great War (1914–18) Western countries embraced the use of political films supporting their positions and enforcing their own national ethos. These films were meant to ‘inspire the each nation’s populations, but they were also used to win over the ears and minds of citizens in neutral countries’.⁴⁴ Since the

³⁹ Anthony Pagden, *The Burdens of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 238–39; Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question. Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), pp. 33–56.

⁴⁰ Ian Aitken, *Film and Reform: John Grierson and the Documentary Film Movement* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), pp. 129–38; Bert Hogenkamp, ‘The Radical Tradition in Documentary Film-making, 1920s–50s’, in *The Documentary Film Book*, ed. by Winston, pp. 174–79; Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary*, p. 40.

⁴¹ Fatimah Tobing Rony, *The Third Eye: Race, Cinema, and Ethnographic Spectacle* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996).

⁴² Ukadike, ‘Africa’, p. 217.

⁴³ Peter J. Bloom, *French Colonial Documentary. Mythologies of Humanitarianism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), pp. 1–2.

⁴⁴ Musser, ‘Problems in Historiography’, p. 126.

countries at war directly supported the production of documentaries and newsreels, the film industry experienced a remarkable series of technical innovations, which inevitably changed the relationship between modern mass media, popular culture, and society.

Italy was no exception: the entanglement of exoticism, creation/classification of the colonial alterity, educational purpose, and propaganda played a crucial role in the development of the Italian film tradition. In the first years of the twentieth century, some foreign companies such as the Lumière, the American Mutoscope, the Biograph Company produced footage about Italy. Those foreign productions were soon followed by the first Italian independent directors (Filoteo Alberini, Italo Pacchioni) and companies (*Alberini e Santoni*, *Ambrosio*, *Società Italiana del Cinematofono di Genova*).⁴⁵ On the one hand, these films made Italy more visible and audible to Italians themselves, by contributing to the self-imagination of national belonging. On the other hand, the non-fiction footage in particular started to play a crucial role in spreading exotic and colonial themes, as in the case of Luca Comerio's documentaries *L'avanzata decisiva in Libia* and *La battaglia delle due Palme* (1911-12).⁴⁶

During this early phase, the production of films was relatively independent from the colonial policies of the Italian governments.⁴⁷ The scenario changed drastically once Fascism seized power in 1922. Colonial ambitions became more evident, and both fiction and non-fiction films started to become, more or less overtly, attuned to the Fascist myth of the empire. Giorgio Bertellini identifies two main trends in early Fascist colonial production: first, Roman lineage was a powerful rhetorical device employed by feature films to exalt Italian belongings as well as to justify colonial enterprises. Secondly, Africa appeared as a 'distant, in-harmonious space inhabited by exotic, non-white bodies speaking a dissonant, mysterious tongue', an unintelligible space from which African otherness is gradually denied preferring instead a self-centred cultural and ideological set-up useful to the assertion of national identity.⁴⁸ This often-contradictory configuration of

⁴⁵ Pierluigi Erbaggio, 'Istituto Nazionale Luce: A National Company with an International Reach', in *Italian Silent Cinema: A Reader*, ed. by Giorgio Bertellini (London: John Libbey, 2013), pp. 221–31 (p. 222).

⁴⁶ On early Italian non-fiction production, see Aldo Bernardini, *Cinema delle origini in Italia. I film 'dal vero' di produzione estera. 1895–1907* (Gemona: La Cineteca del Friuli, 2008). On non-fiction filmmaking during the war in Libya, see Sila Berruti and Luca Mazzei, "'Il giornale mi lascia freddo". I film 'dal vero' dalla Libia (1911–1912) e il pubblico italiano', *Immagine. Note di Storia del Cinema*, 3 (2011), 51–100.

⁴⁷ Erbaggio, 'Istituto Nazionale Luce', p. 221.

⁴⁸ 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*

Italian colonial cinema conveyed not simply ‘la realtà di una conquista, non la costituzione di un impero, ma il fantasma del mito coloniale e forse, più estesamente, il sogno africano come soluzione dei problemi della metropoli in un *altrove* improbabile’.⁴⁹ Africa hence became a space in which symbolism and idealization converged to praise nationalism and patriotism.

In recent years, analysis of Italian colonial films has been increasingly set against the background of wider critical contentions aiming to reveal production mechanisms and the ways in which images spread, the cross-fertilization of different genres, and the influence of foreign film cultures. Ruth Ben-Ghiat’s *Italian Fascism’s Empire Cinema* is a prime example of such a wider methodological agenda. She maintains that Fascist empire films drew heavily upon ‘American Western, French colonial cinema, international Orientalist and desert warfare films, Nazi German war documentaries, and Allied World War II combat movies. [Moreover, they] blend melodrama and realism, theatricality and documentary’.⁵⁰ Maurizio Zinni makes a similar point, arguing that Fascist colonial cinema was characterized by an attempt to popularize colonial endeavours in Italian society by using ‘temi e moduli che hanno la loro origine nei più riusciti film d’avventura italiani ed esteri’.⁵¹ Furthermore, both Ben-Ghiat and Zinni use a transnational framework to accurately describe the aesthetic and productive choices proper to Fascist colonial films, documentaries, and newsreels.

Together with this transnational perspective to assess Italian colonial footage, a detailed understanding of the temporal dimension is equally important in order to diachronically locate a given film, or a series of films, within a more articulated framework. It is indisputable that the development of colonial movies in Italy was inextricably linked to Fascism; the *regime* engaged numerous political and cultural resources in order to represent the *riconquista* of Libya (1928–31), and especially the creation of the empire more broadly, as the apex of a metaphorical reclamation of Italian

the Present, ed. by Patrizia Palumbo (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003), pp. 255–77 (p. 258).

⁴⁹ Jean A. Gili, ‘I film dell’Impero fascista’, in *L’ora d’Africa del cinema italiano 1911-1989* (Turin: Edizioni della Fondazione Giovanni Agnelli, 1996), pp. 39–112 (p. 108); Maria Coletti, ‘Il sogno imperiale. I film coloniali del fascismo, 1935-1942’, *La valle dell’Eden*, 12/13 (2004), 152–65.

⁵⁰ Ben-Ghiat, *Italian Fascism’s Empire Cinema*, p. XIX.

⁵¹ Maurizio Zinni, ‘L’impero sul grande schermo. Il cinema di finzione fascista e la conquista coloniale’, *Mondo Contemporaneo*, 3 (2011), 5–38 (p. 8).

culture.⁵² Looking at the period of the *Africa Orientale Italiana* (AOI) as the peak of Italian colonial films does not mean underplaying previous or subsequent productions. Rather, it will enable a sharper assessment of the diachronic evolution of film tropes since early cinema productions, their re-articulation according to Fascist political plans, and the ways in which colonialism was remembered and/or forgotten thereafter.⁵³

2.5 Decolonial footage: Showing the empire at its end

The studies mentioned so far have dealt mostly with Fascist feature films. However, in spite of a fairly widespread conviction among film theorists that ‘newsreels and documentary reportage in general are “innocent” or “artless” due to their lack of aesthetic reconstruction’,⁵⁴ the production of footage which may be labelled as ‘non-fiction’ was even more significant than feature films during the *Ventennio*.⁵⁵ This is primarily because Mussolini was aware that non-fiction and educational cinematography, more than feature films, could act as a powerful tool of indoctrination and convince Italians of the virtue of his political goals. Newsreels and documentaries had therefore to substantiate the representation of a given reality mediated through the Fascist gaze. In 1924, the establishment of *L’Unione Cinematografica Educativa* (henceforth Istituto LUCE) served to impose a monopolistic control over the production of non-fiction films, which were mandatorily projected before any film shows in Italy (and then in the colonies).⁵⁶ During the Ethiopian war (1935–36) and throughout the AOI (1936–41), newsreels and documentaries had to legitimate the imperial aspirations of Fascism by crafting ‘images of gender, race, and class [...] that confirmed imperial epistemologies and taxonomies’.⁵⁷ In

⁵² Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities. Italy 1922-1945* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001), pp. 125–31.

⁵³ In the pivotal book *Italian Fascism’s Empire Cinema*, Ruth Ben-Ghiat maintains a strong focus on the time frame of the *Africa Orientale Italiana* (1936–1941), even though in her epilogue she traces the continuities between Fascist and non-Fascist films in terms of production and emerging contents, see Ben-Ghiat, *Italian Fascism’s Empire Cinema*, pp. 296–307.

⁵⁴ Paul Arthur, ‘On the virtues and limitations of collage’, *Documentary Box*, 11 (1997), 1–7 (p. 2);

⁵⁵ Bruzzi, *New Documentary*, p. 19.

⁵⁶ RD 1000 (1926), see Ernesto G. Laura, *Le stagioni dell’aquila: storia dell’Istituto Luce* (Rome: Ente dello Spettacolo, 2000), pp. 47–54.

⁵⁷ Sandra Ponzanesi and Marguerite Waller, ‘Introduction to part 1’, in *Postcolonial Cinema Studies*, ed. by Ponzanesi and Waller, pp. 17–18.

all likelihood, the *regime*'s level of internal consensus peaked in those years also by virtue of the massive spread of Istituto LUCE productions.⁵⁸

Ground-breaking works by scholars like Mino Argentieri, Ernesto Laura, Federico Caprotti, and Barbara Corsi have addressed the relationship between Fascist colonial myths and newsreels/documentary production by targeting how they reflected the ideological and political aims of Fascist expansionism.⁵⁹ In those very years, a Fascist-oriented connection between non-fiction films, imperial war, exoticism, and national myths climaxed, then affecting also the subsequent cinematographic imagination about the post-colonial presence in Africa which is the object of this thesis. From a more theoretical point of view, it is interesting to notice that Fascist colonial films cross-referenced themselves across diverse genres. As far as this fluid understanding of formal traits is concerned, Adolfo Mignemi's leading study has paved the way for further dissections of the Italian archive of colonial visuality as it materialised in different formats and media platforms; Mignemi's *Immagine coordinata per un impero* systematically addresses Fascist colonial propaganda about the Ethiopian war across different media like feature films, documentaries and newsreels, newspapers, postcards, and advertisements.⁶⁰

Mignemi's pioneering work might be regarded as the first attempt to consistently keep together different analytical strands concerning historical reconstruction, visual analysis, and production mechanisms. The consideration of the substantial porosity of visual narratives limits the relevance of analytical barriers arranged according to formal criteria. This means that when dealing with colonial topics — especially those of the Fascist phase — the line separating realism and fiction became very thin and even indistinguishable. James Hay was the first to describe the cross-fertilization of documentary and non-fiction stylistic traits, identifying how Fascist films often used a

⁵⁸ Renzo De Felice, *Mussolini il duce. Gli anni del consenso 1929–1936* (Turin: Einaudi, 1974), pp. 758–64; Simona Colarizi, *L'opinione degli italiani sotto il regime* (Rome and Bari: Laterza, 1991); Paul Corner, 'L'opinione popolare nell'Italia fascista negli anni Trenta', in *Il consenso totalitario. Opinione pubblica e opinione popolare sotto fascismo, nazismo e comunismo*, ed. by Paul Corner (Rome and Bari: Laterza, 2012), pp. 127–54.

⁵⁹ Mino Argentieri, *L'occhio del regime. Informazione e propaganda nel cinema del fascismo* (Florence: Vallecchi, 1979); Barbara Corsi, 'Istituto Luce. Inventario generale dei documentari e dei cinegiornali a soggetto coloniale', in *L'ora d'Africa del cinema italiano 1911–1989*, ed. by Brunetta and Gili, pp. 173–91; Laura, *Le stagioni dell'aquila*, Federico Caprotti, 'Information management and Fascist identity. Newsreels in Fascist Italy', *Media History*, 11:3 (2005), 177–91.

⁶⁰ Adolfo Mignemi, *Immagine coordinata per un impero. Etiopia 1935–1936* (Turin: Gruppo Editoriale Forma, 1984).

form of expository realism and journalistic evidence to convey a truthful idea of the myth of Italian qualities abroad.⁶¹ Another vivid example of such a hybridization of styles is provided by Maurizio Zinni, who observes that Romolo Marcellini's feature films were heavily influenced by the documentary aesthetic the director used when he worked as a LUCE operator.⁶²

Among the flourishing scholarship currently paying attention to the creation and re-articulation of colonial imaginaries across different media formats and beyond a well-arranged periodization, Daniela Baratieri's work is particularly worthy of mention. Her analysis focuses on the silences surrounding the crimes, racism, and violence which characterized the Fascist empire, silences which were either strengthened or (infrequently) challenged in colonial films as well as in other visual and written texts made between the 30s and the 60s. This relatively extended time span tackles the continuity of cultural phenomena as correlated with, and not merely subordinate to, diverse political scenarios. Furthermore, since 'producing and the producing apparatus do not exist in a vacuum, but interacts with other sites', the attention Baratieri pays to the discourses connecting film contents and socio-cultural context can dialogue with the Historical-Discourse Approach assumed in this thesis.⁶³ This is because any film is understood here as part of a discursive constellation which delimited how to remember/forget the colonial past, and how to imagine the new Italian presence in Africa.

The peculiar end of Fascism, and of its imperial ambitions, were direct consequences of WWII. As we shall see below, decolonial footage about the Italian presence in former colonies was produced by an intricate conglomeration encompassing former Fascist institutions such as the Istituto LUCE, state-sponsored productions, companies that were surreptitiously supported by the state, and private companies. Due to such a convoluted and uncertain transition, we can intuit a substantial continuity in film representations of the Italian presence in Africa.⁶⁴

⁶¹ James Hay, *Popular Film Culture in Fascist Italy. The Passing of the Rex* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987), p. 184. A more recent contribution regarding the cross-fertilization of genres comes from Marie-France Courriol, 'Documentary strategies and aspects of realism in Italian colonial cinema (1935- 1939)', *The Italianist*, 34:2 (2014), 122–41.

⁶² Zinni, 'L'impero sul grande schermo', p. 14.

⁶³ Daniela Baratieri, *Memories and Silences Haunted by Fascism. Italian Colonialism MCMXXX–MCMLX* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2010), pp. 33–35.

⁶⁴ Ibid., pp. 79–92; Chiara Ottaviano, 'Coloniali. I documentari LUCE e la Settimana INCOM', *Zapruder*, 23 (2010), 9–23; Maurizio Zinni, 'Una lettera dall'Africa. Il colonialismo italiano nel cinema del dopoguerra. 1945–1960', *Contemporanea*, 19:1 (2016), 69–99 (pp. 70–74).

Broadening the horizon to wider phenomena, the end of empires did not bring about a sudden change in films traditions or the market dynamics of the countries involved in the decolonial transition. Though it is incontestable that decolonization encouraged the independent development of cinema cultures in formerly colonized nations,⁶⁵ Ian Aitken and Camille Deprez point out the controversial results of that process. In particular, they emphasize the significant connections between colonial and postcolonial cinema histories of metropolitan centres as well as of former colonies.⁶⁶ Stylistic and structural continuities reflected the ambiguity of decolonization as a historically located phenomenon discussed in chapter 1: as Tom Rice explains, despite some changes in terms of non-fiction film content, the production structures and the reference culture inspiring filmic narratives remained that of the metropolitan centre.⁶⁷ The relationship between colonial and post-colonial film cultures is even more intricate in the case of Italy's ambiguous decolonization process; this is because the transition from a colonial to a post-colonial system of film production was encompassed within the passage from a Fascist state-controlled industry to an officially private one, which nonetheless remained supported and even subtly oriented by the Italian governments.

2.6 Dismantling Fascist cinema? Films, documentaries, and newsreels after WWII

The first article of Royal Decree (RD) n. 678, issued on 5 October 1945, solemnly proclaimed: 'l'esercizio dell'attività di produzione di film è libero'.⁶⁸ This was the first law disciplining cinema after the totalitarian experience. This article was followed by other clauses repealing the previous decrees through which Fascism had tried to control and nationalize cinema production and distribution.⁶⁹ Through that norm, the cinema industry

⁶⁵ Priya Jaikumar, *Cinema at the End of Empire* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), p. 16.

⁶⁶ Aitken and Deprez, 'Introduction', p. 4.

⁶⁷ Tom Rice, 'From the Inside. The Colonial Film Unity and the Beginning of the End', in *Film and the End of the Empire*, ed. by Lee Grieveson and Tony MacCabe (London: British Film Institute, 2011), pp. 135–53.

⁶⁸ Lorenzo Quaglietti, *Storia economico-politica del cinema italiano 1945–1980* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1980), p. 43.

⁶⁹ Fascism imposed the political supervision of film contents and offered subsidies depending on the approval of the script by the government. Moreover, the *regime* oriented and reorganized the cinema industry: it exerted its authority by controlling and authorizing private productions, and it protected collaborating companies that, in return for their compliance, were generously funded. The Fascist state became the owner of studios and distribution companies as well as of a chain of cinema theatres. It put into effect some measures to protect Italian films against foreign companies (in particular against Hollywood films, 1938). Despite this

entered into a free market regime. However, in order to moderate the effects of the so-called invasion of foreign films, the subsequent laws on cinema passed in 1947 and 1949 (n. 379, n. 958) established a system which encouraged the national film production.

These laws authorized the government to monitor film production by establishing a system combining the control over the production with substantial financial incentives for national footage, which were awarded based on box office revenues and the artistic value of each film.⁷⁰ As far as the artistic value of films was concerned, it was fairly obvious that the government's freedom to support films close to its agenda was almost absolute. Moreover, any distribution company looking to import and project a foreign film was required to pay a 2.500.000 lire contribution to the *sezione per il credito cinematografico*, which was meant to fund national production. The initiatives of introducing incentives for national productions and a tax on imported foreign titles were complemented by the imposition of mandatory screening-days of Italian movies, which according to Law 958 (1949) had to be projected at least eighty days per year. Accordingly, the combination of not-so-thinly-veiled forms of protectionism and subventions encouraged the revival of the national film industry, which had been weakened by the suffocating control of Fascism and by WWII.

The effects of this renewed form of state intervention in the cinema market are even clearer when looking specifically at the non-fiction film market. Post-Fascist governments faced a rather peculiar situation: Fascism had promptly established a monopoly over non-fiction films through the Istituto LUCE in 1925, whereas it did not formally banish the private companies producing feature films. As a result, dismantling the total control the state exerted over non-fiction films was far more complicated than freeing feature films from the shackles of the totalitarian control. This is because the great majority of the

intervention, Fascism did not impose totalitarian control over feature film production, which substantially remained in the hands of private companies. For an overview on Fascist cinema, see Philippe V. Cannistraro, *La fabbrica del consenso. Fascismo e Mass-Media* (Rome and Bari: Laterza, 1975) pp. 290–98; Christopher Wagstaff, 'Cinema', in *Italian Cultural Studies. An Introduction*, ed. by David Forgacs and Robert Lumley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 216–32; Gian Piero Brunetta, *Storia del cinema italiano. Il cinema del regime 1929–1945 (vol. 2)* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 2001); Steven Ricci, *Cinema and Fascism. Italian Film and Society, 1922–1943* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

⁷⁰ The *Sottosegretariato per la Cinematografia* assessed whether a national production could be funded by the 'artistic value' prize, see Gian Piero Brunetta, *Storia del cinema italiano. Dal neorealismo al miracolo economico 1945–1959 (vol. 3)* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1993), pp. 46–55.

political forces composing the *Governi d'unità nazionale* shared a determination to offer a renewed public service of cinema news.⁷¹

Despite the formal liberalization of the market, post-war governments still conceived of non-fiction films as potent tools to address Italian society and to convey ideological and political messages. Giulio Andreotti, the undersecretary of the newly-established Central Office for Cinematography at the Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri (PCM), designed an institutional framework in which educational documentaries and newsreels produced by private companies were still supported by the government.⁷² That framework established that private companies needed the Central Office for Cinematography's authorization to project their non-fiction films in the movie theatres.⁷³ Moreover, the laws previously mentioned granted the possibility for documentaries and cine-news to obtain a subvention from 3% up to 5% of the *tassa erariale* (the global tax revenues of a film's distribution). As a result, any film shorter than 30 minutes and containing some realistic content could be supported by the state.⁷⁴

The two-fold mechanism of control and funding was complemented with legal provisions regarding the obligatory 'pairing' initiative (*abbinamento*), which imposed the mandatory screening of a newsreel or a documentary prior the feature film show. Although RD 678 (1945) abolished the fee which owners of movie theatres had to pay for renting LUCE's films during the *Ventennio*, the obligatory pairing was not repealed and post-Fascist laws even replicated its rationale by imposing the mandatory screening of non-fiction films in every show.⁷⁵ In addition, Law 958 (1949) provided a clearer definition of *film d'attualità* (newsreel) which distinguished it from the *cortometraggio* (short films or documentary).⁷⁶

⁷¹ Laura, *Le stagioni dell'aquila*, pp. 223–24.

⁷² Rome, Archivio Storico Istituto Luigi Sturzo - Archivio Giulio Andreotti (ASILS-AGA), Group 'Cinema', Box 1071, folder 5.5, file 'Nuova legge documentari e cortometraggi', 'Quei nove minuti di pubblicità mascherata', *Panorama*, 3 July 1969.

⁷³ RD 678 (1945) stated 'gli enti e le imprese che intendano svolgere la loro attività nel campo della ripresa cinematografica di fatti o avvenimenti di attualità debbono ottenere l'autorizzazione dall'autorità competente'.

⁷⁴ Bonifazio, *Schooling in Modernity*, p. 16.

⁷⁵ RD 1000 (1926) imposed the mandatory pairing of non-fiction to feature films.

⁷⁶ According to the art. 15, Law 958 (1949), a newsreel was a movie 'non inferiore ai 200 metri, che riproduca fatti e avvenimenti del giorno ed abbia i caratteri della informazione o della cronaca cinematografica', see Maria Adelaide Frabotta, 'Il cammino dei cinegiornali italiani nel Paese e in Europa', in *Identità italiana e identità europea nel cinema italiano dal 1945 al miracolo economico*, ed. by Gian Piero Brunetta (Turin: Edizioni della Fondazione Giovanni Agnelli, 1996), pp. 173–91.

This precise articulation of the difference between newsreel and documentary was not only technical jargon. Instead, it made it possible to combine the state premiums for those companies producing both *film d'attualità* and *cortometraggi*. Accordingly, as Quaglietti explains, the audience had to put up with a newsreel *and* a documentary in addition to the movies they paid for.⁷⁷ This last sentence touches on one of the most controversial points: the diffusion and reception of non-fiction films. Mino Argentieri holds the view that the audience generally appreciated the style of post-war films, which were undoubtedly more vibrant and sophisticated than the previous LUCE films.⁷⁸ Augusto Sainati maintains a similar point of view, but cautions that the straightforward contraposition to Fascist non-fiction films does not necessarily imply that spectators always found post-war *attualità* and *cortometraggi* fascinating and engaging.⁷⁹ Rather, it is highly likely that, since the late fifties — when television started to spread and forms of film political propaganda started to be regarded as outdated — the mandatory screening before the feature films for which the audience paid the ticket started to be perceived as an unnecessary interruption.

The difficult assessment of the level of appreciation of post-war newsreels and documentary by the Italian audience is confirmed by reading some records held at the Archivio Audiovisivo del Movimento Operaio (AAMOD), and at the Archivio Storico Istituto Luigi Sturzo (more specifically in the section storing the documents by Giulio Andreotti). In 1982, some of the members of Archivio Storico Audiovisivo del Movimento Operaio — the forerunner of the AAMOD — started to craft a series of TV documentaries about the film activities of left parties between 1945 and 1955.⁸⁰ The transcript of the interview with the director and screenwriter Florestano Vancini confirms the politically-biased setting of the non-fiction market, and a different response whether to newsreels or documentaries insofar as ‘il pubblico gradiva molto il cinegiornale. Mentre quando partiva il documentario qualche volta, immediatamente, prima di sapere cosa c’era partivano i

⁷⁷ Quaglietti, *Storia economico-politica*, p. 130.

⁷⁸ Mino Argentieri, ‘Il 18 Aprile 1948 e il cinema’, in *Propaganda, cinema, e politica 1945-1975. Annali dell’Archivio del Movimento Operaio e Democratico*, ed. by Ermanno Taviani (Rome: Archivio del Movimento Operaio e Democratico, 2008), pp. 41–59.

⁷⁹ Augusto Sainati, ‘Introduzione’, in *La settimana INCOM. Cinegiornali e informazione negli anni ’50*, ed. by Augusto Sainati (Turin: Lindau, 2001), pp. 11–21 (pp. 12–15).

⁸⁰ Rome, Archivio Audiovisivo del Movimento Operaio e Democratico (AAMOD), Group ‘Attività Istituzionale Esterna - Attività Progettuali - Progetti 1’, box 16, folder ‘Le cineattualità realizzate dalle sinistre nell’Italia del dopoguerra. Vol. + videointervista di Stefano Masi’, file ‘Testimonianze per il cinema di documentazione politico – sociale’, interview to Florestano Vancini (1982).

fischi'. This is because the documentaries close to the government's agenda were matched to the most successful films regardless of their quality, and they were

tanto noiosi che si era creato nel pubblico un moto di rifiuto [...] La gran massa di questi documentari veramente erano inguardabili, e la massa era tale per cui anche se qualche volta capitava un buon documentario, il pubblico era abbastanza diffidente in partenza.⁸¹

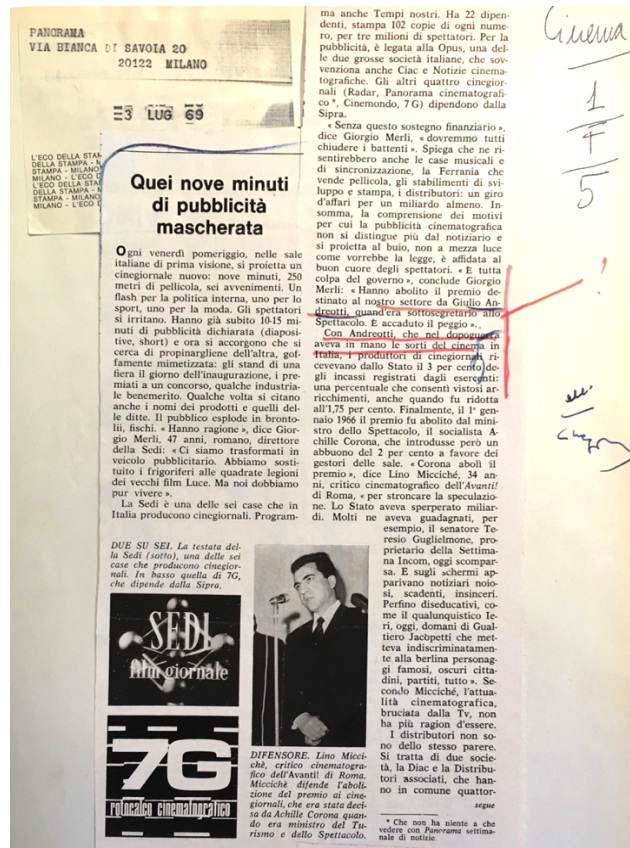
As a result, theatre owners quite often decided not to project the documentaries; the 'proiezione del documentario era cosa rarissima poiché l'esercente li metteva semplicemente nel borderò'. They simply filled in the form declaring it had been screened, thus allowing the documentary to receive a premium without being watched by an apparently unappreciative audience. Such a widespread aversion to the mandatory screening became even more acute from the mid-fifties onwards for a series of interrelated reasons which ultimately resulted in a less favourable legislative support for non-fiction films.⁸²

The first lines of an anonymous journal article published in the 60s (picture 3) made once again clear the contemporary audience's distaste for the rather lengthy combination of *attualità* and *cortometraggi*. Even though this article was published when the golden age of newsreels was coming to an end, it is interesting to observe — alongside the shifting opinion concerning the projection of undesired films — that the non-fiction market was still heavily reliant upon state funding notwithstanding Law 897 (1956) and its reduction of state contributions for non-fiction producers.⁸³

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² David Forgacs, Stephen Gundle, *Mass Culture and Italian Society from Fascism to the Cold War* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2007), pp. 27–35 and pp. 192–94.

⁸³ ASILS-AGA, Cinema, 1071, folder 5.5, file 'Nuova legge documentari e cortometraggi', 'Quei nove minuti di pubblicità mascherata', *Panorama*, 3 July 1969.



Picture 3: Anonymous article. *Panorama*, 3 July 1969

2.7 Direct and indirect forms of state intervention in non-fiction film production

Both the pairing practice (*abbinamento*), the 3 per cent prize for Italian documentary production as well as the additional 2 per cent prize ‘nei casi di eccezionale valore tecnico e artistico’ created a scenario in which private companies bowed to government policies in order to get as much money as possible.⁸⁴ The figures concerning the years between 1948 and 1951 confirm the growing amount of money allocated to non-fiction films. In 1948 feature films received 686.958.290 lire, documentaries 241.251.310 lire, newsreels 691.408.216 lire; in 1949 feature films received 912.091.490 lire, documentaries 515.816.495 lire, newsreels 796.701.019 lire; in 1950 — when the effects of the Law 958 (1949) came into effect — feature films received 1.871.296.410 lire, documentaries 1.194.190.065 lire, newsreels 1.362.819.947 lire; in 1951 feature films received 2.136.095.267 lire, documentaries 1.423.319.090 lire, newsreels 1.695.293.282 lire.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Law 958 (1949), art. 15.

⁸⁵ ASILS-AGA, Cinema, 1070, folder 1.2, file ‘Legge 1949’, document ‘Premi complessivamente pagati ai film a lungo metraggio ed ai documentari italiani negli anni 1948-1949-1950-1951’; unfortunately, the archival records studied so far provide figures neither for the previous nor for the following years.

The amount of money granted to newsreels and documentaries is, on average, far higher than that for feature films. The promise of such copious sums of state money was extremely appealing to newly established documentary producers, who were attracted by the possibility of great incomes. Lorenzo Quaglietti observes that documentary studios mushroomed: between 1948 and 1957, roughly 4730 documentaries were produced, and 4425 newsreels were crafted between 1950 and 1959.⁸⁶ Against this background, Giampiero Brunetta maintains that ‘il controllo della produzione e la vincente azione di dirigismo ideologico sono soltanto due aspetti dell’intervento articolato nel settore [cinematografico] da parte dello Stato’.⁸⁷ In other words, state control and prizes were two sides of the same coin through which the government allowed the diffusion of filmic representations of Italian reality which were consistent with its own ideological and political aims. News films and documentary did not simply indoctrinate Italian people but tried to permeate and influence the everyday life of population.

The interrelation of the mechanisms of production reminiscent of the previous Fascist setting and the educational function of non-fiction cinematography invites us to reflect on the formal rejection of the word ‘propaganda’ in post-war Italy. Paola Bonifazio maintains that the refusal of that word was a pivotal rhetorical device in restructuring a form of pastoral power through which Italians were re-educated regarding specific social, racial and gendered subjectivities.⁸⁸ This contradictory attitude of refusing any explicit reference to ‘propaganda’ while restructuring some of its practical traits is symptomatic of the uncertain cultural scenario of post-war Italy. In particular, the mechanism of incentives and controls meant that producers yielded to the government’s goals notwithstanding the formal liberalization of the market, and this system might be described as an *indirect* form of influence exerted by the government over private companies. The closer a company was to the government’s agenda, the more rewards it could claim, regardless of the quality of its films. That is because the *abbinamenti* ‘non erano fatti sulla base di una logica ideologico-politica. Era più una banale logica soltanto di potere; cioè le grosse case di produzione di documentari avevano maggiori possibilità di arrivare alle grosse distribuzioni dei film’. The counter-voices, such as the series of newsreels and documentaries produced by the Libertas film company owned by the PCI between 1947

⁸⁶ Quaglietti, *Storia economico-politica*, pp. 130–31; Frabotta, ‘Il cammino dei cinegiornali italiani’, p. 174.

⁸⁷ Brunetta, *Storia del cinema italiano*, p. 56.

⁸⁸ Bonifazio, *Schooling in Modernity*, pp 8–13.

and 1949, were very infrequently censored or prohibited openly.⁸⁹ This because it was enough that distributors close to the government matched undesirable footage with an unsuccessful feature film: as a result, small independent companies did not receive sufficient funds to survive.⁹⁰

Together with such an indirect form of control, there was also a *direct* form of intervention through which the government commissioned some films which were produced by state or private companies. We can delineate different categories of newsreels and documentaries according to these various forms of influence: those produced by previously state-owned institutions established during the *Ventennio* which did not totally and suddenly cease their activity afterward, films directly sponsored by the Italian government, and productions by companies which were officially private but which actually operated under the wing of the government.

As far as the first category of production mechanisms is concerned, post-war governments inherited some cultural institutions established by Fascism such as the Istituto LUCE, the *Ente Nazionale Industrie Cinematografiche* (ENIC), the Cines, and the *Cinecittà* compound.⁹¹ These institutions were kept alive and supported by the state even though their explicit propaganda ethos was rejected.⁹² The vicissitudes of the Istituto LUCE are worth mentioning in greater detail insofar as they concern part of the film corpus this thesis is dealing with. Soon after the Cassibile Armistice in September 1943, the Istituto LUCE became part of the *Repubblica Sociale Italiana* by continuing its pro-Fascist propaganda activity in Venice. After the liberation from Nazi-Fascist troops in April 1945, the *Governi d'unità nazionale* understood the risk of keeping the LUCE alive as it represented the Fascist cultural institution *par excellence*. Despite such an awareness, the

⁸⁹ Mino Argentieri, 'The Italian Communist Party in Propaganda Films of the Early Post-War Period', in *The Art of Persuasion: Political Communication in Italy from 1945 to the 1900s*, ed. by Luciano Chelos and Lucio Sponza (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), pp. 74–86 (pp. 84–85); Roberto Curti and Alessio Di Rocco, *Visioni proibite. I film vietati dalla censura italiana (1947–1968)* (Turin: Lindau, 2014).

⁹⁰ AAMOD, Group 'Attività Istituzionale Esterna - Attività Progettuali - Progetti 1', box 16, folder 'Le cineattualità realizzate dalle sinistre nell'Italia del dopoguerra. Vol + videointervista di Stefano Masi', file 'Testimonianze per il cinema di documentazione politico – sociale', interview to Florestano Vancini (1982).

⁹¹ The ENIC and the CINES were two Italian film companies. They took over the *Società Anonima Stefano Pittaluga*, the biggest Italian film company in the 20s. The CINES focussed mainly on production whereas the ENIC on distribution; according to Angelo Guglielmi, after the sudden death of Stefano Pittaluga in 1931, the ENIC and the CINES were formally nationalized and brought under the wing of the Istituto LUCE in 1935 (the ENIC), and under the Cinecittà system in 1937 (the CINES), see Angelo Guglielmi, *Cinema, Televisione, Cinema. L'ultima volta dell'Istituto LUCE* (Milan: Bompiani, 2013), p. 45.

⁹² Quaglietti, *Storia economico-politica*, pp. 143–204.

LUCE was not dismantled. As Bartolo Ciccardini, a member of the DC, reveals, there was lots of hesitation within anti-Fascist forces regarding the use of cinema and especially about the ‘destino dell’Istituto LUCE, quando, nell’immediato dopoguerra, si discusse se abolirlo oppure conservarlo. Però fummo costretti ad adoperare il mezzo cinematografico, perché ormai il cinema era nella vita di tutti i giorni’.⁹³

Such an awareness of the effectiveness of film news led to the production of the series *Notiziario LUCE nuova* (or *Nuova LUCE*). This was reminiscent of the previous *Giornale LUCE* in terms of format even though it was now attuned to the political agenda of anti-Fascist forces which composed the *Governi d’unità nazionale*. The series was composed of 22 newsreels produced between 1945 and 1946, the date when the last National Unity Cabinet resigned. The concurrence of these two events was not random: the end of the *unità nazionale* experience enabled the *Democrazia Cristiana* to secure its position as the first Italian party, also in view of the forthcoming election of 1948. The fairly pluralist and conciliatory tone of the *Nuova LUCE*, which reflected the ethos of the *Resistenza* and the resulting political balance among diverse forces, was no longer relevant in the context of the rising tension between centre-right and left parties.⁹⁴ As a result, the DC undertook to support more directly the private — yet indirectly controlled — *Industria Cortometraggi Milano* (INCOM). Even though the LUCE should have been disbanded in 1947, it was instead reorganized in 1948 after some months of commissarial management. The renewed LUCE (Istituto Nuova LUCE) focalized its production on educational documentaries and, in 1962, it became a public stock company.⁹⁵ Curiously, one of the first documentaries produced by the renewed Istituto LUCE was *Una lettera dall’Africa* (1951), which was conceived to support Italian claims over former colonies; moreover, it was also one of the first colour films distributed in Italy.⁹⁶

Despite the liberalization of the cinema market, the production scenario of non-fiction films remained complex. The Italian governments formally replaced the Istituto

⁹³ Bartolo Ciccardini, ‘Cinema, televisione e propaganda nella Democrazia cristiana’ (interviewed by Tatti Sanguinetti and Ermanno Taviani), in *Propaganda, cinema, e politica 1945–1975*, ed. by Taviani, pp. 177–89 (p. 177).

⁹⁴ Argentieri, ‘Il 18 Aprile 1948 e il cinema’, p. 54.

⁹⁵ ASILS-AGA, Cinema, 1074, folder 3.3, file ‘Luce, vicende anni 50 – 60 – 70 – 80’, document draft by Tommaso Fattorosi (the commissioner) entitled ‘Istituto nazionale Luce - un decennio di gestione commissariale 1947 - 1957; see also Guglielmi, *Cinema, Televisione, Cinema*, p. 47; Laura, *Le stagioni dell’aquila*, pp. 223–56.

⁹⁶ Laura, *Le stagioni dell’aquila*, p. 241–42.

LUCE with the *Centro di documentazione della Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri* (CDPCM). Paola Bonifazio has thoroughly examined the footage produced by the CDPCM, highlighting the extent to which films became a tool to govern and re-educate Italian people toward a capitalist-oriented model inspired and materially supported by the United States of America.⁹⁷

The footage made by the CDPMC dealt with economic reconstruction, the capitalist way of life, and democratisation, but there are no movies about Italian decolonization notwithstanding the diplomatic efforts to return to Africa and the presence in the former colonies of tens of thousands of Italians. A fairly reasonable explanation of this absence is the fact that colonial topics were no longer as central in public debate as they had been a decade or so earlier.⁹⁸ However, there is also a subtler reason for this absence; in the new socio-cultural scenario it was no longer feasible for a government to engage in such overt propaganda, especially when the subject recalled the Fascist past. For these interrelated reasons, the Italian government and some Ministries preferred to sponsor, at times openly, at times more covertly, private companies to produce non-fiction films.⁹⁹

2.8 INCOM's (quasi)monopoly

The institutional setting analysed above allowed the state to indirectly control non-fiction film production while private companies gradually bowed to the government's needs in order to obtain protection and funding. Accordingly, the production and diffusion of non-fiction films about Italian decolonization may be deemed as a privileged vantage point from which to observe the convoluted transition from Fascism to the Republic in the sphere of popular culture. Direct and indirect forms of government influence in film production created a scenario in which, despite the growing number of private companies desperate for state funding, only a few companies like INCOM, Documento Film, Astra

⁹⁷ On the Americanization of Italian culture in the 50s, see Stephen Gundle, 'L'americanizzazione del quotidiano: televisione e consumismo nell'Italia degli anni Cinquanta', *Quaderni Storici*, 21:2 (1986), 561–94; more specifically on non-fiction films, see Elena Aga Rossi, 'Il mito americano nel dopoguerra attraverso le immagini della "Settimana INCOM"', in *La Settimana INCOM*, ed. by Sainati, pp. 161–67.

⁹⁸ One of the first opinion polls held in post-war Italy, in October 1946, revealed that public concern about the loss of the colonies was marginal, see Nicola Labanca, *Oltremare. Storia dell'espansione coloniale italiana* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2002), p. 348.

⁹⁹ Frabotta, 'Il cammino dei cinegiornali italiani', p. 181; Baratieri, *Memories and Silences*, pp. 14–29.

Cinematografica, and SEDI thrived.¹⁰⁰ The favourable *abbinamento* with the most successful movies together with an ideological affinity with the political and economic elites granted those companies an oligopolistic control over the non-fiction market.¹⁰¹ A further appraisal reveals that INCOM practically monopolized an already oligopolistic configuration and started to be regarded as ‘l’unico giornale d’attualità riconosciuto agli effetti della legge’.¹⁰² For almost two decades, the *Settimana INCOM* took the lion’s share of state commissions and prizes allocated for non-fiction productions. Therefore, it became the privileged tool through which the government conveyed ideas of modernization and reconstruction based on Western-capitalist values.¹⁰³

The role INCOM played within the post-war non-fiction market elicits a rather straightforward comparison with the function of the Istituto LUCE during Fascism. Like the Istituto LUCE, INCOM offered the means to represent a specific vision of reality mediated by the government’s gaze. Understanding fully how INCOM built its quasi-monopoly requires us to take a step back to 1938, when it was founded. At this time, the propaganda activities carried out by the Istituto LUCE during the *Ventennio* were anything but broadly and consistently appreciated. This was mostly due to differences between the various branches of the Fascist administration responsible for organizing mass culture.¹⁰⁴ For instance, two of the harshest critics of the LUCE were Luigi Freddi, the head of the cinema section of the Ministero per la Stampa e Propaganda – which in 1937 became the Ministero della Cultura Popolare (MINCULPOP) – and Dino Alfieri (MINCULPOP undersecretary). Both decried the LUCE for its inadequate contribution in conveying

¹⁰⁰ Maria Adelaide Frabotta counts 48 producing houses in 1957, see ‘Il cammino dei cinegiornali’, pp. 176–80.

¹⁰¹ Laura, *Le stagioni dell’aquila*, p. 233; Quaglietti, *Storia economico-politica*, p. 132.

¹⁰² *Bollettino Agis*, 52 (1947), in Quaglietti, *Storia economico-politica*, pp. 127–28.

¹⁰³ Augusto Sainati, ‘Stile e formato dell’informazione “INCOM”’, in *La settimana INCOM*, ed. by Sainati, pp. 25–36 (pp. 27–29).

¹⁰⁴ A significant example of this attitude is the title of Mino Argentieri’s book about the Istituto LUCE, entitled ‘*L’occhio del regime*’, the ‘eye’ of the *regime*. This unambiguous title might induce us to conceive the LUCE as a monolithic and consistent organization; however, Argentieri himself, and more recent contributions, have emphasized criticism toward LUCE’s production arose within the Fascist ‘manufacture of consent’, see Argentieri, *L’occhio del regime*, pp. 46–51; Caprotti, ‘Information management and Fascist identity’, pp. 177–91; on the criticism about LUCE’s production during the imperial phase, see Gianmarco Mancosu, *La LUCE per l’impero. I cinegiornali sull’Africa Orientale Italiana (1935-1942)* (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Cagliari, 2014), pp. 149–55 and pp. 162–89.

propaganda truly driven by Fascist ethos.¹⁰⁵ It is no coincidence that, in 1938, Luigi Freddi supported the journalist and director Sandro Pallavicini in establishing the new INCOM company, whose main aim was to challenge LUCE's monopoly by creating a series of non-fiction films inspired by American footage such as *The March of Times*.¹⁰⁶ However, Mussolini encouraged the draft of a Royal Decree which allowed private companies like INCOM to compete with LUCE exclusively in the production of documentaries. Accordingly, the Istituto LUCE remained the sole producer of newsreels, even though its monopoly started to waver.

The collapse of Fascism dismantled — at least officially — the state monopoly over non-fiction films. In the aftermath of WWII, DC member Teresio Guglielmone, a banker and businessman from Turin, acquired the majority stake in INCOM. He became the president of the company, and the founder Sandro Pallavicini was appointed as chief executive. Guglielmone became a DC senator in 1948, and at that point the connection between INCOM and DC governments became obvious. INCOM consolidated its quasi-monopolistic role in the newsreels' market thanks to the *Settimana INCOM*, a series of 2555 newsreels produced between 1946 and 1964 that might be regarded as the post-Fascist counterpart of the *Giornale LUCE*. The *Settimana INCOM* had a more lively and entertaining style than the LUCE, yet its ideological affinity with the political and economic setting of the DC government was clear. As we shall see especially in chapter 5, the scripts edited by Giacomo Debenedetti and the voice-over by Guido Notari hardly disguised the 'intrinsically authoritarian' essence of films notwithstanding their familiar and occasionally humorous register.¹⁰⁷ The fact that INCOM was able to secure a prominent role in the newly established RAI television broadcast with *Teleincom* and *Cronache dal Mondo* TV news is further evidence of its strong connection with the government.¹⁰⁸

The special relationship between INCOM and the Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri (PCM) was established soon after the adoption of Law 678 (1945), and it is

¹⁰⁵ Several archival records confirm such a critic attitude toward the LUCE, see Rome, Archivio Centrale dello Stato (ACS), Group 'MINCULPOP', box 9, folder 50 'Istituto LUCE', letter sent by the undersecretary Alfieri to Paulucci di Calboli (president of the Istituto LUCE) on 3 April 1939.

¹⁰⁶ Argentieri, *L'occhio del regime*, p. 139; Baratieri, *Memories and Silences*, p. 39.

¹⁰⁷ Augusto Sainati, 'Il visibile e l'udibile. Il commento verbale alla settimana INCOM', *La valle dell'Eden*, 4:1 (2000), 101–11.

¹⁰⁸ Baratieri, *Memories and Silences*, pp. 42–43.

evident in diverse examples. For instance, on January 1946, the head of the *Segreteria Particolare* of PCM Raffaele Pio Petrilli wrote to Giovanni Solari, manager of the *Ferrovie dello Stato*. Petrilli asked for some trucks and jeeps to be dispatched as soon as possible since INCOM needed them to craft and spread ‘un giornale cinematografico del tipo “Giornale LUCE”’.¹⁰⁹ Moreover, the government urged other branches of the administration, such as the *Prefetture* or the Ministry for Trade and Industry to ‘benevolmente esaminare le richieste [...] da parte degli incaricati della società [INCOM]’.¹¹⁰ Also the *Stato Maggiore dell’Aeronautica* was asked to grant the air shipping of INCOM footage, so it could reach the most isolated Italian cities as fast as possible.¹¹¹

The solid relationship between the government and INCOM strengthened during the late 40s and throughout the 50s, and is exemplified in the extensive correspondence between Teresio Guglielmone and the undersecretary for cinema Giulio Andreotti. In 1948, when the Parliament was debating the new law on cinema, Guglielmone sent a note to Andreotti asking him to clarify the situation for companies that produced both newsreels and documentaries, like INCOM. Law 379 (1947) acknowledged the difference between the two formats without specifying the implications of this distinction for state premiums. Guglielmone boldly suggested that state premiums reflect this distinction, making it possible to get the 5% incentive for *both* the newsreel and the documentary projected in a single movie show, rather than the 2.5% permitted by current law.¹¹² Guglielmone’s lobbying certainly influenced the drafting of the subsequent Law 958 (1949), which eventually allowed the aggregation of both incentives and hence tacitly favoured

¹⁰⁹ ACS, Group ‘Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri’ (PCM) 1944-47, box 3412, folder 3.1.10, file 57338 ‘società INCOM (Industria film corto metraggio)’, correspondence between the head of the Particular Secretary at the *Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri* Raffaele Pio Petrilli and Giovanni Solari, manager of the *Ferrovie dello Stato*, 10 January 1946.

¹¹⁰ ACS, PCM 1944-47, 3412, 3.1.10, 57338, letter by Guido Arpesani (the State’s undersecretary at the *Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri*) to the *Prefetture*, 9 February 1946.

¹¹¹ The *Stato Maggiore* agreed and reserved to a load weight of 20kg for INCOM materials in each public flight service. The air transport was addressed to: Genova, Milano, Bologna, Torino, Treviso, Napoli, Bari, Lecce, Palermo, Catania, Cagliari, Alghero, see PCM 1944-47, 3412, 3.1.10, 57338, letter by the head of the Services of the Air High Command Gussoni addressed to INCOM and to the *Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri*, 14 March 1946.

¹¹² The 5% refers to the global film revenues of the feature film with which newsreel and the documentary were paired (3% was the premium for national value granted for all Italian non-fiction films; 2% was the extra premium for ‘exceptional artistic value’).

INCOM.¹¹³ Just to give an idea of the benefits INCOM received from that law, it is worth noting that of the 21 billion lire allocated by the government to companies producing newsreels and documentaries between 1949 and 1955, almost 17 billion lire went to INCOM.¹¹⁴

The Italian geography of media consumption started to change dramatically with the advent of RAI broadcasts in 1954. Since the end of the 50s, the growing possibility to buy a private television for an increasing number of Italians led to a slow yet predictable decline of the non-fiction format, also because the government was increasingly engaged in controlling TV news rather than the film news.¹¹⁵ This structural shift was mirrored in the Law 897 (1956), which for the first time prescribed a reduction of state funding for non-fiction producers. This new legal framework, together with the rapid growth of TV programmes and Sandro Pallavicini's resignation from INCOM all signalled the slow decline of INCOM's monopoly and the end of the newsreel era.

2.9 The ambiguous framework of non-fiction production

The singular relationship INCOM built with the major Italian ruling party suggests that the political and discursive setting of non-fiction films' production inherited by the *Ventennio* was dismantled very slowly. However, too straightforward an analogy between INCOM and the previous activity of LUCE, as asserted by several scholarly interventions, risks underestimating some of the discontinuities in the passage from Fascism to the Republic which surfaced both in the production mechanisms as well as in film contents.¹¹⁶ Pierre Sorlin argues that post-Fascist production was increasingly influenced by the capitalist interests operating during Italian reconstruction (such as the *Confindustria*, FIAT, or agencies related to the Marshall Plan). Some films were even in contrast with Christian Democrat values and quite close to leftist principles: for instance, the *Settimana INCOM*

¹¹³ ACS, PCM 1948-1950, box 3569, folder 1.1.2, file 10949, subfile 84 'Servizio informazioni - spettacolo e proprietà letteraria. Riduzione dal 3% al 2% del contributo governativo ai giornali d'attualità', note by Teresio Guglielmone who reported a meeting he had had with Giulio Andreotti on 15 November 1948.

¹¹⁴ Quaglietti, *Storia economico-politica*, p. 137.

¹¹⁵ Forgacs and Gundle, *Mass Culture and Italian Society*, p. 5; Elena Dagrada, 'Television and its Critics: A Parallel History', in *Italian Cultural Studies*, ed. by Forgacs and Lumley, pp. 233-47 (pp. 243-45); 'RAI – Radiotelevisione Italiana', <<http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/rai-radiotelevisione-italiana/>> [accessed 20 September 2019].

¹¹⁶ Zinni, 'Una lettera', pp. 72-73; Ottaviano, 'Coloniali', pp. 10-14; Baratieri, *Memories and Silences*, pp. 79-92.

80, 81, and 91 praised the land occupation occurring in some areas of Lazio as well as the mass protests against *carovita*. It is likewise undeniable that, while exalting any expansion of Italian productivity, the *Settimana INCOM* indirectly referred to the broader repositioning of post-Fascist Italy within the capitalist-Western political sphere and tried to re-educate Italians accordingly. Furthermore, Sorlin observes that even though INCOM footage about the national economy may have echoed LUCE's propaganda, the former saw the individual as the first beneficiary of progress rather than the *Patria*, as Fascist films did.¹¹⁷

Another striking difference which should be kept in mind while comparing LUCE and INCOM films concerns the different political and cultural setting in which they operated. Though INCOM's attempts monopolize the market were reminiscent of the relationship between the LUCE and the Fascist state, criticism of INCOM's dominance did surface, a point which reveals an evident level of discontinuity with the previous dictatorial setting. Severe disapproval emerged during the discussions about cinema laws. On the occasion of the parliamentary debate about Law 379 (1947), which formalized state support for non-fiction films, the biweekly cine-magazine *Intermezzo* accused the government of blatantly favouring INCOM.¹¹⁸ The Communist senator Clarenzo Menotti lamented that 'la INCOM è nelle mani di un gruppo finanziario [...] e molto spesso questa INCOM presenta agli spettatori una produzione deteriore e [...] volutamente tendenziosa, di propaganda politica di parte'.¹¹⁹ Harsh criticism surfaced also in the aftermath of the adoption of the Law 958 (1949); the journalist of the PCI-sponsored journal *Paese Sera*, Piero Crosetti, decried the unbalanced distribution of resources which favoured INCOM, arguing that the new law was pushing toward the production of 'documentari

¹¹⁷ 'Problemi del giorno. Occupazione di terre incolte', *Settimana INCOM* 80 (INCOM, 24 September 1947); 'Lotta al carovita. Manifestazioni di protesta', *Settimana INCOM* 81 (INCOM, 26 September 1947); 'La lotta contro il carovita ondata di ribasso', *Settimana INCOM* 91 (INCOM, 31 October 1947). Pierre Sorlin, 'La Settimana INCOM messaggera del futuro', in *La Settimana INCOM. Cinegiornali e informazione negli anni '50*, ed. by Sainati, pp. 71–77 (pp. 72–73).

¹¹⁸ In 1952, the Socialist MP Egidio Ariosto wrote a newspaper article in the journal *L'Araldo dello spettacolo* which accused some big companies (especially Edelweiss and INCOM) of 'cannibalism' toward the smaller companies. Ariosto argued that it was extremely hard for small companies to find feature-film distributors willing to pair their non-fiction films with the most successful movies. The situation forced small companies to sell their documentaries to big producers. The big studios, which bought such films at a relatively low price, later received significant financial premiums as promised by the law, see Quaglietti, *Storia economico-politica*, pp. 132–35.

¹¹⁹ *Atti Parlamentari. Senato della Repubblica. Discussioni 1948-1950*, vol. 17, session DXXXVIII, 20982, cited by Frabotta, 'Il cammino dei cinegiornali', p. 182.

insignificanti' without any artistic value, since shrewd companies aimed to obtain state funding only.¹²⁰

The majority of criticism against INCOM quasi-monopoly arose from the left-wing milieu, ignited by the debate between DC and PCI, as Florestano Vancini reveals:

Si trattava di un tipo d'informazione molto 'parziale' perché esercitava o la reticenza o addirittura il silenzio completo su certi fatti, o la deformazione. Recentemente ho avuto modo di rivedere una serie di vecchi cinegiornali INCOM di quegli anni e ho notato che si trovano anche certe cose, ma a anni di distanza, forse mentre vivevamo non ci rendevamo, ma sì, ci rendevamo perfettamente conto di quanto erano così deformanti, deformate e deformanti questo tipo di queste informazioni che venivano date.¹²¹

What is striking here is not as much the mystification of reality attributed to INCOM, but the hesitation concerning the level of awareness of that mystification ('forse mentre vivevamo non ci rendevamo, ma sì, ci rendevamo perfettamente conto...'). Therefore, even though INCOM thrived between the ambiguous function of *documentare* and *documentire* as the previous LUCE production did, the shifting context started to allow a still feeble, yet inexorable, questioning of the persistence of state-propaganda mechanisms.¹²²

Criticism of these mechanisms of state control was not exclusively related to the 'physiologic' debate between DC and PCI. INCOM's quasi-monopolistic position also jarred with the new configuration of the Italian film market supported by the *Governi d'unità nazionale*.¹²³ This paradoxical situation stands out in a letter from Pallavicini to the Head of the *Segreteria Particolare* at the PCM, Raffaele Pio Petrilli, in which he asks whether the government could oblige a private company (the Ferrania) to donate celluloid to produce INCOM films (pictures 4 and 5).¹²⁴

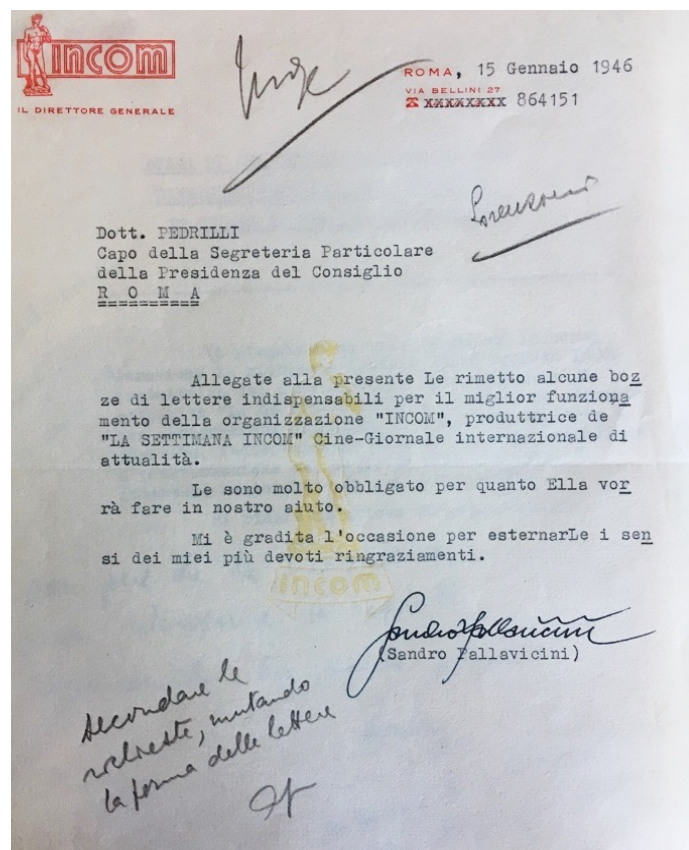
¹²⁰ ASILS-AGA, Cinema, 1071, file 5.5 'Nuova legge documentari e cortometraggi', newspaper article by Piero Corsetti, 'L'assurdo regna nel campo dei documentari', *Il Paese sera*, 6 November 1951.

¹²¹ AAMOD, 'Attività Istituzionale Esterna - Attività Progettuali - Progetti 1', 16, 'Le cineattualità realizzate dalle sinistre nell'Italia del dopoguerra. Vol + videointervista di Stefano Masi', 'Testimonianze per il cinema di documentazione politico - sociale', interview to Florestano Vancini (1982).

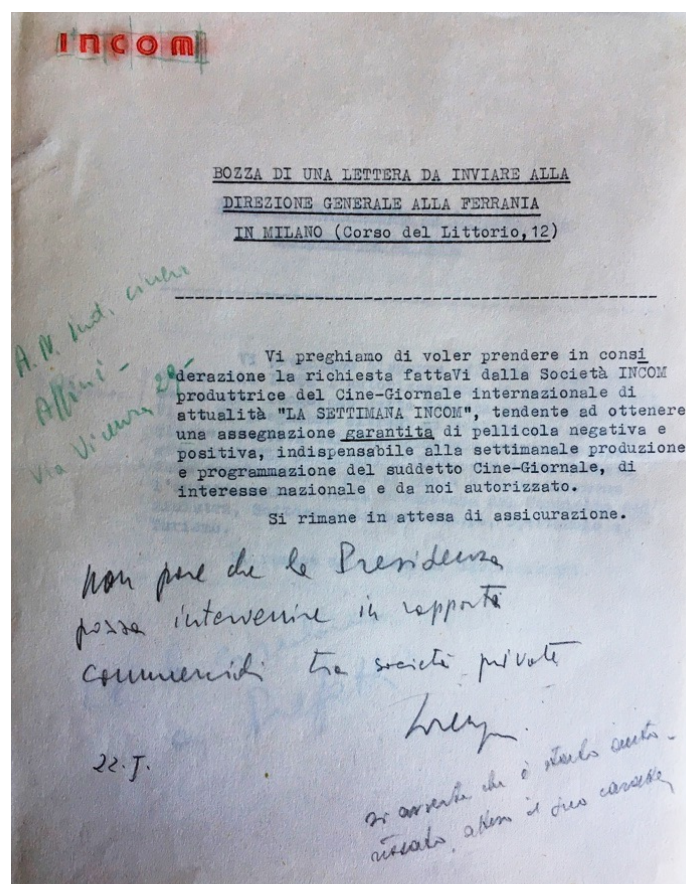
¹²² Pietro Craveri, 'Il cinegiornale dell'età degasperiana', in *La Settimana INCOM*, ed. by Sainati, pp. 133–41.

¹²³ Laura, *Le stagioni dell'aquila*, p. 231–33.

¹²⁴ Even if the document is addressed to 'Dott. Petrilli', at that time the Head of the *Segreteria Particolare* at the PCM was Raffaele Pio Petrilli. It is very likely that Pallavicini made a mistake in writing the surname.



Picture 4: Sandro Pallavicini to the PCM, 15 January 1946



Picture 5: Sandro Pallavicini to the PCM, 15 January 1946

It is interesting to notice that an initial pencil note states that ‘non pare che la Presidenza possa intervenire in rapporti commerciali tra società private’, indicating the establishment of a free relationship among private companies. Despite that first rejection, a subsequent pencil note in the bottom-right corner of the document (picture 5) states ‘si avverta che è stato autorizzato [...]’.¹²⁵ Such indecision and the final acceptance of INCOM’s request exemplifies the cross-institutional uncertainty surrounding the passage from a state-controlled system to a private and ostensibly free one, an ambiguity which is even more accentuated while looking at the production of non-fiction films about the loss of the Italian colonies.

2.10 Crafting films on decolonization

The films about Italian decolonization were newsreels and documentaries dealing with diverse topics such the international decisions about Libya, Eritrea, Somalia; the Italian communities still living those countries; the new diplomatic relationship with Ethiopia; the Italian Trusteeship in Somalia. The topic of decolonization was almost monopolized by INCOM footage, even though some other actors, either private or public, were involved. For instance, some of the archival findings analysed in this section — which reveal the direct involvement of the Italian government in the production of decolonial footage — were produced by the Ministero dell’Africa Italiana (MAI), the former colonial office which was dismantled only in 1953, several years after the formal end of Italian colonialism.

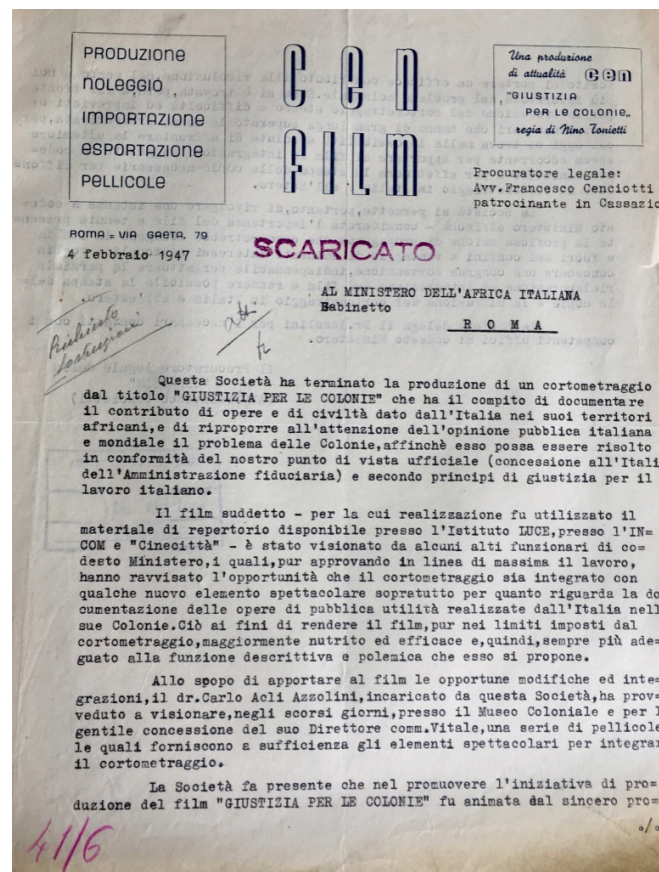
The institutional framework explored above enabled the government to influence the non-fiction film market directly and indirectly. As far as the footage about the former colonies is concerned, two distinct trends can be observed. On the one hand, the PCM, but also the MAE and the MAI commissioned and encouraged private film companies to produce single titles or film series consistent with government aims. This is the case, for instance, of some documentaries by OPUS about the Italian trusteeship in Somalia directed by Giorgio Moser and Adriano Zancanella, which were shot under the auspices of the *Istituto italiano per l’Africa* (IsIAO) and by the AFIS, as their opening titles indicate.¹²⁶

¹²⁵ ACS, PCM 1944-47, 3412, 3.1.10, 57338, correspondence between Sandro Pallavicini and the Head of the Particular Secretary of the Presidency of the Council of Ministries, Raffaele Pio Petrilli, 15 January 1946.

¹²⁶ Those films will be analysed in chapter 6.

Such a pattern might be regarded as *centrifugal* insofar as production's input was triggered from the core of state institutions toward formally independent studios.

On the other hand, *centripetal* dynamics might better describe the private companies' efforts to obtain state funding and protection via a film production which was attuned to the government agenda for decolonial themes. The history of the documentary *Giustizia per le colonie* exemplify such a centripetal tendency. In February 1947, the CEN FILM company used Istituto LUCE footage to craft *Giustizia per le colonie*. The documentary was previewed to MAI delegates, who suggested amendments that would make the footage more effective in supporting the claims over former colonies (picture 6).¹²⁷

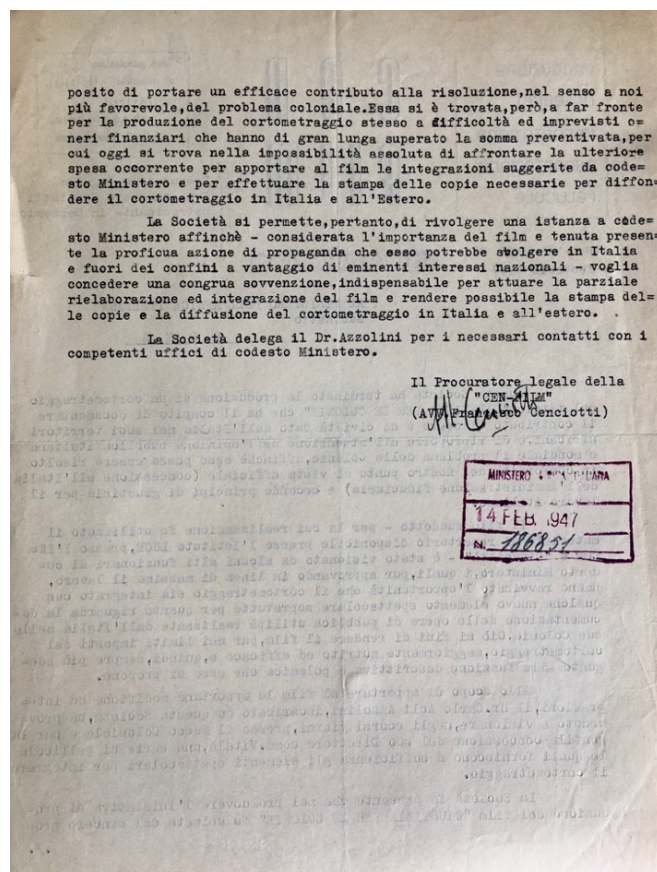


Picture 6: Francesco Cenciotti to the MAI, 4 February 1947

According to CEN's legal advisor, Francesco Cenciotti, these amendments, together with the correction of some small faults, would make the finalization of the film too expensive.

¹²⁷ ACS, group 'Ministero Africa Italiana', box 67 'Rapporti con la stampa italiana ed estera 1945-1967', folder 4 'Stampa italiana e film. Sovvenzioni varie', letter by CEN's legal representative Francesco Cenciotti to the Ministry of *Africa Italiana*, 4 February 1947.

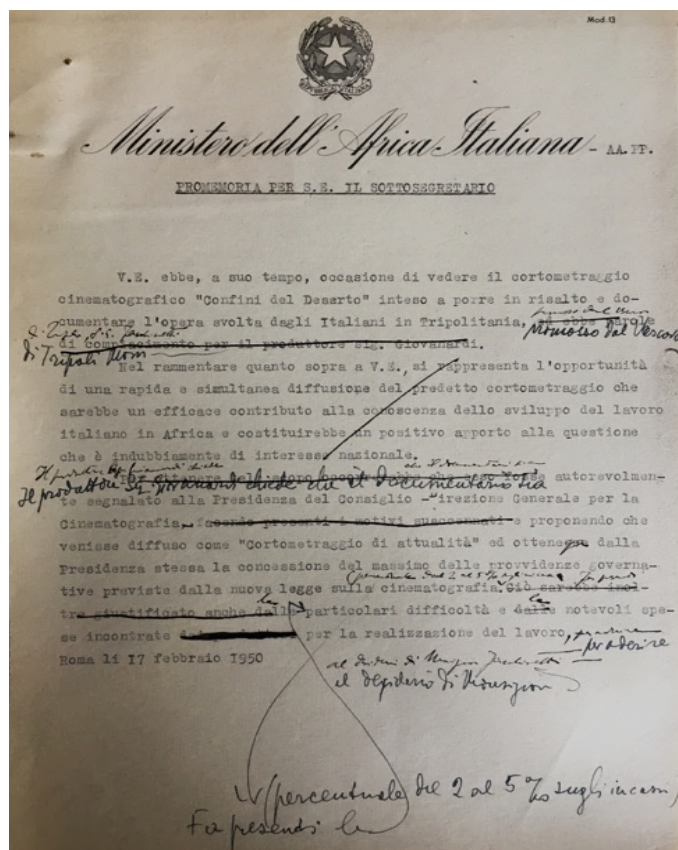
He requested a financial subvention on account of the ‘importanza del film e tenuta presente la proficua azione di propaganda che esso potrebbe svolgere in Italia e fuori dai confini nazionali’ (picture 7).



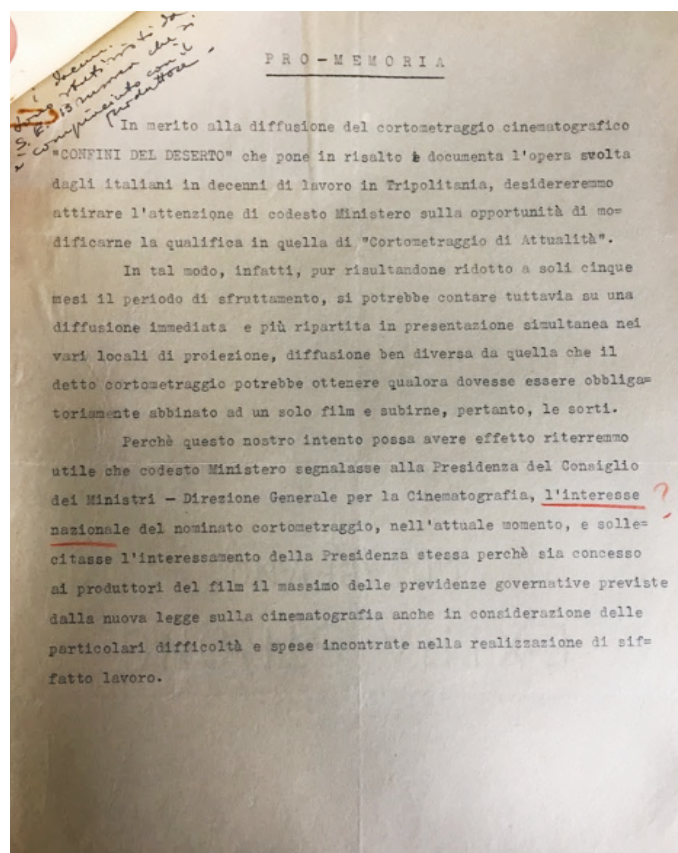
Picture 7: Francesco Cenciotti to the MAI, 4 February 1947

In 1950, the producer Giovanardi was promoting a documentary entitled *Confini del deserto* about Italian activities in Libya. Giovanardi wrote to the MAI, which in turn addressed the *Direzione Generale per la Cinematografia* (PCM), explicitly requesting that *Confini del deserto* receive the maximum premium prescribed by Law 958 (1949), that is 5% of global revenues of the feature film it would be shown with. The archival documents show a rather interesting feature: the initial request by Giovanardi was quite heavily edited by the MAI personnel, who emphasized that the Bishop of Tripoli (Facchinetti) supported the film, and the opportunity to refer to the footage as a ‘cortometraggio d’attualità’, so as to obtain the maximum premium (pictures 8 and 9).¹²⁸

¹²⁸ ACS, MAI, 67, folder 41/9 ‘Propaganda Cinematografica’, file ‘Cortometraggio cinematografico “Confini del deserto” del vicariato apostolico della Tripolitania’, documents produced by the MAI to be sent to the General Direction for Cinema at the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, 17 and 24 February 1950.



Picture 8: Documentary 'Confini del deserto', February 1950



Picture 9: Documentary 'Confini del deserto', February 1950

Both *Giustizia per le colonie* and *Confini del deserto* are revealing of the indirect and hegemonic control the state exerted upon private companies, which were attracted by the prospect of gaining public money and tailored their production accordingly. Such a centripetal dynamic was strictly connected with the centrifugal activity through which Italian governments managed cultural products about the former colonies by using private as well as public tools and actors.

The affair of the documentary *Lavoro italiano in Africa* reveals more clearly the complex entanglement between centripetal and centrifugal patterns of decolonial films' production. In 1947, the *Associazione per le imprese italiane in Africa* sponsored a documentary praising the beneficial impact of Italy in Africa during the colonial past.¹²⁹ *Lavoro italiano in Africa* was distributed in Italy by Generalcine. However, its screening was forbidden in the free territory of Trieste by the Allied Military Government that was controlling that area. Unfortunately, the files do not mention the reasons why the screening was forbidden, but the correspondence between Generalcine and the MAI is significant in that it evidences the close connection between private and public actors while crafting films supporting pro-colonial discourses.

Lavoro Italiano in Africa received a positive response from the pro-colonial milieu. Some records issued in the following years prove that even the Ministero degli Esteri and some diplomatic missions abroad used the footage to promote Italian claims over the former colonies. For instance, it was projected in New York in September 1949, and General Consul Mazio arranged its English dubbing.¹³⁰ Furthermore, the Swiss journalist Hans Leuenberger, who had also directed a documentary set in Eritrea and Ethiopia, requested a copy of the movie to be screened in Switzerland together with his own documentary.¹³¹ This transnational and even 'trans-institutional' diffusion of *Lavoro Italiano in Africa* epitomizes the combination of centripetal and centrifugal patterns characterizing the production of non-fiction films about decolonial topics. The company

¹²⁹ ACS, MAI, 67, 41/9, telegram n. 91246, 23 May 1947, sent by the *Associazione per le imprese italiane in Africa* to the MAI, with attached the note in which the Allied Military Government refused to authorize the screening (on 14 May 1947).

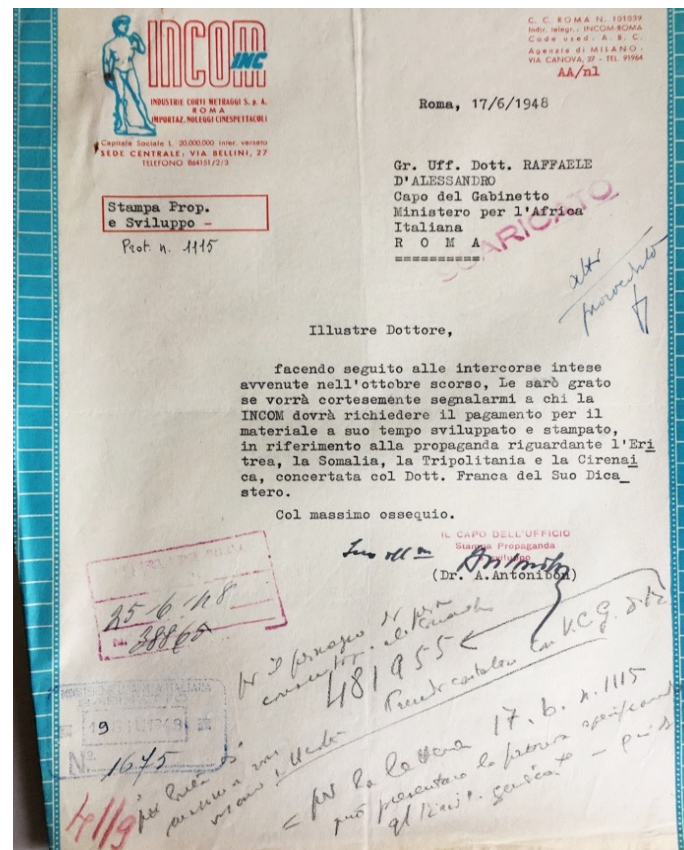
¹³⁰ Archivio Storico-Diplomatico del Ministero degli Affari Esteri (MAE), group 'Affari Politici 1946-1950', box 80 'Italia/Ex-possedimenti', folder 1 'Stampa e propaganda sulla questione coloniale', telegram by the Italian Consul General in New York to the MAE (24 September 1949), then forwarded to the MAI.

¹³¹ MAE, Affari Politici 1946-1950, 80, 1, file n. 4502, 4 November 1949. Telegrams n. 3/5092 - 3/5096 (15 November 1949), through which the MAE agreed in giving a complimentary copy of the film to Leuenberger.

that funded the documentary sought MAI's support in order to screen the film without restrictions, and the film was then used by the MAI and the MAE for their own purposes.

2.11 State-led propaganda: Active efforts and growing criticism

One of the activities that both the MAE and the MAI carried out concerning decolonial themes was to map out and orient the occasions in which films, books, and newspapers dealt with the destiny of the former colonies and of the Italian communities which still lived there. A significant document reveals that the MAI was paying INCOM for shooting and editing propaganda-like footage about decolonial themes to be spread among the Italian audience (picture 10). In June 1948, a member of INCOM urged the MAI's *capo di gabinetto* to indicate who would pay for propaganda films as agreed in October 1947.¹³²

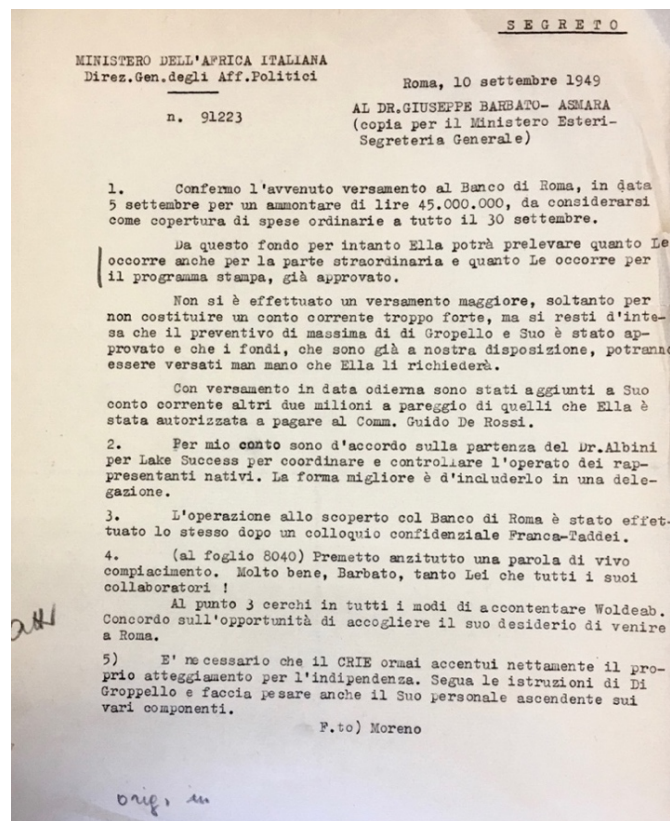


Picture 10: INCOM asking the MAI the payment for propaganda films

State-led activity promoting a certain vision of the decolonial issues was not limited to fostering film production; the government supervised a vast array of cultural products such

¹³² ACS, MAI, 67, 41/9, letter n. 1115 sent by Antonibon (the head of INCOM office for press, propaganda, and film developing services) to the *capo di gabinetto* at the MAE Raffaele D'Alessandro, 17 June 1948.

as books, newspapers, and conferences which addressed the national community, Italian communities abroad and Italians who were still living in the former colonies. For instance, on 26 August 1949, the Italian embassy in Asmara urged the MAE to send some newspapers (such as *Italiani nel mondo*, *Affrica*, *La Rivista INCOM*, *L'Europeo*) able to 'orient' Italian public opinion abroad.¹³³ A more daring and substantial effort was approved in 1949, when the MAI secretly authorized the payment of 45.000.000 lire for propaganda purposes to Giuseppe Barbato, who was the director of the journals *Eritrea Nuova* and *Lunedì del Medio Oriente*, and who coordinated the activity of a semi-clandestine association — the *Comitato Rappresentativo Italiani in Eritrea* (CRIE) — aiming to shape Eritrean public opinion (picture 11).¹³⁴



Picture 11: Public funding for propaganda purposes in Eritrea

¹³³ MAE, Affari Politici 1946-1950, box 104 'Italia/Ex-possedimenti', folder 3 'Stampa e servizi radiotelegrafici', telegram n. 3/3548/6 sent by the secretariat of the MAE to the MAI, 3 September 1949.

¹³⁴ MAE, Affari Politici 1946-1950, 104, 3, letter n. 90931 (18 August 1949) and n. 91223 (10 September 1949) sent by the *direttore generale degli affari politici* at the MAI Moreno to Giuseppe Barbato. The pro-independence attitude of the association mentioned in point 5 (the *Comitato Rappresentativo Italiani in Eritrea* or CRIE) was a result of the diplomatic U-turn of Italy, which in 1949 decided to support the independence of Libya and Somalia, see chapter 1, section 1.1 and 1.2 (pp. 27–33). On Italian associationism in post-war Eritrea, see Tekeste Negash, 'Italy and its Relations with Eritrean Political Parties, 1948-1950', *Africa*, 59:3/4 (2004), 417–52 (pp. 420–21).

The MAI was also considering the feasibility of directly producing a newspaper able to ‘svolgere un’opera sana di orientamento dell’opinione pubblica’. It should appear ‘apolitico, non avere carattere ufficioso’ so as to surreptitiously persuade national and foreign audiences of the good intentions of Italy in Africa.¹³⁵

Though such propagandistic attempts and projects by the MAE and the MAI aimed to influence public opinion about Italy’s role in the former colonies, they did not reap the desired results. Criticism regarding these propaganda attempts surfaced on many occasions, both in Italy and in Africa. For instance, in 1950 an article appeared in the Libyan newspaper *Ṭarābulus al-Gharb* condemning the fact that cinema owners in Tripoli, who for the greatest part were not Libyans, were importing mainly Italian films. The journalist thus lamented that foreign interferences were still playing a decisive role in post-colonial Libya.¹³⁶ The growing disapproval concerning pro-colonial discourses surfaced also within the peninsula, specifically targeting the activity of the Ministero dell’Africa Italiana. In November 1947, the *Giornale dell’Emilia* criticized the squandering of state resources to keep the MAI alive, which was deemed as no longer useful to post-Fascist Italy. Curiously enough, however, the article does not say a word about the thinly veiled neo-colonial ambitions the government were pursuing in the former colonies. However, even more interesting is the response of Francesco Massei degli Astanti (the head of the MAI’s *Direzione degli affari politici*):

l’articolista ben conosce quali lotte vengano effettuate perché le nostre ex colonie ci vengano conservate. Una semplicissima domanda: se il Ministero dovesse essere sciolto [...] le nostre vecchie colonie chi le amministrerebbe? L’autore dell’articolo?¹³⁷

Such a disparaging rhetorical question is revealing of the mindset that characterized MAI’s personnel and, broadly speaking, the attempts by the government to play a hegemonic role in former colonies. Though the Fascist colonial presence was repealed, or rather concealed, and forms of cooperation, trusteeship, and independence were ostensibly encouraged, the latent rationale still did not accept the possibility that former colonies could rule

¹³⁵ ACS, MAI, 67, folder 41/2 ‘Stampa italiana’, proposal for the publication of a newspaper funded by the MAI.

¹³⁶ MAE, Affari Politici 1946-1950, box 92 ‘Italia/Ex-possedimenti’, folder 2 ‘Stampa e propaganda’, telegram n. 1932/1004 sent by to the Italian embassy in Libya to the MAE, 29 September 1950.

¹³⁷ ACS, MAI, 67, 41/2, document n. 7804, 26 November 1947, which refers to an article published in the ‘Giornale dell’Emilia’ on 20 November 1947.

themselves independently. Moreover, the mechanisms of cultural production in-between private and public initiatives mirrored the ambiguous transition from Fascist propaganda to new methods and approaches of state intervention in the cultural and social fields. As far as decolonization is concerned, it is irrefutable that those modalities were still laden with Fascist debris. Nevertheless, it is likewise evident that post-war environment started to offer more opportunities for the criticism of such debris or — more frequently — the potential for it to be transfigured in the construction of post-Fascist Italy.

The political and social framework in which decolonial footage was crafted reveals not simply an ambiguity in the material production of films. Rather, it elucidates the process according to which the colonial past acquired specific and often-contradictory meanings in relation to the redefinition of national identity. Even though the political discourse was increasingly willing to support forms of trusteeship and independence, the documents analysed in this chapter, and the following analysis, demonstrate that film tropes and narratives re-articulated previous colonial discourses, by adapting them to the difficult transition from Fascism to the Republic.

3. Liminality and Decolonization.

Composing Post-Colonial Italy

*Dove meno si poteva sperarlo, le sabbie si sono messe a fiorire.
Questa storia di un miracolo umano è offerta, simbolo, e testimonianza a tutti i pionieri e
colonialisti che in Libia, superando ogni sorta di avversità, hanno appoderato 225000 ettari in
pieno deserto, 5800 costruito case coloniche [...] valgono le seguenti immagini a illustrarne il significato.*

This lyrical opening scroll could have been the overture to any film about the colonies produced in the 30s, during the Fascist imperial momentum. This mainly for its religious nuance, in that the faith of Italians is described as strong enough to overcome any difficulty, even to make the desert bloom. Despite the resemblance to Fascist discourses, this commentary features in a documentary entitled *Dal deserto alla vita* produced in 1951, about the supposedly positive impact of the presence of Italy in Libya.¹ This documentary lays specific emphasis on the relationship between the alleged qualities of former colonizers and the African soil, which continues to bear fruits because some Italians are still living and working there. This rhetorical device lent itself to use well beyond the colonial phase. The indelible impact of Italians in Africa was one of the most exploited arguments through which the governments tried to claim a new role in those countries that, until a few years before, were part of its empire.²

The relationship between (former) metropolis and (former) colonies in the transition from Fascism to the Republic was portrayed as happening in a deterritorialized and suspended space of belonging (that is, the countries which comprised the former empire); this space was conceived of as a stage in which to represent Italian qualities as untouched by the Fascist parenthesis. Accordingly, this chapter uses the collapse of the Fascist imperial structure and the rebuilding of Italy following WWII as a vantage point to

¹ *Dal deserto alla vita*, dir. by Raimondo Musu (Documentari INCOM, 1951).

² Alessandro Pes, 'Coloni senza colonie. La Democrazia Cristiana e la decolonizzazione mancata', in *Quel che resta dell'impero. La cultura coloniale degli italiani*, ed. by Valeria Deplano and Alessandro Pes (Milan: Mimesis, 2014), pp. 417–37.

observe how the shifting relationship between territory, homeland, and national belonging was moulded, reworked, and represented according to new political and cultural stances.

Newsreels and documentaries about the Italian presence in former colonies dealt with the borders of Italy not as much in geographical or political terms. Rather, they refashioned the space and the boundaries of *Italianità* internally — in order to reconnect the fractured Italian society — and externally, to re-envision the position of post-Fascist Italy within the developing Cold War system. The intersection of time (post-Fascism, post-colonialism) and space (the Cold War polarization, the former colonial space, the Mediterranean Sea) alludes to the uncertain and contradictory position of Italy in the world. This chapter will deal with two specific sets of contradictions. Firstly, the paradoxical coexistence of the attempt to disentangle the nation from the Fascist/imperial past while trying to maintain a deterritorialized form of influence in Africa. Secondly, Italy's re-articulation of the colonial discourse according to which former subjects still needed Western support and guidance to be emancipated from backwardness and barbarism.

The uncertain position of Italy within the geography of Western modernity, and the suspended status of a nation which wanted to erase its recent Fascist past while preserving its influence in Africa, will be addressed through the concept of liminality, both in its anthropological and in its critical understanding. Anthropologists, cultural theorists, and psychologists have mobilised this concept to describe rites of passage, postcolonial interactions, individual as well as social transitions, and the uncertain definition of physical and social boundaries. I will first tackle the representations of the temporal transition toward democracy and Italy's attempt to re-join the 'civilized' world by claiming a deterritorialized form of sovereignty in former colonies. The original anthropological elaboration of liminality will be used to address the representations of the transition from a colonial to a post-colonial setting of Italian identity, which embraces a chronological as well as spatial element.

The implication of the notion of liminality as the transitory status betwixt two phases will take into account not simply the socio-political and historical results of the decolonial passage. Rather, it will expose to what extent the reconfiguration of the relationship between formerly colonized people and former colonizers could reproduce colonial discourses or stimulate discursive spaces to undermine them. Accordingly, the second part of this chapter will deal with the notion of liminality by exploring its 'creative'

potential to undermine the previous colonial setting and episteme, following Homi Bhabha's influential reflections.³

The entanglement of liminal times and spaces pertaining to the discourse of national identity materializes in the relationship between the story the footage recounts and the spatiality the images refer to. This chapter will therefore pay attention to the extent to which documentaries and newsreels enact their arguments through the visual arrangement of the filmed space, and through the elements within the scenes. *Mise-en-scène* and composition will be brought to the fore in order to assess how the films inscribe 'traditional stories and emotions into images' by establishing a 'relation with the world' they wanted to create.⁴ The focus on composition, on the use of light and objects in the shot, on camera-angles will disclose the uncertain transition from a colonial toward a postcolonial context insofar as the spaces filmed were still informed by narratives of racial difference and by the self-definition of former colonizers according to colonial discourses.⁵

3.1 The end of empires: Liminal institutions and liminal belongings

In its original Latin meaning, *limen* means 'threshold', a word which implies entering, leaving, passages, crossing, and change.⁶ Individual and social lives are constantly characterized by interconnecting forms of in-betweenness, which frame the perception of time and space in which subjectivities and collective identities perform. Therefore, in keeping with Bjørn Thomassen's line of reasoning, liminality might be primarily understood as a very simple and universal concept which addresses 'how human beings, in their various social and cultural contexts, deal with change'.⁷

According to Arnold Van Gennep, any rite of passage is characterized by a pre-ritual stage, followed by a suspended condition which leads to the new status.⁸ Such an

³ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

⁴ Jaques Rancière, 'The Gaps of Cinema', *NECSUS*, 1:1 (2012) <<https://necsus-ejms.org/the-gaps-of-cinema-by-jacques-ranciere/>> [accessed 23 September 2018].

⁵ Richard Butsch, *Screen Culture: A Global History* (Cambridge: Polity, 2019), pp. 60–73 and pp. 125–29.

⁶ Arup Ratan Chakraborty, 'Liminality in Post-Colonial Theory: A Journey from Arnold van Gennep to Homi K. Bhabha', *AIJSS – Anudhyan. International Journal of Social Sciences*, 1:1 (2016), 145–53.

⁷ Bjørn Thomassen, 'Thinking with Liminality. To the Boundaries of an Anthropological Concept', in *Breaking Boundaries: Varieties of Liminality*, ed. by Agnes Horvath, Bjørn Thomassen, Harald Wydra (New York: Berghahn Books, 2015), pp. 39–58 (p. 40).

⁸ Arnold Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, trans. by Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1960).

essential understanding has lent itself to use in diverse critical approaches insofar as it explores the ways in which people, societies, and cultures experience borders, transitions, ‘societal-level crisis situations, structural transformations of institutionalised orders, and the constitution of political identities’.⁹ Liminality therefore assumes that social and political practices and discourses do not always fit in neat interpretative patterns. This concept thus offers a fertile theoretical framework to analyse not simply the passage from a status to another, but to illuminate the very nature of that transition; that uncertain yet creative moment able to expose the nature and the significance of the ordering principles of human existence and societies.¹⁰

The indeterminateness proper to any transitional status is especially accentuated in moments like the decolonization processes which occurred in the aftermath of WWII. The effect of the World Wars and the increasing role of anticolonial movements affected the very nature of modern empires, their unity as well as its territorial integrity. The end of WWI led to the collapse of ‘old’ imperial powers (the Ottoman, German, Russian, Austro-Hungarian Empires) while other nation-states such as Great Britain, France, Japan, and the United States strengthened their influence in terms of political and economic control over overseas territories.¹¹ Approximately thirty years later, large empires such as that of the United Kingdom and France started to face uprisings as their colonial subjects called for independence.

The passage from colonialism to independence was seldom clearly organized; it was more often characterized by various forms of resistance to colonial institutions (by former subjects) or to decolonial processes (by former settlers). Furthermore, as Hardt and Negri illustrate, both former colonies and former metropolitan centres ‘found themselves stymied by the bipolar divide between the United States and the Soviet Union’. The developing Cold War divide, together with supranational organizations and forums (United Nations, European Economic Community, the Bandung Conference, the African

⁹ Jason Dittmer and Fiona McConnell, ‘Liminality and the Diplomacy of the British Oversea Territories: An Assemblage Approach’, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 36:1 (2018), 139–58 (p. 142); Fiona McConnell, ‘Liminal Geopolitics: The Subjectivity and Spatiality of Diplomacy at the Margins’, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 42:1 (2017), 139–52; Agnes Horvath, ‘Liminality and the Unreal Class of the Image-Making Craft: An Essay on Political Alchemy’, *International Political Anthropology*, 2 (2009), 51–73.

¹⁰ Arpad Szokolczai, ‘Living Permanent Liminality: The Recent Transition Experience in Ireland’, *Irish Journal of Sociology*, 22:1 (2014), 28–50 (p. 33).

¹¹ Eric J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes. The Short Twentieth Century, 1914–1991* (London: Abacus, 1994), pp. 267–94.

Union), consolidated deterritorialized forms of sovereignty and a global system in which single nation-states could be no longer regarded as the principal actors of international politics.¹² As a result, categories like ‘nation-state’ as a homogeneous entity and ‘empire’ as a multi-ethnic patchwork were reconfigured into an intricate system: concessions, forms of trusteeship, post-imperial communities, development cooperation are all examples of liminal forms of management of the post-colonial political power that corresponded neither to the imperial setting nor to the nation-state configuration.¹³

Italian decolonization, too, happened in the midst of such a global re-arrangement: the country was in a peculiar geo-political position, caught in-between the rising Cold War polarization as well as betwixt the metaphorical threshold separating European metropolitan centres and some of their soon-to-be former colonies. In political terms, the influence of the US (and the money of the Marshall plan) swayed the nation toward the Atlantic sphere of influence, even though Italy’s Communist Party was the biggest operating beyond the Iron Curtain.¹⁴ Moreover, as seen in chapter 1, the traumatic transition from Fascism to the Republic and the forced renunciation of Italy’s colonial possessions made the Italian political position regarding decolonization even more fluid and ambiguous.¹⁵

The cultural results of such a convoluted political and cultural repositioning engendered a liminal geography of national belonging, which vacillated between nostalgia for the past, the need to envision a new national future, and the will to play a pivotal role in the Mediterranean basin. These themes pervade the whole corpus of decolonial footage. The films systematically revisited the colonial past by transmuting it into a narrative able to re-anchor the meanings of Italian identity diachronically, in which the ‘contingency of the present is countered by a search for roots in the past’ and synchronically, in relation to the position of Italy in the Western world.¹⁶ Therefore, the concept of liminality may

¹² Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), p. 245.

¹³ Maria Mälksoo, ‘The Challenge of Liminality for International Relations Theory’, *Review of International Studies*, 38:2 (2012), 481–94; Peter Clegg, ‘Governing the UK Caribbean Overseas Territories: A Two-Way Perspective’, in *Governance in the Non-independent Caribbean*, ed. by Peter Clegg and Emilio Pantojas-Garcia (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2009), pp. 3–23.

¹⁴ Antonio Varsori, ‘La dimensione internazionale della transizione postbellica in Italia (1943-1949)’, *Il politico*, 82:3 (2017), 124–59 (pp. 128–39).

¹⁵ Laura Pastorelli, ‘Una precoce decolonizzazione: stampa e ambienti coloniali italiani nel secondo dopoguerra (1945–1949)’, *Studi Piacentini*, 28 (2000), 65–95.

¹⁶ Rosario Forlenza and Bjørn Thomassen, *Italian Modernities. Competing Narratives of Nationhood* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), p. 13.

convincingly explore the entanglement between the diachronic and synchronic rephrasing of the film vocabulary of the Italian presence in Africa.

3.2 A complicated decolonial transition: *Séparation, marge, agrégation*

The entanglement of historical happenings with the representations of post-colonial identities requires us to revisit the basic anthropological definition of liminality provided by Arnold Van Gennep. In his ground-breaking study, Van Gennep maintains that liminality is the ambiguous middle stage proper to any rite of passage, where participants have already left their pre-ritual status, but they have not reached yet the post-ritual condition. Any initiation practice is roughly characterized by three stages: the *séparation* from a pre-ritual stage, followed by truly a liminal condition (*marge*/transition), and finally the *agrégation* of the initiate into the new status.¹⁷

Victor Turner has further expanded Van Gennep's analytical framework by encompassing much larger societies and practices in which intersecting liminal conditions operate. To a certain extent, Turner's elaboration points back to the very literal meaning of liminality by exposing its ubiquity in modern societies as well as its creative power. As such, Turner helps unshackle the concept from the disciplinary boundaries which might constrain its use, enabling its employment in relation to different transitory moments. Italian decolonization can be therefore appraised as one of several liminal happenings which allowed the 'creative' re-envisioning of national qualities and belonging.¹⁸

Narratives about the past, present, and future presence of Italy in Africa were often intertwined in these films. Accordingly, the three-phase passage to which both Van Gennep and Turner refer is a useful tool for systematically analysing the decolonial footage. The *séparation* will reveal how the colonial past, and especially the Fascist phase, was either erased or selectively reworked in order to be inserted, via the liminal *marge*, to the final stage of *agrégation* that is the new course of Italian history. Such an approach is able to highlight the hidden threads connecting these films, which were quite diverse in terms of contents, style, and narrative. As a further methodological precaution, it is important to note that the tripartite structure is often reduplicated in the transitional period

¹⁷ Thomassen, 'Thinking with Liminality', pp. 42–44; Chakraborty, 'Liminality in Post-Colonial Theory', pp. 147–49.

¹⁸ Victor Turner, 'Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in *Rites de Passage*,' in *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*, ed. by Victor Turner (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967), pp. 93–111.

itself;¹⁹ within the liminal moment, some institutionalised passages might arise, and *séparation*, *marge*, and *agrégation* are best understood as protean categories, especially when looking at the entangled forms of liminality Italy was caught in during the post-war and post-colonial transitions.

The liminal condition of Italy in relation to the decisions about its former empire surfaces clearly in the films about the Paris Peace Conference.²⁰ The newsreel *A Parigi si tiene la Conferenza che decide la sorte dei possedimenti italiani in Africa. Visita di Brusasca al Museo Coloniale di Roma*, aired in 1948, offers a clear example of how decolonial footage tried to eliminate the Fascist imperial past while emphasising the enduring relationship with the former colonies.²¹ The first scenes are shot in Paris, where the foreign ministers of the victorious powers are determining the destiny of the Italian colonies. The commentary promptly highlights that their decision will not favour Italy's claims. Interior shots with low lighting and close-ups of the serious faces of foreign secretaries are recurring elements in the films about the Conference. Such an austere composition conveys a sense of helplessness in the face of the decisions by the victorious countries.

The atmosphere is suddenly dissolved with a rather violent cut bringing the audience to the *Museo Coloniale* in Rome. The pace of the voice-over is quicker, and it comments that Giuseppe Brusasca — the Italian undersecretary for Foreign Affairs who played a major role in managing the decolonial issues — is happy to show to the international audience the achievements and the civilizing work of Italians in 'their' colonies. The camera moves closer to photographs of Italian explorers, colonial relics, and wooden models of old Roman monuments present in Libya as well as pictures portraying roads, bridges, and buildings erected during colonization. All these objects invade the space filmed, overwhelming the audience. In so doing, they champion the rhetoric of the

¹⁹ Thomassen, 'Thinking with Liminality', p. 43.

²⁰ 'Meridiano d'Europa. Palazzo del Lussemburgo: la conferenza di Parigi e l'intervento di De Gasperi. Vedute della costa occidentale istriana con le sue pittoresche cittadine', *Notiziario Nuova LUCE* 18 (Istituto LUCE, 1946); 'La conferenza della pace', *Settimana INCOM* 19 (INCOM, 14 August 1946); 'La delegazione italiana firma i protocolli di intesa degli accordi raggiunti al termine della Conferenza della Pace di Parigi', *Settimana INCOM* 47 (INCOM, 27 February 1947).

²¹ 'A Parigi si tiene la Conferenza che decide la sorte dei possedimenti italiani in Africa. Visita di Brusasca al Museo Coloniale di Roma', *Settimana INCOM* 192 (INCOM, 24 September 1948).

persistent continuity between the Roman Empire and modern colonialism — though any reference to the Fascist imperial era is carefully avoided.

The choice to construct the narrative of the last part of the film around wooden and plastic models, memorabilia, and old pictures seems consistent with the attempt to trace back the legitimization of the current claims over the former colonies to well before the *Ventennio*.²² The *séparation* phase thus unfolds in the tacit rejection of the recent Fascist past, a choice which enables the preserving of the temporal and discursive continuity with the Roman Empire.²³ Therefore, the uncertainty and liminality pertaining to the process of identity rebuilding are fully relegated to the Fascist past, which is regarded as a shameful exception not even worth mentioning.

The pictures of the explorers, the models of Roman debris, and the objects held at the *Museo coloniale* represent a store of symbols that could help Italians to face the dissolution of their empire while still providing evidence of their enduring civilizing work.²⁴ The overarching issue at stake here is the relationship between heritage (and its mediated reproduction), national identity, and political discourses in times of crisis. The reference to colonial heritage refers to a discourse through which the artificial idea of the past assumes a material, visible, and even ‘plastic’ form; it is thus ‘processed through mythology, ideology, nationalism, local pride, romantic ideas’ which are significant traits fashioning national myths and ideologies in liminal periods.²⁵ The documentary *Dal deserto alla vita* by Raimondo Musu (1951) represents a similar narrative thread. Fascist colonial brutalities are neglected whereas a sense of strong continuity with the Roman Empire is advocated through panoramic scenes of archaeological remains and monuments such as the city of Leptis Magna.²⁶

Even though no reference is made to colonial crimes, the attempt to envision an uninterrupted line since the Roman Empire obliquely required to the film to take into

²² Antonio M. Morone, ‘Introduzione. Quando è finito il colonialismo italiano’, in *La fine del colonialismo italiano. Politica, società e memorie*, ed. by Antonio M. Morone (Florence: Le Monnier, 2019), pp. 1–27 (pp. 9–13).

²³ Victor Turner, ‘Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites of Passage’, in *Betwixt and Between: Patterns of Masculine and Feminine Initiation*, ed. by Louise Carus, Mahdi Steven Foster, Meredith Little (Chicago: Open Court, 1994), pp. 3–22 (p. 4).

²⁴ Forlenza and Thomassen, *Italian Modernities*, p. 201.

²⁵ Frans F. J. Schouten, ‘Heritage as Historical Reality in Heritage’, in *Heritage, Tourism and Society*, ed. by David T. Herbert (London: Mansell, 1995), pp. 21–31 (p. 21); Jo Angouri, Marina Paraskevaidi, Ruth Wodak, ‘Discourses of Cultural Heritage in Times of Crisis: The Case of the Parthenon Marbles’, *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 21:2 (2017), 208–37 (p. 214).

²⁶ *Dal deserto alla vita*, dir. by Musu.

account also the period of the Fascist empire. *Dal deserto alla vita* surreptitiously circumvents the thorny question of the Fascist presence in Libya by simply rattling off a series of figures about the transformation of some parts of the desert area of Al-‘Azīzīyah into arable soil, mentioning only fleetingly the years in which colonization started. Those years (1927, 1932, 1937, 1942) are of course all within the Fascist *Ventennio*, and the voice-over stresses that in 1937 ‘la tecnica ardita in cui concorrono anche la fede e il coraggio’ made possible the conversion of the desert soil into an oasis of *Italianità*. Accordingly, the film re-contextualizes some of the key-terms which characterized the Fascist imperial momentum (such as ‘faith’, ‘bravery’, ‘industriousness’) in order to exalt the enduring link between Italy and Libya. In other words, the colonial past is reclaimed from the Fascist crimes in order to prove that the Africa landscape was ‘creato e quasi inventato’ by Italians since the Roman Empire.

Dal deserto alla vita’s choice to de-brutalize the Fascist past and mention the development projects elicits a question: why does Italy have to withdraw from Africa? The answer lies in the omissions that pervade the film: war, usurpation, and racial policies are excluded, together with any attempt at coming to terms with them. As in *A Parigi si tiene la Conferenza*, such a deceitful suspension of judgment presents the liminal condition of Italy as proper to the Fascist period, tacitly considered a parenthesis which did not undermine the quality of Italians and their civilizing work within and beyond the peninsula.

3.3 An ongoing, dispelled, and subtle transition

The allegedly civilizing work of Italians in Africa since the Roman Empire materializes in the country’s continued presence in former colonies under the form of the *Amministrazione Fiduciaria Italiana della Somalia* (AFIS). Both *Settimana INCOM* 411 (*Mogadiscio. Lo sbarco*) and 455 (*Dalla Somalia. Visita del Sottosegretario Brusasca*) deal with the beginning of the ten-year trusteeship.²⁷ The first film is about the arrival of the Italian army in Somalia. According to the footage, Somali people ‘recognise’ the Italian soldiers, and are happy to welcome them back. They are portrayed as a compact entity, an adulatory backdrop to the reaffirmation of Italian values and Italy’s physical presence in Africa. The camera — probably placed in a truck — voraciously tries to capture their gestures by getting relatively close to them, but it moves too quickly; such a composition is meant to

²⁷ ‘Mogadiscio. Lo sbarco’, *Settimana INCOM* 411 (INCOM, 3 March 1950); ‘Dalla Somalia. Visita del Sottosegretario Brusasca’, *Settimana INCOM* 455 (INCOM, 15 June 1950).

emphasize the enthusiastic participation of Africans, but it rests on a sense of fugacity which in fact conceals any possible counter-voice/counter-gaze coming from the people filmed.

The transitional phase from colonialism to trusteeship is clearer in the second newsreel, which is about Giuseppe Brusasca's trip to Somalia. In the first part, he is sitting in a car parading through the streets of Mogadishu while a military demonstration pays homage to him. The mechanical roars of aircraft and tanks seem to reimpose a visual and aural domination over the city. The military presence epitomizes the renewed control of the African landscapes, which is described as marked by decades of Italian work. Moreover, rather dynamic editing intersperses ethnographically flavoured images (e.g. African people dancing and wearing 'traditional' clothes) with scenes of happiness for Brusasca's arrival. The portrayal of non-white inhabitants and the images of the Italian presence metaphorically seal the end of the decade between 1941 and the 50s, which is the liminal time between the loss *manu militari* of the colony and the new phase of the AFIS. The uncertain phase thus ends in 1951, when Italy is officially entitled to bring the Somalis 'al coronamento delle loro aspirazioni': the *agrégation* is therefore peculiarly reminiscent of an idealized colonial past. The legitimation provided by the international community mentioned by the voice-over explains the positive atmosphere expressed by the footage inasmuch as post-Fascist Italy is acknowledged as different from Fascism, notwithstanding the substantial continuity of the aesthetic devices used to support the claims to remain in Africa.

These films referred to different processes of *séparation* from the Fascist colonial past and, as a result, they portrayed diverse forms of the decolonial liminal condition. Firstly, there is a form of *ongoing liminality* evident in films such as *Italiani d'oltremare*, or the footage about the Paris Peace Conference.²⁸ It concerns the suspended status of post-Fascist Italy, awaiting the outcome of international decisions regarding the former colonies. Accordingly, we can detect here a form of 'permanent liminality', a conceptual tool that is valuable to explore not simply the nature of a given transition but modern societies as a whole.²⁹ This is because some practices established during liminal periods

²⁸ 'Italiani d'oltremare', *Settimana INCOM* 16 (INCOM, 27 June 1946); 'A Parigi si tiene la Conferenza', *Settimana INCOM* 192; 'Meridiano d'Europa. Palazzo del Lussemburgo', *Notiziario Nuova LUCE* 18; 'La conferenza della pace', *Settimana INCOM* 19; 'La delegazione italiana firma i protocolli', *Settimana INCOM* 47.

²⁹ Arpad Szakolczai, *Reflexive Historical Sociology* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 200.

tend to assume the ‘qualities of structure’, hence becoming permanent beyond the transitory time span.³⁰ As far as Italian decolonization is concerned, the arguments the films expressed to support the return of the former colonies left enduring traces in the ways in which the colonial season and the relationship with Africa have been remembered after the decolonial transition.³¹

In these films, the frequent use of artificial objects and memorabilia and the overall management of the filmed space strengthened the process through which the footage proposed its arguments — mostly via the voice-over — in a form in which the boundary between realism and constructed narratives is indistinct.³² The imbrication of an aesthetic of reality with constructed narratives was meant to stabilize the intrinsic liminality of the decolonial passage in order to transform that transition in an eternal present. As a result, positive images of the Italian presence in Africa addressed not as much the colonial past, but the present and the future of the national projection beyond the peninsula. This crystallization of the permanent traits of decolonial liminality also emerges in other footage, especially that which describes the return to the colonies after WWII. Films like *Mogadiscio. Lo sbarco* and *Dalla Somalia. Visita del Sottosegretario Brusasca* feature an attempt to *dispel* the proper liminal condition following the official loss of the colonies.

The ongoing and dispelled liminal conditions some films promote might be seen as encompassed within an underlying liminality which permeates the whole film corpus. It stands out clearly, for instance, in the documentary *Dal deserto alla vita* or in the *Settimana INCOM* set in the *Museo Coloniale* in Rome.³³ These films recognize the Fascist colonial season as the moment in which the qualities and the positive impact Italy had had in Africa since the Roman Empire were partially suspended. Therefore, this form of *subtle* liminality re-addresses the Italian liminal condition in a larger scale, inasmuch as it conceives the whole *Ventennio* as an ambiguous parenthesis within the process that spread Italian

³⁰ Thomassen, ‘Thinking with Liminality’, p. 51.

³¹ Patrizia Palumbo, ‘Introduction. Italian Colonial Cultures’, in *A Place in the Sun. Africa in Italian Colonial Culture from Post-Unification to the Present*, ed. by Patrizia Palumbo (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003), pp. 1–14; Jacqueline Andall and Derek Duncan, ‘Introduction. Hybridity in Italian Colonial and Postcolonial Culture’, in *National Belongings. Hybridity in Italian Colonial and Postcolonial Cultures*, ed. by Jacqueline Andall and Derek Duncan (Bern: Peter Lang, 2010), pp. 1–19 (pp. 10–13)

³² Fernão Pessoa Ramos, ‘What is Documentary *Mise-en-Scène*? Coutinho’s Mannerism and Salles’s “*Mauvaise Conscience*”’, *Studies in Documentary Film*, 8:2 (2014), 143–55 (pp. 146–48).

³³ *Dal deserto alla vita*, dir. by Musu; ‘A Parigi si tiene la Conferenza’, *Settimana INCOM* 192.

qualities throughout the world.³⁴ The subtle character of decolonial liminality hence permeates both the implicit and explicit ways through which the colonial past was staged and projected in a manner that re-envisioned the position of the nation in the world, and its qualities beyond the borders of the peninsula.

3.4 Beyond liminality

The anthropological understanding of liminality has been used to explore the ambiguous representations of the passage from colonial discourses to more elusive narratives supporting new forms of Italian influence in Africa. Such a re-articulation did not merely serve to remember the colonial past in a self-exculpatory way. Rather, it actively promoted the contemporary and continued presence of Italy in the former colonies while simultaneously positioning the nation within the geo-political Atlantic sphere. Such a synchronic repositioning of Italy took into account an expanded geography in which a renewed sense of *Italianità* could properly dwell, and which peculiarly included the former overseas territories.

The postcolonial elaboration of liminality is a powerful device to explore the shifting position of post-war Italy both in the geography of Western modernity as well as in relation to the former colonial space. Homi Bhabha maintains that liminality is an in-between status characterized by ambiguity and hybridity in which social meanings, subjectivities, and identities are produced.³⁵ This fluid yet creative space undermines the polarization of colonizers and colonized which characterized, for instance, the notion of colonial discourse as conceived by Said in *Orientalism*. Bhabha holds the view that representations and signifying practices are the privileged fields in which liminal statuses, subjectivities, and identities might question the neat distinction between ‘upper and lower areas, each of which was annotated with plaques referring to blackness and whiteness’.³⁶

Though Bhabha’s line of reasoning deals mostly with cultural spaces, liminal discourses may also relate to ‘a range of physical sites including several which have had particular importance in the post-colonial experience’ such as borders, boats allowing the sea crossing, seashores, settler communities, and various other kinds of thresholds spaces

³⁴ Bjørn Thomassen, ‘Anthropology, Multiple Modernities and the Axial Age Debate’, *Anthropological Theory*, 10:4 (2010), 321–42.

³⁵ Homi K. Bhabha, ‘Culture’s In-Between’, in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, ed. by Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay (London: Sage, 1996), pp. 53–60.

³⁶ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p. 4.

separating yet connecting colonizers and colonized even in a post-colonial scenario.³⁷ Against this background, the critical use of liminality might shed a light on physical and discursive boundary zones, on thresholds, on heterotopias as well as on the social and cultural relationship which unfolds in those suspended spaces and times. It is therefore revealing of the extent to which the uncertain transfer of sovereignty designed a third space in-between colonial dependencies and independent states, and can provide insights into the contingency of belonging and recognition.³⁸ The representations of such articulated liminal spaces — key sites of interaction and negotiation — take into account the physical places in which Italy presented itself as entitled to exert a special form of influence due to historical and cultural reasons. Borrowing and elaborating Nirmal Puwar's line of reasoning, the focus is on how these films implemented multifaceted rhetorical and aesthetic devices to portray Italian communities in Africa as not out of place despite the formal end of the colonial season.³⁹

The idea that a long-lasting connection (the Roman Empire, explorations, migrations, colonialism) expanded the space of *Italianità* in Africa is a common theme present in almost any film about Italian decolonization. This implies that the images and narratives about Eritrea, Somalia, and Libya which starting sprouted from 1946 onwards did not merely address the dichotomy of metropolis/colony. Rather, they materialize an expanded idea of a homeland beyond the peninsula, in which the experience of the borders is not as much a matter of geography, but of belonging and, as we shall see in chapter 4, of blood and organic legacies.⁴⁰ The films articulate a renewed relationship between the former metropolitan peninsula and the so-called *oasi d'Italianità*. Those oases remained thriving symbols of a civilizing presence that had been transforming the African territory since the Roman Empire, and of which modern colonialism was just the last piece of the puzzle.

The post-war discourse surrounding the images of those oases of *Italianità* was peculiarly contiguous with the 'islands of ethnicity' paradigm that Mia Fuller employs to describe the new Italian rural settlements which dotted the colonial landscape under Fascism. In those Fascist 'islands', Libyans became the new Italian subalterns, especially

³⁷ John Thieme, *Post-Colonial Studies: The Essential Glossary* (London: Print, 2003), p. 144.

³⁸ Dittmer and McConnell, 'Liminality and the Diplomacy of the British Oversea Territories', p. 142.

³⁹ Nirmal Puwar, *Space Invaders. Race, Gender and Bodies Out of Place* (Oxford: Berg, 2004).

⁴⁰ Norma Bouchard and Valerio Ferme, *Italy and the Mediterranean. Words, Sounds, and Images of the Cold War Era* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 200.

after that Libya became de facto part of the Italian metropolitan territory in 1939. As a result, ‘Libya became Italy; and in a simultaneous counter-movement, Libyans became the equivalent of migrants to another country, rather than inhabitants of their own’. The agricultural settlements in fertile areas of Libya were portrayed as ‘a different sort of showcase of newly built villages’, and such a depiction of urban and rural settlements as spaces belonging to Italy, rather than to former colonial subjects, persisted even in decolonial footage.⁴¹

The first post-war newsreel dealing with the destiny of the colonies, aired on June 1946, is a clear example of how the Libyan territory was represented as belonging to Italy. The film, entitled *Italiani d’oltremare*, is about those Italians born in the colonies during the AOI and who, for different reasons, were in Italy when WWII raged in Africa in the early 40s. The footage focuses especially on a small number of young Italians born in Libya, who were in the peninsula for summer holidays. They could not go back home until 1946, and the film portrays their trip back to Libya.⁴² A slow movement of the camera pans over the harbour of Naples; a ship carrying approximately 1600 people is departing for Tripoli, whose description does not even question its status as a fully Italian place. The slow pace panning, the dramatic music of the score, and the low tone of the voice-over create a sombre atmosphere. Such thinly veiled colonial nostalgia climaxes as soon as the images show the city of Tripoli and the voice-over sighs emphatically ‘ah! Tripoli bel suol d’amore’, a clear reference to the song of the same name which was written in 1911 on the occasion of the conquest of Libya.⁴³

The connection with previous colonial propaganda features also in other scenes, such as that of Italians on the ship joyfully greeting the camera and waving their handkerchiefs. Their enthusiasm recalls a recurring visual trope of the newsreels produced by the Istituto LUCE about a decade earlier, which portrayed Italian settlers crowding the ships departing from Italian harbours to build the empire.⁴⁴ In spite of such a similar *mise-*

⁴¹ Mia Fuller, *Moderns Abroad. Architecture, Cities and Italian Imperialism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), pp. 171–96.

⁴² ‘Italiani d’oltremare’, *Settimana INCOM* 16; Antonio Morone, ‘Italiani d’Africa, africani d’Italia: da coloni a profughi’, *Altretalia*, 42:1 (2011), 20–35 (p. 23); Valeria Deplano, *La madrepatria è una terra straniera. Libici, eritrei e somali nell’Italia del dopoguerra* (Florence: Le Monnier, 2017), pp. 23–29.

⁴³ In 1911, Gea della Garisenda sang *Tripoli bel suol d’amore* for the first time wearing only a *tricolore* flag, see Franco Lechner, *C’era una volta in Libia* (Milan: Bompiani, 1979); Angelo Del Boca, *Gli italiani in Libia. Tripoli bel suol d’amore 1860-1922* (Rome and Bari: Laterza, 1986).

⁴⁴ ‘I volontari per l’Africa Orientale’, *Giornale LUCE* B0628 (Istituto LUCE, 20 February 1936); ‘L’imbarco dei volontari per l’Africa Orientale’, *Giornale LUCE* B0637 (Istituto LUCE, 6 March 1936); ‘La divisione

en-scène, the enthusiastic feelings of Italians returning to Libya in 1946 in fact clash with the melancholy comments of the voice-over. The commentary mentions the positive impact of the Italian presence in Africa, but suggests that the season was bound to end. Accordingly, the departure for the so-called ‘Fourth Shore’ presents a rather peculiar sense of homeland: Italy is simultaneously within and beyond the peninsula because its projection embraces the Mediterranean basin and every place in which the qualities of Italians have settled. Such a liminal sense of belonging materializes in the contradictory relationship between the images recalling the enthusiastic departure to conquer the *oltremare* and a soundscape that, as a whole, tends to be more realistic, featuring diegetic noises.

In 1946, when *Italiani d'oltremare* was aired, Cyrenaica and Tripolitania were under British administration whereas the Fezzan was controlled by France. Despite the official end of its political presence following WWII, it was in Italy's economic and political interests to insist on a renewed presence in Libya.⁴⁵ The political discourse emphasized the proletarian character of the Italian presence, advocating the political, economic, and cultural rightfulness of Italian claims to rule post-war Libya.⁴⁶ The implicit assumption underpinning that claim was that the relationship between sovereignty and physical territory had to replicate a colonial relationship, which disregarded entirely the possibility that Libyans could decide their future independently. In 1949, Italy renounced its claim to the former Fourth Shore: at the end of 1951, when the British administration ended, Idris al-Senussi became king of independent Libya. Nevertheless, the gaze through which non-fiction films portrayed Libya still echoed previous discourses. For instance, a film produced in 1952, *Viaggio nella ex colonia italiana*, was meant to recount the first months of the newly independent kingdom. Despite this premise, the voice-over refers only briefly to King Idris, and does not even pronounce his name, but describes him as ‘il senusso’, thus emphasising his tribal origins and obliquely delegitimizing his sovereignty over the former colony. Moreover, the extended title of the film (*Libia terra d'Italia*.

Gavinana mobilitata per l'Africa Orientale’, *Giornale LUCE* B0638 (Istituto LUCE, 8 March 1936); ‘I mille avieri per l'Africa Orientale’, *Giornale LUCE* B0640 (Istituto LUCE, 13 March 1936).

⁴⁵ Angelo Del Boca, *Gli italiani in Libia. Dal fascismo a Gheddafi* (Milan: Mondadori, 1997); Gianluigi Rossi, ‘La Libia nel mediterraneo, 1943-1951: interessi delle potenze, indipendenza e questione dell'unità’, *Africa*, 63:2 (2008), 345–58 (pp. 345–49).

⁴⁶ Giampaolo Calchi Novati, *Il Corno d'Africa nella storia e nella politica. Etiopia, Somalia e Eritrea fra nazionalismi, sottosviluppo e guerra* (Turin: SEI, 1994), p. 382–85; Pes, ‘Coloni senza colonie’, p. 419–24.

Viaggio nella ex colonia italiana) epitomizes the extent to which Libya, even after its independence, continued to be conceived of, and represented as, an integral part of the Italian territory.⁴⁷

The introductory scene of *Libia terra d'Italia* is worthy of close examination insofar as it synthesises the structure of the whole film. The first frame is a brief on-screen text stating *Libia terra d'Italia*. As soon as that text dissolves, the audience is metaphorically placed in a plane which is flying over the city of Tripoli, and any viewer becomes a visitor arriving there. When the commentary states that Libyan soil is inextricably bound to Italy, a wide-angle framing focuses on ships crowded with Italians who are disembarking at the port of Tripoli. The size of the ships substantiates the will to show that lots of Italians — and lots of 'Italy' — are still in Libya, and the composition reinforces such a narrative. A montage combines a series of Dutch-angles framing the ships. The shifting orientation of the camera, which is placed alternatively on the dock to capture the ship through a wide-angle framing and on the top deck to shoot the scene below, expresses an unaltered sense of spatial domination of the former colonial space.

As in *Italiani d'oltremare*, the aesthetic trope of a ship crowded with Italians presents the boat as the floating space which extricates *Italianità* from historical-geographical boundaries. In other words, the ships allow a deterritorialization of national qualities. Moreover, drawing on Foucault's definition of heterotopia, they suspend and inhibit the production of critical meanings about the colonial period while nourishing the dream of a worldwide and unbounded national belonging.⁴⁸

According to the voice-over, 'mai la Libia venne considerata colonia' but it was regarded as a strip of metropolitan territory which welcomes Italian workers.⁴⁹ Even though any reference to Fascism is carefully avoided, almost twenty years of rhetoric presenting the so-called *quarta sponda* as a *lembo della madrepatria* was still at play. In this case, the commentary matches consistently the images. A quick transition brings the audience from the harbour to the desert. The camera is now in a moving car approaching

⁴⁷ Maurizio Zinni, 'Una lettera dall'Africa. Il colonialismo italiano nel cinema del dopoguerra, 1945-1960', *Contemporanea*, 19:1 (2016), 69–99 (p. 83). The film is 'Libia terra d'Italia. Viaggio nella ex colonia italiana', *Mondo Libero* 6 (Astra Cinematografica, 3 March 1952).

⁴⁸ Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', trans. by Jay Miskowiec, *Diacritics*, 16:1 (1986), 22–27 (p. 27).

⁴⁹ In 1939, the territory of the Libyan colony became part of the Italian Kingdom. A special form of citizenship was established for Libyans, who in their country had the same rights of Italian citizens. However, this special form of citizenship was valid within the Libyan territory only and, in fact, it legally denied colonial subjects full access to Italian citizenship, see Deplano, *La madrepatria è una terra straniera*, p. 138.

a settlement of Italian farmers. According to the voice-over, they made the desert productive and fertile through the introduction of irrigation ditches. Pamela Ballinger and Federico Cresti have exhaustively demonstrated that post-war governments and institutions such as the *Istituto Nazionale di Previdenza Sociale* (INPS) considered Libya as the ‘natural and historically reserved place for an ongoing peaceful expansion of the Italian labour force’.⁵⁰ Therefore, both *Dal deserto alla vita* and *Viaggio nella ex colonia italiana* demonstrate that the end of formal colonization did not imply the end of settling projects, nor lessen the praise they enjoyed in popular culture. The Italian presence benefits not only the former settlers, but it is portrayed as valuable to local populations too, and should hence continue despite the end of colonialism.

3.5 Re-composing post-colonial relationships

The documentary about the official visit of Giuseppe Brusasca to the Horn of Africa deals with very similar themes to those explored so far, even though they are fashioned in a more articulate yet surreptitious way. The film recounts the establishment of the new diplomatic relationship between Ethiopia and Italy, which had been interrupted due to the 1935-36 war.⁵¹

The opening frame is a wide-angle shot of a straight road cutting across the African landscape and disappearing into the horizon. A perfectly symmetrical composition puts the endless road at the very centre of the screen as if to indicate that Italian industriousness is still paving the way toward the future of the former colonies. Such a framing becomes the backdrop for an on-screen text stating ‘Torniamo in Etiopia con un messaggio di pace’. Nevertheless, far from conveying any form of repentance, the first part of the film is about several current Italian agricultural projects in the Horn of Africa. The scenes of a farm on the Kenyan-Somali border, in which Africans are depicted as happy to work under the

⁵⁰ During the *Ventennio*, the INFPS (*Istituto Nazionale Fascista di Previdenza Sociale*, the predecessor of the INPS) managed a great number of settling projects in the AOI. Pamela Ballinger holds the view that the vicissitudes of such agricultural settlements in the aftermath of WWII are clear examples of the ambiguous results of Italian decolonization. That is because the democratic governments, for at least 10 years after the signing of the peace treaty in 1947, continued Fascist projects, see Pamela Ballinger, ‘Colonial Twilight: Italian Settlers and the Long Decolonization of Libya’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 51:4 (2016), 813–38 (pp. 826-33). See also Federico Cresti, *Non desiderare la terra d'altri: La colonizzazione italiana in Libia* (Rome: Carocci, 2010); Emanuele Ertola, *In terra d'Africa. Gli italiani che colonizzarono l'impero* (Rome and Bari: Laterza, 2017).

⁵¹ ‘Torniamo in Etiopia con un messaggio di pace. Servizio speciale sulla missione dell'on. Brusasca in Africa’, *Settimana INCOM* 648 (INCOM, 26 September 1951).

supervision of Italian masters, and the sequence dealing with the construction of a huge hydroelectric dam on the Awash river both reveal that Italian people make that landscape economically productive and socially organized. This stands out clearly in a passage where a young shepherd is looking after cattle, wearing Somali clothes but also a pair of glasses: the choice to shoot the glasses through a close-up is indirectly praises the positive impact of Western civilization upon the everyday life of local people.

Somalia, and to a lesser extent Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Libya are portrayed as still in need of the ‘civilizing’ Italian presence in order to reach their future independence. This element marks a striking difference with Fascist footage, which did not envision any form of self-government for colonized cultures at all.⁵² Despite this differentiation, decolonial footage conveys the idea that the pathway to modernity for African countries is still far from complete, and the films create and re-contextualize the allegedly intrinsic backwardness of African people and societies accordingly. The reproduction of the Western patronizing gaze permeates the description of the construction of the dam on the Awash river by Italian workers, thanks to whom all of Ethiopia would have electricity. The atmosphere changes in the scenes set in Addis Ababa, where members of the Italian community welcome Brusasca at the local airport.⁵³ Images of urban life are interspersed with scenes of the activities of Italians in the Ethiopian capital — primarily related to the construction of public and private houses and infrastructures. There is also a passage on an Italian sculptor who is sculpting a bust of the emperor Haile Selassie. According to the voice-over, the statue was commissioned by the Ethiopian government, and this element should thereby prove the good disposition of Ethiopian politicians toward the former colonizers.

The film becomes more solemn when it recounts the meeting between the emperor Haile Selassie and Brusasca. An interior scene of the imperial palace portrays the *Negusa Negast* standing in front of his throne, in an elevated position while Brusasca bows slightly to him. The lighting is very low and only the emperor is fully illuminated. The audience’s attention is therefore directed to his figure, while the slightly low-angle framing seemingly serves to increase his authoritativeness. However, such a *mise-en-scène* does not seem crafted to exalt the emperor per se. Rather, the footage praises the emperor’s activity

⁵² Gianmarco Mancosu, ‘L’impero visto da una cinepresa: il reparto “Africa Orientale” dell’Istituto LUCE’, in *Quel che resta dell’impero*, ed. by Deplano and Pes, pp. 259–78 (p. 274).

⁵³ Emanuele Ertola, ‘La società italiana nell’Etiopia di Haile Selassie’, in *La fine del colonialismo italiano*, ed. by Morone, pp. 175–201 (pp. 175–76).

exclusively because he ‘per quasi dieci anni ha difeso migliaia di nostri connazionali rimasti nelle sue immense provincie’ and since he now requests that ‘che altri connazionali li raggiungano per il bene comune dell’Italia e dell’Etiopia’. In so doing, the film fulfils a perfect circle in that even Haile Selassie praises the Italianization of the Horn of Africa. As a whole, therefore, *Torniamo in Etiopia* re-signifies the former colonial presence by toning down the dichotomous relationship between former colony and former metropolis. This is possible due to the celebration of the Italian industriousness which has inexorably bound Africa to Italy. Furthermore, it shows that African authorities — embodied in this case by Haile Selassie — acknowledge this bond and even encourage the post-colonial presence of Italy.

The films analysed so far negotiate the description of the moral and technical values of Italians still operating in the colonies with the new political authorities of post-colonial countries. Nevertheless, far from bestowing legitimacy upon the new post-colonial elites, the footage dwells in the liminal space between old colonial discourses and the assumption of a new ‘non-colonial’ and deterritorialized form of Italian presence in Africa. As a result, the emerging narrative still sees Italians at the centre of the post-colonial scene. Furthermore, the erasing of any clear reference to the most brutal sides of the colonial past did not implicate a retreat from the discursive space of the *oltremare*: Italians were depicted as carrying out a civilizing mission whose effects were acknowledged even by formerly colonized people. The films championed the suspension of any form of critical judgement on the imperial period which, in fact, started to lose the connotation of a violent endeavour and become understood as a migratory and benevolent influx of people, work, and ideas.

3.6 Former subjects’ in-betweenness

Several films, while advocating the expanded geography of national qualities and the righteousness of Italy’s claims, assumed that African people and landscapes were directly or indirectly supportive of Italian requests to remain in the former colonies. For instance, the newsreel *Gli ex coloni libici a Padova per chiedere che venga affidata all’Italia l’amministrazione fiduciaria dell’ex colonia* portrays Italians and Africans asking together for the return of ‘le sue colonie’ to Italy, as the voice-over utters by quoting a Libyan

delegate.⁵⁴ A gloomy atmosphere, however, conveys a sense of nostalgia for the colonial loss, which is emphasized in the close-up of an *àscaro* — African-born soldier who fought for Italy during the colonial war — with a commemorative wreath performing honour guard duties. As a whole, the film clearly argues that Italy has to exert a form of direct political administration over the former colonies: an argument consistent with the government's diplomatic efforts at that time. Furthermore, any form of independence is not even mentioned, and African people are rather objectified insofar as they are taken into account exclusively for their subordinate role to Italians.

The objectification of former colonial subjects features even more clearly in other films, together with the stubborn presence of an ethnographic yet disparaging attitude toward African people and cultures. For instance, a film produced in late 1946 states that any Libyan is 'nomade e fannullone'.⁵⁵ The study of a specific film trope, which returns throughout the corpus, might better explain the persistence of a colonial discourse that oriented the signification of the footage about formerly colonized people. This trope substantiates in the use of images of dances (the so-called *fantasie*) with which African populations ostensibly welcomed the arrival of the Italian diplomatic delegations, as in the case Brusasca's visit to Somalia, Eritrea, and Ethiopia in 1951 or in another film about the beginning of the Trusteeship administration in Somalia.⁵⁶ In such scenes, the camera lingers on smiling faces of Africans, who are dancing uninhibitedly to pay homage to the Italian politicians and militaries. Their quick and compulsive moves and the background music often featuring percussive sounds compose a spectacle of ethnicity which catches the attention of the Italian viewers. Though metropolitan audiences were gradually losing interest in colonial/decolonial topics, they remained fascinated by ethnographic and orientalist themes notwithstanding the changing political scenario.⁵⁷ We can presume that

⁵⁴ 'Gli ex coloni libici a Padova per chiedere che venga affidata all'Italia l'amministrazione fiduciaria dell'ex colonia', *Settimana INCOM* 89 (INCOM, 24 October 1947); 'Notabili della Libia, dell'Eritrea e della Somalia vengono ricevuti dal sottosegretario Brusasca in occasione del Ramadan', *Settimana INCOM* 73 (INCOM, 29 August 1947).

⁵⁵ 'Un raro documentario sulla colonizzazione italiana della Libia', *Nuova LUCE* 20 (Istituto LUCE, 1946).

⁵⁶ 'Mogadiscio. Lo sbarco', *Settimana INCOM* 411; 'Dalla Somalia. Visita del sottosegretario Brusasca', *Settimana INCOM* 455; 'Torniamo in Etiopia con un messaggio di pace', *Settimana INCOM* 648.

⁵⁷ Nicola Labanca, *Oltremare. Storia dell'espansione coloniale italiana* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2002), p. 348. Derek Duncan, in relation to the representation in Italian media of the performances by Kledi Kadiu, an Italian dancer of Albanian origins, uses the terms 'spectacle of masculinity and ethnicity' to indicate that dancer's performance is not as much a matter of skills; rather, it is socially perceived and signified according to 'the values circulating round his body', see Derek Duncan, 'Kledi Kadiu. Managing Postcolonial Celebrity', in *National Belongings*, ed. by Andall and Duncan, pp. 195–214 (p. 204).

these dances were meant to tease white masculinity insofar as the camera mostly captures barely-dressed black women, whose frenetic body gestures are interpreted as evoking the allegedly unrestrained sexual desire provoked by the gaze of white/male viewers.

The sexual objectification of black bodies and their description exclusively according to ethnographic and sexualized tenets is certainly reminiscent of the ways in which previous Fascist newsreels depicted the *atti di sottomissione* of local authorities to the Italian army during the Ethiopian war.⁵⁸ Focusing on ‘primitive’ behaviours such as the ‘tribal’ dances, often performed by young girls, allows the films to reiterate the discourse that conceives African people as embedded into a timeless landscape which, in turn, is eroticized in order to be fertilised by the Italian virile presence.⁵⁹ Such a re-contextualization of exotic-erotic narratives was inspired by the persistent idea of Africa as a timeless space, a *tabula rasa* waiting to be conquered by the power of the ‘civilizing’ West where Italy could legitimately affirm its white and male traits.⁶⁰ Such representations relate to the broader attempt ‘to forge a post-Fascist, capitalist, consumable set of masculinities in continuity with traditional ideas of virility, family, and domestic hierarchy inherited from the past (and partially re-articulated by Fascism)’, so as to dispel the post-traumatic liminal condition which characterized the reframing of Italian subjectivities and identities in the aftermath of WWII.⁶¹

Despite the substantial continuity in the gendered and racial gazes which objectified the African landscape and its inhabitants, other films started to craft a slightly different portrayal of formerly colonized people.⁶² For instance, two short films acknowledge an emergent, though still incomplete, form of African agency. *Settimana*

⁵⁸ Mancosu, ‘L’impero visto da una cinepresa’, p. 275.

⁵⁹ Loredana Polezzi, ‘L’Etiopia raccontata agli italiani’, in *L’impero fascista. Italia ed Etiopia (1935–1941)*, ed. by Riccardo Bottoni (Bologna: Il Mulino: 2008), pp. 285–306 (p. 296). On the exoticization/eroticization of African bodies and landscapes in Italian colonial and postcolonial cultures, see Sandra Ponzanesi, ‘Beyond Black Venus: Colonial Sexual Politics and Contemporary Visual Practices’, in *Italian colonialism. Legacy and Memory*, ed. by Jacqueline Andall and Derek Duncan (Bern: Peter Lang, 2005), pp. 165–89 (pp. 176–79).

⁶⁰ Jean-Loup Amselle, ‘Il fascino repulsivo dell’Africa nell’immaginario occidentale’, in *Società africane*, ed. by Daniele Mezzana and Giancarlo Quaranta (Milan: Zelig, 2005), pp. 175–88. Simon Ryan, ‘Inscribing the Emptiness. Cartography, Exploration, and the Construction of Australia’, in *De-Scribing Empire: Postcolonialism and Textuality*, ed. by Chris Tiffin and Alan Lawson (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 115–30; Jeanne Van Eden, ‘The Colonial Gaze: Imperialism, Myths, and South African Popular Culture’, *Design Issues*, 20:2 (2004), 18–33.

⁶¹ Gaia Giuliani, *Race, Gender, and Nation in Modern Italy* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), pp. 121–28.

⁶² ‘Notabili della Libia, dell’Eritrea e della Somalia’, *Settimana INCOM* 73.

INCOM 73 is one of the first films that overtly recognizes a certain degree of moral, political, and cultural authority in Libyan, Eritrean, and Somali delegates (e.g. politicians, military personnel, academics, entrepreneurs) who are visiting Rome to meet the undersecretary Brusasca. The camera intersperses the frames of Brusasca, who declares that Italy is ready to take over the trusteeship of former colonies under the UN mandate, with images of the African politicians, who wear ‘Western’ clothes and who call upon the Italian return to support their independence. The commentary reports the words of Libyan professor Beshir Gherrim, who explicitly mentions that Italy has to accomplish its ‘missione di civiltà’: as soon as the voice-over enunciates such words, the camera lingers on a prolonged handshake between the politician Abdulaman Bunkeila and Brusasca. Such a conciliatory atmosphere, which materializes in a fairly plain composition of interior settings, aims to dispel the liminal status of former territories by hence justifying the renewed presence of Italians in Africa. The support of Italian claims by African voices means that the film does acknowledge some form of agency proper to African people. However, Italy remains the ultimate beneficiary of that discourse: the more the former colonizers’ delegation is portrayed as entitled to represent Africans, the more genuine their request of Italian support appears. In a rather egotistic narrative circle, this footage starts to portray Italian authority in Africa as moral and economic, rather than merely political.⁶³ A similar understanding emerges also in the film *Torniamo in Etiopia con un messaggio di pace*. As a result, both these films are exemplary of an embryonic negotiation of meanings in relation to the colonial past. The political authorities of former colonies started to be portrayed in the liminal space of decolonization, from which they were able to breach the political authority of former colonizers over their countries in order to envision their new postcolonial identity.

The film *Protesta a Mogadiscio* seems likewise inclined to give voice to Somali people while they are protesting against the United Kingdom which, according to the footage, allowed the annexation of the desert region of Ogaden to Ethiopia and not to Somalia.⁶⁴ The images of the protest taking place in Mogadishu utilize a tracking shot in

⁶³ We must bear in mind, however, that Ethiopia did not have any transition period after Fascist colonialism, since Haile Selassie simply reclaimed the throne which was usurped by Italians in May 1936. For this reason, Republican Italy did not claim any role in post-colonial Ethiopia, see Morone, ‘Introduzione. Quando è finito il colonialismo italiano’, pp. 6–7.

⁶⁴ ‘Protesta a Mogadiscio’, *Mondo Libero* 182 (Astra Cinematografica, 4 February 1955). The desert region of Ogaden divides Somalia from Ethiopia. It has been historically contended between the two countries, see

which the camera is placed in a moving car and frames the protesters. In one frame, a young man is holding a poster which reads ‘ingiusto accordo anglo-etiopico in contrasto con i principi delle nazioni unite. Chiediamo pronto intervento delle Nazioni Unite e del governo italiano’. The camera lingers on that poster for around ten seconds: such protracted framing highlights that Italy is still on the side of Somali people in so far as they are against the United Kingdom. Two further posters are shot more fleetingly, probably because they are more explicit in condemning any form of colonialism: the first one says ‘Abbasso l’imperialismo ed il colonialismo. Viva la libertà’ while the other, ‘chiediamo giustizia per la nazione somala’. Therefore, only in 1955 an Italian newsreel explicitly gives (limited) voice and room to an unmistakable anticolonial message. However, it is not unreasonable to surmise that Italy, at that time, did not conceive of itself as an ‘imperial’ power and that the negative connotation of the words *imperialismo* and *colonialismo* referred to other Western countries (namely the UK and France).

The images of the protest convey the idea of a modern setting. One gains this impression from the scenes of the urban landscape and from the shots of ‘Western’ clothes that Somali protesters are wearing, which are definitively at odds with the ‘tribal’ dresses which abound in other decolonial footage. The voice-over, for its part, supports the Somali people as far as they are against the United Kingdom. Furthermore, it states that the issue of the Ogaden is similar to that of Trieste for Italians. Despite this apparent empathy, the film as a whole surreptitiously presents the view that such a demonstration is peaceful because Italian authorities are watching over it, thus implying that even anticolonial protests should be ‘supervised’ by Italy.⁶⁵

3.7 Permanent liminality: Reiterating the colonial *mise-en-scène*

The footage regarding former colonial subjects’ political agency reveals how the vocabulary and the agenda of the Italian presence in Africa was slowly changing. Though colonial discourses still permeated the portrayal of decolonial issues, some films started to encompass images and narratives which were not perfectly consistent with the previous

Ioan M. Lewis, *A Modern History of Somalia*, 4th edn (Oxford: James Curry, 2002), p. 59; Bahru Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia* (Oxford: James Currey, 1991), p. 113.

⁶⁵ This can also be an indirect reference to the protests which happened in Mogadishu in January 1948, in which 54 Italians and 14 Somalis died when two manifestations (one pro-Italians, the other pro-independence) clashed, see Giampaolo Calchi Novati, ‘Gli incidenti di Mogadiscio del gennaio 1948: rapporti italo-inglesi e nazionalismo somalo’, *Africa*, 35:3/4 (1980), 327–56.

colonial framework. This juxtaposition of different meanings was possible due to the peculiar configuration of Italian decolonization, a liminal transition which brought neither the total obliteration of a racist depiction of Africans nor the straightforward replication of the divide between (former) colonized and colonizers. As a result, Africans were represented as the newest members of the Western ‘moral universe and were to be enlisted in its mythologies of power and order. Thus the mission [of Italy] was [...] to draw Africa into civilization, a task that required African participation as political subjects’.⁶⁶

The integration of former colonial elements within the post-war idea of *Italianità* engendered a rather contradictory discourse, which was based on the assumption that the African landscape, whether physical or human, was inextricably bound to Italy. On the one hand, decolonial footage redefined national identity beyond the geographical borders of the peninsula by showing how Italian qualities were now appreciated also by former colonial subjects. On the other hand, however, that integration carved out a space for the hybridization and negotiation of imaginaries by the formerly colonized people. Therefore, Africans started to be portrayed as entitled to acquire a specific subjectivity and agency *only to the extent* they were able to appropriate Western discourses and categories.

The concept of liminality returns here as a significant critical device to address such an ambiguity. Liminal is any transition during which the normal limits of thought, self-understanding and behaviour are relaxed; that status hence enables us to bring to the fore the practices of innovation pertaining to individual and social agency.⁶⁷ Victor Turner holds the view that the liminal ‘creative’ momentum does not simply reflect pre-institutionalized rituals and pre-given social norms. Rather, he points out that a certain degree of agency is always latent in any rite of passage.⁶⁸ Therefore, he gives a substantially positive connotation to the liminal transition in cultural and societal practices.⁶⁹ Such a creative and even optimistic understanding of liminality resonates with Homi Bhabha’s elaboration of the concept. His understanding has focused on the multiple configurations of the relationship between colonizers and colonized people, which in fact

⁶⁶ Deborah Kaspin, ‘Signifying Power in Africa’, in *Images and Empires. Visuality in Colonial and Postcolonial Africa*, ed. by Paul S. Landau and Deborah D. Kaspin (Berkley: University of California Press, 2002), pp. 320–36 (p. 327).

⁶⁷ Bjørn Thomassen, *Liminality and the Modern: Living Through the In-Between* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), pp. 1–3.

⁶⁸ Turner, ‘Betwixt and Between’, pp. 95–99.

⁶⁹ Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre. The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York: PAJ, 1982), pp. 11–19.

are characterized by indeterminacy, hybridity, and potential for change rather than by a neat and dichotomous divide.⁷⁰ Furthermore, liminality and hybridity go hand in hand insofar as they both refer to the ‘interstitial passage between fixed identifications’, opening up the possibility of cultural hybridity beyond an assumed or imposed hierarchy.⁷¹

As far as the film corpus is concerned, the increasing presence of images about African politicians, scholars, and civilians could be understood as a form of mimicry which is fundamentally unsettling for the direct re-articulation of Italian hegemony the films were championing. The appropriation of the Western political dictionary by Africans is part of such a process, and it could have helped to undermine the persisting colonial discourses.⁷² However, a closer inspection reveals a more complex and equivocal discourse. The majority of films assumed that any potential form of hybridization was essentially mono-directional. Liminality is therefore incomplete, insofar as it concerns only one of the poles of the (post)colonial interaction; while colonial subjects were presented at the beginning of the path to Italian/Western modernity, Italians were instead depicted as inspired by timeless and universal values which dispel any form of hybridization. To put it more simply, Italians operating in Africa maintain their alleged qualities, they are not ‘Africanized’ whereas the African soil and local people are slowly ‘Westernized’. Moreover, Italian films acknowledged the subjectivity and agency of the formerly colonized only to the extent that they could strengthen the Italian claims in the international forums. As a result, the creative and ultimately positive connotation of liminal statuses maintained by Turner and, to a lesser extent, by Bhabha, does not apply to the case in question. This is because these representations neither breach the divide between Italian and African people nor recognize the Africans’ right to rule their own land and shape their destiny autonomously.

Despite the positive portrayal of the enduring Italian presence in Africa, the representations of the uncertain decolonial process reveal that any liminal passage does not automatically have emancipatory qualities. Agnes Horvath has clearly pointed out the problematic and even negative aspects of liminal transitions, a standpoint which has been

⁷⁰ Bhabha, *Questions of Cultural Identity*, pp. 53–60.

⁷¹ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, pp. 6–7.

⁷² Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, Helen Tiffin, *Postcolonial Studies. The Key Concepts*, 2nd edn (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), p. 10.

further elaborated via the concept of ‘permanent liminalities’.⁷³ The anguishing situation of uncertainty which characterized the period of national reconstruction after the *Ventennio* and WWII substantiated the need to reaffirm moral and political sovereignty over the former colonies. In so doing, the representations of former subjects were crystallized in a form of permanent liminality unable to breach the colonial discursive polarization between (former)colonizers and (formerly)colonized people. Such an incomplete form of liminal transition surfaces from the images of former subjects. They are either portrayed as backward or, when claiming for independence, they request the help of Italy and use the same language and discourses of the former colonizers.

The overall configuration of the filmed space is attuned to the concept of permanent liminality insofar as the *mise-en-scène* blurs in the idea of *mise-en-valeur* of the former colonial space. The scenes of roads, buildings, and farms indirectly refer to the French doctrine popularized by Albert Sarraut in the 20s, according to which colonizers assisted colonized societies through the provision of social welfare, construction of economic infrastructures, population policies, and political engineering. In the context of decolonization, however, *mise-en-valeur* is a means of understanding the exploitation of former colonial resources by ‘conceiving, experimenting with, and implementing new policies’.⁷⁴ The spatial organisation of the visual dimension of the footage corresponds to such a rhetoric. The political strand of the decolonial transition is often portrayed in an interior setting, with low lighting which can be read as underlining Italian pessimism about the decisions concerning the former colonies. However, the use of objects such as plastic and wooden models, memorabilia, and pictures gives a sense of artificial evidence supporting the claims over the colonies. It furthermore mediates the relationship with the former colonial world in a way which relegates historical truthfulness to an insignificant background, while transforming the colonial past in an ‘artificially plasticised’ spectacle aiming to display the tenacity of Italian qualities.⁷⁵

⁷³ Agnes Horvath, ‘Mythology and the Trickster’, in *Democracy and Myth in Russia and Eastern Europe*, ed. by Alexander Wöll and Harald Wydra (London: Routledge, 2008), pp. 27–44; Agnes Horvath, ‘Liminality and the Unreal Class of the Image-making Craft: An Essay on Political Alchemy’, *International Political Anthropology*, 2:1 (2009), 53–72; Szakolczai, ‘Living Permanent Liminality’, pp. 29–32.

⁷⁴ Robert Aldrich, ‘Imperial *Mise-en-Valeur* and *Mise-en-Scène*: Recent Works on French Colonialism’, *The Historical Journal*, 45:4 (2002), 917–36 (p. 934–36).

⁷⁵ Adrian Martin, *Mise-en-Scène and Film Style. From Classical Hollywood to New Media Art* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 155–57. On theoretical debates on *mise-en-scène* in documentaries, see Pessoa Ramos, ‘What is Documentary *Mise-en-Scène*?’, pp. 143–45; Stella Bruzzi, *New Documentary*. 2nd edn (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), pp. 233–37.

The ways in which decolonial footage organizes the representation of the colonial space is instrumental to the re-articulation of Italian hegemony over the former colonies. This is especially true in some services on the African landscape and natural resources, which are reminiscent of previous Fascist production.⁷⁶ Despite a pseudo-ethnographic focus in certain scenes on rituals, tribal dances, and exotic landscapes, the overall composition tends to self-centredly exalt the Italian arrangement of the visible and narrative space. Therefore, although the films are different in terms of form, content, and intent, they all refer to a kind of colonial *mise-en-scène*, according to which the presentation of African inhabitants bespeaks a continuity with the narratives of racial difference produced by previous pseudo-scientific Fascist discourses.

A core premise of the representation strategy of these films was that former colonial subjects should not be entitled to assume legal power over those territories which had been indelibly marked by the Italian presence. We can accordingly interpret a colonial *mise-en-scène* in the decolonial footage insofar as it relegates formerly colonized people to the edges of the film narrative and framing. Decolonization is instead tackled from the perspective of the former colonizers, who are typically constructed as benevolent emissaries for a new civilization.⁷⁷ In so doing, the footage tried to dispel any form of postcolonial hybridization which could undermine Italy's political ambitions to renew its influence in Africa. Former colonial subjects are constructed as a captive audience, able only to praise the performance of the supposed Italian qualities. Therefore, Africans are caught in a permanent liminal situation between two stable statuses — the colonial past and the future form of trusteeship/Western influence — both characterized by the fact that only Italians could introduce modernization and civilization to Africa. The liminal condition of Italian decolonization, therefore, cannot be interpreted as progressive and emancipatory trajectory from colonialism to independence. Rather, it is a narratological full circle which collapses on itself while reiterating the myth of the Italian benevolence and industriousness in Africa.

⁷⁶ Mino Argentieri, *L'occhio del regime. Informazione e propaganda nel cinema del fascismo* (Florence: Vallecchi, 1979), pp. 176–78; Federico Caprotti, 'The Invisible War on Nature: The Abyssinian War (1935-1936) in Newsreels and Documentaries in Fascist Italy', *Modern Italy*, 19:3 (2014), 305-21.

⁷⁷ This tendency can be noticed in several European colonial and post-colonial cinema cultures, see <<http://www.filmreference.com/encyclopedia/Academy-Awards-Crime-Films/Colonialism-and-Postcolonialism-EUROPEAN-COLONIAL-CINEMA.html#ixzz5tlQiDxRd>> [accessed 16 July 2019].

4. Transnationalizing a Proletarian Nation. The *Lavoro Italiano* and the Organic Understanding of *Italianità*

A nation is such — a living body, that is — when, instead of shutting itself up in its own territorial identity, it is able to de-territorialize itself, to look at itself from the outside, and to take from the outside world whatever aids in renewing and developing its own roots, rather than obstructing them.

It is highly probable that, while writing this sentence, the philosopher Roberto Esposito was not thinking of the crackly footage that portrayed the loss of the Italian colonies. Nevertheless, although this definition refers to the elaboration of a specific distinctiveness of the Italian philosophical tradition, it likewise seems apt to describe the desires and aspirations certain newsreels and documentaries conveyed while reimagining the Italian national belonging after WWII. This is because those films offered a positive image of the influence Italy had in Africa and in the world, by portraying the Italian national community as able to detach itself from the peninsula and represent its transnationalization in the now former colonies accordingly.

In this chapter, through an investigation of the remoulding of post-war identity I will analyse how post-Fascist Italy ‘de-territorializes itself, looks at itself from the outside’ in relation to decolonial topics, to paraphrase Esposito’s sentence.¹ Such an attempt will tackle, from a theoretical viewpoint, how a given territory might be represented as organically connected to the people living and operating in it; how this biological connection serves to define both the people’s qualities and allegiance to a national community; and how the geographical and discursive borders of that community are demarcated according to previous colonial discourses. The films about the uncertain Italian decolonization are a case in point for the assessment of the extent to which Italian national

¹ Roberto Esposito, *Living Thought: Origins and Actuality of Italian Philosophy* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012), p. 196.

belonging was historically redefined, according to biological characteristics typical of the previous imperial period.

The organic reimagination of the relationship between Italy and certain disputed territories referred back to Fascist colonial discourses and practices, especially when these denied the now former subjects any political as well as cultural agency. Moreover, the vital connection between Italy and those territories transformed by a ‘positiva e feconda attività civilizzatrice italiana’ unfolded also in the representations of the equivocal relationship between post-Fascist Italy and the countries who won WWII.² The film corpus examined here dealt with these issues extensively, by setting Italian decolonization against the background of a wider discourse on the geographical as well as cultural borders of the post-Fascist/post-colonial nation. Accordingly, this chapter will pay attention to those film elements that depicted Italy as an organic and living body, injured by the loss of some of its territories and, at the same time, on the road to recovery.

The analysis of biological and even surgical metaphors will be read against the backdrop of a rhetoric in which foreign countries were said to have amputated some of the limbs of the Italian territorial body. This narrative was underpinned by a discourse on the deterritorialized and transnational traits of Italian identity, which conceives national belonging as beyond the tight relationship between the power of the State, a given territory, and the people living in it. Italian people were therefore portrayed as entitled to settle and to ‘civilize’ everywhere by virtue of their inherently benevolent and productive attitude, and despite the international decisions that would constrain their industriousness and fecundity within the peninsula’s borders. All those discourses conflated in the compulsive praise of the *lavoro italiano*, which is one of the most salient features running throughout the film corpus. The proletarianization of the Italian presence in the world, and especially in the now former colonies, furthermore took into account the discourse on the national *risentimento* (resentment) toward other European countries, which has characterized the dialectical definition of Italian national identity since the eighteenth century.³

² The Italian Prime Minister Alcide De Gasperi uses the word *fecondare* several times, when referring to the activities of Italian settlers in the former colonies, see Paolo Acanfora, *Miti e ideologia nella politica estera DC. Nazione, Europa e comunità atlantica (1943–1954)* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2013), pp. 32–33.

³ Silvana Patriarca and Lucy Riall, ‘Introduction: Revisiting the Risorgimento’, in *The Risorgimento Revisited. Nationalism and Culture in Nineteenth-Century Italy*, ed. by Silvana Patriarca and Lucy Riall (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 1–17.

The first sections of this chapter will provide a close critical description of some newsreels and documentaries produced during and after the Paris Peace Conference. The aim is to assess the multifaceted ways through which the myth of the *lavoro italiano* was put to the fore, in order both to support Italian claims over the former colonies and to recollect the allegedly positive traits of Italian labour in the former colonies. I will cross-reference the films analysed in these sections — together with some additional footage — in the following sections, where images and narratives will be read against the background of three analytical categories dealing, respectively, with the ‘proletarian transnationalization’ of Italy, with the organic and biological understanding of national belonging, and with the peninsula’s ambiguous relationship with the victorious countries, who wanted to ‘amputate’ the Italian organic body. As far as the aesthetic and stylistic choices are concerned, the metaphorical reclaiming of the images reaching us from the Fascist past will tackle the rather peculiar ways in which the actual colonial footage produced by the Istituto LUCE was reused in post-war Italy. Awareness of such technical continuities enables an even sharper analysis of the modalities through which post-war films have re-articulated previous colonial discourses in the post-colonial scenario.

4.1 The Italian claims at the Paris Peace Conference

In the immediate aftermath of WWII, Italian governments carried out intense diplomatic work aimed at maintaining a hegemonic role in Libya, Eritrea, and Somalia.⁴ Those efforts featured in several films about the Paris Peace Conference, produced between late 1945 and early 1948, whose number peaked in the summer of 1946. The films paid prominent attention to the debates conducted in this international forum by using a twofold strategy: on the one hand, they invoked the legitimacy of the Italian claims over the disputed territories for historical, economic, and cultural reasons; on the other hand, the praise of Italian qualities went hand in hand with an urgent appeal through which Italy uttered its anxiety about, and resentment toward, the four victorious nations (France, UK, US, Soviet Union), in whose hands the destiny of those territories lay, given the fact that the Peace

⁴ Gianluigi Rossi, *L’Africa italiana verso l’indipendenza (1941–1949)* (Varese: Giuffrè, 1980); Pietro Pastorelli, *Il ritorno dell’Italia nell’Occidente. Racconto della politica estera italiana dal 15 settembre 1947 al 21 novembre 1949* (Milan: LED, 2009); Antonio Varsori, ‘La dimensione internazionale della transizione postbellica in Italia (1943–1949)’, *Il politico*, 82:3 (2017), 124–59 (pp. 146–57).

Treaty (February 1947) did not indicate the actual path toward independence for the former colonies.⁵

Three *Settimana INCOM* newsreels epitomize the praise of the Italian diplomatic work and the resentment toward the WWII winners: *In contrasto con la Carta Atlantica si decide il destino dell'Italia*, *La conferenza della pace*, and *In contrasto con la Carta Atlantica: La conferenza della pace*.⁶ The film titles share very similar words and juxtapose the forum in which a fair decision should have been reached, and the principles against which the real verdicts were made. For its part, the voice-over oscillates between a very sad and pessimistic register when describing the pain of Italians living in the disputed territories, and a sarcastic tone; for instance, in the *Settimana INCOM* 22, the camera rests on the Indian delegate while the voice-over says, 'già troppi altri in questa conferenza si incaricano di "fare gli indiani" per quello che riguarda le frontiere d'Italia.' In Italian, the idiom 'fare gli indiani' means that the victorious countries are turning a deaf ear to the Italian pleas.⁷ In so doing, the commentary and the images intermingle so as to give a sardonic nuance to the harsh judgement of the results of the Paris Peace Conference.

Although the newsreels about the Paris Peace Conference dealt mostly with the issue of Italy's north-eastern border, three films make exclusive reference to the international debate about the destiny of the former colonies. One of these, entitled *A Parigi si tiene la Conferenza che decide la sorte dei possedimenti italiani in Africa. Visita di Brusasca al Museo Coloniale di Roma*, reiterates certain aesthetic devices typical of the films about the Paris Peace Conference: interior scenes with low lighting, close-ups of the faces of the attending politicians, the use of a dramatic score, and the rather austere commentary.⁸ As soon as the camera enters the Museo Coloniale in Rome, the atmosphere

⁵ See chapter 1, sections 1.1 (pp. 32–37).

⁶ 'In contrasto con la Carta Atlantica si decide il destino dell'Italia', *Settimana INCOM* 17 (INCOM, 13 July 1946); 'La conferenza della pace', *Settimana INCOM* 19 (INCOM, 14 August 1946); 'In contrasto con la Carta Atlantica: la conferenza della pace', *Settimana INCOM* 22 (INCOM, 6 September 1946). Other film companies and series, such as the *Nuova LUCE*, paid likewise attention to the Peace Conference: 'Trieste. Manifestazioni di piazza in favore dell'Istria italiana', *Nuova LUCE* 9 (Istituto LUCE, 1946); 'Meridiano d'Europa. Palazzo del Lussemburgo: la conferenza di Parigi e l'intervento di De Gasperi. Vedute della costa occidentale istriana con le sue pittoresche cittadine', *Nuova LUCE* 18 (Istituto LUCE, 1946).

⁷ It is noteworthy to say that the idiom *fare gli indiani* refers to Native Americans rather than to the Indians, see <http://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/ricerca/fare-l-indiano/Sinonimi_e_Contrari/> [accessed 14 December 2018].

⁸ 'A Parigi si tiene la Conferenza che decide la sorte dei possedimenti italiani in Africa. Visita di Brusasca al Museo Coloniale di Roma', *Settimana INCOM* 192 (INCOM, 24 September 1948).

changes so as to exalt the Italian presence in Africa since the dawn of Western civilization. These two quite distinct parts of the film metaphorically converse with each other, inasmuch as they provide a piece of visual evidence to the rightfulness of the Italian claims over the now former colonies. These indications become stronger and assume a 'living' aspect in the *Settimana INCOM* 89, which is about a gathering held in Padua attended by both the former Italian settlers and the former colonial subjects from Libya. According to the voice-over, both Libyans and Italians want the United Nations to grant Italy the Trusteeship administration of Libya.⁹ As in the above-mentioned film (the *Settimana INCOM* 22), a sarcastic register emerges when the camera frames the Palazzo della Ragione, the medieval town hall of Padua, while the voice-over says that 'la ragione' should inspire the victorious powers to achieve a reasonable resolution of the issue.

Another footage, which is currently stored at the Archivio Storico dell'Istituto Luce (ASL), this time without sound or commentary, offers a very similar visual narrative;¹⁰ images of politicians and representatives of Italian settlers are interspersed with scenes of the crowd holding posters that claim Italy deserves to have its overseas territories back. The camera zooms in on some sections of the crowd, while the speakers on stage are surrounded by people who encourage them, thus conveying the idea of a heartfelt participation. Nevertheless, the most noteworthy element of this film lies in the numerous shots of the protest signs held up by the crowd, featuring slogans like 'Le nostre famiglie ci attendono in Africa', 'All'Italia le sue colonie', 'Tripoli, Bengasi, Asmara, Mogadiscio sono lembi d'Italia', and 'Il diritto [...] e sovranità italiana sulle sue vecchie colonie è insopprimibile' — these all refer to the ongoing international debate in Paris. In the immediate aftermath of WWII, colonial issues were not very popular, especially if compared to the intense propaganda that invaded the everyday life of Italians during the period of the AOI.¹¹ Hence, the shots of the protest signs served as a tool to remind, and even to educate, the audience about the government's attempts to maintain control over the former colonies, and in particular to preserve the economic and social interests Italy had in Africa.

⁹ 'Gli ex coloni libici a Padova per chiedere che venga affidata all'Italia l'amministrazione fiduciaria dell'ex colonia', *Settimana INCOM* 89 (INCOM, 24 October 1947).

¹⁰ 'Un comizio di propaganda e rivendicazione delle colonie italiane in Africa si svolge nel secondo dopoguerra in una località italiana', 14605 (Repertorio Istituto LUCE Venezia, 1946–1947).

¹¹ Nicola Labanca, *Oltremare. Storia dell'espansione coloniale italiana* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2002), p. 348; Valeria Deplano, *L'Africa in casa. Propaganda e cultura coloniale nell'Italia fascista* (Florence: Le Monnier, 2015), pp. 117–54.

4.2 Reusing Fascist colonial footage

The footage about the Italian diplomatic work at the Paris Peace Conference balanced two interrelated elements against one another: on the one hand, it did not mention the recent Fascist past and its imperial phase, which was characterized by the systematic use of violence as well as by the establishment of a racially-inspired legal and social order; on the other hand, those silences about the past would have helped to re-articulate a new form of hegemony over those colonies conquered before the *Ventennio*. Alessandro Pes has comprehensively explored the agenda of the government, and especially of its ruling party, the DC, which implied that the former colonies would have reached independence and a democratic form of government only after a period of Italian protectorate. In that transitory period, democratic Italy would have taught the principles of self-government and industriousness to the newly independent African countries. As a corollary thereof, all the claims and the rhetoric concerning the future presence of Italy in Libya, Eritrea, and Somalia, built upon the almost obsessive exaltation of Italian industriousness — the so-called *lavoro italiano*.¹²

Newsreels and documentaries, whether directly or indirectly, were set up to praise Italian industriousness. In chapter 2, while exploring the complex dynamics of the production of decolonial footage, I mentioned a documentary (*Lavoro italiano in Africa*, distributed by Generalcine) as the example of a private production, which the government used, at the time, to support the claims over former colonies. Furthermore, the production of another documentary, distributed by CEN Film, is even more revealing of the ways in which the government intervened directly to support this quasi-propaganda production. A member of CEN Film, Francesco Cenciotti, wrote to the MAI in order to obtain funds to finalize the documentary *Giustizia per le colonie*. Eventually, the MAI granted the required funding. However, what is interesting to note is that, to produce the film, ‘fu utilizzato il materiale di repertorio presso l’Istituto LUCE, presso l’INCOM e “Cinecittà”’ (see pictures 6 and 7, chapter 2).¹³ This document is extremely significant insofar as it

¹² Alessandro Pes, ‘Coloni senza colonie. La Democrazia Cristiana e la decolonizzazione mancata (1946–1950)’, in *Quel che resta dell’impero. La cultura coloniale degli italiani*, ed. by Valeria Deplano and Alessandro Pes (Milan: Mimesis, 2014), pp. 417–37; Alessandro Pes, ‘Il lavoro italiano in colonia nel dibattito politico tra il 1946 e il 1949’, *Il politico*, 82:3 (2017), 160–75.

¹³ ACS, G. ‘Ministero Africa Italiana (MAI)’, F. 67 ‘Rapporti con la stampa italiana ed estera 1945–1967’, f. 4 ‘Stampa italiana e film. Sovvenzioni varie’, letter by the CEN’s legal representative Francesco Cenciotti to the Ministry of the *Africa Italiana*, 4th February 1947; see also chapter 2, section 2.10 (pp. 96–100).

demonstrates that the practice of using found footage — produced by the Istituto LUCE — about the Fascist Empire was accepted, and even supported, by the government, which at that time was still controlling the archives that stored LUCE footage and its technical equipment.¹⁴

From a more theoretical vantage point, decolonial footage concealed as far as possible the use of old footage, which was, instead, resemanticized via the new commentary. In so doing, any explicit connection with the former colonial propaganda was camouflaged. Despite this disguised use, Fascist found footage was indirectly deemed capable of engendering a specific historical bond between the colonial past and the post-war claims to play a new role in Africa. Although it is extremely hard to pinpoint the very moment in which previous footage was recasted, a close analysis of the films might reveal the extent to which decolonial footage constructed its arguments by using old materials to convey, or refashion, given meanings about the colonial past.¹⁵ This means that the surreptitious use of found footage was part of a mutable strategy, aimed at dissolving the temporal hiatus between the colonial past and the present time of the audience, and at proving the long-lasting and useful impact of Italy's 'civilizing' work in Africa.¹⁶

One of the most interesting newsreels of the entire film corpus, entitled *Gli italiani non dimenticano le terre d'Africa*, offers a clear idea of the extent to which the previous colonial footage was reactivated in the post-colonial political debate.¹⁷ As a whole, the film has an impeccably conceived *mise-en-scène*. The first shot is taken through a Dutch-angle, that is, with the camera being tilted to create disorientation, a feeling which is enhanced by the canted camera shooting an interior setting through a mirror. As soon as the camera moves left and returns to a straight position, the viewers are able to bring into focus the office of Undersecretary Brusasca, who is reading one of the hundreds of letters lying on his desk. The voice-over asks, 'che cosa dicono tutte queste lettere che giungono sul tavolo dell'onorevole Brusasca?' At this point, Brusasca directly answers the question by looking straight into the camera, and mentioning the commitment of the government concerning the issue of the 'italiani d'Africa strappati alle loro case e alle terre regenerate

¹⁴ Ernesto G. Laura, *Le stagioni dell'aquila: storia dell'Istituto Luce* (Rome: Ente dello Spettacolo, 2000), pp. 223–45.

¹⁵ Carl Plantinga, "'I'll Believe it when I Trust the Source": Documentary Images and Visual Evidence', in *The Documentary Film Book*, ed. by B. Winston (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 40–47 (p. 41).

¹⁶ Stella Bruzzi, *New Documentary*, 2nd edn (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), pp. 12–14; Robert Rosenstone, *History on Film. Film on History* (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2006), pp. 7–8.

¹⁷ 'Gli italiani non dimenticano le terre d'Africa', *Settimana INCOM* 138 (INCOM, 2 April 1948).

dal loro lavoro’. This is a significantly original choice, because Brusasca becomes the hegemonic voice of the film by replacing the ‘standard’ voice-over. In so doing, the voice of the film (in this case, INCOM’s speaker Guido Notari) and that of the government explicitly overlap, revealing the propagandistic aim of this footage.

As soon as the undersecretary mentions that Italy gave a ‘glorioso contributo alle esplorazioni dell’Africa’, and that ‘con la colonizzazione è subentrato il lavoro italiano [...] che ha pochi rivali al mondo per lo spirito d’intraprendenza, l’ingegnosità delle risorse, e la frugale tenacia nella fatica’, scenes of infrastructures and construction sites that the Italian settlers had built in Africa follow one another. These scenes have without a doubt been taken from Fascist footage, given that, in 1948, INCOM did not send any troupes to Africa.¹⁸ At first glance, the connection between spoken words and images makes it rather hard to spot the use of found footage. A closer look, however, reveals that the simple montage — featuring stationary, wide-angle framings of workers, bridges, roads, and buildings — contrasts, in fact, with the first part of the films, which instead features well-edited framings, complex camera movements, and accurate lighting. These two contrasting styles metaphorically embody the complex and even contradictory agenda of the government concerning the former colonies. This is because it aimed at re-articulating a new presence in the former colonies, by using the same vocabulary, discourses, and images of the former colonial propaganda, yet obliterating any explicit reference to that past.

4.3 Urban and rural spaces: A landscape that still *parla italiano*

The rhetoric of the *lavoro italiano* unquestionably echoed the Fascist propaganda, and the idea that Italy’s empire was a proletarian construction founded on labour. According to Mussolini’s policies, East Africa and Libya were the ideal destinations to prevent, or at least to divert, emigration to America.¹⁹ The description of that continuity referred to certain aesthetic devices typical of old colonial discourses, which were recontextualized and hence made operational during the 40s and the 50s. In particular, there are three sets of representations that epitomize how the territories that had experienced the Italian

¹⁸ Sandro Pallavicini, *I cinegiornali d’attualità in Italia e nel mondo* (Rome: [n. pub], 1962), pp. 17–18.

¹⁹ Michele Strazza, ‘Il fascismo e l’emigrazione negli Stati Uniti’, *Storiain* (2015) <<http://www.storiain.net/storia/il-fascismo-e-lemigrazione-negli-stati-uniti/>> [accessed 13 December 2018]; Neelam Srivastava, *Italian Colonialism and Resistances to Empire, 1930–1970* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), p. 29.

presence became indissolubly bound to the metropolitan centre. The first element deals with the images of the colonial soil becoming fertile and productive; the second is about the urban dimension of the colonies; the third aspect concerns the images of old archaeological debris that, especially in Libya, functions as a reminder of the long-lasting Italian presence and civilizing work.

Water is the element Italians brought to Africa that makes the desert bloom, as we have seen in the film *Dal deserto alla vita*.²⁰ According to the footage, the irrigation system introduced by the Italian settlers in 1927 still grants a thriving life for the Italian settlers, for local labourers, and for the Libyan people living nearby. The images of the beginning of the settlement in 1927, and those referring to the other stages of colonization, which happened during the *Ventennio*, are taken from older LUCE footage.²¹ In so doing, the film suggests a seamless historical link with that past. Even though the word ‘Fascism’ is never mentioned, the divide between the past and present time, in which the audience watched the film, is suspended thanks to the ‘the paradoxical status of moving images’, which contributed to silencing the most brutal sides of the recent past.²²

This film, but also a very similar documentary entitled *Un raro documentario sulla colonizzazione italiana in Libia*, which asserts the positive impact of Italian workers in the country, portrays the desert as a world in itself, an extraterritorial realm separated from the sea and other liveable rain-fed lands.²³ As such, it is the natural barrier to human expansion, to social progress, and to economic development. The desert is therefore described as a fortress holding out against the development of any kind of biological life. Hence, it can be considered as a metonymy for the colonial space that needs to be ‘Westernized’, and thus brought to the ‘civilized’ world through its taming.²⁴ In a similar way, the scenes of a huge dam on the Awash river in *Torniamo in Etiopia con un messaggio di pace*, as well as the water system in a Somali city described in the film *Avvenimenti di 12 di vita politica*

²⁰ *Dal deserto alla vita*, dir. by Raimondo Musu (Documentari INCOM, 1951), see chapter 3, section 3.2 (pp. 110–12).

²¹ <patrimonio.archiviolute.com/luce-web/detail/IL3000050979/1/dal-deserto-alla-vita.html> [accessed 10 May 2018].

²² Bill Nichols, *Blurred Boundaries. Question of Meaning in Contemporary Culture* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), pp. 116–17.

²³ ‘Un raro documentario sulla colonizzazione italiana in Libia’, *Nuova LUCE* 20 (Istituto LUCE, 1946).

²⁴ Joana Lucas, ‘Orientalism and Imperialism in French West Africa. Considerations on Travel Literature, Colonial Tourism, and the Desert as ‘Commodity’ in Mauritania’, in *Tourism in the Global South. Heritages, Identities and Development*, ed. by Edoardo Brito-Henriques and João Sarmento (Lisbon: Centre for Geographical Studies – University of Lisbon, 2013), pp. 25–43.

italiana, were meant to demonstrate that Italian industriousness could bring proper civilization and even life to Africa.²⁵ In these films, but also in those previously analysed, the management of water resources symbolizes the mastering of the natural landscape in which Africans are embedded. Italy thus transforms the hostile nature that has constrained the development of those societies, and prepares them for independence, which is however far from being reached by Africans alone.

The purported positive impact the *lavoro italiano* had on the former colonies emerges even more clearly in those scenes that describe the urban landscape in Eritrea, Somalia, and Libya. Mia Fuller has provided an in-depth analysis of the significance of urban planning during the Italian colonial period.²⁶ As happened in coeval imperial experiences, Italian colonial cities reflected the colonizers' history and modernity rather than those of the locals. This element is evident in the films set in Asmara. For instance, two short INCOM documentaries about the visit of Undersecretary Brusasca in the Horn of Africa, in 1951, describe Asmara as a city that 'parla ancora italiano nelle insegne dei suoi edifici e nei palazzi'.²⁷ The city, which is often referred to as 'la piccola Roma' for its modernist architecture, is described as being conceived and erected as if it was within the peninsula. The numerous shots of the futurist and modernist building, such as the Fiat Tagliero Service Station and the Cinema Impero, visually recall the previous colonial period, clearly in an attempt to show that Italians built the city from scratch. Indeed, this is almost entirely true for the Eritrean capital, which was a very small village before the arrival of the Italian settlers.²⁸ Therefore, Asmara's portrayal indirectly conveys the idea that any form of modernity and development was materially built by the Italian workers, who set the social space and allowed African people to improve their living condition.

²⁵ *Avvenimenti di 12 di vita politica italiana. L'attività politica del sottosegretario Giuseppe Brusasca*, 35705 (Documentari INCOM, 1956); 'Torniamo in Etiopia con un messaggio di pace. Servizio speciale sulla missione dell'on. Brusasca in Africa', *Settimana INCOM* 648 (INCOM, 26 September 1951).

²⁶ Mia Fuller, 'Wherever You Go, There You Are: Fascist Plans for the Colonial City of Addis Ababa and the Colonizing Suburb of EUR '42', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 31:2 (1996), 397–418 (p. 402); Mia Fuller, *Moderns Abroad: Architecture, Cities, and Italian Imperialism* (London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 151–213.

²⁷ 'Brusasca in Africa', *Settimana INCOM* 638 (INCOM; 31 August 1951); 'Il sottosegretario Giuseppe Brusasca diretto a Nairobi fa tappa ad Asmara e a Mogadiscio, dove viene inaugurato un monumento ossario ai caduti italiani dell'11 gennaio 1948', 8613 (Repertorio INCOM, August 1951).

²⁸ Peter Vogtler, 'Introduction', in *Architecture in Asmara. Colonial Origins and Postcolonial Experiences*, ed. by Stefan Graf and Peter Volgger (Berlin: SB, 2017), pp. 14–23 (pp. 15–21).

This discourse is also used in the films set in other former colonial cities, such as Mogadishu and Tripoli, notwithstanding their being important conurbations well before Italian colonialism. The Italian settlers awoke these cities from a long and ‘innate’ sleep by bringing them into a new form of colonial modernity. In this regard, the images of Mogadishu that feature in the *Settimana INCOM* 425 are illustrative; wide-angle framings of Italian buildings, such as the *lungomare* Vittorio Bottego or the SS. Vergine Consolata cathedral, are commented on by a nostalgic voice-over, which uses the words ‘ricementare l’amicizia’ to suggest the rebuilding of the Italian presence there.²⁹

The portrayal of Libyan cities, and especially of Tripoli, is slightly different, for two interrelated reasons. First, Libya was historically considered as the *quarta sponda*, a condition that was legally recognized in 1939.³⁰ Accordingly, the films produced during the decolonization somehow reflected such a different status. Secondly, the films traced back the distinctive relationship between Italy and Libya well before Italian modern colonialism, which started following the Italo–Turkish war (1911–12). For instance, two documentaries (*Italiani d’oltremare* and *Libia terra d’Italia*) provide a portrayal of the city as inextricably bound with Italy. The Italian work has improved the urban space; the voice-over of *Italiani d’oltremare* states that ‘le strade che il lavoro italiano e l’italiano senso d’armonia hanno fatto linde, civili, e accoglienti, danno alla capitale libica l’aspetto di una città modello’. While pronouncing this pompous sentence, the camera — placed in a moving truck that drives through the city — reminds the audience of the fact that industriousness, harmony, and even tidiness are all characteristic of Italy’s presence there ever since the Roman Empire.³¹

The reference to Latin civilization plays a significant part in the praise of the tireless *lavoro italiano* in Libya. This enduring connection is outlined deliberately in a film entitled

²⁹ ‘Nostro servizio speciale da Napoli a Mogadiscio con i soldati italiani’, *Settimana INCOM* 425 (INCOM, 6 April 1950).

³⁰ RD 70 (9 January 1939), see Florence Renucci, ‘La strumentalizzazione del concetto di cittadinanza in Libia negli anni Trenta’, *Quaderni fiorentini per la storia del pensiero giuridico moderno*, 33/34 (2005), 319–42. On the impact of Italian colonialism in the urban and rural architectural landscape of Libya, see Vittoria Capresi, *The Built Utopia. The Italian Rural Centres Founded in Colonial Libya* (1934–1940) (Bologna: Bononia University Press, 2010).

³¹ ‘Italiani d’oltremare’, *Settimana INCOM* 16 (INCOM, 27 June 1946); ‘Libia terra d’Italia. Viaggio nella ex colonia italiana’, *Mondo Libero* 6 (Astra Cinematografica, 3 March 1952). The *Mondo Libero* series, produced by the Astra Cinematografica, is composed of about four hundred films produced between 1951 and 1959, see Daniela Baratieri, *Memories and Silences Haunted by Fascism. Italian Colonialism MCMXXX – MCMLX* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2010), pp. 42–43.

Crociera della pace, about a cruise through a number of Mediterranean port cities.³² The largest section of the film deals with Tripoli. The ship docks at the city's marina, which is described as beautiful because built by Italians. The rapid editing and a commentary balanced consistently with the images construct a vast array of evidences of the allegedly positive impact of Italians. Such vivid editing is suspended when the camera dwells upon the statue of Julius Caesar in Tripoli, and then on the archaeological remains of the Roman city of Leptis Magna. Here the length of each shot increases, becoming more static so as to focus more extensively on the magnificence of the Roman presence. Wide-angle shots of the huge amphitheatre are interspersed with stationary frames of the architectonic details that recall the Colosseum, as the voice-over states.

The sophisticated composition suggests the strong continuity between old and new colonization, but also the durable and innate industriousness of Italians who have transformed and civilized every place they settled into since the dawn of Western civilization. Hence, these scenes entail a slightly different elaboration of the rhetoric of the *lavoro italiano*: they embrace an understanding that is older and broader than that typical of the colonial period and spaces. The exaltation of settlers' industriousness is therefore a myth that includes the colonial experience in the wider narrative of the innate qualities of the Italian people, who bring modernity and civilization to Africa and anywhere they have ever settled since the Roman Empire.³³

4.4 The myth of the *lavoro*: Italy in Africa and in the world

In May 1946, when the destiny of Italy's former colonies was still uncertain, Alcide De Gasperi made a pressing appeal that offers the best synthesis of the rhetorical use of the *lavoro italiano*:

Non sarebbe giusto privare l'Italia di tutte le colonie in cui ha profuso il lavoro dei suoi figli; ha fondato città italiane e promosso coltivazioni, mentre si è visto che dove cessa l'opera del nostro contadino, torna il deserto. Noi non rivendichiamo le colonie per l'imperialismo politico e l'espansionismo economico, ma in nome del lavoro e senza il

³² 'Crociera del "Pace"', *Settimana INCOM* 756 (INCOM, 10 April 1952).

³³ Roemke Visser, 'Fascist Doctrine and the Cult of the Romanità', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 27:1 (1992), 5–22 (pp. 7–10); Andrea Giardina e André Vauchez, *Il mito di Roma. Da Carlo Magno a Mussolini* (Rome and Bari: Laterza, 2000); Jan Nelis, 'Imperialismo e mito della romanità nella Terza Roma Mussoliniana', *Forum Romanum Belgicum*, 2 (2012), 1–11.

lavoro italiano nel Mediterraneo, mare nel quale dovrebbe esplicarsi la piena collaborazione internazionale, non sarebbe possibile progredire.

These words aimed to detach the nation from its Fascist, imperial past whilst simultaneously promoting a renewed presence in the Mediterranean and in the world.³⁴ Although De Gasperi still uses the word *colonie* when referring to the African territories, this speech indicates a paradigm shift: the *lavoro italiano* and the necessities of the Italian workers started to replace those of the Italian colonizers/settlers. As such, the praise of the *lavoro italiano* served, on the one hand, to sustain the selective recollection of the colonial past by portraying ‘the Italians as labouring subjects as they revisited many of the sites where the most terrible atrocities of Italian expansion occurred (Ethiopia, Greece, Libya)’.³⁵ On the other hand, however, the discourse of Italians as benevolent workers in Africa became an additional facet of the process of nation rebuilding that followed WWII. This means that the idea of Italy as an ‘emigrant nation’ was promoted at the expense of the imperial myth, which, instead, characterized the Fascist expansionist discourse.

The films analysed so far — but, to a different extent, the corpus as a whole — use the myth of the *lavoro* in manifold ways in order to incorporate the memories and the actual political implications of the Italian presence in Africa into the narrative of Italian industriousness throughout the world. In so doing, they redefine the contours of Italian belongings beyond the peninsula. Donna Gabaccia and Mark Choate, amongst others, have meticulously tackled the significance of Italian migrations against the background of the nation-building process. They sustain that the fashioning of national identity happened both within and beyond the geographical borders of Italy.³⁶ According to them, the representations of the work Italian settlers used to do — and continued to do — in the former colonies address a broad discursive space in which narratives of diaspora and migration, imperialism and settlement, culture, and of economic and political issues conflate. Such different ways to ‘make *Italianità* abroad’ are kept together precisely by the myth of the *lavoro italiano*, which was a key feature in the support of the labour force’s

³⁴ Speech by the Italian Prime Minister Alcide De Gasperi (Cagliari, 21 May 1946), cited by Pes, ‘Coloni senza colonie’, p. 426.

³⁵ Mark Hayward, ‘Good Workers: Television Documentary, Migration and the Italian Nation, 1956–1964’, *Modern Italy*, 16:1 (2011), 3–17 (p. 4).

³⁶ Donna Gabaccia, *Italy’s Many Diasporas* (London: UCL Press, 2000); Mark I. Choate, *Emigrant Nation. The Making of Italy Abroad* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2008).

emigration, and the related transnational elaboration of Italian belonging in the shifting scenario of post-war Italy.

The presence of Italian workers in the now former colonies gradually started to be portrayed as a facet of the praise of Italian emigration abroad. This discourse enabled the films to redefine a sense of *Italianità* and, more practically, to represent an ambitious foreign policy that implied both the continuation of the old colonial settlement projects and the connection among expat communities throughout the world.³⁷ The intrinsic transnational character of the *lavoro italiano* that the films championed hence becomes the tool through which to keep together, consistently, the wreckage of colonial discourses, neo-colonial paradigms, the disputed national borders, and the fluid status of Italy as a Mediterranean as well as a European country.

The documentary *Il prestigio dell'Italia nel mondo*, produced by the renewed Istituto LUCE in 1958, is an eloquent example of how the issue of the former colonies overlapped with the broader discourse on national reconstruction, as well as with the idea of the transnational traits of Italian belonging.³⁸ This documentary shares its structure with some other films — like *L'Italia lavora* or *Rievocazione delle drammatiche giornate del 1945 e della storia repubblicana dell'immediato dopoguerra* — that aimed to condense the main national events from the end of WWII onward.³⁹ As such, they feature the praise of the ethos that drives the national reconstruction and repositioning within the Western–Atlantic block. Moreover, they understand the communities abroad to be evidence of the fact that Italian industriousness and benevolence could spread once again in the world after the Fascist parenthesis. All these documentaries start with scenes that document the shattered condition of the nation in 1945. They next portray construction sites and workers intent on rebuilding the nation. The footage also refers to the new political scenario, by exalting the ruling party and, in particular, Prime Minister Alcide De Gasperi and his efforts to place Italy back in the Western world. As put by Forgacs and Gundle, at the end of the war, the conviction that Fascism corrupted and sabotaged the benevolent, long-lasting, and positive idea of Italian belonging ‘tended to produce an emphasis both in

³⁷ Mark I. Choate, ‘From Territorial to Ethnographic Colonies and Back Again: The Politics of Italian Expansion, 1890–1912’, *Modern Italy*, 8:1 (2003), 65–75 (p. 67).

³⁸ *Il prestigio dell'Italia nel mondo*, dir. by Antonio Petrucci (Documentari LUCE, 1958).

³⁹ ‘Numero unico: rievocazione delle drammatiche giornate del 1945 e della storia repubblicana dell'immediato Dopoguerra’, *Settimana INCOM* 1414 (INCOM, 9 June 1956); *L'Italia lavora* (Documentari INCOM, 1957).

public speeches and policy on a rejection of Italy's immediate imperialist past and a turning outward to membership of a larger transnational community'.⁴⁰

A short section of *Il prestigio dell'Italia nel mondo* sums up how Italian industriousness in the former colonies is used against the background of the new and global path of the nation. A specific passage on the AFIS, following a number of scenes dealing with the thorny question of the north-eastern border, features an on-screen text that reads 'United Nations advisory council for Somaliland under Italian administration', making clear the UN umbrella under which the AFIS operated. Next, the voice-over states that 'nel 1949 l'Onu concede all'Italia l'amministrazione della Somalia, il primo passo verso l'ammissione vera e propria', implying that the AFIS was the first step through which Italy could prove both the fairness of its claims over Somalia and its status as a Western country. The editing then juxtaposes a series of old scenes of the various diplomatic missions both De Gasperi and his successors carried out in Europe and beyond, when the voice-over asks the following question:

12 anni fa ci chiedevamo: potrà il lavoro italiano farsi valere nel mondo? Questa è la risposta: in Africa, in Asia, in America, dalla Rhodesia al Venezuela alla Persia imprese italiane costruiscono dighe, oleodotti, pozzi petroliferi, impianti industriali. E vi lavorano operai italiani.

As these words are being pronounced, the footage shows Italian people working abroad in industrial plants, on huge cranes in the desert, and while building a big dam. The film structure thus creates an ideal thread between foreign policy and Italy's civilizing work being done around the world, drawing on the emblematic example of the AFIS; this is the test-bench indicating that Fascism was a parenthesis that did not corrupt the intrinsic benevolent and laborious nature of Italians.

In these newsreels and documentaries, the line separating the portrayal of colonial settlers from the images of the Italian labour force abroad becomes increasingly blurred. The role of workers and that of colonizers gradually overlap, especially if we look at the footage from a chronological perspective. The films produced in the immediate aftermath of the war (1946–48) tended to use footage and narratives characteristic of the colonial propaganda, spreading an uncritical image of former colonial mobility among the

⁴⁰ David Forgacs and Stephen Gundle, *Mass Culture and Italian Society from Fascism to the Cold War* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2007), p. 23.

audience. Later films, instead, stressed the contribution of Italians to help African countries reach their independence and development. Italian workers are thus legitimised to go back to their alleged civilizing work by virtue of their inherent benevolence and palpable productiveness, which is fruitful also for the now former subjects.⁴¹

The portrayal of the Italian as a good worker, both in the former colonies and in other countries, becomes the discursive means through which national qualities were deemed capable of operating beyond national borders, as the symbol of Italy's post-war economic and industrial development. This stands out very clearly in the documentary *Come ci vede il mondo*, which features a mixture of reportages of the Italian communities in the world, described as the best example of national reconstruction following WWII.⁴² The myth of the *lavoro* thus played a twofold function; it had to portray the alleged good qualities of Italians in the world in the eyes of the international community, while at the same time erasing the usurpation that characterized the colonial period, and even reproducing some of its hegemonic visions concerning the relationship between Italy and Africa.

4.5 Transnationalizing a proletarian nation

As far as the deterritorialized and transnational form of *Italianità* is concerned, the footage does not assume the straightforward eradication of colonial discourses. It seems, instead, that they were refashioned so as to prove the intrinsic industriousness of Italians even after the formal colonial domination. In other words, although the Italian governments and diplomacy tried to silence the brutalities of the Fascist past, decolonial footage argued for the existence of a positive way to return to Africa, a way which was not characterized by usurpation but, as De Gasperi put it, by the 'lavoro italiano, che si è incanalato verso quelle terre, le ha fecondate con lo sforzo, il sudore, il sacrificio dei lavoratori italiani'.⁴³

Italians working in former colonies are portrayed as diligent workers and benevolent supervisors engaged in modernization projects, all values deeply ingrained in the capitalist framework that INCOM films, in particular, reproduce, also as a result of

⁴¹ Antonio M. Morone, 'I custodi della memoria. Il comitato per la documentazione dell'opera dell'Italia in Africa', *Zapruder*, 23 (2010), 25–38 (p. 31).

⁴² 'Come ci vede il mondo', *Settimana INCOM* 881 (INCOM, 18 December 1952).

⁴³ Speech by Alcide De Gasperi (Palermo, 28 September 1946) in Pes, 'Coloni senza colonie', pp. 426–27; see also Acanfora, *Miti e ideologia nella politica estera DC*, pp. 31–36.

INCOM's allegiance with Italian industrial groups.⁴⁴ Moreover, the portrayal of the former subjects that emerges in several films, including *Un raro documentario sulla colonizzazione italiana in Libia*, *Italiani d'oltremare*, or *Brusasca in Africa*, features a significant connection with previous Fascist propaganda and with the related attempt to dominate African otherness.⁴⁵ In those films, African people have neither political nor individual subjectivity. More precisely, they have one exclusively when they are portrayed as happy, insofar as 'gli indigeni sentirono sempre che per questi italiani l'Africa era terra di lavoro, non di sfruttamento. Più che prendere, essi seppero dare [...] Il nostro camion circola liberamente nella città che li riconosce'.⁴⁶ The most interesting part of this commentary is the last sentence, which describes a scene with a truck full of Italians driving through the streets of Mogadishu. It seems that Italians are recognized as such by virtue of the streets and the buildings they constructed, rather than by their attempts to civilize Somali, people who are depicted as passive elements nestled in the urban landscape.

What emerges from these representations is not so much the usurpation of a territory that belongs to other people, but the self-centred need to advocate the proletarian character of the Italians.⁴⁷ Although a rather feeble reference to the future independence of those countries is made, the films imply that the *lavoro italiano* gives Italian settlers the moral, cultural, and political authority to set the African populations free from their ostensible backwardness. In so doing, however, the films elude any image of contact and hybridization between people and cultures. The renewed presence of Italy in Africa — especially in those colonies gained before the Ethiopian war — was therefore envisioned according to an evident contradiction: although the idea of the future independence of Libya, Eritrea, and Somalia started to breach political discourses, their portrayal was still underpinned by the objectification of the African human and political element, which was depicted as being prone to support the Italian claims.

In this sense, the footage selectively portrays the positive sides of the Italian presence in Africa, keeping alive the liberal as well as Fascist idea of the *colonialismo*

⁴⁴ Pierre Sorlin, 'La Settimana INCOM messaggera del futuro', in *La Settimana INCOM. Cinegiornali e informazione negli anni '50*, ed. by Augusto Sainati (Turin: Lindau, 2001), pp. 71–77; Hayward, 'Good Workers', pp. 3–7.

⁴⁵ 'Un raro documentario sulla colonizzazione italiana in Libia', *Nuova LUCE* 20; 'Italiani d'oltremare', *Settimana INCOM* 16; 'Brusasca in Africa', *Settimana INCOM* 638.

⁴⁶ 'Mogadiscio. Lo sbarco', *Settimana INCOM* 411 (INCOM, 3 March 1950).

⁴⁷ Pes, 'Il lavoro italiano in colonia', pp. 162–64.

proletario, but re-articulating its applicability and neutralizing its potential for change, and any possible solidarity with anti-capitalist and anticolonial causes. Neelam Srivastava, in her analysis of the left anticolonial resistance in Italy, outlines that the global decolonization in the 60s and 70s was seen, by ex-partisans and left-wing intellectuals, as the ideal continuation of the *Resistenza*. At the same time, however, she points out that that political as well as intellectual milieu had an ambiguous attitude toward the puzzling amnesia concerning Italy's own colonial past.⁴⁸ Decolonization, in other words, was something that pertained to other countries. As a result, the rhetoric of the *lavoro italiano* in Africa did not mention the national as well as global contraposition between capitalism and workforce/proletarians. Rather, it projected such a contraposition beyond the borders of Italy, which — by imagining itself as an organic, transnational entity by virtue of its labour force in the world — continued to depict itself as a consistent *proletarian nation* set against other Western and capitalist countries/empires. This contraposition, based on the simultaneous proletarianization and transnationalization of Italian belongings, unfolds in three interrelated discourses that inspired the narratives and the stylistic choices of the decolonial films. They deal, respectively, with the organic traits of Italian belonging; with the rhetoric of the amputation of some of its national appendages; and with the *risentimento* toward the countries that amputated parts of the national body.

4.6 The *lavoro* as the genetic makeup of the living body of the nation

The ubiquitous rhetoric that praises the *lavoro italiano* and the proletarianization of the Italian presence in the former colonies repeals any class struggle within the Italian nation. The *patria italiana* is constituted by all the people in whose vein runs Italian blood, and whose bodies are depicted as genetically Italian.⁴⁹ Italian workers, regardless of their origin or social background, belonged to the same national body whose limbs were not exclusively in the peninsula, but in every corner of the world where the workers could demonstrate their industriousness. Such a discourse was the backbone of the Fascist vision of the organic State: the nation as a living body in which each person had its own place and function.⁵⁰ As such, it theoretically denied any form of divergence within it, and any

⁴⁸ Srivastava, *Italian Colonialism and Resistances to Empire*, pp. 195–253.

⁴⁹ Valeria Deplano, 'Within and Outside the Nation: Former Colonial Subjects in Post-War Italy', *Modern Italy*, 23:4 (2018), 395–410 (pp. 395–96).

⁵⁰ Luciano Marroccu, *La sonnambula. L'Italia nel Novecento* (Rome and Bari: Laterza, 2019), pp. 140–47.

conflict had to be projected abroad. As a result, Fascism conceived the world as divided between bourgeois nations and proletarian ones like Italy, which had to struggle to survive in the international arena.⁵¹

During the period of the AOI, imperial Italy was portrayed as a virile and powerful body constituted of workers and settlers; Fascism organized the cultural, social, and legal devices of imperial citizenship according to such a biological discourse.⁵² This organic understanding of national belongings — and the related, pseudo-scientific idea of the hierarchy among races and people — led to the colonial and racial legislation, which in the colonies was implemented in 1937 onwards, and subsequently toughened with the Aryan and anti-Semitic turn of 1938.⁵³ The racial laws adopted by Fascism against Jews and African people were dismantled in the aftermath of WWII. However, Valeria Deplano has pointed out that the abolition of the colonial racial decrees remained in the background if compared to the debates about the abrogation of the anti-Semitic laws.⁵⁴ This reflects the scale of the ambiguous intermingling of cultural and legal practices, which made the decolonization of the racist and patronizing imaginaries of black Africans more difficult in post-war society.

In spite of the official rejection of the biological form of racism, which characterized the Fascist hierarchy of citizenship during the AOI, an organic representation

⁵¹ Deplano, *L'Africa in casa*, p. 14. On the organic understanding of the Fascist State, see Renzo De Felice, *Mussolini il Duce. Gli anni del consenso 1929–36* (Turin: Einaudi, 1974); Emilio Gentile, *Fascismo. Storia e interpretazione* (Rome and Bari: Laterza, 2002).

⁵² The Fascist intellectual Renzo Sartori Salis described those differentiated regimes of imperial, racial citizenship as organized according to concentric layers: the further people were removed from a hypothetical core defined by Roman genes, the less level of civilization and citizenship they could aspire to, see Davide Rodogno, *Il nuovo ordine mediterraneo. Le politiche di occupazione dell'Italia fascista in Europa (1940–1943)* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2003), pp. 91–92; Gianluca Bascherini, *La colonizzazione e il diritto costituzionale. Il contributo dell'esperienza coloniale alla costruzione del diritto pubblico italiano* (Naples: Jovene, 2012).

⁵³ Some racial norms were implemented in the colonies since 1933, even though they did not become laws of the Italian Kingdom (Royal Decrees), see Olindo De Napoli, *La prova della razza*, pp. 34–46. On racial legislation in the empire, with specific reference to the 1937 and 1940 Laws against mixed marriages or *madamato* — RD 880 (1937) — and the prohibition, for Italians, to recognize children born from a mixed marriage — RD 822 (1940) (the so-called *meticcianto*) — see Giulia Barrera, *Dangerous Liaisons. Colonial Concubinage in Eritrea 1890–1941* (Evanston: Northwestern University, 1996); Barbara Sorgoni, *Parole e corpi. Antropologia, discorso giuridico e politiche sessuali interrazziali 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).

⁵⁴ Valeria Deplano, *La madrepatria è una terra straniera. Libici, eritrei e somali nell'Italia del dopoguerra (1945–1960)* (Florence: Le Monnier, 2017), pp. 87–97.

of national belonging nestled in political discourses, narratives, and in mass media products championing industriousness as the genetic makeup so typical of Italian people's bodies and minds.⁵⁵ The documentary *Realtà della Libia d'oggi* artistically condenses these elements, insofar as Libya is still connected with Italy for the tireless civilizing work the Italian explorers and settlers did there.⁵⁶ In the first scenes, the camera is put on a plane departing from Rome to the desert region of Libya. In so doing, it re-articulates and 'updates' the trope of the crowded ships through which Italian settlers, until a few years earlier, moved from Italy to work and 'civilize' Africa. The footage then insists on the boldness of the Italian workers who transformed a portion of the desert — the Gefara Oasis — into a fertile land that looks like Sicily, as the voice-over states.

The link between old and modern forms of Italian industriousness is crafted through the juxtaposition of these initial scenes with the epic wide-angle framings of the marble statues and archaeological debris of the Roman city of Leptis Magna, while the voice-over says that 'l'uomo passa, ma le sue opere restano. Restano per tutti. La sua grandezza, la sua operosità, il suo amore per l'arte restano ai figli, e ai figli dei figli'. Hence, the editing crafts an uninterrupted lineage between ancient and modern forms of colonialism, which stand out as the backbone that will grant a positive future for the, now, independent country. In a similar vein, *Gli italiani non dimenticano le terre d'Africa* and *Un raro documentario sulla colonizzazione italiana in Libia* make explicit reference to the long-lasting, or better immutable, genetic predisposition of Italians to spread civilization abroad, ever since the Roman Empire.

As I explored previously, the innate inclination of Italians to work and civilize abroad acquired a perceptibly racialized form during the *Ventennio*. Nevertheless, it was, likewise, surreptitiously reactivated in the aftermath of Fascism, when the *lavoro italiano* was conceived as the defining trait of *Italianità*. Such an understanding resonates with Rhiannon Noel Welch's study about the biopolitical traits that characterized Italian early-colonial endeavours. Biopolitics understands the nation-state as grounded on its people

⁵⁵ On the re-signification of racial assumptions in post-war Italy, see Tatiana Petrovich Njegosh, 'Il meticciato nell'Italia contemporanea. Storia, memorie e cultura di massa', *Iperstoria*, 6:1 (2015), 143–66; Gaia Giuliani, *Race, Gender, and Nation in Modern Italy* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), pp. 109–38; Valeria Deplano and Silvana Patriarca, 'Introduction. Nation, "Race", and Racism in Twentieth-Century Italy', *Modern Italy*, 23:4 (2018), 349–53.

⁵⁶ *Realtà della Libia d'oggi*, dir. by Guido Arata (Documentari INCOM, 1963).

rather than constructed merely through its territory, as geopolitics does.⁵⁷ The vital link between territory and human bodies enables us to conceive the nation-state as a living and organic entity. Noel Welch maintains that Italian colonial expansion served to consistently harmonize diverse ‘biological’ entities — that is, the Italian individuals, their subnational communities, social groups — within an organic idea of national community. This passage happened exactly through labour, because ‘the collective “fruits” of individual labouring Italian bodies were to nourish the new-born nation-state. “The population” is thus born, so to speak, through labour’.⁵⁸

Against this background, the parallelism between pre-Fascist and post-Fascist rebuilding of Italian identity seems to make a perfect circle, if understood through an organic understanding of national belonging. The rhetoric of Italian industriousness in Africa returns as the genetic trait capable of evening out any internal difference and any social struggle. This is because it enabled the projection of a consistent image of the national organic unity beyond its geographical borders. Furthermore, the post-war recovery of the myth of Italy as a ‘global nation’, to use Choate’s definition, served not simply to piece together the fractured social fabric of the nation. Rather, it allowed Italy to be anchored back into the Western geography of economic as well as epistemic structures, to the extent that its renewed presence in Africa was represented as being under the aegis of the international community.⁵⁹

4.7 The vaccine against postcolonial hybridization

There are two further implications concerning the use of the *lavoro italiano* as the ‘genetic’ trait defining Italian belonging. On the one hand, this use echoed and, in turn, replicated a biological understanding of Italian citizenship even after the formal repeal of Fascist racial legislation. On the other hand, it underpinned the use of physical as well as surgical metaphors to describe the suffering of Italy after WWII, which furthermore corresponded with a long-lasting discourse about the resentment toward the countries that ‘amputated’ some of the territorial limbs of the national body.

⁵⁷ Rhiannon Noel Welch, *Vital Subjects. Race and Biopolitics in Italy, 1860–1920* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2016); pp. 4–7, where she analyses the first theoretical elaboration of biopolitics as provided by the Swedish political scientist Rudolph Kjellén in *Staten som Lifform* [The State as a Living Organism] (Stockholm: Hugo Gebers förlag, 1916).

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁵⁹ Choate, *Emigrant Nation*, p. 2.

As far as the first element is concerned, historiography has demonstrated the substantial continuity between pre-Fascist, Fascist, and post-Fascist understandings of Italian citizenship, considered as being based on the blood principle (*jus sanguinis*).⁶⁰ This principle, sanctioned through Law 555 (1912), was modified only in 1993, and yet it de facto maintained the same *ratio legis*.⁶¹ As a result, despite the abrogation of racial legislation between 1944 and 1947, the discourse that defined national belonging according to biological features seemed hard to fully eradicate.⁶² This is not exclusively because of legal devices, but also due to the surreptitious activity of mass media like those being discussed in this thesis, which definitively contributed to concealing and re-signifying those racial assumptions within a formally post-Fascist context.

The portrayal of Italy as an organic working body, whose appendages are its settler communities in the world, used the rhetoric of the *lavoro italiano* to immunize the national body — and its transnational extensions — against any form of hybridization. To put it differently, the tireless work and the civilizing efforts carried out by Italians in the former colonies made that landscape indelibly Italianized, and pushed the African people to ask that ‘torni presto l’Italia [...] per concludervi la sua opera di civiltà’.⁶³ These words, pronounced by the Libyan professor Beshir Gherrim through the voice-over of the

⁶⁰ De Napoli, *La prova della razza*, pp. 34–47; Petrovich Njegosh, ‘Il Meticcio nell’Italia contemporanea’, pp. 144–46; Tatiana Petrovich Njegosh, ‘Gli italiani sono bianchi? Per una storia culturale della linea del colore in Italia’, in *Parlare di Razza. La lingua del colore tra Italia e Stati Uniti*, ed. by Tatiana Petrovich Njegosh and Anna Scacchi (Verona: Ombre Corte, 2012), pp. 13–45; Deplano, ‘Within and Outside the Nation’, pp. 402–05.

⁶¹ The *jus sanguinis* (right of blood) is the legal system that grants citizenship according to the parents’ citizenship and without taking into account the place in which the child is born. As such, it is opposed to the *jus soli* principle (right of soil). The former entails the biological or genealogical basis of citizenship, whereas the latter gives citizenship to those who are born in the territory of the state that adopts the right of soil. In recent years, the increasing number of second-generation migrants and the related reconfiguration of Italy as a multicultural society have fostered a debate about the possibility to reform the citizenship regime toward the *jus soli* principle, see Guido Tintori, ‘Ius Soli the Italian way. The Long and Winding Road to Reform the Citizenship Law’, *Contemporary Italian Politics*, 10:4 (2018), 434–50; Guido Tintori, ‘Italian Mobilities and the *demos*’, in *Italian Mobilities*, ed. by Ruth Ben-Ghiat and Stephanie Malia Hom (New York: Routledge, 2016), pp. 111–31; Isabella Clough Marinaro and James Walston, ‘Italy’s “Second Generations”: The Sons and Daughters of Migrants’, *Bulletin of Italian Politics*, 2:1 (2010), 5–19.

⁶² The *Legge Organica per l’Eritrea e la Somalia* (RD 999, 1933) regulated the recognition of the children born from a mixed marriage (usually a black woman and a white man) according to discriminatory principles, see Michele Strazza, ‘Faccetta Nera Faccetta nera dell’Abissinia. Madame e meticci dopo la conquista dell’Etiopia’, *Humanities*, 1:2 (2012), 116–33 (p. 119); Gianluca Gabrielli, ‘Un aspetto della politica razzista nell’impero: il “problema dei meticci”’, *Passato e presente*, 15:1 (1997), 77–105 (pp. 78–79).

⁶³ ‘Notabili della Libia, dell’Eritrea e della Somalia vengono ricevuti dal sottosegretario Brusasca in occasione del Ramadan’, *Settimana INCOM* 73 (INCOM, 29 August 1947).

Settimana INCOM 73, entail that the *lavoro italiano* is praised even by former subjects. Accordingly, any form of hybridization is avoided since Africans need Italians' help, they aspire to become like the Italians, though without succeeding, because they do not have the Italians' genetic makeup. Hence, the proletarian transnationalization of the *lavoro italiano* reproduces the hegemonic position of the former colonizers, often presented under the new guise of bearers of democracy, independence, and of development cooperation. Yet, it also redrafts the line separating those who are entitled to work and civilize — because of their innate predisposition — and those who are the passive recipients of that labour. Moreover, since the films insist on claiming that the Africans themselves want Italians to come back and continue their civilizing work, the resentment for having lost those territories, 'fecondati dal lavoro italiano', could be channelled exclusively toward the victorious powers of WWII.⁶⁴

4.8 L'*Italia mutilata* strikes back

'La spada è calata ugualmente, e ha reciso dall'Italia lembi del suo corpo.' This dramatic sentence was pronounced by the voice-over of a newsreel distributed in the summer of 1946.⁶⁵ The footage was about the diplomatic work the Italian delegation was doing at the Paris Peace Conference. The sword that amputates Italian limbs is implicitly operated by the victorious powers, which were not taking into account that 'l'Italia è guarita' from the Fascist disease, as stated in another film.⁶⁶ This sentence encapsulates the difficult transition toward a post-Fascist setting for the shattered nation; as a living body, the latter was suffering for the loss of some of its territorial appendages. In spite of this pain, the cells of those geographical limbs — namely the Italian people who were living and working abroad — were depicted as still entitled to settle and even to civilize the soil and the social landscape that, until a few years earlier, were part of the empire.

Not many films are entirely devoted to supporting the Italian claims with regard to the former colonies. This is because the majority of newsreels and documentaries dealt with the issue against the background of a broader discourse about the territorial readjustments caused by the end of WWII. In particular, the footage was mostly concerned with the north-eastern border of Italy, which was a long-term disputed area because of the

⁶⁴ Pes, 'Coloni senza colonie', pp. 424.

⁶⁵ 'In contrasto con la Carta Atlantica: la conferenza della pace', *Settimana INCOM* 22.

⁶⁶ 'Conferenza dei Quattro Grandi al palazzo del Lussemburgo', *Nuova Luce* 14 (Istituto LUCE 1946).

presence of Italian, Slovene, Serb, and Croat populations.⁶⁷ The connection between the northern border issue and the former colonies was made explicit in the *Settimana INCOM* 19, which places the Italians still living overseas on the same level as those living on the Istrian peninsula.⁶⁸ The *fil rouge* between these two political issues is the accusation against the victorious powers, which would dispossess Italy of the right to maintain control over those territories that were not traditionally part of the nation-state. This film aesthetically recalls certain other movies about the Paris Peace Conference, especially in the scenes recorded in interior settings and in its use of wide-angle frames of the rooms where the debates took place. This rather plain and even tedious *mise-en-scène*, in fact, contrasts with a very passionate commentary: the voice-over reports De Gasperi's words, emphasizing the pain caused by unfair decisions that did not take into account the fact that Italians fought against Fascism.

Other films, instead, offer a more vibrant portrayal of the claims over disputed territories, by extensively using surgical metaphors and therefore indirectly corroborating an organic understanding of national belonging. We could identify some parallels between two of these, the *Nuova LUCE* 14 and the *Settimana INCOM* 8, for their stylistic traits reminiscent of previous Istituto LUCE film.⁶⁹ In both films, the non-diegetic soundtrack is a rapidly paced orchestral march, and the voice-over by Guido Notari utters authoritatively that Italy needs to maintain control of those disputed territories. This aggressive tone evokes the Fascist footage, and this impression of continuity is confirmed by an extremely simple editing that merely juxtaposes static shots of Trieste, Istria, and Dalmatia.⁷⁰ Such stylistic choices do not simply convey the urgency of the political issue in itself. Rather, while recalling the aesthetic of Fascist films, they substantiate the strong determination of Italy to keep those territories within the organic body of the nation.

These aspects are even more obvious if we listen to the commentary of the *Settimana INCOM* entitled *In contrasto con la 'carta atlantica'. Si decide il destino*

⁶⁷ Franco Cecotti, 'Cartografie variabili. I confini orientali dell'Italia tra Otto e Novecento', *Zapruder*, 15 (2008), 88–101.

⁶⁸ 'La conferenza della pace', *Settimana Incom* 19.

⁶⁹ 'Conferenza dei Quattro Grandi al palazzo del Lussemburgo', *Nuova Luce* 14; 'A Trieste', *Settimana INCOM* 8 (INCOM, 10 April 1946).

⁷⁰ Massimo Cardillo, *Il duce in moviola: politica e divismo nei cinegiornali e documentari 'Luce'* (Bari: Dedalo, 1983); on the changing style of Guido Notari's voice-over from the LUCE to INCOM films, Patrizia Cacciani, 'Il commento verbale nei cinegiornali INCOM', <<https://luceperladiattica.com/2018/03/01/il-commento-verbale-nei-cinegiornali-incom-a-cura-di-augusto-sainati/>> [accessed 5 January 2019].

dell'Italia'.⁷¹ The last sentence of this film is an appeal, or, more accurately, a thinly veiled menace being addressed to the four victorious powers that — in July 1947, when the film was distributed — were deciding the destiny of the disputed territories: 'signori quattro grandi [...] l'Italia è guarita dai vecchi nazionalismi, ma state attenti voi a non crearne dei nuovi con le vostre ingiustizie troppo palesi.' The spectre of the resurgence of a new and aggressive form of nationalist government was thus around the corner, because of the unfair decisions Italy was suffering.

Another trait of this film is worth mentioning, insofar as it offers a collection of surgical metaphors. The Luxembourg Palace (the venue of the Paris Peace Conference) is described as 'una tetra clinica dove si taglia con chirurgia sommaria', while the political decisions about the former colonies and the northern territories are described like a scalpel that 'affonderà sugli orli', making 'piccole incisioni' on the body of the nation. A sardonic commentary minimizes the weight of these territorial cuts, while the images of bucolic Alpine valleys with waterfalls, creeks, and cattle seem to create an emotive tension among the audience. A sudden transition shifts the focus to a pylon that is filmed from a very low-angle perspective, so as to emphasize its massive dimensions; next, the camera lingers on several industrial plants of the region of Moncenisio (Piedmont). Given that some of the areas of this region were annexed to France, the voice-over replaces the ironic tone with a more aggressive register, saying that the Italian workers 'hanno bisogno' of those territories.

Such violent cuts and transitions, which alternate diverse settings, accompanied by a rather harsh commentary, keep the audience swaying between self-exculpatory memory and anger toward those decisions that deprived Italy of its appendages. This element also characterizes other films, according to which the Paris international forum becomes a gloomy hospital, where the victorious powers are depicted as 'mercanti o chirurghi', who have 'reciso lembi del corpo'.⁷² The juxtaposition of the gloomy atmosphere of the Paris Peace Conference and the romantic praise of the landscapes where Italian industriousness unfolds, together with the surgical metaphors, are all elements referring to the enduring

⁷¹ 'In contrasto con la Carta Atlantica si decide il destino dell'Italia', *Settimana INCOM* 17.

⁷² 'Conferenza dei Quattro Grandi al palazzo del Lussemburgo', *Nuova Luce* 14; 'In contrasto con la carta atlantica: la conferenza della pace', *Settimana INCOM* 22; 'La delegazione italiana firma i protocolli di intesa degli accordi raggiunti al termine della Conferenza della Pace di Parigi', *Settimana INCOM* 47 (*INCOM*, 27 February 1947).

discourse on the *risentimento* toward other Western countries, which was a key feature used to define the geographical as well as cultural borders of *Italianità*.

4.9 Italy in between the *Risentimento* and the *Re-inserimento*

At first glance, the north-eastern border issue and that related to the former colonies might appear as quite at odds. Nevertheless, since the famous Fourteen Point speech delivered toward the end of WWI by the US President Woodrow Wilson, the discourses about the readjustment of the north and eastern frontiers ‘along clearly recognizable lines of nationality’ entailed a not so thinly veiled connection with overseas ambitions. This is because the Treaty of London established that, in case of victory, Italy would have gained several disputed territories in the north of the country, as well as some overseas compensations.⁷³ The results of the Paris Peace Conference in the aftermath of WWI (1919–20) were considered unsatisfactory by a large part of the Italian public opinion and political establishment, and such resentment indeed helped Fascism to seize power. Against this background, the ‘deprivation’ of what was described as the rightful claim to the disputed territories and the need to increase, maintain, and reorganize the control of overseas territories were conceived as two sides of the same coin.⁷⁴

The emerging Fascist movement used the resolutions concerning both the north-eastern borders and the Italian colonial aspirations rhetorically in order to gain strength. Of course, this discourse was ignited by the rhetoric of the *vittoria mutilata* of D’Annunzio, which contributed to spreading the idea of Italy as having been vexed by other countries.⁷⁵ This *risentimento* toward international decisions on the destiny of Italy possibly rested on an even older rhetoric of the proletarian nation that seeks new territories to solve its demographic as well as economic, chronic problems. Since 1911, when Giovanni Pascoli coined the motto *la grande Proletaria si è mossa*, Italian colonial endeavours started to be depicted as ‘proletarian’.⁷⁶ This epitome addressed not so much the relationship between

⁷³ Roberta Pergher, *Mussolini’s Nation Empire. Sovereignty and Settlement in Italy’s Borders 1922–1943* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 73–116. The Treaty of London was an agreement signed in April 1915, through which Italy joined the Triple Entente (United Kingdom, France, Russian Empire) against its former allies (Germany and Austria–Hungary).

⁷⁴ Antonio Scottà, *La Conferenza di pace di Parigi fra ieri e domani (1919–1920)* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2003), pp. 75–85; Eric J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes. The Short Twentieth Century, 1914–1991* (London: Abacus, 1994), pp. 21–54.

⁷⁵ James H. Burgwyn, *The Legend of the Mutilated Victory* (Santa Barbara: Greenwood Press, 1993); Emilio Gentile, *Le origini dell’ideologia fascista (1918–1925)* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1996).

⁷⁶ Giovanni Pascoli, ‘La Grande Proletaria’, *La tribuna*, 27 November 1911.

Italian migrants/colonizers and the inhabitants of the colonized countries. Rather, it described the dialectical relationship between Italy and other Western/imperial countries. Pascoli made this point clear in the less famous part of his speech, when he says the following:

Prima ella [Italy, the Great Proletarian] mandava altrove i suoi lavoratori che in patria erano troppi e dovevano lavorare per troppo poco. Il mondo li aveva presi a opra, i lavoratori d'Italia; e più ne aveva bisogno, meno mostrava di averne, e li pagava poco e li trattava male e li stranomava.

The irritation at other Western countries or 'il mondo', which 'pagava poco e trattava male' the Italian labour force, is a trope that permeates Italian colonial discourse. Roughly two decades on, that resentment at foreign countries peaked. This happened in the autumn of 1935, when Italy invaded Ethiopia despite the League of Nations' opposition.⁷⁷ Both the economic sanctions imposed by the League of Nations and the high costs of the war pushed Mussolini to advocate economic as well as cultural autarchy, which implied a sturdy critique of the so-called 'plutocratic' countries that were constraining Fascist imperial ambitions.

The entangled and momentous processes of decolonization and defascistization did not lead to the eradication of the rhetoric of the *risentimento*. As far as the destiny of both the disputed northern territories and the colonies in the aftermath of WWII was concerned, the film corpus re-articulates and feeds the resentment toward the victorious countries according to previous colonial narratives and visual tropes. For instance, the film *La conferenza della pace: De Gasperi a Parigi* presents Alcide De Gasperi as the defendant in the Paris Peace Conference's trial, and the victorious countries as the prosecutors. The choice of using diegetic sounds, which are actually only De Gasperi's words, and the fact that the assembly is quietly listening to him, makes the atmosphere even more dramatic.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Ethiopia was a member of the League of Nations since 1923. At the end of November 1935, the British Foreign Secretary Samuel Hoare and French Prime Minister Pierre Laval made Italy a secret proposal to end the Ethiopian war. However, English journalists discovered this secret proposal, which established the partition of Ethiopia and gave Italy a part of it, and the plan never went into effect. The widespread European indignation at Italy's invasion pushed the League of Nations to impose economic sanctions on Italy, see Andrew Holt "'No more Hoares to Paris': British Foreign Policymaking and the Abyssinian Crisis, 1935", *Review of International Studies*, 37:3 (2011), 1383–401; Nicola Labanca, *La guerra d'Etiopia 1935–1941* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2015), pp. 138–44.

⁷⁸ 'La conferenza della pace: De Gasperi a Parigi', *Settimana INCOM* 21 (INCOM, 29 August 1946).

Through his speech, De Gasperi utters the thought that Italy is falsely being accused; the aesthetic choices pertaining to the low lighting and the sober *mise-en-scène* amplify the solemnity of the moment as well as the Italian victim complex.

This discourse is neither isolated in this film, nor is it limited to the period of the Paris Peace Conference: the *risentimento* at those countries that ‘amputated’ certain vital parts of the organic body of the nation is almost inextricably bound to the obsessive praise of the *lavoro italiano* abroad. *Un raro documentario sulla colonizzazione italiana in Libia* (1946) epitomizes this link: the first scenes exalt the civilizing work Italians did in Libya by portraying the desert landscape and its transformation in arable soil, thanks to Italian workers who supervise African attendants. The footage ends with this mordant sentence: ‘dedichiamo questo documento a tutti coloro che si ergono a maestri di colonizzazione dopo aver distrutto interi popoli con alcool e col fucile.’⁷⁹ Although not explicitly expressed, the reference to France and Great Britain is clear. This narrative structure returns in *Italiani d’oltremare*: a series of scenes of the Italian buildings in Tripoli are meant to demonstrate Italian industriousness in spite of the decisions of the victorious powers (‘cheché se ne dica a Parigi,’ says the voice-over).

This victim complex, which resurfaces in the passive-aggressive attitude the films articulate, was not confined to the time span of the Paris Peace Conference. Against this backdrop, the film *Mondo Libero* 182, entitled *Protesta a Mogadiscio*, is a case in point.⁸⁰ The film, produced in 1955 during the AFIS, is about a big demonstration held in Mogadishu. Members of Somali parties and local population gather in front of the British embassy to protest against the English decision to support Ethiopia in its claim over the contended region of Ogaden. The images are mostly low-angle frames of the protesters. The choice to frame them from a slightly low perspective is meant to give Somali people dignity and authority while they are ‘invocando l’intervento dell’Italia e delle Nazioni Unite’. The commentary mentions Somali politicians and compares the Ogaden question to that of Trieste for Italy; the film therefore puts the territorial claims of both former colonizers and former colonized on an equal footing, by implicitly setting them against other imperial/Western countries.

The straightforward comparison between Italian and Somali claims is exceptional, since the majority of decolonial footage entails the objectification of the African people

⁷⁹ ‘Un raro documentario sulla colonizzazione italiana in Libia’, *Nuova LUCE* 20.

⁸⁰ ‘Protesta a Mogadiscio’, *Mondo Libero* 182 (Astra Cinematografica, 4 February 1955).

and the almost total denial of any form of African agency. In a similar way, the reference that *Mondo Libero* 182 makes to the ‘intervento dell’Italia e delle Nazioni Unite’ is worthy of attention insofar as it allows Italy to be finally regarded as being integrated in the international system, a nation that is ‘guarita’ from the Fascist disease, as another film says.⁸¹ The AFIS, and the several scenes of African people asking that Italy returns to guide their modernization, are thus evidence of the fact that Italy has finally been healed from Fascism. These narratives, in other words, are caught in between a blatant contradiction aiming to dispel the *risentimento*, whilst simultaneously advocating the *re-inserimento* of Italy within the international community by virtue of its tireless civilizing work.

4.10 Re-using film debris. *Lavoro italiano* up to date

The analysis broached in this chapter dealt with metaphors and narratives related to illness and healing, to the myth of the *lavoro italiano*, to the resentment at the winners of WWII, but also to the desire to reach the same status as international powers. I have reconducted all these elements to the discourse on the organic understanding of national belongings, which implies the biological connection between a given territory and the people living and, especially, working in it. Accordingly, the return to the colonies was envisioned as the healing process that would enable Italy to recover from the Fascist disease, and also as a way to reach a new and respectable, international status after WWII.

The intermingling of these two — apparently incompatible — narratives engendered a rather paradoxical discourse. This is because the ‘club’ of civilizing countries (the ‘First world’) that Italy wanted to join was composed of those very countries that, according to the long-lasting *risentimento* rhetoric, cut the limbs that belonged to the national body as a result of the *lavoro italiano*. Since the Italian peninsula stretches from the very heart of Europe, that is, the metaphoric heart of Western modernity and Eurocentrism,⁸² to the narrow maritime strip that for centuries connected Africa to the Old Continent, the simultaneous yet schizophrenic need to portray the hegemonic and subaltern character of the post-colonial nation takes into account the suspended status of Italy: as a

⁸¹ *Repubblica anno zero*, dir. by Jacopo Rizza (Documentari INCOM, 1963).

⁸² Walter Dignolo, *The Darkest Side of the Renaissance. Literacy, Territoriality, and Colonization* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995); Aníbal Quijano, ‘Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality’, *Cultural Studies*, 21:2/3 (2007), 168–78. See also chapter 1, section 1.4 (pp. 37–42).

European as well as a Mediterranean country.⁸³ In other words, Italy wanted to overcome its subalternity to other European countries by re-articulating a form of hegemony over its former colonial space. Accordingly, the film corpus draws a map of national belongings, in which the brain and the heart of the organic body of the nation are located in the peninsula, whereas the working arms are those of the settler communities spread throughout the world. This image is useful to understand the process that described the character of Italian colonialism as proletarian, but also the aspiration to be considered as a fully European/Western country. As expressed by Roberto Esposito's sentence, which opened this chapter, claiming a new role in the former colonies meant, for Italy, to 'look at itself from the outside, and to take from the outside world any aids necessary to renew and develop its own roots'. These roots were the 'innate' predisposition of Italians to civilize the world, whose representations served to reposition the nation and exorcise the fluid geopolitical as well as socio-cultural uncertainty that followed the fall of Fascism, the loss of the empire, and national reconstruction.

The mantra of the *lavoro italiano*, which civilizes and makes any soil productive, was the pivot of the discourses through which decolonial footage selectively remembered Italy's colonial past in order to invoke a new hegemonic role in the former colonies. The rhetoric of Italian settlers' industriousness had, of course, deep historical as well as political foundations; since its unification, Italy was a medium-sized power with serious problems, mainly related to the unbalanced economic performance and social condition of northern regions as opposed to the southern ones (the *questione meridionale*). One of the possible answers to these problems was to divert the overabundant population into territories that were presented as part of the *madrepatria* ever since the Roman Empire, as in the case of Libya.⁸⁴ The connection with the Horn of Africa was not so old and tight. Yet, the films create a similar link by emphasizing the Catholic and scientific missions of the eighteenth century as well as the Italian colonial presence since the end of the nineteenth century.⁸⁵ The footage thereby referred to a specific historical continuity that,

⁸³ Jacqueline Andall and Derek Duncan, 'Introduction. Hybridity in Italian Colonial and Postcolonial Culture', in *National Belongings. Hybridity in Italian Colonial and Postcolonial Cultures*, ed. by Jacqueline Andall and Derek Duncan (Bern: Peter Lang, 2011), pp. 1–19 (pp. 4–5).

⁸⁴ Noel Welch, *Vital Subjects*, pp. 22–7; Choate, *Emigrant Nation*, pp. 3–12.

⁸⁵ On the political, scientific, as well as religious missions in the Horn of Africa between the eighteenth and the twentieth century, see Donald Crummey, *Priests and Politicians. Protestant and Catholic Missions in Orthodox Ethiopia, 1830–1868* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972); more specifically on the Italian interest over Ethiopia in the nineteenth century, see Alessandro Pes, *La costruzione dell'impero fascista. Politiche di regime per una società coloniale* (Rome: Aracne, 2010), pp. 16–69.

in turn, was recontextualized according to the post-war social scenario, and its new political agenda.

The continuity with this allegedly glorious, transnational past, and especially with the last phase of Italian colonialism, obtained a concrete result in the use of footage produced during Fascism. A number of rare, yet significant, archival files have proven that the practice of using found footage coming from the imperial period in order to craft decolonial films was well spread; furthermore, it is revealing of the ambiguous scenario of production in which the boundaries between private productions and state propaganda remained blurred. Textual analysis of films has exposed, in an even more evident way, the use of Fascist colonial celluloid; its editing with footage produced in the post-war period might be spotted in dissimilar stylistic traits that featured in some of the analysed films. Despite such formal differences, Fascist and post-war footage was seamlessly harmonized both through the film narrative and, especially, via the leading role of the voice-over. The commentary was decisive in the obliteration of the most shameful sides of the colonial period, while it simultaneously enforced the discourse about the long-lasting, even innate and therefore ‘genetic’, trait of Italian industriousness.

The use of found footage and visual objects — pictures, shots of buildings, Roman monuments, plastic and wooden models — configure an indexical path leading the audience to uncover a consistent discourse about the beneficial unfolding of Italian history in Africa. Old materials, therefore, intimate a deep-rooted historical link connecting that history to the decolonial issues the films were tackling. Nevertheless, the use of archival materials was uncritical and concealed; the period in which they were produced, and their original meanings alike, became a ‘spectre’ with the potential of recurrence in new forms, as put by Lumley.⁸⁶ The simultaneous and contradictory reference to, and obliteration of, Fascist colonialism makes the documentaries work *against* as well as *with* old materials; they are rescued from oblivion, and their original meaning is refashioned so as to connect the colonial period they originally referred to with subsequent decolonial issues.⁸⁷ As a result, the uncritical usage of Fascist films’ debris in post-war Italy contributed to erecting

⁸⁶ Robert Lumley, *Entering the Frame. Cinema and History in the Films of Yerevant Gianikian and Angela Ricci Lucchi* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2011), pp. 4–5.

⁸⁷ Robert Lumley, ‘Amnesia and remembering. “Dal Polo all’Equatore”, a film by Yerevant Gianikian and Angela Ricci Lucchi’, *Italian Studies*, 64:1 (2009), 134–43 (p. 135).

the basis upon which ‘the lack of suture in terms of historical knowledge’ about the colonial past in Italian society could spread.⁸⁸

⁸⁸ Derek Duncan, ‘Shooting the colonial past in contemporary Italian cinema. Effects of deferral in “Good Morning Aman”’, in *Postcolonial Italy: Challenging National Homogeneity*, ed. by Cristina Lombardi-Diop and Caterina Romeo (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 115–24 (p. 117).

5. Disremembering. Amnesia, Aphasia, Amnesty, and the Articulations of Italian Colonial Memory

*Andai incontro al sottotenente e gli dissi: 'Dobbiamo andarcene'
Poi aggiunsi: 'Mi sembra inutile parlare di delitti visto che nessuno mi cerca'.
'Sì,' rispose, 'proprio inutile'.
'Se nessuno mi cerca,' insistei, 'possiamo andarcene'
'Tranquillamente,' rispose.
'Il prossimo è troppo occupato coi propri delitti per accorgersi dei nostri'.
'Meglio così,' dissi.
'Se nessuno mi ha denunciato meglio così. Tuttavia, non si ha diritto
di essere tanto generosi'.*

This dialogue between two Italian soldiers, featuring in the novel *Tempo di uccidere*, condenses the equivocal balance between a sense of guilt and the self-exculpatory silence concerning the crime around which the plot of the book revolves.¹ The lieutenant who is speaking — a nameless protagonist serving in Ethiopia during the AOI — has raped and killed an Ethiopian girl. In spite of his moral discomfort, he will eventually not be punished for this outrageous action, whose uncomfortable memory starts fading away ‘tranquillamente’. Flaiano’s *Tempo di uccidere* uses ordinary happenings in the lives of Italian soldiers in Africa (e.g., a toothache, a car accident, but also the ‘normalized’ violence against Ethiopian women) in order to recount the protagonist’s growing disillusion toward the Fascist imperial myth and, by extension, the sense of anxiety toward Western colonialism as a whole.²

¹ Ennio Flaiano, *Tempo di uccidere* (Milan: Bur, 2008), p. 284–85.

² According to Lucia Re, *Tempo di uccidere* was the first Italian postcolonial novel, see Lucia Re, ‘Italy’s First Postcolonial Novel and the End of (Neo)Realism’, *The Italianist*, 37:3 (2017), 416–35 (p. 428). On the systematic violence of Italian men against African women, see Gabriella Campassi, ‘Il madamato in A.O.: relazioni tra italiani e indigene come forma di aggressione coloniale’, *Miscellanea di Storia delle Esplorazioni*, 12 (1983), 219–58; Chiara Volpato, ‘La violenza contro le donne nelle colonie italiane.

Ennio Flaiano himself was a Fascist soldier in Ethiopia, and he wrote this story between 1946 and 1947, during the tortuous transition from Fascist dictatorship to democracy. However, *Tempo di uccidere* is quite an exception against the background of the complex mnemonic dynamics through which Italian society and culture either selectively recollected or repressed memories of the preceding colonial period. Like the protagonist of the novel, Italian politics, culture, and society, too, dealt with the decolonial caesura in contradictory and ambiguous ways.³ This temporal as well as discursive disconnection engendered deafening silences, which need to be questioned, paradoxically dissected, and even superseded in order to highlight the surreptitious connection between colonial debris and the contemporary postcolonial scenario.

This chapter will deal with the peculiar formation of Italian colonial memory, whose foundations lie upon its peculiar process of decolonization. The focus will be on what was both said and what remained unsaid about the Italian empire, as well as on the omissions and re-articulations of its narratives during its dismantling. Such a critical perspective can be summarized through the use of three ‘A-concepts’ I will apply in this chapter: Amnesia, Aphasia, and Amnesty. The first section will problematize the concept of amnesia in relation to postcolonial trauma. Amnesia is the umbrella term that is often used to interpret the peculiar postcolonial configuration of Italian society, and the uncomfortable coming to terms with its imperial past. Nevertheless, Italian decolonization foregrounded a more troubled recollection of the colonial period. In order to question amnesia-based approaches, the analysis of decolonial footage will examine the complex nature of the Italian decolonial trauma by tackling both the ways in which it was somatized within the post-Fascist transition, and the representations of one of the few shocking events related to the loss of the colonies: the massacre of Mogadishu (11 January 1948).

The convoluted mnemonic dynamics concerning the imperial past were further complicated by the fact that Italy claimed a new role in those countries conquered before the Fascist invasion of Ethiopia; as a corollary thereof, both the call for independence by formerly colonized people as well as crimes and racism perpetrated in Africa were ousted from political and social debates about the future of Italy in Africa. Newsreels and

Prospettive psicosociali di analisi’, *DEP. Deportate, Esuli, Profughe*, 10 (2009), 110–31; Michele Strazza, ‘Faccetta nera dell’Abissinia. Madame e meticci dopo la conquista dell’Etiopia’, *Humanities*, 1:2 (2012), 116–33.

³ Nicola Labanca, ‘History and Memory of Italian Colonialism Today’, in *Italian Colonialism. Legacies and Memories*, ed. by Jacqueline Andall and Derek Duncan (Bern: Peter Lang, 2005), pp. 29–46 (p. 29).

documentaries played a significant role in reworking images, discourses, and the very words coming from that past, according to an updated political as well as cultural agenda. The simultaneous presence and absence of the colonial past that featured in these films address a disconnection ‘between words and things, an inability to recognize things in the world and assign proper names to them’, which is typical of any aphasic condition.⁴ Accordingly, the pivotal sections of this chapter will be dedicated to the appraisal of the disarticulated presence of discourses, expressions, and utterances typical of the vocabulary of coloniality, which were nevertheless used to describe the Italian decolonial transition. Such a theoretical perspective will be made operational by paying particular attention to the voice-over commentary of certain films produced by INCOM between 1946 and the early 60s. The Archivio Storico dell’Istituto LUCE holds the original scripts of the commentary that accompanies these films; the analysis of how words and sentences were used, omitted, and recontextualized will therefore explain the extent to which a disarticulated and aphasic memory could have sprung from that footage.

The final part of the chapter will deal more specifically with the active attitude through which the films balanced uncomfortable silences and colonial discourses, in order to reformulate a lexicon that could describe Italy’s new presence in the former colonies. Such a re-articulation, consistent with the political aims of the Italian government, had as a side-effect a failed *metanoia* for Italy, as its colonial crimes were de facto amnestied and erased from national consciousness and history.⁵

5.1 Beyond amnesia. The active silencing of the colonial past

In medical terms, amnesia refers to the loss of the ability to remember information and events because of a brain injury (i.e., head injury, severe illness, emotional shock or hysteria, stroke, Alzheimer’s disease). Symptoms may include memory loss, confusion, and the inability to recognize familiar faces, places, or events. This concept has gained widespread attention in postcolonial studies, as it serves to describe those contexts with a troubled process of decolonization and a complicated coming to terms with the colonial

⁴ Ann Laura Stoler, ‘Imperial Debris. Reflection on Ruins and Ruination’, *Cultural Anthropology*, 23:2 (2008), 191–219, (p. 210).

⁵ On *metanoia*, see Ismael-Selim Khaznadar, ‘*Élucider ou se repentir?*’ in *Aspects de la repentance*, ed. by Ismael-Selim Khaznadar (Alger: Barzakh, 2012), pp. 85–106. For the failed public repentance for colonial crimes in post-imperial European nations, see Dietmar Rothermund, ‘Memories of Post-imperial Nations: Silences and Concerns’, *India Quarterly*, 70:1 (2014), 59–70.

past.⁶ On the one hand, amnesia describes the desire to forget the past in newly constituted, anticolonial nation-states born from the ashes of empires. As put by Leela Ghandi, this form of ‘postcolonial amnesia is symptomatic of the urge for historical self-invention or the need to make a new start [...] to erase painful memories of colonial subordination’.⁷ On the other hand, the former settlers and metropolises could experience an amnesic form of memorialization alike. They may indicate the need to erase the most brutal crimes perpetrated during that experience, and the related lack of repentance for those shameful endeavours.⁸

As far as the Italian context is concerned, amnesia is one of the most used terms among scholars, artists, journalists, and writers who have explored the difficult recollection of the colonial period and the ways in which it has shaped modern and contemporary Italy.⁹ Jacqueline Andall, Charles Burdett, and Derek Duncan, amongst others, have referred to the ‘convenient [colonial] amnesia’ as one of the factors that constructed the representations of Italy as a mono-cultural society following the colonial period. Such an amnesic form of memory therefore points out the lack of awareness concerning the effects Italian colonialism has had within Italian society. Hence, the critical challenge to this

⁶ Michael Rothberg, ‘Remembering Back: Cultural Memory, Colonial Legacies, and Postcolonial Studies’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Postcolonial Studies*, ed. by Graham Huggan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 359–79; Dietmar Rothermund, ‘Introduction’, in *Memory of Post-imperial Nations. The Aftermath of Decolonization*, ed. by Dietmar Rothermund (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 1–17.

⁷ Leela Ghandi, *Postcolonial Theory. A Critical Introduction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), p. 4.

⁸ Monika Albrecht, ‘(Post-)Colonial Amnesia? German Debates on Colonialism and Decolonization in the Post-War Era’, in *German Colonialism and National Identity*, ed. by Michale Perraudin and Jürgen Zimmerer (New York: Routledge, 2010), pp. 187–96; *Memory, Empire, and Postcolonialism: Legacies of French Colonialism*, ed. by Alec G. Hargreaves (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005); Paul Bijl, ‘Colonial Memory and Forgetting in the Netherlands and Indonesia’, *Journal of Genocide Research*, 14:3/4 (2012), 441–61.

⁹ Roberta Pergher, ‘Impero immaginario, impero vissuto. Recenti sviluppi nella storiografia del colonialismo italiano’, *Ricerche di storia politica*, 1 (2007), 53–66 (p. 54). On the social and artistic practices that use, yet also challenge, Italian colonial amnesia see, for instance, the documentary *Negotiating Amnesia*, dir. by Alessandra Ferrini (Italy: independent production, 2015) <<https://vimeo.com/145849615>> [accessed 1 February 2019]; the exhibition curated by Vasco Forconi, ‘Italiani brava gente. Amnesie e memorie del colonialismo italiano’, Rome, Fondazione Volume! (2018) <<https://not.neroeditions.com/italiani-brava-gente/>> [accessed 3 February 2019]; the flash mob (*passeggiata narrativa*) and exhibition ‘Viva Menelicchi’, curated by Wu Ming Foundation and Fale Ala and held in Palermo (October 2018), which aimed at challenging the amnesia about the ways in which the colonial past affects the toponymy of Italian cities <<https://www.wumingfoundation.com/giap/2018/06/viva-menelicchi-palermo-a-piedi-contro-il-colonialismo-per-coltivare-la-coesistenza/>> [accessed 1 February 2019].

widespread amnesia might reveal the extensive nature of Italy's contact with other cultures, and how 'this contact shaped Italy itself' since unification.¹⁰

The peculiar configuration of Italian decolonization has undoubtedly contributed to suspending the appraisal of the ways in which colonialism reverberated in its immediate aftermath, thereby preventing a thorough critique of its legacies. It seems that, 'in the decades after Italy lost possession of its colonies, colonialism appeared to have no place in the nation's collective consciousness and was absent from public discourse'.¹¹ Any public repentance for, and reconciliation with, colonial crimes was carefully avoided; proof of this is, for instance, the fact that the MAI was dismantled as late as 1953 and its personnel relocated to other departments, but also the fact that colonial lobbies and associations were not disbanded.¹² Moreover, a precise political strategy made it difficult for historians to have access to archival records about the AOI; part of these were, instead, re-organized in the series *L'Italia in Africa*, curated by a governmental Comitato per la documentazione dell'opera dell'Italia in Africa, which had to 'pubblicare [...] i più significativi documenti [...] testimonianza dell'opera di civiltà svolta dall'Italia nel continente africano'.¹³ It is no coincidence that, 'se si osserva la composizione del Comitato, si scopre che 15 membri su 24 sono ex governatori di colonia o alti funzionari dell'amministrazione coloniale, mentre gli altri, con l'eccezione di Mario Toscano, sono africanisti di provata fede colonialista', as put by Del Boca.¹⁴ These examples show that the mantra of amnesic silence and delay, with which almost every work on these topics initiates, does not suffice to tackle the

¹⁰ Jacqueline Andall, Charles Burdett, and Derek Duncan, 'Italian Colonialism: Historical Perspectives (Introduction)', *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 8:3 (2003), 370–74 (p. 370).

¹¹ Jacqueline Andall and Derek Duncan, 'Memories and Legacies of Italian Colonialism', in *Italian Colonialism. Legacy and Memory*, ed. by Jacqueline Andall and Derek Duncan (Bern: Peter Lang, 2005), pp. 9–27 (p. 9).

¹² Charles Burdett, 'Colonial Association and the Memory of Italian East Africa', in *Italian Colonialism*, ed. by Andall and Duncan, pp. 125–42.

¹³ Antonio M. Morone, 'I custodi della memoria. Il comitato per la documentazione dell'opera dell'Italia in Africa', *Zapruder*, 23 (2010), 25–38 (p. 27); Angelo del Boca, *Gli Italiani in Africa Orientale. Vol. 4. Nostalgia delle colonie* (Rome and Bari: Laterza, 1984); The conference held in Taormina in October 1989 has been a pivotal turning point in the study of the archivist policies that limited access to the documents on Italian colonialism, see *Fonti e problemi della politica coloniale italiana. Atti del convegno, Taormina–Messina, 23–29 ottobre 1989*, ed. by Paola Carucci and others (Rome: Ministero per i beni culturali e ambientali, Ufficio centrale per i beni archivistici, 1996). The choice to make the archival records about colonial administration unavailable has been addressed comprehensively by Patrizia Ferrara, 'Recenti acquisizioni dell'Archivio centrale dello Stato in materia di fonti per la storia dell'Africa italiana: Ufficio studi e propaganda del MAI', in *Fonti e problemi della politica coloniale italiana*, ed. by Carucci and others, pp. 77–86.

¹⁴ Del Boca, *Gli italiani in Africa Orientale. Vol. 4. Nostalgia delle colonie*, pp. 423–33.

artificial nature of the void concerning the memory of Italy's colonial past. Therefore, more than being an involuntary reaction to a localized traumatic loss, colonial forgetfulness seems to be shaped by political as well as cultural strategies, which have somatized and defused decolonial trauma within the process of nation rebuilding after WWII.¹⁵

5.2 Reassessing amnesia and postcolonial traumas

The very spark of any amnesic status is a traumatic event, which causes brain damage and affects the ability to remember. Trauma theory has gained increasing attention by scholars engaged with postcolonialism, for its ability to offer an effective and critical framework to investigate the traumatic legacies of usurpation and violence, which have characterized colonial and post-colonial interactions.¹⁶ Sonya Andermahr holds the view that the relationship between trauma theory and postcolonial studies is 'born out of the confluence between deconstructive and psychoanalytic criticism and the study of Holocaust literature', with the aim to 'bear witness to traumatic histories in such a way as to attend to the suffering of the other'.¹⁷ Franz Fanon might undoubtedly be regarded as one of the first anticolonial thinkers who explored the enduring, yet traumatic, results of the sustained interaction between colonial subjects and settlers. According to Norman Nikro, both *Black Skin, White Masks* and *The Wretched of the Earth* address colonial trauma as something that deals with 'varying and very different emotional and intellectual geographies, varying historical trajectories of decolonization and postcolonial critique'.¹⁸ Colonialism might therefore engender different traumatic events that are localized in space and time (e.g., rape, murder, genocide, deportation), but also persistent painful experiences that are fashioned in the protracted relationship between colonizers and colonized. The everyday racism in the colonies and in the metropolises, apartheid and segregation practices, institutional slavery and internal colonialism, border making and forced control, the

¹⁵ Paolo Jedlowsky, 'Memoria pubblica e colonialismo italiano', *Storicamente*, 7 (2011), 1–4 <http://storicamente.org/jedlowski_colonialismo> [accessed 12 February 2019].

¹⁶ Stef Craps, *Postcolonial Witnessing: Trauma Out of Bounds* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Norman Saadi Nikro, 'Situating Postcolonial Trauma Studies', *Postcolonial Text*, 9:2 (2014), 1–21; Sonya Andermahr, 'Decolonizing Trauma Studies: Trauma and Postcolonialism – Introduction', *Humanities* (special issue 'Decolonizing Trauma Studies: Trauma and Postcolonialism'), 4:4 (2015), 500–05.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 500.

¹⁸ Saadi Nikro, 'Situating Postcolonial Trauma Studies', p. 14.

internment camps for colonial subjects — these are all examples of sustained collective traumas that can scarcely be pigeonholed, neither chronologically nor geographically.

As far as the decolonial transition is concerned, Fanon points out that ‘national liberation, national reawakening, restoration of the nation to the people or Commonwealth, whatever the name used, is always a violent event’.¹⁹ The end of empires entailed a fluid and scattered notion of trauma, which engendered prolonged post-traumatic amnesia within formerly colonized countries, to the extent that they wanted to forget the violence and usurpation the colonial settlers had subjected them to. Former metropolitan centres, too, might experience a totally different post-traumatic amnesia, one that dealt with the ‘dramatic loss of wealth, status, power and pride’ caused by the collapsing of the empire.²⁰ Moreover, decolonial trauma that concerns the former metropolitan centres takes into account the way they have either recollected or exorcised the pains they have inflicted on the colonial ‘others’, and how that violence engendered amnesic silences afterwards. This perspective opens up a more fluid recognition of the traumatic experience related to colonialism. By enlarging the perspective from a specific acute, individual, and event-based approach toward a collective and fluid process, composed of numerous events and practices, postcolonial trauma can be appraised as being delocalized in time and space, and not wholly ascribable within the syllogism between cause (i.e., loss of the colonies) and effect (i.e., ailment/colonial amnesia).²¹ It can thus assume multiple and contradictory forms, with dispersed geographies and temporalities ranging from the very beginning of the colonial interaction to the postcolonial relationship between former subjects and former settlers.

5.3 The Mogadishu massacre (11 January 1948)

Italian decolonization is a case in point to address a scattered yet repressed form of decolonial trauma, since it was a protracted process (1941–60), and a blurred one within the broader traumatic transition from Fascism to the Republic. As we have seen in chapter

¹⁹ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Groove Press, 1963), p. 33.

²⁰ Aleida Assmann, ‘Memories of Post-imperial Nations’, in *Memories of Post-Imperial Nations*, ed. by Rothermund, pp. 171–80 (p. 174).

²¹ Irene Visser, ‘Decolonizing Trauma Theory: Retrospect and Prospects’, *Humanities*, 4:4 (2015), 250–65 (pp. 257–58); Maria P. Root, ‘Reconstructing the Impact of Trauma on Personality’, in *Personality and Psychopathology: Feminist Reappraisals*, ed. by Laura S. Brown and Mary Ballou (New York: Guilford, 1992), pp. 229–65; Kai Erikson, *A New Species of Trouble: Explorations in Disaster, Trauma, and Community* (New York: Norton, 1994).

4, during this rather long period, narratives and images of Italy's positive impact on the former colonies spread significantly.²² Such discourses, on the one hand, assumed that former colonial subjects did not suffer any traumatic experiences during Italian rule; on the other hand, they tried to somatize the long and intersecting collective traumas Italy was facing during the 40s. Therefore, Italian decolonization epitomizes the contravention of the syllogism between localized trauma and amnesia, since any traumatic result related to that experience was meant to vanish in the images of the benevolent impact Italians had on Africans, and in the representation of national rebuilding.

Despite the attempts to shape an untroubled and a-traumatic colonial memory, there was an event in which the traumatic reality of decolonial struggles clearly surfaced. It happened in Mogadishu, in 1948, when the capital was still controlled by the British Military Administration (BMA), whereas Italy was trying to obtain its protectorate. On 11 January, following the arrival of members of the UN mission, who were supposed to decide the destiny of the former colony, two opposite rallies collided. The demonstration organized by the Somali Youth League (SYL), which was close to the British administration and adamant about rejecting any involvement of Italy in the country's future, clashed with an unauthorized, pro-Italian parade supported by the Italian community. There was a fight between demonstrators and an offensive against the SYL's main branch, followed by an attack by the anti-Italian protesters against dozens of Italians, who were assaulted individually and in their homes. The police force (under British command) was overrun and, in many cases, 'Somali members of the Gendarmerie joined the rioters. For several hours the Italians became the target of an angry mob that did not spare them any possible violence, from rape to mutilation'. By the end of the riots, fifty-two Italians had been killed and forty-eight badly wounded, against fourteen Somalis being killed and forty-three wounded.²³ Many shadows remain as to the responsibilities for the massacre; although a direct involvement of the BMA has never been substantiated, it is highly possible that the British government was at the very least prone not to oppose the SYL's claims. Likewise, it is clear that the Italian community encouraged the pro-Italian

²² Chapter 4, sections 4.3–4.5 (174–87).

²³ Paolo Tripodi, *The Colonial Legacy in Somalia. Rome and Mogadishu: From Colonial Administration to Operation Restore Hope* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 1999), p. 46.

counter-rally.²⁴ In spite of this uncertainty, the Italian political debate and mass media suddenly accused the United Kingdom of having instigated the massacre.²⁵

A number of Italian newsreels and documentaries have dealt with this event, and the discourse they convey is extremely useful to understand how the trauma of the loss of the colonies surfaced in popular culture. Two *Settimana INCOM* films are, without doubt, focused on the culprit of the massacre: this is clear from the title of newsreel 114 (*Eccidio di italiani ad opera della gioventù somala*).²⁶ The SYL is described as a chauvinist movement that contrasts with the opinion of the majority of Somali people, who instead wanted Italy to stay in order to lead the transition toward independence. The film is divided in two parts, both characterized by an extremely gloomy atmosphere. The first scenes, shot in a church in Rome where a memorial service for the Italian victims is taking place, feature dark lighting and an ominous cello music score. The camera pans across the church, where some important Italian politicians (i.e., De Gasperi, Corbellini, Togni) are praying for the victims, while the voice-over states that the same rite is taking place in Asmara and Mogadishu. This commentary suggests that three former capitals of the Italian empire are still bonded by a spiritual union. The shrilling of an oboe suddenly dissolves the unhappy atmosphere. This sonic shift leads to a more vibrant section of the film, featuring shorter takes of the pro-Italian protesters in Mogadishu. Such a dynamic cut is meant to overwhelm the audience with visual pieces of evidence, proving that the entire Somali society wants Italy to guide the process toward independence.

The commentary, too, becomes more cadenced as it counterpoints the images; it performs a crescendo of praises of the Italian presence, which climaxes with the emotional reference to the ‘fantasie di festa [which have turned into] una tragica fantasia di sangue’. This last sentence plays a twofold function: on the one hand, the *fantasie di festa* are reminiscent of the trope through which non-fiction films portrayed the unbridled joy with which Africans allegedly welcomed Italians, both during and after the period of Fascist colonialism.²⁷ On the other hand, the *fantasia di sangue* seem to be orchestrated by the

²⁴ Giampalo Calchi Novati, *Fra Mediterraneo e Mar Rosso. Momenti di politica italiana in Africa* (Rome: Istituto Italo-Africano, 1992), pp. 133–60; Giampaolo Calchi Novati, *L’Africa d’Italia. Una storia coloniale e postcoloniale* (Rome: Carocci, 2011), p. 412; Annalisa Urbano and Antonio Varsori, *Mogadiscio 1948. Un eccidio di italiani tra decolonizzazione e guerra fredda* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2019) pp. 44–49.

²⁵ Chiara Ottaviano, ‘Riprese Coloniali. I documentari LUCE e la Settimana INCOM’, *Zapruder*, 23 (2010), pp. 9–23 (p. 20).

²⁶ ‘Eccidio di italiani ad opera della gioventù somala’, *Settimana INCOM* 114 (INCOM, 21 January 1948).

²⁷ See the analysis featuring in chapter 3, section 3.6 (pp. 123–23).

BMA, which used the SYL merely to physically enact the massacre. The hurtful separation from the colony therefore happens not so much because of the Somali's call for independence. Such a rhetorical discourse allows the footage to dissolve the traumatic effects of decolonization by exorcising the direct confrontation with the former subjects. In so doing, this film and, more generally, the whole corpus, accuse other Western countries of being responsible for the painful separation that caused suffering for both Italy and its former colonies.

The second film that makes reference to the Mogadishu incident was aired in March 1948. It recounts the arrival, at the harbour of Naples, of the ship *Sparta*, which brought back to Italy those who had escaped from Somalia following the 11 January massacre.²⁸ The ship, which in previous and coeval films represented the mean fostering of the imperial myth while transnationalizing Italian qualities, here stands as the end of that myth.²⁹ The atmosphere is even sadder than in the previous film. Camera movements are slow, and high-angle, medium close-ups of the people on the boat convey their sense of helplessness while facing the decision to return to Italy.

Guido Notari's voice-over is consistently attuned to such an unhappy atmosphere. He speaks slowly, emphatic breaks interspersing with the words that describe the 'navi dolorose' that are bringing back the settlers, depicted as a 'schiera perseguitata'. There is a passage in which the identification of the voice-over with the people on the ships arriving from Africa reaches a climax. Notari says touchingly: 'scampati dall'eccidio del gennaio, fratelli d'Italia [voice breaking] i fratelli di tutta Italia vi riabbracciano. Poche cose raccolte all'ammeglio, ecco cosa ci è rimasto di tanti anni di fatica.' The voice here is deeply moved, and it struggles to find the right words to describe that wretched situation. This choice, in fact, undermines the classical authoritative role that the commentary had in interwar films, as it attempts to express the feelings of the people on screen.³⁰ The camera is consistent with this pitiful atmosphere; it lingers on the hugs between the people arriving and those waiting for them on the dock, often through the use of close-ups in order to capture the tears on their sad faces. As soon as the focus shifts to Undersecretary Brusasca, who himself awaits the arrival of the *Sparta*, the commentary and the images convey a slightly different feeling; the undersecretary announces that the boat people will stay in

²⁸ 'Una pagina di dolore. Mogadiscio: arrivano i profughi', *Settimana INCOM* 127 (INCOM, 5 March 1948).

²⁹ See chapter 3, section 3.4 (116–20).

³⁰ On the authoritativeness of the voice-over, see Bill Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary*, 3rd edn (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2017), pp. 67–77.

Italy only temporarily, because they will go back to their homes in Africa. Accordingly, this part of the footage argues that the traumatic events they experienced on 11 January 1948 could be overcome by returning to Somalia and resuming their civilizing work.

A very similar narrative structure can be found in a newsreel produced in April 1948, entitled *Gli italiani non dimenticano le terre d'Africa*.³¹ Brusasca speaks directly to the audience, about the positive results the government is achieving in terms of the management of the decolonial issue.³² At the end of the footage, he indirectly mentions the Mogadishu massacre, as the 'tragica vicenda [che] si è aggiunta in questi mesi'. He then appeals to the audience, with the following words: 'scopriamoci italiani davanti alle ultime croci del deserto. Sotto di esse, riposano i caduti di Mogadiscio.' This sentence, following a number of shots of construction sites, roads, and railways, describes a scene where the camera portrays some gravestones and crosses. It thus conveys the idea that the events of Mogadishu are still an open wound. Nevertheless, a closer examination reveals that the truly traumatic process related to these events is not so much death in itself, but the fact that those Italians who survived the slaughter could not return to their 'grande opera di civiltà'.³³

Although departing from different assumptions, these films share the determination to somatize the trauma of the loss of the colonies by focusing on the suffering of the Italian people, who would be deprived of a *posto al sole* where to unfold their intrinsic qualities and industriousness. African people, instead, are portrayed as prone to have Italy lead their development. Accordingly, these films entail that if Italy had left the former colonies, African people would have suffered painful consequences. Against this backdrop, the images of the Mogadishu massacre seem to describe a gloomy omen both for Africans and for Italians. For the former, it represented the moment of chaos that would have anticipated the dreadful chaotic scenario engendered by the departure of Italians. For the latter, it was the traumatic end that interrupted their civilizing work in Africa. Hence, the decolonial trauma seems to be disarticulated and decentred: the pain is provoked not so much by the

³¹ 'Gli italiani non dimenticano le terre d'Africa', *Settimana INCOM* 138 (INCOM, 2 April 1948); this film is analysed thoroughly in chapter 4, section 4.2 (pp. 137–38).

³² As pointed out by Chiara Ottaviano, this choice should be read against the background of the forthcoming political elections; this film is thus a clear propagandistic attempt to increase the consent given to the *Democrazia Cristiana*, see Ottaviano, 'Riprese coloniali', p. 20.

³³ The complete sentence is: 'La nostra speranza, fervida come una promessa, è che i nostri lavoratori e imprenditori possano ritrovare le loro case e le loro imprese per continuare, insieme alle popolazioni locali, la loro grande opera di civiltà'.

riots, as by the indirect action — or negligence — of the international community, which did not indulge what both Italians and Africans wanted, that is, the Italian protectorate over the former colony. As such, the representations ‘both elicit and elude recognition of how colonial histories matter and how colonial pasts become muffled or manifest’ during the complicated end of the empire, and within the process of national rebuilding following WWII.³⁴

5.4 From amnesia to aphasia

The films about the Mogadishu incident are interesting examples of cultural memories and narratives related to Italian colonialism, which have to be understood against the background of a traumatic experience. The discursive and aesthetic strategies they refer to aimed to somatize and dissolve the trauma of the loss of colonies; in so doing, the footage — together with other films I will analyse — contributed to configuring a specific form of collective colonial memory, which might be defined as a-traumatic insofar as it camouflaged the loss of the colonies and encompassed it within the broader passage from Fascism to the Republic. This form of a-traumatic memory conceptually questions the amnesic removal of colonial discourses; the films and the documents this thesis focuses on are prime examples of the fact that, even if the empire was no longer existent, its very rhetoric and instrumentality still fed the representation of national qualities. Despite this continued presence, the imperial debris started to become unintelligible. This is because the intersecting traumatic occurrences Italy faced from the end of the 30s to the end of the 40s — the racial laws, WWII, the fall of Fascism and the *Resistenza*, and economic and political precariousness, just to name the most blatant events — prevented the uncomfortable confrontation with the crimes and usurpation that characterized its presence in Africa.

The prolonged and delocalized trauma of Italian decolonization, encompassed within and scattered throughout the transition from Fascism to the Republic, only partially allows the paradigm of amnesia to tackle the issue of the country’s troubled colonial memory. Moreover, amnesia might underestimate the active attitude and the occasions in which that past was either remembered or silenced. For this reason, the silences the films

³⁴ Ann Laura Stoler, ‘Colonial Aphasia. Race and Disabled Histories in France’, *Public Culture*, 23:1 (2011), 121–56 (p. 122).

constructed did not point toward oblivion or definitive forgetting, but to ‘issues of the availability of language and possibilities for its expression’.³⁵ As put by both Ben-Ghiat and by Andall and Duncan, exploring these configurations of memory through the lens of cinema confirms the value of investigating ‘not only colonial amnesias but “the ways in which Italy held on to memories of colonial rule and ambition”’.³⁶

After 1945, the cultural memory of Italian colonialism started to be characterized by a persistent and inescapable dichotomy, which addressed the simultaneous presence and absence of the colonial past.³⁷ This is, indeed, a contradiction that is common to the majority of post-imperial metropolitan centres, which have made ‘colonial history alternately irretrievable and accessible, at once selectively available and out of reach’, according to diverse political and cultural stances.³⁸ The pivotal work of Ann Laura Stoler sheds a fascinating light on the composite mechanisms through which colonialism spread its contradictory memories and debris in post-imperial nations. Following the research of psychologists such as Jakobson or Swinney, who worked on the disruptions in the comprehension and production of language in both oral and written forms, Stoler suggests that aphasia can address the ‘comprehension deficit’ of the postcolonial scenario, due to a partial knowledge loss concerning the colonial past. The aphasic condition is thus ‘a-grammatic’, because it alludes to the difficulties in understanding structural relationships and the ‘cognitive and epistemic organization’ of the post-colonial scenario. Accordingly, more than ‘forgetting’, aphasia emphasizes the fact that the knowledge of the colonial past is not merely present or absent at a societal level. Rather, it may be occluded, blocked, ‘disabled and deadened to reflective life, shorn of the capacity to make connections’ through a variety of practices.³⁹

Although aphasia seems an extremely effective tool to tackle the puzzling mnemonic processes that characterize the recollection of Italy’s colonial past, whilst simultaneously repressing its most hurtful memories, only very few scholarly contributions

³⁵ Bijl, ‘Colonial Memory and Forgetting in the Netherlands and Indonesia’, p. 449.

³⁶ Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *Italian Fascism’s Empire Cinema* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University press, 2015), pp. 298; Andall and Duncan, ‘Memories and Legacies of Italian Colonialism’, p. 21.

³⁷ Cultural memory can be defined as the ‘concept for all knowledge that directs behaviour and experience in the interactive framework of a society and one that obtains through generations in repeated societal practice and initiation’, see Jan Assmann, ‘Collective Memory and Cultural Identity’, *New German Critique*, 65 (1995), 125–33.

³⁸ Stoler, ‘Colonial Aphasia’, p. 122.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 122–23.

have used this paradigm systematically. An exception is Giorgio Bertellini's survey of Italian colonial silent films, where he refers to aphasia when describing the 'difficulty in articulating a confident, untroubled possession of national selfhood' that certain film characters demonstrate.⁴⁰ Chiara De Cesari has articulated a more comprehensive aphasic framework to dissect the political dispositif of the Italo–Libyan Treaty of Friendship, Partnership, and Cooperation (signed in 2008 by Silvio Berlusconi and Muammar Gaddafi). Since the 'treaty announces the closure of a period of confrontation with the past that in fact never began', it epitomizes the difficulty of Italian politics and society to speak critically about the colonial past.⁴¹ Aphasia, hence, seems to be instrumental in tackling the lack of a discursive grammar that may address the traces of a colonial past, which have been present in the construction/reconstruction of a given idea of national identity.

5.5 Displacing the documentary's voice: Memories from the Ethiopian past

Decolonial footage offers some remarkable examples of the process through which Italian politics, society, and culture articulated an aphasic form of post-imperial memory. Aphasia has a direct link with memorability, because the lack of the ability to articulate meaningful sentences may inhibit the production of a comprehensive discourse about the past. Therefore, the language those films used, the very words they deployed, and the ways in which these intermingled with the images can be considered indicative of the active strategies through which the colonial past was reworked and exploited for the discourse about national qualities. My analysis of the commentary through which the footage recontextualized the images and the discursive vocabulary of colonialism starts with a historical account of the process through which the films' commentaries were crafted.

Post-war newsreels and, to a lesser extent, some decolonial documentaries did not have a classical film direction. The footage was rarely filmed by the operators on the spot;

⁴⁰ 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. by Patrizia Palumbo (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003), pp. 255–77 (p. 258). Sandra Ponzanezi, too, uses this paradigm, albeit more fleetingly, to describe the troubled Italian postcolonial memory and the ways in which it is still shaping the intersection of racialized and gendered representations of the black bodies in Italian culture, see 'Edges of Empire: Italy's Postcolonial Entanglements and the Gender Legacy', *Cultural Studies – Critical Methodologies*, 16:4 (2016), 373–86.

⁴¹ Chiara De Cesari, 'The Paradoxes of Colonial Reparation: Foreclosing Memory and the 2008 Italy-Libya Friendship Treaty', *Memory Studies*, 5:3 (2012), 316–26 (pp. 317–18).

the films were more often crafted by editing found footage, and by combining it with foreign footage coming from commercial exchanges with foreign companies.⁴² The film scripts simply consisted of the text of the commentary, which was added extra-diegetically. Between 1946 and the late 50s, INCOM film scripts were written almost exclusively by Giacomo Debenedetti, a left-wing intellectual who was supervised by other members of INCOM, namely its president, Sandro Pallavicini, and the chief editor Domenico Paoella. Paola Frandini observes that Debenedetti's texts were crafted meticulously, so that they could consistently merge with the images. Such a 'perfetta armonia di parlato e immagine resta una delle caratteristiche della INCOM e una delle ragioni del suo successo', and some archival records will show that Pallavicini, Paoella, and other figures intervened massively in order to calibrate the sentences that the voice of Guido Notari would spread in every cinema.⁴³

The spoken words and the scripts that inspired them are the strongest components of non-fiction films of the interwar/post-war era. This is because the commentary is where ideological and discursive structures are located, and from whence a certain social meaning concerning the images stems.⁴⁴ Documentary theorists have often epitomized this prime role of the commentary as the 'voice-of-God', a title which perfectly embodies the significance of the voice-over in the representation of a given image of reality. Bill Nichols has pointed out that the voice-over is a pivotal element in the chronological and stylistic categorization of a documentary according to formal traits.⁴⁵ While acknowledging Nichols' crucial contribution to the field, Stella Bruzzi has offered a systematic critique of the classification of documentary aesthetics according to this formal device. Moreover, she

⁴² A report Sandro Pallavicini drafted in 1962, presented at the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia (CSC) in Rome, illuminates the extent to which foreign footage was edited in Italian films and how, in turn, INCOM's and other studios' films were used by foreign producers abroad, see Sandro Pallavicini, *I cinegiornali d'attualità in Italia e nel mondo* (Rome: [n. pub], 1962).

⁴³ Giacomo Debenetti was a relevant figure in Italian culture. Born into a Jewish family, he became a journalist, literary critic, and writer. He wrote *16 Ottobre 1943*, the first account of the deportation of Roman Jews shortly after the occupation of Rome by the Nazi army. He was one of the most important critics of twentieth-century Italy, see Paola Frandini, *Il teatro della memoria. Giacomo Debenedetti dalle opere e i documenti* (Lecce: Manni, 2001), pp. 231–33.

⁴⁴ Augusto Sainati, 'Il visibile e l'udibile. Il commento verbale nella settimana INCOM', *La valle dell'Eden*, 4 (2000), 101–09; Pascal Bonitzer, 'Le silences de la voix', *Chaiers du Cinema*, 256 (1975), 22–23; Martin Stollery, 'The Newsreel Commentator, the Actor, the Intellectual, and the Broadcaster: Celebrity and Personality Voices in Classic British Documentary', *Celebrities Studies*, 4:2 (2013), 202–18.

⁴⁵ Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts of Documentary* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991), p. 34; Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary*, pp. 142–70.

maintains that the voice-over does not necessarily distort the ‘purity’ of what happens in front of the camera, since that purity is always artificially crafted. To put it differently, since any element of the documentary film is a performative act, the distinction between purity/truthfulness of the image and the artificial and political interference of the voice-over loses its relevance.⁴⁶

A more articulated understanding — as opposed to the standard paradigm of the ‘voice-of-God’ — is necessary to study the footage about Italian decolonization. This is because the voice-over employs different registers and roles, alternating the embodied authoritativeness of State power, which refers to the ‘discourse of sobriety’ that the non-fiction films conveyed, with a more familiar, sympathetic, and ironic tone, which positions the commentary closer to the audience.⁴⁷ This is clear, for instance, by looking at the *Settimana INCOM* 48, the first newsreel dealing with Ethiopia after the end of the Fascist Empire.⁴⁸ The footage is about a military parade held in Addis Ababa. In 1947, when this film was produced, INCOM did not have a crew in Ethiopia, and the footage therefore comes from exchanges with foreign companies. The images of well-arranged troops are interspersed with low-angle medium shots of Haile Selassie, against whom Fascism fought to conquer its ‘place in the sun’ in 1936. As a whole, the *mise-en-scène* gives dignity to the emperor’s portrayal and to the Ethiopian forces; any form of exoticism or backwardness, which was used to depict African landscapes and people in other Italian films, is thus absent. Nevertheless, the extra-diegetic INCOM commentary and the soundtrack, featuring marimbas and tribal-like percussions, completely change the narrative and the atmosphere that the images alone would have conveyed. In the first scene, when Haile Selassie gets out of his car, Notari’s voice puts an emphasis on the presence of the *cagnolino* — hardly visible in the images — that, according to the commentary, always accompanies the emperor. In so doing, the voice somehow defuses the emperor’s dignity as reflected by the images alone, redirecting the audience’s attention to the presence of the pet and away from the ceremonies of an independent country.

Similarly, when the camera lingers on the military parade, the voice-over drawls significantly to describe some soldiers as they march, following the ‘passo dello struzzo addormentato’, which was allegedly invented by the ‘generali indigeni’, who were envious

⁴⁶ Stella Bruzzi, *New Documentary*, 2nd edn (New York: Routledge, 2006), pp. 47–72.

⁴⁷ Craig Hight, ‘Beyond Sobriety: Documentary Diversions’, in *The Documentary Film Book*, ed. by Brian Winston (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 198–205.

⁴⁸ ‘Dall’Abissinia. Rivista militare ad Addis Abeba’, *Settimana INCOM* 48 (INCOM, 6 March 1947).

of the more martial (and, of course, Western) goose-step. The commentary then mocks the African soldiers, who would be better doing parades rather than fighting, as happened ‘in guerre non lontane’: the reference to the Ethiopian war of 1935–36, and to the Italian victory, is obvious. Hence, the commentary uses sarcasm against Ethiopian people in order to indirectly connect the account of the current situation in Ethiopia with the former colonial presence of the Italians. What is noteworthy here is not so much the complete silence about Fascist crimes, which are obliquely evoked when commenting on the Ethiopians’ inability to fight, but the mockery of Ethiopian people, who are depicted as simply imitating Western models but without succeeding; this was meant to provoke a sense of irony among the Italian audience. Such a botched mimicry does not undermine the hiatus separating white and black people and cultures. Rather, it reinforces the predominance of Western models, and a Western episteme, in a post-colonial context.

The *Settimana INCOM* 48 newsreel on Ethiopia is rather short (barely one minute long), but it nonetheless presents another extremely interesting aspect concerning the commentary, in particular the use of two very evocative words, which might be regarded as the singing motto of the Ethiopian war: *Faccetta Nera*. Written in 1935, to celebrate the forthcoming conquest of the empire by the Fascist army, this marching chant is about an Ethiopian female epitomized as a ‘small black face’. The song exalts the invasion of Ethiopia as the moment in which Italian (male) soldiers will set the *faccette nere* free. *Faccetta Nera* was composed before the promulgation of the racial laws, which banned interracial unions; the song’s thinly veiled allusion to the sexual conquest of the Ethiopian women by the Italians did not please Mussolini, and the lyrics were changed according to the new racial legislation.⁴⁹

As observed by Áine O’Healy, the original meaning of the song was never completely forgotten, neither during nor after the Fascist imperial period; since the 50s, it has addressed a kind of imperial nostalgia, especially in certain right-wing circles, by recalling the ‘good old days’ of a virile and predatory understanding of national ethos.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, one of the first re-articulations of *Faccetta Nera*’s meaning happened exactly

⁴⁹ The lyrics of the song was changed in order to respect the new racial legislation, even though the original version remained more famous, see <http://www.lorien.it/X_INNI/Pg_Canzoni-D/Faccetta-Nera.html> [accessed 11 February 2019]. For a close reading of the two versions of the lyrics, see Karen Pinkus, *Bodily Regimes. Italian Advertising Under Fascism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), pp. 56–58.

⁵⁰ Áine O’Healy, “[Non] è una somala”: Deconstructing African femininity in Italian film’, *The Italianist*, 29:2 (2009), 175–98 (p. 181).

in the film under discussion. Although the camera portrays a military parade, the voice-over says that ‘i soldati vogliono far colpo sulle faccette nere occhieggianti tra il pubblico’. The use of the word *occhieggianti* is meant to replicate the trope of African women as loose and tempting the white males. Nevertheless, the sarcastic mockery with which the voice-over describes the Ethiopian soldiers aims to portray them as incapable of properly satisfying the gazes and flirts of the *faccette nere*. As a result, the ogling of Ethiopian females is very much addressed at the Italian audience. The epitome *faccette nere* therefore makes Ethiopian women embody the desire of Italians for Africa to be conquered once again; in so doing, Italy could portray itself as the country from which spring productiveness, virility, and civilization.

5.6 Speaking silences: Irony, nostalgia, and missed repentance

The representation of Ethiopia that features in decolonial footage relies on an ambiguous discursive map whose coordinates oscillate between the use of irony, subtle nostalgia, racism, and exotic backwardness. This is because the memory of the Fascist Empire was still alive, but the changing political scenario required Italy to recontextualize certain tropes and narratives that used to describe its relationship with Ethiopia. These elements feature in a service of the *Settimana INCOM* 323, on a sporting event held in Addis Ababa.⁵¹

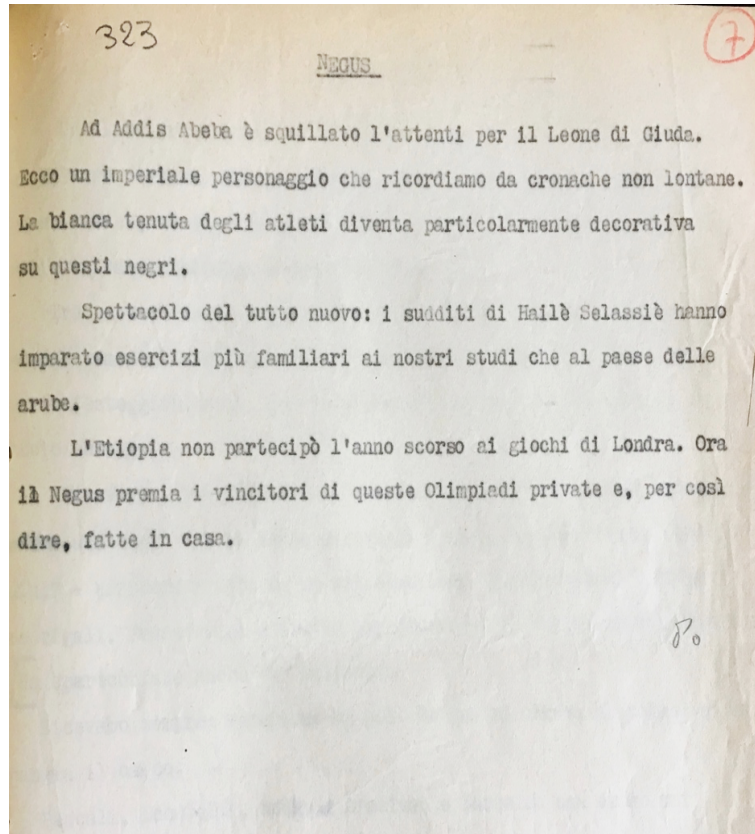
Haile Selassie, called here the Lion of Judah, is still present in the memories of the Italian audience, because of recent happenings — ‘in cronache non lontane’, as written in the script reported in the image below (picture 12).⁵² The film’s text obliquely hints at the contrast between the white clothes of the Ethiopians and their skin colour. They are then epitomized as ‘negri’, who are doing exercises that are more similar to those the Italian had taught them during the AOI than to those typical of the so-called ‘paese delle arube’.⁵³ Although the word *negro/negri* had a quite neutral meaning at the time, the words *paese*

⁵¹ ‘In seguito alla non partecipazione alle Olimpiadi di Londra, ad Addis Abeba atleti africani gareggiano in diverse discipline sportive alla presenza di Hailè Salassié I’, *Settimana INCOM* 323 (INCOM, 4 August 1949).

⁵² Archivio Storico Istituto LUCE (ASL), Group ‘Testi Cinegiornali INCOM 1947’, file ‘Negus’ (film n. 323).

⁵³ In Italy, the use of the word *negro/i* in a pejorative sense started in the 70s, see Federico Faloppa, ‘Per un linguaggio non razzista’, in *Contro il razzismo. Quattro ragionamenti*, ed. by Marco Aime (Turin: Einaudi, 2016), pp. 69–123 (pp. 90–95); Federico Faloppa, *Parole contro. La rappresentazione del diverso in italiano e nei dialetti* (Milan: Garzanti, 2004).

delle arube deserve further attention. Their meaning is unclear (Aruba is an island in the Netherlands Antilles); yet, in all likelihood, it was used in this film to underline the backwardness and exoticism of Ethiopia.



Picture 12: Original script of the *Settimana INCOM* 323 (4 August 1949)

The two films about Ethiopia (*Settimana INCOM* 48 and 323) contributed to making the memory of the controversial and violent relationship between Italy and Ethiopia increasingly indefinable and irretrievable. Any form of *metanoia*, understood as the attitude that former imperial countries might have had by showing respect for the former colonized cultures and admitting that the *mission civilisatrice* was a sign of arrogance and usurpation, is avoided.⁵⁴ Against this background, the voice-over's commentary inhibited the mnemonic process through which to critically recollect the previous Fascist presence in Ethiopia. Nevertheless, although silencing any direct references to Fascist crimes, the scripts still used the racist, deceitful, and scornful vocabulary of Fascism, which consequently remained in an 'active register', to use Stoler's suggestion.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Khaznadar, '*Élucider ou se repentir?*', pp. 85–88.

⁵⁵ Stoler, '*Imperial Debris*', p. 192.

Two other INCOM services, produced in 1953 and 1954 respectively, do exemplify how the awkward memories of the Fascist presence in Ethiopia were eclipsed, deactivated yet reformulated in a narrative about the benevolent attitude of Italians abroad.⁵⁶ Both deal with the Emperor Haile Selassie, and are part of a section — *Colpi d'obbiettivo sul mondo* — that featured in some newsreels produced in the mid-fifties; it contained very short reports (lasting, on average, forty seconds) composed of two or three scenes dealing with international politics, and with foreign societies and events. This clarification offers a clue to read the complex mnemonic process related to Italian decolonization; the topics concerning former colonies no longer feature in the section of the newsreel dedicated to home affairs, as happened both in previous films and in those dealing with more tangible political interests — namely, the footage about the AFIS. Rather, they find their place in that part of the newsreel dealing with foreign affairs and world events.⁵⁷

Ethiopia, which for years was depicted as the mythic ‘promised land’ of the Fascist Empire, started to slip inexorably out of national memory. This mnemonic fading out becomes evident if we look at the *Settimana INCOM* 1160, entitled *Londra: Ricevuto da Elisabetta, il Negus torna in Inghilterra per 3 giorni*, about Haile Selassie’s visit to the UK. The footage — most likely coming from a foreign company — features scenes of the London streets filled with people, and Ethiopian and Union Jack flags waving together. Furthermore, the camera puts the Queen and the emperor on the same level of dignity and status.⁵⁸ The commentary avoids any exotic portrayal of Haile Selassie, contrary to what happened in other INCOM films. In so doing, the footage seems to detach the emperor’s figure from the vicissitudes of Italy, which starts to look at him in an almost disinterested way. However, there is an interesting sentence where Notari utters fleetingly, ‘dal termine della guerra Haile Selassie non tornava a Londra, dove ha trascorso i suoi anni d’esilio dal trono.’ The vague reference to the war that forced the emperor into exile in Bath avoids mentioning that this war was provoked by Fascist Italy. As such, the sentence offers a perfect example of the shifting lexicon through which the colonial past was obliterated, yet

⁵⁶ ‘Addis Abeba’, *Settimana INCOM* 1022 (INCOM, 26 November 1953); ‘Londra: ricevuto da Elisabetta, il Negus torna in Inghilterra per 3 giorni’, *Settimana INCOM* 1160 (INCOM, 21 October 1954).

⁵⁷ The short service ‘Addis Abeba’ (*Settimana INCOM* 1022), about the visit of Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands to Ethiopia (1953), is a case in point since there is no reference to the previous colonial presence of Italy.

⁵⁸ ‘Londra: ricevuto da Elisabetta, il Negus torna in Inghilterra per 3 giorni’, *Settimana INCOM* 1160.

reframed, in order to disremember the most brutal sides of the Italo–Ethiopian war and of the AOI.

Textual and spoken elements permeate and even invade the aesthetic dimension of decolonial footage; the voice-over attempted to orientate the audience's opinion about those issues by re-signifying both old and imported footage coming from commercial exchanges. While performing such contradictory purposes, the voice-over in post-war films tried to soften and conceal the overwhelming authoritativeness typical of previous Fascist footage, by establishing, instead, a more friendly and empathic relationship with the audience. As a result, the 'voice-of-God' understanding of the voice-over's role is mediated by the multiplicity of positionalities that the commentary assumes concerning the often-divergent agendas that the decolonial documentaries conveyed. Although it is undeniable that the commentary offered an authoritative and almost omniscient perspective on the topics the footage dealt with, it is likewise clear that it tried to bridge the gap between political aims, audiences' tastes, and the mnemonic recollection of the colonial period. Such diverse objectives materialized in the alternation of pathos, empathy, irony, mockery, and exoticism/eroticism. The conflation of different tones and registers was, hence, meant to harmonize the need to push away the uncomfortable memories of the empire, and of its loss, yet retaining those aspects that were deemed to be useful to rebuild a positive image of *Italianità*.

The voice-over is the very tool that would have transformed the cacophony of divergent and uncomfortable memories into a polyphony that exalted the colonial past and the purported civilization Italians brought to Ethiopia. However, despite the attempt to orchestrate different narratives through the commentary, the footage hardly harmonized the praise of the Italian presence in Africa with the description of the newly established independence of the former colonies. For instance, the ironic description of the exotic traits of Ethiopians, their supposed aspiration to become like Western people, and the subtle exaltation of Italy's colonial presence without mentioning its racial and exploitative results are all elements that compose a puzzling discourse, which excludes some elements whilst simultaneously mentioning others. The commentary therefore contributed to the occlusion of consistent knowledge about the colonial past insofar as it reframed interpretative categories 'in which knowing is disabled, attention is redirected, things are renamed, and disregard is revived and sustained'.⁵⁹ Any possible form of *metanoia* concerning the

⁵⁹ Stoler, 'Colonial Aphasia', p. 153.

colonial past is avoided, whilst exoticism and eroticization of Africa are re-articulated according to the political as well as cultural scenarios of post-war reconstruction.

5.7 A changing lexicon that reframes colonial discourses

The political agenda regarding the former colonies, which aimed at maintaining an influence in those countries conquered before the *Ventennio*, engendered contradictory representations of the Italian presence in those countries. As the films studied above (*Settimana INCOM* 1022 and 1160), the footage about Ethiopia that INCOM produced after 1945 indirectly referred to the same discourses of the former colonial presence, although taking for granted the country's political independence since 1941. Nevertheless, the footage is silent about any form of *metanoia* with regard to crimes and violence committed during the six years of the AOI; accordingly, it also fails to adopt a proper decolonial vocabulary. It seems that the films and, broadly speaking, Italian politics and culture as a whole, indirectly 'recognise certain issues but decide not to speak about them' in a consistent way.⁶⁰ The epistemological frames through which to recollect the colonial past were thus altered, and self-exculpatory and benevolent memories about the Italian presence in Africa spread and thrived.

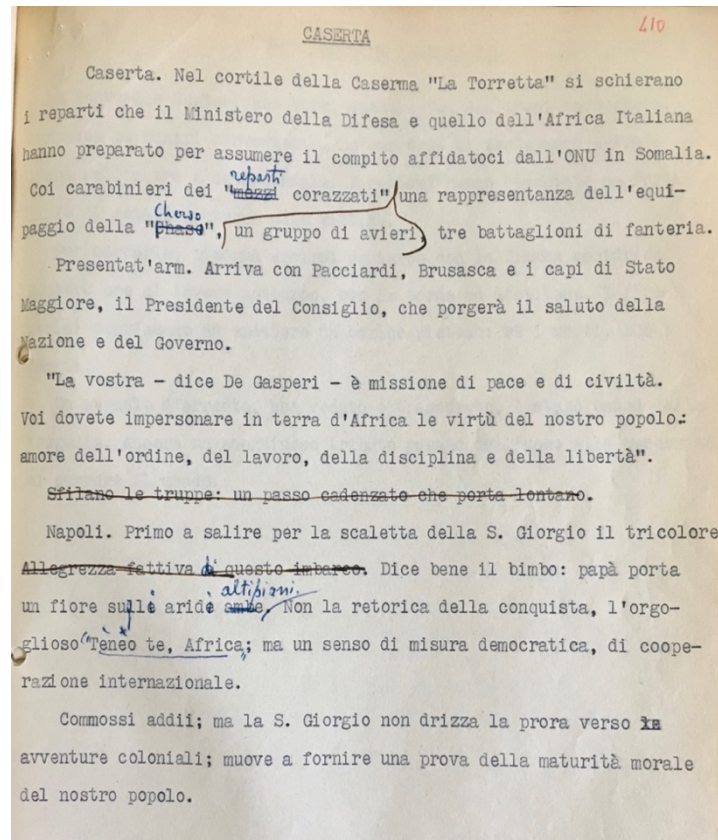
A biased portrayal of the colonial period, and of its end, is blatant in films dealing with the government's attempts to gain a new influence in Somalia, Eritrea, and Libya. Italy wanted to sustain a form of hegemonic presence in each of those countries, by advocating a long-lasting relationship which could be traced back until before Fascist colonialism.⁶¹ Analysis of the film texts enables an exploration of the extent to which the very language used in the footage was prone to reframe the discourse about the positive impact Italy had on Africa, whilst eradicating any direct reference to previous propaganda. One of the most interesting examples of such entangled dynamics features in the commentary of the *Settimana INCOM* 410.⁶² The film, produced in 1950, is about the Italian troops getting ready to depart to Mogadishu for the beginning of the AFIS. Framings of well-arranged units are indeed reminiscent of older Fascist parade films. The martial

⁶⁰ Bijl, 'Colonial Memory and Forgetting in the Netherlands and Indonesia', pp. 450–52.

⁶¹ Giampaolo Calchi Novati, 'Il Corno d'Africa e il colonialismo come 'facitore' di stati', in *L'Africa Orientale Italiana nel dibattito storico contemporaneo*, ed. by Bianca Maria Carcangiu and Tekeste Negash (Rome: Carocci, 2008), pp. 159–89; Calchi Novati, *L'Africa d'Italia*, p.113;

⁶² 'Ritorno in Africa. De Gasperi Saluta le truppe', *Settimana INCOM* 410 (INCOM, 2 March 1950).

and virile description of military divisions equally recalls this authoritarian style. Nevertheless, as the transcription of the written commentary shows (picture 13), INCOM management decided to erase the sentence ‘sfilano le truppe: un passo cadenzato che porta lontano’, which could have been considered as too evocative of previous imperial discourses.⁶³



Picture 13: Original script of the *Settimana INCOM* 410 (2 March 1950)

A few other sentences that indirectly recalled Fascist propaganda were omitted also in the second part of the script. The footage portrays Brusasca and De Gasperi standing on the dock, while the soldiers are boarding the ship San Giorgio. The atmosphere is fairly relaxed, featuring a calm editing and passages of children and families cheering the departing troops. Guido Notari's voice reports De Gasperi's words: 'la vostra è missione di civiltà'. Then the prime minister makes clear that 'la San Giorgio non drizza la prora verso le avventure coloniali; muove a fornire una prova della maturità morale del nostro popolo'. In so doing, the film obliterates the colonial past from the representation of the new Italian presence in Africa, which is, instead, portrayed as instrumental in proving the

⁶³ ASL, Testi Cinegiornali INCOM 1947-, file 'Caserta' (film n. 410).

moral and political reliability of a nation that has left Fascism behind. This element is epitomized by the replacement of the word *ambe*, used in the original script. It was used between the end of the nineteenth and the middle of the twentieth century, with reference to the massive mountains and plateaus of Ethiopia. Those *ambe* were the locations where the biggest battles between Italian and Ethiopian armies took place, both in 1896 and in 1936.⁶⁴ One of these battles, which happened in the Amba Aradam, was extremely violent: its name has given rise to the Italian expression *ambaradan*, which indicates a chaotic situation. In all likelihood, the substitution of the word *ambe* with the more neutral *altipiani* represented an attempt to avoid any reference to these battles.⁶⁵

The script puts much emphasis on the paradigm shift that inspired the new Italian presence in Africa. The former colonial domination, which is epitomized in the reference to the book *Teneo te, Africa* that D'Annunzio wrote to praise the conquest of Ethiopia in 1936, is transfigured in the renewed 'senso di misura democratica, di cooperazione internazionale'. Despite such a purported philanthropic ethos, the image of the former colonizers — while bringing 'l'amore dell'ordine, del lavoro, della disciplina e della civiltà' to Africa — always resurfaces. By contrast, the former colonial subjects remain passive recipients of that benevolence. This means that colonial discourses are latently re-articulated with a more polished lexicon, which intermingles with images that attempt to disguise a new epistemic and economic conquest of Africa.

The film *Ritorno in Africa. Primo aereo per la Somalia* conveys an even more mystifying aesthetic and vocabulary concerning the beginning of the AFIS.⁶⁶ This newsreel is about the departure of the AFIS commissioner Mario Pompeo Gorini, along with other political as well as business delegates, from Ciampino airport in Rome. The narrative structure unfolds in the contraposition between dark shots of people boarding the plane for a night flight to Mogadishu and a commentary that, instead, exalts the new dawn of the Italian presence in Somalia. Notari's voice concludes the film, solemnly uttering the following words: 'sorgerà il sole lungo questo volo: come un diagramma del nostro augurio.' Such a metaphor implies that the opaque period of Italian presence in Africa was

⁶⁴ Giorgio Rochat, *Le guerre italiane 1935–1943: dall'impero d'Etiopia alla disfatta* (Turin: Einaudi, 2005); Nicola Labanca, *La guerra d'Etiopia 1935–1941* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2015).

⁶⁵ On the use of the expression 'Ambaradan', see <<http://www.accademiadellacrusca.it/en/italian-language/language-consulting/questions-answers/origine-parola-ambaradan>> [accessed on 5 February 2019].

⁶⁶ 'Ritorno in Africa. Primo aereo per la Somalia', *Settimana INCOM* 407 (INCOM, 23 February 1950).

the Fascist period, which is dead and buried. Therefore, the ‘ottima gestione coloniale’ mentioned in the script, indeed, refers to an older and pre-Fascist phase, when the connection with ‘nostra prima colonia’ was established.⁶⁷

The *ritorno* of Italians, according to an uninterrupted lineage, also features in the film *Mogadiscio. Lo sbarco*, when the voice-over mentions that those Italians departing for Mogadishu are ‘i fratelli minori, i figli, e i nipoti dei generosi soldati e pionieri giunti in passato’.⁶⁸ Such a generic reference to the previous Italian presence is wholly unproblematic. There is space neither for a critical account of the most controversial aspects of the colonial presence nor for the possibility that Somali people may want to decide their future autonomously. Hence, although the vocabulary changes, the hidden meanings and discourses remain obstinately similar to those typical of the colonial past.

Two films about the visit Brusasca paid to the Horn of Africa (1951) provide further examples of the extent to which film commentary disguised the systematic articulation of postcolonial discourses by suppressing any critical readings of the colonial past.⁶⁹ *Brusasca in Africa* is about the first leg of the undersecretary’s visit.⁷⁰ As a whole, the film is organized in three quite distinct sections, dealing respectively with Brusasca’s departure, with the description of Asmara and Mogadishu as cities still connected with Italy, and with the mentioning of the Mogadishu massacre. The commentary and the images follow this tripartite structure consistently; the first two parts of the film feature a montage aiming to bring the audience into the atmosphere of the Horn of Africa by alternating images of dusty and noisy markets, tribal dances, and black people cheering the Italian delegates. Yet, at one point, the voice-over says that ‘l’Asmara parla ancora italiano’, and the camera instantly shifts to Italian bars, restaurants, a cinema, and other buildings. Such a transition counterbalances the exotic atmosphere that featured just before. This may be because an excessive exoticization could have weakened the purpose of the newsreels, that is, the praise of the long-lasting Italian presence in Africa.

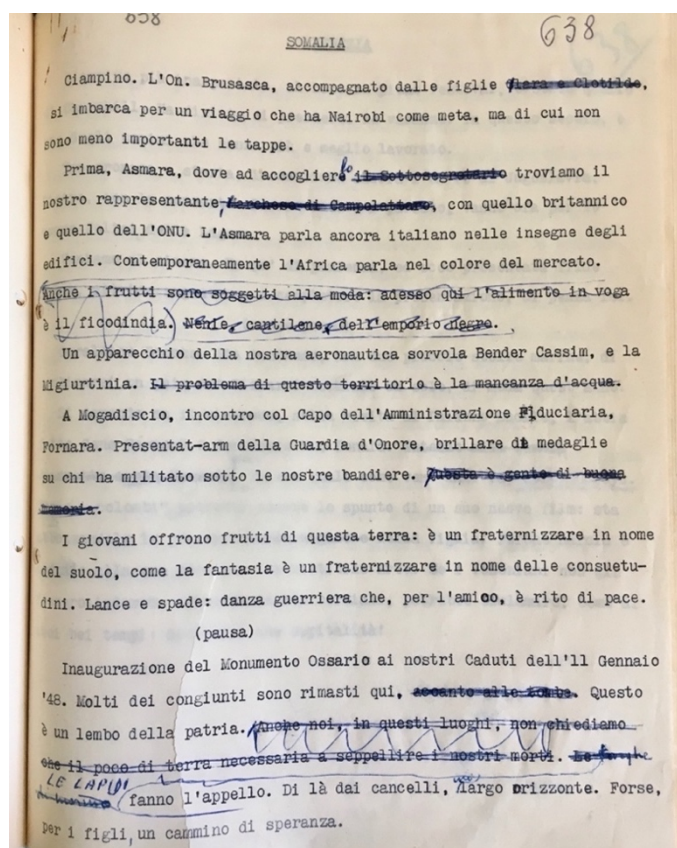
⁶⁷ ASL, Testi Cinegiornali INCOM 1947–, file ‘Somalia’ (film n. 407). It is worth noticing that, in fact, the first Italian colony was Eritrea, epitomized as the *colonia primigenia* (the first-born colony).

⁶⁸ ‘Mogadiscio. Lo sbarco’, *Settimana INCOM* 411 (INCOM 3 March 1950).

⁶⁹ Between 1948 and the mid-fifties, Giuseppe Brusasca travelled to Africa several times, and especially to those territories that were part of the former colonial empire, in which Italy still had relevant economic and political interests, see Antonio M. Morone, ‘Brusasca l’africano’, in *Giuseppe Brusasca e gli inizi della Repubblica. Atti del convegno di studi (27 Maggio 2006. Sala Consigliare del Palazzo Comunale di Casale Monferrato)*, ed. by Luigi Mantovani (Casale Monferrato: Assessorato alla Cultura, 2006), pp. 37–68.

⁷⁰ ‘Brusasca in Africa’, *Settimana INCOM* 638 (INCOM, 31 August 1951); the second film (*Settimana INCOM* 648), will be analysed in the following section.

The tone of the film becomes more emotional as soon as the voice-over mentions the events of Mogadishu of January 1948. The atmosphere becomes soberer, with the commentary saying that Mogadishu remains an appendage of Italy because of the sacrifice of its sons, who died on that occasion. The original script (picture 14) and its corrections might reveal the extent to which the process of collective memory-making that the commentary conveys was influenced both by the political goals of the government — as we have seen in chapter 2 — and also by a shifting socio-cultural scenario, according to which Italian society was no longer attracted by colonial/decolonial topics.



Picture 14: Original script of the *Settimana INCOM* 638 (31 August 1951)

The omitted parts in the first paragraphs make the film's pace more vibrant, allowing for a perfect synchronization between the visible and audible dimension of the footage.⁷¹ However, the strikethrough in the sentence 'il problema di queste terre è la mancanza d'acqua' might be appraised slightly differently. This omitted part, more than serving as a mere stylistic refinement of the film's pace, conceals a problem still present in the former colony. If the voice-over had admitted the lack of water, it would have discredited the

⁷¹ ASL, Testi Cinegiornali INCOM 1947–, file 'Somalia' (film n. 638).

rhetoric of the Italian good workers who solved the problems of Africans, a discourse that both previous and coeval films spread widely in order to justify the Italian presence after decolonization.⁷²

The break (*pausa*) indicates the passage to the saddest part of the film. Debenedetti's text here evokes the Mogadishu massacre in order to reactivate the memory of this traumatic experience among the audience. This passage wants to create an emotional connection between the official voice of the government (which was simultaneously embodied by Brusasca and disembodied in the voice-over), and the common feeling of an audience that was inevitably forgetting the colonial topics.⁷³ However, the removal of the sentence stating that Italy was asking just 'il poco di terra necessaria per seppellire i nostri morti' seems significant, insofar as it alludes to the fact that the international decisions about the destiny of Eritrea and Somalia were finally accepted and digested. Accordingly, this film puts the resentment toward the international community aside and reframes a form of moderate exoticism not directly connected to the imperial past.⁷⁴ However, the passionate response the film seeks to evoke among the audience epitomizes the difficult effort to detach Eritrea and Somalia from the emotional map of Italian belongings that characterized the previous representation of the empire.

5.8 The aphasic disconnection between past, present, and future

The medium-length documentary *Torniamo in Etiopia con un messaggio di pace. Servizio speciale sulla missione dell'on. Brusasca in Africa* condenses all the elements I have discussed in this chapter.⁷⁵ Describing a fairly long, diplomatic mission Brusasca undertook in the summer of 1951, followed by cameraman Aldo Pennelli, the film is a case in point to observe the silencing of the uncomfortable sides of Italy's colonial past and the re-articulation of the new Italian presence in its former territories. The first scenes offer a

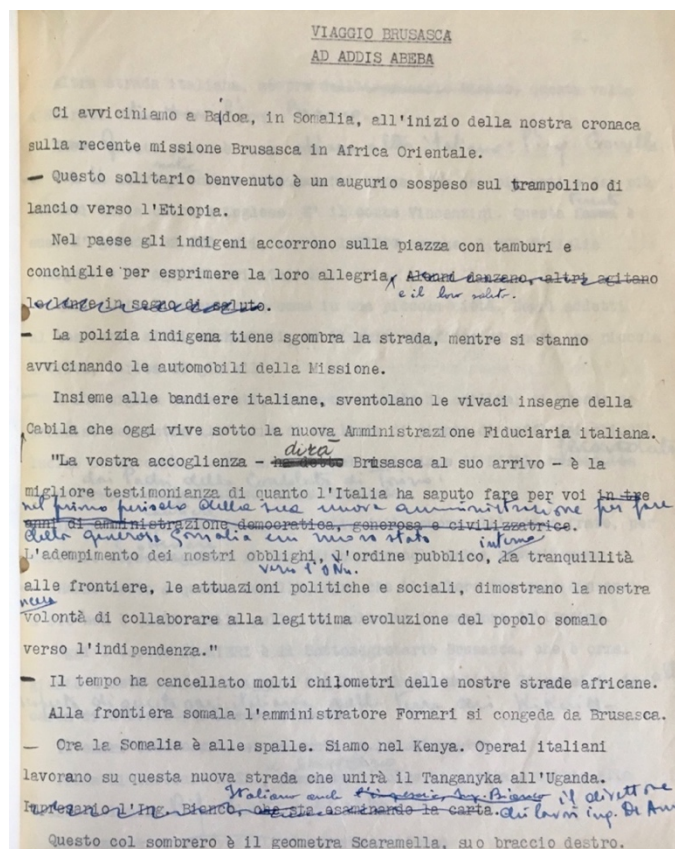
⁷² See, for instance, the analysis of the film 'Un raro documentario sulla colonizzazione italiana in Libia', *Nuova LUCE* 20 (1946), which featured in chapter 4, section 4.3 (139–42).

⁷³ As observed by Alberto Tarchiani, the Italian government raised big expectations and aspirations among Italians, with regard to the destiny of the former colonies, and not vice versa; this means that colonial topics were somewhat forcefully kept alive in Italy, by following a top-down approach, and not as much as the result of a popular and widespread interest of Italian society, see Alberto Tarchiani, *Dieci anni tra Roma e Washington* (Milan: Mondadori, 1955), pp. 191–93.

⁷⁴ This element will be extensively studied in chapter 6.

⁷⁵ 'Torniamo in Etiopia con un messaggio di pace. Servizio speciale sulla missione dell'on. Brusasca in Africa', *Settimana INCOM* 648 (INCOM, 26 September 1951),

disarticulated recollection of old colonial tropes, which are recast in order to describe the now independent countries. The camera, after portraying dusty roads with wide-angle framings, increasingly comes up to some Somali people wearing ‘traditional’ clothes and playing handmade percussions and seashell horns; they are singing and playing to express their supposed happiness for the arrival of Brusasca. The original script (picture 15), however, shows that a relevant part of the description of this exotic welcoming — ‘Alcuni danzano, altri agitano le lance in segno di saluto’ — was removed.⁷⁶ Such a choice may have been made with the aim of defusing the authoritative stance of the film, by letting the exotic images speak for themselves; in fact, exoticism stands palpably out, especially when the camera lingers on the details of Somali dresses and on the smiling faces of dancing girls. The rationale of this choice is twofold: firstly, it gives the film a lighter touch, able to attract the audience’s attention; secondly, it reframes the exotic backwardness by implying that Italy had to lead the path toward the independence of that country.



Picture 15: Original script of the *Settimana INCOM* 648 (26 September 1951)

⁷⁶ ASL, Testi Cinegiornali INCOM 1947–, file ‘Viaggio di Brusasca ad Addis Abeba’ (film n. 648), fol. 1.

Two handwritten comments are noteworthy insofar as they put additional emphasis on the future independence of Somalia, for example in the sentences ‘fare della generosa Somalia un nuovo stato’ and ‘collaborare alla legittima evoluzione del popolo somalo verso l’indipendenza’. Moreover, the script points out that Italy’s presence in this country continued under the aegis of the United Nations, rather than being motivated by a mere national interest. This suggests that the representation of the Italian action in Africa started to be projected onto the future; furthermore, it began to be read against the background of Italy’s new international position within the UN. Such a forward-looking gaze, however, did not alter the persistent exotic portrayal of African people. Rather, this exotic backwardness keeps Africans’ political and individual subjectivity anchored to colonial narratives, which had to justify — in the eyes of the Italian audience — the epistemic superiority of white people.

As far as this re-articulation is concerned, it is not surprising that there is no room for any critical reflection on the colonial past, which would allow for a fairer relationship with the former colonies. Instead, the footage pays significant attention to the compulsive exaltation of Italian industriousness, which now addresses not so much the past but the future economic possibilities of those Italians who invested in Africa. Reflecting this exaltation, the heart of the documentary is a long section about infrastructures and the positive economic impact Italy has had on Africa, which includes some scenes filmed in Kenya and Tanganyika (modern Tanzania). Roads, bridges, dams, buildings, agricultural plants, and Catholic missions are no longer portrayed as debris of the former imperial presence. Rather, they stand as tangible elements that re-articulate the Italian presence in Africa even in countries that were not part of previous colonial expansion.

The concluding section of the film is about the meeting between Brusasca and the Emperor Haile Selassie, held in Addis Ababa on 7 September 1951. On that occasion, the emperor offered Italy official reconciliation and the resumption of diplomatic relationships. The *Negusa Negast*, who was denigrated in certain previous films,⁷⁷ is now praised for having defended some of the Italians living in Ethiopia when the Fascist Empire collapsed. As historiography has clearly shown, when Haile Selassie took his imperial throne back in May 1941, following the Fascist defeat in the Horn of Africa, he did not retaliate against the Italian community living in Ethiopia. This decision was motivated not so much by the acknowledgement of the allegedly intrinsic benevolence and

⁷⁷ ‘Dall’Abissinia. Rivista militare ad Addis Abeba’, *Settimana INCOM* 48.

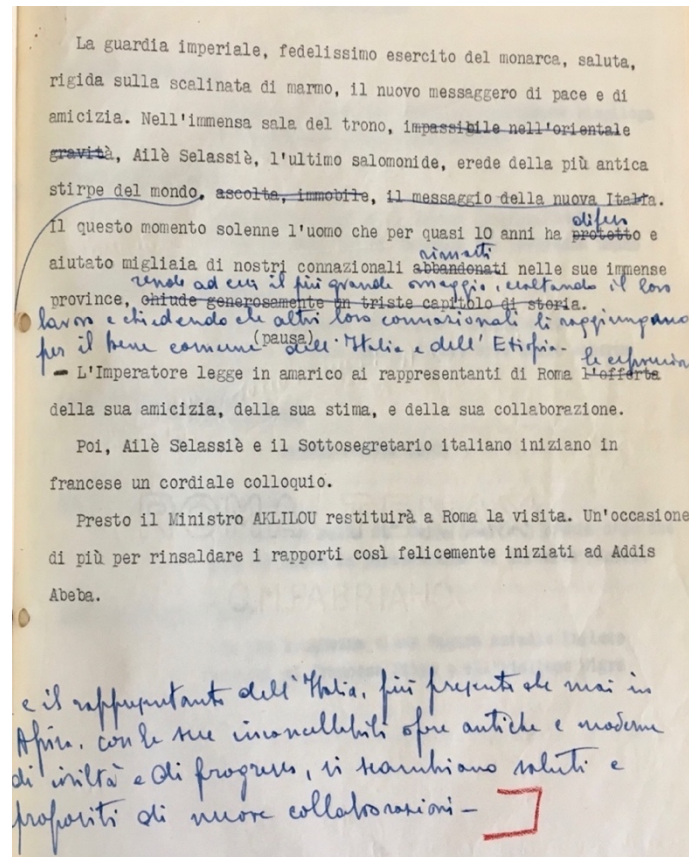
industriousness of Italians, as the footage indirectly advocates; rather, it was *realpolitik*, inspired by contingencies and responding to the need to grant as little power as possible to the BMA that freed the country. Moreover, the emperor assumed that some sections of the Italian community could have helped the economic growth of Ethiopia.⁷⁸

The exoticism that permeated the first part of the film, dealing with Somalia and other African countries, is dissolved in the second part, so as to give institutional dignity to the emperor's words, through which he praises Italians and 'rende ad essi il più grande omaggio, esaltando il loro lavoro e chiedendo che altri connazionali li raggiungano per il bene comune dell'Italia e dell'Etiopia'.⁷⁹ This sentence encapsulates how the footage selectively uses the figure of the emperor to avoid any form of repentance for what the Italians did to the Ethiopians. If he does not criticize the colonial past, why should Italy itself do it? This unspoken rhetorical question inspires the concluding part of the documentary and signifies the description of the meeting between Haile Selassie and Brusasca. The handwritten note added at the end of the script leads the voice-over to say that Italy is 'più presente che mai in Africa, con le sue indissolubili opere antiche e moderne di civiltà e progresso', evoking the obsessive exaltation of the myth of the *lavoro italiano* and the 'propositi di nuove collaborazioni' (picture 16).⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Alberto Sbacchi, 'Haile Selassie and the Italians 1941–1943', *African Studies Review*, 22:1 (1979), 25–42 (p. 38). On the same perspective, see Angelo Del Boca, *Gli italiani in Africa Orientale. Vol. 3. La caduta dell'impero* (Rome and Bari: Laterza, 1982), p. 541; Bahru Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia. 1855–1991* (Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press, 1981), pp. 178–82; Aregawi Behre, 'Revisiting Resistance in Italian-Occupied Ethiopia: The Patriots' Movement (1936–1941) and the Redefinition of Post-War Ethiopia', in *Rethinking Resistance: Revolt and Violence in African History*, ed. by Jon Abbink, Mirjam de Bruijn, Klaas van Walraven (Leiden: Brill, 2003), pp. 87–103.

⁷⁹ The emperor's speech is clear: 'We, for our part, having fully shared the sufferings of our own beloved people, have nevertheless, always been conscious that the people of Italy, themselves, have also been victims of Fascist oppression. We have, therefore, ever been guided and inspired by the principles of Christian charity and it was in that spirit that, from the moment of our historic return to our Empire, we called upon our faithful people to accept, respect and protect those Italians who had chosen to lead their lives among us. The thousands of your compatriots who remain here today and who participate in our national life, bear testimony to the fact that this appeal has always been heard and obeyed by our people', see Haile Selassie, *Selected Speeches of His Imperial Majesty, Haile Selassie First, 1918–1967* (Addis Ababa: Imperial Ethiopian Ministry of Information, Publications & Foreign Languages Press Dept., 1967), p. 91.

⁸⁰ ASL, Testi Cinegiornali INCOM 1947–, file 'Viaggio di Brusasca ad Addis Abeba' (film n. 648), fol. 2.



Picture 16: Original script of the *Settimana INCOM* 648 (26 September 1951)

The disconnection between the colonial past and any critical judgment of Italian responsibility for the crimes committed in Ethiopia also recurs in the newsreel *Ailè Selassie stronca una congiura di palazzo*, aired in late December 1960.⁸¹ It is about a palace coup that was foiled by the emperor. As a whole, the footage expresses a sense of distance between the episode it recounts and the Italian audience; the images are not produced in-house by INCOM, and they feature a rather mild editing. The commentary, as well, is a simple description of events that happened far away. The fact that the commentary is not the 'familiar' voice of Guido Notari and uses a reserved register contributes to emphasizing such a descriptive function. Of course, almost twenty years had passed by since Italy was defeated in Ethiopia, and these stylistic choices reflected that significant caesura.

Such a drab style makes two interesting passages almost go unnoticed. First, the opening sentence of the film mentions that 'l'Etiopia fa oggi gola a quanti si dichiarano anticolonialisti ma dal Sudan e dalla Somalia inviano emissari a sobillare le tribù abissine'. The reference to the British presence in Sudan and Somaliland is obvious, and it is reminiscent of the rhetoric of the *risentimento* toward Western/imperial countries typical

⁸¹ 'Ailè Selassie stronca una congiura di palazzo', *Settimana INCOM* 2013 (INCOM, 22 December 1960).

of Fascist colonial propaganda, but which permeated post-colonial discourses about the return of the colonies alike. The commentary then states that, ‘da oltre trent’anni, il Negus è imperatore della più vecchia nazione indipendente Africana’, and again ‘il Leone di Giuda [...] interessò il mondo quando, nel 1936, tentò di difendersi dall’occupazione italiana’. This is a remarkable passage: for the first time (as late as 1960), a non-fiction film admits that the Italian presence in Ethiopia was a military occupation of an independent and sovereign country. Moreover, both passages state that, in 1936, the world turned its attention to the emperor, who in fact protested vehemently against the Fascist invasion, and that the Fascist Empire did not bring his enduring kingdom to a fall.⁸²

5.9 Disremembering, amnesty, and the interruption of postcoloniality

The praise of Haile Selassie that features in the film I analysed above is one of the first timid attempts the film corpus makes to reconcile Italian society with the memory of the invasion of Ethiopia. Nevertheless, throughout the footage this chapter has dealt with, the critical appraisal of Italy’s colonial past remains elusive, ambiguously oscillating between the repression and recontextualization of previous discourses. The voice-over, for its part, played a crucial role in anchoring the meanings that the images conveyed to the rather contradictory agenda concerning the end of the Italian empire. In spite of the fact that the new presence in Africa was described as being inspired by values such as international cooperation, democracy, and self-determination, the films resorted to a lexicon typical of the *mission civilisatrice*, which praised Italian industriousness and re-proposed the exotic backwardness of Africans, who were unable to take care of themselves. In so doing, the footage ‘dismembers’ the historical result of the past relationship between Italy and its former colonies, by selectively portraying the allegedly positive results only. Such a selective re-articulation suggests that a controversial past was finally mastered through the disconnection between what happened back then and Italy’s new presence in Africa.⁸³

The verb ‘dismember’ sounds very similar to ‘disremember’; the metaphorical juxtaposition of these two words exemplifies the critical pathway to address the aphasic nature of Italian colonial memory. Colonial forgetfulness was sustained by the

⁸² Haile Selassie held a very touching speech, accusing Fascist Italy at the League of Nation in June 1936, see <https://astro.temple.edu/~rimmerma/appeal_to_the_league_of_nations_.htm> [accessed 25 February 2019]. Neelam Srivastava, *Italian Colonialism and Resistances to Empire, 1930–1970* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), pp. 65–98.

⁸³ De Cesari, ‘The Paradoxes of Colonial Reparation’, p. 324.

dismembering of the discourses through which Italy used to justify its colonial endeavours. The debris of such a disarticulation was recomposed in the aftermath of WWII, in order to express a new discourse about the relationship with the former colonies. In other words, the pieces that composed the puzzle of the old colonial propaganda were not merely obliterated; rather, they were put back together but without using those pieces that did not fit into the new and positive portrayal of national identity.

The process of selective remembering and the omissions that characterize the uncertain Italian decolonial vocabulary do not reflect a consistent silencing. Rather, the formation of colonial memory has hinged on a contradictory semantic field, in which divergent utterances composed an a-grammatic discourse typical of any aphasic condition.⁸⁴ The silences in the transmission of colonial memories are therefore unnatural: they were audible, tangible, and intentional.⁸⁵ This is consistent with what Dietmar Rothermund calls ‘conspiracy of silence’, which might be caused by a ‘feeling of shame or discomfort, an unwillingness to articulate repentance for deeds which one may not have done but which one had tolerated’.⁸⁶ This paradigm fittingly applies to the uncertain recollection of the imperial past that the footage conveys, in which the silencing and the reworking of the colonial period were peculiarly intertwined. The voice-commentary orchestrated such an intertwined re-articulation; the several registers used in the films, the corrections, the added notes, the strikethroughs, all epitomize the fact that artistic and political stances went hand in hand in decolonial footage. Accordingly, the commentary’s aesthetic and strategies concealed the wounds that a critical appraisal of the most dishonourable aspects of overseas expansions would have opened. As a side-effect, however, this inconsistent recollection engendered a disarticulated grammar of decolonization, which made it extremely difficult to question both colonial crimes overtly, and the more surreptitious occasions in which colonial discourses were rescued and revitalized.

⁸⁴ Stoler, ‘Colonial Aphasia’, p. 154, especially when she recalls Michel Foucault’s *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994).

⁸⁵ Tillie Olsen, *Silences* (New York: Delacorte Press–Seymour Lawrence, 1979), p. 6; Daniela Baratieri, *Memories and Silences Haunted by Fascism. Italian Colonialism MCMXXX–MCMLX* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2010), pp. 14–16.

⁸⁶ Rothermund, ‘Introduction’, in *Memory of Post-imperial Nations*, p. 5; Rothermund, ‘Memories of Post-imperial Nations’, p. 65.

The inhibition of the critical appraisal of the Italian presence in Africa, which was palpable in the time span of decolonization, led to an ‘interruption’ of postcoloniality, which spread an inadequate awareness about the colonial past and related legacies. For these interrelated reasons, Italian colonial memory today still appears as scattered and weak; colonial discourses and tropes are latently present in the subconscious of the nation, though in a way that seems more troubled today than in the aftermath of WWII.⁸⁷ Alessandro Triulzi describes these mnemonic dynamics as confused and self-exculpatory, a kind of ‘backup file which can be accessed according to convenience or factuality’.⁸⁸ Against this background, aphasia has convincingly explained the artificial disconnection ‘between what happened back then and its contemporary legacies, be it transnational migration or the often-predatory alliances between postcolonial national elites’;⁸⁹ it thus points out the self-exculpatory strategies that eluded any repentance and made the real decolonization of Italian culture and society unintelligible. As such, this concept merges with the metaphorical amnesty for colonial crimes and usurpation. Amnesty implies that legal authorities take no actions against a specified offence during a given period. It has the same Greek origin and semantic structure as amnesia.⁹⁰ Both refer to the idea of *dimenticanza*/forgetfulness. Nevertheless, if amnesia deals with a deficit of memory due to brain damage or psychological trauma, amnesty denotes an institutional remission of certain illegal actions. It thus addresses a voluntary, legal, and deliberate set of actions that remit previous crimes.

Like the protagonist of *Tempo di uccidere*, Italian collective memory has not faced the colonial crimes and usurpation critically. The self-amnesty that the lieutenant seeks — from his consciousness in the first instance, more than from the institutions — does not imply the disremembering of what he has done. In other words, the protagonist tries to repress and disarticulate, more than to erase, the trauma of the crime he committed. Any explicit repentance for the murder, or *metanoia*, is avoided; yet, the indolent somatization of that event shapes the future vicissitudes and life of the protagonist. This is a powerful metaphor to explain the extent to which the intricate memory of the Italian colonial period

⁸⁷ Nicola Labanca, ‘History and Memory of Italian Colonialism Today’, in *Italian Colonialism: Legacy and Memory*, ed. by Jacqueline Andall and Derek Duncan, (Oxford and Bern: Peter Lang, 2005), pp. 29–40.

⁸⁸ Alessandro Triulzi, ‘Displacing the Colonial Event. Hybrid Memories of Postcolonial Italy’, *Interventions*, 8:3 (2006), 430–43 (pp. 435–36).

⁸⁹ De Cesari, ‘The Paradoxes of Colonial Reparation’, p. 324; Stoler, ‘Colonial aphasia’, pp. 121–56.

⁹⁰ ‘a’ as α (alpha) privative + μνήσια (-*mnesi*), ‘remember’.

did not simply evaporate. Rather, it seems as if those uncomfortable memories have faded out *tranquillamente*; they have become indecipherable yet present, detached from the main narrative of national history yet concealed in the ways through which to reimagine post-war subjectivities and collective identities.

6. White Noise. Resilient Soundscapes between Memory and Exoticism

*Non so se ti chiami Ciccirilli o Zazzà, sei nata in Asmara e sei un fior di beltà
Fanciulla asmarina sei più bella per me
ogni giorno alle tre suono e canto perché mi ricordo di te.*

*Asmarina Asmarina, di bellezza sei regina,
a vederti da lontano casca quello che ho in mano, asmarina guarda un po'?*
*Tu ti fai una risatina, io mi accascio alla panchina,
con un nodo nel canale che non scende e manco sale, inzuppato di sudor*

*Tengo un mazzolin di fiori profumato come te,
te lo voglio regalare perché pensi un poco a me.*

*Asmarina Asmarina, son deciso stamattina,
ma a vederti così bella a me vien la tremarella, Asmarina del mio cuor.*

In all likelihood, as soon as Pippo Maugeri finished singing the last refrain of this song, a round of applause filled up the theatre where the *Concorso Asmarino della Canzone* was taking place. This ironic and joyful tune certainly had everything it takes to gain popularity among the Italian community living in Eritrea, in that the female girl the Italian protagonist falls in love with is beautiful precisely because of her Asmara origins.¹ The romantic yet exotic atmosphere that the song evokes most definitely impressed the audience.² Nevertheless, the themes and music featuring in *Asmarina* are not particularly original if compared to other songs of that era;³ musically speaking, it starts with an allegro tempo

¹ The song can be listened to here: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fzc5gjpRMko>> [accessed 16 March 2019].

² <<http://www.maitacli.it/canzone>> [accessed 28 March 2019].

³ Examples may include: Gorni Kramer, *Un giorno ti dirò* (1935); Carlo Buti, *Fiorin Fiorello* (1938) and *La Piccinina* (1939); Elio Lotti, *Che Musetto* (1942); Carlo Rossi, *Amore Baciarmi* (1947); Teddy Reno, *Piccolissima Serenata* (1957). A research project currently running at the École Normale Supérieure de Lyon maps out Italian pop songs since the end of the nineteenth century, see <<http://cle.ens-lyon.fr/italien/arts/musique/musique>> [accessed 4 April 2019].

theme played by a marimba. The fundamental major chord (F sharp) becomes minor (F sharp minor) in the verse, evoking a sadder atmosphere, through which the singer describes the heart-breaking story of his falling in love with the girl from Asmara. The harmony returns in major chord in the refrain, where the singer/protagonist describes, in an amusing way, his embarrassment and hesitation when he wants to declare his love to the girl. As far as these musical choices are concerned, the arrangement well balances the protagonist's inner struggle and the hilarious happenings that the song recounts.

In spite of these rather banal themes and an ultimately unoriginal musical arrangement, *Asmarina* presents some peculiarities that are extremely meaningful to introduce the critical analysis of the films I will address in this last chapter. In particular, there is a sound element that pervades the whole composition, and that makes it quite eccentric: I am referring to the subtle use of an echo effect, which replicates and fades out each word of the lyrics. These echoed repetitions are not perfectly synchronized with the song's overall tempo. This odd delay creates an asynchronous soundscape, because Maugeri's vocal melody seems disjointed from the music underpinning it. Hence, the composition assumes an oneiric, hazy, and even nostalgic nuance.

Such a disconnection between lyrics and music does not pertain to the sonic dimension only. Rather, it takes into account the entire semiotic dimension of the song and its symbolic 'out-of-synchness' with the Italian history of colonialism and decolonization. This becomes evident if we look at the lyrics, where the attractive girl who astonishes the singer is identified as 'Asmarina'. The use of such a nominalized adjective implies that the girl's belonging to Asmara coincides with her beauty. This element is, of course, reminiscent of the vast array of exotic/erotic representations of black women that circulated within and across Western empires, and which started to be significant also in Italy from the end of the nineteenth century onwards.⁴ Nonetheless, it also refers, more

⁴ On the sexualized images and discourses related to the Italian early colonial period, see Silvana Palma, *L'Italia coloniale* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1999); Barbara Sorgoni, *Parole e corpi. Antropologia, discorso giuridico e politiche sessuali interraziali nella colonia Eritrea: 1890–1941* (Naples: Liguori, 1998); Giulia Barrera, *Colonial Affairs: Italian Men, Eritrean Women, and the Construction of Racial Hierarchies in Colonial Eritrea 1885–1941* (Evanston: Northwestern University, 2002). For a theoretical and historiographical framing of the relationship between sex and colonialism, see Ronald Hyam, *Empire and Sexuality: The British Experience* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990); Robert Young, *Colonial Desire. Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London: Routledge, 1995); Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); *Sexe, race & colonies. La domination des corps du XVe siècle à nos jours*, ed. by Pascal Blanchard and others (Paris: La Découverte, 2018).

specifically, to the conquest of both the African landscape and of the female bodies living on it, which saturated Fascist imperial discourses pervasively. Rural and urban landscapes and bodies were both described as waiting for the Italian (male) action that would have redeemed, yet also subjugated, them thanks to its irresistible virility.⁵ Therefore, Maugeri's song is not exclusively related to a generic idea about exotic attraction, but it might specifically address the legacy of the Fascist period against the background of the re-articulation of colonial-like, exotic and sexual desires. The word 'legacy' and the prefix 're-' in front of 'articulation' reveal another, even more pertinent, out-of-synchness of the song; surprisingly, *Asmarina* — whose text seems a polished and naive version of other songs such as *Faccetta Nera* (1935), *Africanella* (1935), or *Oh Morettina Cioccolatina* (1936) — was sung for the first time in 1956, four years after Eritrea was federated to Ethiopia (picture 17).



Picture 17: The original vinyl of *Asmarina* (1956)

⁵ On the Italian sexual/colonial conquest of African women, with specific reference to the *Ventennio*, see Liliana Ellena, 'Mascolinità e immaginario nazionale nel cinema italiano degli anni Trenta', in *Genere e mascolinità. Uno sguardo storico*, ed. by Sandro Bellassai, Maria Malatesta (Rome: Bulzoni, 2000), pp. 243–64; Giulietta Stefani, *Colonia per maschi. Italiani in Africa Orientale: una storia di genere* (Verona: Ombre Corte, 2007); Robin Pickering-Iazzi, 'Mass-Mediated Fantasies of Feminine Conquest, 1930–1940', in *A Place in the Sun. Africa in Italian Colonial Culture from Post-Unification to the Present*, ed. by Patrizia Palumbo (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), pp. 197–225; Angelica Pesarini, "'Blood is Thicker than Water": The Materialization of the Racial Fascist Body in East Africa', in 'Performing Race', special issue ed. by Irene Fattacciu and Claudio Fogu, *Zapruder World*, 4 (2017), <<http://zapruderworld.org/journal/archive/volume-4/>> [accessed 23 July 2019]. Both Federico Caprotti and Ruth Ben-Ghiat have focused on the entanglement between the conquest of bodies and that of landscapes, see Ruth Ben-Ghiat, 'Envisioning Modernity: Desire and Discipline in the Italian Fascist Film', *Critical Enquiry*, 23:1 (1996), 109–44; Federico Caprotti, 'The Invisible War on Nature: The Abyssinian War (1935–1936) in Newsreels and Documentaries in Fascist Italy', *Modern Italy*, 19:3 (2014), 305–21.

That said, the oddities regarding the story behind this song do not end here, for *Asmarina* is an example of postcolonial resilience exactly because of its out-of-synchness in relation to the Italian decolonial process. At the end of the 50s, when this song became popular in the Eritrean capital, the Italian community living there was considerably smaller than that of the early 40s.⁶ Nevertheless, the Italian people living in the so-called *colonia primigenia* still played prominent roles in the economic, social, and cultural life of Asmara. A great number of movie theatres, restaurants, shops, health centres, catholic churches, and leisure activities were managed by them, and mainly addressed the Italian community. Evidence of this is the fact that Radio Marina, one of the city's radio stations that aired predominantly Italian songs,⁷ widely broadcasted *Asmarina*, thus making the tune extremely popular.⁸

The popularity of *Asmarina* soon trespassed the factual colonial-like boundaries between Italian and African people, which still marked social life in Asmara.⁹ This is because the music of the song, in the 60s, was appropriated by Eritreans. The lyrics, by contrast, have changed radically; they have acquired a completely different meaning owing to the references to the nostalgia for Asmara that Eritreans feel when they are abroad.¹⁰ Hence, the original meaning of the song is appropriated, translated, and overturned by the former colonial subject; as such, it is a telling example of postcolonial resilience. The Eritreans' translation-appropriation of the song is possible exactly because of the multiplicity of out-of-synchness that it features; in its original version, *Asmarina* represents a first form of colonial resilience pertaining to the colonial tropes that the song reiterates during the decolonial process. Such a mismatch becomes sonically tangible through the odd delay I described above. This effect metaphorically foregrounds the lyric's disentanglement from the music, with the latter being re-routed by the former colonial subjects, in its becoming the accompaniment for the Eritrean version of the song. The story

⁶ About a fourth of the almost eighty thousand Italians living there in 1941, see Angelo Del Boca, *Gli italiani in Africa Orientale. Vol. 4. Nostalgia delle colonie* (Rome and Bari: Laterza, 1984), pp. 10–16.

⁷ Since 1953, Radio Marina was controlled by the US Navy; nevertheless, it maintained its original Italian name because it used to be the radio station of the Italian Navy, in the 30s, see <<http://www.kagnewstation.com>> [accessed 5 April 2019].

⁸ See, for instance, <<http://www.paolapastacaldi.it/document.php?DocumentID=1071>> [accessed 3 April 2019] and <<http://www.maitacli.it/canzone>> [accessed 28 March 2019].

⁹ Alazar Tesfa Michael, *Eritrea to-day. Fascist Oppression Under Nose of British Military* (Woodford: New Times Book Department, 1945), p. 14.

¹⁰ The vicissitudes of the song *Asmarina* feature in the documentary directed by Alan Maglio and Medhin Paolos, about the Italo-Eritrean community living in Milan, entitled *Asmarina* (Italy: Independent production, 2015); see also Gianmarco Mancosu, 'Discourses of *Impegno* and Italian Colonial Legacies: Reassessing Times, Spaces and Voices in Documentaries on (post)Colonial Mobility', *Journal of Italian Cinema & Media Studies*, 6:1 (2018), 33–48.

of *Asmarina* synthesizes the main points this chapter is going to address. The main focus will be on the resilience of colonial discourses and stereotypes featuring in the aural dimension of films produced during Italian decolonization. By taking cue from some of the reflections broached in the previous chapter (on Italian colonial aphasic memory), the critical analysis of decolonial footage will explore to what extent a new form of exoticism was reframed in certain documentaries and newsreels.

The analysis will deal mostly with footage produced between 1951 and 1960. In that decade, the engagement of the government with the former colonies became less evident and almost exclusively limited to the Trusteeship administration of Somalia (AFIS), mostly because the United Nations had not granted any political role to Italy in other former colonies.¹¹ As a result, in the 50s fewer newsreels about decolonization were produced than in the previous period (1946–49), when the political claims over the former colonies were more topical. Accordingly, I will focus mostly on short documentaries rather than on INCOM newsreels, also because its informal monopoly on non-fiction films started to waver in the mid-fifties.¹² Despite this progressive disengagement, the films did not simply erase the traces of the colonial past. Rather, the discourse encompassing self-exculpatory memories and new desires concerning the African landscape simply changed in terms of the balance between the two, with the latter element becoming predominant. I will tackle such a paradigm shift by exploring the extent to which it became aurally tangible in the films' soundscape (music, noises, voices, sound effects).

After a theoretical contextualization of the concept of resilience in relation to Italian decolonization, the analysis of one of the most iconic films dealing with Italian colonial memories (*Una lettera dall'Africa*) will stimulate theoretical reflection on the importance of sound in documentary films. The analysis of additional footage will then be set against the background of a transition, which epitomizes the passage from sound memories of the colonial past to a resilient form of exoticism that emerges from the films' soundscapes.

¹¹ Antonio M. Morone, 'Introduzione. Quando è finito il colonialismo italiano?', in *La fine del colonialismo italiano. Politica, società e memorie*, ed. by Antonio M. Morone (Florence: Le Monnier, 2019), pp. 1–27.

¹² As we saw in chapter 2, sections 2.7 and 2.8 (pp. 104–13), the appearance of new companies, the advent of television broadcast, and the adoption of Law 897 (1956) that was less generous with the producers, weakened the quasi-monopolistic position of INCOM, see also Lorenzo Quaglietti, *Storia economico-politica del cinema italiano 1945–1980* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1980), pp. 138–39.

6.1 Framing Italian postcolonial resilience

Resilience is one of the terms used most to read the connection between traumatic events and their positive somatization. Its original definition stems from the psychological analysis of individual experiences of recovery, related to the process of adapting well in the face of adversity. Accordingly, it refers to the strategies through which a person ‘bounces back’ from difficult experiences.¹³ Such a basic understanding has been further expanded to be used in a plethora of approaches and studies. In Humanities and Social Sciences, it has found a relatively stable field of application, and addresses the vulnerability of geographical, geopolitical, and social landscapes as well as the strategies according to which the environment, communities, and subjectivities adapt to and challenge the results of shocking events, disasters, and adverse political/economic decisions.¹⁴ This all-encompassing definition of resilience, which tackles the intermingling of issues related to hardships, tragic events, and natural and political disasters, does require a methodological trimming down to be applied to postcolonial contexts. In so doing, I aim to use this paradigm to explore discourses and practices that have either somatized or remediated colonial discourses and desires during decolonial processes.

As a preliminary note, I would argue that the universal and essential understanding of resilience embraces diverse understandings of trauma, vulnerability, and recovery.¹⁵ Therefore, these categories need to be adapted to ‘both [the] culture and context [that] shape the environment in which processes associated with resilience occur, making some processes more crucial to adaptation and growth than others’.¹⁶ As far as postcolonial approaches to resilience are concerned, they are useful not simply to explore the many-sided subjective or social responses to colonial and decolonial events and traumas — what is called ‘disorder’ in medical terms. Rather, postcolonial resilience pinpoints what Ungar calls ‘protective processes’: assessable strategies that individuals, groups, and institutions mobilize in order to cope, adapt to, and take advantage of their condition when facing

¹³ Corey LM Keyes, ‘The Mental Health Continuum: From Languishing to Flourishing in Life’, *Journal of Health and Social Behaviour*, 43 (2002), 207–22; <<http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/road-resilience.aspx>> [accessed 10 March 2019].

¹⁴ Mary Vardy and Mick Smith, ‘Resilience’, *Environmental Humanities*, 9:1 (2017), 175–79; Geoff A. Wilson, *Community Resilience and Environmental Transitions* (New York: Routledge, 2012).

¹⁵ Sonya Andermahr, ‘Decolonizing Trauma Studies: Trauma and Postcolonialism’, *Humanities*, 4:4 (2015), 500–05.

¹⁶ Michael Ungar, ‘Researching and Theorizing Resilience across Cultures and Contexts’, *Preventive Medicine*, 55 (2012), 387–89.

significant stress that might affect them, for instance, during the decolonial transition.¹⁷ This paradigm is thereby concerned with the modalities through which former subjects *as well as* former settlers have used discourses, practices, and memories related to the colonial experience to build their postcolonial future — this is comparable to recovery and wellbeing in medical jargon. These protective processes are multifaceted because subjects/groups/cultures perform multiple forms of resilient agency, to tackle different forms of adversity.¹⁸ Such a methodological clarification is essential to address how Italian society faced the loss of its empire, against the background of a wider process of bouncing back from the hardship that followed the end of WWII.

Focusing on the ways in which Italy somatized the loss of its empire through the paradigm of resilience entails a re-articulation of the flexible understanding of colonial trauma, which I have discussed in the previous chapter.¹⁹ Building on a collective, scattered, and delocalized understanding of decolonial distress, Italian postcolonial resilience assumed manifold and subtle forms, ranging from the political and cultural repression of uncomfortable memories — like the colonial, aphasic memory discussed previously — to the appropriation and adaptation of former discourses, images, and sounds to rebuild a consistent image of national identity in a changed context.²⁰ Accordingly, I will address the complex configuration of the soundscape that features in the films in terms of a protective process, which composed — through its employment of aural effects — a

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 387.

¹⁸ Vardy and Smith, 'Resilience', p. 178.

¹⁹ For an overview of collective trauma theory, cultural memories, and resilience strategies in different postcolonial contexts and literature, see Irene Visser, 'Decolonizing Trauma Theory: Retrospect and Prospects', *Humanities*, 4:4 (2015), 250–65; see also chapter 5, section 5.2 (pp. 169–70).

²⁰ There is also another form of resilience pertaining to the former metropolitan centre, which is worth mentioning, but whose analysis goes beyond the scope of this thesis. It refers to the several ways in which the colonial past, and the connections it created between former metropolises and former colonies, are resurfacing in contemporary social, scholarly, artistic, and cultural practices. Works on this topic include *Postcolonial Italy: Challenging National Homogeneity*, ed. by Cristina Lombardi-Diop and Caterina Romeo (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002); Jacqueline Andall, 'The G2 Network and Other Second-Generation Voices: Claiming Rights and Transforming Identities', in *National Belongings. Hybridity in Italian Colonial and Postcolonial Cultures*, ed. by Jacqueline Andall and Derek Duncan (Bern: Peter Lang, 2011), pp. 171–93; Camilla Hawthorne, 'In Search of Black Italia', *Transition*, 123 (2017), 152–74. Literature and documentary films are among the most privileged fields in which such forms of resilience resurface: just to name a few of the most relevant books, see Igiaba Scego, *Adua* (Florence: Giunti, 2015); Gabriella Ghermandi, *Regina di fiori e di perle* (Rome: Donzelli, 2011); about the films, *Asmarina*, dir. by Maglio and Paolos; *Blaxploitalian. 100 anni di Afrostorie nel cinema italiano*, dir. by Fred Kwornu (Italy/US: Do The Righth Films Entertainment, 2016).

polyphonic narrative aiming to either forget or reframe stories, discourses, and practices typical of the colonial period.

6.2 ‘An echo of a distant time, comes willowing across the sand:’ *Una lettera dall’Africa* and the resilience of a travelogue aesthetic

Una lettera dall’Africa (1951) is probably the best example of a film that, visually and aurally, reworked the loss of the *oltremare* via a resilient narrative about national qualities.²¹ This is the first colour film to be produced by the renewed Istituto LUCE, and this fact reveals the extent to which the Horn of Africa still remained a relevant topic for the institution that was born during Mussolini’s dictatorship. Even more interesting is the film’s agenda, whose main goal is to reframe an exotic desire all the while keeping with the sturdy description of the former colonies as *terre di lavoro* for the few Italians still living there. Against this backdrop, the film stays somewhat aloof from the impetus that characterized previous as well as coeval footage, regarding the Italian claims over former colonies this thesis is dealing with. Nonetheless, this aspect is crucial insofar as it heralds a process of memorialization of the colonial period, which starts to resemble a closed chapter, reasonably distant from the present time of the viewers.

Una lettera dall’Africa’s vantage point permits us to link the footage to a format that was gradually losing relevance during the Fascist imperial momentum and in its immediate aftermath, that is, the travelogue film.²² Leonardo Bonzi and Maner Lualdi were among the rare examples of adventurous travellers who, in the 50s, filmed their endeavours. The footage they filmed during the 12,000 km trip from Libya to Kenya (following the Nile river in Egypt, Sudan, Uganda, but diverting from it in Eritrea and Somalia) was edited in the LUCE studios in Rome, by Gian Gaspare Napolitano, an operator who was part of the Fascist Reparto Foto-Cinematografico Africa Orientale (RAO), the LUCE section that produced newsreels and documentaries about the Ethiopian

²¹ *Una lettera dall’Africa*, dir. by Leonardo Bonzi and Manuel Lualdi (Istituto LUCE, 1951).

²² During the *Ventennio*, the overwhelming diffusion of propaganda films obscured the travelogue and exotic genre that, since the early twentieth century, had played an important role in Italian documentary production, see Pierluigi Erbaggio, ‘Istituto Nazionale Luce: A National Company with an International Reach’, in *Italian Silent Cinema: A Reader*, ed. by Giorgio Bertellini (London: John Libbey, 2013), pp. 221–31; Marco Bertozzi, *Storia del documentario italiano* (Venice: Marsilio, 2008).

war.²³ These two elements make *Una lettera dall'Africa* very much a 'mappa sentimentale legata all'incontro con "gli italiani o il loro ricordo"', as put by Liliana Ellena while quoting the first words of the film.²⁴

The somatization of decolonial traumas embraces the removal of the whole *Ventennio*, which is never mentioned explicitly, and also the celebration of Italy's alleged, long-time civilizing work carried out in Libya, Eritrea, and Somalia. For instance, various scenes of Italian agricultural plants and buildings in Libya as well as in Asmara offer a nostalgic recollection of a condition suddenly interrupted by WWII, the traumatic event that is briefly mentioned in a touching scene filmed in a military cemetery in Libya. However, the status of Italians as the 'bearers of civilization' is reasserted notwithstanding the end of the empire, and thus it does not pertain to a merely mnemonic dimension. It is, instead, obliquely reasserted in the concluding scenes, about the activities of the Catholic 'Comboni' missionaries in Khartoum. The missionaries are living symbols of the continuation of the civilizing mission, which now goes beyond the geopolitical and emotional map of the former colonies. To put it differently, they are resilient examples of the 'positive' establishment of colonial interactions. The narrative structure here completes a perfect circle: African people and landscapes are portrayed as still in need of being 'civilized' by Italian missionaries *despite* the loss of the colonies Italy suffered at the hand of other Western countries.

Showing the topicality of the Western civilizing mission in a post-colonial context implied the re-articulation of exotic tropes for the portrayal of African people and cultures. For instance, there is a very poignant scene when the crew stops in the Geben area (Libya). The camera lingers on the sunset over the sea, then films some people sitting around a bonfire, and then shifts to a group of Bedouins riding camels in a semi-desert landscape. Such an exotic portrayal is interspersed with wide-angle, slow pan shots, focusing on some abandoned villages built by the Italians settlers in east Libya (e.g., the Baracca, D'Annunzio, Maddalena).²⁵ Orientalist traits and nostalgic recollection of the past

²³ Gianmarco Mancosu, *La LUCE per l'impero. I cinegiornali sull'Africa Orientale Italiana 1935–1942* (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Cagliari, 2015); Ernesto G. Laura, *Le stagioni dell'aquila. Storia dell'Istituto LUCE* (Rome: Ente dello Spettacolo, 2000), pp. 254–55; Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *Italian Fascism's Empire Films* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2015), pp. 223–42.

²⁴ Liliana Ellena, 'Geografie della razza nel cinema italiano del dopoguerra', in *Il colore della nazione*, ed. by Gaia Giuliani (Florence: Le Monnier, 2015), pp. 17–31 (p. 19).

²⁵ Mia Fuller, *Moderns Abroad. Architecture, Cities and Italian Imperialism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), pp. 172–75.

intermingle in order to reframe a form of exoticism that, in fact, underpins the desire for a new presence able to resume the modernization of Libya.

Although *Una lettera* makes an effort to leave behind the colonial past and, especially, its Fascist phase, it nonetheless advocates a devious refashioning of the patronizing control over those populations and cultures that are still depicted as out of the time of Western modernity. The analysis of the intricate sonic dimension confirms this understanding insofar as voices, noises, and music convey the film's inharmonious goals. The opening scene is remarkable in this sense: the camera is panning horizontally over a marina, when the siren of a ship brusquely breaks the silence. The horn blast, which is added extra-diegetically, intermingles with the images so as to lead the audience's attention to the main theme of the film: the travelogue. The explosive volume of the siren becomes quieter when the camera moves onto a group of people, who we later discover to be the film crew. The interviewer starts asking the crew questions, which are directed at Leonardo Bonzi and Maner Lualdi. As soon as Lualdi says that their reportage is 'un racconto sentimentale, quasi una lettera dall'Africa', we hear timpani roll and horns blare loudly, as if to introduce an ominous symphonic piece, where an acute and dissonant violin legato contrasts with the severe low-note background provided by brass wind instruments.

This sonic juxtaposition between the ship's siren and the subsequent raspy symphony is a powerful metaphor that enables us to read the ambiguous agenda of the film. On the one hand, the siren is reminiscent of the numerous scenes through which previous films used to show the departure of Italian settlers to the colonies, a connection made explicit in the subsequent scene, shot on a boat that is approaching Tripoli's harbour.²⁶ On the other hand, the hazy soundscape evoked by the symphonic music conveys a sense of mysterious adventure, as it accompanies the camera and the voice-over in the re-articulation of the Western, dominant gaze over the 'exotic' African landscape. The passage filmed at the Villaggio Bianchi (al-Zahrā, south-west of Tripoli) epitomizes, in an even clearer way, the tension between exoticism and praise of the Italian presence. The scenes of a Libyan farmer getting water from a well with the help of a cow are interspersed with details of a pulley, whose mechanism facilitates the drawing of a huge amount of water. The voice-over says that, before the implementation of the pulley by the Italian settlers, the 'meccanismo era primitivo'. At this point, the camera slowly zooms in on the device; the noise of the pulley and that of the stream of water become so loud so as

²⁶ The images concerning the trope of the ships have been analysed in chapter 3, section 3.4 (pp. 116–20).

to overcome the flute melody of the background music. If the pulley's noise makes the myth of the *lavoro italiano* tangible, then the murmur of the stream of water is reminiscent of the trope of the Italian presence which once again makes the desert bloom. Such a crescendo of sounds, at the expense of the orchestral music, expresses the shifting balance between recollection of the Italian colonial past and a general form of exoticism, featuring in the 'orientalist' music scales of the symphonic arrangement.²⁷ In other words, the noisy spectres of the colonial past still pervade the exotic scenario of Libya.

The aural reference to colonial nostalgia counterpoints the vivid images, which have been produced using the colour techniques of Ferrania-color.²⁸ This modern feature, concerning the film's visual dimension, almost clashes with the often-nostalgic commentary of the voice-over, and also with a sound narrative that tends to emphasize the positive impact of Italian colonialism and the essentialized portrayal of Africa. Nevertheless, such a short circuit between the modernity evoked by colour images and the nostalgic soundscape does not engender any critical awareness about that past. Rather, it is revealing of the attempt to offer a consistent memorialization of the Italian colonial period, which is simultaneously distanced from the present time of the viewer yet taken into account to show the unaltered qualities of Italians working abroad. In other words, *Una lettera* puts the colonial past and new exotic desires on the same level, in which past and future are two distinct musical phrases, harmonized by aesthetic choices that compose a polyphony praising the Italian presence in Africa.

6.3 The soundscapes of non-fiction films in the golden age of newsreels

The analysis of *Una lettera dall'Africa* has highlighted the role that noise, music, and sound effects played in the semanticization of film images. The sonic dimension of films has already been addressed in the previous chapters of this thesis, where I focused on the voice-over and on certain significant scores. Nevertheless, a more articulated theoretical overview of the overall audible dimension of the footage under examination here is central

²⁷ The background music of newsreels and documentaries about the former colonies often featured melodies based on the double harmonic major scale. This scale has two augmented seconds: in the interval between the flat supertonic and the median, and between the flat submediant and leading tone. Augmented seconds are common in the music of North Africa and the Middle East, and may therefore sound 'exotic' to a Western audience, see Michael Hewitt, *Musical Scales of the World* (London: The note tree, 2013).

²⁸ Ferrania was an Italian industry that produced film for video and photo cameras. It introduced several technologies, including colour film, see *Ferrania. Storie e figure di cinema e fotografia. Immagini dall'archivio fotografico Fondazione 3M*, ed. by Cesare Colombo (Novara: De Agostini, 2004).

to explore the extent to which sound, noises, and music have materialized resilient colonial discourses in post-war Italy.

In the preface of a comprehensive volume about sound and music in non-fiction films, the pioneer of documentary theory Bill Nichols writes cogently that ‘music is part of the heart of a film form that strives to represent what it feels like to experience the world from a particular angle’. Sounds therefore give concreteness to the images while evoking further temporal and spatial dimensions. They bring images alive in a similar way as when ‘our own bodies and sense organs receive the world around us as far more than a conglomeration of facts and much more as a force field of intensities and lures, focal points and empty spaces’.²⁹ Therefore, what the audience hears while watching a film is not a mere combination of music and noise accompanying the dominant eloquence of the images; rather, the soundscape actively adds new layers of meaning, capable of either supporting or challenging the realist claim of the documentary.

This perspective encapsulates the point of arrival of a theoretical reflection sprouting from one of the biggest technological innovations in cinema history, that is, the introduction of synchronous or ‘direct’ sound. The origin of synchronization is conventionally dated in the late 20s, but initially it was used sparingly due to the bulkiness of sound tools. Nevertheless, voice-over descriptions that contain sound effects and music soon became the norm for newsreels and documentaries produced during the interwar period, in the golden era of documentary. The practice of adding diegetic and non-diegetic sounds persisted until the late 50s, when a more non-interventionist aesthetic (dubbed direct cinema or *cinéma vérité*) began to spread. According to the principles of direct cinema, only the sound taken from the filmed scene (i.e., synchronous or diegetic sound) was permissible, whereas extra-diegetic sounds — like voice-overs, sound-effects, music — started to be regarded as something that might corrupt the truthfulness of images.³⁰

One of the most important elements that stimulated this shift toward a less artificial sound aesthetic was the fact that, during the classic phase, documentaries and especially newsreels were often used as propaganda tools. On this point, Holly Rogers maintains the following:

²⁹ Bill Nichols, ‘Preface’, in *Music and Sound in Documentary Film*, ed. by Holly Rogers (New York: Routledge, 2015), pp. IX–XI (p. XI).

³⁰ Brian Winston, ‘Introduction: The Filmed Documentary’, in *The Documentary Film Book*, ed. by Brian Winston (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 1–29 (p. 3).

The power that music holds over an audience's interpretative juices is perhaps most obvious within documentary films of persuasion. Music has frequently been used as a powerful propaganda tool, for instance, propelling many examples of early documentary such as *The Triumph of the Will* (Leni Riefenstahl, with a soundtrack compiled from Wagner's music, 1935) and many World War II films.³¹

These propaganda films, whether they were produced by totalitarian or by democratic states, shared the determination to champion the validity of their gazes on reality according to political, cultural, and economic stances.³² Against this backdrop, diegetic and non-diegetic sounds could reinforce opinions and discourses that were attuned to the hegemonic forces at play in society.³³ However, this does not mean that the whole auditory dimension is always and seamlessly connected with the content of the image; 'real' sounds, recorded on the spot, have the ability to challenge the superimposition of meanings that synchronized sounds might engender during the editing process. This vantage point is especially true when we are dealing with a format like that of non-fiction films, whose ultimate aim is to provide a representation of the real world as truthfully as possible. Therefore, the sounds featuring in Italian decolonial footage could either be imbricated with, or moving away from, the post-colonial reality the images aimed to craft. In my view, this flexible understanding of the use of sounds in films is necessary to dissect the function that several musical styles, overlapping noises, and sound effects played in the process of conveying a positive recollection of the colonial past and the new projection of Italy in Africa.

³¹ Holly Rogers, 'Music, Sound and the Nonfiction Aesthetic', in *Music and Sound in Documentary Film*, ed. by Rogers, pp. 1–18 (p. 9).

³² Stella Bruzzi has offered an effective definition of propaganda film that embraces footage produced well after the classic phase of documentary, see Stella Bruzzi *New Documentary*, 2nd edn (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 56. James Deaville has written an interesting comparative work on sound and music in war documentaries and newsreels produced by the United States and Nazi Germany, see James Deaville, 'Pitched Battles. Music and Sound in Anglo-American and German Newsreels of World War II', *Journal of Musicological Research*, 38:1 (2019), 32–43.

³³ Ian Kershaw, 'How Effective Was Nazi Propaganda?', in *Nazi Propaganda. The power and the Limitations*, ed. by David Welch (London: Barnes & Noble, 1983), pp. 180–205 (pp. 183–84); Malte Hagener, *Moving Forward, Looking Back: The European Avant-Garde and the Invention of Film Culture, 1919–1939* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2007), pp. 212–15.

6.4 Reverberating the Fascist imperial order: The AFIS transition

As pointed out throughout this thesis, there is a noteworthy continuity between Fascist and post-Fascist ways of representing the Italian (former) colonies, especially when referring to certain film tropes such as Italian industriousness, the blooming of the desert, the *fantasie indigene*, the ships crossing the sea to conquer the *oltremare* once again. Music and sound effects of post-colonial footage were likewise reminiscent of previous films, because they feature romantic, orientalist, and military tunes widely spread both in Italian and foreign non-fiction films produced since the late 20s.³⁴

In 1931, five years after the first film with sound commentary was released in the United States, the Istituto LUCE produced the first Italian sound documentary. It featured live recorded sound effects and a synchronized authoritative commentary, a stylistic praxis that became widespread also in the weekly newsreel series *Giornale LUCE*, as of May 1934.³⁵ The implementation of sound technology was instrumental in reaching the propaganda goals set by Fascism, especially in relation to its biggest endeavour: the conquest of the empire. The exotic nuance of the score is inspired by an orientalist taste typical of Western colonial films and inherited by Istituto LUCE's film-makers, as in the case of the orchestral score and military marches that were paired with the voice-over's authoritative role.³⁶ Moreover, noises and sound effects drawn from the army, cars, pulleys, planes, and cranes played a vital role in making the fascistization of the empire tangible and audible, insofar as they 'validate, through convincing noises, new devices, new creatures, new spaces' imposed by the colonizers.³⁷ This variety of sound narratives therefore marked the difference between the colonizers' powerful technology and the backwardness of the colonized.

Echoes of Fascist aural practices can be spotted in a significant amount of films dealing with decolonization, especially in the footage that more sturdily exalts the positive

³⁴ James Deaville, 'Sounding the World. The Role of Music and Sound in Early 'Talking' Newsreels', in *Music and Sound in Documentary Film*, ed. by Rogers, pp. 41–55; Jeffrey Ruoff, 'Conventions of Sound in Documentary', *Cinema Journal*, 32:3 (1993), 24–40.

³⁵ Similarly to what happens in newsreels produced in other Western countries, symphonic music and military marches characterized the score of LUCE films, together with diegetic sounds recorded on the spot as well as ambient noises and archival sound effects added during the postproduction, see Laura, *Le stagioni dell'aquila*, pp. 79–88; Deaville, 'Pitched Battles', p. 34; Julie Hubbert, 'Race, War, Music and The Problem of *One Tenth of Our Nation* (1940)', in *Music and Sound in Documentary Film*, ed. by Rogers, pp. 57–73.

³⁶ Giuseppe Fidotta, 'Ruling the Colonies with Sound. Documentary, Technology and Noise in *Cronache dell'Impero*', *Journal of Italian Cinema and Media Studies*, 4:1 (2016), 111–25.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 120; Michael Chion, *Le son au cinéma* (Paris: Cahiers du cinéma, 1985), pp. 68–69.

impact of Italians in the Horn of Africa. This is the case, for instance, of the newsreel *Settimana INCOM* 426, about the official beginning of the Trusteeship period in Somalia.³⁸ The scenes of Italian soldiers parading in the streets of Mogadishu are interspersed with frames of local people watching the parade. Although the voice-over describes the ‘viali orlati di folla festante e commossa’, the crowd seems to be all but happy: no one is cheering or smiling. Nevertheless, a sort of artificial enthusiasm is triggered by the military marches of the score, which converges with the voice-over as it praises the ‘fiducia e lealtà degli italiani’. As usually happened in previous imperial films, there is an almost complete negligence of Africans’ agency; they are a passive part of a scenery in which Italy performs a self-centred and even autistic exploration of its collective ‘identities, embedded with fantasy of power and authority’.³⁹

This self-centred representation of decolonial topics returns curiously where one least would expect it, namely in the (only) film about the end of the AFIS. Curiously, *Indipendenza Somala* is not set in Africa but in a villa in Rome, where a party for the Somali diplomatic mission is taking place.⁴⁰ The voice-over remarks that ‘l’Italia può guardare con orgoglio al lavoro svolto laggiù [...] caso un po’ raro oggi, quello di uno stato che vada d’accordo con una sua ex-colonia’. These words, accompanied by triumphal music, highlight not so much the future independence of the former colony, but the tenacious discourse about the beneficial impact of Italian administration.

The ten-year Trusteeship administration of Somalia was, indeed, the perfect scenery in which to portray Italian industriousness and generosity. The praise of Italian qualities assumes a patronizing tone in the newsreel *Ricostruite le truppe somale*, to the extent that the voice-over speaks on behalf of Somali people, who allegedly felt part of Italy.⁴¹ The film, produced in 1953 by the Astra Cinematografica and part of the *Mondo Libero* series, is about the AFIS administrator Enrico Martino, who reviews the newly

³⁸ ‘Dal nostro inviato speciale in Somalia. Passaggio di poteri’, *Settimana INCOM* 426 (INCOM, 7 April 1950).

³⁹ 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. by. Patrizia Palumbo (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), pp. 255–78 (p. 258).

⁴⁰ ‘Roma – Indipendenza Somala’, *Caleidoscopio Ciac* 1226 (Compagnia Italiana Attualità Cinematografiche, 7 April 1960).

⁴¹ ‘Ricostruite le truppe somale’, *Mondo libero* 105 (Astra Cinematografica, 14 August 1953).

established Somali troops in some remote villages.⁴² A trumpet bugle gives a martial tone to the first sequences. The central part is, instead, about the training of the troops and about the warm homage Somali people are paying to Martino. The background music moves from the trumpet melody to a simple percussion that generates a slow and hypnotic cadence, which softens the atmosphere by allowing the voice-over to exalt the military skills of the Somali armies. A similar combination of martial and exotic registers veers toward a more political ending, in which an intense symphony score provides a background for the concluding sentence, which states that Italy is helping Somali people who, ‘già un tempo, all’ombra del tricolore, non si consideravano parte dello sfruttamento economico coloniale, ma veri figli di una patria bella.’

The tripartite structure of *Ricostruite le truppe somale* is similar both to previous and coeval films: the initial part frames the topic and the African setting; the core section is about the passage from exotic backwardness to a Western kind of behaviour; the concluding appeal aims to conceal colonial crimes while exalting the updated version of the *mission civilisatrice*, carried out under the banner of the AFIS. What changes here is the perspective of the film’s dominant voice, which seems to shift from the Italian to the African perspective. Even if this more fluid positionality concerning the representational mechanism might suggest a renewed agency that the film grants African people, the latter remain passive recipients of an objectified role attuned to the political and cultural agenda of the former settlers.

The agency of a Somali person who has yielded to the Italian cause, together with an aesthetic that alternates military and exotic nuances, emerges also from an emblematic documentary entitled *Hassan il soldato*.⁴³ In 1953, director Giorgio Moser travelled through the Horn of Africa. He crafted a series of films about that journey, which present some structural similarities with *Ricostruite le truppe somale*, like the opening scenes in which he explains the plot, the exotic and mono-dimensional description of African landscapes and people, and nostalgic memories of the colonial period.⁴⁴ *Hassan il soldato*

⁴² Directed by Gastone Ferranti, the *Mondo Libero* newsreel series (1951–59) were second only to the *Settimana INCOM* series in terms of popularity. They dealt with topics such as fashion, football, art, news and, of course, politics. They also featured funny gags and world events, see <<https://www.archivioluce.com/mondo-libero/>> [accessed 17 May 2019].

⁴³ *Hassan il soldato*, dir. by Giorgio Moser (Documentari OPUS, 1953).

⁴⁴ See, for instance, *Kumula e il leone*, dir. by Giorgio Moser (Documentari OPUS, 1953); *Testa d’elefante*, dir. by Giorgio Moser (Documentari OPUS, 1953); *I pascoli del sole*, dir. by Giorgio Moser (Documentari OPUS, 1953).

recounts the story of an *ascaro* who, during the AOI, was enrolled to serve in the Italian army.⁴⁵ He fought against the Allies during WWII, and then decided not to collaborate with the BMA, which took control of Somalia in 1941. A slow-paced percussion rhythm opens the films, giving a nostalgic tone to the recollection of the period in which Hassan was an *ascaro*. A trumpet bugle playing a military melody introduces a low- and wide-angle framing of an old Italian garrison, where two African soldiers — wearing the indigenous soldiers' uniform — are standing and controlling the area. The impeccable composition of this frame accentuates the volume of the garrison, by implicitly recalling the domination over a space that was entirely mastered by Italian power.

A rather long passage, with scenes of rural villages and wild landscapes, is accompanied by an original soundtrack. A hypnotic percussive rhythm provides the background for a tense piano composition with jazzy and discordant nuances. As soon as the camera shows Somali dresses, dusty villages, and 'exotic' animals, extra-diegetic sounds can be heard; for instance, a mooing sound — while the camera shows two poor cows — is overlaid with the inharmonious music, overcomplicating the soundscape, which not infrequently becomes unintelligible. This sonic dissonance is reduced toward the end of the film, when another trumpet blast introduces a quick military march. Hassan is now enrolled in the new Somali army and trained by the Italian administration. A touching description says the following:

quando al tramonto viene chiamata l'adunata per il saluto alla vecchia e gloriosa bandiera, nessuno dei somali può dimenticare o sottovalutare il contributo che l'Italia ha dato alla Somalia. Ieri, quando era una nostra colonia, ma soprattutto oggi che per una missione di civiltà abbiamo accettato il compito non lieve di avviarla entro breve tempo verso la completa autonomia economica e politica.

This emotional and nostalgic comment concludes the film, whose soundscape features diverse registers and sound effects. Both *Hassan il soldato* and the three newsreels about the transition of power in Somalia epitomize a discourse still imbued with previous aural tropes typical of Fascist films. The sound and noises featuring in these films are therefore instrumental devices to reframe the spatial domination and mastering of the African landscape after the formal loss of the colonies. This indirect reference to the former direct

⁴⁵ Alessandro Volterra, *Sudditi coloniali. Ascari eritrei (1935–1941)* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2005).

domination of the Horn of Africa started, however, to be gradually negotiated with a different and more ethnographic viewpoint featuring in certain other films.

6.5 The shifting balance between memories and exoticism: *Somalia d'oggi*

The construction of a selective memory, which spread the idea of an allegedly beneficial impact of the Italian presence in the former colonies, implies that African human, as well as natural, elements must be depicted as backward and uncivilized in order to be ‘helped’ and ‘redeemed’ once again, now within the new scenario of the AFIS. As a result, sounds and noises were used as instrumental devices to reframe a narrative about the spatial domination and mastering of the African human and geographical landscape. These elements lead us to adopt a multilayered understanding of resilience. On the one hand, in terms of the formal analysis of certain elements in the films, resilience addresses the aesthetic strategies according to which sound effects, music, and voices function as point of references for images still entrapped within colonial imaginations and narratives. On the other hand, content analysis may benefit from the use of the paradigms of resilience in order to explore the re-articulation of a discourse dealing with the taming, the rational exploitation, and the ‘civilization’ of African landscapes.

This reclaiming path stands out clearly in the pedagogic structure of a number of documentaries produced mainly between 1953 and 1955: *Somalia d'oggi*, *Il fiume verde*, and *Testa d'elefante*.⁴⁶ They deal with the passage from exotic backwardness to a more civilized condition because of the Italian work carried out there. Although this narrative structure is reminiscent of several other films, a more substantial effort to re-exoticize the African scenario characterizes the three movies, making them more similar to ethnographic footage than to propaganda film.

Especially the documentary *Somalia d'oggi* features an aural dimension that is still imbued with resilient forms of colonial rhetoric. This 1955 colour film is about the activities of the Italian Trusteeship administration in the former colonies, five years on from its beginning. Its rather unoriginal narrative develops in a way similar to other films, due to the opening scenes focusing on an Italian plane landing at the Mogadishu airport, and the central part about the educational path of Somali people. Although exotic and orientalist traits almost never lacked in Italian colonial and decolonial footage, *Somalia*

⁴⁶ *Testa d'elefante*, dir. by Moser; *Somalia d'oggi*, dir. by Adriano Zancanella (Documentari OPUS, 1955); *Il fiume verde*, dir. by Adriano Zancanella (Documentari OPUS, 1955).

d'oggi adopts a more travelogue-oriented style, by dealing with political issues only briefly. This becomes clear from the opening sentence, which highlights the fact that — although the weekly plane from Rome to Mogadishu ‘toglie ai grandi viaggi il sapore di un tempo’ — Somalia is truly far away from Western modernity, an exotic and ‘genuine’ land full of adventurous surprises. The political impetus for the claims over the former colonies is receding, by giving way to a primordial form of post-colonial exoticism, which is nonetheless domesticated and tailored for the Italian audience.⁴⁷

Music and sound effects epitomize this shift from political stances to commodified exoticism. Wide-angle pan shots of Mogadishu’s buildings are backed up by an adagio, symphonic piece of music, in which an oboe and a flute play double harmonic, major scale melodies that are supported by a diminished and consequently dissonant, fixed-chord background orchestra of cellos.⁴⁸ While the flute melody outlines a rather standard orientalist tune, the diminished chords in the background convey a sense of dramatic and persistent tension, making the subsequent resolution to the consonant chord more impactful. This resolution leads the viewer to the core section of the film, which is about the education of Somali pupils. Here the background music speeds up and becomes joyful: the pizzicato arpeggios and trills of violins accompany this section’s subplot, about a shy boy who is secretly looking into a classroom from the outside of the school.

The staged nature of this documentary becomes obvious when the camera takes a close-up shot of a smiling student inside the classroom, who invites the shy boy to join the lesson. A quick cut takes the viewer outside the school again, where the teacher — a Somali native who, according to another passage, has been trained by Italians — suddenly grabs the shy boy’s arm and brings him into the classroom. Although the hilarious background music makes these scenes resemble an innocent farce, the ‘dolce violenza del maestro’ who forces the child into the classroom is an embodied debris of the violence

⁴⁷ On the commodification of the empires according to the tastes of the metropolitan centres, see Laura Chrisman, *Postcolonial Contraventions. Cultural Readings of Race, Imperialism, and Transnationalism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), pp. 28–31; on neo-orientalisms, see Elleke Boehmer, ‘Questions of Neo-Orientalism’, *Interventions*, 1:1 (1998), 18–21; Lisa Lau and Ana Cristina Mendes, ‘Introducing re-Orientalism. A new manifestation of Orientalism’, in *Re-Orientalism and South Asian Identity Politics. The Oriental Other Within*, ed. by Lisa Lau and Ana Cristina Mendes (New York: Routledge, 2011), pp. 1–16 (pp. 4–5); Sandra Ponzanesi, *The Postcolonial Cultural Industry. Icons, Markets, Mythologies* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 3–12.

⁴⁸ As explained previously, the double harmonic major scale is common in the music of North Africa, the Middle East and Eastern Europe, but sounds ‘exotic’ to a Western audience. In a diminished triad, the middle and two top notes of the chord – called the third and the fifth – are flattened (i.e., lowered half a step). This is an example of a dissonant chord that provides a sense of musical conflict, and gives a dramatic nuance.

characterizing the colonial imposition of the former settlers' epistemic order. A colonial discourse is thus acting indirectly and resiliently through the agency of those former subjects — in this case the teacher — who are willing to accept, translate, and reproduce the supposed moral and intellectual superiority of the white-Western-Italian elements in their society.

This passage, but also some other scenes dedicated both to the education of adults and to the medical services provided by the Italian administration, feature an accurate *mise-en-scène*, a perfectly crafted composition, and vivid Ferraniacolor images and lighting. As soon as the documentary reaches its last section, the music becomes remarkably exotic, featuring melodies played using North African instruments.⁴⁹ Both the formal accuracy of the images and the music subtly disguise the attempt to justify the Italian presence in the post-colonial context. Additionally, and more crucially, these stylistic choices allow the film to avoid making any explicit reference to the memory of the colonial past. The future independence of Somalia is mentioned fleetingly. Although the voice-over states that Italy's activities are pivotal to 'contribuire al futuro assetto del paese', this does not necessarily lead to the successful completion of the path toward Somali's self-government, inasmuch as the 'compito è arduo, la natura degli uomini e le condizioni ambientali sono ostacoli gravi'. Accordingly, *Somalia d'oggi* re-advocates the essentialized nature of African people and landscapes as well as the factual impossibility to fully free them from their innate, backward condition. The score and sound effects act as the ubiquitous thread that attunes the film narrative consistently to the need to show the inevitability of the Italian presence. Accordingly, the soundscape deals far more with the development of a precise film narrative supporting the beneficial impact of Italians than with the attempt to craft a truthful representation of Somalia's post-colonial reality. The fact that all the sounds are added extra-diegetically substantiates this vantage point, making the overall soundscape extremely clear and refined, yet unrealistic as it points toward the praise of the Italian agenda in Africa.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Like the Oud (similar to a banjo), Nay (flute), Tabla (percussion).

⁵⁰ This is particularly true if we think that, when *Somalia d'oggi* was produced, debates about notions of truth and reality in documentary film, which would eventually lead to the definition of *cinéma vérité*, were already circulating, see Bruzzi, *New Documentary*, pp. 8–9. On sounds in documentary films produced in that period, see John Corner, 'Sounds Real: Music and Documentary', *Popular Music*, 21:3 (2002), 357–66.

6.6 Sounds and landscape: Environmental resilience

The choice to synchronize the sounds during the editing process, but also the fluid relationship between the struggle to represent the post-colonial reality of Somalia and the need to re-exoticize its traits, feature in two other documentaries (each about eight minutes long) entitled *Testa d'elefante* (1953) and *Il fiume verde* (1955). *Testa d'elefante*, like *Somalia d'oggi*, is a Ferraniacolor film directed by Adriano Zancanella. Both films stemmed from an expedition sponsored by the Istituto italiano per l'Africa (IsIAO) and by the AFIS, as reported in the opening titles.⁵¹ Furthermore, they share a rather simple structure, which pivots around two 'standard' narrative poles, dealing respectively with the exotic depiction of Somalia and with the positive impact of the Italian presence there. Nevertheless, if in *Somalia d'oggi* exoticism and the *mission civilisatrice* seamlessly intermingle, *Il fiume verde* features a more tightly defined development; the first and lengthier part is dedicated to the description of hardship that nomad populations face every day, whereas the final section praises the role of Italian settlers in taming the wild landscape.⁵²

The life of itinerant tribes who settle around the Webi Shabeelle river (*Uebi Scebeli* in Italian), in some periods of the year, is constantly menaced by the river overflowing. In the opening scenes of *Il fiume verde*, wide-angle shots are interspersed with details and close-ups that emphasize the peculiarity of the African landscape, people, and traditions. Such an exotic gaze becomes voyeuristic and even erotic in a passage where the camera focuses on naked Somali natives bathing in the river. The fact that the camera is placed far away, that it frames the scene through a telephoto shot, and that the composition is somewhat disturbed by tree leaves at the top of the image, are all elements bolstering the sense of furtiveness that the whole scene conveys.

The exotic and even erotic desire the images elicit among the audience is both supported and toned down by the sound narrative, which is engendered by the score and by the commentary. The voice-over uses a condescending register when it describes the landscapes and the hardship of Somali nomads as they face adverse natural conditions. In this section, which occupies two thirds of the film, the voice and the score are impeccably attuned; for instance, the volume of the background music decreases when the commentary starts talking, whereas it increases as soon as the voice description stops. Such formal

⁵¹ Adriano Zancanella, 'Impressioni di Somalia. Il diario del regista', *Africa*, 10:7/8 (1955), 221–24.

⁵² *Il fiume verde*, dir. by Zancanella.

accuracy also marks the background music; it features rather common, orientalist melodies played by flutes and violins, which are backed up by an innovative sound made by an electric transistor organ. This drone-like undertone, the slow-paced tempo of the melodies, and the considerable use of reverb effects give the images a misty and dreamlike nuance. Nonetheless, the latter is reversed in the last section of the film, when the voice-over overwhelms the audience with the praise of the Italian presence in Africa.

Different spatial and temporal levels coalesce in the last part, which reverses the oneiric atmosphere that beforehand described nomadic life. If, for Somali nomads, ‘il tempo non ha valore’, then the advent of Italians ‘riscattò dalla boscaglia sabbiosa 25,000 mila ettari di terreno adesso ricchi di piantagioni di banana e di canna da zucchero, e che favorì lo stabilirsi di popolazioni sullo Uebi Scebeli’. An abrupt cut epitomizes the burst forth of Western modernity: images of farms, wells, and watering systems, and of Somali people working under the supervision of Italians, are backed up by accelerated music, which aurally engulfs the scenes with African percussions and chants. These ‘tribal’ sounds are used not so much, or not simply, as references for the film setting; rather, they seem to pay homage to the work done by the ‘300 coloni italiani che vivono [...] lottando contro la natura ed il clima perché non torni la boscaglia dove oggi si mietono copiosi frutti’. In other words, these sounds — which aurally embody the authenticity of African culture — are synchronized with the tempo of modernity that Italy is ticking.

Both *Il fiume verde* and *Somalia d’oggi* encapsulate a complex understanding of postcolonial resilience, which primarily refers to the use of previous colonial tropes in order to bounce Italy back from the scattered decolonial trauma. Against this backdrop, the praise of Italian technology stood out as one of the most significant traits of the fashioning of a positive narrative about Italians in Africa. In *Il fiume verde* and *Somalia d’oggi*, resilience also assumes an environmental feature *ante litteram*, according to which the former settlers continue to tame the ‘savage’ African landscape because native people are unable to do it themselves.⁵³ This element is also the backbone of the *Settimana INCOM* 457, dealing with the overflowing of the Juba river.⁵⁴ Introductory scenes of huge birds and crocodiles locate the wild and exotic setting of the film. A symphonic score

⁵³ For a broad overview of issues related to resilient strategies in post-colonial contexts, see *Global Ecologies and the Environmental Humanities: Post-colonial Approaches*, ed. by Elizabeth DeLoughrey, Jill Didur, Anthony Carrigan (London and New York: Routledge, 2015).

⁵⁴ ‘Si cerca di porre dei rimedi allo straripamento del fiume Giuba’, *Settimana INCOM* 457 (INCOM, 21 June 1950).

featuring a violin tremolo gradually increases in loudness, creating a suspense that reaches its climax in the throaty explosion of low-pitch brass sounds. This crescendo introduces the viewer to the central part of the film, which deals with the devastating flooding of the river. This natural calamity is, however, mastered by Italian technology, which materializes in the scenes of tractors and bulldozers that ‘travolgono macchie e boscaglie, macinano, sovvertono masse di terriccio per farsi strada’ and tame ‘gli eccessi di una natura esuberante, ferace, terribile’. Low- and wide-angle shots of the tractors create a slightly distortion of the lens that, in fact, emphasizes the bulkiness of the machines as they invade the landscape and the screen. This aesthetic invasion is supported by diegetic noises coming from the tractors, which counterpoint the low-pitch sforzando notes played by the horns and brasses of the score.⁵⁵ The dialogue between diegetic and non-diegetic sounds engenders a dramatic hymn to the technical power that makes the Italian superiority palpable. At the same time, however, such an unusual abundance of noises, often overlapping with the music, prevents any proper understanding of the sound narrative; it thereby weakens the construction of a form of ‘exotic authenticity’ that the newsreel developed in the first part.

As far as this reclaiming rhetoric is concerned, *Testa d’elefante* (1953) by Giorgio Moser is also worth being mentioned. Similar to what happens in other films directed by Moser and set in the Horn of Africa,⁵⁶ *Testa d’elefante* opens with the director standing in front of the camera and describing the plot. The story is about an Italian soldier who, during the early 30s, fought in the Horn of Africa under the Fascist banner.⁵⁷ He decided to quit the army and settle in a wild and harsh plot of land close to the Juba river, which was later tamed and converted into arable soil. The first part of the film is a collection of scenes of the rough landscape; these passages are accompanied by a score featuring ‘ethnic’ percussions, which is overlapped by a melody containing minor and diminished scales, and played using a clavichord-like instrument. Such a melodic progression is reminiscent of a musical improvisation filled with unnatural undertones, which gives the soundscape

⁵⁵ Sforzando (sfz, ‘suddenly with force’) is a dynamic articulation according to which the execution of a given note/chord starts with a strong emphasis. The latter is followed by the sudden dropping of the dynamic, which then swells up again. This technique is used either to create or to resolve a situation of musical tension.

⁵⁶ *Hassan il soldato*, dir. by Giorgio Moser. We can also mention *Kumula e il leone* and *I pascoli del sole*, both directed by Moser.

⁵⁷ Maurizio Zinni has acutely observed that this film tells the same story featuring in the Fascist colonial film ‘Sotto la croce del sud’, by Guido Brignone (1938); see Maurizio Zinni, ‘Una lettera dall’Africa. Il colonialismo italiano nel cinema del dopoguerra. 1945–1960’, *Contemporanea*, 19:1 (2016), 69–99 (p. 84); on Brignone’s film, see also Ben-Ghiat, *Italian Fascism’s Empire Films*, pp. 167–73.

jazzy and even eerie nuances. As soon as the voice-over says ‘l’uomo bianco e la macchina combattevano la loro battaglia contro la foresta’, the atmosphere changes; a swift cut shows a bulldozer reclaiming the soil, and the eerie music fades out and is replaced by the aggressive rhythmic cadence of an orchestral march. This shift signals the changing agenda of the film, which passes from the description of an exotic landscape to the exaltation of the Italian willpower, embodied simultaneously by the white man and by the tractor, his technological limb.

Although *Testa d’elefante*, *Il fiume verde*, *Somalia d’oggi*, and the *Settimana INCOM* 457 newsreel might differ in terms of aesthetic and narrative choices, there is a silver thread connecting the discourses they convey. This connection unfolds in their attempt to materialize an environmental understanding of resilience, which is nonetheless still entrenched within previous colonial discourses. Natural adversities — i.e., desert and unfertile soils, drought, rivers overflowing — as much as the description of the innate backwardness of African people are represented as two faces of the same coin, insofar as they would be unable to master the arduous natural conditions in which the Africans live. Moreover, such an environmental understanding rests upon a narrative according to which natural risks and wilderness are the distinctive traits of the African landscape, whose depiction returns to an almost pre-colonial condition. Therefore, Italians still living there are depicted as agents of post-colonial resilience, thanks to their ability to transform the vulnerable life conditions of African people into a productive and ‘civilized’ life according to Western standards and economy.⁵⁸

6.7 The return to ‘familiar’ exoticism

The sounds, music, and noises of the films analysed so far epitomize a discursive operation according to which the colonial past acted loudly, yet surreptitiously, in conveying meanings about the past and future presence of Italy in Africa.⁵⁹ These meanings were, however, changing; the political stance typical of both Fascist films and those films produced when the destiny of the former colonies was still at stake (1946–49) started to fade, because of the UN’s decisions regarding the issue of the future political order of those countries. This led to a slow yet inevitable conceptual shift concerning the ways in which

⁵⁸ Brad Evans and Julian Reid, *Resilient Life: The Art of Living Dangerously* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2014); see also Ranabir Samaddar, ‘Forum on Brad Evans and Julian Reid’s *Resilient Life: The Art of Living Dangerously*’, *Resilience*, 3:2 (2015), 141–44.

⁵⁹ Fidotta, ‘Ruling the Colonies with Sound’, p. 119.

to represent Africa and, especially, that ‘familiar yet exotic’ space that used to be part of the AOI. This change substantiated in the removal of the traces of both the old and current Italian presence. As a result, newsreels and documentaries became more inclined to emphasize an atavistic, atemporal, and exotic dimension, which was described as characterizing the former colonial space.⁶⁰

Dahlak (1953), by Vittorio Carpignano, and *Danze dall'Eritrea* (1953), by Guido Manera, are two examples of ethno-anthropologic footage that mentions neither the colonial past nor the Italian communities still living in the former colonies.⁶¹ In such films, produced by small and independent companies, diegetic sounds recorded while shooting Dahalik and Kunama people and their habits are paired with tribal percussions added extra-diegetically, a choice meant to enforce the claim made by the footage, namely that these populations contain a wild authenticity. Nevertheless, despite the unofficial production of these films, the attempt to bypass any allusion to the Italian colonial presence seems to be neither motivated by a truly postcolonial discourse, nor substantiated in new representational mechanisms. Against this background, the condescending role of the voice-over, the ubiquitous use of ‘tribal’ sounds, the close-ups of smiling black faces, and the details of poor and handcrafted tools are all elements that ‘re-orientalise’ and ‘retribalize’ the former colonial space.

The artificial reconstruction of exotic backwardness through aesthetic practices typical of travelogue and ethnographic footage can also be spotted in other films. Giorgio Moser’s *Kumula e il leone* (1953) and Adriano Zancanella’s *Caccia grossa in Somalia* (1955), both produced by Opus Film, are prime examples of this production. *Kumula* is about two Somali boys who try to hunt a lion in order to sell it. With the exception of the first scenes, where Moser explains the plot, the film strives to adopt the viewpoint of the two boys, but without succeeding. This is because both the commentary and the editing — as a result of which the film features slow-paced scenes of wild landscapes populated by crocodiles, lions, and monkeys — engender a portrayal that indulges the audience’s taste, rather than offering an unbiased perspective of the lives of local people.

The score, similar to that of Moser’s *Testa d’elefante*, accompanies the voice-over, which fashions such an adventurous atmosphere. The soundscape is furthermore enriched

⁶⁰ Mary Louise Pratt, ‘Scratches on the Face of the Country; Or, What Mr Barrow Saw in the Land of the Bushmen’, *Critical Inquiry*, 12:1 (1985), 138–62 (p. 139).

⁶¹ *Dahlak*, dir. by Vittorio Carpignano (1953); *Danze dell'Eritrea*, dir. by Guido Manera (Corona Cinematografica, 1953). These rare films have not yet been digitized. The original reels are held at the AFCB.

by animal calls, like the lion's roaring or the monkey's cry, all synchronized during the editing. The scene in which the camera gets particularly close to a small monkey is revealing of the attempt to evoke such a wild atmosphere; although the chimpanzee is eating, the audience hears its non-diegetic cry. Such a blatantly artificial synchronization foregrounds the attempt to appeal to the Italian audience by an exotic form of entertainment. Accordingly, this film shows the former colonial space as a neo-colonial, exotic commodity, a horizon that elicits exploratory and exotic desires while indirectly removing the traces of Italy's presence in Africa.

The shifting balance between colonial memories and exotic desires can be found in some other newsreels and documentaries more directly sustained by the Italian government. This is the case of *Caccia grossa in Somalia* that, as I mentioned before, was produced under the auspices of the IsIAO and of the Italian Trusteeship administration in Somalia. Moreover, the director is Adriano Zancanella, who also directed the other two films sustained by the AFIS, which I previously analysed (*Somalia d'oggi* and *Il fiume verde*).⁶² *Caccia grossa* is about a safari hunt, and features a collection of feral scenes of desert and savanna landscapes, African animals (e.g., elephants, cheetahs, monkeys), bare-chested Somali men who escort the white hunters to the spots where to hunt some elephants. The portrayal of such a wild landscape assumes a farcical tone in a scene where a group of elephants, while they quietly graze, are 'dubbed' by a trombone emulating their trumpeting.

A very similar use of brass sounds in order to mimic 'exotic' animals engenders a more deliberately comical tone in the *Settimana INCOM* 424 (1954).⁶³ The film is about an ordinary afternoon in Mogadishu. In the opening sequence, some boys are shown playing in the street, and the voice-over says that they have just finished their homework; for this reason, they would be similar to Italian teens. A stylistic shift occurs, when a transition leads the camera to focus on a camel ruminating; the voice-over starts using an ironic register to describe 'i cammelli che "ruminano" chilometri di pista' and, subsequently, the *passatempo* of a white man who is taking care of a big snake, kissing it. The commentary then says, sighing, "'occhi di gazzella!' dicono gli innamorati alla loro donna,' while the camera frames some gazelles eating from the hands of a young girl. A rather relaxed orchestral score, featuring slow-paced oriental-like melodies, comes to an

⁶² *Caccia grossa in Somalia*, dir. by Zancanella.

⁶³ 'Dalla Somalia fiere in libertà', *Settimana INCOM* 424 (INCOM, 5 April 1950).

end when a more up-tempo, comic, and louder trombone melody accompanies what is described as the funny walk of a small hippopotamus, which is being fed through a nursing bottle held by the girl who previously fed the gazelles. The sneaky eroticization of the Somali setting turns into a hilarious appraisal of the blurred line that separates animals and (black) humans.

These comic nuances and the urban landscape in which the scenes are set gives this film a fairly original, ethnographic afflatus, which indeed differs from that featuring in films like *Dahlak*, *Danze dall'Eritrea*, *Kumula e il leone*, or *Caccia grossa in Somalia*. However, all these titles carefully avoid any explicit reference being made to Fascist colonialism and to the current political situation that originated from decolonization. The diverse forms that the films use to 'return' to exoticism aimed to place Africa back in an atavistic and atemporal dimension. The perspective these films adopt is thus an eternal present that is 'intrinsically' present in the African element, and which compels the Italians to continue to depict themselves as the bearers of civilization and modernity.⁶⁴ As a result, despite the attempt to offer an exotic perspective that is disentangled from political contingencies, these films, in fact, resonate with the discourse through which the Italian governments claimed back a new and direct role in the former colonies between 1946 and 1949.⁶⁵ Those claims assumed a positive recollection of the pre-Fascist colonial period, during which orientalist, adventurous, and civilizing narratives dominated as opposed to the subsequent, aggressive and technological aesthetic typical of Fascist imperial propaganda.⁶⁶

There is a further explanation for this circular dynamic, through which the films rediscover a peculiar form of exotic desire at the expense of more political narratives. It regards the attempt to recover from the dramatic changes that occurred during the transition from Fascism to the Republic. Against this backdrop, the aesthetic choices pertaining to the aural and visual dimensions of films acted as devices of resilience: on the one hand, they re-articulated stylistic and narrative tropes of the colonial past in a way that was exotic and reassuring for the reconstruction of the nation's collective memory; on the other hand, such sounds, noises, and images became fragments of the a-grammatic discourse that contributed to making unintelligible the traces of the colonial past, which still circulated

⁶⁴ Pratt, 'Scratches on the Face of the Country', p. 139.

⁶⁵ Morone, 'Introduzione. Quando è finito finito il colonialismo italiano', p. 7.

⁶⁶ On the circulation of exotic and orientalist discourses in Italy during early colonialism, see Giuseppe Finaldi, *A History of Italian Colonialism 1860–1907* (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), pp. 96–101.

in the aftermath of decolonization. Both Stephen Foster and Graham Huggan maintain that the exotic functions dialectically as a symbolic system, domesticating the foreign for the metropolitan audience. As such, it is a discursive space that creates and controls the culturally different, by providing forms of cultural translation that help define collective identities.⁶⁷ The Italian post-colonial exotic, and its commodification, was therefore central to the casting of a new form of alterity, which simultaneously articulated an aphasic memory of the empire still imbued with colonial discourses. Those representations, in other words, were able to ‘radicare un esotico nostrano’, which served to forget the Fascist phase and to anchor national memory back to a pre-Fascist phase, whose echo reverberated in new exotic desires and narratives.⁶⁸

6.8 White noise

Finding a consistent framework able to read the manifold articulation of the soundscape of documentaries and newsreels is not a straightforward endeavour, inasmuch as the films were produced during — and in turn reflected — diverse yet entangled, liminal transitions. Firstly, the sores of the traumatic passage from Fascism to the Republic after WWII were still visible; however, during the 50s, an extensive process of economic, political, and social growth improved the Italian industrial base, its demographic distribution, and citizens’ living standard.⁶⁹ The democratic system consolidated itself against the background of both the Cold War’s contraposition and of the worldwide passage from a colonial toward a post-colonial setting. This led to the adoption of a peculiar vantage point regarding colonial memories and decolonial processes; while the attention to topics concerning the former Italian colonies started to evaporate, a new interest in the decolonization of other Western countries arose, especially among left-wing milieux.⁷⁰

Secondly, and more specifically with regard to the topic of Italian decolonization, the occasions in which Italy’s former colonies were explicitly mentioned became rarer.

⁶⁷ Stephen Foster, ‘Exoticism as a Symbolic System’, *Dialectical Anthropology*, 7 (1982–83), 21–30; Graham Huggan, *The Post-colonial Exotic. Marketing at the Margins* (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 13–14.

⁶⁸ Mario Isnenghi, *L’Italia del fascio* (Florence: Giunti, 1996), pp. 216–17.

⁶⁹ Stephen Gundle, *Between Hollywood and Moscow* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), pp. 3–4; *L’Italia dal fascismo alla repubblica. Sistema di potere e alleanze sociali*, ed. by. Massimo Legnani (Rome: Carocci, 2001).

⁷⁰ Neelam Srivastava, *Italian Colonialism and Resistances to Empire* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), pp. 195–214.

Those occasions concerned almost exclusively the AFIS, because the UN's decision on Eritrea and Libya established a different and quicker path toward independence, in which Italy would not have played a role. Italy renounced any claims to a direct political role in Africa, and the Trusteeship of Somalia should, in theory, have been inspired by a new commitment to the future independence of the country. In spite of this agenda, however, not only discourses and narratives but also institutions and personnel remained those inherited by Fascism.⁷¹ Accordingly, this decolonial passage was characterized by uncertainty and by the attempt to either conceal or rework this living and tangible, imperial debris. Decolonial footage condensed this ambiguous balance between the need to find a new vocabulary in order to describe the future independence of African countries, and the obstinate presence of previous colonial tropes and institutions, which configured the nature of the new Italian presence in Africa.

This element leads us to the third liminal transition, pertaining more specifically to the changing stylistic register of the footage. The films produced in the 50s echoed previous colonial propaganda.⁷² In spite of this continuity, however, a more ethnographic and travelogue-oriented perspective became increasingly important. This stylistic transition may have been inspired by a broader passage from a classic propaganda style to a more realist and direct cinema aesthetic. This becomes evident if we look at films (e.g., *Danze dall'Eritrea, Dahlak, Kumula e il leone*) that epitomize the effort to create a sort of 'ethno-realistic' aesthetic, which concerns certain areas that are depicted as being almost untouched by Western colonialism. Nevertheless, the dominant perspective on Africa remained unaltered, and might be located in the artificial authenticity of the sounds of these films. Their soundscapes often lack the rough and unpolished texture that characterizes the recording of diegetic sounds on the spot; this, in turn, should pertain to a format prone to represent reality. As a result, voices, music, sound effects, and noises did not merely represent, but actively *constructed* the post-colonial reality according to the agenda of the former colonizers.

All the films analysed in this chapter — willingly or unwillingly — foreshadowed a process according to which the debris of Italy's colonial past was re-articulated in a new discourse permeated by exoticism, adventure, and desires, which are at odds with a

⁷¹ Morone, 'Introduzione. Quando è finito il colonialismo italiano', p. 11; Chiara Giorgi, *L'Africa come carriera: funzioni e funzionari del colonialismo italiano* (Rome: Carocci, 2012).

⁷² Within this category we may easily also count films produced between 1946 and 1949, the period in which the final UN decision about the former colonies was promulgated.

thorough critique of the discursive order typical of the previous colonial phase. Therefore, the combination of visual tropes and sound modules often taken from the colonial period created a discourse that was hardly synchronized with the global decolonial transitions of the 50s.⁷³ This out-of-synchness between aesthetic choices reminiscent of the past and decolonial momentum refers to contrasting temporalities, which were aurally substantiated in the shrilling juxtaposition of several musical styles: symphonic marches and joyful motifs recalling the ‘good old days’ of the formal political presence; orientalist melodies that tended to reframe an exotic portrayal of African human and geographical landscapes; mechanical noises embodying Italian technological industriousness; ethnic drums epitomizing African backwardness; jazz and oneiric nuances triggering (post)colonial desires.

The often-dissonant mixture of exoticism, classical symphonies, inharmonious jazz chords, trumpet bugles, military marches, different registers used by the voice-over, animal calls, mechanical noises — all these elements compose a dis-harmony. This cacophony reflects the ambiguous discourse about the transition from the former colonial presence to a new, and indirect, form of hegemony over Africa. The aural discordance of the narratives about the future of Italy in Africa is at odds with the contrapuntal strategy of critical thinking suggested by Edward Said, that is, ‘a different kind of reading and interpretation [...] both of the metropolitan history that is narrated and of those histories against which (and together with which) the dominating discourse act.’⁷⁴

The concept of cacophony is diametrically opposed to the technique of counterpoint; while the former is a strident, discordant mixture of sounds and melodies, the latter is a specific type of polyphony that focuses on the melodic interaction between multiple and independent voices. Used as a metaphor for critical thinking, counterpoint suggests the possibility to rethink discourses and cultures in a more inclusive way, which is able to make sense of multiple and competing, postcolonial histories and discourses. The

⁷³ On this decolonial momentum, see Raymond Betts, *Decolonization (The Making of the Contemporary World)*, 2nd edn (London and New York: Routledge, 2003). As pointed out by Robert Young, the Bandung Conference (1955) represents a seminal moment in the formation of a postcolonial, political agency that spread globally, see Robert Young, ‘Postcolonialism: From Bandung to the Tricontinental’, *Histoirein*, 5 (2005), 11–21; see also chapter 1, section 1.5 (pp. 43–45).

⁷⁴ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage, 1994), pp. 50–51. A thorough and updated account of the use of musical theory in Said’s thought and, more broadly, in postcolonial studies, is provided by David Bartine, ‘The Contrapuntal Humanisms of Edward Said’, *Interdisciplinary Literary Studies*, 17:1 (2015), 59–85.

cacophonic soundscapes of the films I have discussed here provided, instead, no space for counter-punctual voices able to challenge the hegemonic perspective of the Italian colonizers. Rather, they engulfed the auditory spectrum with dissonant narratives whose images and sounds often clashed with one another, and were at odds with the global scenario of decolonization, making a thorough critique of Italian colonialism even more unintelligible.

The conflation of different sound narratives in a cacophonic way might be daringly synthesized via the white noise paradigm.⁷⁵ White noise has a constant amplitude throughout the audible frequency range, inasmuch as it consists of the mixture of all audible frequencies (about twenty thousand tones). Its texture has the ability to drown out other sounds; for this reason, it is often used to help people relax and fall asleep. The dissonant sonic stimuli Italian audiences received while watching the films examined here acted in a similar way; the overwhelming mixing of diverse tones, harmonies, images, and narratives managed to metaphorically render the collective memory of the colonial past undisturbed, latently inactive, and even lethargic.

This aural concealment of stressful memories aided the re-articulation of the discourse according to which Italians had to continue their civilizing mission as bearers of modernity for the exoticized and racialized, African elements. Against this background, the colour adjective of the white noise paradigm becomes metaphorically significant to dissect the racializing discourses that nestled into the post-colonial elaboration of *Italianità*. The ‘white’ characteristic that describes the most predominant form of noise refers to the way in which white light works as a combination of all the various colour frequencies. The mixture of artificial noises and frequencies to portray the former colonial space acted in a rather similar way in the footage. African ‘black’ noises were managed by former settlers and made instrumental in the reaffirmation of the white-Western identity of Italians, and of their intrinsic qualities, as they operated in the formal colonial space. These racialized sound practices found amplification, for instance, in the accompaniment of orientalist melodies, in the animal calls, and in the use of ‘tribal’ instruments, however artificial this might have appeared. Such sonic elements reactivated the preconceptions about the atavistic backwardness of Africa and of its inhabitants, which had been ingrained

⁷⁵ White noise can be heard here <<https://mynoise.net/NoiseMachines/whiteNoiseGenerator.php>> [accessed 3 June 2019].

since the colonial period.⁷⁶ Moreover, they aimed at satisfying the eyes and ears of Italian audiences whilst simultaneously reinforcing self-exculpatory and aphasic narratives concerning what, once upon a time, was ‘their’ *oltremare*. As a result, sounds, voices, and images did not simply address the mnemonic horizon of the colonial past. Rather, they made that ‘exotic’ horizon instrumental in the national recovery from the traumas of WWII and decolonization, by simultaneously placing the former colonial world in proximity to, yet distant from, the geographical and discursive boundaries of *Italianità*. In so doing, the films’ soundscape contributed to the re-signification of Africa as a distant yet familiar space in which to perform Italy’s new, post-war identity and new forms of economic, political, racial, and cultural hegemony.

⁷⁶ Deaville, ‘Sounding the World’, pp. 50–51.

Conclusion

(to not conclude...)

In July 1960, exactly fifty-nine years ago, the ten-year *Amministrazione Fiduciaria Italiana della Somalia* ended, putting an end to the formal presence of Italy in the now former colony. This event was celebrated via a newsreel about a party held in a luxurious palace in Rome.¹ In the film, Somali and Italian diplomats — dressed elegantly and holding shiny glasses of champagne — are pleasantly talking to each other; the whole atmosphere comes closer to a glamorous premiere than to a moment in which a colonial yoke is finally thrown off. In fact, the overall depiction of Italian decolonization the films analysed in this thesis offered, especially when portraying the AFIS administration, was that of a stage in which Italy could perform its spectacle of industriousness and civilization, whereas African people were bit players against the background of a scenery profoundly linked to Italy. The voice-over commentary of the aforementioned newsreel is more eloquent than the images alone, inasmuch as it utters sentences like: ‘si ammaina l’ultimo tricolore sul continente nero,’ ‘Roma ha festeggiato il nuovo stato africano, cui l’Italia è legata da tanti vincoli,’ ‘il nostro paese può guardare con orgoglio al lavoro svolto laggiù,’ and ‘caso un po’ raro oggi, quello di uno stato che vada d’accordo con la sua ex-colonia.’ At the end of this last sentence, the camera lingers on a young Somali girl, who — after a moment of hesitation — starts smiling to the audience. She embodies Somalia, still ogling the Italian (male) audience.²

To condense the results of this doctoral piece of research in four sentences and one film scene is perhaps too pretentious. Nevertheless, the fifty-five seconds of this newsreel service are unexpectedly instrumental to systematically arrange, though not without difficulties, the concluding remarks of this thesis according to the original nature of the corpus, the methodologies used to study the context of production and diffusion, and the critical dissection of the Italian decolonial passage. First of all, this short report of the party in Rome was included in a newsreel whose other services were about the exhibition ‘Italia

¹ ‘Roma. Indipendenza Somala’ *Caleidoscopio CIAC* 1226 (CIAC, 7 July 1960).

² On the gendered perspective of post-war newsreels, see Marta Boneschi, ‘La donna in pellicola. Le italiane nei cinegiornali degli anni ‘50’, in *La Settimana INCOM. Cinegiornali e informazione negli anni ‘50*, ed. by Augusto Sainati (Turin: Lindau, 2001), pp. 85–91.

61' held in Turin, a debutante ball held at the American embassy in Rome, Sicilian ceramics, a Go-kart competition, and also featured comedy sketches. Indeed, the juxtaposition of the most disparate topics characterized almost any newsreel produced in Italy and in the world between the 30s and the 60s. This trait, if combined with the several themes pertaining to the Italian presence in Africa, has urged me to carefully dissect the process that made the content of films about Italian decolonization meaningful. The meanings the audience could give to the films about the transition dialogued with contrasting images, information, and perspectives about Italian and world events and cultures. For instance, the aforementioned service was preceded by footage about the 'Italia 61' exhibition and followed by that about the American cotillon in Rome. The images about Somali independence were wrapped with meanings that referred to a smooth and even pleasant transition, due to that overall glamorous atmosphere. Furthermore, the Turin exhibition about the centenary of Italy and the *orgoglio* through which Italians should evaluate their presence in Africa were in a seamless discursive relationship, according to which the Italians' qualities and industriousness unfolded in the entanglement between national and colonial histories.³

This is just one example of the multidimensional framework in which representations about the former colonies were fashioned. Such a multiplication of possible meanings considers both the intertextual relationship among the several services that compose a single newsreel, and the interdiscursive connection between the footage and other cultural products about the same topic (e.g., other newsreels, documentaries, feature films, newspapers, books, etc.). A slightly different consideration is necessary when studying documentaries. This is because these are not serial products, and their aim is more clearly articulated than that of the newsreels. However, the fact that they had to be screened in combination with a newsreel, and in advance of the main feature, puts the documentaries in interdiscursive and intertextual systems of meaning-production, which engendered often contrasting narratives about the Italian presence in Africa across different formats and practices.⁴

³ Norma Bouchard, 'Italia 61: The Commemorations for the Centenary of Unification in the First Capital of the Italian State', *Romance Studies*, 23:2 (2015), 117–29.

⁴ On compulsory screenings and pairing, see chapter 2, sections 2.6 and 2.7 (pp. 98–108), and the related discussion about Laws 379 (1947) and 958 (1949).

The choice to focus on a very specific body of visual documents, which fall under the rubric of ‘decolonial footage’ (i.e., newsreels, short documentaries, educative films, and found footage), was motivated by two equally important factors. On the one hand, I conceived these documents as highly privileged tools to envision the new social and cultural configuration of post-war Italy, mostly centred on the values typical of the hegemonic forces that were governing the State and the process of reconstruction.⁵ On the other hand, I deemed the films worthy of close investigation for their implicit assertion to offer a representation of this reality as truthfully as possible. The indexical relationship they aimed to build with what happened in front of the camera made them instrumental in delivering political and cultural messages, whether directly or in more surreptitious ways.⁶ As far as the stylistic choices and the nature of the footage are concerned, the analysis of these has repeatedly led to the key question of the level of constructiveness documentaries and newsreels referred to so as to appear as realistic as possible. The ultimate answer to this question has been deliberately elusive, since any neat categorizations of the corpus — according to either formal traits or a given canon — might fail to tackle the different discourses about decolonization that the films conveyed; the label ‘decolonial footage’ expresses such a fluid understanding to the extent that it embraces visual products that diverge according to format, aims, and narratives.

The specific dissection of aesthetic devices like the *mise-en-scène*, voice-over, soundscape, and the use of found footage has highlighted the fact that the films presented elements of realism as well as a strong manipulation of the facts they wanted to represent. Especially the voice-over and the balance between diegetic and non-diegetic sounds have been revealing of such a tension between propaganda-inspired formulas and more direct ways to represent the former colonial world. Furthermore, a closer look at the films has put emphasis on the fact that their production happened in the thick of two paradigm shifts. The first, more general, of these shifts pertains to the growing international awareness spreading among film practitioners and theorists; the latter increasingly engaged in the dismantling of the debris of totalitarian and direct state intervention in documentary

⁵ Augusto Sainati, ‘Stile e formato dell’informazione “INCOM”’, in *La settimana INCOM*, ed. by Sainati, pp. 25–36 (p. 26).

⁶ Bill Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary*, 3rd edn (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2017), p. 25–27.

aesthetics and production mechanisms.⁷ The second change, although obliquely correlated to the one I just mentioned, tackles more specifically the difficult Italian transition from Fascism to the Republic, which reflected an ambiguous scenario of state intervention in the production of non-fiction films.

Decolonial footage remained *de facto* strongly influenced by the government, notwithstanding both the liberalization of the non-fiction film market — and, accordingly, its liberation from the shackles of Fascist control — and the growing disapproval of propaganda-inspired practices and approaches to mass culture. The study of original archival records, combined with the review of literature about the production and diffusion of non-fiction films, has exposed this equivocal scenario. Although in more indirect ways, the *Governi d'unità nazionale* and the subsequent DC cabinets continued to use newsreels and documentaries as a means to ‘make Italian society more visible and audible to its own members’, thereby integrating Italians while conveying images and social models able to reframe pre-existent local and social belongings.⁸ Accordingly, the dismantling of the state monopoly over non-fiction films inherited by the *Ventennio* was all but easy, both conceptually and materially. The conviction that newsreels and documentaries had to deliver messages consistent with hegemonic agendas remained widespread. As put by Dino Cofrancesco, this discourse was underpinned by an obstinate postulation that conceived the audience in terms of the ‘cultura del suddito’, which is typical ‘dello spettatore della politica, di chi è al di fuori di tutto e assiste alla politica come a uno spettacolo del potere, quale è quello trasmesso dai cinegiornali’.⁹ In this light, a conceptual continuity with previous Fascist tenets about non-fiction production is clearly discernible.

The conceptual continuity between Fascist and post-Fascist non-fiction films has been the silver thread running through this thesis, whose ultimate purpose is to assess either the permanency of, or the resistance to, previous colonial discourses against the background

⁷ This change led to the establishment of the *cinéma vérité* movement in the early 60s, see Brian Winston, ‘Introduction: The Filmed Documentary’, in *The Documentary Film Book*, ed. by Brian Winston (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 1–29 (pp. 1–4).

⁸ David Forgacs and Stephen Gundle, *Mass Culture and Italian Society from Fascism to the Cold War* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2007), p. 2.

⁹ The ‘cultura del suddito’ is therefore at odds with the ‘cultura del cittadino’, which implies ‘la partecipazione e la consapevolezza dei diritti di cittadinanza, il contributo fattivo [...] alle strategie politiche, l’aggiornamento e la lettura dei giornali’, see Dino Cofrancesco, ‘La “civic culture” nei cinegiornali INCOM degli anni ‘50’, in *La Settimana INCOM*, ed. by Sainati, pp. 101–07 (p. 104).

of Italy's shifting post-war scenario. As we have seen in chapter 2, a straightforward resemblance between Fascist and post-Fascist ways of managing film news and documentaries was increasingly being questioned from the late 40s onwards, although direct and indirect forms of state support of and control over non-fiction production started to weaken only with the adoption of Law 897 (1956).¹⁰

Decolonial issues have offered a privileged vantage point from which to appraise this unclear scenario of production. The vicissitudes that occurred during the production of two specific films (*Lavoro Italiano in Africa* and *Giustizia per le colonie*) epitomized the complex framework of the production and diffusion of decolonial footage. The former film was produced in 1947, by a private company, which sought the government's support to solve a small issue related to its diffusion. It was subsequently used by the Ministero dell'Africa Italiana and by the Ministero degli Affari Esteri to support the Italian claims over the colonies. The latter film was equally produced by a private company, which requested and obtained state funds to finalize the footage on the condition that some improvements suggested by the MAI's personnel would be adopted. Moreover, as it happened for other films analysed in this thesis, *Giustizia per le colonie* used found footage from the Istituto LUCE, which was recontextualized so as to become meaningful in the context of the diplomatic claims over the former colonies. This last aspect takes into account the centrifugal and centripetal dynamics that may explain the involvement of institutions in the propaganda about decolonization. Even though the word 'propaganda' was perceived as increasingly embarrassing, the mechanisms of controls and incentives regulated by law made the companies bend to the government's agenda. The government, for its part, actively produced materials to orient the audiences in the peninsula and in the former colonies. Against this background, decolonial footage was part of a broader and deeper intertextual and interdiscursive chain composed of diverse cultural products, political practices, and narratives about the relationship between the Western world and Africa, according to which the former had the right to bring civilization and modernity to the latter even after the formal end of colonial ties.

¹⁰ And, most likely, as a result of the government's shifting attention from cinema to television production, see David Forgacs, *Italian Culture in the Industrial era 1880–1980. Cultural Industries, Politics and the Public* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), pp. 132–49; Forgacs and Gundle, *Mass Culture and Italian Society*, p. 5; Elena Dagrada, 'Television and its Critics: A Parallel History', in *Italian Cultural Studies*, ed. by David Forgacs and Robert Lumley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 233–47.

The reference to intertextual, discursive frameworks in which meanings about the end of Italian colonialism were moulded has served to reflexively assess the perspective adopted in this piece of research, and to highlight the contribution it might offer to further discussions. Moreover, putting decolonial footage at the fore does not simply mean to fill a research vacuum concerning non-fiction films that previous scholarship has addressed only partially. Rather, it means to analyse a corpus of visual products that, for a long time, has been deemed as dwelling at the margins of other discourses and representations. However, in this very element resides the importance of this specific film corpus. Its subordinate proximity to feature films, its claim to represent a given reality, and the government influence it was subjected to have made decolonial footage extremely permeable to the contrasting discourses it wanted to convey, yet also intriguingly slippery to manage for those who study this footage. For this very reason, the vantage point adopted in this thesis has privileged a thorough analysis of the historical and cultural genealogies and conditions that have made decolonial footage meaningful in the specific context of Italian decolonization, rather than a mere synchronic comparison with other, and more studied, cultural products.¹¹

The specific placement of the film corpus within broader discourses, dealing not simply with decolonization but with the self-representation of post-war national belongings, takes into account the choice to adopt a Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA). There are two analytical considerations that motivate the adoption of such a methodology. On the one hand, it has provided a consistent framework to read the vast array of historical conditions and practices of production, dissemination, and reception, in which colonial discourses could hide. On the other hand, but in a clearly related way, the Discourse-Historical Approach has enabled a reflection upon the mechanisms of re-articulation and resemanticization of cinematic and narrative tropes about the colonial past.

¹¹ On decolonial and postcolonial feature films, see Karen Pinkus, 'Empty Space. Decolonization in Italy', in *A Place in the Sun. Africa in Italian Colonial Culture from Post-Unification to the Present*, ed. by Patrizia Palumbo (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003), pp. 299–320; Linde Luijnenburg, 'The Other in Italian Postcolonial Cinema. Pasolini and Fellini. Two Case Studies', *Incontri*, 28:1 (2013), 34–43; *L'Africa in Italia. Per una contro storia postcoloniale del cinema italiano*, ed. by Leonardo De Franceschi (Rome: Aracne, 2013); Antonello Gallo, *Riusciranno i nostri eroi a ritrovare l'Africa nel cinema italiano. Un secolo d'Africa nel cinema italiano*, (Rome: Aracne, 2015); Maurizio Zinni, 'Una lettera dall'Africa. Il colonialismo italiano nel cinema del dopoguerra, 1945–1960', *Contemporanea*, 19:1 (2016), 69–99; Liliana Ellena, 'Geografie della razza nel cinema italiano del primo dopoguerra. 1945–1955', in *Il colore della nazione*, ed. by Gaia Giuliani (Florence: Le Monnier, 2015), pp. 17–31.

The critical underpinning of such an approach allows us to conceive the adjective ‘historical’ not merely in terms of one of the methodologies this thesis has employed, that is, archival research and interpretation of the representations drawing on a variety of sources coming from the past. Rather, it points out the genealogy of discursive practices and the ways in which they are subjected to diachronic change; in other words, DHA has allowed me to examine how representations concerning the colonial past and decolonization ‘acquire stable and natural forms’, becoming a hegemonic *history* narrated to Italians in order to strengthen their post-war national identity (chapter 1).¹² Therefore, film analysis has developed against the background of a theoretical reflection about the ways in which iconic power unfolds in society, reproducing and naturalizing racial, social, and cultural inequalities that derive from colonial discourses and epistemologies.

DHA foregrounds the intermediate passage in which the films’ content was produced and signified, according to the broader archive of colonial visuality, which operated across the borders of (post)imperial countries ever since the dawn of modern colonialism, in the late fifteenth century. The analysis of film elements and narratives featured in each chapter has therefore been supported by an interpretation drawing on the historical and social conditions in which meanings were fashioned. In so doing, this approach has deciphered how cultural objects and narratives have supported ‘a particular kind of discursive hegemony’, which constrained the emergence of any counter-discourse able to question the benevolent representation of the Italian presence in Africa.¹³

The imbrication of the rather ambiguous scenario of film production with the no less uncertain decolonial process made the footage play an active role in the resurgence of a colonial way of seeing, or more accurately, *visualizing*, the soon-to-be former colonial world. To put it differently, the films were part of that conglomeration of media texts and political practices that composed the conspiracy of silence, which made the memory of the colonial past unproblematic, vague, and unintelligible.¹⁴ Colonial amnesia and the belated critical assessment of colonial history have therefore been questioned, and not taken for granted. Accordingly, I have performed an in-depth dissection of that silence, by exposing

¹² Ruth Wodak, ‘What CDA is About – A Summary of its History, Important Concepts and its Developments’, in *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*, ed. by Michael Meyer and Ruth Wodak (London: Sage, 2001), pp. 1–13 (p. 3).

¹³ Terry Locke, *Critical Discourse Analysis* (London: Bloomsbury, 2004), p. 43.

¹⁴ Dietmar Rothermund, ‘Introduction’, in *Memory of Post-imperial Nations. The Aftermath of Decolonization*, ed. by Dietmar Rothermund (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 1–17.

the material practices concerning a corpus of visual documents that have contributed both to disable the critical assessment of that past and to avoid the destabilizing effects of a thorough and epistemic decolonization in post-war Italy.

It is undeniable that the specific configuration of Italian decolonization inhibited an overarching assessment of the previous colonial period.¹⁵ Furthermore, the fact that post-war Italy found itself in a liminal position between ‘Europeanness’, ‘Mediterraneanness’, and the arising Cold War polarization, makes the study of the loss of the colonies extremely salient to address how national *and* Western identities and belongings were re-articulated. Scholarship has thoroughly exposed the connection between Italian nation-building and colonial endeavours: Adwa’s defeat and the Libyan war, the national mobilization for the conquest of the Fascist Empire and its loss at the hands of ‘white’ enemies (who soon became allies), the related strategies of silence and the failed public *metanoia* — these are all elements that have urged the recognition of a specific critical scenario to assess the Italian (post)colonial experience. This, of course, has nothing to do with a chauvinistic understanding of the methodology that has inspired this thesis. Rather, the fact that Italian decolonization happened during intersecting momentous transitions (i.e., toward the post-war period, from Fascism to the Republic, but also global decolonizations) has compelled me to carefully gauge the analytical categories, the delay and the extension of Italian ‘post-colonialism’, as well as its legacies.¹⁶ Therefore, acknowledging Italy’s peripheral in-betweenness in comparison to dominant structures and hegemonizing discourses, including French and British ‘(post)colonialisms’, is not a drawback per se; rather, it has enabled a thorough dissection of that peripheral status, and even of its instrumentality within discourses pertaining to the national belongings that the films conveyed.

Chapters 3 and 4 have dealt extensively with the inherent contradiction concerning the liminal position of post-war Italy within the geography of Western belongings. Its *re-inserimento* in the ‘first world’ club was justified by the ostensibly positive work Italy did,

¹⁵ Antonio M. Morone, ‘Introduzione Quando è finito il colonialismo italiano?’, in *La fine del colonialismo italiano. Politica, società e memorie*, ed. by Antonio M. Morone (Florence: Le Monnier, 2019), pp. 1–27.

¹⁶ Jacqueline Andall and Derek Duncan, ‘Introduction. Hybridity in Italian Colonial and Postcolonial Culture’, in *National Belongings. Hybridity in Italian Colonial and Postcolonial Cultures*, ed. by Jacqueline Andall and Derek Duncan (New York: Peter Lang, 2010), pp. 1–19 (pp. 3–4); Sandra Ponzanesi, ‘The Postcolonial Turn in Italian Studies. European Perspectives’, in *Postcolonial Italy. Challenging National Homogeneity*, ed. by Cristina Lombardi-Diop and Caterina Romeo (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 51–69; Ruth Ben-Ghiat, ‘Modernity is just over there. Colonialism and Italian National Identity’, *Interventions*, 8:3 (2006), 380–93.

and would still do, in Africa. As a result, the *lavoro italiano* was not merely the rhetorical pivot the diplomatic claims revolved around; it also infiltrated the political and cultural recollection of the colonial period. Such obsessive praise assumed an organic connotation insofar as the genetic predisposition of Italians to ‘civilize’ people abroad enabled the transnationalization of national belongings. In other words, every place in which the *lavoro italiano* could make the soil productive, and the landscape civilized, was portrayed as an *oasi d’italianità*.

The former colonial landscape was therefore still depicted as organically connected to the Italian people living in and operating on it; in so doing, the films conceived a sense of national belonging according to biological characteristics oddly reminiscent of the previous Fascist Empire. Fascism erected those racial and social boundaries to defend the nation, which was considered as ‘a body that needed protection from the infecting presence of the others’.¹⁷ Nevertheless, once Fascism collapsed, this organic understanding was peculiarly reformulated in film narratives describing the organic and even biological connection of Italy with its former colonies. This biological bond defined both the qualities and the allegiance of the people to a national community, whilst simultaneously excluding those people whose bodies did not contain the gene of Italian industriousness.

The myth of the *lavoro* was instrumental not simply in setting Italians against the ‘backward’, ‘inferior’, and ‘lazy’ Africans. It likewise defined the borders of the nation against those Western countries that would amputate the territorial limbs that had been ‘fecundated’ by Italian industriousness.¹⁸ This way it was possible to mark the difference with the so-called ‘capitalist’ empires, whose negative colonial tradition and hostility toward Italy is — directly or indirectly — evoked in a great amount of films. Nevertheless, the backbone of that discourse was a blatant contradiction: Italy sought to be officially legitimized to return to the colonies by those very countries against which it had addressed its fierce accusations. The *re-inserimento* in the international scenario after the Fascist

¹⁷ Olindo De Napoli, *La prova della razza. Cultura giuridica e razzismo in Italia negli anni Trenta* (Florence: Le Monnier, 2009); Nicoletta Poidimani, *Difendere la ‘razza’: Identità razziale e politiche sessuali nel progetto imperiale di Mussolini* (Rome: Sensibili alle Foglie, 2009); Francesco Cassata, ‘La Difesa della razza.’ *Politica, ideologia e immagine del razzismo fascista* (Turin: Einaudi, 2008). On hybridity, see Andall and Duncan, ‘Introduction. Hybridity in Italian Colonial and Postcolonial Culture’, p. 8.

¹⁸ Paolo Acanfora, *Miti e ideologia nella politica estera DC. Nazione, Europa e comunità atlantica (1943–1954)* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2013), pp. 32–33; Alessandro Pes, ‘Coloni senza colonie. La Democrazia Cristiana e la decolonizzazione mancata (1946–1950)’, in *Quel che resta dell’impero. La cultura coloniale degli italiani*, ed. by Valeria Deplano and Alessandro Pes (Milan: Mimesis, 2014), pp. 417–37.

parenthesis, and the *risentimento* toward those countries that would have constrained this aspiration were thereby two sides of the same coin.

As far as this paradox is concerned, the organic connection between Italians and their former colonies might be encompassed in the uncertain definition of a homogeneous idea of Italian national identity *through* its transnationalization. This is because the praise of the *lavoro italiano* was meant to re-articulate the hegemony over the former subjects, while at the same time ‘proletarizing’ the self-representations of the nation in relation to other European empires. In so doing, the simultaneous transnationalization and proletarianization of Italian belonging allowed the films to re-route and sublimate any social conflict within the peninsula into a new projection of Italy in Africa. The *risentimento* was, hence, channelled against those countries that allegedly constrained the ‘making of Italy abroad’, and especially in those territories where Italy had ostensibly brought civilization and modernity.

The composite understanding of liminality that I broached in chapter 3 has enabled a fairly well-arranged understanding of such often-divergent narratives and contradictions. The *ongoing* liminal condition of Italy, which surfaced, for instance, in the films set during the Paris Peace Conference, tended to convey a sense of uncertainty which enabled the accusation of those countries that would deprive Italy of its extra-territorial appendages. This ongoing liminal status was thus obliquely useful to redefine the borders of the nation. The AFIS period somewhat dispelled that liminality, insofar as the Trusteeship was conceived as proof of the fact that ‘l’Italia è guarita’ from the Fascist disease, and could regain a new international status accordingly.¹⁹ The subtle form of liminality, which pervades the entire film corpus and which conceived Fascism as a transitory moment within the long-lasting history of Italy, is therefore confined to the opaque pages of the *Ventennio*, which is not even worth mentioning.

If Italy was able to dispel that liminal status, the same cannot be said for the former subjects, who dwelled in an unstable condition of permanent liminality that did not entail any emancipatory qualities. This is because Africans were depicted as unable to overcome the polarization between (former) colonizers and (former) colonized. Far from acknowledging the legitimacy of the new post-colonial elites, the footage still lingers in a

¹⁹ As the words of the commentary of the film *Repubblica anno zero*, dir. by Jacopo Rizza (Documentari INCOM, 1963).

discursive space where old colonial discourses are re-articulated together with the postulation of a new, 'non-colonial' and deterritorialized form of Italian identity. The reappearance of 'primitive' traits in the films of the 50s — such as 'tribal' dances, bare-chested bodies, smiling faces being surprised by the camera — materialized the attempt to avoid any reference to the decolonial momentum, instead eliciting a renewed exotic desire (chapter 6). Eritrea, Libya, and especially Somalia, in other words, were recasted as the scenario in which national history and qualities could continue to shine.

This last point takes into account, in a straightforward manner, the resemanticization of the Fascist colonial past, its 'impossible' connection with the post-war scenario, yet also the tenacity of its material debris. As seen both in chapter 2 and in chapter 4, the actual footage about the colonies was recovered, used, and recontextualized. Images of buildings, settlements, and roads taken from Fascist footage made that past visible again, but its meanings changed as a result of different editing choices and thanks to a voice-commentary that disarticulated this debris, which was recomposed into a new discourse about the Italian presence in Africa (chapter 5). The Fascist past is tamed, the word 'Fascism' is never mentioned, yet its spectral presence emerged from the aesthetic devices and tropes through which the camera reimagined Italy's presence in Africa. The ships taking Italians to Africa epitomize that continuity; no matter what they were going to do, Italians had to return to and stay in Africa to make the desert bloom, to tame the marshlands, to build roads, to heal and educate 'backward' people, to restore social and military order, and to make the landscape productive.

The repeated reference to the Roman presence in Libya, and to Italian 'pioneers', missionaries, and explorers who travelled and operated in the Horn of Africa well before Italian colonialism, does indicate that the African landscape is still adjacent to Italy, a kind of *esotico nostrano* where to perform *Italianità*.²⁰ As we have seen in chapter 6, the return to a more ethnographic, travelogue, and orientalist perspective is evident in the films produced from the mid-fifties onwards, and it fulfils a double function: on the one hand, it erased both the aggressive ethos of Fascist propaganda and also the political stance typical of decolonial films produced during the diplomatic negotiations of the Paris Peace Conference. On the other hand, though, this return to exoticism was distant from the search for a more accurate and unbiased representation of African societies and cultures. Rather,

²⁰ Mario Isnenghi, *L'Italia del fascio* (Florence: Giunti, 1996), pp. 215–19.

it seems to be still entrenched within a colonial discourse, which objectified, racialized, eroticized yet disdained Africans and put them at the margins of the films' composition.

The resilient depiction of the former colonies as a landscape in which sexual, orientalist, adventurous, and civilizing desires could be performed entailed the suspension of judgment concerning the Fascist colonial period, whose traumatic end is somatized through the new endeavour in Africa, where to continue the civilizing work. Italian workers still living in Libya, Eritrea, Somalia and, to a lesser extent, Ethiopia are therefore considered agents of resilience: they would help Italians living in the peninsula to recover from the intersecting traumas of the colonial, Fascist, and WWII aftermaths by reclaiming, making productive, and civilizing those sections of Africa that have not yet been Italianized. As a corollary thereof, the human and social landscapes of Africa are suffering not so much because of the colonial exploitation they have been subject to, but for the very end of the Italian colonial presence. This discourse requires a complete denial of Africans' ability to manage their lives by counting on their own abilities. Former subjects are placed in a sturdy dichotomy, according to which they have neither agency nor subjectivity; although the films start to acknowledge that Africans possess certain degree of political agency and dignity, this is all but sincere. The reason for this is that former subjects have a voice only to the extent that they recognize themselves as *subjects* still in need of Italian guidance.

Due to the changing political and international scenario, the films were somewhat 'compelled' to acknowledge the dignity of figures like Emperor Haile Selassie and other African politicians, scholars, and civilians. Nevertheless, the unspoken discourse is always centred on the autistic exaltation of Italians' positive impact in the former colonies, which is now acknowledged by Africans as well. Any struggle for independence or anti-Italian protest is simply obliterated, and the Africans' aspiration to become members of the universal idea of modernity is constructed by making them the spectators of the performance of Italian qualities. This *mise-en-scène*, so reminiscent of colonial propaganda, and the updated rhetoric of the *mise-en-valeur* compose a representation that still organized the former colonial space as if it pertained to Italy (chapter 3). The lexicon started to change, and words like *cooperazione*, *sviluppo*, *indipendenza*, and *crescita economica* slowly breached film narratives, although remaining in the background when compared to *lavoro italiano*, *civilizzazione*, *strade*, and the overarching reference to the *mission civilisatrice*.

The contradictory presence of outdated colonial rhetoric and a new vocabulary to describe the Italian presence in Africa reflected the multifaceted, liminal condition of Italy I have analysed in this thesis, a condition that pertains to the arduous transitions from Fascism to the Republic, from colonialism to post-colonialism, from WWII to the Cold War, from propaganda to apparently free practices of film production. The white noise paradigm that concludes chapter 6 has the bold pretension to condense all the inconsistencies that the films referred to. Incongruous narratives materialized in a soundscape that oscillates between the echoes of the Fascist past, orientalist tunes and tribal percussion setting the location of the films, and mechanical noises as well as symphonic harmonies exalting the *lavoro italiano* in Africa. Hence, the soundscapes made sonically tangible the complex and at times schizophrenic attitude toward the memory of the colonial past, oscillating between the erasure of its most shameful aspects and the use of some of its discourses in order to justify Italy's current and future presence in Africa.

The combination of all audible frequencies creates white noise. This pattern has explained the intermingling of diverse narratives, visual tropes, and discourses, which have had the ability to drown out any contrapuntal and critical reading of the colonial past, which could fade out *tranquillamente*. Moreover, white noise might also refer to the recontextualization of racialized narratives that surreptitiously thrived in post-war cultural products, notwithstanding the formal repeal of previous racial legislation and discourses.²¹ Such an often dissonant discourse about the colonial past and the future presence in Africa materialized in the form of sonic stimuli composed of divergent tones, harmonies, images, and narratives, whose conflation favoured the sedimentation of undisturbed, latently inactive, and even lethargic colonial debris. Such a cacophony of diverse tropes and memories was orchestrated, whether intentionally or not, by the predominant role of the voice-over; the latter harmonized different narratives through an authoritative and omniscient perspective on the artificial reality the films presented the audience with.

The dissection of the process through which the voice-over's spoken words came to life in the footage's scripts has pointed out that the use of several registers, corrections, and handwritten notes epitomizes the attempt to overwhelm the audience with the praise of the colonial past. At the same time, however, the voice-over concealed the distress that

²¹ Gaia Giuliani, *Race, Gender, and Nation in Modern Italy* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), pp. 209–40; Valeria Deplano and Silvana Patriarca, 'Introduction. Nation, "Race", and Racism in Twentieth-Century Italy', *Modern Italy*, 23:4 (2018), 349–53.

an overarching coming to terms with the most brutal sides of the colonial period could have elicited. The dispersed trauma of colonial loss was thereby deferred and exorcised in the heartfelt praise of Italian industriousness. Moreover, and rather peculiarly, Italians and Africans share the same post-traumatic conditions provoked by Italy's withdrawal from the very landscape they had made productive, modern, and civilized. As a side effect, though, this inconsistent recollection engendered a disarticulated grammar of decolonization, which made it extremely difficult to question both colonial crimes and also the more surreptitious occasions in which colonial discourses have been recovered and revitalized (chapter 5).

Inconsistent aesthetic choices reflected Italy's difficult confrontation with its colonial past, whose unquestioned legacies affected the a-grammatic nature of the discourse about decolonization. The need to silence and erase the most shameful and disturbing memories of the colonial past did not preclude looking at the *oltremare* as the repository of the good values typical of Italians. Therefore, more than an amnesic silence caused by the trauma of the loss of the colonies, the cacophonic presence *and* absence of the colonial past do refer to the aphasic inability to find intelligible expressions capable of articulating a thorough criticism of the colonial debris harbouring in post-war Italy. As a result, colonial memory was selectively truncated, edited, and recomposed. The decolonial footage this thesis has dealt with was part of a plethora of political, cultural, and social practices that *actively* contributed to disconnecting Italian society from any form of critical appraisal of, or repentance for, colonial crimes. It therefore corroborated that deliberate amnesty for the crimes committed during the overseas endeavours of Italy, by simultaneously enabling the re-articulation of the discourses underpinning them in a post-colonial context.²²

Concluding a piece of research that has dealt with the genealogies of colonial legacies entails an inherent contradiction concerning the delicate nature of Italian colonial memory, which even nowadays appears unstable, ambiguous, and operating in the subconscious of the nation.²³ The nature of the *ambigui ritorni di memoria* needs to be further expanded

²² Marcia Esparza, 'Impossible Memory and Post-Colonial Silences: A Critical View of the Historical Clarification Commission (CEH) in Guatemala', in *Indigenous Peoples' Access to Justice, Including Truth and Reconciliation Processes*, ed. by Chief Wilton Littlechild and Elsa Stamatopoulos (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), pp. 170–81 (p. 173).

²³ Alessandro Triulzi, 'Displacing the Colonial Event. Hybrid Memories of Postcolonial Italy', *Interventions*, 8:3 (2006), 430–43 (pp. 435–36).

inasmuch as the archive of reticence and misconceptions regarding the legacies of the colonial past is all but inoperative. For instance, on 5 July 2019, the Five Star Movement's Undersecretary for Foreign Affairs Manlio Di Stefano wrote a Facebook post advocating that:

l'Italia può e deve essere protagonista di una nuova stagione di multilateralismo sincero e concreto. Possiamo esserlo perché non abbiamo scheletri nell'armadio, non abbiamo una tradizione coloniale, non abbiamo sganciato bombe su nessuno e non abbiamo messo il cappio al collo di nessuna economia. Siamo l'Italia e siamo italiani, un popolo abituato a farsi rispettare per la qualità delle nostre merci e delle nostre azioni.²⁴

I am confident that not even Giacomo Debenedetti would have conceived such a blatantly pretentious, and utterly untrue, recollection of the colonial past to be used as a commentary for an INCOM film about decolonization. I am likewise positive that Guido Notari would have felt embarrassment in pronouncing those words. The lexicon changes, but the meaning remains the same; Italy has had a positive influence in the world, and neither violence nor usurpation could be associated with the Italians' belongings, whose innate predisposition is, instead, 'la qualità [...] delle nostre azioni'. Room for hope has materialized in the thousands of comments warmly inviting the Undersecretary to study history at the very least — just to remain within the domain of the politically correct. His answer raised even more eyebrows:

Leggo i soliti commenti di chi è tanto accecato dall'ottusità da non distinguere tra 'episodi' e 'tradizione' coloniale. Abbiamo una tradizione coloniale? Cioè siamo come Francia e GB?

Leaving aside the complete theoretical, historical, and methodological sloppiness of the Undersecretary's argumentation, the *risentimento* toward France and the United Kingdom and the accusation of their implicitly negative colonial tradition, as opposed to that of Italy, are discourses entirely consistent with the themes this piece of research has dealt with. *DecolonItaly* is therefore to be conceived as a critical endeavour able to further intercept the genealogy of these misconceptions, their sedimentation in the national subconscious,

²⁴ <<https://www.facebook.com/ManlioDiStefano/posts/2593496807375096>> [accessed 29 July 2019].

and their recontextualization in diverse periods and contexts of modern and contemporary Italy.

This doctoral thesis has proposed an analytical and methodological framework addressing only a section of the *ambigui ritorni di memoria*, more specifically dealing with visual discourses and political information. As such, it is intrinsically open to further contributions aiming to put the current analysis in dialogue with other research about Italian post-war culture and decolonization. In addition to a similar synchronic conversation with other works on the troubled transition from Fascism to the Republic, a diachronic perspective would improve the critical impact of this thesis; a more systematic confrontation with previous and subsequent research about the Italian presence in Eritrea, Libya, Somalia, and Ethiopia could open up new perspectives capable of challenging the a-grammatic and uncritical recollection of Italy's colonial past.

Naturally, a further development of this work depends on the availability of new archival findings, which might give insight into production practices and the active silencing of one of the most shameful pages of Italian history. Moreover, the recent attention to audience practices and distribution in Italian film studies may undoubtedly contribute to shedding an innovative light on the moment in which Italian viewers constructed meanings about what they saw on screen.²⁵ Another important dialogue could be established with scholars working on the film cultures of those countries upon which Italy wanted to reimpose its hegemonic control. In so doing, different perspectives offered to us by formerly colonized countries may enrich our understanding of post-colonial film cultures and societies both in Europe and in Africa.²⁶

The scholarly development of *DecolonItaly* goes hand in hand with the multifaceted and critical engagement of scholars, activists, artists, and practitioners aiming to map the occasions in which the spectres of the colonial past resurface in Italy's

²⁵ *Rural Cinema Exhibition and Audiences in a Global Context*, ed. by Daniela Treveri Gennari, Danielle Hipkins, Catherine O'Rawe (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018); <<https://italiancinemaaudiences.org>> [accessed 29 July 2019]; Maria Grazia Franchi and Damiano Garofalo (eds), 'Storia e storie delle audience in era globale' (Special Issue), *Cinema e Storia*, 7:1 (2018); see the AHRC-funded research project based at the University of Warwick 'Producers and Production Practices in the History of Italian Cinema, 1949-1975' <https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/film/research/current/italian_producers_project/> [accessed 29 July 2019].

²⁶ *The Colonial Documentary Film in South and South-East Asia*, ed. by Ian Aitken and Camille Deprez (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017); *Cine-Ethiopia: The History and Politics of Film in the Horn of Africa*, ed. by Michael W. Thomas, Alessandro Jedlowski, and Aboneh Ashagrie (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2018).

contemporary debates, society, and culture.²⁷ The results of this thesis are therefore intrinsically open to further academic, artistic, and social contributions aiming to dissect and archaeologically track down the unintelligible debris of empires that are present in contemporary culture, and in economic and political frameworks. This does not imply that we must exchange methodological and critical meticulousness for ethical and social engagement. Rather, the more critical and historiographical tools are sharpened, the less colonial debris may find legitimation in the fluid and incessant reimagination of national belonging and identities, especially in light of the intolerant and extremist discourses that are dangerously resurging in our contemporary societies.

²⁷ The use of the Twitter hashtag [#decolonitaly](#) has accompanied the development of this doctoral research, and will further expand its critical engagement and the overall impact of its academic outcomes, see https://twitter.com/search?q=%23decolonitaly&src=typed_query&f=live [accessed 30 July 2019].

Appendix: Archival Documents

ARCHIVIO AUDIOVISIVO DEL MOVIMENTO OPERAIO E DEMOCRATICO (AAMOD, ROME)

Group 'Attività Istituzionale Esterna - Attività Progettuali - Progetti 1'

Box 16, folder 'Le cineattualità realizzate dalle sinistre nell'Italia del dopoguerra. Vol. + videointervista di Stefano Masi'

ARCHIVIO CENTRALE DELLO STATO (ACS, ROME)

Group 'MINCULPOP'

Box 9, folder 50 'Istituto LUCE'

Group 'Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri' (PCM) 1944–47

Box 3412, folder 3.1.10, file 57338 'società INCOM (Industria film corto metraggio)'

Group 'Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri' (PCM) 1948–50

Box 3569, folder 1.1.2, file 10949

Group 'Ministero Africa Italiana'

Box 67 'Rapporti con la stampa italiana ed estera 1945-1967', folder 4 'Stampa italiana e film. Sovvenzioni varie'

Box 67 'Rapporti con la stampa italiana ed estera 1945-1967', folder 41/2 'Stampa italiana'

Box 67 'Rapporti con la stampa italiana ed estera 1945-1967', folder 41/9 'Propaganda Cinematografica'

ARCHIVIO STORICO ISTITUTO LUIGI STURZO. ARCHIVIO GIULIO ANDREOTTI (ASILS-AGA, ROME)

Group 'Cinema'

Box 1070, folder 1.2, file 'Legge 1949'

Box 1071, folder 5.5, file 'Nuova legge documentari e cortometraggi'

Box 1074, folder 3.3, file 'Luce, vicende anni 50 – 60 – 70 – 80'

ARCHIVIO STORICO DELL'ISTITUTO LUCE (ASL, ROME)

Group 'Testi Cinegiornali INCOM 1947- '

ARCHIVIO STORICO-DIPLOMATICO DEL MINISTERO DEGLI AFFARI ESTERI (MAE, ROME)

Group 'Affari Politici 1946-1950'

Box 80 'Italia / Ex-possedimenti', folder 1 'Stampa e propaganda sulla questione coloniale'

Box 92 'Italia / Ex-possedimenti', folder 2 'Stampa e propaganda'

Box 104 'Italia / Ex-possedimenti', folder 3 'Stampa e servizi radiotelegrafici'

OTHER ARCHIVES AND LIBRARIES CONSULTED¹

AFCB – Archivio Film Cineteca di Bologna

ASMC – Archivio Storico Museo del Cinema. Biblioteca Mario Gromo (Turin)

CSC – Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia. Biblioteca 'Luigi Chiarini' (Rome)

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