

Roundtable on Visuality, Race and Nationhood in Italy

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Abstract. This Roundtable on Visuality, Race and Nationhood in Italy brings together scholars from the arts, humanities and social sciences to discuss historical constructions of Italian whiteness and national identity in relation to the current xenophobic discourse on race and migration, stressing their rootedness in as yet unchallenged modern notions of scientific racism. Building on postcolonial historian and anthropologist Ann Laura Stoler's definition of the colonial archive as a 'site of knowledge production' and a 'repository of codified beliefs' in *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (2009: 97), the discussants conceive the archive as a multi-layered, collective repository of aspiration, dominance, desire, self-aggrandizement and fear through which the development of society's self-image can be revealed but also – through a systematic and critical approach to the (visual) archive of coloniality – contested. Based on the analysis of visual cultures (photographs, news footage, advertisements, propaganda, fiction film, etc.) the Roundtable addresses and connects wide-ranging issues such as: the gaze from above and below in colonial-era ethnographic film; the depiction of migration in the Far Right's rhetoric; representations of fears and fetishisms towards Others in Federico Fellini's work; and the exploitation of the colonial past in the Italy–Libya Bilateral Agreements on migration. The Roundtable was organized in response to the surge in xenophobic violence sparked by the Italian Parliamentary elections of March 2018 and to mark the publication of Gaia Giuliani's monograph *Race, Nation, and Gender in Modern Italy: Intersectional Representations in Visual Culture* (2018).

Keywords. colonial archives • coloniality • Fascism • migration • national identity • scientific racism • visuality • whiteness

Gaia Giuliani (GG): This collective contribution aims to interrogate the reasons why racism in Italy is so easily concealed and still commonly accepted and reproduced. We wish to contribute to an analysis of the mutual action of invisibilization and hypervisibilization in the hegemonic discourse on racialized Others, which reproduces whiteness as a norm in a self-portrayed 'homogeneously' white country.

The purpose of this Roundtable discussion¹ is to investigate racism in post-Fascist Italy as a rearticulation of its colonial archive – deployed both against internal racialized ‘Others’ within the national borders and in the overseas colonies – as well as its impact on perceptions and constructions of (racist) identity politics.² In line with postcolonial historian and anthropologist Ann Laura Stoler’s (2002: 97) definition, by colonial archive, we mean a ‘site of knowledge production’ and ‘a repository of codified beliefs’. This archive can be read along with the cultural archive of the Western Imperial states, which Afro-Surinamese Dutch educator Gloria Wekker (2016: 2) described as ‘the memories, the knowledge, and affect with regard to race that were deposited within metropolitan populations, and the power relations embedded within them’. The conflation of these locally and transnationally constructed archives, which produce different knowledge according to the reader, the time in history, the social contexts and the power relations they serve, constitutes the visual archive of coloniality. These archives hold the symbolic material forming what I have called ‘figures of race’ (Giuliani, 2018a) and act as a lens through which events, societies and situations are hegemonically and racially interpreted in colonial and postcolonial times. By ‘figures of race’, I mean images that sediment transnationally over time and crystallize some of the meanings assigned to bodies – which are gendered and racialized in colonial and postcolonial contexts.

Today’s ‘threats’ to national homogeneity and to an apparent, discursively constructed racial consistency (even if, or precisely because, such homogeneity has always been very hard to establish) are ascribed to clearly defined racialized Others. The construction of the racialized Other serves a twofold purpose: to discursively discriminate or justify exploitation and differential inclusion and to provide a contrast against which the idea of whiteness is constructed as a normative charge that structures, sanctions and gives substance to the racialized social hierarchy that is variously reproduced in what is a very dis-homogeneous Italian society.

Along with many Italian and international scholars, the German-born, Italian-based Renate Siebert (2010: 3) has noted that ‘in many European countries [Italy included], the word “race” – after its positivist scientific legitimization in the 19th century and its criminal use by the Nazi-Fascist regimes of the 20th century – has become a sort of taboo.’ Today’s racism has been culturally and politically ‘cleansed’ of its immediate references to inherited biophysical or genetic abilities/inabilities linked to racial belonging. It is instead ‘openly non-anti-Semitic and exempt from manifest fascist reminiscences’ (Siebert, 2010: 3), a stratagem that has contributed to making it popular but at the same time ferociously anti-Muslim and against immigrants.

The attention given to cultural texts by all contributors to this Roundtable discussion is driven by the idea that racist content has moved and still

oscillates in Italy across the multiple spheres of public and private life, and a number of different media. To stress the cultural nature of racism – its need for ‘figurations’ and discursive constructs, and their interplay with biophysical features through human interpretations – means here to forsake claims to post-racialness for the time being. It means acknowledging the capacity of racism to reproduce itself in culture, even when the purpose of the text in which it gets reproduced is not immediately racist. It means acknowledging the institutional character of the cultural reproduction of racism and the role played by cultural habits and institutions claiming white privilege and (hetero) patriarchy as the (racialized and gendered) interlocking systems of power underlying Italian society.

The argument advocated here is that colonial memory has been neither erased nor suspended but is ‘elliptically present’ (Ellena, 2015) and productive, albeit ‘cleansed’ of the most violent and disturbing experiences and overtly inferiorizing language. A contrapuntal reading of these historically and culturally uneven uses of the Other’s image permits their deconstruction – connecting constructions of gender and race in visual discourses, social practices and biopolitics, while tracing the genealogy of their mutual intertwining and productivity in specific time–space frames. This deconstruction allows us to grasp the rearticulation of those ‘figures of race’ stemming from the Italian and international colonial archives that today structure Italians’ racist imaginary.

Last but not least, it is worth noting that there is a fascinating emerging discourse around ‘Black Italian-ness’, part of a broader ongoing conversation about Black European-ness and Afropean Culture (Di Maio, 2012; Hawthorne, 2017; Hine et al., 2009; Petrovich Njegosh, 2012; Wright, 2015). Such a discussion is interested in critically uncovering the modalities through which whiteness has been discursively constructed as the hegemonic trait of Italian national identity (Giuliani, 2018a; Giuliani and Lombardi-Diop, 2013). In addition to these debates, we should also point out the important contribution of artists and scholars of Romani, Asian, South American and Eastern European (especially Balkan) origin that have enabled the rethinking of Italian national identity from a decentralized position. We are here discussing representations and presentations of Blackness in Italy and its former colonies, and the troubling ways such visual rendering resonates, both historically and in the present. That said, it strikes us as important to acknowledge this ongoing debate and to contribute in its effort to dismantle the very ways in which Italy has racialized and still racializes some members of its society through a vast array of political, bio-political, social and cultural practices (Ahmed, 2002; Portelli, 2003; Pesarini, 2017). To do so, our work presupposes a self-reflexive acknowledgment of our positionality as researchers working on such crucial issues, which aims to give a stronger political as well as ethical stance to the critical reading of Italian visual culture with which we are dealing. Therefore, our contribution wants to collectively deconstruct the racial and colonial

gazes through which Italy has been looking at itself as a homogeneously and consistently white entity (Lombardi-Diop and Romeo, 2012), in order to rethink critically both the past and the future of the nation, and Europe as a whole.

Gianmarco Mancosu (GM): My contribution explores the visual archive of Fascist colonialism by specifically asking how the Fascist long-term interest in the conquest of Ethiopia featured in non-fiction films that sprouted in Italy between the mid-20s and late 30s. The notion of the archive of coloniality is pivotal to address how images functioned within Fascist Imperial discourses. The archive is not a mere and static storage of documents. Rather, it is an ever-changing system of discursivity that establishes what can be said or *seen* in a given context, and the extent to which specific meanings can stem from a given image (Foster, 1988; Foucault, 1989; Jay, 1993). Accordingly, the visual archive of coloniality, as already mentioned by Gaia, is a transimperial 'site of knowledge production ... a repository of codified beliefs' (Stoler, 2002: 97, 2009) which stores 'the memories, the knowledge, and affect with regard to race that were deposited within metropolitan populations' (Wekker, 2016: 19).³ Against this backdrop, this critical perspective potentially tackles not simply the genealogy of a given visual representation, but also the endless ways in which it can be re-used and re-signified according to different historical contexts or political stances.

Italian Fascism used and adapted such a transimperial visual archive according to its political agenda. The documentary *Aethiopia* 1924, a state-backed reportage about the expedition of the journalist Guelfo Civinini in the Horn of Africa, is one of the earliest examples of this adaptation. As evident in this still (Figure 1), the film uses an ethnographic point of view to describe Ethiopian (and, by extension, all African) people whilst acknowledging a certain dignity to Ethiopian history. *Aethiopia* hence conveys 'exoticism' and portrays a land that is 'dangerous' but attractive at the same time. In so doing, it satisfied a call for 'primitivist' entertainment – well spread in Europe, including in Italy – rather than to envision the brutality of the Fascist colonial impetus, which would characterize the wars in Libya (1931) and in Ethiopia (1935).

Fascist colonial ambitions climaxed with the invasion of Ethiopia and the declaration of the Empire in May 1936 (Labanca, 2002). The two following stills extracted from footage produced by the Istituto Luce (the state institution for film propaganda) exemplify the main characteristics of Fascist visual discourses concerning the Empire. The first of these stills (Figure 2) conveys complete disrespect towards African culture and people through the camera's exaggeration of 'primitive' traits obtained by zooming in on naked or unhealthy bodies for whom any dignity is denied (Polezzi, 2008).



Figure 1. Guelfo Civinini, *Aethiopia* 1924. Documentari SIC (Cinematographic Education Syndicate's Documentaries). Film still. © Istituto Luce Cinecittà srl. Reproduced with permission.

Simultaneously, as is evidenced by the second of these stills (Figure 3), the exaltation of the Italian technical and military technology helped both to portray the 'civilizing' mission to 'redeem' Ethiopians' bodies, and to metaphorically dominate any spot of the Ethiopian landscape. The massive use of aerial pictures and footage foregrounds the role of the technological gaze in dominating the colonial landscape (Caprotti, 2008; Mancosu, 2015). The representations of such a disembodied and absolute power visualizing 'from the above' goes hand in hand with the physical disappearance from the battlefield of the Ethiopian soldiers who fought against Italy.

These two stills seem apparently contradictory: the first one features a zooming into the naked, eroticized and 'animalized' African bodies whereas the other one is a wide-angle aerial shot on a *terra nullius*-style landscape. However, there is a subtle silver thread connecting them in so far as they both place the Italian viewer in an elevated position, a higher perspective than the African subjects (whether looking down on their bodies, or from the air over the landscape). The perspective on the conquest rises up from the ground level of the battlefield, where power was traditionally legitimated through physical conflict, to impersonal air warfare, which stands for a panoptical



Figure 2. Arturo Gemmiti, *L'addestramento degli indigeni e il loro inquadramento nei reparti italiani* (The training of the natives and their classification in Italian departments), LUCE Newsreel B0855, March 1936. Film still. © Istituto Luce Cinecittà srl. Reproduced with permission.

and total power able to exert the *droit de glaive* – to sentence to death those who challenged the process of fascistization (Jay, 1993; Mirzoeff, 2015). Such gazes ‘from the above’ had to convey the spiritual, cultural and racial superiority of the Italian invaders, which in other Luce films is also supposedly acknowledged by Ethiopians themselves. At the same time, they visualize the extreme punishment for the opponents: their physical disappearing. The camera gaze makes the judgement; it is the very tool that balances the utopic Fascist universalism and the tangible segregation and violence that were implemented during the Empire.

The unstable relationship between patronizing gazes, domination, and abjection characterizes the Fascist Imperial footage – and the three stills analysed here reflect different needs and phases. Those images fed the Fascist archive of colonial visuality, in which different and even contrasting visions coexisted and visual meanings were juxtaposed and overlapped (Jay and Ramaswamy, 2014; Landau and Kaspin, 2002; Shohat and Stam, 1994). Such



Figure 3. Arturo Gemmiti, *La visita del sottosegretario generale Valle sul fronte eritreo* (The visit of the undersecretary general Valle on the Eritrean). LUCE Newsreel B0822, January 1936. Film still. © Istituto Luce Cinecittà srl. Reproduced with permission.

a complex coexistence of visual discourses did not terminate with the end of Fascist colonialism. On the one hand, such discourses permeated the very ways in which Italians imagined themselves and their role in the world well beyond the Fascist dictatorship (Baratieri, 2010; Pinkus, 2003; Zinni, 2016). On the other hand, it is nowadays providing the starting point from which unproblematic and self-exculpatory narratives about the most brutal sides of Italian history and identity can be questioned (O’Healy, 2014; Mancosu, 2018).⁴ Because of this, a deconstruction of the visual archive of coloniality is pivotal to revise not simply the national memory, but also the genealogy of contemporary racist discourses which are resurging today in Italy as well as across Europe more generally.

Linde Luijnenburg (LL): My focus is on a specific example of collective memories and its accompanying visual archives that challenge Imperial, racializing gazes (here we can think again of Ann Laura Stoler’s definition of the colonial archive as already mentioned by Gaia and Gianmarco). Jacques

Derrida argues in *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (Derrida and Prenowitz, 1995: 9) that the meaning of 'archive' comes from the Greek *arkheion*: 'initially a house, a domicile, an address, the residence of the superior magistrates, the *archons*, those who commanded'. In the context of Italian cinema, Federico Fellini could be considered *the* authority, the *archon*, the one who commanded in Studio 5 and outside, dictating a film language, the *fellinesque*, which continues to dominate (inter)national film critics' and many scholars' idioms – for instance, Italian 'star director' Paolo Sorrentino's cinematographic language is continuously compared to the *fellinesque*. Fellini's cinema as such is fixed in the collective (cinematographic) memory of the imagined community of 'Italy'. Here, I revisit the cinema of this commanding figure to offer a re-reading of his well-known and well-researched cinema in order to recognize his awareness of the postcolonial, or his 'uneasiness' with it. While doing so potentially opens me up (in my eyes, falsely) to accusations of *hineininterpretieren*, my hope is that reading a (filmic) text from this angle will allow Fellini's unacknowledged awareness and unease to surface. Since white Italian characters' fears and fetishisms towards their Others are in Fellini's films portrayed with a grotesque undertone as described by Roberto de Gaetano (1999: 7–8), these films invite viewers to laugh at characters who frame Others as outsiders. Those characters are without exception *italiani medi*, namely, (stereo)typically *Italian* characters. Through an analysis of specific frames in *Lo sceicco bianco* (*The White Sheik*, 1952) I intend to illustrate that the Italian 'selves' portrayed in this film strongly rely on their fictive, cartoonish imaginary as Orientalized or 'blacked up' to distinguish between them and this Other, creating what Sara Ahmed (2000: 3) characterizes as 'stranger fetishism', projecting their fears of not belonging onto these 'strangers'. In using the word projection, I refer to Freud's definition by which 'an internal perception is suppressed and, instead, its content, after undergoing a certain kind of distortion, enters consciousness in the form of an external perception' (Freud, 1991 [1911]: 204).

The conceptual (and comical) nature of this mechanism of projection is underlined in *Lo sceicco bianco* by way of 'Italian characters' who, as I've noted, observe characters they perceive as 'Others' as though the latter were cartoon characters. As such, Fellini suggests that the 'externalization' of Blackness onto the African colonies during Fascism to accomplish the 'whitening' of Italians as Gaia (Giuliani, 2018a) describes in her book, continues in the post-World War II Italian reality, while this mechanism is itself ridiculed through the comedic approach of the grotesque.

The network of many revealing frames in *Lo sceicco bianco* illustrates the complex constructs of *italianità* (Italianness) and its Others in the specific context during which this film was produced – and the cartoonish–grotesque reality that follows a lack of insight into the constructive nature of these notions. The film portrays Black and Orientalized outsider characters primarily when both the validity of projecting a sense of Otherness by Italian

characters, and the need for an Other in order to belong, is questioned and ridiculed. The arbitrariness of these projections is emphasized, as all of them can easily belong or differ by means of a costume change – as we can see in the character of the White Sheik, interpreted by Italian star Alberto Sordi, who changes into an *italiano medio* as soon as he changes clothes (Figure 4). As such, the film plot and its visual components denaturalize the seemingly fixed Italian identity (typical for the *commedia all'italiana*) and resonate with scholar of Black European Studies Shelleen Greene's (2012: 265) description of the anxiety stemming from the 'peripheral' status of Italy in the context of the (re)construction of the post-World War II Western World. The protagonists' obsessive need to come across as white further testifies to this. The film thus illustrates the anxiety surrounding the complex notion of 'belonging', referring to the specific Italian context of the loss of the war and the uncertainty of any sense of a collective identity thereafter.

The dominant historical narrative of 'Italy' is not devoid of Black subjects – Alessandro dei Medici, Othello, Black *burattini*, Black saints (predominantly in Sardinia and Sicily) and, more recently, the rise in the visibility and thus importance of African-American soldiers in Italian films about World War II, Black politicians, athletes and artists have been part of, and are currently shaping, the narrative of 'Italy' (cf. Giuliani, 2015; Greene, 2012; Scoza Barcellona, 2008; Valeri, 2006). However, as we will see in Marianna's presentation, political discourse and certain specific policies, journalistic language and priorities, and isolated but striking incidents of violence and exclusion indicate that significant sectors of the Italian population seem to ignore this, and seem to have forgotten that they themselves have long been a migrant people, both internally, as a consequence of the *boom economico* of the 1950s and 1960s, and abroad, during the beginning of the last century when large groups of Italians moved to the US. A re-reading of this *auteur* cinema, which has become part of the imagined community of Italy, invites us to reconsider this seemingly fixed part of the collective identity, and cultural archive, of *italianità* as exclusively male, white, and 'understood'.

Alessandra Ferrini (AF): Building on the previous contributions, I aim to further the conversation by introducing my ongoing work on the production of a medium-length essay film, *Gaddafi in Rome: A Screenplay* (part of a wider, practice-based PhD research project) and to create a connection between the past and the present. In this work (see Figure 5), I expand on my earlier research on the legacy of the Italian colonial project and of its visual and narrative registers, which was specifically questioning the way these issues have shaped the current debate (or lack thereof) around the colonial past as well as Italy's relation with, and political responsibilities towards, the African continent.

Gaddafi in Rome is based on a collection of real-time news updates published and archived online by the popular Italian newspaper *La Repubblica*.



Figure 4. Federico Fellini, *Lo Sceicco Bianco*, 1952, starring Alberto Sordi. Film poster. © De Agostini Picture Library. Reproduced courtesy of Alinari Archive.

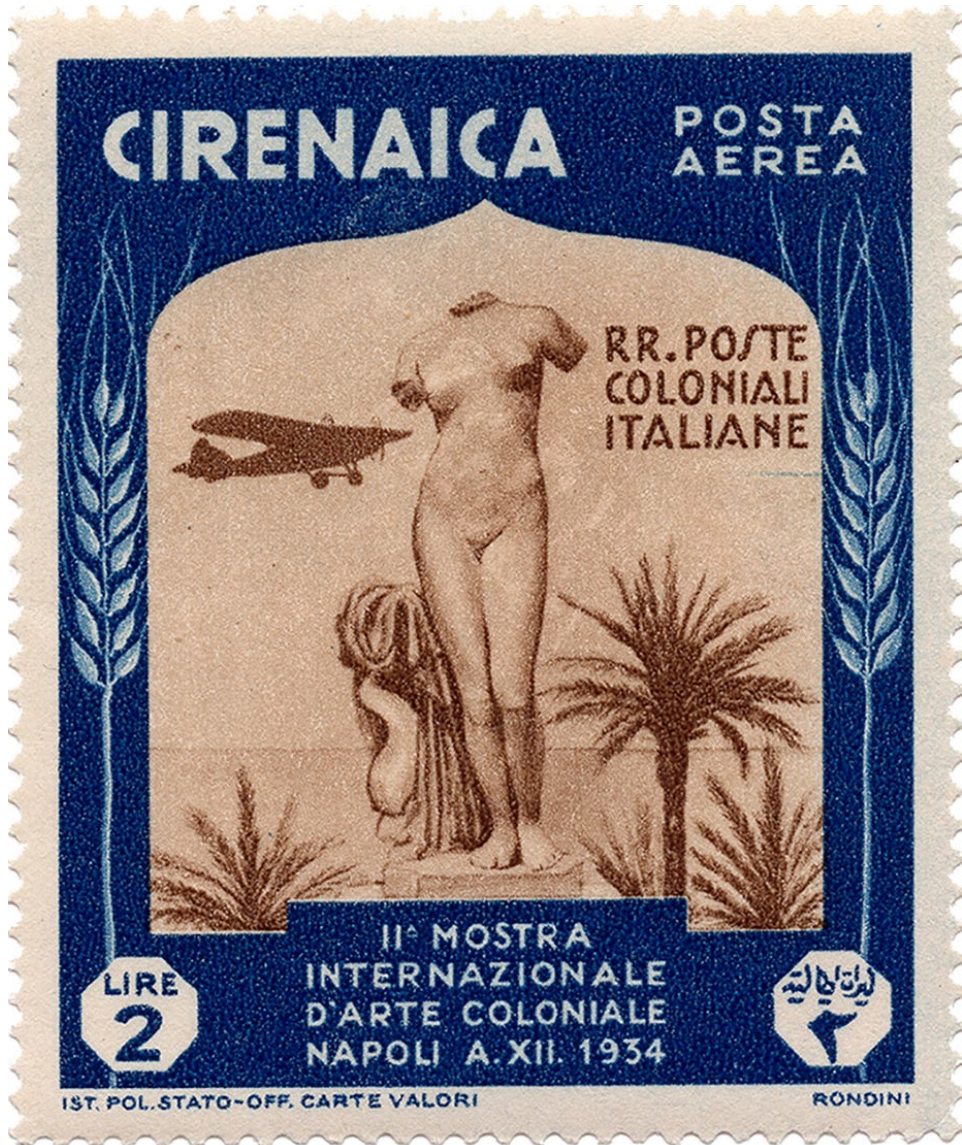
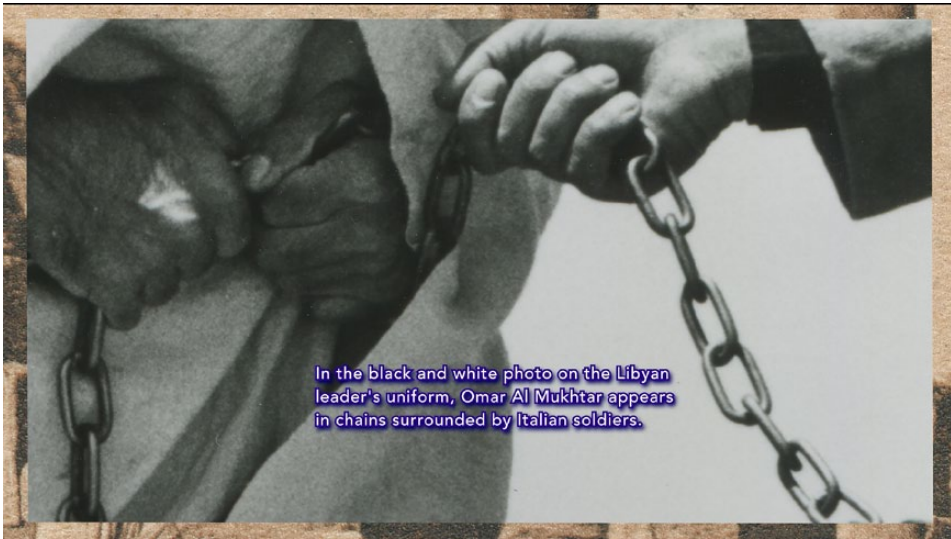


Figure 5. Alessandra Ferrini, *Gaddafi in Rome: A Screenplay*, 2018–ongoing. Video still. Featuring an Italian stamp from the Cyrenaica province (Libya), commemorating the 2nd International Oversea Art Exhibition in Naples, 1934. Reproduced courtesy of the artist.

Appearing as a detailed chronicle, this newsfeed was produced during the 2009 meeting between former Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi and former Libyan autocrat Muammar Gaddafi in Rome. This state visit was intended as a celebration of the Italy–Libya Treaty of Friendship, stipulated in 2008. It followed Berlusconi’s reparations for the Italian occupation of



In the black and white photo on the Libyan leader's uniform, Omar Al Mukhtar appears in chains surrounded by Italian soldiers.

Figure 6. Alessandra Ferrini, *Gaddafi in Rome: A Screenplay*, 2018–ongoing. Video still. Reproduced courtesy of the artist.

Libya (1911–1943), which included the repatriation of the Venus of Cyrene, a Roman statue that was unearthed in Libya by the Italians in 1913. As the Italo-Turkish war of 1911–1912 that resulted in the occupation of Libya was greatly supported by a propaganda based on the notion of *romanity* – namely the suggestion that Italian identity and national cohesion would be found in the resurrection of the Roman Empire – the fortuitous find of the Venus came to incarnate the belief in *the right-to-the-land*. The politics of regret performed by Berlusconi, however, hid an ulterior motive, as they were intended as a form of exchange.

Indeed, while in Rome, the two leaders signed the Bilateral Agreements on the control of migration across the Mediterranean and on fuel trade. This accord has led to the return of migrants heading to Europe back to Libya, forcefully, where they are imprisoned in detention camps, violating human rights. As a result, what the Treaty of Friendship did, ultimately, was to allow Italy, once again, to draw Libya's borders, turning this country, at least symbolically, into Italy's *fourth shore*, to borrow from Benito Mussolini's rhetoric. Libya's commitment to contain the migration flux means that the border between the two countries – but also between Europe and Africa – has been de facto set and inscribed onto the Libyan coast. Colonel Gaddafi, however, stirred controversy and protests as he arrived in Rome with a picture pinned to his chest, a portrayal of the Libyan anti-colonial leader Omar al-Mukhtar, in chains, taken days before he was executed by Mussolini's army in 1931 (see Figure 6). Yet, the image was not immediately recognized and its contents were not fully acknowledged. What was registered as an offence was Gaddafi's



Figure 7. Alessandra Ferrini, *Gaddafi in Rome: A Screenplay*, 2018–ongoing. Video still. Reproduced courtesy of the artist.

audacity in wearing an uncomfortable image – whatever its actual meaning – since it was perceived as a mockery. The colonial violence implied by the photograph, nevertheless, was never discussed during the meeting. The past seemed to amount only to a transaction: a nation's trauma could, for the Italians, be erased for the right price.

Gaddafi in Rome: A Screenplay takes this incident as a starting point to unravel the controversial history that these two countries share while reflecting on the way the colonial past was used as a bargaining chip by Berlusconi and Gaddafi. Indeed, as Alessandro Triulzi wrote in 2006:

Colonial memory in Italy may be described as a sort of 'pendulum' oscillating between an all-out desire to forget and the nostalgic recollection of a past which is selectively remembered and re-enacted to suit Italy's new role in the postcolonial age. Given its oscillating nature, colonial memory and its renewed positioning are like back-up files which can be accessed according to convenience or factuality. (p. 430)

When completed, *Gaddafi in Rome* will comprise archival images, found footage, onscreen text and a voiceover, in order to dissect the memory of this event and the way it was reported (see Figure 7). Exploring notions of acceleration, fragmentation and synthesis typical of real-time news in the montage, the film will turn the online newsfeed (published and archived online by *La Repubblica*) into a film script. By doing so, it will attempt to shed light on the temporal structure and afterlife of real-time news in order to understand

how, as documents of the present, they affect the way historical knowledge is produced and experienced.

In order to highlight the performative character of the meeting, *Gaddafi in Rome: A Screenplay* will be based on the format and language of a screenplay (as the title suggests) and will be structured in three 'acts' – one for each day of the meeting – and three, intertwined, 'counteracts'. The former will focus on testing the newsfeed, and the latter will offer a space to contextualize and fill gaps in both information (the deficit implicit in real-time news updates as a result of their distilled nature) and historical knowledge (the general lack of awareness about the colonial past that pervades Italian society). Through the use of a reflexive voiceover, the 'counteracts' aim to disrupt this aptitude for disavowal by drawing a clear link between Italy's (former) colonial and (current) neo-colonial interests in Libya. In this way, I wish to reflect on the notion of accountability vis-à-vis a history of trauma, exploitation and repression, as well as the impact of the necropolitics at the core of the ongoing racialization of the Mediterranean border.⁵

Marianna Griffini (MG): In keeping with Alessandra's focus on contemporary media and politics, and drawing on Gaia's reflections, I am going to present my current research on the relationship between xenophobia and colonial memory in the discourse of two Italian Far-Right parties, Lega and Fratelli d'Italia.⁶ A 2009 Lega manifesto portrays a stereotypical native American next to the slogan: 'They underwent immigration. Now they live in reservation camps!' (Figure 8), which implicitly draws a parallel between Italians, apparently victims of contemporary immigration, and the natives of America, who were the victims of European colonialism, termed here as 'immigration'. This manifesto is not just a strategy to attract voters by appealing to a sense of danger triggered by immigration, but also encapsulates well the colonial echoes constellating the Italian Far Right's discourse on immigration in the past two years, when immigrant arrivals in Italy peaked. Regrettably, the relationship between the Italian Far Right's xenophobia and colonial memory has been understudied, while scholarly attention has been devoted to the link between racism and colonial memory in Italian culture. Therefore, this research, deploying semi-structured interviews with the Italian Far Right's representatives, aims at filling the gap in the literature investigating how the Italian Far Right's discourse on immigration is linked to a sugar-coated selective memory of Italian colonialism, purged of its negative components.

Against the recent backdrop of the terminological, taxonomical and definitional chaos affecting the study of the Far Right, in my research I privilege the label 'Far Right' over inaccurate competing labels such as 'Radical Right', 'Neofascism', or 'Populism'.⁷ Such labels shed light only on some ideological elements of the parties analysed in this research, such as the critique of democracy, the

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Figure 8. Lega, political campaign poster, 2009. © Lega Nord. Reproduced with permission.

ambivalence to Fascism and the attack on the elites, and may refer also to completely different political actors, like right-wing terrorism, novel fascist movements, and centre and left populism. Instead, 'Far Right' is for me an umbrella term capturing unambiguously the multifaceted ideology of the parties taking part, which include parties characterized by an ambivalent relationship with Fascism, and, using Mudde's (1995) seminal definition of the Far Right, a call for a strong state, populism, nationalism and xenophobia. Currently, two political parties with representatives in Parliament are identified today within the Italian Far Right: Lega and Fratelli d'Italia. Indeed, both parties call for a firm state authority against the perceived impending social and political decay, appeal to 'the people' (as 'pure') as opposed to the 'corrupt' political elite, while criticizing the current liberal democracy, promote a predominantly ethnic Italian national identity, and frame the immigrant in Manichean terms as a threatening Other. Moreover, both parties have not completely distanced themselves from Fascism.

The analysis of the Italian Far Right's xenophobic discourse on immigration builds on the literature on postcolonialism (see, for instance, Andall and Duncan, 2005, Giuliani, 2018a; Ponzanesi, 2005), which illuminates the persistence of colonial rhetoric in the Italian cultural discourse on the immigrant Other. In fact, the current Italian Far Right articulates discursive representations of immigrants drenched in colonial rhetoric: the topoi of Othering, criminalization, inferiorization and abjectification of the colonized Other resurface in the service of the contemporary Italian Far Right's xenophobia. Indeed, as indicated by the interviews I have conducted, first, immigrants are framed as inherently Other, since they allegedly pose a threat to Italian national identity and trigger a sense of alienation among Italians. Second, immigrants are represented as intrinsically criminal, as they are associated with prostitution, rape, drug-smuggling, thefts, and the alleged Muslim holy war against the West. Third, immigrants are portrayed as inferior by nature because they are seemingly lazier than Italians and disregard human rights, especially women's rights. Fourth, immigrants are depicted as essentially abject since they are linked to the diffusion of illnesses once eradicated, such as tuberculosis and scabies. These xenophobic representations of immigrants by the current Italian Far Right echoing colonial rhetoric are grounded in a distortedly affirmative memory of colonialism, which, as emerged in the interviews, praises the positive aspects of the Italian colonial past, such as the purported spread of infrastructures, civilization and moral values, but ignores the negative elements of it, such as crimes in countries colonized and against colonized peoples. This selective memory, foreclosing the possibility of a critical appraisal of Italian colonialism, manifests itself also through the Italian Far Right's refusal to acknowledge the destructive legacy of colonialism on the immigrants' countries of origin and its function as a 'push factor' for immigration. Indeed, the Italian Far Right xenophobically denies that colonialism has any role in the political and economic instability plaguing the

immigrants' countries of origin, the blame for which is placed squarely on the country's own citizens.

Therefore, the Italian Far Right's whitewashed memory of the colonial past selects only positive reminiscences and erases negative ones, such as crimes in countries colonized and against colonized peoples, which, as the interviews show, are not celebrated per se by the Italian Far Right as successful events to repeat in the current situation against immigrants, but simply go unacknowledged. So, despite colonialism remaining an underexplored topic in the Italian political arena, a sugar-coated selective memory of the Italian colonial past resurfaces nowadays in the Italian Far Right's xenophobic discourse on immigration, demonstrating that the Italian Far Right lacks an accurate and critical appraisal of the Italian colonial past. This selective memory affirms a particularly positive version of the Italian colonial past, dominated by the self-redeeming myth of *Italiani brava gente*, idealizing Italian colonizers as particularly soft and benevolent (Del Boca, 1992), and immune to racism. Overall, this research, innovatively drawing on semi-structured interviews with the current Italian Far Right, shows that the Italian Far Right's selective memory of Italian colonialism is reflected in these parties' reiteration of colonial rhetoric in their xenophobic discourse on immigration and in their refusal to acknowledge the relationship between the destructive legacy of colonialism and immigration. Within a context of the escalating Italian Far Right's anti-immigrant xenophobia, this research signals the need for the Italian Far Right to come to terms with its colonial past, thus abandoning colonial rhetoric vis-à-vis immigrants and recognizing the devastating impact of colonialism on the immigrants' countries of origin.

GG: Thank you very much. Charles, perhaps you would like to start by responding to the presentations.

Charles Burdett (CB): I think there is a strong sense of connection throughout all of these talks. I was particularly struck by the recurrence of the idea of the archive and its use as a theoretical framework. In particular, there is a connection between the presentations regarding the ambivalence of the notion of the archive. At some point, the archive presents itself as an objective point of reference since it can provide factual information for events of the past. Nevertheless, the deconstructive work that the contributors do to dismantle its status of objectivity enables it to be seen as a collective repository of aspiration, dominance, desire, self-aggrandizement and, indeed, fear. What the presentations do is thus humanize the sense of the archive so that it is not a hypostasis but a human creation. As far as this critical standpoint is concerned, questioning the status of the archive has taken us through the ways in which Italian cultural identity has been fashioned as a collation of concepts. What the presentations have done, in other words, is to posit the notion of national identity as something that is constructed through the

projection, in a Saidian way, of a complex of emotions and ideas onto those who are considered as 'Others'. The presentations have tracked how a dialogue between self and a notional 'Other' becomes basic to a belief in a collective identity (Said, 1978, 1993). Therefore, by referring to the notion of the archive, they have presented not just an objective structure but a Freudian palimpsest where concepts are superimposed on one another, and through which we can see the development of society's self-image. Against this background, the way in which the relationship with the archive is constructed in a given society is something very productive to think about, especially as far as the place of visual cultures is concerned.

LL: I also think that we, even as we are deconstructing or constructing our ideas, are ourselves creating new archives! I have a question: I was wondering how you, Marianna, actually identified the topic of your research, how you found your subjects for the semi-structured interviews, and how you approached them, and to what end?

MG: The interviewees were not very difficult to approach, they were just very busy. Although around only 10 percent of the Italian Far Right politicians and intellectuals I contacted replied, I managed to obtain a satisfactory number of interviews. The sample is heterogeneous as it cuts across different geographical areas (from Trentino Alto Adige to Campania), levels of involvement within the parties (from local councils to the national parliament), and ages (from the 20s to the 70s). I also wanted to strike a balance between men and women, but there are comparatively fewer women in these parties than men, despite Giorgia Meloni being at the helm of Fratelli d'Italia. Moreover, very few women actually replied to my emails, so I could interview only four, which was a little disappointing. However, the interviewees were very kind and helpful in giving information. Some were even eager to hear my opinion. Nevertheless, I think that some of them misinterpreted my role: despite my detailed explanation of the academic project, they thought I was a journalist, so they were particularly keen to answer the interview questions as they believed I could give them immediate publicity in the media, thus increasing their electoral gains. Overall, these semi-structured interviews with Italian Far Right representatives allowed me flexibility to capture the complexity and nuances (Mason and Dale, 2011: 64) of their current stance on immigration and on colonial memory. Then, in order to investigate the relationship between the Italian Far Right's discursive representation of immigrants and the Italian Far Right's colonial memory, I analysed the interviews using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which is a method of discourse analysis shedding light on power inequalities inherent to political discourse (Van Dijk, 2008: 352). Semi-structured interviews and CDA carry drawbacks as they both rely on the interests of the analyst, who selects interview questions and interprets the interview transcripts (Chilton, 2004: 205; Harrison and Bruter, 2011: 65).

However, I tried to eschew prejudice and bias as much as possible by taking into account my own reflexivity. The CDA of the semi-structured interviews with the Italian Far Right yielded valuable insights into the relationship between xenophobia and colonial memory. What emerged is the lingering of colonial rhetoric in the Italian Far Right's xenophobic discourse, evident in the Othering, criminalization, inferiorization and abjectification of the immigrant. Moreover, the Italian Far Right predominantly refuses to acknowledge the negative elements of Italian colonialism, such as the use of gases in Ethiopia, the deportation of the local population to concentration camps in Libya, and the burning of villages in Eritrea (Del Boca, 2003; Randazzo, 2006). Thus, in a typically xenophobic and colonial fashion, they blame, as I mentioned in my presentation, the immigrants' countries of origin for their political and economic instability, and this then functions as a 'push factor' for immigration. Therefore, despite colonialism being a neglected topic in Italian politics, a distorted and selective memory of Italian colonialism, purged of its negative aspects, deeply penetrates the Italian Far Right's xenophobic discourse on immigration.

GG: Gianmarco, you spoke about 'the view from above', showing us images of colonial Ethiopia, with people squatting on the ground. As though that were the body position 'naturally' associated with Africans, right? Recently, we have seen similar images on the news on a daily basis, portraying the arrival of African migrants to Lampedusa, Italy's southernmost island in the Mediterranean. A line of squatting people on the pier, all squatting in the same position. This is the first land they've stepped on in quite a long time. And they are kept in that position for hours. So there is, in a sense, a spatiality that has to do with the relation between body, time (modern and postcolonial) and the space of governmentality, which is somehow being re-established. Which is amazing, and shocking!

GM: This is a new strand of my research on colonial gazes that explores the connection between the 'animalization' of the Ethiopians and representations of the African soil. Because Fascism described its Imperial desires as driven by a civilizing and even religious drive, colonial power could not simply be visualized on the battlefield. Power is always 'up' as well as ubiquitous with regards to those upon whom it exerts its supremacy. This ability to visualize implies a mapping of something and a controlling of it accordingly: thus, the aerial shots, but also the shots looking down on the 'helpless' and 'sick' African bodies, which similarly takes on a God-like perspective.

Fascism's propaganda in that period aimed not so much at the creation of exotic Otherness, but at conveying and aesthetically materializing a universal system encompassing everything that was able to arrange the Empire according to its racial hierarchy. Stressing this universalizing

process – and not just the process of Othering – allows us to understand the religious impetus through which Fascism described its colonial action. The several frames taken from the planes featuring in the Fascist films I have previously mentioned are the maximum expression of that epistemic control of every dimension of the colonial landscape and of the human beings who are depicted as part of it. Such a theo-technological perspective from which to portray the total invasion of Ethiopia is confirmed by an analysis of documents issued by the Fascist administration, which I studied at the *Archivio Centrale dello Stato* (State Archives, Rome). According to those files, Fascist propaganda institutions were planning a panoptical and pan-audio propaganda with speakers mounted on planes in order to invade every human dimension of the African landscape. The Italian archive of coloniality was built against the background of such articulated projects and discourses. Indeed, tracing back such visual and sonic tropes, but also the discourses and the political goals underpinning them, is pivotal to the process of understanding how post-colonial societies both create and dispel Otherness according to unquestioned colonial legacies. Gaia, you have mentioned the images of migrants arriving in Lampedusa, and this is a case in point. These images re-signify the colonial visual trope of the gaze from above; in so doing, they reproduce that contrasting mix of patronizing attitude and repulsion that is a pivotal feature of the Western archive of colonial visibility.

GG: Also, as the camera moves from bottom to top, there is a sense of awkwardness – of the grotesque even. In some of the images you have shown us, the close-up gaze expresses power, opposing the positionality of the (authorial) gaze and the object of that gaze. The camera's upward movement returns a distorted image, as though the authorial gaze wanted to impart a grotesque quality to its object and lent them (their appearance, gestures, behaviour) an air of deformity, ugliness, irrationality, fanaticism, uncanniness. This is something I have noticed in the very first scene of *Mondo cane* (1962), Gualtiero Jacopetti's documentary film. It's a 'way to look' that comes from a specific colonial archive, from one of the many imaginaries representing the so-called Other (see Giuliani, 2018b).

Next, I would like to comment on what Alessandra said. When Gaddafi visited Italy in 2009, what Berlusconi provided was not simply a 'kitsch' setting, as Italian politician Emma Bonino described it (Figure 7). From Berlusconi's perspective, complying with the requests made by Gaddafi for his stay (that is, to re-create a tent encampment in the heart of the former colonial metropole) offered a complacent over-representation of Italy's supposed friendship with, or paternal guidance for, a still 'backward' Libya. From Gaddafi's perspective, those requests were meant to symbolize his occupation of the former colonial capital. Their different interpretation of the same tent encampment has to do with the tension between two concurrent readings

of the Italian colonial legacy: one attesting to the missing decolonization of the Italian Orientalism-infused imaginary, and the other showing a proud counter-invasion from the formerly colonized.

AF: Yes, I see what you mean. The main symbol of this Orientalist spectacle – the bedouin tent that Gaddafi set up in Rome – is also the most remembered element from the meeting. Yet, although Gaddafi brought the tent to other state visits (in France and the US, for example), when you speak with people in Italy, it is often seen as an assault on the Italian capital and on the rules of hospitality. But the issue here is more complex, because this is also a process of self-exoticization on Gaddafi's part, which he plays with and which Berlusconi exploits. It is interesting that Emma Bonino actually uses the term 'institutional kitsch' to describe the meeting. It made me think about the question that historian Cecilia Dau Novelli (2015: 260) asks in the article 'Italy and the memory of colonialism in the seventies', where she compares two pictures of Haile Selassie visiting Rome, noticing how, although the ceremonial codes and look are similar, the context is very different. In the earlier one, from 1924, Fascist Italy is contemplating occupying Ethiopia, in the second one, from 1970, Italy is a Democratic Republic which has left behind its Imperial politics. So, by association, when I read Bonino's comment, I immediately wonder about what the political context that welcomed Gaddafi in 2009 was and how this performance of politics was staged – how the event's glossy surface hides a complex and tacit set of messages. By excavating the event, it becomes clear that both Berlusconi and Gaddafi exploited the colonial past in order to strike deals. Berlusconi's intentions are perhaps more obvious, while Gaddafi's operation is less transparent. However, the latter obsessively made reference to the colonial occupation throughout his ruling, in order to gather consent and consolidate his power in Libya.

Actually, while listening to Linde's presentation, I kept thinking about the idea of swapping identities by swapping clothing, and for me it resonated with Berlusconi and Gaddafi. There is something very disturbing, a mirroring between the two figures – it seems easy to draw parallels between the two characters. Perhaps the fact that they shared the same plastic surgeon does not help! I was very much thinking about how emphasizing these similarities can affect the way we think about the Italian position within the Mediterranean, as well as about the construction of Italian whiteness, especially considering how the colonial endeavour was instrumental in this process – the way whiteness could be claimed against the Blackness of the African colonies.

GG: I have one last question for Marianna. In a previous conversation we had about your research, you mentioned that your interviewees don't talk about sexual intercourse between partners of different racial groups. What they do talk about is epidemiology, which is very telling of how the 'I am not a

racist' mantra works in terms of denying the language of biological racism and replacing it with something more palatable to liberal or non Far-Right identifying Italians. So, they talk about intimacy without talking about intimacy. It seems as if we, Italians, need to keep 'us' and 'them' separated so that 'we' don't mix together, don't get 'miscegenated' and, at the same time, don't 'infect' each other: again, it has to do with body fluids. It's interesting how the metaphor of sexuality can be reshaped, sanitized. I don't know why they were speaking so ... euphemistically, whether it was because they wanted to show a certain respect for their (female) interviewer (you), or because they decided that this is how they should act in public. I think both. The degree of brutality they allow themselves when speaking about these matters surely also depends on who the interviewee is. I wonder if it would be very different if the interviewee was a man, a woman, or a Lega representative like Borghezio or Calderoli, who were allowed by their own party to use highly offensive language.

MG: The way in which sexuality has been reconfigured in the Italian Far Right's discourse may be related to the Far Right's shift, initiated in the 1970s by the Nouvelle Droite in France, from purely biological racism to an increasingly cultural version of racism (see, for instance, Zaslove, 2004), where clearly racist biological aspects, such as the criticism of interracial sexual intercourse, are underplayed, taking a back seat to more culturally racist elements. Regarding the discussion about the multiplicity of voices within the Italian Far Right today, some party representatives project themselves as more moderate, while some are actually not moderate at all. Interestingly, I think that the least moderate are the local councillors, while the representatives that are very close to Salvini, being at the upper echelons of their parties, are quite moderate in their views, at least publicly. Indeed, in line with the Far Right's civic turn observed in other European countries in the past few years (see, for instance, Halikiopoulou et al., 2013), the Italian Far Right tends to cloak xenophobia under a mask of civic-ness. The local councillors are also more populist in style as they frequently deploy swear words and often burst into uncanny laughter when talking for instance about tragedies or, generally, about Otherness in a very disparaging way. To conclude, yes there is a difference in the intensity of xenophobia and in the populist style between local party representatives and the representatives standing at the top level of their party's organization.

GG: I am very interested to know if any of the interviewees' arguments were similar to the discourse of left- and right-wing parties in northern Europe (e.g. Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands, but also Britain), recently appropriated by Le Front National in France, against the 'Muslim' or, more generally, African or 'brown' 'male invasion'. That is, the complex discourse that associates LGBT+ rights and women's emancipation with border restrictions, outlined by Jasbir

Puar (2007) in her reflections on what she has defined as *homonationalism*: the inclusion of gay civil rights among the 'values to be defended' against the alleged 'invasion-and-subversion' of Western self-claimed secularized and inclusive societies by fundamentalists and homophobes from the migrants' and refugees' countries of origins.

MG: The issue of LGBT+ emerged in the interviews when I asked the Italian Far Right questions about family. Indeed, the party representatives and the party intellectuals reinforced their reactionary ideology, by calling for the so-called 'traditional family' against LGBT+ rights. Interestingly, without being prompted to do so, they spontaneously remarked that the traditional family does not contemplate the existence of homosexual arrangements. I remember that one local councillor from Lega Nord in Trentino started the interview, which was about immigration, by telling me 'I can't understand how a child can have two parents of the same sex.' Apparently, the theme of the 'traditional family' and hostility to LGBT+ rights were such significant themes for him that they were prioritized over immigration. However, the Italian Far Right does not seem to call for the protection of LGBT+ rights against seemingly obscurantist immigrants, as, on the contrary, it is deeply entrenched in its own reactionary position.

Audience member: I would like to say something in relation to the gaze from above in the images of the former colonies. There was also a gaze from below that is, in my opinion, equally important. Actually at the time there was a large Italian Fascist party in London, which published a newspaper called *Italia Nostra*. Immediately after the sanctions against Italy by the League of Nations in autumn 1935, the Italian Fascist party published a special supplement of *Italia Nostra*. The supplement was in English and portrayed the Italian occupation of Ethiopia as a major civilizing mission. A number of photographs were used to support such a point of view but I am not sure if they were taken from film footage or if they were actual photographs. Through the six or seven months that this supplement was published, you can find a large number of photographs which present the two views: the one from above – which I think had something to do with aviation, because it was a bird's-eye view of what happened beneath – and the one from below. I think that the latter was used to connote power but also to inform the British public about the 'civilizing' factor of this war, which became important at the time, given the sanctions applied to Italy. There was an effort to show how Italy was bringing order to 'barbarians'. The view from below was always focused from that level, with the Ethiopian population very low to the ground in order to enhance that civilizing power.

GM: Thank you very much for this observation. Of course, there were different perspectives on the conquest of Ethiopia, but the films and pictures

I am dealing with convey a strong sense of the power that is imposed from above. Theoretically speaking, the pictures you mentioned, which featured in the supplement of *Italia Nostra*, confirm what I am trying to argue. Ethiopian people are sitting on the ground while Fascist figures are standing up, in an elevated position, so their top-down gazes towards Ethiopians epitomize that localization of power in Fascist gazes. On the portrayal of the Ethiopian war in the UK, I just wrote a paper about how English, French and American journalists embedded within the Fascist army in Ethiopia radio-broadcast their description of the war (Mancosu, 2017). We know that the majority of public opinion in France, in the UK, in the US was against the Fascist invasion of Ethiopia. Nevertheless, some broadcasts and journalists were undoubtedly pro-Fascism. I was struck by noticing the tropes and the recurrent themes that such non-Italian journalists used to address their national audience. They are incredibly similar to those that Fascism used in Italy (the civilizing mission and the continuity with the Latin Empire, which was also the 'origins' of the other Western countries). That is to say: colonial gazes can assume different perspectives according to historical and political stances. Nevertheless, such perspectives are held together by way of the epistemic 'superiority' the European Imperial countries constructed for themselves from the 15th century onwards. Such a universal epistemic order used visual technologies and machinery to measure and classify racial differences inscribed into the representations of the colonial encounter, and which surreptitiously nestled into the very foundations of the idea of European modernity and culture (Bloom, 2008).

GG: Thank you everyone for this very interesting discussion. I really believe it offers an important contribution to the interdisciplinary and intersectional analysis of the role played by visuality in the rearticulation of colonial mentality and racism in Fascist and post-Fascist Italy. We've done a really good job of bringing together History, Philosophy, Cultural Studies, Politics, and Visual and Media Studies to present deeper insights into the complexity of a legacy that has only recently begun to be explored by intellectuals, academics and activists. Regardless of the efforts made thus far, this legacy does still profoundly affect the public understanding of Italy's past and present society, as it emerges in cinema as well as political debates, while remaining mostly politically unaccountable. Our intellectual and political commitment has been and will be to continue exploring and discussing it.

Notes

1. This Roundtable discussion took place on 7 June 2018 at Birkbeck, University of London.
2. These were also the premises and aims of my book *Race, Nation and Gender in Modern Italy: Intersectional Representations in Visual Culture* (2018a).
3. As Gaia Giuliani (2018a: 5) writes: 'colonial archives were built both locally and transnationally and produce different knowledge according to the reader, the time in history, the social contexts, and the power relations they serve.' Therefore, the transimperial critical perspective pinpoints a

cultural space fashioned by the mutual trajectories of nation-based/localized events (in this case, the Italo–Ethiopian war) and supranational ideas of Western supremacy and belonging.

4. The project *Notes on Historical Amnesia* (<https://www.alessandraferrini.info/notes-on-historical-amnesia>) by Alessandra Ferrini is the epitome of how the visual archive of coloniality is now artistically used to reverse its original meanings. In the film essay *Negotiating Amnesia* and in the related exhibitions, Ferrini uses old colonial pictures and glass negatives of colonial propaganda postcards in order to elicit a reflection on the narratives, genealogies and discourses that have built a whitened and monolithic Italian society and culture, whose racial legacies reverberate even today in the political and social arenas.

5. Since I started my PhD project, migrants' lives have been gradually exposed to increasing risks. Firstly, the death toll in the Mediterranean sea has grown exponentially as the Italian government has shut down its ports in Summer 2018. Secondly, as the civil war in Libya has intensified in August 2018, those people crossing or being detained in Libya are in great danger. And, thirdly, the rise in xenophobia in Italy (and in the Global North in general) has resulted in an increment of violent assaults on people of colour. It follows, then, that making visible the historical conditions that have contributed to this situation, feels as urgent as ever.

6. As of June 2018, Lega is part of the governing coalition. Lega's party leader, Matteo Salvini, is the current Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister.

7. In fact, *neofascism* does not reflect the fact that the parties analysed in this research, despite not having completely cut their umbilical cord with Fascism (Traverso, 2017), are not wholly violent and imbued in Fascism. The label *Radical Right* also denotes violent movements (Ignazi, 2010: 28), such as the radical right-wing terrorism (Ferraresi, 1996), that are distinct from the parties analysed in this research. Finally, *populism* is a vague tag attached also to centre and left parties, such as the Five Star Movement or Podemos (Campani and Lazaridis, 2017: 2), which share very little with the parties under consideration here.

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