

THE FOURTH ROAD, AULÒ, BEYOND THE FRAME, AND MAKÀ:
A STUDY GUIDE

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This study guide is aimed to help students explore four documentaries about postcolonial culture in Italy: *The Fourth Road*, *Aulò*, *Beyond the Frame*, and *Maka*. It is the result of a reflection and collective work by a professor who wrote the films and a teaching assistant and previous student of a course on migration studies. Each film features a prominent African Italian writer, respectively Kaha Mohamed Aden, Ribka Sibhatu, Ubah Cristina Ali Farah and Geneviève Makaping. After a brief plot summary, the study guide includes questions about various elements of cinematic style, such as sound, lighting, and genre conventions. It also explores themes related to migration cultures, including the feelings of multiple belonging and unbelonging experienced by immigrants. Additionally, the guide investigates spatial issues such as ghettoization, the spatialization of memory, and the concept of intimate and affective geography. Specific questions address the histories of Somalia, Eritrea, Cameroon, and Italy.

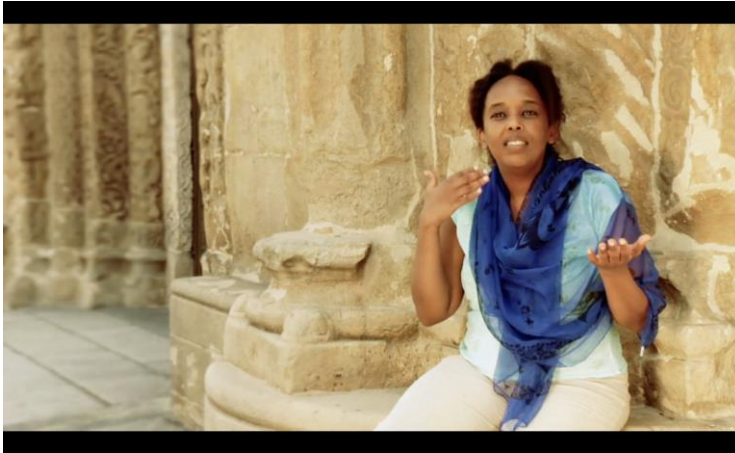
Keywords

Colonial Memory and Legacy; Migration; Documentary; Critical Race Studies; Black Italians

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THE FOURTH ROAD (2012; *LA QUARTA VIA*)



Synopsis

Kaha Mohamed Aden, an Italian writer originally from Somalia, narrates her memories of Mogadishu, her hometown, and reconstructs its story in Pavia, the Italian city where she has lived for twenty years. Mogadishu is the capital city of Somalia – an Italian colony from the late 19th century until the mid-20th century – is divided into five main roads, each corresponding to different historical periods. The «fourth road» symbolizes the realities of the civil war, but also negates the preceding periods and makes it necessary to set our hopes on a «fifth road». Aden tells the history of Somalia through her family history, and she shows how personal stories can successfully disrupt nationalist and homogeneous accounts of Italian identity.

The History of Somalia

- What is the time span of the events Kaha Mohamed Aden discusses in *The Fourth Road*? According to her, what are the main periods in which Somali history can be divided? What characterizes these periods?
- The case of Somalia's trusteeship is unique in the decolonization of Africa. Why do you think Italy, the former colonizer, was chosen to administer Somalia from 1950 to 1960? What does this relationship indicate? How is Italian Somalia presented in the 1960s newsreel included in *The Fourth Road*?
- How does Kaha Mohamed Aden describe the Somalia of her childhood?
- How does the film expand, challenge, or change your ideas about women in Somalia? Your ideas about the veil?
- How would you define the term «diaspora»? To what extent is the Somali diaspora similar to other diasporas (i.e., Jewish, Italian, Armenian)? How is it different?

The Somali Civil War

- What do you know about the civil war in Somalia? Try searching for information online about this historical event.
- How do you think the experience of living around a conflict and then moving to another country, especially one that has a direct link to this instability, would affect a person?
- At the end of the film, Kaha Mohamed Aden says that she was able to think of the home she left behind in Mogadishu only when she had a new home in Pavia. Why do you think this is? How are our memories and sense of nostalgia affected by traumatic or substantial events like emigration and the adjustment to a whole new culture and society?

Redefining Italianness

- What do you think it means to be Italian for Kaha Mohamed Aden? How does she define her sense of national belonging?
- What were the major historical events and social trends in Italy in the early 2010s? Which of these events and issues are addressed in the film?

An Affective Map

- How are each of the roads on Kaha Mohamed Aden's map depicted? What is the significance of each one in constructing the Somalia that she remembers leaving?
- The idea of reconstructing Mogadishu by drawing it on a sheet of paper stems from the desire to make it survive in memory. How do you think memory and writing/drawing relate to each other? Do you find this practice to be more meditative and cathartic, or something that is perhaps too painful or emotionally draining?
- *The Fourth Road* presents an affective and individualized map of Mogadishu. Try to remap your city, talking about three places that are most dear to you, or three places/neighborhoods that you think critically define your city. Where are the places you feel the most at home? What are these places and how are they characterized in your perception? How do you think they are perceived by other people from your city or people who are visiting from somewhere else? Do these three places coincide? Are they connected, or contextually separate from one another?

A quote

- The following quote appears in the film: «Being grounded is not necessarily about being fixed; being mobile is not necessarily about being detached» (Ahmed, Castañeda, Fortier, Sheller 2004, 1). What does this quote mean? How is it

relevant to Kaha Mohamed Aden's story? How do you think this statement relates to the way in which emigration is commonly perceived?

- Do you think in some ways Kaha Mohamed Aden's narrative challenges the mainstream media's portrayal of African migrants and the depiction of their home country? Do you view Somalia or Italy any differently than you did before watching the movie? Do Kaha Mohamed Aden's reflections around migration shift the way you characterize it?

AULÒ (2012)*Synopsis*

Ribka Sibhatu, an Italian writer and essayist originally from Eritrea, presents the history of her homeland, in her current city, Rome. In her imaginary trip backward through her memories, she is accompanied by a young Italian man, who shares her same interest in exploring the relationship between personal identity and national belonging. Ribka Sibhatu's own story intersects powerfully with the stories of the Eritrean diaspora and highlights how the legacy of Italian colonialism in Eritrea continues to influence the present. Through the writer's voice, the words and poems of Eritrean men and women fill the symbolic spaces of the Italian capital. They create a counter-narrative that questions the role of monuments glorifying colonization in Africa.

Before the Screening

- What do you know about Italian colonialism? How does this compare to your conception of colonialism in a wider picture?
- *Aulò* was filmed in Rome. Have you ever been to this city? What do you think are the most representative monuments and places of this city? What is significant about Rome's history?

- Have you ever heard of Eritrea before this movie? If so, what was your impression of the country and its history?

The Beginning

- The film begins with the coffee ceremony, a symbol of Eritrea's culture. This ceremony can last for hours. Coffee is also one of the symbols of Italy, though it is not a native product. What does coffee represent in *Aulò*? What role do cultural elements such as food or traditional objects play in narratives about migration?
- What is Ribka Sibhatu's «home» country? How is it represented in the film, and how does she perceive herself in relation to it?

Three Locations



Fig. 1 Il Vittoriano

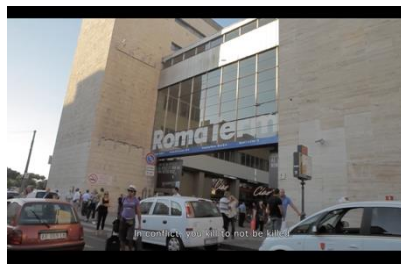


Fig. 2 Roma Termini



Fig. 3 San Salvatore in Campo

- After watching *Aulò*, contemplate whether the film features places in Rome that you knew of or have seen before. How have these places been presented to you in the past, how was their meaning conveyed?
- Having the perspective of someone from Eritrea such as Ribka Sibhatu, does it change the way you perceive the culture of Rome or Italy in general?
- The first scene pictures Ribka Sibhatu centered in a visual right outside of the Vittoriano (Fig. 1). What initially comes to mind when you see this screenshot? Why do you think this visual was used as the movie poster? What is the intended message behind this decision? How can the arrangement of people within a

certain shot or frame change the way the scene is received and encoded by the audience?

- What does the Termini station (Fig. 2) represent in the affective geography described by Ribka Sibhatu?
- What is the significance of the interview scenes with Ribka Sibhatu in front of the church of San Salvatore in Campo (Fig. 3)? In what facets do you think Ribka Sibhatu's story, struggles, and journey are related or similar to the experiences of the Eritrean and Ethiopian people inside the church? If these connections exist, how do you think they are preserved in places of worship? What part does religion play in uniting or dividing people, especially those from a country that has experienced colonization and sometimes forced conversion?
- Do you think different religions could co-exist in Rome the same way they do in Asmara? Why?
- Considered comparatively, can Italy be defined as a multi-cultural society? If a multicultural society is a place that different ethnic communities can peacefully co-inhabit, does this genuinely exist anywhere? Consider this question while also pondering how multicultural societies are created.

Remembering a Date: October 3, 2013

- Ribka Sibhatu wrote a poem to remember the shipwreck of Lampedusa on October 3rd, 2013 (2016), which resulted in about 368 deaths and about 20 presumed missing. This boat was carrying hundreds of immigrants from Libya, Eritrea, Somalia, and Ghana on their way to Italy. What strikes you about the poem? What kind of images are used to describe the tragedy?
- What do poems or pieces of literature about historical events communicate that other mediums cannot?
- This poem was written by a living Black Italian poet. Have you read many literary texts by Black authors during your schooling? How many of them were women?

- Do you think that labels such as «post-colonial,» «migration,» «Black» literature contribute to including or excluding these voices?

Maternity and Family

- In the film, audiences are introduced to Ribka Sibhatu's daughter, Sara Moyret, who was born and raised in Italy. Sara talks about the benefits that come from her multicultural background. What are the benefits she is referring to? How does being connected to a multitude of cultures influence the way in which we traverse and perceive the world around us?
- How is the presence of maternity characterized over the course of the two scenes in which Ribka Sibhatu talks about wanting to be considered «Roman» and Sara talks about her identity?
- How do you think the realities of being a mother and a migrant interact with each other? How can cultures be preserved or erased through someone's children and family?
- Why do you think Ribka Sibhatu thinks she'll never be considered Roman, but Sara might? Why does she hope this for her?
- Sara talks about how drawing complicated her identity in the sense that she stopped drawing Black people for a time, but photography helped her reconcile with this activity. How are photos sometimes honest or telling in a way that drawn images are not?
- In what ways can art construct or distort our identities?
- Is immigration a generational condition? What do you think of the term «second-generation immigrant» to call the children of immigrants like Sara? Would it be better to say that Sara is a «first generation Italian»?

After the Screening

- How does a colonial presence shape our conceptions of personal and cultural identity, both on the side of the oppressor and the oppressed?

Comparing Different Experiences of Migration

- Do you know other people who have migrated to your country or emigrated abroad? People who were born in a city other than the one in which they live? Ask them to tell you their stories and how they remember their other «home». Can you find any similarities and differences with Ribka Sibhatu's story? Can all stories of migration be read the same way?

BEYOND THE FRAME (2023; OLTRE I BORDI)*Synopsis*

The fortuitous discovery of a box of photographs taken in Italian East Africa in the 1930s by a distant relative prompts more general considerations about the colonial gaze and its legacy. In a narrative that interweaves personal reflections and collective history – shared by both colonizers and colonized – this film invites us to look at what is left «beyond the frame» from colonial photography. A revelatory and personal film, *Beyond the Frame*, discusses colonial photography and challenges the gaze through which it framed Africa.

The Title

- The film's title comes from the following quote: « No story is ever simple. Every photograph extends beyond the frame», which originates from an interview with Maaza Mengiste, an Ethiopian American writer (2016, 182). Why was this title chosen for the film? What is the quote's meaning or intent given the context of *Beyond the Frame*?
- What does the verb «to frame» mean in English?

- What is the meaning behind the title of the film, in a physical, and metaphorical sense?

Three Colonial Photographs

These are some of the photographs that were taken by Giulio Brioni in Ethiopia during the 1930s. Look at these images and list the people, objects, and activities that you see. Try to attach a characteristic to each of these.

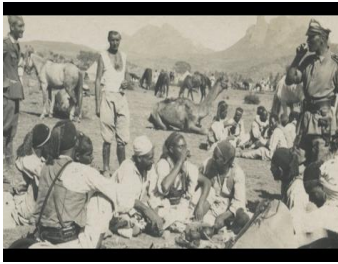


Fig. 4 Askaris



Fig. 5 Giulio Brioni surrounded by African children



Fig. 6 Italian soldiers

Askaris (Fig. 4). Questions:

- What story or stories could be found in these pictures? If you could split this scene into different pieces, where would you divide them?
- What's the first thing you noticed? Why did you notice this first?
- What do you feel the general atmosphere of the photo is?
- What do you think this photo says about the way the supposed African Other was perceived during a time of Fascism and colonization? How do you think the African Other is perceived now?
- What role does a photographer have in framing what is happening in an image?
- What did you learn from this photo that you don't think you'd be able to from elsewhere?

- Do photos and other types of visual media shape how the past is perceived or understood?

Giulio Brioni surrounded by African children (Fig. 5). Questions:

- What do you think is going on in this picture? What can you deduce from it?
- Who is at the center of the picture? What strikes you about the figures represented?
- What would you name this photograph?
- What audience do you think this photo is intended for? What led you to this conclusion?
- Why do you think this photo was taken? List the evidence from the picture or your knowledge of the period that supports this.
- What general message does this photo communicate to you?

Italian Soldiers (Fig. 6). Questions:

- What historical or social events may have influenced or led to the production of this photograph?
- Consider the point of view of the photographer. What interest do you think they had in producing this photograph?
- How does the framing of this picture visualize these men?
- Is it a pleasant feeling to feel a part of a group of people? How can organized forms of camaraderie sometimes be dangerous?
- Have you ever had to wear a uniform? How did it make you feel? How do you think these men felt in their uniforms? What is the power behind a uniform, and how does this fluctuate depending on what institution it comes from?

- Besides the purpose of identification and ranking, what is a uniform for? What does it establish? How does it act as a tool for separating and uniting people, for creating the teammate and the enemy?

Sound

- Take notes on the sounds you hear throughout the movie. Which sounds come from the world within the film (diegetic), and which ones are external (extra-diegetic)?
- How are both these applications of sound used within the film?
- How do extra-diegetic sounds shape the way we perceive a film?
- How did the voice-over narration influence the way in which you looked at the photographs?
- Why do you think the film begins with a monologue and ends with a dialogue?

The movie poster

- The poster of *Beyond the Frame* was made by Jane Yun. Why do you think she used these colors? Why was a photograph that does not picture Giulio Brioni chosen? What is this poster trying to communicate?
- How does the poster coincide with or relate to the ending scene of the film?
- Why do you think a map of Brescia was placed over the background of the poster?

An Italian Town: Brescia

- In this scene, the protagonist is considerably shrunken in comparison to the scope of the size of the architecture using a wide shot. Why do you think this technique is being applied?
- What historical period does the visual evoke? Why do you think such grand buildings were built in Italy during Fascism? Can you think of any similar examples in the United States, or any other country?
- The documentary shows a map of Brescia, a city in Northern Italy. How do maps change our perception of space?
- Think of three adjectives that encompass how Brescia was portrayed in the film. How does Brescia compare to how Rome is portrayed in *Aulò*?
- The collective Viva Zerai! made an online map of places celebrating Italian colonialism in Italy. Do a little research on these places and what historical characters are celebrated by toponymy. Are there any controversial monuments in your city? Would you argue that they should be torn down or reworked to create a new meaning?
- In the U.S., there is much debate about whether Confederate statues or statues of controversial white historical figures like Christopher Columbus should be

removed. What do you think of this conflict? Do you think the existence of these statues is a reminder of the tragedies of the past or a commemoration of backwards power structures? Does this mean they should be taken down or reflected on with the context of their backstory?

Ubah Cristina Ali Farah

Ubah Cristina Ali Farah – a Somali Italian writer and poet, and the author of two novels translated in English: *Little Mother* (2011) and *Commander of the River* (2023) – is interviewed in the second part of the film.

- Do you agree with her that it is not possible to understand today's migration from Africa without studying the history of colonization, considering how colonial borders, economic exploitation, and cultural disruptions have shaped current migration patterns?
- How do you think historical narratives would change if they were told from a female perspective?
- Think about the two poems recited in the film: Angelo Canossi's *Ai fiöi chè part pèr l'Africa* (1935; To the Sons who Go to Africa) and Ubah Cristina Ali Farah's *Axum* (2006) and How can poetry serve as a powerful tool to heal individuals and communities, and in what ways might it also have the potential to harm or destroy?

The Story of Your Family

- In the introduction sequence of the film, the protagonist discusses how he discovered a box of photos of a man called Giulio while he was in East Africa, through a distant cousin of his also named Giulio. This leads him to the historical, familial, and ethical exploration that occurs throughout the movie. Have you ever had an instance where family photos, stories, or experiences have

directed you in the same way? Why did this happen? How did it affect the way you viewed yourself in relation to your family and heritage?

- How is Giulio depicted? Do you think the documentary provides a fair representation of him? Is it possible for us to neutrally analyze someone we are related to?
- It is mentioned during the film that most white Italians have a box like the one in Giulio's photos in their home, preserving a memory of Italian colonization. How would you feel by finding a similar box? What would you do with these pictures and why?

MAKA (2023)



Synopsis

Maka is a documentary about Geneviève Makaping, a Cameroonian Italian anthropologist, writer and the first Black woman to be named the director of a newspaper in Italy. The film offers a detailed firsthand account of Geneviève Makaping's journey of migration from Cameroon across the desert and the Mediterranean Sea, her arrival in Italy in 1982 following the tragic death of her partner, her success as a journalist and television host, and her more recent relocation and current teaching job in Mantua. *Maka* explores how the perception of migration and race has changed since Geneviève Makaping first came to Italy in

the 1990s. *Maka* is a bold statement about what it means to be Other, to be a woman, and particularly a Black woman, in Italy.

The Beginning

- What is the purpose of beginning the film with a quote from the *Aeneid* written in Arabic and one from the Koran as well? What do they facilitate in the exploration of identity that is about to come?
- Why do you think Elia speaks in Arabic rather than Italian? What is the contrast present in speaking these two languages?

Themes and Motifs

- Can you describe a single moment or scene in the film that you could relate to? How did this moment make you feel? Why could you relate to it?
- From your perspective, what is the main purpose of *Maka*? If you had to describe it to someone unfamiliar with its contents, how would you go about it? Do you think certain takeaways are more vital than others?
- Is there any new information you obtained from watching this film that you would consider transformative or substantial to your understanding of certain topics?
- In her book *Reversing the Gaze: What if the Other Were You?* (2023), Geneviève Makaping writes « I look at myself looking at those who have always been looking at me» (2023: 51). How is this oppositional gaze presented in *Maka*? How are questions of looking and being looked at presented in the film?
- If you could ask someone in the film a question, who would it be and what would you ask them? Would this be a difficult question to ask?

- Are the ideas communicated in *Maka* relevant to general audiences, or does the film contain concepts that are only significant for particular demographics to receive? How do you think a general audience would interact with the movie?
- Would there be a contrast in people's reaction to the film now as opposed to if it was made twenty years ago?
- *Maka* was made during the COVID-19 pandemic. Is this fact referenced indirectly and directly? Why do you think this is? Does it shape the film in any specific way that is notable to your viewing?

The Documentary Genre

- *Maka* is a documentary yet possesses elements that are not completely realistic. What are they? What is their significance to the film itself, and the context they are placed within?
- How do we typically picture a documentary? In what ways does *Maka* subscribe to or diverge from these expectations?
- Do you find *Maka* similar to other movies you may have seen about immigration? How does this film compare with the other films in this guide in terms of characteristics or defining features?

The Hairdresser

- The scene at Mercy's house includes two women talking to each other without referring to a man. Can you think of any other films or TV shows where this occurs off of the top of your head?
- How is the scene at Mercy's integral to the message of the film? What, if anything, does it reiterate?
- How are hair and other physicalities connected to beauty explored or presented in the film? How does Geneviève Makaping's style characterize her?

The Protagonist: Geneviève Makaping

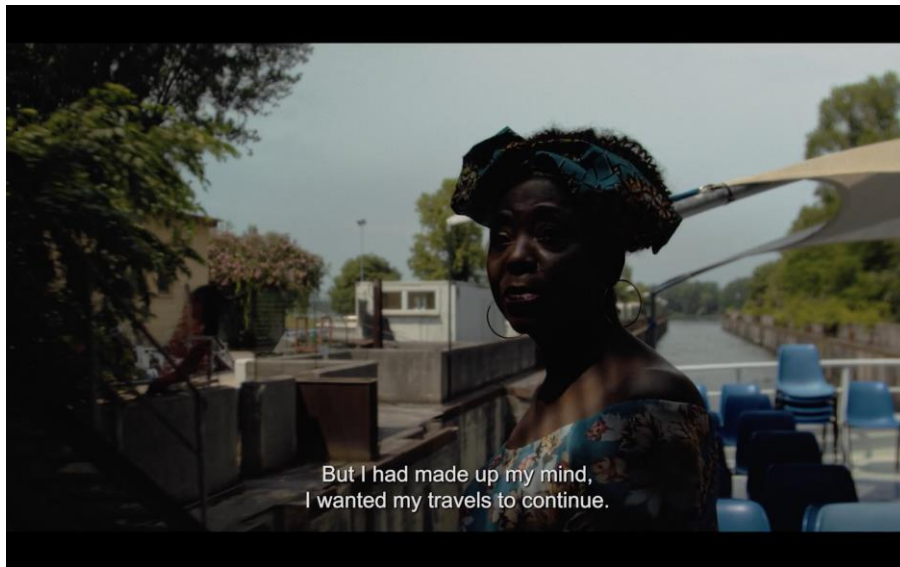
- Which groups does Geneviève Makaping say that she feels a part of?
- What are some of the quintessential aspects of Geneviève Makaping's journey from Cameroon to Italy in regard to how they shift her perception of the world and herself?
- Were there any viable alternatives to emigration for Geneviève Makaping, what do you think staying in Cameroon would have meant for her? Try to imagine and discuss what her life would have been like if she stayed.
- Geneviève Makaping describes crossing the Mediterranean as a new birth. Do you think it's possible to be reborn out of an experience? Has your state of being or the world around you ever been altered in this way, and do you think these kinds of transformations are constructive to our development?

Labeling

- In the clip of Geneviève Makaping on TV in 2002, she corrects the host when he says she was the first «colored» editor of a newspaper, asserting that she is proud of being identified as Black. What do you make of this? Why do you think people sometimes feel uncomfortable with saying Black and prefer to identify someone as «colored»? What are the implications of these labels? What does it mean to be «colored»? Why white people are not considered to be «colored»?
- Think back to the scene where the filmmakers discuss translating the derogatory term «terrone». What is the conflict of their discussion? Who do you agree with? Is it okay to use derogatory terms for educational or interpretive purposes? Or should words like this not be spoken entirely? Does the meaning of a word change with intention, or is it always grounded in its origin?
- How important is it for minorities to be represented? Think about specific case studies (i.e. *The Little Mermaid* (2023)) and discuss whether the increased

representation of Black people in U.S. TV programs and movies has had tangible effects in creating a more inclusive US society.

Lighting



- In looking at the sequence where the protagonist's skin color is shifted by the movement of shadows, what can you learn about the protagonist?
- Can you describe a moment or scene from the movie that inspired, resonated, or struck you in some way? Why do you think it made you feel this way?
- How does the lighting scheme in this sequence shape your idea of the main character? in what ways does the lighting in the film alter, support, or reconstruct the narrative?
- Is there a moment or scene from the movie that you could relate to? If so, why is this and how did it affect the way you perceive the condition of identity? If not, why do you think that is? Do you think you have to directly relate to something to fully comprehend it and the sentiments it contains?

National Belonging and Citizenship

- How is Italy portrayed and how does Geneviève Makaping feel about the country? How does she perceive herself in relation to it? Did this film alter your picture of Italy at all?
- According to Geneviève Makaping, how has the perception of immigrants in Italy changed over time? Do you think emigrating there would be a different experience for her now, or that she would find herself in similar situations and encounters?
- Why do you think Geneviève Makaping chose to become an Italian citizen while wearing traditional Cameroonian attire? Was this a vital choice for her? Why do you think she was questioned by some of her Italian and Cameroonian friends?
- In her lesson, Geneviève Makaping shows an image of the victory of Libania Grenot, Maria Benedicta Chigbolu, Ayomide Folorunso, and Rapfaela Lukudo at the 2018 Mediterranean Games. Why is this picture interesting, and relevant to Geneviève Makaping's narrative?
- In your opinion, does the image celebrate 1. A national triumph for all of Italy, 2. A personal triumph for each of these athletes, 3. A triumph for all people of the African diaspora? Is it possible for all three of these to be true simultaneously?

Geographies and Maps

- Which characteristics or issues predominately compose the perception of the relationship between the North and the South, both in Italy and in a global context? What do you perceive the North and South to be in both respects? Who constructs these perceptions?
- How large is Cameroon compared to Italy? To answer this question, compare a map of Cameroon in the Peters projection and with a map in the Mercator projection.

- How do the maps in the film accompany the narrative of space and how space is traversed on an individual level?

Art and Beauty

- Towards the end of the film, there is a sequence in which Geneviève Makaping explores the Ducal Palace in Mantua and looks at paintings from the Renaissance period, depicting Black servants and noblemen. How does her dialogue with these painted figures emphasize or subvert their context of production?
- How are the ways the art is presented visually and through the dialogue pertinent to understanding the cultural impacts of the Renaissance and its construction of beauty?

Research proposal: Decolonization of Cameroon

- Conduct research on the decolonization process in Cameroon. What is your understanding of a decolonization process? How is the decolonization of this country similar to or different from Somalia? What are these countries' relationships with the countries that colonized them?

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