Images of Colonialism and Decolonisation in the Italian Media

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Edited by

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and Cecilia Dau Novelli

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INTRODUCTION

PAOLO BERTELLA FARNETTI
AND CECILIA DAU NOVELLI

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PART ONE:

CINEMA, RADIO, TELEVISION
AND NEW MEDIA

FRAGILE HERITAGE AND DIGITAL MEMORY IN AFRICA

LIVIO SANSONE

1. The heritage debate

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

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

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

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

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1 William Cunningham Bissel, "Engaging Colonial Nostalgia," *Cultural Anthropology* 20, no. 2 (2005): 215–248.
2 Jacques Depelchin, *Silences in African History* (Dar es Salaam: Mbuki Na Nyoto Publishers, 2005); and Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past. Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Books, 1995).

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

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3 Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, *Ethnicity, Inc.* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).
4 Ciraj Rassool, "Heritage and the post-apartheid nation, 1994–2004: the biographic order, the memorial complex, and the spectacle of history," in *The struggle for memory. Biographies, locations/ places, archives, monuments and museums in today's Africa*, ed. Livio Sansone and Claudio Alves Furtado (Liverpool: University of Liverpool Press, forthcoming).
5 Federica Sulas, Stephanie Wynne-Jones, and Kate Spence, "Editorial," *The African Archaeological Review* 28, no. 1 (2011): 1–3.
6 Ibrahima Thiaw, "Slaves without shackles: archaeology of everyday life on Gorée Island," in *Comparative Dimensions of Slavery in Africa: Archaeology and*

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

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

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

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

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Memory. Proceedings of the British Academy 168, ed. Paul Lane and Kevin C. MacDonald (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 147–165.
7 Thiaw, "Slaves without shackles."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2. New opportunities and challenges

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

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

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

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

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

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

13 Livio Sansone, "The Dilemmas of Digital Patrimonialization: The Digital Museum of African and Afro-Brazilian Memory," *History in Africa* 40, no. 1 (2013): 1–17.
14 Paolo Israel, "A Loosening Grip: The Liberation Script in Mozambican History," *Kronos* 39, no. 1 (2013): 11–19.

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

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

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

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

3. New power relations?

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER TWO

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

PATRIZIA MANDUCHI

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

1. The cinema of the Empire

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

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