

Black markets: Fascist constructions of race in East African marketplace newsreels

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Abstract

This article investigates East African marketplace films to trace the developmental arc and varieties of Italian Fascist racism in empire. Totalling over 70 in number, these bantam adventures in souks and bazaars were among the most popular formats for 1930s newsreels purporting to document daily life in the colonies. The short documentary-style films were produced by LUCE, the cinematic arm for state-run propagandistic projects. Like many of the films produced by this larger cinematic body, marketplace newsreels cast Italian technology in starring roles. Tractors and sewing machines frame Italian as modernizing heroes. By focusing on visual and acoustic examples, the article examines the markets of propaganda through a sensory focus. Ultimately, this approach intertwines two modes of inquiry: the history of East African architecture and urbanism, and Fascist Italian empire film.

Keywords

Italian East Africa (AOI), colonialism, empire cinema, Fascism, imperialism, Italy

Blaring trumpets, growling tractors, and tapping sewing machines tick the time in the Fascist regime's 90-second *cinigiornali* (newsreels) that were dedicated to the marketplaces of Libya and Italian East Africa (AOI). These short documentary-style films were produced by LUCE, the cinematic arm for state-run propagandistic projects. Totalling over 70 in number, these bantam adventures in souks and bazaars were among the most popular formats for 1930s newsreels purporting to document daily life on the *quarta sponda*, the colonial 'fourth shore' of Fascist Italy. Marketplaces provided a convenient synecdoche for empire. As a commercial space, it evoked the Fascist regime's preferred tropes of exoticism and picturesque underdevelopment. At the same time, it hinted at ample foodstuffs to be seized in support of Italian autarchy or economic self-sufficiency.

But the luminous colonial markets of celluloid fantasy conjured a dark shadow: the unofficial and illegal food markets in Rome. Here, clusters of food stalls huddled under bridges and in the

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yard of the infamous Regina Coeli prison. Black markets provided grocers with a place to sell rationed goods such as butter, meat, and bread at soaring prices. Desperate cooks still came to purchase such ingredients. At its simplest, a black market means a shadow economy. Etymologist and journalist Paolo Monelli dates a variant of the term to 1380, citing a derivative of *borsa nera* as a black market for currency. Former Accademia della Crusca President Bruno Migliorini points out that these marketplaces typically emerged near local banks. To avoid police busts of these illegal stock exchanges during the interwar period, the furtive trade of Italian *Lire* for German *Reichsmark* took place under the cover of night. The modern Italian *mercato nero* was thus doubly dark, both morally (being illicit) and literally (being unlit). Although this form of commerce dates back as far as the early Renaissance, the term ‘black market’ evolved in the interwar period before entering dictionaries in 1942.¹ As tensions mounted, sanctions and scarcity prompted the creation of black markets across Europe. Allied and Axis nations alike decreed purchasing goods, including rice, sugar, nylons, and gasoline to be illegal over government-sanctioned amounts and prices. Here, transactions flouted institutional rules, and illegal goods could be exchanged. Under this definition, any market outside of Fascist control was considered a black market.

In Italian East Africa (AOI), markets assumed additional racial resonance. Marketplace activities such as displaying one’s fruits by type or haggling over the appropriate price for a piece of cloth are not inherently meaningful activities; instead, they create meaning through the repeated demarcation of boundaries and assignment of relative value. Commercial hubs inevitably promoted culinary and racial mixing. People came to gather, to joke, to argue, and to eat. After all, the key activity of a marketplace is exchange. Because markets function through a semiotics of sorting and evaluating, the Fascist regime seized on these spaces as an arena for forging racial hierarchies. At the same time, East African marketplaces directly challenged Fascist Italian racial policy in the colonies because their success relied on racial mixing as part of commercial trade.

This article explores the racist dimension of black markets to examine the developmental arc and varieties of Italian Fascist racism in empire through East African marketplace films.² It focuses on visual and acoustic examples, examining the markets of empire film through a sensory focus. Ultimately, this approach intertwines two modes of inquiry: the history of East African architecture and urbanism, and Fascist Italian empire film. Marketplace newsreels thus comprised part of what Ruth Ben-Ghiat has termed ‘empire cinema’. Made between 1936 and 1943 under the aegis of Benito Mussolini’s regime, these documentary and feature films relied on Italy’s African and Balkan colonies to supply subjects and settings. The hallmark of the genre lies in its unmarked

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1. Terms related to *mercato nero*, such as *libero mercato* (free market) meaning illicit trade, or, figuratively ‘a place of great confusion’, date as far back as 1380 tracts associated with Saint Catherine of Siena. See ‘néro’ in: M. Cortelazzo / M. A. Cortelazzo (eds.), *l’Etimologico minore Zanichelli*, Bologna 2004, 789–799. In Italian, as well as German and English, the term *black market* was used throughout the 1930s. All three nations added the phrase to dictionaries on the eve of World War II.
 2. These recent discussions follow 75 years of debate, wherein little consensus has emerged regarding the relative importance of the conditions of Fascism, the total number of conditions to be met, or even the conditions themselves. See S. Payne, *Fascism: Comparison and Definition*, Madison 1980. The question of the essential nature of Fascism often rests in the uneasy place of identification without explanation. Walter Laqueur has pushed for a specific definition, arguing that Fascism and Nazism constitute forms of political modernism, see W. Laqueur (ed.), *Fascism: A Reader’s Guide*, Berkeley 1976. Similarly, Eric Hobsbawm has suggested that the primary motivation behind both movements lay in the creation of a revitalized modern society; see E. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: A History of the World, 1914–1991*, New York 1994. Hannah Arendt’s seminal study included the element of terror in the definition of totalitarianism—but while violence as analytic frame captures the horrors of the Holocaust and Stalinist Russia, terror did not represent the everyday experience of Italian Fascism; see H. Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, New York 1951. See also R. De Felice, *Interpretations of Fascism*, Cambridge 1977.

alternation between fiction and non-fiction, a slippage that also marked other empire films aiming to provide both authenticity and entertainment. British and French features, for instance, played documentary footage of local festivals and landscapes, and also hired indigenous inhabitants as actors and extras. However, Fascist Italian empire cinema contains historically specific racial variants, of which the marketplace newsreels are a prime exemplar. The 1936 burst in filmic productivity resulted from the propaganda crisis that had been catalysed by the regime's invasion of Ethiopia in October 1935. Coordination between print, aural, and visual media tightened, a move that marks such newsreels that erected sonic barriers between white and black marketgoers at the same time as when urbanists lay *cordons sanitaires* of eucalyptus trees between East African city neighbourhoods. Market segregation and market segmentation were mutually constitutive. As Ben-Ghiat notes, state promulgation of racial legislation from 1937 onwards had an impact, affecting the story lines, reception, and casting of features. Advances in cinematic technology, such as advances in weaponry and transportation, eradicated the distance between Italy and East Africa.

Like many of the films in this larger cinematic body, marketplace newsreels cast Italian technology in starring roles. Tractors and sewing machines frame Italian as modernizing heroes. Trumpets sound from the stages of Cinecittà, speaking to LUCE's technological leap to sound, accomplished less than a decade prior to the Ethiopian Invasion. Although these newsreels did not boast the budget, length, or publicity of feature films such as *Kif Tebbi*, *Lo squadrone bianco*, or *Sotto la Croce del Sud*, they dealt with the same questions of interracial sociability, martial hierarchy, and commercial success. Moreover, theatres from the Alcazar in Rome to the Supercinema Teatro Italia in Addis Ababa screened these 1- to 2-minute films immediately before feature films. A 2-minute newsreel of a Mogadishu marketplace thus takes on additional meaning. When screened directly before a viewing of *Sentinelle di bronzo*, a film based in Somalia, this newsreel would have naturally conditioned audience reception of the film's content. In their alternation between documentary and feature form, East African marketplace newsreels were part of the larger project of nationalist expansion undergirded by a common cinematic experience. The fantasy of an Italian Mediterranean, Ben-Ghiat argues, involved not only transplantations and resettlements, but also 'an imperial-diasporatic nation that encompassed Italians in the colonies, the metropole, and in Italian communities abroad'.³

The materials centring this study thus emblemize the fusion of the public and the private that George Mosse identified as characteristic of Fascism in general and of Italian Fascism in particular.⁴ Faced with what seemed to be an over-inflated term, Gilbert Allardyce once suggested doing away with definitions altogether.⁵ Roger Griffin countered this recommendation, proposing the open definition of 'Fascist minimum', the idea of a set of criteria without which Fascism could not exist.⁶ More recently, scholars have turned towards the specific theory and history of Fascist imperialism and racial science in Italy. Caterina Miele has convincingly argued for an 'archaeology' of Italian racial discourse that accounts for the cultural specificity of Italy.⁷ To this end, this article contextualizes the interconnection of emigration and colonialism, and explores racism towards Southern Italians as the counterweight to filmic depictions of Italian modernity in East Africa. It

3. R. Ben-Ghiat, *Italian Fascism's Empire Cinema*, Indianapolis, 2015.

4. G. Mosse, *The Fascist Revolution: Towards a General Theory of Fascism*, New York 1999.

5. G. Allardyce, 'What Fascism Is Not: Thoughts on the Deflation of a Concept', in: *The American Historical Review* 84 (1979) 2, 367–388.

6. R. Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism: The Sense of a Beginning under Mussolini and Hitler*, Basingstoke, 2007.

7. C. Miele, 'Per un'archeologia del discorso razziale in Italia', in: A. Curcio / M. Mellio (eds.), *La razza al lavoro*, Rome 2012.

couples these ideas with Francesco Cassata's anti-hegemonic interpretation of Fascist Italian racial science as being composed of three threads: Nordic racism, Mediterranean racism, and traditionalist racism.⁸ Rhiannon Welch has underscored a point shared by Roberta Pergher, that the regime drew rhetorical links between agricultural labour productivity and biological productivity. Since the national identity had been created through labour, she asserts, racial thinking in the AOI ought to be read as a 'vital' key.⁹ This analysis dovetails with Pergher's characterization of Italy as a latecomer empire that eschewed older models of British and French colonialism. In these models, relatively limited numbers of white settlers oversaw vast work crews of native labour. In contrast, the Italian Fascist regime favoured massive resettlement schemes of ethnic Italians who worked the African land to establish Italianità at home through their agricultural labour abroad.¹⁰ This article does not engage with the theory of Fascism writ in general terms. Rather, it provides filmic materials and analysis to investigate the specificity of Italian Fascist racial policy. Through close readings and thick descriptions of marketplace newsreels, it illuminates the historical development and varieties of Italian racism in the colonies as writ in film and stone.

Fascist urban segregation policy divided cities into white, mixed, indigenous, and industrial zones in Addis Ababa, Asmara, and Mogadishu. The 1938 Volta conference in Rome presented the first comprehensive set of Italian positions on 'Native policy' that aimed to repress interracial contact across the capital cities of the AOI. Italian architects debated how to implement urban segregation in East African cities, and provided architectural flanking for the Race Laws that criminalized interracial sexual unions, marriage, and the paternal acknowledgement of interracial children. These policies also split buildings and sites into racial zones, each with their own dedicated marketplace. But city zoning backed by legislation failed to entirely separate sites by skin tone. Markets in these capital cities were the first examples of site-specific racial zoning. Consider the case of the Merkato Ketema in Addis Ababa.¹¹ From 1930 to 1936, city planners working for the Consulta centrale per l'edilizia e l'urbanistica created new racial lines through topographic segregation of the new Italian and Ethiopian market sites. Grouping European and African buyers and vendors at two different sites collapsed a spectrum of skin tones into two groups, white and black. They then used the city's mountainous terrain to physically construct the Fascist conception of racial hierarchy by moving the indigenous Merkato into the shadow of the Italian market by placing it on a lower hill, effectively darkening the market. East African markets were black not because they contained illegal goods or hosted illicit transactions, but because the regime relied on colour as a racist marker of inferiority, and thus a justification for territorial seizure. Segregation meant dividing East Africans from Italians in separate markets so as to make racial difference and hierarchy appear obvious.

Fascist urbanism's engagement with segregation in the colonies is in itself unsurprising. What is surprising, though, is the coordination of these racial projects in the colonies with cinematic projects to promote marketplace segregation in the metropole. In Addis, the Fascist regime created separation with stone. In Cinecittà, they recreated separation with sound. Put telegraphically, the East African markets discussed here became black markets in the metropole, especially through filmic intervention. To map the coordinates of Fascist Italian racial thinking through sonic segregation, I focus on five marketplace newsreels that had been shot in the capital

8. F. Cassata, *Building the New Man Eugenics, Racial Science and Genetics in Twentieth-century Italy*, Budapest 2011.

9. R. N. Welch, *Vital Subjects: Race and Biopolitics in Italy, 1860–1920*, Liverpool 2016.

10. R. Pergher, *Mussolini's Nation-empire: Sovereignty and Settlement in Italy's Borderlands, 1922–1943*, Cambridge 2018.

11. Please note that this article uses the conventional English spelling of the Ethiopian capital, 'Addis Ababa'. Italian citations retain the historical source's spelling of the city, typically 'Addis Abeba'.

cities of Italian empire during the early- to mid-1930s, with additional references to other marketplace newsreels to provide context for these examples. Director Arturo Gemmiti stands out as a key figure in the creation of these newsreels. He first worked as a journalist before signing on with the LUCE National Institute as a documentary filmmaker and assembly fitter (*montatore*). In 1936, he filmed the first two marketplace newsreels discussed here, *Addis Abeba. Il mercato di Addis Abeba* and *Impero Italiano. Addis Abeba. Colonna di autotrattori sfilano per le vie del mercato di Addis Abeba* as part of his mid-1930s documentary work for LUCE in AOI.¹² This news coverage spans the evolution of technology, including both silent and sound films, as well as geography. Shooting locations for the newsreels include North Africa (Tripoli, Libya [1932, 1934]) and East Africa (Addis Ababa, Ethiopia [1930, 1936], Mogadishu, Somalia [1935]). Claiming to be disinterested documentaries, the marketplace newsreels instead used filmic techniques of cyclical narrative, static shot portraiture, and machine-based soundtracks to create an anthropological gaze that cast Libyan, Ethiopian, and Somali buyers and sellers as examples of primitivism, ensconced in the picturesque chaos of the imperial marketplace. Particularly when read alongside LUCE's unpublished photographs of these markets, the newsreels speak to these moments of tension and irresolution, ultimately demonstrating that the tighter the regime tried to hold on to triumphal storylines of Italian race and empire, the more these narratives eluded their grasp.

Marketplaces were so potent a signifier of Fascist empire as a whole that directors used them as backdrops to report military advances and political imbroglios that were unrelated to food, farming, and commerce in the colonies. In other words, marketplaces served as stages for Italian imperial enterprise and technology. They also provided a theatre to perform racial difference and promote racial policy in the colonies. Cinema illustrated what this new empire was supposed to like. This article turns to the five senses to pose a related and more specific question. What was empire supposed to sound like? Based on these model marketplaces, colonial East Africa was supposed to sound like Italian machines, their growls and clicks bespeaking European futurity, rendered beautiful as music. Sonic segregation, I argue, is the point of these interventions. If the markets were the theatre for empire, then technology provided its orchestra.

I. Directorial intervention: diminishing Ethiopian warfare to child's play

In comparison to British and French colonialism, Italian empire in East Africa was more restricted, especially in terms of both temporal duration and geographic bounds. However, Italy's truncated empire still played a disproportionately large role in shaping Italian models of race and national identity. National unification in 1861 coincided with the apex of positivist and biological notions of race and with the acquisition of its first East African protectorates, Assab and Massawa, in 1869 and 1897. Prime Minister Francesco Crispi relied on African colonization to consolidate the division of labouring Italian bodies that had been lost to successive waves in emigration to Argentina, Brazil, and the United States by establishing ethnic Italian labourers in the newly

12. In the later years of Fascism, Gemmiti returned to Italy where he won acclaim for his Italy-based documentary work with LUCE, including *L'olivo in Sardegna* (The Olive in Sardegna [1941]) and *Rocciatori ed aquile* (Rockclimbers and Eagles [1942]), the latter of which won the documentary category of the 1942 Mostra di Venezia. In the postwar years, Gemmiti founded the film production house La Pastor, and served as its general director until 1947. His popular film *Montecassino* (1950) brought him further commercial success. In his later years, Gemmiti worked in South America, with several stints in Italy. During this time, he produced 11 documentaries in Chile alone. For more information, see 'Arturo Gemmiti', *Filmlexicon* (Rome: Edizioni di Bianco e Nero).

formed limbs of the colonial nation-state.¹³ Moreover, the Italo-Turkish War (1911–1912), Italy's first war as a unified nation, was a colonial campaign that would determine the ownership of Libya. For Italy, this contiguity of unification and empire meant that colonization fed the nascent constructions of nationhood to a relatively greater extent than it did for other European empires.

Proletarian empire, wherein Italians personally worked the land to mark their ownership of farms and fields, also distinguished Italian colonialism in East Africa from earlier British and French counterparts. Tiago Saraiva has argued that the Italian Fascist regime relied on food production campaigns to guarantee the survival and growth of the national body. Raw materials including coffee, rubber, and cotton undergird this commodity history of Fascist Italian and Portuguese imperial rule. Despite the *Italiani brava gente* mythos that posed Italians as humane colonists in comparison to the British and French, settlers' stories attest to the quotidian brutality of Fascist expansionism.¹⁴

Due to the mutually dependent constitution of Italy and empire, set against the backdrop of extensive emigration to the Americas, the Battle of Adwa in 1896 played a key role in the formation of pre-Fascist Italian racial thinking that later conditioned the Ethiopian Invasion in 1935. In this clash between Italian and Ethiopian troops, the Italian military suffered a humiliating defeat, losing roughly 7000 lives to the Ethiopians' 4000. Famously, the Battle of Adwa provides the only example of a nineteenth-century battle between a major European power and an African nation in which the latter proved victorious. Throughout the Fascist occupation of Ethiopia, Ethiopian militias fighting for independence drew on this battle to suggest the immanence of their eventual victory over the colonizing forces. On one hand, his climactic battle was a decisive defeat for Italy and secured Ethiopian sovereignty. Divergent emotional memory of this confrontation powerfully formed notions of nationhood and race in Italy and Ethiopia. As Bahru Zewde has observed, 'few events in the modern period have brought Ethiopia to the attention of the world as has the victory at Adwa'. On the other hand, Donald Levine has pointed out that Italy's disastrous military rout by Ethiopian troops precipitated a series of crises of national confidence in government. For the Italians, Adwa 'became a national trauma which demagogic leaders like Mussolini strove to avenge'. For the Italians, the Battle of Adwa was not just a martial humiliation, but a racial one. With propaganda such as the 'Ritornermo' posters plastered across Roman walls, the ensuing crisis of national confidence in many ways primed Italian citizens for newsreels depicting Ethiopia as the final and inevitable addition to AOI.

Marketplace newsreels evoke the attempt to grapple with the national humiliation attached to the Battle of Adwa. They framed Ethiopian imperialism not as a failed military venture, but as a successful touristic adventure. Two short films bearing the same title, *Addis Abeba. Il mercato di Addis Abeba*, attest to this connection in their focus on the Merkato Ketema marketplace. Shot in 1930 and 1936, the twinned newsreels reveal the regime-approved approaches for Italians to engage with East African marketplaces pre- and post-Ethiopian Invasion. Both are the work of Italian director Arturo Gemmiti. Both newsreels follow a simple narrative arc: Italian soldiers meander through the Merkato Ketema. They appear to enjoy the marketplace as a touristic adventure, but the two seem to travel in a bubble: they speak only to each other and do not engage with the Ethiopian vendors. The newsreels' reductive choreography communicates two powerful

13. Welch makes a similar argument, bolstered by Francesco Crispi's dictum, that 'colonies must be like arms'. She further notes, 'Crucially, these labouring bodies were themselves figured as little more than "arms." Agricultural labourers were named *braccianti* for the only tool they possessed, their *braccia* (arms). For Crispi, the passage from individual to member of a national population occurs through labour'. See R. N. Welch, *Vital Subjects: Race and Biopolitics in Italy, 1860–1920*, Liverpool 2016.

14. See R. Ben-Ghiat / M. Fuller, *Italian Colonialism*, New York 2005.

messages. First, they advertised the benefits of military enlistment to young Italian men by equating colonial military service with vacation, complete with a leisurely walk through an enticing foreign market. According to the *cinegiornali*, being a soldier in Addis Ababa could be as safe and amusing as being a tourist. Second, the newsreels demonstrated practices for maintaining segregation in colonies—even in the marketplace, the apogee of racially mixed urban space. The soldiers approach the market as a space of recreation rather than necessity. They enjoy the Ethiopian marketplace, but they do not need it to supply their tobacco, razors, and rice. The Fascist regime will have already seen to their household needs. Instead, the soldiers approach the market with experiential goals. They come for the pleasure of looking at exotic wares and tasting new foods. In other words, the soldiers maintain an economic as well as social distance from the market.¹⁵ Here, the touristic mode is key to the creating of psychological distance, a convenient proxy for when physical distance is not an option.

Posing vendors who sold weapons paraphernalia reinforced regime narratives that diminished Ethiopian men's martial prowess to child's play. Returning to the moving sections of *Addis Abeba* provides an interesting point of comparison to the marketplace portraiture at its centre. Sequence 28 suggests that Gemmiti's mediation of the market scene prior to filming. Here, a market stall displays a collection of shields. Deep indentations crenellate the domed forms of the shields, suggesting art as well as weaponry. But any portrayal of Ethiopian martial aptitude sparked a frisson of fear for the regime, and for LUCE. Written notes to the newsreel occlude this moment of Italian awe as well as fascination with Ethiopian weaponry, focusing instead on the vendor's activities and those of a child nearby, '*un bambino di colore sta dietro lo stand che vende scudi, mentre un uomo di colore davanti al banco mostra, impugnandolo, uno scudo*' ['a child of colour is behind the stand that sells shields, while a man of colour in front of the counter shows, punching it, a shield']. An artisan hoping to make a sale might demonstrate the value and use of his wares to a customer in this way. But the camerawork suggests that the director might have prompted him to do so. Two subsequent shots separated by a cut show the soldiers from the side, and then the vendor straight-on. Between two takes, Gemmiti seems to have asked the merchant to show off his wares for him. Directorial intervention augments reality by asking vendors to perform their work as actors. At the market's weaponry stall, soldiers posing with children place the vendor's shields in the context of war, editorializing the Ethiopian Invasion in the process (Figure 1). In two different ways, this newsreel sequence works to visually diminish potential threats from Ethiopian military might. Making an Ethiopian child pose as a warrior next to an Italian soldier transforms the Italian's fear of East African defence movements to the realm of the comic picaresque. When an Ethiopian child poses as a warrior, his war play is just that—play. Games belong to the realm of imagination, and should not threaten the reality of Italian occupation. Second, the director selected a backdrop for the action that further diminishes fears of rebellion.

Although Gemmiti used sound to great effect in many of his marketplace newsreels, he silences this sequence. The martial band music that animates *Cairnan, Tunisia—Scene di mercato* and

15. This touristic division between Italian soldiers and East African marketgoers held true in LUCE photography as well as film. For three archetypal examples, see 'Mercato indigeno: Mercato indigeno nella città vecchia di Harar: popolazione indigena vende le proprie mercanzie a soldati italiani' ['Indigenous Market: Indigenous market in the old city of Harar, indigenous population sells their own merchandise to Italian soldiers'], 8–31 May 1936, Photo Code AO00008513 (Series S.O., Various 5), 'Mercato indigeno a Quóram: Ripresa di un mercato indigeno, con molti locali in movimento, una camionetta di lato e, sullo sfondo, una moschea' ['Indigenous Market at Quóram: Shot of an indigenous market, with many locals in movement, a small truck on the side, and, in the background, a mosque'], 1936–1937, Photo Code AO00001471 (Series A.S.—Asmara), 'Axjùm—Mercato. Tre Ufficiali italiani al mercato di Macallé' ['Axum—Market. Three Italian Officials at the Macallé Market'], 1 January 1936–28 February 1936, Photo Code AO00000981 (Series A).



Figure 1. Film still of Italian customer and Ethiopian shield vendor posing in the Addis Abeba marketplace, in *Addis Abeba. Il mercato di Addis Abeba* [Addis Abeba. The Addis Abeba Market] newsreel. Director Arturo Gemmiti, 14 October 1936, Addis Abeba, Ethiopia, 1:22 seconds, film with sound (Archivio Luce B0974, Rome, Italy).

Tripolitania: I Berberi e gli Italiani might send the wrong message in this wartime context, perhaps by recalling the military bands that would have accompanied the Italians' famous defeat in the Battle of Adwa in 1896.¹⁶ Perhaps this is why the marketplace newsreel sequence raises the trope of armed conflict; it casts potential Ethiopian combatants in the context of defensive rather than offensive warfare. Finally, smiles and apparently playful mimicry combine to make merry, an affective strategy that portrays the entire scene—actors, props, and backdrop—as an amusement for the Italian soldier. By framing Ethiopian weaponry and those who would wield them as being of touristic interest, the newsreel implies that their significance to the viewer should be anthropological or cultural rather than martial or political. Gemmiti's directorial interventions in this scene seem to arise from a deep discomfiture with the potentially threatening tones of its content.

2. Venere Nera at the market: mobilizing Italian racial anthropology in empire film

Static shots borrow from the visual language of Italian anthropological criminology, the pseudo-science that conflated race with pathology. Cesare Lombroso established the foundations of this

16. At Adwa, the First Africa Alpini Battalion under Colonel Menini was known for their songs, as were the Italian Army mountain infantry corps in general. Prime Minister Francesco Crispi, along with his government, were held responsible for the loss of Italian face and life, and were ousted from power soon after the Treaty of Addis Ababa was signed, securing the sovereignty of Ethiopia until Mussolini's invasion of Ethiopia in 1935.

dubious discipline in his famous and widely imitated publication *La donna delinquente, la prostituta, e la donna normale* [*The Delinquent Woman, the Prostitute, and the Normal Woman*, Turin 1893] which he co-authored with his son-in-law Guillaume Ferrero. Drawing from physiognomy, phrenology, psychiatry, and Social Darwinism, Lombroso argued that criminality could be inherited. Furthermore, he claimed, physical defects marked the potential for delinquency. The shape of a head conveyed the brain power within. For example, a sloping forehead betrayed the thoughts of its owner to be savage, primitive, or atavistic. Lombroso included numerous pen-and-ink renderings of physical variations, such as the *Veneriae* or *conchiglie di Venere*, the so-called ‘Venus ear’, that is, an earlobe connected with skull, which supposedly marked its owner for a life of prostitution.¹⁷ Illustrations of these arguments provided visual corollaries to racist rhetoric, creating a useful catalogue of physical features for the consultation and identification of latent criminality. In these texts, the southern question played a central role in the development of Italy’s particular brand of racial discourse. Lombroso developed and popularized pre-existing veins of anti-southern racism by contributing phrenological ‘proof’ that depicted Neapolitans and Sicilians as inherently criminal. By creating the so-called Southern Type,¹⁸ Lombroso effectively figured Italian region as race.

Italian Fascists would later face the conundrum when, as southern Europeans, they themselves became subject to negative racial stereotyping by Germany and other Northern Europeans. The demographic colonization of East Africa promised a partial answer to the southern question by redeeming Italian peasant bodies. Through territorial positioning in the colonies and biological and labour output to benefit the metropole, Fascist racist thinking used the nature-nurture debate as a boundary tool to map race onto place. Official racism institutionalized these ideas with the Manifesto of Racial Scientists, a prelude to the 1938 Race Laws. This influential document developed racism along what Aaron Gillette termed a biological or ‘Nordic’ line.¹⁹ Here, a collection of scientists, academics, and curators came together, including three professors of anthropology: Marcello Ricci (University of Rome), Lidio Cipriani (University of Florence, where he also served as director of their National Ethnographic Museum), and Guido Landra, who in addition to his anthropological research title added the role of director of the Race Office of the Ministry of Popular Culture. Other academic signatories included Leone Franzi (University of Milan), a professor of paediatric medicine, and Lino Businco (University of Rome), a professor of genetic pathology. The journalistic lobby would then spread this line of racial thinking via *Il Tevere*, the daily paper directed by Telesio Interlandi, *Quadriavio*, a weekly review, and, most infamously, via the thrice-monthly journal, *La difesa della razza*.

Directors were conscripted to promote Italian racial prestige through the mass deployment of visual imagery. Propagandistic films and newsreels showcased Italian modernity in East Africa as a visual counterpoint to anti-southern racism. Gemmiti, for instance, created a filmic counterpart to Lombroso’s criminal anthropology. The director elected to highlight Ethiopian market scenes that Italians would have viewed as emblematic of primitive foreignness, such as turbaned men, naked children, and unclothed women. In doing so, Gemmiti’s newsreel domesticates the colonial marketplace with a typology of recognizable stereotypes wherein the outer limit is refigured in film as the norm. His filmic depictions of East African tourist activities drew on North African historical

17. See S. Palma, ‘Mirror with a Memory? La confezione dell’immagine coloniale’, in: P. M. Farnetti / A. Mignemi / A. Triulzi (eds.), *L’impero nel cassetto: L’Italia coloniale tra album privati e archivi pubblici*, Milan 2013, 94.

18. See P. D’Agostino, ‘Crania, Criminals, and the “Cursed Race”: Italian Anthropology in American Racial Thought, 1861–1924’, in: *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 44 (2002) 2, 319–343.

19. See A. Gillette, ‘The Origins of the “Manifesto of the Racial Scientists”’, in: *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 6 (2001) 3, 305–323.

precedents. In Libya, tourism had already served as an instrument of the regime. Aviator Italo Balbo took the Governorship through 'indigenous politics', a dual strategy that called for modernizing Libya while preserving visible elements of local culture. To these ends in Libya as well as Ethiopia, the regime deployed technology, namely the camera, to redefine colonial space.

Photographing and collecting photographs of young East African women in particular was a popular Italian colonial pastime. The practice originated with the *Miltizia Volontaria per la Sicurezza Nazionale* (MVSN), who used the *Venere Nera* or 'Black Venus' imagery that conflated territorial and sexual conquest. The paramilitary wing of the National Fascist Party then reproduced these photographs on postcards, printing addresses and phone numbers for colonial military enlistment offices on reverse side. Soldiers and citizens alike then began to adopt and adapt the conventions of *Venere Nera* photography. In doing so, they enlarged the set of activities associated with this photographic practice. Although most scholars have framed *Venere Nera* photography as a form of state-sanctioned colonial pornography aimed at heterosexual men, Italian women also participated in this practice. Female colonists often pasted postcards of African landscapes into their diaries, turning written testimonials into scrapbooks or travelogues. Others collected the cards for erotic purposes. Priminia Marchesi, for example, uses a *Venere Nera* card pasted into her diary as an introductory segue to describe her first reflections on sex and sexuality during early adolescence.²⁰ Although the majority of records describes *Venere Nera* photography and its use as a heterosexual phenomenon between Italian soldiers and East African women, this diary is by no means a unique example of sexual relations with East African women as initiated by Italian *coloniste*. The larger point is this: across colonists' diaries and in newsreels, narrative framing fixed Africa in the past by enshrining its temporal position as Italian memory of place.

Directors applied this photographic approach to filming marketgoers, mobilizing the photographic precedents of Italian racial anthropology for empire film. Moments in which action was typically suspended allowed for extended contemplation of facial features and regional dress. These stills were assembled into groups at the mid-point of the marketplace newsreels, creating an effect akin to flipping through the pages of a photo album, writ in the racialized key of Lombroso and *Difesa della Razza*. Director Arturo Gemmiti repeatedly used this technique to cover marketplaces from Axum to Quóram. His camerawork for *Addis Abeba* (1936) exemplifies his approach. Here, he framed marketgoers, along with an assortment of livestock, in 4 to 12 close-up static shots of one to two seconds in duration. Older people, adults, and children sell, negotiate, chat, buy, eat, drink, and smoke. At the heart of the newsreel, they freeze in the midst of these actions. Marketplace portraiture thus framed living vendors and shoppers as instances of the eternal embodiment of East African commerce. This camera work diminishes actions and individuality so as to heighten exoticism and perceived authenticity. By contrast, Italian soldiers appear only in the moving sections of the film. Ultimately, the use of portraiture in the marketplace newsreels embellishes Italian modernity and worldliness. By stopping the camera here, Gemmiti ushered viewers into viewing East Africa through an anthropological mode.

3. Acoustic Africa Orientale Italiano: from military fanfare to snake-charmer scales

In October 1935, Benito Mussolini's shock troops invaded Ethiopia. Mussolini proclaimed the establishment of the Italian Empire, with Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Somalia united as one colony,

20. See Priminia Marchesi. 1988. Testimony of Priminia Marchesi, 'Ricordi di sabbia', 1933–1948. Transcript of manuscript MG/08, Archivio dei Diari, 7–11.

Africa Orientale Italiano (AOI). Critically, Ethiopia was the only foreign territory acquired under Fascism. The four colonies that Italy had claimed during the Liberal era (extending to Libya and the Dodecanese Islands as well as the AOI) were reshaped by Fascist rule, in terms of racial and urban policies.

Haile Selassie I fled from Ethiopia with his family in the wake of the invasion. In June 1936, he spoke out at the League of Nations in Geneva, condemning Italy for assaulting a sovereign nation. The League of Nations, of which both Ethiopia and Italy were members, responded by imposing a raft of economic sanctions against Italy. British newspapers and newsreels campaigned vociferously against Italian military aggression against an independent nation that had never been brought under European rule. The ensuing propaganda crisis created a hothouse climate, creating an uptick in the production of Fascist print and film. Alongside the concurrent restructuring of Fascist bureaucracy to address the newly formed empire, the regime moved to increase coordination across media platforms.

Architecture, as well as film and print, were part of this larger bid to reshape the colonies through the aesthetics of Fascist design. After 1936, as Mia Fuller has noted, 'the earlier colonial territories were retrofitted architecturally, developing new imperial, imposing appearances'. From new city zoning to site-specific interventions, the regime intensified pre-existing barriers to interracial contact in the capital cities of empire. Addis Ababa's Merkato Ketema provides a trenchant example. The regime's interventions to Merkato Ketema are particularly strident in the Central Committee's first plan for changes to the market.²¹ The Italian plan divided the marketplace into two, creating one market for Italians, centred in the city core, and one for Ethiopians, relegated to the periphery. Eminent architects like Enrico Del Debbio and Gio Ponti designed urban plans for the Governor's Technical Office to racially divide the city. But Merkato Ketema is the sole example of a site-specific target chosen for the introduction of racial zoning.²² Newsreels of this marketplace from the 1936 on reflect this segregation, not only in their use of market space but also in their use of studio sound.

In his 1936 newsreel, Gemmiti leveraged the power of music to control audience perceptions of the new Fascist architectural interventions to the Merkato Ketema. He relied on Cinecittà's recent developments in sound technology to manage the connotations evoked by the shield seller's stall even before the camera arrives on the scene. As the camera approaches the shield seller's stall, martial music plays in F# major, and takes the binary form of A-B-coda. 'A' is composed of two, repeated eight-bar phrases with running scalar sequences. Each phrase ends a trumpeting fanfare, in the form of an accented, three-note motif. 'B' has two, repeated four-bar phrases. Binary musical forms such as this one are typical of triple metre dances, such as the waltz, and in fact, the rhythm of the martial music in this newsreel is also triple metre (3/4). But when the camera arrives at the stall itself, standing where a customer would, the music switches from martial to exotic. Musical tone underscores didactic intent, teaching potential colonists how to look at the marketplace with imperial eyes. Exotic music insists that they view these shields as striking and bizarre rather than bellicose or threatening. Exotic music means the harmonic minor or 'Aeolian scale'. Here, it is used to evoke Orientalism in the sense of exoticism and intrigue. Colloquially, many refer to the harmonic minor as 'snake-charmer music'.

21. This article section has been informed by an illuminating correspondence with Heyaw Terefe (Professor of Architecture and Civil Engineering, Ethiopian Institute of Architecture, University of Addis Ababa; Spring 2015), as well as his study of the contemporary refurbishments and popular use of the Merkato Ketema and the surrounding neighbourhood; see H. Terefe 'Contested Space: Transformation of Inner-city Market Areas and Users' Reaction in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia', Doctoral thesis, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, 2005.

22. See E. Gentile, *Fascismo di Pietra*, Rome 2007.

Although Western musical canons rely on the harmonic minor to denote Eastern exoticism, this musical trope is rarely used in Eastern musical traditions. Minor chords tend to sound sad, strange, and uncanny, which may account for why Western musicians conflated these sounds with their own reactions to Eastern cultures to produce a musical stereotype. For this reason, it is unlikely that a non-Western listener would characterize stereotypically Eastern music as being Eastern. Music thus split marketplace newsreel production into two. Imagery was shot in Addis, but music was recorded and inserted at the Cinecittà sound studio in Rome. Newsreel footage provided the material for the regime's cinematic curiosity box, to be collected in empire and curated at home.

Timing is key to the meaning of the music. The Addis marketplace newsreel soundtrack evokes exoticism by introducing music composed in the harmonic minor at the exact moment that Gemmiti cut the camera, that is, at the visual switch from Sequence 27 (buying and selling of food and livestock) to Sequence 28 (the shield seller). Acoustically heralding this visual break, higher register woodwinds, perhaps oboes or clarinets, take over from the low register woodwinds and brass. At this point, the music switches from F# major to F# minor, the minor parallel key. Darkly echoing the martial music of the first section through a lens, each coda concludes with two, repeating chromatic notes, evoking both tension and resolution in one fraught musical element.

Despite substantial audio distortion, the instrumentation creates a heavily articulated, staccato texture. Wood winds and brass pervade. Strings are wholly absent. Overall, the acoustic effect reads as one of exaggeration, suggesting an aural form of propaganda whose crushing acoustic weight matches the heavy-handedness of the newsreel's visual elements. By shifting from the music from martial to exotic just in time for the shield-seller's scene, Gemmiti not only avoided conjuring Italy's disastrous military history in Ethiopia, but also diminished Ethiopia's current military potential by using exotic music to frame local weaponry as touristic curiosity rather than as a true threat to Italian colonial livelihood.

This is not the only moment, or even the only newsreel, in which Gemmiti used Orientalist harmonics to set an East African context to music. In *Mogadiscio Somalia: Il mercato di Mogadiscio* (February 1935), we hear the Aeolian scale/harmonic minor sound each time that film's visuals depict stereotypically Arabian imagery, including palm trees (Sequences 2 and 10), camels (Sequence 10) and vendors in turbans (Sequence 5). This Somali marketplace newsreel demonstrates that Gemmiti utilized music to conflate stereotypes of the East with stereotypes of East Africa in the marketplace newsreels from Addis to Mogadishu.

Gemmiti not only used the harmonic minor to signal the significance of the shield seller's stall, he also accentuated this musical moment by raising the overall volume of the newsreel. In doing so, he evoked an Eastern flavour, and loudly. The propagandist point of the music is clear. Less obvious is the reasoning behind Gemmiti's decision to apply the harmonic minor to the soundscape of East African marketplace newsreels. During the 1930s, Orientalist tropes were commonly applied to North Africa, not East Africa. In the context of Italian newsreels, exotic music typically accompanied depictions of Libyan and Tunisian marketplaces rather than their East African corollaries. Why did Gemmiti deviate from this acoustic pattern?

Geographic limits of Orientalist theory generally set the parameters of the East as including North African as well as Middle Eastern and Asian societies, constraints that exclude Italy's East African territories to the south. Italian Fascist racial doctrine typically mirrored these boundaries. The 1938 Race Laws and racialist periodicals including *La difesa della Raza* described East Africans in terms of racial blackness, eschewing Arab associations. Gemmiti's use of Orientalist musical tropes to animate an Italian newsreel on an Ethiopian marketplace is all the more interesting for its peculiarity. Two possible explanations work in synergy; combined, they suggest the types of racial reasoning that conditioned the use of sound in Fascist period depictions of empire.

First, Gemmiti might have applied Orientalist music in this East African marketplace newsreel because Cinecittà's sound studios did not possess acoustic conventions yet for African music. *La difesa della Razza's* racist depictions of Ethiopian musicians as beating wildly on drums and tambourines belied the musical realities of Addis Ababa. Ethiopia's traditional music, *azmari*, comedic stories sung to the accompaniment of a lyre, would have problematically evoked European traditions of picaresque poetry, and when the Italians arrived, Addis Ababa's urban music was a local variation of the global phenomenon of jazz.

Prior to the Italian invasion, jazz was the most popular and well-regarded Ethiopian music. The story of its arrival in Addis Ababa is an interesting one. In 1924, Haile Selassie visited Jerusalem. The future emperor was welcomed to the city at St. James Cathedral, a Crusader-era Armenian church, by a brass band composed entirely of teenage orphans, survivors of the Armenian genocide. Haile Selassie adopted the group, and invited them to Addis Ababa to form Ethiopia's first imperial band, known as Arba Lijoch (The Forty Orphans). Arba Lijoch not only popularized brass instruments, particularly saxophones, trombones and trumpets, but also ignited Ethiopia's jazz scene.

Second, Gemmiti's use of Orientalist music shielded Italian viewers from dangerous associations. Shifts to the musical genre acoustically divided the sequences of marketplace newsreels along racial lines. In the acoustic version of spatial segregation, musical sequencing contained the threat posed by social and cultural mixing via food exchange and commensality in the marketplace by surrounding apparently foreign music with Western music. Four seconds (minute 1:22) before the newsreel's conclusion (minute 1:25), the martial music returns. Trumpet fanfare at the start and conclusion of the newsreel enclosed the Orientalist scales with Western instrumentation: the reassuring triumphal blast of the LUCE closing page. Melodically, this progression from Western to Eastern and back to Western harmonics mimics a successful journey and an attainment of knowledge of the 'dark heart' of Africa, one that left the listener dependent on false, generalized musical stereotypes that connote Otherness in lieu of culturally specific knowledge of Ethiopian music. By mirroring the meaning of the vendor's wares, Gemmiti militarized music as a defensive tool for propaganda.

4. Imperial Soundscapes: The Music of Technology in LUCE Newsreels

Composing soundscapes from marketplace noises provided a powerful means to establish racial constructs in newsreels depicting AOI. Directors approached the clicks of sewing machines and rumbles of tractors as notes to be harnessed through composition, building imperial hymns with Italian technology. In doing so, directors narrated the Italian role in empire through the music of machines.

To build an image of the Italian race as a modern one, directors blended technology into the music of the newsreels. In two Ethiopian examples, *Impero Italiano. Addis Abeba* and *Addis Abeba. Il mercato di Addis Abeba*, Gemmiti used the sounds of machines in the marketplace as percussive elements, which he then accentuated with classical soundtracks in both films. In the former newsreel, he blended the drum-like rumble of the Italian tractors with horns and violins to mimic the instruments typically included in a triumphal march. Approaching machines as instruments embraced Futurist approaches to empire and to music in three interrelated ways. First, music leveraged what Futurists considered to be the implicit aesthetic beauty of machines towards appropriately artistic ends. Second, emphasizing machines kept music in the masculine realm of battle. Music could thus play an active role in F.T. Marinetti's oft-cited characterization of war as 'the only hygiene of the world'. Finally, music based on the sounds of technology supported the

notion that the future belonged to those who embraced both technology and war. Just as the tractors' progress through the Addis Ababa marketplace enacted an agricultural occupation of the territory, so too did soundtracks underscore the Italian sonic domination of the Ethiopian marketplace.

Similarly, in the latter film, Gemmini blended the rapid ticking of an Ethiopian tailor's tool as a snare drum, marking the pace for the marketplace. Here, Gemmiti's sewing machine symphony works to highlight the larger colonial infrastructure projects that made its constant clicking possible. The sewing machine shown here was not the foot-peddle sewing machine more widely in use, but the most recent Singer Sewer electric model.²³ This machine's presence points to the fact that the Addis Ababa marketplace was wired for electricity. Because few regional marketplaces in Italy were connected with major power grids during this period, the total connection of electricity of the Addis Ababa marketplace is noteworthy. Gemmiti underscored the importance that the regime had attached to imperial infrastructure projects by devoting 10 sequences and almost half of total content in this 56-second newsreel to panning the length of the electric wires of the Addis marketplace. Other directors of documentaries also took pains to emphasize electric wiring in marketplaces: Arnaldo Ricotti's 1932 newsreel *Tripoli. Il nuovo mercato* (B0151) included two extended pan shots (0:00–0:16 and 0:44–0:53) that move from right to left over the market's electric wires and lamp posts. Long pan shots following electrical wires from pole to pole typified twentieth-century Italian industrial films, such as Ermanno Olmi's *Tre fili fino a Milano* (*Three Lines All the Way to Milan* [1958]) shot as part of his documentary work for Edisonvolta (1954–1958).

Fascist infrastructure projects like this one worked in the service of Italian comfort. On the left-hand side of the screen, an Italian man dressed in a suit looks on at the tailor's work, awaiting the completion of his project. Indeed, the inclusion of the tailor might have been meant to show Italians, potential colonists all, that they could find all the comforts and modernities of home if they chose to move abroad—and in the case of electricity, Italian colonists could potentially enjoy greater technological benefits on the 'fourth shore' than they could in their own countryside.

The quickening sounds of the sewing machine speak to a cultural goal that the electric lines in the marketplace helped to support: increasing velocity of daily life. The marketplace provided an ideal setting for these types of innovations, in that so many activities, like sewing, were being automatized with small, easily transportable machines, not only in Ethiopia, but in Italy as well. In the tailor's sequence of the newsreel (Figure 2), the music speeds up, accelerating the pulse of the viewer, and encouraging the belief that this sewing work is being accomplished in rapid time. In a larger sense, speeding up time in this small instance of marketplace work speaks to the larger issue of Fascist regime's conceptions of Africa as a permanently slow place, existing in mythic time. The Italian State wanted to speed up everyday life in the colonial territories, bringing it into modern time, defined by standardized train schedules and postal deliveries. But in doing so, the regime risked unfavourable comparison in terms of Italy's relative modernity.²⁴

As the Fascist regime had only just begun to nationalize these two elements of infrastructure, any acceleration towards a European standard time in Ethiopia might have suggested that the Italians were falling behind. The high quality of Ethiopian clothing produced by the sewing machines suggested that this fear was not unfounded: unpublished photographs show that many marketgoers were attired in cosmopolitan fashion. Immaculate suit jackets, shawls, top hats, and robes seemed to have sprung directly from the market's many rows of elegantly arrayed apparel (Figures 3 and 4).

23. Testimony of Priminia Marchesi, 'Ricordi di sabbia', 1933–1948. Transcript of manuscript MG/08, Archivio dei Diari, 18.

24. For further discussion of the meaning of speed and modernity in the context of Italian Fascism, see J. T. Schnapp / T. L. Alborn, *Speed Limits*, Miami Beach, FL 2009.

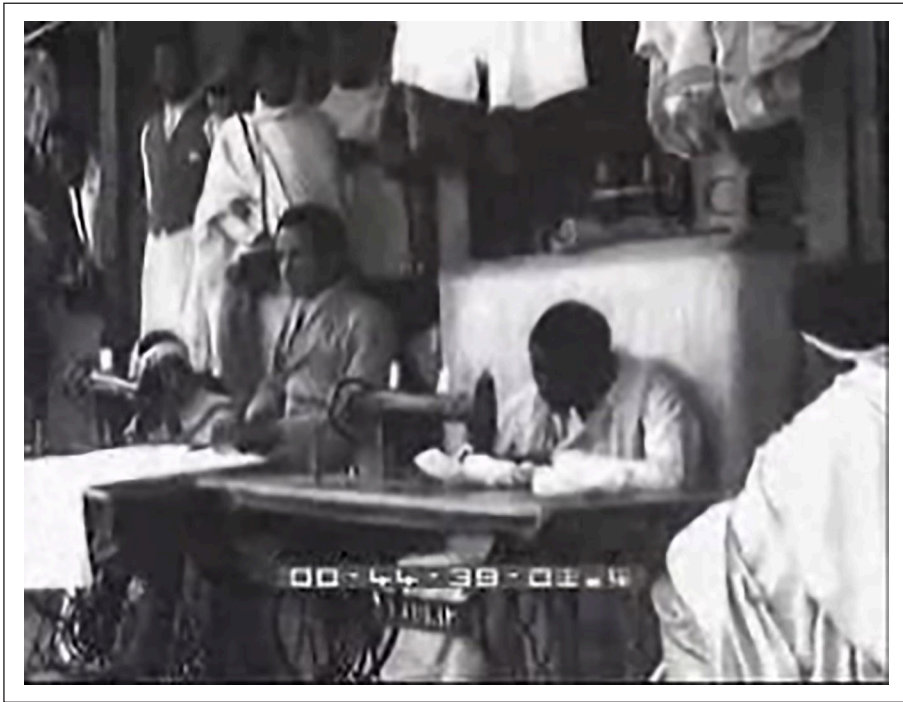


Figure 2. Film still of Italian customer and Ethiopian tailor in the Addis Abeba marketplace, in *Addis Abeba. Il mercato di Addis Abeba* [Addis Abeba. The Addis Abeba Market] newsreel. Director Arturo Gemmiti, 14 October 1936, Addis Abeba, Ethiopia, 1:22 seconds, film with sound (Archivio Luce B0974, Rome, Italy).

What the newsreels chose to exclude was just as significant as what they chose to include. Returning to the theme of sound, both of the Ethiopian newsreels engaged in sonic cut-and-paste, increasing the volume for sounds of Italian machines in the marketplace to diminish the human sounds of multilingual marketplace chatter and activity.²⁵ To name but a few of the languages in use, marketgoers would have used Amharic, the former national language of Ethiopia. Many also spoke Italian, the new language of the state. Still more would have added an international or regional or ethnic dialect, such as Tigrinya or Oromiffa, to their list of linguistic competencies. For the most part, Afro-Asiatic languages dominated the Addis Ababa marketplace. Vendors spoke European languages chiefly for commercial purposes. Broad linguistic competency made the marketplace a meeting place. As Barbara Sorgoni and Giulia Barrera have noted, markets often catalysed *madamismo* relationships between Italian soldiers and East African women. In time, these unions produced children who defied easy categorization along previously conceived racial lines. Worse still for the Fascist regime, they often spoke Italian better than the colonists themselves, further weakening any possible linguist buttressing for the period's nascent racial distinctions.²⁶

25. This atypical treatment accentuates the Italian presence in the Ethiopian marketplace. By contrast, other films included the rush of multilingual dialogue as part of the newsreels, such as Arnaldo Ricotti's *Tripoli. Il Nuovo Mercato*. Here, the local muezzin's prayer calls and marketplace conversation are in Libyan Arabic.

26. See S. Ponzanesi, 'The Color of Love: *Madamismo* and Interracial Relationships in the Italian Colonies', in: *Research in African Literatures* 43 (2012) 2, 155–172.

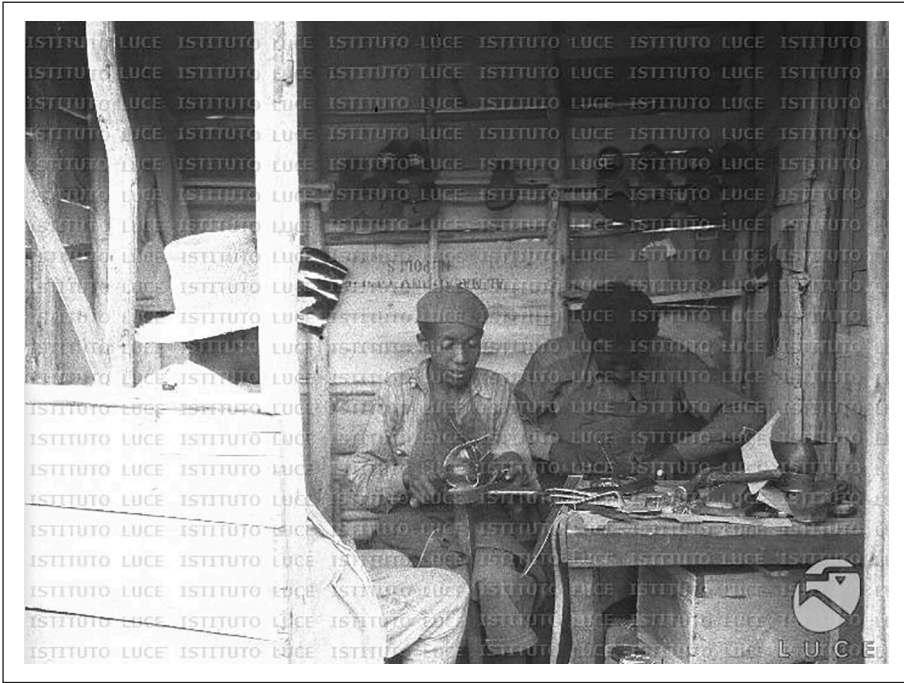


Figure 3. Photograph of shoemaker at the Addis Abeba market, *Calzolari al mercato di Addis Abeba* [Shoemakers at the Addis Abeba Market]. Descriptive text reads, 'Calzolari al lavoro all'interno di un rudimentale baracchino al mercato indigeno di Addis Abeba; in primo piano, di spalle, un cliente in attesa della riparazione dei suoi sandali', 'Shoemakers at work inside a rudimentary stall in the indigenous market of Addis Abeba; in the foreground, from the back, a client awaits the repair of his sandals'. Photographed for LUCE by unknown photographer, 1936–1937, Addis Abeba, Ethiopia, black and white photograph (Archivio Luce Photo Code AO00005666, Series A.A. Addis Abeba, Rome, Italy).

To drown out the mounting crescendo of linguistic fluency, newsreel directors like Gemmiti conducted a symphony of technology, accentuating the sounds of Italian machines in Africa with a musical score of horns and violins. This selective use of marketplace sounds and its accentuation with a musical soundtrack not only erased the problematic aspects of racial mixing in the marketplace by occluding Ethiopian linguistic fluency, but also allowed the Italians to distance themselves from Ethiopians by casting their own technologies of tractors, sewing machines, cameras, and soundtracks as being more advanced than human language.

5. Shooting the Market: When tractors turn to tanks

By the mid-1930s, technological innovations—in film, weaponry, and transport—collapsed distances, and made the marketplace newsreels simultaneously available to cineastes in Italy as well as to attendees of the segregated cinemas in the capital cities of East African empire. The state's promulgation of racial legislation from 1937 onwards began to shape feature films as well, affecting directorial choices in the cast and plot, as well as audience reception. As Paul Virilio has noted, World War II ran on technologies of violence: shots were fired by cameras as well as by machine guns.²⁷ In

27. See P. Virilio, 'A Travelling Shot over Eighty Years', in: *War and Cinema: The Logistics of Perception*, London 2009, 68–81.



Figure 4. Photograph of shoemaker at the Addis Abeba market, *Venditore e cliente al mercato di Addis Abeba* [Vendor and Client at the Addis Abeba Market]. Descriptive text reads, ‘Un mercante espone la merce ad una cliente, ripresa di spalle, al mercato indigeno di Addis Abeba’, ‘A merchant shows his wares to a client, shot from the back, at the indigenous market of Addis Abeba’. Photographed for LUCE by unknown photographer, 1936–1937, Addis Abeba, Ethiopia, black and white photograph (Archivio Luce Photo Code AO00005673, Series A.A. Addis Abeba, Rome, Italy).

an era when military technology rapidly shifted the nature of war from hand-to-hand combat to long-range shooting, cinematic technologies raced to keep up, a fact, which, according to Virilio, ‘explains the urgent need that developed for ever more accurate sighting, ever greater magnification, for *filming the war*’.²⁸ For LUCE, one of the most recent developments was the introduction of sound to its newsreels. And as we have seen, both of the 1936 films, *Impero Italiano* and *Addis Abeba*, deployed music to devastating effect.

In their mobilization of sound to propagandistic effect, directors included speech as well as music in the marketplace films. Narrative voice-overs filled informational gaps that remained after musical tone had manipulated mood. In *Addis Abeba*, the male Italian narrator intones,

Corona che della vita indigena del capitale del impero, il caratteristico aspetto del mercato che nonostante la stagione delle piogge conosce un periodo di proiettata senza precedenti, un animazione di contrazione e [inaudible] di bestiame, ortaggi, delle maglie, legname, e spezie. [Crown of indigenous life of the capital of the empire, the characteristic look of the market that, despite the rainy season, experiences an unprecedented period of protection, an animation of [inaudible] of livestock, vegetables, shirts, woodwork, and spices.]

In two ways, the voice-over mediates the market for the audience, placing it within emergent conventions of Italian colonial thinking. First, the metonymic framing of this indigenous market in

28. *Ibid.*, 70.

Addis Ababa to simultaneously stand for all indigenous markets in Italy's colonial empire. Second, the contrastive framing of buying and selling of goods in the face of the rainy season supports and amplifies narratives of colonists as heroes. Raising the value of this marketplace through superlative comparisons to other spaces provides support for the Italian occupation of Ethiopia by highlighting the cultural and economic value of this space through images of picturesque locals buying and selling the raw goods that Italians lacked due to the economic sanctions. Elevating the value of this marketplace to convince Italian citizens of the value of the Fascist regime's imperial projects worked in tandem with the goal of encouraging Italians to see themselves as protagonists in the marketplace.

Here, the narrator underscores a specific anecdote: since the Italians have arrived, hours of operation at the Ethiopian market have increased. Now it operates year-round, even during the rainy season. The narrator credits the Italian army presence for this increase, and ties this militarization of the market to the idea of increased commercial productivity.

In *Impero Italiano*, the male narrator picks up similar themes in his introduction in a series of verbal bursts:

Imponente colonna di autotrattori partita dall'Harrar sfilano per le vie del mercato di Addis Abeba! La tonica curiosità degli indigeni, *increduli*, che macchine e cariche così potenti abbiano potuto raggiungere la capitale durante la stagione delle piogge! [A powerful column of tractors from Harrar parade through the streets of the Addis Ababa Market! The lively curiosity of the indigenous, *incredulous*, that machines and loads so powerful had been able to reach the capital during the rainy season!]

These telegraphic descriptions sound like wartime dispatches, imparting a sense of heroic urgency. As the narrator speaks these lines, the camera pans across a line of tractors as they lumber through the market. The camera shoots from below, accentuating the height and might of the machines (Figures 5 and 6). And yet even as the narrator asserts the 'tonic curiosity' and 'incredulity' of the Ethiopian marketgoers in attendance, newsreel visuals show that the crowds parted due to practical concerns (for instance, to avoid being run over by the tractors) rather than out of deferent interest or fascination. Close shots show a number of Ethiopians walking in the opposite direction of the procession, completely uninterested in its fanfare. Here, the general response to Italian technology was a collective shoulder shrug.

But if these images could have potentially embarrassed the regime by revealing the hollowness of their claims of Ethiopian awe of the Italians, why would Gemmiti have included them in the newsreel? One possible answer lies in the symbolic interpretations inherent in this sequence: the Ethiopian marketgoers, their backs visible, walk away from the camera even as the tractors lumber forwards towards the viewer. Writ large, this unscripted movement falls into the familiar Fascist script of East African peoples marching into the past. They proceed in the opposite direction of progress that is conversely symbolized by the Italians' mighty machines. In the context of this newsreel, to follow the progress of the tractors with one's body and one's eyes was to march bravely into the future. Those who did not would be left behind or conquered. As such, this apparently subversive sequence served as a negative example to highlight the supposed obedience of the majority of the Ethiopian marketgoers: those who moved aside to let the tractors pass.

To judge from the newsreel's visuals, the people who seem most interested in the parade are Italian soldiers. Military officials, some standing atop the tractors to pose with heads thrown back and their chins in the air, guide the vehicles through the centre of the market square. Others stand at attention throughout the crowd. Heroism, co-created by both the Italian military officials and the director through poses and camera angles, cast these Italians as heirs of the ancient Roman conquerors. This presents an interesting case where the Italians themselves posed for a marketplace



Figure 5. Film still of two Italian military officials posing on a tractor in the Addis Abeba marketplace, in *Impero Italiano. Addis Abeba. Colonna di autotrattori sfilano per le vie del mercato di Addis Abeba* [Italian Empire. Addis Abeba. Column of Tractors Parades through the Streets of the Addis Abeba Market] newsreel. Director Arturo Gemmiti, 5 August 1936, Addis Abeba, Ethiopia, 1:25 seconds, film with sound (Archivio Luce B0933, Rome, Italy).

newsreel, rather than asking Ethiopian vendors or marketgoers to pose. And indeed, these poses seem to have been so important to the regime that the parade stopped to allow the newsreel's film crew sufficient time to set up shots of the military, the tractors, and the parade from many different angles. In the second sequence of the newsreel, colonial officials stand on top of the tractors, feigning unawareness of the camera's presence, even though striking such a pose during a moving parade would have toppled them from their perches. This suggests that newsreel coverage of this event was more important to colonial officials than the event itself. Whereas the parade had had a small audience (the Ethiopian marketgoers and vendors) at the time of filming, the soldiers seem to have played their roles for the presumed audience of Italian citizens who would watch the newsreel later. The marketplace thus provided a stage to perform a certain kind of play: posing provided an opportunity for Italian self-authentication as conquerors.

This newsreel used the marketplace to fuse agricultural and military iconography to the point where their individual characteristics merge, literalizing the metaphor that they imply. The presence of military officials and the filmography suggest that these tractors are actually tanks that are going off to fight the Battle for Grain. Tractors provided critical arms in this fight, especially since Ethiopia was hardly the Promised Land propagated by the Italian regime. Wheat production gave poor yields of four to eight quintals per hectare. As Alberto Sbacchi notes, 'Contrary to what was claimed by the Fascist press, the empire was never self-sufficient in wheat, and ironically it had to



Figure 6. Film still of tractor parade progress in the Addis Abeba marketplace, in *Impero Italiano. Addis Abeba. Colonna di autotrattori sfilano per le vie del mercato di Addis Abeba* [Italian Empire. Addis Abeba. Column of Tractors Parades through the Streets of the Addis Abeba Market] newsreel. Director Arturo Gemmiti, 5 August 1936, Addis Abeba, Ethiopia, 1:25 seconds, film with sound (Archivio Luce B0933, Rome, Italy).

be imported from Italy'.²⁹ Tractors might have helped in this regard by increasing agricultural output, but the regime could not import a sufficient number. By 1940, there were only 400 tractors in total in all of Ethiopia.³⁰ In light of these facts, this newsreel's focus on the tractors speaks to the regime's urge to overcompensate visually for their lack of agricultural equipment. This might explain why the presence of the doubled audience of 'incredulous indigenous' and Italian citizens were so crucial to the psychological goals of this newsreel. Because these tractors were meant for Italian rather than Ethiopian use, the parade appears to have been meant to heighten the perceived value of a modern material good via a positive comparison to the surrounding space and peoples. The parade makes use of the marketplace in its capacity as a gathering place, essentially using it for the filmic purpose of recruiting Ethiopian marketgoers as 'extras' to create an appropriately 'backward' background for the display of Italian technology. Rather than as a commercial centre used by both Ethiopians and Italians, the marketplace of the newsreel functions as a setting to visually enhance imperial progress and military might.

Through demonstrations of technology, both in the marketplace itself and in the filmography that surrounded it, Italians cast themselves as modern. Along these lines, *Impero Italiano* approached

29. A. Sbacchi, *The Legacy of Bitterness: Ethiopia and Fascist Italy, 1935–1941*, Lawrenceville, NJ 1997, 104.

30. *Ibid.*, 117.

technology with an intensity that borders on fetish. In this 85-second newsreel, all four sequences focused on the tractors' passage through the market:

- 1 colonna di autotrattori proveniente dall'Harrar nel mercato di Addis Abeba
- 2 indigeni si assiepano vicino agli autotrattori
- 3 riprese particolari degli autotrattori
- 4 la colonna di autotrattori sfila per le strade del mercato di Addis Abeba
- 1 column of tractors from Harar in the Addis Ababa market
- 2 the indigenous crowd around the tractors
- 3 particular shots of the tractors
- 4 the column of tractors parades the streets of the Addis Ababa market

In particular, the third sequence, a close-up shot pans across the pipework on the lower side of a tractor, and lingers over the muddy machinery as though it were an *objet d'art*. The technique (an extended pan shot in a newsreel composed largely of static images) and the duration of this shot (the tractors' pipework alone merits a full four seconds (0:34–0:38) of the brief newsreel) both indicate the importance of the tractors themselves to the self-image that this marketplace newsreel attempted to construct. As masters of these machines, the Fascists used their possession of agricultural technology to cast themselves as modern by relative comparison to the 'incredulous' indigenous peoples who 'crowded' around the tractors. But as the film footage shows, shoppers were indifferent to the presence of the tractors in their market during the rainy season. Rather, it was the Italian officials and directors themselves who were so amazed that they had managed to transport the tractors from the coast to the inland market. Because the presence of an awed, child-like Other buttressed the construction of Italians as modern beings, marketplace newsreels had to leverage voice-overs to bridge this gap. Editorial voicing brought contradictory visuals into alignment with this broader racial narrative.

6. Beyond black markets: political and racial legacies of the marketplace newsreels

'Historiography has disproved the monolithic description of Fascist racism in Italy', as Francesco Cassata has observed. Moving away from uniform approaches, scholars of Italian colonialism have typically divided Italian colonialism's official racism, namely, its legislative policies, into three sequential phrases. Mia Fuller has summarized these as assimilation (forced integration of East African institutions into the Fascist system), association (separate institutions for Italian citizens and East African subjects with a modicum of judicial economy reserved for the latter, combined with indirect Fascist rule through local East African elites), and apartheid (separation of Italians and East Africans combined with discrimination in all spheres of life). Marketplace newsreels were part of what Ruth Ben-Ghiat has termed Italian Fascism's 'audio-visual arsenal', in that they created racial segregation in the cinematic space of marketplace newsreels. Directors such as Arturo Gemmiti working on behalf of LUCE wielded documentary not only as an instrument of propaganda, but also as a means to construct the historical archive of Fascist Italian presence in East Africa, and the racial politics that underpinned the imperial invasion. If the winners write the history books, then perhaps they direct the films as well.

Historical newsreels are smoking volcanoes and speak to the contemporary eruptions of historical behaviours. Although documentary in form, marketplace newsreels were propagandist in approach. They framed colonialism as tourism, incorporating instructions for photography and

collection into filmic techniques such as masking and narration. This framework instructed potential colonists in the anthropology and erotic of empire, two gears that turned in tandem to create psychological distance along newly drawn racial lines. In an interwar analogue to contemporary discussions of fake news, the 1930 and 1936 version of *Addis Abeba* can be combined with other marketplace newsreels to provide a meaningful structure for the investigation of identifiable marks of propaganda in film. Filming on site in the colonies raises additional questions. How did Italian directors use filmic techniques to narrate the marketplace? How did East African vendors and shoppers change their behaviour while on film? Where is the line between documentary coverage and amateur anthropology? At stake in these questions lie a set of directorial approaches that mobilize the aesthetics of realism to serve imperial ends.

Racism varies not only in quality and intensity, but also in its content. In Arturo Gemmiti's productions, snake-charmer music exoticized East African marketplaces. The music of machines wrote Italian colonists as technological moderns. In other words, prejudice derives specific meanings from its local and historical context. While the Fascist regime's goal of seizing the East African territory to promote autarchic food production was unsuccessful, LUCE's coverage of the capital marketplace did increase the production of another, more sinister autarchic export from Ethiopia to Italy: new ways of thinking about both race and racism. Marketplace newsreels leveraged the assumed truth of documentary form to engage in anthropological tourism, ultimately creating filmic arguments for Italian racial superiority and justification for Fascist rule abroad. Governmental structures of control are obvious, and easy to manipulate. But intimate forms of regulation, nested in naturalized habits, often remain invisible and therefore unexamined. Thanks to the apparently apolitical and innocuous nature of marketplace activities like buying and selling food, LUCE directors seized on the close connections of the Addis Ababa market with people's daily habits to produce new concepts of race and racism for export to Italy. More than governments, these habits of daily life conserve power relations. As Robin Bernstein has observed, 'one century's proverb becomes the next century's nursery rhyme'.³¹ The intimate self-replicates. Long after dictatorial regimes have been dismantled, the celluloid ghosts of Fascist racial policy continue to spin in news contemporary cycles.

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31. See R. Bernstein, *Racial Innocence*, New York 2011, 7.