

Uncovering colonial legacy in a British digital archive: The Pitt Rivers Museum case

CERE, Rinella <<http://orcid.org/0000-0002-6048-6036>>, GIGLITTO, Danilo <<http://orcid.org/0000-0002-5334-4136>> and PETRELLI, Daniela <<http://orcid.org/0000-0003-4103-3565>>

Available from Sheffield Hallam University Research Archive (SHURA) at:

<https://shura.shu.ac.uk/30780/>

This document is the Accepted Version [AM]

Citation:

CERE, Rinella, GIGLITTO, Danilo and PETRELLI, Daniela (2023). Uncovering colonial legacy in a British digital archive: The Pitt Rivers Museum case. In: GIGLITTO, Danilo, CIOLFI, Luigina, LOCKLEY, Eleanor and KALDELI, Eirini, (eds.) Digital Approaches to Inclusion and Participation in Cultural Heritage. Insights from Research and Practice in Europe. London, Routledge, 141-159. [Book Section]

Copyright and re-use policy

See <http://shura.shu.ac.uk/information.html>

8. Uncovering the colonial legacy in a British digital archive: The Pitt Rivers Museum case

Rinella Cere¹, Danilo Giglitto², Daniela Petrelli³

¹ <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6048-6036>

² <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5334-4136>

³ <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4103-3565>

Abstract

Anthropological and ethnographic cultural institutions generally hold large collections of audiovisual material connected with several European nations' colonial past. Many of these institutions are now aware of the ethical challenge they are faced with and are currently attempting to address this ambiguous and often violent colonial past. In the case of anthropological photographs and films, the process of decolonisation has been particularly complicated, as it is also bound up with the glowing reputation of many of the founders of the discipline of anthropology itself. Within the context of the European-wide project 'Polyvocal Interpretation of Contested Colonial Heritage (PICCH)', this research proposes a framework for decolonising anthropological films held in digital archives and obtained within colonial relationships. The chapter illustrates a re-usable process of re-appropriation and re-interpretation by analysing characteristics and patterns from a sample of the anthropological films digitised in the collection of the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford, UK.

Keywords: archives, anthropology, decolonisation, polyvocality, audiovisual.

Introduction

Archives and polyvocality

In the last three decades, the idea of cultural heritage has undergone a fundamental reconceptualisation. The traditional view of the archive was anchored to the idea of the past and its legacy as formal and conservative responsibility – a prerogative of governmental or intellectual authorities to stabilise and reassure during uncertain or dire times – and based on the assumption that ordinary people should consume it rather than producing it (Lowenthal 1985, Hewison 1987, Atkinson 2008, Wright 2009). In this context, archives were seen as an authoritative field, wary of nonprofessional endeavours, and firm in holding the right to tell history and preserve heritage (Flinn 2012).

This vision has been gradually yet radically delegitimised because of two main occurrences in the cultural heritage sector at large. Firstly, a new scholarly trend built on the idea that bottom-up approaches to cultural heritage's identification, collection, and management – involving both the contribution of local communities (Giglitto 2017, Nitzky 2013) as well as the

perspectives of people whose histories and records have been subsumed in archival repositories (Mason and Baveystock 2013, Beel *et al.* 2015) – has taken over (Flinn 2012, Robertson 2012). Secondly, the advancement of digital technologies has fundamentally contributed to the establishment of this new paradigm, mostly by suggesting the necessity of taking advantage of the new possibilities in terms of dissemination and access granted by new technologies to switch the focus on the grassroots level (Affleck and Kvan, 2008, Flinn 2010, Brown and Nicholas 2012, Tait *et al.* 2013). These two trends are occurring within the paradigmatic shift proposed by the critical heritage framework, which challenges the ‘authorised discourse’ approach where heritage is interpreted via experts’ perspective that tends to privilege prestigious, universal, and grand narratives (Smith 2006), neglecting the role of non-dominant groups such as ethnic minorities (Berkhofer 1995). As alternative discourses do exist, clustered around different communities (defined by geography, ethnicity, culture, belief, etc.), critical heritage calls into question the concept of consensual heritage that underpins a single, authorised interpretation (Smith 2006).

Plurality of values is important if heritage must become an expression of social inclusion rather than a means to assimilate and dissimulate different, potentially dissenting voices (Smith 2006). By opening up to multiple interpretations, memory institutions' role shifts from that of being ‘guardian of collections’ to ‘ambassador of cultural values and significance’ (Thomas 2016). European cultural heritage institutions are increasingly addressing topics of race, religion, diversity, gender representation, colonialism, and social injustice (Van Huis 2019), counterbalancing grand narratives with the history from below, while fostering an interplay of viewpoints in polyvocal frameworks (Berkhofer 1995). With the challenge to the traditional approach to the ‘authorised voice’, the idea of heritage started to be investigated in the context of complex social processes and political actions (Smith 2006); however, most of the efforts at the level of cultural institutions have revolved around exploring how to enhance their societal role by adopting more participatory approaches to diversify the audience they aim to engage, with special attention to traditionally excluded communities (Sandell 2002, Simon 2016). We argue that diversifying audiences carries little value if not accompanied by an attempt to also expand the cultural representation held in memory institutions.

Although the interest in this direction is increasing, a systematic effort is needed to address the power imbalance and the historical imperialist narratives embedded in GLAMs (Galleries, Libraries, Archives, and Museums) of former colonial powers (Chambers *et al.* 2016). The concept of heritage as a process of contemporary interpretation of the past is particularly significant for colonialism-related heritage whereupon today’s sensitivity changes the way a nation looks back. European media archives hold and curate recordings of former empires, and many have been propelled to examine such heritage, imbued with an imperialist mind-set, in an attempt to decolonise and challenge it, sometimes through the voices of grassroots movements (wa Thiong'o 1981, Kurtz 2006, Agostinho 2019, Van Bockhaven 2019, Odumosu 2020). However, such dissonant voices, often rich in personal accounts and memories, do not re-enter the archive, but live on the Internet, for instance on social media or YouTube (Gebeil 2016).

Therefore, while memory institutions, postcolonial scholars, and grassroots activists are all pulling in the direction of decolonisation, the path is far from straightforward. Through a case-study, we propose an epistemological approach looking at the relationship between

anthropology and colonialism as the basis through which to generate a systematic way to uncover colonial legacies in archives hosting audio-visual material from the colonial era.

Anthropology and colonialism

Important critical research and writings have been done in recent decades about the complicated (and sometimes direct) relationship between anthropology, ethnography, and colonialism, but despite this, anthropology has not yet been able to shake off entirely its problematic origins in the colonial context, not least because it still relies on foundational epistemologies connected to the writings and collections (objects, photographs, films) by early anthropologists about groups and societies that were subjected to colonial rule. Appropriately, Pels and Salemink point out that ‘the emphasis on the “big men” of anthropology in disciplinary histories obscures the way in which ethnography was linked to the construction of colonial and neo-colonial societies’ (Pels and Salemink 1994, p. 1).

The chronological correlation between anthropology's birth as an academic discipline with the apex of many 19th century colonial empires is not just a mere temporal coincidence, as in many cases colonial authorities facilitated anthropologists' fieldwork in exchange for information about the colonised. In some other cases, there was a more direct relationship, with colonial administrators turned anthropologists.

The critique of the collusion between the discipline of anthropology and colonial powers has accelerated in recent years through the lens of decolonial and postcolonial theories to encompass the collections amassed and the archives and museums that holds them. This will necessitate a process not only to rewrite the history of anthropology but to attend to the paradigmatic shift required for a new epistemology that accounts for the ‘stolen’ knowledge. A process that will require many different types of critical interventions, at archives and museum level, for example the contestation of what is considered a shared cultural heritage and/or the highlighting of the connection between colonialism and contemporary forms of racial oppression. Alongside, there is the yet unresolved question of returns, and here too we have seen institutions taking a different stance as to the appropriateness of restoring the objects to the people to whom they belonged.

Some key works from the second half of the last century are worth mentioning as they set in motion the epistemological shift. A very early example came via the French writer Michel Leiris (1950) in his article entitled ‘L’ethnologue devant le colonialisme’ (‘The ethnographer facing colonialism’), an essay addressing the ethnographer to call on the ‘segregation and other practices which testify the persistent racism’ (p. 117) perpetrated by the colonial powers. For Leiris, any ethnographer with a professional consciousness must undertake this task, even when dependent on those very same colonial powers, especially if they are truly attached to the human groups studied.

Not long after Claude Lévi-Strauss will write about the contemporary crisis of anthropology in the context of decolonisation and the disappearance of the traditional object of study along with the ideological discourse that sustained it: ‘Anthropology must transform its very nature and must admit that logically and morally, it is almost impossible to continue to view societies as scientific objects, which the scientists may even wish to preserve, but which are now collective subjects and claim the right to change as they please’ (Lévi-Strauss 1961). Our intervention

and interpretation of the anthropological films at Pitt Rivers Museums also want to address this question, what has been recorded in the frame and how can its status be changed from preserved object to collective subject in the analysis of the cultures represented.

Leclerc (1972) will speak openly in his book of the ethnocentric and ideological character of the anthropological viewpoint even in its endeavour to acquire a ‘good ethnographic consciousness’ (p. 30) that can only be achieved through ‘epistemic decolonisation’ (p. 142). Similar critique on the problematic relationship between anthropology and colonialism has been addressed by Diane Lewis (1973) in her classic piece on anthropology and colonialism where she stated outright that ‘anthropology is in a state of crisis’ (p. 581) and followed up the opening statement with a detailed account of the contradictions inherent in ethnographic fieldwork carried out under the auspices of colonialism and the unacknowledged racist implications of the anthropologist’s work: ‘The noting of differences between two groups is not in itself racist, but invariably acquires such a connotation in the context of colonialism (Lewis 1973, p. 584).

In 1994, Pels and Salemink published an article in *History and Anthropology* entitled ‘Introduction: five theses on ethnography as colonial practice’. This lengthy article provided a sharp critical overview of the different roles played by ethnography in the colonial apparatus but it also interpellated the relationship between colonialism, academic anthropology, and ethnography (Second Thesis), with the latter, along with the fieldwork, becoming the adopted mean by which anthropologists constructed their knowledge: ‘[E]thnographic knowledge, constructed on the basis of extended fieldwork by a trained anthropologist, constituted a claim to authority that enhanced the anthropologists’ monopoly of this kind of knowledge. Fieldwork became the hegemonic form of ethnography for most anthropologists’ (p. 10). The Third Thesis traces the ongoing relation between ethnography and colonialism even through ‘theoretical innovations’ in the discipline of anthropology, such as holism, relativism and functionalism (p. 11). Thesis Four and Five are of particular importance to the discussion in this chapter about ethnographic film and the Pitt Rivers’ archive for different reasons; Thesis Four focuses on the ‘materially mediated’ context of the ‘production and consumption of ethnography’, a context that is very much relevant to the anthropologists looked at here, both in terms of their original filmic production but also in terms of the films finding their way into the archive and the subsequent trajectory into digital forms, along with the questions of access and reuse by digital ‘artisans’.

Thesis Five is especially relevant to the discussion in this chapter about ethnographic film and it is worth quoting in full: ‘Ethnography was mostly relevant for colonial society, not in terms of the truth or falsity of its representations, but because it instituted representation as such (both in the literary and political sense) (Pels and Salemink 1994, p. 19). Representation that meant the ‘fixing of identity to a specific territory’ which previously had no such fixity; the drawing of boundaries around groups was both an ethnic as well as a territorial ethnographic classification. This process has also been referred to as ‘tribalization’; ethnographic mapping contributed to the creation of ethnic groups and minorities within what was to become the nation states after decolonisation. The political question about representation is key to the polyvocal interpretation of the anthropological films deposited at Pitt Rivers Museum, there is evidence of ‘ethnographic mapping’ about territorial and ethnic groups’ boundaries for colonial control: ‘control through representation’ (p. 21).

The Pitt Rivers Museum

The museum

Pitt Rivers Museum, part of the University of Oxford, owes its existence to the rise of disciplines like anthropology and ethnography and prior to that, archaeology. Its foundational history is connected with a man who the museum is named after, an officer in the British Army, amateur anthropologist, archaeologist, and collector. In the documents deposited in the museum about its history, in the first box of documents (there are 31 boxes), it states that Pitt Rivers wanted his extensive collection then deposited at South Kensington Museum to be transferred to the British Museum. Nothing came of this transaction as the two conditions he proposed: 'adequate space' and 'sole control with power to act during his lifetime' were clearly not palatable to the then British Museum's administrator and himself a collector, Augustus Wollaston Franks. A year later in 1881, negotiations begun with the University of Oxford and by the end of the decade the Victorian Neo-Gothic Building had been erected to house both the Natural History and Pitt Rivers Museums.

The chronology and context of Pitt Rivers Museum foundational history is important for two reasons in this chapter. Firstly, it was established during the decades when the British Empire was at its utmost expansion, and secondly, it was intrinsically connected to the rise of the disciplines associated with its collections of objects, manuscripts, photographs, and films, the latter the specific subject of analysis of this chapter. The colonial mindset often cited in connection with the work of early anthropologists, ethnographers, and explorers, has received serious criticism from former colonised groups, often the 'object' of these studies, and whose lives and artefacts became 'collections'. Criticism also alighted from anti-colonial and postcolonial scholars and intellectuals trying to disentangle the discipline from its colonial legacy, as Tim Ingold pointed out recently: "Britain had its empire and turned to anthropology for guidance on native social institutions to help in the administration of colonial policy." (Ingold 2018, p. 77).

Today, there is also an ongoing public debate about the 'raison d'être' of these collections, specifically related to stolen sacred objects and even human remains in the context of colonial violence and a call for returning wherever possible to their source communities and nations. Activists are also increasingly calling for a total decolonisation of the ongoing colonial mindset. The museum itself has taken up this challenge and has begun a process of undoing the imprimatur of its collections and interpretation. Apart from the obvious and much publicised withdrawal of the display of the 'shrunk heads' (Batty 2020), the museum introduced a host of parallel activities, for example the webinar about 'The Emotion of Removal' in June 2021. On the museum floor, this included inserting reading labels that address the colonial legacy of the museum and the objects displayed, in consultation with some of the communities of origin, in order to (re)write their forgotten and unique history as well as to consider return.

The digitised film collection

In 2014, the museum digitised part of its film collection, which is now available on the Vimeo sharing platform. There are a total of 68 films linked on the PRM website under 'Film Collection', and the majority of these are from the earlier half of the 20th century. This major digitisation project has undoubtedly allowed for a more public access to films about

representations of communities and groups of people, their traditions and cultures, which would otherwise have not reached us. However, very little information is available in the metadata to explain the historical context of the filming and in the introduction to the content of the film collection on the website. The museum describes them as having been ‘acquired for teaching and research purposes’ and originally part of larger deposits and donations of objects and photographs.

The films we subjected here to the critical analysis are also highlighted on the description in the website as having ‘significant historical importance’ and being ‘unique’ (Pitt Rivers Museum n.d. b). These are the films of Ursula Graham Bower, Beatrice Blackwood, and Frederick Spencer Chapman, all from the 1930s and 1940s. The idea of ‘uniqueness’ and ‘historical significance’ is what we will try to unpack in this chapter, as all these films were made with different purposes in mind, although undoubtedly with some sophisticated filmmaking skills on the part of the three individuals concerned.

As is often the case in filmcraft, there are also surprising ways in which the final films counters unwittingly established and dominant narratives, in this case, narratives of empire. Equally, however, some of the sequences in the films also reproduce that narrative of empire and the political motivation behind the filmmaking, especially in the case of Chapman Spencer and Graham Bower. This will call into question their classification as visual anthropological and ethnographic documents even if they ostensibly fit in that category. Another question surrounding filmcraft is the amateurish nature of some of these films, at times bordering on tourism and leisure style filming, notwithstanding the limited technology of the time. There is an evident unevenness in quality in some of the films we analysed. In filmic terms, there is an absence of information about the technologies behind the filmmaking, that could have helped explain some of the choices made in the filming in terms of shots, editing and montage.

There is also an absence of critical material on the circumstances of this filming, although some of the information is available separately on the website under the names of the individual anthropologists and filmmakers. The visual shortcomings arising out of these colonial-related filmic texts will be unravelled below but it is worth pointing out at the outset that the people filmed were not seen as subjects in their own right and their cultures were rendered picturesque. As it has been pointed out by many decolonial and postcolonial scholars and activists, ‘patterns of objectification and exploitation for personal career benefits are very ingrained in the profession’ (Asad 1979, p. 313). Equally, in early anthropology, the ethical protocols for seeking consent were not in place.

These are important critical issues when looking at some of the early films realised whilst Britain still had an extensive empire and deposited at PRM. The films are sometimes difficult to classify in an anthropological sense many of them were not even made for the field of anthropology, but rather for political purposes as in the case of Graham Bower and Spencer Chapman; this entanglement between colonial administration and anthropology is a legacy visible in the filming itself.

Methodology

In looking at the anthropological audiovisual material hosted at the Pitt Rivers Museum’s archive, we carried out a film analysis looking at the content, proposed narrative, aesthetics,

and symbolic meaning of the films (Mikos 2013). We also cross-referenced the films with biographic information about the anthropologists as well as the monographic material released by the anthropologist themselves. Our analysis led to the formulation of five postulates underlying the colonial legacy in anthropological digital archives.

As the archive hosts 68 films, we had to make a sample of films to analyse. In doing so, we proceeded by selecting three prominent British anthropologists that operated during the same period and under the privilege of British colonial endeavours, but that extensively differed from each other in terms of gender (two women and a man), expertise (namely, the extent of previous anthropological training and professional background), interests, place of fieldwork, and ethnographic style. The reason is that by looking at such different figures operating in similar contexts it would be easier to investigate what ideas and patterns intersect with the colonial context. The choice fell on Ursula Graham Bower, Frederick Spencer Chapman, and Beatrice Blackwood. Table 8.1 shows the list of films sample for the analysis, while next section provides more details on the three anthropologists and their films.

<Table 8.1 here>

Table 8.1. List of films included in the analysis.

Analysed films and anthropologists

Of the three individuals whose films have been analysed, only one could be described as having formally trained as an anthropologist, Beatrice Blackwood. The other two, Ursula Graham Bower and Frederick Spencer Chapman, may be perhaps described as ‘having fallen’ into anthropological and ethnographic research via their personal interests (steeped in class privileges), in adventures the former and in nature the latter. However, in both cases the term adventurer has been applied. By her own admission, Ursula Graham Bower went to Northeast India by ‘accident’ on an invitation of a friend whose brother was in the Colonial Office (Macfarlane 1985a, 1985b), while Spencer Chapman visit to Tibet was as an employee of the British Government delegation in a political-related ‘mission’ to ‘establish permanent British representation in Lhasa’¹. On the other hand, Beatrice Blackwood gained her anthropology diploma at Oxford University in 1918 and alongside her fieldwork worked for the institution in many different departments and guise until her official retirement in 1959, and unofficially well beyond that, right up to her death in 1975. In the reorganisation of the departments, she was transferred from the Human Anatomy Department to Pitt Rivers Museum as ‘Demonstrator in Ethnology’.

“A stone age people?”: Beatrice Blackwood

In the digitised film collection, there is only one film by Beatrice Blackwood of the fieldwork she undertook in New Guinea amongst the Anga people. The film is titled *A Stone Age People*, which is edited together from three short reels in black and white with metadata from Blackwood’s own fieldnotes describing the content. In them, she details the visual content of the footage; the daily activities of the group, referred to as ‘domestic scenes of KUKUKUKU

¹ Frederick Spencer Chapman (1907–1971). Available from: https://tibet.prm.ox.ac.uk/tibet/Frederick_Spencer_Chapman.html [Accessed 10 March 2022].

life'. Noteworthy, even by her own admission the terminology KUKUKUKU, long discarded, is not how the people she lived with addressed themselves. Studies on Blackwood are at pains to point out that she was not keen on the requirements dictated but the 'paymasters' at Oxford and the museum, or on being subject to pressures from the colonial office. Larson describes her somewhat romantically in these terms:

In Melanesia, she had immersed herself in village life, realizing that anthropologists must work hard to break down the barriers—physical, cultural and linguistic— between them and their subjects. She had resented having to interact with, and compromise for, the colonial community in New Guinea; she had resented the pressure to travel in order to collect artefacts or anthropomorphic data: she had been happiest when she could have “my natives to myself”. (Larson 2011, p. 88)

Nonetheless, however much Blackwood tried to think herself outside the colonial constraints of the time, and in line with what Leiris called the 'professional consciousness' mentioned above, she was undoubtedly facilitated in her ethnographic fieldwork by that very same context, not least because the fieldtrip to New Guinea was financed by the museum and was ostensibly conceived to serve the purpose of enlarging the collections: 'As a result of this trip well over 2,000 objects were accessioned into the collections at the Pitt Rivers Museum' (Pitt Rivers Museum 2005).

The description and language used in 'my natives to myself' also connote a relationship of possession that objectify the groups she was studying and as a consequence deprived them of agency. The film itself, which is under 30 minutes, is only a small part of the visual account of her overall fieldwork with the Anga people, and we will discuss below the question of authenticity and filmcraft in the film.

The “Naga Queen”: Ursula Graham Bower

Ursula Graham Bower was a prolific photographer and filmmaker; in the interview conducted by Alan Macfarlane in 1985, she stated that she had taken about 2000 films on the culture of the Zemi Nagas (Macfarlane 1985a, 1985b). The film currently digitised stand at 10, three on the Apatanis, five on the Nagas and two more on the culture and crafts in Manipur, Northeast India, as shown on the table above. The interview covers her near entire life, beginning from her origins as an upper-class woman, albeit 'impoverished', to her involvement in World War II and her eventual return to the UK after the war. In the course of the interview, her 'uncomplicated views' about her relationship with the groups of people she lived with and filmed, her own position as a white woman, undoubtedly part of the British colonial empire, become a mythologised narrative of courage, strength, and adventure. More than that, as encapsulated in the sentence she utters in the interview about how she was perceived by the people she met: '...they couldn't be more delighted to be honoured with the presence of an unescorted young lady'. The theme of the adventurous British woman is a constant refrain throughout the interview that masks the coloniser-colonised relationship at play in this narrative.

The title 'Naga Queen', acquired during a further trip to Northeast India, among Manipuri, is also an example of the collusion between her and the colonial service. Movements that were

likely spurred by rebellion to colonial powers but that have been recorded as ‘millenarian movements’ drawing on fanatical religious sources, had apparently replaced their captured and imprisoned leader, a young woman they believed to be their goddess, with Ursula. To give her due she was not particularly keen on this but clearly the advice from the colonial office was such that this would make her a better ‘informer’ on any problems arising in the district. One of the many examples where anthropologist, especially amateur ones as Graham Bower, could serve colonial power and ideology.

“Mission’ to Lhasa”: Chapman Spencer’s Tibet

The motives behind the Gould ‘mission’ to Lhasa were politically motivated and undoubtedly stemmed from the previous century colonial and commercial expansionist British government project (Mckay 2003). No details of this transpires on the website metadata but surprisingly some of the sequences in Chapman Spencer’s silent films speak volumes as we will see in the analysis below. The photographic material connected with the mission has been digitised and is available on the PRM website under the title: The Tibet Album, British Photography in Central Tibet 1920–1950 (Pitt Rivers Museum 2006). For this ‘mission’, Frederick Spencer Chapman collaborated along with other members as photographer and filmmaker as well as Secretary to Gould². The idea of him having lived an adventurous life is also present in the short biography available on the PRM’s website, albeit without the gendered preoccupations we have seen for Ursula Graham Bower (Pitt Rivers Museum 2006).

Unlike the reports and the photographs, the films were not the main source of information required by the British Government, and it appears as if they were more complementary to the photographic production, much of it based on Spencer Chapman’s own interests in the natural landscape of Tibet, especially its flora and fauna, its people, its religious architecture, and Buddhist customs. Only few sequences are dedicated to the official gathering and meetings, although occasionally difficult to distinguish the temporal from the religious powers. Perhaps in the case of Chapman-Spencer, given the specific political context and his role on the trip, we may not properly talk of anthropology and ethnography, even though the audio-visual material is deposited in the archive of Pitt Rivers Museum. We can however still draw a parallel in terms of British political interests and the gathering of information and what has been described on the PRM’s website metadata as ‘unprecedented in the history of British representations of Tibet’ (Pitt Rivers Museum n.d. a). The film collection digitised to date is composed of 11 films in their near entirety about Tibet, with just a short film about a steamer boat called Lady Sybil and many shots connected with the voyage to Greenland, mixed in with shots of Tibet, probably because taken on the same roll of film.

The colonial legacy in anthropological archives: A framework

The five postulates

In identifying patterns and commonalities within the films, and by cross-referencing these with additional material about and/or from the three anthropologists that complemented our observations, we have identified five postulates that constitute the basis of our framework aimed at uncovering the colonial legacy in anthropological audiovisual material. These are:

² Basil Gould was the political officer that led the mission to Tibet; Frederick Spencer Chapman was his “private secretary”.

1. *Anthropological subjectivity*, referring to the self-perception of the anthropologist making the film.
2. *External perception*, referring to the tone of externally-attributed perceptions, both in the field of anthropology and outside.
3. *State of exception*, referring to the way in which the fieldwork might have been conducted that was not (entirely) abiding by the existing social conventions, rules, and customs.
4. *Authenticity and filmcraft*, referring to the overall quality, informativeness, and ethnographic values of the films.
5. *Use and reuse*, referring to the way the films are conceptualised and presented when re-proposed in more recent or contemporary settings.

These postulates can be interwoven on several different levels to feed the depiction of composite descriptions. In the next section, we will apply this framework to films selected for analysis.

Feeding the framework

Postulate #1: Anthropological subjectivity

We define our first postulate, the *Anthropologist subjectivity*, as having four specific features: self-interest, intrusiveness, othering of cultures, and romantic view of self among ‘the noble savage’. All the three individual filmmakers construct a narrative about themselves and their relationship with the subject they are filming. What we refer to as the anthropological subjectivity is interwoven with ideas of self and ‘other’ and the inevitable construction of this ‘colonial-anthropological’ mode in the films: the idea of cultures ‘stuck’ in time, which one can ‘intrude upon’ as a necessity for undertaking fieldwork and which are perceived as requiring study and preservation. The relationship which ensues is always one where the ‘primitive is defined in an inverse relationship to civilised [sexuality]’ (Stallabrass 1990, p. 108). Indeed, as Leclerc (1972) commented in his book on anthropology and colonialism, what is missing is the Western understanding of the specificity of [African] cultures as ‘real knowledges’ and as ‘branches of universal knowledge’, in other words what he also termed as ‘the narcissistic monologue of the west’ (p. 119). The Western subjectivity plays out differently in the three sets of films not least because the context and interaction between the filmmakers and the people filmed are very different. For example, it is less in evidence in the films of Chapman Spencer, whose subjectivity is translated into his predominant interest of filming nature rather than people and customs, but also because we do not have any writing from him that articulate a relationship of ‘possession’ (as with Blackwood) or as having a special place within the groups and cultures filmed (as in Graham Bower).

Postulate #2: External perception

Our second postulate, *External perception*, refers to the narrative that have been constructed over the years about these three individuals, both within the field of anthropology and in the public and mediatic spheres. In this process, a whole host of aggrandising terminologies have been adopted to describes their persona and their work which have ignored the colonial context in which they operated. In the case of Graham Bower, the descriptions extended to a full-blown mythologising exercise connected to how she herself thought she was perceived by the Naga

group she lived with; the 1985 interview with Cambridge anthropologist Alan Macfarlane (Macfarlane 1985a, 1985b) does nothing to dispel the myths, if anything, it reinforces the idea that she was an exceptional woman, a quasi-heroic figure for having chosen to live with the exotic ‘other’ rather than live out the comfortable life of an upper-class English woman. A more recent account, part of the 2019 Pitt Rivers Museum exhibition “Intrepid Women: Fieldwork in Action, 1910–1957”, depict her somewhat differently and mentions how in later life she rallied for the Zeme Naga and their discontent with the British and Indian administration (Pitt Rivers Museum 2018). Blackwood was also one of the six women anthropologists in this exhibition, which is framed around the prejudices and obstructions towards women studying anthropology at the turn of the 20th century, undoubtedly worthwhile research, but which again does not provide any consideration of the colonial context or signals to the connections between patriarchy, anthropology, and colonialism. Terms like pioneer, legendary figure, and brave are used often in the external perception without attending to the negative meaning they carry in the British imperial history of the 19th and 20th centuries. Spencer Chapman also received much public and media attention over the years and similarly his exploits were referred to as heroic, especially in relation to World War II. Likewise, Spencer published a number of books on his voyages and missions and one in particular, a 1940 publication, was directly connected with the Mission to Lhasa in Tibet and the films deposited in Pitt Rivers Museum archive.

Postulate #3: State of exception

We have called our third postulate *State of exception*, by which we mean that the fieldwork conducted by anthropologist – and already referred above as being problematic in its very nature – was justified on the basis of the ‘superiority’ of Western science methods and the ensuing suspension of non-Western rules, what Tomaselli has called the ‘victorious “scientific” order of knowledge’ (Tomaselli 2001, 178). The scientific status, along with the colonial context, allowed anthropologist to ignore questions of consent around local rules, transforming live cultures, people, and their craft into collectable for museums, whilst boundaries were either ignored, misinterpreted, or even belittled. The fieldwork practice that today demands express permission was not part of the consideration of the early anthropologist. In the films we have analysed, we have come across numerous instances of the practice of the ‘state of exception’, especially in relation to the absence of permission to film people, their sacred surroundings, and intimate ceremonies. In the films of Graham Bower and Blackwood we have instances of people, often women, fleeing in front of the camera. In others, we have a sense of a passive resigned attitude to the filmmaker, or of people intrigued by the technology while others adopt a more performative stance; this is particularly the case in the films of Spencer, possibly connected with the demands of the political mission, as many shots are clearly of Tibetan dignitaries with their British counterpart. Even these, however, connotes a state of exception in the way the people and surroundings are rendered picturesque and hence not a political body in Western terms.

Postulate #4: Authenticity and filmcraft

The visual content of the body of films analysed has generated this fourth postulate, which attempts to combine observations about the question of *Authenticity and filmcraft*, the latter denomination adopted in part to denote the different level of skills of these ‘amateur’

filmmakers, all of them however with a keen sense of the visual if not of the montage process. Arguably, their aim was principally to provide authentic visual documentation about the culture they were encountering and studying. The films are silent, so the visual element is the determinant of the interpretative process. In terms of filmcrafting, we have identified two elements: the staging and even direct intervention for camera of indigenous people and activities and the aestheticisation of their lives and cultures, what we also call along with Leiris, the ‘eye of the ethnographer’ (Leiris 2005). Coupled with filmcraft is the idea of capturing authenticity of the other, which the constant fascination with exoticism and primitivism reinforces and with a preference for the most remote, distanced and uncontaminated societies possible, temporally and spatially. Blackwood’s images about the Anga people in New Guinea (*A Stone Age People*) do not show ‘performative primitives’ (MacCannell in Tomaselli 2001) but the insistence of the camera eye on people and objects (stone age tools) replicates Western stereotypes about these contemporary people as of the past. On the other hand, Graham Bower extensive filming of the Apatani and the Naga filmcrafts most of her subjects and their culture through a visibly performative actions, down to approval from the filmmaker. The filmcraft of Spencer Chapman films is less ethnographic in style. The sequences of Lhasa buildings, its inhabitants and the various meetings with dignitaries required by the political mission (which are still shot with evident performative actions), are interspersed with long shots of the natural environment. Filming nature rather than people and their customs was an obvious preference of Spencer Chapman, who indulged in high-level and skilful documentaristic shots of the Himalayas and the animal kingdom (especially birds). The main connection of the films with anthropology seems to be mostly stemming from the fact they are included in an anthropological collection, raising some doubts over their intrinsic anthropological value.

Postulate #5: Use and reuse

Use and reuse refers to the way the films are conceptualised and presented when re-proposed in more recent or contemporary settings. This postulate has looked at the ways in which these films have been recirculated and interpreted, including the more recent process of their digitisation and their availability via the PRM’s website on Vimeo. The films have been reused on television programmes and documentaries; an early example was Graham Bower films featured in 1956 BBC series *Travellers’ Tales*, produced and narrated by David Attenborough (1956–1959). The specific episode was titled ‘The hidden Valley of the Apa Tani’; it was one of nearly thirty episodes with exotic and racist titles, such as ‘Savage New Guinea’. Blackwood and Graham Bower photography and film work has been reused more recently in the 2011 documentary *Captured by Women* (2011) by anthropologist and filmmaker Alison Khan. This documentary, as already mentioned above, offers an insight into the difficulties of women achieving recognition at the turn of the 20th century but does not delve into the visual representation of their anthropological work or into the colonial context which facilitated their visits and fieldwork. Spencer Chapman was the subject of the TV Series ‘This is your life’, broadcast in two episodes in January 1964. The programme concentrated on his life as a soldier in Malaysia during World War II rather than on his work as a photographer and filmmaker. While postulate #2 concentrates on the perceptions about the three anthropologists and their work, *Use and reuse* explores how the narrative surrounding them is still reproduced through the use and/or reuse of their audio-visual material, which not also replicates the same aggrandising and flattering portraits, but also deliberately or negligently ignores the colonial context.

Digital archives and colonialism: A way forward

The development of the analytical framework has provided us with a much-needed tool to interpret critically ethnographic and anthropological films produced during colonial times. On the surface, the films appear to reveal hidden cultural treasures, whether it be people and their ways of life or their material and spiritual culture; however, delving into the production and aesthetics of the film exposes all the Western bias as well as the colonial power relations in place. In this exercise, we have hoped to accompany the access already provided by the archives themselves, in our case through digitisation, with a decolonial methodology that interrogates not only the films themselves but their wider significance as part of the contested origins of the discipline of anthropology and ethnography and the colonial-related cultural heritage more generally.

The framework – with its five postulates arising out of considerations on the individual involved, the films themselves, their reception, their use/reuse and the historical context – is also meant as a contribution to the epistemological shifts referred to above. Firstly, the absolute necessity to reverse the dominant Western paradigm which generated the idea and practice of racial supremacy, even if disguised in scholarly and scientific pursuits. Secondly, the urgency of providing a framework that allows for broader and more diversified interpretation of digital archives by uncovering the bias informing their foundation. As Fanon put it so well as far back as the early 1960s, ‘Racism is never a super-added element discovered by chance in the course of the investigation of the cultural data of a group’. (Fanon 1970, p. 46). Anthropological archives hold this data in many forms which now requires not only an acknowledgement of its multiple ties with the colonial legacy but a granular revision and re-interpretation of their collections stemming from the imperial past, which to date remains a work in progress.

Conclusions

This chapter has illustrated an analytical framework that may facilitate the identification of colonial legacy in audiovisual material. While the framework was developed for analysing ethnographic material, several of the postulates may be adapted to different disciplinary contexts and types of audiovisual material. For instance, the filmmaker’s subjectivity and their externally attributed perception may serve as tools to investigate potential biases in other forms of audiovisual cultural representations. Similarly, how filmcraft may push deliberate agendas or unconscious biases in light of a claimed authenticity – together with the way in which the material is received, recirculated, and re-narrated – may also offer fruitful critical lenses.

With this in mind, within the context of the European-wide project ‘Polyvocal Interpretation of Contested Colonial Heritage (PICCH)’, we are working on enriching the framework. Next, the framework will be used to analyse the audiovisual material of two other European digital archives: the colonial propaganda films hosted at the Netherlands Institute for Sound and Vision and audiovisual material related to the Algerian war of independence from colonial France hosted at the French Institut National de l’Audiovisuel. The findings of this new film analysis will inform the framework both by adding new postulates or expanding the existing ones.

Reference list

Affleck, J., and Kvan, T., 2008. A virtual community as the context for discursive interpretation: A role in cultural heritage engagement. *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 14 (3), 268–280.

Agostinho, D., 2019. Archival encounters: rethinking access and care in digital colonial archives. *Archival Science*, 19 (2), 141–165.

Asad, T., 1979. Anthropology and the colonial encounter. In: J. Huizer and B. Mannheim, eds. *The politics of anthropology. From colonialism and sexism toward a view from below*. The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 85–96.

Atkinson, D., 2008. The heritage of mundane places. In: B.J. Graham and P. Howard, eds. *The Ashgate research companion to heritage and identity*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 381–396.

Batty, D., 2020. Off with the heads: Pitt Rivers Museum removes human remains from display. *The Guardian*, 13 September.

Beel, D., *et al.*, 2015. The geographies of community history digital archives in rural Scotland. *Scottish Geographical Journal*, 131 (3–4), 201–211.

Berkhofer, R., 1995. *Beyond the great story. History as text and discourse*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Brown, D., and Nicholas, G., 2012. Protecting indigenous cultural property in the age of digital democracy: Institutional and communal responses to Canadian First Nations and Māori heritage concerns. *Journal of Material Culture*, 17 (3), 307–324.

Chambers, I., *et al.*, eds., 2016. *The postcolonial museum. The arts of memory and the pressures of history*. London: Routledge.

Fanon, F., 1970. *Toward the African revolution*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.

Flinn, A., 2010. Independent community archives and community-generated content: “Writing, saving and sharing our histories.” *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*, 16 (1), 39–51.

Flinn, A., 2012. Archives and their communities: Collecting histories, challenging heritage. In: G. Dawson, ed. *Memory, narrative and histories. Critical debates, new trajectories*. Brighton: University of Brighton, 19–35.

Gebeil, S., 2016. Les mémoires de l’immigration maghrébine sur le web français de 1999 à 2014. *Les Cahiers du numérique*, 12, 115–138.

Giglietto, D., 2017. *Using wikis for intangible cultural heritage in Scotland: Suitability and empowerment*. Thesis (PhD). University of Aberdeen.

Hewison, R., 1987. *The heritage industry. Britain in a climate of decline*. London: Methuen.

Ingold, T., 2018. *Anthropology. Why it matters*. Cambridge: Polity.

- Kurtz, M., 2006. A postcolonial archive? On the paradox of practice in a Northwest Alaska project. *Archivaria*, 61, 63–90.
- Larson, F., 2011. “Did he ever darn his stockings?” Beatrice Blackwood and the ethnographic authority of Bronislaw Malinowski. *History and Anthropology*, 7 (2), 75–92.
- Leclerc, G., 1972. *Anthropologie et colonialisme*. Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard.
- Leiris, M., 2005. *L’occhio dell’etnografo. Razza e civiltà e altri scritti 1929–1968*. Turin: Bollati Boringhieri.
- Lévi-Strauss, C. 1961. Today’s crisis in anthropology. *The UNESCO Courier*, November.
- Lewis, D. 1973. Anthropology and colonialism. *Current Anthropology*, 14 (5), 581–602.
- Lowenthal, D., 1985. *The past is a foreign country*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- McKay, A., 2003. 19th century British expansion on the Indo-Tibetan frontier: A forward perspective. *The Tibet Journal*, 28 (4), 61–76.
- Mason, R. and Baveystock, Z., 2013. What role can digital heritage play in the reimagining of national identities? England and its icons. In: M. Anico and E. Peralta, eds. *Heritage and identity: Engagement and demission in the contemporary world*. London: Routledge, 15–28.
- Macfarlane, A., 1985a. Interview with Ursula Graham Bower, Part 1 of 2 [online]. YouTube, Prof Alan Macfarlane - Ayabaya. Available from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oKy3I5afxEA> [Accessed 8 April 2022]
- Macfarlane, A., 1985a. Interview with Ursula Graham Bower, Part 2 of 2 [online]. YouTube, Prof Alan Macfarlane - Ayabaya. Available from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RSMhZqf2FiY> [Accessed 8 April 2022]
- McKay, A., 2003. 19th century British expansion on the Indo-Tibetan frontier: A Forward Perspective. *The Tibet Journal*, 28 (4), 61–76.
- Mikos, L., 2013. Analysis of film. In: U. Flick, ed. *The SAGE handbook of qualitative data analysis*. London: Mikos, 380–393.
- Nitzky, W., 2013. Community empowerment at the periphery? Participatory approaches to heritage protection in Guizhou, China. In: T. Blumenfield and H. Silverman, eds. *Cultural heritage politics in China*. New York: Springer, 205–232.
- Odumosu, T., 2020. The crying child. On colonial archives, digitization, and ethics of care in the cultural commons. *Current Anthropology*, 61 (22), 289–302.
- Pels, P. and Salemink, O. 1994. Introduction: five theses on ethnography as colonial practice. *History and Anthropology*, 8 (1–4), 1–34.
- Pitt Rivers Museum, no date a. Lhasa Mission Diary 1936–1937. Available from: <https://tibet.prm.ox.ac.uk/mission.php.html> [Accessed 4 April 2022]

- Pitt Rivers Museum, no date b. Film collections. Available from: <https://www.prm.ox.ac.uk/film-collections> [Accessed 26 April 2022]
- Pitt Rivers Museum, 2005. Beatrice Blackwood. Available from: <https://www.prm.ox.ac.uk/b-blackwood.html> [Accessed 4 April 2022]
- Pitt Rivers Museum, 2006. Frederick Spencer Chapman (1907–1971). Available from: <https://www.prm.ox.ac.uk/event/intrepid-women> [Accessed 21 April 2022]
- Pitt Rivers Museum, 2018. Intrepid women: fieldwork in action, 1910–1957. Available from: https://tibet.prm.ox.ac.uk/tibet_Frederick_Spencer_Chapman.html [Accessed 4 April 2022]
- Robertson, I.J.M., ed., 2012. *Heritage from below*. Farnham: Methuen.
- Sandell, R., 2002. *Museum, society, inequality*. London: Routledge.
- Simon, N., 2016. *The art of relevance*. Santa Cruz: Museum 2.0.
- Smith, L., 2006. *Uses of heritage*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Spencer Chapman, F. 1940. *Lhasa the Holy City*. London: Chatto & Windus.
- Stallabrass, J., 1990. The idea of Primitive: British Art and Anthropology 1918–1930. *New Left Review*, 183, 95–115.
- Tait, E., et al., 2013. Linking to the past: An analysis of community digital heritage initiatives. *Aslib Proceedings*, 65 (6), 564–580.
- Thomas, N., 2016. *The return of curiosity. What museums are good for in the 21st century*. London: Reaktion Books.
- Tomaselli, K., 2001. The semiotics of anthropological authenticity: The film apparatus and cultural accommodation. *Visual Anthropology*, 14 (2), 173–183.
- Van Bockhaven, V., 2019. Decolonising the Royal Museum for Central Africa in Belgium's second Museum Age. *Antiquity*, 93, 1082–1087.
- wa Thiong'o, N., 1981. *Decolonizing the mind. The politics of language in African literature*. London: James Currie.
- Wright, P., 2009. *On living in an old country*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.