
Colonial heritage, colonial legacy. The photographic collections of Giuseppe De Reali and Nello Puccioni

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This article investigates the colonial photographic collections belonging to the traveller Giuseppe De Reali (1877-1937) and the anthropologist Nello Puccioni (1881-1937). Between the end of the nineteenth century and the 1930s, both visited the African continent several times, creating two collections — a zoological-naturalistic one, and an anthropological-ethnographic one — that are now kept and partly displayed in the Natural History Museum of Venice and in the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology in Florence, respectively. By analysing these images, the article examines the modes of representation of the African continent and its populations, and the functions and meanings acquired by pictures and objects in the transfer to museums. In conclusion, it raises a series of preliminary questions concerning the continuities of exhibition practices between the fascist and the republican period.

Key words: Colonialism, Racism, Photography, Anthropology, Fascism, Museum

In this article I present two case studies chosen from the complex framework that characterises Italian museum institutes: the photographic collections of the traveller Giuseppe De Reali (Venice, 26 June 1877 - Dosson, 15 February 1937) and of the anthropologist Nello Puccioni (Florence, 16 July 1881 - Florence, 31 May 1937). While these two collectors could be considered representative figures of the Italian expansionist project in the broad sense, their collections could be exemplary of its legacy instead: both are indeed currently stored and partially exhibited at the Natural History Museum of Venice and at the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology in Florence,¹ respectively. By juxtaposing the cultural experiences of De Reali and Puccioni, I will first of all examine how different actors contributed to the construction of the Italian colonial imaginary within a specific time frame. For both the protagonists,

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¹ It is relevant to underline that when this article was translated and revised in May 2021, the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology in Florence turned out to be temporarily closed for refurbishment works.

this period began at the end of the nineteenth century and evolved between the liberal age and the fascist regime. It is noteworthy that these experiences ended in 1937, when both De Reali and Puccioni died, which is the same year when the Royal Decree-Law 880 of 19 April 1937 was announced, that is, the first notorious “defence of race” laws that marked the beginning of the regime’s racist turn. Secondly, the collections’ long-term museum set-ups — starting in the 1930s and running into the present — make them a privileged point of observation; in the absence of a major national colonial museum, an analysis of the multitude of collections — including the two objects of this article — that are scattered across the territory will allow us to study the history and heritage of the Italian expansionist project and, most of all, the visual legacy of the colonial imaginary in contemporary Italy.²

The traveller and the anthropologist

Giuseppe De Reali and Nello Puccioni were both protagonists of journeys to the African continent. Coming from different backgrounds, the former put together a zoological-naturalistic collection, the latter an anthropological-ethnographic one.

Giuseppe De Reali was the last-born of the Venetian Reali family, which owned many lands in the Treviso region and in the lagoon area and had belonged to the Venetian entrepreneurial world from the mid-nineteenth century onwards.³ Although the documentation on Count De Reali is scarce,⁴ we know that he was a traveller, hunter, sculptor, painter, mayor and podestà.⁵ In sum, a man of quite considerable cultural and political importance within the local context. On 20 April 1922, De Reali married Amelia Pigazzi (Padua, 24 November 1871 - Venice, 28 September 1957),⁶ who played a significant

² See Beatrice Falucci, *Sources for colonial historiography: museums and colonial collections, a mapping and memory project on the Italian national territory*, “Cahiers d’histoire”, automne 2019, n. 1, pp. 21-40.

³ Giampaolo Rallo, *La raccolta africana del Conte Giuseppe De Reali al Museo civico di Storia Naturale di Venezia*, special issue “Quaderni del Museo civico di storia naturale di Venezia”, gennaio 1999, n. 5, suppl. “Bollettino del Museo civico di storia naturale di Venezia”, 1997, vol. XLVIII, pp. 5-6.

⁴ G. Rallo, *La raccolta africana del Conte Giuseppe De Reali*, pp. 6-7. Vittorio Emanuele III bestowed the title of count by Royal Decree *motu proprio* on 16 December 1936 and RR. LL. PP. on 17 March 1927. More information can be found in the Central State Archive (Archivio Centrale dello Stato, hereafter ACS), Presidenza del consiglio dei ministri. Consulta araldica. Fascicoli nobiliari e araldici delle singole famiglie, 6507 De Reali Giuseppe, b. 1094.

⁵ Report by the Prefect of Treviso Marcello Vaccari, 18 May 1935, in ACS, Ministero dell’Interno, Podestà e consulte municipali, Comune di Casier.

⁶ G. Rallo, *La raccolta africana del Conte Giuseppe De Reali*, p. 8. With regard to Amelia Pigazzi, the only information that has been retrieved is contained in a letter dated 13 March 1937 from Osvaldo Sebastiani, Mussolini’s secretary, which was addressed to the

role also with regard to her husband's collection. Indeed, it is only by virtue of Pigazzi's major efforts in engaging with important people of the time and making the collection known that we nowadays have some idea of the count's activities.⁷

Being a young aristocrat,⁸ De Reali's interest in Africa was nurtured by the aspiration of going on a "colonial Grand Tour". It is probably for this reason that his endeavours never gained much notoriety at a national level, given that these were private trips, even if they were of no less importance than those of contemporary travellers, such as Giovanni Miani, Vittorio Bottego, Carlo Piaggia and Ernesto Cordella.⁹ Nevertheless, in 1960 the geographer Giotto Dainelli apparently dedicated some space to De Reali in his text about Italian explorers in Africa, where he recalled De Reali's first journey at the age of 21 (1898).¹⁰

De Reali visited the African continent 11 more times, between 1901 and 1929: his second journey (1901) covered Eritrea, Abyssinia and Eastern Ethiopia; three years later (1904) he moved towards Equatorial Africa, following the Tana and Uaso Nyiro rivers on his way to German East Africa, Kenya and Tanganika, and eventually pushed into Ethiopian territory. In 1907 he again passed through Kenya on his way to Uganda, and in 1908 he passed across the Seychelles Islands on his way back. De Reali went on one more trip in 1912, before returning to Eritrea in 1920 and 1922.¹¹ In 1926 he travelled to Tripolitania, through to Ghadames, whereas his last peregrination dates back to 1929, when he went to Tripolitania, Tunisia and the French Sahara.¹² The only journey we have some information on was that to Congo in 1925, with his wife

Prefect of Venice; from this letter we may deduct that Pigazzi had become a member of the National Fascist Party in 1926, was awarded the Croce commemorativa della III Armata (Commemorative Cross of the 3rd Army) and covered the positions of president of the Ente della Moda and vice-president of the "Terre Rendente" association for the city of Treviso. She was also a fiduciary of the rural housewives of San Michele di Quarto (in ACS, Segreteria particolare del Duce, Carteggio ordinario (1922-1943), b. 424, fasc. 160434).

⁷ The complete documentation that is stored at the Central State Archive concerns Countess De Reali. From these documents we may deduct that she personally knew Edda Ciano Mussolini and Rodolfo Graziani. See ACS, Segreteria particolare del Duce, Carteggio ordinario (1922-1943), Sussidi, b. 2616, fasc. P38477; ACS, Segreteria particolare del Duce, Carteggio ordinario (1922-1943), b. 424, fasc. 160434.

⁸ In fact, Antonio De Reali (Venice, 24 July 1834 - Venice, 17 June 1887), Giuseppe's father, at the time of his nomination as Senator of the Kingdom of Italy (1876) turned out to be a hereditary noble; in particular, he received the title on 13 May 1855. See <https://bit.ly/2AQ75jc> (last accessed 19/06/2020).

⁹ Erika Ferrando, *Le spedizioni africaniste di G. De Reali: dal terreno al museo*, Bachelor's Degree thesis, Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, discussed in the academic year 2005-2006, supervisor Giovanni Dore, pp. 51-61.

¹⁰ Giotto Dainelli, *Gli esploratori italiani in Africa*, vol. II, Turin, Utet, 1960, p. 639.

¹¹ G. Rallo, *La raccolta africana del Conte Giuseppe De Reali*, pp. 8-10. E. Ferrando, *Le spedizioni africaniste di G. De Reali*, pp. 51-61.

¹² G. Rallo, *La raccolta africana del Conte Giuseppe De Reali*, pp. 8-10.

Amelia Pigazzi,¹³ who gathered her personal impressions in the diary *Alcuni appunti del mio viaggio al Congo* [Notes about my trip to Congo].¹⁴ Although this is a rather bare text, it is nonetheless an important document for a reconstruction of the couple's approach to the journey and to their encounter with what we nowadays call "otherness".

While De Reali's relation to the African continent cannot be examined in detail due to the absence of direct accounts, his passion for the big game offers an important interpretative key. Indeed, while the Scramble for Africa was in full motion, hunting represented a popular recreational pursuit both in the aristocratic and in the scientific world, as well as a symbolic ritual and a metaphor for the colonial encounter itself.¹⁵ An adventurous spirit and curiosity for the most remote angles of a continent many nations were in the process of dividing up played an equally important role.

Contrary to the traveller De Reali, Nello Puccioni was a scientist, anthropologist, anthropometrist, ethnologist, a scholar of prehistory and an intellectual.¹⁶ For a long time, he collaborated with two important Florentine institutes: the Italian Society of Anthropology and Ethnology and the Italian Institute of Human Paleontology. He was elected a member of the former as early as 1902, after his enrolment in the School of Medicine and two years before obtaining his first degree in Physical and Natural Sciences at the University of Florence.¹⁷ Later, he maintained his membership — according to the wishes of the founder, Paolo Mantegazza — taking up an assistant position at the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology, of which he was eventually elected director (from 1931 until his death).¹⁸ Instead, he joined the Italian Institute of Human Paleontology when it was founded in 1912, and remained "one of its most distinguished members".¹⁹

Between the beginning of the twentieth century and the 1930s, Puccioni went on various expeditions in Italy and North-East Africa, which served the

¹³ Amelia Pigazzi accompanied De Reali during five of the 12 expeditions. For more information see: letter from Amelia De Reali to the Venice Municipality, 16 August 1938, in Archivio Municipale di Venezia (hereafter AMV), Affari trattati dalle sezioni municipali, 1941-1947, IX istruzione pubblica, 11 musei, 8 Museo di Storia Naturale.

¹⁴ Amelia De Reali, *Alcuni appunti del mio viaggio al Congo*, Treviso, Longo & Zoppelli, [1925].

¹⁵ James R. Ryan, *Picturing Empire. Photography and the visualization of the British Empire*, London, Reaktion Books, 1997, p. 106.

¹⁶ In 1904, in Florence, Nello Puccioni was one of the founding members of the journal "Hermes", along with Giuseppe Antonio Borgese, Luigi Dami, Maffio Maffii, Marcello Taddei and Nello Tarchiani.

¹⁷ Francesco Surdich, *Puccioni, Nello*, in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, 2016, vol. 85, p. 614; *Commemorazione di Nello Puccioni*, "Archivio per l'antropologia e la etnologia", 1937, vol. LXVII, p. 12.

¹⁸ F. Surdich, *Puccioni, Nello*, pp. 614-616.

¹⁹ *Commemorazione di Nello Puccioni*, p. 9.

purpose of determining “the major and minor varieties of man”.²⁰ More specifically, Puccioni visited the African continent four times in the course of three expeditions. The first trip dates back to 1924, when he participated — on behalf of the Italian Geographic Society — in Giuseppe Stefanini’s second expedition, aimed at exploring Somalia (the sultanates of Hobyo and of the Majeerteen); a second occasion presented itself when Puccioni was teaching Anthropology at the University of Pavia.²¹ Thus, in the academic year 1928-1929 he travelled to Libya twice on invitation of the Cyrenaica government, on a mission aimed at studying local populations. His last trip did not take place until 1935; on behalf of the Accademia d’Italia and accompanied by Paolo Graziosi, Puccioni went on a mission that served to study the populations of the Giuba and the “Oltregiuba”.²² While these expeditions produced scientific monographs and essays, the last expedition also resulted in the publication of a more didactic text: *Giuba e Oltregiuba. Itinerari della Missione della R. Accademia d’Italia 1935* [Giuba and Oltregiuba. Itineraries of the Mission of the R. Accademia d’Italia 1935].²³ No longer a purely anthropometric text, the latter is a travel diary with descriptions and comments that are typical of colonial literature. In doing so it contributed to an interpretation of the photographic documentation he had gathered and partially included in the text.²⁴

Finally, throughout the years Puccioni was involved in the organisation of events such as the Third Colonial Congress,²⁵ and he was among the collaborators of the *Enciclopedia Italiana*, for which he wrote the entries on: *Berberia, Cirenaica, Darod, Deformazioni e mutilazioni, Dighil, Egitto, Etiopici, Gobahin, Hauia, Oltregiuba, Pittura del corpo, Poggiatesta*.²⁶ The entries

²⁰ *Commemorazione di Nello Puccioni*, p. 9.

²¹ As of 1925, he taught the following courses at the University of Pavia: Anthropology and Human Anatomy (1925-1926), Anthropology, Ethnography and Paleontology (1926-1927 and 1927-1928), and Anthropology (1928-1929). From 1929 onwards he taught classes in Geography and Ethnography of the colonies and in Monographic illustration of the Italian colonies at the Istituto Superiore di Scienze Sociali “Cesare Alfieri”. In 1931 Aldobrandino Mochi’s death offered Puccioni a double opportunity: he took up the position of professor in Anthropology, Ethnology and Paleontology at the University of Florence, and he became the director of the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology.

²² F. Surdich, *Puccioni, Nello*, p. 615.

²³ Nello Puccioni, *Giuba e Oltregiuba. Itinerari della Missione della R. Accademia d’Italia 1935-XIII (con fotografie dell’autore)*, Florence, Sansoni, 1937.

²⁴ Recently, scholars have rediscovered the unpublished accounts of the journeys of 1928 and 1929. See Beatrice Falcucci, Fausto Barbagli, *La missione in Cirenaica del 1928 nei diari inediti di Nello Puccioni*, “Archivio per l’antropologia e la etnologia”, 2017, vol. CXLVII, pp. 71-85. Not long ago the manuscripts have been published in Fausto Barbagli, Beatrice Falcucci (eds.), *Affrica all’acqua di rose. Le missioni in Cirenaica del 1928-1929 attraverso i ‘Diari’ di Nello Puccioni*, Florence, Edizioni Polistampa, 2019.

²⁵ *Commemorazione di Nello Puccioni*, p. 25. The administrative documents of the congress are held in the Historical Archive of the University of Florence, year 1936, b. 100.

²⁶ Giuseppe Vedovato, *Una vita operosa: Nello Puccioni*, Florence, Tipografia Enrico Ariani, 1937, p. 38.

Berberia, *Cirenaica* and *Egitto* deserve particular attention, as they were the outcome of a negotiation between Puccioni, Renato Biasutti, Gioacchino Sera and Giovanni Gentile that occurred between 1927 and 1928. They likely reflect a wider debate concerning the anthropological position of North African populations,²⁷ which should originally have been included in the entry on “Afro-Mediterraneans”. Sera and Biasutti suggested to change this title into “North Africans”, but their proposal was not approved by the Encyclopaedia’s director, who at that point preferred splitting them up.²⁸

The photographic collections: staging the African continent and its populations

De Reali and Puccioni documented their journeys across the African continent through numerous photographs and, occasionally, also through films, which are currently no longer traceable.²⁹ I have decided to focus my attention on the collections’ iconographic elements, at the expense of the zoological-ethnographic ones, for two reasons: the role photography played throughout the Italian colonial project and the force that is inherent in this medium when it comes down to representing stereotypes and mental categories.³⁰ Indeed, the

²⁷ See Barbara Sorgoni, *Parole e corpi. Antropologia, discorso giuridico e politiche sessuali interraziali nella colonia Eritrea (1890-1941)*, Naples, Liguori Editore, 1998; David Forgacs, *Margini d’Italia. L’esclusione sociale dall’Unità a oggi*, Rome-Bari, Laterza, 2014, pp. 59-140.

²⁸ See the Historical Archive of the Institute of the Italian Encyclopedia, 1925-1939, sezione II Attività scientifica e redazionale, 1925-1939, s. 5 Corrispondenza, lettera P, 1925-1938, fasc. 1110 Puccioni Nello, b. 27.

²⁹ Only written sources survive that testify to the use of the film medium for documentary purposes on behalf of the traveller and the anthropologist. In both cases, the sources regard travel diaries. For examples see: A. De Reali, *Alcuni appunti del mio viaggio al Congo*, pp. 13-14 e p. 30; N. Puccioni, *Giuba e Oltregiuba*, p. 46.

³⁰ With regard to the broad theme of photography in a colonial context see: Adolfo Mignemi (ed.), *Immagine coordinata per un impero. Etiopia 1936-1936*, Turin, Gruppo Editoriale Forma, 1983; Nicola Labanca, *Uno sguardo coloniale. Immagine e propaganda nelle fotografie e nelle illustrazioni del primo colonialismo italiano (1882-1896)*, “AFT. Rivista di storia e fotografia”, 1988, n. 8, pp. 43-61; Alessandro Triulzi, *Fotografia coloniale e storia dell’Africa*, “AFT. Rivista di storia e fotografia”, 1988, n. 8, pp. 39-42; Luigi Goglia (ed.), *Colonialismo e fotografia. Il caso italiano*, Messina, Sicania, 1989; Silvana Palma, *La fototeca dell’Istituto Italo-Africano: appunti di un lavoro di riordino*, “Africa”, 1989, n. 4, pp. 595-609; Christraud M. Geary, *Pratica fotografica in Africa*, “AFT. Rivista di storia e fotografia”, 1995, n. 21, pp. 38-51; Silvana Palma, *Le collezioni fotografiche della Società africana d’Italia e dell’ex Museo coloniale*, in Alessandro Triulzi (ed.), *Fotografia e storia dell’Africa* (International Conference Proceedings, Naples-Rome 9-11 settembre 1992), Naples, Istituto Universitario Orientale, 1995, pp. 199-212; James R. Ryan, *Picturing Empire. Photography and the Visualization of the British Empire*, London, Reaktion Books, 1997; Enrico Castelli (ed.), *Immagini & colonie*, Montone, Centro di documentazione e Museo etnografico Tamburo Parlante, 1998; Silvana Palma, *L’Italia coloniale*, Rome, Editori Riuniti, 1999; Paolo Bertella Farnetti (ed.), *Sognando l’impero. Modena-Addis Abeba (1935-1941)*, Milan-Udine, Mimesis, 2007; David Forgacs, *Margini d’Italia. L’esclusione sociale dall’Unità a oggi*, Rome-Bari, Laterza, 2015.

photographs did not only offer a means of recording phenomena or happenings, which becomes particularly evident when looking at De Reali and Puccioni's photographs; they were also considered true forms of communication.³¹ Being more than a mere personal recollection, they testified to the fact that the pictured event-object had actually happened, and that the photographer had physically been in that specific location. If we take De Reali's collection into consideration, we notice how the traveller used the pictures as a support for his collection of hunting trophies, like memories in a private photo album being exposed to an audience in the family's villa, demonstrating the courage and the bravery of his endeavours. By contrast, Puccioni's photographs — before (partially) becoming the visual apparatus of the museum's ethnographic collections — had been stored within the institute's photographic archive, as a further proof of his desire to share them with academic and national communities.

If, throughout the whole expansionist project, the photographs helped to maintain the coloniser's power from a propaganda point of view, at the same time they were part of a process in which the specific power relations of the colonial encounter were also represented and enacted in a visual form. This was a power that was not always exercised in a conscious way, but which nevertheless became part of the photographic image,³² as in the case of the Venetian traveller. Thus, while he never seems to have openly expressed a desire to dominate the places and the people he met, for whom he rather showed fascination and curiosity, the unequal position that is intrinsic in the relation between Europeans and Africans constantly emerges in his pictures, as if it was impossible not to take into account the distance that separates a world one imagines to be highly civilised, and one considered primitive. However, with regard to the inventories, Giuseppe De Reali seems never to have documented the contents of his photographs in any way. He likely felt that the pictures were self-explanatory when placed alongside his trophy collection: arguably the photographs served as captions for the big game hunting trophies, the latter being the real protagonists of his collection.³³ In fact, in the safari the pictures' function was not exclusively linked to taxidermy,³⁴ but also served as a visual

³¹ See D. Forgacs, *Margini d'Italia*, p. 63.

³² See D. Forgacs, *Margini d'Italia*, pp. 139-140.

³³ Although De Reali's pictures did not originally contain any captions, today the photographs have been made into an inventory and identified using wordings that seek to compensate for the lack of information. It is assumed that Giampaolo Rallo wrote these short captions in the 1980s and 1990s, in occasion of the research that resulted in the following text: G. Rallo, *La raccolta africana del Conte Giuseppe De Reali*. Given that these are not the original captions, I will mark them in roman in order to distinguish them from Puccioni's captions (written, instead, at the time and probably by the photographer himself), which will be marked in italic, and from my own captions, which will be placed in between square brackets.

³⁴ At the time, the main reference text on the theme of the big game was Rowland Ward's *Records of big game with their distribution, characteristics, dimensions, weights and horn & tusk measurements*, London, Ward, 1910, of which De Reali owned a copy (donated to

confirmation of the “heroic endeavours” that allowed travellers such as De Reali to gain notoriety and fame.³⁵ Such confirmation necessarily occurred through the hunter’s self-representation next to the dead prey or the conquered trophies.³⁶ Within this context, Amelia Pigazzi had repeatedly adopted a similar — “typically” virile and masculine — position, evidence of the fact that De Reali’s wife had a certain weight in the African journeys (fig. 1).

Fig. 1 — The Count and Countess De Reali in proximity of a shot equine or roan antelope (Hippotragus equinus), in Natural History Museum of Venice (hereafter MSNVE), Giuseppe De Reali Collection, photographic archive, AF 32



If De Reali’s journeys were nurtured by a hedonistic interest in capturing an unviolated, primitive and wild Africa, which he himself — as a “civilised”

the Natural History Museum). Ward considered photography an essential part of the taxidermic process as it allowed to conserve evidence of the specimen before it deteriorated. In this regard, we must also mention the manual *Istruzioni per lo studio della colonia Eritrea*, published in 1907 by the Society of Geographic and Colonial Studies and by the Italian Society of Anthropology and Ethnology (the first of its kind to appear in Italy). If we may take for granted that Puccioni was acquainted with this text, which was intended specifically for colonial officials (after all, the scholar had been a member of the Italian Society of Anthropology and Ethnology ever since 1902), the same cannot be said for De Reali in the absence of contemporary sources that could prove this.

³⁵ See S. Palma, *L'Italia coloniale*, p. 33.

³⁶ J.R. Ryan, *Picturing Empire*, p. 99.

European — had managed to domesticate, Puccioni's expeditions were simply aimed at obtaining knowledge, exercising control over and supervising the new colonial possessions. What mainly distinguishes the two collections is, then, the different purposes of the pictures. If we focus on the ethno-anthropological pictures, the purpose might be described in terms of what Francesco Faeta has dubbed the juxtaposition of an anthropological *studium* and *otium*: the difference between a systematic anthropological photography and an occasional, non-professional one.³⁷ In fact, on one side we have Puccioni's photographed subjects, selected on the basis of a predominantly scientific interest with the aim of studying their physical characteristics and cultural traditions (fig. 2); on the other, we have the pictures shot by De Reali, who moved about more freely, with a pictorial and aestheticising intention, which resulted in static and controlled framings (fig. 3).

Fig. 2 — Nello Puccioni, Tenda da inverno a Derna, 1928-1929, Libya, in *Museum of anthropology and ethnology in Florence* (hereafter MAEFI), photographic archive, cart. XVI (2342-2519), n. 2399



³⁷ Francesco Faeta, *L'immagine e il senso. Appunti sull'uso della fotografia in etnografia e antropologia*, in Francesco Faeta, *Fotografi e fotografie. Uno sguardo antropologico*, Milan, FrancoAngeli, 2006, pp. 66-67.

Fig. 3 — Giuseppe De Reali, *Group of natives: women with armed men nearby, in MSNVE, Giuseppe De Reali Collection, photographic archive, AF 38*



In both collections, the “predatory” aspect of the photographic medium manifests itself in a tangible and aggressive way,³⁸ highly characteristic of contexts such as the colonial one.³⁹ If we examine De Reali’s collection, the camera — about to shoot a picture — seems to become a prefiguration of and a metaphor for the firearm.⁴⁰ In this context, it seems as if even the natives immortalised by the traveller undergo a “taxidermic” treatment, forced as they are to take up rigid postures in the presence of members of the expedition group. This type of iconography could refer to what James R. Ryan has described in the context of British imperialism, where natives were represented as “form[s] of wildlife”: as an integral part of the natural world, that is, equal to the animals (figs. 4 and 5).⁴¹

³⁸ See Susan Sontag, *Sulla fotografia. Realtà e immagine nella nostra società*, Turin, Einaudi, 2004, p. 4.

³⁹ Maria Francesca Piredda, *Hic sunt leones. Fotografia missionaria e immaginario esotico: l’incontro con l’Altrove*, in Enrico Menduni, Lorenzo Marmo (eds.), *Fotografia e culture visuali del XXI secolo*, Rome, RomaTre-Press, 2018, pp. 256-257.

⁴⁰ See S. Sontag, *Sulla fotografia*, p. 13.

⁴¹ J.R. Ryan, *Picturing Empire*, p. 139.

Fig. 4 — Giuseppe De Reali, The hunting companion Dionisio in between two elephant paws (Loxodonta africana) held up by natives, in MSNVE, Giuseppe De Reali Collection, photographic archive, AF 39



Fig. 5 — Giuseppe De Reali, Shot down giraffe (Giraffa camelopardalis) surrounded by some natives, in MSNVE, Giuseppe De Reali Collection, photographic archive, AF 4



With regard to Puccioni's pictures, while the technique of the anthropometric photograph — an iconographic typology that constitutes the centre of the collection — itself carries with it a violent charge, one prescribed by the imposed posture and the obligation to have one's picture taken, the photographs testify to an even greater aggressiveness when the depicted subjects are women; their nudity was very likely forced upon them, especially in predominantly Muslim areas (figs. 6 and 7).

Nevertheless, the "predatory" aspect of photography resides not only in the way of posing the subjects, which was fundamental in the anthropometric genre and for those like De Reali who shot pictures using glass panes;⁴² it also lies in the actual ethnographic *mise en scène*. Although part of the iconographic corpus of Puccioni's collection is composed of photographic sequences that suggest a more impromptu approach, the anthro-

⁴² With regard to the use of glass panes, only some of the positives can be identified as prints produced by negatives of this type. Although the Natural History Museum does not hold any original negatives, there are 48 printed photographs drawn in 1997 from glass panes considered to be "original", which are nowadays in the custody of the De Reali heirs.

Figs. 6 and 7 — Nello Puccioni, Fai Ibrahim, [woman], Somala Hauia, Abgal (card n. 39), 1924, Somalia, in MAEFI, photographic archive, cart. XV (2208-2341), n. 2269-2270



polologist could not refrain from using this method in order to document certain cultural practices. For example, if we consider the consecutive images of a singing and dancing ritual of “Elai” and “Gobauin”, narrated and depicted in the anthropologist’s diary,⁴³ it turns out that we are dealing with an actual choreography Puccioni himself had commissioned from the Resident Michele Pirone for the purpose of his documentation (figs. 8 and 9).⁴⁴ In sum, the ethnographic *mise en scène* was a practice that required the collaboration of photographic subjects, be it a forced collaboration or one obtained via some form of negotiation with the subject.⁴⁵

It is only through certain secondary or casually captured, involuntary — thanks to Roland Barthes’ *punctum* — elements in the photographs that the document’s examination can be opened up to new interpretations.⁴⁶ Let us take the anthropologist Puccioni’s picture of the Soluch mosque in Libya as

⁴³ N. Puccioni, *Giuba e Oltregiuba*, p. 46.

⁴⁴ N. Puccioni, *Giuba e Oltregiuba*, p. 46.

⁴⁵ C.M. Geary, *Pratica fotografica in Africa*, pp. 35-40.

⁴⁶ Roland Barthes, *La camera chiara. Note sulla fotografia*, Turin, Einaudi, 2003, pp. 27-29 and p. 43.

Figs. 8 and 9 — Nello Puccioni, Ischia Baidoa: l'orchestra della fantasia Elai, 1935, Somalia, in MAEFI, photographic archive, cart. XVI (2342-2519), n. 2426-2427



Fig. 10 — Nello Puccioni, Moschea di Soluch, 1928-1929, Libya, in MAEFI, photographic archive, cart. XVI (2342-2519), n. 2392



an example (fig. 10). Although he probably just wanted to show the mosque, choosing a perspective that would exclude any disturbing elements, we may in fact see how the shadow at the bottom of the picture of an element placed behind the photographer (presumably a lattice tower) — not to mention the presence, at the horizon, of a small wooden tower of an Italian fortification⁴⁷ — allow the viewer to see the small city of Soluch for what it really was: not so much a place outside of history symbolised by an abandoned building, but an important centre for the Cyrenaica government, namely the headquarters of a prison camp for Libyans where, some years later, Omar al-Mukhtar would have been hanged.⁴⁸ Similarly, thanks to certain details in the background that should have remained neutral, and bandages worn by the depicted subjects, one may

⁴⁷ Istituto Nazionale Luce, *Cirenaica. Parte prima. La capitale della colonia e il sud bengasino. Parte seconda. Il Gebel Akdar (il monte verde). Parte terza. Verso Porto Bardia. Parte quarta. Autocolonna in cammino nel deserto*, 1930, M013505, available at: <https://goo.gl/HrIENC> (last accessed 10/05/2020). In the video the fortification is described as follows: “The small fort of Soluk that, in the shadow of the Italian national flag, protects and overlooks thousands of Bedouins with their very rich weaponry”.

⁴⁸ Nicola Labanca, *Oltremare. Storia dell'espansione coloniale italiana*, Bologna, il Mulino, 2002, p. 175.

sense that Puccioni's anthropometric photographs were obtained in situations of forced "residence": hospitals, police stations and prisons (figs. 6 and 7).⁴⁹

Finally, an analysis of these photographic collections demonstrates that the recurrent iconographic themes are once again those of the "savage", the colonial subject, the "Black Venus", big game hunting, the "primitive" jungle, the "racial types", poverty and nudity — all themes that were already widespread at the end of the nineteenth century and which were reinforced in subsequent decades. This observation raises a further issue: the construction of the "other" that was put in play during the Italian expansionist phase — including through an iconographic production — also revealed to be a construction of the "I" that was functional to the mobilisation of society and the process of consolidating a national identity. This was exemplified by the overall approximate representation of people, environments, habits and customs, which gave rise not so much to an actual process of getting to know the African continent, but to an iconisation of Africa itself.⁵⁰

From private to public collections: re-significations, persistences, representations

As in other national contexts, in Italy museums and exhibitions played a fundamental role in the process of teaching colonial history and gaining consensus on the various stages of the imperialist experience.⁵¹ By conveying myths and images that evoked hopes and dreams, they revealed to be an important means of consolidating national identity.⁵² In different ways, De Reali and Puccioni's collections, too, contributed to this process.

Throughout his journeys, the count had amassed hunting trophies, relics and photographs that were exhibited in what De Reali and his wife defined an "African museum",⁵³ before they ended up in the Museum of Natural History. This colonial *wunderkammer* was set up in the family's villa in Dosson di Casier (Treviso), which also hosted part of the archaeological finds from the

⁴⁹ Puccioni himself explained the context of the photographs in Nello Puccioni, *Antropologia e etnografia delle genti della Somalia*, vol. I, *Antropometria*, Bologna, Zanichelli, 1931, p. 1.

⁵⁰ Gianluca Gabrielli, *L'Africa in giardino*, in Gianluca Gabrielli (ed.), *L'Africa in giardino. Appunti sulla costruzione dell'immaginario coloniale*, suppl. "IBC. Informazioni, Commenti Inchieste sui Beni Culturali", 1998, n. 4, pp. 25-60.

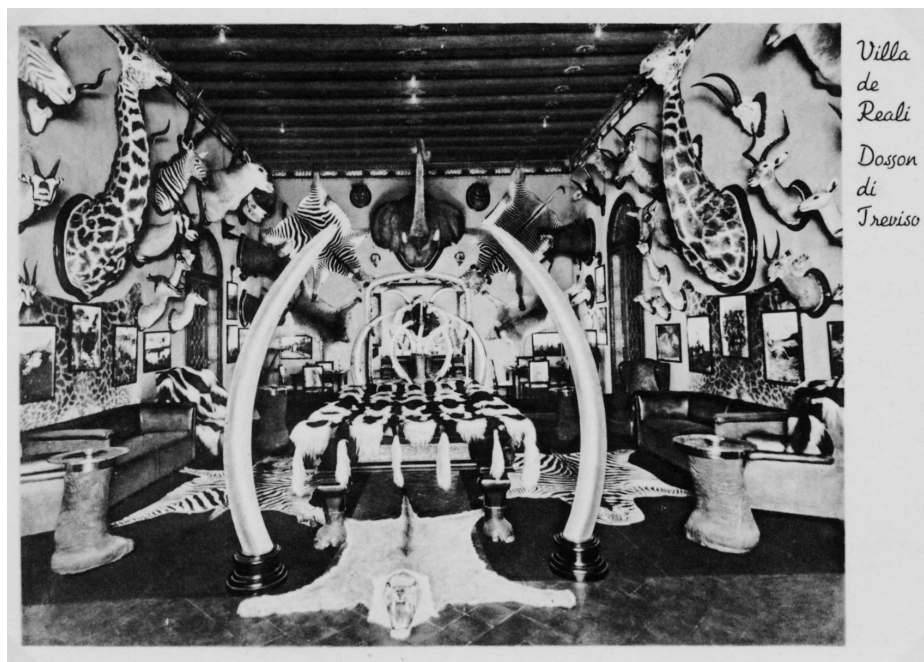
⁵¹ See Nicola Labanca, *Introduzione*, in Nicola Labanca (ed.), *L'Africa in vetrina. Storie di musei e di esposizioni coloniali in Italia*, Paese (TV), Pagus Edizioni, 1992, pp. 3-4.

⁵² Nicola Labanca, *Introduzione*, p. 1.

⁵³ The use of this expression is quite common in the documents stored in: ACS, Segreteria particolare del Duce, Carteggio ordinario (1922-1943), b. 424, fasc. 160434; AMV, Affari trattati dalle sezioni municipali, 1941-1947, IX istruzione pubblica, 11 musei, 8 Museo di Storia Naturale; AMV, Affari trattati dalle sezioni municipali, 1940-1941, IX istruzione pubblica, 4 argomenti vari — istruzione elementare, 4 edifici scolastici — mobiliare e materiale scolastico.

excavation works in their San Michele di Quarto estate (Altino).⁵⁴ The result was a situation that we could call exhibitory, and a good example of the strong link between archaeology, colonialism and practices of identity construction, which developed from the end of the nineteenth century to the 1930s. Various elements created a whole — nowadays close to what we call kitsch, but representative of the taste of the time — in which carpets, animal skin rugs and trophies on the walls were juxtaposed to elephant paws used as coffee tables. Even today, this rather clear image of the Italian colonialist-imperialist imaginary emerges from an illustrated postcard,⁵⁵ which proves that the De Reali had some awareness of their possessions, since the postcard could be considered an act of self-promotion too (fig. 11).

Fig. 11 — Garatti, Villa De Reali. Dosson di Treviso, [1930s], in MSNVE, Giuseppe De Reali Collection, diapositive-photographic archive (early twentieth century-1998), two De Reali's original postcards about one of the African Rooms in Villa De Reali at Dosson di Casier



⁵⁴ G. Rallo, *La raccolta africana del Conte Giuseppe De Reali*, p. 8; for a detailed examination of the archaeological finds of the De Reali's collection see: Sara Ganzaroli, *La collezione de Reali. Genesi e sviluppi*, Master's Degree thesis, Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, discussed in the academic year 2011-2012, supervisor Giovannella Cresci Marrone.

⁵⁵ It is impossible to accurately date this postcard, as the series it was part of. We may nevertheless assume that it dates back to the early 1930s given the sequence of the images in ACS, *Segreteria particolare del Duce, Carteggio ordinario (1922-1943)*, b. 424, fasc. 160434.

Amelia Pigazzi seems to have regularly used the postcards contained in this series.⁵⁶ She also organised the exhibition at the Luna Hotel (Venice) in 1935, likely the first exhibition to have entirely been dedicated to the collection.⁵⁷ After her husband's death, the countess again had to assure that the collection would be preserved in its entirety within the villa. She thus started a procedure to have the villa and the surrounding park acknowledged as a "national monument", motivated by the fact that they contained African memorabilia and Roman archaeological finds. Although Pigazzi even made an appeal to the Duce in person,⁵⁸ no traces on the continuation of the procedure remain.

News about the donation to the Civic Museum of Natural History first emerged in 1937,⁵⁹ whereas the Venice Municipality officially accepted the collection on 9 August 1938.⁶⁰ Another year passed before the new De Reali rooms would be inaugurated; the opening ceremony was held on 20 July 1939, in the presence of the Duke and Duchess of Genoa, Senator Davide Giordano, Director Michelangelo Minio and other local authorities, among whom Count Volpi and the Podestà Giovanni Marcello. During the transfer, the collec-

⁵⁶ See five original postcards from one of the African Rooms in Villa De Reali at Dosson di Casier in ACS, Segreteria particolare del Duce, Carteggio ordinario (1922-1943), b. 424, fasc. 160434; two original postcards of one of African Rooms in Villa De Reali in Natural History Museum of Venice (hereafter MSNVE), Giuseppe De Reali Collection, diapositive-photographic archive (early twentieth century-1998).

⁵⁷ On the exhibition see *Trofei di caccie africane esposti all'Albergo Luna*, "Il Gazzettino di Venezia", 21 febbraio 1935, n. 45, p. 3; *Lodierna inaugurazione della Mostra dei Cimeli Africani*, "Il Gazzettino di Venezia", 26 febbraio 1935, n. 49, p. 3; *La mostra africana del co. Reali pro Sinite Parvulos*, "Il Gazzettino di Venezia", 27 febbraio 1935, n. 50, p. 7; *La mostra benefica del co. De Reali*, "Il Gazzettino di Venezia", 7 marzo 1935, n. 57, p. 3; *Echi della Mostra pro "Sinite parvulos"*, "Il Gazzettino di Venezia", 9 marzo 1935, n. 59, p. 4. The exhibition was also visited by officials of the Istituto Luce, who subsequently produced a *Giornale Luce: Istituto Nazionale Luce, Giornale Luce B/B0641, La mostra di trofei di caccia grossa delle colonie dell'Africa*, Venice, 13/03/1935, available at: <https://goo.gl/hp3rKz> (last accessed 10/05/2020).

⁵⁸ Correspondence between Amelia De Reali and Osvaldo Sebastiani (Mussolini's secretary), July-August 1937, in ACS, Segreteria particolare del Duce, Carteggio ordinario 1922-1943, b. 424, fasc. 160434. Although neither the villa nor the park has been acknowledged as a single "national monument", along with relics and finds that they contained, over ten archaeological objects were declared protected cultural heritage by the Italian State on 31 July 1937, the year the correspondence between the countess and Sebastiani took place and news was first released about the donation of the African collection to the Natural History Museum of Venice. On this matter see: S. Ganzaroli, *La collezione de Reali*, pp. 35-49.

⁵⁹ We have little information about the dynamics that led to the collection's inclusion in the Venetian museum's patrimony, but it appears to have been the count's personal desire. See AMV, Affari trattati dalle sezioni municipali, 1941-1947, IX istruzione pubblica, 11 musei, 8 Museo di storia naturale; ACS, Segreteria particolare del Duce, Carteggio ordinario 1922-1943, b. 424, fasc. 160434; G. Rallo, *La raccolta africana del Conte Giuseppe De Reali*, pp. 18-22.

⁶⁰ Atto podestarile n. 11048, *Donazione alla città di Venezia di una collezione di cimeli africani del defunto Conte Giuseppe De Reali*, in AMV, Atti Podestarili, 1939, trim. 3.

tion “in which Africa truly spoke” was also preserved in terms of how it had been set up in the first place.⁶¹ This is demonstrated by a number of pictures the Fiorentini studio produced in 1941, on behalf of the museum director who responded to the requests of “L’Azione Coloniale”; the latter wanted to include the photographs in an article about the collection.⁶² Nevertheless, as the collection was transferred from the villa to the museum, the home-museum aspect that had characterised the De Reali residence was — perhaps inevitably — lost. Indeed, the villa’s rooms came across as real rooms that could be inhabited, where the objects and memorabilia often emerged in a crossover of “art works” and home furnishings. As often happens when objects are museumised, their functional aspect had been lost; they were now exhibited according to formal and aesthetic — or at the most naturalistic — characteristics, given that in most cases the objects were of animal origin. It is interesting to note how during this transfer the number of photographs was reduced: the new set-up mainly focused on safari scenes and hunting activities, whereas natives were depicted as “primitive warriors”, armed with spears and shields. As a whole, the exhibition contributed to an exotic and savage image of Africa, as such domesticated not only physically but also culturally. The individuals De Reali had immortalised were incorporated in an exhibition itinerary that focused on the origin and evolution of life, on one side, and on naturalistic aspects, on the other. In the visitors’ eyes, they could therefore be interpreted in two ways: both their supposed primitiveness was highlighted, and they were juxtaposed to a more natural than civilised world. This representation persisted throughout the second post-war period, as the set-up essentially remained unchanged, as demonstrated by the pictures taken for conservation and archival purposes in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s.⁶³

In the early 2000s a process was started to renew the exhibition itinerary, which was terminated around 2010. This intervention led to an overall upgrade of the institute from a museological and museographic point of view; in this recent reorganisation, the De Reali rooms’ original set-up was not only preserved, but even rearranged with the aim of retrieving an exhibitivistic sense that was even closer to the original home-museum of Dosson than the old set-up. Notwithstanding the collection’s concise contextualisation within the broad history of expeditions, big game hunting and colonialism, the iconographic apparatus nevertheless remains nothing more than an illustrative

⁶¹ *I Duchi di Genova all’inaugurazione della “Raccolta africana De Reali”*, “Il Gazzettino di Venezia”, 21 luglio 1939, n. 172, p. 3.

⁶² Correspondence between Marco Pomilio (for “L’Azione Coloniale”), Michelangelo Minio and the Podestà of Venice, October-December 1941, in AMV, Affari trattati dalle sezioni municipali, 1941-1947, IX istruzione pubblica, 11 musei, 8 Museo di Storia Naturale.

⁶³ In particular, the pictures date back to the 1970s, to 25 March 1980 and to 1995, see MSNVE, Giuseppe De Reali Collection, diapositive-photographic archive (early twentieth century-1998).

support for the hunting trophies. Once again, the photographed subjects — probably chosen, for the occasion, on the basis of the horizontal shape of the print — appear decontextualised, conveying messages and meanings of colonial imprint that we cannot even fully deconstruct, as they are not sufficiently explicit.

With regard to the Puccioni collection, the items he had collected during the expeditions (i.e. anthropometric records, ethnographic objects, photographs and plaster face casts)⁶⁴ were directly incorporated into the exhibition itinerary and the museum's archive, that is, without first being exhibited elsewhere. Consequently, his collection went through a very different process than De Reali's; from an exhibition point of view, the anthropologist's collection — an integral part of the collections that were ascribable to the diverse expeditions — was not exhibited in a unified manner, but with single elements being displayed according to their geographical provenance.

When Puccioni took up the role of director, at the time of the museum's rearrangement in its current location (Palazzo Nonfinito), he decided that it was essential — for better communication purposes — to improve the "collections' demonstrative role" with the help of an iconographic apparatus,⁶⁵ following in his predecessor Aldobrandino Mochi's footsteps. At present we cannot confirm this intervention if not through a contemporary text by Stefanini,⁶⁶ even if recent research has managed to prove the production — between 1930 and 1932 — of "small didactic frames" (composed of a photographic image, a geographic map and a text); the latter served to identify the "peoples of the Earth" in — what scholars consider — a racist way.⁶⁷ The exhibition itinerary was inaugurated in 1932 in the presence of Vittorio Emanuele III, who was received by the University Dean Bindo De Vecchi and accompanied into the rooms by Nello Puccioni and Lidio Cipriani. The itinerary continued to be grounded in a Darwinian framework already present during the period of Mantegazza, who had fitted the world populations in an

⁶⁴ In his Somalia travel diary of 1935, Puccioni moreover narrates how in 1924, on return from his first mission, he had brought back with him a "pure" Somalian: Nur Ali. The museum's archive holds at least four photographs of Nur Ali: n. 2309-2310 e 2323-2324 in Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology of Florence (hereafter MAEFI), photographic archive, cart. XV (2208-2341). N. Puccioni, *Giuba e Oltregiuba*, p. 15.

⁶⁵ Giuseppe Stefanini, *In memoria di Nello Puccioni*, for the Library of the Museum of Anthropology, Florence, n. 15, p. 219 cited in Mariangela Landi, Jacopo Moggi Cecchi, *L'antropologia coloniale: "dai popoli del mondo all'uomo del fascismo"*. *Nello Puccioni, Lidio Cipriani*, in Jacopo Moggi Cecchi, Roscoe Stanyon (eds.), *Il Museo di storia naturale dell'Università degli studi di Firenze*, vol. V, *Le collezioni antropologiche ed etnologiche*, Florence, Firenze University Press, 2014, p. 24.

⁶⁶ G. Stefanini, *In memoria di Nello Puccioni*, p. 24.

⁶⁷ Francesca Bigioni, Emanuele Paggetti, *Umanità sotto vetro: i quadretti esplicativi del Museo di antropologia di Firenze*, "Museologia scientifica", new series, 2018, n. 12, pp. 33-41.

evolutionary sequence.⁶⁸ The oldest documentation that I could retrieve, which dates back to the second post-war period,⁶⁹ shows how this rearrangement — which remained unchanged also in the wake of the museum's temporary closure due to the Second World War — was based on the same museological and museographic criteria of the original museum, and how the many elements contained in the collection — including photographs — served as an instrument to convey a very precise image of Africa, along with elements from other Florentine collections.

The museum's reopening in the 1950s did not lead to any changes in the exhibition itinerary, which still began in the African rooms; in the 1930s, this implied a celebration of the (more or less recent) colonial conquests.⁷⁰ Hence, not only had the subdivision of the permanent collection in geographic areas remained the same throughout the decades, and in spite of the end of Fascism; the very arrangement of the objects within the showcases had also not changed. According to the museum organisation, firstly, objects had to be divided per type to highlight the fact that “primitive” populations adopted “backward” solutions for everyday problems; secondly, within each typology, the objects were displayed according to their form, and once again in an evolutionary perspective — from the simplest to the most complex form.⁷¹ The museum itinerary proposed a static vision of each ethnic group — or “race” — that was presented to the audience in its “purest” form, through a collection of objects, artefacts and photographs, thus creating a direct link between the evolutionary level of the material culture, the “race” of belonging and the somatic traits that mark each group. For example, next to the objects of the section on Somalia, which had mainly been collected during the expeditions of Stefanini-Paoli (1913), Stefanini-Puccioni (1924) and Puccioni-Graziosi (1935),⁷² the few pictures that were exhibited — taken by the anthropologist and probably also framed by the latter, except for one case that is difficult to attribute, whose iconography recalls that of a commercial postcard — not only depicted the subjects in a characterising way, but ended up conveying an even more generalising and objectifying aspect the moment they were juxtaposed to objects that typified a specific culture (figs. 12, 13 and 14).

⁶⁸ Monica Zavattaro, *Le collezioni etnografiche del Museo di storia naturale di Firenze: storia e prospettive museologiche e museografiche*, “Museologia scientifica”, new series, 2014, n. 8, pp. 58-59.

⁶⁹ *Somalia. Sala XI*, 8 February 1973, Florence, in MAEFI, photographic archive.

⁷⁰ M. Zavattaro, *Le collezioni etnografiche del Museo di storia naturale di Firenze*, pp. 58-59.

⁷¹ M. Zavattaro, *Le collezioni etnografiche del Museo di Storia Naturale di Firenze*, p. 58.

⁷² The ethnographic collections concerning Somalia nowadays also contain some elements taken from naturalistic expeditions conducted by the University of Florence, with the CNR's support from 1959 onwards. Monica Zavattaro, *Collezioni Somalia*, in Jacopo Moggi Cecchi, Roscoe Stanyon (eds.), *Il Museo di storia naturale dell'Università degli studi di Firenze*, vol. V, *Le collezioni antropologiche ed etnologiche*, Florence, Firenze University Press, 2014, pp. 68-71.

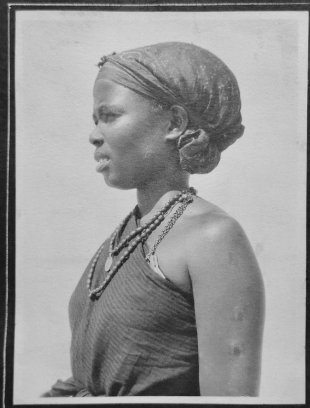
Figs. 12, 13 and 14: [Small illustrative frames], [1930s], section Somalia, MAEFI. The original pictures that have been identified correspond to: fig. 12: Nello Puccioni, Cadigia Hussein Mohamed, [woman], 20 years old, Dighil Dabarre group (card n. 37), 1935, Somalia, in MAEFI, photographic archive, cart. XIII (1759-1952), n. 1840; fig. 13: Nello Puccioni, Ischia Baidoa. Gemia Muctar della tariqa Salika. Tre mogli dei santoni, 1935, Somalia, in MAEFI, photographic archive, cart. XVI (2342-2519), n. 2431.



*Pendagli per l'acconciatura della testa
di una donna del gruppo DIGHIL =*



*Le mogli dei Santoni di Baidoa
usano portare sotto la futa un
giacchetto e coprirsi le gambe
con gambali di tela*



*Acconciatura della testa
delle donne*

—SOMALIA—

Along with the photographs, the plaster facial casts also played an important role. Today, this collection contains over 600 samples, thanks in part to the anthropologist's efforts.⁷³ The casts granted a tangible concreteness to the photographs, representing a form of "heightened reality" of the exhibited images and helping to re-enforce their apparent veracity and scientific reliability.

At present, the section on Somalia hosts the same images as during the second post-war period, despite the fact that the exhibition was partially changed in 2003, and a larger print of the fourth photograph — originally included in the display cabinets — now accompanies the exhibition dedicated to Somalia.⁷⁴ Moreover, recent changes coincided with a revision of the exhibition itinerary. Indeed, it was not until the early 2000s that the latter was inverted; it now started with the rooms dedicated to the Medicean collections and to the objects of the "New World"; in sum, the itinerary no longer opened with the rooms that celebrated Italian colonialism.⁷⁵ In the same way, the "small didactic frames" of the fascist period — which were when Puccioni was the museum's director — were removed only in 2016.⁷⁶ As demonstrated by the inertia that characterises it, for a long time the Florentine museum remained outside of the international debate, which has involved the main European and American ethnographic museum institutes ever since the beginning of the twenty-first century.⁷⁷ Furthermore, throughout the second half of the twentieth century, the excuse of having to respect an alleged loyalty to the museum's "historical memory" prevented the exhibition from undergoing any changes; instead, it continued to reflect a taxonomic-comparative arrangement. In reality, though, what was considered a "historical" exhibition was not, and still is not, "original" in that the exhibition rooms have partially been changed and adjusted by the museum operators throughout the decades.⁷⁸

Notwithstanding the partial, recent attempts at rearranging the exhibition, then, the Florentine institute's museum itinerary continues to offer a static vision of those identities that have changed from "races" to "cultures", conveying a self-referential image wherein geographic provenance, material culture and somatic traits are strongly linked. In other words, an exhibition that will probably continue to nurture the creation of stereotypes, at least until the enactment of a "radical revision".⁷⁹

⁷³ Jacopo Moggi Cecchi, *Le collezioni antropologiche*, in Jacopo Moggi Cecchi, Roscoe Stanyon (eds.), *Il Museo di storia naturale dell'Università degli studi di Firenze*, vol. V, *Le collezioni antropologiche ed etnologiche*, Florence, Firenze University Press, 2014, pp. 192-193.

⁷⁴ The photograph in question is: Nello Puccioni, *Margherita: Musciungullo coi crepitacoli*, 1935, Somalia, in MAEFI, photographic archive, cart. XVI (2342-2519), n. 2417.

⁷⁵ M. Zavattaro, *Le collezioni etnografiche del Museo di storia naturale di Firenze*, p. 60.

⁷⁶ F. Bigioni, E. Paggetti, *Umanità sotto vetro*, p. 34.

⁷⁷ M. Zavattaro, *Le collezioni etnografiche del Museo di storia naturale di Firenze*, p. 56.

⁷⁸ M. Zavattaro, *Le collezioni etnografiche del Museo di storia naturale di Firenze*, p. 59.

⁷⁹ M. Zavattaro, *Le collezioni etnografiche del Museo di storia naturale di Firenze*, p. 64.

Conclusion

In the decades ranging from the end of the nineteenth century to 1937, Giuseppe De Reali and Nello Puccioni developed — albeit with different backgrounds — analogous iconographic themes and applied similar representational techniques that refer to the most widespread typologies of colonial photography *tout court*. These can be summarised in the images of Africa as a “virgin land”, of the native “warrior”, and of the atavistic “primitiveness” of African populations. While the traveller De Reali distinguished himself through a pronounced pictorialism and a strong aesthetical sense that generally translated itself in celebrative images of his “heroic” endeavours, Nello Puccioni instead produced photographs that seemed more extemporaneous (with the exception of the anthropometric pictures), driven by the intention to document and classify the populations of North-East Africa.

Following different paths in the process of collecting, organising and classifying the photographs, during the first 30 years of the twentieth century, the two collections were thus set up and exhibited in the Venetian museum and the Florentine institute in conjunction with the widespread retrieval of pre-existing museum collections and with the creation of new, temporary exhibitions by the fascist regime, as part of a detailed propaganda agenda aimed at creating a colonial visual imaginary capable of involving the crowds in the imperialist experience.⁸⁰ Moreover, especially in the years of the regime’s racist turn, to exhibit “otherness” meant advancing a specific idea of fascist “Italianness” that could also be distinguished and defined according to its racial traits.

More than 80 years on, the exhibition choices that I have described in this essay — which have survived the colonial project, its demise after the fall of Fascism and, subsequently, the loss of the colonies — are therefore a visible testimony of the original museographic and museological solutions, while only partially calling into question the concepts that had produced them. After all, if we look at the national context, the fall of the Empire and the subsequent beginning of the Republican phase were not accompanied by a critical re-elaboration of the Italian experience abroad. Already at the end of the Second World War, new (post)colonial aspirations had started to gain space drawing on the theme of labour, so as to reclaim Italy’s right to return to Africa.⁸¹ Moreover, even if the Somalian case was the only one to have witnessed an actual continuity at the political, administrative and cultural level, the relations between Republican Italy and the former colonies were prolonged for quite

⁸⁰ See Adolfo Mignemi, *Mostre e musei coloniali*, in Adolfo Mignemi (ed.), *Immagine coordinata per un impero. Etiopia 1936-1936*, Turin, Gruppo editoriale Forma, 1983, pp. 183-187.

⁸¹ Massimo Zaccaria, *Rimuovere o riscrivere il colonialismo? Il lavoro degli italiani in Africa*, in Antonio M. Morone (ed.), *La fine del colonialismo italiano. Politica, società e memorie*, Florence, Le Monnier, 2018, p. 87.

some time — they had not even ended by 1960.⁸² Indeed, Africa “never disappeared from the Italians’ mental horizon”,⁸³ which allowed the colonial-type imaginary to continue being transmitted and spread constantly.⁸⁴ The images gathered by Puccioni and De Reali — which continued to occupy just about the whole original positions without ever being seriously called into question — offer a representative example of this long-term dynamic.

If, in other European states, the expansionist experience found an institutional expression in large museum institutes whose history runs well into the present,⁸⁵ in a national context like that of Italy — where no museum played a comparable role (think of the Colonial Museum of Rome, the first to earn a similar definition, which was closed a year after the Empire was proclaimed to open again only in 1947, then permanently closed in 1971)⁸⁶ — it therefore becomes essential to consider, from a broader perspective, the dozens of collections currently scattered across the peninsula.⁸⁷ The photographic collections of the two protagonists therefore come to represent the still visible traces and persistent vehicles of a (not so distant) colonial past, and of the “racial” inferiorisation Italy has not yet come to terms with. While taking into due consideration the legal-bureaucratic complexity that cultural assets are subjected to in Italy, the various adaptations made in recent decades remain insufficient to undermine and deconstruct the meanings these collections carry with them. Furthermore, the lack of important interventions highlights the fact that the awareness of the Italian colonial history and the need to come to terms with it — despite its temporal closeness to and repercussions in the present — still are not considered a priority within public debates. In other words, colonialism continues to represent, in many ways, an unresolved issue in Italian collective memory.

⁸² For a more comprehensive overview of the events concerning the end of the Empire and its legacy see: Antonio M. Morone (ed.), *La fine del colonialismo italiano. Politica, società e memorie*, Florence, Le Monnier, 2018.

⁸³ M. Zaccaria, *Rimuovere o riscrivere il colonialismo?*, p. 85.

⁸⁴ See E. Castelli (ed.), *Immagini & colonie*.

⁸⁵ Think, for example, of the Musée du Congo in Bruxelles, Amsterdam’s Tropenmuseum and the Musée d’Ethnographie du Trocadéro in Paris.

⁸⁶ Francesca Gandolfo, *Il Museo coloniale di Roma (1904-1971). Fra le zebre nel paese dell’olio di ricino*, Rome, Gangemi Editore, 2014, p. 23.

⁸⁷ See B. Falcucci, *Sources for colonial historiography*.