



INSTITUTE OF
LANGUAGES
CULTURES AND
SOCIETIES

SCHOOL OF
ADVANCED STUDY
UNIVERSITY
OF LONDON

Self and Other in Italian Colonial Memories: Perspectives Across Borders

3 June 2025 | 2:30 PM - 4:30 PM

Room 234, Second Floor, Senate House, Malet Street, London WC1E 7HU

Chair: Charles Burdett (School of Advanced Study, University of London)

The seminar explores how Italian individuals and communities in Africa have constructed, experienced, and remembered their colonial experiences, with a particular focus on representations of the “other” and on personal and collective memories of the period. Through the analysis of public records, diaries, and testimonies, the discussions will highlight the complex ways in which Italian narratives portrayed alterity—oscillating between stereotypes and attempts at redefining identity. The event will shed light on both the dynamics of colonial and diplomatic power and their postwar repercussions, offering a critical perspective on the cultural and political legacies of Italian colonialism.

Gianluca Bo (Sapienza Università di Roma) - **Representations of self and other in autobiographical accounts of the Italian occupation of Ethiopia**

Recent scholarship on autobiographical and oral accounts of Italian colonialism has highlighted how individuals internalized and reinterpreted the cultural logic of the colonial system. Memoirs and personal accounts provide a powerful lens through which to see the colonial imaginary of Italian colonisers in Ethiopia (1936–1941). Drawing on a selection of unpublished diaries from the National Diaristic Archive (Pieve Santo Stefano), this paper examines the representations that Italians projected onto the colonized “other” of the Horn of Africa, as well as the ways in which these perceptions evolved through everyday contact with the Ethiopians in the occupied country. Special attention is given to the persistence of Fascist stereotypes within these narratives – the depiction, for example, of supposed cultural hierarchies and the highly eroticised portrayal of Ethiopian women

Fabio Sappino (London School of Economics and Political Science, LSE) - **At the court of Yahya. The Italo-Yemeni Treaty of 1926 and the visit of the Yemeni delegation in Italy in 1927**

Italy was the first country to establish diplomatic relations with Yemen. The Italo-Yemeni Treaty of 1926 was the result of the personal efforts of the governor of Eritrea Jacopo Gasparini (1879 – 1941), who was able to gain the trust of the King of Yemen, the Imam Yahya. The Treaty led to a period of close economic and political ties between the two countries, causing alarm within the higher circles of the British empire, that feared an excessive Italian involvement in the Red Sea and in the Arabian Peninsula. Two events marked Italo-Yemeni relations: the visit of Gasparini at the court of Yahya in 1926 and the official

State trip of a group of Yemeni dignitaries led by the son of the Imam in Italy in 1927. The paper will examine, through unpublished documents and photographs of Italian and British archives, the diaries and reports of the two missions, shedding new light on Italian imperialism in the Red Sea and on the relations between Fascist Italy and Muslim-majority countries such as Yemen.

Joseph John Viscomi and Laura Ponte (Birkbeck, University of London; University of Messina, University of Genoa) - **Italians in Egypt between marginalization and emigration between 1946 and 1952**

Through an analysis of documentary material preserved at the Archives of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the National Archives in London, this study aims to retrace the experiences of the Italian community residing in Egypt between 1946 and 1952. The years between the end of World War II and the rise of Nasser's nationalist government constitute a crucial period for this community, marked by its progressive political and economic marginalization, which spurred an increasing drive toward emigration.

The period immediately following World War II was characterized by considerable instability and profound political and social changes. Within this context, the Italian community faced increasing political and economic marginalization. Evidence relating to the work of Italian stonemasons in 1950 and the activities of the Italian Benevolent Society clearly highlights the labor and social difficulties characterizing the daily lives of Italians in Egypt. The situation further deteriorated with the events of January 1952, known as "Black Saturday," when numerous Italian properties were damaged or destroyed during violent anti-foreigner riots. Following these episodes, many Italians began to view repatriation not merely as a return to their homeland, but rather as genuine emigration, including toward new destinations.