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## IMAGES AND “INTERESTING SUBJECTS” FROM THE COLONIES. ARCHIVE, MEMORY AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF OTHERNESS AT THE MUSEUM OF ANTHROPOLOGY AND ETHNOGRAPHY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF TURIN

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### ABSTRACT

Recently, the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography of the University Of Turin (MAET) started a process of reordering its archive and of digitising its photographic collections. Among the latter stand out three albums from the 'Carlo Vittorio Musso' collection, containing 111 photographs produced between 1920 and 1923 in Italian Somalia. After years of “oblivion”, the museum’s archive reveals images linked to a corpus of ethnographic objects from the Italian colonies, which connect the cultural heritage to the collective memory and to the imaginaries and narratives on otherness. The 'rediscovery' of these albums and the 'along the grain' investigation of archival documents and photographic collections question the MAET's past and present use of images from 'elsewhere' and its co-participation in specific narratives concerning the construction of the national identity. The biographical approach to both objects and images and the reconstruction of the story that led them to the MAET allow the start of a process of decolonisation and the recognition of those subjectivities that, for too long, have had no voice in public, political or scientific representation.

### KEYWORDS

Heritage; Photographic collections; Visual Anthropology; Museum Anthropology; Italian colonies; Decolonisation; Archives

### BIO

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## Introduction



**FIGURE 1:** “Zanini non dà tregua ai soggetti interessanti”, (Zanini gives no breath to interesting subjects) 1920-1923. Courtesy of Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography; University of Turin.

In Turin, an old photograph and its “interesting subjects” emerge from the darkness of the archives (Fig. 1). The blurred photograph portrays a young woman holding a basket and looking at the camera. We can just glimpse her drawn smile and serious gaze. On the right side, a man bent over his camera. He wears a light-coloured shirt, knee-length pants, leather shoes, and socks. Behind the two, there are two columns and a barren landscape. It is a black and white photograph, with shades tending towards sepia. The neutral tones and the out-of-focus details contribute creating an opaque and ill-defined atmosphere, increasing the fascination on the observer. The subjects are involved in a peculiar game of glances. The man looks at the twin-lens camera’s lens in his hand. The camera’s objective lens points at the woman as to capture her and, through the camera viewfinder, to ‘offer’ her image to the photographer. The woman is not looking at either the man or his camera. She looks at us. Her intense gaze not only suggests the presence of a third person on the scene - the unknown author of the photograph - but also questions the observer from the time and place of the shot, over a century ago and more than eight thousand kilometres away. Beside the photograph, on the dark cardboard page of the album that contains it, there is a brief caption written in elegant hand: “Zanini gives no breath to interesting subjects”.

The photograph is contained in an album that opens with a dedication: “To my dear friend

Lieutenant Vittorio Musso”. It is one of the three albums of the Carlo Vittorio Musso collection<sup>1</sup> of the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography of the University Of Turin (MAET). The MAET’s cultural heritage includes ethnographic, anthropological and archaeological collections, and various photographic collections (among them are the Marro<sup>2</sup>, Carlo Vittorio Musso, Giuseppe Carlo Sesti<sup>3</sup> and Bicknell<sup>4</sup> collections, all made up of gelatin dry plate negatives). This heritage has been collected since the foundation of the MAET (1926) and documents peculiar perspectives and understandings of alterity and otherness worthy of being fully analysed and evaluated. Since 2017, after years of closure to the public, MAET initiated a wider resumption of its activities including the reorganization and digitalization of the historical archive and the photographic collections. In this context, the “Giuseppe Carlo Sesti” and “Carlo Vittorio Musso” collections have been involved in a process of digitisation, restoration and cataloguing<sup>5</sup>, which makes them accessible to a wider public.

This contribution aims to critically analyse 'Carlo Vittorio Musso' albums that until recently were among MAET's unpublished materials. They are part of the “heritage in the dark” (Rabino Massa 1998), as the MAET’s heritage has been referred to in the past, and for decades they have been ignored, as has much of the Museum’s ethnological and photographic corpora (Grasso 2020). The two most consistent albums contain 88 silver gelatin prints marked with the initials “F.Z.”. They are photographic reproductions of images (probably postcards) most probably part of a series of numbered images that circulated in Italy between 1920s and 1930s. We know just the author's last name: Zanini. He is the photographer portrayed in the image described above (Fig. 1), part of the third album. This third album is composed of 23 print photographs with handwritten captions that document a journey across the inner Somali territories, then under the control of the Italian government in the early 1920s. Time seems to have been less kind to this album, which is the least substantial of the collection. It differs from the other two in that it contains photographs of different sizes and, most likely, by different authors. In some cases blurred and deteriorated, these photographs are less intelligible today than Zanini's postcards. Zanini's name connects the three albums that turn out to be a private collection that reached the MAET’s rooms with a corpus of ethnographic objects from Somalia and Libya through trajectories only partially understood. The three albums and the ethnographic corpus are connected with wider processes related to heritage, memory and identity. The 111 photographs resonate with the history of ethnographic heritage and photographs collecting processes in the first half of the 20th century. Moreover, the “interesting subjects” portrayed in the images bring to light the need to question ourselves – as scholars, curators and citizens - on the reasons and modalities with which Zanini and 'his' subjects met and travelled, albeit virtually, towards the Musso private collection and, then, to the MAET archive.

This paper aims to contribute to the MAET heritage’s process of decolonisation (Mangiapane and Grasso 2019a) through the reconstruction of the history of the Carlo Vittorio Musso collection and its critical analysis. It addresses the crucial question of how to actually proceed towards the decolonisation of cultural heritage by examining the case of a photographic collection that is part of the heritage of a museum, founded during a period of fascism and characterised by a complex and ambiguous history

<sup>1</sup> The collection consists of three cardboard albums bound with cord binding, two of which (24 pages, 19 cm x 13 cm) contain 88 silver gelatin prints marked “FZ” (14 cm x 9 cm). The third album (12 pages, 19 cm x 14 cm), also in cardboard with a drawstring binding, contains 23 silver gelatin prints of different sizes and accompanied by captions.

<sup>2</sup> The Marro photographic collection was donated to MAET by the museum's founder Giovanni Marro and consists of approximately 2000 gelatine dry plates, which document the research activities of the museum's founder. Of particular value are the 228 plates of the Egyptian photographic collection dating back to a period between 1911 and 1923 that document the excavation campaigns in Egypt of the Italian Archaeological Mission (Rabino Massa and Boano 2003; Boano, Campanella, Mangiapane and Rabino Massa 2016).

<sup>3</sup> The Giuseppe Carlo Sesti photographic collection consists of 343 negatives gelatine dry plates. The photographic collection became part of the museum's holdings with a large collection of objects from the Congo Basin, which constitute the largest part of the African corpus of ethnographic collections collected by Giovanni Marro. The Congolese ethnographic collection is owed to the engineers Pietro Gariazzo and Carlo Sesti, author of the photographs, who were engaged in the construction of the railway line between the cities of Matadi and Leopoldville (today Kinshasa) in the early years of the 20th century (Gualino 1938; Pennacini 2000).

<sup>4</sup> The Bicknell photographic collection consists of about 140 gelatine dry plates, which reproduce rock engravings from the pre- and proto-historic era made by Clarence Bicknell and Luigi Pollini in the region of Mount Bego between 1905 and 1913.

<sup>5</sup> The digitalisation and restoration project ““Fondi fotografici del Sistema Museale di Ateneo dell’Università di Torino: immagini del brigantaggio e rappresentazioni coloniali, un patrimonio inedito da scoprire e salvaguardare” have been promoted by the Italian Ministry of Culture through the campaign “Strategia Fotografia 2020” (<https://www.museoantropologia.unito.it/strategia-fotografia-2020/>).

(Mangiapane and Grasso 2019b). It moves from the awareness that “Anthropology museums represent crucial public spaces in which to undertake this social and political process, which is a necessary first step towards any prospect of the ‘decolonisation’ of knowledge in these collections” (Hichs 2020: xiii). In this sense, this contribution also aims to bring out an anthropological approach and ethnographic method that is impactful and important (Bargna 2019), improving the capacity of the Museum to be “relevant” in its social context (Simon 2016) and recognising the Museum and the archive as spaces and devices (Grechi 2021) and “turning the focus back upon the anthropologist, curator, or museum as both object and subject of enquiry, performing dialogue with certain ‘source communities’” (Hichs 2020: xiii). In particular, cultural anthropology critical approach and the focus on the biographies of both the objects and the protagonists of the museum’s history play an essential role in the process of deconstructing the cultural context in which the museum was born and through which its heritage was created. For this reason, it seems essential to retrace the traces of those who appear mentioned in the archival documents in an attempt to bring to the surface memories that question the present (Benjamin, 1997) and the Italian and Western sight on otherness. For these reasons, this contribution aims to reconstruct the history of the Carlo Vittorio Musso photographic collection and to recognise the meanings condensed on the opaque surface of its albums’ pages. The article will proceed along the trajectory that has characterised archival research and critical analysis. The first part of the contribution will be dedicated to the challenges of the museum and archive context in which the collection has been preserved. As it will be seen, it is characterised by a substantial lack of attention to the heritage - ethnographic and photographic - of non-European origin. The condition of silence and oblivion that characterises part of the MAET’s heritage seems to be surmountable thanks to the deepening of knowledge about the collections. It is in this sense that, in the second part of the contribution, the history of Carlo Vittorio Musso collection and of the subjects portrayed in the photographs or cited in the captions will be reconstructed and the images critically analysed.

As suggested by Jean-Loup Amselle, museums and heritage are related to essential political issues and to the processes of re-appropriation of values by different subjects (Amselle 2016). The MAET’s archives and its photographic and ethnographic collections, constitute a crucial chance to investigate the meanings that images and material culture have assumed, which have defined otherness in the past, to question the one-way relationship between museums and cultures and to acknowledge how museums can be a “contact zone” (Clifford 1996). In this sense, this contribution is part of a wider process of deconstruction of the narratives and practices that saw the MAET’s extra-European material culture and images as a mere corollary of those collections (anthropological and archaeological) exhibited and used as an objective document of evolutionist and racist theories (Grasso 2020). The historical and biographical reconstruction seems essential for the constitution of a knowledge that makes the heritage accessible to a wider public. Following traces within the archives and retracing the paths that led Carlo Vittorio Musso’s albums from Somalia to Turin, it is possible to shed light on the nuanced meaning that heritage takes on over time. It appears as a long journey over time and space that apparently ends in the museum’s depository and which brings out the possible “contact-zone”, but also the asymmetries in which it is grounded (Boast 2011). Moreover, it led to new paths, bringing the museum to better acknowledge its role and to open up to those subjectivities which have been claimed to represent it for so long.

In the following paragraphs, therefore, analysis and historical reconstruction will collide with the opacity that characterises the heritage at the encounter between the public and private dimensions. A complex panorama of relationships and memories emerges questioning the relationship of Italian and Western society with otherness. In this sense, the conclusions will refer to the need to proceed with virtuous processes of decolonisation and valorisation of ‘sensitive heritages’ (Schorch 2020: 1).

### **Images and absences in the archive**

The MAET’s historical archive preserves documents mostly related to the research and teaching work of its founder, Giovanni Marro<sup>6</sup>, and his assistant, Savina Fumagalli. After years in oblivion and

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<sup>6</sup> Giovanni Marro (1875-1952), a psychiatrist and anthropologist, founded the Institute and Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography at the University of Turin in 1926, a few years after being appointed professor of Anthropology for the Natural Sciences (1923).

copious losses (Grasso 2020; Mangiapane and Grasso 2019b), the MAET's archives emerge today as a space in which absences are more substantial than the presences of collections to critically engage with. Although sometimes 'interesting subjects' emerge from the obscurity which, for a long time, the photographic collection, archival documentation and ethnological collections gravitated (Grasso 2020), offering the chance to reconstruct histories and trajectories that led to the creation of the MAET's cultural heritage.

Musso's albums were jumbled up with notebooks, papers and images dating back to the first thirty years of the museum's activities. The old archival inventory marked them as "African photographs?" and it did not mention their origin, who donated them to the Museum or the subjects they portray. It is a first and interesting evidence of the scarce attention given in the past to the cultural heritage coming from extra-European contexts. The MAET was created in accordance with the positivist and racist scientific paradigms of the time. The scientific framework that shaped the institution at its inception affected the way it considered material culture and images coming from 'elsewhere'. For a long time other cultures' objects and images were understood as a mere corollary of other findings considered more crucial to document the history of human evolution (Grasso 2020). This way of considering - or not considering - the non-European patrimony characterised not only the first period of the museum's activity, marked by clear racist and positivist lines, but also the years following the Second World War and the change of direction when the hateful racial theses were abandoned but the focus was maintained on the evolution of the human beings. Little attention was given, therefore, to the photographic collections and to the ethnological heritage, which was considered of little interest. The recent resumption of the reorganisation and cataloguing of the patrimony required the start of processes of investigation and research that allowed us to 'discover' and 're-discover' several unexplored areas, both in the archives and in the deposits. Among them were the 'Carlo Vittorio Musso' collection's albums. Undeniably, the albums emerged as an element of great fascination. They appeared to be an 'interesting' and original document among the MAET's heritage, but they also constituted a possible link between the archive and ethnographic collections. Among the objects of African provenance, in fact, there are some objects whose provenance and biography had not yet been possible to determine, but which could be traced back to Italian colonial contexts (Libya and the Horn of Africa) and which were waiting to find a more pertinent place in the MAET's inventory. Despite a small «Ethiopian collection» appearing in the inventory, attributed to Savina Fumagalli (dated between the late 1950s and early 1960s) it did not take into account all the artefacts of clear colonial provenance conserved by the Museum. Just like the objects, the three photographic albums were simply more elements of the MAET's heritage which were waiting to find a place, not only in the Museum heritage, but also in the wider context of collecting and the contact with otherness with which the museum was born and developed with. In this sense, the anthropological and critical approach to the museum collections and to the archival documents made it possible to recognise the MAET's historical grey areas that for so long have been silent (Mangiapane and Grasso 2019b). Within the broader framework of the reconstruction of the biographies and trajectories that allowed for the creation of the museum's heritage, the albums of "African photographs" emerge as an exemplary case of how the analysis and study of documents enable us to 'restore' voices and agency to documents and artefacts, and potentially also to the subjectivities that may be represented through them. Moreover, the albums are intrinsically linked to national history and, therefore, to the society of which the museum institution is an expression.

### **The "Carlo Vittorio Musso" collection: images between history and fascination**

The three albums are therefore to be considered part and document of a collective memory. Paradoxically, the reconstruction of the historical context in which they were first produced was possible thanks to the captions on the private album. It is a trace of the intimate and private nature of the album, a travel souvenir and gift made to Carlo Vittorio Musso. The album opens with a dedication: "To my dear friend Lieutenant Vittorio Musso" (Fig. 2). It links the entire collection to Carlo Vittorio Musso. At first glance, Musso's name did not find any echo in the MAET's archive documents and it has not yet been possible to identify F. Zanini, the author of other two albums' images, with certainty. The name of Carlo Vittorio Musso, to whom the private album is dedicated, seemed to be one of many names confused in the labyrinth of those individual and collective events that make up the colonial context, of which the photographs are both document and practice (Modest 2014:25).



**FIGURE 2:** “Iscia Baidò - Abbeverata”, 1920-1923. Courtesy of Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography; University of Turin.

The images of the “Carlo Vittorio Musso” collection are part of the broader panorama of colonial photography. They should be seen as tools useful to reproduce and contextualise the colonial reality. The images from the Italian colonies represent the first glimpse through which Italian society came into contact with and built its knowledge of the colonial experience. They generate *topoi* that mark the history of colonialism by supporting the construction of an imaginary and collective identity in which the idea of “diversity” and mildness of Italian colonialism stands out. The images from the Musso collection confirm that the colonial universe recorded by photography was proposed in reassuring and self-celebratory terms (Palma 1999: 16).

Significantly, the captions in the private album make visible the interconnection between collective experience and subjective trajectories. They also bring up clues for a probable dating and contextualisation of the collection. One side, the images signed by the photographer Zanini unequivocally express the colonial and Italian gaze on otherness. On the other, we see the private images go further. They give to the otherness of the places and faces a subjective and real connotation. This peculiar dimension allows us to better understand the whole collection and to place it in the broader panorama of the colonial conquest of Somali territories by the Italian government and the collective narratives about it. For this reason, in order to understand and contextualise the entire Musso collection, it was necessary to start by carefully observing the private album, which is paradoxically the most complex and potentially the most critical as it contains ‘just’ 23 images which have suffered due to the passage of time. In some cases, the subjects portrayed are not recognisable, the photographs appear to

be different in shape and cut, and the album is most likely a collection of shots by different authors.

The private album opens with a view of a herd of camels at watering holes (Fig. 2). The photograph is blurred and degraded by time and it is possible only to recognise the figures of the animals, the water glare and the typical shrubs of the Somali bush. It could be an oasis, a classic trope of colonial photography and an emblem of the world seen by Europeans as inexorably different and exotic. The oasis is the first in a series of images that reproduce all the classic themes of colonial photography. Like in the albums signed by Zanini, it is possible to recognise the themes and the aesthetics that are typical of the cumulative repertoire on which the Italian collective imagination regarding otherness is grounded. They are similar to the images that have been circulating in Italy since the beginning of the colonial conquests of Libya; they document the workplace, the local population, with whom the colonists sometimes stand side by side, perhaps to testify to some form of contact. They show scenes of daily life in the villages and the attention of photographers is focused on exotic imagery and manifests the fascination for exploration of the colony (Frascaroli 2013: 41). Both private and collective, this repertoire testify to the exotic gaze on which the Western perception of otherness, and of Africa in particular, is grounded (Mudimbe, 1988). In particular, images from the Italian colonial context document the fascination with a racial and cultural otherness that was 'finally' available to the masses and an object of appreciation, desire and pleasure (Hooks 1992: 21-29).

The private album differs from the other two by the presence of captions which accompany the images. Although the captions do not provide detailed information on the date and occasion of the shots, they proved essential for the historical and critical analysis that led to a plausible dating of the albums and the recognition of the specific context from which they came. One caption in particular made it possible to recognise one of the portrayed subjects. It identifies the three men standing in a barren landscape portrayed in one of the last images of the album (Fig. 3): «Ugo Ferrandi. Capt. d. Bianchi. Com. Bertazzi (Afogoi)».



**FIGURE 3:** “Ugo Ferrandi. Capt. d. Bianchi. Com. Bertazzi (Afogoi)”, 1920-1923. Courtesy of Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography; University of Turin.

Ugo Ferrandi<sup>7</sup> is the man in the centre of the group. He was a renowned Italian explorer present in Somalia as early as the end of the 19th century. Ferrandi conducted the exploration of the Uebi Scebeli and Juba valleys with Vittorio Bottego and he was active in Somalia participating in the explorations that often turned, when not into military expeditions, into surveys that were functional to and anticipated the actual Italian occupation. In the album appears the village Lugh, the takeover of which, motivated the expedition with Bottego in 1895<sup>8</sup>. Ferrandi returned to Italy definitively in 1923. The photographs can be traced back before that year and to a period prior to the installation of Cesare Maria De Vecchi<sup>9</sup> as governor of Italian Somalia in 1923. Thus, they are a document of the transition period between the Italian liberal colonialism and the fascist imperial enterprise.

Among other colonial officials, the captions identify “H.E. the Governor” not naming him. Italian forces were active in Somalia since 1889, but just in 1908, the Italian Parliament enacted a law that brought all the territories between Bender Cassim and Kisimajo under the administration of Italian Somalia and the governor was appointed for Italian Somalia (in the first two years as many as seven names alternated at the head of the colonial administration). Therefore, the journey documented in the album took place after 1908. Since that year, the colonial administration focused its efforts in the occupation of the Lower Uebi Scebeli region. A garrison was set up in Afgoi, where Ferrandi is portrayed. The album's captions mention Baidoa, a centre occupied on 25 June 1913. Thus, the photographs that immortalise the colonial officials at the Baidoa outpost are to be dated in the following years. The information regarding the (Italian) subjects portrayed in the album are so far not yet exhaustive to fully retrace the trajectories that led them from Mogadishu to Afgoi, Baidoa and Lugh. The trace left by whoever created the album and chose the photographs, their order and their captions, made it possible to date it and to proceed to a deeper, critical analysis. They were the first step in the identification of Carlo Vittorino Musso and in the retracing of his experience in the Italian colonies.

Born in Ceva (CN) in 1896, Carlo Vittorino Musso fought in the First World War as an officer in the Alpine Corps. During the Second World War, he was in the Balkans with the 4th Alpine Regiment, and in 1943 he took part in the Resistance war in the Garibaldi Partisan Division in Montenegro. Back in Italy, he joined the Partisan war in Turin. After the Second World War, he continued his military career in the Alpine corps, reaching the rank of colonel (ANVRG 2008:47). This is the brief biography provided by the introduction to the volume *Per la libertà dei popoli. Memorie garibaldine. Penne nere allo sbaraglio. Diario di guerra di Carlo Vittorino Musso* that collects the handwritten notes that Carlo Vittorino Musso kept during his experience in Montenegro after 8 September 1943, when twenty thousand soldiers belonging to the Italian army's 'Venezia' and 'Taurinense' divisions voluntarily decided to join the resistance against German occupation. This account of Carlo Vittorino Musso's life focuses on his exceptional experience in Montenegro and then in Italy at the height of the civil resistance war and totally overlooks the first years of Musso's military career, the years which the images preserve in the albums of the photographic collection named after him.

At his home, Carlo Tua, Carlo Vittorino Musso's great-grandnephew and member of a family with a long military tradition, spoke at length about his great-uncle clutching in his hands a leather folder. Similar in material, features and decoration to three photo frames and a cushion of Somali origin, part of the MAET's ethnographic collections, the folder was just one of the few artefacts that Carlo Tua inherited from his granduncle, a passionate collector of weapons. It contained documents, a picture of a Libyan woman, some Carlo Vittorino Musso portraits, and his service record. Although even for his family Carlo Vittorino Musso's overseas experience is not fully known, his service record has proved to be an essential document in tracing his movements between Eastern Europe, Somalia and Libya between 1917 and 1924. That year he ceased to belong to the Royal Colonial Troops Corps (RCTC)

<sup>7</sup> Ugo Ferrandi was an Italian explorer (Novara 1852 - 1928). In Somalia, he explored the lower Juba valley and went as far as Bardera (1892). He joined the Bottego expedition (1895) and was in charge of the Lugh station, later called (1932) Lugh Ferrandi, where he stayed for two years. He then held various colonial posts and was the regional commissioner of Upper Juba.

<sup>8</sup> The mission had the aim to find practicable accesses to Ethiopia. In the small centre of Lugh, not far from the border, Ferrandi had the task of opening an Italian station of which he remained in charge until 1897 (Ferrandi, 1903). In 1910 he moved back in Lugh and in 1913 he was appointed Commissioner of Upper Juba and, later, of Northern Somalia.

<sup>9</sup> Cesare Maria De Vecchi (Casale Monferrato, 14 November 1884 - Rome, 23 June 1959) served as Italian Somalia governor from 8 December 1923 to 1 June 1928.

and was transferred to the IV Alpine Regiment. Between 1917 and 1919 he was stationed first in Macedonia (162nd Infantry Regiment, 35th Division) and then in Bulgaria and Romania (102nd Infantry Regiment). On 4 December 1919, he embarked at the port of Naples with his destination Mogadishu where he arrived on 10 January 1920. Carlo Vittorio Musso served in Italian Somalia between 1920 and 1923, both as an outcast of the RCTC and as a civilian 'resident'. Between 1926 and 1930 he was stationed in Libya (21st Eritrean Btg. of Cyrenaica), while between 1940 and 1942 he was active in Algeria with the Italian Armistice Commission with France. His grandnephew confirmed that he collected local artefacts and weapons during his experience in the Italian colonial territories, which he kept in the Turin home he shared with his second wife, Bianca Gastaldi, curators at the Galleria Sabauda<sup>10</sup>. Some of them were donated to the MAET between 1952 and 1961 with the three albums that were most likely a gift that Musso received from a friend with whom he shared his experience in Italian Somalia.

The ethnographic objects that can be traced back to Carlo Vittorio Musso are characterised by being typical travel souvenirs brought back to Italy after the experiences in the colony. In the absence of precise lists, it is only possible to assume that the objects identified as coming from Somalia and Libya are indeed the result of Musso's donation. Among them is a large camel leather trunk, with a lid engraved with 'A. Italiana', confirming that it came from Italian Africa. The aforementioned portrait holders and a leather cushion cover decorated with geometric motifs and themes clearly related to the Somali context. There is also a scarf, a leather Quran holder, some milk containers typical of the pastoral populations of the Horn of Africa, a bag and two Tuareg saddle covers probably collected by Musso during his activities in Libya and Algeria. Like the photographic representations, the objects refer to the 'other world' of the colony and constitute one of the many ways of bearing witness to and remembering one's experience elsewhere. They carry stratified on their surface the meanings with which they are loaded. They cease to be objects of the everyday life of the subjectivities that produced them and take on the role of a document of otherness and testimony of the participation of those who collected them in the collective experience of colonial conquest. For this reason, the objects that can be traced back to Carlo Vittorio Musso today seem to have value as a document of the communities they come from, but even more so as a trace of those contacts between Italian and African societies which, violent and unfair, are at the basis of both the constitution of Italian national identity and the relationship with otherness (Sorgoni 2009). Moreover, like the captions of the photographs, the objects that once belonged to Musso as well as those that are now kept by his heirs provide access to his subjective experience. If the captions refer to a shared memory, it is easy to imagine the pillowcase or the milk containers in Musso's Turin home. Objects that fill the space of everyday life and give form to the inhabited space, creating a true aesthetic that leads back to individual and collective memory and the relationships on which it is based (Miller 2004).

### **Private and collective memories from “elsewhere”**

It cannot be denied that the main peculiarity of Musso's collection is that it is made up by albums that contain photographs that have been selected and organised according to specific thematic and hierarchical choices. As a device to preserve images and memories, the album cannot be considered a neutral and culturally irrelevant material container. Conversely, it appears as an expression of the taste of the time<sup>11</sup> and of a subjective will. It belongs to the domain of the transition and passage. What emerges from the Carlo Vittorio Musso collection, is the changing social space between public and private (Tommasini 2013: 60). Moreover,

An album collects within a case and thus unites and connects a series of photographic images: with this simple operation, the album actually contributes to overcoming the fragmentary nature of photography, it introduces a sequence, a succession, a link between the images; if photography is the negation of the passing of time and therefore of history, the album allows for the construction of stories, narratives (Tommasini 2013: 62).

<sup>10</sup> Art Gallery founded in 1832 in Turin by Carlo Alberto.

<sup>11</sup> The golden age of the dissemination of photo albums seems to be the late 19th and early 20th century (Tommasini 2013: 62), a period to which the albums in the Musso collection actually date.

In this sense, the case of the Musso fund is illustrative. Although different from each other, they can only be understood as a single document. Similarly, the images they contain acquire meaning and significance only if they are observed sequentially, following the reading trail indicated by the person who composed the collection.

Musso's albums reproduce themes and subjects widespread in the Italian early colonialism's visual discourse and fruit of a political and cultural climate in which colonialist and racial myths proliferated and later found full expression in fascist propaganda and imperial aspirations (Labanca, 1988). They date back to the period of transition between the liberal and fascist phases of Italian colonialism and do not present the fascist iconography of classical elements. Rather they seem to contain “the whole Italians' iconographic colonial universe” (Labanca, 1988:43) taking the observer back to that particular moment in the history of Italian Somalia when the takeover of the coast and of some areas of the interior turned into the actual constitution of the colonial state<sup>12</sup>. They were produced shortly before the arrival in Mogadishu of the fascist governor Cesare Maria De Vecchi in 1923 and preserve in their black and white shadows the private memory of an official visit that engaged the governor Carlo Riveri<sup>13</sup> and some officials in the occupied territories between Mogadishu and the Ethiopian border. From the images, emerge the tones of a pleasure trip. They depict profiles of ancient mosques (such as the ancient Jama Mosque in Mogadishu), nomadic caravans, river banks, camel herds at watering holes and the barren Somali countryside, women posing or surprised, children and herders looking directly at the camera, often characterised by indecipherable gazes that reveal mistrust and wonderment at the same time.



**FIGURE 4:** “Uddur. Tenente Orlandi e Cocò”, 1920-1923. Courtesy of Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography; University of Turin.

In the collection, the contact between different subjectivities – the western 'visitors' (or conquerors) and the local population – take place through the camera's lens, the true medium between two worlds

<sup>12</sup> For a reconstruction of the events that interested Somalia and the Horn of Africa during the Italian colonial campaigns, see Del Boca, 1976; 1979 and Labanca, 2002.

<sup>13</sup> Carlo Riveri served as Italian Somalia governor from 21 June 1920 to 8 December 1923.

which, in the shots, only come into contact in a couple of cases. The European officers are never captured with the “interesting subjects” that Zanini portrayed in his series. One photograph shows Lieutenant Orlandi playing with a baboon: “Cocò” (Fig. 4), bringing out a sort of everydayness and familiarity with the exotic, but also arousing curiosity. So too do the large number of images of men and women posing, which linger on the physical appearance and clothing of the portrayed subjects. Above all, Carlo Vittorio Musso's albums consist of images that show the “land of blessing” (Del Boca, 1976: 432) over which Italy had taken control through a highly aestheticized and stereotypical representation, and at the same time, glances that reveal confidence and habit and from which emerge an interesting interweaving of gazes. The private and subjective memory is given and preserved by the images like the portraits of Somali women. In particular Betulla, the protagonist of three blurred shots: first «serious!» and then, in the last one, «smiling!». In between, a close-up of the girl posing with other women behind her. Her gaze is confident, her left fist is resting on her side, while her right hand is closed and resting on her stomach. With her hair covered by a fancy scarf, Betulla looks at us from what seems to be the other end of the long road that led her from Somalia to Turin.

The choice of images and their succession in the albums' pages help the observer to grasp glimpses of a real or presumed everyday life that looks ordinary and extraordinary at the same time. This is especially true of the album with captions. The neat cardboard pages, the frames provided for the photographs and the captions written in nice handwriting betray the intention to give the memory of a pleasant, exotic and unforgettable journey. Moreover, it does appear clear that it is a shared experience between Carlo Vittorio Musso and whoever donated and dedicated the albums.

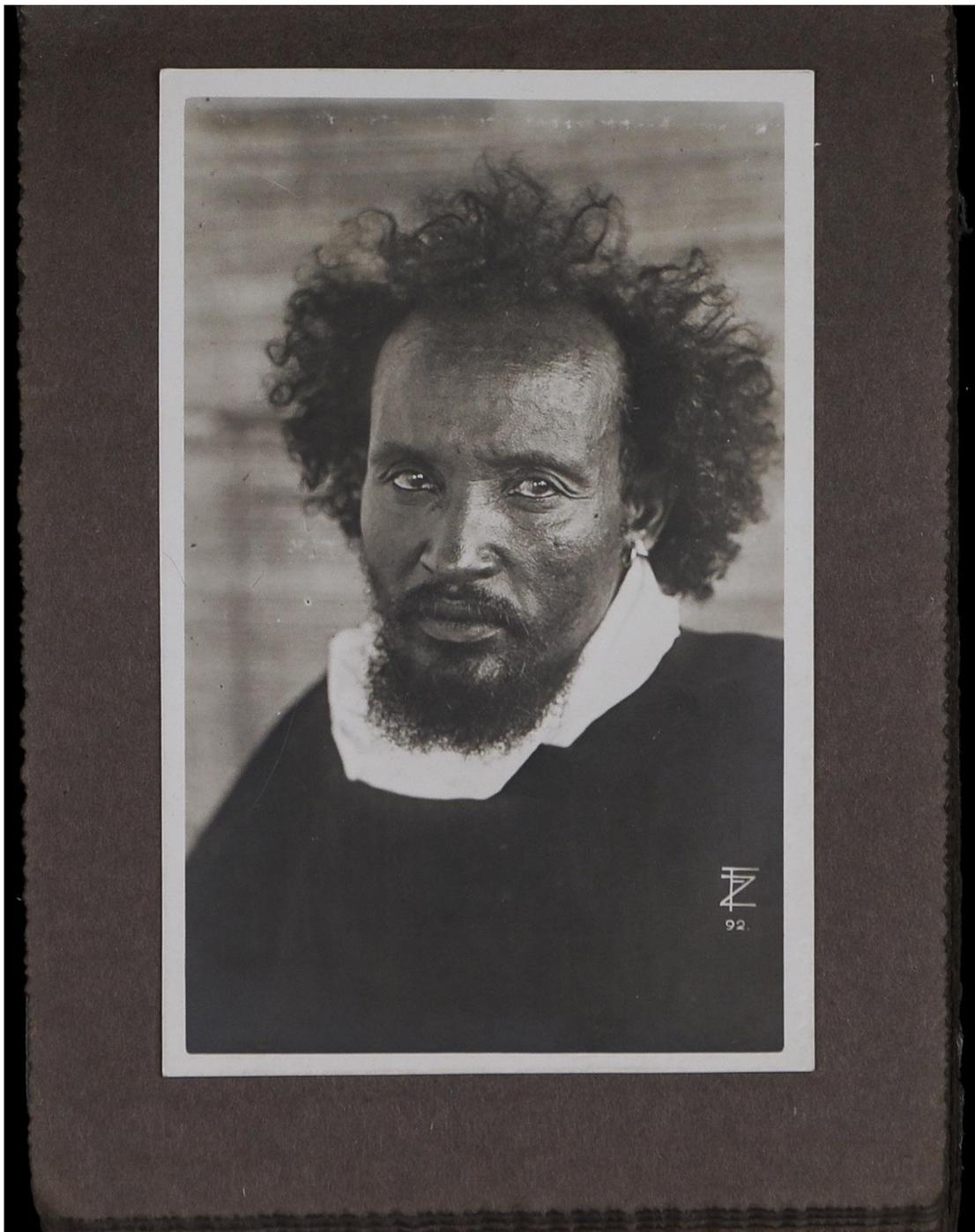
The two albums 'signed' by F.Z. are the result of a composition that was intended and conceived in the same way, but which presents different characteristics and apparently has no addressee. The images present the classic tropes of this genre of photography. The landscapes, the herds of dromedaries as they walk and drink, the local population portrayed in front of traditional dwellings or gathered at the market, all contribute to the image of 'another world'. A mysterious and uncivilised Africa in which to find exotic animals and uncontaminated landscapes - a visual depiction that places the inhabitants on the same level as the landscapes. They seem to make real those landscapes imagined and narrated in adventure novels, exploration reports and personal diaries and that, reproduced in photographs and postcards, facilitate the visual penetration of the African continent (Geary and Krzysztof: 2018). Evidence of this sort of 'wildness' of Africa and Africans are also to be found in the photographs that immortalise indigenous “fantasies”: men dancing in groups with their sticks raised, their bodies in motion, their arms raised from which emerge the sense of disorder and disorientation that the dances dedicated to and in honour of Italian officials must have created in those who attended them.

Michel Foucault stated that “Curiosity evokes 'concern'; it evokes the care one takes for what exists and could exist; a readiness to find strange and singular what surrounds us; a certain relentlessness to break up our familiarities and to regard otherwise the same things; a fervour to grasp what is happening and what passes; a casualness in regard to the traditional hierarchies of the important and the essential» (Foucault 1996: 305). In this sense, the Musso photographs express not only the ambivalence of the colonial relationship but also a kind of Western voyeurism. The posed women, like the warriors and shepherds, appear as subjects representing a diversity that is not the object of cultural appropriation but rather of appreciation and desire (hooks 1992: 21-29). Moreover, between the folds of the sepia tones of the images, emerge the complex relationship between race and sexuality, fetishism and domesticity that shaped European imperialism (McClintock, 1995).

Moreover, in the images depicting the life scenes of local populations and Western officials emerge from the ordinariness of daily life and practices. The dimension of curiosity leads to widen the gaze and recognise in the “colonial iconographic universe” (Labanca 1988: 48) a record of the encounters between subjects who are curious about each other and between individuals and unknown environments (Pennacini 2015). The multiple, subjective meanings that photographs document, practise held and their ambivalence become clear if we take into account the mutual curiosity of which they are the fruit and that is constituted by fascination, suspicion and, perhaps, fear (Edwards 2013:50).

This is evident in the profile and three-quarter profile close-ups that occupy a large part of Zanini's albums that are unmistakably reminiscent of the anthropometric photographs used by anthropologists and social scientists of the time, who classified humanity into 'types' with recognisable somatic features. Zanini's subjects gaze fixedly at the lens and, today, make evident the asymmetries and paradoxes stored in the archive. Men and women in the foreground, in front or three-quarter view, pose for the camera

lens. The backdrop is neutral and sight is focused on the expressiveness of their faces and the 'strangeness' of their clothes. These portraits are not accompanied by captions and respond to the aspiration to document an idealised and stereotyped otherness. Zanini's shots, however, seem mostly to express curiosity and interest, as mentioned above. The gazes betray intimacy and closeness between subject and photographer. An 'other' reality and, at the same time, knowable and visible, the 'interesting subjects' portrayed by Zanini are the fruit of a productive power and part of the colonial discourse as described by Homi K. Bhabha (1994). The 'posed' men and women seem to have consented and had a voice in the composition of the shot and, at the same time, they seem to be imaginary figures of whom we can assume everything and know nothing (Fig. 5).



**FIGURE 5:** F. Zanini, N°92, 1920-1923. courtesy of Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography; University of Turin.

Moreover, Zanini seems to make visible a particular sense of the past - 'pastness' - through the act of taking photographs (Vokes and Newbury 2018: 1). In the same vein are images of men and women in 'traditional' dress, Somali warriors posing or in groups during dances most likely staged for the photographer or in honour of the Italian delegation. This ideal past is cleverly constructed in the stereotypical photographs and is contrasted with an ideal future of Africa. Aerial images of colonial settlements or portraits of groups of officers, explorers or Ascari don't exclusively preserve an event for posterity but have as their object the planning of a different future (Vokes and Newbury 2018: 2).

Moreover, the photographs they preserve evoke a visual anthology that gives the sensation of containing the whole world in the mind (Sontag, 1977). They stand in a liminal position between the public and private domain soliciting the contemporary observer to seek interpretations that acknowledge the cumulative nature of visual archives in which the ideas of "affection" and "effect" return to the photographs their nature of document and practice of the colonial sphere (Modest, 2014:25). Generally, private pictures taken by soldiers or civilians active in the colonial contexts documenting everyday life are placed side-by-side with photographs or postcard series that were commissioned and purchased by a wider public in the national context. They share themes and subjects that characterise private and public collections and often are preserved in series or in albums. Actually, they constitute a visual diary through which, thanks to the language of the "now distant memory", heal the contradictions of the colonial (violent) experience and legitimise having been part of that page of national history (Mignemi 1998: 45-47).

### Conclusions

Carlo Vittorio Musso's albums present typical characteristics of collections of historical photographs relating to Africa and, in particular, of the photographic corpus concerning the Italian colonial experience. Part of public and private collections, often inaccessible or little considered, this sort of diffuse archive of images (and imaginaries) consists of scattered documents that have contributed in an essential way to the definition of both otherness and national community (Triulzi 1995: 146). In the absence of information regarding the subjects, locations and dating of the shots, the seemingly muted nature of the images in the Musso albums emerges. As with many other photographic collections of this kind, they are distant and barely recognisable landscapes, inhabited by men, women and children who often look into the camera, but of whom little is known and whose stories little can be imagined. Although the captions help to identify some of the places and subjects portrayed, they do not say enough. The bodies portrayed, the gazes, the crowded streets and the cities are part of an archive of memories that have travelled paths often characterised by silence and oblivion, that have seen the involvement and succession of different experiences and subjectivities and that need to be properly investigated. Lacking essential identification data, images require reconstruction of the context and the cultural discourse through which they were produced.

In this sense, the 'emotional' and 'subjective' relationship of those who took the pictures, but also of those who ordered and preserved them over the years, with the places and people portrayed, must be put into dialogue with the political and scientific context within which the shots were produced. As Alessandro Triulzi points out, the reconstruction of the context and identification data would allow each image to be restored to its documentary value (Triulzi, 1995: 147). As far as the photographic collections of the MAET are concerned, the need for a historical and thematic framing of the images they preserve is dictated firstly by the lack of certain information regarding the history of many of the museum's collections and, secondly, by the history and nature of an institution whose foundation dates back to the fascist era and whose past is marked by ambiguous junctures and many silences. In this sense, the analysis of the MAET's unpublished photographic collections and ethnographic collections that began in 2017 is part of a broader action of study. It is increasing public accessibility and valorisation of the heritage and aims to investigate both the contexts of production and collection of the stories of subjects represented in its collections, long ignored. At the same time they enable an interrogation of different types of documents starting from the history of the archives and collections and the ways in which they were created and maintained over time, through a critical analysis and reconstruction, "along the archival grain", as proposed by Ann Laura Stoler for colonial archives (Stoler 2009).

Recently, therefore, MAET has been involved in and has promoted heritage study and enhancement activities, such as reorganisation and cataloguing campaigns of its ethnographic and photographic

heritage. In addition, heritage communication and public engagement activities were promoted through social media following what is defined as a digital turn of the museum world (Pennacini 2020). In addition, exhibitions were inaugurated that included collaborative heritage re-signification projects in collaboration with African diaspora communities in Turin and other museums and cultural institutions (Grasso and Mangiapane 2021) such as the exhibitions 'GELEDE. Our Yoruba Mothers (Nigeria/Benin)' (2018), “The gaze of the anthropologist: connections between Egyptology and anthropology' (2020) and 'The world in a room. Precious testimonies of extra-european cultures from the collections of the University of Turin” (2021). These initiatives, as well as the projects of digitisation of the photographic fonds already mentioned, move from the need to deepen a knowledge of heritage that allows the rooms of museums and archives to be opened to a wider public. The study of the Carlo Vittorio Musso photographic collection illustrative of how heritage is an essential element in reconnecting individual histories and collective memories that are crystallised on the surfaces of the objects and images collected, conserved and 'exhibited' by different subjects and according to changing strategies and trajectories. It shows how to reconstruct subjective and collective trajectories of those involved in the heritage construction or ideally represented by it allows to recognize the discrepancies and power relations underlying heritage and to move forward giving voice to those subjectivities that for too long have been silent.

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