Gaddafi in Rome:

Dissecting a Neocolonial Spectacle

Crafting a genealogical strategy for an accountability-based framework.

By

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ABSTRACT

This practice-based research project has developed a set of tactics for the *dissection* of a twenty-first-century media event that spectacularised neocolonial relations between Italy and Libya. Through a situated and genealogical approach, it proposes a strategy based on *accountability* for analysing sensitive political events that require a complex approach, capable of engaging with the extended timelines and continuities of imperial politics. This is achieved by engaging with Critical Discourse Analysis, Media Event Studies, investigative aesthetics, post and decolonial theory. Framed by an investigation into the Treaty on Friendship, Partnership and Cooperation between Italy and Libya, this research focuses on the Italian press documentation of the meeting between Silvio Berlusconi and Mu'ammar al-Qadhdhafi in Rome (2009). These materials (a photograph and a collection of live news updates) are the departure for the production of a series of experiments that translate the essay film form into other media: a performance-lecture (*Gaddafi in Rome: the Expanded Script*) and a three-channel video installation (*Gaddafi in Rome: Notes for a Film*). Based on the format and language of screenplays, this body of work highlights the spectacular character of the meeting, thus exposing how *neocolonial spectacles* (a concept developed in this research) are performed and narrated. Rooted in the *essayistic* – a metafilmic and reflexive format – it translates and sheds light on the temporal structure of contemporary, instantaneous news forms by addressing their gaps and lacks and exposing their colonial biases. Through a personal, reflexive point of view, it proposes an *accountability-based framework* that can counteract the Italian nation's nonperformative (Ahmed, 2006) attitude to accountability. A wide array of found material (referred to as *archive of coloniality*) is analysed through an approach inspired by the early history of medical and public dissection, which is inherently spectacular, discursive, demonstrative, and pedagogical. Through the symbolic deployment of *dissection*, and the subversion of its normative and disciplinary framework, the practical outputs are predicated on the tension between the topical (the news and its spectacle's surface) and the systemic (neocolonial politics and colonial memory).

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I wish to dedicate this research to the person who has inspired it, Ahmed Khalfalla. And to those people from my chosen family who I lost during this journey: Emma Wolukau Wanambwa and Andrea Zamperoni.

NOTES TO THE READER

Accessing the Practical Outputs:

The reader is recommended to watch the two practical outputs, in the order that follows, before reading the thesis. Please listen with headphones and make sure to watch in full HD 1080.

Gaddafi in Rome: the Expanded Script (2018-2021)
performance-lecture, video documentation, duration: 48'59"
https://vimeo.com/663958732/6b4697afb0?share=copy

Gaddafi in Rome: Notes for a Film (2022)
Three videos, 20 minutes each, total duration 1 hour.
https://vimeo.com/showcase/9884253
PASSWORD: omar

Note on Abbreviation:

Please notice that after introducing the the two outputs with their full title, the performance-lecture *Gaddafi in Rome: the Expanded Script* will be referred to as simply *The Expanded Script,* while the video installation *Gaddafi in Rome: Notes for a Film* will be referred to as *Notes for a Film*.

Notes for a Film refers to a three-channel installation, which includes sculptural elements. The three videos are referred to as *Acts* (together) or as *Act I, Act II* and *Act III* whenever they will be named individually.

Note on Formatting:

In this thesis the word *fascism* is capitalised when referring to the Italian Fascist Party and regime, while it is not capitalised when referring to fascism as a political ideology more generally.

Note on Transliteration:

I have used the spelling *Gaddafi* (*Muhammar*) - the most widely employed anglophone spelling - in the title of this thesis and its outputs, as well as within the artworks produced as part of it. In the artworks, I have also used the more common anglophone spellings for other Libyan names: *Senussi Orde*r (name) or *Senussi* (adjective) and *Omar al-Mukhtar*.

Within this thesis, however, I have followed US-Libyan historian Ali Abdullatif Ahmida's use of the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*'s Arabic transliteration system. Thus, these names are spelled as follow:

Sanusiyya order (name) - *Sanusi* (adjective)
'Umar al-Mukhtar
Mu'ammar al-Qadhdhafi (full name) - *Qadhdhafi* (surname only)

Note on Translation:

All translations from Italian and French are mine, unless stated.

Introduction

FRAMING THE PROJECT

[The] analysis of the role played by visuality in the rearticulation of colonial mentality and racism in Fascist and post-Fascist Italy [contributes to understanding] the complexity of a legacy that has been only recently explored by intellectuals, academics and activists.

Regardless of the efforts made, this legacy does still profoundly affect the public understanding of Italy's past and present society, as it emerges in cinema as well as political debates, while remaining mostly politically unaccountable.

Our intellectual and political commitment has been and will be to continue in exploring and discussing it widely.

(Gaia Giuliani, in Burdett et al 2019, p.23)

Preamble: on positioning and getting entangled

In 2012, at the age of 28, I found myself living with a new friend, Ahmed, who had just fled Libya and was seeking asylum in the UK. Before meeting him, I had never heard that Italy had been a colonial power and that it had occupied Libya. It was never part of my school curriculum. It also never came up amongst the activist groups I frequented while growing up in Italy. Coming face to face with this heritage - and my oblivion - happened accidentally on a squatted boat in South East London. It shocked me deeply and changed my life profoundly.

Dealing with the systemic concealment of the Italian colonial past, and its genocidal violence, led me to the work that I have been developing in the past decade. This PhD research started in 2017 and has grown parallel to other projects dealing with Italian Fascist and colonial heritage. During this time, I have been fortunate to engage with many questions that are going to accompany me for a long time to come: questions about what kind of artist, researcher, and activist I want to be or about how, from my position, I can sustain this work. Much of this thinking has stemmed from and shaped my PhD and its outputs.

In this introduction, I wish to position myself and situate my research, considering some of the political implications that my work entails within the Italian context. The resistance and challenges I have experienced in this context have directly impacted the research development, helping me devise new ways to, as Nicholas Mirzoeff would put it, "strike against white sight"[1] (2023) and the power system it upholds. As the Black Lives Matter protests swept through Italy in 2020, it became clear how racism had been perceived as a foreign issue by a large part of the Italian population. In the article *Questioni di privilegio. L'Italia e i suoi George Floyd [Questions of privilege. Italy and its George Floyds]* (2020), the Italian Black feminist scholar Angelica Pesarini denounced how many activist movements taking the streets in solidarity with the BLM movement were connoted by a performative antiracism devoid of any reflection on Italian racism and white privilege. Pesarini noticed how the racially motivated killings

[1] Nicholas Mirzoeff proposes a strike against white sight: a refusal to "participate in white ways of seeing", namely, to join the struggle of indigenous people and people of colour against the dominant, Eurocentric racist and dehumanising gaze (Mirzoeff in McClain, 2023).

or the deaths of African migrants trapped in modern-day slavery in Italy were ignored. Through a reflection on white privilege, my work (and this research) has been investigating how Italian whiteness has been constructed through the colonial project, the continuities of this process in Mediterranean border politics and contemporary Italy's attitudes towards migration.

A practice well established by feminist scholars and activists, positioning has also come to be seen as a redemptive formula that has legitimised white subjects without them ensuring any commitment to dismantling whiteness and white privilege. In other words, confessing to one's white privilege does not remove these privileges. I have reflected on this in a previous article:

> positioning must be understood as a foundational practice: it is something that, from an ethical and political point of view, must always be accounted for. Yet, positioning should not be intended as a confessional act that washes away all sins - namely, a tactic to cleanse the researcher/artist from accountability and obliquely restore white privilege. Indeed, positioning cannot be used as a disclaimer or stand as a performance of white guilt. It needs to be supported by a deeply rooted critique of white privilege and a meaningful contribution to anti-racist praxis. (Ferrini, 2020, p.140)

This project is articulated through my position as an insider and outsider to the Italian context, having grown up in Italy and moved to the UK as a teenager. Here, I underwent my studies and developed my critical tools. This position grants me proximity and tacit knowledge of the object of my research but also a critical distance. Yet, both contexts of my upbringing and formation are rooted in the same Eurocentric, imperialist tradition. Reflecting on these degrees of distance - the different privileges, biases, contradictions, and responsibilities they imply - has underlined most of my work. So, positioning here is not simply a disclaimer but a driving force.

Besides the specific questions that this PhD engages with, there is one question in particular that has accompanied me in this journey: how can a project that is inherently educational for Italian/European audiences create modalities that foster accountability rather than reproducing didactic models that are deeply authoritarian or based on eliciting white guilt or shame?

In this thesis, I will put forward what I have called an *accountability-based framework*, not as an arrival and a fully realised operation or task but as a proposition, something to live up to and continue to pursue. Such an aim was identified towards the end of this PhD journey, when I had completely embraced my transnational identity. Meeting Ahmed also provoked a return, a rediscovery, through an active process of resignification, of the culture I was brought up in. It led to a deeper understanding of the ideological formations that make up the Italian "imagined community" (Anderson, 2006 [1983])[2]. In reconnecting and getting to know anew this symbolic space, I have found myself more in-between Italy and the UK. To develop a solid presence and relationship within the Italian cultural scene, I had to learn to navigate a system that was alien to me in terms of academia, institutional dynamics, artistic references, and approaches to art practice. During this process, I have become an active part of the Italian cultural scene, negotiating a complex and, at times, hostile environment that has placed much pressure on my work and mental health.

This process of re-connection has thus also led to a partial disengagement and self-marginalisation within the place I have lived for over half my life, the UK: a confusing space to inhabit during this research. At some point, I have started to be totally absorbed by the Italian context, whether due to my work's impact there or to the draining aspects of the political pressure I was experiencing. This confusion was amplified during the COVID-19 pandemic, as I was at a greater distance from the community that I was meant to be taking part in, at a time in which the debate on colonial and racist violence propelled by the BLM movement was reaching the Italian mass media.[3]

In the transnational space my in-betweenness generated, which I did not envisage nor consciously aim for, I started to re-familiarise myself with my mother tongue, which I could no longer comfortably speak or write in. Only recently have I become fully aware

[2] Benedict Anderson refers to the nation as "an imagined political community" in which "nation-ness, as well as nationalism, are cultural artifacts" (Anderson, 2006, p.4). An "imagined community" thus is a country's collective body, understood as a monolith constituted by nationalist ideology.

[3] In June 2020, a statue portraying the Italian right-wing journalist Indro Montanelli (1909-2001), which was erected in Milan in 2006, was vandalised by the feminist antiracist group Non Una di Meno. The protests focused on Montanelli's engagement in the practice of *madamato*, the sexual exploitation of underage girls by Italian colonisers in Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Somalia. On numerous occasions, Montanelli remembered with pride and using extremely racist language his relationship with a 12 years old Eritrean girl. The statue was covered with pink paint, an act that became a contentious topic of discussion, leading to a national debate on colonial heritage.

of this process of re-entanglement, embracing it as a necessary consequence of this research. So, if this PhD project began as a scrutiny of my biases and responsibilities as a white Italian national investigating the relations between Italy and Libya – and the biases and privileges afforded by my distance - this long process has, in addition, propelled an enquiry into how this position can be deployed to gain perspective, to be able to position myself without succumbing to the constant political and social pressure that arises from questioning racism, colonialism, and fascism in contemporary Italy. Although these specific reflections will not be engaged directly in this research, during the development of this project I have come to experience growing levels of aggression (more or less explicit) in academia and within cultural institutions. These incidents reflect the current political climate[4] and the deeply ingrained systems of oppression towards female, 'young'(according to Italian standards in academia), working class, and fat bodies[5]. Yet, being based in the UK and fully funded during my PhD has allowed me to take positions and expose myself in ways that, even if they had repercussions, granted me some independence and some degree of safety.

As I explored this environment and regained familiarity with my mother tongue, a series of linguistic gaps and constraints that initially went unchallenged became a pressing matter in my research. Accountability, the aim of this PhD, was one of the main results of this process. A term that cannot be translated into Italian[6], it allowed me to delve into this space of un-translatability that I have come to inhabit and draw from. Other terms at the core of this research also present similar challenges. For instance, in the English language, the verb *to dissect* conveys two distinct meanings - it means "the action of cutting something open, especially a dead body or plant, in order to study its structure" and "the process of examining or considering something in detail, or a piece of work that is the result of doing this" (Cambridge Dictionary online). In the Italian language, however, the word *dissezione* is a strictly medical term, which is not used as a metaphor for the process of analysis. Lastly, the word *essayistic* cannot be translated in Italian. It also provides an uncomfortable ground, given that I have difficulties pronouncing it.

[4] I have written about the effects on the artistic context of Giorgia Meloni's far right government in its first 100 days in the article *Cultural Politics of the New Right in Italy* (Ferrini, 2023).
[5] My accent and way of speaking in Italian can be considered lower class, not only because of my class background but also because my Italian is not very articulate, having left Italy at a young age. Fat shaming, instead, has been increasingly used to discredit me without discussing the topics I engage with.
[6] I will fully unpack this in Chapter 5.

When publicly engaging with this term, the limits and the potential of my transnational identity become painfully and joyfully evident while also consistently reinforcing the outsider nature of my position, whether to the Italian, the British, or other international contexts.

1. Research Breakdown, Journey, and Outputs

This practice-based research project revolves around the production of an expanded essay film by the title *Gaddafi in Rome: Notes for a Film* (2022) that focuses on a highly mediatised event: the meeting between Mu'ammar al-Qadhdhafi and Silvio Berlusconi in Rome, which took place in 2009. This event is part of the Treaty on Friendship, Partnership and Cooperation between Italy and Libya signed a year earlier. This PhD stems from and engages with the reporting of this event in (almost) real-time by the Italian newspaper *La Repubblica*.[7] Their extensive reporting was archived in a peculiar online format[8], which is referred to in this research as the *newsfeed*[9].

Overall, this project aims to devise a genealogical strategy rooted in the *essayistic* form (see Chapter 5) for the *dissection*[10] of a twenty-first century *neocolonial spectacle* (Chapter 2), in order to put forward a proposition for an *accountability-based framework*. At the core of this research is a study of the uses of history and artefacts as part of state diplomacy and international relations: their manipulation, exploitation, appropriation and concealment. This concern with history and media – carried out through attention towards language - is at the centre of the research and practical outputs, a running thread that carries the narration and the selection of the materials carefully collected and analysed in this work.

[7] At the time, the left leaning Rome-based daily *La Repubblica* was the second most-read newspaper in Italy and the first to invest heavily in the transition from print to digital (Bettini, 2006).
[8] To the extent of my knowledge, live news updates are not generally archived in such format by *La Repubblica.* I also did not find any other newspaper using this specific format. The archiving of news updates or breaking news does not seem to fit a systematic practice.
[9] The *newsfeed* can be accessed here: http://www.repubblica.it/indici/dirette/sezioni/esteri/gheddafi-roma/index.html
[10] Throughout the thesis I will write *dissection* in italics whenever it refers to the strategy developed in this research. When it is used to indicate any other meaning (i.e. medical practice) I will not use italics.

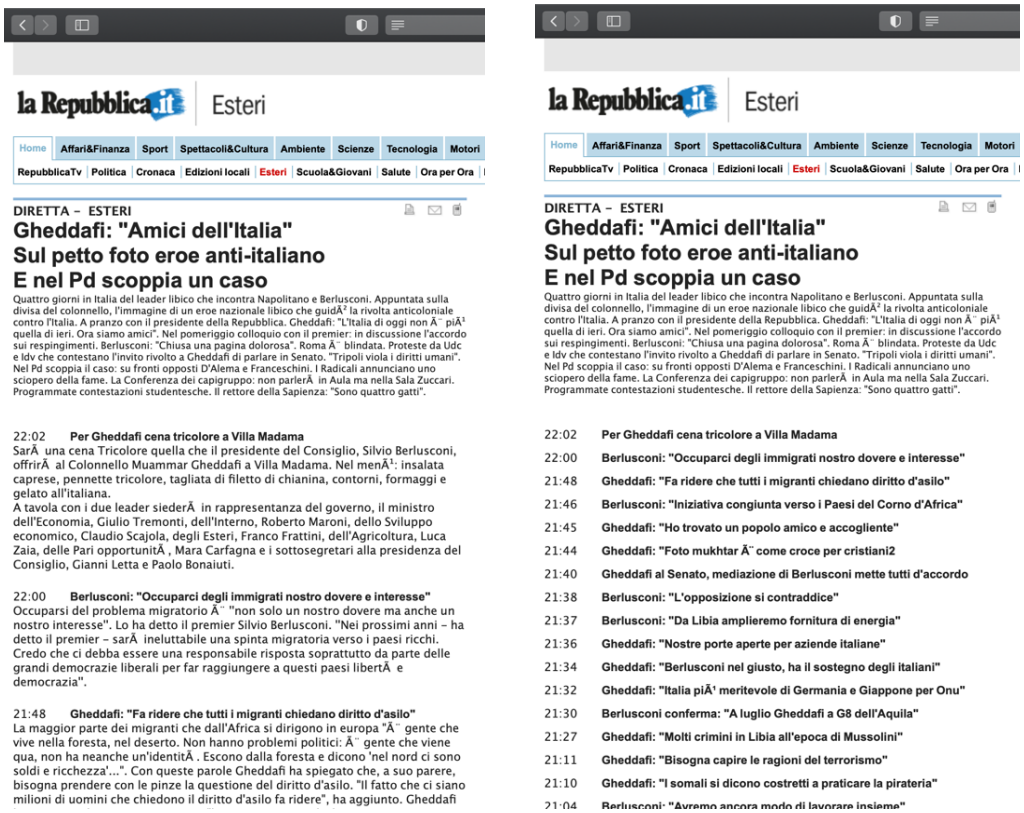


Fig.1 - *La Repubblica*'s website: *newsfeed* of day 1 in full expanded form (left) and contracted form – titles only (right).

Notably, the notion of *dissection* became the primary concern of this research in an almost accidental way since it originated from a recurring linguistic choice. Observing the detailed, almost minute-by-minute narration of the event produced by *La Repubblica*, I kept referring to the analysis of the meeting between Berlusconi and Qadhdhafi as the "dissection of an event" (defined in this research as a *neocolonial spectacle*). It sparked an engagement with the history and practice of anatomical dissection. One of the central concerns of this research has been the acknowledgement of the links between the Libyan genocide that took place in the 1920s-30s and the bilateral agreements on migration that fueled the Treaty on Friendship, thus engaging with colonial and neocolonial models for the administration of death, what Achille Mbembe defines as "necropolitics".[11] As a result, medical public dissection's focus on death - together with its investigative, pedagogic, and spectacular dimensions[12] - has resonated with this research.

[11] This term will be unpacked in Chapter 2.
[12] See Chapters 4 and 5.

Besides the *newsfeed*, this project originates from a press photograph, which I will refer to as the 'iconic image' in this thesis. It portrays Berlusconi greeting Qadhdhafi as he disembarks his aeroplane in Rome, when the two leaders exchange a handshake surrounded by their security entourages. This reciprocal and cordial act is, however, undermined by a black-and-white image pinned to the Libyan head of state's uniform. It portrays the capture of 'Umar al-Mukhtar, the leader of the anticolonial resistance against the Italian occupation, by officers of the Italian Fascist Army in Libya. The photograph was shot days before his execution.



Fig.2 - Qadhdhafi and Berlusconi at Ciampino Airport in Rome, 10 June 2009.



Fig.3 - Italian colonial officials posing with 'Umar al-Mukhtar (centre) after his capture, September 1931.

This research began as an exploration of the iconic image and the *newsfeed*. In the first two years, the focus was on establishing what I defined as the historiographical potential of the *newsfeed* – that is, how it functions as a document. Initially, the research was driven by the following questions: what is this document's temporal structure and afterlife? What is its documentary value, and how can it be re-activated, questioned and analysed through visual research? And lastly, how does the emphasis on the reduction between the time of the event and the time of its reporting (with its reliance on instantaneity, fragmentation, and synthesis) affect our understanding of how history is produced in the present and how this process is experienced? These broad questions were instrumental in investigating the *newsfeed* and guiding the thinking around its translation into a film to test the narrative characteristics of the detailed chronicle produced and archived by *La Repubblica*.

In this phase, I aimed to produce a long-form, single-channel essay film for cinema screening. In an attempt to start writing the script, in 2018, I produced the first output, the performance-lecture *Gaddafi in Rome: the Expanded Script* (2018-21)[13] (Figs.4-5, p.16). Testing the possibility of creating a single-channel film, it is focused on developing a film structure suited to interact with the *newsfeed* and situate the event within the long historical arch of Italian-Libyan relations.

The final and main output, *Gaddafi in Rome: Notes for a Film* (2022), is a three-channel video installation.[14] It draws on the performance lecture's structure and adapts the work developed towards the single-channel screen into an installation tailored for the gallery space. The format of the *notes-for-a-film-to-be-made,* common within essay filmmaking, was initially envisaged for the single-channel essay film. Yet, in abandoning this project in favour of the installation, the *notes-for-a-film* format takes on a double meaning: as a metafilmic format but also as a fragmented and expanded form rather than a linear film. The installation provides a more open-ended format, which is suited for the genealogical approach of this research. Moreover, its sculptural and

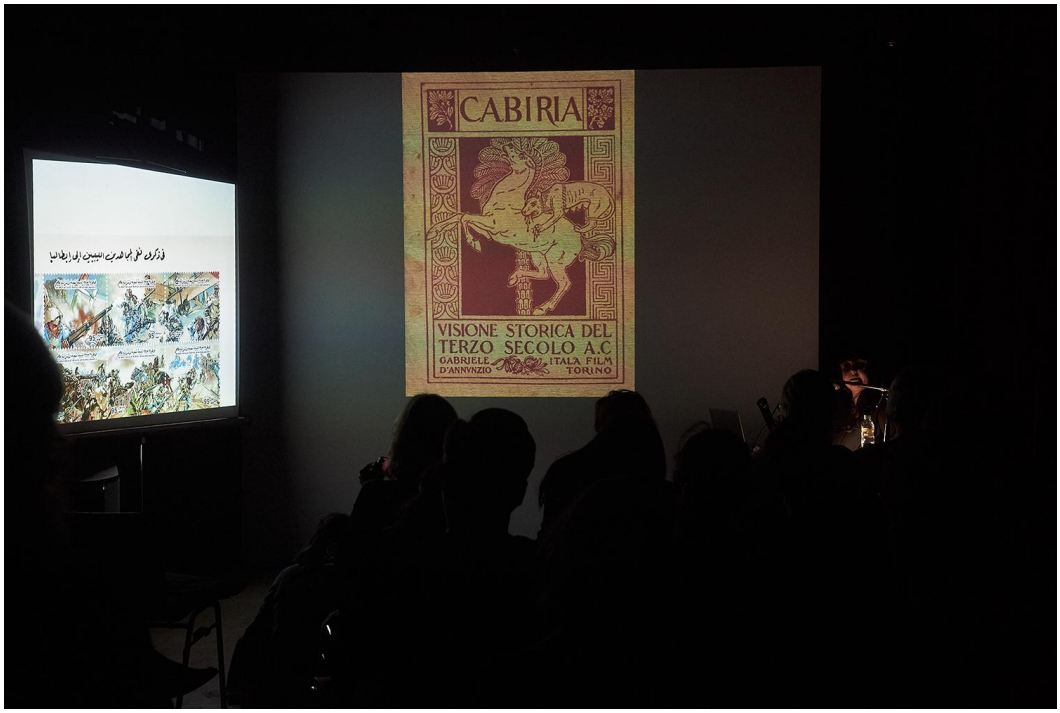
[13] The performance-lecture was first presented in September 2018. The presentations that followed have been updated to relate to the developments of the political situation in Italy and the relations between Italy and Libya.

[14] This work was produced for the Maxxi Bvlgari Prize 2022 finalists' exhibition at Maxxi National Museum of 21st Century Art in Rome. In October 2022 it was award the main prize.

architectonic elements add to the viewing experience by creating a tailored space to relate to the *dissection* process.



Figs.4 - *Gaddafi in Rome: The Expanded Script,* performed at Villa Romana (Florence, Italy, 2018)



Figs.5 - *Gaddafi in Rome: The Expanded Script,* performed at Wolf Kino / Archive Kabinett (Berlin, Germany, 2019)

Lasting 45 minutes, the format of the performance-lecture was suited to start selecting, organising, and testing the layering and interplaying of different textual and visual

elements through the use of two screens and a discursive format. The open-endedness and hybridity of the performance-lecture were also suitable to reflect on how the research process can be shared and to identify visual and *essayistic* formats suitable for *dissection*. This work helped me reflect on the style of my voice and my presence as a narrator and the way I could physically interact with the collected materials: it allowed the development of the roles of *lecturer*, *ostensor* and *sector*[15] involved in the tradition of medical public dissection.

The analysis and translation of the *newsfeed* into a film have exposed its fragmentation and gaps. As a result, I have devised a structure that can test the *newsfeed* and add a narrative and analytic layer that allows me to expand, connect, and address some of the gaps inherent in this information format. This decision was dictated by the nature of live news updates and my positionality: without an appropriate contextualisation, this material would risk recreating the selective memory and general unawareness related to the Italian colonial past. Such an approach was further developed in *Notes for a Film.*



Fig.6 - *Gaddafi in Rome: the Expanded Script,* 2018-2021, video still.

[15] In medieval public dissections the *lecturer* was the physician in charge of the process, who read from anatomical texts while giving instructions on which parts of the body should be sectioned. The *ostensor*'s function was to point at the parts of the body that needed to be cut by the *sector* (a surgeon or barber), who physically cut the body. These roles will be fully defined and engaged with in Part II.

Borrowing from the format of a playwright, *The Expanded Script* and *Notes for a Film* draw on the Three-Act Structure to highlight the performative character of the meeting, thus bringing to the fore the performative and narrative aspects of State diplomacy. The Three-Act Structure consists of a model of screenplay structure, which Syd Field has illustrated in his seminal book *Screenplay, the Foundations of Screenwriting* (2005 [1979]). The first act (the *set-up*) introduces the context and main character(s) before presenting the *inciting incident* (the dramatic premise), which propels the story into motion. The second act (the *confrontation*) is characterised by a series of obstacles that must be overcome by the protagonist(s). The third act (the *resolution*) presents a closure, by either overcoming or failing to overcome the dramatic premise.

Each day of the meeting between Berlusconi and Qadhdhafi (a total of three) follows a Three-Act Structure plot. The first day, the *set-up,* is identified by the *inciting incident*: Qadhdhafi's choice to wear the image of 'Umar al-Mukhtar on his chest, which many politicians saw as a provocation. As a result, the second day was connoted by protests (*confrontations*) from students to Members of Parliament and a general resistance to Qadhdhafi's visit. On the last day, Qadhdhafi's compliance with ceremonial etiquette and the signing of economic deals seemed to restore the peace. However, as he refused to attend the last conference, tension still ran high. *Resolution* was then achieved when Qadhdhafi apologised.

In *Notes for a Film,* these reflections are presented in a three-channel video installation inspired by the anatomical theatre of Padua – the first permanent theatre built for dissecting bodies for pedagogical purposes. Each video follows a different visual/dissecting approach in this work through sectioning, magnifying, and X-Ray imagery[16]. It aims to propose a structure and aesthetics that pushes the relation between topicality (a characteristic of both news and medicine) and systemicity (a feature of systems of power/oppression/violence and medicine).

[16] I refer here to the use of manipulated, digital images that resemble X-Ray images (they are 'inverted').



Fig.7 - *Gaddafi in Rome: Notes for a Film*, 2022, Maxxi National Museum of XXI Art, Rome. Installation view, exterior.



Fig.8 - *Gaddafi in Rome: Notes for a Film,* 2022, Maxxi National Museum of XXI Art, Rome. Installation view, interior.

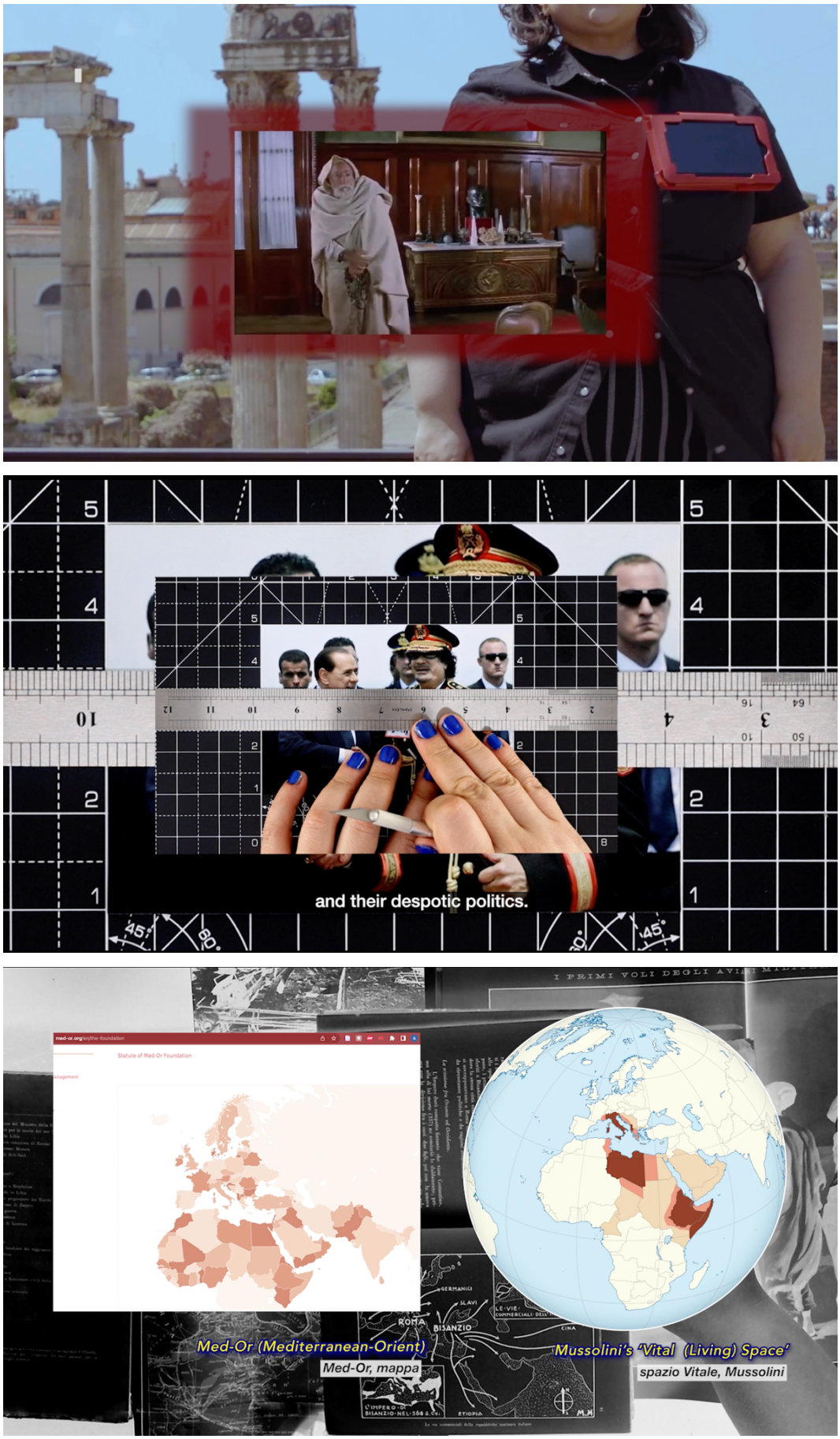


Fig.9-11 - *Gaddafi in Rome: Notes for a Film,* 2022, video stills.

A wide array of material is analysed in the work: from media images and footage to archival documents, photographs and stamps, to amateur video from YouTube, screen recordings of websites, fictional films, and text. The *essayistic* has provided the tools to make the research process public.[17] The *essayistic* is broadly understood in this research as a translation and expansion of the essay film into other media, formats, or spaces. For instance, *Notes for a Film* can be read as a translation of the essay film trope of the *notes-for-a-film-to-be-made* and of the performance-lecture *The Expanded Script* into an installation. The performance-lecture and the *essayistic* have been chosen as they turn "attention to the way we experience information as a twofold transaction: as an act of structuring controlled by a subject and as an act of subjectivisation…[they are] politicised mode[s] of undermining the authority claim of (mass media) information" (Frank, 2013, p.8).

Overall, this project has revolved around the development of a strategy (*dissection*) rooted in the *essayistic* to propose a series of tactics to contest the (Italian) *archive of coloniality*. I have developed a situated approach that attempts to unpack and probe this specific event and its media representation (the *neocolonial spectacle*) while also proposing an a*ccountability-based framework*. The latter was prompted by crucial aspects of this research, from Italy's transitional justice process after World War II to the colonial reparations that were part of the Treaty on Friendship. The failure of these processes in achieving accountability for State violence has led me to reflect on what accountability also means for this research, given the risks associated with indulging in reflexive methodologies from a Eurocentric perspective (Mortari, 2015, p.2). As I have written previously, "to deal with whiteness in the archive of coloniality, one must be prepared to be affected, to be stripped bare, to be honest about one's history, privileges and bias" (Ferrini, 2020, p.145). In so doing, this research aims to take on philosopher and art historian Marina Garcés' proposition to "deal honestly with the real", that is, to "[enter] on to the scene, not to participate in it and choose some of its possibles, but to take a stance […] exposing oneself and getting involved" (2012, p.3).

[17] The term *essayistic* will be fully explored in Chapter 5.

2. Methodology

2.1 Multimodal and Situated

A deep entanglement between self and research, as Morweena Griffiths argues, is typical of practice-based research. She writes: “arts-based, practice-based research needs to address the issue of the self of the researcher. It shows the significance of self within the processes and in its outcomes, whether these are propositions, descriptions, explanations, theories, artefacts, changed practices or changed understandings” (Griffiths, 2011, p.167).

This research engages with a wide range of theoretical literature and disciplines. As a result, it is based on a multi-method approach, often adopted in practice-based research. Robin Nelson (2013) states that “PaR [Practice as Research] typically involves a multi-mode inquiry drawing upon a range of methods” (p.98). This implies that practice-based research results in the testing and interplay of several methods, rooted mostly in qualitative methodologies (Nelson, 2013; Gray & Malins, 2016 p.21). By testing, I mean that different tactics are explored both through practice and theoretical research and that the methodology gets shaped through responsiveness, unfolding as I engage with the research question but also with its context.

Given the sensitive political nature of the Mediterranean region and the colonial history shared by Italy and Libya, coupled with my Eurocentric position, ensuring that my research is developed respecting ethical research practices to avoid bias and over-simplification has been fundamental. In *Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective,* Donna Haraway (1988) argues for a form of embodied “objective vision” that counteracts what she calls the “god trick”. Characteristic of a disembodied position that claims a comprehensive, transcendental vision/knowledge, the “god trick” represents “modes of denial through repression, forgetting, and disappearing acts” (Haraway, 1988, p.584). It is, as Haraway argues, “irresponsible” in the sense that it is “unable to be called into account” (Haraway, 1988, p.583).

Drawing on Haraway's notion of situated knowledges, this research is located in my body to counteract the "irresponsible" view of authoritarian politics and international diplomacy (incarnated in Berlusconi and Qadhdhafi) and media reporting (specifically, the *newsfeed*). A situated vision, as Haraway reminds us, is always partial, complex, and contradictory (Haraway, 1988, p.589). Contrary to the bodies of power that I analyse in this research, my partial perspective is, potentially, a responsible position: it (I) can "be called into account" (Haraway, 1988, p.583). As a result, I have adopted a situated methodology to develop an *accountability-based framework*.

2.2 Genealogical Methodology

This PhD research develops around a specific event and operates outside of the constraints of institutional archives and historical temporalities, rethinking the present by destabilising monolithic narratives of History and nationhood. Given the preoccupation with both the past and the present, this research is rooted in the genealogical model crafted by Michel Foucault drawing on Friedrich Nietzsche. Foucault proposed the genealogical model in the mid-1970s as a departure from his archaeological model,[18] to develop a "history of the present" (Foucault, 1979 [1975], p.51). Foucault insisted that if History looks for origins, genealogy is concerned with "descent". He writes:

> The purpose of history, guided by genealogy, is not to discover the roots of our identity but to commit itself to its dissipation. It does not seek to define our unique threshold of emergence, the homeland to which metaphysicians promise a return; it seeks to make visible all of those discontinuities that cross us" (Foucault, 1977, p.162).

Drawing on postcolonial anthropologist Ann Laura Stoler I understand genealogy as a "grounded, enabling political methodology" rather than as "an abstract, 'theoretical' program" (Stoler, 2016, p.23). Stoler draws on political theorists Wendy Brown and Martin Saar to salvage genealogy from what she perceives as a widespread, superficial use of this term as a substitute for history. Stoler points out its "political force and

[18] David Garland effectively sums up the difference between these methodologies: "*Archaeology* wants to show structural order, structural differences and the discontinuities that mark off the present from its past. *Genealogy* seeks instead to show 'descent' and 'emergence' and how the contingencies of these processes continue to shape the present. (2014, p.371)

potential resource" to address displaced histories, employing a genealogical methodology to develop her notion of "duress", which is concerned with "imperialist durabilities" (2016) in the present – a concept that resonates with the notion of coloniality.[19]

Moreover, Wendy Brown proposes a parallel between genealogy and *dissection,* even though not in relation to medical practice but strictly related to its metaphorical meaning as critical analysis. She writes:

> Knowledge is "made for cutting", Foucault insists, and the political landscape dissected by genealogical knowledge is the monolith of the present, a landscape that genealogy converts into questions: What are the characteristics of power in the time in which we live? What kind of subjects has this time made of us? (Brown, p.106)

Through these questions and the use of a generalised subject, "we", Brown implies both a collectivity and a subjectivity, which resonates with the public function of late Medieval dissection. In terms of collectivity, Martin Saar's (2008, p.311) analysis of genealogy is helpful in understanding its "mode of explanation" typical of genealogical knowledge production, which he describes as "hyperbolic", aiming to put doubt in the mind of their reader in order to question the "present form of subjectivity".

It follows that genealogy presents information in a register that aims to involve its audience and trigger a self-reflexive process – a characteristic shared with essay film. Such an interest in reflexivity originates from Foucault's insistence that genealogy does not hide its author; instead, it is bound to a "perspectival knowledge" (1977, p.382), contrary to what Foucault claims is the approach of historians.

Genealogy, as a result, is a political practice that deals with events across expanded and complex timelines and in relation to questions of power, systemicity and disruption – and through a situated approach. It provides the most suitable methodology for this research and its commitment to dissipating nationalist narratives of origins.

[19] In Section 3.2 of this Chapter I will expand on the term coloniality.

2.3 Digital Historiography

This project is based on a wide array of found material that is understood as an expression of what Charles Burdett et al. defines as the Italian *archive of coloniality*:

> a multi-layered, collective repository of aspiration, dominance, desire, self-aggrandizement and fear through which the development of society's self-image can be revealed but also – through a systematic and critical approach to the (visual) archive of coloniality – contested. (Burdett et al., 2019, p.53)[20]

This definition is rooted in an understanding of the colonial archive as a "site of knowledge production" and a "repository of codified beliefs." (Stoler, 2009, 97), that is both material and immaterial. The materials I have collected during this research are not bound to the historiographic understanding of the archive as an institution or repository of evidence. Instead, this research has been conducted outside of physical and institutional archives by collecting materials that are publicly available and circulated online.[21]

In so doing, it performs what David Joselit (2012) defines as the Epistemology of Search. Given the centrality of the World Wide Web in contemporary life, he argues that

> composition occurs under conditions of image population explosion…what now matters most is not the production of new content but its retrieval in intelligible patterns through acts of reframing, capturing, reiterating, and documenting...In economies of image overproduction connectivity is key. This is the Epistemology of Search (Joselit, 2012, p.43).[22]

This is a position shared by the artist and writer Hito Steyerl (2015, p.19), who claims that we live in a world so saturated by images that post-production has become the mode of production for artists. This strategy, at the core of my practice, is what Jaimie

[20] This quote is extracted from the article *Roundtable on Visuality, Race and Nationhood in Italy*, which was collectively written by Charles Burdett, Gaia Giuliani, Marianna Griffini, Linde Luijnenburg and Gianmarco Mancosu. Although this is a collective definition, it builds on Gaia Giuliani's contribution to the roundtable.

[21] Although this was set up at the beginning of the research, it became integral to the project, allowing for remote research, something that became particularly urgent during the COVID-19 pandemic.

[22] The argument draws on Chris Andersen's 2006 influential book *The Long Tail: Why the Future of Business Is Selling Less of More.* New York: Hyperion.

Baron (2014) calls “digital historiography”. She argues that artists’s moving images that rely on the appropriation of digital archives (digital and online sources) are “theorizing and enacting the problems we currently encounter as we confront the digital archive in the pursuit of some form of historical understanding” (2014, p.143). Baron, thus, infers that artists’ moving images produced through an engagement with the digital archive are inherently historiographic. Likewise, another definition of digital historiography that originates within the disciplinary boundaries of Historiography, claims that it amounts to the “interdisciplinary study of the interaction of digital technology with historical practice” (Sternfeld, 2011 p.544). Delivered through a set of archival processes such as “selection, search, and the application of metadata”, Sternfeld adds, its integrity “is measured according to the representation’s potential to generate historical knowledge, and, more importantly, evoke humanistic inquiry” (Sternfeld, 2011 p.572). Sternfeld, moreover, claims that digital historiography has the potential to “help us theorize how to move from the data stream to guided close reading of selected texts” (Sternfeld, 2011, p.572). Although this PhD is not concerned with generating historical knowledge, it is however, entangled with historical research and mnemonic processes. In addition, it is deeply concerned with the relation between streams of information (the *newsfeed*) and the possibility of offering a close reading of them. In confining the collection of materials (whether purchasing physical, archival material online, or by collecting digital sources) this project has embraced a digital historiographic methodology.

2.4 Critical Discourse Analysis

This research stems from the analysis of the *newsfeed*. As a text, it lends itself to the application of Discourse Analysis methodologies to identify the way the text functions and how socio-political constructions have shaped it. As Marianne Jørgensen and Louise Phillips (2002) claim Discourse Analysis is based on a general refusal of the notion of objective knowledge, given that “the ways in which we understand and represent the world are historically and culturally specific and *contingent”* (Jørgensen & Phillips 2002, p.5, emphasis by the authors) as well as constructed through social interaction. As a result, “[d]ifferent social understandings of the world lead to different social actions, and therefore the social construction of knowledge and truth has social consequences” (Burr 1995, p.5; Gergen 1985, pp.268–269).

Out of the different approaches to discourse analysis, I identified Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as the most suited to analyse the *newsfeed* and, by extension, the *neocolonial spectacle*. Understood as a form of Media Event (an event constructed by and through media reporting), the *neocolonial spectacle* is strictly related to the *newsfeed* - the way the event was represented by *La Repubblica* (Part I).

According to Norman Fairclough, CDA relies on "explanatory critique" and "critical language awareness" (Fairclough, 1992, p.13). Rooted in social constructivism and poststructuralist theory, CDA aims to "uncover the role of discursive practice in the maintenance of unequal power relations" (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002, p.64).

As pointed out by Jørgensen and Phillips (2002), CDA "does not…understand itself as politically neutral (as objectivist social science does), but as a critical approach which is politically committed to social change" (p.64). CDA's political commitment, thus, resonates with this research's political nature and positioned stance. It provides the appropriate framework to critically engage with the Italian *archive of coloniality* and to consider the impact of journalism in producing and disseminating information. In particular, I have drawn on Norman Fairclough's application of CDA to the media, as put forward in his book *Media Discourse* (1995).

3. Contribution to Knowledge

This PhD has developed a series of tools and concepts that offer a meaningful contribution to the fields of visual arts, visual culture and media studies. Overall, it contributes to contemporary debates around politically-engaged artistic research and the presentation of practice-based research. It has revolved around six terms that I have either coined or expanded upon: *archive of coloniality, neocolonial spectacle, newsfeed, dissection, essayistic*, and *accountability-based framework.* In themselves, they offer original contributions to different debates and across different disciplines.

3.1 Primary Contributions

Engaging with the late Medieval performance of dissection, the practical outputs of this research are concerned with visualising and making the research process accessible. Through a situated practice centred on self-reflexivity, I have adopted an embodied voice that questions the partial perspective and limits of the researcher/subject, opening to anecdotes and detours. Borrowing tools from medical anatomy, it proposes a subversion of its disciplinary function, thus defusing the juridical aspect of post-mortem autopsy. The main preoccupation of *dissection* is with the performance of the research process through an open-ended format rooted in the *essayistic*, to expose an analytical process that challenges systemic power relations. Through a counter narration and the resignification of the pre-modern practice of dissection, it makes a valuable contribution to what Matthew Fuller and Eyal Weizman (2021) call "investigative aesthetics" (and its relation to the forensic). It also contributes to growing literature and practices concerned with the *essayistic*, which wishes to depart from the essay film to consider more hybrid formats and intermedial translation.

The *archive of coloniality,* intended as a practice of refusal to engage with institutional archives and as a practice of collecting based on "radical scavenging" (Weiner and de Antonio, 1971) builds on recent literature debating what constitutes an ethical set of strategies for reusing found material (Baron, 2014 and 2020; Bruzzi, 2020). That is, how "audiovisual appropriation has been used as an ethical tool…in the service of interrupting hegemonic discourses that serve the interests of white, patriarchal, heteronormative capitalism while excluding subjects and discourses that do not fit into its dominant categories and narratives" (Baron, 2020, p.93).

Given this research's focus on neocolonialism and necropolitics, it also contributes to decolonial approaches in the arts. The past decade has witnessed a growing engagement with decolonial discourse and decolonizing practices within the arts and cultural sectors.[23] This phenomenon has led to the widespread use of terms such as decolonial and decolonization, which, in turn, are running the risk of becoming empty signifiers within Eurocentric debates (especially in institutional narratives). Eve Tuck and Wayne

[23] International exhibitions such as the 55th Venice Biennale curated by Okwui Enwezor (2015) and the 15th Documenta curated by ruangrupa (2022) for instance, have reflected and influenced the art sector's interest in decoloniality.

Yang (2012) have warned that decolonization is often used as a metaphor, as if settler colonial occupation was confined to the past, ignoring Indigenous people's ongoing liberation struggles. An issue even more pressing as the Israeli settler colonial project has entered its deadliest phase.

Emerging from the Latin American network Grupo Modernidad/Colonialidad (Modernity/Coloniality Group), decoloniality focuses on colonial legacies that are not strictly linked to land occupation. It builds on Peruvian sociologist Anibal Quijano's concept of the "colonial matrix of power" (from which the terms *coloniality* and *coloniality of power* derives). Quijano (2000) referred to the way colonial power dynamics still structure economies and epistemologies, keeping former colonies in a subordinate relation towards former imperial powers. As a practice or methodology, decoloniality requires the active undermining of systems that require obedience and complicity, de-linking from Western tradition (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018, p.151).

As a white subject working from within Eurocentric institutions of knowledge production at the centre of the former British Empire and in possession of an Italian/European passport, I am aware that my work upholds and recreates power dynamics rooted in the coloniality of power. From my position and within the power/knowledge system this research inhabits, I believe decoloniality cannot be practised to its full and true potential: claiming otherwise would risk whitewashing, taming, and appropriating the decolonial struggle.

However, this PhD proposes tools to expose and challenge the coloniality of power, contributing to the discourse around decoloniality. It has developed tactics to *dissect* neocolonial power dynamics and to become accountable. As Walter Mignolo argues, the ability to "see" coloniality is a highly transformative experience, because it "always *already calls for* decolonial thinking" (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018, pp.112-113, emphasis by the author). Working within Italian institutional frameworks, at times by being complicit with them to access and strike at more central sites of power/knowledge, this research wishes to be an accomplice to decolonial practices. As such, it provides a situated strategy for intervention that takes into consideration the complexity and contradictions inherent in my position. In devising a framework for accountability, I have grounded my approach within a critique of power and on the analysis of the failed

transitional justice processes that are at the centre of this research. That is, the lack of accountability for Fascist and colonial crimes in Italy after World War II and the deceiving process of colonial reparations that took place as part of the Treaty on Friendship. The *accountability-based framework* that I am proposing in this PhD, thus, reflects on accountability as a driving force for research, based on the knowledge that it may not be fully accomplishable. Instead, it conceives it as a utopian drive to be striven for.

3.2 Contextual Contributions

Around 2005, different Italian Studies scholars across Italy, the UK and the USA have noted how Italian colonialism has been under-discussed within both international and national contexts (Ben-Ghiat & Fuller, 2005; De Donno & Srivastava, 2006). As Miguel Mellino notices (2006, p.461) Postcolonial Studies have experienced a "scanty" and "late" development in Italy, due to a process of erasure of the colonial past from collective memory and a defective university system.[24] From its beginning in 2017, this research has wished to contribute to these developing fields. Particularly, it has addressed Italian colonial historians Valeria Deplano and Alessandro Pes's (2014, p.12) argument that most of the scholarship in their field has been preoccupied with assessing the effects of Italian colonialism on the former colonies. This, they claim, has contributed to a perception of this historical period as something disconnected from, and without long-lasting effects on, Italian society (Deplano & Pes, 2014, p.12). On the contrary, this research is concerned with the Italian *archive of coloniality* and the continuities of Italian colonialism into the present. Working across a long temporal arch through a genealogical methodology, it engages with the colonial past to read the present, developing around the concepts of (neo)colonialism and necropolitics. Counteracting reductive understandings about the lack of colonial awareness in Italy, which revolve on the notions of amnesia, this research builds on Gianmarco Mancosu's work (2019 and 2021) to focus on the amnesty of 1946. Placing it in relation with the colonial reparations of 2008-2009, this research highlights the continuities and the enduring presence of the colonial past, through the lens of accountability. Given the lack of artistic productions critically engaging with the Italian occupation of Libya, this

[24] Chapter 1 delves into the different reasons behind such the lack of critical scholarship.

PhD offers a set of tools to develop a situated, practice-based analysis and contributes to the Italian artistic context by filling a void in scholarship and artistic productions.

3.3 Secondary Contribution

I have developed the term *neocolonial spectacle* (Chapter 2) to describe Qadhdhafi's visit to Rome in 2009. However, it can be applied to investigate highly mediatised ceremonial events of international diplomacy that reinstate colonial power dynamics between former imperial powers and their colonies. In particular, it can be helpful to assess how processes of colonial reparations are staged publicly. As a result, it makes a substantial contribution to the field of Media Events Studies.

Paul Frosh and Amit Pinchevski (2018) have pointed out a gap in Media Event Studies' scholarship, which is concerned with the "temporal nature of the broadcast media event" (p.136). Their remark also resonates with Hannele Seeck and Terhi Rantanen's argument that the way Media Studies have understood media events needs to be reassessed in light of the dramatic changes in news production and circulation (Seeck & Rantanen, 2014, p.2). This is especially related to what they claim to be a hybridization of news forms. "In short", they add, "since the concepts of media events and media spectacles originate from the pre-globalization period of dominant national broadcasters and mass print media, we need to deliberate upon their ability to capture the important emergent phenomena that characterize our contemporary global age." (Seeck & Rantanen, 2014, p.2) Thus, the investigation of the temporality of the *newsfeed* (Chapter 3) contributes to what Frosh and Pinchevski, Seeck and Rantanen have referred to as a lack inherent to Media Event Studies.

4. Structure of the Thesis

This research focuses on a complex media event, which requires engaging with a vast number of topics and contexts. Given its genealogical methodology, it does so in conversation with a wide breadth of historical considerations. As a result, much attention is placed on historical contextualisation and exposing the connections between contemporary topics and historical debates.

Chapter 1 *Situating the Event* is dedicated to the historical and geopolitical contextualisation of the event. It focuses on Italy's and Libya's formation as nation-states to assess the role that colonialism has played in these processes. Due to the situated approach and personal perspective embodied in the practical outputs, it homes in on the politics of denial, erasure, and censorship towards the colonial past that have taken place in post-Fascist Italy. It considers how the impunity towards Fascist and colonial crimes that connoted the transitional justice process (the passage from Mussolini's regime to the Republic) has denied the development of accountability. Offering an overview of different theories of memory formation in relation to the colonial past and of the role played by historical research and archives, it introduces the notion of the *archive of coloniality*. This chapter also defines the specific artistic context that *The Expanded Script* and *Notes for a Film* intervenes in, by providing an overview of the way the Italian occupation of Libya has been tackled by Italian moving image artists.

The rest of the thesis is divided into two parts, each containing two chapters, followed by the Conclusions. **Part I**, *Technological Imaginary,* focuses on media and it is introduced by a brief consideration of the proto-Fascist's attitudes toward some of the technologies and media apparatuses that are explored in this research. In particular, it highlights the role played by wireless technology and embedded journalism during the Italo-Turkish War of 1911-12 (the Italian occupation of Libya). **Chapter 2**, *Performing Neocolonial Spectacles,* provides an analysis of the meeting between Silvio Berlusconi and Mu'ammar al-Qadhdhafi in relation to the history of bilateral agreements between Italy and Libya. In so doing, it provides a critical reading of the Treaty on Friendship, Partnership and Cooperation and the colonial reparations that it implies, bringing to the fore the "necropolitical" (Mbembe, 2019) and neocolonial nature of Mediterranean border politics. Focusing on Berlusconi and Qadhdhafi's performances of power, through the notion of "strongmen" put forward by Ruth Ben-Ghiat (2020), it engages with Media Event Studies to propose to read the event as a form of *neocolonial spectacle.* This concept draws on Kwame Nkrumah's understanding of neocolonialism and Guy Debord's notion of the "integrated spectacle". **Chapter 3**, *Instantaneous News,* focuses on defining what this research understands as a *newsfeed*, by analysing *La Repubblica*'s reporting of the event. Due to the live news updates' emphasis on the

reduction between the time of the event and that of its reporting, it considers how their value is affected by their archivisation online (the *newsfeed*). Thus, it engages with media and photographic theory to assess the temporal characteristics of the live news update and the *newsfeed.* This chapter also introduces the notion of media translation involved in turning the *newsfeed* into moving images, offering a close reading of this process in *The Expanded Script*. It also scrutinises the *newsfeed'*s contents – a crucial step in developing the practical outputs narration - through the application of tools borrowed from Critical Discourse Analysis.

Part II, *Medical Imaginaries,* focuses on *dissection.* It is introduced by a consideration of the relationship between cinema and medicine at the beginning of the twentieth century in the Italian context and in reference to the Italo-Turkish War. **Chapter 4**, *Defining Dissection*, provides an overview of the practice of dissection in Europe, specifically on its emergence as a public event in late Medieval Italy. It puts forward a series of historical and epistemological considerations on this practice. Michel Foucault's *The Birth of the Clinic* (2003 [1963]) offers an important reference in showing the evolution of the medical gaze. Focusing on the spectacular and pedagogical aspects of the earlier forms, it analyses the anatomical theatre's viewing perspective and the way it has shaped the installation *Notes for a Film.* It also places this work in relation to what Matthew Fuller and Eyal Weizman call "investigative aesthetics." Finally, **Chapter 5**, *Practising Dissection*, delves into the formal aspects of the practical outputs (in particular, of *Notes for a Film*) by engaging with the *essayistic* form, which is understood as a "set of conditions: dialogue/metadiscourse; experiment/experience; and utopia/impossibility" (Papazian and Eades, 2016, pp.2-3). It offers a series of artistic references that have influenced the realisation of this project: Pier Paolo Pasolini's notebook filmmaking, the Dziga Vertov Group's manipulation of documentation, Harun Farocki's soft montage, and his emphasis on gesturality. These elements are pivotal to proposing a reading of *dissection* as a disruptive strategy: through the unruly character of the *essayistic,* it borrows the core elements of public dissection and subverts their roles to "render powerless the structures within which the dissector's knife is probing."(Sawday, 1995, p.1) It is such a potentiality that allows to consider and develop an *accountability-based framework.* Finally, this proposition for accountability will be developed in relation to notions of self-reflexivity, transitional and reparative justice.

Chapter 1

SITUATING THE EVENT

La cinematografia è l'arte più forte
[cinematography is the strongest weapon]

(Benito Mussolini, 1937)



Fig.12 - Istituto Luce's opening ceremony, 1937 (Istituto Luce Cinecittà).

Introduction

This chapter offers a contextualisation of the event at the core of this research – the 2009 meeting between Silvio Berlusconi and Muammar Qadhdhafi in the context of the Italy-Libya Treaty on Friendship, Partnership and Cooperation. Given the shared history between Italy and Libya, namely, the colonial occupation and the ensuing bilateral relations after Libyan independence, it places this event within a historical arch that stretches from the formation of the Italian nation-state to contemporary debates on colonial memory. The first section, *Italy-Libya: Imperial Drive and Colonial Constructions,* focuses on these historical relations and the impact of Italian colonialism on the formation of the Libyan nation-state and the construction of Italian national identity.

The second section, *The Colonial Past on Screen: from Censorship to Nostalgia,* focuses on attitudes towards moving image production, from censorship towards productions exposing Italian colonial violence to contemporary artists' films focused on the Italian occupation of Libya. The movie *Lion of the Desert* by Moustapha Akkad (1981) has served as an anchor, given that it is a central element of this project, returning both within the practical outputs and in the contextual research.

The following section, *Colonial Memory in Italy,* explores Italian colonial memory, considering different models such as amnesia, aphasia (Stoler, 2009) and the notion of a "conspiracy of silence" (Rothermund, 2015). These models will then be read against the backdrop of the transitional justice process, which took place after World War II. It resulted in the Togliatti Amnesty of 1946, which led to a general impunity for crimes committed by the Fascist regime and in the colonies. The amnesty is important to start a reflection on juridical models for collective accountability. Finally, the last section, *From the Colonial Archive to the Archive of Coloniality,* focuses on the Italian and Libyan governments' attitudes towards archives and historical research after the end of the colonial occupation. It then considers my refusal to engage with Italian institutional archives and the strategies adopted as a result, defining what this research understands as an *archive of coloniality.*

1.1 Italy-Libya: Imperial Drive and Colonial Constructions

As Italian historian Anna Baldinetti argues, academic, anglophone literature about Libyan nation-building is scarce - if we make an exception for the works of Ali Abdullatif Ahmida, Lisa Anderson, and Majid Khadduri (2010, p.11). On the other hand, scholarly work produced in Italy tends to merely inscribe Libya within Italian colonial history, thus reinforcing Eurocentric hierarchies and the co-dependency caused by colonialism, denying once again the possibility of self-determination (Baldinetti, 2010, p.11). Her point of view echoes Ahmida's preoccupation with "listening to the voices of history (…) approach[ing] Libyan social and cultural history with respect to its own dynamics and not as a footnote in the history of colonialism, modernity, and capitalism […to] make sense of the history of a people *without history* as they were ignored or misrepresented by colonial and postcolonial elites" (2005, p.xv). Ahmida's work is driven by the urgency to counteract the main pitfall of Western historiography on Libya and the Maghreb more in general: a colonial mindset that relies on European definitions, historical periodisation, and nation-state models. Moreover, Ahmida notes how Arab nationalism constitutes another misconstruction that dominates the understanding of this area. That is, the widespread nationalist historiography that has arisen across the Maghreb from the political classes that established themselves as a result of the struggles for independence from colonial rule. Regarding Libya, he is specifically concerned with the centrality given to Qadhdhafi within contemporary scholarship and Western media, which marginalises the Libyan people and their experiences. As Ahmida puts it:

> academicians have, in my opinion, been myopic in their assessments of Libyan politics—commonly seen through a lens limited to demonizing Qadhdhafi as irrational and unpredictable—the 'Mad Dog Syndrome'. The conventional approach not only reduces Libya's culture, history, and society to the personality of its current leader, but ignores the significance of Libya's geography and the importance of the Sahara [which is v]iewed as an empty space dividing the Maghreb from sub-Saharan Africa (2005, p.162).

The concerns expressed by Ahmida and Baldinetti have been vital in shaping this PhD research, assessing and addressing my biases. Even though this project places much emphasis on Qadhdhafi, it does so to stress the Italian media's portrayal and politicians'

perception of the Libyan leader[25] while pointing out how this imposing figure overshadows the Libyan people (see *Notes for a Film, Act II*). In order to situate this research within a geopolitical and historical context, this section focuses on colonial continuities and the way Libya has been affected by the Italian occupation. By doing so, it provides an overview of the constitution of both Italy and Libya as nation-states in relation to Italian imperialism, understood here as the driving force behind the establishment of Italy as a European power and the determining factor behind the construction of Libya as a nation-state in the present configuration. Thus, if on the one hand this framing may seem to reinforce what Ahmida and Baldinetti denounce as a flattening of Libya's history – and the subsequent silencing of the Libyan people's experiences and the impact of Libya in North Africa – on the other hand, it sketches the historical conditions that led to the neocolonial relations explored in this research.

The focus on international relations firstly necessitates a historical and geopolitical contextualisation. Italy became a nation-state in 1861, around two decades before the Berlin Conference of 1884 and the so-called Scramble for Africa. Through the colonial endeavour, the newly formed nation-state claimed recognition as a first-world power (Bosworth, 1979, 1996; Gentile, 1994; Ben-Ghiat, 2011; Giuliani, 2018) despite its history of fragmentation and subordination to foreign rule (predominantly Arab, French, Spanish, and Austro-Hungarian). The process of unification was spearheaded by the House of Savoy monarchy, which was ruling what is now the north-western Italian region of Piedmont and the island of Sardinia. This process consisted of the occupation and annexation of north-east and central Italy first, followed by the military occupation of southern Italy and, eventually, of Rome (under Vatican rule). Building on Antonio Gramsci's work on what he called the "Southern Question", this process has been widely considered "internal colonialism" (1966 [1920]), a thesis corroborated by the calculated underdevelopment of the south under Savoy rule.[26] Resources continued to be mined in the south to sustain the modernisation of the north until the mid-twentieth century. At the same time, Italy underwent a process of mass emigration.[27]

[25] This aspect will be further explored in Chapter 2.

[26] Notably in reflecting on the condition of the Italian South, Gramsci developed the concept of *subalternity*, which became a foundation of Postcolonial Studies, because of its adoption by the Subaltern Studies Group – most notably, by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak.

[27] It is estimated that between 1861 and the beginning of World War II around 20,000,000 Italians emigrated (Bosworth, 1996, p.115).

The newly formed state rapidly joined the Scramble for Africa to secure overseas territories. In 1882, the Eritrean colony was established[28] and Somalia was to follow in 1890. However, Italy's thirst for expansion in Eastern Africa came to a halt because of the striking defeat incurred at Adwa, as the Italian army attempted to occupy part of the Ethiopian Empire.[29] Italy's interest in Libya, on the other hand, emerged in 1881 (Del Boca, 2010a, p.10-11; Proglio, 2016, pp.37-38) after Italy's claim over Tunisia was turned down at the Berlin Conference of 1884. This led to growing propaganda promoting Libya as an extension of mainland Italy, its so-called *quarta sponda,* namely, its 'fourth shore' on the Mediterranean Sea. Libya was also seen as a (partial) solution to the problem of mass emigration, conceived as an empty, fertile land to be occupied by impoverished Italians.[30] Thus, borrowing from postcolonial theorist Edward Said's description of the "system of ideological fictions" (1978, p.321) that make up the Orientalist tradition, Libya is understood "as an empty desert waiting to burst into bloom" and its inhabitants as "inconsequential nomads possessing no real claim on the land and therefore no cultural or national reality" (Said, 1978, p.286). As Ahmida puts it, it portrays the Sahara as "an empty space and a divide between the Maghrib and sub-Saharan Africa" and as "Libya's role in the rest of Africa [as] an aberration" (1994, p.162).

The imperial project was also deployed to induce a feeling of national unity and belonging by providing a common objective (focusing on the alterity of the overseas populations rather than on internal differences). In addition, the military victories and territorial expansion constituted a strategy to generate consensus for the ruling elite. Italy's reputation as degenerate, passive, and impoverished among the major European countries had to be opposed with a demonstration of military prowess (Del Boca, 2009, p.14; Patriarca, 2010) but also through an act of domination over its African neighbour.[31] Italians' character and skin tone was thus whitened through colonial

[28] This was possible mainly because of the Rubattino shipping company that had acquired the Bay of Assab, in Eritrea, in 1869 (Podestà, 1998; Labanca, 2007, p.48)

[29] To date, this is considered the biggest defeat sustained by a western country in Africa.

[30] In keeping with the use of archaeology for colonial propaganda and legitimation – Libya was conceived as the so-called "granary of Rome " belonging to Italy, the heir to the Roman Empire (Proglio, 2016, p.131).

[31] Overall, the Italian occupation covered: Eritrea, Somalia, Libya and Ethiopia, the Dodecanese Islands (now Greece), Albania and the protectorate of Tientsin in China.

violence (Wong, 2006, p.4; Patriarca, 2010; Giuliani, 2018, p.16). This process started in what is known as the 'Liberal era', from 1861 to 1921, and escalated under Mussolini's rule in the 'Fascist era' from 1922 to 1945. Italy lost the control of its empire at the end of the Second World War and, as a result, after 1946 (the beginning of the 'Republican era') colonialism became often associated with Fascism. This association is also linked to Mussolini's heavy investment in imperial politics, which led to the peak of consensus for the regime in 1936 (De Felice, 1974, pp.758-764), with the occupation of Ethiopia and the foundation of the Empire. However, notably the colonial/imperial desire was rooted in the very notion of the Italian nation-state.



Fig.13 - *Gaddafi in Rome: Notes for a Film, Act II,* 2022, video still.

In 1911 Italy declared war on the Ottoman Empire, which was undergoing a profound crisis.[32] Known as the Italo-Turkish War, it lasted one year, resulting in the annexation of the regions of Tripolitania, Cyrenaica and, later, Fezzan, which were then united in one territory called Libya after the Ancient Roman's name for this area. As pointed out by the former Libyan Studies Centre's director, Muhammad T. Jerary, prior to the Italian occupation the Ottomans ensured that Muslim and Arabic communities lived in harmony, respecting their religious traditions - a balance that was unsettled by the

[32] Despite ongoing amicable diplomatic relations and the admonitions of the international community, Italy attacked the Ottomans in 1911. Known as the Italo-Turkish War, it was the first conflict in which air-bombing was used. According to historian Christopher Clark the war triggered a cascade effect that accelerated the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and led to the First World War (2012, p.42).

Italian imposition of a system based on Christian values (Jerary, 2005, p. 203). Before being subjugated by Italy, the three provinces of Tripolitania, Cyrenaica and Fezzan were separated and distinctly administered. Their geographical location and morphology also contributed to their diverse histories (Ahmida, 2005, p.3). For instance, as Ahmida points out, from the early-mid 1800s Cyrenaica (the eastern region bordering Egypt) gained some independence since it was at the centre of the Saharan luxury trade - upon which all three provinces relied. In the 1880s, as a result of Western colonial occupation in Northern Africa, however, this historical trade route began to decline, leaving Tripolitania and, especially, Fezzan in financial instability (Ahmida, 2005, p.4). Yet, as the new commercial route uniting Europe with the Near East crossed Cyrenaica, this region was able to preserve stability. The Sanusiyya is a Sufi religious order founded in 1842. It ensured the safeguarding of its wealth and political independence by forging tribal alliances and relying on a growing group of followers. The Sanusi sternly defended this economic and political independence during the Italian colonial occupation. Their resistance was spearheaded by the Sanusi teacher 'Umar al-Mukhtar.[33]



Fig.14 - Map of Libya, divided in regions.

[33] On the contrary, Tripolitania and Fezzan were not able to oppose the foreign aggressor for too long, as in 1835 the Ottomans had also begun 'a process of weakening' of local governance through the elimination of tribal chiefs (Ahmida, 2005, 10).

All provinces resisted the occupation quite successfully in the first decade and different parts of Libya managed to negotiate different degrees of independence, especially in Tripolitania (Ahmida, 2005, p.2). In Cyrenaica, moreover, the Sanusi order obtained special recognition and Prince Idris (later King Idris I between 1951 and 1969) was nominated as leader, while being forced to undergo some forms of containment and betrayal on his tribe (Ahmida, 1994, 106). However, the advent of Fascism in Italy in 1922 initiated the so-called 'pacification of Libya': the repression of the Sanusi's resistance through the use of increasingly brutal tactics, such as mustard gas bombs (that were deemed illegal after World War 1), forced displacement, and concentration camps that led to genocide. The capture and execution of 'Umar al-Mukhtar in 1931[34] brought to an end this period, as the resistance was ultimately contained. The following decade was marked by a progressive ethnic segregation. Having become a crucial battleground during World War Two, at the end of the Italian occupation in 1943 Libya was split in two. Cyrenaica and Tripolitania were administered by the British, while Fezzan by the French. In 1951 all provinces gained independence through the constitution of the Libyan monarchy. However, its leader, King Idris I, retained strong ties with the British Empire. This period was characterised by increasing frictions between the tribal groups as a result of the distinctive histories of each region, as well as different relations with the occupiers. As explained by Anderson (1986) and Ahmida (2005), thus, it would be erroneous to talk about a unified Libyan history or even of the Libyan people as a cohesive or monolithic group.[35]

In 1969, by positing himself as the heir to the anticolonial resistance, Mu'ammar Qadhdhafi's so-called 'bloodless revolution' allowed him to claim Libya's sovereignty back, away from European control.[36] As explained by the Libyan political scientist Mabroka Al-Werfalli, Qadhdhafi's forty-two year rule was based on the "legitimisation of charisma", which was built on anti-colonial, anti-Zionist, pan-Arabist sentiments that were investing Libyan political culture (2011, pp. 23-25). According to Italian historian Antonio Morone (2013), Qadhdhafi's assimilation of his coup to the liberation struggle from colonial occupation served to minimise the overthrow of the Sanusi monarchy while justifying Libyan unity, despite inheriting colonial borders for the concept of

[34] This is thoroughly examined in the film *Sight Unseen* (2019) documented in Appendix C.
[35] This issue is also referred to *in Notes for a Film* and it will be further explored in Chapter 3.
[36] In 1977 Qadhdhafi renamed the country the Great Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya.

independent Libya. As explored also in the *Notes for a Film – Act II*, the Italians merged Cyrenaica, Fezzan and Tripolitania into one country causing significant internal friction, both during and after colonial occupation.

As pointed out by Anderson (1986, p.65), however, the identity provided by Islam to the Libyan people was far more relevant than any other nationalist discourses like Arabism or the attempts at forging a Libyan nationalism that were particularly fervent amongst the exiled Libyans. Yet, the internal divisions of each province in tribal groups remained intact, with each new change in governance creating a complicated reshuffling of relations and hierarchies amongst the many groups – and so, failing to develop a cohesive Libyan identity. As a result, to appeal to Libyan unity could have been seen as supporting what Baldinetti defines as a "colonial construction" (2010, p.1). Qadhdhafi's appeal to Libyan nationalism through anticolonialism and anti-European views, as well as Islamic tradition (particularly the notion of *jihad*), was a way to mobilise all Libyans against a common, foreign enemy. And throughout the four decades that he ruled, maintaining the memory of the suffering caused by this enemy was paramount.

In approaching figures as complex as Berlusconi and Qadhdhafi, this research has focused on the analysis of their relation with the colonial past (and how this related to the Treaty on Friendship, Partnership and Cooperation). If *Notes for a Film*, *Act I,* highlights the language employed by Berlusconi and in the Treaty, on the other hand, *Notes for a Film*, *Act II* considers Qadhdhafi's exploitation of colonial history to build consent. Moreover, through the recurring presence of 'Umar al-Mukhtar, I wished to engage with a figure who was not only overly-used by Qadhdhafi, but who is still considered a national hero. Even though Qadhdhafi's regime fell, the figure of 'Umar al-Mukhtar has remained at the centre of Libyan collective imaginary, often evoked by the fighting militias during the post 2011 civil war. Currently, 'Umar al-Mukhtar still appears on 10 Dinar notes as well as on stamps, just like during Qadhdhafi's regime. More than any other symbol or figure, al-Mukhtar seems to unify Libyans across times. And it is for this reason and for its example of anticolonial resistance that both practical outputs of this research rely on this figure. In the next section, the movie *Lion of the Desert,* which narrates his story, is going to drive a reflection on filmmaking, censorship and colonial memory in Italy.

1.2 The Colonial Past on Screen: from Censorship to Nostalgia



Fig.15 - *Lion of the Desert* advertising, September 1981.
From personal archive.

Lion of the Desert is a feature-length fiction film by the Syrian-American director Mustapha Akkad. He stars Anthony Quinn in the role of the Libyan anti-colonial fighter 'Umar al-Mukhtar. Based on historical events, it portrays the last days of al-Mukhtar's life, until his capture and execution by the Italian colonial army in 1931. The movie was released in 1981, four decades after the end of the Italian occupation of Libya. In Italy,

it was never approved for distribution thus resulting in a form of 'soft' censorship. Contributing to this ban was the Italian government's perception of it as a threat to the bilateral relations between the two countries, which were at an all-time high (Tosatto, 2009, p.133). At the time Italy was prepared to discuss the issue of colonial reparations - an ongoing cause of contention - and the organisation of a state-visit by Qadhdhafi, in order to officially become Libya's first commercial partner (Del Boca, 2010b, 502). It would take almost three more decades to make this happen, with the signing of the Treaty on Friendship Partnership and Cooperation in 2008. *Lion of the Desert* was finally screened on Italian TV to celebrate this historical event, albeit on a private channel rather than national TV. On the 11th of June 2009, as Qadhdhafi was visiting Berlusconi in Rome, Sky Cinema (2009) broadcasted the film at prime time proclaiming that it was "breaking the censorship".[37] Yet, the ban on distribution was not officially lifted by the government.

Lion of the Desert represents my first encounter with Italian colonial violence.[38] It features prominently within this research to represent Libyan resistance, especially in *Notes for a Film* that employs extracts of the movie in the three *Acts*. In this section, its censorship in Italy will be analysed against contemporary artistic productions that focus on the Italian occupation of Libya. In this way, it provides a contextualisation for the practical outputs of this research.

In 1981, during the parliamentary discussion surrounding the decision to prevent distribution of the *Lion of the Desert,* the undersecretary to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Raffaele Costa, declared that "the events narrated in the film refer to a distant past - in which, however, Italy has implemented soft and essentially civilised policies" (Costa, 1981, quoted in Tosatto, 2009, p.133). Yet, according to British historian Denis Mack Smith, and Italian historians Angelo Del Boca and Giampaolo Calchi Novati, the film offers an accurate, factual depiction of resistance fighters' military tactics, as well as of Italian colonial violence in Libya - including the genocide of the Sanusi's

[37] Introduction to the broadcasting of *Lion of the Desert* available on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H2XN2M0ZYJA. The audio from this clip also features at the end of *Notes for a Film, Act III.*

[38] This is also mentioned in *Notes for a Film, Act I.* I was given a DVD of *Lion of the Desert* by my friend Ahmed to begin to educate myself on Italian colonialism.

population, which was deported into concentration camps.[39] As Del Boca puts it, commenting on the ongoing ban of the film, this "can be inserted into a larger and more underhanded campaign of mystification and disinformation that aims to protect a romantic and mythical vision of our colonial history" (2005, 197).



Fig.16 - Ken Kirby, *Fascist Legacy,* 1989, poster.

Nicola Labanca points out how, in the 1980s and 1990s, critical historical research on Italian colonialism was hindered, together with any public critical debate (2007, p.462). In this climate, the BBC documentary *Fascist Legacy* by Ken Kirby (1989), which documents the brutalities committed by the Italians in the colonies, was prevented from being screened in Italy by the Italian national public broadcasting company RAI. By buying the rights for distribution in Italy, RAI "shelved it" (Ahmida, 2021, p.54), thus impeding its circulation.

As argued by Claudio Tosatti (2009), *Lion of the Desert* was not strictly censored. However, because of the mounting political pressure, a request for distribution was never formally filed and the film was never granted distribution rights. A handful of film festivals managed to show the movie in Italy anyway. Yet, in 1987, three people were arrested and fined for attempting to screen it. As argued by historian Maurizio Zinni in *Fascisti di Celluloide* (2010), film censorship was a tactic deployed by the Italian government not only during Mussolini's regime but also in post-fascist Italy.

[39] Out of the 100,000 people interned in the camps, 40% died, while the survivors had to deal with displacement.

Zinni's book covers different cases of censorship from 1945 to 2000 and identifies 1948 as the most defining moment for film censorship as an "institutionalised form of amnesia" (Zinni, 2010, p.48).

The transition from Fascism to the Republic coincides with a series of pivotal events that are crucial to assess the way a collective colonial memory has been constituted in Italy, given that it is at this very time that the colonial possessions were lost. Italy's *transitional justice* process after World War II was dominated by the so-called *amnistia Togliatti* (Togliatti's amnesty, bearing the name of the Ministry of Justice that wrote the law in 1946). According to Ruti G. Teitel, transnational justice is broadly defined as "the conception of justice associated with periods of political change, characterised by legal responses to confront the wrongdoings of repressive predecessor regimes" (2003, p.69). It was constituted as a field of study following the publication of Teitel's *Transitional Justice* in 2000 and the foundation of the International Center for Transitional Justice in 2001 (Caroli, 2022, p.10). This research is concerned with the juridical process that oversaw the passage from two decades of Fascist dictatorship (1922-1943) plus two years of civil war (the war of liberation from Nazism and Fascism between 1943-1945, after Italy joined the Allies) to the democratic republic that was voted in 1946. The amnesty guaranteed impunity not only for most of the crimes committed by the Fascist regime in the Italian metropole but also for those atrocities perpetrated in the colonies.

If some members of the Fascist party were removed from high-profile political positions (the so-called "purge" that was at first overseen by the Allies), the judiciary, the very category responsible for the implementation of transitional justice, often remained in their seats. (Cairoli, p,2022, pp.58-59) The same happened for public officials and administrators, including those in charge of archives, censorship, and the film industry. Film scholar Paolo Saporito notices that "censorship acted as a further form of institutional amnesia aimed at erasing from films the traces of the compromising continuity between the Fascist past and the democratic present" (2018, p.299). This strategy has survived well into the present, as is evident in the struggle experienced by the US-Ethiopian filmmaker Haile Gerima, who has been refused access to footage held at the Istituto Luce Cinecittà in Rome. As the central archive of colonial film in Italy, Istituto Luce (now merged with the production studios of Cinecittà) was the Fascist

government's education and colonial film unit – one of its principal propaganda organs. Working on two films about the Italian occupation of Ethiopia, Gerima has seen his requests for footage ignored for almost four decades.[40]

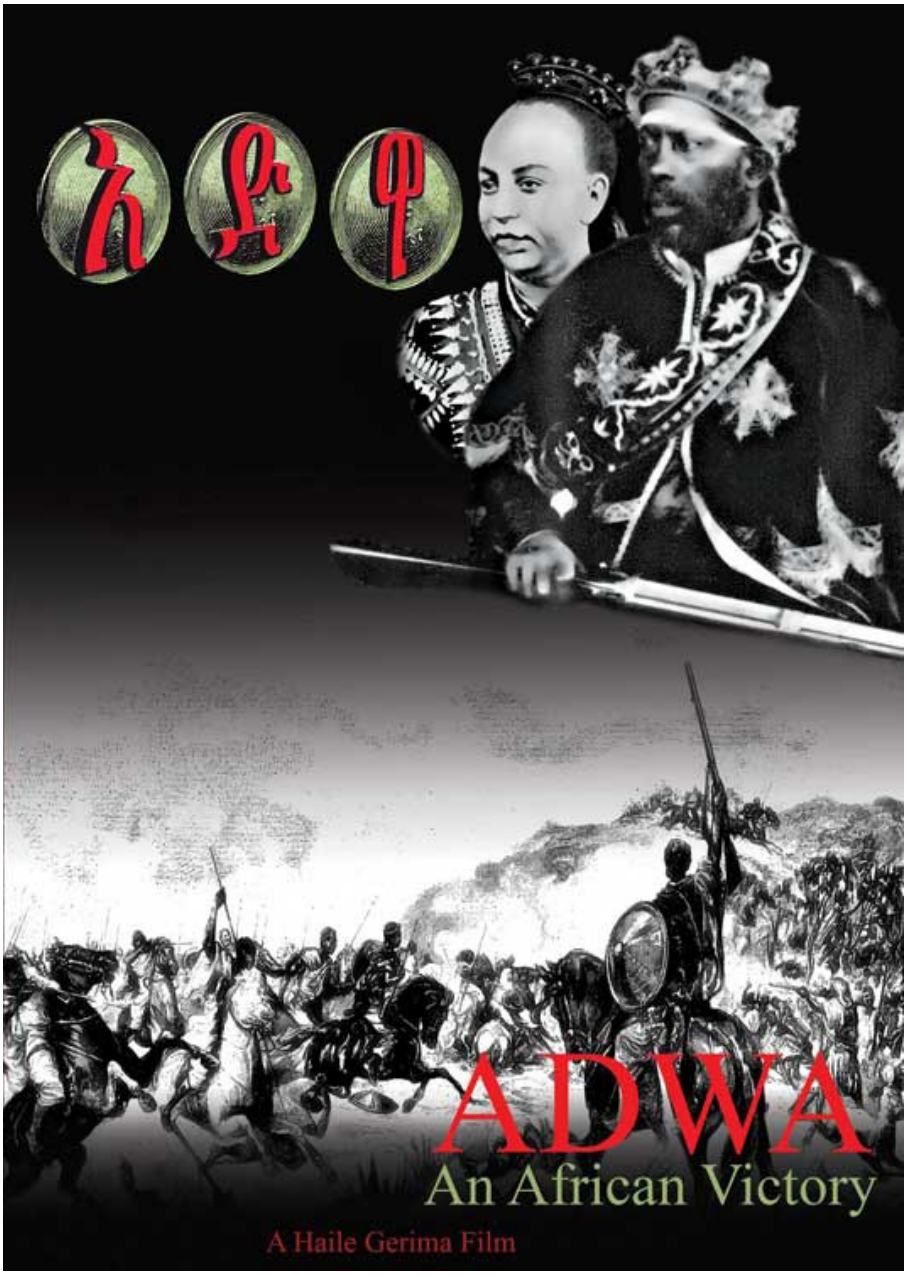


Fig.17 - Haile Gerima, *Adwa: An African Victory,* 1999 poster.

[40] In 1999 Haile Gerima managed to release the first film, *Adwa: an African Victory,* despite the lack of the footage he requested from Istituto Luce. He is now in the process of releasing *Black Lions, Roman Wolves,* a five part documentary about the Ethiopian resistance to the Italian occupation, an homage to his father who was a resistance fighter. I have written about this situation in the article *Six Scenes of (Dis)Engagement. Creating Friction in the Italian Fascist and Colonial Archives,* which will be published in the forthcoming volume *Restitution and the Moving Image: On the Politics and Ethics of Global Film Heritage,* edited by Nikolaus Perneczky, Fabian Tietke and Cecilia Valenti.

This amnesic tendency, however, has been increasingly challenged in the twenty-first century. Within the visual arts and film industry, 2015 saw the flourishing of moving image works dealing with Italian colonial memory (Ferrini & Frangi, 2017), focusing primarily on the occupation of Ethiopia. Regarding visual artists, the works of Rossella Biscotti, Theo Eshetu, and Patrizio Di Massimo preceded this wave of productions in 2015, although only Di Massimo focused on Libya. The centrality of cinema in Mussolini's propaganda and on moving images in this research, determine my focus on moving images in this contextual analysis.



Fig.18-19 - Yervant Gianikian and Angela Ricci Lucchi, *Pays Barbare,* 2013, video stills.



Fig.20 - Yervant Gianikian and Angela Ricci Lucchi, *Pays Barbare,* 2013, video still.

The primary reference remains the seminal, experimental film work of artist duo Yervant Gianikian and Angela Ricci Lucchi, which began with the film *From the Pole to the Equator* (1986). Through their so-called "analytical camera", Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi have explored colonial violence and the Western imperialist gaze. Their work has also investigated the cult of Mussolini as a consequence of the pre-fascist colonial drive as featured in *Diana's Mirror* (1996), culminating in *Pays Barbare* (2013), where the violence of the Fascist colonial gaze is deconstructed to its core. In the latter, the analytical camera closely scrutinises one of Mussolini's visits to Libya. Through a detailed analogue process, Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi recapture archival film stills frame by frame. It is a process of unveiling and close encounter with the people captured in the archival footage. As they put it:

> The construction of an analytical camera lets us get close to, even enter deep within, each individual frame. We have control over the speed of the film, the details, the colour. [...] Using the old to create the new, bringing hidden significance out of the past. (Gianikian & Ricci Lucchi, 2017, p.8)

By slowing down the footage, Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi identify and isolate the gazes, gestures, expressions and poses that characterise the colonial mindset so deeply ingrained in Italian society. As Miriam De Rosa (2017, p.34) notices, the slowness implied in the analytical camera and the films is dictated by their profoundly ethical

commitment towards the people portrayed in the archival footage and the histories of oppression they engage with. Slowness is the expression of a "poetics of care" (De Rosa, 2017, p.34) in which "ethics equals the responsibility for the future fuelled in the present by the heritage of the past" (2017, p.33). Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi's work, thus, appears to directly contend with the history of censorship that has characterised the Italian film industry, slowing down and closely scrutinising those inconvenient truths that have been actively concealed.



Fig.21-22 - Patrizio di Massimo, *Oae,* 2009, video stills.



Fig.23 - Patrizio di Massimo, *Oae,* 2009, video still featuring footage of *Lion of the Desert.*

Although interest in Italian colonial history has been increasing, artistic productions by Italian artists exploring the occupation of Libya are rare. Patrizio Di Massimo and Martina Melilli are exceptions to this tendency, having produced several works on this topic. Di Massimo developed a large body of work between 2008 and 2010. In the short video *Oae* (2009) he juxtaposed footage from the *Lion of the Desert* with his exploration of Tripoli, which focused on Ancient Roman and Fascist architecture. His quest for the traces of the Italian occupation - often incarnated in his fascination with Roman ruins - betrays an ambivalent attitude in which the footage of *Lion of the Desert* almost results in a 'tokenistic' gesture. Even though the extracts from *Lion of the Desert* attempt to make colonial violence visible, the artist's framing of the project reveals his orientalist and nostalgic gaze over Libya. In an interview from 2009, Di Massimo defines Libya as "Italy outside Italy. The diehard frontier" (Rabottini, 2009, p.125). He refers to his desire to visit Libya as "an obsession", "an outright physical need (…) to see with my own two eyes what had once been a part of Italy" (Rabottini, 2009, p.125). His motivations are exemplified in this sentence: "I was attracted to the idea of an exotic Italy, of our modernist architecture set up at the gates of Africa, of the layering of cultures that populated and colonized the land: Phoenicians, Greeks, Romans, Turks, Arabs, Italians". Here, Libya is described through an Orientalist lens as an empty land devoid of Libyan people. As Said observed, "[i]nsofar as this Arab has any history, it is part of the history given him (or taken from him: the difference is slight) by the Orientalist tradition" (2003, p.286) - what Ahmida describe as the perception of Libyans as people "without a history" (2005, p. xvi). Moreover, Di Massimo adds how his "expectations were crashed the moment [he] arrived in Tripoli" (Rabottini, 2009, p.125)

and of his “disappointment” in finding out that Fascist monuments were no longer standing and Italian architecture had been painted over in the traditional green shade that symbolised Qadhdhafi’s power.

Di Massimo’s uncritical tone is not uncommon in Italian artistic production. A lack of engagement with theoretical debates in these fields, as well as in critical race theory and critical whiteness studies within art academies and museums, paired with a systemic unawareness of colonial history and the lack of inclusion of people of colour in the cultural sphere, have led to an artistic production that seems to be immune to scrutiny and accountability (Ferrini, 2020, p.144). This scenario is further problematised by the lack of criticality manifested by those artists whose families have benefitted directly from colonialism, leading to superficial condemnations of the colonial system mixed with attempts to redeem their personal connections.

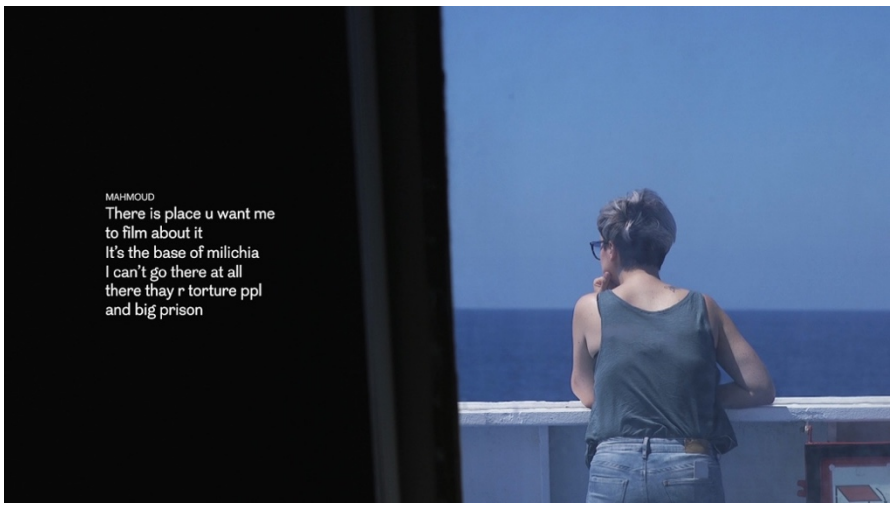


Fig.24 - Martina Melilli, *My Home, in Libya*, 2018, video still.



Fig.25 - Martina Melilli, *The Fourth Day of School,* video still, 2015



Fig.26 – Martina Melilli, *Italian-African Rhyzome. A Choreography for Camera (+voice)*, 2017, video still.

This is apparent in the documentary films *The Fourth Day of School* (2015), *Italian-African Rhyzome. A Choreography for Camera (+voice)* (2017), and *My Home, in Libya* (2018) by the artist-filmmaker Martina Melilli. These are the only three artists' moving image works devoted to Libya that have emerged from the 2015 spike in productions on the Italian colonial past. They are significant because of their wide circulation across the most prestigious European film festivals and because they draw two problematic associations. Firstly, they all focus on Melilli's family history as settler colonisers in Libya without offering any contextualisation. For example, the feature-length documentary film *My Home, in Libya* focuses on the artist's grandfather's nostalgic memories of Tripoli, from which he was expelled in 1970 together with the remaining 20,000 Italian settlers.[41] Yet Melilli fails to include any historical information on the colonial occupation or critical posture towards it, thus omitting the conditions that allowed her grandfather to move to and prosper in Libya. Secondly, in the short films *The Fourth Day of School* and *Italian-African Rhyzome. A choreography for camera (+voice)* Melilli creates a troubling parallel. Overlaying recent images of African migrants' boats crossing the Mediterranean Sea with descriptions of her family's hurried repatriation following the expulsion from Libya, the artist suggests that their experiences are comparable. Melilli's engagement with Libya thus hinges on a dynamic of victimhood in which she portrays herself as the bearer of her family's plight: looking for *her* home in Libya in *My Home, in Libya,* she travels to the

[41] In Chapter 2 I will explain the context that brought to the expulsion of Italians from Libya.

southernmost Italian seashore in a symbolic attempt to reconnect with Libya. As the civil war was raging and she was not allowed to visit Tripoli to film the places her grandfather was reminiscing about, Melilli asked a young Libyan man whom she befriended on Facebook to film them for her. The documentary presents short clips recorded by this person as he risks his life, while Melilli does not seem to acknowledge her privilege or any of the historical conditions that have determined the differences between their lives in any meaningful way. The film overall is pervaded by a nostalgic tone, in which the artist – like her grandfather – seems to be suffering because of the severed link with the former colony. Suggesting a right to this land, a notion of possession (clearly stated in the film's title) while avoiding taking any accountability or providing the viewer with any historical contextualisation.

Ali Abdullatif Ahmida claims that "the silence of scholars on the genocide in Libya has led to the perception of Italian fascism as benign, or a lesser evil than Germany" (2005, p. xvi). Likewise, I contend that artistic depictions of colonial history that refuse to name its violence sustain the widespread conviction that Italian colonialism was benevolent. Going back to Raffaele Costa's statement on the banning of the *Lion of the Desert*, it can also be noticed that besides the trenchant colonial narrative alluding to a "civil" and "soft" mission, it betrays Costa's complete denial of the centrality of the colonial project in the constitution of a cohesive Italian national identity. It also disregards the ongoing relations between Italy and its former colonies through neocolonial deals and bilateral agreements. In light of this cyclical resurfacing of colonial narratives, albeit unrecognised or misinterpreted, several historians (Triulzi, 2006, Ellena, 2015, Proglio 2018, Giuliani 2018) have noticed how "colonial memory has been neither erased nor suspended, but is elliptically present and productive, albeit cleansed of the most violent and disturbing experiences" (Giuliani, 2018, p.13). Therefore, Costa's stance reflects a common attitude towards the colonial past in Italy. The following section expands on this aspect, considering different theories and widespread narratives of Italian colonial memory.

1.3 Colonial Memory in Italy

Italian Postcolonial Studies emerged as a fully constituted discipline in the twenty-first century, mostly building on the work of those historians that had sternly challenged the main, government-controlled historiographic work concerning the Italian colonial past. Such scholars include Angelo Del Boca, Nicola Labanca, Richard Pankhurst and Giorgio Rochat.[42] Their work also brought to the surface the repressive politics that surrounded the memorialisation of this historical period, which, from the early nineties, triggered a new, interdisciplinary debate on Italian colonial politics of memory that expanded on the work of historical reconstruction carried by the previous generation (Pes, 2010, p.7).[43] This pivotal work was crystallised in some seminal collections of essays, edited and published by Anglophone academia, contrasting with the marginalisation reserved for this topic within Italy at the time.[44] These works have been crucial in creating a foundation for the field to grow, with a spike in publications, conferences, and public debates witnessed in the following decade. Some historical and socio-political events also contributed to this increase: the so-called 'refugee crisis' (that put a spotlight on Italy's relations with the African continent, and especially with Libya and Eritrea), the fall of Qadhdhafi's regime (and its impact on migration in the Mediterranean), the 80th anniversary of the founding of the Italian colonial ('new Roman') empire in 2016, and the growing need to oppose a very nationalist (often Fascist) rhetoric, including the escalation of racially-motivated violence in Italy. The debates around colonial public heritage triggered by the Black Lives Matter movement's protests in 2020 have also played a significant role in fostering a public discussion of these topics.

[42] In the specific case of Libya, Angelo Del Boca and Giorgio Rochat were the first two to make a valuable contribution to military history. Nicola Labanca followed, with an approach more influenced by cultural theory and so giving a broader contextualisation to the historical events. (Bassi, pp. 87-88)

[43] Amongst these scholars it is worth mentioning Alessandro Triulzi, Giulia Barrera and Giampaolo Calchi Novati in Italy, while internationally, Tekeste Negash Derek Duncan, Charles Burdett and Ruth Ben-Ghiat (Pes, 2010, p.7).

[44] In the USA, historians and cultural theorists Ruth Ben-Ghiat and Mia Fuller curated the anthology *Italian Colonialism* (2005), while in the UK Jacqueline Andall and Derek Duncan edited *Italian Colonialism: Legacy and Memory* (2005). A year later, Italo-British historians Fabrizio de Donno and Neelam Srivastava guest edited the special issue of *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* titled *Colonial and Postcolonial Italy* (2006).

Much of the scholarly work produced from the turn of the twenty-first century has challenged the notion of collective amnesia that emerged from the earlier historiographic work. In a recent article titled *Amnesia, Aphasia and Amnesty: the Articulations of Italian Colonial Memory in Postwar Films (1946–1960)* (2021) and in his unpublished PhD thesis *DecolonItaly. Decolonization and National Identity in Post-War Italy 1945-1960* (2019) historian Gianmarco Mancosu provides an overview of the leading models employed to define Italian colonial memory.

Mancosu notices that, as a medical condition, amnesia is the result of a traumatic injury to the head that leads to loss of memory, confusion, and difficulty in recognising familiar elements (2019, p.166). Yet, amnesia can also manifest as a result of a traumatic event that an individual might block out as a survival strategy. This second definition has been used in postcolonial studies to describe a coping mechanism developed by societies torn by colonial violence. The discarding of traumatic memories, as Leela Ghandi suggests, could be conducive to "historical self-invention" (1998, p. 4, quoted in Mancosu, 2019, p.167).[45] On the other hand, as argued by Aleida Assman (2015), trauma can stem from losing wealth and prestige in former imperial powers (Assman, 2015, p.174, quoted in Mancosu, 2019, p.170).

However, Mancosu fails to notice how Ghandi also points out that the "will to forget" is not enough for a condition of amnesia to take place (Ghandi, 1998, p.4). These traumatic histories still affect these countries, shaping the present through outlasting relations of dependency or exploitation. Therefore, amnesia seems to constitute a desire rather than an actual possibility and should be intended as a drive instead of a fully realised condition when considering the Italian context. Dietmar Rothermund's (2015) concept of a "conspiracy of silence", which Nicola Labanca (2015) has also applied to the Italian context, seems more fitting:

> A conspiracy of silence rather than amnesia could affect a collective memory. This conspiracy may be due to a feeling of shame or discomfort, an unwillingness to articulate repentance for deeds which one may not have done but which one had tolerated. (Rothermund, 2015, p.5)

[45] Interestingly, Freud's term for this is 'screen memories' (masking an intolerable memory with a more amenable one).

As such, it brings out its intentionality and the agency required to uphold it; it involves a "social contract" (Rothermund, 2015, p.5). As Haitian historian Michel-Rolph Trouillot (1995, p.48) observes, silencing is an active practice that can be implemented at different stages within the historiographic process. In the Italian context, the conspiracy of silence can be traced back to a specific moment – a calculated strategy of self-absolution. That is, the amnesty proclaimed by the newly founded Italian Republic in 1946. In other words, the history of post-fascist, post-monarchic Italy begins with a social contract that imposes the silencing of anything related to the fascist and colonial violence unleashed by the Italians and of its legacies.

As Reneé Jeffery (2014, p.4) notes, engaging with transnational justice within regime changes brings to the fore the centrality of amnesty in this process and the debate around cultural memory and amnesia that connotes it. The word amnesty derives from the Greek *amnēstia,* which means "oblivion" or "forgetfulness" (Jeffery, 2014, p.4). It is understood as a strategy to avoid accountability by refusing to prosecute any individual, organisation, or agent previously implicated in state violence. Jeffery (2014, p.6) argues that before the transitional justice process of post-World War II was developed, amnesty was a standard practice since the political classes were not held accountable in the court of law. As Paolo Caroli (2022, p.155) points out, until this time, amnesties were thought of as inherently part of transitions, as individuals were not considered capable of acting in the state's name. The Nuremberg Trials, thus, constituted a new model, one that is based on retributive justice focused on holding accountable individuals who executed extreme state violence.[46]

Having joined the Allies in 1943, Italy experienced a rather complex and flawed transitional justice process that significantly differed from the German case. That is,

[46] Building on by Ruti Teitel's *Transitional Justice Genealogy* (2003) and her foundational work *Transitional Justice* (2000), which gave rise to this academic discipline, three main attitudes towards transitional justice can be identified. The first one, is retributive, as in the Nuremberg Trials, namely, a model focused on holding accountable individuals directly responsible for extreme state violence (Teitel, 2000, p.4). As Caroli (2022) notices, this process takes place at an international level (p.11). The second more "experimental" stage took place at a national level and unfolded between the late 1980s and 1990s. As part of this phase, Truth and Reconciliation Committees were established. According to Teitel, it goes beyond the purely retributive model focused on punishing individuals for state violence, and tests restorative approaches (Teitel, 2000, p89). The last stage, emerging at the very end of the1990s, aims to go beyond the binary associated with retributive vs restorative justice, With the constitution of the International Criminal Court (ICC), it wishes to implement both models, while operating both at a national and international level (Teitel, 2003, p.90). See Chapter 5.

because of the change in alliances and the ensuing civil war, Italy was not held to account by the international community like Germany was. Italy was not subjected to a retributive justice process like the Nuremberg trials, nor was it forced to undergo a systematic process of de-fascistization. As Caroli (2022, p.25-26) points out, the Allies initiated the "purging" of the Fascist officials and public servants from governmental institutions but quickly left this process in the hands of the Italians. The civil war that took place between 1943 and 1945 also saw crimes committed by the Resistance fighters, the Partisans. The Togliatti Amnesty, written by Palmiro Togliatti, the Ministry of Justice and Secretary of the Communist Party, was meant to grant leniency towards the Partisans, not only the Fascists, and it had to be applied case by case. However, having failed to purge the judiciary, the Togliatti Amnesty was applied arbitrarily and deliberately to absolve Fascists and persecute Partisans (Caroli, 2022, p.42). This was also possible because Togliatti used ambiguous language that left much room for interpretation.[47] From a legal standpoint, Caroli states, the Togliatti Amnesty "became a vector of impunity," constituting the "formal justification of impunity" (2022, p.171). It also allowed the government to redirect all the responsibility for this process to the judiciary (2022, p.151).

Within this context, the crimes committed in the colonies were also brushed off in favour of a so-called *clean slate policy*. The amnesty created a fertile ground for the implementation of a "conspiracy of silence" at an institutional level, yet colonialism was still being debated quite widely, given that the Italian government was campaigning to get the empire reinstated.[48] At the same time, as European empires were beginning to fight against anticolonial liberation movements, their violent tactics and legitimacy were under scrutiny. Having lost control over its overseas territories in the 1940s (with the only exception being the Trusteeship in Somalia from 1950-1960), Italy never had to deal first-hand with the process of decolonisation that was unfolding after World War II. Thus, it was not under scrutiny. This situation fostered the formation of a self-exculpatory attitude, which is evident in the narrative of *italiani brava gente* (meaning

[47] As Caroli puts it: "the minister signatory of the amnesty decree completely overlooks the language used in the decree itself, as well as the very large margin left to a judiciary whose intimacy with Fascism, by Togliatti's own admission, was well known." (Caroli, 2022, p.43)

[48] This campaign resulted in the Italian Trusteeship in Somalia that was conceded to Italy between 1950-60.

that Italians were good-natured colonisers)[49] and *colonialismo straccione* (paupers colonialism, which claims that the territories Italy colonised were not profitable).[50] Thus, practices of silencing went hand in hand with active processes of (selective) "mentioning" (as Trouillot would put it), albeit through sanitised narratives.

Through the decades that followed, the systematic silencing by the institutions (especially within the education and research systems), together with a tendency for minimalization and a rhetoric of good intentions, I argue, created a condition better captured by Ann Laura Stoler's concept of *colonial aphasia*. In medical terms, aphasia refers to impaired speech caused by brain injury. Stoler describes it as both "loss of access and active dissociation…an occlusion of knowledge…a difficulty of speaking, a difficulty generating a vocabulary that associates appropriate words and concepts with appropriate things" (Stoler, 2011, p.125). When considering collective memory, colonial aphasia accounts for individuals' unfamiliarity with colonial history and the lack of language and tools to decode any reference to it.[51] As Mancosu argues, drawing on Stoler: "the formation of colonial memory [in Italy] has hinged on a contradictory semantic field, in which divergent utterances composed an a-grammatic discourse typical of any aphasic condition" (2019, p.196). This concept has been increasingly adopted to frame the mnemonic process at the core of the Italian postcolonial condition. It will also be employed in Chapter 2 to analyse the reactions to Qadhdhafi's use of 'Umar al-Mukhtar's image.

Given the focus of this research on language and translation, Stoler's concept is particularly fitting since it places the capacity of recognition and articulation/utterance at the centre. I also find colonial aphasia more appropriate because, contrary to the notion of amnesia, it has potential for agency. If amnesia can be understood as a survival strategy brought on by psychological trauma, it follows that regaining the erased memory would be not only difficult but also re-traumatizing. On the other hand,

[49] Both *The Expanded Script* and *Notes for a Film* include a reflection on the way this narrative is still very widespread especially among Italian Members of Parliament.

[50] A self-victimizing and absolving narrative, *colonialismo straccione* blames the Italian delayed colonial expansion and the so-called 'greediness' of British and French imperialism for what is considered an 'unsuccessful' colonial venture. That is, it claims that the territories it occupied were not profitable and that the Italian investment in infrastructure and the so-called civilizing mission was not met with an appropriate economic return.

[51] This also applies to *La Repubblica*'s reportage of Qadhdhafi's visit to Rome and his use of 'Umar al-Mukhtar's image, as I will argue in Chapter 2.

aphasia is not caused by trauma but by injury. It can be overcome through training or by learning alternative communications systems. This important characteristic carries a generative potential and suggests that the individual has agency in this process.

When considering governmental strategies of censoring, as in the case of *Lion of the Desert,* or the refusal to grant access to archives to formerly colonised subjects, the notion of a conspiracy of silence seems appropriate. It also fits the systematic concealment of colonial history from history textbooks and the educational system. Colonial aphasia, instead, is helpful to describe the results of these processes on collective memory, which have resulted in a generalised lack of awareness of the colonial past in Italian society.

1.4 From the Colonial Archive to the *Archive of Coloniality*

The self-absolving narratives of *colonialism straccione* and *italiani brava gente* flourished in the 1950s after Italy failed to recover the colonies lost in World War II during the Paris Peace Treaty on 1947.[52] At the time, several factors hindered the production of rigorous historical work. For instance, in 1952, the Committee for the Documentation of Italy's endeavour in Africa was set up to take care of the documents of the recently suppressed Ministry of Italian Africa. The committee – which never accomplished to archive its materials systematically – was tasked with producing a series of official historical volumes on the history of the colonial project. Yet, it was formed by former functionaries of the Ministry rather than by trained, unbiased historians (Labanca, 2002, pp.442-443). Besides a small number of colonial historians whose work remained anchored in the propagandistic material they produced in the 1930s/40s, independent historians were not allowed to access state-owned archives until the 1980s.

[52] Caterina Lu (2017) points out that after the Paris Peace Treaty, the status of the former Italian colonies was "determined by the Soviet Union, the US, the UK, and France within a year, but there was no provision in the treaty for the determination of reparative or compensatory claims by peoples – individual, collective, or corporate – in these colonies for losses and damages incurred in war or under colonial rule." (Lu, 2017, p.227)

However, as apparent in the case of the US-Ethiopian filmmaker Haile Gerima discussed earlier, access has been granted arbitrarily. In *Genocide in Libya: Shar, a Hidden Colonial History* (2020, p.18), Ali Abdullatif Ahmida writes about being denied access to documentation of the concentration camps built by the Italians in Cyrenaica while conducting research in the Italian National Archives in 1986. The archivist claimed that Libyan scholars should be refused access to Italian sources since Libyan archives were interdicted to Italian researchers – a claim that was contested by the director of the Libyan Studies Center (Ahmida, 2020, p.18). In addition, when he resumed this research around the year 2000, Ahmida faced many obstacles, not only with access, but also due to missing or intentionally deceptive documents (2020, p.18).[53]

In Libya, on the other hand, neither King Idris's monarchy nor the Qadhdhafi regime supported the development of a national archive. Italian historian Francesca Di Pasquale argues that they were especially eager not to preserve colonial documents, prohibiting the study of the occupation (Di Pasquale, 2017, pp.35-36). If the monarchy did so to avoid the building up of internal tribal tensions, Qadhdhafi was eager to control historical knowledge to craft a self-serving nationalist narrative. To this end, in 1978, he inaugurated the Libyan Jihad Center for Historical Studies (initially called by Qadhdhafi the Center for Research and Studies for the Jihad against Italians), which allowed him "to present the fight against colonisation as a *jihad*, inscribing the revolution of September 1969 and his own action in a double religious and independent heritage" (Dumasy and Di Pasquale, 2012, p133).

Qadhdhafi repeatedly evoked and exploited the colonial past to legitimise his role as "the Leader of the Revolution" (Muftah Al-Sayyid al Sharif quoted in Dal Monte, 2015, p.16). For example, he instituted the *Day of Revenge* (7 October) in memory of Italian colonial violence, which was suppressed and replaced with the *Day of Friendship* when

[53] Regarding this situation, Italian historians Angelo Del Boca and Giorgio Rochat informed him that: "the Italian state archive files on the camps had been manipulated and some crucial files on the camps had been 'misplaced,' or taken out by what they described as the 'colonial lobby', which referred to ex-colonial and fascist officials who dominated the administration of the Italian National Archives after the fall of the fascist regime in 1945. These ex-colonial and fascist administrators created obstacles and restricted access to sensitive and colonial crimes, especially the concentration Camps." (Del Boca and Rochat, quoted in Ahmida, 2020, p.26)

the Treaty was implemented in 2008. Writing about the performance of democratic politics, Shirin M. Rai (2015) argues that in "colonial and post-colonial contexts...national state formation needs the imaginary of history" (p.157), a process that implies the creation of traditions and historical myths.

This situation led to, as Di Pasquale puts it, an "absence of the link between the national archive and memorial practices" (2017, p.37). Furthermore, forty-two years of dictatorship and retaliations against opposers have profoundly stunted the production of Libyan scholarship and cultural artefacts.[54] After the fall of the regime, however, a considerable number of documents and memorabilia became available to buy online through eBay and other websites. Given the difficulty of accessing archival resources and the scarcity of Libyan scholarship in English or Italian, I began acquiring materials that were available online, a practice that became an integral part of this research.[55]

For example, I collected series of special edition stamps that were printed for commemorative purposes, which portray 'Umar al-Mukhtar's capture and death, the deportation of the Libyan elite to Italy during the Italo-Turkish War in 1911-12, and colonial battles. Beside colonial history, these stamps also focused on other instances of foreign assault onto the Libyan people and often featured him depicted as a saviour and heir to the anticolonial resistance. These stamps show how Qadhdhafi instilled a sense of victimhood in his people to build consensus, a hallmark of "strongmen" politics[56] (Ben-Ghiat, 2020, p.9).



Fig.27-28 – Libyan stamps featuring 'Umar al-Mukhtar. From personal archive.

[54] Researching the Libyan context can prove difficult, especially when not speaking Arabic as in my case.
[55] This was possible thanks to a small grant, the 2017 London Film Festival's Experimenta Pitch Award (FLAMIN/BFI).
[56] See Chapter 2.





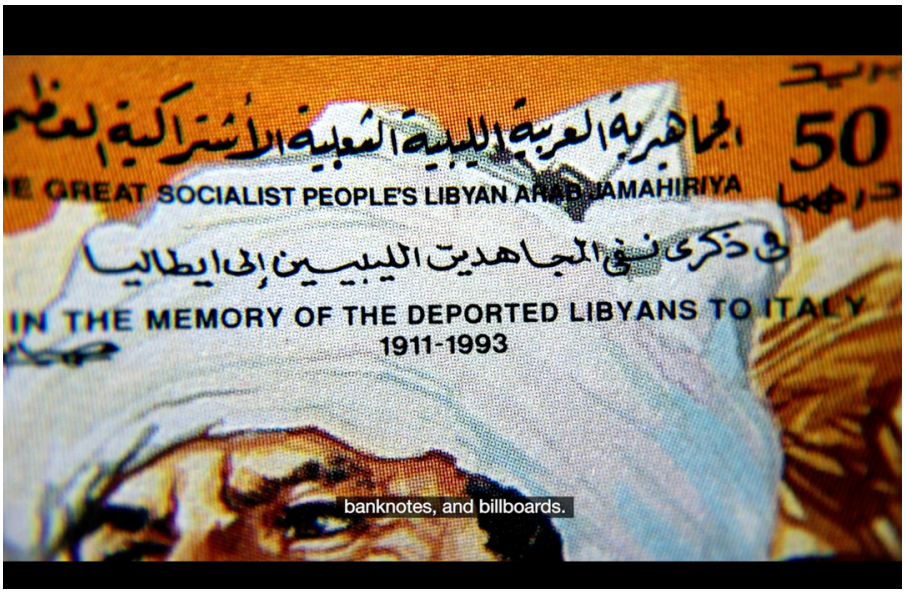


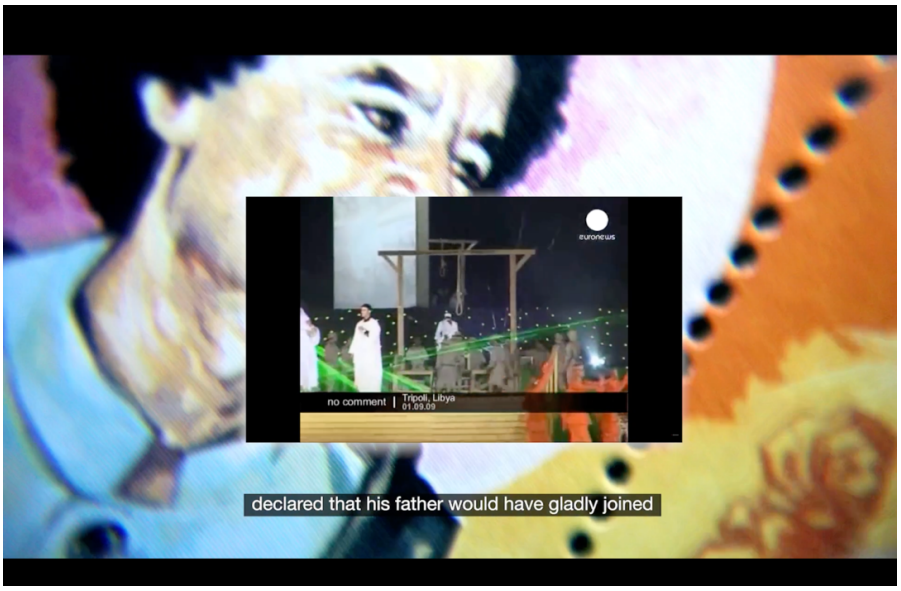
Figs.29-31 – Libyan stamps commemorating the struggle against Italian occupation, 1982-1994. From personal archive.

The stamps were used in both practical outputs and in *Notes for a Film, Act II* they are placed in relation to the video documentation of the celebrations of the 40th anniversary of the Qadhdhafi's coup, on the 1st of September 2009. During this spectacle, an archival film from the Fascist occupation of Libya was screened to a large audience, including Italian politicians. Following this screening, a choreographed spectacle took place, which included the re-enactment of 'Umar al-Mukhtar's hanging.



Fig.32 – Libyan stamps in memory of the deported Libyans to Italy, 1993.
From personal archive.





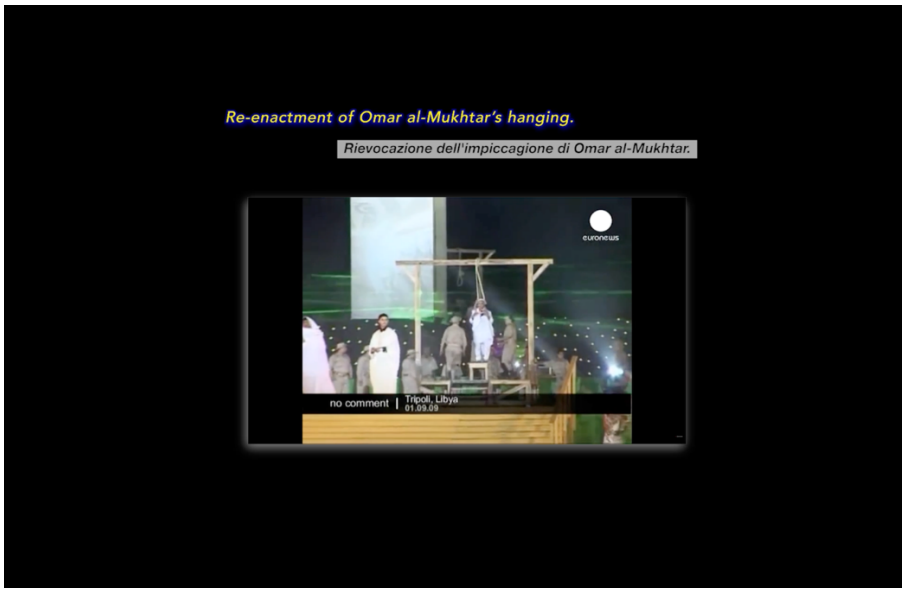


Fig.33-35 - *Gaddafi in Rome: Notes for a Film, Act II,* 2022, video still.

Other remarkable stamps I collected include a series that features Qadhdhafi's speech at the 64th UN General Assembly in 2009, in which he denounces colonialism and Western neoimperialism and a stamp depicting 'Umar al-Mukhtar minted in 2014. The latter, used in *Notes for a Film, Act II*, demonstrates how al-Mukhtar remains a national symbol after the regime's fall.

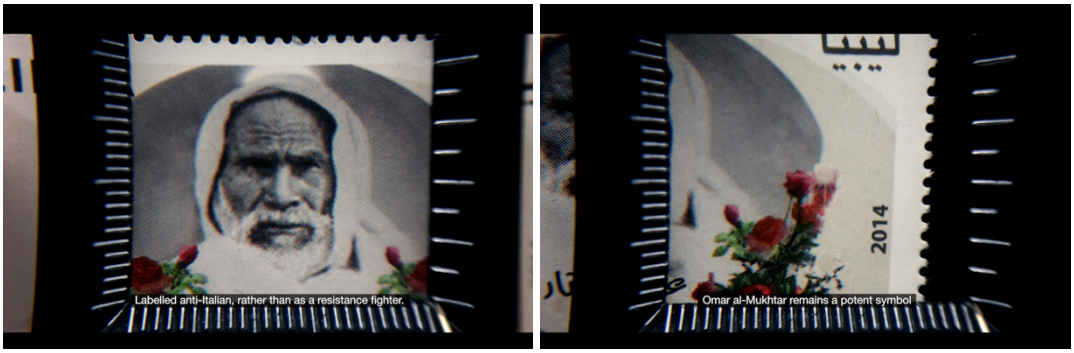


Fig.36-37 - *Gaddafi in Rome: Notes for a Film, Act II,* 2022, video still.



Fig.38 – Libyan stamps, 2009. From personal archive.





LION OF THE DESERT (AA). Omar Mukhtar (ANTHONY QUINN) in chains after his capture. Distribution by Enterprise Pictures Limited. (0107)

Fig.39-40 – *Lion of the Desert*, marketing material. From personal archive.

The Libyan stamps led me to purchase original colonial documents (postcards, photographs, magazines and books) that I could manipulate physically – a crucial aspect of *dissection*. In addition, I collected marketing material for *Lion of the Desert*.
Given the difficulty of accessing archives in Italy from the UK (and its impossibility during the COVID-19 pandemic), building a small collection that I could keep exploring became extremely helpful. On the other hand, since the focus of this research is on news media representation (Part I), while being concerned with the aftermath of this event, I scoured the internet for materials related to the Treaty on Friendship and its afterlife. This search mostly focused on news reporting and media-sharing websites like YouTube. It was instrumental to monitor the evolving diplomatic relations between Italy and Libya and the Italian politicians' attitudes towards the colonial past and the Mediterranean area.[57]



Fig.41-44 – Italian Fascist colonial stamps. From personal archive.

[57]As the event took place in 2009, smartphones could record video at very low resolution, amateur video documentation is scarce.



Fig.45 - Display cabinet with research materials Maxxi Bvlgari Prize 2022 exhibition. Photo by Roberto Apa.

Furthermore, I made two initial research trips to Rome in 2018 to investigate the places where the meeting took place. I visited the University of Roma Tre's Iconographic Archive that holds the largest collection of photographs portraying the four days spanning from the capture to the execution of 'Umar al-Mukhtar, including an original copy of the image Qadhdhafi pinned to his uniform in 2009. These images, however, could not be published since the descendants of the photographer (General Giuseppe Bedendo, the general prosecutor at al-Mukhtar's trial) still held the copyright to the archive and ignored any request for reproduction. At the time, Volterra had studied the images closely and was eager to publish his findings, but he was unable to do so.[58] This situation led me to realise a short film, *Sight Unseen* (2019), which strives to bypass this copyright impasse. I recorded Volterra as he leafed through the photographs while describing what they portray and why they contribute novel understanding to this under-documented and under-researched event. The video was edited to never fully reveal the images, offering blurred or fading-to-black glimpses that are filled in by Volterra's narration: the photographs thus can be evoked in the viewer's mind-eye.



Fig.46 – *Sight Unseen,* 2019, video still.

This encounter pushed me to rely solely on building my own collection to avoid interacting with archives. Thus, the focus on materials circulated online in this research also derives from my refusal to deal with institutions that have been instrumental in the colonial project and which make the access and use of sources difficult, especially for

[58] Volterra was able to solve the copyright issue and publish the book in 2021 (see Volterra and Zinni, 2021).

formerly colonised subjects like Gerima and Ahmida.[59] Responding to the multiple strategies of erasure, concealment, and gatekeeping of the colonial past that are upheld by Italian archives, I have committed to avoid consulting and financing these institutions. This is especially relevant when images and footage are concerned since reproduction fees can be high.[60]

Even though purchasing materials online can be costly, possessing these materials allows me to use them in different ways and repeatedly, without additional expenses. Even though buying online can also imply financing people and businesses that are unethical, I prefer to research the vendors and risk financing an individual rather than being dependent from and financing problematic institutions. Owning the materials also removes them from the market.

The process of collecting online (both digital and physical materials) implies a "radical scavenging" (Weiner and de Antonio, 1971) – an expression first used by Bernard Weiner to describe the practice of filmmaker Emile de Antonio. It refers to sifting through large amounts of found material (footage and television outtakes for De Emilio, the internet in my case) to locate the sequences that provided "an alternative and maybe even directly oppositional narrative from that which it inherently possesses" (Bruzzi, 2006, p.28). Thus, radical scavenging is disruptive, positioned, and politically motivated, as De Emilio's practice demonstrated. Likewise, I conceive my collecting practice as political and deliberately partial.

To describe the move from a focus on archival research to a practice of scavenging, I have adopted the term *archive of coloniality* borrowing it from an article I co-authored in 2019. Here, Gaia Giuliani defines the "visual archive of coloniality" as "a multi-layered, collective repository of aspiration, dominance, desire, self-aggrandizement and fear through which the development of society's self-image can be revealed" (Burdett et al., 2019, p.53). Giuliani's definition allowed me to depart from the notion of the

[59] I would like to point out that I have also experienced unfair treatment during the development of this PhD. Not from archives but in academia and the art sector, from institutions and individuals in position of power. It has included minor threats and aggressions.

[60] Istituto Luce Cinecittà's archival footage is used in the *Notes for a Film* (at the beginning of *Act III*), however, it is done without permission, by including a watermarked, time-stamped video taken from *YouTube*.

archive as a physical entity. The concept of coloniality, from Anibal Quijano's "coloniality of power", pervades all spheres of life. As Steve Martinot (2011) puts it: it "operates through control or hegemony over authority, labor, sexuality, and subjectivity - that is, the practical domains of political administration, production and exploitation, personal life and reproduction, and world-view and interpretive perspective" (p.1).

I understand the *archive of coloniality* as a "collective repository" that is diffuse, immaterial, and located in the present. It is a genealogical tool that aims "to trace the forces that gave birth to our present-day practices and to identify the historical conditions upon which they still depend. Its point is not to think historically about the past but rather to use historical materials to rethink the present" (Garland, 2014, p.373). The materials that I collect – whether digital or physical - are not confined within an institution and its history. They are still in circulation and have not been 'captured'; they have an afterlife. They are not sacralised as archival material can be. They get affected by the present just as they affect the present. I find it freeing to be able to manipulate these materials through "radical scavenging", living with them (literally), being affected by them and affecting them (that is, sometimes the materials get misused or 'abused'). The level of care I assign to these materials is dictated by my own parameters and values, which are politically determined. In addition, since I check on what is available regularly, I am able to monitor what gets sold, how materials circulate at different times and how their economic value changes over time. It does give me a perspective on how certain parts of Italian and international society relate to these historical materials and how memorabilia acquires value depending on different variables.

By embracing the *archive of coloniality* as a framework for this research, this strategy resonates with postcolonial anthropologist Ann Laura Stoler's claim that institutional and colonial archives are not conducive to research on historical continuities because they are created with an embedded temporal and spatial categorisation that makes it difficult to see beyond these organising principles. (Stoler, 2016, p.5). As I wrote elsewhere about this process:

> the very violence I have been preoccupied to name, expose, or deconstruct, is as much inside as it is outside of these institutions… It is important to stress, however, that this way of working should be a choice, as it is in my case, rather than an imposition, as in the case of Gerima and Ahimda. (Ferrini, 2024).

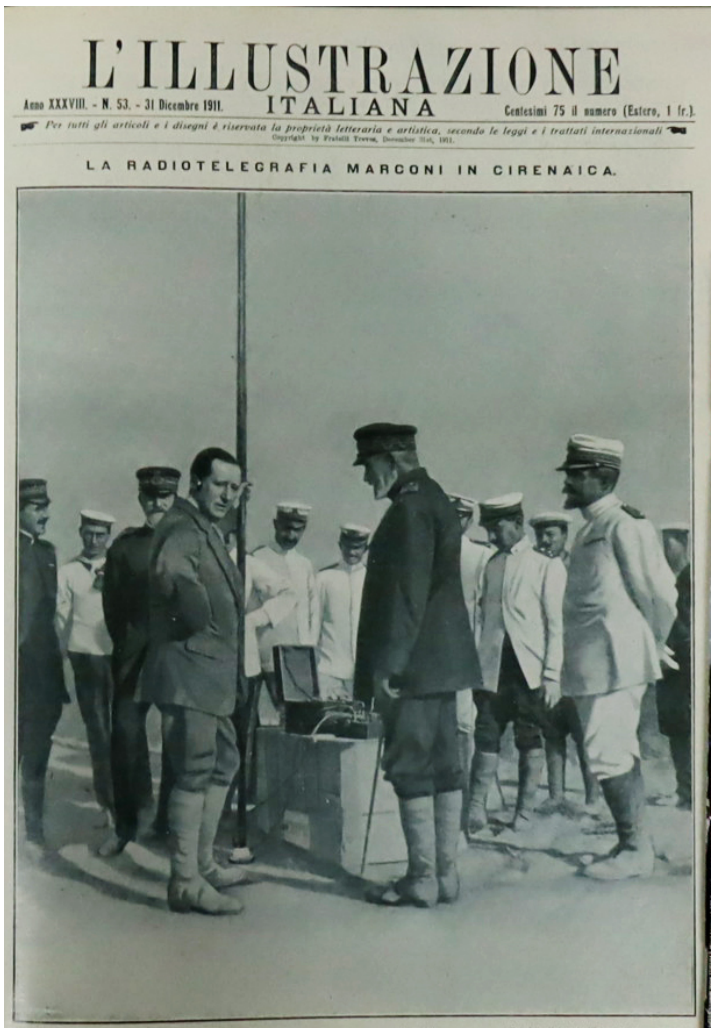
Analysing the materials that circulate outside of the official archives is thus chosen within this genealogical research since it allows me to respond to the present and focus on continuities. In abandoning these institutions, the aesthetics and approach to these materials has also changed, leaning towards what I conceive as a desacralisation of the archival source in the practical outputs. Handed freely, with non-gloved hands, and mixed with low-fi digital documents, these materials get normalised rather than charged with an aura of exceptionality and value. They are not preciously preserved and hard to access, instead, they are in circulation and accessible.

PART I

Prelude: Technological Imaginaries

I reclaim the honour of being the first fascist in the field of radiotelegraphy, the first who acknowledged the utility of joining the electric rays in a bundle, as Mussolini was the first in the political field who acknowledged the necessity of merging all the healthy energies of the country into a bundle, for the greater greatness of Italy.

(Guglielmo Marconi, 1923, quoted in Monteleone, 1976, p.44)


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Per tutti gli articoli e i disegni è riservata la proprietà letteraria e artistica, secondo le leggi e i trattati internazionali

LA RADIOTELEGRAFIA MARCONI IN CIRENAICA.

Fig.47 – "Marconi's wireless telegraphy in Cyrenaica" - Guglielmo Marconi in Libya, 1912. From personal archive.

Having situated the research and the event within a historical frame, the next part of this thesis focuses on media. Chapter 2 engages with Media Event Studies, while Chapter 3 with instantaneous news media, photography and the notion of "media translation". These different elements are also connected to geopolitical and temporal questions that can be traced back to the early twentieth century. Particularly to the Italo-Turkish War of 1911-12.

The Italo-Turkish War grew out of the fervour triggered by the celebrations of the 50th anniversary of the Italian unification. At the beginning of 1911, the Italian press began a zealous propaganda campaign portraying Libya as a fertile land full of opportunities that Italy had the right to claim (Tesoro, 1990, p.720). As Franco Gaeta (1996) states, this was "the first big campaign of mass information and disinformation in Italian history" (p.396).[61] It was so effective that it pressured Prime Minister Giovanni Giolitti (Castronovo, 1984, p.83) to declare war on the Ottoman Empire earlier than intended. The news media outlets of the time had demonstrated their ability to create national consensus and their potential to bypass the slower temporality of diplomacy (Tesoro, 1990, p.719). Prominent nationalist figures, like the members of the Futurist movement Filippo Tommaso Marinetti and Enrico Corradini, were employed by newspapers and sent to the frontline as embedded journalists.

As explored in the performance-lecture *The Expanded Script,* the years stretching between the Italo-Turkish War of 1911-12 and the onset of World War One were punctuated by a series of technological innovations that connected warfare, telecommunications, and the arts. For instance, during the conflict in Libya, aeroplanes were employed in combat for the first time (Hippler, 2013, p.51), an event that also led to the launch of the first aerial bomb (Virilio, 1986, p.22). The war also resulted in the large-scale use of Guglielmo Marconi's wireless technology in the field (Labanca, 2012, p.78). Marconi had joined the Italian Army as an officer of the Special Corps of Transmission Engineers in Libya. In 1912, he conducted the first experiments in wireless communication between planes and warships (Labanca, 2012, p.78). Marconi's

[61] Socialist newspapers like *Avanti!* and *La Voce,* instead, were vocal about their opposition to the war (Bergamini, 2018, p.210).

wireless technology, like the telegraph, developed into a technology for warfare and imperial control.

These technologies greatly fascinated Italian intellectuals. Italian Futurism, the artistic movement founded by Marinetti in 1909, was devoted to exalting warfare, speed, and technology, as stated in the *Futurist Manifesto* (Marinetti, 1909). Here, war is defined as "the only cure for the world", while "the beauty of speed" is associated with automobiles and war technology (Marinetti, republished in Apollonio, 2001, p.22). In this fertile, if dangerous, ground, the seeds of Fascist ideology sprouted, manifesting, for instance, in Giovanni Pastrone's epic cinema endeavour, *Cabiria* (1914) - an ode to Ancient Rome, pregnant with imperialist ideology.

Timothy Campbell (2006, p.xv) calls Marinetti's experiments with wireless writing (*parole in libertà)* "wireless imagination". Stressing the "essential, condensed word" as the main feature of wireless technology's syntax (Campbell, 2006, p.xv), they resonate with contemporary questions about online, real-time news reporting. Thus, the "wireless imagination" shares some of the preoccupations of this research, especially those associated with the *newsfeed*'s temporal and semantic nature explored in Chapter 3.

More generally, at the centre of Marinetti's work and Futurism lies a link between warfare, speed, and wireless technology. This convergence also features in the works and political speeches of proto-fascist poet, pilot, and warmonger Gabriele D'Annunzio.[62] In 1919, D'Annunzio widely employed wireless technology during the occupation of Rijeka (Croatia), which he led on indipendently. Campbell argues that "certain features of wireless writing become associated with fascist symbolic, somatic and political values (…) wireless became identified with an apocalyptic tone and rhetoric meant to generate alarm in its subject" (2006, p. xvi).[63] In addition, posing the basis for Mussolini, D'Annunzio developed a politics of "showmanship" characterised by ultra-nationalist violence, a cult of personality, and the exaltation of technological progress. This resonates with the figure of the "strongmen", as argued by Ruth Ben-

[62] Gabriele D'Annunzio also wrote part of the script for the film *Cabiria.* These relations are explored in *The Expanded Script.*

[63] Campbell here refers to D'Annunzio's speeches and relays in Rijeka (then called with its Italian name of Fiume).

Ghiat (2020), which is going to be unpacked in Chapter 2 in relation to Berlusconi and Qadhdhafi.

If, as stated by Marshall McLuhan, “the medium is the message” (1964) then it becomes important to highlight how the media analysed in this research are intertwined with the very historical events and trajectories that this research is concerned with - specifically, with Fascist and proto-Fascist imperialist politics and warfare. Technologies like Marconi’s wireless, in turn, helped and supported the creation of a Fascist imaginary that pervaded cultural and artistic thought and developments.

Chapter 2

PERFORMING *NEOCOLONIAL SPECTACLES*

> It was a constant tug of war with Gaddafi, but in Berlusconi he had perhaps found his match. Berlusconi the schmoozer turned on the charm and eventually the deals began to flow. This constant commercial diplomacy between Italy and Libya…was part of the mood music, the backdrop during the transformation of Gaddafi from Public Enemy Number One into friend and ally in the period between 2001 and 2006.
>
> (Alan Friedman, 2015, p.192)



Fig.48 – Libyan postcard and stamp commemorating the “Italian apology to Libya about the colonial period”, 2010. From personal archive.

Introduction

The meetings held between 2008 and 2010 to celebrate the Treaty on Friendship, Partnership and Cooperation in Italy and Libya – and whose ritualised public displays were immortalised in documentary imagery – showcase the different power dynamics incarnated in the bodies of Berlusconi and Qadhdhafi. As Jeffrey C. Alexander (2011) notes:

> [p]ower comes into being when social actors exercise their agency. It is subtle and complex, often of exquisite indirection, a process that is not all that different from how dramatic actors project the power of their characters in a play (p.3).

Such a link between politics and theatre plays an important part in this research, and, in this chapter, it is investigated through the notion of *neocolonial spectacle.* Given both Berlusconi's and Qadhdhafi's embodiment of particularly bold, unpredictable, and flamboyant political personas, their overstated performances offer a stark example of the increasing spectacularisation of politics in the twenty-first century.

This chapter focuses on the bilateral relations between Italy and Libya. The first section, *Bilateral Agreements and the Externalization of Borders,* provides an overview of the developments of the bilateral agreements and demands for reparation from Libyan independence in the 1950s to the Memorandums of Understanding (2017-2022). Focusing on the management of migration across the Mediterranean, which led to the externalisation of the Italian/EU border to Libya, it considers the border as a space of "necropower" (Mbembe, 2019).

The second section, *Performing Friendship and Apologies,* analyses Berlusconi and Qadhdhafi's performance of power within international diplomacy, read against the figure of the "strongman" (Ben-Ghiat, 2020). It also scrutinises the language employed in the Treaty on Friendship and in Berlusconi's apologies for the colonial occupation of Libya, teasing out the way Italian neocolonial interests hijacked the colonial reparations.

Focusing on the event at the core of this research - the 2009 meeting between Berlusconi and Qadhdhafi and on its photographic documentation – the third section, *The Inciting Incident,* engages with Media Event Studies to analyse the media's constructions of events as spectacles. It also features a close reading of the 'iconic

image' of Berlusconi's and Qadhdhafi's handshake.

These considerations are then expanded in the final section, *Neocolonial Spectacles*, which brings to the fore Italy's and the European Union's (as a result of their partnership) hegemonic and imperialist politics in the Mediterranean. Engaging with critical thinkers such as Kwame Nkrumah and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak to understand the dynamics of neocolonialism as well as with Guy Debord's definition of *spectacle*, it attempts to establish what constitutes a twenty-first century *neocolonial spectacle.*

2.1 Bilateral Agreements and the Externalization of Borders

Libya became independent in 1951. Four years later, the Libyan oil industry was established, and drilling licences began to be granted to international companies, mostly British and US-owned (Paoletti, 2010, p.111). In 1956, the first bilateral agreement between Libya and Italy was signed. King Idris I demanded reparations for the colonial occupation, financial compensation, and the repatriation of several items. No formal apologies were issued, yet Italy agreed to invest in developing Libyan infrastructure (Paoletti, 2010, p.11). Granting financial aid while refusing to take responsibility for colonial violence left Italy open to further demands, which were made in 1969 by Qadhdhafi (Del Boca, 2005, p.199). As these were again not met, Qadhdhafi proceeded with the expropriation and nationalisation of all possessions owned by the remaining Italian settlers (around 20,000 people), followed by their expulsion (Del Boca, 2010b, p.469).

Despite these reciprocal hostilities, Italy's National Hydrocarbon Corporation (Ente Nazionale Idrocarburi, ENI) was granted privileged access to Libya's resources during Qadhdhafi's rule. Qadhdhafi struck several deals with Italy (especially regarding oil and gas supply) even during the 1980s when he was in a contentious relation with several Western powers, including President Reagan's US government (Del Boca, 2011, p.169). Even when sanctions were imposed on Libya - first by the EU in 1986 and then by the Security Council between 1992 and 2003 - Italy still retained its bilateral economic relations with Libya (Del Boca, 2011). This situation exposed Italy's pull between

different poles and aspirations: its commitment to the Atlantic Pact and the European Union on the one hand and, on the other, its interest in securing a leading role in the Mediterranean (Abbondanza, 2016).

As featured in *Notes for a Film, Act III,* the first agreement that led to the Treaty on Friendship between the two countries was signed in 1998. Known as *Joint Communiqué*[64], it involved an apology by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Lamberto Dini, for "the Libyan people's suffering at the hands of the Italian colonialism" (Bentley, 2016, p.169). The document opened with the following sentence: "in an effort to boost relations between the two friendly people, Italy calls upon Libya to forget the past" (Bentley, 2016, p.169). Since the negotiations fell through, the *Joint Communiqué* was never implemented. Nevertheless, it initiated the process of Qadhdhafi's rehabilitation in the international community, establishing Italy's privileged partnership with Libya and its role as a mediator. In 2002, Silvio Berlusconi restarted the negotiations and, by 2008, managed to sign the Treaty on Friendship in Benghazi. The focus, however, had shifted from terrorism to migration since Berlusconi's government took on an aggressive and repressive approach to the soaring number of migrants entering Italy from Mediterranean waters. Italy offered a higher investment ($5bn over twenty-five years), including the building of a highway stretching across the country, the repatriation of key artefacts, and a formal apology for the colonial occupation. In return, Libya guaranteed Italy increased access to fuel extraction and a crackdown on migration (Ronzitti, 2009, p.129) This latter point cemented the so-called *push back* policy started by the second Romano Prodi's centre-left government in 2007 (Kashiem, 2010, p.10). Funded by Italy and later backed by the EU after initial opposition, it consists of the right to refoul migrants arriving by sea back to Libya, where they are incarcerated in detention camps that severely violate human rights (De Cesari, 2012b, p.317).

With the Libyan popular uprising in 2011, Italy upheld the Treaty, even though it should have been legally suspended through a mutual agreement between both parties. Italy disregarded its commitment, stated within the Treaty, to "not resort to the threat or

[64] The *Joint Communiqué* (*Comunicato congiunto Dini-Mountasser*) comprised a series of commitments for the Italian government and, through a joint venture, the implementation of some projects in Libya, as well as a commitment to antiterrorism (Ronzitti, 2009, p.126)

use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of the other Party" (Gazzetta Ufficiale, 2009). By allowing NATO to use its airbases to bomb Qadhdhafi's troops, Italy thus failed to refrain "from any form of direct or indirect interference in internal or external affairs that fall within the jurisdiction of the other Party, adhering to the spirit of good neighbourliness" (Gazzetta Ufficiale, 2009). Simultaneously, as the US and the EU were applying sanctions to Libya, Italy was not keen to interrupt its bilateral economic deals. Italy's eagerness to stop the migration influx and fully reinstate the bilateral agreements led the following governments to strike similar deals with the UN-backed Government of National Accord in Libya, headed by Fayez al-Sarraj (Deutsche Welle, 2017). To facilitate the rehabilitation of the Treaty on Friendship after its infringement, Italy demonstrated its support to this new government by reopening its embassy in Tripoli in January 2017, becoming the first Western power to do so (Reuters, 10 January 2017).

Italy and Fayez al-Sarraj's government signed the Memorandum of Understanding in 2017 (then rectified again in 2020 and late 2022), which maintains the externalisation of the Italy/EU border to Libya concerning the management of migration (Liguori, 2019). The memorandum also focuses on the securitisation of the border to prevent departures of migrants from Libya, with the collaboration of Frontex, the EU agency for border security (European Centre for Constitutional and Human Rights, 2022). In other words, the Memorandum does not reinstate any of the Italian obligations towards Libya that were part of the reparations. Italy entrusted a country undergoing a civil war, lacking appropriately regulated coastguard authorities and still not undersigning the 1951 Geneva Refugee Convention, with the lives of thousands of vulnerable people. In so doing, Italy has denied these people access to the asylum process.

It is because of such gross human rights violations and of the staggering number of deaths among the people attempting to cross the Mediterranean that this border constitutes a "death-world", namely, a necropolitical space in which life is subjugated to the power of death (Mbembe, 2019, p.92). Building on Michel Foucault's concept of biopower, Achille Mbembe argues that in the contemporary world, sovereign power is constituted above all by the administration of death, which he calls necropolitics or necropower (Mbembe, 2019, p.93). Biopower indicates the sovereign's power over the lives of a population, which is exerted through the control of births, deaths, and the

management of life. Even though Foucault's concept of biopower already implies the administration of death (as a counterpart to life), Mbembe's focus on death through the concept of necropolitics/necropower provides an important shift: it identifies and names the aims and effects of imperialist politics. In so doing, it places the attention on those invisibilised lives who are systematically targeted and eliminated to uphold European hegemony. The Mediterranean border, thus, can be read as a space intentionally connoted by death and enmity, administered through warfare technology. Within this necropolitical framework, the status of those groups of people subjected to necropower dynamics, Mbembe (2019) argues, is equal to that of the "*living dead*" (p.92). As Mathias Hatleskog Tjønn and Martin Lemberg-Pedersen put it, drawing on the work of Aurora Vergara- Figueroa:

> The EU's deafening postcolonial silence […] illustrates that besides its immense humanitarian consequences, the categories and discourses of EU externalization politics also represent an epistemological erasure of this particular racialized, political economic and societal context where the Union's policies play out. (Hatleskog Tjønn & Lemberg-Pedersen, 2022)

Notes for a Film, Act II, reflects on the border necropolitics, connecting it to the Italian colonial attitudes towards the Mediterranean area, incarnated in the notion of *mare nostrum.* It reflects on the people attempting to cross the sea, whose faith has been dictated by the Treaty. Across the three *Acts*, the extracts from *La Repubblica*'s newspaper offer various examples of how Berlusconi and Qadhdhafi discuss migration through either demonising or dismissive language. *Notes for a Film, Act III,* instead engages with the securitisation and militarisation of the Mediterranean border through a focus on the agencies and corporations managing and profiting from the border necropolitics: Leonardo, Selex, MedOr (Mediterranean Orient) and Frontex.[65] As the 2008 Treaty on Friendship officialises Italy and the EU's externalisation of the border to Libya,[66] the more recent operations and maps shown in *Act III* bring the European Union's penetration into the African continent to the fore.

[65] *Act III* also exposes a conflict of interest involving Marco Minniti. Currently working for MedOr (which is part of Leonardo), he was the Ministry of Foreign Affairs when Paolo Gentiloni's centre-left government signed the first Memorandum of Understanding in 2017.

[66] This model was then adopted between Greece and Turkey, Spain and Morocco, and currently it is being developed between the EU and Tunisia.



Figs.49-50 - *Gaddafi in Rome: Notes for a Film, Act III,* 2022, video stills.



Fig.51 - Forensic Oceanograpy, *Liquid Violence*, 2011-18, installation.

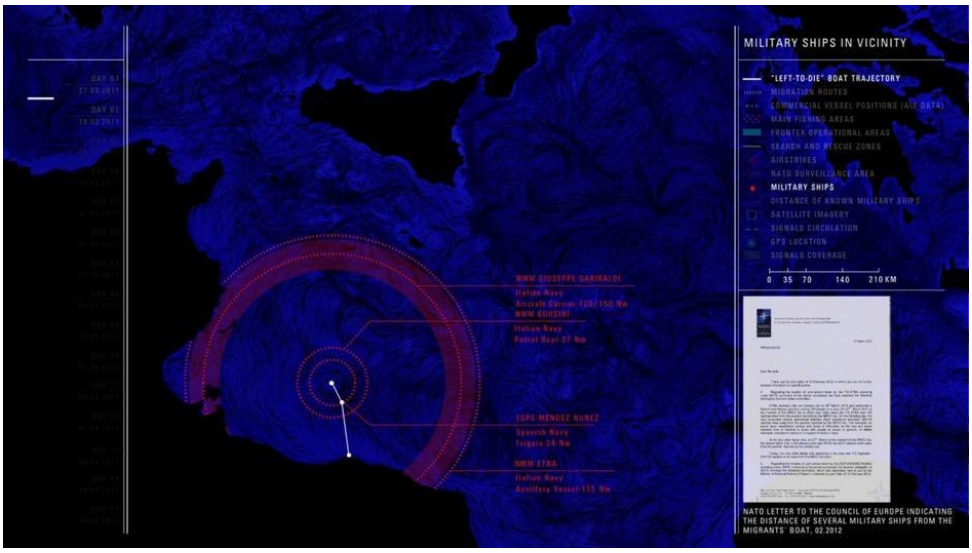


Fig.52 Forensic Oceanography (Lorenzo Pezzani and Charles Heller), *Liquid Traces*, 2014, video still.

The research and artistic work of Forensic Oceanography (Lorenzo Pezzani and Charles Heller) has provided an essential reference for the practical outputs of this research, both for their engagement with Mediterranean border politics and for their aesthetic strategies (this will be expanded in Chapter 3). The multiscreen installation *Liquid Violence* (2018) brings together three cases that reveal the necropolitics at the core of the Italy/EU management of the Mediterranean border – and that were escalated by the Treaty on Friendship. Two video projections reconstruct the effects of the decision by Italy and the EU to cut back search and rescue activities at sea. A third work, a short video animation titled *Liquid Trace* (2014), investigates the case of a boat abandoned at sea during NATO's 2011 military intervention in Libya. Its hybrid format can be read as an exercise in storytelling through data visualisation. The video relies on a fixed image (the illustration of the stretch of Mediterranean Sea between Italy and Libya) that mimics the interface of the technology used by coastal guards to monitor naval transit.[67] A variety of data (GPS tracking, distress calls, environmental information and news updates) is layered over this interface to reconstruct the story of 72 migrants who were left to drift for two weeks and die while crossing the sea on a rubber boat. The video exposes NATO's awareness of the situation and their responsibility in the passengers' deaths. *Liquid Violence* is part of a larger project that gathers and presents evidence to be used in a court of law. As will be argued in Chapter 4, their forensic approach differs

[67] In Chapter 3 I will further engage with this work, specifically with its use of animation to recreate the surveillance system's interface.

from *dissection* in scope, yet they share similar concerns with investigative aesthetics and the display of research.

2.2 Performing Friendship and Apologies



Fig.53 – Berlusconi and Qadhdhafi, Touisha, August 2009.

Throughout the history of reparations requests between Italy and Libya, the coastal highway built during the Italian occupation has played a central role. Emilio Distretti (2021) proposes to read this infrastructure as a "colonial continuum" (p.1423) that incarnates the reparation process. By highlighting the history of the highway – initially built under the Fascist regime for military purposes and pivotal to the realisation of the genocide in Eastern Libya - through the Treaty on Friendship, it gets "revived as both an instrument and a space of the coloniality of power" (Distretti, 2021, p.1435). As the main infrastructural work that Italy agreed to carry out after the fall of Qadhdhafi, the highway remained in decay. It became the main route used by the different factions fighting in the civil war. The highway is also implicated in the surveillance, control, and administration of migration since the detention centres (just like the concentration

camps in the 1930s) are located alongside it. As a result, Distretti (2021) argues that it was returned "to the initial function, namely a space of power and control at the base of geopolitical transformations and the entangled histories surrounding mobility across the Mediterranean" (p.1423). He adds: "Italy's compensation plans have transmogrified into the sharpening of new mechanisms of control and mastery over these same populations that for centuries had experienced European dispossession and violence." (2021, p.1435).[68]



Fig.54 – *Gaddafi in Rome: Notes for a Film,* Maxxi Museum of 21st Century Art, 2022. Print on Perspex. Installation detail.

[68] Chiara De Cesari (2012b, p.320) concludes that "the Treaty, instead of preventing abuse and unlawful behaviour, in fact nurtures them under the guise of reconciliation (Amnesty International, 2010). Reparation, a chief instrument of a new moral international law is used here to produce exceptions to this very framework."

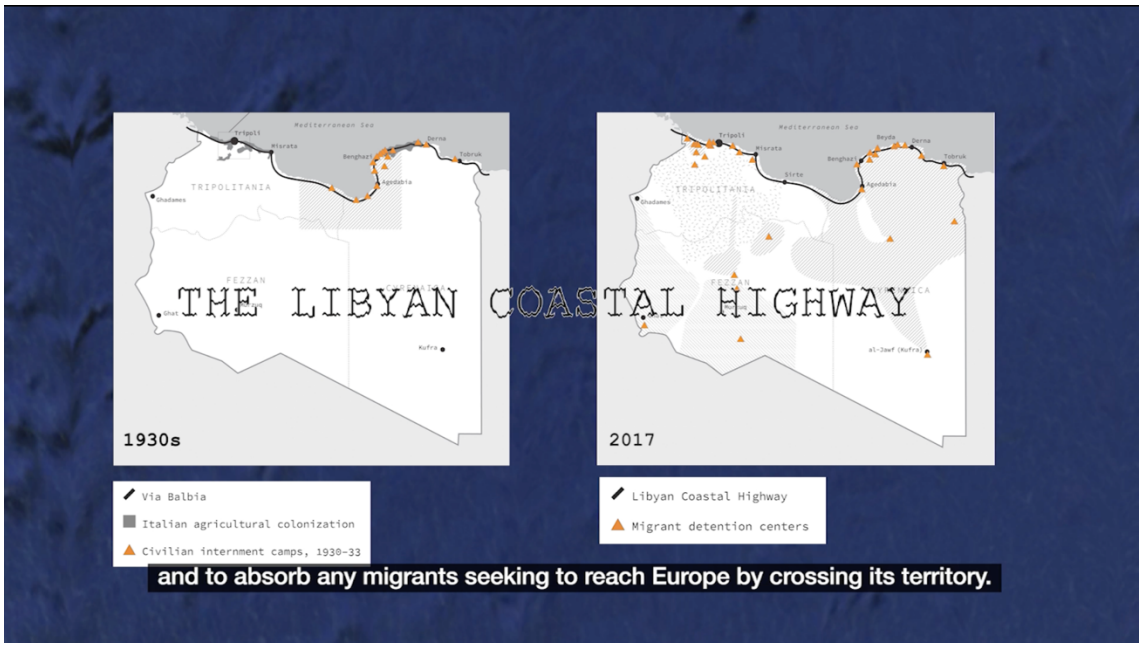


Fig.55 - *Gaddafi in Rome: Notes for a Film, Act III,* 2022, video still.

The significance of the coastal highway is also stressed in *Notes for a Film.* A print on plexiglass within the installation shows a digital collage in which several hands support a map displayed within a wooden frame. This image is extrapolated from a press photograph taken in August 2009 in Touisha, Western Libya, where the first stone of the new coastal highway was laid during the project's launch. Berlusconi and Qadhdhafi pose together, holding the frame. This image became a point of reference – hence its use and placement in the installation – because it brings together some elements that are central to this project. Firstly, by showing the coastal highway, which runs parallel to the *via Littoria* built by the Fascist regime, the map is almost indiscernible from colonial maps of Libya, thus constituting a colonial continuity. Secondly, since the map is framed, the glass protecting it reflects the journalists who are photographing Berlusconi and Qadhdhafi. The journalists and their cameras (unintentional presences) reveal the artifice of the spectacle, its construction and its dependency on spectatorship. This digital collage is printed on Perspex, a reflective material that allows the audience to see their silhouettes reflected within the image. Finally, Berlusconi and Qadhdhafi's hands are a reminder of the role of hand gestures in the performance and portrayal of diplomacy, which tend to feature handshakes or hand-signing agreements. It is also a reference to the act of pointing, which will be discussed in Chapter 5. Together, these elements are helpful to start reflecting on the notion of *neocolonial spectacle,* which is going to be unpacked more thoroughly in the next section.



Fig.56 - Berlusconi and Qadhdhafi in Rome, August 2010

Between the signing of the Treaty in 2008 and Qadhdhafi's death, five meetings took place to celebrate this newfound friendship. In August 2010 Qadhdhafi's second visit to Italy took place among a series of grandiose events and spectacles. The picture of the 2009 meeting that triggered this research aimed to conjure up notions of friendship and reciprocity through the handshake between the premiers, yet it implied a conflictual relation, conveyed through the photograph of 'Umar al-Mukhtar pinned on Qadhdhafi's chest. Instead, the image portraying the 2010 meeting reveals an increased spectacularisation of politics and complicity between the two leaders. Standing on an army vehicle, they are surrounded by law enforcement while their bodies - elevated and paraded - project an image of power and authority. Departing from the more traditional images of diplomacy between nations, of which the handshake is a trope, this image – which portrays the last meeting celebrating the signing of the Treaty - seems to reveal the authoritarian connotations of the bilateral agreements. According to historian Ruth Ben-Ghiat, Berlusconi and Qadhdhafi are part of a genealogy of male authoritarian rulers who rely on a cult of personality. Originating with Benito Mussolini, whom she deems the "first man to transform a democracy into a dictatorship" (2020, p.19), Ben-Ghiat calls these figures *strongmen*. Appealing to "populist rhetoric that defines their nations as bound by faith, race, and ethnicity rather than legal rights", they embody the nation "above and beyond any institution." (2020, p. 6). Both Berlusconi and Qadhdhafi

are featured in the case studies analysed by Ben-Ghiat, who carefully identifies the shared strategies these political leaders deploy to assert power. Also, investigating the way these figures have interacted through the last century, she defines the strongman's "brand of charisma" as an equal mix of "seduction and threat that celebrates male authority through 'man to man' diplomacy" (Ben-Ghiat, 2020, p.250). The events surrounding the Treaty on Friendship amplify these aspects while highlighting the similarities and resonances between the two strongmen. Given the specific ways in which Berlusconi and Qadhdhafi incarnate and perform power and their nations, these events result in highly spectacular displays of diplomatic relations.

A quick combined search on Google Images for the two leaders returns a plethora of pictures in which their friendship is embodied through intimate gestures: hugs, kisses (on cheek and hands), holding hands and gazing into each other's eyes from up close. Although political alliance and respect is generally enacted through reciprocal gestures and greetings, Berlusconi and Qadhdhafi's more extreme displays of proximity have captured the curiosity of many people, resulting in memes, Youtube compilations, and a general, ironic take on what is often mocked as a love story. These dynamics of intimacy, reciprocity, and complicity between Berlusconi and Qadhdhafi are particularly heightened during the ostentatious performances of friendship that were staged between 2008 and 2010 as part of the Treaty. These events also wished to fully rehabilitate Qadhdhafi in international circles, portraying him as "docile"[69] and trustworthy while projecting a 'safe' and 'genuine' image of the partnership between two countries that otherwise share a very controversial history.

[69] By alluding to the project of befriending Qadhdhafi to make him (in his own words) "more rational", Berlusconi stated in 2014: "I remember telling President Bush that we were domesticating Gaddafi. We had educated him, we had charmed him, and we had trapped him. Each of us did our part. I remember working hard to put Italy's colonial past behind us." (quoted in Friedman, 2015, p.194) This passage is featured in both *Notes for a Film* and *The Expanded Script*.

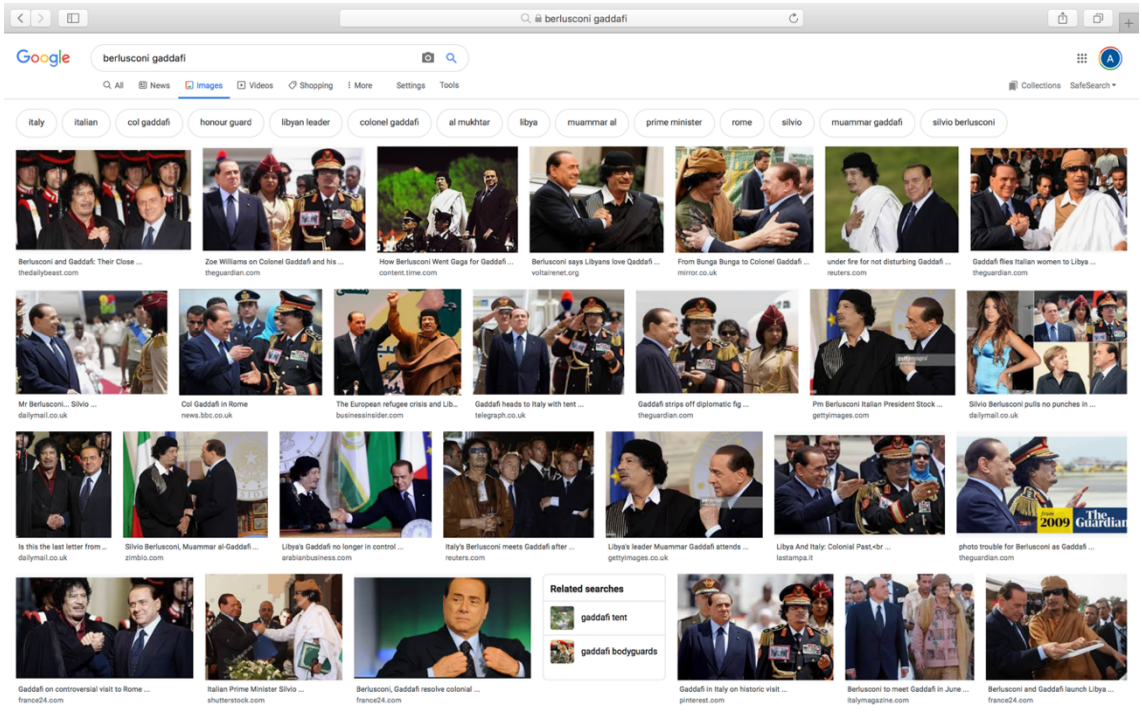


Fig.57 - Google Image search for 'Berlusconi and Gaddafi'

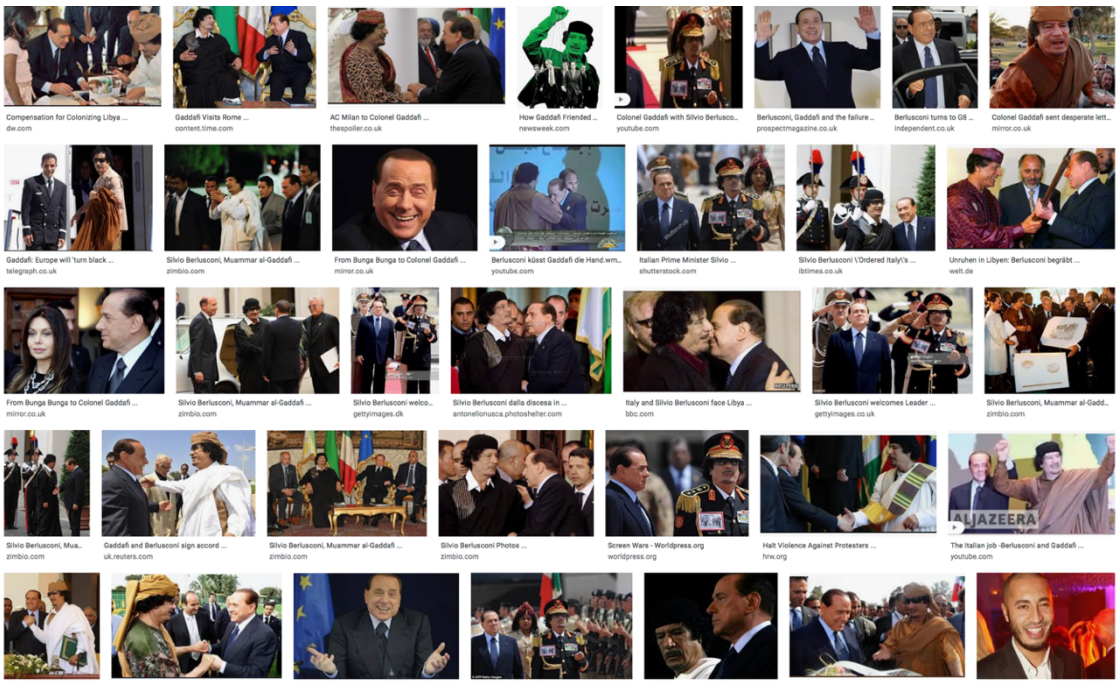


Fig.58 - Google Image search for 'Berlusconi and Gaddafi'

Ben-Ghiat claims that Berlusconi and Qadhdhafi's emphasis on intimacy is, however, typical of the strongman, given that:

> displays of machismo and […] kinship with other male leaders are not just

> bluster, but a way of exercising power at home and conducting foreign policy. Virility enables [their] corruption, projecting the idea that [they are] above laws that weaker individuals must follow. (2020, p.7-8)

If this behaviour is tailored to build consensus domestically, appealing to a nation's understanding of virility, when displayed in front of a foreign/international audience, it can be read as a culturally determined marker that infringes diplomatic etiquette. For instance, Qadhdhafi's behaviour during state visits in the Global North was often perceived as 'self-exoticizing' because of his use of clothing, iconography, props or emphasis on tradition. His choice to be surrounded by The Revolutionary Nuns (the all-female bodyguards also known as Amazonian Guards) or to bring his Bedouin tent to all state visits has served to reinforce his alterity. However, this has also enabled him to maintain an independent position rooted in Islamic, Bedouin and anticolonial traditions while reiterating his pan-Arabic and pan-African affiliations. That is, Qadhdhafi has navigated Western (neo)imperialist spaces through a deliberate antagonistic stance. Berlusconi, on the other hand, has performed a specific brand of stereotypical Italianness. He has defied political correctness through the use of sexist, racist and mischievous humour. In line with his political persona, he has fused traits of glamour and celebrity culture with "cultural myths and beliefs (…) and contingent perceptions of 'italianità' (Italian-ness) and 'italiano medio' (Italian everyman)" (Marini Maio, 2015, p.14-15).



Fig.59 - Sirte Parliament, March 2009



Figs.60-61 - Berlusconi's colonial reparations at Sirte Parliament, March 2009

Both leaders shared a penchant for provocation and bold statements, carefully orchestrated to gain maximum media attention and domestic consensus (these aspects are explored in *The Expanded Script*). Since strongmen have made the spectacular their weapon of choice, as spectators, we should not be deceived by appearances. As Guy Debord points out, the spectacle offers false choices by juxtaposing "competing yet interconnected roles" that are "designed to generate fervent allegiance to quantitative trivialities" (Debord, 1983 [1967], p.30). Thus, deception blurs the line between spectacle and reality: Debord claims that "reality erupts within the spectacle, and the

spectacle is real. This reciprocal alienation is the essence and underpinning of society as it exists" (Debord, 1983, p.8).

The media's role in creating the spectacle – and the deception – is thus paramount and it will be explored both here and in Chapter 3. As noted by Bruce Magnusson and Zahi Zalloua, "[t]hrough its abstraction and dehistoricization of events, spectacle breeds mystification' (2016), which makes it a "tool of pacification and depoliticization" (Best & Kellner, 1998).To analyse the events surrounding the Treaty and their legacies, it is thus important to understand the spectacle's inherent "mechanisms of contemplation" (Debord 1983, 8) and the active production of deception at its core. Specifically, this research is committed to establishing the role played by colonial violence/trauma in such spectacular politics. Focusing on reparations and how the colonial past has been remembered, exploited, or manipulated as part of the Treaty, it understands the spectacle as a deflecting device. That is, it contributes to hindering the development of a sense of accountability towards the colonial trauma caused by the Italian occupation of Libya. As Chiara De Cesari notices, "[h]istorical memory is belittled by the spectacle of the two leaders, whose 'colorfulness' dominates the scene" (2012b, p.322). In so doing, the central deception operated by the spectacle is the establishment of new dynamics of oppression and death, which reproduce colonial violence under the guise of reparations – what Distretti deems a "failed reparation model." (2021, p.1436)

Regarding the performance of reparation - namely a state's political/historical apology (also often described as performances of guilt)[70] - in March 2009, Berlusconi gave a short speech at the Libyan Parliament in Sirte, officially apologising for the colonial past. His speech was brief and convoluted, avoiding using the word *colonialism* or derivatives. He apologised "for what happened many years ago and for that which has marked many of your families." Tom Bentley (2016, p.179) notices how Italy's apologies for the colonial occupation of Libya are remarkable in reparative politics because they do not focus on a specific event but on the entire period of occupation.

However, Bentley argues by looking closely at Berlusconi's speech and the Treaty's text, it becomes clear that they "still contain vestiges of the impulses towards silence

[70] In Chapter 5 I will expand on this by relating it to Sarah Ahmed's concept of the "politics of admission" (2004).

and obfuscation" (2016, p.179). This text mostly addresses colonial history as "a painful chapter" and something in the past that needs to be overcome. As a result, Berlusconi's apologies have been considered a deceiving strategy and even a parody (De Cesari, 2012a, p.322).

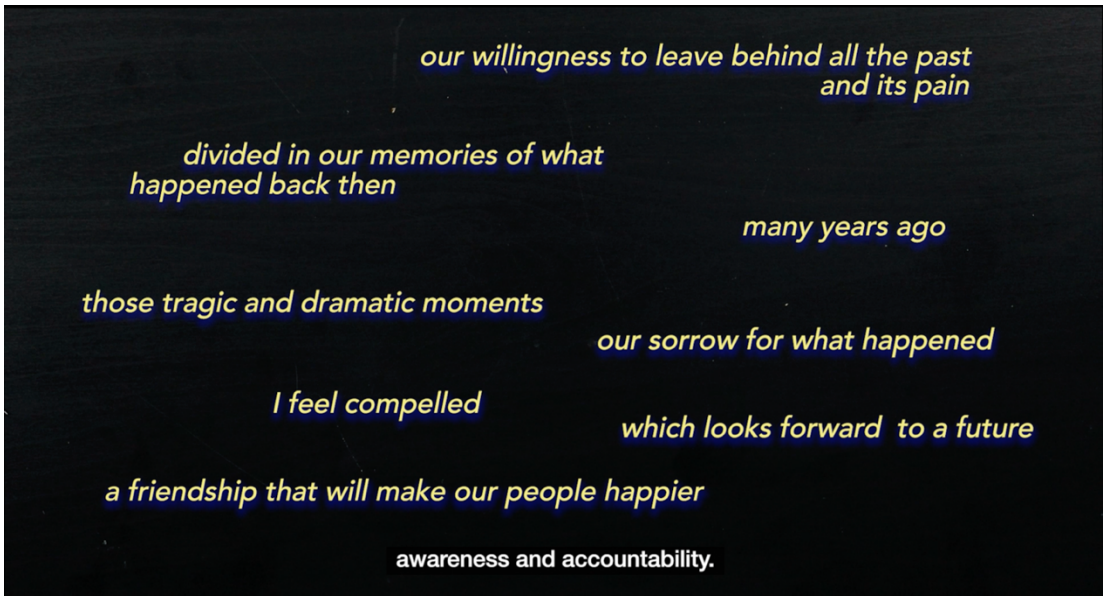


Fig.62 – *Gaddafi in Rome: Notes for a Film, Act I*, 2022, video still.

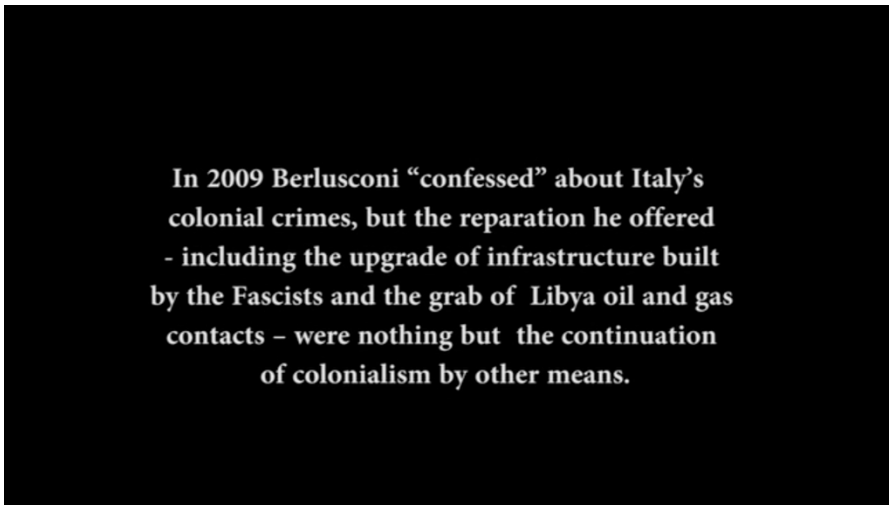
This analysis also drives *Notes for a Film, Act I,* which features Berlusconi's speeches in Sirte and Benghazi. In the video, the most deflective expressions are isolated and, using onscreen text, presented to the viewer, thus emphasising the process of discourse analysis that underpins the process of scriptwriting in this research.[71] Bringing to the fore the sanitised use of language – which fails to name colonial violence while pretending to take responsibility for it – this passage unveils the manipulative language employed by Berlusconi. Since neither the violence perpetrated by the Italians in Libya nor Italy's accountability in this matter are explicitly mentioned, they are exposed as deflecting strategies. The voiceover, on the other hand, reflects on the lack of news coverage of the reparations by the Italian media, highlighting the unbalanced news reporting between the event in Rome and those that took place in Libya. The importance of colonial reparations is thus dismissed. The press, instead, focuses on the spectacular and 'entertaining' aspects of the diplomatic relations between Italy and Libya. As a result, the voiceover addresses the way this situation prevents the fostering of a wider reflection on accountability. Placed within a context like Italian society, which already

[71] I will unpack the use of Critical Discourse Analysis in Chapter 3.

lacks awareness of its colonial past, these dynamics create a further obstacle to the development of historical responsibility.







Figs.63-65 - Decolonizing Architecture, *Italian Ghosts:* Confession*,* 2014.

Berlusconi's reparation speech is also addressed by the installation *Italian Ghosts* (2014) by Sandi Hilal and Alessandro Petti (known as DAAR or Decolonising Architecture), for the Venice Biennale of Architecture. It featured two videos contained within a Church-like confessional box. The first video, *A Scandalous Beauty*, consists of a slideshow of images of Italian modernist (Fascist) architecture in Libya. The second video, *Confession*, presented different found footage: an extract from Berlusconi's apologies in Sirte in 2009; a longer clip documenting a speech given by Berlusconi at the Italian Parliament in 2009; and archival footage documenting the concentration camps built by the Italians in Cyrenaica to annihilate the Senussite resistance. In much the same way as this research*, Italian Ghosts* attempts to shine a light on – and problematise – the performance of the politics of regret enacted by Berlusconi in Sirte, as part of the colonial reparations. This work sets a precedent for my research, not only because it engages with some of the same material (and event) but also because it

initiates a reflection on the merging of colonial reparations and neocolonial interests. However, the text slide featured here is the only information that is given, reducing the very complex issue of colonial reparations to a highly simplified narrative. The erasure of Qadhdhafi from this work also seems to be a strategy to avoid engaging with more profound questions that would not result in such a clear-cut narrative as that presented by the artists.

In addition to these points, the use of the confessional box and the lack of deconstruction of the documentary imagery – or adequate contextualisation - seem to flatten the work, reducing it to a spectacle lacking the capacity to trigger critical thinking in the audience. As much as it is notable that issues like the Libyan genocide, colonial reparations, and the Bilateral Agreements are disclosed, the lack of information makes it very difficult to understand their significance. Moreover, the artwork was produced five years after the event, when the Treaty on Friendship was no longer active due to Qadhdhafi's death. The only surviving part of the Treaty, the bilateral agreements on migration were only reinstated in 2013 (), and they are not even mentioned in the work. This, in my opinion, not only misrepresents the nature of the reparations and the Treaty, but also contributes to erasing the people whose human rights have been severely violated.

The synopsis of the work available on DAAR's website, fails to provide any further information or a more complex reading of the event or the installation:

> However crucial they were for the colonial project for Italy's history and identity the modernist architecture of Italian colonialism is as little known as the entire period of Italian colonialism and its ongoing legacy.
> The embarrassing elegance of these architecture contrasts with the crimes of the colonization that have never been acknowledged; the "Gheddafi-Berlusconi reconciliation" of 2009 attempted to bypass, ignore or forced to produce a farce of the past.
> The afterlife of these buildings might help to unpack and reveal the strict problematic relation between modernism and colonization, Italy and its colonial ghosts. (Decolonizing, no date)

The focus on Fascist architecture that is realised through the slide show titled *A Scandalous Beauty* does not seem to add much context or understanding to the other video. Nor is it clear how a slideshow of photographs of these buildings (a mapping)

can offer an understanding of the “problematic relation between modernism and colonization” (Decolonizing, no date).Lastly, the correlation between Fascist architecture and beauty is rather troubling - especially when described using the expression “embarrassing elegance” – since it reinforces its fetishization, which is common among Italians. The erasure of Libyan people from the built environment, as much as the disregard for the bilateral agreement on migration, together with the focus on architecture, refuse to reveal and name the necropolitics at play in the Treaty. *Italian Ghosts,* much like the work of Patrizio di Massimo or Martina Melilli (Chapter 1), does little to contribute a critical reading of the relationship between Italy and Libya. Intervening in this genealogy, it was important for my project to develop a deeper reflection not only on the historical and geopolitical context of the Treaty, but also notions of positionality and accountability - while devising ways to convey the complexity of these issues in a legible way.

2.3 The Inciting Incident



Fig.66 Gaddafi and Berlusconi at Ciampino Airport in Rome, 10 June 2009

The notion of having "closed a chapter", which features in Berlusconi's apologies, was at the core of the frenzied media reporting[72] of Qadhdhafi's first visit to Rome. In *Notes for a Film, Act I,* this expression is highlighted and questioned when Berlusconi first uses it and when Qadhdhafi repeats it. As the voiceover states: "Gaddafi's emphasis on closure, seems to contradict his use of Omar al-Mukhtar's photograph." (*Notes for a Film, Act I*) This expression is crucial to the analysis of the event, not only because it recurs within *La Repubblica'*s *newsfeed*,[73] but because it provides an understanding of the way the colonial past/trauma was used as a bargaining chip by both leaders. Nevertheless, the act of defiance that Qadhdhafi staged by pinning an image of colonial violence to his chest[74] a mere three months after Berlusconi performed his apologies for the colonial past in Libya, sparked many protests. Perceived as mockery by the Italian political class, it was also interpreted as a symbol of Qadhdhafi's untrustworthiness, highlighting the deeply rooted denial of accountability regarding the colonial past within Italian society.[75] As the image triggered this research project, its *dissection* is central in both practical outputs.

La Repubblica's live coverage of the 2009 meeting provides a detailed, almost obsessive narration of the three days spent by Qadhdhafi in Rome and of the protests sparked by this event (which will be thoroughly explored in Chapter 3). As if to highlight the historical significance of this visit (the first time the Libyan leader set foot on Italian soil) such extensive coverage required a rather large effort from the newspaper's editorial staff in terms of logistics, coordination and general workload. The carefully planned State visit, which resulted in severe restrictions of movement for the population within the city, was announced with ample advance notice. Thus, it can be assumed that its documentation had to be pre-planned, attesting to the newspaper's conception of this event as 'transformative': a special event that deserved substantial coverage. Yet, it is exactly their choice to dedicate such attention to it that gives an impression of the event as a major historical occurrence, an exceptional event. In other

[72] This includes the *newsfeed* published by *La Repubblica* that is at the core of this research.
[73] Having used Critical Discourse Analysis to establish the most recurrent expressions and words in the *newsfeed*, it constituted an important element. In Chapter 3 I will expand on this.
[74] The short video *Sight Unseen,* which I produced while developing this research, offers an in-depth analysis of the significance of this image.
[75] Such interpretation of the event is the focus of *Notes for a Film* overall. The reception of such image will be further explored in the next subchapter, in relation to the concept of *neocolonial spectacle*, performed by the two leaders.

words, this extensive news-reporting operation indicates an eagerness to turn Qadhdhafi's visit into a "media event" – a concept first thoroughly theorised by Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz. In their seminal book *Media Events: The Live Broadcasting of History* (1992), which gave rise to the Media Events Studies field, Dayan and Katz's provide a clear definition of media spectacle that, however, has since been criticised by several scholars for being too narrow. Julia Sonnevend (2016) thus sums up their strict taxonomy:

> A "media event" had to (1) be broadcast live, (2) constitute an interruption of everyday life and everyday broadcasting, (3) be preplanned and scripted, and (4) be viewed by a large audience. There should also be (5) a normative expectation that viewing was obligatory and (6) a reverent narration. Moreover, the event had to be (7) integrative of society and (8) mostly conciliatory. (p.8)

Drawing on their work and on Guy Debord, Douglas Kellner (2010) has attempted to simplify their premise and update it according to the shifts in broadcast media by defining "contemporary media events as media-orchestrated "spectacles" that reach over numerous mass and digital media, that colonise the everyday, and that often have a global reach" (quoted in Ytreberg, 2017, p.316). Thus, media events are carefully constructed in both their execution and media coverage – they are not reactions to unforeseeable events like breaking news that happen suddenly and cannot be anticipated. They are, instead, ceremonial occasions that are intrinsically conceived as historic (both by their actors and by the broadcasters) and in so doing they demand attention and reverence, ultimately reinforcing hegemonic power structures.[76]

[76] Yet, Bianca Mitu and Stamatis Poulakidakos (2016, p.3) have argued that a stress on scripting and rituals fails to include those 'disruptive events' that also gain similar media attention and historical legitimacy through it.



Figs.67-69 - Korpys-Löffler, *Nuclear Football,* 2004, video stills.

A state visit from a foreign president, for instance, could be classified as a media event, as explored by the German artist-duo Korpys-Löffler in the video *Nuclear Football* (2004). This work exposes the planning and staging of then-US President George W. Bush's visit to Berlin. By gaining press access, the artists had the chance to document the 'backstage operations' of the ceremonial event. That is, the "protocol-governed procedures that make up this visit: the arrival at Berlin-Tegel airport; disembarkation from the aeroplane; security officers; unrolling the red carpet" (Theweleit, 2007, p.67), amongst other ritualistic elements like greetings and army parades. As they wait for the plane to arrive, the slowness and anti-climactic aspects of the spectacle are emphasised, revealing the artifice of the spectacle, its construction, and the constitutive elements of the performance of diplomacy. In this way, they also contribute to the understanding of the theatrical metaphors that pervade the discourse on democracy: references ranging from notions of 'stage' and 'backstage' to "political actors and audiences" (Parkinson, 2015, p.19). The voiceover, moreover, employs a striking whispered and rather hypnotic tone, switching between English and German, to utter factual commentary in a synthetic and descriptive manner (Korpys-Löffler, 2005, p.733). Similarly, the first part of *Notes for a Film, Act I* opens with footage of Berlusconi greeting Qadhdhafi at Ciampino Airport, while the voiceover closely analyses the scene: Qadhdhafi stepping out of his plane, how the two leaders moved across the space, the different people surrounding them, the red carpet, and the major 'actors' in this event. While considering and describing these elements, the voiceover speculates on what the two leaders must be thinking and whether they planned, together, to disrupt the event by having Qadhdhafi pin the photograph of 'Umar al-Mukhtar to his chest.

Borrowing from the lexicon of dramaturgy, the 'iconic image' is addressed as the 'inciting incident' that disrupts the ceremonial script at the very beginning of the Qadhdhafi's visit to Rome. In the video, we can see the two premiers posing for the photograph and we can hear the journalists interacting with them to choreograph the handshake.

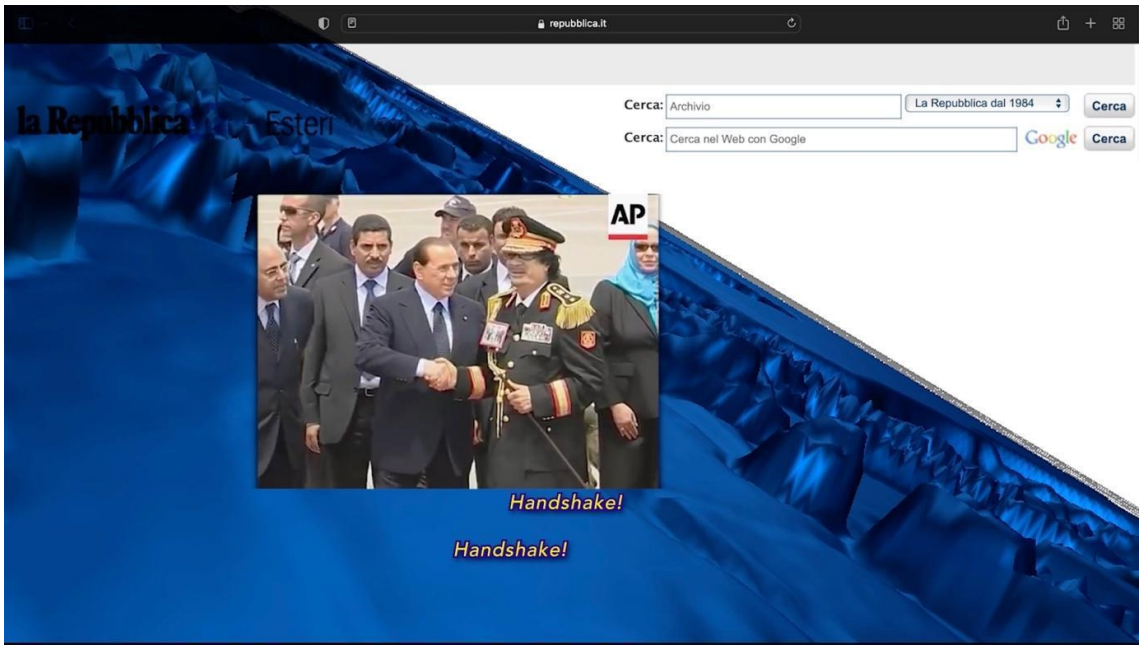


Fig.70 - *Gaddafi in Rome: Notes for a Film, Act I,* 2022, video still.

In keeping with the dramaturgical schema, Dayan and Katz identify three kinds of scripts that are generally followed by media events - *contests, conquests* and *coronations* - all based on the performance of power. What differs is the message that is conveyed therein and their corresponding rituals. Qadhdhafi's visit to Rome borrows different aspects from each script, without fully conforming to Dayan and Katz's definition of a media event and resulting in a cacophonic and confusing effect. This, I argue, is related to the kind of power figures (strongmen) and political relations (neocolonial) that are on stage, since they don't comply with such strict categorisations. As already mentioned, Berlusconi and Qadhdhafi presented themselves on the international political stage as extravagant characters, emphasising their alterity, controversial personas, and unpredictability. Both premiers aimed at asserting power through what Marini Maio defines as a "semiotic" "fracasso" (fracas, ruckus) in the cultural and political system". Drawing on a wide and often contrasting spectrum of references, such semiotic "fracas" generate a destabilising effect directed to appeal to nationalist rhetoric. Furthermore, the intensification of the bilateral relations between the two countries – and the tension between performing friendship and re-establishing Italian hegemony in Libya and the Mediterranean - also contributes to a destabilising effect that has made it necessary, in this research, to devise a specific category of media event: the *neocolonial spectacle.*



Fig.71 - *Gaddafi in Rome: the Expanded Script,* 2018-21, video still.

Even though media events are scripted and pre-planned, Dayan and Katz notice that they are open to contingency. Their liveness implies the possibility of unplanned interferences. Qadhdhafi's state visit in 2009 presents all these elements, from the strictly ceremonial to the unexpected. The use of 'Umar al-Mukhtar's picture as a provocation triggered a series of vocal protests and thus caused what Dayan and Katz define as the *hijacking* of the event – namely, a deviation from the pre-planned script that put a crease in the spectacle's surface. In *Notes for a Film* the use of al-Mukhtar's image by Qadhdhafi is constantly interrogated as a potentially pre-planned action in which Berlusconi was complicit. This is, however, not answered, rather it is suggested and left as an open question for the viewer.

His gesture, even if not expected, seems to confirm Qadhdhafi's previously established role within the international political milieu, which the Western press labels with the derogatory term "mad dog". Nevertheless, this stunt - which was read as mockery by the Italian political class - shifted the attention away from the contents of the agreements stipulated during the meeting. Yet, it did not direct it towards al-Mukhtar's image and its significance. On the contrary, as Chiara De Cesari (2012a) has noticed, "the photographic visibility of the colonial past does not always translate into collective memory" (p.345). In other words, within the Italian context, colonial history is so far removed and unrecognisable that the suffering and violence represented by the picture is not registered as such - the condition of colonial aphasia theorised by Ann Laura Stoler

(see Chapter 1). What is missing is the knowledge of what is seen or the language to articulate it. This, in turn, produces what De Cesari calls "memorial invisibility" (2012a, p. 346): a condition in which evidence of colonial trauma is not recognised as such. For De Cesari, the fact that al-Mukhtar's image is contained within a press image portraying Berlusconi and Qadhdhafi, renders it irrelevant and invisible.

Unable and unwilling to articulate or engage with what the image captures, the Italian and international press merely interpreted it as a symbol of Qadhdhafi's untrustworthy nature: "a farce" (De Cesari, 2012a, p.346). This highlights the deeply rooted disregard towards the actual suffering of the Libyan population since no reflection on what the image portrays was offered by the news media. As De Cesari (2012a) puts it:

> The exposure of the colonial past at the visual level did not correspond at all to its engagement in the corresponding articles. Not a single piece in the mainstream Italian and international press addressed the broader historical dimension of the Treaty beyond mere descriptive reporting, or attempted an in-depth discussion of what happened in colonial Libya (p.344).

Thus, even an image as charged as 'Umar al-Mukhtar in chains seems unable to trigger a process of accountability towards the colonial past. Analysed semiotically, this means that there is a stark, culturally determined difference between signifier and signified. For the Italian/Western imagined community (the audience), the image of 'Umar al-Mukhtar (signifier) has a profoundly different meaning from that associated with it by Libyans (signified).[77] In terms of spectatorship, what this implies is an impossibility for the Western audience to identify with 'Umar al-Mukhtar or his son Mohamed who accompanied Qadhdhafi in Rome.

According to De Cesari "[t]he Treaty's ambiguous (dis)engagement with colonialism, coupled with its simultaneous creation of pastness, suggests that we have already dealt with the colonial past", voiding the image of al-Mukhtar from its "potential to provoke critical reflection" (De Cesari, 2012b, pp.323-324) even in the face of international

[77] From La Repubblica's newsfeed: "21:44 Gaddafi: "The hanging of Omar al Mukhtar for us Libyans is like the crucifixion of Christ for Christians. They carry the cross to remind the world of the tragedy of Christ. For us this image is a tragedy, which is symbolized by the photo I wore" . The Libyan leader explained the reasons that led him to wear, on his uniform, a photo of the Libyan anti-colonial hero al Mukhtar on the first day of his visit to Italy".

diplomacy and reparative politics.

2.4 *Neocolonial Spectacles*

As pointed out by Gabriele Abbondanza, Italy's relation to Libya has been more "varied and complex" than that with the other former colonies, becoming the "fulcrum of Italian geopolitical interests" (2016, p.154). That is, it has embodied Italy's interests in establishing control over the Mediterranean region. Writing after Qadhdhafi's death, Abbondanza notices how the way the Treaty was rehabilitated, in the midst of the ongoing Libyan civil war, makes apparent Italy's aspiration to be a hegemonic power within the Mediterranean region, which started following the loss of the colonies in the mid 1940s. As featured in *Notes for a Film, Act II,* this attitude is, however, a direct legacy of Fascist imperial politics encapsulated in the idea of Mare Nostrum ("Our Sea") the ancient Roman name for the Mediterranean Sea that was revamped and appropriated by Mussolini.[78]

Such continuity in Italian foreign affairs in the MENA region was more recently confirmed by Andrea Manciulli, currently the Director of Institutional Relations at MedOr[79], former President of the NATO PA-GSM (Mediterranean and Middle East Special Group), and Deputy Chairperson of Italy's Chamber of deputies Committee on Foreign Affairs (2013 to 2018). In an article that appeared on the 25th of June 2020 as part of the 'Observatory on the Mediterranean' on the online platform *Europa Atlantica*, titled *Is the Mediterranean still "Mare Nostrum"?* he stated:

> "We cannot renounce our projection on the Mediterranean, the heart of our foreign policy since before Italy became a unified state, just as Europe cannot avoid taking an interest in what is happening in this region. We need each other and vice versa. And we both have an interest in securing political centrality for the whole West, and an ability to be an arbiter, in this region. We do not lack the

[78] This concept is the Italian equivalent of the German and more specifically Nazi's concept of *Lebensraum,* or 'vital space'. It was also at the core of Mussolini's conception of Eurafrica. If the Mediterranean was described by the fascist leader as an 'Italian lake', while Libya as 'Italy's fourth shore', Eurafrica also establishes the roots of fascist ideology, specifically related to foreign politics, within European imperialism.

[79] MedOr is a foundation established by the aerospace, security and defence company Leonardo. This institution is mentioned in *Notes for a Film, Act III.*

> tools nor the space for action to achieve this ambitious but indispensable goal. But if we don't act quickly, we may run out of time and we may be cut off inexorably." (Manciulli, 2020)

This imperialist, Eurocentric posture is also rooted in the concept of *Eurafrica*, which is entwined with both the Fascist notion of Mare Nostrum and the foundation of the European Economic Community (EEC). Popularised in the 1930s by the Paneuropean Union organisation (founded in 1923), according to Peo Hansen and Stefan Jonsson (2014, p.18), the geopolitical project of Eurafrica was politically realised with the funding of the EEC in 1957, during the Treaty on Rome – at the verge of the decolonization era. Anticipating the dissolutions of formal empires, the main programme of the Eurafrican project was to secure sustained control over African resources after the passage to informal empire. That is, to a configuration in which the European colonial system of exploitation would continue in the African continent without physical occupation of the land and after recognition of the sovereignty of African nation-states. Although this programme was integral to the foundation of the European supranational project, in the 1960s it disappeared from the EEC's political agenda (Hansen & Jonsson, 2014, p.16). By recovering and reinscribing it into the history of both Europe and Africa, Hansen and Jonsson argue, it is possible to trace the continuity of the colonial system and its conflation into an informal model of imperialism, through neocolonial policies. The Treaty on Friendship Partnership and Cooperation between Italy and Libya emerges from this dynamic of continuity.

Focusing on Italian colonialism, this research uses the term *colonialism* mostly to refer to the period stretching from the mid-late nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century: a time connoted by the Berlin conference of 1884 and the so-called 'Scramble for Africa', which led to the European occupation of most of the African continent. This period is also called *new imperialism:* a time in which European expansion overseass soared. More broadly, the word colonialism indicates a *formal empire*, that is, it is based on land occupation through settlement, direct rule, and military control. Through enslavement, extractivism, and other forms of exploitation and violence, colonialism has sustained and accelerated the development of the global capitalist system.

If at times the terms *colonialism* and *imperialism* are used almost interchangeably, this research understands *Western imperialism* as a system of domination that can be both *formal* or *informal.* By the latter, I refer to a situation in which a sovereign state has substantial power and influence over a territory even though it does not physically occupy it, nor does it rule it directly. Likewise, *neocolonialism* operates in the absence of territorial occupation, thus constituting a type of *informal empire*. Yet neocolonial relations do not need to be strictly between two sovereign states. They can also take place between corporations and sovereign states. In these situations, the companies exert control or influence over land, resources, economy or politics.

In this research the use of the term *neocolonialism* is confined to the relations between Italy and Libya that have been shaped by the Treaty on Friendship. As a result, it is understood through the lens of the Treaty. It indicates the long-lasting entanglements between a former metropole and its former colony that are reiterated or reinstated through colonial dynamics of direct political influence, exploitation, and extraction – as well as on the administration of life and death. Furthermore, Italy's externalisation of border control to Libya, implies a territorial control, albeit without formal occupation. Hinging on corporate investment, colonial subtext and reparations – as well as on the deployment of the memory of colonial violence and suffering as a coercive strategy - the Treaty thus seems to befit the use of the term *neocolonialism* to frame this research.

Neocolonialism has also been used instead of Anibal Quijano's notion of the "coloniality of power", which is here broadly understood as the set of colonial power structures (governmental, socio-political, economical, cultural, etc.) that have outlived the end of the formal empires. The concept of coloniality extends to all structures and spheres of life, shaping the power relations within and outside the former metropole as well as former colonies. Neocolonialism, instead, is understood here in relation to the seminal work by former Ghanian president Kwame Nkrumah, since it is focused on economic and governmental influence and on the control of resources, companies, and institutions rather than on epistemic or subjective systems. Nkrumah's work, moreover, given its grounding in the relation between Europe and Africa, has been helpful in reflecting on the relation between Italy/EU and Libya/Africa.

Introduced in the early 1950s, the term neocolonialism was first extensively theorised by Kwame Nkrumah, in the book *Neo-colonialism: the Last Stage of Imperialism* (1965). Following this publication, it came into general usage. Earlier, it featured in Jean-Paul Sartre's *Colonialism and Neocolonialism* (2001 [1956]) where it was employed in relation to France's politics in Algeria during the Independence War. Sartre also used it in his introduction to Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (2001 [1961]), in which Fanon also mentions the term, showing a clear affinity with Nkrumah's analysis (Langan, 2017, p.2). Other noteworthy uses of the term prior to Nkrumah's publication include speeches by Che Guevara, in relation to the US's policies in Asia, Central and South America (Gassama, 2008, p.338), rooted in the phenomenon of *dependency* in the region. On the other hand, a more systematic use of the term occurred in the Second and Third All-African People's Conference (respectively held in Tunis in 1960 and Cairo in 1961) and at the Bandung Conference (1955). As a result, the term emerges during the process of decolonization and from within anticolonial circles to assess the new exploitative practices of Western imperialism as formal empires were beginning to dissolve.

Simultaneously, the *dependency school* that developed in the 1960s and 1970s also offered overlaps with Nkrumah's thinking with which it shared neo-Marxist roots. Walter Rodney, who was greatly influenced by this school, in his seminal oeuvre *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (2018 [1972]), thus sums up this relation:

> The factor of dependency made its impact felt in every aspect of the life of the colonies, and it can be regarded as the crowning vice among the negative social, political, and economic consequences of colonialism in Africa, being primarily responsible, for the perpetuation of the colonial relationship into the epoch that is called neocolonialism (2018, p.286).

As pointed out by Mark Langan, "[t]he concept of neocolonialism is seen as distinct [from dependency], however, in that it places heavier emphasis on political agency, as opposed to the apparent economic determinism of many dependency theorists." (2017, p.2). Yet, Langan notices how recent International Relation's and Development Studies' scholarship has often considered the term neocolonialism outmoded because of a perception of Nkrumah's analysis as "a vulgar form of Marxism that is redundant in a post-Cold War setting" (Langan, 2017, p.55). Langan argues, instead, that Nkrumah's analysis is particularly relevant to understand the role of financial capitalism in the

relations between Europe and the African continent. Alongside his focus on oil and agribusiness, corporate investment, and donor interventions, Nkrumah also warned of the possible complicity with European economic interests of political actors within newly independent countries in Africa. In addition, resonating with independent Guinea's first President Ahmed Sékou Touré, Nkroumah warned about the newly formed European Economic Community's interest in maintaining asymmetrical relations with African countries through financial aid, trade agreements and corporate pressure that were meant to keep Africa in a subordinate position.[80]

Nkrumah defines the neocolonial model as an "empire without colonies" that "executes power without assuming responsibility" – "the worst form of imperialism" (Nkrumah, 1965, p.xi). Thus, Nkrumah locates the dangerousness of neocolonialism in its deceitful appearance, which also results in a lack of accountability. As mentioned in the previous section, the Treaty's text makes visible a manipulative use of reparative politics by counterpoising them with economic deals and border control policies that primarily benefit the former imperial power. Such an asymmetrical relation is at the core of neocolonial forms of power, as Nkrumah and Touré have warned. Tom Bentley argues that Italy's self-interests are blatantly embedded in the Treaty and that this not only contradicts the very nature of reparative politics but also "reproduces a recognizable colonial script" (2016, p.166). This script is identifiable in the asymmetric relation between the two actors in the Treaty: Italy offers infrastructural work reminiscent of the 'civilising projects' during colonial occupation, while Libya provides natural resources, fuel, and free trade, allowing Italy to control its border, with no clear benefits for its citizenry.[81] This model allows for the systemic exploitation of former colonies under the guise of economic cooperation and capitalist trade. As Robert J. C. Young notices, this is more subtle and indirect than colonialism, yet it maintains the economic hegemony of former imperial powers (2015, pp.44-45).

[80] "Touré and Nkrumah both warned that the EEC would ensure that African countries continued to supply its members with raw materials and energy, while ensuring that African states remained open markets for value-added consumer goods produced in Europe." (Langan, 2017, p.119).

[81] Moreover, the Treaty put an end to the Day of Revenge that was instituted in 1970 by Qadhdhafi, by transforming it in the Italian-Libyan Friendship Day, a clause dictated by the Italians and directly affecting local policy.



Fig.72 - *Gaddafi in Rome: Notes for a Film, Act III,* 2022, video still.

Deception thus seems to be implied in this understanding of neocolonialism. As an ideology, Nkrumah claims, it is connoted by insidiousness, its true nature not being visible at surface level or, as Indian postcolonial scholar Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak puts it, it is "comparable to radiation" (Spivak, 1991, p.221). Spivak (1991, p.221) is adamant that neocolonialism is not just an economic system, but also a territorial and cultural form of colonialism. In her words, this distinction implies "that the production of knowledge within neocolonialism seems to have a much subtler role and it's much harder to pin down" (Spivak, 1991, p.221). Her views seem to align with Fanon's warning on the dangers of new forms that imperialist politics would take following independence in the 1960s – and the insidiousness of colonial ideology in both colonisers and colonised subjects. Highlighting a more psychological dimension, in addition to the economic aspects of neocolonialism as in the work of Nkrumah and Touré, Fanon writes: "imperialism…leaves in its wake here and there tinctures of decay which we must search out and mercilessly expel from our land and our spirits." (2001, p.249) Fanon places the attention here on the afterlife of imperialism – echoing the notion of coloniality – in the wake of independence. Spivak's focus on knowledge seems also to resonate with the notion of coloniality, as a system that still permeates all spheres of life despite the end of formal empires.

In this research, neocolonialism is understood, more specifically, through Nkrumah's focus on economic and political influence as the fulfilment of the Eurafrican project,

through an extractivist and necropolitical agenda. In presenting itself through the deceiving façade of diplomacy, reciprocal relations, and power symmetry between European and African countries, it also reveals a will to remain invisible (as in not named, not recognisable). *Notes for a Film, Act III* ends with a consideration of the way paramilitary and necropolitical agents like Leonardo[82] and Frontex are actively collaborating with Italian universities. Thus, it appears that, they are becoming normalised. As a result, Spivak's metaphor of radiation (written in 1991, thus, in a rather different context), is helpful here to address the way certain mechanisms of neocolonialism remain hidden or unrecognised.



Fig.73 - *Gaddafi in Rome: Notes for a Film, Act III,* 2022, video still.

As already explored in the previous section, deception and normalisation are also characteristics of the spectacle: "[t]hrough its abstraction and dehistoricization of events, spectacle breeds mystification" (Magnusson & Zalloua, 2016, p.5), which makes it a "tool of pacification and depoliticization" (Best & Kellner, 1998, p.4). It follows that through spectacularising neocolonial dynamics, then, a degree of "pacification and depoliticization" can take place. As will be argued in Chapter 3, the media event analysed in this research also makes it clear how "dehistoricization" has played an important part in this process. Moreover, Spivak's understanding of neocolonialism as

[82] Since the 7th of October 2023 Leonardo has also been profiting from the genocide of the Palestinian people.

devious and impalpable, together with Nkrumah's stress on its insidiousness resonate with what Debord defines as *integrated spectacle* (1998 [1988], p.9). In *Comments on the Society of Spectacle* Debord made one addition to *Society of the Spectacle*, where he defined power as either *concentrated* (referring to the tyrannical German and Russian models of power) or *diffused* (a concealed form of centralised power, which he associates with the American consumerist model). Integrated spectacle emerges from a fusion of these two forms of power (Debord 1998, p.9) since for Debord, in contemporary society, it is no longer possible to locate power in a leader or clear ideology (as in concentrated power), nor is it possible to find pockets of resistance to the spectacle (as in diffused power). Simply, the spectacle "permeates all reality" and media status has now become its most important value.

With this understanding of neocolonialism as something tacit, though, it seems paradoxical to talk about *neocolonial spectacles*. Yet, the meeting between Berlusconi and Qadhdhafi (and in particular, the Treaty) represents exactly the manifestation and materialization of this ordinarily "invisible" power. Its invisibility is achieved by the spectacle's potential to be a deflective device, in which invisibility is a result of hypervisibility. *Neocolonial spectacle* thus seems to be the essence of the integrated spectacle, in which two strongmen (authoritarian figures incarnating concentrated power) enact a deceiving performance of equality and cooperation (friendship) to advance a necropolitical and extractivist agenda that reasserts Italy's hegemony in the Mediterranean.

Going back to the images of the Treaty on Friendship's celebrations, more broadly the *neocolonial spectacle* can be defined as an integrated spectacle that makes visible the arbitrary power relations – a legacy of the colonial system – that occur between former colonisers and colonised, within a framework that put forward an appearance of equality and reciprocity. It negotiates these relations, which are more or less inscribed within its ceremonials, and reflects the shifting narratives that dominate national identity in each country.

Chapter 3

INSTANTANEOUS NEWS

History (and history making) changed, too.
The telegraph caused the preservation of quantities
of minutiae concerning everyday life.

(James Gleick, 2011, p.16)



Fig.74 - “Italo-Turkish War, journalists amongst the troops”, postcard, 1912.

Introduction

This chapter focuses on contextualising and analysing the news-updates chronicling Muhammar Qadhdhafi's first visit to Italy in 2009, which were published and then archived in the digital edition of the Italian daily *La Repubblica*.[83] Founded in 1976 with a leftist lean, as its readership grew, this newspaper embraced a more liberal stance that characterised the time when this meeting took place. The *newsfeed*, together with the picture of Berlusconi and Qadhdhafi's handshake in Rome, was the trigger for this research and has driven the main choices in the project. This research project started with a simple question: c*an the newsfeed be thought of as (and turned into) a film script?* From the focus on media and "digital historiography" (Baron, 2014), the use of critical discourse analysis and many of the approaches to the practical outputs have been developed in relation and in contrast to the *newsfeed*. As such, it has a central role in this project and it is analysed here in detail.

The *newsfeed* and focus on news media, as well as Berlusconi and Qadhdhafi's image, also represent the boundaries within which this research has traced a path through a vast historical and geopolitical context. As a result, they anchor the research. Establishing how this text functions in terms of form, temporality, language, and digital news media is pivotal to assessing how the practical outputs have been conceived and devised.

The first section, *News Updates vs the Newsfeed,* focuses on the formal and temporal characteristics of the *newsfeed*. It uses theories of temporality in photography to analyse the news updates' production and their archiving as a *newsfeed.* It is important to note here that the literature used to analyse the temporality and news value of the *newsfeed* in this section and part of the next sections looks dated since I focused on discourse emerging around the time of the event (2009). I have also employed older literature, especially around TV broadcasting, mostly because of the hybridity and peculiarity of the *newsfeed* and the way it was archived.

The second section, *Translating the newsfeed,* engages with notions of media translation, specifically, Mieke Bal and Joanne Morra's notion of "intermedial translation" (2007, p.7) and the work of the artist Antoni Muntadas. It focuses on

[83] Please refer to APPENDIX A to access full documentation of the *newsfeed.*

unpacking how the practical outputs have attempted to turn the *newsfeed* into moving images. It focuses on the process that was initially applied to *The Expanded Script,* and that led to the development of the structure of *Notes for a Film*. The final part, *Analysing the newsfeed*, details how Critical Discourse Analysis was applied to the *newsfeed* to establish the most recurrent words used and their significance to the context of the Treaty. It also considers how this analysis relates to *The Expanded Script* and *Notes for a Film.*

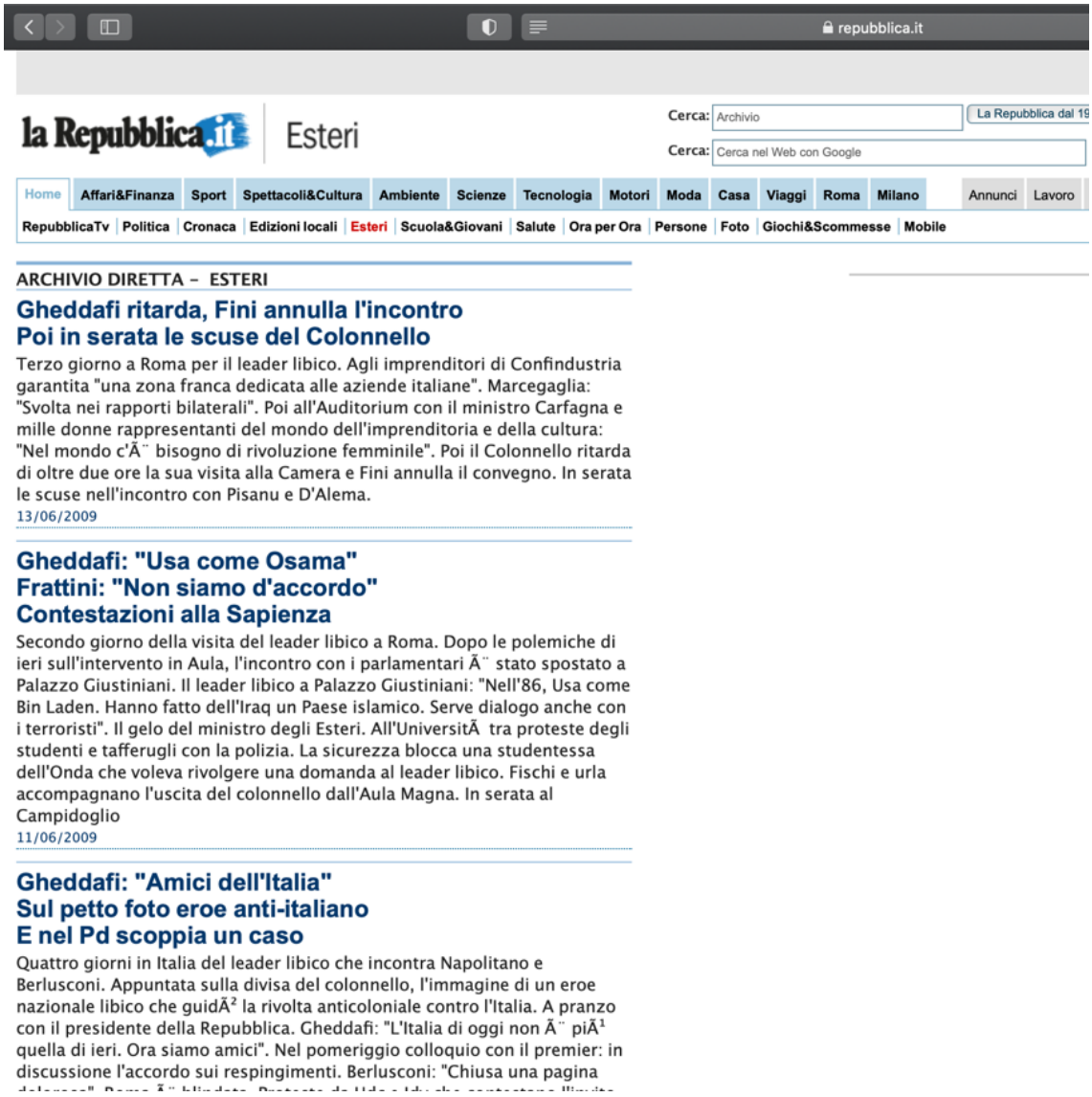


Fig.75 – *La Repubblica*'s website: location of the three *newsfeeds*.

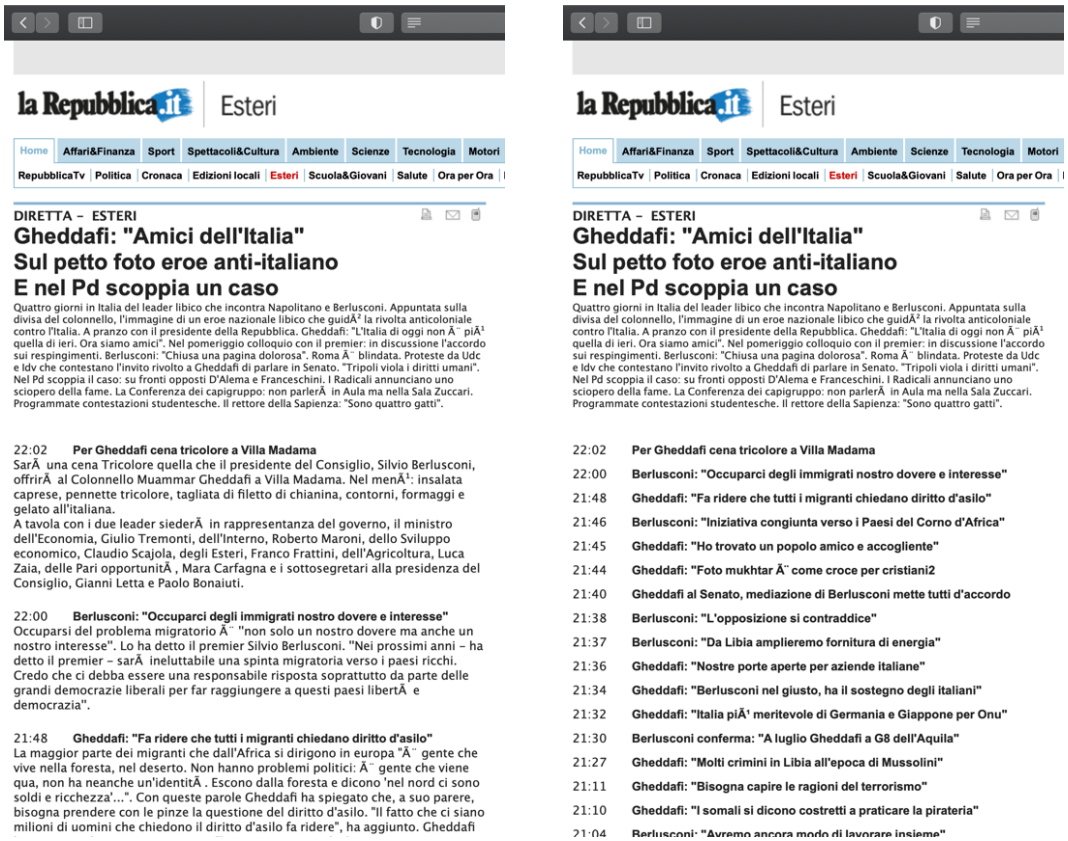


Fig.76 – *La Repubblica*'s website: *newsfeed* of day 1 in full, expanded form (left) and contracted form – titles only (right)

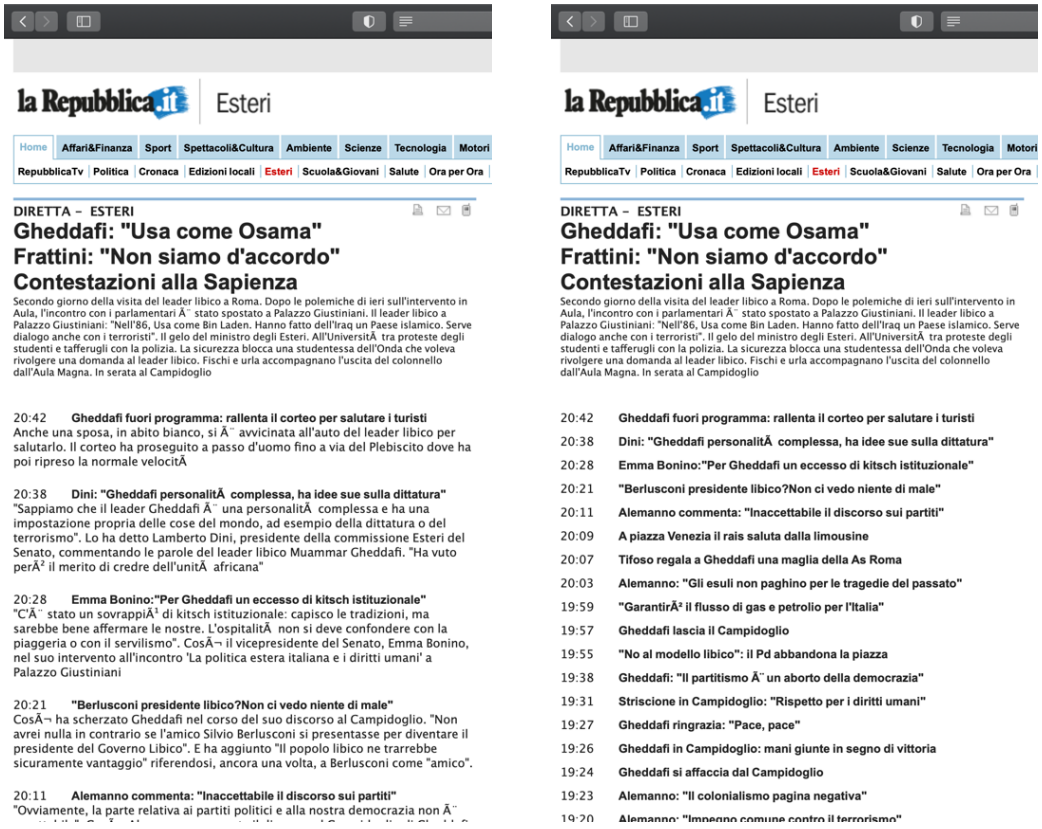


Fig.77 – *La Repubblica*'s website: *newsfeed* of day 2 in full, expanded form (left) and contracted form – titles only (right)

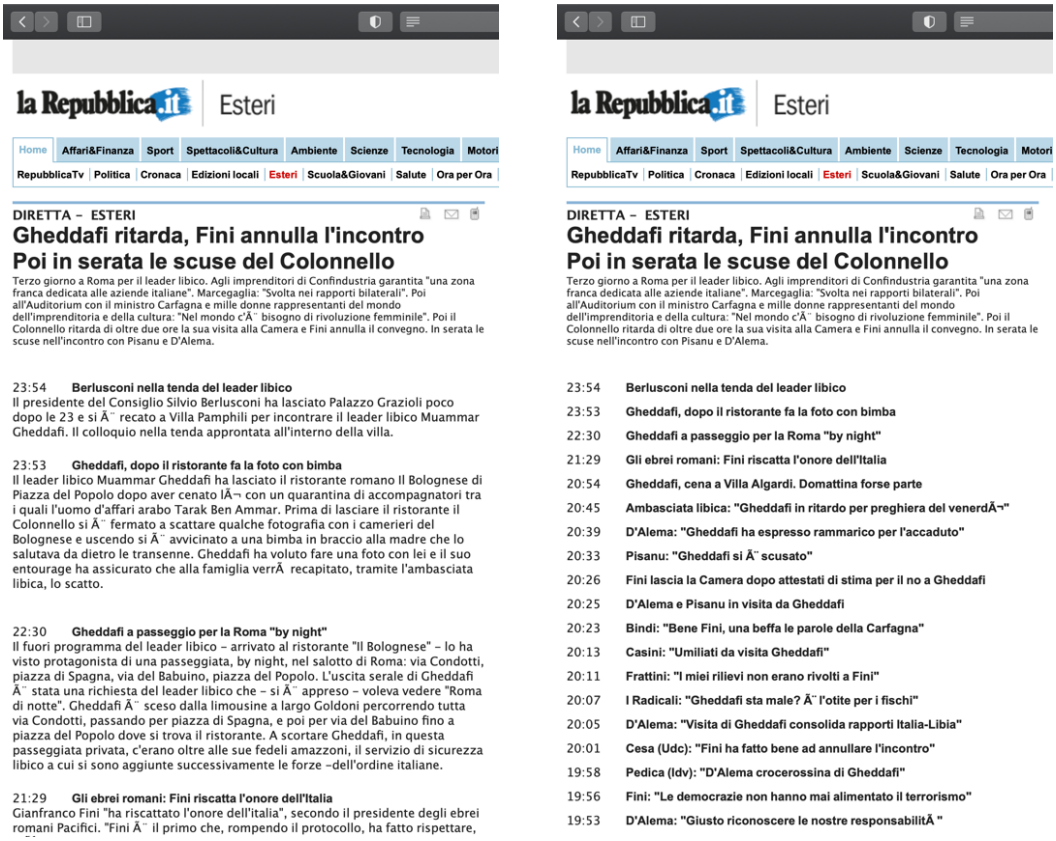


Fig.78 – *La Repubblica*'s website: *newsfeed* of day 3 in full, expanded form (left) and contracted form – titles only (right)

3.1 News Updates vs the *Newsfeed*

During Qadhdhafi's visit to Rome in 2009, the Italian press was swept by a frenzy that resulted in copious amounts of news being produced and circulated nationally. Although many newspapers published live news updates - often by relaying the official Italian newswire service's bulletin[84] as in the case of *Corriere della Sera*'s 'Flash News' - no other dedicated and meticulous live coverage such as that offered by *La Repubblica* can be found.[85] Reserved only for extraordinary events, such hyper production of news, attests to the Italian media's calculated spectacularisation of the event, which has been considered in the previous chapter. By creating an aura of exceptionality, the media invested the event with a sense of historical relevance.

[84] The newswire service is provided by the National Associated Press Agency, ANSA

[85] Yet, a confrontation with *Corriere della Sera's* Flash News, makes it clear that, although the updates are not signed by their authors, *La Repubblica*'s overly detailed reporting was not as derivative, but merged a more inquisitive line of enquiry.

At the time of writing, *La Repubblica* is the second most-read online newspaper and the third most-read print newspaper in Italy.[86] Since the late 1990s it invested heavily in the shift from print to digital ahead of its main competitors. After the new launch of its website in 2006, it has been at the forefront of online news reporting. During Qadhdhafi's visit to Rome in 2009, it generated a large amount of multimedia content, from videos to photographic galleries, from short and long-form articles on both the print and digital editions to online live news updates. Likely in keeping with the growing popularity of Twitter (whose format included no images at the time), *La Repubblica* published updates throughout the three-day meeting as short paragraphs introduced by a title. This material was subsequently archived online as chronological lists (which I have been referring to as '*newsfeeds*' throughout this research) that can be viewed fully in its extended version or as a contracted list comprising only the titles and time-stamps. Overall, there are three *newsfeeds* (one per each day of the meeting) featuring an average of 75 updates each and published over a timespan of around 12 hours per day. The intervals between news updates vary between 2 and 9 minutes. The shortest one has a total of 13 words, while the longest 126.

Appearing like a chronological compilation of news-updates, the *newsfeed* resembles the 'breaking news' stream format and they also resemble what James Bridle calls the "news ticker" (2018, p.17). That is, the stream of breaking news rolling at the bottom of the news broadcastings as text became a permanent fixture on television after it was widely employed during the exceptional reporting of the 9/11 attacks in New York. Breaking news is now often synonymous with rolling news and it constitutes a convention perhaps best exemplified in the 24hrs news cycle.

The proliferation of social media, especially Twitter and Facebook, has also inflated and normalised consumption of media through continuous streams, placing further emphasis on speed – that is, the need to have instant access and to be informed in real-time. It has also given rise to the habit of news "grazing" or "snacking" (Molyneux, 2018, p.), which, mimicking the zapping from television channel to channel, has created a more fragmented and faster consumption of news media. Such patterns, which Logan

[86] In 2023 *La Repubblica* lost his first spot and is now the second most-read online newspaper: https://www.cuec.it/giornali-online-piu-letti-in-italia/ It also want from second to third most-read print newspaper. https://hermesmagazine.it/article/books/i-quotidiani-piu-letti-la-classifica

Molyneux associates particularly with the engagement with news media through mobile phones, “encourages shorter, dispersed consumption patterns” - based on frequency, intermittence, distraction, and low attention - and stresses convenience or brevity over quality thus offering only a passing knowledge on the world going-ons and leading to the devaluation of high quality news (2018, p.634).

Online news, thus, is characterised by *immediacy* and *interaction*, which, as Karlsson and Strömbäck (2010) claim, creates *liquidity*. The possibility of publishing immediately and of continuously updating news, makes news fluid, unfixed and no longer understood and perceived as a finished product or story. In the article *Breaking News Online: how news stories are updated and maintained around-the-clock* Kostas Staltzis points out that online news is not often continuously updated in the same online location (webpage) or formats (2012, p.703). Since connected news reportings tend to be fragmented across different web locations, it can make it difficult to create links, perceive continuities and identify deep structures. Instead, compilations of concentrated outbursts of news updates remain archived and disseminated through different web locations in a state of flux and openness. These ‘compilations’ lack what Paul Ricoeur and Hayden White define as “emplotment”. That is, they appear as a compilation of fragments (condensed events) that are not assembled into an overarching and finite narrative plot. Such *liquidity,* also shared by televisual news tickers, according to Staltzis, renders them “ephemeral”. Even though online news updates tend to be archived or at least remain available for retrieval online – contrary to news tickers - they still “appear to be treated as items with limited lifespan by news organisations and journalists” (Staltzis, 2012, p.705).

In his essay *The Storyteller,* Walter Benjamin (2007 [1968]) claimed that the temporality of the news is responsible for the demise of the art of storytelling. Although Benjamin, writing in the early twentieth century, referred on the one hand to the daily newspaper and on the other to the oral tradition, his argument rests on the notion of a crucial difference in the temporal dimension of these two kinds of texts: the former has a very short lifespan (a 24hours life-cycle), while the latter, he claimed, has an eternal quality. This life cycle is further problematized by the instantaneity of the live *newsfeed*. Live feeds are, at once, new and old (new-born and defunct) at the very moment of being published. Benjamin located his negative understanding of information exactly in

its disposability and as such, these contemporary forms of news, specifically the "ephemeral" breaking news format, seem to take his argument one step further.

Unsigned and unpolished, *La Repubblica*'s text-based stream also resembles the newswire services that provide up-to-date information to the media about breaking news, issues, and events, which is the backbone of news production. In an analysis of how such news is created, Justin Lewis and Stephen Cushion (2009, p.311) found that they tend to be produced in the newsroom, rather than on the field. As news agencies and newspapers compete over who is the fastest to report the news, the pressure of churning out news updates in 'real-time' results in the "reduction of editing" and a focus on "the recording and reporting of moments" rather than "the reflection about moments linked together into coherent narratives." (Schudson 2011, pp.217-218). In this statement, Schudson draws a distinction between news updates written and shared on the go through temporal (and often spatial) proximity to the event, and journalistic writing produced through spatio-temporal distance based on retrospective research and analysis. As distance between the event and the time of its reporting shrinks (instantaneous reportage) he argues that applying appropriate fact-checking, reflection and editing becomes more difficult.

Since *La Repubblica's* headquarters are in Rome - where the event took place - such ease of access suggests that the news updates were produced through proximity and as such implies that their unrefined and often repetitive style is a result of a lack of editing time. Compared to its two main national competitors, *Corriere della Sera* and *La Stampa*, respectively based in Milan and Turin, *La Repubblica*'s staff was also likely invested with a sense of urgency given their direct experience of the general fervour animating the Italian capital during the preparations for the state visit. This may not only have led to the wide reportage but also to the choice of gathering all news updates and archiving them as *newsfeeds*, which is an unusual practice for the newspaper. The importance of the event itself, thus, was not the only reason behind this exceptional media coverage: other factors have impacted this process.

John Galtung and Mari Ruge's seminal study on newsworthiness (1965), attempted to establish "how events become news" by identifying twelve news value factors.[87] In their article: *What is News? News values revisited (again),* Tony Harcup and Deirdre O'Neill (2017) build on Galtung and Ruge's work proposing an updated set of news values by analysing both print newspaper and social media platforms. Their findings claim that it is *exclusivity* - 'stories generated by, or available first to, the news organisation as a result of interviews, letters, investigations, surveys, polls, and so on' (p.1482) - that is most significant. As a result, it could also be claimed that *La Repubblica*'s hyper-production of news updates and their archiving online, was driven by a sense of *exclusivity*.

If Harcup and O'Neill's model is helpful here in understanding what may have caused the newspaper to invest in such a comprehensive reporting and archiving of the event, on the other hand, Paul Brighton and Denis Foy's 2007 study of news values in twenty-first century media outlets is effective in the assessment of the *newsfeed*'s newsworthiness. At the top of their list of news values, they feature *relevance,* and *topicality* followed by *composition, expectation, unusualness, worth,* and *external influences* (Brighton and Foy, 2007, p.25). By *topicality* they intend anything that is "new, current, immediately relevant" (Brighton and Foy p.26), namely, characteristics that are core values of breaking news, tickers, or live updates. *Relevance,* instead, relates to the audience and whether the news will be relatable or of interest to the newspaper's readership base.[88] When analysing *La Repubblica'*s *newsfeed* through the lens of *relevance,* there emerges a tension between the news updates that covered the geopolitical and cultural elements of the event (especially around the Treaty on Friendship) and those that described trivial or anecdotal elements (i.e. the menu of the meals shared by Berlusconi and Qadhdhafi). They also detail with great precision every move made by Qadhdhafi (when he left a place, arrived at another, or when he had quick breaks at his accommodation). All information, regardless of their contents, share

[87] At the top of their list, they placed *frequency*: '[a]n event that unfolds at the same or similar frequency as the news medium' rather than over a long period of time (Galtun & Ruge, 1965, p.27). In the case of the meeting between Berlusconi and Qadhdhafi, we are indeed in the presence of an event that unfolded over a confined timeframe of three days.

[88] This will be further explored in the following subchapter.

a similar word count, yet, since breaking news is based on an economy of words they should, theoretically, aim at reporting what is perceived as essential.[89]

The news updates, however, make little effort at filtering and narrating the event through the value of *relevance*: they provide concise descriptions of each step and happenings of the meeting without discerning between 'important' or 'essential' information. As Lewis and Cushion notice, breaking news is a "symbol of the newness of news...[that] has more to do with a semiotic display of immediacy than with becoming well informed" (2009, pp.316-17). As the urge to churn out timely updates seems to have driven *La Repubblica*'s reportage, their main news values can thus be identified as *topicality* and *instantaneity.* The notion of *instantaneity* of *La Repubblica*'s live-news updates is, however, rather different from that associated with other forms of instantaneous news such as televisual real-time or live broadcasting that flourished in the 1980s and 1990s. Based on satellite technology's capacity to live stream events, real-time televisual reporting constitutes a visual, unfiltered relay of the event and not, as in the textual news updates, the documentation of the event through fixed, written language. There is an important temporal difference between these formats, even though they are both based on concepts of instantaneity. As news is gathered and then circulated by online newspapers through news updates, their temporality differs from the 'real-time' of televisual broadcasting in which there is a correlation between liveness and witnessing (and in which witnessing is extended to the audience). Text-based news is not live as it is mediated by the writing process and so happens with a slight delay. It is, however, circulated with immediacy and with a specific format that, through its condensation and apparent rawness, feels unfiltered and purely descriptive. Contrary to longer articles, based on a more narrative and edited format, they thus give the appearance of neutrality (further reinforced by their anonymity, given that the authors are not named).

Mary Ann Doane's reflections on televisual versus photographic time are very helpful here to establish these differences. Doane notices how, according to Roland Barthes, a photograph indicates that "*That-has-been* [emphasis by the author]", stressing the "pastness of the object photographed", while live TV broadcast indicates that "that-is-

[89] In the next section this will be further analysed in relation to the effect of such levelling of trivial and serious information.

going-on" – implying a sense of "presentness"' (Doane 1990, p.251). By extension, news updates appear to have more in common with the temporality of photography than that of broadcast TV: the news update refers to something that has already happened, even if the distance between the event and its reporting is shorter than ever. Hence, these considerations can offer a key to understanding the temporality of the *newsfeed*. One suitable model is offered by Peter Wollen who, also drawing on Barthes, notices that photographs present two temporal modes: vertical and horizontal (2007, p.108). By vertical time he refers to the idea of the freezing of a moment in time or what he also calls a "near-zero duration" (Wollen, 2007, p.108). In other words, he refers to the capturing of an instant, a fixed moment in time that is forever receding as time passes. This verticality is inscribed within the image. Likewise, the news update - a single unit of information – appears as a 'snapshot', the recording of a moment in time. On the contrary, the stillness of the photograph (as opposed to the flows of photograms characteristic of the moving images) provides the viewer with a very different temporal experience, one that is "horizontal" as it can expand and last endlessly as long as the viewer gazes at the image. The coexistence of vertical and horizontal time in the same object means that a photograph both fixes a moment and gives itself up to contemplation simultaneously. Even though the news update, because of its implied lifespan, is not produced to last (it is meant to be consumed and discarded, rather than contemplated and retained as a document for posterity), *La Repubblica*'s choice to archive them and so make them available and accessible creates a situation for retrieval, which is connoted by horizontal time.

The 'live news update' format, being first and foremost concerned with instantaneity, has suited journalism's quest for newness. Several scholars have raised concerns about the acceleration of news reporting, with its emphasis on immediacy over quality – or as in the case of Paul Virilio (2005), a suspicion towards the effects of acceleration in all spheres of contemporary life. These legitimate anxieties over the way speed and fragmentation affect both the production and consumption of news have accompanied the history of telecommunication technologies since the drastic shift brought about by the invention of the telegraph.[90] This technology contributed to the evolution of a dry, concise, and referential style that gave way to, and legitimised, the concept of "context-

[90] Noticing how structures of thought and fears of the media repeat, James Carey (2008) defines these preoccupations as predictable - 'undeviated corridors of thought'. (p.2)

free information" in which information value is attached to novelty and curiosity, turning it into a commodity whose value is associated with newness rather than meaning (Postman 1985, pp. 66–67). James W. Carey (2008) argues that the telegraph not only impacted the press and the nature of warfare but also affected changes "in the nature of language, of ordinary knowledge, of the very structures of awareness" (p.156).

As Vivian Sobchack (1996) points out, technological developments have given rise to immediacy in the narration and dissemination of events that have, in turn, led to the "collapse of temporal distance between present, past, and future"(p.4). This feeling is what according to Rebecca Solnit (2003), connoted the end of the nineteenth century, when the simultaneous introduction of technologies such as the train, photography and telegraphy "annihilated time and space". She writes: "Telegraph messages travelled almost instantly as electrical impulses over the wires, a technology that telephones and the Internet would only elaborate. (…) News, words, data, were dematerialized and almost instantaneous wherever the telegraph wires were strung."(Solnit, 2003, p.14)[91] With the acceleration of time, distances became shorter – a transformation that was also elicited by the advent of satellite television. Sobchack argues that by offering an immediate experience of events and depriving audiences of the possibility of reflecting on them with some distance, real-time reporting results in the impression of experiencing history as it unfolds rather than retrospectively (Sobchack 1996, p.4). This direct and apparently unfiltered confrontation with events turns audiences into witnesses. If this can seem similar to the live news updates at the time of their publication, the archived *newsfeed*, instead, functions as a record, a document in which all the single units (the news updates) that are contained therein, are interrelated, making up a whole text. As a result, it is important to analyse this text in terms of its use of language, the relation between its parts and whole as well as its ideological construction (the latter will be explored in the next section).

As Thomas Hylland Eriksen points out in *The Tyranny of the Moment*, the acceleration and speed inherent in the news updates also affects style and syntax (2009, p.59). They are written in the non-progressive present through a concise and austere use of language that was originally developed for telegraphic technology. Given that it was expensive to

[91] Earlier, Marshal McLuhan noticed that the telegraph revolutionised the news industry by 'eliminating time and space' (1964, p.235), allowing messages to 'travel faster than a messenger'(p.102)

use this device and that it needed transcription, being concise became the standard. At the same time, the style of the contemporary news update – now liberated from the constraints of the older technology but still far from the narrative construction of news articles - is reminiscent of the style reserved for the captions of news images, that, as Peter Wollen puts it, is written in "a narrative present" (2007, p.109). This is a linguistic choice that attempts to create the impression that news updates are 'neutral', ie. almost raw pieces of information that are free from the bias associated with interpretation. As captions are supposed to (objectively) describe photographs and provide contextual information in a synthetic and neutral way, so news updates claim to provide essential descriptive information about a given event, to imply a degree of indexicality. Drawing on Sanders Pierce's definition of the indexical sign as "the imprint of a once-present and unique moment, the signature of temporality", Doane (2002) notices that since its inception, the photographic media's potential for indexicality – the possibility to record events – provided a "guarantee of the manifold contingencies that seem to specify modernity" (Doane 2002, p.16). In much the same way, news updates seem to be understood as "pure indication, pure assurance of existence" (Doane 2002, p.16) thus providing a guarantee of the contingencies of an ever-accelerating, increasingly complex reality that is shaped and dominated by the rise of information technology. An implicit and intrinsic claim to indexicality in the production of news updates requires, however, an in-depth analysis of the narrative constructions, authorial bias and omissions implied within these objects.

3.2 Translating the *Newsfeed*

Translation is a central issue in this research. Firstly, this work has heavily relied on linguistic translation, constantly shifting between Italian and English while lacking access to Arabic texts. Secondly, it has been invested in translating the same research into different media while adopting hybrid formats. Lastly, the translation of the *newsfeed* is at the core of the project. At its inception, this project revolved around the idea of "turning *La Repubblica's newsfeed* into a script" – that is, to use it as a blueprint for a film script. Driving this inquiry was an interest in understanding the narrative potential of this text and its value as a document. As a result, the first step was to 'translate' the *newsfeed* into a film into a text-based moving image work to draw out the ideological bias of *La Repubblica*'s *newsfeed*.

These different understandings of translation can be defined under the umbrella term of "intermedial translation" put forward by Mieke Bal and Joanne Morra in their introduction to the special issue of the Journal of Visual Culture dedicated to translation (2007, p.7). For Bal and Morra it means "translating across media" and, more generally, "translating across" and working in a deeply interdisciplinary way, but also to be "concerned with the marginal, the gaps, fissures and contradictions of working in the interstices between these various boundaries." (p.7) Drawing on Walter Benjamin's seminal work on translation, they stress the potential of translation to be a liberatory practice that can release the potential of the original. (p.5)

In his seminal essay *Encoding/Decoding* (1991[1973]) Stuart Hall proposes a model to analyse the production and reception of meaning in television, arguing that messages possess a "complex structure of dominance" (p.90) that is ingrained both at the point of encoding (their production) and its decoding (their circulation/consumption). Although the model is developed for television, it can still be applied to other processes of meaning creation and dissemination.[92] Yet, the peculiar formats of the *newsfeed* and of the news updates pose different challenges: firstly, because the news update is extremely distilled and concise, secondly, because the *newsfeed* is the product of the archiving process – it is not a text formed through a narrative structure. Thus, this research conceives the news updates as 'raw' snippets of information, while the *newsfeed* is understood as a 'whole', a text built out of a chronological sequence of fragments (news updates).

At the same time, it also includes the adaptation of Qadhdhafi's use of 'Umar al-Mukhtar's image, which becomes a structuring element for visualising the materials and to drive the montage.

[92] Later in this chapter, I will engage further with Start Hall's essay *Encoding/Decoding*.

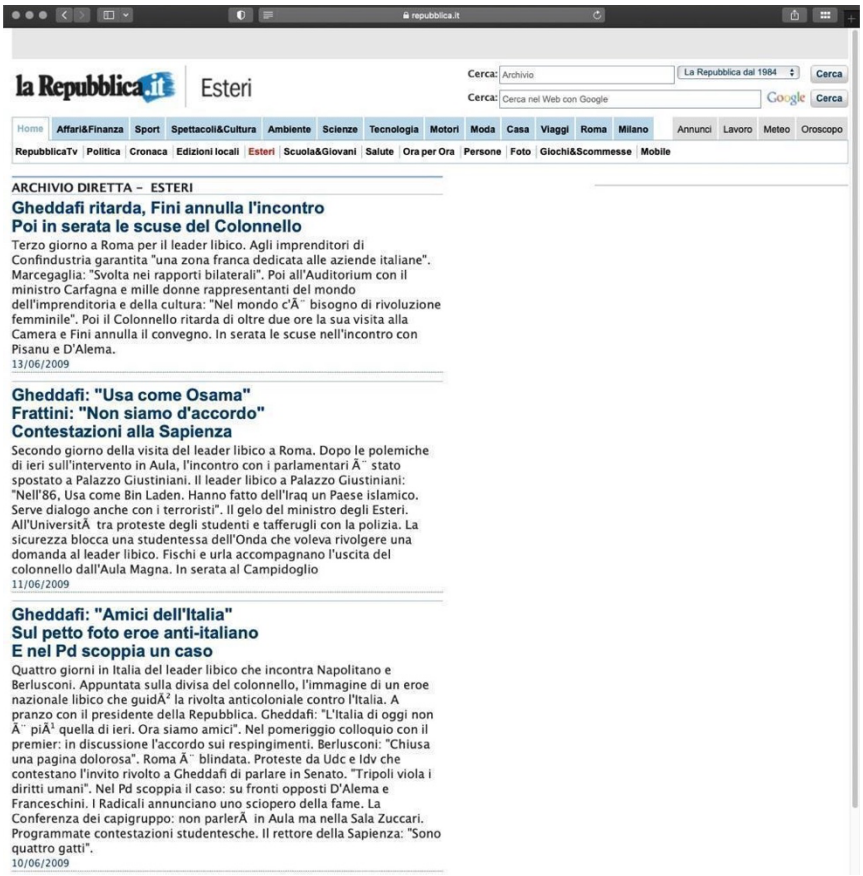


Fig.79 - Webpage menu featuring the three *newsfeeds* (one per day).
Each represented with a title and synopsis.
Translation of the titles, in chronological order:

Day1
Qadhdhafi: "Italy's Friends"
On his chest image of an anti-Italian hero
In the PD [Democratic Party] *a case breaks out*

Day 2
Qadhdhafi: "USA like Osama"
Frattini: [MP] *"We do not agree"*
Protests at La Sapienza [University]

Day 3
Qadhdhafi is late, Fini [MP] *cancels the meeting*
Then in the evening the Colonnel's apologies

Since *La Repubblica* archived the news updates for each of the three days of the event separately, there are three *newsfeeds*. Each has been provided with a title and a short summary: a retrospective attempt to provide a title and synopsis for each day. This framing reveals the newspaper's direct act of interpretation, and so it allows the readers

to peer at the way the *newsfeed* has been encoded.[93] These three interpretative texts also led to the decision to adopt the screenplay model of the Three-Act Structure, as each headline seems to be following its narrative arch (set up/conflict/resolution): Day 1 presents an incident/crisis (the set up); Day 2 is ridden by protests and obstacles (conflict); and Day 3, despite the continued turmoil, ends with an apology (a resolution).

Once this structure was established – which also helped to draw out the notion of 'spectacle of power'- it was further developed and tested in the performance-lecture *The Expanded Script*. This work aims to develop a script for a film about Qadhdhafi's visit to Rome. Drawing on the Three-Act Structure, it employs tropes borrowed from playwriting, such as the distinctive type font (courier new) and layout, to test the materials collected as part of the first phase of the research (i.e. the *newsfeed*, found footage, archival imagery, and documents). It follows this structure:

1.Intro
2.Act I (Day 1)
3.Counteract I
4.Act II. (Day 2)
5.Counteract II
6.Act III (Day 3)
7.Counteract III
8.Outro

Each *Act* focuses on a day of the meeting, translating the corresponding *newsfeed* into moving images. By archiving the *newsfeed* in such an usual way, reveals *La Repubblica*'s willingness to fix it, preserve it, and to allow for contemplation. This, in turn, instils a sense of historical relevance into the *newsfeed*, heightening its status as documents. By turning it into moving images, the *Acts* allow to assess this process, while, through an emphasis on their fragmentation and speed, they convey the temporal experience of acceleration, typical of new forms of information.

[93] For a more detailed analysis of the contents of the *newsfeed*, see the next section.

The *Counteracts,* instead, are reserved for the critical analysis of the *newsfeed*, in which a positioned reading of the news material and of the research process is developed. As such, they are spaces to stress connections, enact contestations, and allow for introspection.[94] In a conversation published in Aperture Magazine under the title *What is a Document?* scholar Thomas Keenan and artist-theorist Hito Steyerl (2014, p.61) discuss how traces and detritus become documents. They argue that to qualify as documents, they need to be perceived as proof; therefore, they must be invested with evidentiary power. This is attained through debating, disputing, interpreting, contesting and contrasting them. Ultimately, documents need to be activated through discursive practices, and as such, they are constructed through narrative framing. By translating the *newsfeed* into a film, analysing and discussing its contents, the *Counteracts* allow for this process to take place. However, as explored in the following chapters, its critical and positioned voiceover on the one hand invests them with evidentiary power and on the other demands a suspicious approach to such evidence.



Fig.80 – *Gaddafi in Rome: the Expanded Script,* 2018, Villa Romana, Florence.

[94] The acts and counteracts contents will be further explored in Chapter 5.



Figs.81-82 – *Gaddafi in Rome: the Expanded Script,* performance-lecture, at Wolf Kino/Archive Kabinett, Berlin, 2019 and at ESAD, Grenoble's Academy of Fine Arts, 2021.

The set up for the performance-lecture is composed of three main elements: a desk, a self-standing folding screen, and two projectors - one projecting onto the wall (which I will refer to as the *large screen*) and the other onto the self-standing screen (which I will refer to as the *small screen*). Their placement is inspired by the photograph of

Berlusconi and Qadhdhafi shaking hands in Rome. It evokes the interplay of the 'image within an image' that is created by Qadhdhafi's display of 'Umar al Mukhtar's picture on his chest. The large screen focuses on media images and footage. During the *Acts* it plays the videos of the 'translated *newsfeeds*' while during the *Counteracts*, it reproduces various found material: videos from Youtube, media photographs, social media screenshots. The small screen, placed in front and in relation to the large screen, is used in two ways: as a support for text that mimics the pages of a screenplay and, during the *Counteracts*, to display archival material, especially celebratory Libyan and Italian stamps. Used in contrast to the contemporary media images shown on the large screen, the stamps make visible how history has been exploited and circulated by different political powers. They open up yet another reflection on the ideological basis of processes of national memorialisation.

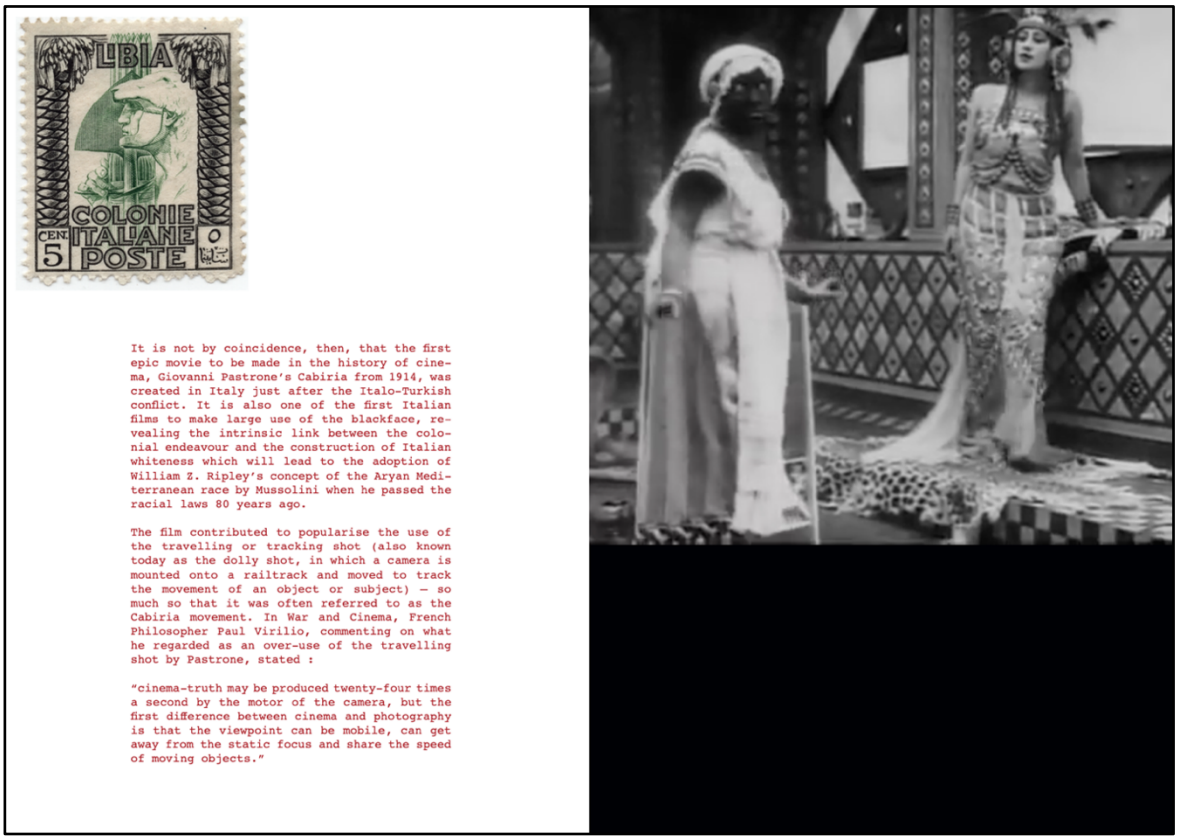


Fig.83 – *Gaddafi in Rome: the Expanded Script,* performance-lecture documentation, Depo Istanbul, 2019.

This interplay between screens was also conveyed in a series of booklets that served as documentation of the performance-lecture to make it available in the gallery space.[95] In this format of the work, the videos of the *Acts* were played in a loop on a monitor alongside the booklets, which feature the Intro, Outro, and *Counteracts*, conflated in three separate booklets. The double-page spread attempts to recreate the experience of montage evoked by the two screens, through its layout. The page on the right takes on the role of the large screen, while the left page is divided in two: the top part stands in for the small screen, while the bottom part features the transcription of the performance-lecture's script/voice. In this way, similarly to the performance-lecture, there is a juxtaposition between images and text(voice). Translating the material from one medium to another, as well as creating a performance-lecture to work towards a film, thus, it places the notion of translation at the core of this project.

In assessing the 'potential' of the *newsfeed* as a document, its translation across media has also been concerned in employing text, images and sound to recreate the temporal dimension of the news updates. The notion of speed that connote this media was thus translated through a fast montage framed by a soundtrack that emphasises the feeling of acceleration, fragmentation and repetition as well as through a computer generated voice (Siri) that read out loud the time stamps, thus placing much emphasis on the passing of time and continuous updates.

[95] It was developed for the exhibition *When the Present is History* at Depo, curated by Daphne Vitali for the collateral programme of the Istanbul Biennale of 2019. It can be accessed here: https://www.alessandraferrini.info/gaddafirome-script PASSWORD: omar



It is not by coincidence, then, that the first epic movie to be made in the history of cinema, Giovanni Pastrone's Cabiria from 1914, was created in Italy just after the Italo-Turkish conflict. It is also one of the first Italian films to make large use of the blackface, revealing the intrinsic link between the colonial endeavour and the construction of Italian whiteness which will lead to the adoption of William Z. Ripley's concept of the Aryan Mediterranean race by Mussolini when he passed the racial laws 80 years ago.

The film contributed to popularise the use of the travelling or tracking shot (also known today as the dolly shot, in which a camera is mounted onto a railtrack and moved to track the movement of an object or subject) – so much so that it was often referred to as the Cabiria movement. In War and Cinema, French Philosopher Paul Virilio, commenting on what he regarded as an over-use of the travelling shot by Pastrone, stated :

"cinema-truth may be produced twenty-four times a second by the motor of the camera, but the first difference between cinema and photography is that the viewpoint can be mobile, can get away from the static focus and share the speed of moving objects."

Figs.84-85 – Pages from the booklet documentation of *The Expanded Script.*

In June 2009 former Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi visited Italy for the very first time, in order to celebrate the newfound friendship between the two countries through the signing of the Bilateral Agreements – mostly regarding the control of migration across the Mediterranean Sea and fuel trade. Amidst a media frenzy, the Italian newspaper *La Repubblica* extensively reported the event as it unfolded through a hyper-production of live news updates. When I found this text, I was struck by its vastness. It looked to me as a ready-made script. Just as photographic snapshots, these news updates, through their synthetic and instantaneous format, seem to be capturing a fleeting moment, a snippet of the present time as it unfolds. This expanded script is based on *La Repubblica*'s newsfeed, which was exceptionally archived on their website.

So, going back to Virilio, if each news-update in this list is characterised, like photography, by a static focus, does that mean that taken in succession, like film frames, they make up a filmic sequence? Can we inject speed into them to create the illusion of movement? And, taken together, can they make up a tracking shot of Gaddafi's visit to Rome?



Figs.86-87 – Pages from the booklet documentation of *The Expanded Script.*

The performance-lecture opens with a reference to Paul Virilio's *War and Cinema* which sets the premise for the investigation of the *newsfeed* and its translation into moving images. In the previous section, *News Updates vs the Newsfeed,* a link between the news updates and photography (or the 'snapshot') was put forward by drawing on Peter Wollen's work. By taking this metaphor forward, *The Expanded Script* creates a relation between Virilio's musing on cinematic time, as well as on Cabiria's use of the travel shot, and the *newsfeed*. In so doing it proposes to think of news updates as film-frames that, taken in a sequence, could become animated, and so translated into moving images. In this metaphor, it follows, the *newsfeed* is conceived as a piece of moving images.

From such a premise, the performance-lecture cuts into the first *Act.* Such 'translation', within the performance-lecture, that is, in its first iteration, merged archival imagery with text, creating a collage. The images serving as background to the news consisted in pictures of architecture that make visible the Italian imperial claims over Libya. *Act I* explored a colonial postcard portraying the archaeological site of Leptis Magna, in Libya, featuring Ancient Roman ruins. As the first day of the meeting (covered in *Act I*) focused on the image of 'Umar al-Mukhtar, which sabotaged the meeting by shifting the attention onto colonial violence, the backdrop offered a way to reflect on the colonial claim that Italy made over Libya through the manipulation of history – that is, through the exploitation of archaeology and an identification of Italianness with 'romanity'. The second *Act*, instead, focused on Fascist architecture in Libya, since on the second day many of the protests and events took place within La Sapienza University's architectural complex, built in the traditional 'rationalist' style promoted by the Fascist regime. This focus also resonates with Qadhdhafi's meeting with Gianni Alemanno, then mayor of Rome, formerly a far-right militant. Lastly, *Act III* employs images of Fascist architecture in Rome (where the meetings took place on that day) and, on the other, references to industrial built environment, specifically, oil wells established by ENI, the Italian multinational oil and gas company, in Libya. These two places are linked, since in his last day in Rome Qadhdhafi encountered the representatives of ENI and held meetings at Confindustria – the General Confederation of Italian Industry – discussing fuel deals and other economical agreements at the heart of the EUR district (built by Mussolini).



Figs.88-90 - *Gaddafi in Rome: the Expanded Script, Act I,* 2018-21, video stills.



Figs.91-93 - *Gaddafi in Rome: the Expanded Script, Act II,* 2018-21, video stills.



Figs.94-96 - *Gaddafi in Rome: the Expanded Script, Act III,* 2018-21, video stills.

The purpose of this translation from one medium into another is twofold. On the one hand, it gets the audience to 'experience' the *newsfeed*'s temporality by emphasising its fast pace. On the other, it wishes to test the *newsfeed*'s narrative potential by confronting the audience with the chronicle produced by the newspaper and its

ingrained biases. A similar approach was used by Lebanese artist Rabih Mroué in the performance-lecture *Looking for a Missing Employee* (2003). This work attempts to retrace the story of a missing person in Lebanon through a collection of newspaper articles from local and international newspapers, questioning the contrasting narratives and shady codes of conduct of the press. Mroué (2012) explains that by reading the newspaper articles in chronological order, the mechanisms of the news media become apparent, revealing how they follow the "same logic as 'chatting' and gossip". This work does not wish to be accusatory towards the press or to point out mechanisms of manipulation and propaganda. Instead, it aims to make the audience aware of the contradictory nature of news media, providing tools "to read this kind of unreliable narration" (Mroué, 2012).

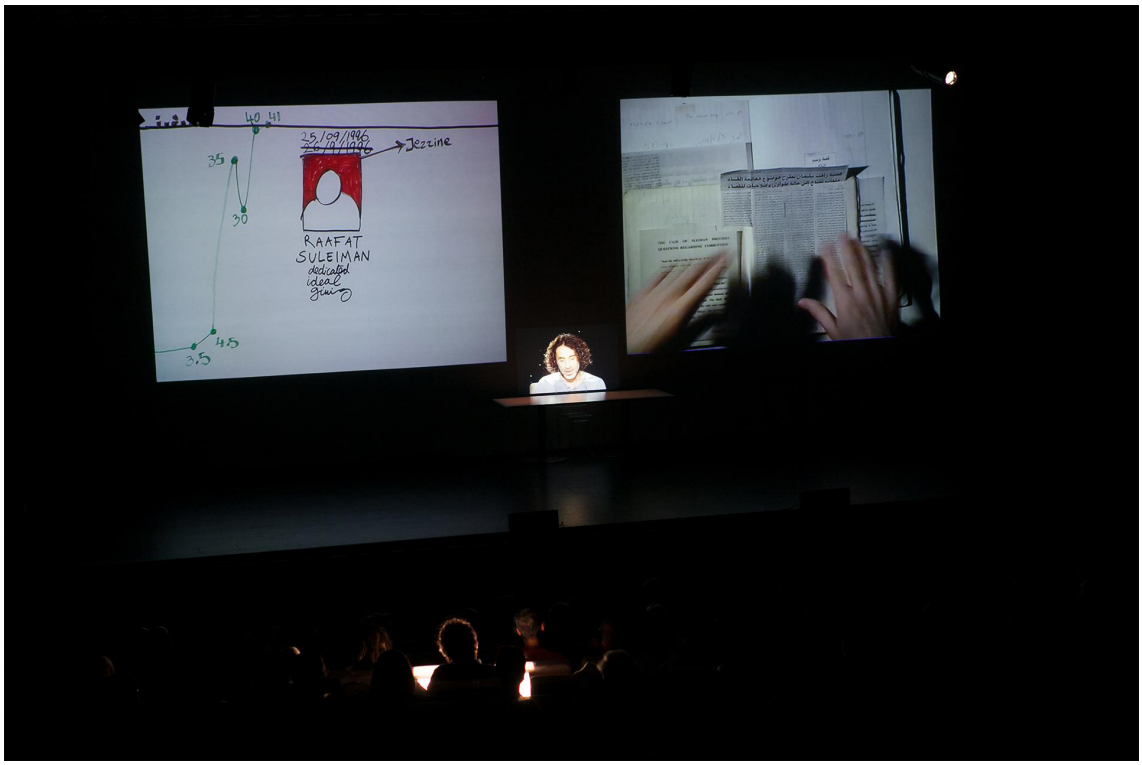


Fig.97 - Rabih Mroué, *Looking for a Missing Employee,* 2003, performance-lecture.

While watching the translation of the *newsfeed*, it becomes apparent how superfluous information (e.g. Berlusconi and Qadhdhafi's lunch menu) occupies more space than sensitive entries (e.g. the joint Libyan-Italian interests in the former Italian colonies in Eastern Africa). The conciseness of the news updates, thus, results in a levelling of information that renders trivial and urgent matters equal. The comparison between these contrasting topics (and their news values) also implies that a stress on topicality through a focus on instantaneity deflects attention away from systemic issues, leading to a lack

of contextualisation. This characteristic becomes particularly noticeable when the *newsfeed* is translated into moving images.

Video artists widely explored news language and its intermedial translation in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Since televisions became more affordable, the artists of this generation focused prominently on televisual language. Their experimentation with the temporality and syntax of news broadcasting and their engagement with media aesthetics and its underlying biases greatly resonate with the inquiry set forth by *Gaddafi in Rome.* Martha Rosler's *If It's Too Bad to Be True, It Could Be DISINFORMATION* (1985), for example, enacts a critique of news TV broadcasting in the US through the manipulation of video recordings of the news and the use of superimposed text. News speech gets chopped and fragmented revealing its deceiving syntax and message.

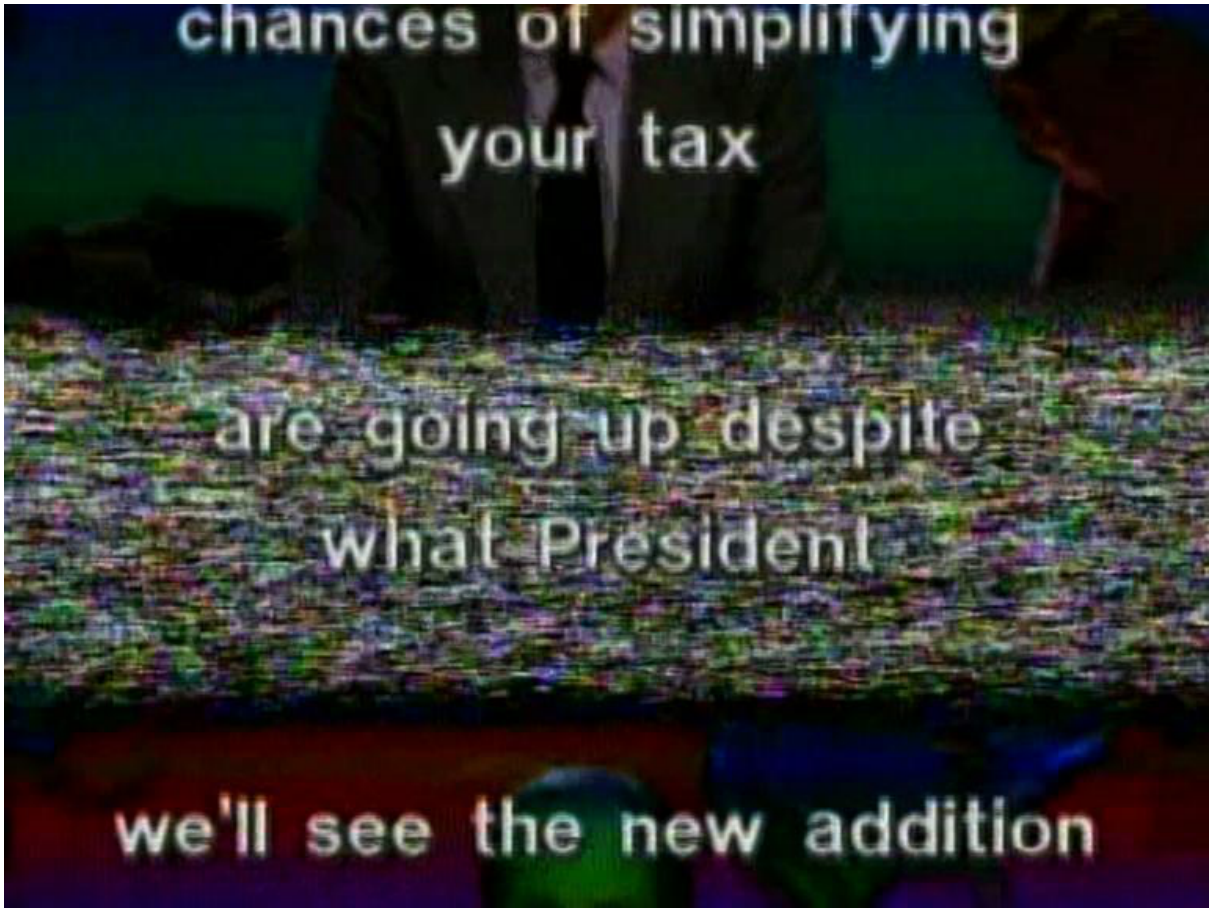


Fig.98 – Martha Rosler's *If It's Too Bad to Be True, It Could Be DISINFORMATION, 1985*

A pioneer in the investigation of the relations between information and translation is the Catalan artist Antoni Muntadas, who has devolved his entire career to researching these topics. His earlier video work production in the 1970s and 1980s focused on the language of televisual communication and advertising. His work has been rooted in a critique of political discourse, either by analysing the language of fear surrounding the Cold War (and later on, around the War on Terror) or in focussing on political campaigns (as in the ongoing collaborative work with Marshall Reeses, *Political Advertisements X: 1952-2020*, which was started in 1984). In the video *Between the Lines* (1979), Muntadas offers an overview of the behind-the-scenes of televisual news production, providing an understanding of the editorial choices behind the programmes and revealing news reporters' responsibilities. In *Watching the Press/Reading Television* (1981), on the other hand, he shifts his focus to the fragmentation and reduction of information that magazines and television operate. Through close-ups of printed news and distorted televisual footage, he reflects on how the condensation of information leads to manipulation and restriction.

These first investigations led to *On Translation* (started in 1995 and still ongoing), a large and ambitious body of work in which Muntadas further experimented with the media landscape by delving into the notion of translation. As Emily Apter (2006) writes, "Muntadas makes mediality a conceptual art practice by treating translational technologies themselves as the grist or filters of the medium. […He] takes the media environment itself, along with its second-order transposition to other media systems, as subject to translation" (p.205).

According to Modesta di Paola, (2017, p.58-59) *On Translation*, which focuses on rather diverse subjects, is overall framed through an engagement with four theoretical discourses: linguistic translation, cultural translation, intermedial translation, intercultural or international translation (rooted in the discourse around globalisation). Di Paola (2017) concludes that this has led Muntadas to increasingly "confront himself with the geopolitical and geo-aesthetic aspects of trans-national translation" (p.59). Through the adoption and translation of its tools and protocols, Muntadas' engagement with the language of media and power exposes the mise-en-scene of transnational institutional functions and processes. For example, in *On Translation: the Pavillion*

(1995), he explores the process of simultaneous translation within a specific international diplomatic meeting.

Muntadas' pioneering work on the topic of translation and his complex understanding and declinations of this term are a great source of inspiration for this project. Not so much in aesthetics, given the different visual languages used, but more specifically for reflecting on translation as a medium and conceptual framework. This research shares many of the preoccupations of Muntadas's work, yet it does so through a more personal and situated point of view. These aspects will be further unpacked in Chapter 5.



Figs.99-100 – Antoni Muntadas, *On Translation: the Pavillion*, Venice Biennale, Spanish Pavilion, 1995.

3.3 Analysing the *Newsfeed*

A search for Qadhdhafi's visit in the most read print newspaper *Corriere della Sera*'s digital archive returns 47 articles published across its online, national, and local Rome's editions between the 9th and 12th of June 2009.[96] Scrolling through this list it can be noticed that none of the articles' titles directly mention the Treaty on Friendship, the colonial past, migration, or 'Umar al-Mukhtar. The only exception is historian, journalist, and former diplomat Sergio Romano's editorial piece on the 12th of June, titled *Le Verità Dimenticate* (*The Forgotten Truths*), which seems to allude to the colonial past, without spelling it out. In the article, Romano – who has published around thirty monographs on Fascist and colonial history – laments that Qadhdhafi's "tirades against colonial Italy" could have been opposed by Italian politicians with a reminder "that colonialism was many things, not all and not always necessarily despicable"[97]. He then moves on to list some of Qadhdhafi's most controversial international dealings, concluding that "[i]f he is still in power and can freely visit a European state, it's because he owes to his pact with the United States and Europe'.[98] Overall, the 47 articles, including Romano's piece, which lays out the newspaper's editorial line, convey a negative perception of the event by conflating all attention towards Qadhdhafi and thus identifying him as an unwelcome guest or threatening foreign body.

In contrast *La Repubblica* offers a more nuanced picture of the event, in keeping with its progressist views and critical attitude towards Berlusconi's government – than the more conservative views of *Corriere della Sera.* Headlines mentioning 'Umar al-Mukhtar, for instance, appear amongst the articles published by *La Repubblica* and in the title under which the *newsfeed* documenting the first day of the meeting was archived. Yet, the contents of this material need a more detailed analysis given its

[96] Archival search accessible here: http://archivio.corriere.it/Archivio/interface/lists.html#!gheddafi/09-06-2009/12-06-2009/NobwRAdghgtgpmAXGAJlALlMAaMAzAJwHsYkwAGATgHpyA2agJnKpzHSLIEZHaHnWAX2zho8MgGs4ATwDuRAijbo4AD3RkA5gAs4KNHgCWYQQF0gA

[97] My translation. Original, in Italian: "Dopo avere ascoltato le sue filippiche contro l'Italia coloniale avrebbero potuto ricordargli che il colonialismo fu molte cose, non tutte e non sempre necessariamente spregevoli.

[98] My translation. Original, in Italian: "Se è ancora al potere e può visitare liberamente uno Stato europeo, lo deve in buona parte al patto con gli Stati Uniti e con l'Europa" Romano, 2009, Le Verità Dimenticate, in *Corriere della Sera,* published on 12/06/2009.

meticulous chronicle, free from the more complex narrative constructions of news articles.

As Stuart Hall argues, newspapers have a habit of "personifying events", through "the isolation of the person from his relevant social and institutional context, or the constitution of a personal subject as exclusively the motor force of history" (1973, p.130). As discussed in Chapter 1, the mediatic attention given to Qadhdhafi internationally for over forty years has led to a correspondence between Qadhdhafi and Libya. Overshadowing his people, Qadhdhafi incarnated the nation, and, during his visit to Rome, he also incarnated the event: these arguments are also developed in *Notes for a Film*. In addition, through its title, *Gaddafi in Rome,* this project has attempted to convey the Italian emphasis on Qadhdhafi's presence, which has hindered a meaningful discussion of the Treaty on Friendship, the Bilateral Agreements on Migration, and the Italian colonial past. Qadhdhafi's presence in Rome was almost read as an aggression on the town[99], its institutions and its hospitality. Indeed, according to *La Repubblica*'s *newsfeed* on the second day of the meeting, the 11th of June 2009, the then MP Emma Bonino is reported to have stated that: "hospitality should not be confused with flattery or servility".

If *La Repubblica*'s reportage does not seem to take any explicit stance against Qadhdhafi and in defence of Italy's colonial past (in the way that Romano did on the *Corriere della Sera* newspaper), it does, however, follow Qadhdhafi very closely throughout his visit to Rome. His movements in the city are logged meticulously, together with the protests against him, highlighting Qadhdhafi's alterity. In keeping with the task of assessing the news value of the event that was started in the previous section, such an approach by the newspaper seems to be shaped by the event's *unusualness.*[100] Brighton and Foy define this news value as "anything which is out of the ordinary, which is unexpected – or is something ordinary done by somebody who would not be expected to do it" (2017, p.28).[101] This understanding frames the

[99] From Qadhdhafi's choice to reside in a 'Bedouin tent', refusing what was considered as conventional accommodation reserved for head of states, to the extreme road traffic disruptions in Rome (which have reportedly descended the city into a chaotic standstill) – it all caused great outrage. This feeling may have been, perhaps, amplified by *La Repubblica* because of its proximity to the event.
[100] At the same time, this could also be read as an example of bias based on the notion of insularity.
[101] This notion, will be further expanded in the next subchapter.

representation of the event by *La Repubblica*, structuring it and conveying such implicit reading of the event to the audience.

The many references to Qadhdhafi's movements within the city seem to be directed at the local Roman audience and are intrinsically linked to the place, likely reflecting the newspaper's connection with the city. Upon reading the *newsfeed* in its entirety, these constant mentions of the city bring it into the foreground: its layered histories and the connoted places that shift into focus become intrinsically related to the event. This attention has been reflected in the practical outputs, especially in *Notes for a Film,* in which such loaded and symbolic spaces have been explored through found material and in the purposely filmed performances for the camera at different locations. Not only do they appear as backdrops to the event, but they also reveal the ideological entanglements of these sites and their relation to the spectacle of power enacted by Berlusconi and Qadhdhafi.

As Bednarek and Caple (2012, p.104) note "most researchers take a cognitive perspective on news values, conceptualising them as beliefs (or criteria), ''intersubjective mental categories'' (Fowler, 1991, p.17), ''rules or codes'' (Allan, 2010, p.72) or ''*internalized* assumptions'' (Cotter, 2010, p.56, italics in original) that people hold/apply about qualities/aspects that make something newsworthy." In the first section of this chapter, I analysed how these values have shaped the media discourse on the event, suggesting that their underlying biases and ideologies are thus encoded in the *newsfeed*. To develop a critical reading of its contents, a further linguistic analysis that makes the relation between ideology and language fully visible was necessary: on the basis of such an undertaking, the voiceover of the film could be developed. Indeed, the *Counteracts* are spaces for critical reflection triggered by the *newsfeed*. They are shaped by the desire to contextualise and explain the news updates, which, as already established, lack appropriate contextual information for the audience to understand specific processes and relations. As a result, the commentary attempts to *Counteract* the colonial aphasia that connotes Italian society and that is reproduced and fuelled by the news updates.

The following analysis, which informed the writing of the *Notes for a Film*'s script, is based on Bednarek and Caple's methodology for Critical Discourse Analysis. It must be

noted that, however, this analysis is not to be considered a thorough CDA study. Rather this method is borrowed as a guideline to establish linguistic patterns and biases in the *newsfeed* when read as a whole. A Critical Discourse Analysis would go beyond this stage by using codings and more in-depth linguistic scrutiny.

The specific methodology developed by Bednarek and Caple has been identified as the most suitable to inform this analysis since it focuses on power structure and ideology. In addition, it is centred around the study of news values, understood as discursively constructed, while considering semiotics systems like layout as part of text/discourse. Given the peculiar format and characteristics of the news update versus the *newsfeed*, which greatly differ from a traditional news article, this approach is more suited than other CDA models. As Bednarek and Caple (2014) put it:

> [such] discursive approach ties in well with two recent trends in CDA –towards multimodal and towards corpus-assisted discourse analysis. More specifically, the case studies show that corpus linguistic techniques can identify conventionalised discursive devices that are repeatedly used in news discourse to construct and perpetuate an ideology of newsworthiness (p.1)

Bednarek and Caple suggest a series of up to seven steps for this analysis, depending on the study's desired depth, breadth and focus. For the purposes of this research, this analysis is built on the reflections already put forward around news values by providing more precise data and revealing further values. In addition, it offers additional insights into the discursive construction of the *newsfeed* that has emerged from a close analysis of words and clusters undertaken with NVivo software. The process devised for data processing and analysis included different stages.

In the first stage, each *newsfeed* (one per each day of the meeting, for a total of three) was imported into NVivo. The software allows for word frequency and clusters to be identified. The decision to exclude the titles of each news update was taken, at this stage, as they consist of excerpts from the main text and thus provide mere repetition and could possibly throw off results. The data regarding the 100 most frequently used words was extrapolated for each day of the meeting and compared with the initial, preliminary list of values (open coding). This was followed by refining and adding codes, ending with a comparative approach, which led to identifying keyword clusters.

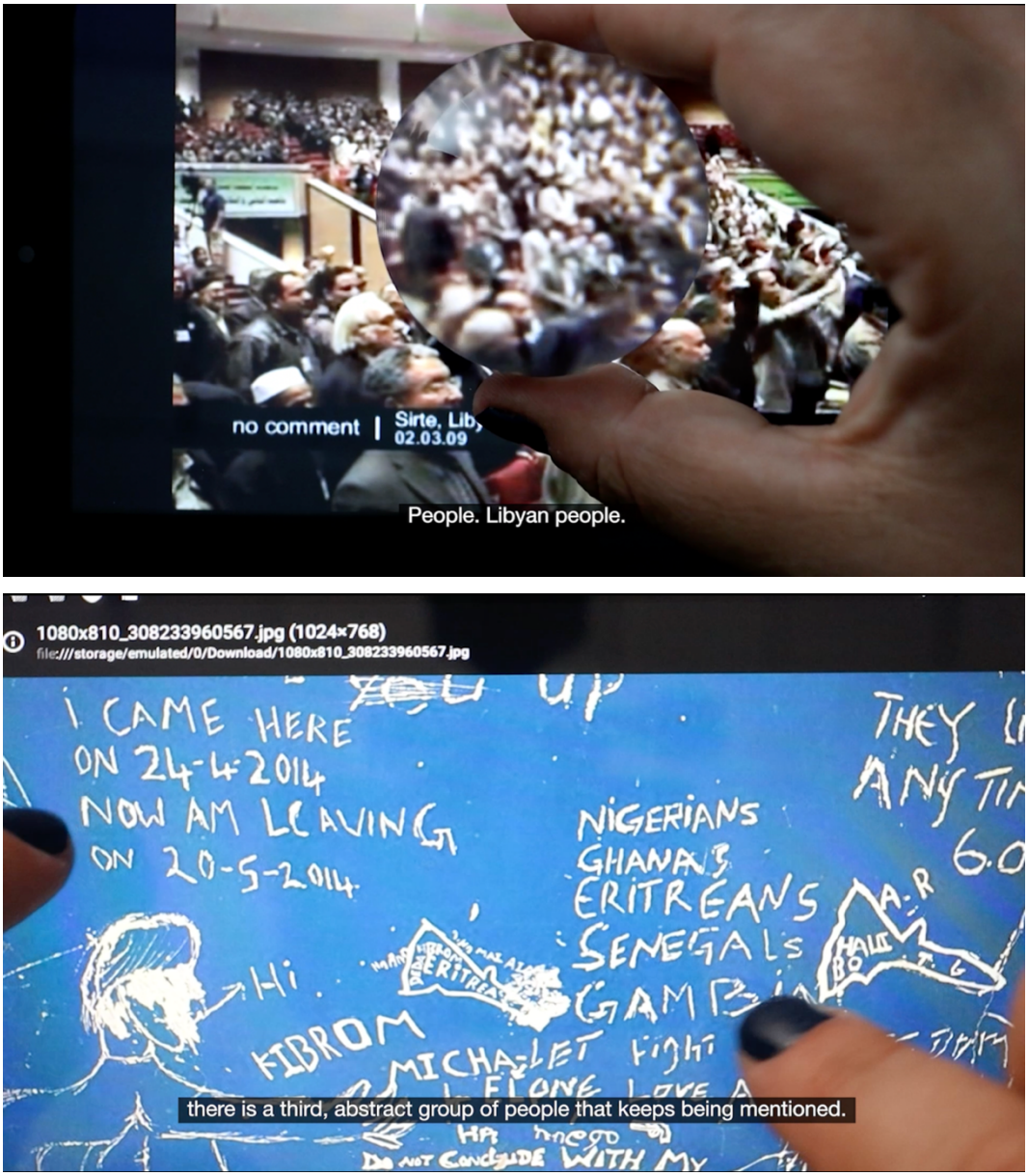
In the second stage, the three *newsfeeds* were conflated into one document and the same codings were applied, except that the 200 most frequent words were exported. This list, for ease of legibility, will be referred to as *list of text/body*

Stage one explored contents and determined patterns and codes to analyse the *newsfeed* in stage two. The following list illustrates the frequencies with which they appear within the *list of text/body* (from highest to lowest):

-*Friendship* (including similar terms: friend, collaboration, cooperation, together)
-*Rights*
-*Against*
-*Women*
-*Terrorism*
-*People*
-*Delay*
-*Democracy*
-*Security*
-*Colonialism*
-*Human Rights*
-*Protests*
-*Migration*
-*Responsibility*
-*Past*
-*Page/Chapter*
-*Mediterranean*

Many of these words have been scrutinised in the practical outputs. Specifically, in the performance-lecture *The Expanded Script,* the words ‘friendship’, ‘democracy’, ‘page/chapter’, and ‘Mediterranean’ are at the core of the work. The high frequency of words like ‘women’ and ‘security’, which were missed in a preliminary analysis, are being included in the final output. This analysis has proven crucial to bring to the fore the core concepts and issues reported by *La Repubblica.*

In particular the word ‘people’ became a central focus of *Notes for a Film, Act II.* Responding to the overwhelming use of the word during the second day of the meeting, allowed me to shift the focus on the groups of people that have been most affected by the Treaty on Friendship and which have been greatly marginalised in the reportage. Thus, it reflects on the Libyan population in relation to the overshadowing figure of Qadhdhafi and on the people who attempt to reach Europe through Libya: the migrants crossing the Mediterranean Sea. From these considerations, I also insert a reflection on my positioning (see Chapter 5). It is by confronting myself with the analysis of the *newsfeed* that I could better understand my biases or simply elements that escaped my reading.



Figs.101-102 - *Gaddafi in Rome: Notes for a Film, Act II,* 2022, video stills.

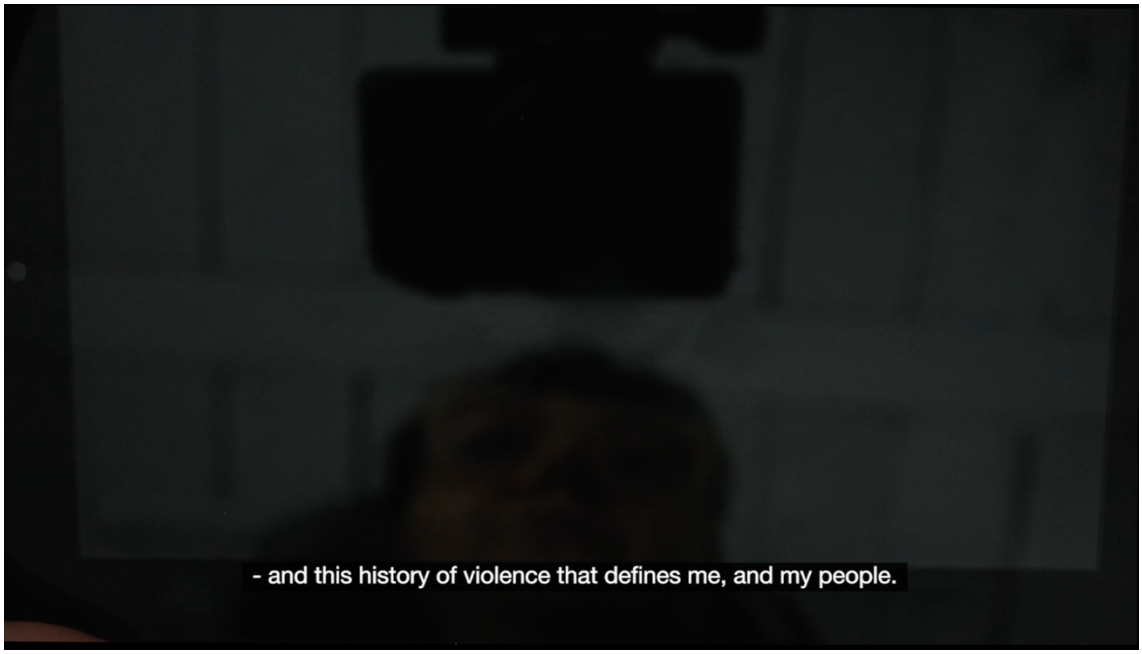


Fig.103 - *Gaddafi in Rome: Notes for a Film, Act II,* 2022, video still.

The final stage of the CDA analysis consisted of the processing of all titles (*list of titles*) to compare this more condensed and 'essential' list with the slightly more articulated texts of the *list of text/body*. Such comparative analysis reveals more substantial findings and thus also contributes to the creation of a method for the analysis of this peculiar news format.

Thus far, seven news values have been identified in this chapter through an inductive process consisting of looking for patterns within the *newsfeed*. They are: *exclusivity, relevance, proximity, topicality, instantaneity, unusualness, personalisation*. Not all of these can be analysed through word frequency analysis, as they are intrinsic to the format and temporality of the news updates rather than their contents since they are assessed through external factors like context and audience. These include *exclusivity, instantaneity, relevance* and *topicality.* However, there are some words that can contribute. For example, in the *list of titles*, out of the most frequent words, we can find the verb 'leaves', and also the location name 'Pamphili' (the place where Qadhdhafi had his 'bedouin tent' installed) respectively in 13th and 14th position, followed by the word 'meeting' in 16th place, tent in 20th and 'visit' in 30th. What this denotes is that great coverage of Qadhdhafi's movements features in the *newsfeed*, which raises questions on

instantaneity's importance over *relevance*, or *relevance* being understood in relation to local audiences' curiosity regarding Qadhdhafi's movement in the city.

Overall, 'Gaddafi' is at the top of all the lists, together with other words referring to him (i.e. 'leader' 'Libya/Libyan'). In the *list of text/body*, Gaddafi is followed by 'Berlusconi' and a list of locations visited by the former. In the *list of titles,* Berlusconi and other politicians' names are featured before locations. As a result, the news values of *proximity* and *personalisation* seem to drive the *newsfeed*.[102] Given that these people and sites are all linked to politics and the administration of power, the news value of *eliteness,* as intended by Bednarek and Caple (2017) is clearly framing the urgency of this report. Put simply, this is a high profile international affairs event which calls for attention.

The first word that follows after the names of people and locations is the same in both lists: 'against'. This finding is particularly striking and led me to the analysis of the news value of *negativity* which Bednarek and Caple link to *eliteness* as a declination of this value. That is, *eliteness* can be interpreted either with positivity and respect, or with negativity. There are other words that, following this code, reinforce this reading: specifically 'terrorism', 'protest', 'delay' and 'scorn'. These words are all used in relation to Qadhdhafi. It is interesting to notice that negative attributes are more prominent in the *list of titles* since they feature with more frequency. Another interesting word that deserves a mention is 'tent' (Qadhdhafi's accommodation in Rome) which was seen as scandalous and provocative. Within the *list of titles* it features at number 20, while in the other list, at number 77. An opposite result is noticeable when looking at the expression 'human rights': in the *list of titles*, it is at number 119, while in the other at 58. It could thus be argued that the titles used a more sensationalist language than the main body of text.

Overall, the reportage is characterised by a hostile attitude towards Qadhdhafi, based on *personalisation* – that is, these appear more as personal attacks linked to his presence in Rome than with his politics or the event itself. As a result, such values denote a bias. They seem to reinforce dominant ideologies and widely shared beliefs which, coming full circle with the underlying investigation of this research, call into question the

[102] Likewise, this pattern recurs in the individual day's newsfeeds.

construction of Italian national identity. They reveal an internalised neo-imperialist view which structures both conservative and progressist thought alike.

As already mentioned, this analysis forms the basis for the *dissection* of the *newsfeed* in *Notes for a Film.* The three *Acts* are organised around the translation of the *newsfeed* into moving images and the direct response and critical unpacking of the *newsfeed*. These two operations are interwoven, as in a dialogical model. In Chapter 5 the direct relation between the CDA-informed analysis of the *newsfeed* and the choices made in the development of the voiceover narration will be discussed more in-depth, as I will consider notions of enunciation and self-reflexivity.

PART II

Prelude: Medical Imaginaries

> Film pleasure, as it derives from the motion of curiositas –
> the desire to explore mapped in the "lust of the eyes"
> [Saint Augustine] – is also embedded in spectacle.
> The lust to find out leads to a fascination with seeing,
> a perceptual attraction for sites, and consequently
> the formation of spectacle.
>
> (Giuliana Bruno, 1993, p.59)

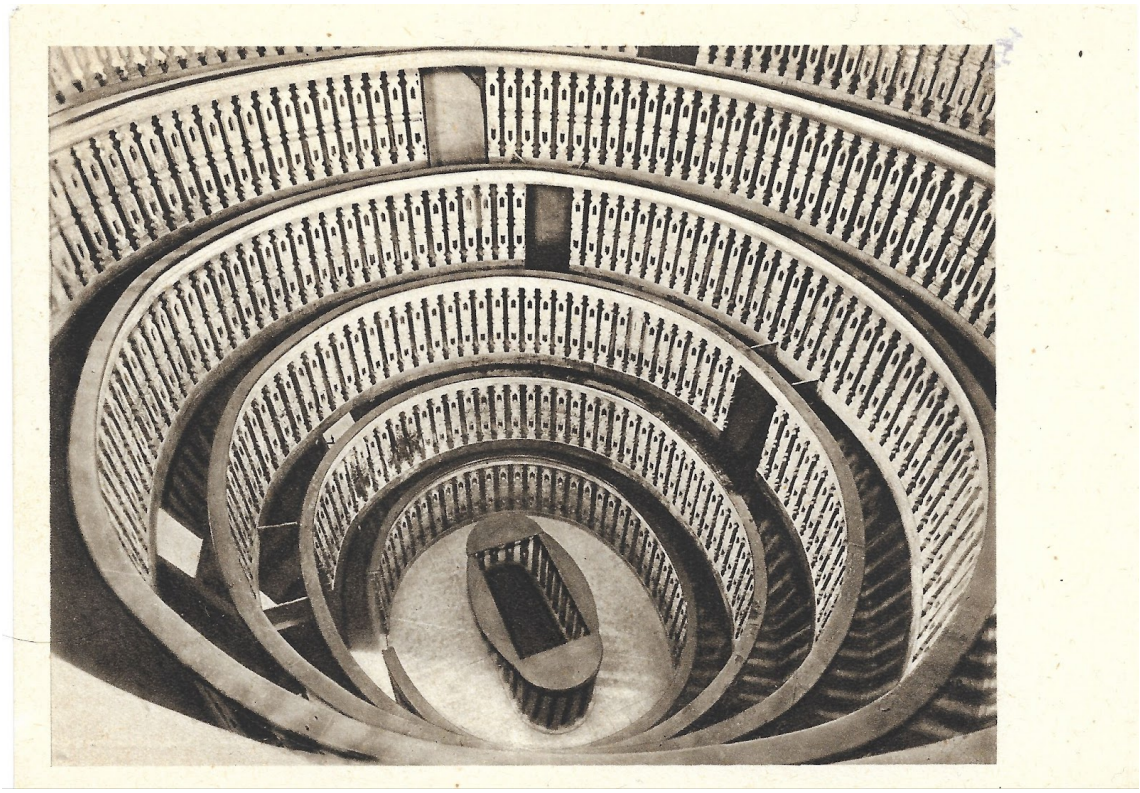


Fig.104 – *Anatomical Theatre of Padua*, postcard.
From personal collection.

Thus far, this research has been concerned with contextualising and scrutinising the geopolitical and cultural factors that led to the Treaty on Friendship (Chapters 1 and 2) and the specific characteristics of the *newsfeed* (Chapter 3). In so doing, it has identified a series of interconnected issues that originate from the historical period that coincides with the Italo-Turkish War: the myth of romanity, justified through archaeology, and its centrality in the construction of Italian national identity; the obsession with flight and its applications to warfare; wireless technology and its impact on communication, in warfare and journalism.

Alongside these ideological and technological undertakings, cinema and the development of medical technologies of vision also play a pivotal role in this research. This is going to be the focus of Part II.

In *Streetwalking on a Ruined Map* (1993) the visual culture scholar Giuliana Bruno (p.59) notices how the first cinema in Naples was housed within an anatomical theatre. This, she argues, establishes a correlation between cinema and a "visual curiosity about the body's landscape" (Bruno, 1993, p.59). Since they are both moulded on the model of the Vitruvian theatre (the Greek and Roman tradition) cinemas and anatomical theatre share similarities.

Streetwalking on a Ruined Map surveys and contextualises the work of Elvira Notari, who is considered the first Italian female filmmaker. Her filmography includes two short documentaries and a feature film about the Italo-Turkish War produced in 1911 and 1912. Titled *L'eroismo d'un aviatore a Tripoli* (*Heroism of an Aviator in Tripoli*, 1912) the synopsis of the feature film reads: "In Libya the war showed the terrible potential of aviation: the rain of bombs exploding confused and destroyed the enemy. Strange spectacle! Powerful means of destruction" (Notari, quoted in Welch, 2016, p.198). Celebrating Italy's use of aerial bombing in Libya, this work incarnated the cultural propaganda of the time, whose more notable representatives were the futurist Tommaso Filippo Marinetti and Gabriele D'Annunzio. As mentioned in Chapter 3, Giovanni Pastrone's *Cabiria* (1914) emerged out of this climate.

As Rhiannon Noel Welch (2016) argues, however, Pastrone's work takes a rather different direction from the propagandistic work of the likes of Marinetti, since *Cabiria*

does not relate to Libya directly. Instead, he "conjure[d] up a mythical past in order to justify the present by staging an analogy between ancient Rome's battle for Carthage and contemporary Rome's attempts to colonize Libya" (Welch, 2016, p.198-199). *Cabiria,* moreover, conveys Italy's racist colonial drive through a series of metaphors and direct references (including the use of blackface) that call for an annihilation of the Other. Italy's white supremacism was evoked through the correlation between Libya and Carthage, which was razed to the ground by the Ancient Roman Empire (Welch, 2016, p.210; Giuliani, 2018, p.51). Despite such a racist and colonial work, Pastrone is now mostly remembered for his cinematographic achievements, his ground-breaking use of the dolly, and for inaugurating the epic film genre. Yet, Pastrone quickly abandoned cinema to follow other passions, such as radio and medicine. In the feature-length documentary film *Pastrone!* (2019), the researcher and filmmaker Lorenzo De Nicola has painted a portrait of Pastrone's life as an inventor and medicine man. It is based on original research stemming from the finding of a previously unpublished manuscript by Pastrone that documented his experiments in science and technology.[103] De Nicola documents Pastrone's work on a 'diagnostic machine' that he devised by adapting a movie camera. Initially believed to be lost, this machine was preserved by Pastrone's family and De Nicola, through his long-term relation with his heirs, was allowed to access it for research purposes and inclusion in the film.

Pastrone's involvement in medicine brings to the fore the deep intertwining of cinema and scientific research, that can be traced back to the emergence of cinematic technology from the studies in motion developed by Étienne-Jules Marey and Edward Muybridge. Pastrone's ideological, technological, and medical interests, I believe, encapsulate not only the mindset of early twentieth-century Italy, but place it in a wider, Western culture of visuality. For instance, the visual culture scholar Lisa Cartwright, in her study of the medical technologies of vision in the book *Screening the Body: Tracing Medicine's Visual Culture* (1995) notices how the "patriarch of cinema" Auguste Lumière dedicated his life to pushing the boundaries of visual medical technology (Cartwright, 1995, p.1). However, she points out that besides the mention of Marey and Muybridge, the relation between these technologies is not generally acknowledged,

[103] Alongside his work in cinema, he developed an interest in telecommunications and, as his grandson explains in the film, he allegedly wrote to Marconi suggesting a solution for his antennas. What is claimed by the family, is that Marconi likely followed such advice, without any recognition for Pastrone's contribution.

leaving out “that the scientific film culture that contributed to the emergence of the popular cinema thrived beyond 1895, extending well into the twentieth century.” (p.3)[104]

This thesis is concerned with these relations and the intersection between medicine, cinema and technology with pedagogy, performance and the production of critical knowledge. On the other hand, it is preoccupied with the role and positioning of the producer of knowledge within this system, as well as its embodiment of this process. In this part, two chapters will focus on the practice of dissection through history and its application as a filmmaking strategy, delving into its epistemological characteristics, limitations, and potential.

[104] In her contribution to this history, Cartwright offers a detailed account of the histories of microscopic and X-Ray cinematography, amongst other technologies, that will be further engaged with in this chapter.

Chapter 4

DEFINING *DISSECTION*

> [t]he surgeon (even within the harshly empirical structures of western medicine) therefore enjoys a rare cultural status as mediator between the exterior and the interior worlds. The surgeon seems to share the iconic status of the artist (the visionary) within our [western] culture, since both are held to be in possession of a privileged gaze which is able to pass beyond common experience, through surface structures, to encounter a reserved core of reality.
>
> (Jonathan Sawday, 1995, p.12)



Fig.105 – *Mondino de' Liuzzi's dissection,* Science Photo Library, Sheila Terry's collection, early 14th century, engraving.

Introduction

In engaging with the viewing perspective that the anatomical theatre enables, this chapter focuses on the development of the anatomical gaze and its applications in the practical outputs. *Dissection* is understood and applied here, metaphorically, to indicate a set of practical and analytical strategies deployed to critically scrutinise what this thesis refers to as a *neocolonial spectacle* (Chapter 2). To unpack the notion of *dissection* that is a core element of this work, it considers the relation between sight and knowledge that is intrinsic to this practice. The first section, *Performing* Dissection*: Epistemological Considerations* provides a historical contextualisation of this practice while scrutinising the notion of dissection as a system of knowledge production and performance. It considers its potential and limits - specifically, those related to positivist, scientific understandings of the practice. The second part, *The Anatomical Theatre,* focuses on the structural organisation of the anatomical theatre and its viewing perspectives to reveal how they influenced the development of the installation *Notes for a Film.* It also considers the role of the body in this research and the different ways in which I used the table in the installation and the three *Acts.* The last section, *From the Topical to the Systemic* analyses how *Notes for a Film* applies different devices and ways of seeing associated with dissection, both in the translation of the *newsfeed* and in the organisation of each *Act.* I will also establish the correlations between the notion of *forensis* and *investigative aesthetics* proposed by Matthew Fuller and Eyal Weizman (2021).

4.1 Performing *Dissection*: Epistemological Considerations

The development of the study of anatomy is primarily attributed to the Greeks and the Greco-Arabic canon (Standring, 2016, p.32),[105] yet, human bodies were not lawfully dissected except for a brief period during the third century BCE at the medical school of

[105] The earliest written records of anatomical and physiological terms trace back to the ancient Egyptians. Such observations mostly pertained to the process of mummification and the observation of gaping wounds, since the practice of human dissection was strictly forbidden (Standring, 2016, p.32). Since dissection was generally outlawed in Greece, Europe and the Arab world, it is difficult to prove whether other physicians practiced human dissection in secret: no conclusive evidence exists to support these theses. (Standring, 2016, p.33)

Alexandria – then a Greek colony under Ptolemy's rule.[106] In Europe, following the revival of animal dissection in the Middle Ages,[107] the University of Bologna established itself as the frontrunner in the study of anatomy since it was the first place where human dissection was allowed (Standring, 2016, p.34). Mondino De Liuzzi was the first physician entrusted with such task, in public spectacles strictly performed on the bodies of 'strangers' - executed criminals sourced outside of a specific mile radius from the town or beyond. In 1315, the first human dissection took place in Bologna, and it was conducted on the corpse of a female criminal (Sprumond, 2016, p.273).

From the late sixteenth century onward, the classical tradition was fully disputed by physicians like the Dutch Andrea Vesalius and the English William Harvey, leading to what is hailed as the birth of Modern Anatomy. However, this widely accepted and established narrative emerges from what has been called "The Great Doctors" approach to the history of medicine (Reverby and Rosner, 1979)[108] that has dominated medical historiography and promoted a distinctively Western lineage. Linking classicist scholars to those of the Renaissance, for instance, it does not consider the pivotal role of Islamic medicine in the developments of Western anatomy, medicine, and science in general (Goody, 2012, p.36).[109] Their work was appropriated while promoting a linear and 'untainted' European genealogy (Hobson, 2004, p.2).[110] This research acknowledges

[106] Given their extensive study of the human body through vivisection, the Alexandrian physicians Herophilius and Erasistratus are, as a result, considered to be the 'fathers of anatomy' (Sprumont, 2016, p.257).

[107] The first place where it was practiced consistently was the Salerno Medical School in Southern Italy, which was founded during the Greco-Roman period. Between the tenth and thirteenth century CE it became a leading institution in Europe also thanks to the translations of medical texts from Arabic to Latin produced by Constantinus Africanus. The School of Salerno only dissected animals and was mostly preoccupied with studying how diseases function within the body, for the purpose of developing cures (Cunningham, 1997, Kindle Location 1083).

[108] In their seminal essay *Beyond the Great Doctors* (1979) Susan M. Reverby and David Rosner put forward a critique of the way, the history of medicine has been written predominantly by physicians and as such it had been narrated through the achievements of these men. They argue that this narrative has been also promoting the notion of a linear "march of progress" (p.4).

[109] Such an operation of concealment is at the core of the myth of the European Renaissance's origins, which identifies in the translation and circulation of classical scholarship, specifically Greek, the rebirth of Western culture. As Jack Goody puts it, the Christian Church "tried to set aside the pagan, non-Christian, heritage of Greece and Rome, doing away with its gods and its secular tradition of knowledge" (Goody, 2012, p.25), which were then reintroduced in the late Middle Ages. While Europe rejected such scholarship, in the Near East it was recovered and translated as well as expanded on. By the nineth century CE, Baghdad was the main centre for medical knowledge (Goody, 2012, p.26). Also see the work of Emily Savage-Smith (1995 and 2013) on the relation between Islamic and European medicine.

[110] In the long unchallenged Euro-centric narrative of Western Renaissance, the role played by Muslim scholars in such cultural revival was merely confined to one of preservation and translation, disregarding

such problematic lineage as it takes as a starting point the practice of dissection developed by Mondino De Liuzzi to devise a model for the presentation of a process of knowledge production.

In the late medieval time, before the birth of Modern Anatomy, dissection was either demonstrative (performed for a didactic purpose rather than to advance physiological knowledge) or employed to ascertain causes of death (post-mortem autopsy) (Standring, 2016, p.41). It was not, that is, directly involved in challenging previous scholarship (Standring, 2016, p.40). On the one hand, it was conceived as an illustrative tool and form of spectacle, while on the other as a diagnostic tool restricted to specific inquiries around death. The strict regulations on the access to bodies, made it also difficult for physicians to conduct further research through dissection (Sawday, 1995, p.55). As a tool for studying anatomy and physiology, throughout its history dissection has been invested with different symbolic, spiritual, political, and juridical meanings that raise a series of ethical questions (Sawday, 1995, p.63) In addressing such crucial and sensitive points, this chapter aims to put in place a set of boundaries, carving a path across a history punctuated by different degrees of violence – physical, epistemological, institutional. These issues are constitutive of Eurocentric knowledge production and form the core of imperialist epistemology and what Peruvian sociologist Anìbal Quijano (2000) defines as the "coloniality of knowledge and power": the hierarchical and racist structures of power (reflected and supported by its knowledge production), established through the colonial system, and continuing to oppress the (formerly) colonised subjects. It is such continuities that this research aims to bring to light by subverting and deploying some of the tropes of human dissection. To do so, dissection's practical, historical, and epistemological constructions must be analysed.

Firstly, it is important to distinguish between the practice of dissection for research and diagnostic purposes (such as autopsies) that was practiced outside of the public spectacles and the theatrical form popular between the fourteenth and eighteenth

---

or downplaying their contribution to the advancement of such scholarship (Al-Rodhan, 2012, p.2). The history of anatomy, as a matter of fact, is denoted by a racist, classist and normative set of practices. The bodies employed in dissection were generally identified because of their alterity: from criminals strictly belonging to the Egyptian colony, to the bodies of executed 'foreigners' in Renaissance Italy, up until to the disproportionate employment of African American bodies in anatomical schools in nineteenth and twentieth century United States (Warner and Edmonson, 2009, p.19).

century - the object of study of this research. Public dissections took place alongside these practices when post-mortem autopsies were required, that is, when causes of death needed to be established, especially in the case of illnesses and pandemics (Sprumond, 2016, p.275). These operations, as well as those undergone for research, were not subjected to public staging. The public performances were, instead, strictly scripted and symbolic, highly theatrical and not concerned with diagnosis or acquiring new knowledge: they were purely demonstrative.

De Liuzzi's demonstration followed a specific format, which set the script for dissection. According to this late Middle-Ages model, three people were necessary to deliver public dissections: a *lecturer*, an *ostensor* and a *sector.*[111] (Wilson, 1987, p.71) The former presided by reading out loud from an established anatomical book and commenting on it, while the *ostensor*[112] (an 'exhibiter') pointed out – both to the audience and the *sector* – in which parts of the body the incisions and extractions had to be made. (Wilson, 1987, p.72). The latter, often a barber-surgeon, was physically cutting and handling the body. This set up was highly hierarchical: the *lecturer* (the anatomist, or knowledge bearer, like De Liuzzi) was overlooking the body and the people involved in the operation from a higher platform, while the *ostensor* and *sector* – together with other helpers – surrounded and manipulated the corpse. Yet, the *lecturer* followed the text, rehashing established knowledge produced by the great masters, without questioning it: the purpose was to show the placement of organs and systems as they described them (Wilson, 1987, p.71). These texts were generally penned by the notorious Roman anatomist Galen.[113] However, his work presents crucial errors because of his lack of first-hand analysis of the inner working of the human body through dissection, which was forbidden under Roman rule. The medieval model, thus, was based on blind reverence to traditional knowledge and conceived public dissection as a demonstration. As historian Jonathan Sawday (1995, p.40) points out, this authoritarian pedagogic model followed the tradition of anatomy as a discipline, which was "patrilinear" (handed down from "father to son") and Eurocentric (from the Greco-

[111] These roles will be further explored in the next chapter.
[112] In Chapter 5 I will fully engage with the etymology of this word and on the role of the *ostensor*.
[113] Galen was a main reference in the study of Anatomy for centuries. Serving as physician to the Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius in the second century CE, Galen produced an extensive amount of writing based on the dissection of primates and studying the open wounds of gladiators. (p.124)

Roman masters to the European masters) and discouraged the challenging of traditional knowledge.

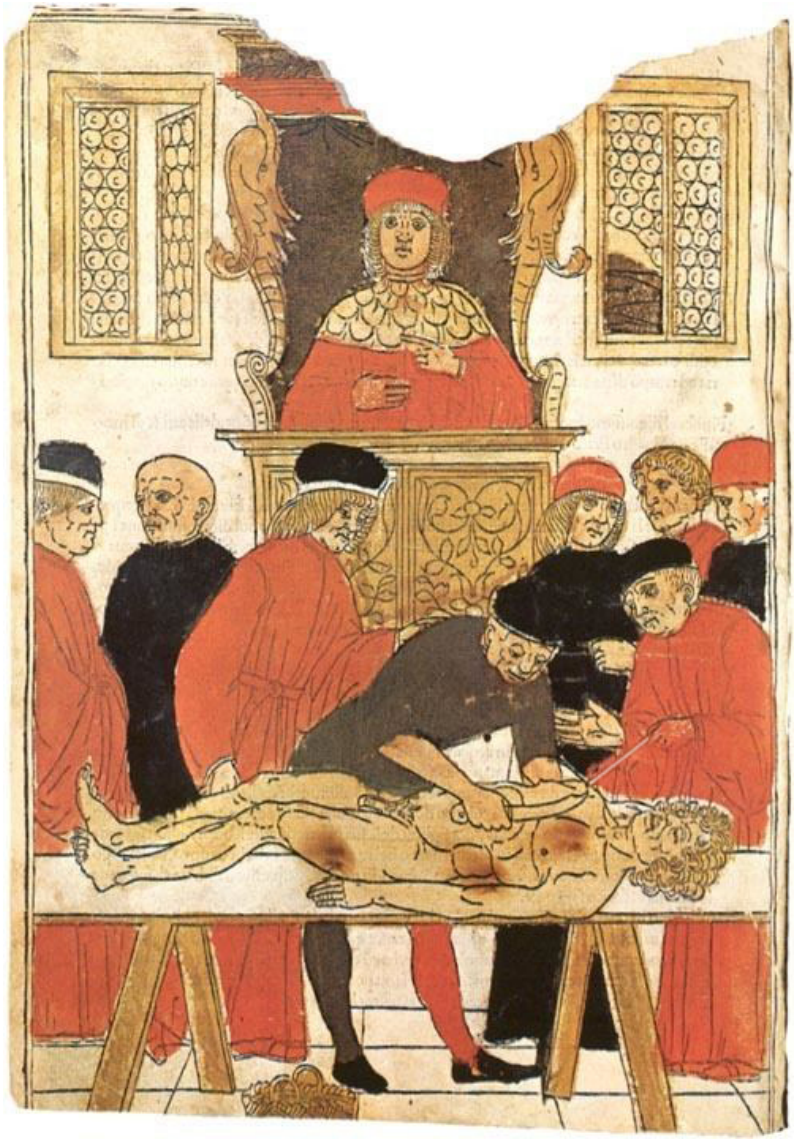


Fig.106 - Italian late medieval dissection from *Fascicolo di medicina*,1493.
Hagströmer Medico-Historical Library, Karolinska Institutet.

Although in his book *Anathomia* (1316), De' Liuzzi described the anatomical study as *videre ad sensum*, "seeing (understanding) through practice", the book drew heavily on Galen and repeated many of his mistakes. De Liuzzi's inability to fully question the authority of the masters meant that things that were clearly visible, could not be discerned (Crivellato & Ribatti, 2006, p.581). At the same time, the book also included new insights, from studies conducted by De Liuzzi besides the public performances of dissection – more probably during autopsies (Crivellato & Ribatti, 2006, p.581).

Several centuries earlier, Roman encyclopaedist and physician Aulus Cornelius Celsus put forward a categorisation of the scholars of anatomy, whom he divided in three groups, all rooted in the Greek tradition: the Rationalists (or Dogmatics), the Empirics and the Methodists. The Rationalists followed Aristotle's school and included Herophilius, Erasistratus (the school of Alexandria) and Galen. Their approach was based on the practice of dissection to gather knowledge of the functioning of the body and its structure. As the historian Andrew Cunningham notices: "[i]t is rational because disciplined reasoning is taken to be the key for going from the seen to the unseen (which means both from the function to the structure and from the structure to the function)" (1997, Kindle Location 652-654). For the Empiricists, on the other hand, a dead or injured sectioned body could not provide accurate knowledge of the living body's functioning. At the same time, the Methodists did not believe that knowledge of the body's internal working (obtained through dissection) was required for curing diseases. Although the Rationalist approach became the backbone of the anatomical discipline in Europe, Celsus' testimony shows how different ways to conceive anatomical work coexisted, beyond the frames of reference we are accustomed to in the present. As Cunningham (1997) puts it – "[d]ifferent projects of inquiry – different [intellectual] spectacles – make different bodies visible in anatomy" (Kindle Locations 293-294). Thus, Celsus' classification is a reminder of the different approaches to the study of the body and the way notions of visuality and observation have come to structure Western knowledge. And how they are intrinsically linked with notions of rationality.

On the other hand, it also implies that this practice can take on a different epistemological framework by wearing "different intellectual spectacles" in the present. The public performances in late Middle-ages and Renaissance Italy, however, were not based on "disciplined reasoning" but relied on regurgitation discouraging more investigative approaches. Yet, the conflation of seeing/understanding through practice stressed by De Liuzzi managed to encourage practitioners to build on traditional knowledge, rather than merely repeating it (Di Matteo et al., 2017, p.1792).

In the tradition of "The Great Doctors" Andrea Vesalius is considered the physician responsible for a deep shift in anatomical practice in the sixteenth century. While

teaching at the leading medical school of the time, the University of Padua (part of the Republic of Venice), Vesalius began to perform dissections alone (Wilson, 1987, p.68). The *lecturer*, *ostensor*, and *sector* roles were merged in one person. Stepping down form the *lecturer*'s *cathedra* he got his hands dirty to "see for himself" – what Sawday (1995, p.) defines, within the confines of medicine, as the "autoptic vision"[114]. Autoptic (from autopsy) derives from the ancient Greek language: *autos* (self) + *optos* (seen), from which the Greek word for *eyewitness* also derives.

De Liuzzi's spectacle of dissection - witnessing the human body's mortality by peering into its interior to understand its functioning – was now endowed with a new function: the performance of investigation. Vesalius' dissections were not merely illustrative of the traditionally accepted texts. They demonstrated the inquisitive process by which knowledge of the body's functions was produced through dissection. (Wilson, 1987, p.69). Thus, this approach refuses to follow classical knowledge in a dogmatic way, but, at the same time, it establishes itself as a new authority through such refusal of authority. As the mise-en-scène of the performance changed, the narration of what was being witnessed also shifted and so did its symbolic meaning. Yet, the patrilinear tradition, and the rationalist and authoritative role of the anatomist kept being reinforced.

The correlation between authority, gaze, and language that is at play within public dissections was also explored by Michel Foucault in *The Birth of the Clinic* (2003). Foucault investigated the relation between "seeing and knowing" within clinical pathology, a discipline that emerged in the eighteenth century. Since it came to be understood as a natural progression from pathological anatomy, Foucault focused instead on their methods and aims, to show that the two disciplines shared two contrasting types of knowledge: geographical and historical (Foucault, 2003, p.175). By geographical Foucault refers to the anatomical method that stems from topographical anatomy, that is, the discipline which is preoccupied with "the study of anatomy based on regions or divisions of the body and emphasizing the relations between various structures (muscles and nerves and arteries etc.) in that region" (close to the "rationalist" group) (Vocabulary Dictionary, no date). That is, the anatomical practice of the Middle-Ages and Renaissance. Pathological anatomy, instead, focuses on "the study of

[114] To 'see for oneself' is also the etymological meaning of autopsy.

structural changes caused by disease" and requires a historical approach, that is, the study of symptoms. This includes observation and conversation with the patient to gather a history of the symptoms or examine the living body through hearing (i.e., a stethoscope). What the two practices mostly diverge on, is based on their subjects: the deceased versus the living body, which imply a focus on, respectively, research/pedagogy and patient care/healing.

Building on the work of topographic anatomists such as Vesalius and Harvey, medical historians claim that pathological anatomy emerged in the late seventeenth century after the publication of Giovanni Battista Morgagni's lifework (also a professor at the University of Padua) and it quickly established itself as a science. The concept of science, however, arose in the eighteenth century: before, medical research was considered part of the discipline of Natural Philosophy (Cunningham, 2010, p.49). Such distinction is important given that the focus of Natural Philosophy was theological. Anatomy was a tool to study God's creation, since it was believed that the body's microcosm reflected God's macrocosm. As Cunningham (2010) argues, it was not only "a ritualised teaching event, but it was a ritual event on a much higher level, for theatrical, ceremonial, anatomy had a higher message", that is, it was a "celebration" of the Christian God (p.48). This understanding is echoed in the ritualised staging of public dissections and their demonstrative rather than inquisitive or diagnostic functions.

Dissection as a practice primarily concerned with investigation emerged, as already mentioned, after Vesalius in the sixteenth century (according to Sawday, with Harvey, 1995, p.143). Since it developed as soon as the scientific method took hold - detaching itself from theology - the use of spectacularised public dissection outside of the medical classroom also faded out, becoming a practice for the specialists and those able to access the restricted (and elitist) system of the university - no more for popular, wide consumption.

Nonetheless, even if Vesalius brought new understandings of public dissection, it was still ultimately engaged in theological reflection. In his master opus, *De Humani Corporis Fabrica,* Vesalius portrays himself pointing a hand toward the ceiling (or, symbolically, the sky/heaven) and one downward directly into the sectioned body on the dissection table. Through these gestures, Vesalius implies that knowledge of the divine

can be obtained by studying the inner workings of the body (God's perfect creation). The understanding of dissection as a device to access divine knowledge was also present in the inscriptions adorning the anatomical theatres of the time. This religious framework was also crucial to securing the Church's acceptance and blessing.



Fig.107 – Illustration from Andrea Vesalius' *De Humani Corporis Fabrica*, 1543.

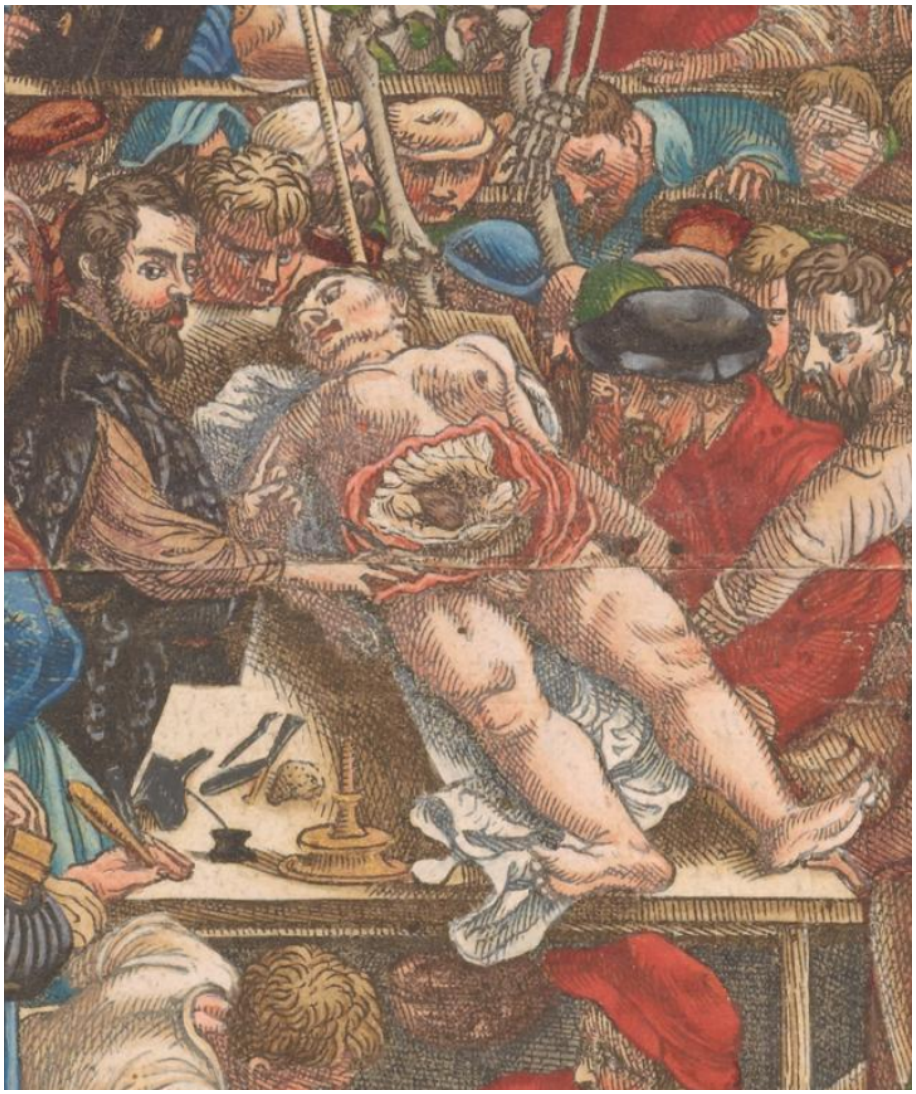


Fig.108 – Illustration from Andrea Vesalius' *De Humani Corporis Fabrica,* 1543 (detail in colour).

Therefore, throughout the centuries, the practice of dissection has been endowed with several meanings. Knowledge about the body's inner workings was acquired and shared within a complex - and often contradicting – juridical and religious system, in which the body itself was understood in different ways and through different "intellectual spectacles". In detaching itself from religion, the stress on rationality was to be increasingly projected onto this practice, and its symbolic and ceremonial nature disappeared.

Due to its many ethical implications and taboo status for centuries, dissection was strictly regulated. It was also deeply entwined with juridical and disciplinary frameworks throughout the late Medieval and Renaissance times. It was enforced on the bodies of 'deviant' subjects - often criminals and foreigners or marginalised people –

and it was considered a form of extreme punishment. Ensuring these bodies (and their souls) a way to hell (Sawday, 1995, p.21), it was a deterrent. Staged for a public, just like executions at the time, it allowed the sovereign power to affirm the law while contributing to the development of medical knowledge. As Sawday (1995) notices, at the time, human dissections were public because they were "ritualistic expressions of often contradictory layers of meaning" in which "the sovereign acted as the 'physician' to the political body." (p.189).

This research builds on this highly spectacular and ritualistic model of anatomical dissection as a basis to sabotage it: no longer performed by the sovereign power but against it. As I will be arguing in Chapter 5, by subverting the role of the speaking subject and the power dynamics involved in the dissection, *Gaddafi in Rome* aims to re-signify the notion of dissection through an oppositional approach. It borrows the tools of late-Medieval dissection to hijack them and perform a critical analysis, thus defusing its normative and hegemonic values.

4.2 The Anatomical Theatre

In the late Middle Ages, public dissections were hosted in temporary structures or existing spaces, even domestic. In the late sixteenth century, purposely built and permanent anatomical theatres began to appear. Inaugurated in 1595, the Anatomical Theatre of Padua is the first one of its kind. Described as a "huge, upside-down telescope for inspecting the dissected human body" (Cunningham, 2010, p.30 and Semenzato, 1995, p.123), with the sectioning table in the middle of it, its oval shape was influenced by courtrooms and the Greco-Roman theatres. Still, it was also reminiscent of a space of worship: a space where all the symbolic functions of the dissected body could be evoked. Sawday (1995) notices how, at the time, anatomists did not strive for "clinical detachment" but rather for a "form of cultural location" (p.63). Thus, these performances were not framed by a scientific mindset – as will emerge later – they were imbued with a series of semantic values reinforced through a confrontation with death and mortality.

Before I analyse the role of the anatomical theatre, I would like to expand on the centrality of the body and death in this research by providing an overview of this research through the lens of the body, cutting across the organisation of these chapters.

This research has engaged with a 'body of evidence', the documentation of an event and its historical entanglements. I am using the expression 'body of evidence' here to bring to the fore its relation to bodies and embodiment, which is also, as David Garland argues, a central preoccupation of Foucauldian genealogy, the guiding methodology in this study. Genealogy conceptualises the body "as a material surface, as a flesh upon which the micro-physics of power leave their mark" (Garland, p.373). This research focuses on two bodies of power, Berlusconi and Qadhdhafi, while reflecting on the body-politic, that is, the collectivities that are affected by (and in turn may reproduce) the State's power dynamics (in this case, neocolonial power dynamics). It has developed a series of tactics to *dissect* and expose the systemic violence and ideological construction encapsulated in the subject of this research: the *neocolonial spectacle*.

The centrality of death in this PhD – through the metaphor of *dissection* - is dictated by the necropolitical nature of this research, which has created connections between different forms of sovereign necropowers (Chapter 2). Through a genealogical approach, thus, the aim has also been to highlight the direct relations between the way colonial and neocolonial powers have administer death within the same space (Libya and the Mediterranean border). As a result, the movie *Lion of the Desert* and the genocide in Cyrenaica have a central role in this research.

The pedagogic and spectacular characteristics of the anatomical theatre have been appropriated, together with the mnemonic and symbolic functions of the memory theatre, to perform a counter-narration that, through a positioned voiceover (Chapter 5), has addressed the colonial aphasia that pervades Italian culture (Chapter 1). In so doing, this research has disclosed the complex and stratified relations at play within neocolonial power dynamics, placing the manipulation of colonial history at its core. This operation hinges on a constant interplay between the notions of the topical and the systemic (which will be unpacked in the next section) intended in their medical sense and in their relation to events, news, and socio-political phenomena. This research proposes a situated and embodied model to visualise and perform the research process

and connect the recent past with a longer line of historical continuities that stretches into the present (Chapter 5).

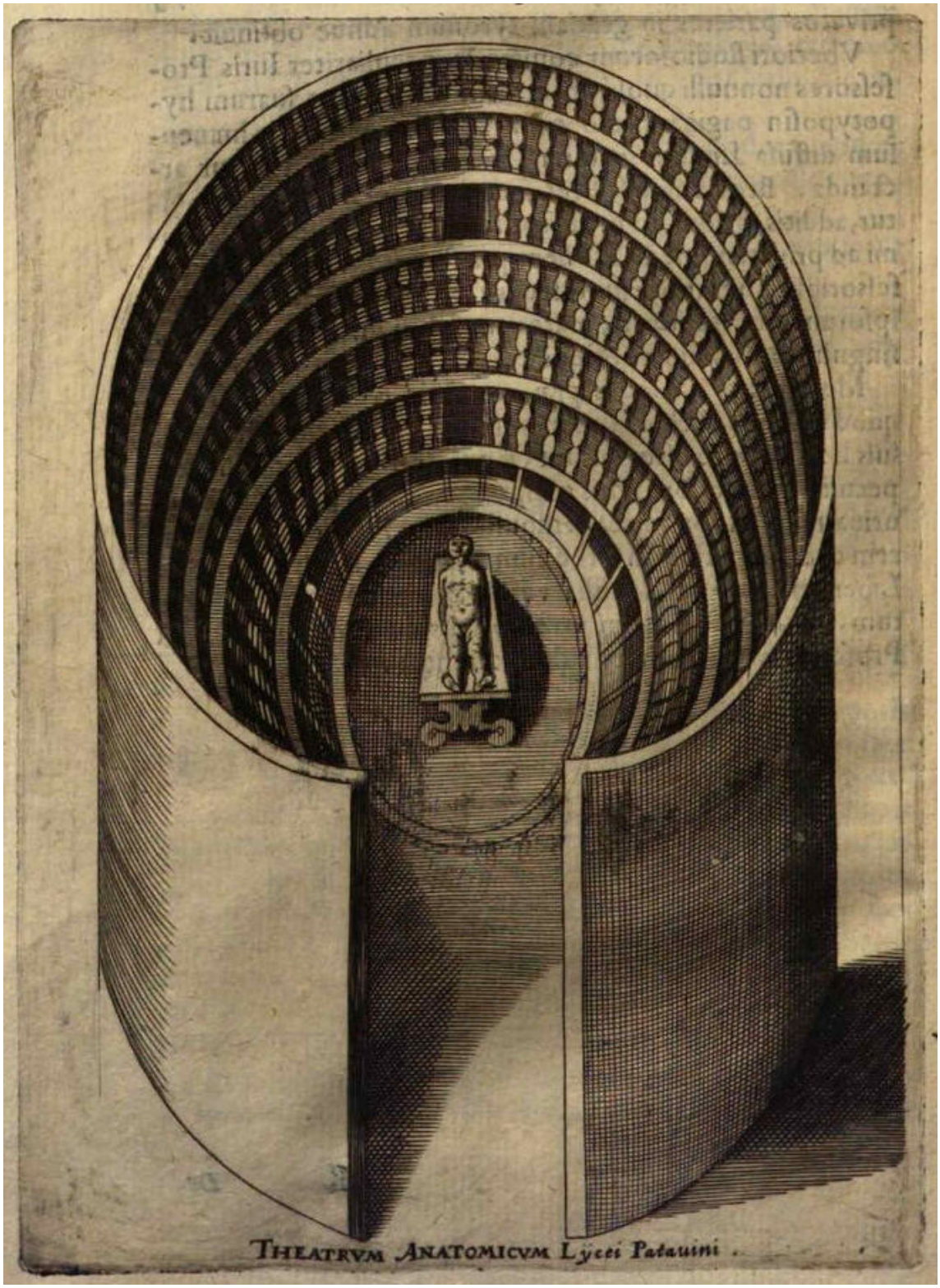


Fig.109 – *Anatomical Theatre of Padua*, engraving from Jacobi Philipi Tomasini's *Gymnasium Patavium,* 1654.

Going back to the theatre, most permanent theatres share the concentric shape of Padua's model and are extended vertically, allowing for many spectators and enabling a specific viewing perspective of the body. This architecture was a "unique form of visual media, a scope or lens", which also resembled the Renaissance's memory theatre designed by Giulio Camillo in the sixteenth century. As theorised by Frances Yates in *The Art of Memory* (1966), this architecture, whether built or imagined, has a "rhetorical and mnemonic function" (Strahler Holzapfel, 2008, p.89). Yet, although the designs are similar, the mnemonic theatre placed a singular person (viewer/performer) at its centre, looking outward towards the tiered auditorium, whose 'seats' were occupied by symbols used as memory aids. Contrary to the memory palaces developed earlier, which were purely a product of imagination, Camillo's memory theatre could be built – as Camillo himself demonstrated (Matussek, 2019, p.46).

Anatomical theatres followed the classical Vitruvian model whose mode of presentation, contrary to "Medieval liturgical performances", dictated that the public should be "separated from the elevated stage and thus excluded from participation" (Matussek, 2019 p.45). This implies that the audience in the anatomical theatre was conceived as a passive witness of a spectacle of knowledge production, re-instating a separation that was no longer prioritised in the Middle Ages. Even in this reversal and despite their functional differences, the anatomical and mnemonic theatres shared a desire to show the connection between man and God and a quest for truth and universal knowledge that was to be found through a confrontation with the individual's interior – whether physical or introspective. Commenting on the mnemonic theatre, Anne Aurasmaa notices that:

> [i]n the pursuit of the "truth" the theatre, as a material memory, was meant to help build the universe into the mind of the viewer. With the help of the theatre the observer sought in his inner universe a route to his own divinity and, thus, to understanding and controlling reality (2003, p.60-61).

The relation between knowledge of the divine and reality also occurs in the anatomical theatre, as mentioned in the previous section. But in the latter, this is achieved through a microscopical gaze/inward gaze zooming into details, while the memory theatre promotes a macroscopical/outward gaze that aims at embracing the totality of knowledge – reminiscent of a panoptical model of vision.

As Michel Foucault (2003) argues in *The Birth of the Clinic*, anatomy establishes vision as its "dominant sign". The spectacle of dissection - or autopsy - is thus a "triumph of the gaze" (p.165). This was particularly emphasised in the Anatomical Theatre of Padua's model, which was developed to allow the best viewing conditions for the audience. Like the people involved in the sectioning, the audience must stand, towering over the corpse to peer inside it.

According to Foucault, from the early nineteenth century, medicine entered its latest stage dominated by the anatomo-clinical gaze, which "plunges into the space that it has given itself the task of traversing" (Foucault, 2003, p.136). It combines the anatomical gaze, which looks beneath the skin, with the clinical gaze's preoccupation with visible, surface-level symptoms. Foucault claims that the anatomo-clinical gaze goes beyond the possibilities of accessing and peering at the body's interior implied by the anatomical gaze. Instead, it is predicated on the learned ability to see the unseen and read the body's interior and functioning before it gets unveiled by sectioning. It is a learned, acquired gaze that is able to recognise what escapes the untrained eye (Foucault, 2003, p.136).

With the development of the scientific method that followed the birth of modern anatomy, its spectacular aspect subsided. From the nineteenth century, dissection becomes confined within specialist knowledge. No longer serving its entertainment and mass dissemination function, it gets confined within the university and hospital. The anatomical theatre, thus, becomes a space solely reserved for academic knowledge. In this shift, the roles of the *lecturer*, *ostensor*, and *sector* are replaced by the figure of the doctor/anatomist. Gaining an almost godly status, the doctor becomes increasingly recognised as an expert and bearer of knowledge: only he can see the unseen.



Fig.110 - *Gaddafi in Rome: Notes for a Film,* installation at Maxxi National Museum of 21st Century Art, Rome, Italy. Exterior view.

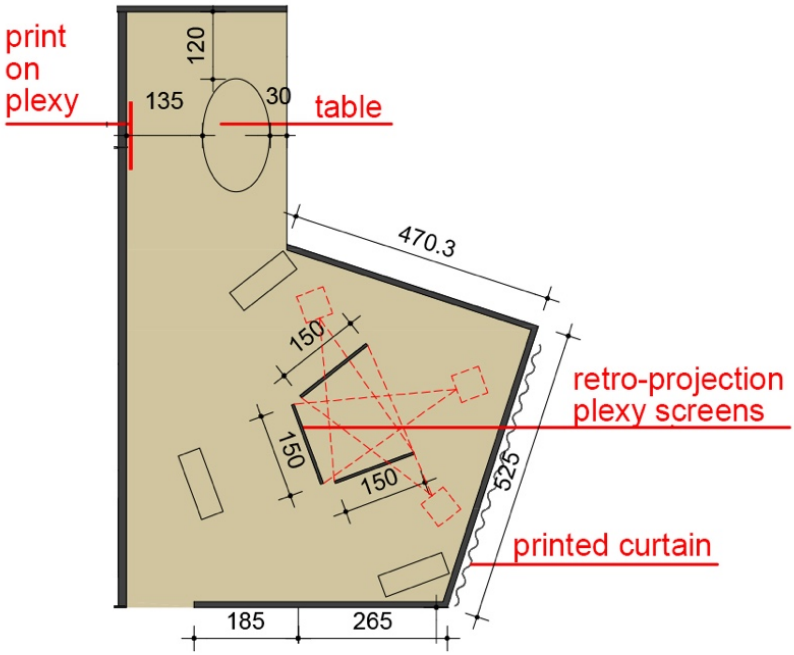


Fig.111 - *Gaddafi in Rome: Notes for a Film,* installation at Maxxi. Planimetry.

The three-channel video installation *Notes for a Film* (2022) draws on the anatomical theatre, however, it also integrates aspects of the memory theatre. In so doing, this work borrows explicitly elements of these devices that are not directly linked to the scientific paradigm. In addition, the installation does not attempt to recreate a quest for universal truth or theological knowledge. Instead, it creates an intimate viewing experience in which the audience can be immersed in a direct relationship with the videos and the voiceover.

In considering the relation between the anatomical theatre and the cinema that was suggested by Giuliana Bruno (Part II), it is important to point out how the viewing position differs: in the anatomical theatre, the focal point lies flat, horizontally, privileging a view from above, while in the cinema the screen is erected vertically, in front of the audience.[115] If the former aims to peer inside and penetrate its subject, looking at details, the latter creates the opposite effect, as the audience gets confronted by a large screen, which emphasises a process of immersion. Both, however, promote identification: in the anatomic theatre, this is a visceral, bodily experience as well as a symbolic one, while in the cinema, this is primarily a cognitive one (although it can also be visceral as the work of Vivian Sobchack has argued)[116], triggered by the interplay between narrative and image.

Contrary to the viewing positions of the anatomical and memory theatre but also the cinema, there is no great separation between the subject of dissection and the audience in the installation. Three suspended screens, each playing one of the three *Acts*, are placed in close contact with the viewer, who must watch one *Act* at a time and move from one *Act* to the next. Each screen has a bench with two pairs of headphones available; thus, they are designed to accommodate two people at a time. This setup does not allow for a full immersion like that created by cinematic viewing. Its lack of total darkness and the need to move between screens means that the views are constantly reminded of their corporeality and of their viewing position. This element is further accentuated by the videos since they each propose a different perspective and viewing experience.

[115] In Chapter 5 I will expand on these viewing modes.
[116] I refer here to Vivian Sobchack's *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture* (2004, University of California Press).



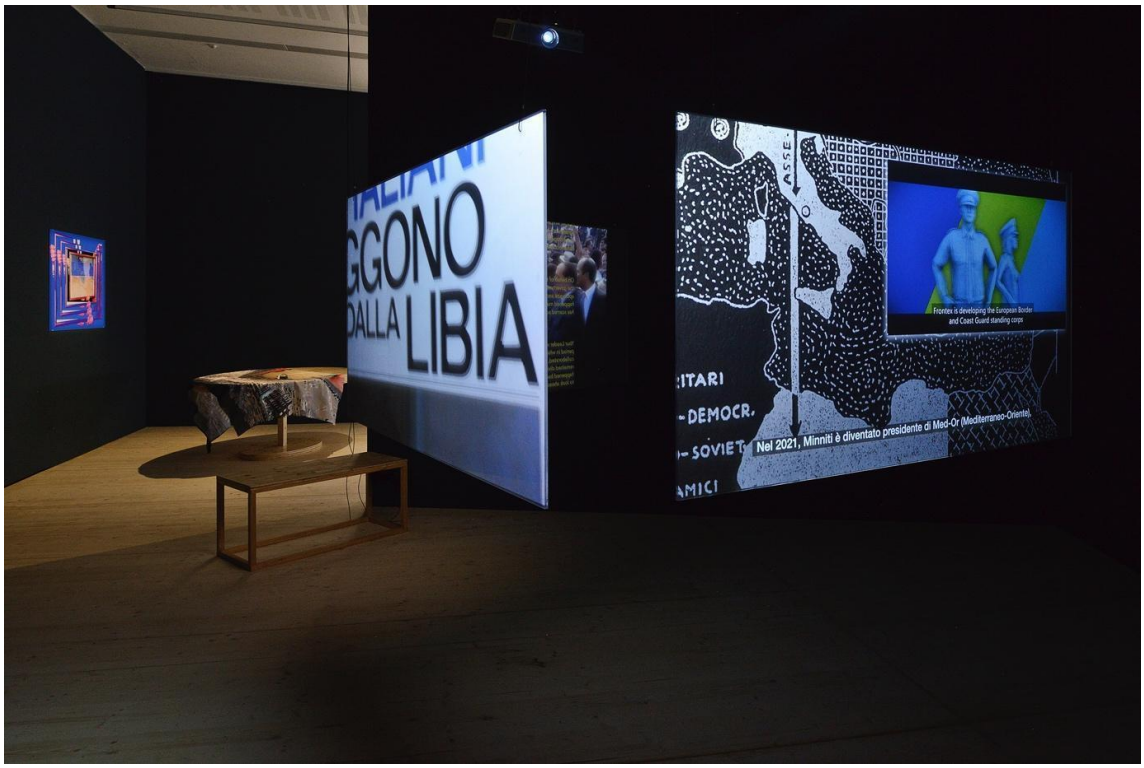
Fig.112 - *Gaddafi in Rome: Notes for a Film,* installation at Maxxi.

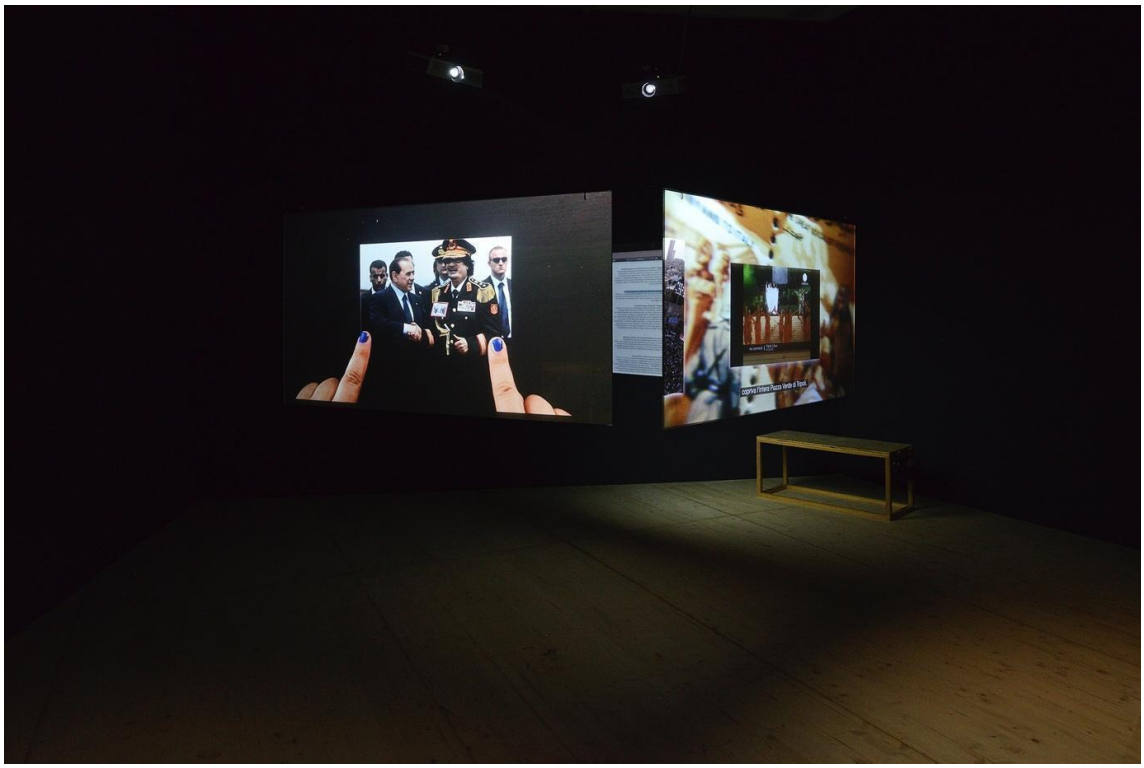
On the left wall, a quote from the Libyan writer Ahmed Ibrahim al-Faqih's *Gardens of the Night: a Trilogy:* "A time has passed; the next has not yet begun. Between the time which has passed and the next which has not yet begun there is a third which retraces its course anew" (1985, p.3).



Fig.113 - *Gaddafi in Rome: Notes for a Film,* installation at Maxxi. Interior view.

On the right wall, a quote from the Libyan writer Ahmed Ibrahim al-Faqih's *Gardens of the Night: a Trilogy* : "A time has passed and another has not yet begun and will never begin. (…) A time of beautiful terror, beautiful, beautiful terror" (1985, p.311)





Figs.114-15 - *Gaddafi in Rome: Notes for a Film,* installation at Maxxi. Interior view (screens).

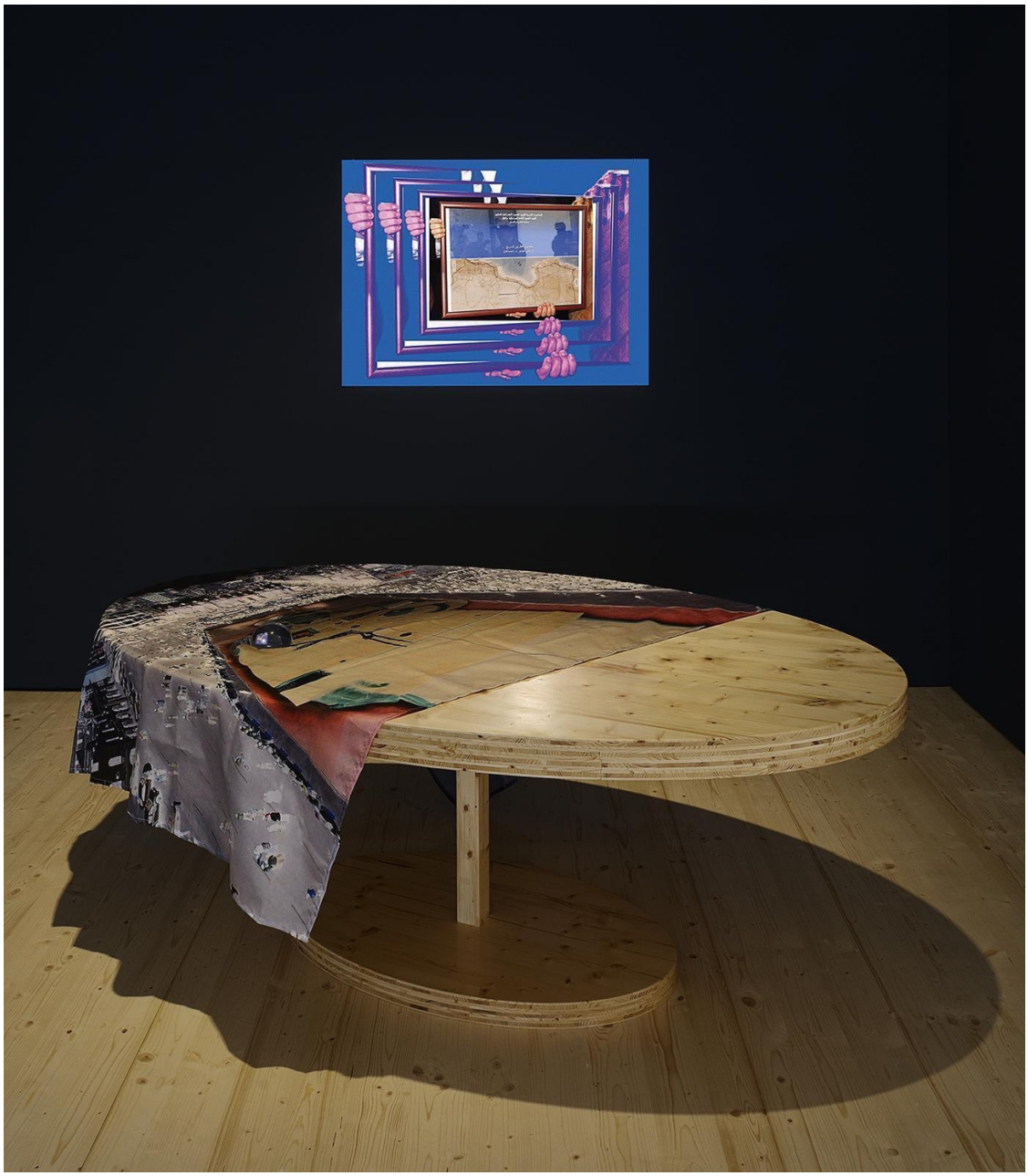
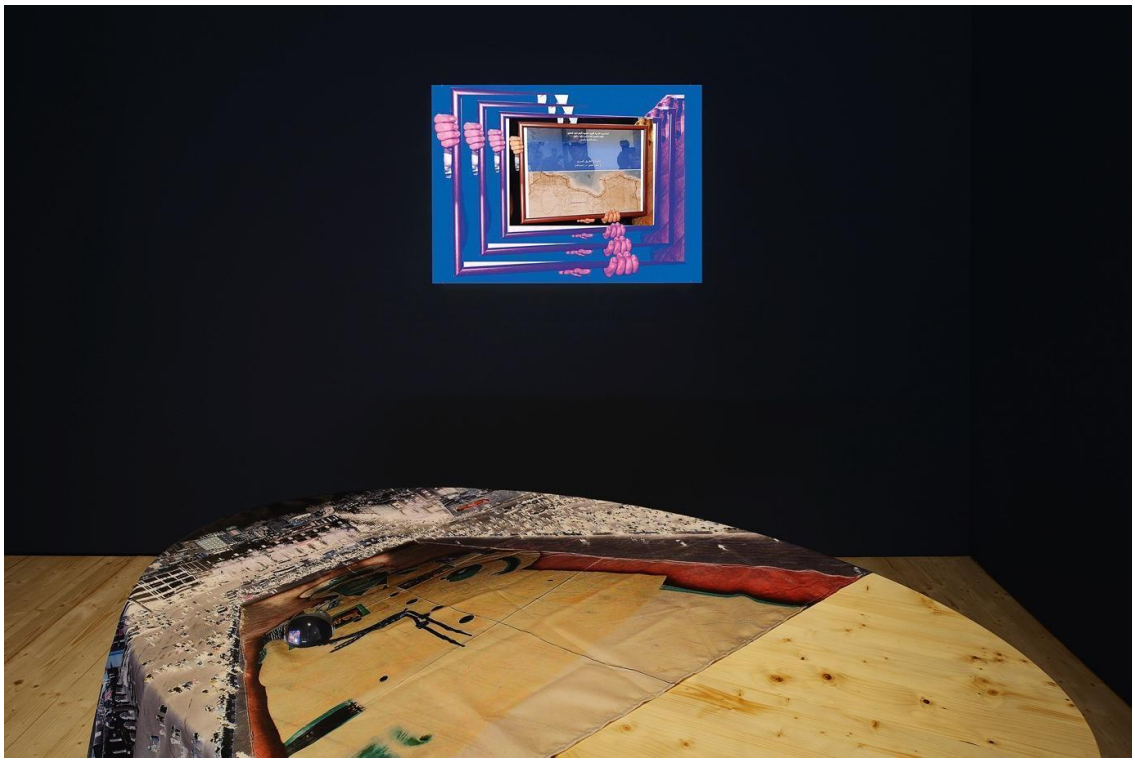


Fig.116 - *Gaddafi in Rome: Notes for a Film,* installation at Maxxi. Table.





Figs.117-118 - *Gaddafi in Rome: Notes for a Film,* installation at Maxxi. Table (details).

Inspired by Padua's theatre, the table has a rather imposing presence in the installation.[117] In *Notes for a Film,* the table is not only a part of the installation as a

[117] In *The Expanded Script* the table is also an imposing presence and it is the location from which I speak.

sculptural element, but it also features prominently in the videos as the surface on which archival material and photographs are sectioned and manipulated.

As a working surface and interface, the table - or more accurately, the desk - is the protagonist of the article *Screenic (Re)orientations: Desktop, Tabletop, Tablet, Booklet, Touchscreen, Etc* by film and media scholars Miriam De Rosa and Wanda Strauven (2020). Here, De Rosa and Strauven analyse the relationship between artworks and display surfaces, identifying the tension between the horizontal axis (e.g. the table) and the vertical axis (e.g. the wall) (De Rosa & Strauven, 2020, p.237).

This exploration is predicated upon two positions: one that conveys the gaze/viewpoint of the camera and one that incarnates the viewing position of the audience – focusing on how the viewer's body interacts with the screen/display. Even though their examples are concerned primarily with hand gestures, De Rosa and Strauven (2020, p.235) argue that *gesturality* involves the entire body. It refers "to both the performative acts and the situatedness of the human body", which applies "to the author or creator of the artwork" and "the viewer as active subject." (De Rosa & Strauven, 2020, p.235). Their observations are helpful in analysing the relationship between the filmmaker and the audience in *Notes for a Film*.

Regarding the categories identified by De Rosa and Strauven, the most used in the three *Acts* is the "horizontal-vertical" axis that consists of a horizontal working surface (a table) that is filmed from above. Its image is then projected onto a vertical display surface (a projection screen). Staged and choreographed hand gestures dominate this mode. *Notes for a Film* prominently features shots of my hands interacting with books, documents, and a tablet over a tabletop. Archival material is shuffled and sectioned with a cutting knife or pinched and swiped while being played on a tablet. It highlights the role of the table as the surface dedicated to sectioning and physically dissecting the 'bodies of evidence'.

In this configuration, the two axis are at a 90º orientation (perpendicular) from each other, "transform[ing] the table from a physical plane on which objects can be placed to

a surface for visual display“ (De Rosa & Strauven, 2020, p.242). This is a common approach in essay-filmmaking, adopted to record the research process, namely, the filmmaker’s interaction with archival materials, images, or books on a desk.

Secondly, *Notes for a Film* employs a “vertical-vertical” axis, which De Rosa and Strauven associate with “desktop cinema”,[118] in which the computer desktop is used as a working surface and a recording device (camera). Within ‘pure’ desktop cinema, like Kevin B. Lee’s *Transformers: The Premake* (2014) or Camille Henrot’s *Grosse Fatigue* (2013), the entire computer desktop is visible, and various actions are choreographed: opening and closing computer windows, tabs and software. In this mode, the working surface’s axis is oriented vertically, as is the projection screen within the installation. Within the three *Acts,* desktop cinema is employed frequently, however, the screen-recordings of specific computer tabs are layered onto different surfaces (i.e. the table), thus mixing the different working surfaces’ axes.

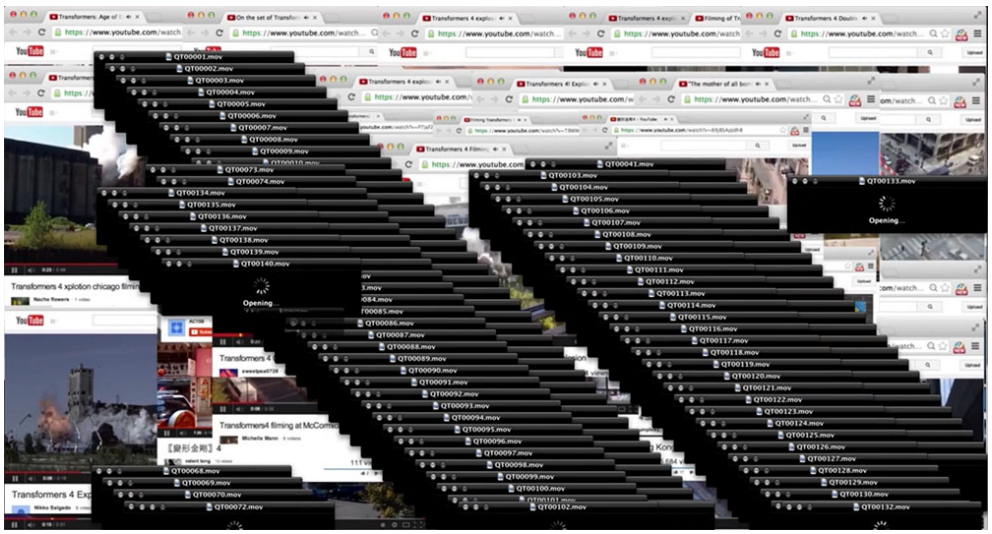


Fig.119 - Kevin B. Lee*, Transformers: The Premake,* 2014, video still.

[118] Miriam De Rosa first used the term “desktop cinema” in 2016 to describe the work of the video essayist and film scholar Kevin B. Lee (De Rosa & Strauven, 2020, p.249). It builds on Lee’s definition of his work as a “desktop documentary” (2014).



Fig.120 - Camille Henrot*, Grosse Fatigue*, 2013, video still.

The final mode De Rosa and Strauven (2020) propose revolves around live performances involving tables, live feeds and a "mixture of analogue and digital gestures" (p.256). It features different axes, multiplying the viewing perspectives. In this configuration, the table becomes a stage, thus resonating with the table's function within the anatomical theatre. Even though the format described by De Rosa and Strauven is not directly applicable to *Notes for a Film,* this work presents a mix of different axes and formats (some enacted physically and some digitally) that take place on the table (the desk or computer desktop, or the layering of both).

In addition, the table's role as a stage is emphasised by its role in research and moving image editing. The desktop, just like the physical table, thus connects the editing and the anatomical theatre's table - the surfaces over which, traditionally, operations of cutting/sectioning take place. If the computer desktop represents the evolution of the desk, as argued by De Rosa and Strauven, *Notes for a Film* further expands this relation by creating a parallel with other operational surfaces that are highly symbolic and significant in this research, like the table at the centre of the anatomical theatre. Amy Strahler Holzapfel (2008) suggests that in the anatomical theatre, the table is also "a spatially symbolic piece of scenery [that] serves as a liminal space, a flat stone or wooden surface, the very rectangular horizontality of which frames the body that lies upon it almost as a pictorial representation" (p.89). Thus, just like the desk and computer desktop, the table is a working surface and a framing device that places the

body at the centre.

4.3 From the Topical to the Systemic

Anatomical inquiry through dissection is divided into two main categories: macroscopic and microscopic. The former includes surface (or superficial) anatomy, which relies on the examination of surface-level features, as well as regional and systemic anatomy, which focus respectively on establishing the function of individual parts of the body (regions like the head or chest) or internal systems (nervous, respiratory, digestive etc.). Microscopic anatomy, instead, involves the study of the tissues and cells that make up all body elements. Surface anatomy does not involve the sectioning of the body but focuses solely on the body's exterior. Its object of study is primarily the human body's outer organ: the skin. And, mostly metaphorically, the notion of skin and the relation between surface/exterior and interior drives the reflections in this research, especially in the installation. *Act I* revolves mainly around this metaphor, but so does the installation itself: a large print of a manipulated image of the anatomical theatre of Padua, appearing almost as if peeling off, encloses the space and represents the first element (surface) encountered by the spectator. The inside of the installation, in bare wood, is both a nod to Padua's theatre and to the rawness of the interior (what lies behind the polished surface).

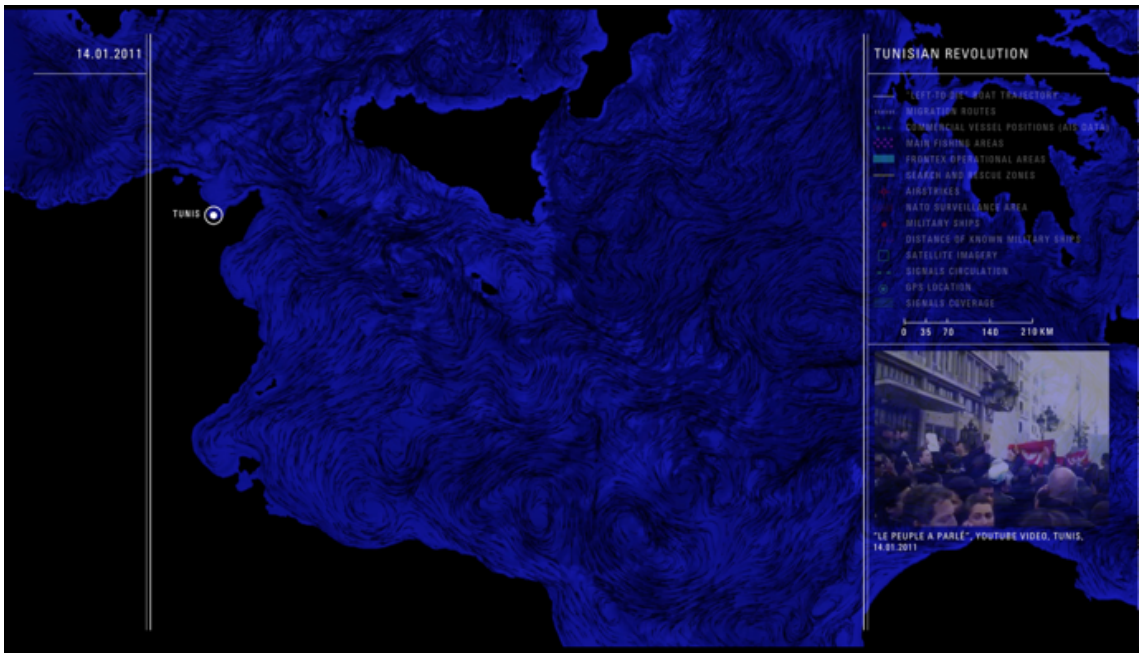
As the body is sectioned by cutting through skin and tissue, different layers are examined to uncover the underlying and inner connections, revealing the hidden systems. Similarly, the three video Acts follow these models: *Act I* focuses on surface and sectioning, *Act II* zooms in, looking at details and magnifying them, while *Act III* looks for systems and relations, zooming out. The relation between inside/outside, visible/invisible and micro/macro is also implied in the relation between the topical and the systemic. Indeed, in medicine, these two terms are employed to draw a distinction between treatments applied to the outer skin layer and those administered internally, tackling specific systems. Both the topical and the systemic are part of macroscopical anatomy. Internal systems, originally only accessible through dissection, are nowadays also visible through technologies such as X-rays and Magnetic Resonance, which allow to peer inside the body without cutting it. On the other hand, both surface and systemic

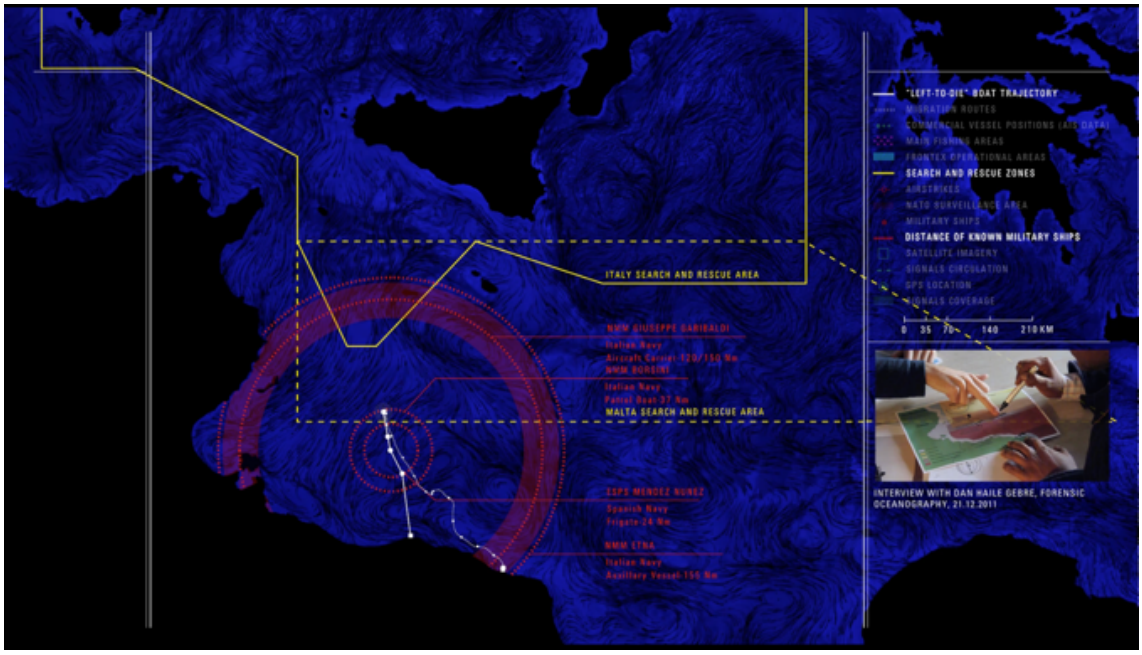
anatomy are aided by microscopical analysis, and the technologies of visions which allow for the magnification of parts of the body, in order to observe their cellular make-up. Even though such binary constructions through the stress on inside/outside, visible/invisible and micro/macro, their interplay wishes to propose a neutralisation of binary thinking, as they are revealed as deeply interconnected to the point of blurring their boundaries and oppositional implications.

In Chapter 3 *topicality* was identified as an attribute of news media and, specifically, of the live news updates. In exploring this value, the first operation that was carried out within the practical component of this research, consisted in the translation of the *newsfeed* into moving images. This operation was based on a premise, that was the thread running through the performance lecture *The Expanded Script*. In the installation *Notes for a Film*, instead, the *newsfeed* is 'translated' in a different way: the original feed from *La Repubblica*'s newspaper (obtained through desktop recording) is overlaid, together with text graphics (the English translation of the news) onto computer-generated backgrounds. This approach takes inspiration from two artworks that, in very different ways, engage with the use of textual information in moving images, both aesthetically and conceptually: Forensic Oceanography's *Liquid Traces* (2014) and Martha Rosler's *If It's Too Bad to Be True, It Could Be DISINFORMATION* (1985)[119].

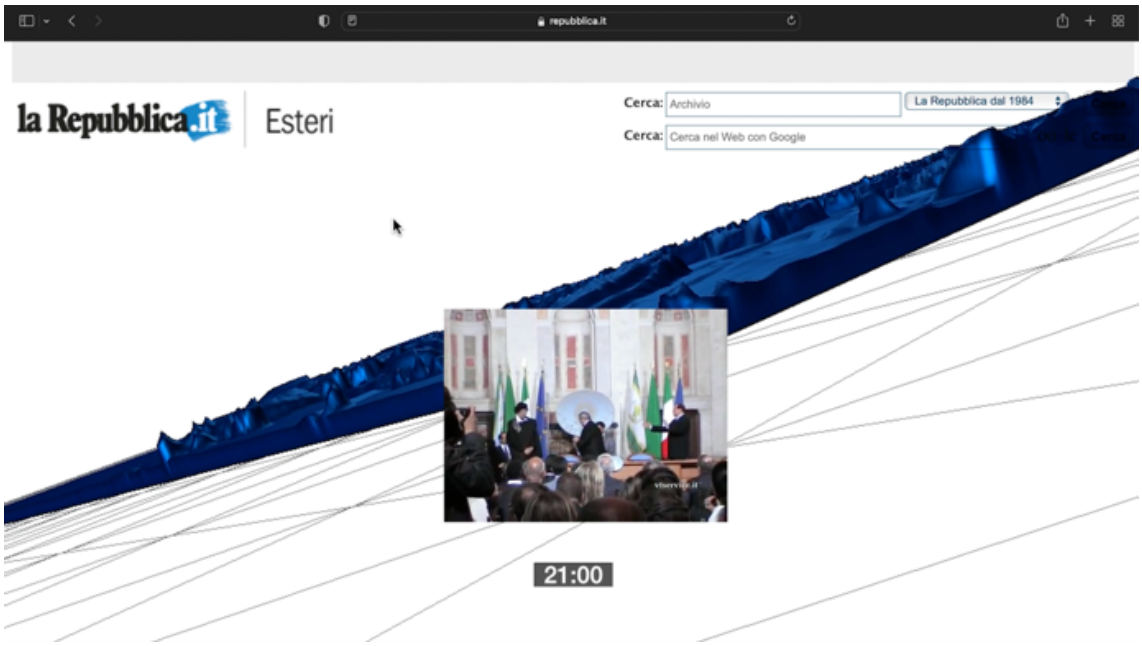
As mentioned in Chapter 2, *Liquid Traces* presents a fixed background image, an illustration that recreates the Coast Guard's surveillance and monitoring system interface. Against this backdrop, a wide range of information is superimposed: from boat distress signals to YouTube videos and visual material shot by the artists. In *Notes for a Film, the video translation of the news presents a fixed interface,* too, with the banner of the newspaper that is embedded on the screen, while the original *newsfeed* (documented through desktop recording) is scrolled through on a computer window that pops up on the screen at different places. The background image upon which these materials are layered changes for each *Act,* portraying the different visuals and narratives of each video (since the three video *Acts* use different approaches).

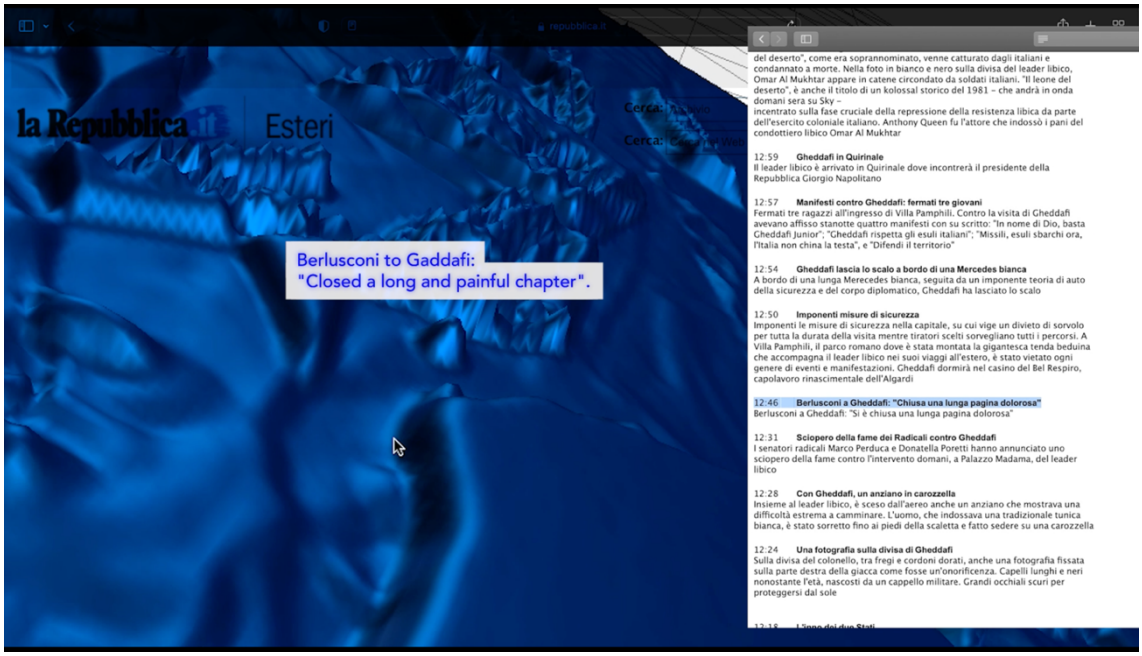
[119] These works were already featured in Chapter 2 and 3 respectively.



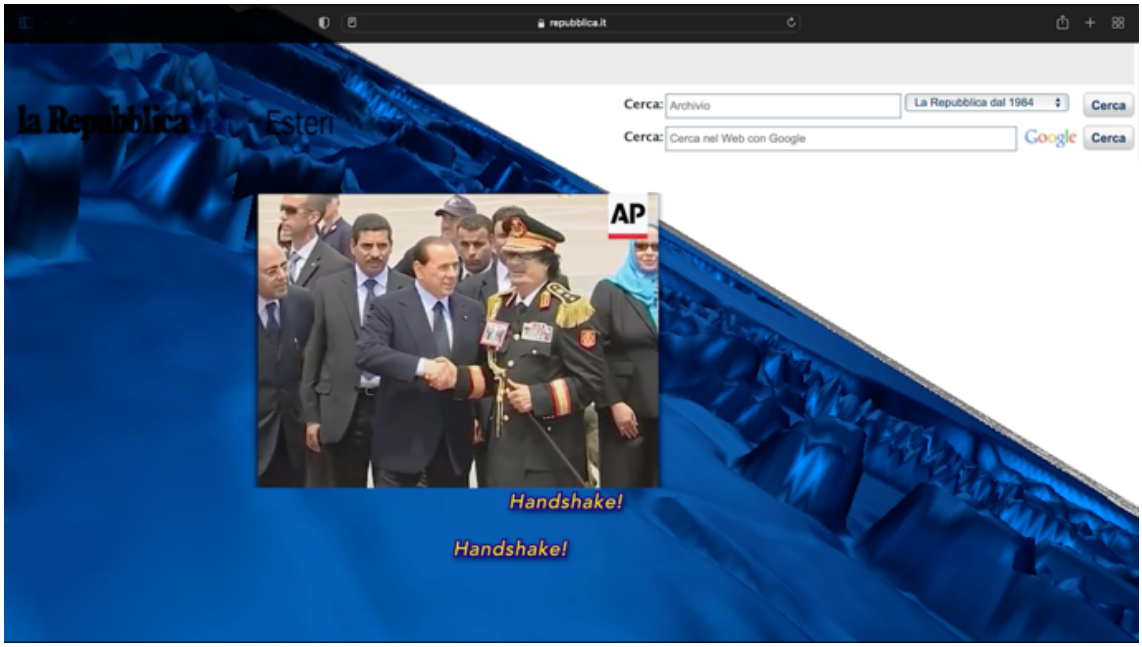


Figs.121-122 – Forensic Oceanography, *Liquid Traces,* 2014, video stills





Figs.123-124 – *Gaddafi in Rome: Notes for a Film, Act I,* 2022, video stills.





Figs.125-126 – *Gaddafi in Rome: Notes for a Film, Act I,* 2022, video stills.

Act I, for instance, focuses on the surface of the spectacle by exploring the surface of the 'iconic' image of Berlusconi and Qadhdhafi shaking hands at Rome's Ciampino Airport. Using online software for creating lithophanes (transforming images in 3D objects), I have manipulated this photograph in order to translate it into a three-dimensional, monochrome, virtual object. Zooming in and out, the new image appears as a topography. By navigating through and across its morphology, it aims to trigger a

reflection on the 'surface of the event' and the attempt to penetrate it. This is not only reflected in the narration of *Act I* but, as already established, it is one of the main focuses of this research. As a result, it is further stressed in another element within the installation, which is part of the second component of the installation – that is, the one encountered after the 'curtain' and before accessing the video projections housed within the installation. These elements work as a sort of prelude to the films and encapsulate the main conceptual frame and aesthetic approaches of the moving images. They include the table (evoking the cutting), a print on textile lying on the table (evoking X-ray vision) [120] and a print on Perspex on the wall (which features a reflective, shiny surface and a picture of a map)[121].

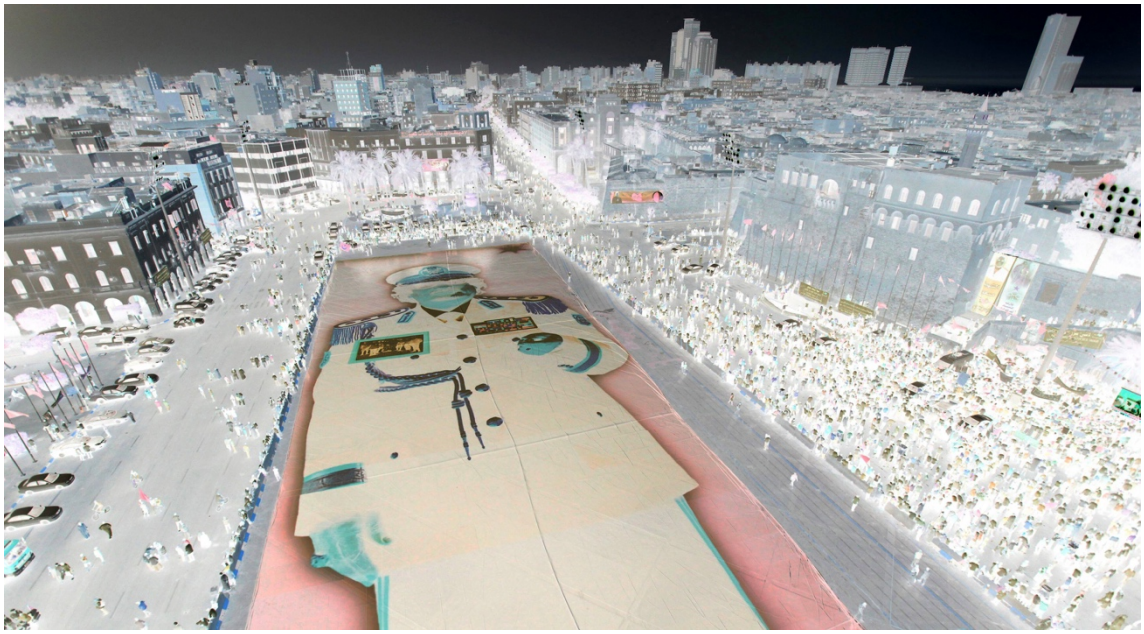


Fig.127 – *Gaddafi in Rome: Notes for a Film*, Maxxi, 2022, image printed on textile and displayed on the table.

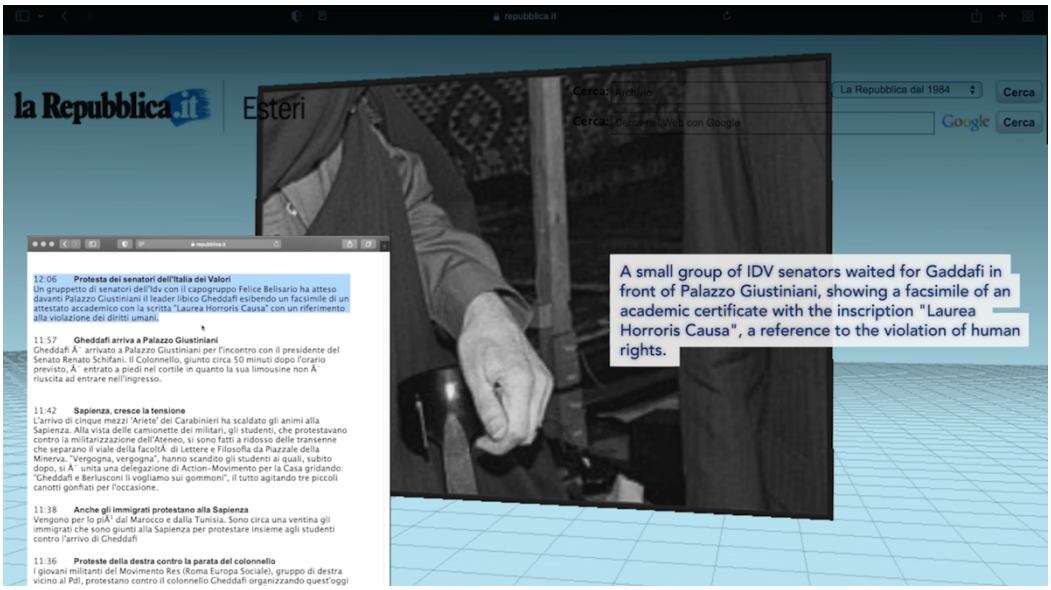
Going back to *Act I,* it should be noted that the translation of the image into a spatial representation is not only dictated by the notion of surface. As argued in Chapter 3, the translation of the *newsfeed* is driven by temporal notions such as speed and acceleration.

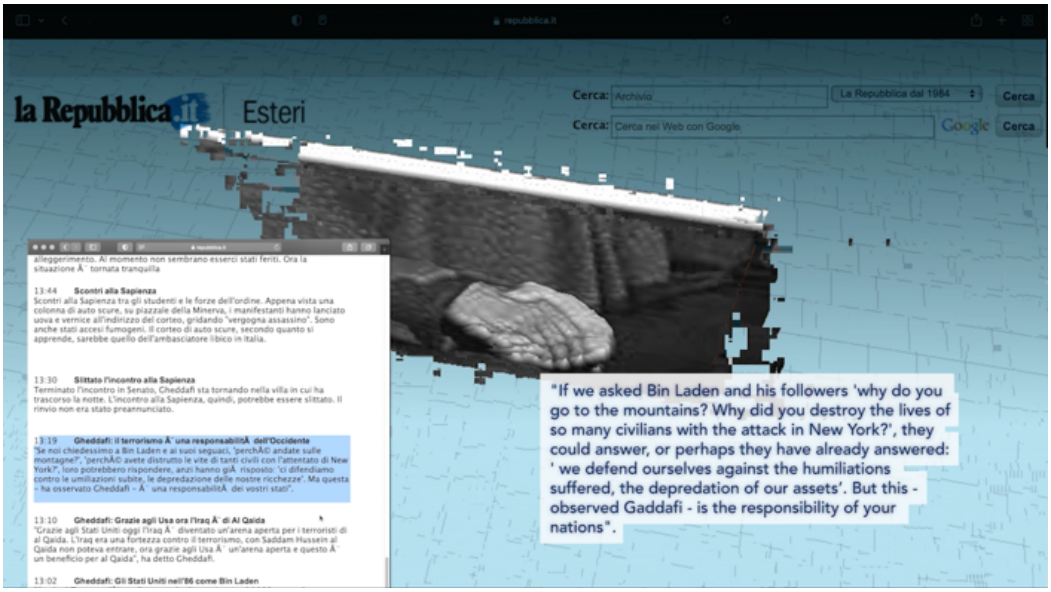
[120] The print on textile consists of an inverted aerial view of Green Square in Tripoli, entirely covered with a photograph of Qadhdhafi in military uniform, with 'Umar-al-Mukthar's image pinned to his chest. That is, a picture taken while he was in Rome. It was installed by Qadhdhafi in 2011 during the Libyan upheaval. A magnifying lens over the textile print highlights al-Mukhtar's image. Inversion is an effect similar to solarization that inverts colours, turning blacks into whites and replacing colours with their complementary colours. It has been used here to recall X-Ray images.

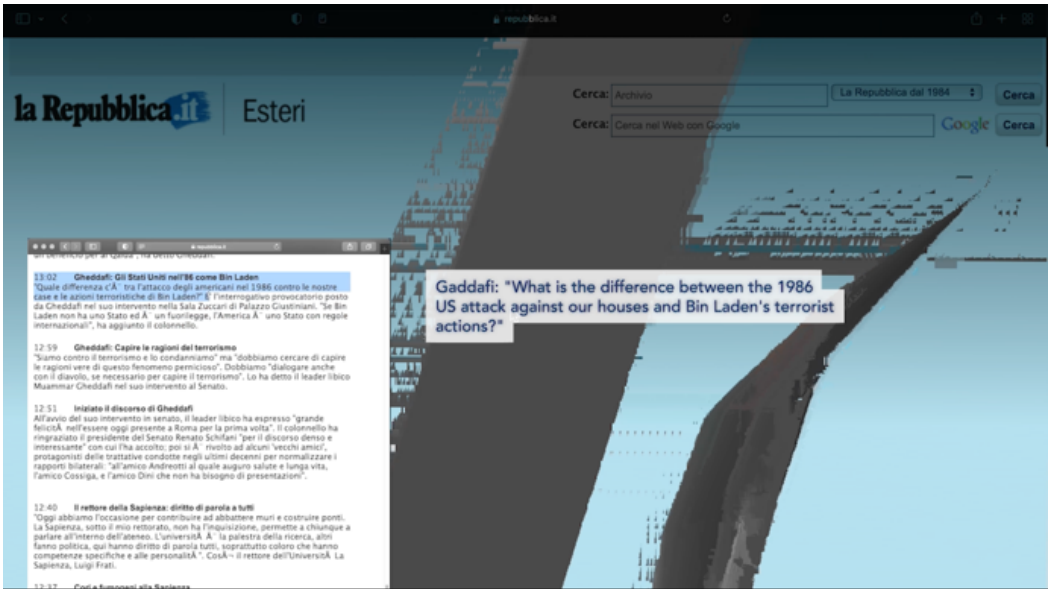
[121] See Chapter 2 where I discussed this image in great detail.

In *Notes for a Film,* contrary to *The Expanded Script*, this is further stressed by the use of the animated text in English and the scrolling text in Italian. Overall, given that the notion of time is generally understood through spatial metaphors (Pérez-Hernández, 2000, p.262), I was interested in manifesting the underlying preoccupation with speed through a focus on spatial motion. As the linguist scholar Lorena Pérez-Hernández (2000) puts it: "human understanding of time is based upon or derived from the experience of space or motion along space" (p.262). As a result, the animations that I have created for the three *Acts* are moulded on the correlation between space and time through an abstract representation of both.

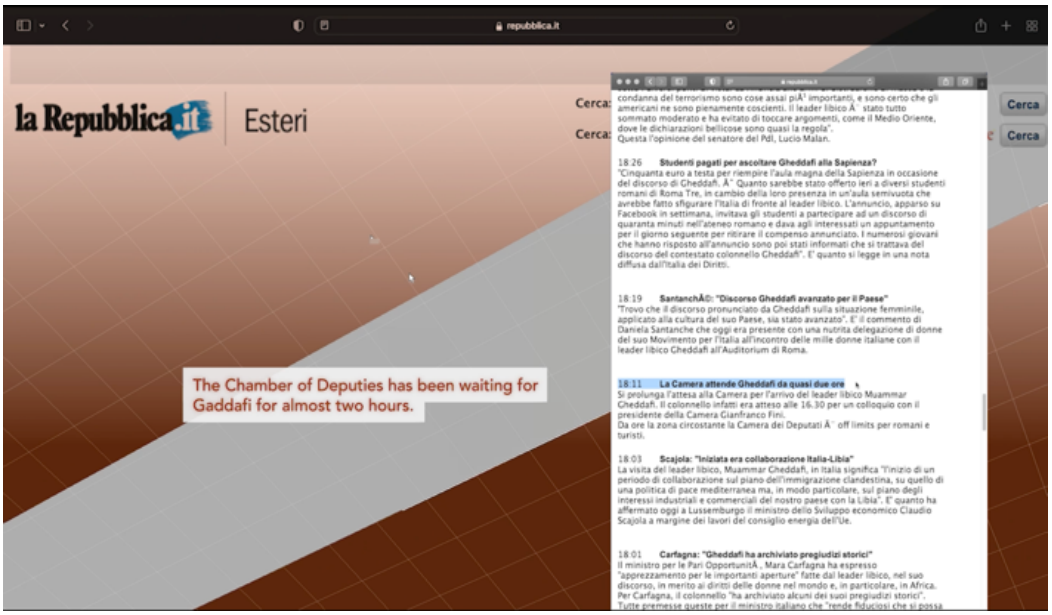
On the other hand, the translation of the *newsfeed* in *Act II* and *Act III* focuses respectively on details and creating a constellation of media images associated with the series of events that make up the Treaty on Friendship between Italy and Libya. Using different online software for creating lithophanes, they focus on the relationship between Qadhdhafi and Italian political leaders. They portray a timeline of the other spectacles that have led to and followed the Treaty. *Act II* presents a series of details – mostly hand gestures - picked out of these media photographs (a period that stretches from 1998 to 2010). *Act III* places these media images in relation, creating a chain and inverting the photos (like in the textile print set over the table). This image effect is also applied to *Act III* to mimic X-Ray's visual imagery. The images in *Act III,* thus, strive to present a systematic configuration in which different events are placed in context while stressing colonial continuities. *Act II,* instead, focuses on 'getting closer', hinting at microscopical vision.

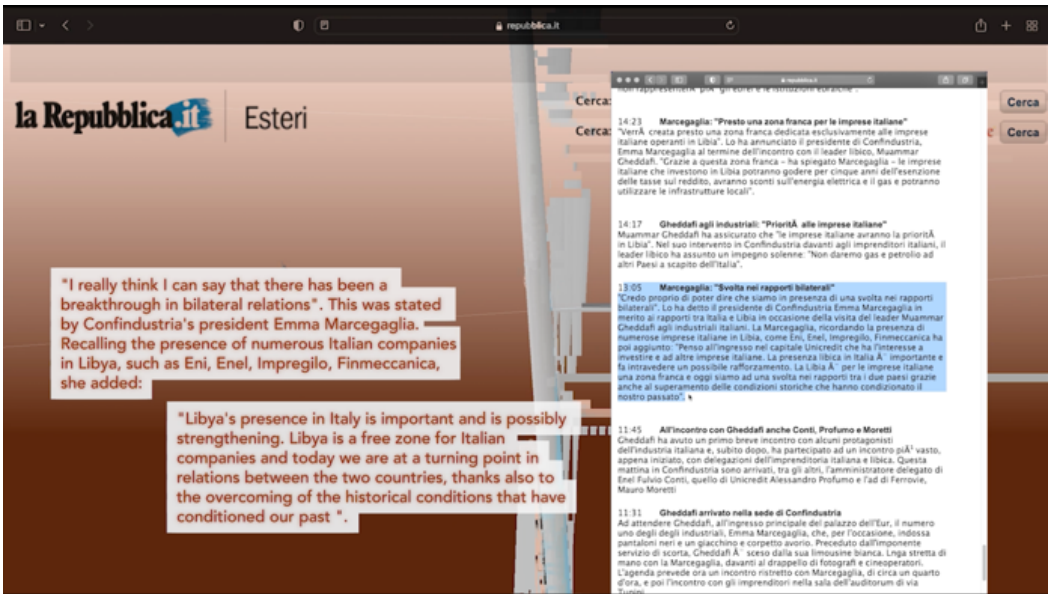


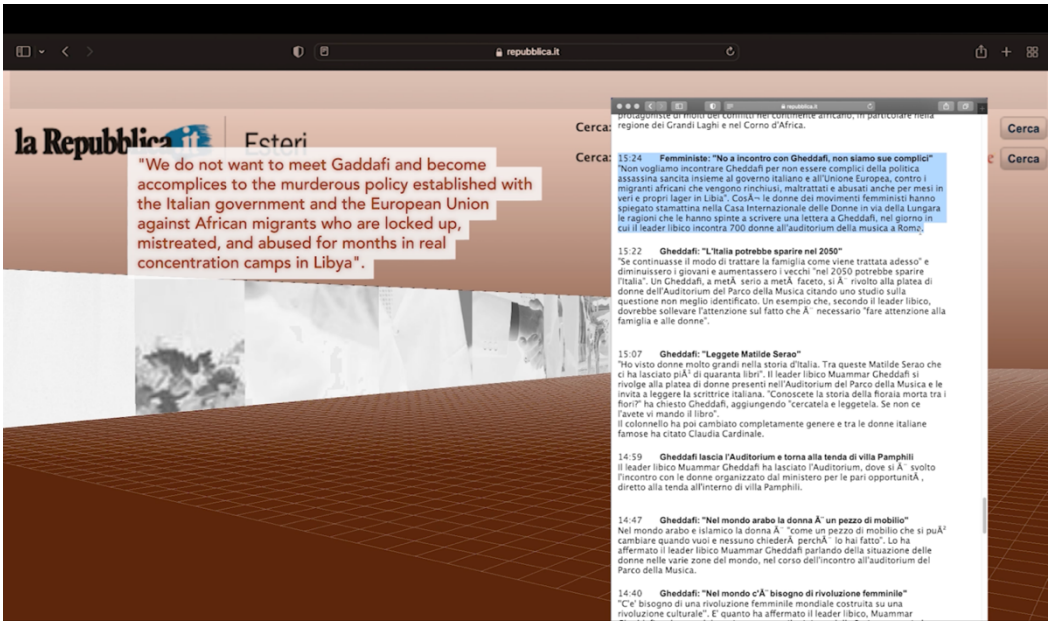




Figs.128-130 – *Gaddafi in Rome: Notes for a Film, ACT II,* 2022, video stills.







Figs.128-130 – *Gaddafi in Rome: Notes for a Film, ACT III,* 2022, video stills.

The animations created for these two *Acts* are connoted by glitches in the recording process (that is, they are not made on purpose but are contingent). These errors create ruptures in the flow of the images, adding noise and distortions. As Sean Cubitt (2017) notes, glitches "not only foreground the technical infrastructure but intervene in the production of signification" (Cubitt, 2017, p.30). In this understanding, the glitch interrupts the general flow. In breaking the illusion of wholeness or the simulation, it brings to the fore the infrastructure that sustains the production of information: it reveals the structure beneath the surface. This, once again, echoes the preoccupation of this research and the relation between the topical and the systemic. Rosa Menkman, in her study of glitches, also elaborates on this notion by stating that:

> the glitch does not just take place on a critically ruined surface. The choice to accept the glitch, to welcome it as an aesthetic form, means to accept a new critical dialectic that makes room for error within the histories of 'progress' (Menkman, 2011, p.44)

Glitches, thus, also acquire a temporal dimension: they are intended as disruptions to the flow of time and history, understood as parables of progress. Moreover, colloquially, glitches in memory are also envisioned as disturbances of the capacity to recall. They are 'hiccups', distortions that compromise one's ability to remember accurately. Using glitched images in sequences that present a timeline of the Treaty on Friendship, featuring many Italian politicians, is also intended as a metaphor for the malfunctioning of the process of remembering. Thus, once again alluding to the colonial aphasia connoting Italian colonial memory. At the same time, resonating with Menkman, glitches are also embraced to disrupt a history of progress and its linearity, which is understood as a history of Western/Italian hegemony.

This strategy was inspired by Martha Rosler's video *If It's Too Bad to Be True, It Could Be DISINFORMATION* (1985), in which the artist uses news text, distortion and glitching. This work inspired me to abandon the use of archival material in the background, as in *The Expanded Script,* since it created a distraction from the *newsfeed*'s text. Rosler's use of distorted news footage with fast-paced and fragmented news text has influence me to rethink the translation of the *newsfeed*. In *Notes for a Film*, intermedial translation is further explored by engaging with the news more

thoroughly, creating a specific visual language that aims to visualise its temporal/spatial qualities.

In the performance-lecture the animated parts dedicated to the translation of the *newsfeed* were called *Acts* and separated by the reflexive parts, the *Counteracts.* In the installation, the *Acts* are composed of both the animated parts and the counter narrations. They are broken down into smaller segments and interwoven. Each *Act* in the installation plays with the anatomical metaphor (surface, microscopic and macroscopic) on different levels, both within the animations that translate the *newsfeed* and within the counter narrations. They are shaped through the interplay between different layers and modes of looking, generating meaning through shifting perspectives and technologies of vision.

Operations of translation and visual representation organised through a tension between scale and temporalities, are also explored by Matthew Fuller and Eyal Weizman (2021) in their conceptualisation of "investigative aesthetics". They state:

> There is a huge epistemological, temporal and geographical space to be traversed from the detail of the incident to larger historical contexts. The investigative work moves between the scales of the local, politically and culturally entrained, to vast geographies and histories. Combining the detail of the incident with wider forms of understanding requires bringing together different forms of knowledge that can also often test each other. To trace evidentiary threads requires labour and care. (2021, pp.13-14)

As can be noted in this definition Fuller and Weizman identify an "incident" as the starting point of contemporary art practices concerned with visualising processes of inquiry. That is, an event that sets the research in motion, opening up a wide breadth of investigative threads involving different geographies, histories, and political and cultural contexts. This research, in much the same way, takes as its starting point what I refer to as the "inciting incident" (Chapter 2) – the image of 'Umar al-Mukhtar pinned to Qadhdhafi's chest – and the specific event which it disrupts. This localised event triggers a series of reflections that crosses various temporal dimensions as well as fields of inquiry: from historical to geopolitical, ideological and technological.

Fuller and Weizman's work is preoccupied with notions of truth and evidence and the work of Forensic Architecture (the agency founded by Weizman). However,

investigative aesthetics as an umbrella term, is preoccupied with different kinds of artistic productions that ensue from a practice-based research process and that are socially and politically motivated. That is, they do not only consider forensics as part of this trend.

Forensic Architecture works on international human rights violation cases, developing highly complex and politically sensitive projects. Their work is based on the presentation of evidence to a court of law. It is aimed at the justice system: it is directed to the state, through a "counter-forensics" [122] that "returns the forensic gaze". In other words, it appropriates the tools of the legal process to challenge the legal apparatus. Through this subversion, it exposes how forensic tools are employed to sustain the production of state violence, while turning them against it. Their installations for art museums and galleries document and illustrate their counter-forensic process, relying on data visualisation and explanatory modes of address.

Even though this PhD research is not forensic, they are both rooted in investigate aesthetics. Moreover, since post-mortem autopsy is a forensic tool, they do overlap and share some preoccupations and tools. In *Forensic Architecture – Violence at the Threshold of Detectability* (2017) Eyal Weizman (2017) makes an important distinction between the words forensic and *forensis*, which is relevant to this research. *Forensis* is a Latin word that means "pertaining to the forum" (Weizman, 2017, p.65). As he notices, in Ancient Rome the forum "was a chaotic and multidimensional domain" in which a wide array of items and issues were presented, from small objects to abstract elements like territories, wars, or empires. These, as he writes, "had to be made vivid by the power of representation or aural demonstration - by what Quintilian referred to with the rhetorical trope of 'prosopopoeia' - the attribution of a voice to inanimate things" (Weizman, 2017, p.65). Forensic Architecture conceives *forensis* as a conceptual framework employed to define their practice "as a mode of public address and a means of articulating political claims using evidence grounded in the built world", despite its roots in imperial Rome (p.65).

[122] Counterforensic is a concept first coined by Thomas Keenan building on a proposition by Allan Sekula.

Dissection, however, does not share Forensic Architecture's central preoccupation with evidence and truth. Rather, it is more concerned with the spectacular and pedagogic aspects of medical anatomy. The tools that are borrowed and subverted, are not involved in a juridical framework. It is a practice based on self-reflexivity and a personal viewpoint. Nevertheless, investigative aesthetics provides a framework for *dissection* that places within a wider, contemporary preoccupation with visualising practice-based research.

Chapter 5

PRACTISING *DISSECTION*

Vision is always a question of the power to see –
and perhaps of the violence implicit in our visualizing
practices. With whose blood were my eyes crafted?

(Donna Haraway, 1988, p.585)



Fig.131 – John Berger sectioning a canvas, *in Ways of Seeing*, episode 1, 1972 (BBC).

Introduction

This chapter builds on Chapter 4 to elaborate on the practical applications of *dissection* within this research. Since *dissection* is conceived as a series of tactics rooted in the *essayistic*, this chapter will provide an overview of these tactics. The first task of this chapter is to clarify how the *essayistic* has been understood in *Gaddafi in Rome.* Thus, the first section, *The Essayistic,* explores its relationship with the essay and the essay film. It will focus on Pier Paolo Pasolini's essay film production, which revolves around the *notes-for-a-film-to-be-made* format. Unmade and meta-filmic, this format will provide the first tactic. I will also engage with Harun Farocki's installation work (the so-called soft montages). The filmmakers analysed here have developed specific forms of critical analysis and a gestural vocabulary that I have drawn on for the development of *dissection*. Departing from a focus on media, I will argue that the *essayistic* is rooted in the act of translation, building on Nora Alter's work to consider issues of display and spatialisation. Therefore, this section is not concerned with defining the essay film or the *essayistic* - complex tasks that escape the scope of this research. Instead, it builds on Papazian and Eades's proposition to illustrate how the *essayistic* has been deployed in this research by engaging with tropes associated with essay filmmaking and notions of media translation.

The chapter will then focus on the roles of the *sector*, *ostensor* and *lecturer.* In the second section, *The* Ostensor *and the* Sector*: on Gesturality*, I will delve into the *sector* and *ostensor* by unpacking how these roles have been conceptualised and deployed in the practical outputs of this research. These figures' symbolic meanings and interrelations have directly shaped the film's aesthetics and narration, with one specific figure – the *ostensor* – gaining centre stage. The *ostensor* and the *sector* will be analysed together as they both rely on gesturality.

The last section *The* Lecturer*: from Reflexivity to Accountability* focuses on modes of enunciation and positioning developed by the figure of the *lecturer* (understood here as an embodied narrator). It builds on debates on self-reflexivity to propose a series of considerations around the way I have positioned myself during the development of this research. Arising from a confrontation with different aspects of this research, I will provide examples of how I have attempted to propose a framework for politically

positioned, self-reflexive practice that strives for accountability. This will be argued against the condition of 'untranslatability' of the term accountability in the Italian language. The tactics that I will propose are highly context-specific and responsive to this research's geopolitical context and my positionality.

5.1 The *Essayistic*

The essay film has gained prominence in the twenty-first century[123], especially within the artistic community.[124] The publication of a series of seminal texts by Anglophone film scholars such as Laura Rascaroli, Timothy Corrigan, Nora Alter, and Michael Renov has contributed to the popularisation of the essay film. This literature has attempted to define this "mode" (Rascaroli, 2008, p.39), intervening in a history of vague and, at times, contrasting understandings of the format. Overall, they have provided a set of loosely defined attributes that film scholar Rick Warner has summarised as:

> a hybrid combination of fiction and nonfiction; the prominent display of the film essayist's subjectivity through voiceover and/or physical self-portrayal; an open-ended structure and manner of expression that often relies on an eclectic montage of both found and newly shot material; a self-reflexive disposition regarding the techniques used and goals pursued; a leftist political stance that may range in tone from activism to more tentative rumination; and a rhetoric of "direct address" that looks to build a collaborative bond with an especially alert spectator. (2018, pp.3-4)

[123] See Paul Arthur's (2003) claim that "the essay has emerged as the leading nonfiction form for both intellectual and artistic innovation" (p.58), also quoted by Laura Rascaroli (2008) when arguing about the "recent proliferation" of essay filmmaking (p.24). More recently, Vassilieva and Williams (2020) have argued that the "essay film is in the spotlight", following a steady popularisation of this mode during the previous 25 years (p.11).

[124] The essay film's lineage is intertwined with visual artists' experimentation with moving images. Most notably, the work of Hans Richter - and his text "The Essay Film: A New Form of Documentary Film" (1940) - is considered an early example (Rascaroli, 2009; Corrigan, 2011; Montero, 2012; Alter and Corrigan, 2017; Alter, 2018). According to Michael Renov (2004), Jonas Mekas' *Lost, Lost, Lost* (1969/1976) is also another key example. The last decade has also witnessed a surge in visual artists that are engaged in exploring this hybrid format, itself a result of the so-called 'documentary turn' of the 2000s (Stallabrass, 2013; Demos, 2013; Balsom and Pelag 2016). The way contemporary visual artists have experimented with the essay film mode, has been explored in Laura Rascaroli, *How the Essay Film Thinks* (2017) and Nora Alter, *The Essay Film After Fact and Fiction* (2018).

However, Warner cautions against these efforts in defining the essay film since they have produced a canonisation that has undermined the rebellious and undogmatic ethos of essay filmmaking (Warner, 2018, p.4). If the body of work developed in this PhD draws on many of what Warner defines as the canonical attributes of the essay film, it does so through a further hybridisation. Through the notion of the *essayistic*, this research wishes to acknowledge and endorse the essay film's elusiveness, its willingness to push the constraints of definitions and formats, and the political potential that this porosity implies.

As urged by film scholars Elizabeth A. Papazian and Caroline Eades (2016, p.3), a focus on the *essayistic* allows one to bypass questions of genre associated with filmmaking since the essay, whether literary or cinematographic, is not tied to one. In *The Essay Film: From Montaigne, After Marker* (2011), Corrigan puts forward a definition of the *essayistic* that aims to go beyond the essay film. He refers to it as "a kind of encounter between the self and the public domain" materialised in many formats (or media) "in which narrative or experimental structures are subsumed within the process of thinking through a public experience" (Corrigan, 2011, p.6). Thus, Corrigan departs from an analysis of style or form to locate the essence of the *essayistic* in its mode of address and relation to an audience.

Papazian and Eades, instead, identify the *essayistic* with a "set of conditions: dialogue/metadiscourse; experiment/experience; and utopia/impossibility" (2016, pp.2-3). The latter, they argue, is conceived either "in aesthetic, technological, or social terms." (2016, pp.2-3). These three *essayistic* conditions are inherent to the attempt to create a film that cannot be made, which drives the practical outputs of this research.

The *notes-for-a-film-to-be-made* format is a trope of essay filmmaking best exemplified by the Italian filmmaker Pier Paolo Pasolini's essay film production from the late 1960s, which has been a central reference for the development of *Notes for a Film*. During this period, Pasolini directed four films playing on this trope: *Location Hunting in Palestine* (1965), *Notes for a Film on India* (1968), *Notes Towards a Novel on Garbage* (1970), and *Notes Towards an African Orestes* (1970). Their metafilmic formats create an open-ended narrative since note-taking inherently points to a form that is incomplete, fragmented and lacking a closed narrative structure. As film scholar Luca

Caminati notices, these films are connoted by an open format that "reflects the pedagogical aspect of Pasolini's political engagement, which is never didactic but serves as the demonstration of an open-ended process" (Caminati, 2016, p.135). In addition, Pasolini's writing is also marked by fragmented, open-ended, unmade, or unfinished works (Rascaroli, 2009, pp.150-151). In deploying the *notes-for-a-film-to-be-made* trope, Pasolini seems to reproduce the creative devices he used in his writing: extensive editing, revisions, and erasures (Attanasio, 2015, p.60). As claimed by Elisa Attanasio (2015), this is possible because he is the sole author of the film (as camera operator, narrator, interviewer, and film editor), with full and continuous access to and control over the editing process (p.60). This is revealed in the opening scene of *Notes Towards an African Orestes*, which begins with Pasolini's image reflected in a shop's window as his off-screen voice announces his intention to record "notes" (Attanasio, 2015, p.60).



Fig.132 – Pier Paolo Pasolini*, Notes Towards an African Orestes,* 1970, film still.



Fig.133 – Pier Paolo Pasolini*, Notes Towards an African Orestes,* 1970, film still.

Rascaroli (2009, p.146) calls this type of essay film "the notebook film" and defines it as a "draft for future films" that discloses the process and gestation of the work since "it records the process of thinking". *Notes for a Film* and *The Expanded Script* share these characteristics with the notebook film, being metafilmic, unfinished and open-ended. *Notes for a Film's* open-ended format, which follows the *newsfeed* closely, is amplified by the installation format that may preclude audiences from experiencing the films linearly (from *Act I* to *Act III* and from beginning to end). The performance-lecture format, moreover, allows for constant revisions. As a result, *The Expanded Script* has been updated several times to reflect the developments in Italian and Libyan relations.[125]

The practice of exposing the filmic process and revealing the construction of a film (or the hypothesis of making a film) has often been adopted to tackle political subjects that might be controversial to represent or to frame with a defined narrative (Rascaroli, 2009). In *Ici et Ailleurs* (*Here and Elsewhere*, 1976), the Dziga Vertov Group (Jean-Luc Godard, Jean-Pierre Gorin and Anne-Marie Mièville) make use of such tropes to reflect on a previous, unfinished film they had shot to support the Palestinian liberation struggle. Their approach is highly critical of their initial intentions, and it problematises

[125] The last and final update was made in November 2021, when it was video recorded.

the difficulty of editing the footage shot while in Palestine from a distance (France), that is, away from combat and removed from the political context where it was produced. Hence, the tension between the notions of *here* and *elsewhere* provided in the title. The flaws inherent in this retrospective and remote sense-making condition are exposed in the film. Therefore, the impossibility of grasping the original intentions and events is caused by post-producing both at a temporal and physical distance.



Fig.134 - Dziga Vertov Group, *Ici et Ailleurs,* 1976, film still.

The documentary material (footage, images, newspaper clips) is activated and physically manipulated, presenting a gestural process of interrogation, reflection, and knowledge production.[126] This approach greatly resonates with this research's engagement with the *archive of coloniality* and has been a source of inspiration for devising different modes of interaction with the material that I have collected.

Driven by the objective of making a film that cannot be made, these works are based on an impossibility: they cannot achieve what they set out to realise. Thus, this aspect represents a utopian drive. As the voiceover narration (my voice) spells out, this

[126] These gestures and tropes are of central importance in the realisation of the performances for the camera that features in *Notes for a Film* and will be further explored in the next section.

impossibility results from the very "partial perspective" (to quote Donna Haraway) of the narrating subject (myself).

Framing the notions of "impossibility/utopia" and "experiment/experience" is the understanding of the essay's function as a 'test', given that the word essay derives from the French word *essai*, which means 'trying out'. Michel de Montaigne first used it in *Essais* (1580) to describe a series of brief texts conceived as 'attempts' striving to test different ideas and literary forms.

Likewise, this research and its outputs have been developed as a series of *tests*. It started with the goal of producing a single-channel essay film that would 'test' the possibility of turning the *newsfeed* into a script. It has also focused on the translation of this film into another medium – an installation. At this initial stage, this translation was envisaged to test the film in the exhibition space, thus physically expanding it and transforming the single-screen video into a multi-channel, spatialised form. However, during its development, this process was reversed. Firstly, the performance-lecture and then the multi-channel installation were created as 'attempts' or steps towards the realisation of the single-screen film. The latter, however, was never produced, and it took on the status of an unreachable or, to put it in Papazian and Eades' terms, an impossible/utopian output. It represents a utopian drive – an idealised or visionary work that cannot be realised but that constitutes the driving force of this research. Corrigan (2016) has referred to the essay as a "rhetorical organisation" (like the literature essay and the essay film) and to the essayistic as an *inflective* practice that "defines and distinguishes, as it defers to, another practice." (p.15) Thus, transmediality (or the extension into other media) is intrinsic to the term *essayistic*.

In the article *Translating the Essay into Film and Installation,* Nora Alter (2007) argues that the audiovisual essay is generally conducive to audience engagement because of its multi-layered composition that requires the audience to actively "translate" the work[127] – what she considers an active process of co-production (Alter, 2007, p.54). Taking Harun Farocki's audiovisual installations as an example, she argues that this process is based on the complexity of the message being put forward (Alter, 2007, p.53). Framed

[127] I do not agree with Alter's use of the term *translate* here. In my understanding, the analysis or the deciphering of a multi-layered message or text are just that and do not constitute an act of "translation".

by the notion of *soft-montage,* Farocki's installations are characterised by multiple screens and by an absence of an overarching narration. He defines this form of montage as "soft" because it presents compilations of loosely related imagery on multiple screens that are juxtaposed in the space, thus requiring a further effort to be connected by the viewer (Farocki in De Genaro & Callou, 2016) As Alter (2007) notices, this approach "allows for an increased flexibility and openness of the text for the spectator – associations are suggested but not formally mandated" (p.53).

As explained by Farocki in the text *Cross Influence/Soft Montage* (2009, p.72), his first intention with using a split screen was to recreate the viewing experience of the video editing suite. During the editing process, the filmmaker's gaze is always divided between two screens (the preview and the edited footage). However, only one image/screen is fully visible to the filmmaker at a time. Farocki's main preoccupation is with translating the process of editing into the gallery and museum space, which implies a departure from the single-channel film form and the cinematic theatre.



Fig.135 - Harun Farocki, *Deep Play,* 2007, installation (soft montage).

Translating the essay and the essay film into spatialised and live formats, such as installation and performance-lecture, transforms the relation between the work, the

author (artist/filmmaker) and the audience. When considering *The Expanded Script* and *Notes for a Film,* the multiple screens, the installation elements, the layering of images, voiceover, sound, and my presence (either recorded or live) require the audience to be involved in decoding and participate in sense-making. These works, however, do not imply the type of openness of *soft-montage* since they have an overarching narration and a more linear format reminiscent of the essay film.

Nora Alter delves into the relationship between translation and the essay film by drawing on Walter Benjamin's seminal essay *The Task of the Translator* (1921). Here, Benjamin defines translation as a mode, "a means of rendering, interpreting, or elucidating" (Alter, 2018, p.14). For Benjamin, translation disrupts the original text's unity and produces an "echo of the original" (Alter, 2018, p.14). Yet, drawing on Adorno's understanding of the literary essay as a fragmented text, Benjamin argues for the necessity of the translator to move freely without being tied down by literal meaning. Alter (2018, p.15) sees this freedom as a distinctive feature of the essay filmmaker/artist, who "can opt to transfer certain elements and leave others behind. As a result, the new 'essay' may bear only a fragmentary resemblance to the original, but that does not make it any less faithful" (Alter, 2018, p.15). Thus, the essay's inherent translatability allows the *essayistic* to exist as a practice that always points to another text (visual or literal, existing or striven for). It "echoes the original" while cherishing the gaps in meaning inherent to acts of translation: it retains and multiplies the fragmentation of the original.

By *essayistic*, thus, this research conceives a series of translations in form, medium, and space (in terms of physical expansion into the gallery/museum), through which a text gets activated and multiplied to explore and fulfil a utopian drive. By utopian drive, it understands a wish to achieve a form or more ambitious aims that are yet unattainable. Its physical transformation does not constitute a betrayal of the original text; rather, as argued by Alter, it maintains a faithfulness to the original, albeit demanding a different mode of engagement from the audience – which, in turn, opens up new (medium-specific) possibilities for reading/decoding the text. Within this framework, thus, the *essayistic* is experienced through the fragmentation and multiplication of the text and a focus on presence and embodiment: it emphasises the relationship between bodies within the physical space they occupy (the installation) and onscreen. And between the

body of the audience and that of the author (myself), whose situated and connoted presence is made explicit and central.

5.2 The *Ostensor* and the *Sector*: on Gesturality

As discussed in Chapter 4, in mediaeval anatomical spectacles, three figures were involved in the performance of public dissection: the *lecturer*, the *ostensor,* and the *sector*. The *lecturer* stood on a raised throne and read from classical scientific texts. Beneath the *lecturer*, the *sector* cut the body while the *ostensor* pointed to the location of the incision. Thus, the *ostensor* had an illustrative and communicative function, creating a dialogical relation between all the subjects involved in the dissection. It connected all the bodies within the anatomical theatre through gesturing: the performers, the audience, and the corpse. Such a demonstrative act can also be considered a process of translation – making the instructions given by the *lecturer* legible to the *sector* and the audience. This relation, however, is also based on a hierarchy: the *lecturer* was the expert while the *sector* - generally a barber or surgeon - had a lower status. The *ostensor* was their link but was consigned to the same plane of the *sector* beneath the elevated seat of the *lecturer* (and close to the stench of the corpse).

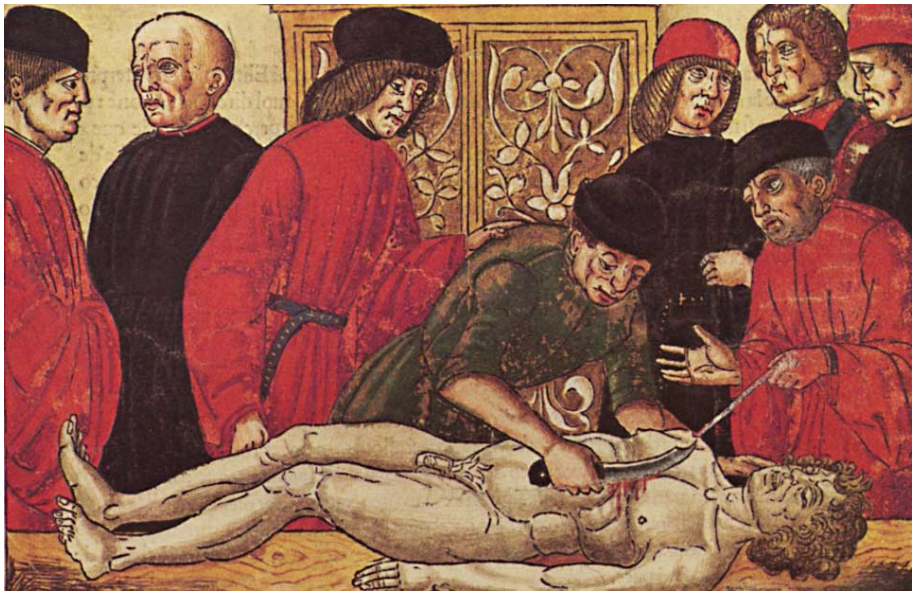


Fig.136 - Italian late medieval dissection from *Fascicolo di medicina*,1493. Detail.

In the performance-lecture *The Expanded Script,* I am confined behind a desk, placing the focus on my voice and the two screens rather than my body. At regular intervals, however, I pointed to specific images on the screen to connect my voice, the material analysed, and the audience. In other words, the *ostensor* was deployed to link the text, the narration, the visuals, and the audience. *Notes for a Film,* instead, features a more balanced and developed use of the three roles. In this work, I feature onscreen performing specific actions, either through a focus on hand gestures or moving across the public space in silence. That is, I am present through choreographed actions that take place outside of the realm of speaking.



Fig.137 - *Gaddafi in Rome: Notes for a Film, Act I,* 2022, video still.

The *sector* appears clearly in *Act I,* in which a knife (reminiscent of a scalpel) cuts through photographs. The narration also refers to this action's symbolic meaning: piercing through the surface. As Jonathan Sawday (1995) notes, in both its medical/literal meaning and its metaphorical use as a synonym of analysis, dissection consists of a "violent reduction into parts" (p.1). Sawday points out that within satirical or literary dissection, this is undertaken to "render powerless the structures within which the dissector's knife is probing" (Sawday, 1995, p.1). In *Act I,* the *sector* carries out different cuts, including the beheading of the two political leaders. It also attempts to

excise ‘Umar al-Mukhtar from the Fascist officers surrounding him. The *sector* appears through disruptive gestures that lift specific elements from the images to bring them to the foreground. In doing so, the sectioning also allows to direct the focus and isolate details. As a result, sectioning also points at elements, thus being intertwined with the role of the *ostensor*.

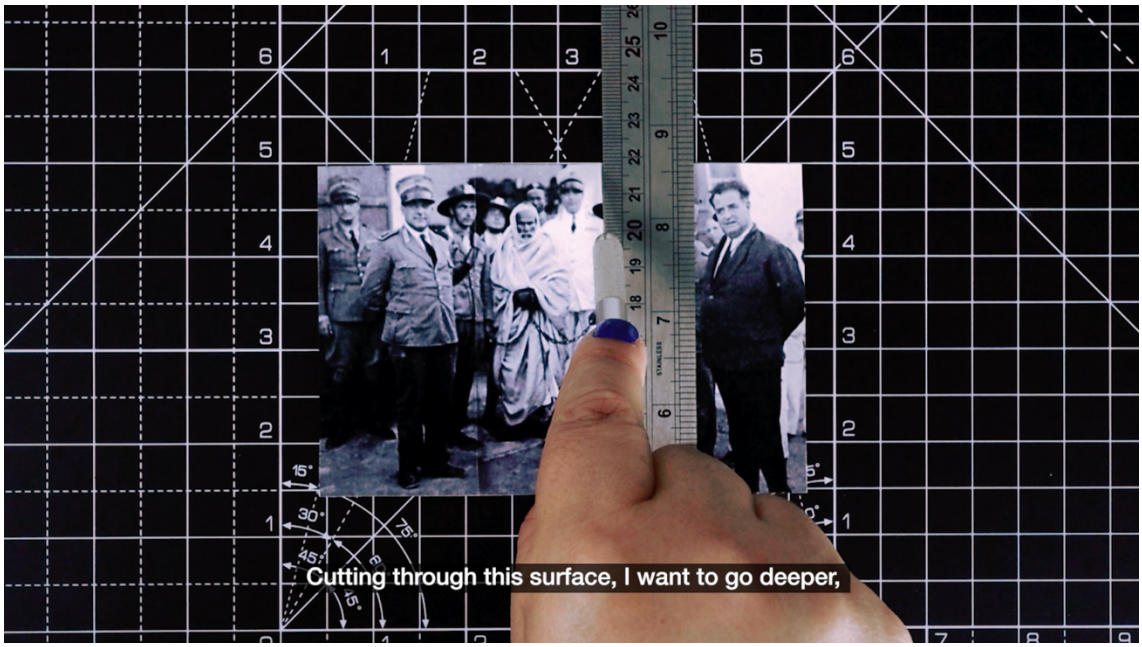


Fig.138 - *Gaddafi in Rome: Notes for a Film, Act I,* 2022, video still.

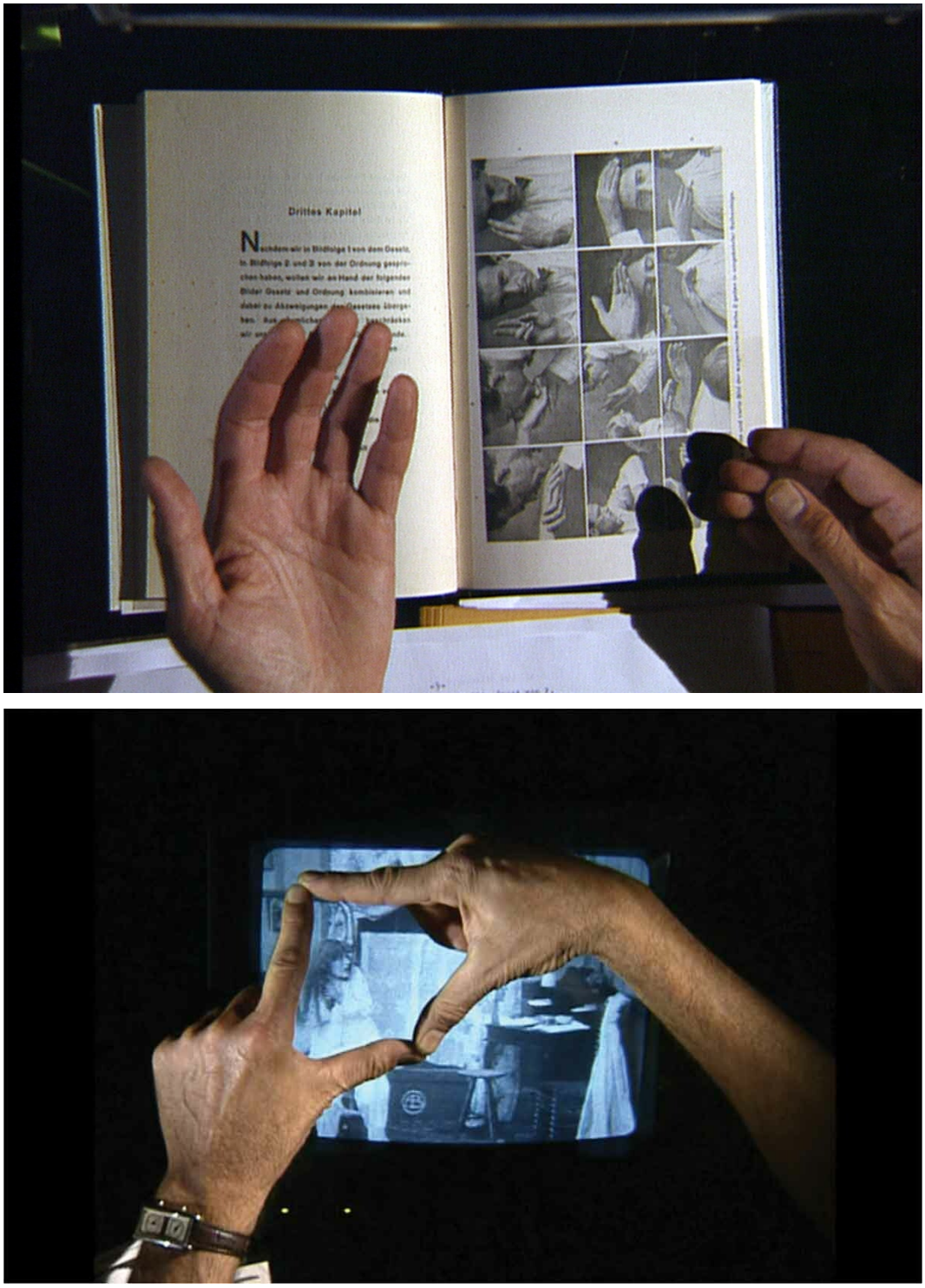
To analyse the role of the *ostensor*, I first wish to clarify the etymological meaning of this term that may be unfamiliar. *Ostensory*, or *ostensorium,* is synonymous with the word *monstrance* (the container of the Host, the Roman Catholic Church’s sacrament), which mean “to show.” (Cambridge Dictionary, no date).

Yet, *ostensory* also means “stretched out to view” and is closely related to the word *ostensible,* meaning: “1.outwardly appearing as such; professed; pretended…2.apparent, evident, or conspicuous” (Collins English Dictionary, no date). Lastly, these terms are related to the word *ostentation:* “1.pretentious or conspicuous show, as of wealth or importance; display intended to impress others. 2.Archaic. the act of showing or exhibiting; display” (Collins English Dictionary, no date).

In communication theory, *ostension* stands for pointing, while an *ostensive definition* refers to pointing towards examples. It follows that the word *ostensory* is strictly related to the act of showing and displaying, as well as the act of seeing and explaining. Thus, the ostensive can be considered the central function of the late Medieval anatomical theatre, which was both a space for demonstration (teaching) and entertainment (spectacle). As Amy Strahler Holzapfel points out, the theatres built from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment were "spectacle and commodity-driven enterprises" designed "for the viewing pleasure and voyeurism of their selective audiences." (Strahler Holzapfel, 2008, p.3).

As considered earlier (Part II), Giuliana Bruno (1993) has also pointed out the link between anatomical and cinematic theatres. In addition, cinema is historically linked to gesturality. The first motion pictures created by Eadweard Muybridge, Etienne Jules-Marey, Louis Le Prince and Louis Lumière were either studies in motion or portrayed the body in motion. Philosopher Giorgio Agamben, in *Notes on Gesture* (1992), claims proximity between gesture, philosophy, and cinema. This is related to the way gesture reveals "the being-in-language of human beings as pure mediality" but also the inability "to figure something out in language" (Agamben, 1992, p.58). Gestures inhabit a contradictory realm: they facilitate or enhance spoken communication and, at the same time, indicate a loss for words, an inability to put something into words.

Gestures are a central preoccupation of Harun Farocki's *essayistic* practice. In a recent article, the film scholar Henrik Gustafsson (2021) defined Farocki's work as a "chiro-praxis" since he "understand[s] Farocki's filmography as a whole in terms of a lexicon of gesturing hands" (p.2). On the other hand, as Farocki points out (Farocki & Ernst, 2004, p.275), gestures also have the potential to betray facial expressions and an individual's apparent intent to reveal true, hidden intentions. Farocki's analysis of gesturality in the film *The Expression of Hands* (1997) begins with scrutinising a film depicting an act of pickpocketing. Filmed within the editing suite, in *The Expression of Hands,* Farocki appears onscreen examining various film clips, his hands staging careful movements of pointing, and framing. This film is striking in its exploration of gesturality in the history of cinema through the deployment of Farocki's lexicon of gesturality. *The Expression of Hands* also represents his last physical appearance in his films.



Figs.139-140 - Harun Farocki, *The Expression of Hands,* 1997, video stills.

Farocki featured himself onscreen consistently from the beginning of his filmmaking career in the late 1960s. During his residency at the Farocki Institut's archive, Kevin B. Lee produced a series of video essays analysing Farocki's body of work. In *Harun Farocki: Presented* (2019), Lee surveys Farocki's presence in his own films, noticing how initially Farocki appeared as the interviewer or listener but progressively moved to

the edge of the screen until he focused primarily on hands. Lee suggests that the hands of the subjects that Farocki films stand as a visualisation of ideas (*Harun Farocki: Presented,* 2019). This shift then leads Farocki to become more concerned with gesturality (including his own) and, according to Lee, with the performing of work. In *Images of the World and the Inscription of War* (1989), self-presentation is no longer concerned with dialogue, listening to an interviewee, or communicating directly to an audience. Instead, this is "a body in deep absorption with its materials" (*Harun Farocki: Presented,* 2019), a process that renders the body immaterial, or, to use Lee's words: "reduced to a collection of parts. Parts that in turn become gestures. Gestures that become images of study in themselves." (*Harun Farocki: Presented,* 2019).

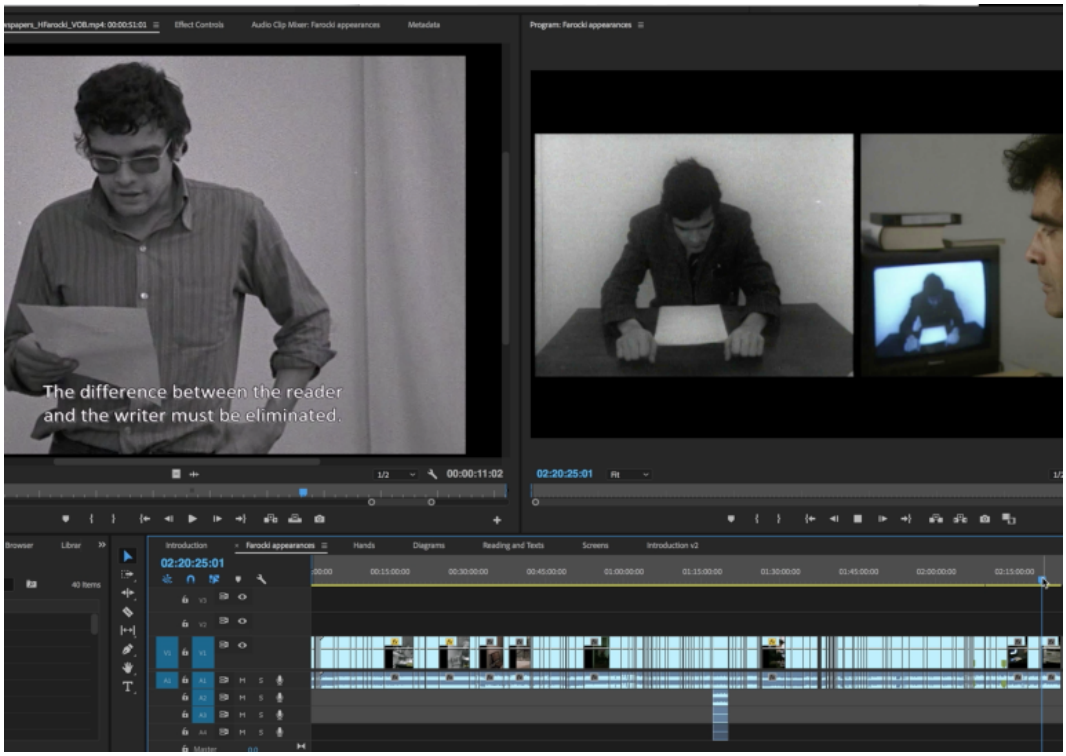


Fig.141 – Kevin B. Lee, *Harun Farocki: Presented*, 2019, video still.

In *Images of the World and the Inscription of War* we can witness an operation of sectioning, of cutting, isolating the hands from the rest of the body, while Farocki's voice accompanies, analyses or complements such gestures. *The Expression of Hands* is also emblematic of this process. It begins with Farocki investigating the relation between hand gestures and facial expressions through the analysis of both the close-up shot and the way meaning is created through the 'cut' in montage. Farocki argues how cinema has evolved from its early use of wide perspectives to a focus on close-ups,

which emphasises and singles out gestures and expressions. Thus, the close-up is also a form of pointing: it indicates and directs the gaze towards a detail. At the same time, creating a close-up in editing is an act of sectioning: a cut that reduces into parts and isolates specific elements. That is, it conflates the sectioning with the ostensive.

In *Notes for a Film, Act II,* this notion of the close-up as a practice of pointing is further explored through the microscopic gaze (Chapter 4). This is carried out through the use of manigifying glasses through which I filmed small elements like stamps and through zooming into images on a tablet. A mix of digital and analogue devices have been employed, for instance, in using a magnifying glass over a tablet. This *Act* plays with different understandings of the close-up.

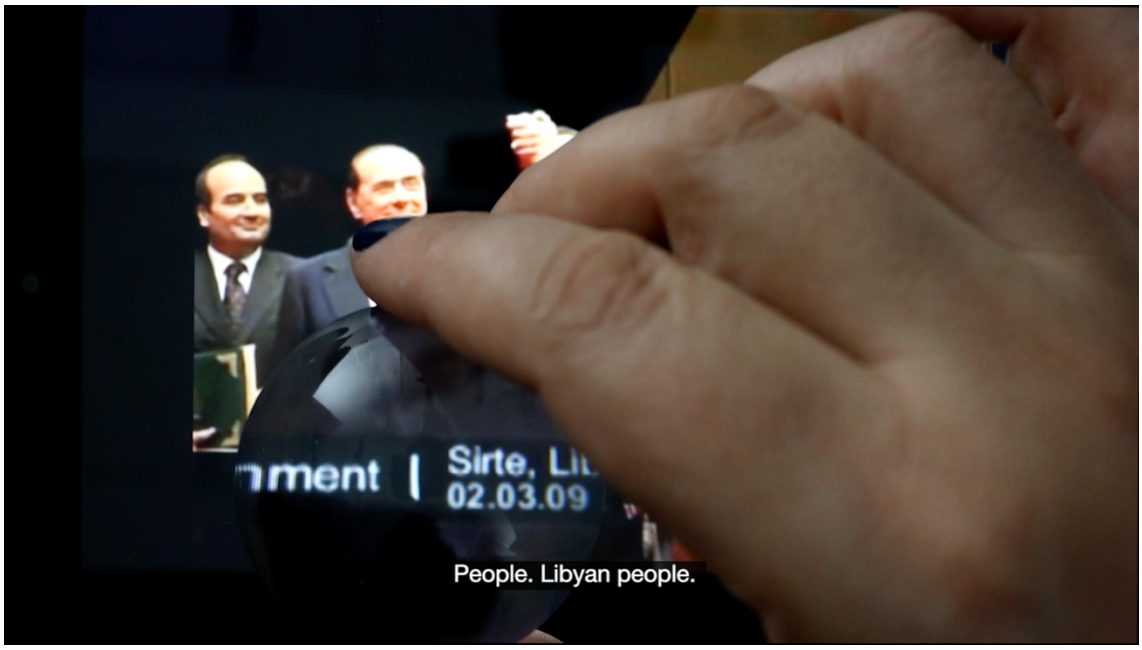


Fig.142 - *Gaddafi in Rome: Notes for a Film, Act II,* 2022, video still.







Figs.143-145 - *Gaddafi in Rome: Notes for a Film, Act II,* 2022, video stills.

In the essay *Gestures of Seeing,* Grønstad, Gustafsson and Vågnes (2016, p.3) point out the ambiguity and difficulty of defining what a gesture is as it moves across many borders: the discursive and the instinctual, the culturally specific and universal, the corporeal and the visual. In addition, they note that within the visual arts, "the gestural appears to be that which intervenes between form and content, materiality and meaning" (Grønstad, Gustafsson &Vågnes, 2016, p.3). They add:

> As a mode of mediation the gestural also traverses the distinct, albeit interrelated spheres of the political, the aesthetic and the everyday. A space of visual articulation in which rhetoric and semiotics intersect, the gestural produces movements and energies of eloquence capable of generating ideas, perceptions and affect. (Grønstad, Gustafsson &Vågnes, 2016, pp.13p-14)

Their understanding of gesturality, thus, goes beyond the act of pointing: the gestural is a symbolic communicative dimension. For Miriam de Rosa and Wanda Strauven (2020), moreover, gesturality involves the entire body, including that of the viewer: it refers, they write, "to both the performative acts and the situatedness of the human body", which applies "to the author or creator of the artwork" and "the viewer as active subject" (p.235). Such relation between filmmaker and audience is also implied in Vilém Flusser's understanding of gestures as inherently intentional (as opposed to any movement) and based on interpretation (the interlocutor must read/decode its significance). The question of intentionality within an artwork, thus, brings out the issue of stagedness: the hand movements are planned, rehearsed, and symbolic (Flusser, 2014). Their meaning must be easily decodable by the viewer, or gestures fail to communicate. Flusser (2014) observes: "gestures express and articulate that which they symbolically represent" (p.4).

Notes for a Film is centred around gesturality, in its deployment of the *ostensor* and the *sector,* as well as in its subject matter and investigation. As a whole, this research focuses on a very striking gesture: the handshake between Silvio Berlusconi and Mu'ammar Qadhdhafi. Specifically, in *Act I* of *Notes for a Film*, a large space is devoted to analysing this image and the expressions as well as the gestures that connoted the arrival of Qadhdhafi in Rome. The works also consider how Qadhdhafi's use of 'Umar al-Mukhtar's picture as a protest (by pinning it to his chest) caused outrage in the Italian political class not because of what the image portrayed but because of Qadhdhafi's gesture of defiance (Chapter 2). The staging – rather than its message –

was considered a breach of diplomatic etiquette and so an offence. By unpacking (*dissecting*) this encounter between the two politicians, *Notes for a Film* considers how diplomatic relations are performed through the bodies of the leaders. It presents a close reading of their expressions and movements to speculate on their intentions, thoughts, and complicity. That is, what is hiding behind the artifice of a staged ceremony of friendship between nations (between a former colony and its former occupier). These specific gestures of friendship are also explored in the translation of the *newsfeeds* into moving images (analysed in Chapter 4). Particularly, in *Act II* and *Act III*, the images showing the genealogy of the Treaty on Friendship feature different meetings between Qadhdhafi and Italian politicians, exchanging handshakes and other reciprocal gestures of friendship. *Act II* zooms into the hand gestures and makes this focus apparent. The film includes other crucial considerations on Qadhdhafi's gesturing as mentioned by the newspaper *La Repubblica* (i.e., in *Act II,* when the news updates describe Qadhdhafi's raised fist while meeting the mayor of Rome, Gianni Alemanno). In contrast, as the voiceover contextualises the meeting and the news updates, this moment is juxtaposed with archival footage documenting Alemanno's election as mayor a year earlier. In this case, a very symbolic gesture (prohibited by the Italian constitution) was the focal point: the roman salute.

The analysis of political and ceremonial gestures is then framed by an array of gestures I have performed in front or behind the camera. The hands cut, point, and manipulate archival material. They pinch and scroll the surface of a tablet. They are also interwoven with performances in which I stand or move in Rome, playing the film *Lion of the Desert* on a tablet pinned to my chest, framed by a red case that recalls Qadhdhafi's use of al-Mukhtar's image. In the performance, I hold the tablet with my hands; I tap on it to start and stop the movie. I point at it. I walk across other bodies (tourists, passers-by) who look unphased, almost not noticing my action and the camera that follows me.





Figs.146-147 - *Gaddafi in Rome: Notes for a Film, Act II,* 2022, video stills.





Figs.148-149 - *Gaddafi in Rome: Notes for a Film, Act II,* 2022, video stills.

5.3 The *Lecturer*: From Reflexivity to Accountability

In the first section of this chapter, I have adopted Elizabeth A. Papazian and Caroline Eades's definition of the *essayistic* as a "set of conditions: dialogue/metadiscourse; experiment/experience; and utopia/impossibility" (2016, pp.2-3). I then assessed the *notes-for-a-film-to-be-made* format's experimental, metadiscursive, and "impossible" dimensions. I now wish to address the "utopian" aspect of the *essayistic,* building on

the reflections and choices made during this research to propose an *accountability-based framework,* which I can keep working towards and aspire to.

In the last section, I have focused on the roles of the *ostensor* and the *sector,* analysing how my hands appear onscreen regularly, cutting, pointing, shuffling documents, or interacting with objects. The voiceover – or the *lecturer* - instead, is off-screen and is the most dominating presence in both practical outputs. In *Notes for a Film,* the three *Acts* feature the voiceover superimposed on shots of my hands, conveying a subjective rather than neutral tone. Speaking in the first person and mainly in English (my second language), it does not reproduce the authoritarian, disembodied 'voice of god'. My foreign accent, in particular, functions as an identity marker. In *Thinking with an Accent,* Pooja Rangan et al. (2023, p.2) note that accents can be loosely understood as a demarcator of power relations and reinforcements of alterity by alluding to geographical, economic, and social differences. They suggest that accents mobilise the listener's imagination to picture "vocalic bodies that exceed the control and the calculations of the speaker" (Rangan et al., 2023, p.3). At the same time, the authors warn about the potential deceptiveness of accents since they do not entail anything particularly specific or exhaustive about the off-screen speaker (Rangan et al., 2023, p.4). If, on the one hand, my Italian accent indicates my mother tongue, on the other, it cannot satisfactorily explain where I am speaking from and my relationship with the context. For example, it does not disclose any social class marker or my racial identity. Performing in front of the camera and revealing my body thus became a crucial strategy to counteract some of these ambiguities. However, the sequences in which I speak are separated from those in which I perform. In the latter, I walk silently across Rome and pose in front of different architecture while I play extracts from the movie *Lion of the Desert*. Even though these clips and my voice provide information about me and are a step towards situating myself, little can be deducted about my positionality from my accent and physical presence.

In *Notes for a Film* the voiceover scrutinises the images, the language used by the media, and the intentions of the politicians, proposing links and connections between historical events. As the narrator, I ask open questions and reflect on the "imagined community" (Anderson, 2006) I belong to. The narration places me within this collective body (the 'nation' as Anderson would have it), to investigate its ideological

foundations. For example, I identify myself with a collectivity that is responsible for the Libyan genocide through the statement "That is, my people" (*Act I,* timestamp: 7':07"), namely, I locate my position within the predominantly white Italian body politic. The full passage reads:

> *I know there is no way of knowing the truth, but still, I ask myself what it must have felt like to Mohammed, to be paraded in front of a people that tried to annihilate his entire tribe, the Senussi. A people that is now oblivious to this genocide. This people, that is, my people.* (*Notes for a Film, Act II* – extract, timestamp 06':46")

As I reflected on Mohamed al-Mukhtar – 'Umar's son – rather than on highly symbolical public figures (Berlusconi, Qadhdhafi, and 'Umar), it was important to relate to Mohammed in a more direct and accountable way. As a result, I wanted to acknowledge that this is my heritage and, as such, I bear a historical responsibility towards it. In such passages, I interrogate my positionality, thus creating a self-reflexive narration. At the same time, it was crucial not to dwell too much on this, since I was conscious of the possible risk of turning a statement of admission into a self-exculpatory narrative. As I have written in a previous article:

> positioning must be understood as a foundational practice: it is something that, from an ethical and political point of view, must always be accounted for. Yet, positioning should not be intended as a confessional act that washes away all sins – namely, a tactic to cleanse the researcher/artist from accountability and obliquely restore white privilege. Indeed, positioning cannot be used as a disclaimer or stand as a performance of white guilt (Ferrini, 2020, 140).

According to Laura Rascaroli (2017), the essay film is denoted by a self-reflexive voice that "does not inhabit the same off-screen space as the voice of God of traditional documentary because it does not ascribe to and, indeed, it undermines its position of separation and the unidirectionality of its approach" (p.117). For Rascaroli, the *essayistic* self-reflexive voice is driven by a sceptical and critical stance that doubts itself as it performs subjectivity. It is a searching voice that discloses the process of investigation (Rascaroli, 2017, p.117).

Likewise, the voiceover of *Notes for a Film* has followed a similar set of parameters to construct a self-reflexive narration. Besides the strategies of incorporation just

mentioned (my accent, my hands, and my body), I have attempted to insert self-doubt[128] to offer personal reflections and disclose the process of investigation. This is articulated, for instance, in *Act II,* when I reflect on the word 'people':

> *People. Libyan people. I dwell on these words. On the way they are used time after time, to refer to those that for Italian audiences are but a fuzzy concept. As I attempt to get closer, to dissect this political spectacle, I am aware of the limits of my sight. And how imposing my presence is in this film. In trying to make sense of this event, perhaps I am just trying to make sense of myself - and this history of violence that defines me, and my people.* (*Act II* – extract, timestamp: 04':25")[129]

In the social sciences, self-reflexivity is commonly employed as it is considered a method to keep researchers' biases in check, reducing the risk of reproducing unethical power relations and hegemonic knowledge (Pillow, 2003, p.176). Thus, it has been considered an ethical framework for research. However, some scholars have also pointed out that it can be deployed to legitimise researchers (Pillow, 2003 and 2015; Berry & Clair, 2011; Emirbayer & Desmond, 2012, Lumsden, 2019), impose a new "disciplinary mechanism" (Lumsden, 2019, p.3), or to reinforce colonial and unethical framings (Pillow, 2003, p.185).

What has been raised as a point of concern is the use of self-reflexivity in a way that focuses on personal experience without considering the "wider disciplinary, institutional, and political context(s) in which reflexivity or being reflexive takes place" (Lumsden, 2019, p.3). In so doing, self-reflexivity could reproduce and reinforce systemic oppression and hegemonic positions. As Emirbayer and Desmond (2012) put it: "When the systemic dimension of identity is not grasped, self-reflexivity fails" (p.591).

As a result, the work that I have produced in this research must be analysed against the contexts I inhabit and the institutions it has traversed – namely, the Italian artistic context, which has been the most influential. A striking aspect of Italian artistic and

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[128] This aspect is stronger in *The Expanded Script* but features also in *Act I,* i.e.: *"Cutting through this surface, I am going deeper, beyond the limits of my gaze.*" – timestamp: 15':19".

[129] Please refer to Chapter 4 for further context and for an image of this section, which portrays my reflection in the tablet, mimicking Pasolini's shot at the beginning of *Notes for an African Orestes*).

cultural spaces is that they are overwhelmingly dominated by whiteness (in terms of their workers and audiences) as well as by a general lack of awareness about the Italian colonial past (see Chapter 1). When I present my work in these spaces, I am generally met with an absence of questions about my positionality, which I believe is a direct result of this situation. This has also highlighted how cultural producers are rarely held accountable for their work and research, which, in turn, fosters uncritical and unethical artistic productions.

In November 2017, one month after starting my PhD and two years after producing my first film investigating the Italian colonial past, I co-authored an article for Flash Art Italia magazine. It closes with this reflection:

> La scena artistica italiana è inoltre ancora un luogo di incontestata bianchezza, dove manca una comunità in grado di renderci *responsabili* – dinamica fondamentale per l'identificazione e lo smantellamento di meccanismi culturali così radicati. E l'unica via per la costruzione di un vero discorso postcoloniale.
>
> [The Italian art scene is still a place of uncontested whiteness, where a community capable of holding us *accountable* is lacking - a fundamental dynamic for identifying and dismantling such entrenched cultural mechanisms. And the only way for the construction of a true postcolonial discourse.] (Ferrini & Frangi, 2017, p.89 – my emphasis)

Such a preoccupation has accompanied my practice and has shaped this PhD. Notably, when I wrote this article, I was faced, for the first time, with the challenge of translating the word *accountable* into Italian.[130] Commonly, as in this passage, it is translated as *responsabilità* (responsibility); however, this is inaccurate. Similarly, the Italian expression 'rendere di conto', which comes close to the English 'to give an account', also does not convey the full range of meaning that the English expression holds. It can allow for some degree of translatability, but it cannot be used in any way to translate the noun 'accountability' or the notion of 'being accountable'. In these cases, it is translated as 'responsibility' and 'being responsible', again lacking accuracy. Such a linguistic gap has also been addressed by Accademia della Crusca, the linguistic regulatory authority

[130] A clarification: the article was published in Italian but I wrote my contribution in English, as I usually do, since I am not able to write in academic or formal Italian. Having left Italy at 18 years old after frequenting a vocational art school, I have never developed this skill. Ironically, I am now getting more fluent in academic Italian, at the expenses of my English.

in Italy, that is, the institute for studying and supervising the Italian language. Academia della Crusca has released a statement in February 2022, penned by Edoardo Lombardi Vallauri, about this matter. It reads:[131]

> The verb to account essentially means 'to explain' [‘spiegare’], 'to answer for something' [‘rispondere di qualcosa’], i.e. 'to give account' [‘rendere conto’]: note that in this last expression, Italian uses the same lexical root as English, that of counting. The abstract derivative accountability means the ability to account for [‘rendere conto’], to explain, to answer for what one does. Therefore, it means taking responsibility (this abstract noun, of French origin, is etymologically linked to the Latin verb respondēre, 'to answer') for one's actions.
>
> However, the sense of accountability is not identical to that of responsibility. Otherwise, the problem posed by the readers would not exist. In fact, accountability is the quality of one who is responsible not only overall and undifferentiatedly ('if I am wrong, I pay') but also step by step, in the sense of being from the outset ready to provide explanations for every aspect that makes up one's overall actions. This composite sense applies well to complex situations in which responsibility does not concern a simple event but an articulated and organised process. […] How then to translate this term, which means the prior assumption (spontaneous, or even imposed from outside) of a commitment to be accountable for all the steps of one's actions, making them knowable, explaining and justifying them, and bearing the possible consequences of their being questioned or sanctioned? (Lombardi Vallauri, 2022).

From this statement, it follows that the difference between the concepts of accountability and responsibility[132] put forward by Accademia della Crusca implies that accountability is part of a pragmatic process articulated through language (not only as an acknowledgement but as an explanation that details causes and effects, faults and responsibilities) as much as action (an actionable plan to compensate for any wrongdoing). In this understanding, accountability is a calculated action that has been consciously considered throughout a complex process. Yet, the same could be said about being responsible, which can also involve a preliminary calculation of what behaving responsibly means.

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[131] I have translated the most relevant parts into English here maintaining the Italian words in brackets. The original text in Italian can be accessed here: https://accademiadellacrusca.it/it/consulenza/come-possiamo-tradurre-accountability/11093

[132] These terms are very complex and at the centre of complex philosophical and juridical theories. Providing a thorough definition escapes the scope of this research. I will limit my reflection to the statement made by Accademia della Crusca and in relation to specific aspects of my research.

The difference between accountability and responsibility in the definition provided by Accademia della Crusca, I argue, is to be located in the specific context associated with the former: law. The notion of consequences and sanctions, or what is a question of answerability, are linked to a juridical/disciplinary framework. On the other hand, responsibility is a much broader term that extends to different contexts and is not necessarily associated with situations of contention (i.e., someone can be responsible for good deeds or operations). As a result, responsibility can also be used metaphorically or in more abstract ways.

According to political philosopher Antonio Y. Vazquez-Arroyo (2016), accountability and answerability are "surrogates", part of a vast constellation of meanings associated with the term responsibility (p.66). In his retracing of the history of the notion of political responsibility, Vazquez-Arroyo argues that it has become an increasingly prominent preoccupation, which is part of a broader ethical turn (Vazquez-Arroyo, 2016, p.43) that stemmed from the post-World War II transitional justice process[133] (Vazquez-Arroyo, 2016, p.44). As considered in Chapter 1, in Italy this period was characterised by the Togliatti amnesty of 1946.

Amnesties have been broadly understood as a denial of accountability (Jeffrey, 2014, p.4) due to the lack of persecution. In *The Justice Cascade*, Kathryn Sikkink (2011) defines accountability as a process requiring "some actors [to] hold other actors to a set of standards and impose sanctions if these standards are not met" (p.12). The Nuremberg Trials, thus, by holding accountable individuals for state violence, fit this model. If the trials were instrumental to Germany's denazification process, it can be argued that the Togliatti amnesty, instead, endangered the possibility of a defascistisation process in Italy by failing to hold individuals accountable.

Furthermore, if before World War II amnesties were the norm (as discussed in Chapter 1), it follows that the possibility to persecute individuals for their role in state violence began to take hold only after the denial of accountability implied by amnesties was recognised. In other words, as the concept of individual accountability for systemic violence was grasped, amnesties' lack of accountability could be clearly identified. The

[133] I have introduced the concept of transitional justice in Chapter 1 in relation to the Italian case.

question that has arisen in my research, thus, is whether the absence of a word that can clearly identify the concept of accountability in Italian - in regard to Fascist and colonial violence - might be at the core of the condition of aphasia described by Ann Laura Stoler (see Chapter 1). That is: has the difficulty in articulating a concept or being able to name it made the possibility of recognising its dynamics more difficult? My desire to develop an *accountability-based framework* is based on this very premise.

In addition, accountability also came to the fore while researching the Treaty on Friendship's focus on colonial reparations. As was explored in *Notes for a Film* as well as in Chapter 2, the Treaty on Friendship verges on the colonial reparations conceded by Berlusconi that Libya had been requesting for decades and that are in themselves a form of reparative justice. Italy's refusal to provide satisfactory reparations after the colonial occupation in the first Bilateral Agreements of 1955 left Italy open to further requests, which Qadhdhafi then demanded in 1969 (Chapter 2). The Italian government's refusal at the time led to the expulsion of the remaining Italian settlers from Libya. At the turn of the twenty-first century, Italy's urge to repress the migratory flux across the Mediterranean caused the Berlusconi government to enact a gesture of reparation. It involved financial investments (mainly through the building of infrastructure), the repatriation of looted artefacts and a formal apology offered at the Parliament of Sirte in March 2009. Berlusconi's colonial reparations were reciprocated by Qadhdhafi's willingness to provide Italy with privileged access to its fossil fuel resources and to contain migration through incarceration.

Berlusconi's admissions of culpability and demands for "forgiveness" to the Libyan parliament, however, were vague. As put forward in *Notes for a Film,* his speeches avoided the use of the word colonialism. What should have been an act of accountability seems closer to a vague performance of guilt. In the *Nonperformativity of Antiracism,* Sarah Ahmed (2006) analyses "institutional speech acts" by deploying the notion of performativity put forward by John Angshaw Austin, meaning that "an utterance is performative when it does what it says" (p.104). In contrast, a nonperformative speech act fails to do what it says. As Ahmed (2006) points out, admission is a form of declaration in which "the speech act, in its performance, is taken up as having shown that the institution has overcome what it is that the speech act admits to" (p.108). In addition, she argues that declarations of antiracist commitment

are nonperformative because they hinder the recognition of racism, and as such, they reproduce it (2006, p.106).

Berlusconi's apology is predicated on an act of admission to past wrongdoings, which does not name the wrongdoings. Instead, it claims that, through the Treaty on Friendship, such wrongdoings have been de facto repaired. In admitting culpability for a past that is in opposition to his reparative and collaborative attitude, Berlusconi implies that the colonial mindset has been overcome. On the other hand, the Treaty (and so the material reparations) followed what Tom Bentley (2016, p.166) calls a "colonial script" (see Chapter 2). As a result, Berlusconi's admission of culpability served to conceal and reproduce colonial dynamics: his speech - and Italy's colonial reparations as a result - can be considered "nonperformative".

These considerations on accountability have emerged through the process of *dissection* of the *neocolonial spectacle* and show a direct continuity from the amnesty to the colonial reparations. They have left me wondering what the meaning of accountability for research that operates within these parameters might be. That is, I have been exploring how these attitudes towards impunity and "nonperformative" speech acts can be countered within this research and my work in general. Reflecting on the different spaces, institutions, and dynamics that I (and my work) traverse and inhabit, I have developed different tactics. So far, I have discussed how I have used my body and voice to *dissect* the *neocolonial spectacle*. Now, I would like to consider two more approaches dictated by my relation to institutions.

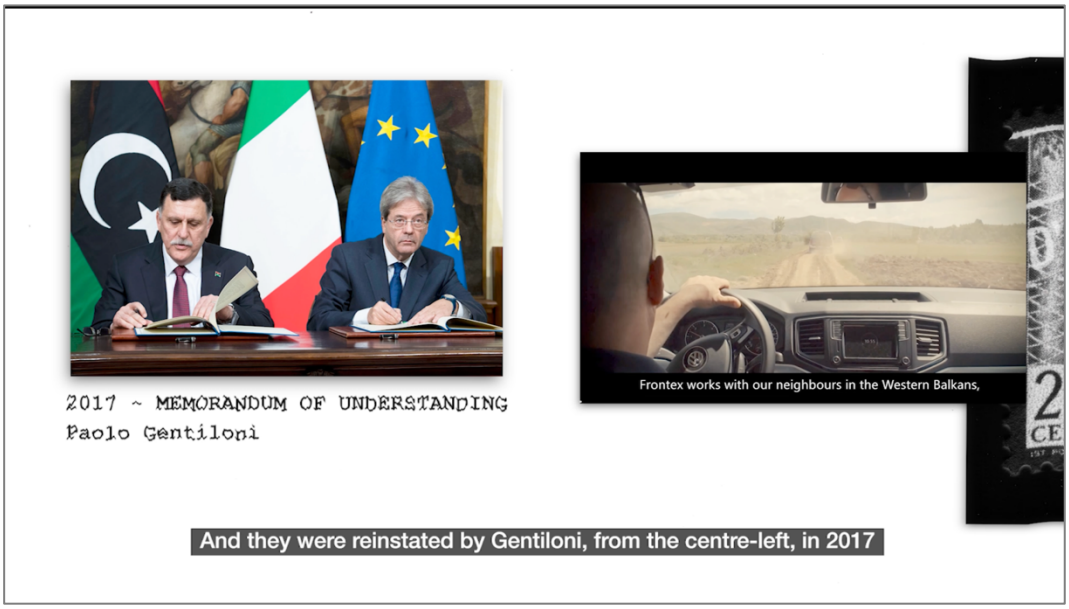
The first tactic I have developed consists of tailoring my practical outputs to the institutions (and their audiences) that have been showing or producing my work. As I explained in a recent article, S*ix Scenes of (Dis)Engagement: Creating Friction in the Italian Fascist and Colonial Archives*, I have deliberately focused *Act III* of *Notes for a Film* on exposing the Italian centre-left PD party (Ferrini, 2024). This was because the PD party initiated the refoulment of migrants in 2007 and reinstated the Bilateral Agreements on Migration in 2017 through the Memorandum of Understanding, leading to gross human rights violations after Qadhdhafi's death. I also focused on the former Ministry of Foreign Affairs Marco Minniti, who was responsible for providing

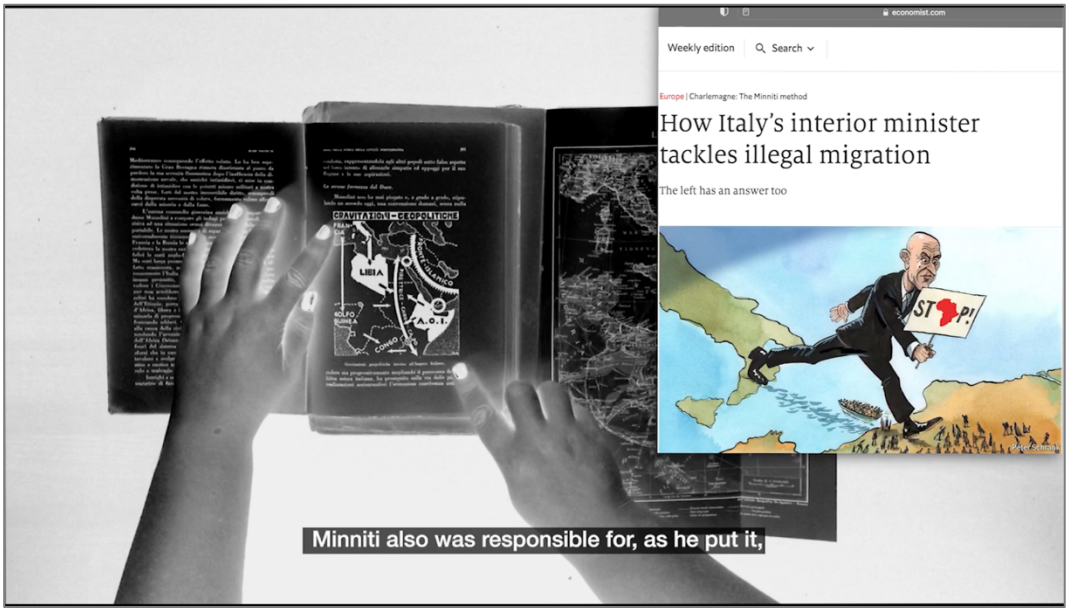
Leonardo with lucrative deals for the securitization of the Libyan southern border – and then became the head of Leonardo's foundation MedOr.

Two reasons led to this emphasis. Firstly, the fact that the work was produced and presented at the Maxxi – Museum of 21st Century Arts in Rome. At the time, the museum's president was a former Member of Parliament belonging to the PD party. Secondly, I was motivated by a willingness to address the most likely audiences of my work, which tend to be left-leaning. I am accustomed to these audiences and I am aware that they are quick to point the finger towards figures like Berlusconi and Mussolini, but they tend to avoid problematizing the imperialist drive of the neoliberal left. As a result, they often fail to recognize their complicity in upholding colonial power dynamics. These two reasons led me to focus on the role of both the centre-left and right in neo-imperialist politics.

In addition, the context for which the work was produced, the Maxxi Bvlgari Prize, led me to focus more on Rome through performances in the public space and an emphasis on its Fascist legacies. Bvlgari, a high fashion brand based in Rome, still uses the Latin alphabet spelling that was adopted in 1934. During that time, the letter U was replaced with the letter V, which was in line with the Fascist regime's preference for this alphabet - a nod to Ancient Rome.







Figs.150-152 - *Gaddafi in Rome: Notes for a Film, Act III,* 2022, video stills.

Another strategy pertains to the appropriation of *Lion of the Desert* within the performance in Rome and of other materials from the *archive of coloniality.* Jaimie Baron (2020) argues that:

> one of the main ways in which audiovisual appropriation has been used as an ethical tool…[is] in the service of interrupting hegemonic discourses that serve the interests of white, patriarchal, heteronormative capitalism while excluding subjects and discourses that do not fit into its dominant categories and narratives. (p.93)

Baron calls an "embodied interruption" the practice of artists from marginalised communities who use their bodies/presence to diffuse and critique archival footage's "hegemonic media tendencies" (Baron, 2020, p.21). In so doing, they dislocate the hegemonic gaze (Baron, 2020, p.21). Another attitude to film appropriation that she has analysed through the lens of ethics is what she calls the "reframing of the perpetrator's gaze". The filmmakers she considers here "attempt to use audiovisual appropriation as a form of ethical intervention by 'repairing' an injustice that lurks within the appropriated materials." (Baron, 2020, p.21).

The use of *Lion of the Desert,* I believe, resonates with these approaches. Although the power relations between the filmmaker, film, and audiences that she analyses are different from my relation to this film, there are affinities in tactics and aim: the wish to "repair" as well as to create "embodied interruptions". What is relevant about Baron's work for this research is the consideration of ethics in appropriation – not from a juridical standpoint but in terms of its potential for hijacking and diffusing power dynamics. This is particularly relevant for continuing to develop the *archive of coloniality,* which is also, in itself, based on a concern for accountability: it is a practice of refusal and subtraction from dynamics of complicity with institutional archives (as discussed in Chapter 1).

On the other hand, *Lion of the Desert*'s distribution in Italy is still, technically, interdicted. Standing next to the Senate, the Capitol and Confindustria's headquarters (the General Confederation of Italian Industry), I played *Lion of the Desert* in the public space. Mimicking Qadhdhafi's act of protest and playing a banned film in Rome, I performed a symbolic gesture, one that attempts to be accountable. It was a way to, as philosopher and art historian Marina Garcés (2012) puts it, "step into the scene" to be

affected by it (p.3). Garcés claims that becoming accountable is a step towards "deal[ing] honestly with the real"[134], which she defines as "entering on to the scene, not to participate in it and choose some of its possibles, but to take a stance and, along with others, to strike at the validity of its coordinates" (Garcés, 2012, p.3). She adds: "[b]eing honest with the real is not, thus, staying true to one's principles. It is exposing oneself and getting involved" (Garcés, 2012, p.2). Similarly, I understand accountability as dealing with what is uncomfortable but necessary, exposing oneself and holding to account the systemic dynamics with which one is complicit. Yet, Garcés places much emphasis on the collective dimension of this process: it is not a solitary act.

Within juridical frameworks, likewise, accountability requires a collectivity. Mark Bovens (2007) has pointed out that the peculiarity of accountability in opposition to responsibility is that it "demands a relationship between an actor and a forum, the actor is required to explain and justify one's performance or conduct, the forum has power to pass judgment, and the actor may face consequences." (Bovens, 2017, p.451). Thus, accountability is demanded by and owed to a forum/community, and it requires a pragmatic response. This, in turn, resonates with Forensic Architecture's reliance on the notion of the forum, namely, the court of law but also a community of practitioners. In *Investigative Aesthetics,* Fuller and Weizman (2021) describe the forum as a space for public presentation and discussion, whose reach is constantly being expanded by devising different ways to communicate with different publics (p.195). They call for the "investigative commons" and "the formation of communities of practice that bring together collaboration, a working with, that expands to include more perspectives and allies" (Fuller and Weizman, 2021, p.199). In becoming entangled with the Italian context, I have been engaged in building what I call "a community of knowledge", one that can participate in a reciprocal process of accountability.

On the other hand, this research is not predicated, as Forensic Architecture, on a juridical framework: it is not aimed at the court of law. It speaks from an individual and subjective position to an imagined community. It aims to be accountable to the histories, people, and spaces that have been erased, abused, and concealed within the *archive of*

[134] I find the concept of 'honesty' to be problematic and I believe that dealing *ethically* with the real would be a better choice. I acknowledge, however, that both terms are very complex and that this consideration – which escapes the scope of this research - would require appropriate unpacking.

coloniality. These elements represent the symbolic and physical forum to which I am accountable.

In a similar way, in the article *(Re)entering the Archive: Critical Reflections on Archives and Whiteness* (2020) I proposed to ask for permission to symbolically enter – and then re-enter – the *archive of coloniality*. I suggested that "permission is requested, metaphorically, to the trauma that has been caused by the assertion of white supremacy" (Ferrini, 2020, p.140). In so doing, asking for permission functions "as a reminder that we are always guests within this archive, as white bodies are always a symbol of colonial violence" (Ferrini, 2020, p.141). To operate through an *accountability-based framework* thus necessitates constant scrutiny and accounting of one's actions and privileges: this is not a retrospective act, nor is it a redeeming exercise for (self)absolution. One must own his/her limits while being conscious of what privileges one's position entails. If accountability is to become a "constitutive force and aim" of my practice, then it must be planned and accounted for at the beginning of and throughout the research process. It will need to be envisaged as a 'contract' with this symbolic forum.

The core element of the *accountability-based framework,* therefore, is commitment: a life-long commitment since "it is the very prerogative of having the possibility of a way-out that constitutes our white privilege" (Ferrini, 2020, p.144). As my career progresses and affords me access to wider audiences and more visibility, I am committed to keep addressing the power dynamics that affect these spaces and to target specific audiences:

> [u]ltimately, every time I can – and allow myself to – enter these [institutional] spaces, I first and foremost aim to create friction, to adapt or shape my work in a way that enables a direct engagement with the power structures that govern it. However, I must admit that in the murky and treacherous environment of the Italian cultural landscape, deciding what constitutes an acceptable compromise is not always an easy or clear-cut choice. (Ferrini, 2024)

Understanding how to navigate these spaces, the increasingly reactionary politics and censoring cultural landscape that we are faced with in Europe, and my evolving position is, therefore, at the basis of the future development of this framework.

Conclusions

TOWARDS AN *ACCOUNTABILITY-BASED FRAMEWORK*

Any reparation that does not transform or attempt to dismantle coloniality is a failed reparation.

(Yomaira Figueroa, 2015, p.43)

This thesis is based on an event of international relations that took place in the recent past: the meeting between Silvio Berlusconi and Mu'ammar Qadhdhafi in Rome in June 2009. As a celebration of the ratification of the Treaty on Friendship, Partnership and Cooperation between Italy and Libya, this meeting was highly spectacularised and mediatised. Rooted in complex historical and geopolitical entanglements, this event has brought to the surface the enduring legacies of colonialism and how colonial memory and the violence it implies have been exploited for nationalist purposes and economic interests.

This research takes as a starting point two press documents - a photograph and a news report (*newsfeed*) - that incarnate the complexities and contradictions inherent in this event while presenting a range of questions on temporality and representation. Its objective has been to translate the *newsfeed* into a metafilmic, *essayistic* output to *dissect* the event at the core of this study (the *neocolonial spectacle*). In so doing, it has aimed to test the value of the *newsfeed* as a document. Concisely, the thesis is organised as follows:

(1) definition of the event and its historical context (Chapters 1 and 2; Parts I and II's preludes);

(2) analysis of the media representation through the development of the concepts of *neocolonial spectacle* (Chapter 2) and *newsfeed* (Chapter 3);

(3) development of a series of self-reflexive, investigative tactics for practice-based research revolving around the notions of the *archive of coloniality* (Chapter 1), *dissection* (Chapter 4) and the *essayistic* (Chapter 5).

(4) speculations on what an *accountability-based framework* may consist of, based on the case study of this research (Chapter 5).

The research has evolved responsively, tackling the different ethical implications of this study, as well as my shifting positionality. Unfolding over a long period of time, it became essential to reassess the priorities of this research as it progressed. This is how it came to be invested by a new preoccupation, which I consider a utopian drive: the

proposition of an *accountability-based framework.* Before I draw this thesis' conclusions, I wish to provide an overview of the circumstances that have impacted this research and led me to reassess its purpose.

Different external factors conditioned this shift. Firstly, the part-time PhD scholarship allowed me to dedicate myself to my practice full-time. The projects that have run parallel to the PhD have dealt with related challenges affecting my thinking and approach to this research. For instance, I have produced two off-shoot projects, *Sight Unseen* (2019) and *Unruly Connections* (2022)[135], which have expanded on specific aspects of this PhD (mostly on the Libyan genocide). As discussed in the Introduction, getting re-entangled with the Italian context has had a profoundly transformative effect, which can be noted, for example, in the development of the notion of the *archive of coloniality* - my refusal to engage with Italian institutional archives and the choice to tailor *Notes for a Film* to the political context in which it was exhibited.

Since the Black Lives Matter protests in 2020 have amplified the discussion of racism and colonialism in the Italian artistic and cultural sectors, the context in which I have been intervening has changed significantly since I proposed this PhD project in 2016 – and so have I and my understanding of this context and my role within. Becoming involved in anti-racist practices and informal education in Italy has provided me with new perspectives and political awareness, while gaining visibility and progressing with my career have affected my approach to institutions. It has allowed me to take public stances and being heard.

As I began to reflect on the five years that have spanned between the start of this PhD in 2017 and the finalisation of *Notes for a Film* in 2022, I became engrossed in questioning what the broader aim of this work has been: what "utopian" desire has driven this endeavour. This led to a proposition for an *accountability-based framework*, which has been the main deviation from – or simply an addition to - the study's original intent.

This PhD has developed around six interlocking concepts/terms. They have been instrumental in navigating and organising the wide range of topics this research has

[135] Please see Appendix C for documentation.

engaged with and in conducting the analysis of the two practical outputs of this PhD: the performance-lecture *The Expanded Script* and the three-channel video installation *Notes for a Film.* As a result, this thesis has focused on unpacking and defining these terms, linking the theoretical arguments and contextual research to the development of the practical outputs. It has highlighted the responsiveness of this research and the critical and analytical applications of research to practice – and vice-versa.

This research has substantially drawn and relied on historical literature. I have produced a body of work that explores over a century of relations between Italy and Libya while engaging with the practice of late Medieval dissection. Through a genealogical approach, I have been able to navigate through this material and keep my focus set on the present. In Chapter 1, I began this thesis with a historical contextualisation of the case study, providing an overview of Italian colonialism in Libya and the attitudes towards this history, focusing on the sustained acts of censorship and the resulting obstructions to historical research that characterise it. Illustrating the lack of critical artistic practice on these issues has highlighted the urgency of this research. This chapter has introduced three crucial concepts for this research: colonial aphasia, transitional justice (Togliatti amnesty), and the *archive of coloniality*. The first was particularly important in assessing the Italian reception of 'Umar al-Mukhtar's image during Qadhdhafi's visit in 2009 (Chapter 2), while the other two terms are instrumental in starting the journey towards accountability. Chapter 1 has also focused on the formation of Libya and the way the Qadhdhafi regime exploited colonial trauma.

If the first chapter has offered a historical context that highlighted mnemonic processes, the second chapter focuses on geopolitics and 'spectacular' diplomacy by investigating media representation. Sketching the history of the bilateral agreements between Italy and Libya, from which the Treaty on Friendship has emerged, it frames them through Achille Mbembe's concept of necropolitics to highlight the deadly politics shaping the Mediterranean border. In doing so, it teases out the enduring legacies of colonialism, which are then engaged more deeply in the discussion of Kwame Nkhruma's (1967) and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's (1991) writing on neocolonialism. These considerations are then read against Guy Debord's notion of the integrated spectacle (1983, 1998) to provide a definition of the term *neocolonial spectacle* – a core concept and valuable contribution of this research to the field of Media Event Studies. Exposing the way the

media have constructed this event as exceptional, this chapter has provided a close analysis of Berlusconi's and Qadhdhafi's performances of power within a history of diplomatic relations. Ruth Ben-Ghiat's work on "strongmen" (a tradition of authoritarian power initiated by Mussolini) was helpful in analysing press photographs and the symbolism of Berlusconi's and Qadhdhafi's brand of politics within an international relations context. Furthermore, much attention was placed on the scrutiny of the 'iconic image' at the core of this research. Overall, this chapter moves this thesis' main argument along by focusing on Berlusconi's performance of guilt as part of the colonial reparations sanctioned by the Treaty on Friendship, thus advancing the PhD exploration of accountability.

Chapter 3, *Instantaneous News,* takes a step back from historical and geopolitical analysis and focuses on news language by providing a detailed analysis of the *newsfeed.* Firstly, it has illustrated the peculiarities of this news format and of its archiving. Then, it has focused on its temporal qualities (both as a whole and in relation to the unit of the live news update) and news value. Peter Wollen's article *Fire and Ice* (2007 [1984]) was instrumental in determining its temporality. Lastly, this chapter considered the way the *newsfeed* was 'translated' into moving images in the performance-lecture. The notion of "intermedia translation" (Bal and Morra, 2007) is here unpacked in dialogue with the work of the artist Antoni Muntadas. The last section has applied tools from Critical Discourse Analysis to put forward a systematic analysis of the *newsfeed*'s contents. This was carried out using the Nvivo software. This chapter has been crucial in posing the basis to analyse the more practical aspects of this research. By locating its analysis within a politically minded methodology such as CDA, it has illustrated one of the tactics at the core of *dissection* and the way it was helpful in analysing biases.

The last two chapters of this thesis focus on *dissection*. Chapter 4, *Defining Dissection,* provides a historical and epistemological context to the practice, focusing on the late Medieval format of public dissection that has inspired this research. It considers the spectacular and symbolic aspects of this practice and the different actors conducting these performances. Michel Foucault's *The Birth of the Clinic* (2003) and historian Jonathan Sawday's *The Body Emblazoned: Dissection and the Human Body in Renaissance Culture* (1995) have been crucial to navigating the evolution of the practice and the development of a scientific, medical gaze that departed from the early practice's

preoccupation with public dissemination. Their work has been instrumental in tracing and establishing the symbolic relation between dissection and power, which has provided the basis to propose ways to hijack this practice to expose and challenge power systems. Chapter 4 has also focused on the anatomical theatre and the way it has inspired the development of the practical outputs. I have considered the role of the table as well as the viewing perspectives within the theatre. Finally, this chapter analyses the visual applications of *dissection* by focusing on the relation between the topical and the systemic, intended as a tension between surface and hidden power structures or as an event and the historical continuities it is embedded within. I have illustrated how *dissection* borrows medical visual registers (the microscopic, X-ray, and the cutting knife) to develop different visual approaches in *Notes for a Film,* further expanding on the way I translated the *newsfeed*. The notions of forensic and investigative aesthetics have also been considered in relation to *dissection.*

Chapter 5, *Practising Dissection,* surveys a series of tactics that I have developed as part of the *dissection* strategy, which are rooted in the *essayistic*. The first part focuses on how this research conceives the notion of the *essayistic* by adopting a proposition by Elizabeth A. Papazian and Caroline Eades, who urged the adoption of a definition not associated with form or genre. They suggest three macro areas of concern: "dialogue/metadiscourse; experiment/experience; and utopia/impossibility" (Papazian & Eades, 2016, pp.2-3). Guided by this "set of conditions", I have examined my practice by relating it to specific examples from essay filmmakers such as Pier Paolo Pasolini, Harun Farocki and the Dziga Vertov Group. This chapter has revolved around an investigation of my presence in the film and how it relates to the figures of the *ostensor, sector* and *lecturer.* As a result, it has focused on notions of gesturality and embodiment. Finally, in scrutinising the voiceover, I have considered the way this project is based on a self-reflexive approach, which has led me to make a proposition for an *accountability-based framework.*

In focusing on colonial violence, international relations, news media and transitional justice, this research has been preoccupied with presenting a critical process, a model for analysis that can visualise and share a situated research process. Guided by a political commitment and striving for accountability, such research places its attention

on the constitution of national identity, highlighting the historical formations of imperialist ideology and their continuities in the present.

As I already mentioned, this research contributes to the Italian context, which is connoted by a delayed engagement with colonial history and post/de-colonial debates. By providing a critical and positioned approach to research and practice, it wishes to build on the pioneering work of Yervant Gianikian and Angela Ricci Lucchi to re-invigorate the Italian art context with a critical and analytical approach to coloniality. This research intervenes in the debate on Italian (neo)colonialism through an interdisciplinary and novel approach to the *archive of coloniality* that contributes both to theoretical and artistic debates. It offers a model for analysing colonial continuities through an engagement with current politics and media representation. Notably, *Notes for a Film* has made a valuable contribution to the Italian artistic community, for which it was awarded the Maxxi Bvlgari Prize 2022 – the most prestigious art prize in the country. In addition, this work has been developed through the term *neocolonial spectacle,* which provides a contribution to Media Event Studies by addressing a lack of scholarship analysing less traditional news media (being mainly preoccupied with TV broadcasting) and transnational events. This term can potentially be deployed in other contexts to identify specific performances within International Relations and the relations between former colonies and their former occupiers.

Focusing on media analysis and digital technology, *dissection* enriches the possibilities opened by Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi's focus on compilation film through their analytical camera, offering tools to analyse the present and what circulates outside of institutional archives. In this regard, *dissection* also implies replicability and its application to other complex events and systemic issues. As a result, it contributes to broader debates on the representation of research in the arts. These include contemporary scholarship on 'investigative aesthetics' and forensic approaches and growing literature around essayistic and practice-based methodologies. *Notes for a Film,* specifically, has also been recognised for its innovative use of narration and archival material, having been the runner-up project at the British Association of Film,

Television and Screen Studies (BAFTSS)'s Practice Research Awards 2022 in the Doctoral category.[136]

In addition, this research proposes a politically situated approach, an *accountability-based framework,* which attempts to resonate with Walter Mignolo's (Mignolo & Walsh 2018) call for "[r]emoving the mask of the modern/colonial enunciation (the heart of the CMP [coloniality matrix of power])" (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018, p.151). As he states, this is a "fundamental and basic task of delinking and decolonial thinking". Yet, I am conscious that, as Mignolo warns, the act of dissenting from within a Eurocentric position is not decolonial: "what decoloniality means is to delink from both Eurocentric regulations and dissent within Eurocentrism." My interest in accountability stems from a desire to contribute to decolonial efforts from my position without appropriating a struggle that originates (and affects in the first person) large populations currently living under settler colonial occupation or battling the ongoing epistemic and racist models imposed by colonialism – that is, structural and systemic violence. The recent 'decolonial trend' sweeping the Western artistic and cultural contexts – and the countless projects providing highly "nonperformative" (Ahmed, 2006) applications of a practice that should imply a political, transformative charge - has led me to place great caution in the use of the term decolonial within Eurocentric contexts. Through this research, I wish to provide tools to expose and challenge these systemic issues to act in complicity with the decolonial struggle, even though I may run the risk of recentring whiteness. I believe that, however, attempts towards dismantling whiteness and imperialism can be worth pursuing if one is mindful of his/her limitations and the constant risk of erasing or extracting knowledge or appropriating struggles.

In addition, the concepts of accountability and responsibility are enmeshed in a long and broad history of philosophical thinking, especially in the field of moral philosophy. I acknowledge that this study has not attempted to engage with this

[136] This is the awards jury statement: "This fascinating documentary/installation (constructed in 3x20min sections in order to reflexively interrogate the 3-act structure) explores Qadhdhafi 's 2009 visit to Italy to meet with Berlusconi. The film adopts and adapts the traditional expository documentary form (voice-of-god narration illustrated by indexical visuals) in a highly original way. It creatively utilises still and moving images combined with web-based sources that are literally dissected to explore the layers of complexity in this unique event, revealing complex themes around colonization, migration, national identity and representation." Available online: https://www.baftss.org/practice-research-awards-2023.html

context. This is not the scope of this research. Instead, this research has considered a recognised lack of translatability to mobilise this gap in meaning and render it productive as a tool for a politically driven practice. As I already mentioned at the end of Chapter 5, further developing the *accountability-based framework* will be a central task of my work for the foreseeable future. This is also true for the notion of the *archive of coloniality* that I will keep relying on and expanding.[137]

The research on *dissection* is going to be developed further through a new iteration of *Gaddafi in Rome* for the Venice Biennale 2024[138] (titled *Gaddafi in Rome: Anatomy of a Friendship*) and through the realisation of a single-screen version. Some of the findings of this research, together with the offshoot projects *Sight Unseen* and *Unruly Connections*, will be published in my first monograph[139] in the Autumn of 2024 (the publisher is Archive Books, Berlin). For this publication, I am focusing on six keywords (*archive of coloniality*, *accountability-based framework*, *dissection*, *neocolonial spectacle*, iconographic silence and unruly connections[140]). I have also invited Libyan practitioners to contribute, and I will include translations of Libyan literature into Italian and English.

To conclude, the historical research that I have conducted for this PhD has opened up many avenues for future investigation. I am beginning new research focusing on wireless technology and Guglielmo Marconi through the lens of what Nicholas Mirzoeff calls "white sight" (2023) and in relation to the development of hyperwar technologies. I will also investigate Marconi's role in diplomacy during Fascism and the way science and technology were exhibited at International Expos by Fascist Italy.

[137] I will also reflect on this term in relation to the notion of "difficult heritage" (Sharon MacDonald) for the *Palgrave Encyclopaedia of Cultural Heritage and Conflict*.
[138] Please refer to Appendix D for more information. Also, please notice that this is not yet public knowledge and it is confidential until the 17th of April 2024.
[139] Please refer to Appendix E for more information.
[140] Iconographic silences and unruly connections are related to the projects *Sigth Unseen* and *Unruly Connections* which are included in Appendix C.

APPENDIX A

La Repubblica - NEWSFEED DOCUMENTATION

ORIGINAL NEWSFEED (Italian, online)

The *newsfeeds* can be accessed online at the URLs that follow.

LINK TO MENU:
https://www.repubblica.it/indici/dirette/sezioni/esteri/gheddafi-roma/index.html
LINK TO DAY 1 (10/09/2009):
https://www.repubblica.it/2009/06/dirette/sezioni/esteri/gheddafi-roma/gheddafi-roma/index.html
LINK TO DAY 2 (11/09/2009):
https://www.repubblica.it/2009/06/dirette/sezioni/esteri/gheddafi-roma/Gheddafi-11-giugno/index.html
LINK TO DAY 3 (12/09/2009):
https://www.repubblica.it/2009/06/dirette/sezioni/esteri/gheddafi-roma/12-giugno/index.html

SELECTION DAY 1 – ENGLISH TRANSLATION
10 June 2009

10:50
Protests at the Senate: “It is shameful to let a dictator who does not respect human rights speak”.

11:26
Luigi Frati, the Dean of La Sapienza University, cuts short on the announced demonstrations by students and staff against the visit of the Libyan leader at the University, scheduled for tomorrow. "I'm not worried", says the Dean, "my idea of university is that anyone can come and anyone can ask them questions, even if controversial, and they must answer. This is my opinion, I'm not a Taliban".

12:01
Muammar Gaddafi's airplane has just landed at Ciampino Airport, with one hour of delay.

12:03
At the bottom of the plane's stairway, Prime Minister Berlusconi visibly aching for a neck contraction.

12:09

Kiss between Gaddafi and Berlusconi.

12:24
On the Colonel's uniform, a photograph pinned to the right side of the jacket, as if it were an army decoration.

12:28
With the Libyan leader Gaddafi, an elderly man in a wheelchair.

12:31
Radical Party's senators Marco Perduca and Donatella Poretti have announced a hunger strike against tomorrow's intervention by Gaddafi at Palazzo Madama, the seat of the Senate.

12:46
Berlusconi to Gaddafi: "Closed a long and painful chapter".

13:12
The photograph pinned on Gaddafi's uniform portrays Omar Al Mukhtar, the Libyan national hero who led the anti-colonial revolt between 1923 and 1931. The "Lion of the Desert", as he was nicknamed, was captured by the Italians and sentenced to death. In the black and white photo on the Libyan leader's uniform, Omar Al Mukhtar appears in chains surrounded by Italian soldiers. "The Lion of the Desert" is also the title of a historical colossal film from 1981 (that will air tomorrow night on Sky) focused on the crucial phase of the repression of the Libyan resistance by the Italian colonial army. Anthony Quinn is the actor who impersonated the Libyan leader Omar Al Mukhtar.

13:29
The menu at the Quirinale, residence of the President of the Republic, includes mushroom pappardelle kneaded with buckwheat (grano saraceno in Italian). Saraceno refers to the term used for centuries, to indicate the Colonel's ancestors. Completing the menu, is plenty of orange juice, respecting the dictates of the Quran. The Italians, however, drink white wine: it goes best with the baked sea bass served as a second course.

13:55
The elderly man in traditional robes, who has exited with difficulty from the plane together with Gaddafi, is the eighty years old son of the "Lion of the Desert".

14:16
The President of the Republic, Napolitano: "Joint effort for Italy and Libya in particular for Somalia". The goal is "to make the Mediterranean an area of peace."

14:19
Gaddafi: "With courage, we turned the page on the past, breaking definitively the relationship with colonialism and fascism. This is why I came here."

15:29
Gaddafi at his tent at Villa Pamphili.

15:39

Opposition party IDV: "Berlusconi is silent on the photo provocation."

17:10
Tomorrow the opposition party UDC will not be present during Gaddafi's speech at the Senate. Gianpiero D'Alia, the UDC party leader at the Senate said: "We did not agree with turning a branch of the Parliament into a megaphone for an authoritarian leader who does not respect human and civil rights."

17:45
Berlusconi's ally, Northern League's leader Umberto Bossi: "Gaddafi helps Italy. Of course he can speak."

18:37
"The closure of a historic phase between Italy and Libya cannot overshadow the responsibilities that at the moment Gaddafi and Berlusconi have towards migrants' rights", stated Rosa Calipari and Jean Leonard Touadì, deputies of the Democratic Party. "The Italian government has chosen to move the Italian borders of immigration to Libya and, therefore, must be sure about what happens to migrants in this country ".

19:00
Berlusconi welcomes Gaddafi in the courtyard of Palazzo Chigi, the official residence of the Prime Minister.

20:24
Opposition party IDV occupies the Senate Chamber waiting for the outcome of the conference and does not intend to leave, in order to prevent Gaddafi from speaking tomorrow.

20:26
Senate Chamber precluded to Gaddafi. The decision that was taken by the Senate leaders' conference, is to transfer the meeting to Palazzo Giustiniani.

20:52
Between Italy and Libya "a new season of peace, friendship and collaboration" has been launched after years of "difficult relations due to the colonial heritage" which has caused "pain to the Libyan people". This was stated by Berlusconi during the press conference at Villa Madama.

20:55
I recognize in Gaddafi a "profound wisdom", said Berlusconi, stressing that he is attached to the "true and deep friendship" cultivated with the Colonel in the last fifteen years.

20:57
"Today we signed four agreements that were stipulated in Bengasi last year, which establish a real partnership and a very close collaboration between our two countries, a common position in international affairs and close cooperation in the economic sector", recalled Berlusconi.

20:59
"Italy has apologized for the evil done by monarchist and fascist Italy", Gaddafi stated.

21:00
Silvio Berlusconi is "a man of steel who, with determination and courage" has taken the "historic decision to apologize" to the Libyan people for the damage caused by colonialism, therefore "paying them back" - the Libyan leader emphasized. "Berlusconi is a dear friend", he added. "A historical era has been closed," says Gaddafi.

21:03
The collaboration between Italy and Libya on immigration has "brought useful results", said Berlusconi.

21:10
Gaddafi: "The Somalis are forced to practice piracy, we need to understand the reasons for piracy, just as we need to understand the reasons for terrorism". Gaddafi and Berlusconi spoke about Somalia, Eritrea and Ethiopia.

21:27
Gaddafi: The "Libyan" martyrs "were attacked by Mussolini only because they defended their land: many crimes were committed at that time, with thousands of deportees", stressed the Libyan leader.

21:36
Gaddafi: "In Libya the doors are open to Italian companies". He then said that he was "fully satisfied" with bilateral relations and recalled that Libya provides Italy with "more than 60%" of its energy needs.

21:37
Berlusconi: "We will expand the amount of energy supply from Libya. Italian companies will be at the forefront in the construction of infrastructure in Libya".

21:44
Gaddafi: "The hanging of Omar al Mukhtar for us Libyans is like Christ's crucifixion for Christians. They carry the cross to remind the world of the tragedy of Christ. For us this image is a tragedy, which is symbolized by the photo I wore". The Libyan leader explained the reasons that led him to wear a photo of the Libyan anti-colonial hero al Mukhtar on his uniform.

21:46
Berlusconi: "We have decided to undertake a joint initiative in the countries of the Horn of Africa: Somalia, Eritrea and Ethiopia".

21:48
Gaddafi: most of the migrants coming from Africa to Europe "are people living in the forest or in the desert, they have no political problems... They come out of the forest and say: 'in the north there is money and wealth '... ". With these words, Gaddafi explained that, in his opinion, the question of the right to asylum must be taken with a pinch of salt. "The fact that there are millions of men demanding the right to asylum makes me laugh," he added.

22:02

"It will be a Tricolour dinner that the prime minister, Silvio Berlusconi, will offer to Colonel Muammar Gaddafi at Villa Madama. In the menu: caprese salad, tricolour pennette, tagliata of chianina fillet, side dishes, cheeses and Italian gelato."

SELECTION DAY 2 – ENGLISH TRANSLATION
11 June 2009

09:45
La Sapienza University presided over for Gaddafi's visit scheduled for today at 12. The student movement Onda is already mobilized, receiving the support of the Roman radical left.

09:49
Imposing security measures: since the early hours of the morning over two hundred men, including Police, Carabinieri and Guardia di Finanza, are working to 'clean up' the entire area around Palazzo Madama.

10:46
La Sapienza University is militarized.

10:51
"It is the first time, for many years, that we see such deployment of Police and Carabinieri within the perimeter of the university", says Francesco Brancaccio, one of the spokespersons of the Onda student movement,

10:59
At the Senate, with Gaddafi is the son of the anti-Italian hero.

11:02
"I believe that institutional decorum and the dignity of the Republic must be always safeguarded. The relationship with the Libyan people must be strengthened but because of the ways in which Gaddafi was received yesterday, they have been violated": thus spoke Pierferdinando Casini, the leader of opposition party UDC.

11:09
Banners at La Sapienza: "Stop rejections, freedom of movement", "Gaddafi-Berlusconi, Rome refuses you: you are illegal immigrants". The students show rubber boats with writings against Gaddafi to denounce, they said, the drama of migration.

11:36
The young militants of the Movimento Res (Roma Europa Sociale), a right-wing group close to Berlusconi's party, protest against Colonel Gaddafi organizing today a 'tricolour motorized parade'. A long caravan of motorbikes will wave Italian flags along the streets adjacent to Villa Pamphili, residence of the Libyan leader in Rome.

11:38
Immigrants also protesting at La Sapienza.

11:42
Tension grows: The arrival of five Carabinieri 'Aries' vehicles has warmed the souls at La Sapienza.

11:57
Gaddafi arrives at Palazzo Giustiniani for the meeting with the president of the Senate Renato Schifani.

12:06
A small group of IDV senators waited for Gaddafi in front of Palazzo Giustiniani, showing a facsimile of an academic certificate with the inscription "Laurea Horroris Causa" with a reference to the violation of human rights.

12:23
"The Italian Parliament voted in favour of the Treaty of Friendship in large majority. Recognizing the historical responsibilities of the past, the treaty now intends to build a bridge to the future: a bridge to Libya, a bridge to make the Mediterranean a sea of peace and no longer a border ", said Schifani during the meeting with Gaddafi.

13:02
Gaddafi: "What is the difference between the 1986 US attack against our houses and Bin Laden's terrorist actions?"

13:19
"If we asked Bin Laden and his followers, 'why do you go to the mountains?', 'why did you destroy the lives of so many civilians with the attack in New York?', they could answer, or perhaps they have already answered: ' we defend ourselves against the humiliations suffered, the depredation of our assets'. But this - observed Gheddafi - is a responsibility of your nations".

13:50
La Sapienza: law enforcement charges. Nobody is hurt.

14:11
Gaddafi arrives at La Sapienza.

15:27
Damages related to colonialism, the right to compensation of the people who suffered from it, and the problems linked to terrorism. This was the focus of the speech given by Colonel Gaddafi in front of the audience of professors and students gathered today in the auditorium of La Sapienza University.

15:49
Long round of applause to the student who asked Gaddafi when there will be free elections in Libya. "We have the utmost respect for the Libyan people and for Africans, but what do you mean by democracy?" asked the student. "In my opinion - he added - it does not only mean having working hospitals or schools, even Mussolini did this: when will Libya have free elections?"

15:56

Gaddafi leaves La Sapienza among the whistles.

16:21
Frattini, Minister of Foreign Affairs: USA as Osama? "We do not agree".

17:03
During Gaddafi's speech at La Sapienza's auditorium, a man in the audience railed against the Libyan leader reminding him Amnesty International reports on the appalling conditions of the Libyan prisons and the Rais replied: "If a million people come here saying to be political refugees would you accept them? If you accept them I will always be with you in respect to human rights ".

17:56
Opposition PD Party MP Vernetti: "Delirious statements by Gaddafi".

18:22
La Sapienza's Dean, Luigi Frati, commenting on the disputed intervention of Gaddafi in the Great Hall said: "The university has always been open to free debate and in the speech of Gaddafi I found ideas of great interest because he gave a reading of events different from ours ".

18:56
Gaddafi just arrived at the Campidoglio. Welcoming him, over the traditional red carpet reserved for visits by great authorities, the mayor of Rome Gianni Alemanno.

19:00
At the Campidoglio Gaddafi salutes the crowd with a raised fist.

19:26
Gaddafi at the Campidoglio: hands clasped in victory.

19:31 PD Party representatives display a banner at the Campidoglio: "Respect for human rights".

19:38
Gaddafi's long-cherished dream is to give power to the Italian people by abolishing all parties, "without right, left and centre". "The symbol of the Italian people will be brotherhood because party politics is the failure of democracy", added the Colonel speaking in Campidoglio.

19:55
"No to the Libyan model": the PD Party abandons the square

19:59
Gaddafi: "I will guarantee the flow of gas and oil to Italy"… "Berlusconi could transfer factories and companies to Libya so it would become an industrialized country. I cannot offer industries like Berlusconi would do, but we have gas and oil and we will guarantee their flow to Italy. Today - he stated - 70% of Italian energy needs are guaranteed by Libyan sources ".

20:03

"Honourably clarified the relationship between our people. Both the Italian government and the Libyan government must do everything possible so that the families of the Italian settlers and of the Tripoli Jews who were expelled from Libya are not the only ones to continue to pay the price of the tragedies of the past". The mayor of Rome said this in his speech at Piazza del Campidoglio.

20:21
Gaddafi: "I would have nothing against the idea of my friend Silvio Berlusconi presenting himself to become the president of the Libyan government". And he added "The Libyan people would definitely benefit from it" referring, once again, to Berlusconi as a "friend".

20:28
"There was a surplus of institutional kitsch: I understand the importance of traditions, but it would be good to affirm our own traditions too. Hospitality should not be confused with flattery or servility" - stated the vice president of the Senate, Emma Bonino at the meeting 'Italian Foreign Policy and Human Rights' at Palazzo Giustiniani.

20:38
"We know that Gaddafi has a complex personality and a specific approach to many issues, such as dictatorship or terrorism". This was stated by Lamberto Dini, president of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Senate, while commenting on Gaddafi's words. "But he had the merit of believing in African unity".

20:42
Gaddafi, impromptu, slows down the procession to greet tourists. Even a bride in a white dress approached the Libyan leader's car to greet him.

SELECTION DAY 3 – ENGLISH TRANSLATION
12 June 2009

11:13
Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi has just left the tent set up inside Villa Pamphili, heading to the headquarters of Confindustria, the General Confederation of Italian Industry.

11:31
Waiting for Gaddafi, at the main entrance of the EUR building, the number one industrialist, Emma Marcegaglia.

13:05
"I really think I can say that there has been a breakthrough in bilateral relations". This was stated by the Confindustria's president Emma Marcegaglia. Recalling the presence of numerous Italian companies in Libya, such as Eni, Enel, Impregilo, Finmeccanica, she added: "Libya's presence in Italy is important and is possibly strengthening. Libya is a free zone for Italian companies and today we are at a turning point in relations

between the two countries, thanks also to the overcoming of the historical conditions that have conditioned our past ".

14:17
Gaddafi to the industrialists: "Priority for Italian companies".

14:23
Marcegaglia: "Soon a free zone for Italian companies investing in Libya, they will be able to enjoy income tax exemptions for five years, have discounts on electricity and gas and will be able to use local infrastructure".

14:29
Italy is and remains committed to African women and their rights. This was assured by the Minister for Equal Opportunities Mara Carfagna, who addressed the Libyan leader in front of an audience of female representatives of the Italian business and cultural world.

14:47
In the Arab and Islamic world women are "like a piece of furniture that you can change whenever you want and no one will ask why you did it". So said Gaddafi when talking about the situation of women in various parts of the world.

14:59
Gaddafi leaves the Auditorium and returns to his tent at villa Pamphili.

15:24
"We do not want to meet Gaddafi and being accomplices to the murderous policy established with the Italian government and the European Union, against African migrants who are locked up, mistreated and abused for months in real concentration camps in Libya". The women of the feminist movements explained this morning the reasons that led them to write a letter to Gaddafi, on the day when he meets 700 women in Rome.

16:58
Tomorrow morning Gaddafi will receive in his tent the CEO of Eni, Paolo Scaroni. The meeting between the Colonel and the head of the energy company will take place on a 'private' level. This meeting was expected, considering the close collaboration between Eni and Libya.

18:11
The Chamber of Deputies has been waiting for Gaddafi for almost two hours.

18:26
"Fifty euros a head to fill the great hall of La Sapienza University on the occasion of Gaddafi's speech: it is what was offered yesterday to several Roman students of Roma Tre University, in exchange for their presence in a half-empty hall that would have embarrassed Italy in front of the Libyan leader.

18:36
The President of the Chamber of Deputies, Gianfranco Fini, has cancelled the meeting and the subsequent conference, because of Gaddafi's "unjustified" delay.

18:54
The Right Party founder, Storace: "We let a Bedouin make fun of us".

19:06
"Democracies, starting with the US, can be wrong, but they certainly cannot be compared to terrorists". This is one of the points of the speech that Fini should have made at Montecitorio in the presence of Libyan leader Gaddafi.

19:10
Gaddafi is unwell, the opposition MPs D'Alema and Pisanu head to his tent to visit him.

19:15
Fini: "The Italians, Catholics and Jews who left Libya are a precious resource for the future of bilateral relations" also because "they have contributed with their work to the prosperity of the country and have suffered by paying for reasons outside of their responsibility".

19:25
"Fini: The Italian-Libyan treaty of friendship signed last August in Benghazi definitively closes the page of colonialism for our country, ""the Italian responsibility of the colonial past has been unequivocally affirmed".

19:31
"Libya has a decisive role in fostering peace in the Middle East". This is one of the points of the speech that Fini should have made in Montecitorio.

19:36
The speech prepared by Massimo D'Alema for the cancelled conference with Gaddafi, would have stressed that "no former colonial country behaved like Italy with Libya. I think Italians must be proud of this ". And again: "Let me say how strong is this feeling among those who feel heirs to those minorities who were there, opposing the colonial adventure and who in recent years fought against the fascist dictatorship ".

19:58
"Now, after the meeting was cancelled, it turns out that the Colonel may have fallen ill: he could have warned us. As Massimo D'Alema and Beppe Pisanu are running to him like Red Cross nurses, I think that this buffoonery - the visit of the Libyan dictator - has reached the most ridiculous epilogue for Italy ". This was stated by Stefano Pedica (IDV party), vice president of the EU Political Affairs Committee and the group leader in the Foreign Affairs Committee at the Senate.

20:07
The Radicals party: "Gaddafi is unwell? It is otitis caused by the whistles."

20:23
The vice president of the Chamber of Deputies, Rosy Bindi, expresses appreciation for the decision of President Fini to cancel the visit of Gaddafi to Montecitorio. The opposition MP has also defined a "mockery" the words of the Minister of Equal Opportunities Mara Carfagna, because "the assumption of a true and credible aid to

African women is the end of the policy of rejections and the ratification by Libya of the UN Refugee Convention."

20:33
Pisanu: "Gaddafi has apologised"

20:39
D'Alema: "Gaddafi has expressed regret for the incident".

20:45
The People's Office of the Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya in Italy, a statement reads, clarifies that the delay was "due to the fact that the Leader had to do the Al-Assr prayer".

20:54
Gaddafi: dinner at Villa Pamphili. He might leave tomorrow morning.

22:30
Impromptu, the Libyan leader arrived at the restaurant "Il Bolognese" and went for a walk by night, in the heart of Rome. This evening outing was requested by the Libyan leader who wanted to see "Rome by night". To escort him in this private walk, not only his faithful Amazonian Guards (the all-female corps of bodyguards), but also the Libyan security service and the Italian police forces.

23:53
Gaddafi left the Roman restaurant Il Bolognese in Piazza del Popolo after having dined there with about forty guests. Before leaving the restaurant, the Colonel stopped to take some pictures with the waiters and, coming out, approached a little girl in her mother’s arms who greeted him from behind the barriers. Gaddafi took a picture with her and his entourage assured that the family will be delivered the shot.

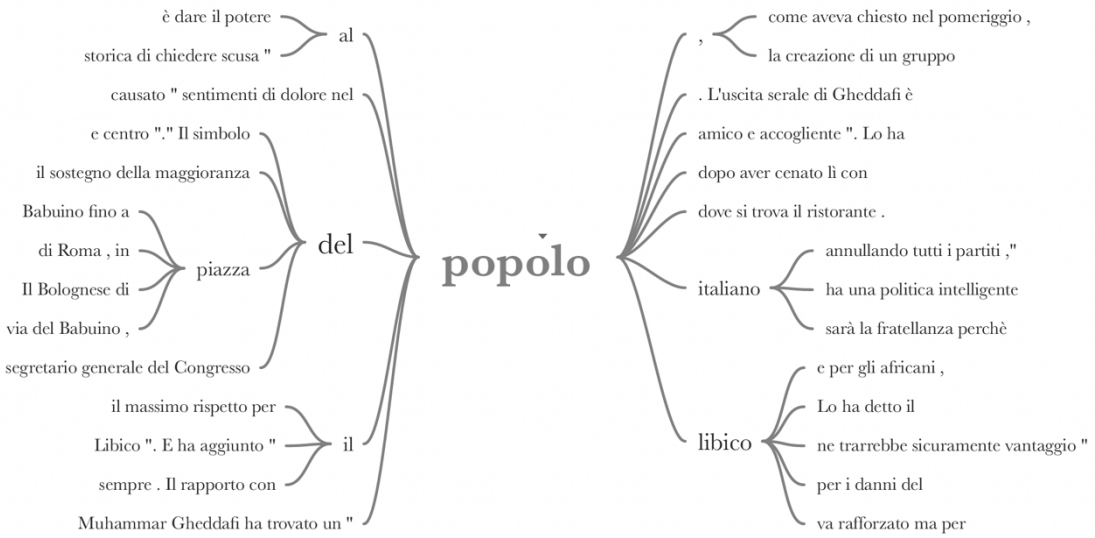
23:54
Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi left Palazzo Grazioli shortly after 11pm and went to Villa Pamphili to meet Gaddafi.

APPENDIX B

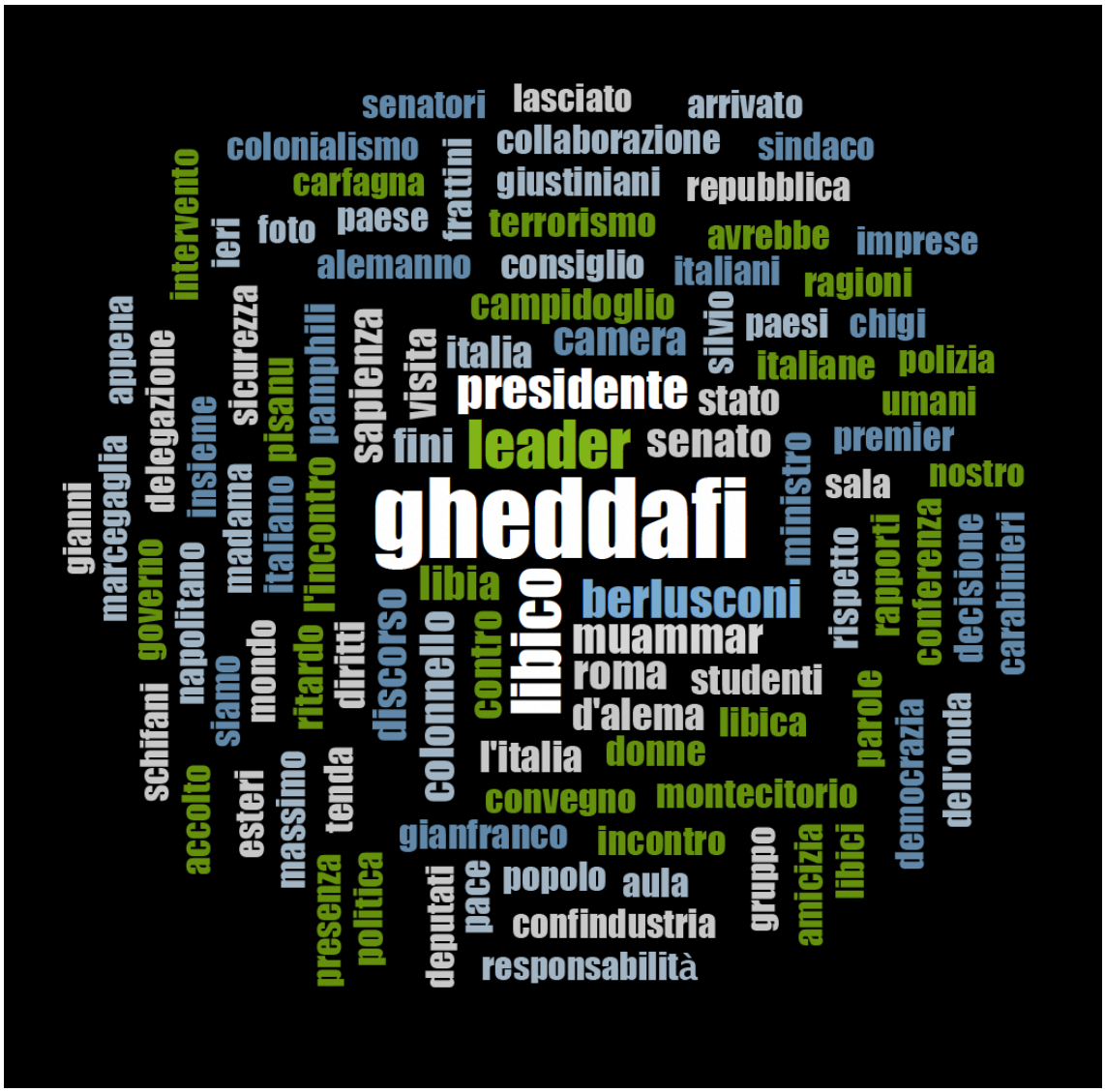
Critical Discourse Analysis

Documentation of Word Frequency Analysis (word mapping + full results) and an example of a word cluster made with Nvivo software.

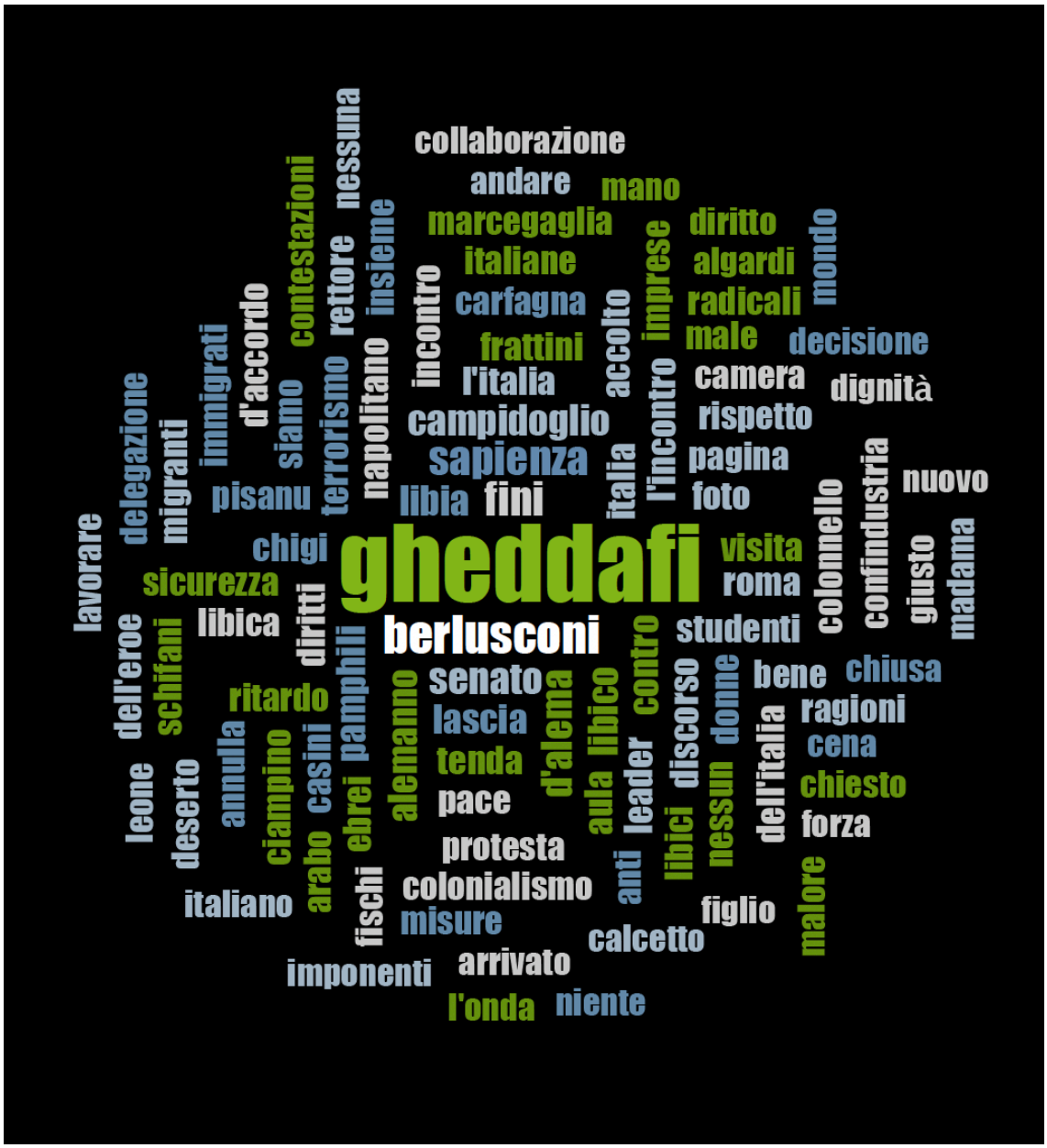
WORD CLUSTER – People



WORD FREQUENCY – Entire Neswfeed



WORD FREQUENCY – Neswfeed's Titles Only



WORD FREQUENCY – Entire Newsfeed / Full results

Word	Length	Count	Weighted Percentage	Similar Words
gheddafi	8	366	3.28%	gheddafi
libico	6	158	1.41%	libico
leader	6	144	1.29%	leader
presidente	10	94	0.84%	presidente
berlusconi	10	81	0.72%	berlusconi
muammar	7	62	0.55%	muammar
libia	5	58	0.52%	libia
senato	6	57	0.51%	senato
fini	4	56	0.50%	fini
colonnello	10	52	0.47%	colonnello
roma	4	50	0.45%	roma
discorso	8	47	0.42%	discorso
sapienza	8	47	0.42%	sapienza
camera	6	45	0.40%	camera
italia	6	37	0.33%	italia
contro	6	36	0.32%	contro
d'alema	7	36	0.32%	d'alema
visita	6	36	0.32%	visita
stato	5	32	0.29%	stato
campidoglio	11	31	0.28%	campidoglio
l'italia	8	30	0.27%	l'italia
l'incontro	10	29	0.26%	l'incontro
diritti	7	28	0.25%	diritti
ministro	8	28	0.25%	ministro
studenti	8	28	0.25%	studenti
donne	5	26	0.23%	donne
pamphili	8	24	0.21%	pamphili
consiglio	9	23	0.21%	consiglio
silvio	6	23	0.21%	silvio
italiano	8	22	0.20%	italiano
ritardo	7	21	0.19%	ritardo
convegno	8	20	0.18%	convegno

rispetto	8	20	0.18%	rispetto
terrorismo	10	20	0.18%	terrorismo
alemanno	8	19	0.17%	alemanno
gianfranco	10	19	0.17%	gianfranco
italiane	8	19	0.17%	italiane
libica	6	19	0.17%	libica
montecitorio	12	19	0.17%	montecitorio
sala	4	19	0.17%	sala
pisanu	6	18	0.16%	pisanu
madama	6	17	0.15%	madama
mondo	5	17	0.15%	mondo
paesi	5	17	0.15%	paesi
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sicurezza	9	17	0.15%	sicurezza
tenda	5	17	0.15%	tenda
incontro	8	16	0.14%	incontro
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premier	7	16	0.14%	premier
avrebbe	7	15	0.13%	avrebbe
frattini	8	15	0.13%	frattini
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paese	5	15	0.13%	paese
popolo	6	15	0.13%	popolo
siamo	5	15	0.13%	siamo
conferenza	10	14	0.13%	conferenza
delegazione	11	14	0.13%	delegazione
governo	7	14	0.13%	governo
massimo	7	14	0.13%	massimo
pace	4	14	0.13%	pace
parole	6	14	0.13%	parole
umani	5	14	0.13%	umani, umani'
aula	4	13	0.12%	aula

chigi	5	13	0.12%	chigi
collaborazione	14	13	0.12%	collaborazione
confindustria	13	13	0.12%	confindustria
decisione	9	13	0.12%	decisione
esteri	6	13	0.12%	esteri
politica	8	13	0.12%	politica
ragioni	7	13	0.12%	ragioni
repubblica	10	13	0.12%	repubblica
carfagna	8	12	0.11%	carfagna
deputati	8	12	0.11%	deputati
foto	4	12	0.11%	foto
gruppo	6	12	0.11%	gruppo
lasciato	8	12	0.11%	lasciato
marcegaglia	11	12	0.11%	marcegaglia
polizia	7	12	0.11%	polizia
responsabilità	15	12	0.11%	responsabilità
schifani	8	12	0.11%	schifani
senatori	8	12	0.11%	senatori
democrazia	10	11	0.10%	democrazia, democrazia''
accolto	7	11	0.10%	accolto
amicizia	8	11	0.10%	amicizia
carabinieri	11	11	0.10%	carabinieri
colonialismo	12	11	0.10%	colonialismo
dell'onda	9	11	0.10%	dell'onda
imprese	7	11	0.10%	imprese
intervento	10	11	0.10%	intervento
libici	6	11	0.10%	libici
nostro	6	11	0.10%	nostro
presenza	8	11	0.10%	presenza
sindaco	7	11	0.10%	sindaco
appena	6	10	0.09%	appena
arrivato	8	10	0.09%	arrivato
gianni	6	10	0.09%	gianni
ieri	4	10	0.09%	ieri

mentre	6	10	0.09%	mentre
nell'aula	9	10	0.09%	nell'aula
nostra	6	10	0.09%	nostra
quando	6	10	0.09%	quando
rettore	7	10	0.09%	rettore
stampa	6	10	0.09%	stampa
uniti	5	10	0.09%	uniti
laden	5	10	0.09%	laden, laden'
'diritto'	9	9	0.08%	'diritto', diritto
bene	4	9	0.08%	bene, bene'', benè
capigruppo	10	9	0.08%	capigruppo
chiesto	7	9	0.08%	chiesto
colloquio	9	9	0.08%	colloquio
comunità	9	9	0.08%	comunità
deciso	6	9	0.08%	deciso
ebrei	5	9	0.08%	ebrei
giorno	6	9	0.08%	giorno
italiana	8	9	0.08%	italiana
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passato	7	9	0.08%	passato, passato'
protesta	8	9	0.08%	protesta
tutta	5	9	0.08%	tutta
'italianieuropei'	17	8	0.07%	'italianieuropei', italianieuropei
aggiunto	8	8	0.07%	aggiunto
all'auditorium	14	8	0.07%	all'auditorium
auto	4	8	0.07%	auto
causa	5	8	0.07%	causa
corteo	6	8	0.07%	corteo
d'accordo	9	8	0.07%	d'accordo
deserto	7	8	0.07%	deserto, deserto'
ebraica	7	8	0.07%	ebraica
fronte	6	8	0.07%	fronte

internazionale	14	8	0.07%	internazionale
l'arrivo	8	8	0.07%	l'arrivo
lascia	6	8	0.07%	lascia
legge	5	8	0.07%	legge
mano	4	8	0.07%	mano
migranti	8	8	0.07%	migranti
parco	5	8	0.07%	parco
poco	4	8	0.07%	poco
quello	6	8	0.07%	quello
renato	6	8	0.07%	renato
sarebbe	7	8	0.07%	sarebbe
senatore	8	8	0.07%	senatore
sviluppo	8	8	0.07%	sviluppo
terroristi	10	8	0.07%	terroristi
zona	4	8	0.07%	'zona, zona
affermato	9	7	0.06%	affermato
all'interno	11	7	0.06%	all'interno
annullare	9	7	0.06%	annullare
atteso	6	7	0.06%	atteso
aveva	5	7	0.06%	aveva
bilaterali	10	7	0.06%	bilaterali
certo	5	7	0.06%	certo
ciampino	8	7	0.06%	ciampino
congiunta	9	7	0.06%	congiunta
dell'incontro	13	7	0.06%	dell'incontro
dell'italia	11	7	0.06%	dell'italia
dittatore	9	7	0.06%	dittatore
dovuto	6	7	0.06%	dovuto
fonti	5	7	0.06%	fonti
forte	5	7	0.06%	forte
giovani	7	7	0.06%	giovani
immigrati	9	7	0.06%	immigrati
istituzioni	11	7	0.06%	istituzioni
mattina	7	7	0.06%	mattina

modo	4	7	0.06%	modo
momento	7	7	0.06%	momento
organizzato	11	7	0.06%	organizzato
parlamento	10	7	0.06%	parlamento
pedica	6	7	0.06%	pedica
politici	8	7	0.06%	politici
proteste	8	7	0.06%	proteste
quirinale	9	7	0.06%	quirinale
ragazzi	7	7	0.06%	ragazzi
rivoluzione	11	7	0.06%	rivoluzione
romani	6	7	0.06%	romani
segretario	10	7	0.06%	segretario
leone	5	6	0.05%	'leone, leone
opportunità	12	6	0.05%	opportunita', opportunità
africani	8	6	0.05%	africani
bianca	6	6	0.05%	bianca
bordo	5	6	0.05%	bordo
casini	6	6	0.05%	casini
coloniale	9	6	0.05%	coloniale
credo	5	6	0.05%	credo
dell'economia	13	6	0.05%	dell'economia
dell'immigrazione	17	6	0.05%	dell'immigrazione
destra	6	6	0.05%	destra
diretto	7	6	0.05%	diretto
divisa	6	6	0.05%	divisa
emma	4	6	0.05%	emma
fischi	6	6	0.05%	fischi
forze	5	6	0.05%	forze
generale	8	6	0.05%	generale
giorgio	7	6	0.05%	giorgio
mara	4	6	0.05%	mara
mediterraneo	12	6	0.05%	mediterraneo
microfono	9	6	0.05%	microfono
misure	6	6	0.05%	misure

APPENDIX C

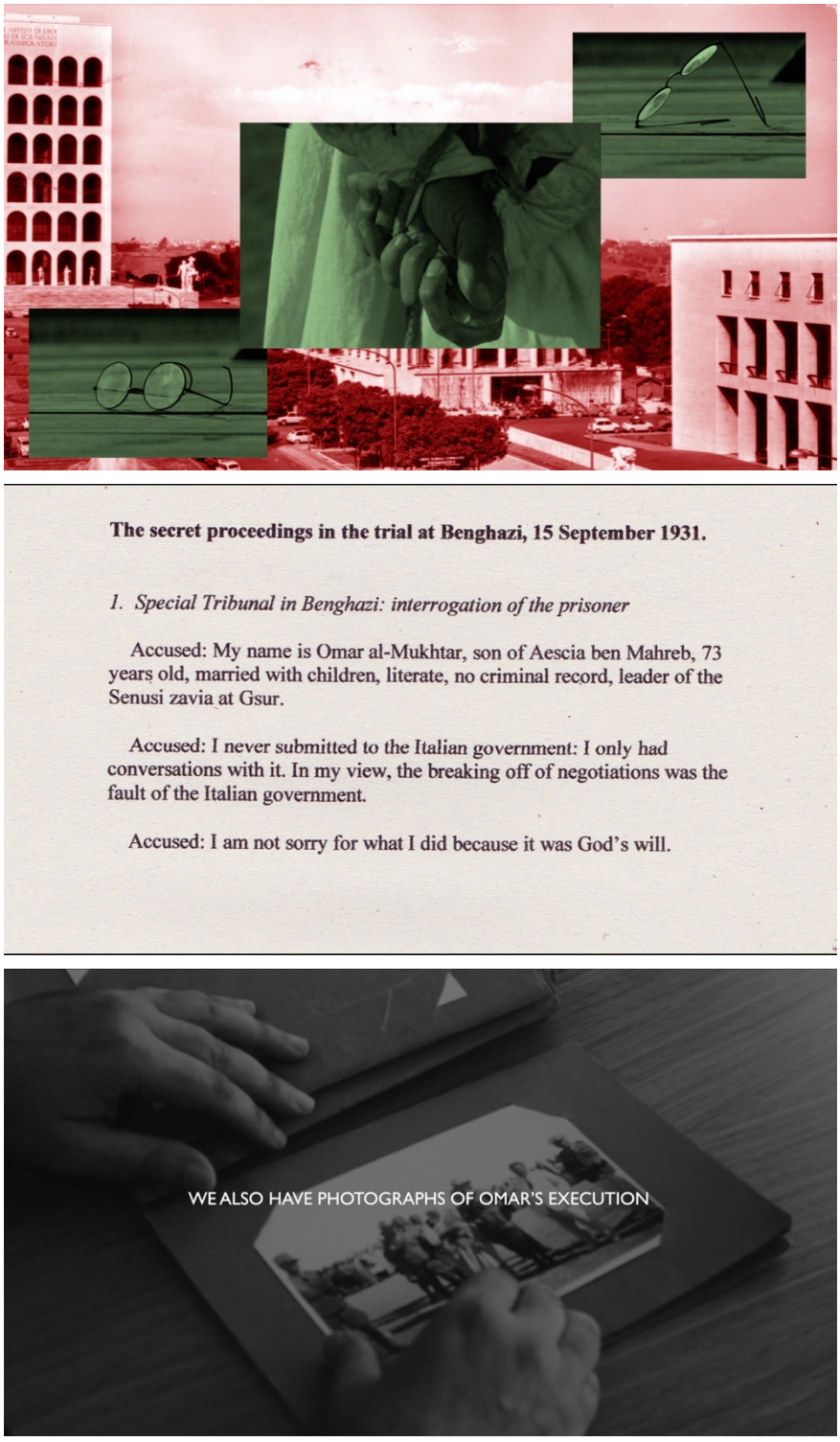
Sight Unseen

HD video, duration 18’56”
2019

Omar al-Mukhtar (1885-1931) was the leader of the resistance against the Italian colonisation of Libya (1911-1943). He became the symbol of the Libyan people’s resilience, but in Italy, he remains unknown. *Sight Unseen* explores the concealment and appropriation around the memory and documentation of Mukhtar’s final days and spectacularised state killing through the analysis of visual and material culture that has been subject to either manipulation or obfuscation in Italy. At its core is the most complete - but legally unpublishable - series of images of Mukhtar's capture and execution, which historian Alessandro Volterra describes and shows to the camera. Conveying the concealment and marginalisation of these images (and legal ban), they are never fully revealed: barely discernible, they are faded to black, blurred, and shown for just an instant. Interwoven to this material are other references that attest to the carefully orchestrated politics of visibility and invisibility that shape the memory of colonial violence in Italy: Mukhtar’s contested glasses; the movie *Lion of the Desert*; extracts from Mukhtar's trial; and Monumento al Carabiniere, a 1933 memorial to the Italian armed forces in Turin.

The work has also been presented in gallery spaces as an installation. In this version, the video is shortened (going from minute 00:46 to minute 16:42). The intro with stamps and the quote by Gaddafi, as well as the outro with the four text slides revealing the nature of the material portrayed in the video - and their histories of censorship and obfuscation (‘Exhibit A, B, C, D) are presented as posters. This allows for the final revelation and the premise of the video to be accessible even to audiences that are not watching the film from beginning to end, in its linear, cinematographic form.

Please Note: The video was recorded in 2018. In 2021 the copyright issues were solved and Alessandro Volterra, together with Maurizio Zinni, was able to publish the book *Il leone, il giudice e il capestro. Storia e immagini della repressione italiana in Cirenaica (1928-1932),* which analyses this collection of photographs.



Video stills.



Installation at Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo (Turin, 2020).



Installation at Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo (Turin, 2020), detail.



Installation at Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo (Turin, 2020), detail.

Unruly Connections

installation
2022

Unruly Connections analyses practices of resistance to colonial violence, weaving together three stories of opposition to the "iconographic silence" towards the repression of the resistance movements in Libya at the end of the 1920's. Introduced by historian Alessandro Volterra, the term "iconographic silence" refers to general Rodolfo Graziani's directive that prohibited photographing and circulating any documentation of the brutal repression of Libyan people at the hands of the Italians, which included the use of outlawed chemical weapons and concentration camps. I have drawn connections between people and literary works that, across different times and locations, challenged the censorship of this genocide.

The exhibition revolves around the willingness to commission the first Italian translation of the novel *The Conscript* by Gebreyesus Hailu. Written in 1927, it was transmitted orally because of Italian censorship and was finally published in 1950. It Is the first novel in the Tigrinya language and one of the first examples of anti-colonial literature, which has remained virtually unknown as it was translated into English only in 2012. The Italian translation, developed by historian Uoldelul Chelati Dirar, is presented in the exhibition.

Within the exhibition, the translation of *The Conscript* intersected with the stories of Danish journalist Knud Holmboe (1902 – 1931) and writer, anarchist, and feminist Leda Rafanelli (1880 – 1971). After converting to Sufism, Knud Holmboe arrived in Libya in 1930, where he came into contact with the Senussi resistance in Cyrenaica, denouncing the atrocious violence of Italians in a diary and photographic series published in 1931 and titled *Desert Encounters* (initially censored in Italy and only translated in 2005). In the same year, he was killed in Jordan - probably at the hands of the Italian government, although this has never been officially proved. Alessandra Ferrini tells Holmboe's story, comparing it to other documents related to his assassination that she mysteriously received via email and Twitter through an anonymous historian/journalist in August 2020.

Urged by her alleged North African family roots, Leda Rafanelli briefly moved to Alexandria in 1900, where she gravitated towards the Italian anarchist community and converted to Islam. Identifying herself as a "Muslim anarchist", her writings - which showcase a very strong interest in and solidarity with the oppressed - intertwine anarchist propaganda, feminism, romance novels and Islam. Despite the strict surveillance she was subject to during the Fascist dictatorship, in 1929 she published romance novel *L'Oasi. Romanzo arabo* (*The Oasis. Arab Novel*), in which a passionate love story acts as the background for a reflection on colonial violence. Set in Tunisia and published under the pseudonym of Etienne Gamalier, the novel draws a parallel with the repression of the Libyan resistance by the Fascist military. Romance is thus employed to disguise political protest. A sound piece presents the reading of extracts from the three novels.



Book cover of the Italian translation of *the Conscript*.

The translation and Chelati Dirar's new insights on the novel, have been published by in November 2023 by Tamu, with a preface by the US-Ethiopian writer Maaza Mengiste and a postface that I wrote: https://tamuedizioni.com/tproduct/467310025-440322377241-lascaro



Installation at Ar/Ge Kunst (Bolzano, 2022).



Installation at Ar/Ge Kunst (Bolzano, 2022).



Installation at Ar/Ge Kunst (Bolzano, 2022), detail.



Installation at Ar/Ge Kunst (Bolzano, 2022), translation of *The Conscript.*



Installation at Ar/Ge Kunst (Bolzano, 2022).



Installation at Ar/Ge Kunst (Bolzano, 2022), detail.



Installation at Ar/Ge Kunst (Bolzano, 2022), detail.



Installation at Ar/Ge Kunst (Bolzano, 2022).



Installation at Ar/Ge Kunst (Bolzano, 2022), detail.

APPENDIX D

Gaddafi in Rome: Anatomy of a Friendship

Two-channel video installation
2024 (new production)

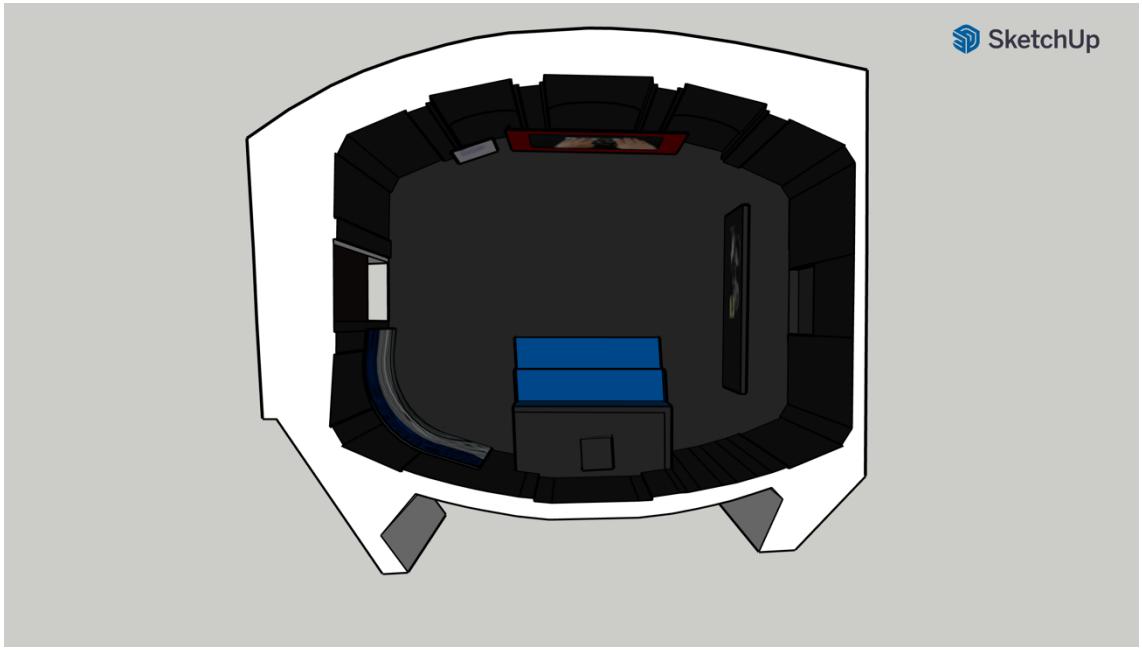
60th Venice Biennale, *Foreigners Everywhere*
International show curated by Adriano Pedrosa)
Location: Central Pavillion, Giardini

Gaddafi in Rome: Anatomy of a Friendship is part of a series of artworks stemming from the ongoing and long-term research *Gaddafi in Rome*, which began in 2017. It revolves around a highly mediatised event, the meeting between former Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi and former Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi in Rome, which took place in June 2009. The research stems from an 'iconic' portrayal of the two leaders at Ciampino Airport. In this image, they exchange a handshake, surrounded by their security entourages. This reciprocal and cordial act is, however, contrasted by a black and white image pinned to the Libyan head of state's uniform, that is, a portrayal of Omar al Mukhtar, the leader of the anticolonial resistance against the Italian occupation (Fig.3). In chains, and surrounded by officers of the Italian Fascist Army, he was executed a few days later. Framing this project is an engagement with the relations between Italy and Libya since the Italian occupation (1911-1943) and during the Gaddafi regime, explicitly focusing on the more recent bilateral agreements shaping the European Union's migration policies in the Mediterranean.

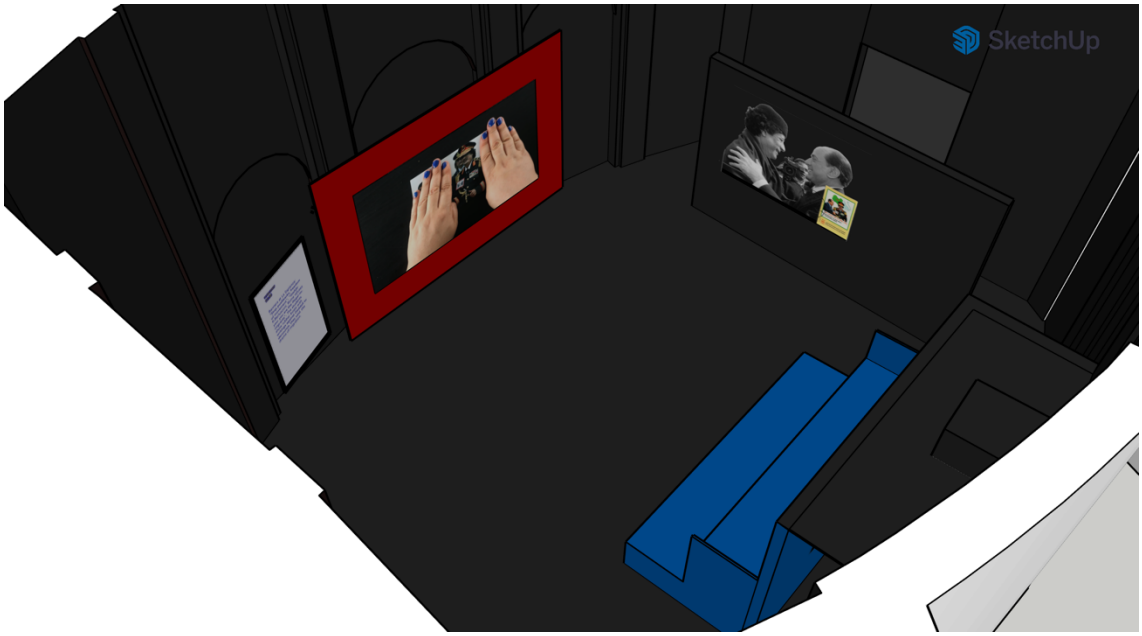
This new production will build on the previous three-channel video installation realised for the Maxxi Bvlgari Prize 2022, titled *Gaddafi in Rome: Notes for a Film* (1 hour duration). If this work presented Gaddafi's visit to Rome through an exploration of the locations and the way it was reported by the media, *Anatomy of a Friendship* focuses more specifically on the Treaty of Friendship, Partnership and Cooperation between Italy and Libya, both through a reflection on the event and on the bilateral relations between the two nations - the trajectory leading to the meeting and its legacies. The video (duration approx. 20min) is narrated through a first-person, self-reflexive voiceover, which engages with a series of documents and media recordings while offering a series of reflections on the continuity of Italian colonialism and its perception in the Italian public. Next to the main projection screen, which will feature a red frame like the image of Omar al-Mukhtar pinned to Gaddafi's chest as a protest, a vertical TV monitor will display a timeline of the Bilateral Relations between Italy and Libya from Libyan independence in the 1950s to today (including Giorgia Meloni's Mattei Plan for Africa)

Central to this work is an engagement with the notion of 'dissection' that provides tools, gestures, and a conceptual frame for the analysis of a media spectacle. This is also reflected and highlighted in the installation that plays on the notion of the anatomical theatre as a metaphor for critical analysis and its spectacularising. Bleacher-like seating and a large-scale 'curtain' will directly reference the first permanent anatomical theatre

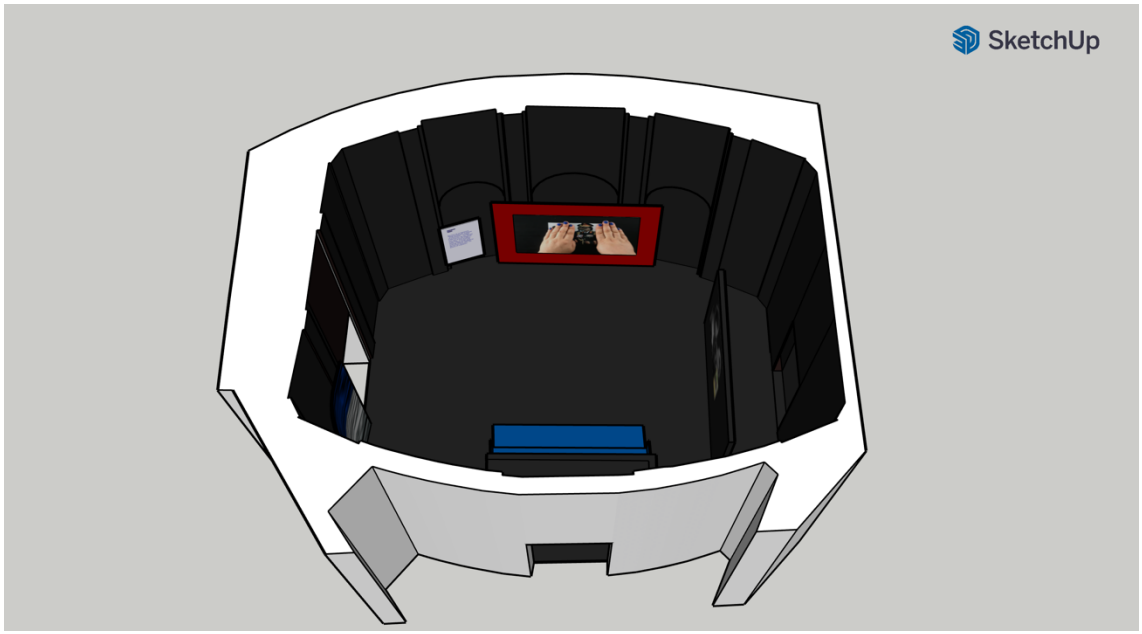
built for teaching: the anatomical theatre of Padua. On the other hand, the space will also include two prints referring to the relationship between Berlusconi and Gaddafi (and their 'friendship') while highlighting elements that directly comment on the contradictory nature of such allyship. That is, it puts an emphasis on the colonial script that drove the Treaty of Friendship.



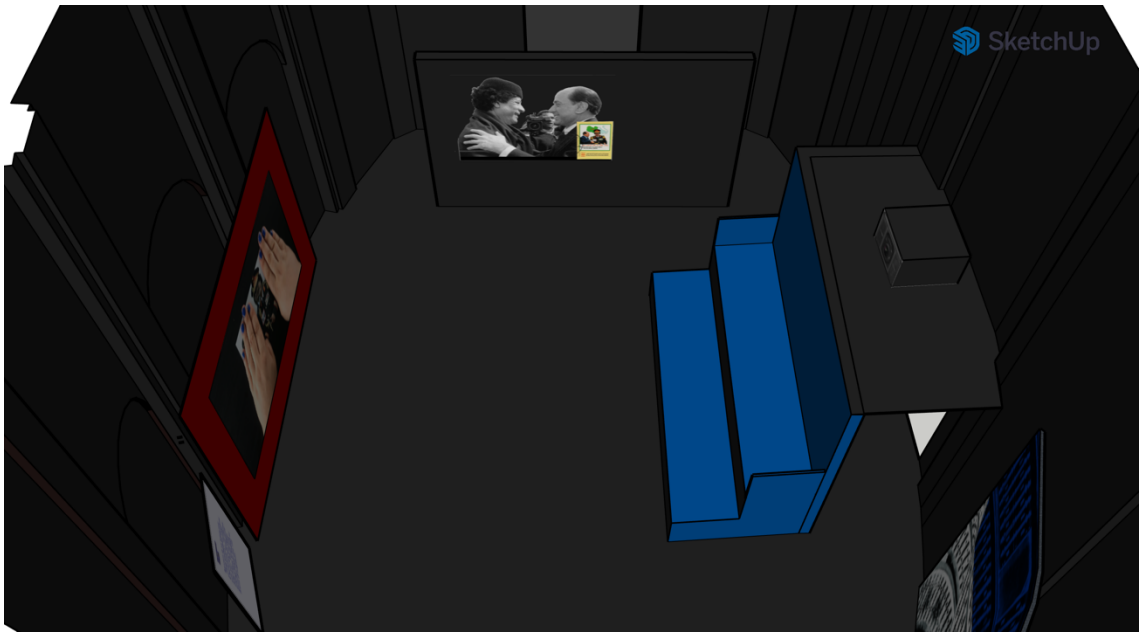
Installation – view from above



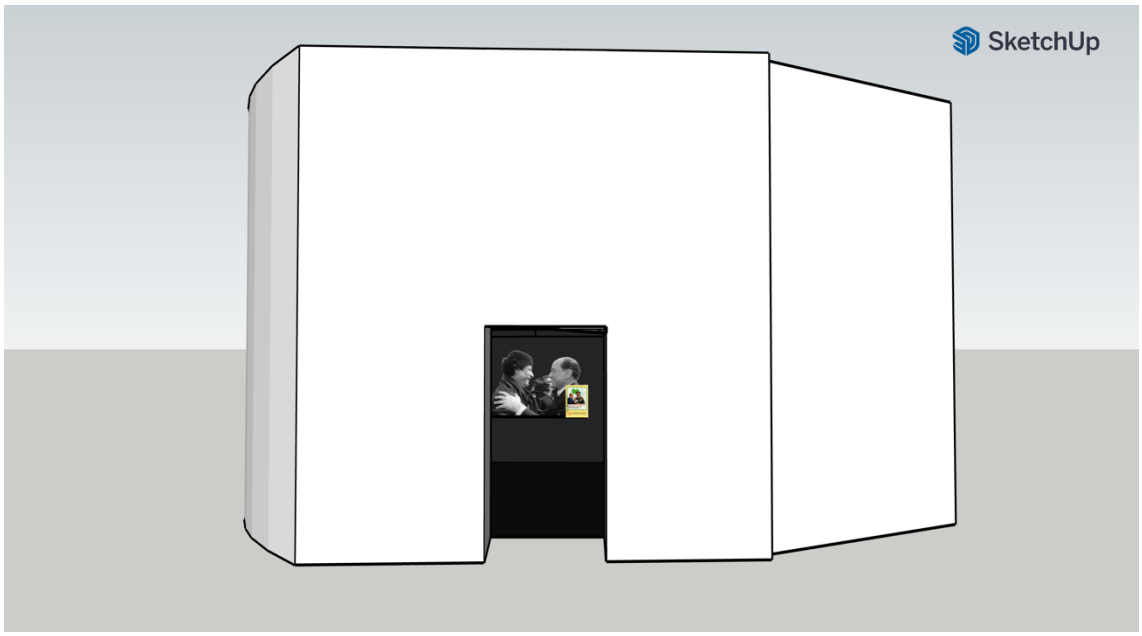
Installation – view from above



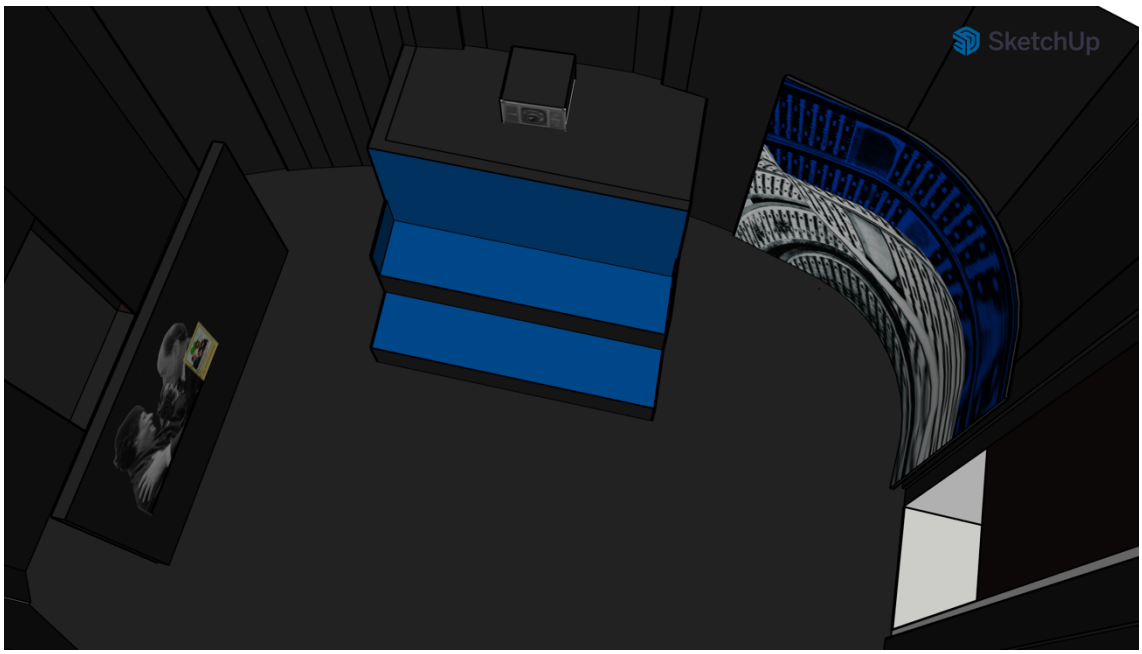
Installation – view from above



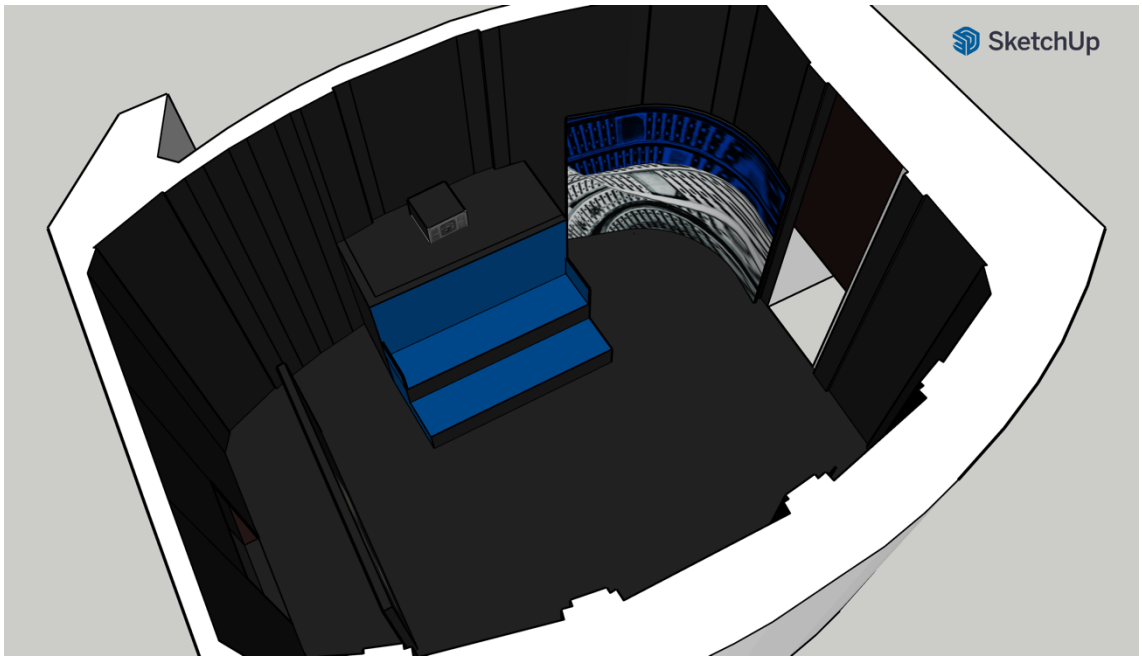
Installation – view from above



Installation – entry 1



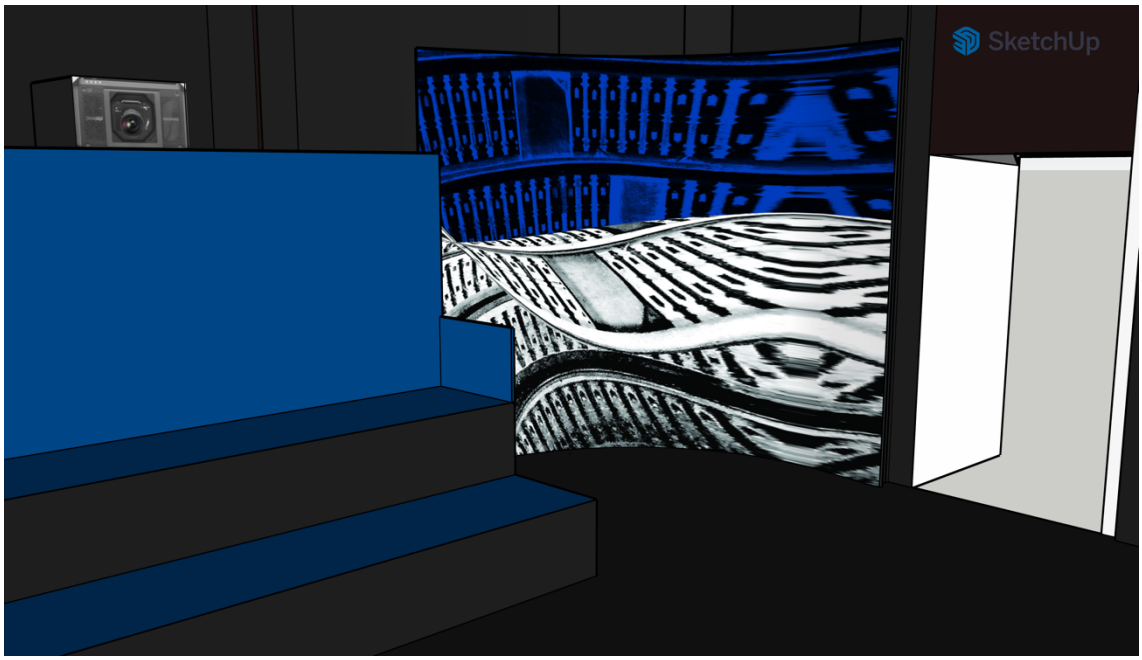
Installation – view from above



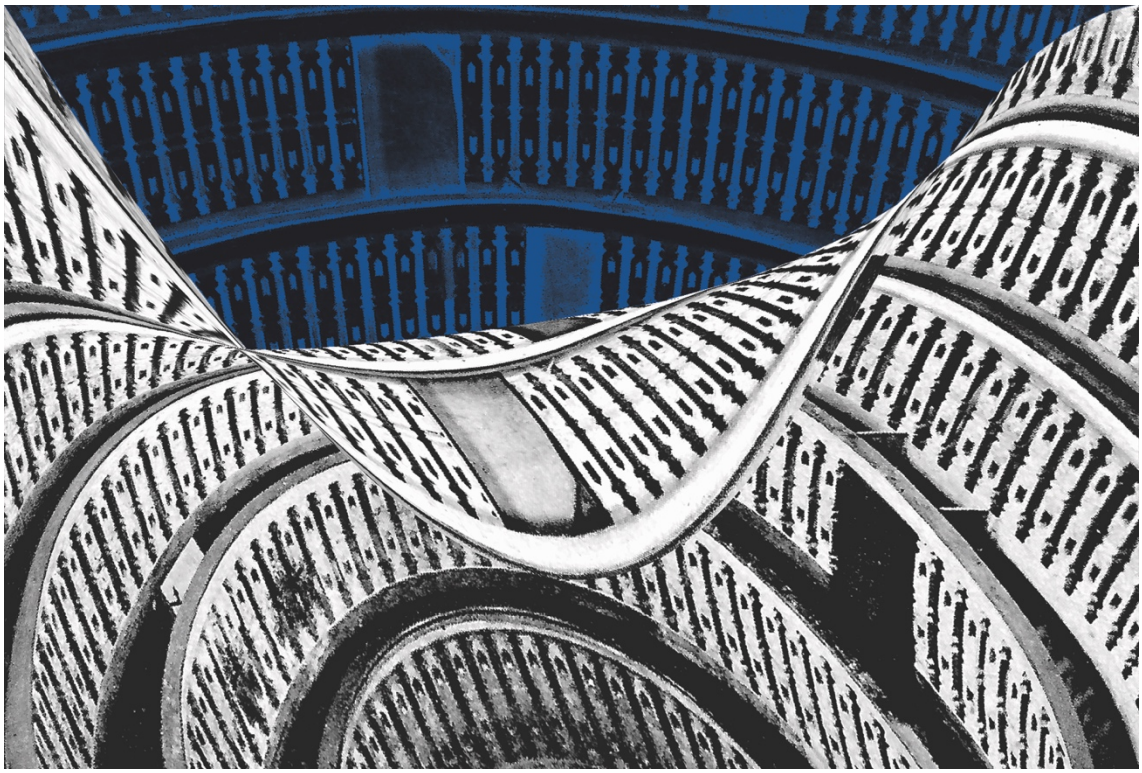
Installation – view from above



Installation – interior (bleachers and print in plexi)



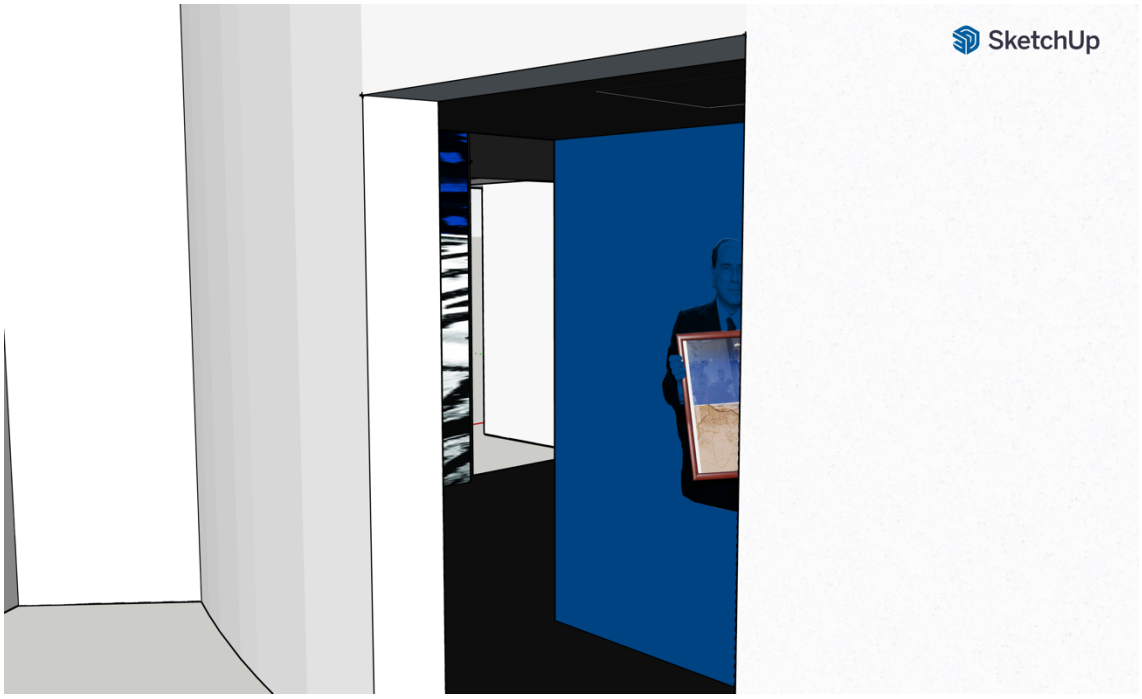
Installation – interior (bleachers, hanging curtain/printed textile)
Please notice: the design of the curtain is distorted by the software in this image



Hanging Curtain / Printex Textile design



Installation – entry 2



Installation – entry 2 (corridor)

APPENDIX E

Like Swarming Maggots: uses and abuses of colonial History.
Reflections on practice, research, translation, and positioning.

Book, 2024 (forthcoming)
Archive Books publisher (Berlin)

Produced by Villa Romana (Florence) with support from an Italian Council production grant. With support from: Depo Istanbul; L'Art Rue Tunis; Maxxi Museum of 21st Century Art, Rome; MOMus Thessaloniki; Triangle-Astérides Marseille.

The proposed publication is the first monograph by the artist-researcher Alessandra Ferrini. It presents the results of a long-term research on the colonial and neo-colonial relations between Italy and Libya through a critical engagement with the Italian 'archive of coloniality' and its structural violence. Expanding on the artist's commitment to archival research, writing, translation, and collaboration, it brings together different voices and visual materials, while working as a platform to showcase her practice and theoretical thinking, putting forward a reflection on the ethical dimension of cultural work. Published by Archive Books, it comprises an English edition as a printed hard copy for international distribution, , as well as a digital, open access version in Italian, aiming to reach a wide public and generate an important and urgent conversation on whiteness, coloniality and (neo)colonial violence, especially among students and practitioners.

Contents

The book is divided in three main parts (a methodological introduction followed by two interwoven bodies of work) each evolving around two theoretical concepts developed by the artist throughout her research, as a sort of glossary. These parts will also be placed in dialogue with the work of Libyan writers (Khaled Mattawa, Alessandro Spina – pseudonym of Basili Shafik Khouzam – and Sadiq al-Nayhoum) that will be reprinted and/or translated for this publication. Their work will be curated and expanded on by cultural producers Ghazi Gheblawi and Amalie Elfallah, who will also engage in a conversation around Libyan literature, colonial memory, and the practice of translation with the artist.

The first part – the methodological introduction **-** revolves around the concepts of 'archive of coloniality' and 'accountability framework' and will put forward a reflection on whiteness and positionality, focused on neo-imperial politics in the Euro-Mediterranean. It will also include a conversation between the artist and the curator-researcher Chiara Cartuccia. Delving into their shared interests and long-term, ongoing exchange, it will also feature a visual mapping, through a selection of archival materials, documents and news material that they have collected.

The second part, emerging from a practice-based PhD research, showcases the work *Gaddafi in Rome: Notes for a Film* (awarded the Maxxi Bvlgari Prize 2022), which scrutinises the Treaty of Friendship, Partnership and Cooperation between Italy and Libya signed in 2008 by Muammar Gaddafi and Silvio Berlusconi. More specifically, it analyses Gaddafi's ensuing visit to Rome in 2009. Taking the Italian media's reaction as a starting point, it puts forward a series of tactics for the dissection of a twenty-first century media event that spectacularised neo-colonial relations between Italy and Libya, while contributing to the reinforcement of border necropolitics and to the manipulation of colonial trauma in both countries. In this section, the concepts that will be developed are: 'neo-colonial spectacle' and 'dissection'. The latter, constituting the methodological approach to the 'archive of coloniality', provides a thorough engagement with the performative, installative and moving image formats deployed in Ferrini's investigative practice. A wide array of archival material and documentation of the work, as well as of the performance-lecture *Gaddafi in Rome: the Expanded Script* (2019), will further reflect on the notion of the 'essayistic', which frames the artist's work.

The **third part** focuses on the genocide perpetrated by the Italians in Libya (late 1920s to mid 1930s), investigating practices of censorship and resistance, while devising approaches to avoid the spectacularisation and circulation of images of violence. It showcases the artwork *Sight Unseen* (2019-20) exploring the concealment and appropriation of Omar al-Mukhtar's story, the leader of the organised resistance against the Italian colonisation of Libya. At its core is the most complete - but legally unpublishable - series of images of Mukhtar's capture and execution, narrated by historian Alessandro Volterra. The second work showcased is *Unruly Connections*

(2022) that analyses practices of resistance to colonial violence through writing and publishing. It weaves together three stories of opposition to the "iconographic silence" towards the repression of the resistance movements in Libya. Introduced by Volterra in *Sight Unseen*, the term "iconographic silence" refers to the Italian directive that prohibited any documentation of the brutal repression. This book's section is driven by an engagement with this concept and the notion of 'unruly connections' (undisciplined relations within the margins of Empire) –two concepts that have driven the artist's thinking.

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