



What We See. What We Understand: Visual Images of the Colonial Experience (1920-1922)

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Essay

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Abstract

Through the comparative analysis of the representation of colonial subjects in a Catholic British missionary film and a Catholic Italian missionary film, this study reconstructs the imperial imagination that these two religious associations constructed in the early 1920s. This analysis reveals emblematic traits of the British and the Italian ways to colonialism in which the missionaries had a crucial part. Missionary cinema is here considered as a pivotal primary source to understand colonial rules and located in the larger context of early 1920s ethnographic films portraying indigenous people from the African territories.

Keywords: Missionary Cinema; Documentary Cinema; British Colonialism; Italian Colonialism; Visual Anthropology

Interdisciplinary Approach to Colonial Histories

This contribution began as the authors started exploring the potential issues that could be interrogated by collaboration between Italian Studies and Anthropology. In our scholarly work, of central interest to us is what visual media can communicate and how we come to define the images conveyed by visual media from diverse angles and national boundaries. Cinema brought us together to see and analyze the images, the message and the political dimension underlying certain films. To us the question was vital regarding how we interpret the significance and the political ramification of what the images denote during a particular decade of the British and Italian colonial period.

Challenging the borders of our respective disciplines is crucial to this study. For our endeavor we neither prioritize one discipline over the other, nor do we favor the visual

over the theoretical scholarship that emerges from colonial studies or cinematic analysis. We analyze the Catholic missionary documentary film *Italy in Eritrea and the Catholic Missions (Italia in Eritrea e il ruolo delle missioni, 1922)*, which we use as primary source for our analysis and compared to another Catholic missionary film from the same period, the *Mill Hill Fathers shed Light on the Dark Places of Earth (1920)*. This article demonstrates that the differences in these films mirror divergent strategies of Italian and British colonial rule. This work centers the focus on the role of socio-cultural interpretation as well as a careful look at the images and their denotations.

Within the larger framework of Italian Studies, postcolonial studies have been moving more effectively towards transnational and comparative perspectives than Italian colonial studies [1]. The body of scholarship pertaining to Italian imperialism and colonial rule remains mostly rooted in a nation-state framework, with only few

exceptions of comparative works privileging the study of Italian and German colonial rules [2]. We demonstrate that a comparative analysis of how Italian and British religious institutions dealt with local communities under colonial rule greatly enhances our understanding of what civilizing mission signified within these two European empires. Our comparative research, thus, breaks new ground as it provides a comprehensive analysis that makes the social context emerge more clearly. For the Italian Catholic missionaries, the idea of educating the colonized locals was central to their work and ideals. On the other hand, one can add that the purpose of the British Catholic Mission was slightly different; more in detail, the British missionaries' aim was civilizing undertaking, or to put it in their own words, it was "to shed light" on the natives with the implication that they resided in spiritual darkness. Educating or shedding light is divergent ways to reach the ideal for missionary work in general. We use British missionary work in a comparative approach to highlight and critically underlie the work and activities of the Italian missionaries.

The commonalities and differences of these two Catholic associations underscore the type of work they initiated with the colonized communities. How did colonialism and proselytism contrast and compare to each other in diverse communities and in different colonial settings? Studies exploring Italian and British colonial rules from a visual perspective are rare; instead, numerous works have explored British and French colonialism from a comparative perspective. Although Italian colonial experiences are abundantly investigated by scholars, it remains unclear as to why there is academic hesitation to use the Italian colonial case as an example for comparative work. Perhaps the divergent colonial rules employed by France and Italy made comparative studies more challenging. For example, at the core of Italy's direct rule was an understanding that Italy perceived the colonial territories as an overseas projection of the national administration. During the liberal era, there was a "moderate subjection policy", while during the empire there was a policy of totalitarian subjection. As a result, Italy did not give much importance to the study or preservation of indigenous cultures [3]. The studies by anthropologist Gianni Dore have shown that some Italian officers studied indigenous culture during the years preceding the invasion of Ethiopia (1936). For instance, Dore detailed the work of Officer Alberto Pollera (1873-1939), who was a self-made ethnographer that produced several ethnographic works on Eritrea between 1902 and 1922 focused on the so-called customary laws [4].

Moreover, we find that the divergent scholarly views on the impact of Italian colonialism on Eritrean society raise crucial issues that call for further investigation. One line of research that informs the present study is Tekeste Negash's

disagreement with Irma Taddia's findings. Negash states that Taddia has argued without sufficient evidence that Italian colonial rule brought profound changes to Eritrean society [5]. "My main contention with Taddia" explains Negash "lies, however, in the problem of assessing the intensity of colonial impact on Eritrean society" [6]. On the contrary, according to Negash, the native policy "empathized the rural nature of the colony and the preservation of Eritrean social organizations" [6]. More in detail, Negash argues that from 1907 until 1932, Italian colonial policies "avoided a drastic reorganization of Eritrean society and economy because of the new economic role assigned to Eritrea." Negash then identifies 1932 as a turning point in Italian colonialism; that was the year when preparations for the invasion of Ethiopia began, and the so-called by the Italians first-born colony of Eritrea assumed greater strategic importance. Therefore, the political stability that was necessary for the development of Eritrea's economy in the earlier phases of colonialism was no longer the priority from 1932 onwards, with new economic and social strategies implemented to prepare for the war. Additionally, historian Lucia Ceci proposed another periodization, stressing that the period between 1935-1938 saw significant changes to the administrative system and ideology of fascist Italy. Ceci's periodization falls three years later than what Negash indicates as a turning point in Italian colonial rule. Furthermore, Ceci explains how, in this three-year period, racism underlined the Italian government's plans and legislation applied racist theories to pursue a plan of racial purification. It was a divide et impera ideology [7].

Looking at the phases of Italian colonialism before 1932, the questions raised by the divergence between Taddia and Negash call for further investigation of the complex relations among colonial subjects before divide et impera was implemented in colonial administration. Gianpaolo Calchi Novati demonstrated that unlike other colonial powers, in its earlier phases Italian colonialism aimed to turn the colonies into unified nations [8,9]. Additionally, through research into cultural propaganda, Triulzi A [10] has demonstrated that the first photographs taken by Italians portraying Eritrea's people and lands replicated the representations of Italians from the South. This implies a level of identification between colonizers and colonized that does not belong to other colonial societies [9].

Although Triulzi A [10] refers to the argument that Eritreans were associated with the Italian colonizers (the Southerners, in lieu of Italians), we argue that, to the Eritreans, the colonizers were not necessarily Southerners or Northerners, but were all white colonialists. The Eritreans situated themselves in accordance to how they should behave in the presence of an Italian colonialist irrespective of which part of Italy they came from. In stating this, we do not intend to dismiss the history of racism and violence suffered

by Italian Southerners that were associated with Eritreans and racialized by colonial propaganda [10]. Instead, we want to stress that there was an association between Italians and Eritreans that was constructed during Italian colonialism and that the same association did not exist in the British case.

Drawing on the abovementioned studies that highlighted traits of the relation between Italians and Eritreans during colonialism before the 1930s, we find that the 1922 documentary film *Italy in Eritrea and the Catholic Missions* (*Italia in Eritrea e il ruolo delle missioni*), which we use as primary source for our analysis and compare to a selection of scenes from *Mill Hill Fathers shed Light on the Dark Places of Earth* (1920), attests to an interest in filming native dances and particular local ways of organizing communities. While it gives little accurate information regarding indigenous traditions, the film did not attempt to dehumanize the locals. The film does not highlight what a foreign audience would have perceived as inexplicable rituals and traditions, in other terms the “otherness”. Additionally, we noted that this film does not fall under the categorization proposed in the study *A Place in the Sun* (2003), which distinguished two main trends in the construction of “Africa” in colonial propaganda:

During the Risorgimento, Africa was invoked as a limb of a proudly resuscitated Imperial Rome. During the Fascist era, imperialistic politics were crucial in shaping both domestic and international perceptions of the Italian nation [11].

The film by the Capuchins does not reproduce the invocation of earlier films for a “limb of a proudly resuscitated Imperial Rome,” nor the Fascist era portrayals of colonial subjects. The Capuchins’ portrayal of the “Other” in their film goes beyond the above quoted colonial discourses. We note the rich ethnographic material presented in this visual narrative; to have a deeper understanding of its aesthetic we decided to situate this film in the larger context of Italian ethnographic and anthropological studies on Eritreans from the early colonial period. This film was made during what Sòrgoni B [12] defined as a phase of “moderate subjection” implying it was “attempting to gain some knowledge of indigenous cultures. [...] According to the extent to which indigenous traditions were useful to colonial rule they were preserved, manipulated, or forbidden. [...] Italian colonialism during the Liberal Era encouraged the study of indigenous cultures and social structures” [12].

Moreover, Sòrgoni B [14] demonstrated that during this early phase of colonial rule, Italian professional anthropologists centered their studies on the hierarchical categorization of races and cultural traits. Among these theories, Giuseppe Sergi’s Hamitic hypothesis received international success and remained at the center of debates until the 1960s. In Sòrgoni’s terms, the Hamitic hypothesis

“placed Europeans and Africans in the same species pointing to a desire for contact and the fertility of cross-race sexuality” [12].

Instead, in the 1930s, there was a remarkable change: anthropologists’ attention completely turned to biological determinism and the categorization of human races. In the 1930s, anthropologists played a key role in the re-organization of Italian colonial rule. Sergi’s theories of biological determinism were instrumental to how Lidio Cipriani (the anthropologist working for the regime and creator of the *Manifesto of the Race*) changed Italy’s colonial rule [13]. In contrast to Sergi’s deterministic theories, Italian anthropologist Mantegazza P [13] sought to develop a unified “science of man”. The broad definition of this new discipline brought together collections of human physiology, ethnography, and “comparative psychology” within his new anthropology museum, later complemented by a companion “psychological” museum. Even though Mantegazza’s Florentine school of anthropology ended under fascism, today the surviving Museum of Anthropology in Florence remains the repository of important ethnographic collections from early Italian traveller-explorers and other contributors [14].

Examining how anthropology and colonialism intertwined in British colonial rule, Stauder J [15] wrote that “[Before the 1920s] Anthropology in Britain was dominated by controversies between diffusionists and evolutionists, who held in common, however, an historical and often speculative approach that was primarily concerned with reconstructing the past of mankind” [15]. Additionally, in Grimshaw A [16] terms “[pre-1920s] salvage anthropology looks backwards. It is the past of a society, not its present or future, which has meaning and authenticity” [16].

In the early 1920s, the discipline of social anthropology introduced the functionalist school of thought. The study of how and when functionalism became embedded in colonial rules allows us to trace important differences and similarities with regards to respective government policies. For example, in Italian oversea territories, functionalist theories were applied much later than in British colonies and protectorates. What our comparative study unveils is that during the 1920s, Italian missionaries played a crucial role in the study of indigenous communities in Eritrea without applying any specific methodology.

In the 1920s, Father Mauro da Leonessa directed the Italian film under discussion, *Italy in Eritrea and the Catholic Missions* (*Italia in Eritrea e il ruolo delle missioni*). Even though Mauro da Leonessa wrote extensively on descriptive characteristics of Eritrean “types” based on initial observation, it is important to stress that his documentary

film does not focus on the perceived differences between the Italian colonizers and the other ethnic groups in Eritrea. There is no representation of different Eritrean “types”. Instead, in the British colonial film, the director made the opposite choice; in this film, different ethnic groups from British African territories are described with inter-texts that highlight the perceived differences between the British colonizers and the locals.

Relatively few studies have examined Italian and British colonialism and cultural production from a comparative view, while British imperialism has long been the focus of comparative history studies. For instance, among the most recent works, that of Fichter JR [17] deserves special mention. This work argues that in a critical sense British and French colonial empires influenced each other, for instance in their mutual engagement with Islam during the Hajj pilgrimage period, in how they shared control over the Mediterranean, Red Sea, Persian Gulf, and South China Sea, as well as in their de-colonization processes. On the other hand, works such as R. Aldrich’s study focus on the mutual aspects of British and French “indirect rule”, for instance in the deposition of native monarchs in Asia and Africa [18]. Aldrich argues that even when colonizers impoverished and destabilized local sovereigns, they could not erase the memory of monarchism in national identity, anti-colonial campaigns and the heritage exiles left behind. Moreover, there is the less recent work edited by Meouchy N, et al. [19], which consists of a collection of essays on the political and cultural policies of British and French mandates in the Middle East, that compares their applications and effects [19].

Our approach is comparative, and our principal question seeks to interpret selected documentary films of the period between 1920-1930’s from both the Italian and British film industry. What exactly did colonial governments offer by using images to transmit their socio-cultural ideas, civic understanding, or the rule of law? What was gained from the use of documentary films at the onset of the colonial expedition? How do we come to understand the underlying colonial rhetoric informing the films’ images? Using Clifford Geertz’s “controlled comparison” we developed a tightly constructed approach in first selecting the documentary films and specific genres of films that presented certain similarities in their manifestations. Additionally, our approach drew upon the work of anthropologist Lloyd Fallers, whose ethnographic study of the Buganda (a Bantu kingdom in Uganda), contained the idea of “primordial loyalty” [20].

Moreover, we build on the work of Piredda MF [21], whose research on Catholic cinema argues that “missionary films are a phenomenon which has been linked to the official use of images by the Catholic Church from its origins until

now” [21]. Missionary films from the 1920s were mostly screened to national (i.e., Italian, British) audiences, who gained a specific projected idea of indigenous cultures. We focus on the similarities and differences in the portrayal of colonized individuals in these films, by linking the application of anthropological and ethnographic methods to the colonial cultural production by missionaries from the period.

Two Missionary Films from a Comparative View

Regarding our primary sources, the 1920 film *Mill Hill Fathers shed Light on the Dark Places of Earth* was produced by the St. Joseph’s Missionary Society of Mill Hill, and was shot in Kampala, Buganda; the 1922 film *Italy in Eritrea and the Catholic Missions (Italia in Eritrea e il ruolo delle missioni)* was filmed in Massawa and other cities in Eritrea. As mentioned above, the films were both produced by Catholic missionary groups. When the St. Joseph’s Missionary Society of Mill Hill arrived in Kampala and established their station in 1895, Buganda was still an independent kingdom. Five years later, it became a province of the British Uganda Protectorate. As for the Capuchins, they played a key role in the Christianization of Eritrea: in 1894 the Capuchin Father Michele da Carbonara was the first Apostolic Prefect of the Italian Colony of Eritrea, and he influenced substantially the development of later missionary activities [22].

Analysing cultural production in the form of missionary documentaries during colonialism in the 1920s from a comparative view allows for a deeper understanding of the impact religious institutions had in the construction of “colonial subjects.” Indeed, the use of images and the words was one way for the Catholic Church to preach its message through multiple forms of related media such as “...painting, sculpture, stained glass, photography, magic lanterns, lithographs, and cinema” [23]. However, given the prevailing difficulties missionaries had with local languages, images proved to be more amenable as a medium to assist and attract the attention of these “children,” or “pupils” as the indigenous people were referred to. These films had multiple functions, namely the “education” of Eritreans to colonial ways of life, but also and primarily to raise funds for the mission.

The film *Italy in Eritrea and the Catholic Missions (1922)* opens with a scene of dhows on the Red Sea while clearly including larger modern ships in the background. The portrayal of three children bowing in front of the camera follows the opening shots. It is unclear as to what it is these shots convey except an image of subjugation. Instead, we found the harvesting of salt to be one of the central ideas for why the film was shot, suggesting colonial notions of modern resource extraction techniques.

In terms of these opening scenes, we observed that neither the images nor the captions detail where we are, but later it is stated that the scene takes place in Gherar, where salt mining was in operation, located in the Northern part of the Massawa area. These images convey the message that the Italians had “discovered” an ancient method of harvesting salt. Building on these indigenous ideas and expanding on the process, we are presented with an interesting set of scenes having to do with salt making and preservation. The salt making process is slowly detailed, showing how one goes about collecting the salt, then onto its placement on a train heading to a factory, and eventually shipped out to world markets. The small gauge train moves the unrefined salt from the harvested site to the factory, demonstrating the modern system of transportation, one that has replaced the use of camels for the work.

Interestingly the workers seem to go about their roles in the process of salt production without any apparent sign of discomfort, even if at times there are scenes of a worker having difficulties climbing the mountain of salt for no specific reason. The apparent ease and familiarity with this kind of work is clearly indicated through the calm and meticulous movements of the labourers, as if they are adept at this type of work.

The salt-workers scene alludes to and represents the beginning of the process of assimilation enacted by colonialism. Here, the colonizers’ perceived and imagined cultural traits of indigenous people are (partially) acknowledged. The camera does not distinguish the ethnicities of the workers, but we are shown able and skilled salt workers and farmers who demonstrate to the viewer’s their knowledge and ability to carry out this work, often oblivious of the camera.

The aim of these images and the captions describing them is to promote the modernization and mechanization that Italians have brought to Eritrea. For example, the captions describing the use of machineries are explanatory and recurrent: “Machines for the containment of salt water in basins,” “Transportation to the grinding,” “Conveyor belt to stock the salt,” “Stack of salt ready to be stored on steamers.” The shots informing this sequence contain Eritreans working with modern machines, and it is implied that Italians have given these machines to them. However, the supervision by the Italians is evident by their dress, including the pith helmet, so reminiscent of colonial officers. The pith helmet signals control, rule, and positions of authority. Eritreans were made to wear the hat to wear if they held supervising positions over other workers as indicated in some scenes.

This salt sequence suggests that colonized Eritrea now possesses a salt-based industry, and that salt is exported in

significant quantities. Therefore, the film conveys the sense that Italians have enhanced the Eritrean economy and have offered technology to enhance and ease manual labor. Indeed, we are made to understand that the colonial government has provided work for the indigenous people. Dan Connell’s most recent study on the history of Eritrea explains that the Italian business named “Saline di Massawa Company” opened in 1905 and, by the 1920s it employed poorly paid local labourers. The company’s “total production averaged 100,000 to 150,000 tons per year, with most of the exports going to India” [24].

Ultimately, through the representation of the industrialization process, there is an appropriation of Indigenous culture by the colonizers. The idea this sequence conveys thus is of an opposition in temporal terms: the “now” of colonial rule and progress is presented in opposition to the primitive “past.” Additionally, the scenes mostly show Eritrean people working and not the Italians showing them how to do it. No Italians appear on the screen, and the local people know the job they are doing. This repeats in the following sequences that portray people working in fields and plantations of akat (doum palms). Later in the film, captions describe “How to cut akat fruit,” “Taking the fiber out,” “Washing the fiber,” “Drying the fruits,” “Working the fiber with spatulas,” “Transportation to the stocking facilities” and the indigenous people show the audience how to do it. The scenes are choreographed to show that the Eritreans are skilful in cutting the fruit and they now have the knowledge of what akat is good for. This scene demonstrates partial acknowledgement of Eritrean social and cultural traits, namely in the recognition of their manufacturing skills.

Modernization and industrialization are also represented in a later sequence where a group of Ascari, Eritrean soldiers enrolled in the Italian Army, return from the war fought on Libyan soil to Asmara and are on their way to rejoin with their families. The caption introducing the scene describes “Ascari veterans from Libya while on their way to Asmara meet with their families.” The first shots portray a crowd preparing to get on the train and collecting their luggage. Then the camera pans over the station of Ghinda and the train. This sequence ends with a panoramic view of the landscape surrounding the railway. In our view, and in contrast to the British missionary film’s representations of the locals, here the implication was that the Ascari were directly part of the colonial project. In this film, they represent a positive colonial advancement. This is not what we see in the British film, and we stress this point precisely because of its absence in the British film under comparison.

Italians allocated the funding to build the first railway of Eritrea between 1888-1889 for military purposes. The government invested in building railways and road systems

in Eritrea more than in other colonies. In 1914, for example, Odoardo Cavagnari designed a master plan dedicated to a new network of roads in Asmara, with contemporary Rome as a model [25]. Transportation was a priority in the plans Italy had for the colony, and the Ascari were a new necessary “military factor” that had a large impact on Eritrea’s urban development. The defensibility of the colony was among Italy’s main concerns and a functional road system facilitated the movement of groups of Ascari. Colonial soldiers also played a significant part in managing the daily activities in running the colonial system. Thus, the sequence portraying the Ascari reuniting with their families at the train station highlights benefits that Eritreans had from occupation and colonial rule at the cost of freedom.

The shots displaying the building of the rail tracks have ethnographic value and purposes. There is meticulous attention given to the laying down of the rail tracks, and each labourer follows directions and seems to know exactly what to do. A lot of training obviously went into the work prior to the film, and eventually the train passes through the newly constructed rail tracks. Why this scene is so carefully shot and orchestrated? We strongly feel that the two separate, yet relatable aspects of the documentary validate the workload performed by local people: laying down rail tracks was not a part of their daily life, but it was an art that had to be taught.

Missionaries set out to share their teaching ideals in Africa with the primary intention to educate and to convert; the sequence of the Capuchin’s documentary film ignores those two primary missions. For instance, instead of scenes representing the Capuchins’ ritual celebrations, or their catechism, we are shown a bit of the Orthodox Church celebrating Timkat with no explanation given as to what is happening. We see priests jump into the water, others follow suit, but the viewers are not told why and what for.

The title of the British film here under scrutiny states the aim of the Mill Hill Fathers and summarizes the intent of the film: *Mill Hill sheds Light on the Dark Places of the Earth*. The film portrays the civilizing mission carried out by this British Catholic missionary group in different countries, but we will dwell on scenes dedicated to one colony, Uganda. The film starts with a simple yet powerful sentence that sets the tone of the documentary, “we are here to civilize and introduce light.” In this sense, light can refer to religious conversion and the introduction of a new way of seeing and understanding the world. We are introduced to the many places that the Mill Hill Fathers had penetrated and where they had attempted to shed light to their world. Amongst these countries are India, Borneo, Philippines, New Zealand, Belgian Cameron and many more, indicating their presence and influences on a global scale. What we are not certain of is the purpose of the film and what its aims are: is it to show the cartographic

spread of an idea (Catholicism), or the sense of the imperial standing amongst European nations? Indeed, the film is addressing a European audience, particularly Britain and the colonies, and its opening does advertise the religious association. It is likely that the film aims at fund-raising. This film is in four parts and is part of a collection of twenty-nine reels that were shot on location in all the different missions, and this opening also advertises the wider series.

The first St. Joseph’s missionaries arrived in Buganda in 1895, and this film was shot years later, in the 1920s. The St. Joseph missionaries had settled on Nsambya Hill. The Mill Hill majestic motherhouse (or perhaps mission station) and its gardens appear immediately after the first introductory scene, which consists of shots portraying a single and several priests talking and noticeably looking rather happy about the world around them. There are shots depicting missionaries already in the mission, several representing the highest religious authority in the colony, such as Bishop John Birmans. One of the earlier scenes depicts white (English) priests in pairs coming down the outside stairs of the mission house; they are happy looking men who are content and very at ease with their environment. We are not privy to their conversations, but they seem discussing important topics. Other scenes show missionaries arriving in Nsambya from London. This sequence covers almost one-third of the film (out of 18’21), and it was carefully shot, which indicates that this film was aimed at promoting the mission in Uganda. The focus is on showing the movement of the church’s servants, but the indigenous people are absent. The missionary building is clearly well established, and it is impressive that in about twenty-five years they could develop such an impressive building. Yet it is interesting that we do not see a reference providing information about the indigenous people for the entire duration of this sequence, even if we do see them on the screen. When a group of missionaries coming from London appears on the screen, we see for the first time the natives who would be receiving the titular light. They appear on the screen suddenly, in tattered clothes, thin and emaciated, seeming to be servants who carry the bags and other goods of the visitors. As they walk in a line towards the camera, carrying the luggage on their heads, the camera also shows that they are wearing torn clothes and unexpressive faces.

This is not the first time we see people who are not missionaries working as servants. The first image of a local indigenous individual is of a man pulling a cycle rickshaw carrying a priest. Later, a shot shows a servant bringing a letter to three missionaries while they are visiting a banana plantation. Another shot consists of a group of locals carrying the bags. Notably absent is a caption informing the viewers who these people are; the caption/narration only alludes to the missionaries’ actions. It is curious why the rickshaw was

introduced to the shot, as it was a mean of transportation from primarily India and other SE Asian parts of the world. Is this meant to signal the same type of lowly work was assigned to local indigenous groups in all British colonies? Where is the Christian egalitarian spirit here? However, the native workers in the mission are well dressed in comparison to a dozen poorly dressed individuals made to carry goods and luggage of the newly arrived missionaries. What are we to make of these images? As the film develops (at about 11'35), there is a scene that invites us to consider a deeper understanding of the way this film constructs an exotic idea of the "petty savages." A caption introduces a scene on "Barbarous methods to be overcome by the missionaries": what exactly does this signify? The "methods" the caption refers to are, in order of appearance: two men showing how to domesticate snakes; a group of hunters drinking bull's blood; and a discussion between two men in front of a person who is presented as "a Buganda chief." These minimalist captions describe the images we see, but it is the underlying meaning that we seek to underscore. The images determine how we the viewer's read these scenes and what they impart to our understandings of the natives. The captions allude to the "barbarous methods," or refer to the "human vampire" when showing how blood is extracted from a bull. The shot portraying hunters drinking blood directly from the bull's vein (after making a small incision to the neck), it is in fact a custom practiced by the Nilotic group of pastoral tribes. The missionaries witnessed the custom practiced by the Ugandans, but could not identify the tribe, and failed to understand that this custom allowed people to sustain themselves while leaving the animal alive without any harm.

The third part of the film highlights a Buganda chief who adjudicates on a case in his traditional role. The caption states, "A native trial before a Baganda Chief. The opposing advocates argue with great heat." Two men are arguing heatedly standing in front of the chief, surrounded by a group of unidentified people who look bored and constantly look at the camera, probably waiting for a sign from the cameraman. It goes back and forth and concludes with the chief handing out his judgment orally ("According to the Baganda customs the winning party of the case thanks the judge by rolling in the dust"). The audience is meant to be shocked that the person who wins the case then is shown rolling on the ground. More explanation of this action would be beneficial to the audience, but none is provided, and the scene moves to another subject.

All these selected scenes clearly appear as staged, composed parts, where the actors repeatedly look at the camera, which reveals that they were previously instructed to perform in front of the camera with clear instructions. The same can be said of the film by the Capuchins, which also presents staged scenes. However, we observe some crucial

differences in the intentions underlying the respective performances. For instance, in the film *L'Eritrea*, there is a scene that shows an extensive ethnographic depiction of indigenous life. It represents a woman going through the process of dressing in her traditional garb, including her jewellery. The meticulous and time-consuming steps inform us about the rich significance of women's culture and decorum. The camerawork appears scrupulous; the meaning conveyed by these images is not condescending like the scenes detailed earlier from the *Mill Hill* film. Here, on the contrary, is a display of cultural traits not mediated by a hostile and diminishing rhetoric.

A further difference between the two films is that, while the Capuchins do not include in their film shots about education, the *Mill Hill Fathers* portray a missionary instructing a group of people, the Pygmy. The instruction was Catechism, for which they would receive a pinch of salt if they stayed until the end of the lessons. And here, in the captions describing this scene, the belittling rhetoric that we discussed above comes back. For instance, in the opening shots of this scene, the backs of Pygmies are shown, as they sit on the ground and attentively listen to the priest deliver his Catechism teachings. The captions instruct us, "Missionary teaching the first class of Pygmies in the Congo Forest. These dwarfs average four feet in height." This caption raises the questions of why their height is relevant to the audience. Is it for shock? The following caption informs the audience, "They are awarded for attendance at Catechism by receiving pinches of salt." Did these people need salt? No, but that was the currency in question, the standard value.

What the Two Films Tell Us about Colonialism

In lieu of a conclusion we shift our attention to two final visuals. We investigate what the producers intended to communicate to the audience. Both selected scenes appear at the end of each documentary film, and their contrast leaves us with a question. What exactly was the intention for those visuals? Were they supposed to convey a religious purpose or some civilizing message to the audience? Were the images educational? Or were they meant to shed light on the unbelievers/uncivilized, or perhaps a combination of both?

Strangely enough the two documentary films conclude on a similar note, a dance: in one we are informed who the tribe is, but for the other no information is provided. The commonality in both these scenes is the dance, which works well within the comparative framework applied in this study, but what does the dance stand for? Is it about tradition, a rite of passage, or does it hold political significance? In the film by the Capuchins, one tribe, the Kunama, dance to celebrate the visit of the Italian Governor General to the lowlands of Eritrea,

the Italian acquired colony. The occasion is special and like all other such events, it is marked by an extraordinary act. Here we see the Kunama waiting and greeting the Governor by showing their artistic qualities through a dance. The Kunama tribe celebrate special occasion by dancing, with such performative dances being embedded in their culture. The dance is shown in exactly the way it takes place: the indigenous individuals go round and round in small circle and although we do not hear the music, their simultaneous steps imply an overarching rhythm. The dance takes a big portion of the film's time, and the documentary ends after repetitions of the Kunama doing the same steps and fades away.

While there is a similar dance ending to the Mill Hill film, it is quite different. The captions state, "A group of savages have not come under the influence of the Missions", although in this case the scene is less orderly, and the individuals seem to be acting for the camera, for the viewer. This bizarre behavior is referred to in captions that state, "When they are not loafing, they are dancing," with the scene showing a mixture of irregular movements. What type of dancing is it? The film provides no information about this ritual dance. Referring to the "savages" in the Mill Hill film and exhibiting the strange movements identified as dancing, in a sense prompts the viewer to understand why the mission's work is important to complete. Wild, savage, loitering, lazy, and with no aim in life is the condition of the nameless tribe in Uganda. Their aimless movements are not framed as traditional dances, but instead are classified as wild behavior by the colonial eye, in this instance the British colonial gaze.

Finally, looking at the treatment of the indigenous colonized people in both documentary films, we can recognize stark differences in how the people of Eritrea and Uganda are portrayed. The visuals themselves are telling in what the images indicate; however, we investigated the questions of how the natives were depicted, and if we see images that tend towards dehumanizing the colonized. Take the example of the train constructions, the actual process of laying out the tracks, teaching the workers how to do the work, and educating them; these scenes do not have similar positive parallels in the Mill Hill British film. Nowhere do we see meticulous or painstaking attention given to something new, a trade unknown to them in their previous life. Eritreans learned to build a train and take the train to their towns or nearby villages. Along with the colonizers, they too benefit from the labor of building and setting up the railroads. These are the images that we do not find in the Mill Hill film, so we propose a question as to why that is the case. Where does the stark colonial difference lie regarding the technological advancement that the outside powers establish? What does investment in the newly acquired country denote?

What the film by the Capuchin Fathers shows is a phase of Italian colonialism after twenty-five years of rule. The Italians had changed the landscape of the country, understanding that with the ingenuous people they could together build a new nation. This interpretation of Italian colonialism that the film advances can be arguably supported by the fact that the Italian Cemetery in Asmara contains family tombs and mausoleums built in this period instead of single graves. This is telling of the fact that the Italians considered the new colony as their new home. For most Italians who joined the colonial mission, coming to serve the colony meant staying and bringing families to reside permanently in the country. What we see in the film is that prior to the 1937 law on madamato and the 1938 Racial Laws, Italians did mingle and cohabit with the local communities. As mentioned above, clear evidence of this are the cemeteries left behind in most Eritrean cities where Italians resided. Mausoleums that house two or four generations of Italians are a testament to the fact that many of the newcomers had no intention of leaving Eritrea, the country they colonized.

The Italian way of colonialism before the 1930s, the earlier phase, can arguably be defined as "temperate colonialism." This early phase of Italian colonialism was centered on the knowledge of local customs. The invasion of Ethiopia inaugurated a new phase in which the leadership of local chiefs was removed and replaced with a military regime. Plus, the attention to ethnographic studies that characterized the pre-imperial phase, when Italian colonial officers were interested in the so-called customary laws, was replaced after 1936 with the focus on racist policies [26].

While comparing these two films, we noted that the treatment of the colonized is starkly different and is telling of how the British people we see on screen in the film, maintained distance from their colonized. As described in the paragraphs above, in the Mill Hill film, the grand mission building stands out, and it is impressive along with the gates to keep the natives out. The gate that we see in the film can be understood as a metaphor of the "divide and rule" policy applied by British colonialism. Obviously, we know that the British experience in India was a punitive lesson for British imperialism, now to be applied to the newly acquired colonies in Africa. And, therefore, what this film shows is a core trait of British colonialism: that British colonial rule was not about building communities but, instead, it aimed at both co-opting and replacing pre-existent social structures and cultural traits.

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