

**Remembering Fascism and Empire: The Public Representation and Myth of  
Rodolfo Graziani in 20th-Century Italy**

**Victoria Witkowski**

Thesis submitted for assessment with a view to  
obtaining the degree of Doctor of History and Civilisation  
of the European University Institute

Florence, 24 September 2021

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**Department of History and Civilisation**

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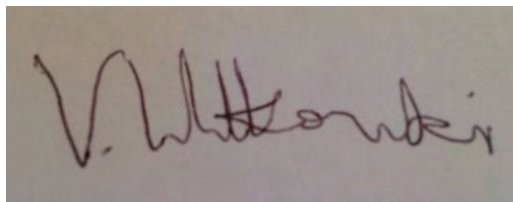
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## Abstract

My PhD has utilised the cultural representation of Italy's most popular military figure from the Fascist period to account for the myth-making and warped remembrance of Rodolfo Graziani in Modern-day Italy. By proving himself to Mussolini with his brutal tactics, namely, mass hangings, the erection of concentration camps, and utilisation of poison gas during the Italian 'pacification' of Libya in the 1920's and the Fascist conquest of Ethiopia in 1936, my project highlights that Graziani was chosen by the Fascist government to be a national imperial war hero. Facilitated by the dawn of totalitarianism and mass consumption, the propaganda campaign to promote the Fascist Empire utilised Graziani as a modern-day celebrity, through many mediums, which became the source base for my research. Images of Graziani filtered back to Italy in the 1930s through postcards, books, magazines, film, radio, busts and the like. During the Second World War, collaboration with the Nazis under the Salò Republic led to his trial in 1948, but his colonial crimes remained unquestioned, testament to the effect of heroisation for his previous colonial career.

Since then, this manipulation of historical consciousness has continued to pervade Italian society as the state searched for a collective 'usable' past from the remnants of the Fascist dictatorship. As Mussolini's most popular enterprise, colonial ambition remained a shared goal across the political spectrum in the immediate post-war period. By countering national insecurities through the utilisation of male symbols, men like Graziani provided an opportunity to promote such ideals through untainted virtues of masculinity. Institutionally therefore, the role of individuals in bringing 'civilisation' to its African colonies continued to be revered in post-fascist and post-colonial Italy. Moreover, most recently, a regionally funded monument that was built in Graziani's honour near Rome in 2012 only led to public outcry abroad and from interested national parties with almost no negative response from the Italian public.

Graziani's memory thus remains a fervent, multifaceted one and signifies tension in popular attitudes to Italy fascist and colonial history. It is with this timely and noteworthy case-study that I aim to shed light on the persistently neglected darker aspects of Italy's recent past.

## Table of Contents

<b>Table of Contents .....</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>List of Illustrations.....</b>	<b>viii</b>
<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The Search for a New Type of Hero in Post-Unification Italy: Graziani's Early Years.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<i>Nation-building and National Heroes: The Italian Case.....</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>The Institutionalisation of Patriotic Heroism: The Italian Army.....</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>Militarised Masculinities: The Battlefield as a Test of Manly Ideals .....</i>	<i>18</i>
<i>World War I &amp; The Crisis of Masculinity.....</i>	<i>21</i>
<i>The Rise of Fascism, Foreign Policy and Colonial Culture: Ruptures or Continuities?.....</i>	<i>23</i>
<i>The 'Pacification' of Libya: Early Written Representations of Graziani .....</i>	<i>27</i>
<b>2. Inculcating the Myth: Graziani in the 1930s.....</b>	<b>33</b>
<i>The 'Pacification' of Libya &amp; Literary Publications .....</i>	<i>34</i>
<i>The Power of the Image: Aesthetics, Appearance and Bodily Ideals .....</i>	<i>40</i>
<i>The Ethiopian War: A Turning Point?.....</i>	<i>51</i>
<i>The Road to Victory: Censorship in the Press and the Media.....</i>	<i>55</i>
<i>Il Vicere d'Etiopia, His Attempted Assassination &amp; Aftermath.....</i>	<i>67</i>
<i>'Al Vincitore di Neghelli, al Leone Bianco dell'Etiopia, al Fascinatore dell'Impero, al Genio Africano' ... Correspondence with Il Maresciallo d'Italia .....</i>	<i>74</i>
<b>3. Testing the Myth Abroad .....</b>	<b>89</b>
<i>International Coverage of Graziani In Libya: Great Britain and the USA .....</i>	<i>91</i>
<i>International Coverage of Graziani and the Ethiopian War: Great Britain and the USA ...</i>	<i>96</i>
<i>Hero or Villain? Newspaper Coverage for Italian communities living in the U.S. &amp; in the African American press.....</i>	<i>109</i>
<i>Hero or Villain? Newspaper Coverage for other communities living across the Globe ....</i>	<i>121</i>
<i>The Viceroy of Ethiopia, His Attempted Assassination &amp; Aftermath.....</i>	<i>124</i>
<b>4. World War II.....</b>	<b>137</b>
<i>Towards World War II: Homecoming and the Internal Colonisation of National Memory</i>	<i>138</i>
<i>Desert War in North Africa: A Humiliating Defeat? .....</i>	<i>157</i>
<i>Desert War in North Africa: The British and North American Press .....</i>	<i>173</i>
<i>Desert War in North Africa: The International Press.....</i>	<i>180</i>
<b>5. A Nation Torn Apart: Italy 1943 - 45.....</b>	<b>187</b>
<i>The Republic of Salò: Beginnings.....</i>	<i>188</i>
<i>The RSI: Continuities and Ruptures in Propaganda &amp; Censorship .....</i>	<i>192</i>
<i>Graziani's Army: Recruitment &amp; Intimidation .....</i>	<i>201</i>
<i>The Anti-Partisan War &amp; Italo-German Relations.....</i>	<i>206</i>

<i>The Italian Campaign &amp; the Loss of the Colonies: Allied Impressions and Propaganda</i> ..	209
<i>A Most Wanted Man: Rumours, Uncertainties &amp; Apprehension</i> .....	214
<b>6. Graziani's Fate in the Post-War Republic</b> .....	<b>223</b>
<i>The International Treatment of War Crimes in Post-War Germany and Japan</i> .....	224
<i>The 'Missing' Italian Nuremberg</i> .....	230
<i>'Fascism On Trial': Graziani Takes the Stand</i> .....	237
<i>Preservation through Publication</i> .....	258
<b>7. Afterlife</b> .....	<b>263</b>
<i>Prelude: The Movimento Sociale Italiano</i> .....	264
<i>Death, Funeral and Hagiographical Accounts</i> .....	273
<i>Film, State Censorship &amp; Fascist Rehabilitation</i> .....	291
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	<b>307</b>
<i>The Graziani Monument of 2012: A Cause for National Debate?</i> .....	307
<i>Contrasting Memories of Graziani in Italy and Abroad</i> .....	316
<i>Men, Monuments and Memories of Italian Colonialism in the Public Sphere</i> .....	324
<i>Post-Colonial Memory in Italy Today: An Exception to the Rule?</i> .....	329

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## List of Abbreviations

ANPI	Associazione Nazionale dei Partigiani d'Italia
ACS	Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Roma
AOI	Africa Orientale Italiana
ASMAI	Archivio Storico del Ministero Africa Italiana
F. RG	Fondo Rodolfo Graziani
FF. RG	Fondo Fotografico Rodolfo Graziani
IMT	the International Military Tribunal
ICRC	the International Red Cross Committee
IMTFE	the International Military Tribunal for the Far East
MIN. CUL. POP	Ministero della Cultura Popolare
MSI	Movimento Sociale Italiano
NMT	the Nuremberg Military Tribunal
PCI	Partito Comunista Italiana
PNF	Partito Nazionale Fascista
RSI	Repubblica di Salò
TNA	the National Archives, London
UNWCC	the War Crimes Commission



## List of Illustrations

- Figure 1: Cartolina *Piazza Generale Graziani (1931)* Bought online on Ebay
- Figure 2: ‘In Cirenaica’, *Almanacco Fascista del Popolo d’Italia*, (1932), p. 322
- Figure 3: ‘Vittorio Emanuele in visita’, Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Fondo Fotografico Rodolfo Graziani, B.2 (Bengasi/Cirenaica 24 Aprile – 5 Maggio 1933)
- Figure 4: ‘Vittorio Emanuele in visita’, ACS, FF. RG, B.2 (Bengasi/Cirenaica 24 Aprile – 5 Maggio 1933)
- Figure 5: ‘Graziani in Cerimonia per l’arrivo di Vittorio Emanuele III’, ACS, FF. RG, B. 1 (Tripolitania Aprile 1933)
- Figure 6: ‘Graziani in Cerimonia per l’arrivo di Vittorio Emanuele III’, ACS, FF. RG, B. 1 (Tripolitania Aprile 1933)
- Figure 7: Giachetti as Imperial Commander, *Lo Squadrone Bianco (1936)* in R. Ben-Ghiat, *Italian Fascism’s Empire Cinema* (Indiana, 2005) p. 126
- Figure 8: ‘Festa degli Alberi al Lete’, ACS, FF. RG, B. 1 (27 Settembre 1932)
- Figure 9: ‘Visita di Graziani in località’, ACS, FF. RG, B. 2 (1930-1934)
- Figure 10: ‘Scavi archeologici’, ACS, FF. RG, B. 2 (1932)
- Figure 11: ‘Dopo aver ascoltato il messaggio del Duce i fascisti circondano la vettura di R. Graziani’ ACS, FF. RG, B. 2, (Bengasi, 28 Ottobre 1933)
- Figure 12: ‘Cerimonie di inaugurazione di vari edifici’ ACS, FF. RG, B. 2, (Bengasi 1934)
- Figure 13: ‘Il Nuovo Governatore della Somalia’, *l’Illustrazione Italiana* (17 Maggio 1935), p. 386
- Figure 14: *l’Illustrazione Italiana* (9 Febbraio 1936), front cover
- Figure 15: *l’Illustrazione Italiana* (17 Novembre 1935), front cover
- Figure (s) 16: ‘Quando al front sud non si combatte’, *l’Illustrazione Italiana* (8 Marzo 1936), p. 393
- Figure 17: ‘Sul Fronte Somalo: Il Generale Graziani...’ *Il Mattino Illustrato* (11 Maggio 1936), front cover
- Figure 18: *l’Illustrazione Italiana* (10 Maggio 1936), front cover
- Figure 19: *La Tribuna Illustrata* (24 Maggio 1936), front cover

Figure 20: Unknown Location in Ethiopia: Plaque Inauguration 27<sup>th</sup> December 1936  
*Graziani*, *Rivista Romana* (Roma, 1956), p. 140

Figure 21: *Il Mattino Illustrato* (22 – 29 Giugno 1936), front cover

Figure 22: Cartolina, Arti Grafiche Gaetano Schenone (Genova 1936) Bought online on Ebay

Figure 23: Cartolina, Casa Editrice Ballerini e Frattini (Firenze 1936) Bought online on Ebay

Figure 24: *La Domenica del Corriere* (31 Gennaio 1937), front cover

Figure 25: ‘Graziani: Chiappe al vento’, *the Wu Ming Foundation website*,  
<[https://www.wumingfoundation.com/images/Graziani\\_chiappe\\_al\\_vento.jpg](https://www.wumingfoundation.com/images/Graziani_chiappe_al_vento.jpg)>

Figure 26: ‘P. Levistici per Rodolfo Graziani’, ACS, F. RG, B. 74

Figure 27: ‘Parole del Dott. Ghirlanda e musica del M. Thodi’, ACS, F. RG, B. 73

Figure 28: ‘S.E. Graziani per il merito di guerra’, ACS, F. RG, B.74

Figure 29: Graziella Montanari, ‘A S.E. Generale Graziani’, ACS, F. RG, B.74

Figure 30: ‘Lettera da Piccola Italiana’, ACS, F. RG, B.50 (Febbraio 1937)

Figure 31: ‘Personalities of the Week: People in the Public Eye’, *The Illustrated London News* (12<sup>th</sup> October 1935), p. 606

Figure 32: ‘They May Rule Ethiopia’, *The Advance News* (9<sup>th</sup> May 1936), p. 3

Figure 33: ‘Commands Duce’s Army’, *The National Labor Tribune* (23<sup>rd</sup> March 1935), p. 1

Figure 34: ‘Agli Artefici della Vittoria’, *Il Progresso Italo-Americano* (11 Maggio 1936), p. 1

Figure 35: ‘Emperor Defies Italian Bombers’, *The Pittsburgh Courier* (21<sup>st</sup> March 1936), p. 1

Figure 36: ‘Loyalty? Or Mandatory Attention?’, *The Philadelphia Tribune* (10<sup>th</sup> December 1936), p. 3

Figure 37: ‘Italian Military Rule in Abyssinia’, *The Illustrated London News* (21<sup>st</sup> November 1936), p. 919

Figure 38: ‘Graziani si imbarca sulla nave Crispi per tornare in Italia’ (10 Gennaio 1938), ACS, FF. RG, B.6

Figure 39: 'Graziani si imbarca sulla nave Crispi per tornare in *Italia*' (10 Gennaio 1938), ACS, FF. RG, B.6

Figure 40: 'Solenne consegna a Graziani del dono delle popolazioni della provincia di Roma', *Il Messaggero* (13<sup>th</sup> March 1938), p. 6

Figure 41: 'Busta di Graziani in Bronzo', ACS, FF. RG, B.8 (Firenze)

Figure 42: 'Cerimonia per l'inaugurazione di un busto bronzo di R. Graziani', ACS, FF. RG, B. 8.

Figure 43: 'Graziani al rientro dell'Africa Orientale Italiana' (Roma, 1938) ACS, FF. RG, B.6

Figure 44: 'Graziani al rientro dell'Africa Orientale Italiana' (Roma, 1938) ACS, FF. RG, B.6

Figure 45: 'Ancona: 28 Maggio 1938' ACS, FF. RG, B.6.

Figure 46: 'visite ufficiali di Graziani in città italiane' (1938) ACS, FF. RG, B.6.

Figure 47: 'visite ufficiali di Graziani in città italiane' (forse Anzio e Frosinone 1938) ACS, FF. RG, B.6

Figure 48: 'Arco di trionfo per S.E. Graziani', ACS, FF. RG, B.15.

Figure 49: 'visite ufficiali di Graziani in città italiane' ACS, FF. RG, B.6

Figure 50: 'Graziani in gita' ACS, FF. RG, B.6

Figure 51: 'Graziani in visita trionfale' (Sardegna, 1938) ACS, FF. RG, B.6

Figure 52: 'Graziani in visita trionfale' (Sardegna, 1938) ACS, FF. RG, B.6

Figure 53: '4 Maggio 1938: Mussolini e Hitler, presente Graziani, al campo di manovra di Centocelle', *Graziani*, Rivista Romana, p. 210

Figure(s) 54: 'una pagina di un vecchio album di fotografie della famiglia Graziani', *Tempo* (26 Settembre 1940) p. 10

Figure(s) 55: sketches by 'un gruppo di vecchi commilitoni', *Tempo* (26 Settembre 1940) p. 9

Figure(s) 56: 'Graziani l'Africano', *Tempo* (26 Settembre 1940), pp. 11

Figure 57: *Tempo* (Ottobre 1940), ACS, F. RG, B. 81

Figure 58: 'Imperium contro Empire: Graziani e la via delle Indie' *Il Mattino* (14 Ottobre 1940)

- Figure 59: ‘Italy’s Army Chief’, *Life Magazine* (24<sup>th</sup> June 1940)
- Figure 60: ‘Mussolini Struts his Stuff as a Prelude to War’, *Life Magazine* (24<sup>th</sup> June 1940), p. 38
- Figure 61: ‘Hombre de Confianza’, *La Prensa de San Antonio* (25 Julio 1940) p. 3
- Figure 62: ‘Personalities of the Week’ *The Illustrated London News* (6<sup>th</sup> July 1940), p. 13
- Figure 63: ACS, F. RG, B. 81, ‘Le Marechal Graziani’, *Gringoire* (9 Novembre 1940)
- Figure 64: ‘Person and Personages: Graziani and Wavell’, *Die Weltwoche* (27 September 1940) & *The Living Age* (February 1941)
- Figure 65: Translation and Clipping of ‘Graziani’s kühner Vorstoß’, *Der Angriff* (3 Ottobre 1940) ACS, F. RG B. 81
- Figure 66: ‘Il Maresciallo Graziani’, Buenos Aires (10 Giugno 1940) ACS, F. RG B. 81
- Figure 67: ‘Il Maresciallo Graziani tiene un Discorso al Teatro Adriano di Roma’, *l’Istituto Luce* (1 Ottobre 1943)
- Figure 68: ‘Il Maresciallo Graziani scende le scale del Vittoriano applaudito da una folla inneggiante’, *l’Istituto Luce* (1 Ottobre 1943)
- Figure 69: Cartolina, ‘A Signorina Ricchetti’, bought on Ebay (Bergamo, 1944).
- Figure 70: ‘Nel Campo Prigionieri di Algeri’ *Graziani*, Rivista Romana, p. 363
- Figure 71: ‘Il vero processo ai 600 giorni’, *La Tribuna Illustrata* (31 Ottobre 1948) p. 2
- Figure 72: ‘Il Processo Graziani iniziato oggi a Roma’, *Corriere d’Informazione* (12 Ottobre 1948), p. 1
- Figure 73: ‘Trials and Release, Peace and Intervention’, *The Illustrated London News* (23<sup>rd</sup> October 1948), p. 455
- Figure 74: ‘Durerà fino ad aprile il secondo processo di Rodolfo Graziani’, *Oggi* (9 Marzo 1950)
- Figure 75: “Lion of Africa” on Trial in Italy’, *The N.Y. Times* (28<sup>th</sup> February 1950), p. 16
- Figure 76: ‘People in the Public Eye and Occasions of Note’, *The Illustrated London News* (5<sup>th</sup> January 1952), p. 23
- Figure 77: ‘Il Caso Graziani’, *l’Europeo* (22 Ottobre 1952), front cover
- Figure 78: *Graziani*, Rivista Romana, p. 427

- Figure 79: ‘La sua guerra è finita adesso’, *Oggi* (20 Gennaio 1955), pp. 26 – 27
- Figure 80: “‘Butcher of Libya’ is Dead. Graziani...a name that held Terror”, *The Daily Mail Reporter* (12 January 1955), p. 5
- Figure 81: ‘un aspetto della folla: funerali di Graziani’, *Graziani*, Rivista Romana, p. 386
- Figure 82: ‘Il Leone Bianco. Vita Eroica di Rodolfo Graziani’, *l’Asso di Bastoni* (Gennaio 1955) Suppl. al fasc. n. 16
- Figure 83: *Graziani*, Rivista Romana, premessa
- Figure 84: Death Commemoration Card Bought on Ebay
- Figure(s) 85 (both sides): Commemorative Medallion bought on Ebay
- Figure 86: ‘Marshal Graziani: Italian Fascist Commander’ Card, Popperfoto London (1977)
- Figure 87: ‘Graziani, Cardinal Schuster & Mussolini’ in *Mussolini Ultimo Atto* (1974)
- Figure 88: ‘La Libia si vendica di Graziani: con un film’, *Corriere della Sera Illustrato* (15 Settembre 1979)
- Figure 89: ‘Omar Mukhtar Lion of the Desert’, *Variety Magazine* (14<sup>th</sup> May 1980), p. 82
- Figure 91: Rodolfo Graziani Calendar (2013)
- Figure 92: ‘La regione Lazio e il monumento fascista di Affile’, *Contropiano Giornale Comunista Online* (11 Ottobre 2013)
- Figure 93: Poster for *If Only I Were That Warrior*, Awen Films (2015)
- Figure 94: Close up of a relief on the Yekatit 12 monument
- Figure 95: A Relief in the courtyard of the Casa Madre dei Mutilati, Roma
- Figure 96: R. Graziani Column (without bust) in the courtyard of the Casa Madre dei Mutilati, Roma
- Figure 97: Bust of R. Graziani inside the Casa Madre dei Mutilati, Roma

## Introduction

This thesis is not just a biography, nor merely the history of one man's life. This is a history of fascism, its memory and legacy. It is perhaps even more importantly a history of empire, how it has been collectively represented and remembered. It is a history of contemporary Italy which contextually begins during the Risorgimento but starts its primary analysis with the rise of the *ventennio* and ends today, in the modern day. The nature of the primary sources that have been analysed are wide in variety, quantity, geographical provenance and are all reflective of the conclusions given. Likewise, the theoretical background and secondary sources that have been consulted are eclectic and yet complimentary to the scope of this research project. Hence, a brief description of the starting point for the PhD is most appropriate here as means to both introduce the historical figure chosen as the protagonist for my analysis and the main research questions that this thesis sets out to answer.

In August 2012, whilst searching for inspiration for my undergraduate thesis centred upon the topic of Italy's recent military history, I came across an online article from *The BBC* entitled 'Italy memorial to Fascist hero Graziani sparks row'.<sup>1</sup> It explained that a regionally funded mausoleum and surrounding park of €127,000 euros of taxpayers' money celebrating a dead Italian general, Rodolfo Graziani, was inaugurated by local government officials on a hilltop town just 70km from Rome.<sup>2</sup> The news was noteworthy on an international level, not just for the inclusion of the phrase 'Fascist hero' so widely tabooed in Europe since 1945. The monument was also deemed global news as the Fascist general that it revered had 'carried out massacres and used chemical weapons' during Mussolini's colonial wars in North and East Africa in the 1920s and 30s.<sup>3</sup>

As suggested by the title of the article, the 'row' was initiated by Italy's politically left-wing parties, among whom the head of the Democratic Party of the Lazio region Esterino Montino rhetorically asked 'is it possible to allow, accept or simply tolerate that, in 2012,

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<sup>1</sup> 'Italy memorial to Fascist hero Graziani sparks row', *The BBC News Online* (15<sup>th</sup> August 2012) <<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-19267099>>, date accessed: 9<sup>th</sup> September 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

we dedicate a park and a museum to the Fascist general and minister Rodolfo Graziani?’<sup>4</sup> This comment sparked my initial curiosity in this case and led me my first question as to how this could have happened? How has a Western European country allowed and financially supported the commemoration of such a controversial historical figure? Reading on, the British correspondent interviewed for the article found it ‘Curious, however, that there has been no formal protest that a crypto-Fascist mayor of a small town near the capital can publicly honour a man who brought death to thousands of Africans and dishonour to his own country’.<sup>5</sup> Hence, my second query as to why the Italian left was the only notable group to oppose the monument, as according to this quote the Italian public did not act at all? Why such indifference, is it due to widespread Fascist sympathies or public ignorance about the past?

A further quick online search and I discovered that some Italian newspapers also reported on the monument, but only weeks after foreign newspaper reports like that of *The BBC*. The liberal national paper *La Repubblica* remarked that ‘il mausoleo al fascista Graziani scandalizza anche *New York Times* e *Pais*’ on the 29<sup>th</sup> of August.<sup>6</sup> The outcry amongst international commentators across the world, contrary to the comparable lack thereof in the domestic Italian press, was even more intriguing and alarming. Other Italian papers such as *Corriere della Sera* followed suit in describing ‘dopo quelle in Italia, le polemiche all’estero non si placano sul Maresciallo Rodolfo Graziani. Ad Affile gli hanno dedicato un Mausoleo’. The statement was correct about ‘le polemiche all’estero’ but what about ‘quelle in Italia?’ There seemed to be little evidence of them so far.<sup>7</sup> This sentence was followed by more unfactual and generalised information that ‘Graziani usò i gas contro libici ed etiopi’.<sup>8</sup> There is actually little evidence that he ever used gas in Libya, only in Ethiopia, and the affirmation was so brief that it served only a footnote to the rest of the article which was only deemed worthy of page 5 news. The intriguing revelations from the *Corriere della Sera* article were two, starting with the fact that the colonial factor appeared almost unimportant to the point that the writer did

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> ‘Affile: il mausoleo al fascista Graziani scandalizza anche *New York Times* e *Pais*’, *La Repubblica online* (29 Agosto 2012).

<[https://roma.repubblica.it/cronaca/2012/08/29/news/affile\\_il\\_mausoleo\\_al\\_fascista\\_graziani\\_finisce\\_su\\_new\\_york\\_times\\_e\\_pas-41664004/](https://roma.repubblica.it/cronaca/2012/08/29/news/affile_il_mausoleo_al_fascista_graziani_finisce_su_new_york_times_e_pas-41664004/)>, date accessed: 20<sup>th</sup> July 2019.

<sup>7</sup> ‘Mausoleo: El Pais e NYT contro Affile per Graziani’, *Corriere della Sera* (30 Agosto 2012), p. 5.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

not even report the correct information and the apparent ‘normalisation’ of the phenomenon. Furthermore, the recent memorialisation of Fascists is not unknown to Italy, hence my surprise that it was not scandalous or novel enough to be awarded front page news.

To provide a rather stark contrast as mentioned in the Italian articles, the international community were outraged by news of the monument as *The New York Times* wrote a similar article to that of *The BBC* with more comments from the Democratic politician Montino to emphasise the severity of the monument by quoting him in saying ‘it’s as if some little village in some German province built a monument to Goering’.<sup>9</sup> This comparison, although somewhat historically inaccurate given the fact that Goering did not commit colonial crimes like Graziani, was useful in providing readers with a recognisable example to the global public who are less familiar with Italian history, compared to the most infamous names to come out of World War II of leading Nazis such as Hermann Goering. However, the most directly affected nation by the news, Ethiopia, certainly did not hold back in vocalising the ramifications of the monumentalisation of Graziani in one of their papers by stating:

For us Ethiopians building a mausoleum and memorial park, in a village south of Rome to the Fascist commander Field Marshal Rodolfo Graziani, a convicted war criminal is far beyond expectation... The Fascist commander was a confirmed criminal. Field Marshal Graziani, also known as the Butcher of Fezzan, is known in history books for his brutality in putting down a local rebellion in Cyrenaica, Libya, in the 1920s. The cruelty of Graziani went as far as ordering the use of poison gas and chemical weapons against Ethiopian troops and tribesmen in contravention of the Geneva Convention, which Italy had signed. In the 21st century where the rule of democracy and the respect of human rights are high on the agenda honouring the convicted criminals on charges of crimes against humanity is indeed deplorable.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> ‘Village’s Tribute Reignites a debate about Italy’s Fascist Past’, *The N.Y. Times Online* (28<sup>th</sup> August 2012) <<https://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/29/world/europe/village-reignites-debate-over-italys-fascist-past.html>>, date accessed: 20<sup>th</sup> September 2019.

<sup>10</sup> ‘Making the Fascist a Hero Unpardonable’, *Capital Ethiopia* (12<sup>th</sup> September 2012).



If all of these allegations were true, how is there so much discord between the international telling of past events and reactions to the commemoration of Graziani and mainstream opinion in Italy? As much as the current debate first ignited my interest in the topic, as a history student my instinct drove me back to the very beginning of the story, that is, to discover the factual evidence myself and discover who Rodolfo Graziani really was. What had he done during his lifetime and why was it still being discussed and disputed now?

The international articles seemed to think that Graziani remains ‘almost unknown to modern generations of Italians’ which was simultaneously interesting and surprising given the wealth of material I found when I started looking.<sup>11</sup> During my preliminary research into the relevant secondary literature, Graziani was mentioned specifically by name in most mainstream historical monographs that have been published on the Second World War in both the English language and in Italian. Yet, it would be naïve to think that the majority of Europeans have a passion for military history and read monumental global histories in their spare time.

Culturally, however, there also seemed to be many leads in mainstream primary sources easily available for consultation in Italy and abroad. At first glance, they all seem to connect him to his role in the foundation of the Italian empire and ranged from contemporary newspaper articles and illustrated magazine spreads, to popular films and playing cards that began with Graziani’s career in the 1920s and long outlived his death well into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Evidently, these cultural products are not merely the preserve of dusty historical archives and some are still available for sale on the internet. Hence my bewilderment in the apparent obtuseness to Graziani’s celebration in 2012.

On a scholarly level, there had been ample interest in him in wider published histories of World War II and Italian fascism and its foreign policy, but they are outdated and strictly adhere to the writing of political and military history, or the history of international relations. Most of the cultural references I found have been ignored. The only notable attempt at a detached study dedicated solely to understanding the various

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<sup>11</sup> ‘Italy Memorial to Fascist hero Graziani sparks row’.

complexities of Graziani as a historical figure was written by the Italian journalist, Giuseppe Mayda in 1992. As you will see, I have gratefully and exhaustively used Mayda's inquest to fill in the gaps of his life in those rare moments where I found little paper trail.

Given this wealth of material I initially came across, it was thus remarkable that foreign journalists and their article titles seem to suggest that the recent commemoration of Graziani was so surprising as it came out of thin air, almost as an amnesic episode, such as that of *The New York Times* entitled 'Village reignites debate about Italy's Fascist Past'.<sup>12</sup> According to this title, the monument 'reignited' an old debate, and all of the articles, including the Italian ones, only mention the main episodes of Graziani's life before fast forwarding to 2012. As a historian and not a journalist my research scope was very different. My preliminary research into the literary and cultural interest in him in the past led me to believe that the monument and its various reactions must have somewhat linear chronological roots that I could trace. At the time I thought that these sources could potentially provide me with a structure for an interesting research project, although I did not know quite how numerous and varied they would end up being.

These discoveries led me to the development of my overarching research questions for this thesis: If Graziani was seen as such an important historical figure of 20<sup>th</sup>-century history, why is there still so much controversy surrounding him today? Who is he remembered by and for what? This has resulted in my research aims being twofold. Firstly, to document Graziani's career and provide an accurate timeline of his life, as other than Mayda as mentioned before, no one to date has written an objective in depth historical study of the man, who is still surrounded by so many question marks surrounding his behaviour, actions and the motivations behind them. Secondly, to provide a thorough cultural analysis as means to answer for the mythology and factual inaccuracies surrounding him. These research aims are, of course, intrinsically intertwined as fundamental to the comprehension of the interplay between myth and reality, his private life vs. his public one.

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<sup>12</sup> 'Village's Tribute Reignites a Debate about Italy's Fascist Past'.

Despite being this early on in the research process, one thing was clear, there seemed to be more discord between the international and national spectrum surrounding the memory of Graziani the colonialist instead of Graziani the fascist. Whilst all journalistic commentators agreed that celebrating the politically fascist nature of this historical figure was unacceptable, there was much less concord surrounding his colonial actions, to which he dedicated almost his whole career. Whilst the Ethiopians gave the accusations against Graziani's colonial conduct the most weight, the American and British papers seemed less concerned in this regard and the Italians least of all. Therefore, ample attention will be paid to analysing Graziani the colonial figure in order to clarify this discrepancy.

My hypothesis here is that a thorough examination of these aspects of this figure's life and afterlife are wholly relevant in providing a tangible case study through which to understand the complexities of the most important themes in contemporary Italian history, that is, colonialism and fascism and explore the connections between them. By utilising such a specific case, it soon became implausible that my research could be governed by a single overriding methodology or analytical approach. The inspiration for this analysis ranges from traditional approaches to national, political and military history, various colonial and post-colonial histories, recent more inclusive cultural analyses that widen the analytical lens to many sources, and memory studies. As it appears that the current field of research into Italian colonialism is a relatively nascent albeit busy one, for the scope of this study I have also relied on scholarly approaches from other national cases, such as that of Britain. As the western nation with the longest colonial history in the globe, the relevant state of research is more advanced and creative in scope and here I have managed to find highly comparable examples to the Graziani case.

As most sources suggest that during Graziani's lifetime he was heroised by western onlookers for his colonial career, appropriate historical theories of imperial heroism must be followed in this case. For example, Berny Sèbe's recent research on the promotion of British and French imperial heroes, has led to his argument that by studying heroic imperialists, scholars can also throw light on wider historical mechanisms involved in

the hero-making process.<sup>13</sup> He therefore believes that ‘there is much more to say about them than just recounting their overseas exploits’, and his work ‘in stark contrast with the canon of the genre, which tends to divide the chapters along biographical lines...offers a genuinely synthetic view which charts the rise of a new type of hero’.<sup>14</sup> Hence, Sèbe’s approach and scope heavily correspond with the aims of this thesis. His analysis revealed that ‘the politics of imperial heroes often reflected a complex web of interests which contributed significantly to bolstering their reputations’.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, the aim of this study is to untangle this complex web of interests that led to Graziani’s heroisation from the outset, and like Sèbe, questions ‘how it came into being, what interest it served and the extent to which it reached wide audiences’.<sup>16</sup>

In order to answer such questions, Sèbe often refers to ‘the particular market conditions of the period’ responsible for the production of this new type of popular hero.<sup>17</sup> What he means by this is:

markets characterised by the extraordinary speed of communications, by the existence of vigorous press, with journalists writing in fresh and vivid styles, achieving immediacy, supplemented by the possibility of image production and dissemination...capable of creating fantasies of exoticism, heroism and drama.<sup>18</sup>

In view of this, his sources naturally ‘turn away from traditional official documents’ and include films, photos, posters, and cheap newspapers, books, magazines designed to reach a rapidly expanding readership.<sup>19</sup> According to Sèbe, these sources ‘reveal the hidden mechanisms’ behind these heroisations which are all highly relevant here as they mirror the sources found in the case of Graziani.<sup>20</sup> The only sources that Sèbe does not mention that I will include in my research is the correspondence between Graziani and the public as ample letters reveal that the Italian population also became, in turn,

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<sup>13</sup> B. Sèbe, *Heroic Imperialists in Africa: The Promotion of British and French Colonial Heroes* (N.Y. 2013), Introduction.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, Introduction.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

Graziani's 'hero makers' in their own right. This is where a publication which is very similar in scope and conclusions to Sèbe's, Edward Berenson's thesis on five colonial case studies again in Britain and France, becomes relevant. Berenson argues that 'one way ... to examine the process of anointing heroes of empire is to consider how ordinary people reacted to charismatic figures in the press'.<sup>21</sup> For his historical cases he found public response and endorsement in 'the masses of people crowding train stations and docks when their heroes returned from long African stays; equally large numbers flocking to ceremonies honouring or memorialising these heroes; stacks of adulatory letters – fan mail of sorts – written by people unknown to the men in question'.<sup>22</sup> This scholarly interest in how 'the crowds then become part of the story' is highly important for this investigation, as it seems anachronistic to analyse any aspect of 20<sup>th</sup> century Europe without taking into account the fundamental participation of the masses.<sup>23</sup>

The wider impact and relevance of hero worship of this historical figures 'who appeared to embody the nation as a whole, who succeeded in uniting people across the boundaries of class, region, gender and religion' is that they 'could wield considerable power, whether or not they held public office' as 'the worlds of journalism, geography, and politics deliberately turned the media spotlight towards them'.<sup>24</sup> They had the capacity to form and influence public opinion on imperial policy amongst other things, and by doing so proved indispensable political weapons to contemporary policy makers of their nation-states. On this note, Berenson also importantly highlights the purpose of these types of studies as 'not to judge the racial attitudes of humanitarian sensibilities of these individuals; it is historical: to examine how their contemporaries viewed them and understood the meaning of what they did'.<sup>25</sup> It is precisely with this lens I aim to examine the potency, promoters and participants of the Graziani myth.

Thus, the initial hypothesis for this inquest is that Graziani became an early prototype of the modern-day male celebrity with a genuine base of personal followers at the dawn of the era of 20<sup>th</sup>-century mass media culture, one of Italy's first examples of the modern

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<sup>21</sup> E. Berenson, *Heroes of Empire: Five Charismatic Men and the Conquest of Africa* (California, 2010), p. 5.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 6 – 20.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

soldier hero and the first and most enduring colonial celebrity in Modern Italy. This is not to say that Graziani was the very first European colonial hero. This is evident in Berenson and Sèbe's work which both argue that the modern roots of colonial heroism lay in the Napoleonic period, but only became a mass phenomenon in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century due to 'a new cultural landscape' of mass communications which allowed for 'the percolation of hagiographic material' throughout European societies.<sup>26</sup> The originality of the Graziani myth, however, lay in the popular dissemination of his exaltation as the first Italian colonial war hero, one that directly echoed Imperial Rome in a modern form that exuded 20<sup>th</sup>-century fascist ideals of racist violence and hegemony. The relevant Italian context and peculiarities that allowed for the Graziani myth will be analysed in the next chapter.

As you shall see as you read, both the primary and secondary sources I use in this thesis are rather eclectic. The only conformity evident throughout the thesis is a closer focus on various cultural approaches than other historical methods, and the overriding transnational approach throughout. By widening the analytical lens on a geographic level at certain times throughout this story a more complete overview of events arises. This is not merely due to the impossibility of writing strictly 'national' histories of any given country in the 20<sup>th</sup> century with the birth of modern globalisation, but also due to my belief that Graziani's 'hero makers' were not restricted to Italy. These decisions in focus and methodological approach, were of course as far as possible, driven by the sources available for consultation and the historical gap that this thesis hopes to fill, as the story of Graziani is a complicated international story that is long overdue.

Thus, the entire thesis is ordered in a chronological manner throughout and is grouped thematically where possible by what I perceive to be commonalities in the sources available, themes, and content. The first chapter of this thesis begins with a contextual and theoretical overview of relevant events and methodologies that sowed the seeds for the mythicization of Graziani in Fascist Italy. The second chapter follows Graziani as he reached the height of his mythicisation in Italy through the use of heavy propaganda during Fascist Italy's most famous colonial war, the Ethiopian War. Contrary to the first chapter which aims to address my initial query as to why Graziani was chosen to be a

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p. 5.

colonial war hero in Fascist Italy, chapter two attempts to analyse the mythicisation process as to how it happened and provide some indications as to how successful it was in Italy with various visual, journalistic and sources from his personal archive. Chapter three widens the geographical lens of enquiry to the international sphere in order to assess the impact of the myth abroad and examines the aftermath of the Ethiopian War in regard to the Graziani myth utilising the same methodology as the previous chapter. Chapters four and five, instead turn to the Second World War and follows Graziani's multifaceted roles within it as he remained a national and international protagonist throughout the conflict, through the use of journalistic and archival sources. Chapter 6 provides a follow up to the previous chapters and focus on the post-war justice that took place after 1945 and its consequences on Graziani through a primary analysis of his 'blockbuster' trial in Italy in 1948. Chapter 7 traces his death a decade after WWII and its aftermath, both immediate and long-term as his afterlife took various turns that kept him in the limelight through various media outlets. Finally, my conclusion provides a contextual analysis of the complicated legacy and memory of Graziani in present day Italy and abroad that has culminated in the public discussions surrounding his monument of 2012.

## **The Search for a New Type of Hero in Post-Unification Italy: Graziani's Early Years**

This chapter traces the creation of the myth of Graziani from its inception. It argues that the political culture of early 20<sup>th</sup>-century Europe and the peculiarities of the national context in Italy provided fertile ground for a new type of national hero, which came to be embodied by Rodolfo Graziani. The peculiarities will be discussed below but should not be exaggerated, as Sèbe also notes in his transnational study that:

Although British and French socio-cultural contexts presented marked differences, the period between 1870 and 1930 witnessed in the two countries unique changes that created favourable conditions for the arrival of a new type of hero, the imperial hero.<sup>1</sup>

So, in an attempt to fill such a historical gap in the case of Italy, I will demonstrate that a very similar outcome is evident in the Italian peninsula, although various details regarding particular events, the manifestation and the dissemination of this new hero differ somewhat. Thus, as I am to demonstrate in this chapter, the eventual public heroisation of Graziani during the *ventennio* responded to a desire for the human projection of an ideological template. This template was largely driven by what were perceived as national 'lacune' or insecurities unique to the Italian circumstance at that time. Therefore, the political reasons for favouring the popular exaltation of Graziani over that of his comrades or indeed superiors will be explored as we follow his career in conjunction with his construction as the nation's colonial war hero.

As other historians have done before, this chapter will also question the long accepted traditional concept of national heroes and the heroic, more commonly known as the 'great man' theory.<sup>2</sup> The notion of inherent charismatic leadership in the creation of modern society, more famously put by Carlyle himself that 'the history of the world is but the biography of great men' continues to culturally dominate the west.<sup>3</sup> Although

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<sup>1</sup> Sèbe, *Heroic Imperialists in Africa*, p. 48.

<sup>2</sup> The 19<sup>th</sup>-century idea is primarily attributed to the philosopher Thomas Carlyle and was consequently upheld by other theorists such as Max Weber & Oswald Spengler.

<sup>3</sup> T. Carlyle, *Heroes, Hero Worship, and the Heroic in History* (London, 1841).



recent studies have begun to debunk the theory that went unquestioned for over a century, the public sphere remains littered with reminders of our ‘founding figures’ across nation states.<sup>4</sup> These figures have been so intertwined in the writing, imagery and collective remembrance of our national histories that it is unsurprising that the notion still remains unquestioned by mainstream society.

The case of Graziani is no different. He is not seen as a founding father of Italy by the Italian public but his widely accepted ‘heroism’ in the consolidation of Italy as a leading European nation, equal to that of 20<sup>th</sup>-century Britain or France, remains evident to this day in the national written histories of fascism and its empire. This case-study strongly contrasts these beliefs by suggesting that his heroism was a blatant cultural construct, designed to fill the given socio-political needs of the time. Other historians before me have previously and successfully supported this notion with other examples, so in this chapter I will adopt these templates as a hypothesis in order to illustrate my argument. One thesis, for example, has appropriately noted that attributing heroism solely to the political agenda does not mean to diminish the life as lived, so to speak, but provides a different focus on ‘the life as made sense of, the life imaginatively reconstructed and rendered significant’.<sup>5</sup> As will become evident with the case of Graziani, the lives of heroes or heroic tales like his, thus ‘become playgrounds for the imagination, richly inviting terrains for ideological projection and mythical speculation’.<sup>6</sup>

Frequently compared to Scipio Africanus, Napoleon, and Garibaldi by his contemporaries, Graziani became famously known as ‘Il Condottiero Africano’ across the peninsula for his role in the Italian ‘pacification’ of Libya and the conquest of Ethiopia in the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>7</sup> Although he did not reach the peak of his fame until the formal declaration of the Fascist Empire, this particular chapter is concerned with origins. In fact, Graziani’s early life and career contradict scholarly consensus which overwhelmingly dictates a rupture in the ideology, practice and culture of Italian colonialism from the rise of Mussolini.<sup>8</sup> My analysis reveals that the birth of the idea of

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<sup>4</sup> G. Cubbit & A. Warren, (eds.) ‘Introduction by the Editors’ in *Heroic Reputations and Exemplary Lives* (Manchester, 2000), p. 3.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Fondo Rodolfo Graziani, Buste 72 – 74.

<sup>8</sup> R. Griffin, ‘Fascism’s Modernist Revolution: A New Paradigm for the Study of Right-Wing Dictatorships’, *Fascism*, 5/2 (2016) pp. 105 – 129.

the colonial hero can be traced back to the ideals of the Risorgimento, providing the starting point for this thesis. Theories of European heroism, nationalism, military masculinity, and colonialism will therefore be applied to an analysis of contemporary newspapers, literary publications, and private correspondence to account for the rise of Graziani as a national hero. The chapter ends in 1930, a period in which the sources examined indicate changes in the representation of Graziani, which reflect not only the changing nature of Fascist foreign policy in North and East Africa, but also the ever-growing grip Fascist culture had on its consumers, both at home and abroad.

*Nation-building and National Heroes: The Italian Case*

First and foremost, the famous and familiar quest of ‘making Italians’ following Italian unification must be mentioned as the stage in which the ideological seed was initially sown for the eventual heroisation of Graziani in Italy.<sup>9</sup> As scholarship long dictates, modern nation-states are far from natural entities and were largely the creation of political elites.<sup>10</sup> Consequently, newly found territories had to be cemented not only geographically and politically, but also spiritually and culturally in the collective imagination of their new citizens.<sup>11</sup> In turn, the interplay between national ideology and national culture found its way in the form of symbolism and iconography. From flags and anthems, to monuments and ceremonies, symbols provided a tangible focus in which the collective community could cohere and rally around.<sup>12</sup> The creation of national heroes as an embodiment of young nation-states proved no exception in homogenising these ideals in human form.

Described as a mere ‘geographical expression’, heavily divided along ethnic, cultural, linguistic lines, and regional loyalties, the creation of a united people in a unified Italy proved a hard task for 19<sup>th</sup>-century nationalists.<sup>13</sup> As ‘the concept of a unified, democratic, and liberal Italy had limited popular appeal’, leading activists sought educational tools that could be nationalised far beyond the interests of the literate middle

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<sup>9</sup> M. Azeglio cited in N. Carter, ‘Nation, Nationality, Nationalism & Internationalism in Italy from Cavour to Mussolini’, *The Historical Journal*, 39/2 (1996), pp. 545 – 551.

<sup>10</sup> E. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge, 1992), p. 114.

<sup>11</sup> B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London, 1991), p. 37.

<sup>12</sup> A. Smith, *National Identity* (Las Vegas, 1991) p. 77.

<sup>13</sup> K. Von Metternich, Letter to Lord Palmerston, *Memoirs: vol. 7* (19<sup>th</sup> November 1849) (N.Y. 1996).

classes, to which most advocates of Italian nationalism belonged.<sup>14</sup> One such propagandistic tool or emblem created in the name of Italian nationalism was the invention of the myth of Italy's founding father, Giuseppe Garibaldi.<sup>15</sup>

Despite Giuseppe Mazzini's political activism in the form of nationalist societies, written publications and various insurrections in favour of a unified Italian state from the 1830s onwards, his most enduring and successful creation was that of Garibaldi, the first national Italian hero.<sup>16</sup> Without diminishing Garibaldi's own role in his rise to fame as Italy's first modern hero, Lucy Riall's thesis demonstrates that 'Garibaldi's celebrity began as a political rhetorical strategy' designed by Mazzini to represent the Italian nationalist cause.<sup>17</sup> Thus, the idea, search, and decision to use Garibaldi as a national icon was carefully orchestrated not by him, but by the political activist Mazzini due to the lack of a wider popular commitment to unite the country.<sup>18</sup> The example of Garibaldi set an inadvertent template for the later creation of other national heroes in the Fascist context, of which Graziani proved to be one of the most prominent.

Perceived by the rest of Europe as only a recent 'battlefield for foreign powers', namely during the Napoleonic Wars, where 'Italians were little more than hostages or reluctant participants', the emerging nation needed to establish a new image for its territory and those who resided in it.<sup>19</sup> Thus, the urgency and nature of heroism in Italy was dictated by the internalisation of international stereotypes of Italian 'indolence, degeneration, and emasculation'.<sup>20</sup> In modern Europe, war and violent struggle had become the most common way to combat lands that lacked 'patriotic self-definition' or shared belonging or tradition, and by doing so, inculcate national pride to counteract these collective

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<sup>14</sup> M. Berezin, 'Political Belonging: Emotion, Nation and Identity in Fascist Italy', in Steinmetz, G. (ed.) *State/Culture: State-Formation after the Cultural Turn* (N.Y. 1999), p. 363.

<sup>15</sup> L. Riall, *Garibaldi: Invention of a Hero* (Yale, 2007).

<sup>16</sup> Riall, 'Making Italian Heroes' in *Garibaldi*.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Riall, 'Men at War: Masculinity and Military Ideals in the Risorgimento', in S. Patriarca, & Riall, (eds.) *The Risorgimento Revisited: Nationalism & Culture in Nineteenth-century Italy* (N.Y. 2012), p. 152.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

insecurities.<sup>21</sup> For Italian patriots, the virtues of virility, and in turn, masculinity therefore provided the solution to these perceived inferiorities.<sup>22</sup>

As a consequence, Mazzini saw in Garibaldi, a self-taught revolutionary who became known in South America for his military successes, as the solution for his cause.<sup>23</sup> Garibaldi's humble beginnings, seemingly noble character, skill in warfare, military courage, and physical presence provided the perfect ingredients for a national icon with widespread appeal.<sup>24</sup> Most importantly, however, during the turbulent period of the Risorgimento, he was willing to fight and die, and through his leadership qualities and charisma incited others to do the same, for a collective ideal, that of a united Italy. Thus, Garibaldi and his men became the first national martyrs, ones which 'santificava la nazione, ma la incarnava anche come una causa degna di essere condivisa, per la quale valeva la pena combattere e morire'.<sup>25</sup> This is the manner in which the idolisation of these men of the Risorgimento set a national precedent that was to be upheld in the new state of Italy by the search for more martyrs willing to make the ultimate national sacrifice through military deeds, institutionalised by the state army.

*The Institutionalisation of Patriotic Heroism: The Italian Army*

The exaltation of Garibaldi and his volunteers in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Italy has its intrinsic relevance to that of Graziani as a national military hero in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but as revolutionaries, the former fought outside the established socio-political structure, whilst the latter was part of an official body whose ideology and image was forcibly joined to the state. This transition of professionalisation of the military hero proved to be a fusion of the old and the new, as regular soldiers were posed to portray more traditional heroic traits whilst being 'controlled and regulated by the state and used to uphold the authority of the state'.<sup>26</sup> Consequently, with the formation of national armies in modern societies,

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<sup>21</sup> A. Lyttleton, 'Creating a National Past: History, Myth and Image in the Risorgimento', in A. Ascoli and K. Von Henneberg, (eds.) *Making & Remaking Italy: The Cultivation of National Identity around the Risorgimento* (N.Y. 2001), p. 31.

<sup>22</sup> Riall, 'Men at War', p. 152.

<sup>23</sup> Riall, *Garibaldi*, p. 37.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>25</sup> Riall, '<I martiri nostri sono tutti risorti!> Garibaldi, i garibaldini e il culto della morte eroica nel Risorgimento', in O. Janz & E. Klinkhammer (eds.), *La morte per la patria: le celebrazioni dei caduti dal Risorgimento alla Repubblica* (Roma, 2008), p. 28.

<sup>26</sup> J. Hopton, 'The State and Military Masculinity', in P. Higate, (ed.) *Military Masculinities: Identity and the State* (Westport, 2003), p. 114.

the armed forces were designed as a ‘moral unit positing certain values...which distinguishes the military (officer) of today from the warriors of previous ages’.<sup>27</sup> By the 1900s, the armed forces had become heightened microcosms of state representation of the societies which they represented given the conspicuous role they enjoyed in the public sphere. Thus, the military came to be used as a tool to legitimise the use of virility in various arenas ‘for the greater good of the wider community’.<sup>28</sup>

The Italian government’s relationship with the armed forces was complicated and turbulent from the outset for many reasons beyond the scope of this study, which is preoccupied primarily with appearances. Although little has been written about the army’s public image in Italy in this period, some deductions can be made to here in relevance to the case of Graziani. By joining the army in 1903, albeit out of financial necessity rather than personal desire, Graziani invested in what would favourably serve his social position later in his career. Without any significant battles or indeed victories unification in 1861 until the First World War, the primary role of the Italian army in this period was the maintenance of public order. This not only made it widely unpopular but also signified a lack of negative cohesion amongst soldiers to rally against external enemies.<sup>29</sup> The introduction of conscription early on in 1863 and the consequently low turn-out rates indicate the widespread apathy felt for the state institution and patriotic duty in general, further reflective of a general absence in sentiment to the nation itself.<sup>30</sup> This public image, or lack thereof, caused existential anxieties which were to be internalised by the military, and facilitated the promotion of soldiers who were keen and able from every social strata to posts that had previously been the preserve of the social elites.

Sure enough, Graziani’s early career in the army may have started off no differently than many other reluctant conscripts, but his rapid rise in the ranks boosted his personal status within the institution and provided the context which initially facilitated the endorsement of his reputation over that of his comrades. The son of a general practitioner and school

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<sup>27</sup> S. P. Huntington, *Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* (N.Y. 1957), pp. 7 - 9.

<sup>28</sup> Hopton, ‘The State and Military Masculinity’, p. 113.

<sup>29</sup> J. Gooch, *Army, State and Society in Italy 1870-1915* (London, 1989), p. 118.

<sup>30</sup> V. Wilcox, ‘Encountering Italy: Military Service and National Identity during the First World War’, *Bulletin of Italian Politics*, 3/2 (2011) pp. 283 – 302.

teacher, Rodolfo Graziani was born into a humble family in a hill town near Rome. As one of nine children, his parents initially sent him to a catholic seminary in order to receive a free education as they couldn't pay for his schooling, which allowed him to eventually complete secondary school and start training as a legal notary. Throughout his training he struggled financially and when he was called up for military service in 1903, Graziani was assigned to the officer corps primarily due to his educational qualifications. It is not exactly known why he then decided to continue his career in the armed forces but in his own words from his autobiography: 'almeno pasti buoni e regolari erano garantiti', so financial stability likely prevailed.<sup>31</sup>

Despite his reasons, even as an educated young man he seemed an unlikely candidate for promotion given that, as his biographer attains, 'Graziani era poco considerato nell'alta ufficialità, proprio per le sue origini'.<sup>32</sup> With no familial roots, political recommendations or military training at the prestigious academies of Modena or Nunziatella, his chance of success was limited. According to Giuseppe Mayda, the fact that Graziani was a 'ciociaro' further hindered his prospects as high-ranking officers were usually from Piedmont or Naples, the 'magna pars dell'esercito' compared to Italians from in and around Rome who were 'soltanto malvisti'.<sup>33</sup> Given these circumstances, why then was Graziani promoted unusually rapidly after his entry into the army, from an officer to a captain, an ambitious three rank promotion, in little more than a decade? Annual reports from the Italian army in this period suggest that it should have taken him at least another six years to reach the grade of captain.<sup>34</sup> Indeed, little evidence other than mere speculation exists for this period of enquiry as Graziani's reputation did not begin to permeate public sphere until he was sent to aid the 'pacification' of Libya. My hypothesis and initial analysis of his initial suggests that the choices he made and 'desirable' qualities he exposed from the outset of his career appealed to the militarised masculine ideals that the national army was striving for in the period leading up to the First World War, which in turn fast-tracked his career.

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<sup>31</sup> R. Graziani, *Una Vita per l'Italia: Ho Difeso la Patria* (Milan, 1950).

<sup>32</sup> G. Mayda, *Graziani, l'Africano: Da Neghelli a Salò* (Firenze, 1992), p. 2.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, p. 59.

*Militarised Masculinities: The Battlefield as a Test of Manly Ideals*

Many scholars have found strong links between militarism and an admired masculinity which appear to be ‘remarkably persistent historically’.<sup>35</sup> This has been highlighted by the leading historian of masculinity, George Mosse, who noted that modern ‘nationalism adopted the masculine stereotype as one means of its self-representation’.<sup>36</sup> As we have already seen with the case of the Risorgimento earlier on, it was precisely Garibaldi’s ‘manly’ characteristics, which appealed to Italian patriots careful selection of a human icon to represent the militant component of the nationalist cause.<sup>37</sup> Later on, the Italian state then used Mussolini as Garibaldi’s successor as he ‘symbolised all the virtues of true masculinity’ through the constant emphasise on military uniforms and marches as he was shown as living ‘in a state of permanent war’.<sup>38</sup> This connection, however, or more simply the common idea exposed in western culture that the army ‘turns boys into men’ is never to be assumed. In fact the core nature of militarism, through various means, has long ‘fed into ideologies of masculinity through the eroticisation of stoicism, risk-taking, and even lethal violence’.<sup>39</sup> From celebrated Greek mythological characters to Arthurian legends, ‘one of the central images of masculinity in western cultural tradition is the murderous hero, the supreme specialist in violence’.<sup>40</sup> Time period or geographical location aside, the common virtue to be equated to these men and their identity was their physical strength and aggression, attributed to them only once they showed success on the battlefield. Warzones had therefore long been sites for the performing of masculinities by the modern era, but were no longer embodied by the lone warrior, and in fact shifted to the ‘common’ military hero, the soldier.<sup>41</sup> As members of national official military bodies, soldiers hence became ‘the quintessential figure of masculinity’ and were celebrated as such when their deeds ‘were invested with the new significance of serving the country and glorifying its name’.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, in states that were in the

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<sup>35</sup> P. Higate, ‘Introduction’, in Higate, *Military Masculinities*, p. XIII.

<sup>36</sup> G. Mosse, *Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity* (Oxford, 1996), p. 7.

<sup>37</sup> Riall, ‘Men at War’, p. 156-159.

<sup>38</sup> Mosse, *Image of Man*, pp. 160 – 168.

<sup>39</sup> Hopton, ‘The State and Military Masculinity’, p. 113.

<sup>40</sup> B. Connell, ‘Masculinity, Violence, and War’, in Kimmel, M. & M. Messner (eds.) *Men’s Lives* (N.Y. 1992), p. 178.

<sup>41</sup> M. Janowitz, *The Professional Soldier: A Social & Political Portrait* (U.S. 1960), p. 21.

<sup>42</sup> G. Dawson, *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire, and the Imagining of Masculinities* (N.Y. 1994), p. 1.

fragile process of forging their national identities, even more emphasis was placed on the importance of these ideals so they were likely heightened and intensified.<sup>43</sup>

This theory can therefore be applied appropriately to the Italian case which supports my argument that the characteristics rendered by Graziani early on in his career were constituted as desirable in the military's quest to fulfil established ideals of militarised masculinity. Firstly, his educational background allowed him to bypass the typical military academies before he had ever set foot on the battlefield, by excelling in fitness and written exams on a fast track course in Parma in 1906. Secondly, his general youth and fitness made him an adequate candidate for advancement, as these requirements were an initial prerequisite for desired standards of modern masculinity.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, in 1908 he requested his transferral to Eritrea, Italy's first colony that had been acquired during a power vacuum in 1889. He stayed in Eritrea for three years and whilst the main task of the armed forces there was peacekeeping during a period of little resurrection and combat, his desire to brave the 'black continent' most likely earned him immediate respect. Since initial contact and exploration with the West from the Age of Discovery, Africa had long been perceived as a remote, wild, and dangerous continent that enjoyed a permanent role in the European cultural imagination.<sup>45</sup> Thus, Italian soldiers who volunteered to go to Africa were more likely to be promoted not only due to less competition in the colonies, but their strive for adventure would also be recognised and commended. At this point, contemporary common perceptions of military masculinity and colonial culture met to create a space for a new type of Italian national hero, the colonial military hero.

The earliest forms of colonial culture, in its most common and accessible form, can be seen in low cost illustrated booklets detailing accounts from travellers and explorers who travelled to the 'black' continent.<sup>46</sup> These popular series have been traced back to at least the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as the traveller became the first Italian representative to reach African soil and therefore the first agents in the imagining of its landscape and

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<sup>43</sup> J. Tosh, 'Hegemonic Masculinity & Gender History', in S. Dudink, K. Hagemann, & J. Tosh (eds.) *Masculinities in Politics and War: Gendering Modern History* (Manchester, 2004), p. 49.

<sup>44</sup> J. Hockey, 'No More Heroes: Masculinity in the Infantry' in Higate, *Military Masculinities*, p. 16.

<sup>45</sup> D. Atkinson, 'Constructing Italian Africa: Geography & Geopolitics' in R. Ben Ghiat, & M. Fuller (eds.) *Italian Colonialism* (New York, 2005).

<sup>46</sup> L. Polezzi, 'White, Male, & Italian: Performing Masculinity in Italian Writing about Africa' in Polezzi (ed.) *In Corpore: Bodies in Post-Unification Italy* (Massachusetts, 2007), p. 29.



inhabitants.<sup>47</sup> Polezzi uses the example and work of the explorer Gustavo Bianchi, an explorer who journeyed to Eastern and Central Africa in 1879 and wrote an illustrated book, *Alla Terra dei Galla*, published in Milan in 1884. She attains that whilst ‘his attitude to Africans remained ambiguous’ the book is filled with ‘atmospheric and exotic illustrations’ describing ‘boschi incantevoli, eccelse cime dorate a ciascun tramonto, sottilissime gocce di rugiada ingemmate ai primi raggi del mattino dall’astro, fulgido sicuramente, ma abbastanza cantato’.<sup>48</sup> The predominant focus on flora and fauna in early colonial discourse therefore took precedent over the African, who remained more of a source of ambivalence and mystery.

In fact, the research of Karen Pinkus notes that Imperial ‘romantic notions of savagery’ relating to Africa in the post-unification only transitioned into a more concrete ‘spacialised consciousness of blackness’ and the African ‘other’ date from the attempted Italian occupation of Libya in 1911.<sup>49</sup> Although here Pinkus touches on Said’s theory of Orientalism, the work of Giuseppe Finaldi elaborates on the importance of ‘otherness’ to the creation of a national identity. Whilst utilising similar sources to both Polezzi and Pinkus, from illustrated pamphlets to adverts, his more regional focus on local entertainment, which he attains were much more influential than written works, given the high illiteracy rates in Italy until long into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, provides a somewhat different outlook. Heavily sexualized images of Abyssinian women and ‘wild cannibal savages’ in Eritrea, with overt phrenological references, in puppet shows in town piazzas proved a more popular medium to incite national identity amongst all sectors of society as divisions along ethnic and geographical lines were being incremented.<sup>50</sup> Finaldi’s thesis therefore demonstrates that became weaved seamlessly into national-patriotic discourse, and hence making it a crucial element of the unfolding of a ‘national’ culture. Thus, early Italian colonial culture and propaganda incited many young men like Graziani to go to the colonies in search of adventure and war against an unknown enemy.

In 1911, at the dawn of the Italo-Turkish War over Libya, perhaps desperate to be involved in direct military action, Graziani sent his request for his transfer to Tripoli.

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, pp. 22 – 38.

<sup>49</sup> K. Pinkus, *Bodily Regimes: Italian Advertising under Fascism* (Minneapolis, 1995), pp. 27 – 29.

<sup>50</sup> G. Finaldi, *Italy’s Culture of Colonialism and La Prima Guerra d’Africa* (Florence, 2002), pp. 173 - 176.

Shortly after arriving he was bitten by a venomous snake and subsequently spent two months in hospital back in Asmara. This setback, however, only ended up demonstrating not only the extent of his determination but also the ultimate virtue of idealised masculinity, that of ‘bravery’ as he immediately renewed his request to be sent back to the front line as soon as he was discharged from hospital. Like many soldiers before him, returning to battle after a severe injury only further established admiration within the ranks as an indication of both moral and physical strength, and perhaps most importantly dedication to the national cause.<sup>51</sup> The recognition he gained here is implied by the immediate heightened responsibility awarded to him following the accident, by firstly being sent as a commander to indigenous forces in Eritrea and shortly afterwards to the heart of the conflict back in Libya. In Libya he encountered another setback, this time malaria, upon which he briefly returned to Italy until he recovered but before requesting his return to Libya once again. Here, he was promoted to the rank of captain in 1914, on the eve of Italy’s entry into the First World War which required the return of all Italian forces to the metropole.

### *World War I & The Crisis of Masculinity*

The First World War spurred another turn of events in relation to patriotic martyrdom and masculinity as it permanently redefined established cultural notions and the concept of the soldier hero across Europe.<sup>52</sup> The rise of the women’s rights movement, urbanisation the expansion of consumer culture and the decline of physical labour at the turn of the 20th century ‘all conspired, or so it seemed, to create a weakened male, a man stripped of his virility and his distinctiveness from the ‘second’ sex’.<sup>53</sup> The Great War therefore provided the opportunity in which gender boundaries could be re-established as the trenches became the preserve of men, the home front that of women, all consolidated by the immense propaganda effort for soldier enlistment and female participation.<sup>54</sup> At the dawn of the age of mass advertising, recruitment posters could be seen on the street corners of the towns of Europe, all emphasising an idealised vision of

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<sup>51</sup> Hopton, ‘The State & Military Masculinity’, p. 113.

<sup>52</sup> Paul Fussell’s book entitled *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford, 1975) explains the irreversible cultural changes that the First World War brought to the West.

<sup>53</sup> Berenson, *Heroes of Empire*, pp. 10 – 11.

<sup>54</sup> M. Albrick, ‘Humanitarians & He-men: Recruitment Posters & the Masculine Ideal’, in P. James, (ed.) *Picture This: World War I Posters & Visual Culture* (Nebraska, 2009), p. 312.

the ‘natural’ role of man.<sup>55</sup> For men, fighting in the Great War therefore became almost a socio-cultural requirement for the preservation of gender identity. Soldiers who participated were likely to be awarded higher social status upon their return, dead or alive.<sup>56</sup>

In Italy alone, ‘3.5 percent of the masculine population died, which was twenty times more loss than in any other war for at least 100 years in the history of the nation’ or its former territories.<sup>57</sup> Consequently, the immense loss proved unpopular with the Italian population who were ill prepared on a psychological basis, given the unclear scope and role of the nation in the Great war in general. Moreover, iconic failures on the battlefield, such as the Battle of Caporetto in 1917, inherent institutional and organisational deficiencies in the high command, and low morale further plagued the wider significance of the war to national consciousness.<sup>58</sup> Nationalists of the period, most notably, members of the Futurist movement and Gabriele D’Annunzio, a prominent Italian writer from the fin de siècle, appropriated these anxieties to push their own ideologies of virility and national regeneration through war. The Futurists used the perceived failures that had emerged here to argue for ‘the creation of a new (Italian) man that was not tied to the weight of past history...proclaiming Italy’s glory through his personal drive and energy’.<sup>59</sup> Furthermore, D’Annunzio emerged from the conflict as a war hero, not merely due to the loss of one eye in battle, but also due to his public presence during political campaigns, whose tactics later influenced and were adopted by the Duce himself.<sup>60</sup>

Thus, Graziani’s participation in the war proved highly important in his symbolic appeal to the state’s ideological purposes in the post-war period. He was not only granted the automatic status of soldier hero given his participation but emerged from the conflict as the youngest colonel in the Regio Esercito, at only 36 years of age. As the country’s pool of suitable leaders was relatively small during World War I, he was granted more autonomy than seen fit for his level of experience. As early as December 1915, almost

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> O. Janz, ‘Lutto, famiglia e nazione nel culto dei caduti della prima guerra mondiale in Italia’, in *La morte per la patria*, p. 66.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, p. 63.

<sup>58</sup> D. Showalter, ‘By the Book? Commanders Surrendering in World War I’, in H. Afflerbach, & H. Strachan (eds.) *How Fighting Ends: A History of Surrender* (Oxford, 2012), p. 290.

<sup>59</sup> G. Mosse, *Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity* (Oxford, 1996), p. 155.

<sup>60</sup> M. Leeden, *D’Annunzio: The First Duce* (Maryland, 1977), p. 30.

as immediately as Italy's entrance into the conflict, he was awarded his first bronze medal for his leadership during the capture of Cima near Lake Como.<sup>61</sup> During the battle he was acting under the command of Carmelo Squillace, a colonel heavily respected for his tough reputation and use of violence.<sup>62</sup> An extract from the report of the Lazio brigade in early 1916 suggests that Graziani was one of Squillace's trusted soldiers whose performance stood out as Squillace granted him the autonomy to lead his own surprise attack. The extract reads:

Il Capitano Graziani, comandante il 1 battaglione del 131, con l'aiutante maggiore in seconda S. Ten. Brizzi e pochi soldati, irrompono nella trincea antistante, catturando quattro prigionieri, due lancia bombe, fucili e altro materiale.<sup>63</sup>

The successful operation likely demonstrated Graziani's organizational abilities and leadership skills to his superior, which were all highly valuable commodities in this context. Despite being injured by tear gas during the Battle of Gorizia the following year, and ordered home from the front in order to recover for 'completo esaurimento fisico', Graziani refused to leave his post, and endured two more injuries before his final promotion and the end of hostilities shortly after.<sup>64</sup> Therefore, Graziani's role in the First World War should not be underestimated and rendered irrelevant, as previous biographical accounts have mistakenly concluded by bypassing such details before dedicating their pages exclusively to his more illustrious days on the battlefields of Africa.<sup>65</sup> On the contrary, I argue that this brief but fundamental prelude to his permanent career in the army not only consolidated his prominent position in the army later on but also distinguished him as a role model amongst his peers, which allowed for his veneration as an embodiment of the quintessential new Italian man at the dawn of the *ventennio*.

*The Rise of Fascism, Foreign Policy and Colonial Culture: Ruptures or Continuities?*

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<sup>61</sup> M. Knox, 'Expansionist Zeal, Fighting Power & Staying Power in the Italian & German Dictatorships', in R. Bessel, (ed.) *Fascist Italy & Nazi Germany: Comparisons and Contrasts* (Cambridge, 1996), p. 119.

<sup>62</sup> Mayda, *Graziani*, p. 60.

<sup>63</sup> Diario Brigata Lazio, ACS, F. RG, B.1 (Gennaio 1916).

<sup>64</sup> Mayda, *Graziani l'Africano*, pp. 61 - 62.

<sup>65</sup> The infamous quote comes from the title of H.G. Wells book, *The War That Will End War* (London 1914).

As the largest war in history regarding the sheer number of countries involved, lives lost and general devastation to date, the overall shock and immense grief caused by the Great War was felt across Europe in the immediate post-war period. As a result and perhaps more poignantly as a wider initiative, ‘the war to end all wars’ led to the unprecedented proliferation of hundreds of thousands of memorials in commemoration of the sorrow and sacrifice.<sup>66</sup> In fact, the war itself changed the wider nature of national memorialisation entirely, for the first time immortalising the national sacrifice of the average man, the soldier hero.<sup>67</sup>

In Italy, this commemoration became known through the creation of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier or *Milite Ignoto* and rallied around the unidentifiable remains of soldiers sent back from the front at the end of the conflict.<sup>68</sup> This initiative was state driven and institutionalized through legislation in 1921 which called for a commission to organise the erection of state commemorations that varied from monuments to mourning rituals by utilizing the unidentified bodies as spiritual centrepieces. The *Milite Ignoto* was therefore presented as the spiritual embodiment of Italian manhood in a national and public way and set the precedent for the new Italian man. As a political movement in the very process of self-identification, the very essence of fascism ‘thought of itself as the inheritor of the war experience’.<sup>69</sup> Thus, in its most fitting symbolic form, this was illustrated by the movement’s inflation of the cult of the *Milite Ignoto*, shortly after the March on Rome. The nascent PNF needed as much a live role model and leader who exposed all these new manly ideals to follow, just as they had a dead national martyr, the physical embodiment of which came to be adopted by Mussolini.<sup>70</sup> As the prototype of a new type of leader in 20<sup>th</sup>-century Europe, the Duce and creation of his cult became integral to the Fascist regime and provided the political culture in which Graziani would also be mythicised during the *ventennio* as a similar prototype of this new ideal fascist man, one who had ‘a love of combat and confrontation’.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> J. Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge, 1995), p. 102.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid*,

<sup>68</sup> E. Pozzi, ‘Il Duce e il Milite Ignoto: dialettica di due corpi politici’, *Rassegna Italiana di Sociologia*, 39/3 (1998), pp. 333 – 358.

<sup>69</sup> Mosse, *Image of Man*, p. 155.

<sup>70</sup> Pozzi, ‘Il Duce e il Milite Ignoto: dialettica di due corpi politici’.

<sup>71</sup> Mosse, *Image of Man*, p. 156.

Consequently, the cult of Mussolini as a dictator was ‘complex and multifaceted to which various factors contributed’ and provided the classic exemplar upon which other Italian men deemed as ‘exceptional’ in the new regime should follow.<sup>72</sup> These factors were a specific amalgamation of the traditional and the modern, from Italy’s long preoccupation with the exaltation of this new type of man and the contemporary context which urged the need for a new ‘strong’ leader, to a ritualisation of the public space and the mythicisation of traditions in a new age of mass politics and popular culture, and Mussolini’s own self-fashioning.<sup>73</sup> The combination of these elements were culminated in the Duce’s own overbearing public presence literal and figurative; at political rallies, in speeches, newspapers, posters, and other kinds of visual and literary propaganda. By use of these methods, the characteristics that Mussolini was largely perceived to possess added to his persona, and detailed by one of his contemporaries, describing him as ‘un emotivo ed un impulsivo persuasivo, molto intelligente, coraggioso ed audace, ambiziosissimo’ before his rise to power in 1919.<sup>74</sup>

The propaganda surrounding the Duce was couched with military expressions and words such as ‘struggle, courage, heroism, intransigence, cowardice, death, glory, discipline, war, mission, martyr, sacrifice’, all designed to ‘militarily’ indoctrinate Italian civilians.<sup>75</sup> This bellicose nature of Mussolini and violence advocated by the new regime was mirrored by Graziani during his career in the 1920s and supported early popular depictions of him. His willingness to utilise violent methods in military campaigns in the colonies distinguished him from his comrades and superiors and resulted in his rapid veneration by the government, tying him intrinsically to the intensification of Fascist violence abroad. As demonstrated beforehand, virility had long been portrayed as a virtue in ideals of militarised masculinity, but the birth of fascism incited the normalisation of violence in the public sphere.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> S. Gundle, C. Duggan, G. Pieri, (eds.) *The Cult of the Duce: Mussolini and the Italians* (Manchester, 2013), Introduction by the editors.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> G. Gasti cited in R. De Felice, & L. Goglia, *Mussolini: Il Mito* (Bari, 1983), p. 98.

<sup>75</sup> T. Koon, *Believe, Obey, Fight: Political Socialisation of Youth in Fascist Italy 1922-1943* (North Carolina, 1985), p. 11.

<sup>76</sup> C. Ferrari, *The Rhetoric of Violence and Sacrifice in Fascist Italy: Mussolini, Gadda, Vittorini* (Toronto, 2013), p. 5.

An intensification of aggression is also reflected in Fascist foreign policy in the 1920s in the transfer of power from Liberal Italy. There exists continued scholarly debate over consistencies and rupture in Italian foreign relations from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to the rise of Mussolini, and in turn the extent of coherence in his policies throughout his reign.<sup>77</sup> This debate started with the early Salvemini interpretation of the Duce's constant improvisation on all foreign matters, to De Felice's argument that his foreign policy was a reflection of the domestic, which undoubtedly fluctuated but retained a degree of conformity throughout.<sup>78</sup> For the purpose of this thesis, however, interest lies in the redirection of scholarly interest in Italian foreign affairs to another area of discussion, that of ties between the Liberal and the Fascist regimes. Whilst there remains more congruence in this particular debate which favours the hypothesis of continuity, the primary focus of historians here is Italy's relations with other European powers and not Italian Imperial endeavours elsewhere. Whilst Richard Bosworth and Macgregor Knox agree that Mussolini shared the view of previous liberal elites in raising the nation to the 'great power' status through domination of the Mediterranean and the acquisition of colonial territories, little attention is still paid to the power and extent of this ideology.<sup>79</sup> As Graziani's military career was dominated by combat and ruling in North and East Africa, attention will here be paid to Italy's interests in Africa.

Italian imperial ambition in Africa first became evident in the 1880s with the colonisation of Eritrea and protectorate over a large part of present-day Somalia, then named Italian-Somaliland. More blatantly however, the link between the nation's imperial ambition in the continent between the Liberal and Fascist governments, can be seen following the Italo-Turkish War over Libya in 1911. Italy won the conflict within a year, but a struggle for complete control with indigenous resistance movements continued throughout the rest of the Liberal period, as Italian domination only extended along the coast. As a consequence, the war for the complete subjugation of Libya was inherited by the Fascist government in 1922. Graziani's participation in both Libyan conflicts are further testament to a continuity in Italian ambitions in Libya. As already

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<sup>77</sup> S. Azzi, 'The Historiography of Fascist Foreign Policy', *The Historical Journal*, 36/1, (1993), pp. 187 – 203.

<sup>78</sup> See G. Salvemini, *Prelude to World War II* (Indiana, 1953); R. De Felice, *Mussolini Il Fascista* (Torino, 1968).

<sup>79</sup> M. Knox, *Common Destiny: Dictatorship, Foreign Policy & War in Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 114.

noted, he briefly fought in the Italo-Turkish War and following World War I, was sent back to Libya in 1921 on the eve of the *ventennio* and remained until his move to Italian Somaliland to the post of Governor in 1935. Although rising to fame under Mussolini's regime, his life and profession primarily as a soldier of the Italian imperial cause is symptomatic of the nation's longstanding colonial intent and not just Fascist aspiration.

*The 'Pacification' of Libya: Early Written Representations of Graziani*

The relationship between national identity, popular imperialism and the cultural imagining of masculinities is therefore undeniable in this case and whilst being implicitly acknowledged by scholars of Italian history, it has yet to be fully explored. The portrayal of Graziani in national newspapers at the dawn of his military campaigns in Libya from 1922, however, sheds light on the nature of early Fascist colonial culture with regard to these themes. This period is still neglected by historians of the *ventennio* who continue to focus their research instead on the Ethiopian campaign of 1935 where sources are more copious and readily available after a fuller consolidation of a Fascist national culture.

In the absence of previous theories applied directly to the Italian case, my research uses the work of Anne McClintock on race and gender in early colonial Britain to examine representations of Graziani's initiatives in Libya in the 1920s. McClintock's thesis suggests that during periods of colonial invasion, the establishment of myths surrounding the site and surrounding of conquest were crucial to the imagining of empire, nation, and masculine ideals in the British Empire.<sup>80</sup> Emphasis was therefore placed on the terrain in which soldiers crossed, which in its earliest form, 'involved both a gender and a racial dispossession' embodied by the 'myth of the virgin land' to be raped by the white man.<sup>81</sup> In these early representations of these unexplored and 'empty' lands, locals and adversaries were thus excluded from early narratives as the land took on a 'feminine' and 'foreign' identity to contrast the paternalistic warriors of the nation state.<sup>82</sup> Even though the young nation of Italy arrived later than other European nations in its search for 'a place in the sun', it was no different in its early colonial representation

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<sup>80</sup> A. McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender & Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York, 1995), pp. 24 – 30.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*



of the African continent, its inhabitants, and the role these portrayals had in the fashioning of an Italian ‘masculine’ national identity.

As Graziani was seen and portrayed as a symbol of colonial victory from the outset, he became a primary ‘hero of the frontier’ against the elements or the unfamiliar deserts and climate of Libya. Shortly after arriving in Libya, he was called upon to head a military column on an offensive in the region of Gebel in 1921 by the Ministry of War. His first big breakthrough in the conquest of this geographically strategic terrain took place shortly after in 1922 and was reflected in early victorious representations of Graziani and his men in February 1923. As stated in *Corriere della Sera*, ‘la colonna del Gebel comandata dal colonello Graziani ha proseguito (la) marcia difficilissima, su terreno roccioso e impervio’.<sup>83</sup> Similarly, in 1924, in an ‘arida regione desertica’, ‘sabbiosa’, with little water in addition to being blinded by the sand storms, Graziani was seen to have managed the conclusion of important operations in ‘terreno intricato’.<sup>84</sup> His disciplined leadership is also revealed as newspapers were keen to note that his military column took little rest and described his unwavering energy despite the tough conditions his soldiers found themselves in, resulting in the conquest of vast distances in a shorter time than other military units. This is illustrated by an excerpt praising ‘la colonna Graziani’ on front-page news on the 28<sup>th</sup> of February 1923: ‘Occupata Sliten dopo solo una giornata di riposo, le nostre infaticabili truppe riprendono la loro marcia. Oggi dopo solo quattro mesi il territorio in nostro completo dominio è più che raddoppiato’.<sup>85</sup>

One difference, however, between early British, French and indeed German representations of colonial conquest and Italian ones, was the censorship of violence, a convenient ‘gap’ in historical knowledge that has had repercussions on public awareness of colonial atrocities that are evident and disputed to this very day.<sup>86</sup> At the time of conquest other European powers usually censored their use of violence in attempts to rally popular support for the imperial cause and provide the foundation for their Imperial

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<sup>83</sup> ‘Cussabat occupata’, *Corriere Della Sera* (6 Febbraio 1923) p. 2.

<sup>84</sup> ‘Le Operazioni di grande polizia conclusa in Cirenaica’, *Corriere della Sera* (21 Maggio 1924), p. 1.

<sup>85</sup> ‘La Colonna Graziani’, *Corriere della Sera* (28 Febbraio 1923), p. 1.

<sup>86</sup> See L. Martin (ed.) *Le censures dans le monde XIXe – XXIe siècle* (Rennes, 2016).

national narratives.<sup>87</sup> The peculiarities of the Italian national case, however, become evident here especially with the glorification of Graziani and his brutal actions against local resistance groups. As an operation of national ‘pacification’, Libyan rebels quickly appeared in descriptions of the Libyan campaign, so the ‘myth’ of an empty land was countered with an additional obstacle and the use of force was favoured by the Fascist government in prioritising rapid victories against all resistors. Personally entrusted from 1922 with ‘l’incarico di ristabilire ordine’, Graziani was regarded by the press from the outset as a key player in wiping out ‘rebel’ forces.<sup>88</sup> The correspondent for *Corriere della Sera* therefore did not hold back in proudly proclaiming that in just three months ‘travolgendo la resistenza di un migliaio di ribelli cui inflisse gravissimi perdite...la colonna Graziani (ha) riportato sul castello di Giosc il tricolore dopo 7 anni’.<sup>89</sup>

The use of violence became even more explicitly commended in an excerpt from 1923 when ‘una svoltazione magnifica, bombardando e mitragliando l’avversario...lasciando morto sul terreno oltre 100 morti contatti’.<sup>90</sup> Thus, the unapologetic use of brutal language in these early years was specific to the Italian Fascist colonial context where violence was acceptable, justified and even encouraged against ‘adversaries’ to Italian imperial rule. In fact, the idea of ‘colonial obedience achieved through repression’ quickly became an accepted and popular one, as fantasised in Luciano’s Zuccoli’s novel entitled *Kif Tebbi* that was inspired by and celebrated Graziani’s assaults in this period as the writer travelled with Graziani in the early 1920s and witnessed his tactics first-hand.<sup>91</sup> The book was made into a film in 1928 and was one of the first colonial films to be financially subsidised by the Fascist regime.<sup>92</sup> This marks one of the regime’s first evident signs of investment in the myth of Graziani in early Fascist visual colonial culture.

A few years later, progress had been made due to such merciless tactics and the region of Gebel was finally under Italian control; this led to Graziani’s promotion to the rank

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<sup>87</sup> See ‘Part One. Sights of Authority: Imperial Domination and Press Intervention’ in J. Codell (ed.) *Imperial Co-Histories: National Identities & the British and Colonial Press* (London, 2003).

<sup>88</sup> ‘Conflitti coi ribelli nella regione di Zavia’, *Corriere della Sera* (25 Aprile 1922), p. 2.

<sup>89</sup> ‘Ribelli Tripolitani sconfitti a 200 chilometri dalla costa’, *Corriere della Sera* (15 Giugno 1922), p. 2.

<sup>90</sup> ‘In Tripolitania: i particolari dell’azione su Sliten, Tenace resistenza superata’, *Corriere della Sera* (25 Febbraio 1923), p. 1.

<sup>91</sup> R. Ben-Ghiat, *Italian Fascism’s Empire Cinema* (Indiana, 2015), p. 32.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

of general, more characteristically titled, ‘il generale della riconquista’ in *Corriere della Sera*.<sup>93</sup> This period was therefore a crucial one not just in marking the initial cultural cementation of the myth of Graziani in the public eye and furthermore notably of associating his name in the formation of national memory, as explicitly noted by the national newspaper:

l’Italia deve ricordare questi nomi: Generale Graziani, Generale Mezetti, Colonello Pintor, Tenente Colonello Amadeo Di Savoia-Aosta; quattro uomini che hanno, con una magnifica affermazione di comando e di disciplina, definitivamente dimostrato che le conquiste coloniali vanno affidate a temperamenti che armonizzino l’azione vigorosa e dura.<sup>94</sup>

As evident from the quote above, Italy is seen as a homogenous and united entity that needs to acknowledge and pay regard to the four men who succeeded in colonial conquest by using ‘vigorous’ and ‘hard’ action. A general differentiation, however, can be noted between Graziani and his colleagues (also mentioned above) and reflected in his further promotion to the vice military and political leader of the region of Cirenaica in March 1930. Lengthy and more frequent journalistic descriptions of him in the national newspaper *Corriere della Sera* along with the choice of language associated to him also stood him apart from his comrades, as supported in the following quote which read ‘(Graziani), il cui ascendente sulle popolazioni del sud vorremmo definire leggendario’.<sup>95</sup>

Having further proved himself in the conquest of Ghibli, Graziani was allowed to lead the named ‘reconquest’ of the province of Fezzan, which had been lost during the First World War, with ‘ampia libertà di manovra...e alle sue truppe sperimentate’, by the new governor of Tripolitania and Cirenaica in the spring of 1929, Pietro Badoglio.<sup>96</sup> Through heavy combat, rigid surveillance, and control of local populations in order to weed out the armed resistance and isolate it from supply sources, Graziani gained control of the region in a mere two month stint, resulting in his nomination as the Vice Governor of

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<sup>93</sup> ‘Il generale della riconquista’, *Corriere della Sera* (19 Aprile 1928), p. 1.

<sup>94</sup> ‘l’Unità della Libia è compiuta’, *Corriere della Sera* (26 Febbraio 1928), p. 1.

<sup>95</sup> ‘La migliorata situazione libica’, *Corriere della Sera* (25 Luglio 1929), p. 2.

<sup>96</sup> Mayda, *Graziani l’Africano*, p. 67.

Cirenaica. The relevance of his success in Fezzan is that it marked the first detailed published book chronicling the campaign in 1929 written by an esteemed member of the colonial administration, Lino Zecchettin di Castelleone. Impressions of Graziani as a tough, organized and disciplined leader were automatically assumed as desirable characteristics as Zecchettin described him giving orders to his soldiers: ‘Il generale fece suonare il gran rapporto. Gli ordini furono rapidi, secchi, precisi: “triplicare le guardie, centuplicare l’attenzione di esse, niente tende, niente fuochi, niente rumori, dormire vestiti!” Disse’.<sup>97</sup>

Zecchettin’s description of Graziani’s physical attributes also provide the first notable sign of the aesthetic mythicisation of the general, which is always a fundamental component in the process of heroisation. Furthermore, Zecchettin’s confident comparison of Graziani to Italy’s national hero and founding father, Garibaldi, is self-evident in intertwining Graziani into national discourse:

Maneggiata dalle braccia muscolose di un ercole leggendario...lo sguardo d’aquila, immobilizzava le lingue più fiere, chiudeva le labbra più arditi. A tal vista non si può non pensare a Garibaldi a Mentana; passando gli anni, cambiano i luoghi, ma una cosa sola rimane a sagacia dei comandanti, il valore dei soldati.<sup>98</sup>

This transition in the emphasis of representation of Graziani may appear discreet at this stage but indicates a fundamental break or transition in the initial creation of his myth, and therefore marks the end of this chapter. Furthermore, Graziani’s written preface to Zecchettin’s book marked the beginning of Graziani’s active role in his own glorification. His added preface indicates that he read, approved of his representation in the book, and by formally introducing it, actively supported and legitimised its contents.

Overall, Graziani’s undeniably rapid reconquest of Fezzan was not only a highly strategic victory in the process of the entire Italian occupation of Libya, but it was, according to Badoglio, also noted abroad, and thus tied Graziani’s victory directly to the

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<sup>97</sup> L. Zecchettin, *Alloro sulle carovaniere: episodi eroici di guerra coloniale* (Tripoli, 1929), p. 113.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid*, p. 117.

nation's long-awaited prestige on an international scale for the first time.<sup>99</sup> The first notable signs of the Italian media's increased attention in him in this period are also undeniably intrinsic to the beginning of his clear mythicisation. As noted by Berenson, 'only when the media paid considerable attention to a particular person, covering his deeds and accomplishments...did the public gain enough information to endow a given individual with the potential for charisma' or exemplarity.<sup>100</sup> Furthermore, by the dawn of the 1930s, the first state attempts to integrate Graziani's name into the building of Italian national memory in the colonies can be seen from a contemporary postcard found online which shows a Libyan square named 'piazza Generale Graziani', dating to 1931 (*figure 1*).<sup>101</sup> Thus, political action in favour of Graziani's permanent heroisation no printed pages and edifices had begun.



*Figure 1: Cartolina Piazza Generale Graziani (1931) Bought online on Ebay*

<sup>99</sup> P. Badoglio, 'Proposta per avanzamento per merito di guerra al comandante Rodolfo Graziani', ACS, F. RG, B 11 (23 Maggio 1931).

<sup>100</sup> Berenson, *Heroes of Empire*, p. 19.

<sup>101</sup> *Figure 1: Cartolina Piazza Generale Graziani (1931) Bought online on Ebay.*

## 2. Inculcating the Myth: Graziani in the 1930s

This chapter continues to trace the fashioning of Graziani as a national hero in the 1930s. Whilst the previous chapter focused on the selection process, that is, why Graziani emerged as the model for the new Italian man and colonial soldier, this chapter is concerned with the ways in which his myth was designed to reach a mass audience. As we have already seen, the press already began to establish Graziani as an idealised symbol of masculinity in the 1920s stressing his patriotic fervour, dynamism on the battlefield, and willingness to use violence. The culture of colonialism and portrayal of Graziani and his military endeavours in the 1930's was instead dictated by further state control, heavy censorship and a greater emphasis on aesthetics. Thus, by the 1930's just as Dawson argues with his own case-studies of soldier heroes, Graziani had come to 'provide a cultural focus around which the national community could cohere'.<sup>1</sup>

Earlier scholarly consensus and broad histories of the period have dictated that this intensification of colonial propaganda was designed to gain popular support for the Ethiopian War and began in the autumn of 1935, signifying a 'cultural revolution'.<sup>2</sup> My sources, similar more recent investigations and localized studies, indicate, however, that the power of the image and the cultivation of the various myths surrounding Graziani and the Fascist Empire in Africa predated the conflict.<sup>3</sup> I argue that the inculcation and the promotion of the *Nuovo Uomo Italiano*, embodied by Graziani, actually began in the early 1930s with the end of the 'pacification' of Libya. This hypothesis therefore further indicates more of a progressive linearity and continuity in Fascist foreign policy and colonial culture throughout the *ventennio* from the outset than previously supposed. This notion, however, does not signify that Ethiopian War did not provide a turning point in Fascist cultural policy as the wealth of images, films, radio discourses and publications support the notion that the propaganda campaign for this war paled in comparison to previous Italian conflicts abroad.<sup>4</sup> It merely suggests that whilst Graziani emerged from

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<sup>1</sup> Dawson, *Soldier Heroes*, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> See for eg. M. Ebner, *Ordinary Violence in Mussolini's Italy* (Cambridge, 2011), p. 166 or S. Payne, *A History of Fascism 1914-1945* (Madison, 1995), pp. 212 – 244.

<sup>3</sup> See for eg. G. Finaldi, *A History of Italian Colonialism 1900-1934* (N.Y. 2016).

<sup>4</sup> Nicola Labanca was one of the first historians to reveal the extent and effects of colonial culture in Modern Italy, see for eg. N. Labanca, *Una Guerra per l'Impero: Memorie della Campagna d'Etiopia, 1935 -1945* (Bologna, 2005), p. 45.

the successful campaign as one of the founding fathers of the Italian empire, this myth had already been created and introduced into the public sphere with the Libyan campaign. The Ethiopian War thus served as means of consolidation, not just domestically but also on an international level. Thus, as we shall see, the ritualisation of the Graziani myth through political spectacle can be seen in this period through mainstream publications, official photographs, newsreels, and public events that were designed for mass consumption in the metropole.

*The 'Pacification' of Libya & Literary Publications*

The first signs of an intensified mainstream propaganda exalting Graziani came in literary form, written none other than by the protagonist himself, detailing his notable military successes, excesses and following more promotions. After Graziani's successes in Fezzan, as the new Vice Governor of Cirenaica, his responsibilities were extended to more than just combat and military leadership upon Badoglio's recommendation that Graziani:

Rilevandosi abile ed oculato amministratore, portando brillantemente a termine in meno di tre mesi il compito da me affidatogli, spazzando tutta quella vasta e desertica regione di ogni formazione ribelle e organizzandola sollecitamente ed in modo esemplare.<sup>5</sup>

Now that he held a prestigious post in overseeing all colonial affairs, he was granted a greater amount of autonomy in decision-making in the realms of politics, the economy, and cultural affairs of Italian Libya. This immediately led him to another swift colonial victory as he planned and organised the deportation of a hundred thousand Cyrenaicans from their homeland into concentration camps.<sup>6</sup> This extreme initiative was designed to isolate members of the local population from anti-colonial 'rebels' who fought in the resistance against Italian rule, as it was believed that the local people were the lifeline to the Libyan resistance in terms of resources, communication and organisation.<sup>7</sup> Detained by kilometres of barbed wire fences, it remains unknown how many people died in these

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<sup>5</sup> P. Badoglio, 'Proposta per avanzamento per merito di guerra al comandante Rodolfo Graziani', ACS, F. RG, B. 11 (23 Maggio 1931).

<sup>6</sup> G. Rochat, *Il Colonialismo Italiano* (Michigan, 1973), p. 127.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

camps, with terrible living conditions in terms of inadequate food provision, poor sanitation and brutal regulation enforcement.<sup>8</sup>

Censorship resulted in a complete journalistic silence of these camps in the press coverage of the campaign, which was countered with more praise for Graziani. This elevation rocketed when he finally brought a formal end to the resistance in the region by capturing and executing the long sought-out Senussi leader, Omar al-Mukhtar in mid-September 1931. Since the beginning of the ‘pacification’ Italian generals had unsuccessfully been hunting al-Mukhtar who had organised and led many successful resistance attacks against Italian forces across the desert.<sup>9</sup> Al-Mukhtar was first raised as a teacher in Cirenaica before joining the Muslim political-religious order, the Senussites, in Libya where he was sent by them to defend Chad from the French as one of the clan’s many anti-colonial missionary activities. He began his anti-colonial resistance in Libya during the Italo-Turkish war of 1911 and continued resistance against the Italian army during World War I. Thus, by the early 1920’s, al-Mukhtar had become highly skilled in desert warfare against European forces and became the popular leader of the natively armed resistance to the Italian ‘pacification’ of Libya.<sup>10</sup>

Thus, upon his capture, Italian newspapers proudly announced an end to ‘la leggenda della invulnerabilità di Omar el Mukhtar agli occhi dei seguaci’ deemed ‘infido e crudele come un eroe sovranaturale’ on the 16<sup>th</sup> of September 1931.<sup>11</sup> The fascist paper founded by Mussolini himself back in 1914, *Il Popolo d’Italia* awarded Graziani sole responsibility for ending the ‘rebellion’ and finding al-Mukhtar. The paper clearly stated that despite previous efforts:

con i precedenti governi... non si era potuto stroncare definitivamente la ribellione ... si riaccendeva subito dopo... si deve a generale Graziani se ogni rapporto fu rotto tra i ribelli armati e i sottomessi. la cattura di Omar el

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<sup>8</sup> Labanca, *Oltremare: Storia della Espansione Coloniale Italiana* (Bologna, 2002), p. 175.

<sup>9</sup> A Del Boca, *Gli Italiani in Libya. Volume II: Dal Fascismo a Gheddafi* (Bari, 1986).

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> ‘La Cattura di Omar el-Mukhtar: capo dei ribelli di Cirenaica’, *Il Messaggero* (16 Settembre 1931), p. 1.



Mukhtar è dovuta anzitutto al ferreo sistema di governo del vicegovernatore generale Graziani.<sup>12</sup>

Within a day of the announcement of his arrest, al-Mukhtar was tried and condemned with capital punishment for ‘i suoi numerosi atti di tradimento e di ribellione armata.’<sup>13</sup> The apparent ‘trial’ and nature of his sentencing was remained conveniently vague in Italian newspaper reports as it is probable that the Fascist government wanted their adversary permanently eliminated as quickly as possible to avoid local disturbances and before any questions about his alleged crimes were raised by international commentators further afield. He was immediately executed on the 16<sup>th</sup> of September by public hanging in one of the concentration camps organised by Graziani in Suluq. Therefore, the capture and public hanging of al-Mukhtar gave a clear message to the populations of both Libya and Italy. In Italy, al-Mukhtar’s arrest resulted in a huge propagandistic triumph for the Vice Governor, emphatically marking the start of a new era, and bringing an abrupt and formal end to the resistance in the public eye. In Libya, it proved a devastating blow to all resisters to Italian rule and demonstrated the violence and brutality the Italians and indeed Graziani were willing to use against them.

Consequentially, al-Mukhtar’s violent death by the Italians granted him the immortal status of national martyrdom in Libyan collective memory and caused the ultimate vilification of Graziani as al-Mukhtar’s ultimate adversary, and by default, an enemy of Libya. In fact, during his lifetime, al-Mukhtar was often called ‘the Lion of the Desert’ or ‘Assad El-Sahra’ in Arabic by his contemporary supporters.<sup>14</sup> The choice of al-Mukhtar’s nickname by his followers is striking as it is the exact same name later utilised by Graziani’s followers for him before World War II. Therefore, both lions came to be highly symbolic amongst their respective supporters and nations, representative of national resistance to European imperialism in al-Mukhtar’s case, and conversely Italian colonial domination of the African continent in Graziani’s case. The emblematic choice of a lion for both figures was a historically potent one, as the lion had long represented the ‘king of beasts’ in medieval heraldry.<sup>15</sup> Thus, it had been traditionally established as

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<sup>12</sup> ‘Brillante Azione di accerchiamento in Cirenaica: Omar el Mukhtar, capo dei ribelli, fatto prigioniero’, *Il Popolo d’Italia* (16 Settembre 1931), p. 1.

<sup>13</sup> ‘Omar el Muctar è stato gustiziato’, *Il Messaggero* (17 Settembre 1931), p. 1.

<sup>14</sup> A. Muhammad as Salabi, *Omar Al Mokhtar: Lion of the Desert* (2011).

<sup>15</sup> O. Neubercker, *Heraldry: Sources, Symbols & Meaning* (N.Y. 1976).

a fierce symbol that evoked physical strength, force, bravery, leadership and indeed fear amongst all enemies.

In Italy, by concluding the end of the lengthy ‘pacification’ of the Libya, Graziani was celebrated as the figure responsible for Italy’s long-awaited victory in Libya and named ‘Graziani l’Africano’ in *Il Popolo d’Italia*.<sup>16</sup> He therefore became the preeminent authority on the conflict in Italy, inciting the publication of his first notable book on Italian colonialism, *Cirenaica Pacificata*, in 1932. The book, and indeed others written by him in the early 1930s harmoniously corroborated official depictions of the Libyan campaign in the selection of content and prose. The primary focus in his early written works was indeed the arduous description of the landscape as analysed in the previous chapter as being the primary ‘foe’ and a convenient omission of his policies and actions directed against Libyan natives. For example, in *Cirenaica Pacificata* he described the conditions he and his soldiers endured in the desert during their advances as ‘squallore, sofferenze, triste’ due to ‘la bufera di vento sabbioso e l’immensità del deserto’.<sup>17</sup> There is even little mention or analysis of Libyan adversaries or the use of violent language at this early stage which remained the preserve of the press. *Il Corriere della Sera* advertised the work by defining the book ‘una bella pagina di storia coloniale’ before dedicating a lengthy article to commend it.<sup>18</sup> The book’s contents and Graziani’s writing style were praised as the paper assured readers that it was ‘uno di quei libri che si leggono come romanza e si consultano come manuali’.<sup>19</sup> Thus, Graziani’s viewpoint and tale of events in the book were uncritically accepted and promoted by the Italian press and presented as such to the Italian public.

In fact, no other colonial generals wrote as many texts as Graziani, amounting to around seven in his lifetime, which undoubtedly drew more attention to him as the most prominent figure to emerge from all of Fascist Italy’s wars in Africa. Five of these works were written in the 1930s first detailing his operations in Cyrenaica and the latter being published after the Ethiopian conflict in 1935. By formally documenting his experiences for others to read, the first tangible signs of Graziani’s own interest in the fostering of

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<sup>16</sup> ‘Graziani l’Africano’, *Il Popolo d’Italia* (11 Febbraio 1932), p. 1.

<sup>17</sup> R. Graziani, *Cirenaica Pacificata* (Milano, 1934), p. 192.

<sup>18</sup> ‘La Cirenaica Pacificata’, *Corriere della Sera* (1 Dicembre 1932), p. 5.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

his reputation become evident. They demonstrate an attempt to control how he was represented and more fundamentally show an active effort to engage in the public sphere, by putting himself in direct contact with the national audience. A letter from Graziani to Galeazzo Ciano in his archive illustrates that he was also involved in providing instructions to the publicity of his second book, *La Riconquista del Fezzan*, in the press, stating that ‘io vorrei pregare ora vivamente la E.V. di volersi compiacere di dare precise disposizioni alla stampa in genere’.<sup>20</sup> The letter furthermore supports the notion that his books were in fact utilised not merely by him but also by the government as means of promoting his heroism. Thus, the state’s investment in his fame as an emerging cultural commodity cannot be denied.

The publishing house for *Cirenaica Pacificata* and *La Rinconquista del Fezzan*, and in fact all of his books until the outbreak of the Second World War, is of vital importance as it was Italy’s largest and most successful during the Fascist regime. Its owner and founder, Arnaldo Mondadori, was a supporter of Mussolini from the outset and closely collaborated with the Party, in terms of promoting and selling works supported by the regime until the armistice of 1943.<sup>21</sup> Mondadori’s publication of these two books are therefore testament to the government’s formal backing of the promotion of Graziani’s image as hero and leader of the nation’s recent colonial triumph in Libya. It must be mentioned however, that even though Arnaldo was a ‘supporter della prima ora’, Guido Bonsaver argues that ‘Mondadori’s support for fascism was more the result of the publisher’s intention to boost his business than a sign of genuine political passion’.<sup>22</sup> Thus, Graziani’s books also proved commercially successful as Mondadori continued to publish Graziani’s other works that he produced throughout the 1930s, implying his genuine popularity amongst public readership. As with all enduring myths, state action coupled with the agency of the consumers to provide a solid foundation to the heroisation of Graziani.

Books written about Graziani also started to appear in the same period as part of political attempts to boost his popularity. The most eminent was written by a fervid member of the Fascist Party and a leader of the squadristi, Sandro Sandri, who established his

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<sup>20</sup> Graziani, ‘Lettera a Galeazzo Ciano’, ACS, Min. Cul. Pop: Gabinetto, B. 6 (10 Novembre 1934).

<sup>21</sup> G. Bonsaver, *Censorship and Literature in Fascist Italy* (Toronto, 2007) p. 43.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

reputation as the most distinguished journalist of Italy's wars in Libya in Ethiopia, writing primarily for the national *Il Popolo d'Italia* and *La Stampa* of Turin. Sandri spent four months travelling with Graziani's troops in 1931 during the Cyrenaican campaign and consequently wrote a hagiographical work entitled *Il Generale Rodolfo Graziani* in 1935. For the first time, in this book, all elements that were required in the invention of a contemporary hero can be seen as embodied by Graziani, as Sandri concluded 'egli, il simbolo dell'Italia Nuova, quella di Vittorio Veneto e del Fascismo'.<sup>23</sup> Sandri's work attempted to elevate Graziani to an even higher mythical status than previous interpretations, stating that 'chi in Graziani ha visto o vede soltanto il soldato commette infatti un errore grossolano'.<sup>24</sup> The assertion is adamant that previous commentators who may have emphasised Graziani's attributes as primarily a soldier underestimated Graziani's significance on a wider scale in other realms of influence. Sandri gave many examples of one of these attributes that he perceived Graziani to pertain from his 'innate instincts' and 'intelligence' that were repeatedly referred to throughout the publication or his 'acuta conoscenza di uomini e di cose, sempre affinatasi in lui, lo farà apparire un personaggio da leggenda'.<sup>25</sup> Sandri thus portrayed him as the quintessential icon of Italy's new empire; a compensatory of Italy's past military failures, and the model for all Italian men as:

Inflexibile con sé stesso, il generale era con gli altri d'una durezza, ma nello stesso tempo d'una umanità specialissima, che li procurava oltre l'ossequio e il rispetto, nei giovani, che lo adoravano, quanto nei vecchi commilitoni, che, in lui, senza invidie vedevano l'uomo superiore...sempre vittorioso.<sup>26</sup>

As evidence from the excerpt above, along with respect and awe supposedly enjoyed by his men, Graziani was seen as incredibly self-disciplined and in turn able to instil obedience in others through discipline, which was the highest virtue to be associated with the Uomo Nuovo Italiano in Fascist Italy.<sup>27</sup> The remaining characteristic needed for the heroisation of such figures, that was also attributed to Graziani by Sandri in his work, although to a lesser extent than the traits mentioned above, was his 'straordinaria fisica',

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<sup>23</sup> S. Sandri, *Il Generale Rodolfo Graziani* (Milano, 1935), p. 159.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, p. 17.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, p. 158.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 69 – 70.

<sup>27</sup> Koon, *Believe, Obey, Fight*, p. 14.

which, although already touched upon by Zecchetin in 1929, become more evident in this period.<sup>28</sup>

*The Power of the Image: Aesthetics, Appearance and Bodily Ideals*

Aesthetics have long been of prime importance to manly ideals. The idolisation of male figures throughout history has always resulted in blending the ideological with the physical, that is, the human body.<sup>29</sup> Nowhere has this notion been more relevant than in the case of Italy, as previously seen with the importance of Garibaldi's various physicalities, when he was venerated through various cultural means during the unification of the country.<sup>30</sup> After the turn of the century, the Italian futurists set the precedent for the intensification of this notion by cementing the relationship between the aesthetic 'beauty' of war, its warriors and aesthetic values.<sup>31</sup> The Duce adopted this ideology for a variety of reasons, and most notably in this case, to further promote his own cult of personality and provide a tangible ideal for the new Fascist Italian man.<sup>32</sup> Similar to Sandri's descriptions of Graziani in the previous section, contemporary admirers of Mussolini also often commented on his physical strength, which he encouraged by displaying his naked torso in public and wearing clothing that emphasised his muscles, thus providing a physical ideal and model of the belligerent leader.<sup>33</sup> These impressions of 'the Duce's physical courage and virility' became increasingly incremented by not only literary culture but also visual culture over the years, which, by the 1930s had become crucial to consensus of the regime.<sup>34</sup>

Unsurprisingly, given the Fascist cultural context, this also became the case with Graziani as visual culture cannot be overemphasized enough in the evolution of his prominence in the public sphere. Firstly whilst cultural historians David Forgacs and Stephen Gundle attain that a 'mass readership did exist throughout the Fascist period', they argued that overall, photographs proved more effective propaganda tools nationwide due to

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<sup>28</sup> Sandri, *Il Generale Rodolfo Graziani*, p. 64.

<sup>29</sup> T. Eagleton, *Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford, 1990), p. 114.

<sup>30</sup> Riall, 'Hero, Saint, or Revolutionary? Nineteenth-century Politics and the Cult of Garibaldi', *Modern Italy*, 3/2 (November 1998) pp. 191 - 204.

<sup>31</sup> C. Poggi, 'Metallised Flesh: Futurism and the Male Masculine Body', *Modernism/Modernity* 4/3, (1997) pp. 19 - 43.

<sup>32</sup> S. Falasca-Zamponi, *Fascist Spectacle: The Aesthetics of Power in Mussolini's Italy* (California, 1997), p. 148.

<sup>33</sup> G. Megaro, *Mussolini in the Making* (Woking, 1938), p. 126.

<sup>34</sup> Koon, *Believe, Obey, Fight*, pp. 15 - 16.

unproportionally high illiteracy rates in Italy compared to the rest of Western Europe until the 1950s.<sup>35</sup> According to such studies, the systemisation of photography as a primary propaganda tool under Mussolini is thus undeniable, and offers scholars of the period the possibility ‘di vedere come i suoi protagonisti si vedevano e volevano farsi vedere’, and in doing so enhances our understanding of how ‘la determinavano per le masse’.<sup>36</sup> In particular, colonial photography, whether official or private, provided the most direct means of communication with the metropole of on-going events on the African continent. Thus, this tool of ‘imagined’ realities was perhaps the most immediate and effective propagandistic method to reach Italian consumers in the 1930s. In his recent work on photography of Africa Orientale, David Forgacs has noted that ‘a principle function of colonial photographs was not just to provide support for the power of the colonisers but to perform or enact that very power in visual form: to show who was in control and how they were exercising that control’.<sup>37</sup> This suggests that the use of these genre of images as a historical source can go beyond its obvious purpose as mere evidence of official propaganda, if the contents of the photograph itself and the protagonists within it are analysed as actors in their own right.

Italian historians have already noted that of all the colonial generals to operate in Africa Orientale, Graziani quickly became the main figure and object of Fascist official photography due to his ‘volto maschio, da antico condottiero’.<sup>38</sup> Despite the wealth of public images of Graziani available in online archives such as the Archivio Storico del Istituto Luce or found directly in his personal photographic archive at the Archivio Centrale dello Stato in Rome no analysis has yet been carried out but will be attempted here. The first photographic reproductions of the general began to appear in mainstream newspapers in the late 1920s, and the earliest sign of him in an illustrated supplement occurred in 1932 in the annual *Almanacco Fascista del Popolo d’Italia*, but it does not go beyond the standardised headshot used for many military figures to appear in the press at the time. (*figure 2*)<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> D. Forgacs & S. Gundle, *Mass Culture & Italian Society from Fascism to the Cold War* (Indiana, 2007), p. 39.

<sup>36</sup> R. De Felice & L. Goglia, *Storia Fotografica del Fascismo* (Roma, 1981), p. VII.

<sup>37</sup> Forgacs, *Italy’s Margins: Social Exclusion & Nation Formation since 1861* (Cambridge, 2014), p. 137.

<sup>38</sup> Del Boca & Labanca, *L’Impero Africano nelle Fotografie dell’Istituto Luce* (Roma, 2002), p. 14.

<sup>39</sup> Figure 2: ‘In Cirenaica’, *Almanacco Fascista del Popolo d’Italia*, (1932), p. 322.



Figure 2: 'In Cirenaica', *Almanacco Fascista del Popolo d'Italia*, (1932), p. 322

So, the first notable official photographs of Graziani to be taken were during Vittorio Emanuele III's visit to Cyrenaica and Benghazi between the 24<sup>th</sup> of April and 5<sup>th</sup> of May 1933. The King was greeted and accompanied by Graziani, Badoglio and Emilio De Bono, Badoglio's predecessor, and indeed by government photographers from the national Gabinetto Fotografico.<sup>40</sup> As a state visit, the whole trip appears to have been staged as a performance of Italy's colonial power and dominion over Libya, with impressive military ceremonies and tours of recently conquered lands and cities. Although perhaps not intended to have been the primary propagandic focus of the visit, Graziani's overwhelming presence in the images is undeniable as he is nearly always at the central focus of the lens. His close proximity to the king, comparative height and imposing posture to that of the other generals all lead to his domination of the shots, as seen in *figures 3 & 4* for example.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Figures 3 & 4: 'Vittorio Emanuele III in visita', ACS, FF. RG, B.2 (Bengasi/Cirenaica 24 Aprile – 5 Maggio 1933).

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.



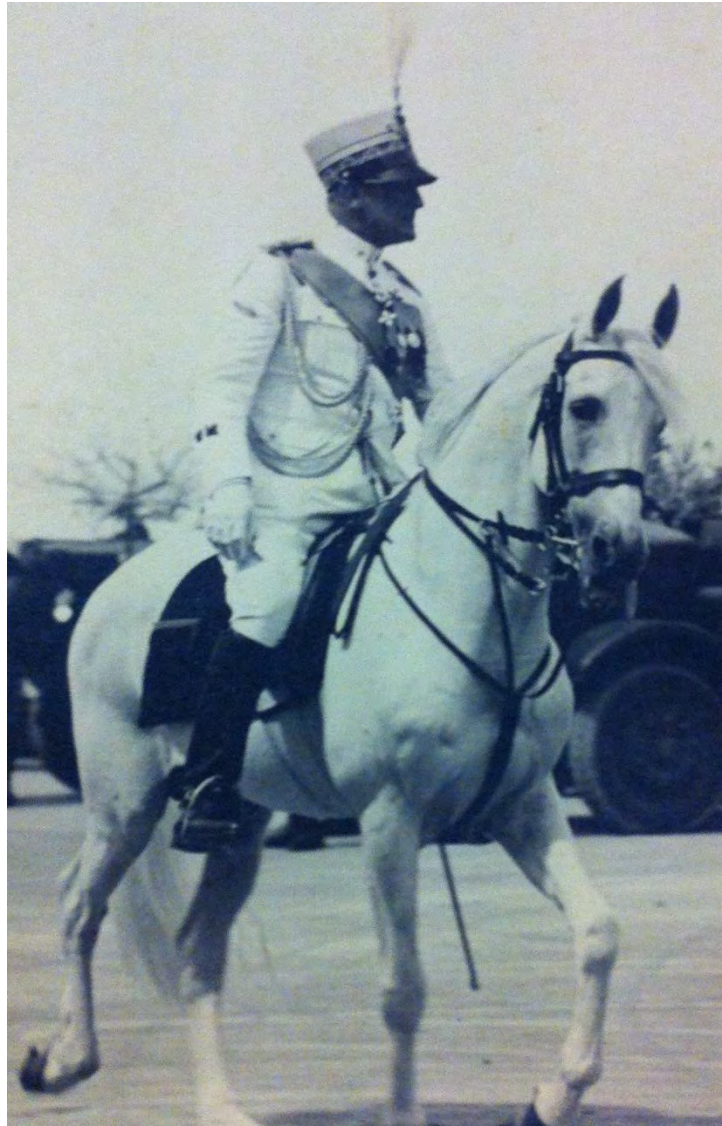
*Figures 3 & 4 (above and below): 'Vittorio Emanuele in visita', ACS, FF. RG, B.2 (Bengasi/Cirenaica 24 Aprile – 5 Maggio 1933)*



Although not evident in the images above due to his military overcoat, his military uniform was usually busily decorated with medals and badges of honour seen in *figure 5*.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Figure 5: 'Graziani in Cerimonia per l'arrivo di Vittorio Emanuele III', ACS, FF. RG, B. 1 (Tripolitania Aprile 1933).





*Figure 5: 'Graziani in Cerimonia per l'arrivo di Vittorio Emanuele III', ACS, FF. RG, B. 1 (Tripolitania Aprile 1933)*

These medals immediately marked him as a national hero by explicitly reflecting his position in the military and in the Fascist regime.<sup>43</sup> This utilisation of military uniforms and accessories at public ceremonies during the *ventennio* further emphasized the ideal of 'discipline' in 'fetishised' an iconic masculine form, that 'had a pedagogical and spectacular value in its address to the viewer'.<sup>44</sup> The use of colour of military uniforms was also fundamental to the creation of an militarised masculine ideal as the futurists had previously written about the importance of fashion, calling men to abandon the use of dark

<sup>43</sup> Falasca-Zamponi, *Fascist Spectacle*, p. 101.

<sup>44</sup> Ben-Ghiat, *Italian Fascism's Empire Cinema*, pp. 11 - 12.

and neutral colours, and adopt starker contrasts to emphasise ‘bellicosity’.<sup>45</sup> The most obvious example of this shift during the Fascist period were the black shirts, that is, the paramilitary wing of the Fascist Party. As a soldier, however, seemingly loyal to the nation and not the regime, Graziani never wore black. In combat, he wore a greyish green coloured uniform and overcoat like the rest of the army, as seen in the previous images. At some state functions, however, he often wore white, and when on horseback had a matching white horse to compliment the ensemble as seen in *figures 5 and 6*.<sup>46</sup>



*Figure 6: ‘Graziani in Cerimonia per l’arrivo di Vittorio Emanuele III’, ACS, FF. RG, B. 1 (Tripolitania Aprile 1933)*

In regard to his choice of horse in both figures, I assume that the Western historical tradition of equating white horses with the ‘divine’, which stems from the ancient Greek myth of the white winged horse Pegasus, played a symbolic role in the fashioning of Graziani.<sup>47</sup>

Furthermore, Ruth Ben-Ghiat argues that there is little coincidence that the senior commanders of the Ancient Roman Empire wore white to establish a deliberate connection between the past and present glory of the Italian nation. Ben Ghiat’s argument is corroborated by my analysis here of Graziani’s photographic archival sources.<sup>48</sup> In

<sup>45</sup> E. Paulicelli, *Fashion under Fascism: Beyond the Black Shirt* (Oxford, 2004), p. 34.

<sup>46</sup> Figures 5 & 6: ‘Graziani in Cerimonia per l’arrivo di Vittorio Emanuele III’.

<sup>47</sup> See A. Hyland, *The Horse in the Ancient World* (Stroud, 2003).

<sup>48</sup> Ben-Ghiat, *Italian Fascism’s Empire Cinema*, p. 124.

fact, her analysis of Fascist colonial film highlights a striking resemblance between the various Italian colonial commanders portrayed and Graziani's public appearances in white.<sup>49</sup> Her analysis of the 1936 film *Lo Squadrone Bianco* filmed in the Libyan desert, with the actor Fosco Giachetti playing an imperial commander 'modeled the martialised Italian body' with his 'stoic, reserved, and restrained masculinity conveyed through a sharp voice and controlled bodily gestures', just as Graziani was perceived to embody and expose (*figure 7*).<sup>50</sup>



*Figure 7: Giachetti as Imperial Commander, Lo Squadrone Bianco (1936) in R. Ben-Ghiat, Italian Fascism's Empire Cinema (Indiana, 2005) p. 126*

Whilst Giachetti played a fictional role and Graziani the non-fictional role of himself, both had commonalities in performing masculinity in the colonial arena. Similar to the staging of a protagonist in a film, it can also be assumed that Graziani retained a certain amount of autonomy in, for example, his choice of horse at these events and his willingness to stand out and apart from others can be seen in *figure 6* where all other horses are much darker in colour. The visual impact of this image, his stance and expression were clearly designed to expose dignity, and elegance in a blatant attempt at

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Figure 7: Giachetti as Imperial Commander, *Lo Squadrone Bianco (1936)* in *ibid*, p. 126.

self-fashioning. Therefore, the mutual combination of cultural state propaganda and fashioning by Graziani himself can be seen in his stylisation in early official images of him.

Whilst continuing with his post as Vice-Governatore of Cyrenaica, by 1933, Graziani had also been granted the prestigious title of Generale di Corpo d'Armata, which was the highest grade of general that could be awarded in peace time, as he became more involved in the colonial development of Libya.<sup>51</sup> This is reflected in the first solo appearances of him as the leading general or authority figure during public functions from 1933 onwards. He now no longer needed to be accompanied by his superiors or other leading members of the Fascist hierarchy as he had earned his position as the primary colonial Fascist representative at events in the colonies. The various images taken at these functions were produced by the Servizio Fotografico del Comando e Servizio Genio Militare della Cirenaica, one of the most prolific colonial branches organised by the metropole in Libya.<sup>52</sup> Produced by the state and for state purposes, the conspicuous intention of representing Graziani as the representative of Italian colonialism can thus be seen in the images of the Servizio Fotografico. These photographs show Graziani's presence at various functions such as the overseeing the erection of new buildings and infrastructure, or visiting military units, as seen in *figures 8 and 9*.<sup>53</sup> The focus on him as the primary focal point of the camera lens in all of these shots is evident in all of these images.

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<sup>51</sup> Del Boca, 'Rodolfo Graziani', *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, Vol. 58 (2002) <[<sup>52</sup> ACS, FF. RG, B. 1 & 2.](https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/rodolfo-graziani_(Dizionario-Biografico)/></a>, date accessed: 20<sup>th</sup> June 2020.</p>
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<sup>53</sup> Figures 8 & 9: 'Festa degli Alberi al Lete' & 'Visita di Graziani in località', ACS, FF. RG, B. 1 & 2 (1930 – 1934).



*Figure 8: 'Festa degli Alberi al Lete', ACS, FF. RG, B. 1 (27 Settembre 1932)*



*Figure 9: 'Visita di Graziani in località', ACS, FF. RG, B. 2 (1930-1934)*

Similar to the Duce, he was often proudly photographed posing in automobiles, a luxurious status symbol that was adopted by the Fascists as a sign of the regime's technological modernity and modern masculinity as seen in *figure 10*.<sup>54</sup>



*Figure 10: 'Scavi archeologici', ACS, FF. RG, B. 2 (1932)*

Although the origins of this iconic strategy cannot be definitively attributed solely to Graziani as that of his own making, it was not uncommon for military leaders to utilise such tactics in this period. General George Patton, for example, senior officer from the United States army, who later became a celebrated World War II war hero, purposefully followed a pattern of visiting his troops on the front line in a jeep and returning to his headquarters by plane.<sup>55</sup> There was a common goal between Mussolini and both generals here, that is, their self-portrayal as models of modern militarised masculinity and dynamism. Therefore, once again, the interplay between the state's directed modelling of Graziani and his own role in it is highly likely. Graziani's public arrival by car became ever more common in the 1930s and almost unfailingly began to include an adoring

<sup>54</sup> Figure 10: 'Scavi archeologici', ACS, FF. RG, B. 2 (1932).

<sup>55</sup> M. Janowitz, *The Professional Soldier: A Social & Political Portrait* (U.S. 1960), p. 47.

audience greeting the car, performing a Fascist salute, listening to him speak from a platform, or indeed waiting to shake his hand with him as he passed the crowd as seen, for example in *figure 11*.<sup>56</sup>



*Figure 11: 'Dopo aver ascoltato il messaggio del Duce i fascisti circondano la vettura di R. Graziani' ACS, FF. RG, B. 2, (Bengasi, 28 Ottobre 1933)*

Furthermore, his presence at events other than mere military ones only serves to illustrate a further heightened assertion of his influence and prestige beyond his previous sphere. The images of him at local events and sites of colonial development also emphasise a new aspect as to how he was portrayed and its reflection on how the empire was being portrayed back at home. Far from the glorification of violence and violent suppression of local rebel groups, now that Libya had been deemed 'pacified' the quest for 'civilising' the nation had begun. The idea of modernising the country the European way through infrastructure, education, and reform was a powerful justification for conquest that was propagated by the regime. Fascist propaganda therefore espoused the idea of the Italian colonialist 'benevolently cloaked in naivete and sincerity' a figure who 'brings the gifts of culture and progress'.<sup>57</sup> Graziani's gradual embodiment of this ideal throughout the

<sup>56</sup> Figure 11: 'Dopo aver ascoltato il messaggio del Duce i fascisti circondano la vettura di R. Graziani' ACS, FF. RG, B. 2, (Bengasi, 28 Ottobre 1933).

<sup>57</sup> R. Pickering-Iazzi, 'Mass-mediated Fantasies of Feminine Conquest 1930 – 1940', in Palumbo, P. (ed.) *A Place in the Sun: Africa in Italian Colonial Culture from Post-Unification to Present* (Los Angeles, 2003), p. 199.

1930's being celebrated for administering the construction of roads, housing, and town buildings and inaugurating the new infrastructure is evident in *figure 12*.<sup>58</sup>



*Figure 12: 'Cerimonie di inaugurazione di vari edifici' ACS, FF. RG, B. 2, (Bengasi 1934)*

### *The Ethiopian War: A Turning Point?*

Scholarly consensus dictates that the Ethiopian War proved the deciding factor in the acceleration of the state's centralisation and the quantity of colonial propaganda that was generated for consumption in the metropole.<sup>59</sup> As the first armed imperial conflict that Italy had embarked upon since the dawn of the *ventennio*, the emblematic significance of the military enterprise cannot be exaggerated as it marked the first time that Mussolini openly implemented his ideology of belligerence and national might on an international scale in front of the global audience.<sup>60</sup> Hence, this geo-political performance was the largest attempted propaganda stunt executed by the Duce in order to demonstrate the potential of Italy's power at home and abroad, and, in turn, command the prestige that he desired for the regime on a larger scale. As evident in the previous chapter, the inculcation of a colonial culture was not new to Italy or indeed the regime, but it cannot be denied that in the lead up to the Ethiopian War, an intensification of state control and censorship

<sup>58</sup> Figure 12: 'Cerimonie di inaugurazione di vari edifici' ACS, FF. RG, B. 2, (Bengasi 1934)

<sup>59</sup> Palumbo, 'Italian Colonial Cultures' in Palumbo, *A Place in the Sun*, p. 8.

<sup>60</sup> Labanca, *Una Guerra per l'Impero*, capitolo 2.



in all aspects of the public sphere can be seen from the mass media to the education system.<sup>61</sup>

Italy's expansionist aims following unification had previously led to an attempt of imperial conquest of the Abyssinian Empire which resulted in a colossal and bloody defeat for a young Italy in 1896.<sup>62</sup> The humiliating notion that Italian soldiers with modern weapons were defeated by Ethiopians with weapons deemed as 'barbaric' by contemporary European standards had continued to haunt the ambitions of expansionists and state policy makers ever since.<sup>63</sup> The legacy of the defeat at Adowa therefore became yet another national insecurity to be inherited by Mussolini who first expressed formal interest in the acquisition of Abyssinia in 1925.<sup>64</sup> For various reasons beyond the scope of this study, Mussolini finally planned the attack for late 1935 when he felt prepared in economic, military, and political terms. It can therefore be safely assumed that the planning of the invasion was scrupulous in all aspects, especially in terms of who he chose to lead the military aggression. Back in Libya, Graziani had long proved that he was willing and able to provide swift results by utilising any means necessary, compared to many of Mussolini's older generals who continued to abide by the more conservative rules of warfare. As a consequence, as the youngest member of the chief of staff, Graziani provided the most promising archetype to incite popular interest in the campaign and proved the best example of the Italian Nuovo that the Duce was so eager to showcase on the world stage.

Therefore, the cultural precedent for Italy's first Fascist colonial war hero were made early in 1935 in preparation for the impending attack that was planned for autumn of that same year. Graziani had been strategically nominated as the new Governor of Italian Somaliland and head of the armed forces there in February 1935 in order prepare for the advance over the southern border.<sup>65</sup> Subsequently, the sheer quantity of images of Graziani to appear in mainstream illustrated national magazines from this point onwards

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<sup>61</sup> Del Boca, *La Guerra d'Etiopia: l'Ultima Impresa del Colonialismo* (Milano, 2010), p. 96; Labanca, *Una Guerra per l'Impero*, capitolo 2.

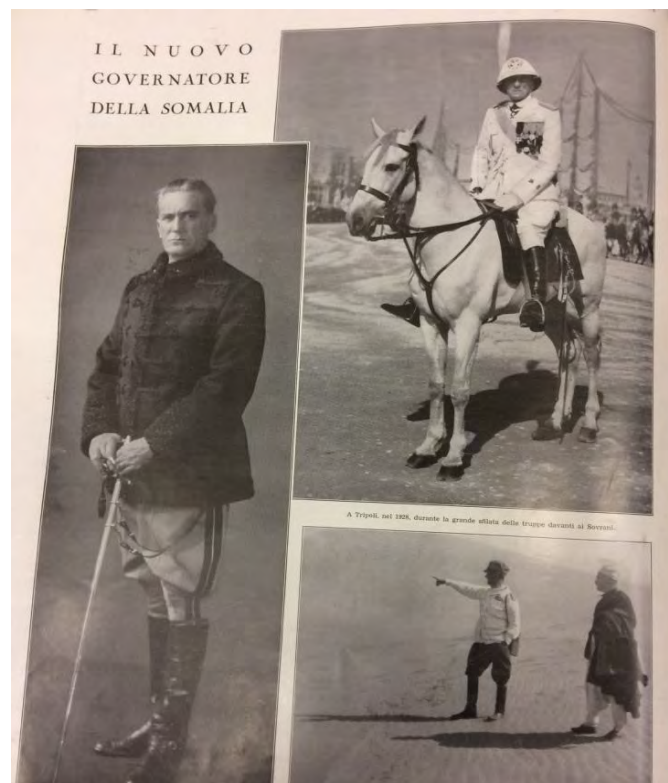
<sup>62</sup> A. Kallis, *Fascist Ideology: Territory and Expansionism in Italy and Germany, 1922 – 1945* (London, 2000) p. 125.

<sup>63</sup> A. Triulzi, 'Adwa: From Monument to Document', *Modern Italy*, 8/1, (2003), p. 95

<sup>64</sup> M. Knox, *Common Destiny: Dictatorship, Foreign Policy & War in Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 95 - 108.

<sup>65</sup> Del Boca, 'Rodolfo Graziani', *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*.

remain unrivalled and those of De Bono or indeed Badoglio who were also chosen to lead various advances into Ethiopia pale in comparison. In March 1935 for example, a large spread entitled ‘il nuovo governatore della Somalia’ was published in one of the most widely read national magazines which detailed national events, *l’Illustrazione Italiana*.<sup>66</sup> The page comprised three photographs of Graziani that exposed every idealised characteristic of him to be represented by the Fascist regime. In the top image, he is dressed in white and studded with medals on his white horse, in the one below, he is giving orders to a local in the Libyan desert, and the last photo is a full-length portrait of him posing in more traditional military attire, claspings a sword to evoke past military aesthetic values, all seen in *figure 13*.<sup>67</sup>



*Figure 13: ‘Il Nuovo Governatore della Somalia’, l’Illustrazione Italiana (17 Maggio 1935), p. 386*

Just two months later, in May, Graziani appeared again in another multiple page spread whilst reviewing troops in Mogadishu.<sup>68</sup> These images and articles provide clear

<sup>66</sup> Figure 13: ‘Il Nuovo Governatore della Somalia’, *l’Illustrazione Italiana* (17<sup>th</sup> March 1935), p. 386.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> *l’Illustrazione Italiana* (26 Maggio 1936), p. 861.

examples of his introduction as a permanent visual feature in the mainstream Italian media to gain initial support for the upcoming conflict. These examples of images of him in the press and media only served to intensify in quantity and frequency from the outbreak of the war in October 1935. Direct differences in representation as well as quantity can also be seen between him and his colleagues at this stage. That is, when the commanders were introduced to the public in *l'Illustrazione Italiana* at the dawn of the conflict in October, De Bono was described as 'nobile figura', whilst Graziani was characterised instead by dynamism and charisma as 'eroe delle guerre coloniali'.<sup>69</sup> Therefore by the new year, his photograph was frequently used as the front cover as the poster boy and representative of the advance on Ethiopia as evident in *figures 14 & 15*.<sup>70</sup>



*Figures 14 & 15 (left to right): front covers of l'Illustrazione Italiana (9 Febbraio 1936 & 17 Novembre 1935)*

<sup>69</sup> 'chi sono i comandanti', *l'Illustrazione Italiana* (20 Ottobre 1935).

<sup>70</sup> At least four appearances of Graziani on the front cover of *l'Illustrazione Italiana* between 17<sup>th</sup> November 1935 and the end of the conflict in May 1936. For eg. figures 17 & 18: 'alla vigilia della grande avanzata, il generale Graziani legge alle truppe e al popolo di Mogadisho il messaggio del Duce alle Camicie nere', *l'Illustrazione Italiana* (17 Novembre 1935) & 'al merito di un condottiero risponde sempre le devozioni dei suoi soldati...' *l'Illustrazione Italiana* (9 Febbraio 1936).

The lengthy captions under some of these photographs were designed to leave no room for independent interpretation as the message was very direct and intended to be a didactic form of propaganda. *Figure 15's* caption, for example, read:

Al merito di un condottiero risponde sempre le devozioni dei suoi soldati che nell'ora della vittoria eroica e conquistata sentono più forte la fierezza di aver eseguito fedelmente gli ordini del loro capo. i dubat. Combattenti valorosi quanto intuitivi, manifestano il loro sentimento di affettuosa riconoscenza al Generale Graziani festeggiando alla loro semplice ma espansiva maniera.

The caption here was not only designed to complement the photograph of Graziani being held up by Somali soldiers in celebration of a military victory. Its length and content in fact also dictated Graziani's 'admirable' military prowess and patronisingly commented on the apparent 'joy' he, and therefore the Italian conquest brought the locals, as 'colonial soldiers were often infantilised' and Italians conversely portrayed as 'pietistic and paternalistic' in portrayals.<sup>71</sup>

#### *The Road to Victory: Censorship in the Press and the Media*

In January 1936, Graziani and his troops made a fundamental breakthrough in crossing the Ethiopian border and gaining control of the city of Neghelli, which had been a stronghold of the troops of a renowned Abyssinian Ras leader, Desta Damtu.<sup>72</sup> Once these advances had been made, the number of images of Graziani and his troops in *l'Illustrazione Italiana* exploded and were often accompanied by long articles on his successes. He was perceived as indispensable to these victories as evidenced in an article from January 1936 that stated 'perché il nostro capo non era altro che il Generale Graziani'.<sup>73</sup> In fact, Graziani became such a regular magazine presence in *l'Illustrazione Italiana* that he was even featured whilst not on the front line, as a figure of visual interest. An example of this in a photographic spread in March entitled 'quando al front sud non si combatte' with photographs of Graziani relaxing in his camp as seen in *figure(s) 16*.<sup>74</sup>

<sup>71</sup> Ben-Ghiat, *Italian Fascism's Empire Cinema*, p. 128.

<sup>72</sup> Mayda, *Graziani l'Africano*, pp. 100 – 102.

<sup>73</sup> 'Strategia di Graziani: La Vittoria del Ganale Goria', *l'Illustrazione Italiana* (12 Gennaio 1936).

<sup>74</sup> Figure(s) 16: 'Quando al front sud non si combatte', *l'Illustrazione Italiana* (8 Marzo 1936), p. 393.

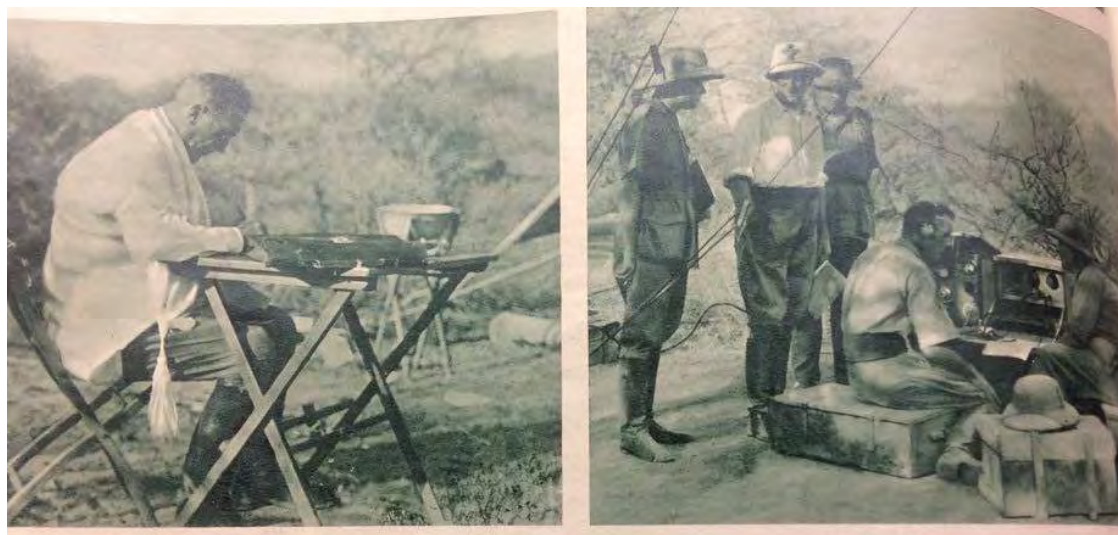
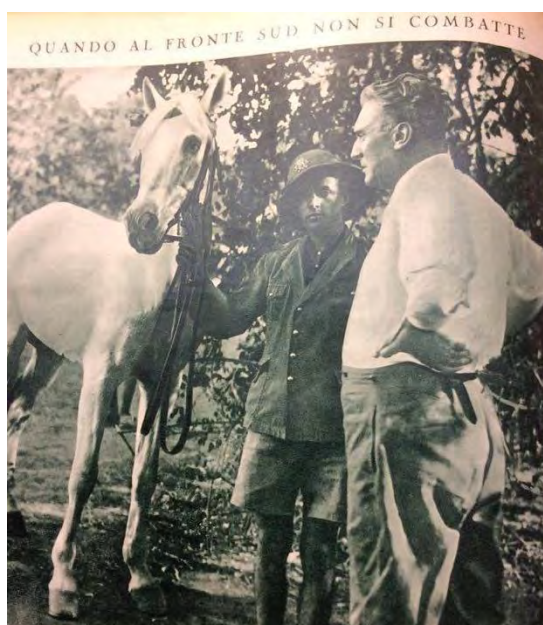


Figure (s) 16: 'Quando al front sud non si combatte', *l'Illustrazione Italiana* (8 Marzo 1936), p. 393

Graziani's advances early in the year also significantly marked the first regular appearances of Graziani on the newsreels of *l'Istituto Luce*. *l'Istituto Luce* was first founded in 1924 as a corporation designated to the production and distribution of films, and the Duce wasted little time in taking control of the Institute in 1925 and transforming it into 'l'occhio del regime' by the 1930s.<sup>75</sup> The films all follow the same format, giving panoramic views of Italian conquered territories and clips of Somalians rejoicing at the

<sup>75</sup> M. Argentieri, *l'Occhio del Regime: Informazione e Propaganda nel Cinema del Fascismo* (Firenze, 1979), p. 34.

arrival of Graziani in Mogadishu or at the news of Graziani and his victories in Ethiopia.<sup>76</sup> The videos were heavily driven by commentary and the shots were carefully orchestrated in order to give clear indications of what the regime wanted viewers to see back in the metropole. For example, the voice over of the video clip ‘in occasione dell’ultima visita della sua eccellenza il Governatore Generale Graziani prima dell’inizio della vittoriosa avanzata dell’Ogaden’ authoritatively said that ‘ecco gli askari con le loro caratteristiche copricapo e le ancora più caratteristiche fantasie con le quali manifestano l’entusiasmo che li anima all’annuncio dell’arrivo del capo che li ha sempre portato alla vittoria’.<sup>77</sup>

Specifically with regard to Luce’s relationship with the African continent, Ben-Ghiat’s lengthy thesis on *Italian Fascism’s Empire Cinema* notes has led her to the conclusion that ‘just a few years after its inception, *l’Istituto Luce* had secured its role as the filmic arm of Italian colonial expansion’.<sup>78</sup> Indeed, by the dawn of the Ethiopian War, Mussolini himself proclaimed cinema and the Institute as ‘l’arma più forte’ of the Fascist state.<sup>79</sup> Thus, both the intention and impact of Graziani’s prevalence in these films cannot be overstated. Statistics show that public cinemas, where the newsreels were often projected film preludes, proved the most popular form of mass entertainment under fascism, with the sale of cinema tickets accounting for 65 percent of total expenditure in Italy on paid entertainment in 1936.<sup>80</sup>

This combination of the widespread diffusion of Graziani’s military advancements in cinematic newsreels, magazines and the press, was a heavily orchestrated and powerful one which followed him to the end of the campaign and established him as a key founder of Modern Italy’s Empire in Africa. Letters from Graziani’s archive pleading him to send more frequent public updates from the front highlight that his own cooperation was also vital to the success of the propaganda campaign.<sup>81</sup> Indeed *Luce’s* crew newspaper correspondents accompanied Graziani to the front and stayed at the military camps with

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<sup>76</sup> See ‘Manifestazione di consenso al regime a Mogadiscio dopo la notizia che le truppe di generale Graziani hanno conquistato Bullale’, *l’Istituto Luce* (13 Maggio 1936) & ‘Immagini di Mogadiscio in occasione dell’ultima visita del Generale Graziani’, *l’Istituto Luce* (6 Maggio 1936).

<sup>77</sup> ‘Immagini di Mogadiscio’.

<sup>78</sup> Ben-Ghiat, *Italian Fascism’s Empire Cinema*, p. 27.

<sup>79</sup> S. Ricci, *Cinema and Fascism: Italian Film and Society 1922 - 1943* (California, 2008), p. 47.

<sup>80</sup> Gundle and Forgacs, *Mass Culture and Italian Society*, p. 5.

<sup>81</sup> ACS, F. RG, B. 22.

the troops.<sup>82</sup> The lack of photographic depictions from Graziani's personal archive or detailed descriptions of direct combat during the conflict, however, suggest that photographers did not follow him to the front line and stayed behind. In absence of such direct photographic images, reproductions of watercolour paintings were utilised instead to stimulate the imagination and curiosity of the national audience on the covers of the weekly illustrated supplements to Italian newspapers. A very evocative painting of Graziani 'incitando le sue truppe all'attacco sventolando in segno di vittoria il mantello azzurro del degiac Abbedé Damtú, il capo abissino caduto durante la furiosa battaglia' appeared on the front page of *Il Mattino Illustrato* following a strategic victory on the Somalian front in May (figure 17).<sup>83</sup> In the depiction, a fierce looking Graziani towers over his troops triumphantly waving his dead enemy's cape as just as it was a flag of conquest. This relative creative freedom enjoyed by Italian newspaper illustrators and commentators not only allowed for the dramatic glorification of the battles and convenient censorship of the more brutal aspects of Italian conduct on the battlefield, but also granted Graziani direct agency in the embellishment of his own narrative of events when he returned from the front line.

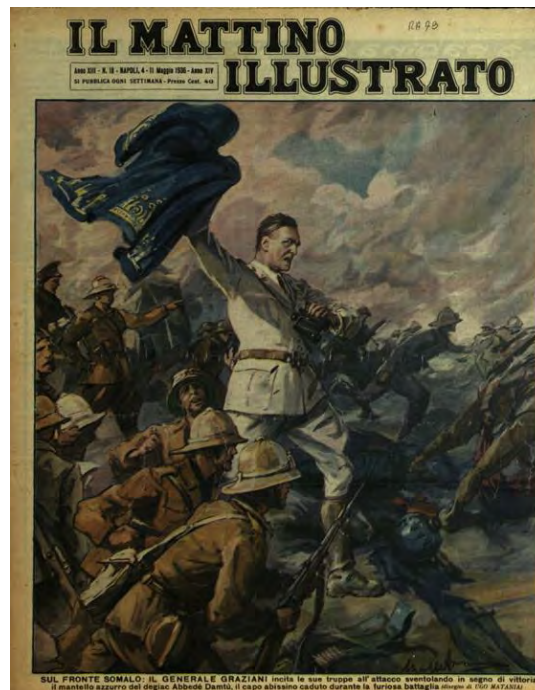


Figure 17: 'Sul Fronte Somalo: Il Generale Graziani...' *Il Mattino Illustrato* (11 Maggio)

<sup>82</sup> 'Relazione dell'Ufficio Stampa della Somalia al Regio Ministero della Stampa e la Propaganda', ACS, Archivio Min. Cul. Pop, B. 48 (17 Aprile – 10 Maggio 1936).

<sup>83</sup> Figure 17: 'Sul Fronte Somalo: Il Generale Graziani...' *Il Mattino Illustrato* (11 Maggio 1936) front cover.

Reports indicate that he even handpicked certain journalists from the appropriate pool of candidates who reported on the events, as they were heavily vetted based not on their credentials but on their ideological dedication to fascism and its empire.<sup>84</sup> He, for example, reportedly favoured Sandro Sandri and Achille Benedetti, the former of which had already written a hagiographical work on the general and had accompanied him in Libya, as detailed in the previous chapter.<sup>85</sup> Likewise, Benedetti had been a prominent war correspondent throughout his career and started writing for *Corriere della Sera* in 1928.<sup>86</sup> He first wrote praise for Graziani in the late 1920s and consequently went on to detail Graziani's successes throughout the Ethiopian campaign, with the first article written by him about the general's recent advance on Dagnerrei, which appeared on the front page of the newspaper in late October 1935.<sup>87</sup> Graziani also showed no reservations in directly criticizing the journalists themselves if he was unsatisfied with their reports. This is exemplified by frequent correspondence between him and Sandri, which involved his critique and advice on reports past and previous, in turn resulting in Sandri sending Graziani provisional articles for approval before sending them to the press.<sup>88</sup>

The case of Fred Roberts perhaps provides a comparable situation that sheds light on Graziani's pre-emptive paranoia towards the press during the conflict. Roberts had been a celebrated British military commander who was plagued by allegations of ruthlessness and misconduct towards the Afghan people during the occupation of Kabul in 1879.<sup>89</sup> According to a study by the historian Heather Streets, Roberts' emergence from the war as a popular hero despite these allegations was 'an outcome that was neither a natural nor inevitable, but instead represented a self-conscious attempt to restore his damaged reputation via skilful manipulation of the press'.<sup>90</sup> Just like Graziani strived to do, Roberts' 'own influence with the metropolitan media', that had 'been cemented by his participation in a colonial war and the massive fame he achieved while in command'

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<sup>84</sup> Relazione dell'Ufficio Stampa al Regio Ministero della Stampa e la Propaganda.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> 'Benedetti, Achille', *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, Vol. 8 (1966).

<sup>87</sup> A. Benedetti, 'Il Travolgente Assalto dei Dabata a Dagnerrei', *Corriere della Sera* (23 Ottobre 1935), p. 1.

<sup>88</sup> Corrispondenza S. Sandri & Graziani, ACS, F. RG, B. 7.

<sup>89</sup> H. Streets, *Martial Races: The Military, Race and Masculinity in British Imperial Culture 1857 – 1914* (Manchester, 2004), p. 123.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.



helped him dispel any potential negative reports and allow him to return home a colonial hero.<sup>91</sup>

Thus, vested interest in what was deemed as ‘positive’ news of conquest and Italian military victory from the front and state control of the media was also coupled with heavy censorship that made sure no other and unofficial information was leaked back to the public in Rome. It has long been known through Del Boca’s preliminary research in post-war Italy that upon Graziani’s telegram requests for “la massima libertà d’azione per l’impiego dei gas asfissianti”, Mussolini gave Graziani a carte blanche to use any means necessary for a swift victory.<sup>92</sup> Therefore, Graziani independently chose to use these horrific means that had been previously illegalised under the Geneva Protocol of the International Codes and Conduct of War in 1925.<sup>93</sup> He did not hesitate in pursuing a scorched earth policy, ‘spraying, villages, pastures, rivers and lakes’ with mustard gas and phosgene bombs to ‘terrorise the civilian population’ in Ethiopia.<sup>94</sup> In fact, according to Angelo Del Boca, Graziani ‘fu il primo generale ad impiegare sistematicamente i gas asfissianti’ in an unnecessary and frivolous manner in order to beat Badoglio to the capital city Addis Ababa and win the credit for doing so.<sup>95</sup> The complete absence of these facts in the press and media at the time of the Italian invasion proved so effective that it resulted in a heavy distortion of the national memory of the Ethiopian War that has lasted till present day. In fact, when international allegations were aired of the Italian use of the burning chemical yprite on ‘neutral’ red cross zones during the aggression, the Italian press went beyond denial and instead diverted the blame to the Ethiopians themselves, through their adoption of the dum-dum bullet in combat, and even filed a complaint to the League of Nations.<sup>96</sup>

Due to such vicious tactics, and despite a seasonal period of heavy rain that heavily hindered the advancement of the Italian troops with tanks that were not appropriate for

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid, p. 122.

<sup>92</sup> Telegram between Graziani and Mussolini in Del Boca, *Gli Italiani in Africa Orientale. Vol. II: La Conquista Del Impero* (Milano, 1992), pp. 504 - 5.

<sup>93</sup> Del Boca, *Gli Italiani in Africa Orientale. Vol. II*, p. 504 - 5 & for the other most detailed examination of the use of gas during the Ethiopian War to date see G. Rochat, ‘l’impiego dei gas nella guerra d’Etiopia 1935-36’, *Rivista di Storia Contemporanea*, 1, (1988), pp. 74 – 109.

<sup>94</sup> A. Sbacchi, *Legacy of Bitterness: Ethiopia & Fascist Italy, 1935-1941* (London, 1997), p. 60.

<sup>95</sup> Del Boca in *Fascist Legacy*, BBC Documentary (1<sup>st</sup> November 1989).

<sup>96</sup> ‘Société Des Nations: Communication Du Gouvernement Italien’, ACS, Archivio del Min. Cul. Pop: Reports, B. 38 (28 Janvier 1936).

the climate or terrain, by May 1936 Graziani had achieved his decisive victory by reaching the city of Harrar. Consequently, Mussolini awarded him the highest military honour by elevating him to the status of Maresciallo d'Italia and giving him the noble title of Il Marchese di Neghelli.<sup>97</sup> The media everywhere now recognised him, Badoglio, Mussolini, and Vittorio Emanuele III, as the four 'artefici della vittoria' in what was deemed 'la più bella notte d'Italia' when news of the victory arrived in Rome.<sup>98</sup> The four all featured together on the front cover of *l'Illustrazione Italiana* on the 10<sup>th</sup> of May as seen in *figure 18*.



*Figure 18: l'Illustrazione Italiana (10 Maggio 1936), front cover*

The caption read:

Sono queste le più alte figure della patria alle quali si rivolge il pensiero commosso e riconoscente di tutti gli italiani, sulle quali convengono ammirati e stupiti gli sguardi dei popoli civili di tutto il mondo. I loro nomi saranno legati nei secoli alla storia trionfale di questa guerra africana in cui l'esercito italiano si è coperto in gloria – S.M. Il Re la cui grande anima ha saputo propiziare e contenere le fortune da Vittorio Veneto alla Rivoluzione

<sup>97</sup> 'l'Ultime Tappe Vittoriose dei Soldati di Graziani', *l'Illustrazione Italiana* (17 Maggio 1936).

<sup>98</sup> 'Riconoscenza della Patria agli Artefici della Vittoria', *l'Illustrazione Italiana* (17 Maggio 1936).

Fascista, dalla nascita spirituale del popolo ad Addis Abeba. Benito Mussolini Duce del Fascismo l'Uomo prodigioso del destino d'Italia. Badoglio e Graziani che hanno guidato truppe verso la più rapida e travolgente vittoria che sia ricordata nella storia di tutti gli eserciti soni gli artefici delle gloriose nuove sorti della patria.<sup>99</sup>

By being exalted on almost the same level as the king and political leader of Italy, Graziani reached the height of his fame with his victory in Ethiopia. In particular, it was the two military victors of the conflict, Badoglio and Graziani, whose images filled the national papers for dramatic effect. They were, for example, exalted across *La Tribuna Illustrata* as 'i due grandi condottieri (che) hanno dato all'Italia fascista, il folgorante vittoria imperiale' with glorious imagery of the generals to compliment the proclamation of Empire (*figure 19*).<sup>100</sup> The inculcation of the official Fascist myth of Graziani in collective remembrance was thus concluded with the Fascist proclamation of an Italian Empire and Modern Italy's formal recognition of finally having a place in the sun.



Figure 19: *La Tribuna Illustrata* (24 Maggio 1936), front cover

<sup>99</sup> Figure 18: *l'Illustrazione Italiana* (10 Maggio 1936), front cover.

<sup>100</sup> Figure 19: *La Tribuna Illustrata* (24 Maggio 1936), front cover.

In the end, Badoglio may have been the first general to reach the capital of Addis Ababa, but it was Graziani who remained in Ethiopia when Badoglio returned to Rome. He was nominated the Viceroy of Ethiopia in June 1936 and remained so until December 1937. With this title and honour, he became the highest physical representation of Italian colonial power and prestige in Ethiopia and indeed the whole of Africa Orientale Italiana and was represented as such in Ethiopia, Italy, and the rest of the Western world by the Italian press. His very title of ‘viceré’ signified that he was endowed as the symbolic ‘second’ to the new Italian Emperor, Vittorio Emanuele III, although he also answered to Mussolini. This notion of his national political importance is evident in the construction of various marble plaques that were raised in Ethiopia with the name of the King ‘Vittorio Eman-III Re Imperatore’ at the top, with Mussolini and Graziani’s names below in 1936 (*figure 20*).<sup>101</sup>



*Figure 20: Graziani, Rivista Roma (Roma, 1956), p. 140*

<sup>101</sup> Figure 20: Unknown Location in Ethiopia: Plaque Inauguration 27<sup>th</sup> December 1936 *Graziani, Rivista Roma (Roma, 1956), p. 140.*

The placement of these plaques primarily in Ethiopia were clearly designed to emphasise reign in an explicit concrete manner to the civilian population. This desired representation of Ethiopian subjugation to Graziani is further exemplified by the image and caption on the front page of *Il Mattino Illustrato*, whereby previous Ethiopian leaders are shown to fully submit to Graziani's rule as they surround him respectfully giving him the fascist salute as he stands in front of some sort of throne above them (*figure 21*).<sup>102</sup> The caption leaves no room for speculation of Ethiopian loyalty to their new conquerors as it reads that 'cinquanta, capi e notabili abissini ... rinnovano al viceré maresciallo Graziani il solenne giuramento d'incondizionata fedeltà e obbedienza al Re d'Italia Imperatore d'Etiopia'.<sup>103</sup>



Figure 21: *Il Mattino Illustrato* (22 – 29 Giugno 1936), front cover

Lastly, as a final but equally important note on the most potent visual means to result from the outcome of the Ethiopian War was memorabilia. Memorabilia as propaganda

<sup>102</sup> Figure 21: *Il Mattino Illustrato* (22 – 29 Giugno 1936), front cover.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

has, until recently, been ignored by most historians who continue to focus their analysis on more ‘monumental’ forms of state cultural production. Yet, given the emergence of a mass consumer society in this very period such means were equally as powerful as official posters, newsreels, and the staging of events which remained in the public sphere. Radio broadcasts, newspapers, books and magazines may bridge the gap between the public and the private as they were often consulted and kept in peoples’ homes. A surge, for example, in books published about Graziani can be seen in 1936 written by pro-fascist politicians and lawyers such as Paolo Orano and Giuseppe Bedendo or the journalists Sandro Volta and Achille Benedetti among others.<sup>104</sup> These books, newspaper articles and radio broadcasts, however, were limited to who could read or afford them which immediately favoured the overall popularity of magazines and heavily illustrated texts. Thus, the propagandistic effect of even smaller commercial objects of a visual nature, such as postcards, playing cards and commemorative coins should not be underestimated due to their consumerist appeal and their longevity as many still exist today. The fact that memorabilia is not included in state archives perhaps hinders the scholarly interest in their significance, but their easy accessibility online on mainstream retail websites such as Ebay renders them popular sources not to be discredited. In fact, in one quick Ebay search and I found at least ten different postcards relating solely to Graziani with a painting of his portrait or a photographic reproduction of him during the Ethiopian conflict, as seen for example in *figures 22 & 23*.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> P. Orano, *Rodolfo Graziani*, (Roma, 1936); G. Bedendo, *La gesta e la politica del Generale Graziani* (Roma, 1936); S. Volta, *Graziani a Neghelli* (Firenze, 1938); A. Benedetti, *La Guerra Equatoriale con l’Armata del Maresciallo Graziani* (Milano, 1936).

<sup>105</sup> Figures 22 & 23: Cartolina, Arti Grafiche Gaetano Schenone (Genova 1936) & Cartolina, Casa Editrice Ballerini e Frattini (Firenze 1936).



Figure 22: Cartolina, Arti Grafiche Gaetano Schenone (Genova 1936)



Figure 23: Cartolina, Casa Editrice Ballerini e Frattini (Firenze 1936)

The scholar John Fraser has dedicated an article of analysis to state the importance of propaganda on the picture postcard and has concluded that ‘the picture postcard was possibly the great vehicle for messages of the new urban proletariat from 1900 onwards’.<sup>106</sup> He importantly noted the immediate appeal of the gradual inclusion of pictures on postcards in mid 20<sup>th</sup>-century Europe, their cheapness, size and mass reproduction which made them so popular amongst the working and middle classes.<sup>107</sup> The Graziani postcards that I have reviewed vary greatly in their production locations as they were seemingly created at independent publishing houses and art studios across the country. This is testament to their appeal as they were not state produced and clearly proved popular and profitable products, pervading many households across the country.

So, as with many myths of the *ventennio*, Graziani, the colonial war hero became a product of sacralisation through potent cultural means that proved indispensable to the consensus of the Fascist regime and the politics of spectacle that had developed in 20<sup>th</sup>-century Italy.

<sup>106</sup> J. Fraser, ‘Propaganda on the Picture Postcard’, *Oxford Art Journal*, 3/2 (October 1980), p. 39 – 48.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

*Il Vicere d’Etiopia, His Attempted Assassination & Aftermath*

Graziani may have not been Mussolini’s first choice for Viceroy, but Badoglio’s relative age and ailing health resulted in his refusal of the post and gave the new Marshall the opportunity to further his career, prestige and power over the newfound empire. More power resulted in more violence as the stakes became higher and the further he climbed the ranks of the Fascist government, the more he had to lose. His heavily increased autonomy over the region and the ego-boost that came with it, only led to even poorer decisions than those made during the war as he continued to treat Ethiopian civilians and continued resistance with more distrust, brutality, and unprovoked hatred. Of course, this was all omitted in press reports which were instead filled with countless contrary tales of the Viceroy’s apparent acts of benevolence throughout the occupation from the outset.

One such account was published in *La Tribuna Illustrata* which described Graziani’s refusal to allow a local Ethiopian woman to bow to him as he passed her in his vehicle, as he reportedly stated ‘che le donne, come creature fragili, non sono tenute a scendere da cavalcature o veicoli’, contrary to men who were meant to do so as a sign of respect for the Italian Viceroy.<sup>108</sup> Another gracious act on behalf of the Viceroy was published in an illustrated narrative from *La Domenica del Corriere* in January 1937 (figure 24).

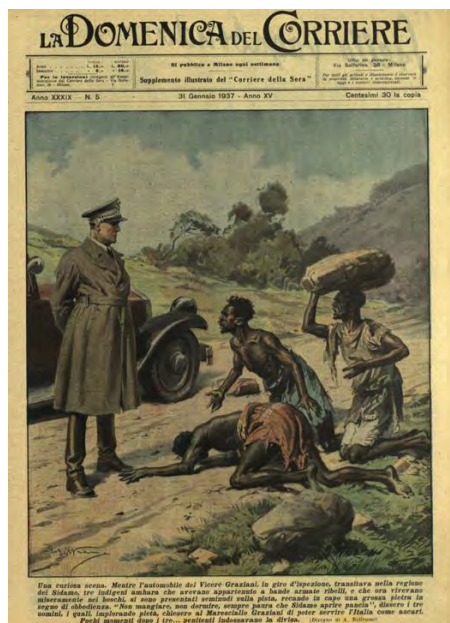


Figure 24: *La Domenica del Corriere* (31 Gennaio 1937), front cover

<sup>108</sup> *La Tribuna Illustrata* (28 Giugno 1936), front cover.



The image on the front cover depicts Graziani leaving his vehicle to pardon:

tre indigeni amhara che avevano appartenuto a bande armate ribelli, e che ora vivevano miseramente nei boschi si sono presentati seminudi sulla pista, recando il capo una grossa pietra in segno di obbedienza... implorando pietà, chiesero al Maresciallo Graziani di poter servire l'Italia come ascari. Pochi momenti dopo i tre... penitenti indossavano la divisa.<sup>109</sup>

However, a mere fortnight after the event reported in *La Domenica del Corriere*, the incident that has received the most attention to date regarding Graziani's reign as Viceroy, took place. The continued controversy that ensued in its immediate aftermath not only threatened Graziani's position and the reputation of the entire Fascist state, but also likely led to his dismissal, and has since left open wounds that remain unhealed to this very day.

On the 19<sup>th</sup> of February 1937, Graziani led an official ceremony in the royal palace of Addis Ababa to celebrate the birth of Prince Umberto, son of the crown Prince Vittorio Emanuele of Savoia, in which chief members of the Italian army in Ethiopia, Fascist squads, and the Ethiopian nobility were present.<sup>110</sup> At around midday half way through the ceremony, five small homemade bombs were thrown where Graziani and the other Italian attendees were standing on the stairs of the palace.<sup>111</sup> Graziani was injured by shards of shrapnel to his leg and immediately taken to hospital by General Gariboldi, who had not been gravely harmed, and the local Fascist Party leader, Guido Cortese. Four Italians and three Libyans who formed part of the Italian Carabinieri force in Ethiopia were killed in the attack and General Liotta lost his leg and an eye.<sup>112</sup> Graziani spent a few days in critical condition due to wounds and high fever due to infection, and a total of sixty-eight days in hospital, giving orders from his bedside.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Figure 24: Caption of front cover, *La Domenica del Corriere* (31 Gennaio 1937).

<sup>110</sup> Del Boca, *l'Italiani in Africa Orientale: Vol. III. La Caduta dell'Impero* (Milano, 2000), p. 83.

<sup>111</sup> Anthony Mockler, *Haile Selassie's War* (2003), p. 165.

<sup>112</sup> Mockler, *Haile Selassie's War*, pp. 165-169.

<sup>113</sup> Del Boca, *l'Italiani in Africa Orientale: Vol. III*, pp. 83 – 86.

A thorough verification of the facts of the 19<sup>th</sup> of February remain improbable to this day as very few accounts about the incident have actually ever been written, other than those by eyewitness account, who are unlikely to have been thoroughly accurate given the immediate chaos that ensued after the bombs exploded. Graziani himself wrote an account that he published in his biography of 1948, *Una Vita per l'Italia: Ho Difeso la Patria*. Clearly this excerpt is to be read with caution primarily because his lucidity at the time of the event was questionable given his severe injuries, and this account was written many years later. Still, the account of events reads:

La prima bomba, lanciata sul davanti, ebbe troppo alto percorso e cadde sulla pensilina. Mi balenò in mente che si trattasse di fuochi di fantasia che dovessero accompagnare la cerimonia; e dentro di me biasimavo l'ufficio politico per non avermene data notizia. La seconda bomba, anch'essa troppo alta, colpì lo spigolo della pensilina sollevando del polverio. Ritenendo che i fuochi d'artificio fossero fatti dall'alto della terrazza e non avendo ancora l'impressione di che si trattasse, discesi d'impeto le scale che dividevano dal piazzale e mi volsi in su per rendermi conto di ciò che avveniva. M'offersi così, bersaglio isolato e ravvicinato, al gruppo degli attentatori. Fu questo il momento nel quale una terza bomba, caduta a una trentina di centimetri da me, m'investiva in pieno producendomi le trecentocinquanta ferite da schegge che m'offesero il lato destro dalla spalla al tallone. Il colpo m'abbatté a terra. Ma subito cercai di rialzarmi. Il generale Gariboldi ed il federale Cortese mi raccolsero e trasportarono nella prima autovettura. Nello stesso momento nel quale ci mettemmo in moto, un'altra bomba fu lanciata, senza che ci colpisse: all'uscita del cancello del parco, un'altra ancora; e appena fuori fummo investiti da una raffica di mitragliatrice. Nulla era stato trascurato; una preparazione da fare invidia ai più raffinati terroristi.<sup>114</sup>

According to this account, the added chaos of the fireworks going off at the same time of the bombs would have added even more confusion, another factor of unreliability that must be taken into account when reading the eyewitness accounts of that day. In addition, he was keen to portray himself and other Italians, in this instance as 'victims.' This belief

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<sup>114</sup> Graziani, *Una Vita per L'Italia*, p. 78.

is supported by a photograph of a trouser-less Graziani brazenly exposing his shrapnel wounds on his right thigh was taken shortly after (figure 25).<sup>115</sup> The contemporary audience of the image is unknown and was probably reserved to private audiences in the Fascist government, perhaps as proof of the attack, as I have found no traces of it in the press and it is unlikely that such an image would have been reproduced for the Italian public.

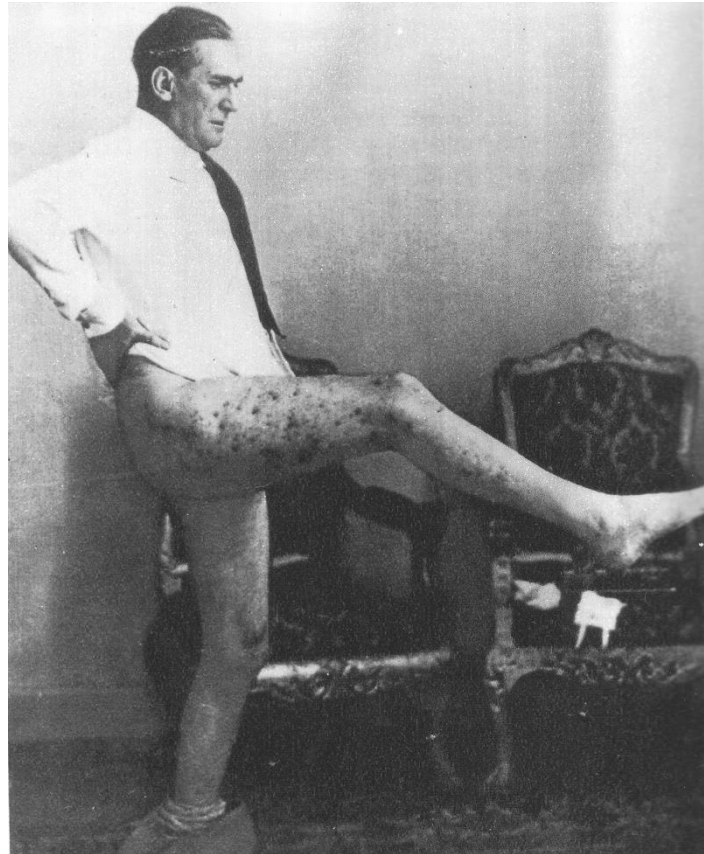


Figure 25: 'Graziani: Chiappe al vento', *the Wu Ming Foundation website*

The events of 1937 that have attracted the most scholarly attention, however, was not the attempted assassination of the Viceroy, but the consequential reprisals that took place in the following days. In the three days after the attack, Fascist squad members in Addis Ababa committed carnage through summary executions, burning entire neighbourhoods

<sup>115</sup> Figure 25: 'Graziani: Chiappe al vento', *the Wu Ming Foundation website*, <[https://www.wumingfoundation.com/images/Graziani\\_chiappe\\_al\\_vento.jpg](https://www.wumingfoundation.com/images/Graziani_chiappe_al_vento.jpg)>, date accessed: 15<sup>th</sup> November 2019.

to the ground and looting Ethiopian property.<sup>116</sup> Thousands of Ethiopians were subsequently sent to detention camps in Danane and the Ethiopian island of Nokra, where it has been estimated that up to 50% of them died there due to terrible conditions.<sup>117</sup> One particular event a few months later in the ‘apparent’ search of the perpetrators also stood out as being particularly ruthless. In the apparent search for the perpetrators of the attacks on Graziani, in May 1937, 297 monks and 23 laymen were rounded up and shot at the monastery of Debre Libanos in the Asmaran highlands.<sup>118</sup> Academic research into these horrific reprisals in order to reveal the extent of the massacres has been largely the preserve of Ethiopian or foreign, non-Italian scholars. There also remains much controversy surrounding the number of deaths and casualties of the victims and civilians, due to the huge contrast in the Italian and Ethiopian investigations that were formally compiled at the time. Contemporary Italian figures of civilian deaths remained anywhere between six hundred and two thousand, whereas Ethiopian estimates were as high as 20,000. These days, given the lack of systematic investigations that were taken place and the inaccurate accounts that were written at the time, it is impossible to provide accurate figures but the most recent detailed investigation of the British journalist based in Addis Ababa, Ian Campbell suggest that the death toll was much closer to the Ethiopian estimate.<sup>119</sup>

The main question surrounding the reprisals is who ordered them? Was it Graziani? Or another Fascist official? The first historian to initially tackle the controversy was del Boca. Del Boca’s research in the Archives of the Ministero degli Affari Esteri in Rome, where general accessibility is still a problem, led him to believe that Graziani ordered the retaliation from his bedside and even gave his orders on the way to hospital to ‘sparare all impazzata’ on the crowd of civilians that were witnessing the ceremony from outside the palace gates.<sup>120</sup> A few years after the first publication of Del Boca’s monumental four volume work *Gli Italiani in Africa Orientale*, Another Italian scholar of Italo-Ethiopian relations, Alberto Sbacchi contradicted Del Boca’s version by

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<sup>116</sup> I. Campbell, *The Plot to Kill Graziani: The Attempted Assassination of Mussolini’s Viceroy*, (Addis Ababa 2010), Introduction.

<sup>117</sup> Sbacchi, ‘Italy and the Treatment of the Ethiopian Aristocracy 1937-1940’, *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 10/2 (1977), pp. 209 – 241.

<sup>118</sup> R. Pankhurst, ‘Italian Fascist War Crimes in Ethiopia: A History of their Discussion, from the League of Nations to the United Nations’ *North East African Studies*, 6/1-2 (1999), pp. 1 – 46.

<sup>119</sup> Campbell, *The Addis Ababa Massacre: Italy’s National Shame* (Oxford, 2017), p. 215.

<sup>120</sup> Del Boca, *Gli Italiani in Africa Orientale. Vol. III*, p. 86.

claiming that Graziani couldn't have possibly given such an order, as he was unable to speak for a while following the attack given his state and the high fever he contracted whilst in hospital during the days that ensued.<sup>121</sup>

More recently, in the publication, of the 'very meticulously researched' book written by Ian Campbell, solely dedicated to the reprisals comes to a compromise.<sup>122</sup> Campbell attributes the blame to both Graziani and Cortese.<sup>123</sup> According to Campbell, Graziani was initially unconscious following the attack, which is when Cortese initiated the rape of Addis Ababa, but when he regained consciousness, he further incited Cortese by organising and ordering a carefully planned project to liquidate the Ethiopian nobility, clergymen and even street storytellers' who were all believed to have aroused anti-Italian sentiment in the capital.<sup>124</sup> This hypothesis is appears likely given my analysis of Graziani's publications, in which he frequently cited his dislike of the Ethiopian aristocracy, and in particular the people of the Amharan ethnic group, of which Haile Selassie was a member. In his biography, Graziani wrote 'non ho mai incontrato sulla terra, e credo non esiste al mondo gente più odiata di costoro basterebbe che l'Italia lasciasse fare, e tutti sarebbero scannati dall'odio delle genti locali.'<sup>125</sup> What is almost certain, however, is Graziani's culpability in the massacre of Debre Libanos in May, when he had fully recovered and had been released from hospital. Telegrams that I reviewed from his personal folders in the National archive reveal that he was heavily implicated in ordering the slaughter, evident in a telegram between him and General Ruggero Tracchia. Graziani wrote to Tracchia:

Caro Tracchia, tu sei troppo vecchio coloniale per non comprendere che tutto il clero di Debre Libanos e popolazioni vicine sono complici nel conoscere esattamente i nomi coloro che in primo tempo si sono rifugiati presso il convento dopo aver partecipato all'attentato persona Vicere... Lascia perciò piena libertà di azione all'Arma per indagare et di penetrare dove ritiene

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<sup>121</sup> A. Sbacchi, *Ethiopia under Mussolini: Fascism and the Colonial Experience* (London, 1985) p. 190.

<sup>122</sup> T. Gardner, 'Painful Memories: Italy and the Addis Ababa Massacre', *The Economist* (20<sup>th</sup> July 2017) < <https://www.economist.com/news/books-and-arts/21725277-italians-it-was-garden-variety-colonial-atrocity-ethiopians-it-was-modern>>, date accessed: 23<sup>rd</sup> August 2017.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> G. Finaldi, 'Method in their Madness: Understanding the Dynamics of the Italian Massacre of Ethiopian Civilians Feb – May 1937' in P. Dwyer & L. Ryan (eds.) *Theatres of Violence: Massacre, Mass Killing and Atrocity throughout History* (N.Y. 2012), p. 246.

<sup>125</sup> Graziani, *Una Vita per L'Italia*, p. 61.

meglio di penetrare. Diversamente ti assicuro che l'intero convento di Debra Libanos passerà un brutto quarto d'ora. Dammi notizie al più presto. Graziani.<sup>126</sup>

Judging from the telegram, it is clear that General Tracchia was aware of Graziani's plan but had been initially hesitant to the idea. It also implies that Graziani had grown increasingly paranoid following his attempted assassination, as no connection between the Eritreans who actually threw the bombs and the monks and monastery at Debre Libanos have ever been found.

The Italian national press was very selective and subdued in reporting on the events of 19<sup>th</sup> of February and the violent aftermath of the following days. On the 20<sup>th</sup> of February, *Corriere della Sera* wrote a rather brief tale of events under the title 'Criminoso atto ad Addis Abeba compiuto da elementi indigeni'.<sup>127</sup> The sober report was probably designed to be brief as there was little immediate positive news to report on behalf of the Italian colony. A couple of days later, when Graziani and General Liotta's conditions were deemed 'soddisfacenti' and there was headway in terms of quelling potential fears in Italy of consequential chaos in the capital of the Italian empire, a report was published that 'la popolazione si mantiene tranquilla'.<sup>128</sup> In acts of blatant censorship which is also corroborated by the Italian newspaper correspondent Poggiali, who was in Addis Ababa at the time and was an eyewitness to the reprisals, there was clearly no national news published in Italy surrounding the unbridled violence that took place afterwards.<sup>129</sup> Only vague assurances that there was now 'tranquillità in tutto l'impero' were published, as some leaders of the Ethiopian resistance movement were caught which apparently marked 'la fine del ribelle'.<sup>130</sup> The news was accompanied by a report from Graziani to Mussolini detailing the formal end to the 'rebellion' by flattering Mussolini and complimenting himself whilst stating that 'i vostri ordini sono stati, come sempre, eseguiti e sono fiero di poter deporre nelle vostre mani la netta vittoria totalitaria che ci permetterà di attendere preoccupazioni all'avvaloramento civile dell'Impero'.<sup>131</sup>

<sup>126</sup> 'Telegramma in Partenza: Generale Tracchia', ACS, F. RG, B. 48 (7<sup>th</sup> March 1937).

<sup>127</sup> 'Criminoso atto a Addis Abeba compiuto da elementi indigeni', *Corriere della Sera* (20 Febbraio 1937), p. 1.

<sup>128</sup> 'l'atto criminoso di Addis Abeba', *Corriere della Sera* (22 Febbraio 1937), p. 1.

<sup>129</sup> C. Poggiali, *Diario AOI 1936-37* (Milano, 1971).

<sup>130</sup> 'la fine del ribelle', *Corriere della Sera* (25 Febbraio 1936), p. 1.

<sup>131</sup> 'la giustizia di Roma nell'impero', *Corriere della Sera* (26 Febbraio 1936), p. 1.

No room was left for further speculation about the events that threatened the Italian Empire as in the following days it was tirelessly assured that ‘Graziani mette la parola <fine> sotto la storia della conquista dell’Etiopia’.<sup>132</sup> Seeing as an unprecedented of financial and propagandistic effort along with many Italian lives had gone into the project of Empire, no effort was spared in preserving the ‘myth’ that all was conquered, consolidated and calm in the Ethiopian capital. Additionally, the news of Graziani’s improved health was of equal importance as he continued to symbolise the status of Italian colonial power at the heart of the empire. It is curious to note here though, that Graziani’s assertions that he had not been well enough to possibly give any reprisal orders from his hospital bed contradict these newspaper reports that indicate that he was capable of dictating detailed telegrams to Mussolini about all ongoing events in Ethiopia.

Whilst assessing the extent of success of the state’s propaganda, censorship and Graziani’s own self-fashioning can prove problematic, the wealth of public correspondence and ‘fan’ mail from Graziani’s archive from 1936 onwards provide some inclinations as regard to the wider public reception of the myth in Italy, the invincibility of which, on a national level, remained resolute and longstanding for decades to come. The myth was, however, to be tested by international actors, as we shall see in the next chapter, but it ultimately failed to dismantle in its entirety as the untainted memory of Graziani the imperial war hero endured the latter half of 20<sup>th</sup>-century in Italy.

*‘Al Vincitore di Neghelli, al Leone Bianco dell’Etiopia, al Fascinatore dell’Impero, al Genio Africano’ ...Correspondence with Il Maresciallo d’Italia*

The 83 boxes of documents from Graziani’s personal archive housed in the *Archivio Centrale dello Stato* in Rome have not yet been consulted in their entirety by scholars. To my knowledge, the only published works utilising sources from Graziani’s archive are based on the countless official military documents and correspondence involving Graziani and high-ranking Fascist officials, namely, Badoglio, Mussolini, Ciano, and General Lessona. The last few boxes filled with a different type of correspondence, however, have been left untouched for over sixty years since the collection was bequeathed by some of Graziani’s living relatives following his death. For the purposes

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<sup>132</sup> ‘Liquidazione’, *Corriere della Sera* (27 Febbraio 1936), p. 1.

of this particular research project, these boxes and the correspondence inside have proved of the upmost interest in terms of sheer quantity and content. The boxed files, of considerable size contain over 1,000 letters, poems, and odes to Graziani written in the 1930s from the public all over Italy, and to a lesser extent, from some countries in Europe and America. In order to complement and gauge the effect of the heavy state propaganda efforts seen previously, this mail from his admirers is intrinsically connected and testament to the personal and, to a certain extent, uncensored, active participation of the Italian public in the reception and maintenance of the myth of Graziani. Therefore, these sources are important not only in regard to Graziani's personal popularity but also has wider significance as to the general reception of Italian imperial propaganda, as Sèbe affirms that imperial heroes like these offer 'ideal case studies to test the popular reception of imperial messages.'<sup>133</sup>

The methodological template utilised here is drawn from the last and most innovative research thesis written by Christopher Duggan, entitled *Fascist Voices*. The first work of its kind that has been applied to the Fascist Period, Duggan's examination of the vast diary entries and letters sent to Mussolini throughout his reign has resulted in a heightened comprehension of the success that the Duce's personality cult had on the majority of Italian population. Although measuring the extent of Graziani's popularity through these sources alone would prove short sighted, and would pale in comparison to that of the Duce who received up to 1500 letters a day in the late 1930s, Duggan's work illuminates the importance of these sources to the history of popular opinion during the *ventennio*.<sup>134</sup> In his own words, the primary conclusion that Duggan drew from his own research was the outstanding 'degree to which the ideology of fascism resonated with ordinary Italians and created an emotional and spontaneous – as supposed to formal and coerced – engagement with the regime'.<sup>135</sup> As we shall see here, the letters, odes, and gifts sent to Graziani from his admirers provide an alarming resemblance in theme, tone, and prose to the contents of the boxes entitled 'sentimenti per il Duce' that were analysed by Duggan. I therefore believe that these sources provide ample testimony to the notion of my thesis that a significant personality cult may have existed around other figures in Italy, and not just Mussolini, as previously supposed.

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<sup>133</sup> Sèbe, *Heroic Imperialists in Africa*, p. 7.

<sup>134</sup> C. Duggan, *Fascist Voices: An Intimate History of Mussolini's Italy* (Oxford, 2013), pp. XII – XIII.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid*, p. XX.



The first noteworthy correlation between public correspondence with Graziani and that of Mussolini, are the dates and timeline in which they were written. Duggan found that the Duce received significantly more letters following the successful Ethiopian campaign than at any other given time during his reign.<sup>136</sup> The same goes for Graziani. Although mail from Graziani's followers' dates back to 1932, well over half of the correspondence he received from the general public was received in direct response to the start of the Ethiopian War and corresponding propaganda campaign. Therefore, following directly on from the previous section in which I have noted that Mussolini and Graziani, were portrayed as among those primarily responsible for the founding of the Italian Empire, the congratulatory mail Graziani received chronologically reflect Duggan's research. The influx of letters in and after 1936 is therefore strongly indicative of public opinion of one of the most popular and important events of the *ventennio*. In addition to letters, the Duce received 'gifts of every kind to express their commiserations or congratulations' as symbolic offerings of affection for the Fascist leader.<sup>137</sup>

Similarly, Graziani received drawings, paintings, postcards, photographs, songs and poems that were reported to have been sent along with the correspondence in addition to various gifts, from fresh food and wine to army medals, Italian flags and other forms of drapery in order to congratulate the general on his military victories. One adult for example, drew a portrait of Graziani alongside buildings in his birthplace of Filetino renamed after him as seen in *figure 26*, whilst another composed a song for him which was colourfully decorated on its title page for impressive effect as seen in *figure 27*.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid, p. 249.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid, p. 224.

<sup>138</sup> Figures 26 & 27: 'P. Levistici per Rodolfo Graziani' & 'Parole del Dott. Ghirlanda e musica del M. Thodi', ACS, F. RG, B. 74 & 73.



Figure 26: 'P. Levistici per Rodolfo Graziani' ACS, F. RG, B. 74



Figure 27: 'Parole del Dott. Ghirlanda e musica del M. Thodi', ACS, F. RG, B. 73

The obvious and perhaps most interesting commonality between Graziani and Mussolini's 'fan' mail to use a modern and perhaps appropriate term that will be explored later on in this section, were the themes expressed and terminology used by the authors. Duggan found that the letters were permeated with messages of hope, reassurance, and trust in the Duce, and in doing so signified a strong 'emotional engagement' with the regime.<sup>139</sup> It is this particular intimacy that also resonated so strongly with the correspondence to Graziani and leads me to argue that his adoring public were not only active recipients of the state's mythicisation of Graziani but also fundamentally promoters of it. Therefore, this myth, like many others, was built largely on sentiment and not rationality, as peoples hopes and expectations for the Italian Empire were projected onto the figure of Graziani and filled the pages of his correspondence with the public.

An example from one of the letters addressed to the Duce that was included in *Fascist Voices* evoking the particular emotions pinpointed by Duggan was written by a young woman and read as follows:

Forgive me if I, just a humble woman, dare to write to you. You, my Duce, are the greatest soldier. I have such a desire to see you even if only at a

<sup>139</sup> Duggan, *Fascist Voices*, p. XIV.

distance and confirm that you are not a myth, but a man, and hear for once your passionate words not through the radio but from your lips.<sup>140</sup>

The correspondence received by Graziani were laced with similar strains of unwavering faith and personal emotion but given his purely military role in the Fascist regime, they had a rather more specific emphasis on his physical strength and virile nature. This somewhat contrasted the Duce's perceived 'paternal' nature over his subjects. An example of this is a poem that was sent to Graziani by a young man in 1937:

O Generale Graziani,  
 Vincitor di Neghelli,  
 Onor degli Italiani,  
 Il terror dei ribelli.  
 O Gloria al condottiere  
 Del continente nero.  
 Forte maschia figura,  
 Coronata di glorie  
 L'Italia a te sicura  
 Affido la vittoria.  
 Son di te tanto fieri  
 Gli inviti legionari  
 Soldati leggendarî.<sup>141</sup>

The notable words that stand out here and were directly repeated by other admirers who sent such odes to Graziani are 'Onore', 'Terrore', 'Gloria', 'Forte', 'Sicura' 'Affido' 'Soldati Leggendarî'. These themes are by now rather familiar to scholars of Fascist Italy due to their tireless threading into the propagandistic rhetoric of the *ventennio*, and in this case are indicative of the reception of the Graziani myth. The fact that members of the public identified him with what were seen as the virtuous characteristics of terror or the ability to instil fear, immense strength, bringing glory and honour to the country all led to his status of being a national 'legend' in popular opinion. The common perception

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid, p. 228.

<sup>141</sup> G. Gignolo, ACS, F. RG, B.75, (20 Settembre 37).

of Graziani primarily as a soldier and military hero is evident here and thus differs from the letters sent to Mussolini.

Another male admirer wrote that ‘delinquenti abissini africani belve e cani che li ha distrutto tutti Graziani per l’Italia del domani’.<sup>142</sup> It is evident from this quote that strong sentiments of racial hate of the African were intrinsically intertwined with the heroisation of Graziani, national pride and his violent destruction initiatives during the colonial wars. In turn, and in order to provide a clear racial distinction and ‘othering’ that was commonplace during wars of colonial conquest, ample attention was given to Graziani’s physical attributes as to contrast the European ‘coloniser’ with the ‘colonised’. Graziani was, therefore, seen as the Italian racial antithesis to the demonised African other, which further proved to elevate him. One poem, for example, was wholly devoted to the theme of idolising Graziani’s various physical characteristics:

Fronte spezziosa, levigata,  
 indóve leggi tutti i pensieri,  
 occhi gufagni, fieri,  
 labbra sottili, faccia di parata.  
 Capelli al vento, quasi neri,  
 mento orgoglioso,  
 fianca la visata,  
 l’orecchio proprio modellato.  
 Alto, robusto, ben proporzionato,  
 impronta dura,  
 denti forti, sani,  
 Severo, generoso, affezionato.  
 Combattente, compagni d’arme  
 Di tempo passato,  
 ecco questo bel soldato.<sup>143</sup>

<sup>142</sup> F. Laurini, ACS, F. RG, B.75 (1 Marzo 37).

<sup>143</sup> L. Sansone, ACS, F. RG, B.73 (7 Dicembre 35).

The poem is incredibly detailed, mentioning nearly every physicality down to the admiration of his teeth, in doing so highlights the potent impact of the visual fashioning of Graziani that have been analysed in earlier sections of the thesis. In fact, the majority of public correspondence with Graziani include such corporeal details, and much of this writing was done by women. In fact, very few studies of Italian Fascism to date include women in their analyses and continue to neglect the fact that ‘women performed an absolutely central, yet slightly complex role in sustaining state power’ and they were consequently ‘nationalised’ under the Fascist dictatorship.<sup>144</sup> The ‘nationalisation’ meant including women nationwide under the umbrella of consent for the regime through organised initiatives such as Fascist women groups and directed propaganda such as women’s magazines and newsreels.<sup>145</sup> Testament to the affirmations from these scholars, the analysis of women’s responses to Graziani discussed below aim to gage some public responses to these propaganda initiatives for women and contribute to growing research into women under the Fascist Regime.

Compared to the male correspondence analysed above, the letters written by Graziani’s female admirers contained even more intense and intimate emotions connected to the various aspects of his physical features than those written by men, as evident here: ‘Lei è passato nella mia vita come un sogno, un sogno, a cui penso con dolce nostalgia. Quando la vedo (nei periodici) ho trovato che mi guarda con tanta severità che la mia mano trema e ho lacrime nei miei occhi’.<sup>146</sup> As illustrated here, the powerful influence of his constant appearance in written publications and the visual media is indeed manifested as female admirers constantly referred to them. The expansion and novel propagandistic use of cinema in this period rendered it ‘by far the most popular leisure-time activity in Italy ... ‘as spaces of socialising and socialisation as well as spaces of fantasy’.<sup>147</sup> Deemed by De Grazia as popular ‘new outlets of disposable income’ amongst middle class women, the cinema and women’s tabloids must have been an easy consumerist way to dispel the Graziani myth amongst Italian females.<sup>148</sup> For example, one young woman claimed to have bought ‘due libri che parlano di lui’, often went to

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<sup>144</sup> V. De Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women: Italy 1922-45* (California, 1992), p. 7.

<sup>145</sup> P. Willson, *Peasant Women and Politics in Fascist Italy: the Massaie Rurali* (London, 2002), chapter 5.

<sup>146</sup> C. Borghese, ACS, F. RG, B.75 (12 Febbraio 36).

<sup>147</sup> Ben-Ghiat, *Italian Fascism’s Empire Cinema*, p. 55.

<sup>148</sup> De Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women*, p. 10.

the cinema ‘solo per sentire la voce, vedere i suoi occhi’, and admitted to having ‘il suo ritratto davanti al mio letto’.<sup>149</sup> The sexual nature of this correspondence did not only pertain to young women. A middle aged nun in Rome wrote multiple letters to Graziani, and once having received a reply wrote back stating that ‘il suo vastissimo affettuoso cuore, lo stretto al mio cuore, e l’ho (la carta) baciato con la stessa venerazione cui si facciano le reliquie dei santi’.<sup>150</sup> Foreign women also wrote to him as a woman from Vienna expressed her admiration of ‘su oeuvre grandoise’, as she ‘suivi avec le plus grand intérêt toutes les phases de la lute contre l’Éthiopie e je sais que grace au genie de la victoire a été acquisé’ por les troupes’.<sup>151</sup>

This strongly suggests that women, were in fact, important actors in their own right in the public veneration of male heroes, but have commonly been disregarded from similar historical surveys of public opinion until recently. Duggan, in fact, traced a similar pattern in his ‘sentimenti per il Duce’ as he argued that ‘women may have regarded Mussolini as a ‘star’, whose image could be set alongside other pin-ups of the war years’.<sup>152</sup> They sent him signed pictures of themselves, and asked for the same in return and wrote often of their personal feelings upon seeing the Duce or hearing his public speeches which proved a ‘crucial component of the intimate relationship of the masses with the leader’.<sup>153</sup> The Duce’s gaze, eyes, voice, and hand gestures were noted for example for making women ‘tremble with excitement’ or ‘transported in heart and soul into a world of joy and greatness’.<sup>154</sup> It is therefore not short-sighted to claim that Graziani, just like Mussolini had many personal followers who upheld his myth and helped ensure its survival. Thus, all of these sources suggest that he became an early prototype of the modern-day male celebrity with a genuine base of personal followers at the dawn of the era of 20<sup>th</sup>-century mass media culture. In his particular case he was one of the first examples of the modern soldier hero and the first colonial celebrity in Modern Italy.

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<sup>149</sup> R. Ivadi, ACS, F. RG, B.75 (13 Ottobre 36).

<sup>150</sup> M. Margherita, ACS, F. RG, B.75 (5 Novembre 36).

<sup>151</sup> D. Schostal, ACS, F. RG, B.74 (6 Agosto 36).

<sup>152</sup> Duggan, *Fascist Voices*, p. 244.

<sup>153</sup> Duggan, *Fascist Voices*, p. 244.

<sup>154</sup> Duggan, *Fascist Voices*, p. 229.

One last, but crucial component, however, of public opinion that Duggan failed to mention in his work, either to lack of sources or oversight, were letters from children. Remarkably, no related studies to date are inclusive of minors whether for practical reasons or otherwise. In fact, the only comprehensive study to of the Fascist inculcation of under eighteens growing up in Italy during the twenty years of Mussolini's reign to exist is Tracy Koon's *Believe, Obey, Fight* which was published in 1985. Her account provides a thorough study of the 'political socialisation' of Italian youth under the Fascist regime and comes to some convincing conclusions regarding the effect of state control and heavy propaganda had on children growing up in the era.<sup>155</sup> Yet, she never utilised sources produced by the subjects themselves in her analysis. The fact that around half of the letters that I found in Graziani's personal archive were written by school children living in Italy or in Africa Orientale implies that ample written documents of this kind exist and are easily accessible but have been disregarded due to the perceived insignificance of the authors who wrote them possibly due to their age.

The correspondence is strikingly similar in rhetoric to that of the adults that wrote to Graziani. The language and prose of the letters is of an eloquence far beyond the age of most of the writers, especially given that the majority authors were no older than age eleven. In order to congratulate Graziani for his military victories, a girl from an elementary school in Trieste, for example wrote rather eloquently that:

Attendevamo con ansia le parole della nostra insegnante che giornalmente ci descriveva gli avvenimenti. Nessuna fiatava allora, poiché si aspettava il momento solenne nel quale la nostra maestra avrebbe spostato la bandierina sulla nostra carta geografica per segnare una nuova vittoria.<sup>156</sup>

As evident from the text, the writer described the intensity of awaiting news from the Ethiopian War with sophisticated sentences and vocabulary such as 'solenne' above the age of a primary school child. Thus, it is clear that many of the kids who were to Graziani were coached by adults, which supports Gianluca Gabrielli's recent PhD thesis on the construction of colonial identity in Italian education following unification. His research

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<sup>155</sup> See Koon, *Believe, Obey, Fight*.

<sup>156</sup> Piccola italiana della seconda elementare, ACS, F. RG, B.76 (Trieste, 25 Maggio 1936).

reveals that the didactic school exercises detailed by the government included letters written by school children directly in class or for homework to be sent to soldiers and published in magazines in support of the war effort.<sup>157</sup> Upon their publication in such magazines, they reported that ‘le lettere che pubblichiamo sono state scritte dai bimbi italiani delle scuole elementare ai loro Fratelli maggiori, soldati in Africa Orientale. Sono tutte di una freschezza, di una spontaneità, di una sincerità commovente’.<sup>158</sup>

Gabrielli conversely highlights that ‘è evidente che invece si tratta di scritture fortemente disciplinate’, also corroborated by my analysis of Graziani’s letters from school-aged children.<sup>159</sup> I do not believe that this however reduces their value as historical sources for analytical research of the period. These sources should therefore be of interest to scholars embarking on research into popular consensus, propaganda and censorship, and the education system in Fascist Italy. For the purposes of this particular project, the sources are vital in providing insight into the possible attitudes of the generations that were born and subjected to Fascist propaganda and state censorship from birth or soon after. These generations, deemed by Baldassini as the ‘generation of nostalgics’ were thus the most impressionable and susceptible to the myth of Graziani, and consequently responsible for preserving his memory into adulthood following the fall of fascism and his death in post-war Italy.<sup>160</sup> Although it shouldn’t be automatically assumed that they were the primary carriers of postcolonial nostalgia following 1945, indications can be made if these sources are examined in conjunction with other relevant documentation.

The timeline of the letters written to Graziani is akin to those written by adults, with a notable peak in correspondence from collective school groups on national holidays, and anniversaries of his successful military campaigns in Africa or even directly during the events. With the dawn of the Ethiopian War, teachers instructed children to directly follow the advances of Italian troops by using various national magazines and newspapers in order to familiarise themselves with the events and Italian protagonists involved.<sup>161</sup> A primary school boy for example wrote to Graziani claiming that ‘ho

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<sup>157</sup> G. Gabrielli, *Insegnare le colonie. La costruzione dell'identità e dell'alterità coloniale nella scuola italiana 1860-1950*, (Università degli studi di Macerata, 2014) p. 256.

<sup>158</sup> ‘Lettera dell'Ispettore scolastico di Trieste a Direttori didattici, 23 aprile 1935’ cited in Ibid.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> C. Baldassini, *L'Ombra di Mussolini: l'Italia Moderata e la Memoria del Fascismo*, (Roma, 2008), pp. 80 – 85.

<sup>161</sup> Gabrielli, *Insegnare le colonie*, p. 22.



visuto questi sette mesi seguendo giornalmente le lotte e sacrificio dell'esercito Italiana nell'AO', which, given the complexity of the language in national newspapers of the time, proves highly unlikely.<sup>162</sup> Another youngster of a similar age even expressed the desire that 'l'Inghilterra toglia le sanzioni perche l'Italia puo diventare più potente degli altri nazioni', suggesting that he understood the complexity of international current affairs.<sup>163</sup> Other children instead drew pictures of Graziani for him or sent him photographs of themselves doing the Fascist salute as evident in and/or in their Fascist youth uniform as seen in *figures 28 & 29*.<sup>164</sup>



Figure 28: 'S.E. Graziani per il merito di guerra', ACS, F. RG, B.76 (Trieste, 25 Maggio 1936)



Figure 29: Graziella Montanari, 'A S.E. Generale Graziani', ACS, F. RG, B.74

Recognisable themes of militaristic enthusiasm and patriotism can be seen in the writing, as illustrated in the letter written by eight-year-old Franco Rossi in 1937:

Io sento nel mio piccolo cuore d'Italiano l'amore per voi, per la grande patria  
vi siete sacrificato combattendo con tutta la vostra alma per ben sette mesi

<sup>162</sup> S. Adarico, ACS, F. RG, B.76 (5 Maggio 36).

<sup>163</sup> R. Vazzarilli, ACS, F. RG, B.76 (30 Marzo 36).

<sup>164</sup> Figures 28 & 29: 'S.E. Graziani per il merito di guerra' & Graziella Montanari, 'A S.E. Generale Graziani', ACS, F. RG, B.74.

contro quei malvagi uomini che si uccidono tra loro come gli animali perché non hanno la civiltà come deve essere. Un giorno quando sono più grande andrò a combattere per conquistare alla mia patria un altro Impero.<sup>165</sup>

The child writer's reduction of Ethiopians to 'animali' and 'malvagi', degraded the 'other' even further from human beings than in the correspondence from adults who more generically referred to them as uncivilised. The reason for the intensification of racialised language among children is perhaps the increased didactic colonial discourse in the 1930s. Gabrielli's research demonstrates that 'libri di testo unici' designed for each school year were distributed to schools across Italy in order to create a national colonial consciousness from 1930 onwards<sup>166</sup>. According to Gabrielli, the jargon in these national textbooks were more effective in the 'trasformazione della didattica in senso militante' than other methods.<sup>167</sup> These educational materials, laced with content of a racialised them directed against opponents of Italian imperialism in the colonies are likely responsible for the use of such violent racist language. Thus, the generational difference and degree of exposure to the totalitarian elements of fascism are evidently at play here.

Furthermore, there are multiple accounts of Graziani visiting international schools in Ethiopia following the war when he was Viceroy, and back in Italy when he did his victory tour in 1938. According to the accounts written by the children, they were organised events that were designed to promote Graziani, and thus his celebrity, to young school children. The accounts were generally very affective, such as this one written by an Italian schoolgirl who recounted Graziani's visit to her school in Addis Ababa:

Ieri fu un bellissimo giorno perché venne il Maresciallo Graziani a visitare. io sono stata molto contenta di vedere questo uomo grande passarmi vicino. Qualcuno dei miei compagni ha ricevuto la sua carezza ed io ero invidiosa e desideravo anch'io d'essere accarezzata da lui e di sentire una sua parola. Io ho pensato a lui tutto il giorno. Io desideravo tanto vederlo perché è il nuovo

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<sup>165</sup> F. Rossi, ACS, F. RG, B.76 (18 Marzo 37).

<sup>166</sup> Gabrielli, *Insegnare le colonie*, p. 164

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

capo dell'Abissinia e perché è grande, buono e coraggioso, ed è venuto con l'automobile.<sup>168</sup>

The school she attended was an Italian one set up by the Missione Consolata which taught not only Italian children but also Europeans of other origins who lived in the Ethiopian capital, implied by her Greek last name. Although in most cases these were compulsory school exercises that these school children were instructed to do, given the sheer quantity of identical written accounts that were sent to Graziani detailing the same event, it must not be assumed that these children were mere passive participants in these written activities. It was a generation of Italians and Europeans that was, although here to a limited extent, 'active in articulating, representing, and remembering itself and which asserted its own distinctive attitudes and needs' through personal expression.<sup>169</sup>

In line with his celebratory mail that he received, Graziani's attempted attack in February 1937 provoked another wave of loving correspondence from the Italian public. This is shown by a long-numbered list of the names and location of adults who wrote him telegrams with wishes to recover.<sup>170</sup> There were also letters from international admirers and well-wishers from Canada for example.<sup>171</sup> In addition to this were an overwhelming amount of letters from children which were similar in prose to those reviewed above. For example, one child wrote on behalf of 'tutti i bimbi d'Italia' assuring Graziani that he was just as loved as the leader of their nation as she wrote 'se sapevi come ti vogliamo bene! A scuola abbiamo la tua fotografia accanto a quello del Duce e sembra che ci guardi e ci incoraggi'.<sup>172</sup> Another girl from the Fascist youth group *i Balilla* wrote that 'i nostri piccoli cuori sono pieni di solegno contro chi ha voluto farvi tanto male'.<sup>173</sup>

In fact, some of these letters were laced with an alarming amount of encouragement and gratitude at the Fascist use of violence against resisting Ethiopians as the letter continued

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<sup>168</sup> M. Arvanutopulos, ACS, F. RG, B.75 (31 Agosto 36).

<sup>169</sup> A. Thomson, 'Transformative events, Memory, and Generational Identity', in M. Boss (ed.) *Conflicted Pasts & National Identities: Narratives of War and Conflict* (Aarhus, 2014), p. 60.

<sup>170</sup> 'Elenco delle persone che hanno scritto e telegrafato a S.M.E per l'attentato del 19/02/1937', ACS, F. RG, B.50.

<sup>171</sup> Jean Vianney Saroche 'Lettera a Maresciallo Rodolfo Graziani', ACS, F. RG, B.50 (Montreal 21 Febbraio 1937).

<sup>172</sup> L. Petrella, 'Lettera a S.M.E. Graziani', ACS, F. RG, B.50.

<sup>173</sup> Piccola Italiana a Chieti, 'Lettera a S.M.E Graziani', ACS, F. RG, B.50.

by stating ‘con che gioia abbiamo appreso la morte di Ras Desta! Perché non si è sottomesso anche lui così non avrebbe fatto quella brutta morte? Bravo chi l’ha ucciso!’.<sup>174</sup> Just like in previous correspondence from children, the violent and sophisticated use of language heavily indicates coaching from adults but also highlights the probable indoctrination of violent Fascist colonial propaganda from such a young age. In further appreciation and cultivation of his personality cult, Graziani ordered his secretary to respond to at least some of these letters with a response and sometimes even a photograph, prompting further replies of glee from admirers who wrote to him as ‘amatissimo Graziani’ and thanked him for the ‘gentile pensiero’ as seen *in figure 30*.<sup>175</sup>

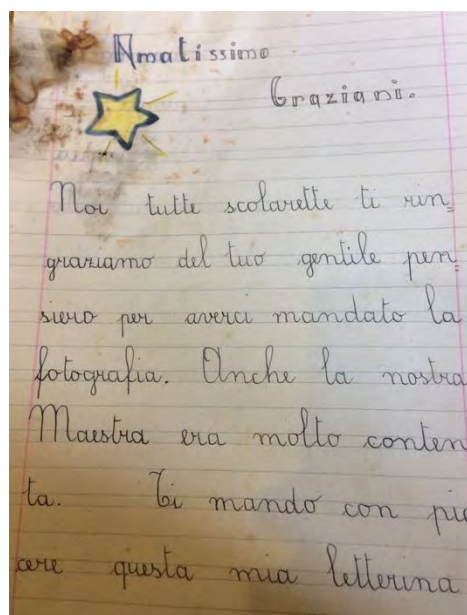


Figure 30: Lettera da Piccola Italiana, ACS, F. RG, B.50 (Febbraio 1937)

The fact that this correspondence in its entirety was collected, organized and catalogued by Graziani, and his secretary sent out many written replies of appreciation confirms his further own active role in preserving and fostering his personality cult amongst all generations. It must lastly be noted, however, that these sources should be assessed with caution, however, as they may be unrepresentative of the more silent and unvocal or indeed illiterate sects of Italy’s contemporary population. Additionally, in his own work, Duggan notes that the high surveillance present in many towns across Fascist Italy made

<sup>174</sup> Piccola Italiana a Chieti, ‘Lettera a S.M.E Graziani’.

<sup>175</sup> Figure 30: Lettera da Piccola Italiana, ACS, F. RG, B.50 (Febbraio 1937).

people wary about what they wrote on paper about the regime.<sup>176</sup> Whilst many of Duggan's sources were letters like the ones analysed here, some were diary entries, which allowed him to shed light on perhaps some of the rawer uncensored emotional ties that Italians felt to the Fascist regime, whilst the documents sent to Graziani came in the form of letters, poems, or accounts of events written by children which cautions a slightly more contrived and formulaic form and content of writing.

In this chapter, I have demonstrated the multifaceted manner in which the myth of Graziani the colonial war hero was concretely propagated in Italy, after its creation as an abstract web of ideas in chapter 1. As with all political concepts, once conceived, it was carefully negotiated by all the vested actors involved, which in this case primarily included the Fascist state and Graziani himself. Then, through the growing cultural means of the time, it was publicly presented in a literary and visual manner to achieve thorough success. Its initial reception amongst national consumers in turn promoted it further. This overwhelmingly positive reception rendered the consumers, the Italian public, actors themselves in the very process of Graziani's mythicisation. As with all modern myths in an increasingly globalised world, an equally valuable target audience also awaited beyond the confines of the Italian metropole. This notion takes us to the next chapter which examines the Graziani myth through a wider geographical lens in attempts to draw comparison and contrast in its very purpose, form, circulation and reactions on a global level.

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<sup>176</sup> Duggan, *Fascist Voices*, p. XIV.

### 3. Testing the Myth Abroad

The purpose of this chapter differs from the inquiry in the previous two. The first two chapters marked and accounted for the gradual mythicisation of Rodolfo Graziani and argued that a complex amalgamation of timely factors resulted in the creation of a new heroic template, that of the modern imperial war hero, which came to be embodied by the *Maresciallo*. This chapter, however, aims to test the durability of the myth once it had been created, and the extent of its impact on a popular level abroad. By doing so, it will examine the course that Graziani's career took following the declaration of the Italian empire in May 1936 and his popular representation on an international scale between 1935 and 1938.

Most notably, the heightened global interest in Graziani in the period and widespread coverage that he received in mainstream publications appear to be directly reflective of the capricious and inconsistent relations between Italy and the great international powers of the time, namely, Britain in Europe and, further afield, the U.S.A. The reason for a heightened analysis in publications from these two nation states in particular is two-fold. Firstly, the period and events under question remain amongst the most discussed and still ambiguous in the history of international relations with Italy, as historians of Italian international relations still struggle to find a coherence in Mussolini's relationship with Britain or the U.S.A.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, this inquiry primarily aims to add depth to the historical knowledge of these few yet crucial years. Secondly, as the most influential Western powers on many global matters, both countries were heavily interested in following Italy's movements abroad, which quickly brought Graziani to their attention. His prominence in their national papers and those that represented other invested groups tell a turbulent tale of inconsistencies in state attitudes and fervent responses regarding Italy's colonial wars as Graziani came to symbolise Mussolini's aspirations abroad. This chapter therefore argues that the career, events, and public representation of Graziani in this period were intrinsically intertwined into the history of Italian relations with Great Britain and the U.S.A in the five years prior to Italy's entry into World War II.

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<sup>1</sup> See for example R.J. Bosworth & S. Romano (eds.) *La Politica Estera Italiana 1860-1985* (Bologna, 1991).

As my main international actors, daily mainstream British and North American publications will be primarily analysed in this chapter in conjunction with relevant events. Furthermore, the ‘alternative’ American press will be analysed due to the crucial and contrasting opinion of the other, lesser researched, communities that were equally, if not more, collectively invested in the events that took place in Ethiopia in the 1930s. Thus, particular attention will be paid to representations in illustrated magazines and publications targeting relevant minority groups divided on ethnic, religious, geo-political and cultural lines. Newspapers dedicated to the Italian American community in the 1930s will be examined, due to their importance to the consensus of the Fascist regime in Italy and also to that of the North American government, as Italian and Italian Americans made up a significant number of the nation’s work force.<sup>2</sup> In addition, African American press outlets will also be considered as politicised anti-imperialist sections of the African American community keenly followed colonial issues. Thus, this chapter takes a transnational approach as my research has made it clear that Italian colonial ambitions abroad impacted not only the African nations directly under threat, but it also affected other communities across the globe.

Firstly, I have chosen Britain as the other national actor for this study for her prominent position as the leading imperial power in early 20<sup>th</sup>-century Europe, which Italy strived to emulate.<sup>3</sup> Secondly, as perhaps the most geo-politically and economically invested country to be present on the African continent, Imperial Britain watched and reported even the slightest move that Italy made there more than any other European power.<sup>4</sup> Thirdly and more crucially for the purposes of this study, the country played an intrinsic role in the positive mythicisation of Graziani throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century and became largely responsible for the endurance of the myth after the fall of Mussolini, as will be demonstrated later on. Consequently, Graziani’s primary role not only in the Ethiopian War but also in its aftermath, as Viceroy of Ethiopia allowed for his prominent and enduring position in the British public eye from early 1936 onwards. As his title of Viceroy might suggest, Graziani became the highest representative of the Italian state to

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<sup>2</sup> R. Alba, *Italian Americans: Into the Twilight of Ethnicity* (New Jersey, 1985), p. 52.

<sup>3</sup> S. Mills, ‘Roman Imperialism: Critics and Aspirants’ in D. Hoyes, (ed.) *A Companion to Roman Imperialism* (Boston, 2013), p. 336.

<sup>4</sup> J. Aldred, *British Imperial and Foreign Policy 1846 - 1980* (London, 2004), p. 50.

be physically present in the newfound territory. This role was powerful not only on a political level, but more pervasively on a symbolic one that reached a global audience.

*International Coverage of Graziani In Libya: Great Britain and the USA*

For the reasons given in the introduction to this chapter, the national press outlets of the two great western powers of Great Britain and the USA have been chosen for an analysis of their portrayal of Graziani, and Italy's colonial aggression and rule in Africa. As a country geographically located on the old continent closely surrounded by other imperial powers, Italy was under close watch. Moreover, as a country run by a totalitarian government, which, by its very nature, was more outward-looking than ever before, Italy's international prestige and status was under close scrutiny. Therefore, as one of the military leaders of the Italo-Ethiopian War, a war that threatened the balance of power in Colonial Africa and beyond, Graziani became the centre of attention in both the British and American press.

As we shall see, the portrayal of the maresciallo that emerged in the Western media during the conflict is a highly confused and contradictory one. This is almost certainly reflective of the fragile and unstable nature of Anglo-Italian and Italian-American relations during a period in which the muscle power of the League of Nations was being tested for the first, and arguably, last time. During the Ethiopian conflict, Graziani soon appeared as one of its key players in early international coverage of the conflict and wasted no time in stealing the limelight from the commander in chief who was in charge of the advance, Badoglio. Casual journalistic curiosity soon spun into a conflicting amalgamation of praise, awe, and condemnation for the general's advances and brutal methods against his enemy. He slowly became an object of international intrigue, national pride for Italy and at times, distaste. His innovative brutal military tactics, that he had practiced in the Libyan campaign prior, drew international attention precisely because of their decisive executions, almost always resulting in rapid success. This specific form of a heightened virility demonstrated by Graziani in a colonial arena, whilst operating in a Fascist context, made him stand out to foreign onlookers and interested international parties; these peculiarities made him one-of-a-kind. In fact, throughout this period, no military figure generated as much international interest as Graziani. Of course, the likes of Erwin Rommel and the American General George Patton generated



comparable international attention, but one key aspect stood Graziani apart from the rest and must be accentuated, the mechanised colonial factor. Moreover, it is important to emphasise that evidence of Graziani's un-wavering narcissism and agency in formulating his own image abroad emerges through in these depictions, just as he did during his national self-fashioning prior to that.

Out of the forty-five American national and regional newspaper and magazines that I reviewed, the first published sign of Graziani emerged in the weekly magazine *Outlook*, which was circulated in New York between 1870 and 1935. The short piece was entitled 'Soldiers of Modern Rome and of "Regions Caesar Never Knew"'.<sup>5</sup> The page contained an enlarged captioned photograph of 'Colonel Graziani, military governor of Tripoli, is shown above reviewing his troops at Tarhuna, over which the Italian flag flies...the standard suggests a touch of ancient Rome'.<sup>6</sup> The main contents of the article first appeared to be relatively factual by giving an objective overview of weekly news worldwide. The title, however, and the caption hinted ever so slightly at Fascist colonial victories restoring the glory of ancient Rome, a notion that Mussolini was keen to export.

The next notable appearance of Graziani came a few years later in the weekly magazine *The Living Age* in 1927 and reflected a heightened interest in him, specifically, and not just wider Italian colonial ambitions in Africa. The eleven-page article focused on 'ambitions and aspirations' of 'Italy around the Mediterranean', devoted a four-page section on Libya alone, two of which describing and event in which Graziani took the American correspondent on a tour around the recently conquered Italian region of Gebel. After a brief description of Italy's newfound colony, Graziani was introduced to the readers with a decisive opening by the correspondent who wrote 'I was motored around the Jebel region by the man who more than any other incarnates this ambition – General Graziani'. It then went on to poetically describe Graziani and the newfound territory:

A tall young officer not yet in his forties, with the physique and the manner of a genuine proconsul. Graziani himself reconquered this territory acre by acre from the rebellious tribesmen. He now commands the southern military

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<sup>5</sup> 'Soldiers of Modern Rome and of "Regions that Caesar Never Knew"', *Outlook*, 134/1 (23<sup>rd</sup>, May 1923), p. 18.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

zone...and obtained the complete and direct political and military control of this magnificently picturesque and fertile mountain plateau. From the troglodytic city of Garyan, nestling in the midst of immemorial olive groves, Graziani keeps an extremely close eye upon his mixed population of Arabs, Berbers, and Jews. The children in the villages and the nomads on the hills salaam to us. "They all know you" I remark. "yes" replies Graziani "and they won't forget me in a hurry".<sup>7</sup>

This powerful excerpt from the article evokes none other than the image that Mussolini and Graziani wanted to portray, one of Italian colonial dominance, African exoticism, military strength, and a population of youthful, aesthetic, and virile Fascist men, embodied in this case by the violent colonial warrior, Rodolfo Graziani. In little more than five concise and compelling sentences his physique, military skills and those of governance were complimented, the Italian colonial project praised, and fear of his use of violence elicited. The article continued to justify the Italian conquest of Libya by describing the town scenes as 'clemency of the paternal ruler'.<sup>8</sup> The correspondent wrote that 'at Garyan I saw Black Shirts walking arm in arm with Arabs; and the greetings in the villages were affectionate rather than formal'.<sup>9</sup> This comment alone suggests full support for the Italian cause in Libya in providing an idealised and rather unrealistic picture of harmony between the colonisers and the colonised.

A further justification for the Italian conquest of the region was given when the author recounted a story that Graziani told him that he found a coin of an ancient Roman emperor at the 'summit of a hardly won knoll', suggesting that the legacy of the Ancient Roman empire eventually set the precedent for the modern Italian colony.<sup>10</sup> This idea of a direct linearity and heritage from Ancient Rome to Fascist Italy was another myth disseminated by Mussolini's regime as means of legitimacy for the conquest of African territories and symbolic power in the present.<sup>11</sup> Thus, 'the myth of Rome', tirelessly exposed by Mussolini, and in turn Graziani, to legitimise his exploits in Africa is evident

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<sup>7</sup> 'Italy around the Mediterranean: A Record of Ambitions and Aspirations', *The Living Age*, 332/4307 (1<sup>st</sup> June 1927), p. 968.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> See J. Arthurs, *Excavating Modernity: The Roman Past in Fascist Italy* (N.Y. 2012).

here and was unquestioningly embraced by the journalist. This myth is further emphasized by the correspondents end to Graziani's story that 'thus do past and present embrace' and calling the Italians 're-colonisers' affirms Italian contemporary claim to the country.<sup>12</sup> His conclusion to the Libyan section of the article furthermore leaves little ambiguity of his opinion on the matter by stating that 'her (Italy) accomplishments are worthy of commendation and her ambitions are justifiable. Who does not wish her good luck?'.<sup>13</sup> The authors applause of Graziani's ruling of the occupied zone and the implemented 'civilising' projects across the country could not have been more clearly or less apologetically disclosed, with not one criticism of what the correspondent saw on his tour. The reasons for this remain unknown as the correspondent in question remains anonymous, but the respectable status enjoyed by the magazine throughout the state of New York and the transparent tone throughout the article, suggest that the views of the author were neither controversial or atypical of the time amongst U.S. middle class readership.

In the British press, however, the first notable mention of Graziani's operations in Libya, was not published until 1930 towards the end of the Italian 'pacification' of the country. The article, published in the fourth most popular national newspaper of the time, *The Daily Telegraph*, provides less of a hagiographical description of the general and instead details his decision to forcibly move 80,000 Cyrenaicans and 600,000 cattle into concentration camps in order to isolate 'rebel' forces.<sup>14</sup> However, the correspondent recorded the provision of concentration camps for the migrant population and assured that they would not be maltreated or starved in their new home by the coast as he stated that 'soil can be made to yield substance for its new population'.<sup>15</sup> This take on the event remains in line with contemporary conservative British imperial thought, that Western powers were justified in their conquest of 'lesser' developed countries in order to 'modernise' and 'civilise' their inhabitants to European standards. The article ends with subtle praise for Graziani's initiative by stating that:

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<sup>12</sup> 'Italy around the Mediterranean' p. 969.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p. 972.

<sup>14</sup> Rome Correspondent, '80,000 Natives Migrated: Italian Measure in North Africa', *The Daily Telegraph* (4<sup>th</sup> October 1930), p. 9.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

With this operation General Graziani has brought about the isolation of the bands of the rebel chieftain Omar el-Muktar, whose raids into the Gebel area not only disturbed the peace but also tended to shake the loyalty of the tribes which had submitted to Italy.<sup>16</sup>

The statement justifies Graziani's organization of the concentration camps as a necessary measure to ensure Italian dominance of the region and the security of the 'tribal' population from dangerous 'rebel' groups by preserving 'peace'. The article was written by *The Daily Telegraph's* correspondent in Rome, but the information utilised here came from a correspondent of *La Stampa* in Benghazi; an implication that is twofold. Firstly, it suggests that foreign correspondents were uncritical and quick to accept the information released by Fascist media outlets, and secondly that by 1930, the Fascist government was already largely in control of the press and propaganda of its colonies and newly conquered territories, that had only just been established.

The international silence that ensued, given a formal end to the Italian 'pacification' of the country early in 1932, was broken in 1934, just before the infamous incident at Wal Wal, which instigated the international Abyssinian crisis. Upon this turn of events, an article in *The Times* of London did not hesitate in praising Graziani's successes by stating that 'Libya has lost his greatest soldier' when he returned home.<sup>17</sup> This bold statement was then followed by a printed copy of one of General De Bono's translated telegrams to Graziani that read: 'It is mainly due to your valour and to your military skill that Tripolitania was reconquered and the rebellion In Cyrenaica was crushed'.<sup>18</sup> The British journalist affirmed that 'these were no telegrams of merely perfunctory official praise' as he tried to convince readers that 'vast improvements have already been made by the Italians throughout Libya...schools, hospitals and banks have been established'.<sup>19</sup> This congratulatory article provided the prelude to the rapid acceptance of at the dawn of the Ethiopian war, despite the rising tensions and uncertainties that the conflict posed for international relations and collective security.

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<sup>16</sup> Rome Correspondent, '80,000 Natives Migrated', p. 9.

<sup>17</sup> Rome Correspondent, 'Colonizing of Cyrenaica', *The Times* (22<sup>nd</sup> June 1934), p. 13.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

*International Coverage of Graziani and the Ethiopian War: Great Britain and the USA*

An incident at Wal Wal, a small Ethiopian town that closely bordered Italian Somaliland, resulted in the Italian violation of the Italo-Abyssinian Treaty of 1928 ensuring peaceful cooperation between the two countries, and proved to be the catalyst for the Italian aggression in Ethiopia. Subsequently, the skirmish attracted international interest from leading members of the League of Nations and led to lengthy discussion at Geneva.<sup>20</sup> Although it remains difficult to comprehend the exact details of what actually happened, due to differing historical accounts of the event, historians overwhelmingly agree that Italy violated the treaty, which had been established to respect borders and trade agreements between the two countries, by moving fifty miles into Ethiopian territory with armed Somali soldiers.<sup>21</sup> The event at Wal Wal is highly relevant here, as British forces were immediately sent to investigate as the military move made Italy a threat to British controlled Somaliland. The international implications of the episode resulted in the futile involvement of the League of Nations, which was repeatedly urged for investigation by the Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie throughout the conflict and for years afterwards, in countless public pleas in the form of speeches and written addresses.<sup>22</sup>

The outcome of the inquest proved half-hearted due to the contradictory attitudes towards Italy on behalf of the most leading members of the League, Britain, France and indeed the most influential non-member of the organisation, the U.S.<sup>23</sup> Contemporary France, in a weaker economic and geographic position than Britain, was all too keen to ignore Italy's move into Abyssinia in order to maintain good relations for reasons of security against ever stronger Nazi Germany.<sup>24</sup> Great Britain's position was instead more ambivalent as, on the one hand, she was keen to maintain close relations with Italy whilst preserving the validity of the Stresa Pact of April 1935, against Germany.<sup>25</sup> On the other hand, Italy's move into Ethiopia directly threatened British imperial interests in the

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<sup>20</sup> G. W. Baer, *The Coming of the Italian-Ethiopian Dispute* (Harvard, 1967), p. 46.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> The most famous speech was given by Haile Selassie in person during his exile upon the culmination of the conflict on the 30<sup>th</sup> of June 1936 at the League's headquarters in Geneva. See W. Safire (ed.), *Lend Me Your Ears: Great Speeches in History* (N.Y. 1997).

<sup>23</sup> R.A.C. Parker, 'Great Britain, France and the Ethiopian Crisis', *The English Historical Review*, 89/351, (April 1974) pp. 295 – 300.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 305 – 308.

region more directly than those of the French, due to the geographical proximity to Great Britain's African colonies.<sup>26</sup> Ethiopia bordered British Somaliland, Anglo-Egyptian controlled Sudan and the British protectorates of Uganda and Kenya: all this helps to explain the colonial power's contradictory attitude towards Italy reflected in the British journalistic representations below. Similar to Great Britain, the official American stance on the Italian aggression in Ethiopia was twofold and was highly influential. Even though it never officially joined the League of Nations, it heavily collaborated, and interacted with it on important global issues.<sup>27</sup> On a rudimentary level, its lofty liberal principles automatically denounced international aggression favouring mutual cooperation in view of Wudrow Wilson's renowned idea of collective security upon which the League had been founded.<sup>28</sup> Yet, Mussolini and Roosevelt's shared ideals of capitalism and joint hatred of anticommunism took precedent in favour of diplomatic cooperation.<sup>29</sup>

Given all of the above, the crisis remained unsolved and infamously proved to be the League's first failure in its primary aim of providing collective security and ensuring worldwide peace.<sup>30</sup> The sanctions that the League eventually imposed on Italy in October when Italy formally began the Ethiopian invasion proved half-hearted as the restrictions were not enforced on the most important raw materials needed to conduct a war, that is, oil and coal. Britain and France also refused to close the Suez Canal due to previous trade agreements, which Italy continued to utilise for the transportation of goods to fuel the aggression as it continued the aggression. Even this rather transparent stance taken by the League was further undermined by its leading member states, which some scholars argue led to its ultimate demise and Italy leaving the League altogether.<sup>31</sup> The U.S.A also continued to trade with and invest in Italy in this period as the national economy was often held as a priority over other issues by the American government.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> J.C. Robertson, 'British Policy in East Africa, March 1891 to May 1935' *The English Historical Review*, 93/369, (October 1978), pp. 835 – 844.

<sup>27</sup> G. Migone, *The United States and Fascist Italy: The Rise of American Finance in Europe* (N.Y. 2015), p. 287.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, p. 309.

<sup>29</sup> C. Ristuccia, 'The 1935 Sanctions against Italy: Would Coal and Oil Have Made a Difference?', *European Review of Economic History* 4/1 (April 2000), p. 85-110.

<sup>30</sup> Baer, *Test Case: Italy, Ethiopia, and the League of Nations* (Stanford, 1976), p. 303.

<sup>31</sup> G. Bruce Strang, "The Worst of all Worlds:" Oil Sanctions and the Italian Invasion of Abyssinia, 1935-1936', *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 19/2 (June 2008), pp. 210 – 235.

<sup>32</sup> Ristuccia, 'The 1935 Sanctions against Italy'.

Moreover, the British Foreign Secretaries of Great Britain and France initiated a pact called the Hoare-Laval Pact which secretly allowed Italy to take the majority of Ethiopia in an attempt to quickly end the war and appease an ever more erratic and belligerent Mussolini in December 1935. The pact may have been abandoned due to a wave of international protest but by then it was too late, the League was deemed useless as it failed its first task, by which time Italy was already advancing across Ethiopian territory.

Once the Italian invasion of Ethiopia had begun in October 1935, Graziani immediately became the centre of international attention as one of the military leaders of the aggression. His photographic portrait appeared in the weekly publication of *The Illustrated London News* on the 12<sup>th</sup> October under the section ‘Personalities of the Week’ and ‘People in the Public Eye’ as the ‘Second most important military commander in East Africa’ (figure 31).<sup>33</sup>



Figure 31: ‘Personalities of the Week: People in the Public Eye’, *The Illustrated London News* (12<sup>th</sup> October 1935), p. 606

In addition, an article by *The Sunday Observer* utilised Graziani as an emblematic ‘hook’ to introduce the conflict and attract readers with the bold opening line ‘this campaign is under General Graziani accounted one of the boldest and ablest of Italian military

<sup>33</sup> Figure 31: ‘Personalities of the Week: People in the Public Eye’, *The Illustrated London News* (12<sup>th</sup> October 1935), p. 606.

leaders'.<sup>34</sup> His 'increasing severity' in warfare was noted by onlookers early on in the war, but this quality was deemed as admirable and granted him the compliment as a 'first class fighter' because of it.<sup>35</sup>

Reports were not all overwhelmingly positive, however. In November, the African correspondent of *The Times* noted that Marshall De Bono had been called home by Mussolini following rumours of 'friction between Marshal de Bono and General Graziani, who is alleged to have been acting too independently of his superior officer and who is criticised for having advanced with undue precipitancy'.<sup>36</sup> Graziani's rogue nature was already becoming apparent abroad. This speculative note, was, however, not personally damning or critical of Graziani, but rather created more speculation for scandal and intrigue into the specificities of his character over that of his superiors. In addition, multiple documents in the archives of the Ministero della Cultura Popolare show British newspaper outlets specifically asking the Italian Ministry of Culture for photographs of the conflict and Graziani at the outbreak of the war; a further indication of their interest not only in his credentials, but also in his physical appearance.<sup>37</sup> One such telegram was written by Dino Grandi, the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs to Graziani thanking him 'per i periodici invi di fotografie relative alle operazioni delle nostre truppe in A.O.'.<sup>38</sup> From the Italian Embassy in London, Grandi wrote that 'non manca di procedure ad una sollecita e larga distribuzione di tali fotografie a giornali e periodici britannici che ne accolgono con vivo interesse la maggior parte di esse'.<sup>39</sup> The fact that Grandi relied on Graziani directly for photographs of the conflict also signifies that Graziani enjoyed almost complete control over the content that was sent to foreign papers, undoubtedly placing himself at the forefront of the conflict in the best possible light.

American coverage of the conflict, given the more polarised nature of U.S. society and politics, was much more varied, and gave a more contradictory overview of the war to

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<sup>34</sup> J. L. Garvin, 'The War: An Incalculable Conflict, Man, Mechanism and Nature First', *The Observer* (13<sup>th</sup> October 1935), p. 18.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*.

<sup>36</sup> Correspondent, 'Italian Command in Africa: De Bono Recalled', *The Times* (18<sup>th</sup> November 1935), p. 14

<sup>37</sup> ACS, Archivio del Min. Cul. Pop: Servizi della Propaganda, B. 120.

<sup>38</sup> 'Fotografie della Campagna Italo Abissinia: D. Grandi a R. Graziani', ACS, Archivio del Min. Cul. Pop: Servizi della Propaganda, B. 120 (7 Novembre 1935).

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*



its British counterparts. Mainstream journalistic opinion fluctuated somewhat in their opinion of the conflict, Italian conduct, and Graziani, throughout the war. This perhaps depended on the contradictory reports coming from the area of conflict itself, thwarted by Italian attempts at censorship of the foreign press, the ideals that the Ethiopian war represented which confused Caucasian middle class American opinion, and clear journalistic sensationalism. On the one hand, Italy's unprovoked aggression and questionable tactics were raised by commentators and questioned on a basic moral level. On the other hand, thoroughly engrained racialised beliefs entwined with those of western idealised masculinity which resulted in the press' captivation with Graziani. An intriguing example of such a contradiction in the popular press was that in the same period in which Graziani was being praised, *Time Magazine* celebrated Haile Selassie as their 'man of the year' in 1936 for the second time; the first time had been in 1936.<sup>40</sup> That said, the lengthy article was laced with racialised language and prose, by stating for example that 'above all, Haile Selassie has created a general, warm and blind sympathy for uncivilised Ethiopia throughout Christendom'.<sup>41</sup> Thus, American interest in Selassie was perhaps no more than condescending intrigue into a supposedly 'civilised' African who ruled over 'uncivilised' peoples due to his shared religious beliefs with the majority of the Caucasian American population. In the end, 'actions spoke louder than words' as indecision and inaction on behalf of the American government to ultimately hold Italy responsible for its act of colonial aggression gave way to uncritical embellished news of the conflict and Graziani as its primary protagonist.

At the beginning of the Italian advance in October, a correspondent from *The Washington Post* who visited the front line on the Southern Ogaden front led by Graziani, paid attention to the Italian use of chemical weapons. Upon his encounter with Graziani, he heard from his interpreter that 'the Italians are using chemicals and gas bombs'.<sup>42</sup> His interview with an Ethiopian commander further confirmed that 'the chemical burns the skin, causing blindness, and destroys the lungs'.<sup>43</sup> Nevertheless, the writer vaguely concluded that 'owing to the unfamiliarity of the natives with such weapons, however, it was impossible to determine the exact type of chemical

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<sup>40</sup> 'Ethiopia: Man of the Year: Haile Selassie' *Time Magazine* (6<sup>th</sup> January 1936).

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, p. 2.

<sup>42</sup> H. R. Ekins, 'Havoc Wrought Among Natives by Aerial Gases', *The Washington Post* (10<sup>th</sup> October 1935), p. 1.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*.

attack'.<sup>44</sup> His interviews with Ethiopian soldiers and military leaders, and not just the European contingent aimed at giving a more balanced overview of the conflict, in contrast to early British accounts. The writer did however, utilise a particularly patronising tone to describe his encounter with Ethiopian leaders as he stated 'it was a strange sight to see these wild chieftains, some of them attired in lion skins, brushing flies away with strips made from lion's manes, discussing the complicated terms of chemical warfare'.<sup>45</sup> The long imbedded western mindset of reducing Africans to a lower and more 'primitive' status than Caucasians is thus clear in this description. Shortly after, another article from *The Washington Post* wrote an even more negative report on Italy's activity in Ethiopia during the League's discussion of sanctions, writing that 'Italy Censors News in Fight on Sanctions' and thus bringing awareness for the first time to the extent of propaganda and censorship in the Fascist press.<sup>46</sup>

In New York, given the high percentage of Italian and other migrants from all over the globe, newspaper focus on the Ethiopian conflict was much higher than elsewhere in the U.S. The self-proclaimed politically independent and highly influential paper *The New York Times*, rather than highlighting the European aggressor's use of poison gases, instead focused on allegations of Ethiopian violence. It revealed Ethiopian possession of 'stores of dum-dum bullets for use against Italians', a weapon that, along with gas, had been illegalised in international warfare under the Hague convention of 1899.<sup>47</sup> To compliment the negative allegations against Ethiopian forces, the paper also provided a positive view of Graziani's military might by affirming that 'the importance of the military successes scored by General Graziani cannot be overestimated'.<sup>48</sup> The rather conservative and republican paper *The New York Herald Tribune* also paid special attention to Graziani in this period with punchy opening lines such as 'General Rodolfo Graziani's troops made a lightening attack' and making record advancements of 300 kilometres in the first days of the war.<sup>49</sup> Graziani finally enjoyed the entirety of the spotlight of having an entire article dedicated to him in November entitled 'Graziani known as Fighter', and described him as follows:

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> 'Italy Censors News in Fight on Sanctions', *The Washington Post* (27<sup>th</sup> November 1935), p. 1.

<sup>47</sup> 'Ethiopian Forces Scattered', *The N.Y. Times* (17<sup>th</sup> October 1935), p. 18.

<sup>48</sup> A. Cortesi, 'Italy To Reinforce Somaliland Army', *The N.Y. Times* (12<sup>th</sup> November 1935), p. 10.

<sup>49</sup> S. Tomars, 'Italians Report Big Victory in Ogaden Sector: Ethiopians Ambushed', *The N.Y. Herald Tribune* (27<sup>th</sup> November 1935), p. 8.

General Graziani, a six-foot, stern jawed soldier of fifty-three, began his army service in Italy's African colonies before the World War, in which he distinguished himself for valour, being twice wounded in action. After the war (in Libya) in his administrative capacity he created attention by devising a 'flying tribunal' to bring justice to settlements far removed along the desert rim. Judges, clerks and interpreters climbed into planes, flew in a few hours to far-flung outposts and there set up court. Graziani's subjugation of the Senussi Warriors gained him the name of a relentless fighter, who employed terroristic tactics where other means failed.<sup>50</sup>

Thus, in a short excerpt, *The New York Herald Tribune* convincingly associated Graziani with valour, strength, and endurance, and set him apart from other 'fighters' as he succeeded 'where other means failed'.<sup>51</sup>

At the turn of 1936, with an intensification of the conflict and further advances by Italian forces into Ethiopian territory, Graziani increasingly became front-page news and described with more striking adjectives. For example, *The New York Times* praised him for 'the smashing blow he has delivered to the enemy' and anticipated Ethiopian 'fears that General Graziani would give the order "avanti" at any moment'.<sup>52</sup> In February, the same newspaper claimed that with the 'swift motorized Italian columns (Graziani's column) was moving with the speed and efficiency of American Police Radio'.<sup>53</sup> His column became known as 'hell on wheels' as these foreign onlookers seemed to comment with a combination of awe and surprise at the techniques and equipment utilised by Graziani and his troops 'so swiftly and efficiently'.<sup>54</sup>

On the contrary to the U.S., British coverage was becoming increasingly negative in regard to the methods utilised by Graziani by 1936. Yet, critics did not mention the rising Ethiopian death tolls or casualties but focused rather more on the much smaller number

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<sup>50</sup> 'Graziani Known as Fighter', *The N.Y. Herald Tribune* (17<sup>th</sup> November 1935), p. 16.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> 'Dolo push carries Italians 125 Miles', *The N.Y. Times* (19<sup>th</sup> January 1936), p. 1; 'Italy Bombers Destroy Harar', *The Washington Post* (30<sup>th</sup> March 1936), p. 8.

<sup>53</sup> 'Drive toward Allata described', *The N.Y. Times* (3<sup>rd</sup> February 1936), p. 1.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

of European white casualties. For example, *The Illustrated London News* published a written message by Graziani and dropped via airplane across the Ogaden region following an air raid that had bombed a Swedish Red Cross Unit in Neghelli.<sup>55</sup> The message was translated from Arabic as follows:

You have killed one of the airmen who was a prisoner and you have cut off his head contrary to all humane and international laws, which lay down that all prisoners shall be respected and well treated. In return thereof you will find what you deserve. Graziani.<sup>56</sup>

Graziani's justification for the bombing raid was the capture and alleged beheading of Sub-Lieutenant Pilot Miniti Tito the previous December. Although the article remains unclear as to who captured the Italian pilot, the alleged beheading suggested that it was Ethiopian warriors, as the neutral Swedes would have had no reason to do so. *The Manchester Guardian* also followed up on the incident but utilised tentative language stating the atrocities were 'alleged', and so was careful not to blame Graziani.<sup>57</sup> Here, the Italian under-secretary of foreign affairs, Signor Suvich was quoted declaring that 'we do not accept the Swedish claim that the ambulance was deliberately bombed', and he went on to state that he was awaiting a report from General Graziani on the incident.<sup>58</sup>

My own examination of the report sent by Signor Suvich to the League of Nations highlights the hard-nosed determination of Suvich not only to deny any Italian atrocities, but also to incite a condemnation of Ethiopian forces for their utilisation of illicit methods. He sent a lengthy list of documents in his attempt to incriminate Haile Selassie's forces, including a:

copie du rapport medical et deux photographies de l'Ascari blessé par un projectile explosiv'; 'la photographie du caporal Antonio Vogric, blessé par une balle dum-dum'; 'la photographie d'un Ascari tombe au cours d'une

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<sup>55</sup> Correspondent, 'With the Italians in North and South: Battles on Both Fronts', *The Illustrated London News* (15<sup>th</sup> February 1936), p. 268.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Correspondent, 'Alleged Italian Atrocities', *The Manchester Guardian* (9<sup>th</sup> January 1936), p. 12.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

rencontre a Debrî ... les photographies du caporal Giovanni Cereda et des soldates, qui ont été mutilés et evirés par les Abyssins.<sup>59</sup>

As is evident from this list, the detailed argument was accompanied by some very gruesome photographs of Italian and indigenous pro-Italian troops that had been wounded by either dum-dum bullets or other methods deemed 'barbaric' by the Italians. The worst of which was the photograph of Giovanni Cereda, with the caption 'enlèvement complet des organes génitaux au moyen d'une arme tranchante'.<sup>60</sup> Following Suvich's introduction with the photographs, the report continued for thirty typed pages, describing other Italian claims such as 'tortura ed uccisione dei prigionieri', 'evirazioni e servizi ai caduti', and 'l'abuso del emblema della croce rossa'.<sup>61</sup>

The Italians made such a public scene about Ethiopian atrocities in response to foreign reports about allegations by Haile Selassie. It is my view that the League dropped the allegations in attempts to appease Mussolini in a period of European instability in international relations. In his detailed PhD thesis, Baudendistel highlights that the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) prioritised health provisions on the ground in response to the Italian use of poison gases over protesting their utilisation in the first place.<sup>62</sup> This does not mean to say that the British press did not continue, for a while at least, to highlight acts of Italian barbarity. Graziani, however, became largely absolved in these accounts. As the correspondent for *The Manchester Guardian* wrote:

The news and repeated violations of the laws of war and international conventions are not attributable to individuals but represent the inexorable application of the policy of merciless extermination of the Abyssinian people proclaimed by the Italian government in its press.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> 'Communication du Gouvernement Italien: Communiqué au Conseil et aux membres de la Société', ACS, Min. Cul. Pop: Reports, B.38 (Geneve, 28 Gennaio 1936).

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> S. Suvich, 'Atrocità Abissine e abuso dell'emblema della Croce Rossa in Etiopia: Denuncia del Governo Italiano alla Società delle Nazioni', ACS, Min. Cul. Pop: Reports, B. 38 (Rome, 18 Gennaio 1936).

<sup>62</sup> R. Baudendistel, *Between Bombs and Good Intentions: The Red Cross and the Italo-Ethiopian War, 1935 – 1936* (New York, 2006), pp. 285 – 289.

<sup>63</sup> 'Alleged Italian Atrocities', p. 12.

This vague description suggests that the British were still unsure about their stance on the events in Ethiopia and were thus careful in their depiction of both the Italian aggressors and the Ethiopians. It is also interesting to note British awareness of the Fascist representation of the conflict in the domestic Italian press compared to that in foreign outlets. British observation of the Italian press proved intense as in *The Observer*, a conservative MP Arnold Wilson was interviewed about evident comparisons and contrasts on the Ethiopian conflict in the Italian and British press. For example, he wrote that:

In the Italian papers I found adequate summaries of the British attitude towards Italy, and no lack of news. The items were much the same as in our papers, but the emphasis was different. The news of the notable victories of General Graziani was contrasted with British assertions, made a few days earlier, that no progress was possible.<sup>64</sup>

*The Times* concurred with the interview in *The Observer* by commenting that:

Although the importance of General Graziani's success in Somaliland continues to be emphasized in the official communiqués from East Africa, few dispatches have yet come through from the Italian war correspondents, so that the public here is, for the most part, dependent on news re-transmitted from London, Paris, and other foreign capitals.<sup>65</sup>

Sources that I examined from the national archives in Rome in fact imply that Italian ambiguity was not merely due to Mussolini's attempt to control the what was being said in the press nationally and abroad. It was also due to the hectic nature of the conflict itself, poor communication lines, and Graziani's own attempts at directing what was said about his advances on the Southern front.<sup>66</sup> In particular, the international press speculated that 'news from Italian Somaliland is scarce, for General Graziani has no love

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<sup>64</sup> A. Wilson M.P. 'The Duce and the War: Special Interview', *The Observer* (9<sup>th</sup> February 1936), p. 17.

<sup>65</sup> Correspondent, 'Rome View of Advance: Important Rather than Decisive', *The Times* (20<sup>th</sup> January 1936), p. 11.

<sup>66</sup> ACS, F. RG, B. 31.

for newspaper men, so it is difficult to foretell how soon the resumption of intense military activity may be expected in this sector.’<sup>67</sup>

Once the League let up its investigation of Italian atrocities following the humiliating leak of the Hoare-Laval Pact to the European press, no further mention was made of the Italian use of poison gases or bombing of red cross zones from February 1936 onwards. The news became, for the most part, positive, and increased foreign access to the Italian front line in Ethiopia resulted in a heightened publication of photographs of the conflict in the British press. For example, a photograph of Graziani ‘photographed with his charger during a halt in the advance in Southern Abyssinia’ appeared in *The Times* in March (a copy of the first image, top centre in *figure 19*).<sup>68</sup>

The month of April remained relatively quiet in terms of reports on the war, as heavy rains and other atmospheric conditions halted the Italian effort, resulting in little news from the front. The peak, therefore, came in May when victory appeared within reach. Climactic language filled the front pages of very American newspaper in describing the lead up to the invasion of Addis Ababa. In its summary of the events of the last week of April, *The Washington Post* wrote that:

All last week the Roman juggernaut of war rolled on relentlessly toward Addis Ababa. Starting the week in a historic race with torrential rains a motorized column of 15.000 cheering Blackshirts roared out of Dessye onto the Imperial highway that points the way to the capital. And at the same hour in the South Gen. Graziani’s seasoned troops flushed their victories in the desert, were deep in the worst battles of the war.<sup>69</sup>

The end of the conflict became more apparent in the reports of the following week as the newspaper posted that as soon as Italian troops moved into Addis Ababa, ‘Pietro Badoglio moved to “systemize” all of the conquered land: Count Galeazzo Ciano, Il Duce’s son-in-law began his duties as propaganda chief: General Graziani cleaned up in

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<sup>67</sup> A. Cortesi, ‘Rome Charges Atrocities’, *The N.Y. Times* (2<sup>nd</sup> January 1936), p. 9.

<sup>68</sup> ‘Photographs of the Week’, *The Times* (2<sup>nd</sup> March 1936), p. 18.

<sup>69</sup> ‘The News of the Week Passes in Brief Review’, *The Washington Post* (3<sup>rd</sup> May 1936), p. 5.

burned and looted Harar'.<sup>70</sup> Thus, the world watched as Mussolini was making preparations for its newfound empire. Ethiopian troops officially surrendered Addis Ababa to Badoglio on the 10<sup>th</sup> of May, and *The Los Angeles Times* consequently called Badoglio and Graziani, 'Victor Emmanuel's Champions'.<sup>71</sup> *The New York Herald Tribune* in fact attributed the whole conquest of the Ethiopian empire to Graziani by writing an article entitled 'Graziani takes Diredawa and Ends Conquest'.<sup>72</sup> On a more satirical note, the magazine *The New Yorker* commented upon Graziani's victory, by making a mockery of his vanity and his glorification of violence.<sup>73</sup> It quoted *The Baltimore Sun* which had published the original dispatch report entitled 'Department of Elegance (Men's Wear Division)' and stated that 'The Italian commander, returning to Danane in the afternoon of the third day, announced the victory while wearing an immaculate white jacket. 'It was a beautiful battle'', Graziani declared'.<sup>74</sup>

Nevertheless, instead of dwelling too long on Italy's new colony, the American press, soon turned their attention to speculating who would be named the Viceroy of Ethiopia: the first Viceroy in the modern history of Italy. Subsequently, a full page spread of Graziani and of the Fascist Secretary General Achille Starace's face was produced on the third page of a New York state paper called *The Advance News* on the 9<sup>th</sup> of May 1936, with the suggestive title 'They May Rule Ethiopia' (figure 32).<sup>75</sup> It was, in fact, when Graziani was first named acting Viceroy in Badoglio's absence in mid-May, before becoming the permanent Viceroy a few weeks later, that even more international interest was sparked in Italian activity on the African continent than ever before which will be explored later on in the thesis.

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<sup>70</sup> The Associated Press, 'Il Duce May Delay Breaking up Italian Army', *The Washington Post* (13<sup>th</sup> May 1936), p. 1.

<sup>71</sup> 'Victor Emmanuel's Champions', *The Los Angeles Times* (10<sup>th</sup> May 1936).

<sup>72</sup> 'Graziani Takes Diredawa and Ends Conquest', *The N.Y. Herald Tribune* (10<sup>th</sup> May 1936), p. 26.

<sup>73</sup> 'Department of Elegance: Men's Wear Division' (A.P. Dispatch in *The Baltimore Sun*), *The New Yorker* (30<sup>th</sup> May 1936), p. 61.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Figure 32: 'They May Rule Ethiopia', *The Advance News* (9<sup>th</sup> May 1936), p. 3.





Figure 32: 'They May Rule Ethiopia', *The Advance News* (9<sup>th</sup> May 1936), p. 3

After the war the British press remained unquestioning of the official Italian narration of the Ethiopian conflict and uncritically accepted the protagonists' tale of events. For example, *The Daily Telegraph* advertised General Badoglio, De Bono and Graziani's own books that they wrote about their victory in Ethiopia in an article entitled 'Italian Marshals as Authors'.<sup>76</sup> This only photograph in the article, however, was that of 'Marshal Graziani writing in the field' (a copy of the second image, bottom left in *figure 19*).<sup>77</sup> In fact, British papers continued to endorse the sale of Graziani's books about the Ethiopian conflict at Selfridges in London in the years that followed, as evident in a page dedicated to 'Italy's colonial development' in *The Times Literary Supplement* in 1938.<sup>78</sup> Graziani's book *Il Front Sud* was reviewed as the author had deemed him, and not Mussolini, 'the arch-preparer of the war' for which he would be widely remembered for years to come.<sup>79</sup>

<sup>76</sup> 'Italian Marshals as Authors', *The Daily Telegraph* (30<sup>th</sup> October 1936), p. 16.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> 'Marshal Graziani on Abyssinia', *The Times Literary Supplement* (3<sup>rd</sup> December 1938), p. 776.

<sup>79</sup> 'Marshal Graziani on Abyssinia'.

*Hero or Villain? Newspaper Coverage for Italian communities living in the U.S. & in the African American press*

Whilst the British take on events only varied slightly according to the political alliances that the newspapers had at the time, the American context proved much more heterogeneous. This heterogeneity was not merely due to the sheer size of the country, departmentalisation of the states and their democrat and republican leanings, but more obviously due to divisions along ethnic and religious lines. Whilst the likes of *The New York Times*, *The New York Herald Tribune*, *The New Yorker*, *The Los Angeles Times* and *The Washington Post* were intended for a mainstream audience, it does not mean that this audience was automatically wider as a result. In terms of language, price, and distribution, these publications were produced for middle and upper class white educated communities, and to a large extent reflected such narrow viewpoints in the choice of events, facts, and opinions aired. In their failure to include more inclusive views which represented the interests of other social and ethnic groups, smaller, independent, but no less significant newspaper publishers flourished all over the country. The multitude of different newspapers which were produced for the wide range of people who lived across each state therefore, naturally, all differed in their version of international affairs, as each newsworthy story had different implications for different people across the USA.

Between 1900 and 1915 alone, a total of three million Italians immigrated to the USA, making it the largest nationality of the new wave of immigrants in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>80</sup> At the dawn of the *ventennio*, numbers of annual immigrants from Italy ranged from forty-thousand to around half that amount, fluctuating in ebbs and flows, between 1923 and the Second World War.<sup>81</sup> This signified that by the dawn of the Ethiopian war, nearly every North American state had its own newspaper designed for the growing Italian American readership. The Italian American coverage varied widely in tone and content, from pro-Fascist, to moderate, to anti-Fascist newspapers across the country. This variety resulted in a complex portrayal of Italian American opinion of Italy's invasion of Ethiopia and Graziani. Moreover, it would be too simplistic to suppose that

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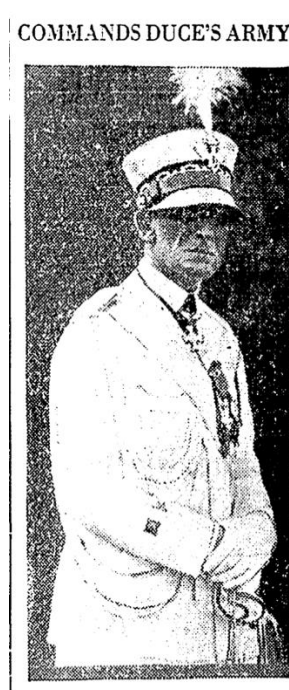
<sup>80</sup> 'Annual Report of the Immigration and Naturalisation Service', U.S. Department of Commerce, *Bureau of the Census*, (1962), p. 44.

<<https://www.mtholyoke.edu/~molna22a/classweb/politics/Italianhistory.html>>, date accessed: 20<sup>th</sup> August 2017.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

an ethnic minority in one country would be homogeneous in their views merely based on their common state of origin.

*The National Labor Tribune*, a paper for the Italian working classes of Pittsburgh, written in both English and Italian, was the first to show an intense interest in Graziani early in 1935 well before the official move towards invasion, with the publication of a striking photograph of Graziani posing with his sword, dressed all in white with an impressive feather helmet (*figure 33*).<sup>82</sup>



*Figure 33: 'Commands Duce's Army', The National Labor Tribune (23<sup>rd</sup> March 1935), p. 1*

The caption read: 'Gen. Rudolpho Graziani, who commands the Italian expeditionary force against Ethiopia, is shown here in his tropical fighting uniform.'<sup>83</sup> The impression given here is a sensationalist one, with little text and a large photo as the main visual aid in order to engage the working-class readership.

Once the war started, however, the most famous Italian language daily periodical in the U.S. the oldest and most popular of its kind (selling almost 100,000 copies daily), *Il*

<sup>82</sup> Figure 33: 'Commands Duce's Army', *The National Labor Tribune* (23<sup>rd</sup> March 1935), p. 1

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

*Progresso Italo-Americano* of New York, published frequently on the events in the Ethiopia on its front page.<sup>84</sup> In May, when victory was imminent for the Italian army, *Il Progresso* published front-page spreads about the events in Ethiopia celebrating the arrival of Italian forces into the capital. When Graziani arrived on the outskirts of the city of Harrar, *Il Progresso* deemed the advance as ‘importantissima’ and apparently proving that ‘lo spirito degli italiani è pronto a qualsiasi sacrificio’.<sup>85</sup> The following day the lead story was also occupied with Graziani’s advance, reading ‘Graziani marcia con le truppe su Harrar che si prepara ad accoglierlo festosamente’, suggesting that the locals were happily awaiting him to ‘save’ them from the ‘negus’.<sup>86</sup>

When Graziani’s troops conquered Harrar and Badoglio’s eventually overran the capital, the newspaper wrote an article entitled ‘Agli Artefici della Vittoria’ echoing the Fascist controlled newspaper reports back in Rome.<sup>87</sup> The only photograph on the spread, however, was of Graziani, captioned ‘il conquistatore di Harar’, supporting the notion that although both Badoglio and Graziani were the victorious military leaders during the conquest, Graziani became the favoured symbol of the victory, not just in Italy but also worldwide (*figure 34*).<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> N. Venturini, ‘Le comunità italiane negli Stati Uniti fa storia sociale e storia politica’, *Rivista di Storia Contemporanea*, 13/2, (Torino, 1984), pp. 189 - 218.

<sup>85</sup> ‘Le Truppe di Graziani sono giunte a Giggiga’, *Il Progresso Italo-Americano* (6 Maggio 1936), p. 1.

<sup>86</sup> ‘Graziani marcia con le truppe su Harrar che si prepara ad accoglierlo festosamente’, *Il Progresso Italo-Americano* (7 Maggio 1936), p. 1.

<sup>87</sup> ‘Agli Artefici della Vittoria’, *Il Progresso Italo-Americano* (11 Maggio 1936), p. 1.

<sup>88</sup> Figure 34: Ibid.



Figure 34: 'Agli Artefici della Vittoria', *Il Progresso Italo-Americano* (11 Maggio 1936), p. 1

The article about Graziani's conquest of Harrar glorified Graziani and his soldiers in typical patriotic manner, detailing their struggles against the elements as stated below:

i soldati italiani erano infangati per la lunga marcia sotto la pioggia e nel fango. Essi erano però lieti di avere bene meritato della Patria con le loro vittorie. Conducevano con sé centinaia di prigionieri catturati nelle battaglie delle settimane scorse.<sup>89</sup>

The nationalistic inflections of *Il Progresso* are evident and perhaps unsurprising given that the owner of the newspaper at the time was Generoso Pope, a personal follower of Mussolini and a Fascist sympathiser.<sup>90</sup>

*Il Corriere del Popolo* of San Francisco provided a completely different portrayal of the occupation to *Il Progresso*. The newspaper was highly influential as it serviced the large enclave of Italians who settled in San Francisco, the city which housed the second largest

<sup>89</sup> 'Harrar Occupata da Graziani, *Il Progresso Italo-Americano* (11 Maggio 1936), p. 2

<sup>90</sup> Venturini, 'Le comunità italiane negli Stati Uniti'.

wave of Italian immigrants between the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the Second World War.<sup>91</sup> *Il Corriere del Popolo*, a pacifist and anti-Fascist newspaper was a particularly vocal one for the Italian community of San Francisco, and from 1930 onwards it did not hesitate in denouncing Fascist colonial practice in Africa. The first article to condemn Graziani in *Il Corriere del Popolo*, appeared in 1930 and provides the only damning representation of Graziani so early on in international newspapers. The article stated that ‘finalmente la Cirenaica è pacificata. Così dice in un feroce proclama il generale Graziani, già noto fucilatore di soldati al front per brutale malvagità’.<sup>92</sup> An even more damning article appeared in the newspaper the following year dedicated to the atrocities committed by Graziani in Libya. It stated that:

tra gli orrori e le crudeltà più atroci della guerra sulla fronte italiana vi sono i delitti del generale Graziani. Idiota e bestione, il generale s’era fatto segnalare per la stupida terroristica disciplina che imponeva alle truppe che aveva la sventura di capitare sotti i suoi ordini...col sorriso delinquente e il sigaro sulle labbra. Graziani minaccio di far fucilare chiunque avesse osato fargli altre osservazioni o preghiere. Il soldato chiese di poter scrivere a sua moglie, che stava per restar vedova con cinque creature. Il generale rise, sghignazzo. Davanti a diecimila uomini terrorizzati il soldato che aveva fumato in presenza del generale venne fucilato. Si dice che gli orrori ch’egli fece compiere in Libia sorpassino ogni immaginazione umana.<sup>93</sup>

For the first time Graziani became the ultimate villain in this portrayal. From the description of instilling fear into Libyans and Italian soldiers alike, killing whom he pleased, right down to the description of his smile, one of a ‘delinquente’ and his evil laugh, the contrast between this particular depiction and every other description of him which was published, is unique. It is not known, however, the degree of truth to the story narrated here, but these damning articles did not stop. In 1935, *Il Corriere del Popolo* was perhaps the first newspaper to reveal the utilisation of poison gases in Ethiopia. Capital letters were used throughout the article to state ‘l’uso del gas dell’Ogaden

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<sup>91</sup> D. Catania, S. Luconi & G. Zucca, (eds.) *Guardando l’Oceano da un Grattacielo* (Roma, 2010), capitolo 1.

<sup>92</sup> ‘La Pace in Cirenaica’, *Il Corriere del Popolo* (26 Giugno 1930), p. 1.

<sup>93</sup> ‘Il Generale Graziani’, *Il Corriere del Popolo* (19<sup>th</sup> March 1931), p. 1.

confermato' and continued with 'Dispacci da Mogadiscio confermano che gli aeroplani del Generale Graziani HANNO FATTO USO DEI GAS ASFISSIANTI per sgomberare alcune posizione abissine'.<sup>94</sup> The unknown author also denounced Italian reports that 'NON HA FATTO USO, SINO AL PRESENTE NE DI GAS VELENOSI' and concluded his disgust 'A TUTTA QUESTA VILE PROPAGANDA'.<sup>95</sup>

Throughout 1936, *Il Corriere del Popolo* continued to criticise Italian newspapers reports on the Ethiopian Campaign and their glorification of violence. A piece entitled 'Sadismo Bellico' followed with the fervent claim that 'la letteratura dal giornalismo fascista ci ha abituati a tutto: tanta messe d'espressioni isterico-sanguinarie'.<sup>96</sup> The article then quoted an excerpt from *Corriere della Sera* to demonstrate the argument:

Il macello in massa dei cammelli e dei muletti dei rifornimenti dell'armata...il Generale Graziani attendeva serenamente l'attacco... intanto sottoponeva l'armata nemica ad un tremendo martirio dell'alto... ogni giorno ferro esplosivo e fuoco. Uomini e bestiame macellati. Vita infernale intorno ai pozzi.<sup>97</sup>

The conclusion that 'questa guerra, come tutte le altre, ha le sue atroci mostruose esigenze; ma perché una così oscena insistenza esibizionistica?' is certainly a thought provoking one.<sup>98</sup> With benefit of hindsight, it should appear obvious to scholars of the period that this colonial war stood apart from others for its exceptionally excessive of bloodshed and brutality. Yet it is interesting that a contemporary newspaper made for Italians living abroad would be the one to highlight such a fact, that of the glamorisation of this colonial violence, when no other Anti-fascist Italian or indeed American papers did so.

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<sup>94</sup> 'Gas Asfissianti e Giornali Fascisti: Le Contradizioni dell'Italia', *Il Corriere del Popolo* (24 Ottobre 1935), p. 1.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> 'Sadismo Bellico: Come I civilizzatori macellano gli abissini', *Il Corriere del Popolo* (27 Febbraio 1936), p. 1.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

Even after the conclusion of the war, when Graziani was acting as Viceroy, the newspaper frequently revealed ‘le rappresaglie di Graziani contro le popolazioni della regione’ and hypothesized that:

Il Generale Graziani diventato famoso in Libia per le stragi compiute, s’immortalerà ancora una volta sfogandosi sulle inermi popolazioni della provincia di Gima. Ha ordinato e forse ha già compiuto la solita spedizione punitiva, stile fascista. Altro sangue perciò, altre stragi. Ecco i risultati degli odi seminati dal fascismo contro un popolo barbaro, geloso della sua secolare indipendenza.<sup>99</sup>

The newspaper’s take on both Graziani and the Fascist government in Rome could not have been clearer. Calling Ethiopians ‘un popolo barbaro’ however, highlights that although *Il Corriere del Popolo* denounced the violence used upon them and the invasion of their country, it still took a Eurocentric racialised view, inculcating pity for them but not in the same way if reporting about violence inflicted upon white Europeans or indeed Americans. Furthermore, the use of the word ‘immortalisation’ in reference to Graziani’s cruel actions in Ethiopia is a compelling one, the very idea so early on in 1936 that he would be ‘immortalised’, in this particular case as a villain, was an accurate foresight.

The other ethnic group living in the U.S.A that was most interested in the Ethiopian war, and that likewise had a rather negative view of Graziani was the African American community. A small, but slowly growing field of historical research surrounds this topic and has led scholars to maintain that ‘the Italo-Ethiopian war of 1935 was the first great manifestation of Afro-American interest in foreign affairs’.<sup>100</sup> According to William Scott, this attitude was due to the sacred belief in Ethiopia’s importance to the black diaspora as the oldest civilization on earth and origin of African civilisation.<sup>101</sup> Furthermore, it was probably catalysed by the fact that Ethiopia was the only African nation ruled by an African Emperor, and thus the only nation state not to have been

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<sup>99</sup> ‘Le Rappresaglie di Graziani contro la popolazione della regione’, *Il Corriere del Popolo* (9 Luglio 1936), p. 1.

<sup>100</sup> B. G. Plummer, *Rising Wind: Black Americans and U.S. Foreign Affairs 1935-1960* (North Carolina, 1996), p. 37.

<sup>101</sup> W. R. Scott, ‘Black Nationalism and the Ethiopian Conflict 1934 – 36’, *Journal of Negro History*, 63, (1978), pp. 118 – 134.



colonised by a white power during the scramble for Africa, along with Liberia. As recently stated by the postcolonial theorist Neelam Srivastava the Ethiopian war was ‘a fundamental event in the history of Pan-Africanism’ or black internationalism, that is, anti-colonial solidarity amongst communities of African origin across the globe, and thus of immense historical importance.<sup>102</sup> This interest in the war sparked by African American communities across North America was manifested in the form of large-scale demonstrations of solidarity in the predominantly black area of Harlem, in New York, conferences and fund-raising events to raise awareness in Chicago, the boycott of Italian American businesses, and even petitions were sent from black Christian priests to the Pope pleading for an end to the war.<sup>103</sup> African American newspapers were subsequently and unsurprisingly damning of the Italian invasion. They need to be included in my analysis of international impressions of the conflict, as they have long been excluded from previous scholarship and are of prime relevance to the contemporary history of the Italian quest for her empire.

On the eve of the war, the most famous African American paper for its far-reaching influence, *The Chicago Defender* set the scene in boosting morale for its readership by stating that:

Those who doubt the ability of Haile Selassie to defend his ancient empire may well know that at the command of Ethiopia’s modern troops are 70,000 officers, well-armed and knowing the lay of the land as they do their own rifles’ ... Haile Selassie, in the opinion of French military experts, can place 1,000,000 or more gunmen of all sorts into a very tangled field that is geographically four times greater than Great Britain.<sup>104</sup>

It then concluded by also menacing the natural obstacles Italian troops were up against when:

The flood of the southwest monsoon subsides a few weeks hence. Diseases, virulent malarial fevers, heat stroke, dysentery and even cholera will take a

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<sup>102</sup> N. Srivastava, *Italian Colonialism and Resistances to Empire, 1930 – 1970* (London, 2018), p. 65.

<sup>103</sup> Plummer, *Rising Wind*, p. 44.

<sup>104</sup> Lochard, ‘Panorama of World News’, p. 1.

hand in the impending conflict....in Mogadishu, the strategic Italian outpost, the only available source of fresh water is in Port Sudan, 350 miles away in Egypt. With such a scarcity, the Italian high command allots only two pints a man per day for drinking and washing purposes. The Fascist labor batallion as well as the combatant forces sleep naked on straw mats in the narrow streets, while the unloading of troop ships proceeds at night by the flares of acetylene light until the fierce solar heat stops all the labor. Such amenities for relief as trees, flowers and fountains, are lacking in the Italian colonies.<sup>105</sup>

This grim depiction is far from the photographs and descriptions published in the mainstream Italian, British, and mainstream papers, which portrayed organized lines of seemingly healthy soldiers and leaders in impeccable uniform on the front line, arriving in Ethiopian towns filled with content locals, lush gardens, and impeccable town buildings. This also the first notable public mention of the strength of the Ethiopian resistance, although undoubtedly an exaggeration given the events that ensued. My research and evidence revealed by other scholars in the field suggests, that the truth, in fact, lies somewhere comfortably in between the contrasting accounts of this newspaper article and others which have been reviewed earlier in this chapter.

Another prominent black newspaper in the United States, *The Pittsburgh Courier*, with the proudly self-proclaimed ‘largest audited circulation of any coloured newspaper in the United States’ reflected *The Chicago Defender’s* encouragement of the Ethiopian war effort and emphasis on Italy’s failures, weaknesses, and setbacks during the conflict.<sup>106</sup> In January, for example, the front page headline read ‘Italians South Wing, cut off by Gallant Ethiopians, At Point of Desperation, Rodger Reports: Graziani’s Legions on the Run – Line Harassed and Pressed Back – Seeking to Hold Off Ethiopian Advance’.<sup>107</sup>

In March 1936, another photograph made front-page news, but instead of the familiar image of Graziani, Badoglio, or Italian troops in the Ethiopian desert, this time the

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<sup>105</sup> Lochard, ‘Panorama of World News’, p. 1.

<sup>106</sup> *The Pittsburgh Courier*, front page.

<sup>107</sup> J. A. Rodgers, ‘Italians’ South Wing, Cut off by Gallant Ethiopians, At Point of Desperation, Rodger Reports’, *The Pittsburgh Courier* (11<sup>th</sup> January 1936), p. 1.

illustration was a majestic photograph of Haile Selassie with members of his imperial guard (*figure 35*).<sup>108</sup>



*Figure 35: 'Emperor Defies Italian Bombers', The Pittsburgh Courier (21<sup>st</sup> March 1936), p. 1*

The caption below stated:

Emperor Defies Italian Bombers, Unlike the Kings of the Occident, who stay far from the battlefield and the danger zone, Emperor Haile Selassie. "Conquering Lion of the Tribe of Judah" fights with his troops. On his shoulder he carries the latest military type of field glasses. Should the enemy make his appearance, the Emperor is prepared to take his place behind an anti-aircraft gun.<sup>109</sup>

Contrary to Graziani, often praised and named as the 'Lion of the Desert' in Italian newspapers, here we instead have the Ethiopian Emperor 'Lion of the Tribe of Judah', a

<sup>108</sup> Figure 35: 'Emperor Defies Italian Bombers', *The Pittsburgh Courier* (21<sup>st</sup> March 1936), p. 1.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

name utilised for all the Solomonic emperors of Ethiopia since Menelik I in the 13<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>110</sup> The Lion of Judah was a national symbol of imperial Ethiopia, featured on the country's flag and came to represent Selassie.<sup>111</sup> Hence, just like Omar al-Mukhtar had become a 'lion' to his followers and likewise Graziani to his supporters, Selassie also took on the emblematic form of the fierce animal in wartime against his enemies. The caption of *The Pittsburgh Courier* both criticized all Western heads of state by suggesting their cowardice, and praises Haile Selassie as both a brave military commander and national leader. The last comment in the excerpt about the anti-aircraft gun are also obvious responses to the notion spread by the Western press that the Ethiopians were 'inferior' peoples whose fighters only possessed outdated and 'barbaric' weapons. This time Selassie, not Graziani or Mussolini, was imagined as the warrior in command of weapons of modern warfare.

As the war turned in favour of the Italian aggressor, these optimistic reports soon became more desperate pleas for African American solidarity in support of the cause. A regular commentator of *The Pittsburgh Courier* stated that 'American negroes are standing idly by while the iron pincers of Badoglio and Graziani descent upon the world's oldest land and the largest singular nation of independent black people on earth'.<sup>112</sup> The radical *New York Amsterdam News*, one of the oldest African American newspapers which was published for the large black community in Harlem, and which was probably the most vocal community to rise up against Italian involvement in Ethiopia, also published very frequently on the war toward its end.

When Italy won the war, the newspaper did not desist in its negative accounts of ongoing events in Ethiopia, as seen in the following comment that 'the Fascists, ruthless at home, have introduced some new terrors and atrocities in the gory history of white imperialism (to warn) what the Ethiopians might expect from Fascist rule should they submit'.<sup>113</sup> The article then continued to list examples of past atrocities committed by Italians abroad such as the 'bombing of non-combatants', 'the rape of nuns and girls of tender age', and

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<sup>110</sup> T. Vestal, *The Lion of Judah in the New World: Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia and the shaping of Americans' Attitude toward Africa* (Santa Barbara, 2012).

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> G. Schuyler, 'Views and Reviews', *The Pittsburgh Courier* (7<sup>th</sup> March 1936), p. 10.

<sup>113</sup> 'Fascist Rule for Ethiopia to be Stern', *The N.Y. Amsterdam News* (16<sup>th</sup> May 1936), p. 13.

‘the bombardment of hospitals and Red Cross stations with the sick and wounded’.<sup>114</sup> The prime example was Graziani’s erection of a 180 mile barbed wire fence around fighting tribes back in Libya, who according to the article, ‘took a step unprecedented in the annals of colonial barbarity’ and to which ‘many preferred death’.<sup>115</sup> The article concluded on the rather pessimistic note that ‘only dead will be happy’ in the new Ethiopia and ‘the chains of Fascist slavery will be fastened tighter than ever’.<sup>116</sup>

The longest standing African American weekly, *The Cleveland Gazette*, however, did not give up. As late as August, when the Fascist Empire had already been declared and Graziani was named Viceroy, the paper continued to stir positivity and enthusiasm for Haile Selassie returning to the capital by stating that ‘Ethiopians march on to Addis Ababa! Two Big Armies’.<sup>117</sup> The subtitle followed with:

In a new drive, determined to retake the capital, at the behest of Emperor Haile Selassie. General Graziani Having Trouble with his Italian Soldiers and Laborers – The Latter Refusing to Renew Contracts – The Heat Unbearable.<sup>118</sup>

Later in the year, *The New York Amsterdam News*, although less positive, continued to argue that Italians had no claim to superiority, following an alleged report from an Italian soldier that ‘Italy’s Luck (had) Defeated Ethiopia’ and that ‘Badoglio lucky, that’s all’, suggesting that the result of the war was no reflection on Ethiopians themselves in regard to morale or fighting strength.<sup>119</sup> At the end of 1936, a photograph published on page 3 of *The Philadelphia Tribune* sums up the widespread African American representation of Graziani as Viceroy of Ethiopia from June onwards. (*figure 36*)<sup>120</sup> The subject of the photograph is Graziani surrounded by Ethiopian chiefs at a public event in Addis Ababa. The title of the photograph, however, leaves no room for interpretation, as written in capitals is the provocative question ‘Loyalty? Or Mandatory Attention?’<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> ‘Ethiopians march on to Addis Ababa!’, *The Cleveland Gazette* (1<sup>st</sup> August 1936), p. 1.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> F. Calvin, ‘Claims Italy’s Luck Defeated Ethiopia’, *The N.Y. Amsterdam News* (7<sup>th</sup> November 1936), p. 24.

<sup>120</sup> Figure 36: ‘Loyalty? Or Mandatory Attention?’, *The Philadelphia Tribune* (10<sup>th</sup> December 1936), p. 3.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

## LOYALTY?—OR MANDATORY ATTENTION?



ADDIS ABABA—General Graziani, the Governor of Abyssinia, addressing some of the notable Abyssinian chiefs, during a recent gathering in Addis Ababa.

*Figure 36: 'Loyalty? Or Mandatory Attention?', The Philadelphia Tribune (10<sup>th</sup> December 1936), p. 3*

### *Hero or Villain? Newspaper Coverage for other communities living across the Globe*

Although the two groups which have been examined above were the most attentive to the Ethiopian conflict, and to Graziani, for reasons connected to their ethnic roots, this does not mean to say that interest was not truly global. In fact, according to my other journalistic sources, the other highly interested international communities in this period appear to be Jews and Hispanic Americans. American Israeli and Jewish newspapers further afield, for example, were very positive in their accounts of Graziani, as they believed him to be of Sephardic Jewish descent. The origins and extent of truth to this belief are unknown, but Graziani was aware of it and also very keen to openly deny it. This is evident in Graziani's reaction to the release of a publication detailing Graziani's biography entitled 'Graziani l'Africain' which concluded that 'Graziani est d'origine et de confession Israelite. D'après notre confrere palestinien <Haevri> cette nouvelle est confirmé'.<sup>122</sup> After becoming aware of the fact, he swiftly sent the following telegram

<sup>122</sup> 'Graziani l'Africain', *Hatikvah* (Février 1936) p. 10.

the Italian Consulate in Jerusalem early in 1936, following its release in an Egyptian magazine:

Rivista Ebraica Hatikvah edita Alessandria Egitto nel suo primo numero pubblica articolo con fotografia su mia persona affermando mia confessione israelita. Essendo io di fede Cristiana Cattolica al cospetto di Dio et delle generazioni prego V.S. esigere a mio nome da Rivista Haevri/Hatikvah immediate smentita falsa affermazione che in questo momento ha certo scopo demolitore nei miei riguardi date mie funzioni governo in paese islamico. Ringrazio. Graziani.<sup>123</sup>

His insistence on the rectification of the accusation was to avoid trouble whilst he was posted in an Islamic country, which was Somalia at the time, as he stated in the telegram. Another possible reason could include his allegiance to Mussolini, the leader of a Catholic country, but has no further evidence to support it. What is clear here, however, is the acute awareness of his portrayal in the foreign press even whilst he was leading a military invasion and adamant attempt in trying to control his representation and any form of speculation surrounding him. In fact, speculation about Graziani's Jewish origins did not cease, as when Ethiopia was conquered by Italy, The American newspaper, *The Jewish Advocate* wrote an article entitled 'King Victor Emanuel makes Graziani First Jewish Field Marshal'.<sup>124</sup> *The Jewish Chronicle* published in Newark, New Jersey, went further by dedicating a section of a column dedicated to 'Jewish War Heroes' and 'Military Leaders and Fighters of Modern Times' to Graziani.<sup>125</sup> The author, Schaffer wrote:

On the Italian front the chief Jewish military figure was General Rudolfo Graziani. One of the most popular officers in the Italian army, General Graziani won decorations from every Allied Power. After the war he was sent to Cyrenaica to put down a native revolt. During the Italo-Ethiopian

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<sup>123</sup> R. Graziani 'Telegramma inviato al Consolato Italia Gerusalemme', ACS, F. RG, B. 77 (13 Febbraio 1936).

<sup>124</sup> 'King Victor Emanuel Makes Graziani First Jewish Field Marshal', *The Jewish Advocate* (2<sup>nd</sup> June 1936), p. 2.

<sup>125</sup>H. Schaffer, 'Jewish War Heroes: Military Leaders and Fighters of Modern Times', *The Jewish Chronicle* (10<sup>th</sup> July 1936), p. 7.

War he commanded the southern army which encircles the Ethiopian forces and made possible the complete rout of Emperor Selassie's troops. In recognition of his achievements in Ethiopia Graziani was recently made a Field Marshal by King Victor Emanuel.<sup>126</sup>

The highly hagiographical tone of the excerpt and the pride evoked at the belief that Graziani was a Jew, and as such brought military honour to Jews around the world, is comparable to the nature of the glory he brought to Italy in the Italian press.

Likewise, the Hispanic press in Texas, namely the newspaper *La Prensa* and *El Heraldo de Brownsville* were keen to publicly revere Graziani's role in the conquest of Ethiopia. In July 1936 *La Prensa* stated:

'La leyenda de Rodolfo Graziani, el Diablo Blanco'. No había que buscarlo en Roma, menos aun en las ceremonias oficiales o en las fiestas mundanas. No en el ajetreo de los grandes hoteles, sino en la calma de otro mas chico y no menos distinguido, cerca de la romana Puerta Pinciana y frente los jardines de la Villa Medici, he visto a Rodolfo Graziani en una ocasión: y pasara inadvertido si su apuesta y característica figura varonil no traicionase su incognito. En Fiuggi, mas no con la sociedad brillante ni con una corte de militares o politicos, sino jugando a bochas, con gente del lugar: hombres despuchugados, y solo, de vez en cuando, algún discreto policia de paisano, de los que veían por el mariscal.<sup>127</sup>

The prose in this excerpt, created suspense and mystery surrounding the proclaimed 'Legend of Rodolfo Graziani, the White Lion', with the author having claimed to have seen him once, not where 'heroes' were supposed to be spotted, at lavish parties or official events, but in his humble hometown of Fiuggi, playing a simple game of 'boules' with the locals. The atmospheric scene described here is thus one of avid mythicization and a common attempt to 'humanise' and 'humble' public figures and incite further

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> 'Heroe Nacional de Italia: Modesto, Sencillo, Trabajador', *La Prensa* (19 Julio 1936), p. 1.



admiration. *El Heraldo de Brownsville* also utilised expressive language to mythicise Graziani in the description of an official event in Addis Ababa when:

The marshal arranged a military review of 10,000 men, rode his horse dramatically to the foot of the obelisk raised by the defeated emperor, Haile Selassie and addressed the Ethiopian public: Once more Italy offers the hand of friendship to all who wish to cooperate quietly in the development of Ethiopia where Italy has come to secure for the inhabitants peace, work, wealth, and civil progress.<sup>128</sup>

By expressing such apparent confidence and paternalism over his Ethiopian subjects, the portrayal of Graziani in this short but evocative piece is also a very positive one, and highly representative of the Fascist ideal that Mussolini and Graziani wanted to portray to the world, now that they possessed an empire. In fact, it is precisely this process, that of reflecting the contemporary ideals of society and politics into human form through the written world, which resulted in the mythicisation of men like Graziani into heroes. Thus, the Fascist government's and Graziani's countless acts of violence in the Italo-Ethiopian conflict reflected in the villainisation of Graziani in the Anti-Fascist and African American press analysed previously was not represented here. In these other papers for other American and international communities, the image of Graziani the hero took precedent upon his success in Ethiopia.

#### *The Viceroy of Ethiopia, His Attempted Assassination & Aftermath*

At the culmination of the war Badoglio decided to leave Addis Ababa, leaving Graziani temporarily in charge. This event left national American and British ruminating over who would take his place on a permanent basis. *The New York Times* attested that 'well-informed circles believe that he will never return here except on a visit' due to health reasons, and it hypothesised that 'these sources consider Marshal Graziani, hard-boiled hero of the Southern Ethiopian campaign, the best choice for the rugged job of subduing the former kingdom of Emperor Haile Selassie'.<sup>129</sup> The news was warmly received, as

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<sup>128</sup> 'Marshal Offers Friendship', *El Heraldo de Brownsville* (6<sup>th</sup> August 1936), p. 7.

<sup>129</sup> 'Badoglio Departs on Way to Italy: Viceroy, giving command of troops to Graziani, is not expected back in Ethiopia', *The N.Y. Times* (21 May 1936), p. 11.

it was reported that Graziani was cooperating with other Western powers in the country, by passing a decree to allow the continued operation of American hospitals in Ethiopia ‘carried on in the interests of the native populations’.<sup>130</sup> Contrarily, *The New York Herald Tribune* announced Graziani’s order to shut down all foreign radio stations in Addis Ababa as ‘Graziani says Duce’s official station is sufficient to handle all messages’.<sup>131</sup> This decree was an attempt by the Duce and Graziani to widen their grip on the information outlets in the newfound empire to ensure no negative news of Italian rule was filtering out to international spectators.

This lonesome report on censorship, was however, never followed up with another story, and from then on, only cases of Graziani’s ‘paternal care’ for his new subjects were highlighted by *The New York Herald Tribune*. For example, early in September, the Viceroy was reported to have ‘ordered monthly payments of subsidies to twenty-eight Coptic churches in Addis Ababa...as an indication that Ethiopians will no way be called upon to surrender their religious beliefs.’<sup>132</sup> When the respective priests apparently thanked him, he was quoted as ‘nobly’ replying ‘we would not be worthy descendants of Roman civilization if we did not permit religious liberty amongst our subjects’.<sup>133</sup> A few weeks later, another flattering report of Graziani passing a decree to ban crawling ‘as a sign of obedience to their Italian conquerors’ was printed in the press.<sup>134</sup> Yet again his apparent respect for his new subjects was emphasised, as he was quoted in stating that ‘only slaves did that...and Italy desires her Ethiopian citizens free to have perfect consciousness of their dignity as men’.<sup>135</sup> A sterner side of the Viceroy was however noted in *The Times* of London as a public speech delivered by Graziani. It was quoted in June as follows:

The faithful shall be happy, but those who break their promises shall be destroyed. This is the law of Rome, which Rome has in the past conquered all the nations and peoples of the earth’...in exalting the work of his Government,

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<sup>130</sup> ‘*The N.Y. Times* (28<sup>th</sup> May 1936), p. 4.

<sup>131</sup> ‘Italy Closes Private Radios in Addis Ababa, U.S. is Hit’, *The N.Y. Herald Tribune* (11<sup>th</sup> July 1936), p. 7.

<sup>132</sup> ‘Italy Grants 28 Subsidies to Addis Ababa Churches: Priests Thank Graziani on Behalf of Ethiopians’, *The N.Y. Herald Tribune* (3<sup>rd</sup> September 1936), p. 14.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> ‘Graziani Bans Crawling as Ethiopian Obeisance’, *The N.Y. Herald Tribune* (29<sup>th</sup> September 1936), p. 2

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

Marshal Graziani told his hearers that “up to yesterday you were sheep, but today you are men.”<sup>136</sup>

The austere and consequential tone of this speech, however, was again but an anomaly amongst other more positive accounts of Graziani’s rule in Ethiopia. Furthermore, the tone of the speech was delivered by the newspaper as rigid but not cruel, harsh but not inhumane, and a necessary way to ensure respect for the new Italian rule of the country.

Public interest not just in Graziani’s direct rule of the country, but also his presence at events such as the Feast of Mascal, was reported upon frequently in *The Times*. An example of his ‘dignified’ manner was noted in the report on the annual feast, as according to *The Times* correspondent, instead of Abyssinians kissing the ground in order to receive favours at the event, under Graziani’s presence ‘he invited them instead to “raise their arm as free citizens and free men to salute the great Italy, mistress of this land.”’<sup>137</sup> The newspaper also seemed pleased that ‘the Italians had been very lenient’ in allowing the continuation of British missionary work in Ethiopia as Graziani was quoted to have stated in an interview ‘of course your work can continue’.<sup>138</sup> In this period, photographic publications of the new Viceroy exploded in *The Illustrated London News*. One example was a photograph of Graziani and other military officials towering above ‘a recent gathering of native chiefs at Addis Ababa’ (*figure 37*).<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Times Correspondent, ‘Law of Rome in Abyssinia: Marshal Graziani’s Warning’, *The Times* (26<sup>th</sup> June 1936), p. 15.

<sup>137</sup> Times Correspondent, ‘The Feast of Mascal in Addis Ababa’, *The Times* (23<sup>rd</sup> September 1936), p. 11

<sup>138</sup> ‘Missionary Work in Abyssinia’, *The Times* (22<sup>nd</sup> September 1936), p. 16

<sup>139</sup> Figure 37: ‘Italian Military Rule in Abyssinia’, *The Illustrated London News* (21<sup>st</sup> November 1936), p. 919.



Figure 37: 'Italian Military Rule in Abyssinia', *The Illustrated London News* (21<sup>st</sup> November 1936), p. 919

The intended message colonial and racial hierarchy in the image is clear and supported by the caption that 'according to reliable reports all Abyssinia down to the eleventh parallel can be considered subjugated and the inhabitants relatively settled under Italian Rule'.<sup>140</sup> Among these familiar photographs taken of Graziani at public events in Addis Ababa, the printing of one particular photo stood out amongst the others, this time directly connected to Italo-British relations in Africa. This was a photograph of the Sikh British Legation Guard awaiting inspection from Graziani before leaving Ethiopia as they were apparently no longer needed, suggesting that Ethiopia was now in 'good' hands under the Italians.<sup>141</sup> Although Graziani wasn't in the shot himself, the caption included the brief comment that Graziani complimented the commanding officer for his 'fine bearing' which signifies British respect for Graziani in not only being worth of

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> 'News Events from Home and Abroad: Items of Topical Interest', *The Illustrated London News* (26<sup>th</sup> December 1936), p. 1192.

reviewing a sample of their troops, but also noting that he granted one of them a compliment.<sup>142</sup>

In fact, general international interest in Graziani as an individual and not just a soldier rose even more after his promotion to Viceroy. As the Viceroy of the first Italian empire since antiquity and the highest representative of the Fascist government, Mussolini, and the Italian king abroad, it is perhaps unsurprising that such an interest was sparked by his new role, which was now far from merely a military one. The writer Grahame Greene published an excerpt from a book in *The Observer*, written by the famous British writer and traveller, Evelyn Waugh, on his impressions of Graziani when he was on his trip around Libya.<sup>143</sup> Waugh stated that ‘Graziani, the then Governor of Cyrenaica, was like the traditional conception of an English admiral; frank, humorous and practical’.<sup>144</sup> The fact that Graziani was being assimilated and compared to the most senior commander of the beloved and highly respected British navy is clearly an overwhelmingly positive one, and was designed to be the upmost compliment for the Viceroy.

Nevertheless, the largest catalyst of global widespread attention in the Viceroy did not come until early the following year. Following the events of the 19<sup>th</sup> of February 1937, the international press exploded after the attack on Graziani with dramatic headlines such as ‘Attempt to Kill Graziani’ ‘Bombs Thrown in Addis Ababa’, and ‘Marshal Graziani narrowly escaped death yesterday at the hands of would be assassins’.<sup>145</sup> *The Illustrated London News* especially exploited the news of the attack with a double page spread of photographs of the event (but not Graziani himself) before the attack, incurring sympathy for him and patronising the ‘primitive’ perpetrators with quotes of him being bombed ‘while he was distributing gifts’ to the locals and being ‘fortunately’ not seriously injured ‘as it appears that the bombs thrown at this party were of primitive manufacture’.<sup>146</sup> The absence of photographs of the aftermath of the 19<sup>th</sup> of February are unsurprising given the state of chaos of the city and almost complete Italian censorship of the foreign press in Ethiopia by this time.

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> G. Greene, ‘A Dance in Africa’, *The Observer* (15h November 1936), p. 9.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> ‘Attempt to Kill Graziani: Bombs Thrown in Addis Ababa’, *The Observer* (21<sup>st</sup> February 1937), p. 17.

<sup>146</sup> ‘News from All Quarters: Noteworthy Events of the Week’, *The Illustrated London News* (27<sup>th</sup> February 1937), pp. 352 – 353.

To follow up on the event, an article was published a few days later and opened with a vague account of what happened in the days that followed:

Subsequently, fires broke out in the city and Abyssinians set some premises alight near a benzine depot in the centre of the town in the hope of an explosion – a danger averted by the Italian troops and firemen. The garrison of 30,000 troops quickly restored order.<sup>147</sup>

In fact, this excerpt not only denied any reprisal attacks by Italian forces by vaguely mentioning that the Italians justifiably ‘restored order’ and even heroised them for ‘averting danger’ and death and blamed Ethiopian civilians for the burning of the city. *The Observer* supported *The Illustrated London News*’ version of the attack and subsequent days of chaos in Addis Ababa in its preoccupation of Graziani’s welfare by reassuring its readership that ‘he is considered to be progressing rapidly towards recovery’.<sup>148</sup> They did acknowledge the executions but heavily downplayed them by writing that:

No figures are published about the number of people executed or killed following the attempt on General Graziani by the terrorist bomb-throwers, but it is declared that figures published abroad which speak in thousands are greatly exaggerated.<sup>149</sup>

This is not to say that the British government was not highly troubled by the issue. In fact, they held two parliamentary sessions in the House of Commons to decide what public stance they should take on the issue. A leading member of the Labour Party, Arthur Henderson called the motion regarding ‘the recent massacre in Addis Ababa’.<sup>150</sup> At the session he spoke to the rest of the house stating that:

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<sup>147</sup> ‘Marshal Graziani Bombed: Just before the Addis Ababa Outrage’, *The Illustrated London News* (6<sup>th</sup> March 1937), p. 395.

<sup>148</sup> Our Own Correspondent, ‘Japan and Abyssinia’, *The Observer* (7<sup>th</sup> March 1937), p. 22.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>150</sup> Parliament Session 1936 -1937, House of Commons Hansard, Fifth Series, Vol. 321, (25<sup>th</sup> March 1937), page column 3047 – 3186.

In doing so, may I at once say that I am in no sense actuated by any feelings of ill-will towards the Italian nation, whose culture and historical traditions this country has always greatly admired. But those feelings of admiration do not in any sense diminish the horror and revulsion with which the news of these atrocities has been received.<sup>151</sup>

Henderson, however, completely absolved Graziani of the blame stating that ‘Marshal Graziani is enraged at the action of the Blackshirts and other Italians concerned in the affair, which reflects on the control, or lack of it, of the military authorities’.<sup>152</sup> Any measure of Graziani’s culpability was only briefly pondered upon as it was highlighted that he had previously ‘enjoyed the nickname of The Hyena of Libya’ during the ‘pacification’.<sup>153</sup> Even the slight implication of his involvement was however immediately dismissed by the leader of the Liberal Party, David Lloyd George who came to Graziani’s defence by stating that:

‘If I may say so, I was very glad to hear-I heard it for the first time-that Marshal Graziani had protested. I know nothing about his record in Tripoli, but I know something of his record in the Great War. He was a very gallant and a very fine soldier. He was the one great General who stood up in the rout at Caporetto and never flinched, and it was very largely due to his courage and calm that the situation was saved on the Grappa, which was one of the bastions there.’<sup>154</sup>

The conclusions which were followed up in later sessions with the Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden, were to not take action on the matter. Eden said that ‘we have publicly stated what we have to say on this subject’.<sup>155</sup> In response to reports about the high death toll and Italian censorship on the matter Eden replied decisively decided that ‘I do not think this matter is of any importance. I regard this statement with contempt.’<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid, page column 977 – 1146.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

To follow up, official British opinion continued to see Graziani and Italian rule in Ethiopia in a favourable light after the events of February 1937. Later on in the year, *The Illustrated London News* posted pro-colonial images and articles of ‘the Imperium Romanum in Conquered Abyssinia’ with news of ‘modernisation’ and ‘civilisation’; in particular, ‘road-building, housing, public security and general conditions under the Italian regime’.<sup>157</sup> This positive press continued until the dawn of Italy’s entry into World War II. In 1939, The Royal Institute of International Affairs reviewed one of Graziani’s books about the Ethiopian conflict rendering it the first ‘official history of the campaign...by the vivid narrative of operations’, as De Bono and Badoglio’s previous accounts were seen to have been somewhat incomplete as they ‘contained little information’.<sup>158</sup> This British academic review published by Oxford University ‘congratulated (the author) on a handsome book’ which was ‘well documented’.<sup>159</sup> By doing so, it not only legitimised Graziani’s actions and telling of events in Ethiopia but also gave a clear stance on state opinion of Graziani as a colonial authority figure even after the events of 1937 and beyond.

The mainstream American press was no less interested in the events of February 1937. By barely acknowledging the reprisals, the American religious and conservative paper *The Christian Science Monitor* assured its readers that after the ‘alleged attacks...reports received from Ethiopia confirm that the peaceful population is not hostile to the Italians, who give them security, money for their products and order which they did not enjoy heretofore’.<sup>160</sup> *The Baltimore Sun*, however, bluntly reported on the massacres in a rather indifferent manner that ‘the firing squad has worked overtime in Addis Ababa since 2,000 suspects were rounded up on suspicion of connection with the bombing, or otherwise resisting the makers of a new Roman empire’.<sup>161</sup> There was no further elaboration, however on the killings or mention of civilian casualties but it rather vaguely and incriminatingly called the Ethiopian victims ‘suspects’. Even *The Toronto Star* headlined the event with the title ‘attempt to slay Marshal Graziani’ but again no mention

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<sup>157</sup> ‘The Imperium Romanum in Conquered Abyssinia’, *The Illustrated London News* (14<sup>th</sup> August 1937), p. 270.

<sup>158</sup> R. Cheesman, ‘Reviewed work: Il Fronte Sud by Rodolfo Graziani’ *The Royal Institute of International Affairs* 18/4 (August 1939), p. 578.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> ‘Italy’s Program in Ethiopia’, *The Christian Science Monitor* (12<sup>th</sup> March 1937), p. 3.

<sup>161</sup> A.P. Dispatch, ‘Capture and Death of Desta Demtu Brings Ethiopian Resistance Nearer End’, *The Baltimore Sun* (26<sup>th</sup> February 1937), p. 7.



of firing squads or executions as it was only stated that ‘2,000 Ethiopians are reported arrested for questioning in connection with the attempted assassination’.<sup>162</sup>

The Italian American newspapers also varied in their narration of events, more obviously this time due to their pronounced political leanings. The fascist & New York based *Il Grido Della Stirpe* completely ignored the massacres of Addis Ababa and worked to combat any recent negative press surrounding Graziani and re-establish his status by publishing an article on Mussolini’s ‘Altissima Decorazione a Graziani’ in early March as he was decorated with yet another military honour ‘per l’opera svolta in Somalia e nell’Impero’.<sup>163</sup> It further justified the Duce’s nomination by writing that:

Ecco la superba motivazione per l’altissima decorazione concessa al Vicere: Guerriero per istinto, tenace volitivo temprato alle maggiori audacie, quale comandante della Somalia forgio del suo corpo operante un poderoso organismo che con illuminata perizia lancio ottenendo risultati che riempiono di orgoglio la nazione.<sup>164</sup>

The fact that Mussolini chose that exact time to honour Graziani, also suggests that he was doing so for the same reason as the American Fascist newspaper, to rehabilitate his image in the months after the attack. *Il Progresso Italo-Americano* was also sympathetic to Graziani by deeming his attack as ‘un episodio di delinquenza comune’ and highlighted that even the Pope sent a telegram to Graziani with well wishes.<sup>165</sup> It did not deny the Fascist round up of 2000 suspects, but wrote that only ‘gli indigeni in possesso di armi sono stati fucilati’, whilst the remaining 700 ‘sono stati liberati perche trovati innocenti’.<sup>166</sup> Only the avid anti-Fascist *Il Corriere del Popolo* highlighted the ‘fuciliazioni in massa...falciando oltre 600 indigeni’ and noted that ‘trecento di questi disgraziati sono stati trasportati in un campo a poca distanza della citta ad uccisi a colpi di mitragliatrice’.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> ‘Attempt to Slay Marshal Graziani’, *The Toronto Daily Star* (22<sup>nd</sup> February 1937), p. 3.

<sup>163</sup> ‘Un’Altissima Decorazione a Graziani’, *Il Grido della Stirpe* (13 Marzo 1937), p. 1.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> ‘200 Arrestati per l’Attentato a Graziani’, *Il Progresso-Italo Americano* (22 Febbraio 1937), p. 1.

<sup>166</sup> ‘Gli Indigeni in possesso di armi sono stati fucilati a Addis Abeba’, *Il Progresso Italo-Americano* (24 Febbraio 1937), p. 1.

<sup>167</sup> ‘Dodici Bombe a Mano contro gli Invasori Fascisti’, *Il Corriere del Popolo* (25 Febbraio 1937), p. 1.

The most damning accounts of the events of February in Ethiopia were those predictably written by the African American press. The *Kansas Negro Star* reported massacres against Ethiopians, and a declaration by an Italian government representative that ‘it is none of the world’s business how many Ethiopians were killed’ and, when asked for the number executed, stated that ‘other governments do not give information when they suppress colonial uprisings. We do not intend to, either’.<sup>168</sup> It was also the only newspaper to report that the ‘French Government was compelled to issue a formal protest to Italy on the slaughter of Ethiopians following the attack on Marshal Graziani’ because apparently ‘the Italians even raided the grounds of the French Consulate, and set fire to the huts of the servants of the French Consulate’.<sup>169</sup> Furthermore, the newspaper claimed that ‘Italians murder more than 7000 Ethiopians in revenge for Graziani’s wounding’ in the ‘most savage and brutal reprisals ever known to history’.<sup>170</sup> Another African American newspaper of Kansas, *The Wyandotte Echo* highlighted that Haile Selassie addressed a letter to the League of Nations pleading them to intervene and impose consequences on Italy, but it sadly concludes that his ‘VOICE NOT HEARD’ for a third time since the beginning of Italo-Abyssinian hostilities (in capital letters in the original).<sup>171</sup>

In sum, the only community to come close to drawing adequate attention to the true events which took place during the multiple day massacre of Addis Ababa, was the African American one. After some shallow deliberation, the mainstream newspapers of the U.S.A and Great Britain desisted in further inquiries of who was responsible for the murder of the innocent Ethiopian civilians, as did the League of Nations. Each government presumably had its reasons and agenda, from pro-colonial sympathies and possible appeasement, to mere neglect of what were deemed as more pressing matters in their own countries and in international relations. Moreover, there was never any mention of the massacre at Debre Libranos in the contemporary press, which went undiscovered until the revelation by Del Boca forty years later. Graziani was never questioned about his role in the reprisals during his lifetime and to this day Italy has never formally acknowledged or apologized for them.

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<sup>168</sup> ‘Italy Won’t Tell How Many Ethiopians Killed’, *The Negro Star* (19<sup>th</sup> March 1937), p. 3.

<sup>169</sup> ‘French Government Protests Ethiopian Massacre by Italy’, *The Negro Star* (19<sup>th</sup> March 1937), p. 3.

<sup>170</sup> ‘Revenge’, *The Negro Star* (19<sup>th</sup> March 1937), p. 4.

<sup>171</sup> ‘Haile Selassie Lays Details of Massacre Before League’, *The Wyandotte Echo* (23<sup>rd</sup> April 1937), p. 1.

Mussolini was well aware of the speculation that was happening in the press, evident in his countless telegrams to Graziani asking for updates and sending him press reports from abroad throughout the course of 1937.<sup>172</sup> It remains unclear why Graziani left his post and prestigious title in Ethiopia in December of that same year after spending an entire career based in the colonies from the outset. He was succeeded by the Duca d'Aosta who had participated alongside him in the earlier Libyan and Ethiopian conflicts. Given the wealth of printed material which my research revealed in this section, it is highly probable that both Mussolini and Graziani were aware of the attention which Italy was getting globally due to the events in Ethiopia and decided upon his withdrawal accordingly to prevent any rising negative press surrounding the Viceroy and Italian rule in Ethiopia. They sought to avoid negative press regarding the Fascist government's inability to fully control its new colony. Furthermore, by 1937 Mussolini had increasingly begun alienating himself from the Western powers, due to his growing closeness to Hitler, with his intervention in the Spanish Civil war on the side of Franco and the signing of the Anti-Comintern pact late in 1936. The Fascist government just couldn't risk any more negative attention.

In conclusion, the rich content and number of sources in this chapter reveal that Graziani proved highly symbolic for the international community for a variety of reasons. The acute and universal interest in him directly reflected global intrigue in Fascist Italy as a whole, a new type of nation-state with an unpredictability in policy and action which was to be admired, feared, and at times slandered. For other colonial western powers this modern colonial Fascist soldier was to be respected for the amplified 'manly' qualities which he exuded, through what was perceived as his unwavering hardiness he showed on the battlefield. For the anti-fascist and anti-imperialist communities left unrepresented in the mainstream international press, he embodied all the horrors of the Fascist regime, its policies, and actions abroad. Yet, in a period in which the official views of Western powers prevailed as Britain and North America were the leading actors on the international scene, so did their overwhelmingly positive image of Graziani. These states therefore heavily contributed to the myth of Graziani, and by default the positive

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<sup>172</sup> ACS, F. RG, B. 48.

reputation of the Fascist State and its actions abroad; an affirmation which has long been neglected in relevant scholarly literature.

Thus, Graziani formally returned to Rome in January 1938 with his reputation intact and embarked upon a 'victory' tour of Italy to further preserve and upholster his image as one of the key founders of the Fascist Empire. This is precisely how he would be widely remembered in the peninsula and abroad. He travelled to many Italian towns, big and small, across the country, as evident from the countless images in his personal archive of being greeted and hailed in processions in towns all over Italy, from Forli to Genova.<sup>173</sup> His retirement was, however, short lived, as when the Second World War broke out in September 1939, he became one of the first trusted generals to be called up by the Duce for guidance on how Italy should proceed. He therefore entered World War II with a prominent position and, on the whole, a saved reputation, which will be reviewed in the next chapter as he went back to Africa in 1940 to lead the Northern Front against the Allies.

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<sup>173</sup> ACS, FF. RG, B. 4 – 6.



## 4. World War II

This chapter is concerned with Graziani's movements, public and private, leading up to and for the duration of the global conflict which tore his nation apart in the period 1938 – 1945. This proved a complicated trajectory which brought him once again into the spotlight across the Western World as he led some of the most infamous conflicts of the Second World War at home and abroad, and for the first time, seriously jeopardised the image of Graziani in his homeland. Therefore, this chapter fluctuates between the national and international arena, as I first return the metropole to test the durability of his myth, which by now was firmly habituated, back at home in Italy in the prelude to World War II, before geographically widening my analysis once again. This variable shift between the domestic and global is not only due to the availability of primary sources, but crucial to Graziani's narrative, as his story stretched long beyond the confines of the Italian peninsula or indeed the African continent where he physically resided throughout his life.

The first section follows directly on from the Duca d'Aosta's succession of Graziani's prestigious title of Viceroy of Ethiopia late in December 1937. Given the context of his sudden retirement from Africa and arrival back in the metropole early in 1938, it is perhaps surprising that Graziani managed to retain his role as a target of public spectacle as he was no longer a principal actor on the colonial stage. He was, however, still, a *Maresciallo d'Italia*, and therefore still highly valuable to the Fascist government on a symbolic level. Graziani thus continued to preserve his image and embrace the path laid out for him by the Fascist government upon his return to ensure that the nation would not yet forget the Lion of the Desert. By doing so, his actions and the popular portrayal of him in the media further indicate his significance beyond the battlefield, and his popular persona continued to be fostered and ritualised through further public spectacle, much like that of a modern-day celebrity.

Mussolini's growing alliance with Hitler, however, and Italy's growing probability of embarking on a war against the Allies spun another turn of events for Italy and Graziani in 1939. As the possibility of Fascist Italy's first battle against another western power loomed, propaganda was replaced by the urgency of military preparations. By mid 1939, Graziani, Badoglio, and some of Mussolini's other most trusted advisors were thrust into

action as an offensive against British forces in Egypt was planned behind closed doors. The Lion was thus sent back to the desert in Italy's first military conflict as an Axis power in an arena familiar to the Maresciallo. Consequently, in repetition of the international coverage which had taken such a heightened interest in Graziani during the Italo-Ethiopian War, he found himself yet again on the front page of *The New York Times* and *The Observer* of London.

This time, though, it was not merely the Allies or other colonial powers which took such an interest in the man who would lead Mussolini's army against the world's leading colonial power in Africa, Great Britain. As a global event, the Second World War and its various arenas were of vital importance to even neutral onlookers, so was Graziani. This interest was perhaps partly due to mere default due to his prominent role in World War II, but it was also inevitably due to the prior mythicisation of his persona prior which automatically incited interest in him over other military leaders in the conflict. His steps on the battlefield and its aftermath will therefore be traced through the national and international press with particular attention given to the discrepancies between the descriptions and details given by various nation-states as a reflection of the fluctuating state of international relations, the Italian national context and control and censorship of the press.

*Towards World War II: Homecoming and the Internal Colonisation of National Memory*

The historiography surrounding Italy in 1938 remains relatively scarce. Scholarship from the period remains preoccupied with the formation of the Axis alliance following Mussolini's signing of the Anti-Comintern pact in November 1937 and subsequent alienation of the Allies. Since the formal declaration of the Fascist empire in 1936, historians assume that the general 'celebratory' propaganda of the Ethiopian war which ensued remains of little relevance in its aftermath, other than rising Anti-Semitic and racist propaganda. Therefore, scholarly focus remains restricted to the racial segregation which ensued and is relevant to this project for a few reasons which will be explored below, from Graziani's active role in legitimising racism & antisemitism in Italy to his less conspicuous emblematic role in Italy's racialised propaganda in this period.

The first significant step towards national racial segregation in period was the publication of a 'Manifesto della Razza' in *Giornale d'Italia* on the 15<sup>th</sup> July of 1938, signed by forty-two government officials and influential academics across Italy.<sup>1</sup> It included ten points which asserted the biological existence of different racial hierarchies, declared the purity of the 'Italian race', excluding all Jews and people of non-European origin, and proclaimed that it was time that Italians defined themselves as 'francamente razzisti'.<sup>2</sup> Significantly, Graziani was one of the forty-two signatories and the inclusion of his name, along with other leading prominent figures of the *ventennio*, was intended to add weight and legitimacy to the declaration. Indeed, during his lifetime, Graziani was known for expressing hatred against various ethnic African groups who he was combatting. In his autobiography, for example, he bluntly wrote that 'non ho mai incontrato sulla terra, e credo non esiste al mondo gente più odiata' about Haile Selassie's Amharan tribe.<sup>3</sup> His signature on the 'Manifesto della Razza', however, was a bold move to formally legitimise Italian racism in his own country, as previously his remarks and actions had taken place abroad.

Further clauses initiated in the Manifesto which separated those deemed as belonging to the Italian 'race' from other 'lesser' races were legally followed by the Racial Laws in November 1938. The laws banned racial 'others' from higher education, excluded them from certain jobs and prohibited them from marrying and procreating with 'pure' Italians, which also naturally applied to Africans, Arabs, and mixed race peoples living in Italy and its colonies.<sup>4</sup> The relevance of the case of Graziani to this institutionalisation of antisemitism and racism in this period is his public emblematic role within it, as we shall start to see in this chapter. As the white Italian coloniser 'par excellence' he provided a key propagandistic boost in the promotion of racism in the Italian press, both in reference to his career and the innate heroic traits which he was deemed to possess. Through the frequent publication of Graziani's movements in the national press from 1938 onwards, he therefore played a part in the state's promotion of hardening racial attitudes. He provided a visual reminder of the Italian triumph over other 'races' through militarism, colonial conquest, and his embodiment of the physical characteristics and

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<sup>1</sup> 'Il Manifesto della Razza', *Il Giornale d'Italia* (15 Luglio 1938), p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> cited in Del Boca, *Gli Italiani in Africa: Vol. III*, p. 80.

<sup>4</sup> M. Sarfatti, *The Jews in Mussolini's Italy: from Equality to Persecution* (London, 2006), p. 23.



comportment attributed to the Uomo Nuovo. This exemplification of a ‘real’ and ‘pure’ Italian man provided a tangible contrast to people seen as belonging to the ‘lesser’ races declared by the Fascist government. Moreover, newspaper articles, photographs, and film did not provide the only indication of the state’s continued promotion of Graziani upon his return to Italy. A transition or boom of the institutionalisation of more concrete and enduring mementos relating directly to Graziani can also be seen more evidently in the public sphere in this period to ensure the longevity of his myth in the national consciousness.

When Graziani was replaced by the Duca d’Aosta as Viceroy of Ethiopia at the very end of December 1937, the shift in leadership was barely noticed by the Italian press to ensure a smooth transition. By drawing little attention to the fact, Graziani’s retirement from his prestigious post went largely unnoticed and appeared dignified, ignoring the international cloud of controversy which surrounded the bloody reprisals following his attempted assassination earlier that year. Only a few photographs were published on page 6 of *Il Popolo d’Italia* in January showing Graziani warmly embracing his successor at a ceremony in Addis Ababa, as a public display of respect for the new ruler.<sup>5</sup> Photographs from his archive indicated Graziani left the continent early in January and he was given a rather regal send off from a large number of Italian colonists who came to wave him goodbye as he boarded the ship to take him back to Italy in a monumental display of affection as seen in *figures 38 and 39*.<sup>6</sup> He arrived in the south by boat in February where according to *Il Mattino*, he spent some time in Sicily recovering from his journey and visiting the citizens of Messina.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> ‘l’Incontro ad Addis Abeba tra il Maresciallo e SAR il Duca d’Aosta’, *Il Popolo d’Italia* (1 Gennaio 1938), p. 6.

<sup>6</sup> Figures 38 & 39: ‘Graziani si imbarca sulla nave Crispi per tornare in Italia’ (10 Gennaio 1938), ACS, FF. RG, B.6.

<sup>7</sup> ‘le accoglienze che la città prepara a Graziani’, *Il Mattino* (25 Febbraio 1938), p. 5.



*Figures 38 & 39: 'Graziani si imbarca sulla nave Crispi per tornare in Italia' (10 Gennaio 1938), ACS, FF. RG, B.6*

The leading southern newspaper, *Il Mattino*, announced his landing via ‘motonave’ in the port of Naples the day before his arrival so citizens could give him a warm greeting.<sup>8</sup> The proclamation was hard to miss as it was written in bold and capital letters on the first page and notified that he would be touring the city for the day between 9.30 and 15.30 if admirers were interested in going to see and honour him.<sup>9</sup> This was a deliberate effort to ritualise his celebrity through civic performance with the adoring public as participants in the process of worship. Page 5 followed with half a page spread dedicated to ‘le accoglienze che la città prepara a Graziani’ pre-empting that ‘tutta Napoli sarà domani a Molo Razza’ to greet him, a calculating tactic to convince readers that they would be excluded from an important event if they were not present.<sup>10</sup> This was further encouraged by the announcement that all schools and shops would be closed especially for the event, and all employees given a few hours off work during the day in order to participate.<sup>11</sup>

Strict instructions were given for, in the newspapers words, ‘the impressive line-up’, which foresaw the presence and ceremonies of various military organizations in the region from Navy volunteers to groups of war widows who ‘lo saluteranno con l’entusiasmo del cuore appassionato’ at various sites across the city.<sup>12</sup> The article urged those who possessed them to wear their military or Fascist uniforms to telling them where to go and stand in order to pay homage to ‘il condottiero audace e geniale che, ha provveduto al consolidamento della vittoria e della sicurezza delle terre del vasto Impero’.<sup>13</sup> The next two days, were filled with various articles dedicated to the description of Graziani’s visits to Messina, Taormina and Naples. In these articles, his wife was also frequently mentioned to be accompanying him, and by default, was also honoured by the public with flowers, medals, as the ‘due illustri ospiti’ toured the south by car.<sup>14</sup>

After the city visits, the trip was evocatively described by papers for days to come. All the central streets of Messina were reportedly crowded with ‘migliaia di cittadini che gli

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<sup>8</sup> ‘S.E. Graziani giungerà a Napoli domattina’, *Il Mattino* (25 Febbraio 1938), p. 1.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> le accoglienze che la città prepara a Graziani’.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> ‘Il Fervido Saluto di Messina a S. E. Rodolfo Graziani’, *Il Mattino* (26 Febbraio 1938), p. 1.

stringevano in torno ed volevano ad ogni costo portarlo sulle braccia' like a true star.<sup>15</sup> The paper's description of Graziani's visit in Naples oozed with even more impetuous emotion as the writer of the newspaper wrote that 'non è facile fare un calcolo di strabocchevole folla che ieri ha trionfalmente accolto il vincitore di Neghelli'.<sup>16</sup> It was stated that 'le grida si diffondono con un crescendo impetuoso' in 'un' atmosfera di alta passione guerriera' as the excitement which his presence generated forced him to emerge on his hotel balcony multiple times.<sup>17</sup> The apparent spontaneity of this affection, in line with the Fascist government's use of crowd psychology and that of mass politics, was designed to add convincing authenticity to Graziani's genuine popularity, similar to the tactics used by the Duce himself. Furthermore, Graziani's role in the state's attempted racialisation of Italians through his use of language is also evident in this article as whilst he addressed a group of Messinian veterans in the local town hall, he is quoted to have congratulated them on their 'sacrificio della razza mediterranea'.<sup>18</sup> This notion was also supported by the description of his 'maschia e caratteristica figura', in colonial uniform 'di aspetto floridissimo' which suggested that through his sacrifice in colonial war, men like Graziani provided prototype idealised Italians.<sup>19</sup>

The most monumental appearance upon Graziani's return, however, was a few days later at his next stop, the capital. As described on the front page of *Il Popolo d'Italia*, given his origins in the Roman region and the long-standing tradition of regional loyalty and heroism of local figures in Italy, 'Graziani è popolare in tutta Italia, a Roma è popolarissimo; la sua figura familiare in ogni ambiente e in ogni ceto sociale'.<sup>20</sup> The Roman newspaper, *Il Messaggero* supported this notion as it was proud to describe his romanità by stating 'Laziale di nascita e di tempera, la sua alta struttura fisica, il suo volto scavato in cui i tratti ascetici armonizzano con la fierezza guerriera sono fortamente, tipicamente, latini'.<sup>21</sup> Additionally, his connection to the myth of Rome was asserted as the article went on to state that 'è romano nel senso antico e nuovo, secondo la tradizione imperiale e secondo lo spirito mussoliniano'.<sup>22</sup> In fact, his arrival at Termini

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> 'La Accoglienza di Napoli al Marchese di Neghelli', *Il Mattino*, p. 2.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> 'Il Fervido Saluto di Messina a S. E. Rodolfo Graziani'.

<sup>19</sup> 'Il Fervido Saluto', p. 1 and 'La Accoglienza di Napoli', p. 2.

<sup>20</sup> 'L'Abbraccio di Mussolini al Vittorioso di Neghelli', *Il Popolo d'Italia*, p. 1.

<sup>21</sup> 'Il vincitore di Neghelli arriva oggi a Roma', *Il Messaggero* (26 Febbraio 1938), p. 1.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

station on the 27<sup>th</sup> of February was announced and photographed where he was greeted by all leading members of the Fascist Party, who were instructed in telegrams sent from the Ministry of Popular Culture to present themselves in ‘divisa fascista invernale senza decorazioni e con uniforme ordinaria’.<sup>23</sup> These instructions were perhaps designed to emphasise Graziani’s military accomplishments as an ‘extraordinary’ figure who stood out from others on this occasion, and highlights the highly coordinated nature of this event as a propaganda spectacle.

Upon arrival, music was played, banners were waved, and the Duce himself notably ‘lo ha abbracciato affettuosamente’, and presumably by doing so awarded him a high honour.<sup>24</sup> In their respective convertible cars, in plain view of the public, the pair symbolically toured Via Nazionale, Piazza Venezia, and Piazza dei Cinquecento, named after the numerous Italian soldiers who died at the first attempt at colonizing Ethiopia in 1887, and were met by the ‘grido di VIVA GRAZIANI’ e ‘scene d’entusiasmo’ from the ‘folla imponente’.<sup>25</sup> According to both articles which reported upon the event, he deserved the gratitude of the population as he had sacrificed for them so heavily in wartime.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, *Il Popolo* asserted that his presence back at the heart of the Fascist Italian empire signified that ‘le giornate memorabilia che portarono alla fondazione dell’Impero rivivevano in tutta la loro luce gloriosa’.<sup>27</sup> Thus, his return to the metropole evoked the revival of national glory through the foundation of empire two years prior and signified that his duty to the nation remained unfinished as ‘le sue energie, la sua capacita, il suo prestigio, la sua esperienza, il suo ardimento gli sarà ancora chiesta per la potenza della Nazione’.<sup>28</sup>

Naturally, these descriptions of events remain impossible to thoroughly verify due to the lack of surviving witnesses and oral accounts today. However, some indications can be made from the published diary of Mussolini’s son-in-law and Foreign Minister, Galeazzo Ciano. Ciano’s diary must be read with caution as, although utilised as a major source from the period by leading historians, he wrote cautiously as the Duce was aware

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<sup>23</sup> ‘Telegramma da Dino Alfieri, Ministro delle Cultura Popolare a Roma’, Archivio del Ministero della Cultura Popolare: Gabinetto, B.102, ACS (25 Febbraio 1938).

<sup>24</sup> ‘l’Abbraccio di Mussolini al Vittorioso di Neghelli’.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> ‘Il vincitore di Neghelli arriva oggi a Roma’.

<sup>27</sup> ‘l’Abbraccio di Mussolini al Vittorioso di Neghelli’.

<sup>28</sup> ‘Il vincitore di Neghelli arriva oggi a Roma’.

he kept a diary, and it was rewritten before its publication after World War II.<sup>29</sup> There does not however, appear to be any notable reason as to why he would be cautious about writing unsympathetically about the popularity of a figure such as Graziani. His account from the 26<sup>th</sup> of February stated that he went to the station to welcome Graziani with all the other major hierarchies and felt that the ‘welcoming of the crowds was, as a whole, organized and therefore of an unconvincing warmth’.<sup>30</sup> Ciano’s comment is interesting and relevant in its implication of the choreographed nature of Graziani’s celebrity and subsequent ritualisation, which supports the main hypothesis of this thesis, that of a state led myth of Graziani.

Over the next few months the government and press ensured he remained in the public eye through various ‘onorificenze’ and ceremonies. Early in March, he was photographed by Luce and mentioned in *il Messaggero* as he was honoured at various ceremonies at state and military buildings around the capital and nearby in his hometown of Affile.<sup>31</sup> In Affile, he was portrayed as a humble ‘concittadino’ as he embraced locals and played with their children despite his ‘glorious’ past twenty years ‘di vittorie africane’.<sup>32</sup> He was also presented with a fresco in his honour on behalf of ‘le popolazioni della provincia di Roma’ in gratitude for his ‘folgoranti vittorie sul nemico in battaglia, con lo stesso spirito avete Saputo conquistare l’ammirazione e poi la devozione e l’affetto delle popolazioni che riconoscono il dominio di Roma’ as seen in *figure 40*.<sup>33</sup> The fresco was painted in typical Fascist futuristic style in the Palazzo della Prefettura di Roma and depicted two colonial Somali soldiers called the Dubat, a group of highly skilled and respected colonial soldiers who formed part of Graziani’s troops during the Italo-Ethiopian War. The artist was Romano Dazzi, whose favourite artistic subjects had long been scenes of combat and had known Graziani personally since 1923 when he followed him into the deserts of Libya in order to perfect his artistic style.

<sup>29</sup> R. De Felice, *Diary 1937 – 1943*, preface.

<sup>30</sup> G. Ciano, *Diary 1937 – 1943: The Complete, Unabridged Diaries of Count Galeazzo Ciano: Preface by Renzo de Felice*, (London 2002), p. 63.

<sup>31</sup> ‘Il Dono di un quadro di Dazzi al Maresciallo Graziani’, *Il Popolo d’Italia* (12 Marzo 1938), p. 3.

<sup>32</sup> ‘Graziani festeggiato dai suoi concittadini’, *Il Messaggero* (10 Maggio 1938), p. 7.

<sup>33</sup> Figure 40: ‘Solenne consegna a Graziani del dono delle popolazioni della provincia di Roma’, *Il Messaggero* (13<sup>th</sup> March 1938), p. 6.



Figure 40: 'Solenne consegna a Graziani del dono delle popolazioni della provincia di Roma', *Il Messaggero* (13<sup>th</sup> March 1938), p. 6

Amongst the public rituals which involved Graziani in this period, one very symbolically charged event was perhaps Graziani's presentation of various crowns to the Duce which had been previously owned and looted by members of the Ethiopian nobility. During the ceremony, Mussolini:

nuovamente espresso il suo vivo elogio, ricordando la decisiva importanza delle vittorie ottenute (dal Maresciallo) per la conquista dell'Impero e le fondamentali opere compiute nel primo periodo di governo superando difficoltà di ogni genere.<sup>34</sup>

Most emblematic of all, however, was perhaps the donation of the crowns to the Museo Coloniale in Rome as artefacts of symbolic conquest on behalf of both the Duce and Graziani. The Museo Coloniale was opened during the liberal period, when it functioned as a natural history museum comprising taxidermy and exotic objects from Africa

<sup>34</sup> 'l'Alto Encomio del Duce al Maresciallo Graziani', *Il Popolo d'Italia* (7 Marzo 1938).

which were brought back by travellers, scientists and missionaries, from taxidermy to tribal costumes, reminiscent of the European Cabinet of Curiosity.<sup>35</sup> After the rise of fascism and colonial propaganda, the urgency for ‘metafore patriota dell’identità nazionale’ intensified and ‘la battaglia simbolica del potere e delle forme’ began.<sup>36</sup> The museum collection was transformed and militarised to assert the notion of the nation’s dominion in Africa more vigorously. Naturally, as a ‘fondatore dell’impero’ Graziani was heavily included in the museum through public gestures and donations.

Upon Graziani’s return to Rome, in the period between 1938 and 1939, documents from his archive reveal that he donated many personal papers and objects of his to the ‘sezione storica’ of the museum. The long list of private ‘cimeli’ or mementos as he called them, were:

Telegrams of his progress to Mussolini and Badoglio during the Ethiopian war; documents relating to his daily itinerary when he was in Africa; photographs of him attending ceremonies in his honor in Libya and Luce photographs of him with Mussolini when he returned triumphantly to Rome; personal photos he had of the ‘negus’, concentration camps; Fascist buildings erected under his command in Africa; a collection of all the books written by him, his uniform; African artefacts that he collected in Africa from Libyan and Ethiopian leaders; and even some stones from the bomb explosion during his attempted assassination the previous year.<sup>37</sup>

This list and variety of the keepsakes is lengthy, and it remains unclear which items were displayed and if he asked for any of it back afterwards, or he permanently offered them in donation. The nature of the items included, however, are potent examples of what I would call the symbolic conquest of the public sphere. Mainstream Graziani memorabilia had of course, long penetrated the metropole by 1938 as mentioned previously following the Ethiopian war, but as objects of popular consumption, once collected, they remained in the private sphere in collectors’ homes. The inclusion of

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<sup>35</sup> F. Gandolfo, *Il Museo Coloniale di Roma 1904 – 1971: Fra le zebre nel paese dell’olio di ricino* (Roma, 2014) p. 233.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> ACS, F. RG, B. 32.



objects relating to events which were openly deemed as Graziani's 'successes' and patriotic sacrifices in a government museum, were highly important in legitimising and upholding his place in the formation of national memory. Graziani's collection and the location of these objects is especially important given that the museum was perhaps the most prominent and ominous example of a 'lieu de mémoire', an institution designed its longevity and direct connection with state formation for a mass audience.<sup>38</sup>

Their tangibility and their display behind a cabinet, automatically appropriate them to the realm of relics of a collective past. Moreover, Graziani's gesture of offering the objects is further testament to his own active agency in actively placing himself in the public sphere. The choices he made of which items to donate allowed him autonomy in how his role in the foundation of empire would be perceived by the museum's visitors. For example, his choice of giving many items which he took from previous African nobles and rulers was designed to symbolise his prowess over the black 'negus' and the subjugation of Africa to Italian rule, his donation of photographs of him with the Duce asserted his prominent place as an equal to Mussolini in the foundation of the Fascist Empire, and the stones from his attempted assassination were probably designed to provide visual evidence of the attack to inculcate sympathy and a narrative of Italian 'victimhood' about the colonies.

Unfortunately, no indication of public responses to the museum and its collection exist to date, but an employee of the Ministero dell'Africa Orientale wrote a letter to Graziani detailing his impressions. He stated that he was left thoroughly 'soddisfatto' with Graziani's contribution to the 'ricordo di eventi e di uomini che sono profondamente connessi con la storia...dell'Italia in Africa'. Additionally, the creation of bronze busts (*figure 41*) and large plaques of Graziani by artists and sculptors from Florence and Rome are evident in archival photographs this period.<sup>39</sup> Their destination and exact dates of creation remain unknown, but their dimensions, details, and more indicatively images from their unveiling ceremonies (*figure 42*) strongly suggest that they were intended for public use.<sup>40</sup> Back in Addis Ababa, 'l'Istituto di Maternità e Infanzia' was also opened

<sup>38</sup> See P. Nora, *Les Lieux de Mémoire vols 1-4* (Chicago, 1998). Nora coined the concept during his research on national memory in France.

<sup>39</sup> Figure 41: 'Busta di Graziani in Bronzo' ACS, FF. RG, B.8 (Firenze).

<sup>40</sup> Figure 42: 'Cerimonia per l'inaugurazione di un busto bronzo di R. Graziani', ACS, FF. RG, B. 8.

in the name of Graziani's mother Adelia Clementi and was ceremoniously inaugurated by the new Viceroy and his wife in October 1938.<sup>41</sup> This initiative 'in ente morale' was another memory building scheme, this time in the capital of the Fascist empire to pay homage to the late Viceroy under disguise of a charitable civilising project for local mothers and children.<sup>42</sup>

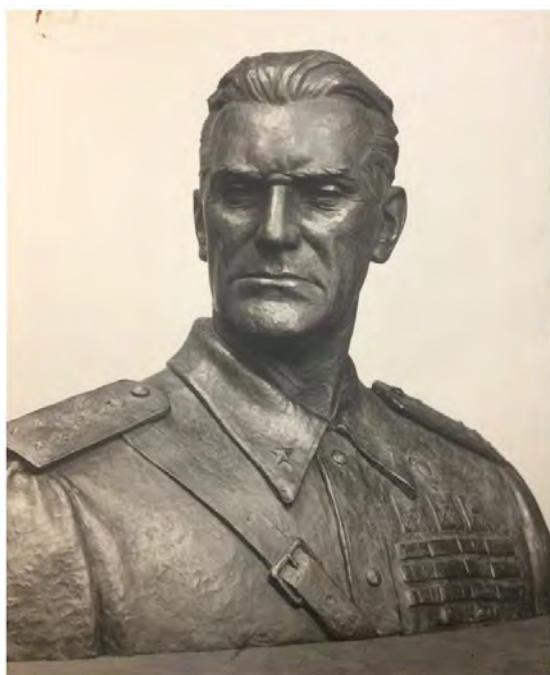


Figure 41: 'Busta di Graziani in Bronzo' (Firenze), ACS, FF. RG, B. 8



Figure 42: 'Cerimonia per l'inaugurazione di un busto bronzo di R. Graziani', ACS, FF. RG, B. 8

A further crucial example of his utilisation as an emblematic instrument of the Fascist state in the months following his return was his victory tour or 'visite trionfali' that he embarked upon across the entire country from April to July 1938 accompanied by the propagandistic 'arma più forte del governo', *l'Istituto Luce*.<sup>43</sup> Rather than going straight into quiet retirement or continuing his role as a military government advisor who remained inconspicuous like Badoglio, for example, his visits to even the smallest provinces ensured that he was a figure to be remembered in all corners of Italy. He began his tour in Milan on a state visit to the Fiera of 1938, a large exhibition which showcased

<sup>41</sup> 'i Duchi d'Aosta visitano in Addis Abeba l'istituto Maternità e Infanzia', *Il Messaggero* (17 Ottobre 1938), p. 1.

<sup>42</sup> ACS, F. RG, B.45.

<sup>43</sup> Many historians deem Luce 'l'arma del governo fascista' as Mussolini is frequently quoted to have stated that it was the 'arma più forte' of the regime. See for eg. D. Manetti, *Un Arma Poderosissima: Industria cinematografica e stato durante il fascismo 1922 - 1943* (Milano, 2012).

the latest innovations and trends in Italian art, industry, and agriculture. Here, he was honoured as the ‘figlio d’elezione’ to become the city’s ‘cittadino onorario’, at an event which according to *Corriere della Sera*, enjoyed as many as 315,000 visitors on the occasion of his visit as the whole city went to see him.<sup>44</sup>

He was also the star of choice to lead the ‘Giornata Coloniale’ on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of May 1938, on the second-year anniversary of the Fascist conquest of the Ethiopian Capital, Addis Ababa. Even though it was Badoglio who had entered the capital, Graziani led the celebration at the Teatro Adriano in Rome with a long speech which repeated Mussolini’s declaration of the Fascist Empire from his balcony on Piazza Venezia in 1936.<sup>45</sup> Speaking under a monumental image of the smiling Duce, he became the leader’s spokesperson of empire.<sup>46</sup> A formal report from the *Ministro della Cultura Popolare* was written on the audience’s main impressions of the speech, as the state always kept close watch of public reactions to government propaganda. The account was positive as it was noted that many seemed surprised at Graziani’s eloquence, that ‘un militare di professione potesse parlare così acutamente e profondamente anche dal punto di vista politico e sociale’.<sup>47</sup> This reaction confirmed Graziani’s flair for oratory, a key skill needed for the creation of a personality cult.

Coincidentally, only four days later, another ceremony in the capital which honoured Graziani as an exemplary citizen was held at the most important symbolic site in Rome, the Capitoline Hill (Campidoglio) at Piazza Venezia. Instructions were sent from the Italian parliament to the Ministero della Cultura Popolare for the event which designated a certain number of tickets ‘ai rappresentanti della stampa Italiana e estera’, whilst the ‘accesso alla sala, per quanto concerne i fotografi, sarebbe limitato all’Istituto Nazionale Luce’.<sup>48</sup> This strict control of the images produced and distributed of the event was designed to control even the physical depictions of Graziani at home and abroad. Some official photographs from Graziani’s archive at this event stand out as the premeditated

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<sup>44</sup> ‘Tutta la città attorno a Graziani’, *Corriere della Sera* (17 Aprile 1938), p. 4.

<sup>45</sup> Il Maresciallo Graziani celebra a Roma la Giornata Coloniale’, *Il Popolo d’Italia* (24 Maggio 1938), p. 3.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> ‘A S.E. Il Prefetto Capo di Gabinetto del Ministero della Cultura Popolare’, ACS, Archivio del Ministero del AOI: Fascicolo del Personale, B.68, (23 Maggio 1938).

<sup>48</sup> ‘Lettera per il Capo di Gabinetto’, ACS, Archivio del Ministero della Cultura Popolare: Gabinetto, B. 102, (23 Maggio 1938).

angles of the shots impressively emphasised the number of spectators at the event, with Graziani as the focal point walking down from the Campidoglio with a big smile which reflected those of his surrounding followers as seen in *figure 43*.<sup>49</sup> The following photograph (*figure 44*) is even more startling as a high-angle shot shows a seemingly ‘never ending’ crowd listening to Graziani speak from the balcony of an unknown fascist building just as Mussolini commonly did ceremoniously from his balcony at Piazza Venezia.<sup>50</sup>



*Figures 43 & 44 (above and below): ‘Graziani al rientro dell’Africa Orientale Italiana’ (Roma, 1938) ACS, FF. RG, B.6*

<sup>49</sup> Figure 43: ‘Graziani al rientro dell’Africa Orientale Italiana’ (Roma, 1938) ACS, FF. RG, B.6.

<sup>50</sup> Figure 44: Ibid.



Throughout April, May and June, he did a ‘victory’ tour around the country in order to keep the ‘myth’ of empire in the public eye. It is unknown exactly which cities and towns he visited, but his photographic archive specifically nominates Milan, the Val d’Aosta, Genoa, Ancona, Frosinone, Anzio, Aquila, Cremona and Sardinia, to suggest that he did not merely stop at big cities. This rather ‘thorough’ tour demonstrates that ‘no stone was left unturned’, so to speak, in ensuring that the Graziani myth survived all corners of the Italian peninsula. The many images and videos of these visits are ample and illustrate ultimate planning and precision of the tour. In particular, one shot (*figure 45*) from his visit to Ancona plainly shows that he was deliberately followed by multiple photographers to document his trips to be used as Fascist visual propaganda, as a photographer is visible in the foreground of the photo taking a picture with another one clearly behind him as the one responsible for the image in question.<sup>51</sup> Advance planning on behalf of the townspeople and/or local Fascist representatives is also evident from the images as printed banners filled town centres with the names of Graziani’s victorious battles in Africa as seen for example in *figure 46*.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Figure 45: ‘Ancona: 28 Maggio 1938’ ACS, FF. RG, B.6.

<sup>52</sup> Figure 46: ‘visite ufficiali di Graziani in città italiane’ (1938) ACS, FF. RG, B.6.



Figure 45: 'Ancona: 28 Maggio 1938' ACS, FF. RG, B.6



Figure 46: 'visite ufficiali di Graziani in città italiane' (1938)  
ACS, FF. RG, B.6

At one of these visits to an unknown location in Lazio, captioned as 'forse Frosinone e Anzio', the unveiling of a triumphal arch in Graziani's honour upon his arrival is shown in *figure 47* with reliefs engraved with his victorious battles down each column and a headstone that read 'Rodolfo Graziani: guerriero per istinto, tenace volitivo, temprato alle maggiori audacie'.<sup>53</sup> Another marble arch modelled in a stylistically rationalist take on ancient Imperial Roman arches is also photographed in the same folder in an unknown location dedicated to Graziani and the Duce as seen in *figure 48*.<sup>54</sup> This particular arch is also sketched in another image from his archive specifically entitled 'arco di trionfo per S.E. Graziani' to highlight that it was designed specifically for Graziani.<sup>55</sup> The relief on the side praises Graziani's battles in Africa that 'riempiono di orgoglio la nazione'.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>53</sup> Figure 47: 'visite ufficiali di Graziani in città italiane' (forse Anzio e Frosinone 1938) ACS, FF. RG, B.6.

<sup>54</sup> Figure 48: 'Arco di trionfo per S.E. Graziani', ACS, FF. RG, B.15.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.



Figure 47: 'visite ufficiali di Graziani in città italiane' (forse Anzio e Frosinone 1938) ACS, FF. RG, B.6



Figure 48: 'Arco di trionfo per S.E. Graziani', ACS, FF. RG, B.15

The disorganisation of this particular file and the lack of known location of the arches is not only due to the fact that they no longer exist, so were probably taken down after 1945, but also because some of Graziani's image and files were temporarily confiscated and displaced by the Allies when they invaded Italy later during World War II. The relevance of these images of the two arches, however, lies in their contemporary intended use by the Fascist regime, that is, they were designed to be permanent pieces of architecture which would uphold the myth of Graziani as one of the founders of the Italian empire on a long-term basis in the public sphere. This 'memory making' technique is strikingly comparable to the various arches and statues dedicated to figures deemed important to a nation's history which we can see in modern nation-states today.<sup>57</sup>

Upon Graziani's arrival at these towns, trumpets tooted, the crowd roared, people clapped and waved banners as seen in *figure 49*, for example.<sup>58</sup> Women and children notably appear to be very active figures present in these images as they couldn't hide their excitement through big smiles, dressing in traditional clothing, throwing flowers

<sup>57</sup> See Nora, *Le Lieux de Memoire*.

<sup>58</sup> Figure 49: 'visite ufficiali di Graziani in città italiane' ACS, FF. RG, B.6.

and waiting to be photographed with him as seen in *figures 50 and 51* for example.<sup>59</sup> This illustrates yet another dimension to these events as a more intimate, familial, and less formal or official element to his celebrity appears here. Although much advanced staging went into the advertising of these events and subsequent images of them through inclusion and omission of certain scenes, there remained an element of authenticity to the reaction of the crowd, various facial expressions and its response to Graziani, which naturally couldn't be completely staged by the camera lens as seen in *figure 52*.<sup>60</sup> Upon his return from his various 'visite trionfali', Graziani did not desist in the cementation of his celebrity and its continued utilisation by the Fascist state as he was often pictured in Rome at official events alongside the Duce in his military colonial uniform.<sup>61</sup> Therefore as we can see from the events of 1938, it is conspicuous that the internal colonisation of the myth of Graziani was being established in authoritative, tangible, and perpetual public form for generations of Italians to come.



*Figure 49: 'visite ufficiali di Graziani in città italiane' ACS, FF. RG, B.6*

<sup>59</sup> Figure 50 & 51: 'Graziani in gita' & 'Graziani in visita trionfale' (Sardegna, 1938) ACS, FF. RG, B.6.

<sup>60</sup> Figure 57: 'Graziani in visita trionfale' (Sardegna, 1938) ACS, FF. RG, B.6.

<sup>61</sup> 'Graziani con B. Mussolini' (Roma, 16 Luglio 1938), ACS, FF. RG, B.6.





*Figure 50: 'Graziani in gita' ACS, FF. RG, B.6*



*Figure 51: 'Graziani in visita trionfale' (Sardegna, 1938) ACS, FF. RG, B.6*



Figure 52: 'Graziani in visita trionfale' (Sardegna, 1938) ACS, FF. RG, B.6

### *Desert War in North Africa: A Humiliating Defeat?*

When the excitement surrounding Graziani's return died down, he retreated somewhat from appearing at the epicentre of the public eye, although his presence remained paramount at all important national functions such as at the wedding of Mussolini's son Bruno in November 1938.<sup>62</sup> In the same month, he was also invited as a guest of honour at the Anniversary of the Battle of Vittorio Veneto of World War I.<sup>63</sup> As international relations grew more contentious in pre-war Europe, state propaganda stunts like these grew more frequent as Mussolini became more intent on asserting Italy's military tradition and might to other states. Along with the King and other leading Fascists, Graziani always played his part during these affairs, appearing next to the Duce to review military parades and exercises in his old white colonial uniform which set him apart from the others in sombre green, grey or black.<sup>64</sup> Furthermore, as Mussolini increased his alliance with Hitler in this period, Graziani was often be seen with the two dictators at Hitler's state visit to Rome in 1938, and thus acting as one of Mussolini's chief deputies and a leading player in Mussolini's growing alliance with Hitler (figure 53).<sup>65</sup>

<sup>62</sup> 'Le Nozze di Bruno Mussolini con Gina Ruberti', *l'Istituto Luce* (3 Novembre 1938).

<sup>63</sup> 'Il Ventennale di Gloria a Vittorio Veneto', *l'Istituto Luce* (9 Novembre 1938).

<sup>64</sup> See for eg. 'Le Grandi Esercitazioni' (17 Luglio 1938) & 'Un Nuovo Stabilimento Balneare', (27 Luglio 1938) *l'Istituto Luce*.

<sup>65</sup> Figure 53: '4 Maggio 1938: Mussolini e Hitler, presente Graziani, al campo di manovra di Centocelle', *Graziani*, Rivista Romana, p. 210.



*Figure 53: '4 Maggio 1938: Mussolini e Hitler, presente Graziani, al campo di manovra di Centocelle', Graziani, Rivista Romana, p. 210*

In fact, the relevance of the busy field of historiography surrounding the state's antisemitism and racial measures of 1938, was intrinsically connected to another rife historiographical debate surrounding this period, Mussolini's relationship with Germany, and his consequential decision to declare war on the Allies in 1940. Whilst some historians such as Dennis Mack-Smith dated Mussolini's decision to ally himself with Hitler with the Rome-Berlin Axis of 1936 following his antagonism with the Allies when he decided upon war with Ethiopia, others disagree.<sup>66</sup> De Felice's apologetic work argued that Mussolini remained reluctant to go to war with the Allies even when he joined the conflict in 1940 and believes that Mussolini continued to seek alliance with the British as late as 1939.<sup>67</sup> More recently, Christian Goeschel's research more pragmatically concludes that the alliance was in fact much more complex than previously supposed as a 'strange mix of reciprocity and hostility, of ambivalence and

<sup>66</sup> D. Mack Smith, *Mussolini* (London, 1994), p. 215.

<sup>67</sup> R. De Felice, *Mussolini l'Alleato* (Rome, 2008).

adoration, characterised both the personal relationship between Mussolini and Hitler and the one between Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany'.<sup>68</sup> Thus, whilst Mussolini's political intentions and reasons for going to war continue to be questioned by scholars, their relevance to this thesis go only so far as to provide the context of Graziani's involvement in the Second World War and his role in military preparations.

Regardless of these various scholarly debates over the precise reasons which Mussolini went to war in 1940, it is clear that by the Spring of 1939, Mussolini had already decided upon which side he would support in the case of a European conflict. His belligerent attitude is illustrated by the Italian invasion of Albania in April 1939. This act of aggression was Mussolini's first attempted conquest of another European state and was a blatant move which he knew would antagonise Italo-British relations beyond repair, moving him firmly into Hitler's camp. Just a few months later, when Hitler openly threatened the German invasion of Poland during the summer, the eventuality of war and Italy's involvement grew more imminent. Therefore, with Badoglio as the Capo di Stato Maggiore Generale, Mussolini's decision to name Graziani the Capo di Stato Maggiore dell'Esercito in August was a calculated move.<sup>69</sup> Badoglio, as head of the entire armed forces, including the navy and air force, was the 'in office' military coordinator to Mussolini so to speak, and would to remain in Italy in the eventuality of war. Graziani, became, instead, the formal head of the Italian army, and was entrusted with sole responsibility of all military forces on the ground. The journalistic announcements of this re-organisation were probably designed to reassure the population through the appointment of well-known competent figures who ensured 'nuove energie' in a time of international uncertainty, but the decision remained ultimately practical.<sup>70</sup> This was a time in which Mussolini called upon his most trusted advisors to guide him through what he knew would be his toughest challenge yet.

Ciano's diary remains the most useful document which provides some insight into Mussolini's thought process and military preparations until his formal declaration of war in June 1940. His diary entries frequently mentioned Graziani in this period, as they both attended numerous government talks and state meetings. In Ciano's words, in early

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<sup>68</sup> C. Goeschel, *Mussolini and Hitler: The Forging of a Fascist Alliance* (Yale, 2018), p. 7.

<sup>69</sup> Ciano, *Ciano's Diary*, p. 263.

<sup>70</sup> 'Cambio della Guardia nelle alte gerarchie del regime', *Il Mattino* (1 Novembre 1939), p.1.

January 1940, Graziani 'revealed himself as an interventionist and pro-German', and Ciano was worried that the general was 'influencing the Duce in the dangerous direction of intervention'.<sup>71</sup> Although Ciano's diary must be read with caution for reasons stated earlier, Graziani's role as an antagonist is probable, given his dislike of the British as he later mentioned in his autobiography, or even a natural predilection to side with Hitler, given their comparable ideological militarism.<sup>72</sup> This does not, however, go as far to say that he was in a rush for Italy to declare war on them. Graziani's lengthy experience in the army and observation of Britain's military might during his time in Africa imply that whilst he was sometimes known to be impulsive on the battlefield, he was not short-sighted enough to think that the British would prove an easy opponent. Having only previously fought against African forces who were usually weaker in modern systematic warfare and weaponry, Graziani knew that a different approach would be needed if he was to be up against a European nation with one of the strongest military traditions, experience, and budget worldwide.

According to Ciano, by February, Mussolini was growing restless and wanted to join the conflict but Graziani responded by telling him that the army was not yet prepared for any sort of military engagement with the Allies and he needed more time to prepare.<sup>73</sup> He argued that the army's budget remained insufficient and was therefore underequipped and outdated in regard to manpower and weapons. In May, Graziani privately told Ciano that he was 'concerned about his responsibilities and says he is clearly opposed to any war action on our part', which is highly indicative of his reservations to Mussolini's continued pressure to act.<sup>74</sup> Typically, although these warnings pushed back Italy's advance for some months, they ultimately fell short of convincing the Duce from action in the autumn as his 'sudden and flamboyant inspirations' to get militarily involved and flex Italy's muscles, were only increasing.<sup>75</sup>

By this point, most historians agree that Mussolini had bought into his own propaganda, believing that as another great power, Italy, could swiftly pursue a 'guerra di rapido

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<sup>71</sup> Ciano, *Ciano's Diary*, pp. 308 – 310.

<sup>72</sup> Graziani, *Una Vita per l'Italia*, p. 49.

<sup>73</sup> Ciano, *Ciano's Diary*, p. 320.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 346

<sup>75</sup> M. Knox, *Hitler's Italian Allies: Royal Armed Forces, Fascist Regime, and the War of 1940 – 1943* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 70.

corso' against the British in one of their most strategic and precious spheres of influence, Egypt and the Suez Canal.<sup>76</sup> The decision to engage with the Allies on the North African front became clear following France's defensive mobilization in Africa on the Tunisian front with Libya.<sup>77</sup> Furthermore, attacking Suez was a highly strategic move in blocking Britain's principal trading route and access to oil and Italian troops could easily be mobilised from Italy's African colonies, in theory at least.<sup>78</sup> For the British however, it proved 'a suitable theatre in which to win victories, raise morale at home and lodge Italians from their position which would threaten the Germans'.<sup>79</sup> Finally, on the 10<sup>th</sup> of June 1940, when the Nazi occupation of France appeared inevitable, Mussolini took the opportunity to publicly declare war on the Allied powers and so skirmishes between Italian and British troops began on the Libyan border with Egypt.<sup>80</sup> Whilst the Italian navy and air force began to mobilise and act in the Mediterranean, the army failed to follow under Graziani's orders to continue on standby.

One of the leading scholars to comment on Mussolini's decision making process in this period, John Gooch, supports Ciano's assertions as he also argues that Graziani continued to stress that 'his was not an army that possessed armoured instruments and general modern equipment' even after war was declared.<sup>81</sup> Even the anti-fascist military historian, Lucio Ceva, agrees that, despite Mussolini's order for Graziani to advance into Egypt from Libya by mid-July, 'non senza ragione, egli rifiuta l'ostacolo'.<sup>82</sup> Nevertheless, he could not refuse the Duce's order for his transfer to Libya at the end of June. For the month of August, antagonistic telegrams were sent backwards and forwards as Graziani continued to put off the advance on the very basis of a general lack of infrastructure for supplies, troops, and modern weaponry, not to mention that of a coherent strategy as neither Graziani, Badoglio, or Mussolini could agree on a plan of action.<sup>83</sup> Given the context, Graziani foresaw the inevitable and perhaps in order to save his reputation later down the line he is noted by his contemporaries to frequently repeat

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid, p. 100.

<sup>77</sup> J. Gooch, *Mussolini and his Generals* (Cambridge 2007), p. 470.

<sup>78</sup> L. Ceva, 'The North African Campaign', in Gooch (ed.) *Decisive Campaigns of the Second World War* (London, 1990), p. 85.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, p. 84.

<sup>80</sup> G. Forty, *The Desert War* (Stroud, 2002), p. 16.

<sup>81</sup> Gooch, *Mussolini and his Generals*, p. 515.

<sup>82</sup> L. Ceva, *Le Forze Armate* (Torino, 1981), p. 286.

<sup>83</sup> Ciano, *Ciano's Diary*, pp. 375 – 381.

that ‘in faccia a Dio e ai miei soldati, io non sono responsabile’ of what was to come.<sup>84</sup> By the beginning of September, although Graziani was still requesting the advance to be postponed by at least a month, if not two, Mussolini became so exasperated that he threatened to replace him if he did not launch an offensive.<sup>85</sup> Thus, with his hands tied, Graziani began his advance into Egypt with Italian forces on the 13<sup>th</sup> of September. Whilst it is not the primary scope of this project to assess Graziani’s leadership in warfare, publications about the war and his portrayal within them is relevant to how he is perceived today and will therefore be attended to below.

Unlike during the Ethiopian war, which had long been part of Italy’s foreign policy beforehand and was thoroughly planned, the same could not be said in 1940. Although there is evidence of Mussolini’s interest in Egypt from at least 1938, as stated by the Nazi general Kesselring later on, ‘la propaganda per la guerra e i suoi scopi era insufficiente’.<sup>86</sup> By 1940, practicalities and logistics had long faded away, as Mussolini’s vision was presumably a self-imposed imagery of victorious Italian warriors headed by his heroic desert-hardened colonial hero, none other than Graziani. Philip Morgan in fact attains that ‘Mussolini had the worst propaganda of all the wartime leaders’.<sup>87</sup> Therefore, the Italian propaganda campaign for the Second World War paled in comparison to any previous ideological initiatives embarked upon by the Fascist regime and Italian public opinion in favour of the war remained subsequently weak.<sup>88</sup> The same can be said for Graziani and his troops. This was less a war of individual heroism or militaristic prowess as portrayed during previous battles, as it was badly planned on all fronts. In relation to this notion, there was less talk, in general, of Graziani in the press’s prelude to the attack other than comments in more general articles about wider war preparations. However, this does not signify that there was complete omission of Graziani and the other military figures of the upcoming conflict. In fact, given the lack of a coherent propaganda campaign this time round, the Italian press were obliged to rely on the protagonists of recent national victories in order to booster national morale. Three days before Graziani launched his offensive, *Corriere della Sera*, for example, stated that ‘i grandi nomi di

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<sup>84</sup> J. Greene & A. Massignani, *Rommel in Africa Settentrionale, Settembre 1940- Novembre 1942* (Milan, 1994), p. 20.

<sup>85</sup> Ceva, *Le Forze Armate*, p. 287.

<sup>86</sup> Greene and Massignani, *Rommel in Africa Settentrionale*, p. 8.

<sup>87</sup> P. Morgan, *The Fall of Mussolini: Italy, the Italians, and the Second World War* (Oxford, 2007), p. 80.

<sup>88</sup> Morgan, *The Fall of Mussolini*, p. 39.

Balbo e Graziani sono pegno di vittoria per le nostre armi. Quando suonerà l'ora della grande offensiva, tutte le resistenze saranno travolte'.<sup>89</sup> Thus, Graziani's name was largely utilised to evoke past victories and reassure many wary Italians that they were in good hands.

One particular article in this vein that focuses solely on Graziani's glories from the beginning of his career stands out here in regard to the content written, images used and its mere length; three pages dedicated to honour the Maresciallo. The article, entitled 'Graziani l'Africano' was written by the well-known pro-fascist war correspondent Luigi Barzini Sr and published in *Tempo* magazine less than a fortnight after the beginning of the conflict.<sup>90</sup> At first glance, it appears as though the writer narrated Graziani's career utilising such repetitive and familiar language used to exalt him that it seems formulaic, often quoted for example as 'nato per essere guerriero' and assure readers of his military skill that 'da vittoria a vittoria il Maresciallo ha percorso sulla terra africana ... come una stella segnalatrice'.<sup>91</sup> However, the repeated reference and connection that Barzini makes between Graziani and 'the myth of Rome', alters the overall aim of the article. As we have seen earlier in this chapter, Graziani's role in 'the myth of Rome' as a protagonist of giving Italy its ancient empire back was crucial to his mythicisation and led to his embodiment of the Italian Uomo Nuovo, a racial counterpart to enemies of Italy which was emphasised more concretely after the conquest of Ethiopia and the racial laws of 1938. Thus, from a contextual perspective it is clear that at the time of writing his article, Barzini was heavily influenced by racialised propaganda, given his constant references to Graziani's 'romanità' in thought and provenance. The author asserts that 'Graziani si sente profondamente romano...(con una) mentalità romana alla concezione della guerra' and that during his battles in Africa Graziani thought to himself 'Roma! Sempre presente, sempre vivente, sempre possente; essa parlava al cuore del vincitore'.<sup>92</sup> In terms of racial origin, Barzini notes that Graziani descended from 'i più puri della razza romana' evident in his 'viso classico e nobile da medaglia' and even comparing his mother to 'certe figure femminili affrescate a Pompei' due to her 'grazia austera'.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> 'Intensa Attività dei nostri Aerei', *Corriere della Sera* (10 Settembre 1940), p. 1.

<sup>90</sup> L. Barzini Snr, 'Graziani l'Africano', *Tempo* (26 Settembre 1940), pp. 9 – 11.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.



The images included in the article are also different to previous photographs of Graziani as they include family photographs of him as a child, teenager, and at the very beginning of his career as a sottotenente (second lieutenant) which I haven't seen elsewhere from a private album (figure 54).<sup>94</sup> As well as providing visual confirmation of Graziani's 'Italianness', the inclusion of these images was perhaps intended to provide new insight into the Maresciallo's personal life and beginnings as by now the Italian public were well acquainted with 'Graziani il guerriero'. Some interesting sketches were also published chronologically following Graziani's childhood and depicted Graziani at the military academy in Parma in 1906, created by 'un gruppo di vecchi commilitoni' of Graziani to congratulate him for his Ethiopian campaign (figure 55).<sup>95</sup>



Figures 54 & 55: 'Graziani l'Africano', *Tempo* (26 Settembre 1940), p. 9 – 10

Sketches like these of Graziani were rare and are thus striking also in their depiction of him. The first sketch more typically shows him charging into battle in front of his comrades, leading the charge, whilst the second one more expressively emphasises Graziani's physical features, as he is not only towering above the other soldier behind him with two legs of an elongated length, but his jaw line (which was often commented

<sup>94</sup> Figure(s) 54: 'una pagina di un vecchio album di fotografie della famiglia Graziani', *Tempo* (26 Settembre 1940) p. 10.

<sup>95</sup> Figure(s) 55: sketches by 'un gruppo di vecchi commilitoni', *Tempo* (26 Settembre 1940) p. 9.

on) is also grossly exaggerated.<sup>96</sup> The other full page of photographs had much more familiar depictions of Graziani the Marshall; in battle, preparing for an offensive, celebrating a military victory, or tending to his horse which was deemed ‘legendario come il <poncho> di Garibaldi’ (figure 56).<sup>97</sup> In addition, another intriguing image, this time a colourful watercolour, from another issue of *Tempo* found in his personal archive sometime in October 1940 depicts a menacing Graziani leading his troops into battle with an ancient Roman legionary leading him with the caption ‘vi accompagno, Maresciallo: io conosco la strada’ (figure 57).<sup>98</sup> This type of propaganda graphically and blatantly connected the modern commander to those of ancient Rome. Therefore, in 1940 written and visual propaganda and intrigue in Graziani continued and even took a more creative and personal turn as what else was there to know about the commander? His myth was even further exploited by the press for the sake of foreign policy on the eve of Italy’s entry to World War II as Graziani led the North African front.



Figure(s) 56: ‘Graziani l’Africano’, *Tempo* (26 Settembre 1940), p.

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Figure 57: *Tempo* (Ottobre 1940), ACS, F. RG, B. 81

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Figure(s) 56: ‘Graziani l’Africano’, *Tempo* (26 Settembre 1940), p. 11.

<sup>98</sup> Figure 57: *Tempo* (Ottobre 1940), ACS, F. RG, B. 81.

Graziani began his move into Egypt with the takeover of Sidi Barrani on the 16<sup>th</sup> of September, a town 90 kilometres east of the Libyan border.<sup>99</sup> Mussolini was thrilled about the action and it is evident from journalistic reports which he tried to direct the press to writing about the strategic importance of the offensive and its military success and enemy losses, no matter how slight at this early stage. Articles focused on more vague details with headlines such as ‘Sollum oltrepassata: l’avanzata italiana oltre il confine Cirenaico’ which described the usual inhospitable vast terrain covered by Italian troops.<sup>100</sup> This time, however, the African landscape and climate was unexoticised, remaining bleak and ‘inospitale’, ‘dai neri ghiaietti ...ai radi ciuffi di vegetazione’.<sup>101</sup> Reporters on the front line tried to sound hopeful in written accounts, but they were usually laced in apprehension with comments such as ‘in pieno deserto...sotto pioggia di granate... sotto questo duro sole, cerchiamo di fare il nostro meglio’.<sup>102</sup>

Thus, despite some advances, no matter how modest, a grim image emerged of soldiers who ‘hanno assunto il colore della terra...l’uniformi sono scolorite, i caschi si sono scoloriti (e) ‘tutto ha preso la tinta dell’ambiente’.<sup>103</sup> A corporal was even quoted to have said ‘ora mi sento composto di sabbia’.<sup>104</sup> When the British enjoyed successes, casualties were detailed but minimised to emphasise good planning on behalf of the Italian government. On the 24<sup>th</sup> of September for example, heavy British bombing in Benghazi was noted but in attempts to quell rising anxieties about the war as it was stated that ‘grazie alle misure di protezione e di ordine pubblico non si lamentano vittime’.<sup>105</sup> This reassurance was quickly followed by detailing the disappearance of a British submarine and gave an overall assessment that Italian bombings were having ‘un esito positivo’ to keep up morale at home.<sup>106</sup> British forces were also portrayed in a vague and subdued manner and merely described as ‘il nemico’, with the worst noted insult as ‘cattivo’ in these early stages of the war. Therefore, descriptions became less distorted by

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<sup>99</sup> Forty, *The Desert War*, p. 13.

<sup>100</sup> ‘Sollum Oltrepassata’, *Corriere della Sera* (17 Settembre 1940), p. 1

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> ‘Battaglia a Sidi-el-Barrani: si Marcia Combattendo all’est’ *Corriere della Sera* (18 Settembre 1940), p. 1.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> ‘Il Bollettino no. 108’, *Corriere della Sera* (24 Settembre 1940), p. 1.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

embellished propaganda and were instead based on more elemental and basic facts of events.

Graziani's name was not utilised with the daily frequency of his glory days, mainly due to the fact that he did not lead the offensive himself and was not on the front line. For almost the entire duration of the war in North Africa, Graziani gave orders nearby from Tobruk, so for the first time he commanded from behind the scenes, out of public view.<sup>107</sup> Nevertheless, the troops on the front were always called 'l'armata di Graziani' and when there was good news the front page of *Corriere della Sera* published an encouraging 'rapporto di Graziani al Duce sul fulminea avanzata'.<sup>108</sup> *Il Mattino* also published a large painting of Graziani with an encouraging text to accompany it about the status of the war as seen in *Figure 58*.<sup>109</sup> The rather large image of the medal-studded Marshall was captioned with the text: 'Graziani l'Africano: l'intrepido Maresciallo d'Italia, che guida le nostre truppe alle più gloriose conquiste'.<sup>110</sup>



Figure 58: 'Imperium contra Empire: Graziani e la via delle Indie' *Il Mattino* (14 Ottobre 1940)

<sup>107</sup> Greene and Massignani, *Rommel in Africa Settentrionale*, p. 21.

<sup>108</sup> 'Vantaggi Decisivi' and 'Un Rapporto da Graziani al Duce sul Fulminea Avanzata', *Corriere della Sera* (19 e 20 Settembre 1940), p. 1.

<sup>109</sup> Figure 58: 'Imperium contra Empire: Graziani e la via delle Indie' *Il Mattino* (14 Ottobre 1940).

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*

So for the time being, they were still the two protagonists of war, but remained so in a more subtle manner than in the years before. At first, although the published reports between the two men appeared positive following the attack on Sidi Barrani, relations quickly turned sour. At Sidi Barrani, Graziani set up a line of defensive camps, ordering the construction of a fort and various administrative resources, as ‘there was never an intention on Graziani’s part to achieve more than local success’.<sup>111</sup> His reluctance continued to infuriate the Duce who then turned his attention and resources to invading Greece in October, and thus refused Graziani’s repeated requests for more mechanised transport in order to advance.<sup>112</sup>

In November, *l’Illustrazione Italiana* was clear and concise in an even bleaker depiction of the struggles which were being faced in the desert, as if anticipating defeat before any large battles had even taken place. It stated that ‘il nostro commando è costretto, in un ambiente tipicamente coloniale e tra i più inospiti e duri, a combattere una guerra del tipo più moderno che possa immaginarsi.’<sup>113</sup> As the month went on with little action or movement from either side, there was little to report other than relief at silence on the front. In fact, the reporter from *l’Illustrazione Italiana* wrote that:

Questa notte soffia il vento di mare sulla costiera che il plenilunio imbianca di un amabile chiarore, quasi la terra si sia addormentata fra veli nuziali... la salsa frescura passa dolcemente le dita fra le cassette bianche della città araba.<sup>114</sup>

The climate and terrain had been utilised here by the writer as a pathetic fallacy, on the one hand a certain comfort in the period of repose, and on the other, uncertainty in the fact of what was to come. He continued that:

Non diresti che in questo cielo, possano apparire le squadriglie nemiche; non crederesti che nel mezzo dell’alone lunare, da un momento all’altro, possano

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<sup>111</sup> Strawson, *The Battle for North Africa*, p. 30.

<sup>112</sup> R. Lamb, *Mussolini and the British* (London, 1997), p. 291.

<sup>113</sup> ‘Sul Front Nord-Africano’, *l’Illustrazione Italiana* (3 Novembre 1940), p. 674.

<sup>114</sup> ‘Guerra e Ghibli sull’oasi dalle Duemila Palme’, *l’Illustrazione d’Italia* (17 Novembre 1940), p. 731.

giostrare grandi falchi meccanici nell'impazzare della morte, come gladiatori in un mirabile ciclo di luce.<sup>115</sup>

Unlike the Ethiopian war, lack of preparation in the face of an unknown enemy, a European power and highly mechanised force, doubt and apprehension could not so easily be concealed. So why was the myth of Graziani not being utilised to alleviate such fears and instil morale on the home front? Was not that the intended scope of his cult and mythicisation?

The answer to this question is testament to the important role Graziani had played in his own mythicisation earlier on, in the 1930s. His own skepticism of the task at hand, his disagreements with Mussolini over how to conduct the war, and his lack of confidence in his own troops and resources in contrast to that of the enemy, is reflected in the lack of his representation in the national press. At the height of his fame, during the Ethiopian conflict, cooperation between Graziani and national war correspondents had been vital in his heroic portrayal on the home front. In 1940, however, he was resentful and bitter as the Duce continued to pressure him; according to Strawson 'no commander had ever undertaken a military operation so much against his will'.<sup>116</sup> Between September and December, Ciano's diary entries are filled with comments about Graziani's inflexibility that he would not advance further until December due to fears the lack of logistical preparation and supply lines, which Ciano agreed was the 'only real final guarantee of success'.<sup>117</sup> The Duce, who was in an 'increasingly bad mood on account of Graziani' lost patience and interest and turned his attention to his advances in Greece, despite further discouragement from Badoglio. By this point, Mussolini had stopped taking advice from his generals' altogether and had almost completely lost sight of reality.

According to some journalists who had previously worked with Graziani, he had become increasingly paranoid about his portrayal in the press following the international negative reports which aired immediately following his attempted assassination in 1937.<sup>118</sup> Whilst during the Ethiopian campaign he had been confident about his

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<sup>115</sup> Ciano, *Ciano's Diary* (2<sup>nd</sup> October 1940) p. 386.

<sup>116</sup> Strawson, *The Battle for North Africa*, p. 30.

<sup>117</sup> Ciano, *Ciano's Diary*, (18<sup>th</sup> October 1940), p. 389.

<sup>118</sup> Greene and Massignani, *Rommel in Africa Settentrionale*, p. 23.

leadership and in control of the press, as he worked closely with his most trusted reporters, this time round he was withdrawn and increasingly losing hope. During the month of November with Italian troops at a stand-still, there was little to report and by December, Ciano increasingly wrote that ‘Graziani cables little news and gives no details’.<sup>119</sup> As the situation deteriorated further Graziani became even more silent. The British finally launched their offensive and counterattack on the Italian fort at Sidi Barrani on the 9<sup>th</sup> of December, an offensive called Operation Compass. Graziani’s lack of movement allowed the British time to study their opponent and meticulously plan an attack over five days on each Italian stronghold along the front line. This setback prompted Graziani to withdraw completely and sparked the beginning of his breakdown. In Ciano’s diary entry on the 12<sup>th</sup> of December, ‘his nerves are quite shaken...upset and now he cannot make decisions’.<sup>120</sup> Following the British advance, he even had an ancient Roman tomb converted into a bomb shelter for him near Tobruk, where he retreated until his resignation early in 1941 and return to Rome.

With nothing positive to report, the press increasingly turned their focus to the Greek front and back in Africa highlighted ambiguous and insignificant gains in terms of bombing British tanks, inflicting small losses of men, and plundering weapons.<sup>121</sup> At the end of December, when the British had pushed the Italians all the way back to the Libyan border and started threatening Tobruk, *Corriere della Sera* published a long report Graziani had sent to the Duce on a more positive note during the first phases of the operation, a few months prior. The article detailed Graziani’s description of the ‘fulgido eroismo’ and the ‘eroico sacrificio di alcuni reparti’ and scrupulous organisation in the face of a highly mechanised enemy.<sup>122</sup> It was also aired twice on the national radio, concluding that ‘il report del Maresciallo Graziani, esprime la fede tenace e la volontà di vittoria di tutti I combattenti’ and tried to persuade the readership that ‘è una positiva e sostanziata valutazione dei fatti...e degli importanti problemi inerenti e conseguenti’.<sup>123</sup> The degree of truth to this report remains questionable, as all documents from Graziani’s archive suggest an overwhelming negativity on behalf of the Italian

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<sup>119</sup> Ciano, *Ciano’s Diary* (12<sup>th</sup> December 1940), p. 403.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> ‘Il Bollettino N. 189’, *Corriere della Sera* (14 Dicembre 1940), p. 1,

<sup>122</sup> ‘Un Rapporto di Graziani sulla prima fase delle operazioni’, *Corriere della Sera* (25 Dicembre 1940), p.1

<sup>123</sup> ‘l’eroismo degli Italiani a Bardia’, *Corriere della Sera* (24 Dicembre 1940), p. 1.

military situation in this period. It may have been tweaked, however, and was presumably designed to prove that Italian losses were not futile and the decision to go to war had not been miscalculated. This was also the tone taken by the reporter for *l'Illustrazione Italiana* who wrote an account of the recent British offensive. He tried to inspire hope and assured the national audience that despite acknowledging the significant fallback, he had 'legittima fiducia che lo sforzo britannico sia destinato ad esaurirsi...nulla è riuscito a piegare i nostri comandanti ed i nostri soldati...l'Italia ed il suo esercito sono in piedi'.<sup>124</sup> The worse the situation in North Africa appeared, the more journalists attempted to cover it up and compensate with positive press.

Journalistic tone remained consistent and continued in the same vein right until the very end of January when British forces reached Tobruk and devastated the Italian stronghold where Graziani was situated. The complete failure was justified with the deduction that 'nessun altro esercito avrebbe saputo vivere e combattere in un inferno tale' given climatic considerations and the strength of the opponent in terms of experience and supplies in the field.<sup>125</sup> This finally resulted in Graziani's personal surrender as he 'suffered a nervous breakdown and pleaded piteously for his own relief', denouncing the Duce for having ignored his warnings and not having supported his requests for reinforcements.<sup>126</sup> When Graziani returned home during the first week of February and thousands of Italian soldiers surrendered at Tobruk, there was no mention of either in the press.

For the Duce, the army, and in turn, Graziani's performance and image on the world stage, directly reflected the tenacity and integrity of the Italian nation as a whole as he told Ciano that 'we must thank Graziani, we owe it to him if our prestige is going to pot'.<sup>127</sup> The humiliation of his failure and resignation went completely unnoticed and was omitted entirely from national reports as Italo Gariboldi, an older war veteran loyal to the regime, discreetly took his place so the transition of leadership went unnoticed. Gariboldi did not fare much better on the front, as he apparently 'showed little energy or aptitude'.<sup>128</sup> This silence was evidently deliberate, less to avoid harming his own

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<sup>124</sup> 'La Battaglia della Mamarica', *l'Illustrazione Italiana* (29 Dicembre 1940), p. 978.

<sup>125</sup> 'A Tobruk, non è rimasto nulla', *Il Popolo d'Italia* (29 Gennaio 1941), p. 1.

<sup>126</sup> Knox, *Hitler's Italian Allies*, p. 120.

<sup>127</sup> Ciano, *Ciano's Diary* (6<sup>th</sup> July 1941), p. 442.

<sup>128</sup> Knox, *Hitler's Italian Allies*, p. 120.



reputation as an individual, and more to avoid damaging the symbolism surrounding him, or what he signified for the regime, the army, and the nation as a whole. The same is to be said of Mussolini's request for help from the Nazi's due to Graziani's resignation and the arrival of the experienced Nazi Field-marshal Erwin Rommel and his well-equipped Afrika Korps. Military support from Hitler in Libya went unnoticed in Italian newspapers as Mussolini felt the humiliation of having to ask for support and 'was unhappy that the battle is now identified with Rommel'.<sup>129</sup> So the Lion of the Desert was replaced by the Desert Fox, who was to continue the war on the North African front over the next two years until the Axis ultimate defeat and retreat in July 1943.

Since then, historical accounts still differ in their conclusions over Graziani's command and ultimate defeat. The majority of early British accounts detailing the battle for North Africa were written by military men or politicians who had been personally involved, and like Graziani, began producing their own heroic memories of Britain at war. Churchill's memoirs, for example, described his soldiers on the North African front as 'lean, bronzed, desert-hardened, and fully mechanised' in his own victors account of the war.<sup>130</sup> Strawson, a British officer who had fought in Greece and Egypt against the Italians followed in the same vein and concluded that the battle was lost, not on account of Graziani's failures, but due to his heroisation of soldiers on his own side, highly trained British and Australian men whose 'familiarity with the desert was unrivalled and their reconnaissance record unequalled'.<sup>131</sup>

The Italians who have written on the conflict write not about the strength of the enemy, but instead about the lack of morale, uncertainties of Mussolini's foreign policy and attribute the overall failure of the conflict to the Duce.<sup>132</sup> Graziani, again, is absolved of all responsibility or association with failure. Only more recent and balanced accounts conclude that the war was lost because it had been disorganised, lacked precision and planning and was spread too thinly as Italy began fighting on other fronts.<sup>133</sup> Just as vital to its failure though, were the lack of Luce newsreels as propaganda efforts dwindled, and the 'hearts and minds' of the Italian public in support of the war effort remained

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<sup>129</sup> Ciano, *Ciano's Diary*, (26<sup>th</sup> June 1942), p. 532.

<sup>130</sup> W. Churchill, *The Second World War: Vol. 2, Their Finest Hour* (London, 1949), p. 58.

<sup>131</sup> J. Strawson, *The Battle for North Africa* (London, 1969), p. 21.

<sup>132</sup> L. Ceva, *Le Forze Armate*, p. 293.

<sup>133</sup> Gooch, *Mussolini and his Generals*, pp. 514 – 519.

unconquered. A prominent military historian of the period, Macregor Knox, attributes these various factors to the overall ineffectiveness of cultural politics of the Italian army in the Second World War; like others before him, he maintains that Graziani was a ‘prominent army victim of battlefield defeat’ and thus not culpable for the loss.<sup>134</sup> Monumental military history books like the ones mentioned above written by Knox, Gooch and Ceva have endless shelf lives and the marked national discrepancies in representation pave way for national and collective representation and remembrance, as we will see in more detail further on.

*Desert War in North Africa: The British and North American Press*

Naturally, the international narrative was quite different to the one detailed above and deserves a separate analysis. As the only theatre in which the British could engage with the Axis powers on land, the North African front became the most vital at the beginning of World War II and most scrutinised by the international audience.<sup>135</sup> Almost immediately after Mussolini publicly declared war on the Allies, *Life Magazine*, North America’s first photographic news publication and the nation’s most popular weekly, utilised a photograph of Graziani as the subject of its front cover on the 24<sup>th</sup> of June 1940 with the caption ‘Italy’s Army Chief’ (*figure 59*).<sup>136</sup> Curiously, however, he was not the protagonist of the corresponding article detailed inside. The article merely described Mussolini’s prelude to war with a blown-up photograph of Mussolini, Badoglio, and Graziani, along with other leading fascists at a public event, and barely any mention of him other than the comment to follow the image above which read ‘leaders are Badoglio, marching beside Mussolini, and the giant Graziani, Army Chief of Staff’.<sup>137</sup> The only arrow pointing to the photograph does not point to either Mussolini or Badoglio, but instead to Graziani (*figure 60*).<sup>138</sup> It must have been designed to primarily draw attention to him, with the caption ‘big man in rear is Graziani (arrow)’.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Knox, *Hitler’s Italian Allies*, p. 120.

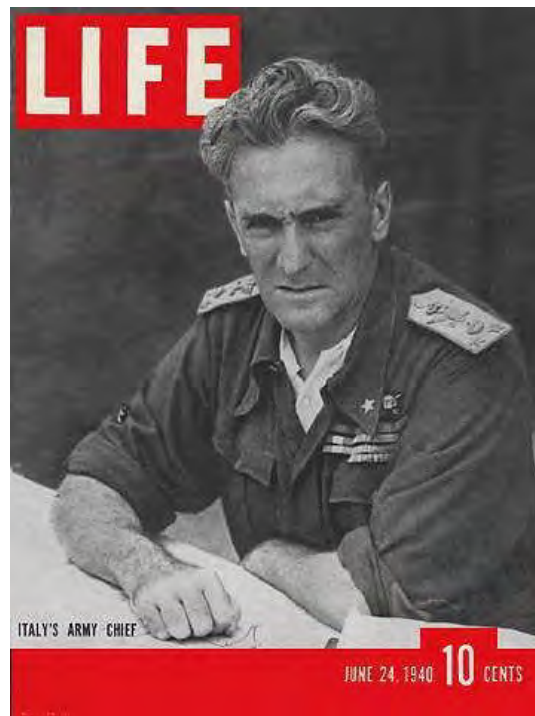
<sup>135</sup> Strawson, *The Battle for North Africa*, p. 28.

<sup>136</sup> Figure 59: ‘Italy’s Army Chief’, *Life Magazine* (24<sup>th</sup> June 1940), front cover.

<sup>137</sup> Figure 60: ‘Mussolini Struts his Stuff as a Prelude to War’, *Life Magazine* (24<sup>th</sup> June 1940), p. 38.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*



*Figure 59: 'Italy's Army Chief', Life Magazine (24<sup>th</sup> June 1940)*



*Figure 60: 'Mussolini Struts his Stuff as a Prelude to War', Life Magazine (24<sup>th</sup> June 1940), p. 38*

The repetitive reference to Graziani's physical height as the 'big man' and 'the giant' appears as journalistic sensationalism which frequently accompanied interest in Graziani's physical appearance over that of his cohort. Therefore, it could not be more evident that the choice of putting Graziani on the front cover at this early stage in the war before the Italian offensive even started, was due to his general allure created in the

years prior and power of the aesthetic. The photograph is a refined one, a black and white portrait of him a few years younger during the Ethiopian war in his uniform and staring straight at the camera with a smouldering frown.<sup>140</sup> The American public must have grown accustomed to intense portraits of the Duce over time, so Graziani proved a tempting alternative, a visually grandiose male figure from the Fascist regime, contrary to a puny and balding Badoglio. International intrigue and public speculation in Graziani did not stop there.

When it soon became clear that he would be the head of all armed forces in North Africa, *The New York Times* wrote a piece on Graziani's new role as the leader of the coming hostilities in Africa. The article painted a confident picture of the 'tough veteran of Italy's colonial wars, returned to Libya, the scene of his earlier triumphs...no Italian officer has wider experience in desert warfare than Marshal Graziani.'<sup>141</sup> A summary then followed detailing his 'impressive' career where he 'earned a reputation for vigorous methods and tactical skill...in this arid, inhospitable expanse, where temperatures rose to 130 degrees at midday and troops had scorpions for bedfellows.'<sup>142</sup> There was no mention of previous accusations of atrocities, just the admirable description of a worthy opponent. This portrayal, implying that he was a man to be respected and feared by the Allies further promoted his 'myth' or the exceptionalism of his persona which he had previously gained on the battlefield.

The same article was reiterated in similar words in all of the U.S. mainstream newspapers, from *The Daily Boston Globe* to *The Baltimore Sun*. *The Daily Boston Globe* introduced their readers to Graziani as 'Italy's ace colonial soldier, having conquered Ethiopia and having twice pacified Libya'.<sup>143</sup> Meanwhile, *The Baltimore Sun* wrote that he possessed 'vein of iron in his character' a 'relentless spirit' and was 'feared by his enemies'.<sup>144</sup> *La Prensa* of Texas went even further by publishing a headshot of him on their front page and entitling it 'hombre de confianza' (*figure 61*).<sup>145</sup> Congruent with the zeitgeist of 'great man' syndrome which commonly engulfed the Western world

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<sup>140</sup> 'Italy's Army Chief'.

<sup>141</sup> 'Army Staff Chief who twice Pacified Libya now Heads Forces in North Africa', *The N.Y. Times* (2<sup>nd</sup> July 1940) p. 7.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>143</sup> 'Graziani Ace Desert Soldier', *The Daily Boston Globe* (10<sup>th</sup> October 1940), p. 4.

<sup>144</sup> Marshal Graziani will Direct Fight against Great Britain', *The Baltimore Sun* (2<sup>nd</sup> July 1940), p. 1.

<sup>145</sup> Figure 61: 'Hombre de Confianza', *La Prensa de San Antonio* (25<sup>th</sup> July 1940) p. 3.

in wartime, Graziani had become an embellished military male symbol of Italian ambition in order to captivate the international audience. It became irrelevant that he represented an Axis enemy power, he was nonetheless mythicised by the foreign press in this instance as the face of the armed forces which would combat another great power in colonial context, on the African continent, called by the British, ‘the Battle of Empire’.<sup>146</sup>

## HOMBRE DE CONFIANZA



Figure 61: ‘Hombre de Confianza, *La Prensa de San Antonio* (25 Julio 1940) p. 3

Instead, for the British press, who were to be his direct opponents on the battlefield, he was demonised more acutely. *The Illustrated London News* published the same headshot of Graziani in the ‘Personalities of the Week’ section and captioned it as ‘the Scourge of Libya, who is said to have executed thirty Arabs a day during his previous Governorship. New Commander-in-Chief of the Italian Forces in North Africa. Formerly Generalissimo in Abyssinia’.<sup>147</sup> Despite such negative speculation of the new

<sup>146</sup> *The Observer* always titled the war on the North African front as ‘The Battle of Empire’.

<sup>147</sup> ‘Personalities of the Week’ *The Illustrated London News* (6<sup>th</sup> July 1940), p. 13.

leader of the enemy army, he was also portrayed as a highly competent and potentially threatening opponent as stated in London's leading contemporary newspaper, *The Observer* in August:

On the Libyan frontier Marshal Graziani, an able and determined commander is massing troops and mechanism. Unmistakably, this is the direct threat to Egypt, the Nile, and the Suez Canal. The unleashing of Graziani's campaign will be by far the most remarkable military adventure that has been undertaken in these parts since Napoleon. The attempt may be imminent.<sup>148</sup>

The contradictions in the British portrayal of Graziani can be more obviously seen in an excerpt from *The Times* that stated 'Marshal Graziani's personal record is heavily weighed down with frightfulness and has earned him the hatred of the desert tribes; his military character and antecedents command a considerable measure of respect'.<sup>149</sup>

When Graziani made his move into Egypt by starting his offensive, *The Observer* was eager to warn that 'Graziani is a keen and wary commander in the field. He has opened his campaign with caution and ability. Crossing the Libyan frontier he has marched his mechanised vanguard along the narrow and hazardous coast-route'.<sup>150</sup> Early British accounts of Graziani's offensive did not dismiss his strategy as they were hesitant to damn the experienced commander. The myth of Graziani the warrior had so clearly been absorbed with them that they feared and respected him as an opponent just as Mussolini's propaganda machine had intended. He remained visually present on the current affairs pages of *The Illustrated London News* throughout 1940, which even published more intimate and less formal images of Graziani seemingly in attempts to humanise the opponent, as seen in *figure 62* where he is smiling and eating a meal in what the paper deemed 'an unconventional photograph' compared to the common stern posed ones of military commanders.<sup>151</sup> Naturally, after the British attack later in December, newspaper reports became more sceptical of Graziani and his 'dilemma' and speculated about his

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<sup>148</sup> 'The Battle of Empire: Axis and Africa', *The Observer* (11<sup>th</sup> August 1940), p. 4.

<sup>149</sup> 'Advance from Libya', *The Times* (25<sup>th</sup> September 1940), p. 5.

<sup>150</sup> 'The Battle of Empire', *The Observer* (22<sup>nd</sup> September 1940), p. 6.

<sup>151</sup> Figure 62: 'Events and people in pictures', *The Illustrated London News* (21<sup>st</sup> December 1940), p. 80.

response as to whether he would remain passive or would counterattack.<sup>152</sup> Even at this point, however, there was overwhelming sympathy for the general, as the correspondent of *The Observer* wrote that ‘no commander abroad could be placed in a more cruel dilemma by the miscalculations of Dictatorship at home’.<sup>153</sup>

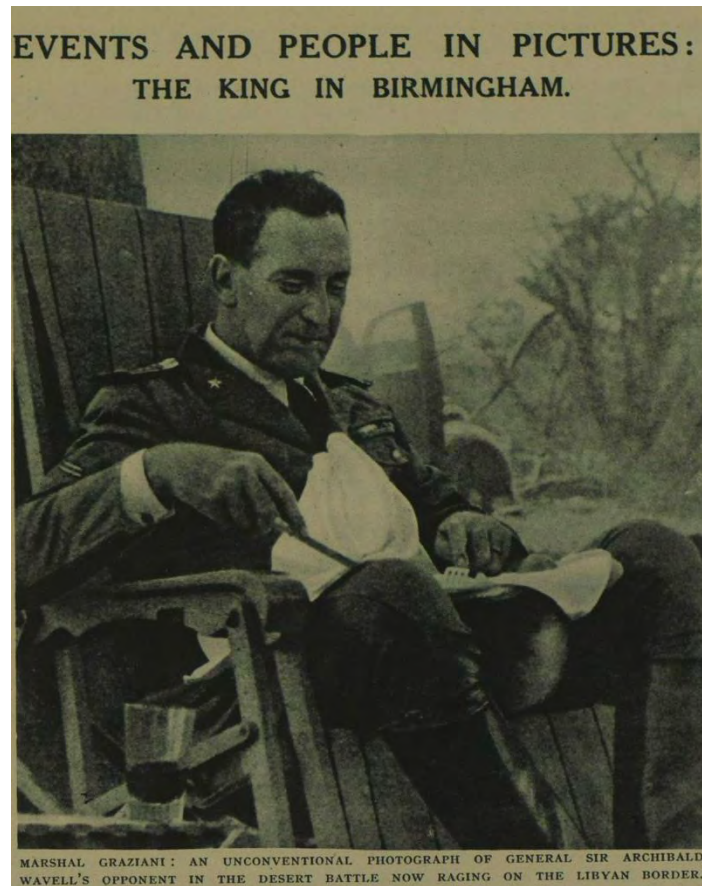


Figure 62: ‘Personalities of the Week’ *The Illustrated London News* (6<sup>th</sup> July 1940), p. 13

When Tobruk was lost and Graziani finally resigned, *The Daily Telegraph* wrote that ‘Graziani was last night reported to have been added to the already long list of Italians to have lost their posts as well as their reputations in attempting to further the Duce’s aims at aggression.’<sup>154</sup> *The Times* also speculated that ‘café comments in Italy’ included calling the Marshall ‘Marshall Disgraziani’.<sup>155</sup> Yet, that was it, there was no more mention of him or critique of his personal conduct in the article, it was just utilised as a

<sup>152</sup> ‘The Boldest Measures’, *The Observer* (8<sup>th</sup> December 1940), p. 6.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>154</sup> ‘Graziani Dismissed his Command’, *The Daily Telegraph* (28<sup>th</sup> January 1941), p. 1.

<sup>155</sup> ‘Café comments in Italy’, *The Times* (31<sup>st</sup> March 1941), p. 3.

sensational phrase in order to attract readers. Instead, the real enemy of the British press was the dictator Mussolini himself, and men like Graziani, perceived as mere military pawns in his game. The American press followed suit, as *The New York Herald Tribune* attributed Graziani's resignation to his 'ill health for several months' beforehand.<sup>156</sup>

Additionally, *The L.A. Times* defended his military performance by attaining that 'Graziani lasted longer than some others of the Fascist Command who suffered defeat'.<sup>157</sup> *The Washington Post* instead explained, in Graziani's own words in his public report to the Duce, that the 'Italians in Egypt were outnumbered' and the 'tanks were too late'.<sup>158</sup> Even the San Franciscan *Il Corriere del Popolo*, which had always been grossly anti-fascist and anti-Graziani concluded under a large heading in bold which read 'Mussolini's Responsibility...Mussolini ordered Graziani to walk into Egypt and did not heed his marshal who asked for more tanks, more planes, more guns. Not the Italian soldier but Mussolini alone is responsible for the plight of the Italian armies.'<sup>159</sup> Unsurprisingly, the only critical comment about Graziani's military failure was the African-American paper, *The Capitol Plaindealer*, published in Kansas. The paper utilised Haile Selassie as its anti-colonial hero against Graziani as its continued symbolic adversary even though they weren't even fighting in the same war, given that Graziani was in Libya and Selassie was in Ethiopia fighting the last remaining Italian troops there.<sup>160</sup> It stated that:

What do you suppose the talk is around those (Italian military) campfires tonight? Have they heard that Haile Selassie the Emperor whom your Duce so brutally cast down, is moving on the frontier? Has the busy telegraph conveyed to them the news that Marshal Graziani, who was the Butcher of Libya before he became the Assassin of Addis Ababa, and massacred 300 people there in a day, is now floundering in retreat? <sup>161</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> 'Graziani Quits as Duce's Chief in North Africa', *The N.Y. Herald Tribune* (26<sup>th</sup> March 1941), p. 7.

<sup>157</sup> 'Graziani Quits African Post', *The L.A. Times* (26<sup>th</sup> March 1941).

<sup>158</sup> 'Outnumbered, Lacking Tanks, Army Fought Well, Graziani Says', *The Washington Post* (23<sup>rd</sup> December 1940), p. 2.

<sup>159</sup> 'The Position of Italy in the Present Conflict', *Il Corriere del Popolo* (27<sup>th</sup> February 1941), Mazzini News Society.

<sup>160</sup> 'London Hears How Ethiopians Fight Italians', *The Capitol Plaindealer* (24<sup>th</sup> January 1941), p. 2.

<sup>161</sup> 'London Hears How Ethiopians Fight Italians'.



Graziani was only emblematically used here in order to reiterate the repeated Italian atrocities in Africa, as nothing was actually written about Graziani's late failures in Libya. Thus in articles like the one above, both Graziani and Haile Selassie remained symbolic enemies for what they represented to African-American readers; anti-colonial sentiment and fascist imperialism.

In general, the overall lack of more detailed or damning reports surrounding Graziani's immediate resignation was presumably because he was deemed somewhat 'dignified' in his surrender rather than being fired from the post. Another more practical explanation, however, was due to the suggestion given by *The Irish Times* that the event 'has been somewhat overshadowed by events in Yugoslavia'.<sup>162</sup> Yet again, as an army general who was 'just following orders', he had escaped personal responsibility from another African scandal which could have ensued following his return to Italy. Thus, his myth, was also left unscathed.

#### *Desert War in North Africa: The International Press*

As the biggest conflict since WWI, it was not merely the personally invested American and British press which keenly anticipated the unfolding of events in the desert. As the founding nation of European fascism took the world stage against a great colonial power for the first time, in an exotic landscape, the global audience keenly turned to the African theatre and its protagonists in apprehension. As Graziani's paranoia grew and his mental state became more fragile after 1937, evidence from his personal archive suggests that he became ever more intent on collecting all publications relevant to him. Therefore, in 1940, when foreign interest peaked and he was being pressured into leading a war in which he was unconfident, files with countless annotations in red and blue crayons and translated newspaper clippings suggest that the Ministero della Cultura Popolare sent any articles which so much as mentioned his name. Although Graziani's exact involvement in this process remains unknown, the letters which accompanied some of these clippings suggest that the Ministry was the source of these articles. The Ministero was renowned for being thorough in controlling and censoring all foreign press relating to Italian activities at home and abroad, resulting in this likely scenario. He probably then kept and scrutinised them or had them annotated upon his request as the continued

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<sup>162</sup> 'Graziani', *The Irish Times* (28<sup>th</sup> March 1941), p. 4.

presence of red and blue crayons across his personal archive suggests either he or someone who worked for him were responsible for doing so, although the reasons for specific annotations remain unclear. These clippings form the basis of my sources for this section of the chapter which indicates the many foreign language articles which the government thought worthy of documenting, translating, and sending to Graziani for inspection.

Turning back to August, on the brink of the conflict, a clipping from the Swedish press made the connection between Graziani and Napoleon, and published a biography of Graziani's life in an article entitled 'In Napoleon's footsteps', claiming he was the 'true conquistador and pacifier' of Italy's Empire in Africa.<sup>163</sup> Similarly, a translated clipping from a Danish newspaper wrote that Graziani 'viene considerato da tutti come il più grande guerriero coloniale dei nostri tempi'.<sup>164</sup> As evident in *figure 63*, an annotated article which I found in Graziani's archive from the French press wrote that Graziani could be compared 'sans exagération' to their greatest colonial general and hero who had been dubbed the empire builder, Hubert Lyautey.<sup>165</sup> The French correspondent wrote that Graziani was 'pareillement magnifique, grande, robuste, e svelte...son traits son de marbre'.<sup>166</sup> In 1940, therefore, we see the mythicisation of Graziani's physique again, as had been done in 1936, an attractive symbol designed for contemporary geo-political needs.

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<sup>163</sup> 'In Napoleon's Footsteps', *Goteborgs Handels* (21 September 1940) ACS, F. RG, B. 81.

<sup>164</sup> 'Rodolfo Graziani', *Berlingske Aften* (28<sup>th</sup> September 1940) ACS, F. RG, B. 81.

<sup>165</sup> Figure 63: ACS, F. RG, B. 81, 'Le Marechal Graziani', *Gringoire* (9 Novembre 1940).

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*

## Persons and Personages

GRAZIANI AND WAVELL

*Die Weltwoche*, Zurich Independent Weekly



Figure 63: ACS, F. RG, B. 81, 'Le Marechal Graziani', *Gringoire* (9 Novembre 1940)

SHOULD posterity erect monuments to the two commanders involved in the great battle in North Africa, the statue of the Italian commander, Marshal Rodolfo Graziani, should be hewn from marble of a somewhat golden cast, in keeping with the statues still to be seen in the sand-strewn Roman temples of Libya. The statue of Sir Archibald Percival Wavell, the British commander, might more suitably be made of the dark gray tuffastone which forms the bare and sad rock-islands of the desert.

The analogies

Both were cited for heroism as the joint conquerors of the Kufra Oasis, which had been held by the rebellious Senussis. Today the fifty-seven-year-old British Officer, and the fifty-eight-year-old descendant of the Romans, confront each other across the dunes as enemies. One wonders, does each still carry the daggers which they exchanged at Kufra Oasis, and on which were inscribed, "United we are the masters"?

Wavell and Graziani are both "Africans," as the saying goes. Since today both the great I.vantev and



Figure 64: 'Person and Personages: Graziani and Wavell', *Die Weltwoche* (27 September 1940) & *The Living Age* (February 1941)

In fact, perhaps the most lengthy and intriguing foreign article on Graziani in this period was written by a Swiss newspaper and then republished across the U.S. in English. It narrated the battle in evocative anticipation by using one of two great historic generals, Graziani, and his equally experienced opponent who led the British, General Wavell, as protagonists. It portrayed two charismatic men charged with the personal responsibility of the fate of their respective nation-states, accompanied by caricatures depicting a rather crazy-looking Graziani (figure 64).<sup>167</sup> It began with a compelling rhetoric:

Should posterity erect monuments to the two commanders involved in the great battle in North Africa, the statue of the Italian commander, Marshal Rodolfo Graziani, should be hewn from marble of a somewhat golden cast, in keeping with the statues still to be seen in the sand-strewn Roman temples of Libya. The statue of Sir Archibald Percival Wavell, the British commander, might more suitably be made of the dark gray tuffastone which forms the bare and sad rock-islands of the desert. The analogies are valid. The Italian, a descendant of the Caesars, has in abundance the qualities of great daring and hardiness, mixed with a sort of operatic brilliance. The

<sup>167</sup> Figure 64: 'Person and Personages: Graziani and Wavell', *Die Weltwoche* (27 September 1940) & *The Living Age* (February 1941).

Englishman, on the other hand, is an able professional soldier, methodical and tenacious, who weights every step on the battlefield, has no cravings for laurels or applause, and prefers to remain in the background.<sup>168</sup>

What was seen as the greatest battle of the Second World War this far, Fascist Italy against Great Britain, was personified by their two military leaders on the front, which explains their atmospheric exaltation through the use of language. Out of the description of the two, Graziani yet again stands out as the more alluring candidate. The article stated that ‘both have had long experience in Africa...and may be regarded as the world’s greatest masters of desert warfare on the Dark Continent’ but their discrepancies in ‘temperament and background’ were soon described.<sup>169</sup>

Wavell was defined as ‘the professional British officer, reacting to the oldest traditions of his land... distinguishing himself during the Boer War’ and later on when he served many years in Egypt, from a family of longstanding military tradition at the prestigious military academy of Sandhurst. Graziani, on the other hand, was portrayed as ‘the gifted condottiere...the hero of dozens of those familiar ‘pacification’ campaigns in North Africa. He moved in an aura of glory and conquest, the envy of his British counterpart chained to routine in Cairo. How much more varied was the life of Graziani!’<sup>170</sup> And not only, the article continued to exalt Graziani further over Wavell by stating that:

Everything he did gave rise to legends. Riding a white horse, at the head of his Sahara Columns, he conquered the district of Fezzan after a magnificent campaign...while serving as military governor, it is said of Graziani, by an explorer who interviewed him, that “I have never seen a man of his harshness and majestic inaccessibility. He was transplanted here from another century. While we talked, he paced up and down, his face a study in stone, and a whip in his hand.” To the natives, the military governor was the ‘Invulnerable One’. A man of towering height, always at the head of his attacking troops, he was never hit by a bullet...a born soldier.

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<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

This remarkable account of Graziani's career was much more colourful than the sober portrayal of General Wavell. The only possible explanation for this is due to the fact that Archibald Wavell represented all which was traditional and familiar to the West. Graziani, however, embodied a new form of militarised masculinity, a fascist general with aesthetic appeal who had severely, yet effectively, and therefore, in white European circles, 'respectably', wiped out Arabs and tribesmen in the mysticised desert and bushlands of Africa. It is thus safe to say that even the international allure of Graziani over other military figures from World War II is unique. This does not signify that his attention remained unrivalled, as the likes of Rommel and General Patton were comparable in terms of intrigue and enthusiasm throughout the conflict, but descriptions of Graziani were one of a kind. Rommel's operations in the desert were also mythicised as the desert as a theatre of battle added to the undeniable mystique, given the names attributed to them both, Lion of the Desert for Graziani, and Desert Fox to Rommel.<sup>171</sup> Graziani, however, was distinct in his long career and heroisation prior, and as a German Nazi, Rommel was a more vilified opponent. Again, there is no mention of any allegations of Graziani's brutal conduct in the article, his pugnacity acknowledged but far from being condemned, it was interpreted as almost an attribute of desired value.

Although the depictions above are positive and ignore any previous allegations of his colonial conduct and administration in his career prior, the German press was naturally even more decisive in its exaltation of Graziani's capabilities at the dawn of hostilities. In August, the *Hamburger Fremdenbett* wrote that 'Il Maresciallo Graziani è un capo troppo forte e ricco di iniziative, e bisogna aspettarsi dalle sue truppe un colpo decisivo'.<sup>172</sup> Moreover, a leading Nazi newspaper published an article dedicated to all of Graziani's previous victories throughout his career and stated that:

Paragonato a Scipione, l'unico grande romano in Africa prima di lui. Riunisce in se le doti militari di un Cesare e l'arte politica di un Augusto. l'Africa è dura e Graziani pure è duro...Dopo la vittoria (in Etiopia) egli appare come un idolo, come il dio della guerra in Africa. Il programma della 'pax romana' vive in questo maresciallo fascista, la cui opera è coronata

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<sup>171</sup> J. Sadkovich, 'Of Myths & Men: Rommel and the Italians in North Africa 1940 – 42', *The International History Review* (December 2010), pp. 284 – 313.

<sup>172</sup> 'Unknown Title', *Hamburger Fremdenbett* (31<sup>st</sup> August 1940) ACS. F. RG, B. 81.

dalla storia...i suoi ordini sono freddi e chiari, egli è preceduto in terra africana del mito della invincibilità come aureola di gloria.<sup>173</sup>

As evident above, the language and prose utilised by the Nazis to describe Graziani is more comparable to Italian articles following his victory in Ethiopia than that of other foreign onlookers. Nevertheless, even as an ally to the Germans his portrayal here is not dissimilar to that of neutral Switzerland or indeed Sweden. Furthermore, it must be noted here that the German representation of Graziani and emphasis of his hardiness and vigour provides a preview to his distinct appeal to the Nazis as a military collaborator when they invaded the country and allied themselves with Mussolini and Graziani later on in 1943.

As with many of the articles, the relevant ones were cut to size, translated and glued to a page for Graziani's reference, such as *figure 65*.<sup>174</sup> As we already know, Graziani and the Fascist government were equally, if not more, interested in imagery so amongst the many newspaper clippings were many images which had been published in around the world, which must have been scrutinised as much as the written words of the global press, as evident in *figure 66* of a picture published in an unknown Argentinian paper.<sup>175</sup>



Figure 65: Translation and Clipping of 'Graziani's kühner Vorstoß', *Der Angriff* (3 October 1940) ACS, F. RG B. 81



Figure 66: 'Il Maresciallo Graziani', Buenos Aires (10 Giugno 1940) ACS, F. RG B. 81

<sup>173</sup> 'Unknown Title', *Westdeutscher Beobachter* (20<sup>th</sup> October 1940) ACS, F. RG B. 81.

<sup>174</sup> Figure 65: Translation and Clipping of 'Graziani's kühner Vorstoß', *Der Angriff* (3 Ottobre 1940) ACS, F. RG B. 81.

<sup>175</sup> Figure 66: 'Il Maresciallo Graziani', Buenos Aires (10 Giugno 1940) ACS, F. RG B. 81.

Thus, it is clear from the sheer variety and origin of these articles published that the world was keen to know who Mussolini's favourite general was. Nevertheless, given the location of these sources in Graziani's private archive, it must be taken into account that negative portrayals may have also been omitted more freely from his collection, although the content of his folders overall suggests that he collected all publications relating to his person, good or bad, for his own paranoia, awareness and documentation.

In conclusion, even the myth of Graziani abroad endured his entry to and exit from the battlefields of North Africa, despite the rapid Italian defeat. Back in Italy, he spent the next two years in recovery from the heavy blow which the event must have had on his ego, and avoided the infuriated Duce, who grew more desperate at Italy's performance during the war, consequently dismissing countless members of his military Chief of Staff as they also failed in their quest, one by one. Naturally, at the time the Duce:

Non intende addossarsi alcuna responsabilità. Anzi, è deciso a far pagare ai generali tutti i loro dubbi, esitazioni e critiche che hanno accompagnato ogni mossa della politica estera fascista dal 38 ad oggi.<sup>176</sup>

By this point, Mussolini had bought into the own myths he had created, his own, that of Graziani, the Italian army, and his infallible confidence in expanding the Italian empire in Africa and beyond.

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<sup>176</sup> S. Colarizi, *l'Opinione degli Italiani sotto il regime 1929 – 1943* (Roma, 1991), p. 346.

## 5. A Nation Torn Apart: Italy 1943 - 45

Little is known about Graziani's movements following his return to Rome in the spring of 1941, other than the fact that Mussolini briefly attempted to have him investigated and court-martialled, albeit to no end.<sup>1</sup> Only one rather incomplete and sparse file from the Graziani archive contains correspondence with various members of Mussolini's military commission gives an indication of Graziani's focus in this period. The documents highlight the disgraced Marshall's obsession with redeeming himself to his associates and superiors even after the allegations against him were dropped.<sup>2</sup> The letters date right up until June 1943, in which Graziani continued to appear overwhelmingly preoccupied with the readership and reception of his 'memoriale' or report of his military decision-making between 1940 and 1941.<sup>3</sup> This heightened awareness of not only his reputation but also his paper trail provides further testament to the selectivity and content of the written documentation that he left in his wake during his lifetime and after. Thus, Graziani's low profile amongst the broader public in this period was warranted as he struggled to preserve the remnants of his prior respectability amongst the Fascist high command. Whilst doing so, he kept a safe but convenient distance from Rome by retiring to his rural hometown and supposedly tended to his family farm. His inability to remain out of the broader spot-light, however, was short-lived as the nation was plunged into a state of chaos in 1943.

The period between 1943 and 1945 deserves its own chapter for a few reasons. First of all is the unique political state of the nation in these two years, internally split between a newly formed Fascist government and varied anti-fascist and pro-Allied elements, and not necessarily harmonious parties/groups. Secondly, in addition to the domestic civil chaos, Italy was dually occupied by both the Nazis and the Allies and so this Mediterranean theatre of war experienced a very specific turn of events in these years. Thirdly, due to the two reasons above, the documentation related to this period remains muddled both geographically and chronologically in many cases, and especially in the case of Graziani. The many sides and forces in Italy at the time meant that many

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<sup>1</sup> Macgregor Knox, *Hitler's Italian Allies*, p. 120.

<sup>2</sup> ACS, F. RG, B. 80.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*



documents were highly valuable for reasons of interception and reconnaissance during the war, incrimination of opposing sides, and post-war justice. This meant that the British, Americans, and Germans took many documents back to their respective nations and opposing Italian sides did likewise in various regions and different archives, given the continued politicisation of the issue in Italy today. Additionally, as a war-torn nation bombed by multiple enemies, many documents were also undoubtedly destroyed beyond repair. It is because of this that only fragments of evidence of Graziani's duties, responsibilities, and function during the fateful period of 1943-45 remain. It remains scarce and disorganised as do the sources of propaganda produced by the Republic of Salò (RSI), which is still perceived by many as the darkest hour in the history of 20<sup>th</sup>-century Italy. As a part of World War II that the Italian government and its citizens are still all too keen to forget, retracing Graziani's steps here is vital to the post-war remembrance of him that lingers on in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

#### *The Republic of Salò: Beginnings*

The final Axis surrender in the African arena took place on the 13<sup>th</sup> of May 1943, facilitating the Allied invasion of Sicily just two months later. With the loss of the Mediterranean, and with American and British Commonwealth troops threatening the Italian mainland, popular belief in the war effort hit an all-time low, resulting in an emergency Fascist Grand Council meeting held on the 25<sup>th</sup> of July in order to remove Mussolini and his dictatorial powers. The armed forces were now under orders from the King, who, along with Badoglio signed a secret armistice with the Allies on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of September, which was publicly declared on the 8<sup>th</sup>. Mussolini, who had been imprisoned following the vote of no confidence against him, was rescued by Hitler's SS troopers on the 12<sup>th</sup> of September in the Gran Sasso Raid and flown to Germany. The Republic of Salò was announced a few days later, when Mussolini returned to Italy and settled in the tiny town on the shores of Lake Garda, a strategic location in-between the industrial centre of Milan and the port of Venice, far from the Allies in the South yet close enough to the German border if Nazi support was needed.

Whilst the extent of Mussolini's independent initiative in forming the Nazi-backed government remains inconclusive, it is indisputable that, by this point, Mussolini was now at the Führer's mercy if he wanted to stay in power and alive. As the journalist and

scholar Ricciotti Lazzero put it, for the duration of the republic, ‘Mussolini (era) un libero prigionero in patria’ and Salò was ‘un carcere per il duce’.<sup>4</sup> Thus, whilst Mussolini relied on Hitler for economic, military, and political support to continue the war against the Allies in Italy, likewise, ‘Hitler needed Mussolini as an ideological and symbolic ally so if they won someone could lead the country’.<sup>5</sup> Hence, the RSI became more commonly known as Hitler’s puppet government in Italy, in operation only due to Nazi reinforcement. Therefore, Mussolini’s primary task was to harness domestic support and assert legitimacy for the new regime, which proved an ambitious task since the beginning of the war given one rather public military failure after another and his public dismissal from his own Party members earlier that year.<sup>6</sup>

In pursuit of such legitimacy for the new republic, Graziani’s name was immediately and unsurprisingly circulated. The only known scholars to examine the propaganda of the RSI to date, Luisa Quartermaine and Ernesto Laura, both attain that Mussolini’s decision to opt for an independent, national and seemingly ‘apolitical’ army, in attempts to gain popular support for the RSI, resulted in the obvious choice of Graziani at its head.<sup>7</sup> A Second World War veteran and assistant to Winston Churchill, Sir William Deakin, concurred with Quartermaine, as he wrote that:

The outstanding gap in these arrangements was the appointment of war minister, and a personality of such seniority and prestige to be able to rally support among the debris of the Italian army (and) even though subject to military enquiry after his failure in North Africa, he (Graziani) had been considered as being suitable for a senior role in the Duce’s plans for a reconstruction of the whole government in the hours after the meeting with the Grand Council.<sup>8</sup>

Therefore, these analyses agree that the decision to approach Graziani was partly based on the non-political nature of Graziani’s long career and public image as a soldier

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<sup>4</sup> R. Lazzero, *Il Sacco d’Italia: Razzie e Stragi Tedesche nella Repubblica di Salò* (Milano, 1994), p. 19.

<sup>5</sup> L. Quartermaine, *Mussolini’s Last Republic: Propaganda & Politics in the RSI* (Exeter, 2002), p. 14.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 21 – 27.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, p. 28; E. Laura, *l’Immagine Bugiarda: Mass Media e Spettacolo nella Repubblica di Salò* (1986), p. 25.

<sup>8</sup> F. W. Deakin, *The Brutal Friendship: Mussolini, Hitler & the Fall of Italian Fascism* (London, 1962), p. 568.

divorced from politics. Mussolini was now devoid of public dignity due to his indivisible role as the founder of a fallen government which was responsible for the Italy's war-torn state, which signified the urgency for a reputable figure, capable of rousing popular support.

Deakin further elaborates by giving additional reasons for choosing Graziani as Mussolini's second in command for the nascent republic by stating that 'the name of Graziani was mentioned (as it) evoked imperial memories of North Africa and Abyssinia and it had the perhaps decisive advantage of raising anew the reputation of Badoglio.'<sup>9</sup> A leading scholar on the RSI, Luigi Ganapini, more recently concurs with Deakin's assessment as he attains that:

Si propone il Maresciallo Graziani, con il prestigio che gli deriva dal mito 'del vecchio combattente africano, che aveva riconquistato la Libia, occupato con fulminee avanzate la parte meridionale dell'Africa Orientale Italiana, era stato il vicere d'Etiopia e portava nelle carni i segni delle ferite di Guerra e delle schegge di bombe e dell'attentato di Addis Ababa.<sup>10</sup>

These statements support the overarching hypothesis of this thesis, that of the importance of the myth of Graziani, the imperial war hero, and its longstanding perceived indispensability to the regime and the symbolism of Italian national unity. Thus, in a letter to Hitler in late September, Mussolini more concisely justified his choice by writing 'è la figura del Maresciallo Graziani che da un carattere al governo e suscita vaste speranze e simpatie'.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, Deakin's initial comment regarding Badoglio is testament to my earlier analysis which suggests that despite Badoglio's superior rank and role in Italy's colonial wars, his public image paled in comparison to that of Graziani. Moreover, Deakin's overall tone towards Graziani support my hypothesis that British writing on behalf of those who took part in the Second World War is still laced with an air of respect for Graziani's military reputation as a worthy opponent.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p. 567.

<sup>10</sup> L. Ganapini, *La Repubblica delle Camicie nere: i combattenti, i politici, gli amministratori, i socializzatori* (Milano, 2002), p. 31.

<sup>11</sup> Deakin, *Storia della Repubblica di Salò* (London, 1962), p. 566.

Scholars concur that Graziani's eventual acceptance of the role in the new government was reluctant, as he initially refused the offer. According to Deakin's account, on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of September 1943, Francesco Barracu, a prominent fascist and fellow war veteran of Graziani's in the colonies, visited Graziani's home with a personal message from Mussolini in Munich offering him the post, which he refused.<sup>12</sup> The very next day, Barracu approached him again with other members of the RSI in order to try again. On this occasion, Barracu apparently persuaded Graziani to at least meet with Rudolf Rahn, the Nazi plenipotentiary to the RSI at the German Embassy, stating that his 'refusal will be taken as cowardice'.<sup>13</sup> Bertoldi attains that Graziani's meeting with Rahn ran along the same vein, with his initial refusal followed by reluctant acceptance due to Rahn's employment of 'l'adulazione e la paura'.<sup>14</sup> Apparently, Rahn:

Gli dice che nessun altro può prendere quell'posto se non lui e che solo dalla sua accettazione dipenderà se la RSI avrà un governo, poichè non crede ad alcun gabinetto italiano dove non figurì Graziani... Poi, quando lo vede lusingato ma ancora titubante, incalza spiegandogli che il Führer, se non saranno i fascisti a reggere il paese non occupato dagli alleati, si vendicherà terribilmente del tradimento dell'otto settembre e farà dell'Italia cioè che ha fatto della polonia. In altre parole, il destino della patria è nelle sue mani.<sup>15</sup>

The extent of truth to Rahn's speech to Graziani remains unclear. Although Deakin's account concurs with Bertoldi in Graziani's hesitant attitude to the proposal, Deakin is the only historian to note that his insistence of Graziani's role in the new government was in fact negatively received by Hitler.<sup>16</sup> According to Deakin, Rahn convinced the Führer of the symbolic and practical benefits of pitting Badoglio against Graziani, as their long lived rivalry could serve to incentivise Graziani's acceptance of the role of Minister of Defence and overall performance as a Nazi ally.<sup>17</sup> A military report sent to Colonel Johann Jandl, a commander responsible for the German armed forces in Italy, was translated by Deakin and stated:

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<sup>12</sup> Deakin, *The Brutal Friendship*, p. 568.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> S. Bertoldi, *Salò: Vita e Morte della Repubblica Sociale Italiana* (Milano, 1976), p. 59

<sup>15</sup> Ibid pp. 59 – 60.

<sup>16</sup> Deakin, *Storia della Repubblica*, p. 566.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

It is common knowledge that Graziani has never been pro-German. He wants to get away from German influence and see Italy sovereign and free and has no scruples as to how he gains his end. But the Marshall, shrewd as a peasant, the condition for this can only be victory. We should therefore harness the ruthless energy of this man, who has driven well about the Italian average, and whose capacity for action is not maimed by corrupt embroilments. We should spur him on by giving him the feeling we have confidence in him.<sup>18</sup>

There is little evidence prior to the war that details Graziani's attitude towards Nazi Germany, so no firm conclusions on this matter can be made, although it could provide one reason for Hitler's hesitation to use Graziani for the RSI, the other perhaps being his poor performance in North Africa earlier on in the war. The relevant detail from this report is the overall impression which leading Nazi representatives in Italy, such as Rahn and Slo (an unknown German military figure who sent the report to Jandl), had of Graziani at the time. They both noted the popular reputation that he still enjoyed in Italy amongst the political elites and wider Italian population and realised the potential of utilising Graziani as a military and propagandistic arm or weapon for the war effort. Thus, they realised that by appointing Graziani as War Minister, a certain prestige and legitimacy had been added to the new republic.<sup>19</sup>

### *The RSI: Continuities and Ruptures in Propaganda & Censorship*

The infallible combination of flattery and fear predictably resulted in Graziani's acceptance of his nomination, a familiar pattern previously seen in 1940 at the dawn of WWII. No time was wasted in announcing his new role, as the new War Minister gave his first radio speech on the 25<sup>th</sup> of September. The discourse took place mere days after his acceptance, was published in all national newspapers, and even named a 'documento fondamentale per la storia d'Italia'.<sup>20</sup> The speech was, characteristic in style with that of the old regime, lengthy and dramatic, compromising nearly seven typed A4 pages.<sup>21</sup> It strategically focused very little on Nazi Germany, Hitler, or indeed even the Duce. This

<sup>18</sup> 'Jandl Report from Slo' cited in Deakin, *The Brutal Friendship*, p. 622.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, p. 569.

<sup>20</sup> 'Forte Discorso alla Radio del Maresciallo Graziani', *Il Messaggero* (26 Settembre 1943), p. 1.

<sup>21</sup> ACS, Ministero Dell'AOI: Fascicolo del Personale: 1194, B. 68.

may be indicative of Graziani and the RSI's awareness of the potential polarising effects that these references might have on the Italian population given the instability and lack of validity of the new government and its allies. As noted by Francesco Germinario, in the RSI 'ricoprivono cariche militari del primo piano...non si trattava più di fascismo, si trattava di onore, dignità'.<sup>22</sup> The discourse, therefore, concentrated upon broad patriotic themes all too familiar to Graziani during previous speeches he had given in preceding decades, largely exposing rhetoric of national honour ('onore' appeared more than any word in this speech) and sacrifice through combat and bloodshed, for which he was most famously known and appreciated. The following extract, for example, made a plea to all 'camerati' to:

Senza riguardo ad interessi personali o speculazioni politiche, col coraggio della convinzione e con la virtù degli animi noi dobbiamo riconquistare all'Italia la purezza dell'onore popolare, patrimonio preziosissimo della razza, il combattimento e il lavoro, non il tradimento e la infedeltà, resituendoci la nostra indipendenza e la nostra integrità territoriale.<sup>23</sup>

As evident in the words and phrases written above, the principles and ideas which were confirmed here to be virtuous in nature, were laced with affirmations of what were deemed to be the vices characterised by the new Fascist government. This equal focus given to the perceived enemy, others, and adversaries, was a rhetoric weapon used before by Graziani in his speeches vilifying Ethiopian resistors during the Italo-Ethiopian conflict for example, and commonly used in war time to rally popular support for any given conflict. Thus, the words 'onore' and 'fedeltà' were contrasted with 'disonore' and 'tradimento', 'pace' and 'grandezza' followed by 'anarchia' and 'degenerazione'.<sup>24</sup> Unsurprisingly, given the fact that it was Graziani speaking, the personification of the larger enemy took on the form of Badoglio. The value of utilising Graziani's long enduring professional and personal rapport with Badoglio as a propagandistic weapon, the literal and figurative enemy of the Republic and all it stood for, is evident in the fact

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<sup>22</sup> F. Germinario, 'Eros e Tanthos: La Morte nella Memorialistica della Repubblica Sociale' in O. Janz, & L. Klinkhammer (eds.) *La morte per la patria*, pp. 205 – 206.

<sup>23</sup> ACS, Min AOI, B. 68.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

that almost a third of the speech was dedicated to the denunciation of his former commander.

Here, Graziani called Badoglio ‘un criminale’, on a personal, political and military level throughout his whole career.<sup>25</sup> Firstly, he heavily attacked him for the recent armistice, whereby he apparently ‘ha ingannato altresì tutto il popolo italiano con uno degli atti più disgustosi che la storia degli uomini abbia conosciuto nell’intero suo corso’.<sup>26</sup> Secondly, he deemed him wholly responsible for the earlier military failures of the Second World War in Greece and North Africa, because, as Capo dello Stato Maggiore Generale, ‘ha la colpa della insufficienza preparazione delle Forze Armate d’Italia’.<sup>27</sup> According to Graziani, it was, by now, ‘l’abitudine di Badoglio di sabotare e di tradire ha lontani e vicini precedenti da Caporetto ad oggi’ and he who single-handedly ‘ha trascinato alla rovina il popolo italiano’.<sup>28</sup> When the reproachful part of the speech was finished, Graziani concluded with a theatrical ‘self-sacrificing’ prose claiming that ‘io offro tutta la mia vita entrando a far parte del nuovo Governo’.<sup>29</sup> The fact that Graziani’s first national appearance as War Minister was on the radio is noteworthy as Quartermaine’s study demonstrates that ‘radio broadcasts played a fundamental role in the history of the RSI from the beginning.’<sup>30</sup> Radio became the most effective manner to widely transmit propaganda during World War II due to common practical issues such as the breakdown in communication and transport lines which resulted in a decrease in the circulation of printed information.<sup>31</sup> Graziani, therefore, unrelentingly utilised the radio for the duration of the war for all of his communication with the Italian public, all aired by the Ministry of Popular Culture’s controlled radio stations.

The Germans took this opportunity to closely monitor their choice in supporting Graziani as an important player and popular agitator in their puppet government by paying particular attention to his reception amongst the Italian public during his inaugural speech. Their impressions were overwhelmingly positive and meticulous in detail in a report sent to Berlin that stated:

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Quartermaine, *Mussolini’s Last Republic*, p. 61.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

Graziani's speech was better received than the Duce's. G is more popular than Badoglio. He is not considered to be a strategist but a leader and man of action. The only thing was found unpleasant as making public differences of opinion between the generals. Speech first propaganda success of the Government. As a soldier he had special qualifications for settling with Badoglio and the King. The fact that a man of such good reputation has taken up so unequivocal a stand for fascism and Germany has made a particularly profound impression. Anyone who speaks in this tone will take on greater danger with youthful enthusiasm and steadfastness. Wavering characters have received new strength... personal attitude of G recognised. Language of the soldier more impressive than well-known fascist catchphrases.<sup>32</sup>

This response is rich in content both in corroborating the choice and emblematic importance of Graziani in the Republic even over that of the Duce, and in the importance of his popular role as a soldier untainted by the responsibility of making poor choices, as political leaders are. Additionally, the assessment of popular opinion, especially in wartime remains rare, so this insight, which would have been as accurate as possible given the high stakes of sending a misleading report to Berlin, is highly valuable for this investigation. Despite his unpopularity amongst some members of the Fascist high command, the fragment suggests that Graziani's prior popular reputation, physical presence, and oratorical skills all worked in his favour amongst the members of the public who went to listen to him speak. This is also presumably the reason why various Fascist and Nazi officials tolerated Graziani's prominent role in the RSI.

Graziani's public debut as the newest, and perhaps, most illustrious new addition to the RSI took place a few days after his radio speech, and was of course, publicised by personal radio reminders, newspaper bulletins, and posters which littered the city in the days anticipating the occasion.<sup>33</sup> 'La grande esposizione pubblica' as described by Bertoldi, was held at the Teatro Adriano on Piazza Cavour, an event hall which was known to have hosted many fascist public spectacles, including the Giornata Coloniale

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<sup>32</sup> English Translation of Kappler Telegraph Rome to Berlin (29/10/43) TNA, HW 19/238.

<sup>33</sup> Radio Reminders in ACS, F. RG. & Posters in Bertoldi, *Salò*, p. 61.



of 1938, also formally held by Graziani in the very same theatre.<sup>34</sup> This time, he presented himself in his heavily medal-studded marshall uniform and was introduced and referred to by the RSI officials who were present as ‘il leone bianco’, in order to maximise his ‘credito antico’ and instill the idea that ‘di lui si può fidare’, due to his prior status of invincible warrior.<sup>35</sup> His speech, advertised as ‘la vibrante parola del Maresciallo Graziani’ mirrored the one he had given on the radio in content and style and thus his rhetoric: ‘non è sostanzialmente, un atto di fede nel fascismo, o in Mussolini, o in Hitler. È una constatazione piuttosto febbrile e drammatica. fa una buona impressione il suo gestire, la sua voce squillante, l’impeto del suo eloquio’.<sup>36</sup>

The official images and videos from Luce’s newsreels provide an impressive depiction of a full auditorium whereby Graziani enjoyed the unwavering attention of both the audience and Fascist officials, who were sat behind him (figure 67).<sup>37</sup> His speech was followed by a typical Fascist procession headed by Graziani to Piazza Venezia whereby the Marshall, Ricci and Stahl ‘si recano a rendere omaggio all’Altare della Patria’.<sup>38</sup> Typically, Graziani, and no one else, is depicted as the leader and centre of the procession up to the Milite Ignoto with his unrivalled ‘soldier’ status. The structure, form, and visual language of LUCE imagery strove to reflect that of the *ventennio*, as the photographs all concentrated on Graziani as the focal point of every shot, surrounded by his entourage, commonly ‘applaudito da una folla ineggiante’, as captioned by the propagandistic newsreel (Figure 68).<sup>39</sup> The cinematographic portrayal of the affair reinforced this notion of his continued and unwavering popularity as the clip opened with a panorama of members of the public physically pushing each other aside in order to enter the Adriano to see Graziani speak.<sup>40</sup> Bertoldi’s account further concretises the degree of propagandistic staging involved in representing the event, as he states that ‘attivisti fascisti si sforzano di preparare una calda atmosfera di entusiasmo’ as they

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<sup>34</sup> Bertoldi, *Salò*, p. 61.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.

<sup>37</sup> Figure 67: ‘Il Maresciallo Graziani tiene un Discorso al Teatro Adriano di Roma’, *l’Istituto Luce* (1 Ottobre 1943).

<sup>38</sup> ‘Autorità dell’esercito e del Partito Fascista Repubblicano si recano a rendere omaggio all’Altare della Patria’, *l’Istituto Luce* (1 Ottobre 1943).

<sup>39</sup> Figure 68: ‘Il Maresciallo Graziani scende le scale del Vittoriano applaudito da una folla inneggiante’, *l’Istituto Luce* (1 Ottobre 1943).

<sup>40</sup> ‘Riunione Ufficiale al teatro Adriano. La Vibrante Parola del Maresciallo Graziani’, *l’Istituto Luce* (11 Ottobre 1943).

filled out the front rows of the auditorium and encouraged exaggerated shows of ovation.<sup>41</sup>



*Figure 67: 'Il Maresciallo Graziani tiene un Discorso al Teatro Adriano di Roma', l'Istituto Luce (1 Ottobre 1943)*



*Figure 68: 'Il Maresciallo Graziani scende le scale del Vittoriano applaudito da una folla inneggiante', l'Istituto Luce (1 Ottobre 1943)*

<sup>41</sup> Bertoldi, *Salò*, p. 61.

As with all matters of contemporary political culture, however, high attendance numbers and popular fanaticism were not entirely orchestrated. Bertoldi reports that:

Il suo nome (di Graziani) ha ancora molto fascino nonostante le sconfitte di Libia, perché Graziani fu l'uomo della nostra vittoria etiopica, è stato vicere, e uno dei Marescialli d'Italia. Alla fine del discorso gli applausi scoppiano forti e sinceri, la grande sala fitta di un pubblico che si accalca fino a non poter respirare mostra un imprevisto entusiasmo...la folla guarda un po' meravigliata e un po' scettica. Ma sia il discorso di Graziani sia l'improvvisa ventata di ottimismo fanno il loro effetto.<sup>42</sup>

As evident from the excerpt, the popular prestige he had enjoyed prior and the 'mito del guerriero da 20 anni' lived on as vigorously as ever, in certain circles at least.<sup>43</sup> The propagandistic power of his longstanding popular reputation remained unique and was exploited from the outset of his adherence to the RSI, wherever possible in the public eye. The aesthetic importance of Italy's most famous recent war veteran peaked once again as the nation rallied for combat.

In fact, aesthetics, in this case, were of prime importance in this war, as shortages of funding, transport, film equipment, and tight censorship under the Nazis meant that the official film of Graziani at the Adriano remained one of the only films produced by LUCE between 1943 and 1945.<sup>44</sup> In general, still images were preferred and took precedent as the war proceeded. Indeed, one of the most iconic photographic reproductions disseminated by the RSI came in postcard form was a close up of a rather fierce looking Graziani, with a quote of his that read 'l'Italia è stata gettata nel fango da un pugno di vilissimi traditori', to remind consumers of his patriotic masculinity in contrast to that of the enemy, namely Badoglio (*figure 69*).<sup>45</sup> It is most likely that this postcard was mass produced as many copies circulate the internet today.<sup>46</sup> Postcards

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid, p. 62.

<sup>43</sup> Laura, *L'immagine Bugiarda*, p. 10.

<sup>44</sup> Laura, *L'Immagine Bugiarda*, pp. 329, 490.

<sup>45</sup> Figure 69: Cartolina, 'A Signorina Ricchetti', bought on Ebay (Bergamo, 1944).

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

were cheaply heavily used as means of essential private communication in wartime, so as stated in a previous chapter, their widespread circulation and endurance should not be underestimated. Thus, the symbolic significance of his image should not be understated even during the war, as evidence dictates that he, and not Mussolini, was carefully chosen as the poster boy of the Fascist Republic.



Figure 69: Cartolina, 'A Signorina Ricchetti' bought on Ebay (Bergamo, 1944)

Consequently, all the printing press controlled by the Republic under Agenzia Stefani, the State's official printing agency, fell in line. They praised Graziani as the ultimate 'figura di soldato, simbolo di una rinascita guerriera...ossannato da tutta la stampa della repubblica' throughout the autumn of 1943.<sup>47</sup> Newspapers set up alongside the Republic, such as *La Corrispondenza Repubblicana* and *Il Regime Fascista* unsurprisingly introduced their new Minister of Defence as an 'incomparabile animatore che ha mostrato come anche negli ufficiali nell'antico esercito...come sia vivo il sentimento dell'onore e del dovere verso la Patria'.<sup>48</sup> The content of the mainstream Italian press regarding Graziani, echoed those of previous decades, following and detailing his official appearances, movements, and altruistic and patriotic deeds but much more so

<sup>47</sup> Ganapini, *La Repubblica delle Camicie Nere*, pp. 30, 190.

<sup>48</sup> Cited in *Il Regime Fascista* (2 Ottobre 1943) by Ganapini, *La Repubblica delle Camicie Nere*, p. 31.

now than those of the Duce, who appeared to operate rather inconspicuously in comparison. *Il Messaggero*, one of the most widely read wartime papers who favoured the RSI, praised Graziani's initiative to rebuild national infrastructure (roads and railways) which had been destroyed by Allied bombing for his 'contribuito alla ricostruzione e alla normalizzazione della vita' and 'giustamente s'è preoccupato di lenire con questo mezzo la disoccupazione e l'indigenza in cui non poche famiglie per la barbara distruzione nemica di tante fabbriche e opifici, sono piombate'.<sup>49</sup> In fact, the nature and scope of this article's philanthropic portrayal of Graziani is highly reminiscent of journalistic representations of his various 'civilising' initiatives during his previous colonial career.

His first official meeting with Hitler as the new War Minister was also noted on the front pages of both *Il Messaggero* and *Corriere della Sera*, the latter of which became Mussolini's preferred paper after the fall of *Il Popolo d'Italia*.<sup>50</sup> *Corriere della Sera* detailed that 'fra il Capo del Terzo Reich e il Maresciallo Graziani si sono svolti colloqui improntati dalla massima cordialità' when they met in Munich in mid October to discuss the reorganisation of the Italian army.<sup>51</sup> Reports such as these, which tried to paint a rosy picture of cooperation and cohesion amongst the Italian and German High Command, were in fact far from reflective of reality. In addition to Hitler's initial hesitation to Graziani's appointment as noted earlier on in this chapter, their relationship became even more strained when it came to their discussion of the future of Graziani's army. Graziani wanted a large, unified, fully equipped force which operated independently of the German armed forces present on the Italian mainland.<sup>52</sup> Hitler contrarily demanded smaller and less autonomous units which would prove easier for the Nazis to supervise, as despite the military alliance, Italo-German relations were far from being in a stable position of mutual trust.<sup>53</sup>

Graziani's insistence against Hitler's on an army 'senza colori politici, ispirato alla necessità unitaria della difesa del territorio' was a highly calculated move, and in my opinion indicative of his long-held preoccupation and awareness of the reputation of

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<sup>49</sup> 'Un Bando di Graziani per l'assunzione di Lavoratori', *Il Messaggero* (10 Ottobre 1943), p. 1.

<sup>50</sup> Laura, *l'Immagine Bugiarda*, p. 185.

<sup>51</sup> 'Graziani a colloquio col Führer', *Corriere della Sera* (14 Ottobre 1943), p. 1.

<sup>52</sup> Lamb, *Mussolini and the British*, p. 317.

<sup>53</sup> Deakin, *Storia della Repubblica di Salò*, p. 647.

both himself and his army as means of distancing them from the Party.<sup>54</sup> He felt so strongly about this issue that he even inconspicuously argued with Renato Ricci, Alessandro Pavolini and Roberto Farinacci continuously on the topic, who believed that all conscripts should be required to be Fascist Party member.<sup>55</sup> Deakin utilises an excerpt from Filippo Anfuso's diary describing an argument about the army which he witnessed between Hitler and Graziani in order to illustrate the bitter nature of their negotiations during the duration of the RSI. He quotes Anfuso as having written that 'ai nostri gesti di stupor soprattutto accompagnati da qualche interrogativo pronunziato a voce più alta da Graziani, Hitler reagì ancora di più la voce ...non avevo mai inteso un Hitler così brutale e così simile alla sua leggenda'.<sup>56</sup> Ganapini has deemed "la battaglia per l'esercito uno dei temi centrali della storia di Salò perché creare l'esercito significa 'dimostrare la legittimità e la vitalità della RSI e provare che gli italiani rifiutano il 25 Luglio e il armistizio'".<sup>57</sup> Thus, the impressions propagated by the press could not have more greatly contrasted the realities.

#### *Graziani's Army: Recruitment & Intimidation*

From November 1943 onwards Graziani's newspaper appearances usually occurred in the form of military recruitment for his army. For example, one of his earliest pleas was published in *il Corriere* and stated:

Giovani soldati! Voi non potete titubare nella scelta, voi che sentite fortemente battere nel vostro petto il cuore della patria che vi chiama e vi indica la giusta e vera via da seguire. Ascoltatela religiosamente e ubbiditela. Vi attendono le vostre bandiere e i vostri capi legittimi, vi attendono anche gli alleati germanici a combattere ancora una volta al loro fianco e ci restituiranno così la fiducia tradita non dal popolo, ma da chi doveva tutelare l'integrità e la lealtà dei patti sacrosantamente sanciti.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>54</sup> Laura, *L'Immagine Bugiarda*, p. 25.

<sup>55</sup> Quartermaine, *Mussolini's Last Republic*, p. 28; Ganapini, *La Repubblica delle Camicie Nere*, p. 191.

<sup>56</sup> Anfuso cited by Deakin, *Storia della Repubblica di Salò*, p. 673.

<sup>57</sup> G. Pansa *l'Esercito di Salò* (Milano, 1969) cited by Ganapini in *La Repubblica delle Camicie Nere*, p. 79.

<sup>58</sup> *Corriere della Sera* (15 Novembre 1943), p. 1.

The lengthier radio transcript complimented the patriotic appeal with ardent denunciations of the RSI's foreign enemies, the Allies.<sup>59</sup> In the transcript, he ostentatiously claimed that 'il 1944 sarà testimone di un maggior sacrificio di vita di soldati britannici ed americani e di battaglie ben più importanti di quelle di Waterloo e Settyburg [Gettysburg?].'<sup>60</sup>

These encouraging announcements, however, proved short-lived as Graziani spent the majority of the war searching for men for his army and the war effort. His rapidly growing desperation as the war continued is almost directly echoed in the rising number of threats disseminated either directly by him or by his ministry. As we have seen before, most notably after his attempted assassination in 1937, Graziani's rising anxieties are often reflected in his willingness to resort to threats and coercion. The first sign of these harsher measures was a compulsory call to arms which began on the 9<sup>th</sup> of November and became known as 'La Banda Graziani' to those who joined. *Il Messaggero* published a lengthy list which required all Italian men born in 1925, and most born in 1923 or 1924 to present themselves for military duty unless they were clerics or university students.<sup>61</sup>

More concise announcements were printed in the form of leaflets or 'volantini' across the country in the following days, ending in a threatening statement stating that 'in caso di mancata presentazione dei militari soggetti alla predetta chiamate oltre alle pene stabilite dalle vigenti disposizioni del codice militare di guerra saranno presi immediate provvedimenti anche a carico dei capi famiglia'.<sup>62</sup> In other words, any able-bodied men between the ages of 18 and 20 who failed to present themselves for military duty would not only be seized but the head of their families was also at risk. Pamphlets like these became a more common and effective form of propaganda as the war went on, as paper shortages and the deterioration of communication lines proved increasingly an issue for daily newspapers.<sup>63</sup> As 1943 drew to a close, the Ministry of Defence's desperation at its lack of experienced soldiers became evident as the printed announcements usually signed by Graziani became ever more threatening. For example 'Termine di

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<sup>59</sup> 'Soldati delle classi 1924 – 1925: Discorso alla Radio', ACS, F. RG, B. 71.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> 'Chiamata alle armi del 1925 e di aliquote delle classi 1923 e 1924' *Il Messaggero* (9<sup>th</sup> November 1943), pp. 1 – 2.

<sup>62</sup> 'Chiamata alle armi delle classi 1923 – 1924 – 1925' *Volantino, Comune di Modena* (17<sup>th</sup> Novembre 1943).

<sup>63</sup> Quartermaine, *Mussolini's Last Republic*, pp. 59, 89.

presentazione il 31 dicembre - sanzioni economiche a carico di ufficiali e sottufficiali dell'esercito che non risponderanno alla chiamata'.<sup>64</sup>

Likewise, Graziani's roadbuilding scheme called 'Azione Graziani' initially failed due to the lack of volunteers willing to work, and resulted in a compulsory call up for classes 1910 – 1914.<sup>65</sup> The overall effect which coercion had on numbers of volunteers remains unclear; Klinkhammer attains that by January 1944, around 26, 0000 men had signed up for Azione Graziani, compared to the mere 8000 from December 1943.<sup>66</sup> According to Klinkhammer's study, only 4649 of these 'volunteers' were forced to sign up, whilst the other 21,868 had done so voluntarily.<sup>67</sup> Graziani's call to arms was deemed 'nell'immediato giudicata incoraggiante ... si presentano alle caserme decine di migliaia di giovani'.<sup>68</sup> This contradictory impression given here was the familiar double-edged sword used by the Fascists which so often characterised Graziani's public persona. On the one hand, he was utilised as an inspiring beacon of propagandistic recruitment as national papers tried to convince readers that it was his presence and leadership which boosted the 'alto fervore spirituale dei soldati, il loro altissimo morale e l'intensa fraternità'.<sup>69</sup> These press articles were all supported by tiresome reminders of his 'alto prestigio di soldato' and reused photographs of a much younger Graziani in army uniform from his career prior as a model soldier (for example a reproduction of figure 2; a headshot of Graziani in the 1920s).<sup>70</sup> Thus, his image was still used throughout the war as it had been throughout his long career with journalists alluding to 'la sua figura dominante l'imponente Quadro e il clamore degli applausi che lo salutano commuovono il suo animo di vecchio soldato'.<sup>71</sup> On the other hand, his enrolment strategies were all imperious in nature, laced with threats and general intimidation. Although his enrolment speeches appeared conspicuously encouraging with slogans such as 'siete chiamati alle armi in un momento dei più solenni della nostra patria', they were 'semplice ed austero', and usually followed by a list of 'sanzioni', not often verbalised by Graziani directly,

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<sup>64</sup> 'Richiamo alle armi di ufficiali e sottufficiali dell'esercito', *Il Messaggero* (16 Dicembre 1943).

<sup>65</sup> L. Klinkhammer, *L'occupazione tedesca in Italia 1943 – 1945* (Torino, 1993), p. 137.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid*, p. 150.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid*, p. 150.

<sup>68</sup> R. Chiarini, *L'ultimo Fascismo: Storia e Memoria della Repubblica di Salò* (Venezia 2009), p. 56.

<sup>69</sup> 'L'ispezione del Generale Gambarà alle truppe del fronte meridionale', *Il Messaggero* (19<sup>th</sup> Gennaio 1944), p. 1.

<sup>70</sup> 'Il Ministro delle Forze Armate', *Il Messaggero* (13 Marzo 1944), p. 1.

<sup>71</sup> 'La parola di Graziani alle reclute che giurano', *Corriere della Sera* (10-11 Febbraio 1944), p. 1.



but always legitimised by his signature, for those who did not present themselves as requested.<sup>72</sup>

Against Klinkhammer, Chiarini attributes the numbers of volunteers ‘non per l’entusiasmo di servire la repubblica fascista’ but more due to fear of repercussions if they did not or simply due to a lack of viable and practical alternatives.<sup>73</sup> In fact, it is well documented that from February 1944 onwards those who still resisted the call to arms 1923 to 1925 ‘pendeva infatti la condanna a morte’.<sup>74</sup> As the months progressed, coercive measures and announcements like these only increased, as by the end of April the death penalty was also enforced for those who were caught housing ‘deserters’.<sup>75</sup> It is noteworthy that the growing intensity of such violent measures in the published rhetoric of the republic coincided with a further increase in German censorship over the Ministry of Popular Culture in April 1944.<sup>76</sup> By this point, German interference, or ‘obstructionism’ had reached an all-time high, as media materials, communication lines and all content were under tight control by German military authorities.<sup>77</sup> Thus both Klinkhammer’s research into the high numbers of willing volunteers responding to propaganda and Chiarini’s assertion of active adherence due to fear of reprisals are valid in concluding that Graziani and the RSI used both methods which had modest but promising results at this point in the war.

Rather spectacularly, the following month, amongst the chaos and devastation of the war and in spite of Italy’s immense colonial losses in Africa, which left her only with mere remnants of her Empire prior, public airtime was still dedicated to the celebration of the foundation of the Italian empire in Africa in May.<sup>78</sup> By this point, public acclamation of empire was perceived as so intrinsically tied to national pride that it remained high on the fascist list of priorities. This time the anniversary was a reminder to prove ‘il nostro diritto al impero’ and Graziani’s assurance that ‘torneremo in Africa’.<sup>79</sup> Another theatrical venue, which was this time the Teatro dell’Opera instead of the Adriano,

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<sup>72</sup> ‘Graziani Parla’, *Il Messaggero* (10 Febbraio 1944), p. 1.

<sup>73</sup> Chiarini, *L’ultimo Fascismo*, p. 56.

<sup>74</sup> Klinkhammer, *L’occupazione tedesca in Italia*, p. 279

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> Quartermaine, *Mussolini’s Last Republic*, p. 58

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 58 – 62.

<sup>78</sup> Italian North and East Africa was formally lost to the Allies by the Autumn of 1943.

<sup>79</sup> ‘Graziani Esalta la Riscossa Repubblicana’, *Il Messaggero* (10 Maggio 1944), p. 1.

another lengthy, dramatic, and unabashed speech. He began with a rhetorical statement, which could not exemplify the sacralisation of the event more, by stating ‘la celebrazione di questo ottavo anniversario della proclamazione dell’Impero ha per noi una significazione mistica, direi quasi religiosa!’.<sup>80</sup> This was followed by habitual ‘civilising’ claims that ‘Da quattro anni furono compiute in Etiopia opera gigantesche e memoranda che rimarranno per i secoli a testimoniare della nostra capacità creatrice e colonizzatrice, e fu avviato un popolo barbaro alla lauce della civiltà di Roma’.<sup>81</sup>

There was, however, more of an explicit purpose with this speech than others which were designed to celebrate the Empire, or what was now left of it, each year. Graziani utilised this occasion to denounce the Axis enemies by arguing that ‘il bolscevismo e le democrazie plutocratiche anglo-sassoni’ had always been against Italian colonialism in Africa due to their own Imperial agenda.<sup>82</sup> According to Graziani, it was the King and Badoglio who ‘aprono le porte del Mediterraneo al bolscevismo e ad esso consegnano la nostra patria. (grazie a loro) si rinuncia ai possedimenti oltremare che tanto sangue e tanto sacrificio ci sono costati’.<sup>83</sup> The anniversary provided merely another occasion to publicly slander the enemy for being ‘deceitful’ and ‘anti-Italian’.

An intensification or changing nature in the use of racialised language is also evident in the speech. For example, he aggressively asserted that:

Noi riaffermiamo solennemente il nostro diritto al Mediterraneo ed all’Impero Africano, la nostra fede nella Universalità di Roma immortale, e nella missione Imperiale d’Italia; la certezza nel trionfo della civiltà latina e Cristiana sulla barbarie Asiatica ed il Giudaesimo internazionale.<sup>84</sup>

The tone of this extract, illustrated by the choice of phrases explicitly honouring ‘Romanita’ and the bellicose use of racialised descriptions of various enemies, remains more resolute than previous speeches which were designed to celebrate the empire. The

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<sup>80</sup> ‘Radio-discorso al Teatro dell’Opera per la Celebrazione Dell’Annuale della Proclamazione dell’Impero’ ACS, F. RG, B. 71, (9 Maggio 1944)

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

direct reference to ‘international Jewry’ could possibly reflect the tightening of German censorship of all RSI propaganda in this period, as it was an anti-Semitic term which had long been utilised by the Nazis to describe all enemies of Nazi Germany, and yet had seldom been quoted in Italy. This, of course, by no means attenuates the gross anti-Semitic measures which had taken place in Italy by the Italian Fascists, but indeed reflects the further hardening of attitudes of the republic during the conflict as a result of the military alliance with Germany.

In fact, the large-scale persecution of the Italian Jewry between 1943 and 1945 is still largely attributed to the Nazis rather than Italian Fascists, and so the latter are given unequal and limited responsibility to this very day. However, despite heavy political pressure from the Germans, Klinkhammer rightly notes that ‘ai Fascisti della RSI va attribuita una sostanziale responsabilità per la persecuzione degli ebrei italiani, che costò la vita a circa 8000 persone’.<sup>85</sup> This affirmation is especially relevant for Graziani not only given his previous treatment of Jews in the African colonies, but also as he was one of the most influential members of the Republic, was frequently in Rome where most of the ‘rastrellamenti’ took place, so the chances that he was unaware or had no hand in such matters is highly unlikely, despite a lack of conclusive evidence.

#### *The Anti-Partisan War & Italo-German Relations*

In July 1944, following the Allied liberation of Rome, Graziani was given full responsibility for the Anti-partisan war in a desperate initiative by the Germans to improve their chances of military success. This meant that all units of the RSI militia were put under his command, including the Brigade Nere and the Decima Flottiglia Mas. By doing so, Mussolini hoped that ‘la concentrazione degli sforzi darà i risultati che attendiamo’ and Graziani would finally have the number of men and weaponry which he had been lamenting since his entry into the conflict.<sup>86</sup> Mussolini followed up with another letter a few days later to further specify that the new organisation, formally known as the Armata Liguria, ‘deve avere un carattere che colpisca la psicologia delle popolazioni e sollevi l’entusiasmo nelle nostre file unificate’.<sup>87</sup> Given these explicit

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<sup>85</sup> Klinkhammer, *l’occupazione tedesca in Italia*, p. 432.

<sup>86</sup> Mussolini cited by G. Bocca, *La Repubblica di Mussolini* (Roma, 1977), p. 255.

<sup>87</sup> Mussolini cited by Mayda, *Graziani l’Africano*, p. 247.

instructions, which eludes not to military strategy but instead to an emotional one, Graziani was the figure who was believed to prevail in this unifying task of building morale for the war effort. A steadfast stalemate between Mussolini and Graziani which echoed the prelude to the North African conflict ensued, as Graziani refused to advance. Graziani and Field-Marshal Kesselring, the Wehrmacht commander in charge of the Italian front, both argued with Mussolini that reasons of military strategy, lack of equipment and men, refused to send l'Armata Liguria to the front line on the Linea Gotica.

Thus, throughout the Autumn of 1944, l'Armata Liguria remained on standby and resigned itself exclusively to the 'repressione del movimento partigiano e esclusivamente negli rastrellamenti'.<sup>88</sup> The violent measures against partisan forces and massacres against Italian civilians which took place in Central and North Italy are attributed to an intensification of the civil war in 1944. The massacres of Sant'Anna di Stazzema and Marzabotto, for example, which took place between August and October of 1944 and resulted in the death of between 500 and 1000 civilians at the hand of Nazi-Fascist forces, coincided with Kesselring and Graziani's new anti-partisan initiative.

Due to the poor state of archival documentation in Italy from the war, evidence which directly ties Graziani to these events or other reprisals which took place under Kesselring's orders remains inconclusive. Some documents seized by the Allies at the end of the war and sent to London, however, suggest that Graziani and Kesselring had worked very closely from the birth of the Republic, with Graziani effectively taking on the role of issuing orders given by Kesselring, acting as his mouthpiece so to speak for the Italian public. For example, a copy of a document passed from German police in Italy to headquarters in Berlin stated that on the 6<sup>th</sup> October 1943, 'the disarming of the Carabinieri in Rome will be carried out tonight ... on a plan authorised by Feld M. Kesselring by order of Marshall Graziani as War Minister'.<sup>89</sup> Therefore, it appears that Graziani acted both as Kesselring's Italian counterpart and deputy from the moment that German military troops entered Italy, and so would have definitely been aware of and carried out his orders if he wanted to keep his post as War Minister.

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<sup>88</sup> Mayda, *Graziani l'Africano*, p. 252.

<sup>89</sup> 'Document passed from German Police Attaché Rome to Security Police H.Q. Berlin during the Night of 7<sup>th</sup> October 1943' TNA, HW 1/2094.

Furthermore, correspondence from Graziani's archive suggests that relations between them were rather agreeable throughout this period, so the likelihood of Graziani's disagreeing with Kesselring's orders was highly unlikely. In a telegraph thanking Kesselring for his birthday wishes in August 1944, Graziani described their 'amicizia personale' as 'ormai indistruttibile' and expressed his pride 'e grande ventura a poter comandare ai vostri ordini l'armata Liguria'.<sup>90</sup> Undoubtedly, there was a required level of flattery in Italo-German relations in this period, given the Nazi occupation, however the language used here exceed such cordial norms. More poignantly, given the close nature of their professional relationship during the Armata Liguria's period in action, it is even less likely that Graziani was unaware or did not share some responsibility in the violent death of many Italian civilians and partisans and the illicit treatment of those captured.<sup>91</sup> In fact, it was reported by the international press that Kesselring personally awarded the First and Second class Iron Cross to Graziani in October 1944, for his war time bravery and deeds.<sup>92</sup> Likewise, as the highest Italian military authority recognised by the Nazis, Graziani was honoured with the role of awarding his own military rewards and often did so on behalf of Kesselring. One such case was a public ceremony whereby he awarded medals to the *SS Italiane*, an Italian group of germanophiles who had pledged allegiance to Germany.<sup>93</sup> In fact, right up till the end of the war he continued to openly cement the connection between his army and 'il leggendario valore del soldato germanico' when he addressed his troops.<sup>94</sup> Thus, his ties to the Nazi government and occupying forces appear substantial and rather apparent. As noted by perhaps the most knowledgeable historian on the armed conflict, Klinkhammer, it can be concluded that 'even though a large part of violence came from the Wehrmacht, neppure le forze di polizia della RSI (now operating under Graziani's command) furono estranee all'escalation della lotta'.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> 'Telescritto: al Feld Maresciallo Kesselring' ACS, F. RG, B.71, (14 Agosto 1944).

<sup>91</sup> Claudio Pavone's monumental work, *Una Guerra Civile: Saggio Storico sulla Moralità della Resistenza* (Torino, 1991) talks in detail about the 'rappresaglie' and the violent measures which were taken against partisans and their families.

<sup>92</sup> 'Germans Honor Graziani', *The N.Y. Times* (8<sup>th</sup> October 1944), p. 12.

<sup>93</sup> 'Graziani Consegna alle SS Italiane la Medaglia d'Argento', *Corriere della Sera* (24 Novembre 1944), p. 1.

<sup>94</sup> 'Graziani ai combattenti del gruppo Armate Liguria', *Corriere della Sera* (1 Gennaio 1945), p. 1.

<sup>95</sup> Klinkhammer, *L'Occupazione tedesca in Italia*, p. 335.

Therefore, Kesselring, who was also partly responsible for the Ardeatine Massacre earlier that year, and the implementation of the ‘killing ten Italians for every German killed on Italian soil’ rule, naturally became the most vilified Nazi amongst Italian partisans. Equally, as perhaps Kesselring’s closest Italian co-operator and counterpart, Graziani took on the same emblematic role for partisan groups, and still does today, as we shall see in the post-war period. In fact, as the war went on, the symbolic role of figures in the Nazi-fascist high command became ever more fundamental to the war effort on both sides. These cults, or rather myths in male form, ‘no matter how rigid, repetitive, or stereotypical’, whether it be that of Graziani or Mussolini, were becoming more effective as myths than as people as the war continued.<sup>96</sup> The ensuing failure of the RSI war effort and growing desperation is reflected in the intensification of propaganda and a ‘nostalgia for the past’.<sup>97</sup> Two undisputable examples of this nostalgia were the futurist Marinetti’s funeral in Milan on the 2nd of December 1944 and a commemoration to Gabriele D’Annunzio in Lake Garda on the 1<sup>st</sup> of March 1945. For Marinetti, despite a severe lack and rationing of electricity, a pompous funeral was still orchestrated with an impressive procession of motor vehicles which crossed the city carrying the Fascist command, including Borghese and Graziani.<sup>98</sup> The tribute to D’Annunzio took place on his estate at the Vittoriale degli Italiani in order to commemorate the anniversary of his death on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of March 1938.<sup>99</sup> The event was led by Mussolini and Graziani and included Nazi officials and the Japanese Ambassador, Shirokura Hidaka as a public display of the Axis alliance.<sup>100</sup> And so, what had been useful earlier on with regard to the ritualised spectacle of celebrating popular figures, ‘as a means to gain public support, now became an essential tool for survival’ for the failing Republic.<sup>101</sup>

### *The Italian Campaign & the Loss of the Colonies: Allied Impressions and Propaganda*

The Allied battle for Italy has its own rather insular but growing body of literature on the topic. For the purpose of this study, attention will be more narrowly focused on the

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<sup>96</sup> Quartermaine referring to Mussolini in *Mussolini’s Last Republic*, p. 60.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid*, p. 89.

<sup>98</sup> Bertoldi, *Salò*, p. 18.

<sup>99</sup> ‘Mussolini a Gardone per la commemorazione di D’Annunzio’, *l’Istituto Luce* (1 Marzo 1945).

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>101</sup> Quartermaine, *Mussolini’s Last Republic*, p. 55.

widespread Allied representation of Graziani, as has been prioritised in previous chapters. Printed posters and leaflets dropped in air raids proved one of the Allies most effective propagandistic weapon to sway Italian popular opinion during the invasion.<sup>102</sup> These images were, however, very generalised and focused more on anti-German sentiment than on anti-Italian imagery and text.<sup>103</sup> Therefore direct references to Graziani were rare and instead centred upon positive imagery and broad wartime themes of assistance for the war effort, damning caricatures of Hitler or the occasional satirical image of Mussolini. However, this does not signify that the Allies were not interested in Graziani as a sensational military figure, as they had done earlier in the war, as was commonplace with other military commanders of WWII, collaborators or enemies. Axis generals such as Graziani or Rommel, perhaps aroused even more curiosity than their Allied counterparts, given the heightened level of mystery and menace that these men posed and represented.

Initial interest in the British press in October 1943 immediately drew attention to Graziani as ‘the most prominent of the neo-Fascists’, with Mussolini reduced to ‘little more than a name’ by the journalist who wrote *The Times* article.<sup>104</sup> Graziani was instantly identified as ‘one to watch’ in the Italian theatre of the war as a British correspondent in an article entitled ‘Berlin’s Hopes of Graziani’ speculated that ‘the Germans have evidently set their hopes on Graziani’ as ‘one of the moving spirits’ on the military side of the then nascent regime.<sup>105</sup> He was thus introduced as a worthy opponent and familiar figure to the British public. When he gave his inaugural speech which heavily damned Badoglio after having accepted his post in the RSI, *The Times* correspondent wrote that:

Graziani is a man with a long string of grievances, foremost among them being his conviction that he, was chiefly responsible for winning the

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<sup>102</sup> See R. Overy, *Why the Allies Won* (London, 2006).

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> From our Diplomatic correspondent, ‘Italy to Prove Herself: Allies’ Attitude’, *The Times* (14<sup>th</sup> October 1943), p. 4.

<sup>105</sup> From a Correspondent, ‘Neo Fascists at Work: Berlin’s Hopes of Graziani’, *The Times* (16<sup>th</sup> October 1943), p. 3.

Abyssinian Campaign of 1936, and that Badoglio stole his glory by reaching Addis Ababa first. He has always loathed Badoglio.<sup>106</sup>

Although there is slight adversity in this portrayal of Graziani, he was not completely vilified even though there was a clear opportunity to damn his character and ego given the explicit reference to the Abyssinian war. The event was instead utilised as a reference point of recognition to the newspaper's readership, given the longstanding British imperial interest in African affairs. Likewise, Claudio Pavone notes that the British controlled *Radio Londra* frequently referred to Badoglio as the <Duca di Addis Abeba> in its popular broadcasts.<sup>107</sup> Therefore, the Allies also continued to utilise and support the mythicization of Badoglio as an imperial war hero as a symbolic weapon in its propaganda efforts during the war, to counter that of Graziani.

The American mainstream press was more damning of Graziani's colonial career as *The Los Angeles Times* did not hesitate to assert that the new Defence Minister was 'known as the butcher of Libya' from the beginning of the RSI.<sup>108</sup> *The New York Times* also noted that Graziani and not Mussolini was the 'one to watch in Italy' who 'gained infamy in his ruthless slaughtering of natives in the Libyan successes in Libya and was the only widely known figure, aside from the Duce, to be included in the list' of the new Republican government.<sup>109</sup> The article introduced the new Republic by publishing an old photo they had of Graziani from 1940 as the opening image for the article, instead of one of Mussolini to whom they merely referred in the title by stating 'Former Duce Named Premier and Marshal Rodolfo Graziani Minister of Defense'.<sup>110</sup> Earlier that year prior to the armistice, in an article about Senussi tribesmen taking up arms in Libya and Egypt, *The New York Times* had also utilised the event as an opportunity to mention Libyans 'grim memories of Marshal Graziani's hangings, of how he had their wells blocked with concrete and the often-reported incident when he had their leaders taken up in airplanes and thrown out over the desert'.<sup>111</sup> The extent of truth to these

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<sup>106</sup> From a correspondent, 'Graziani's Attack on Badoglio: Vitriolic Broadcast', *The Times* (27<sup>th</sup> September 1943), p. 3.

<sup>107</sup> Pavone, *Una Guerra Civile*, p. 7.

<sup>108</sup> 'Mussolini now Premier of Nazi Puppet Regime', *The Los Angeles Times* (23<sup>rd</sup> September 1943), p. 4.

<sup>109</sup> 'Berlin Announces Mussolini Cabinet', *The N.Y. Times* (24<sup>th</sup> September 1943), p. 4.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>111</sup> 'Libyan Arabs Fight Axis: Cairo Reports Force Organised to Avenge Graziani's Deeds', *The N.Y. Times* (9<sup>th</sup> February 1943), p. 4.



affirmations remains uncertain, although highly likely given the extent of Graziani's other violent actions committed in Libya, but the relevance of this quote remains in the anti-colonial and incriminating focus compared to British portrayals.

The Anti-Fascist *Il Corriere del Popolo*, as we have already seen, was nearly always the most incriminating American newspaper in its stance towards Graziani and named him 'la iena affamata' in November 1943.<sup>112</sup> The article followed with a description which read:

La sua specialità è mitragliare e massacrare le popolazioni civili e scappare a gambe levate sul campo di battaglia, quando si trova di fronte a della gente che si può difendere...ora si dedica a sterminare gli abitanti delle città e dei paesi dell'Italia soggiogata dai tedeschi.<sup>113</sup>

This article was the first Allied one to make an explicit correlation between his colonial atrocities and his current role in the war in Italy. As an Italian American paper, a heightened awareness and sensitivity for the civilian population in Italy was predictable, and their longstanding anti-Fascist and anti-colonial stance made their analysis of Graziani perhaps a foreseeable one.

*Il Corriere del Popolo* was also one of the few papers in this period to mention, at least in relation to Graziani, the complete loss of the Italian colonies during the war.<sup>114</sup> The Italians had been effectively pushed out of Libya following Graziani's resignation in 1941, and the East African campaign formally ended their hold over Abyssinia, Italian Somaliland and Eritrea at the hand of British forces in 1943. Eritrea and Libya went under British administration until 1950, Italian Somaliland was eventually given back to the Italians in 1947 under trusteeship by the UN, which continued to justify colonial rule with acts like these, so the only country to be immediately granted its independence was Ethiopia. Thus, the delayed recognition of this devastating blow was perhaps easier to digest by external parties than Italian commentators, such as the Italian American

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<sup>112</sup> 'Graziani: L'Iena Affamata. Perseguita i guerriglieri', *Il Corriere del Popolo* (16 Novembre 1944), p. 3.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> 'Un Impero Costato Sangue e Denaro: La Debacle del Fascismo è Completa,' *Il Corriere del Popolo* (21 Gennaio 1943), p. 1.

community. The article not only stated the obvious but also highlighted the devastating blow the loss would have been to Mussolini ‘d’aver perduto un impero che non aveva conquistato lui!’.<sup>115</sup> Conquest and rule was instead attributed to Graziani, Badoglio and the Italian army, with Mussolini only burdened with the responsibility of it all, the other two, instead always getting off much more lightly.

*The New York Amsterdam News* was the keenest paper to report on the state of the colonies in this period. It highlighted that before the war had even ended, almost as soon as Africa Orientale was placed under temporary British jurisdiction, the Italian government headed by Bonomi, Badoglio’s successor, publicly demanded their return.<sup>116</sup> A member of Bonomi’s cabinet, Carlo Sforza, was reported to have stated that ‘it is a question of our honour and dignity as a nation.’<sup>117</sup> This brief statement is testament to a continued lack of reflection of Italian comportment in the conquest of the colonies, even amongst prominent anti-Fascists, and the perception that colonial possession in Africa as being intrinsically tied to the pride of the nation. The preoccupation of the Italian government with the loss of the colonies despite the anarchic domestic context of Italy in 1944, being occupied by both the Allies and the Nazis, is notable and further confirmation of their significance to Italian national identity. The article also mentioned the question of war criminals, naming both Graziani and Badoglio but rightly predicted ‘an unwillingness to hand these and other criminals over to the Ethiopians for trial and punishment’ amongst both Italians and the United Nations.<sup>118</sup> Here we can see that the Italian colonial/post-colonial question was already being publicly addressed and the post-war tone of events already set in 1944.

Thus, as the global chaos of the war intensified, it was perhaps unsurprising that the only Western attention which was turned to the fate of various African territories came from interested parties. In the Italian press national papers there was no mention of these events at all, as the entire political spectrum would have been actively keen to ignore the loss of their entire precious empire as the state of collective morale was very fragile across the peninsula. In all of these cases, both Allied powers utilised Graziani’s career

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> ‘Italy asks for Return of Colonies’, *The N.Y. Amsterdam News* (21<sup>st</sup> October 1944), p. 8

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

in the colonies as figurative ammunition, which alternated between the unfavourable, the favourable, and the indifferent, depending on the state of play throughout the war.

*A Most Wanted Man: Rumours, Uncertainties & Apprehension*

As 1944 drew to a close and 1945 loomed, no major Allied breakthroughs had yet taken place along the Gothic Line which ran largely across the region of Emilia Romagna. By this point, Graziani still headed the Armata Liguria along the Apennines, but was reduced, like all other Italian units, to secondary battle grounds, which took the Western Flank facing France, as the Germans took the lead along the front line. Thus, there was little to report on either side of the conflict as far as the Mediterranean theatre was involved until the Allied Spring Offensive in April. Mayda has concisely confirmed that ‘con l’Armata Liguria nelle retrovie a fare il cane di guardia finì il ruolo di Graziani condottiero e ministro.’<sup>119</sup> This affirmation supports the general lack of references in the relevant secondary literature as to Graziani’s actions and whereabouts towards the end of the war. He had, in fact, retired to the villa he resided in with his wife near Salò, and was rarely spotted outside of his home or the office. Which were the RSI headquarters in Salò).<sup>120</sup> Following two failed assassination attempts by the partisans the couple were forced to move location and ‘facevano una vita ritiratissima, non ricevevano che pochi, stretti amici.’<sup>121</sup> During an interview from the immediate post-war period, his wife stated that Graziani had even grown hesitant to see the Duce in person and remarked that “il mio marito vedeva il duce soltanto per ragioni di servizio”.<sup>122</sup> This comment could either have been designed to attempt to distance her husband from the tainted memory of Mussolini post-1945, or was perhaps merely reflective of their respective despair in the direction of the war and mutual realisation of its inevitable outcome.

By the last week of April, the Allies liberated Bologna and had reached the Po River, whilst the partisans confident of their position, declared a general uprising and the imminent fall of Milan. Thus, Mussolini and Graziani were forced to the negotiating table to mediate some form of surrender with the formal partisan association in Milan, *the Committee of National Liberation for Northern Italy (CLNAI)* in Milan on the 25<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Mayda, *Graziani l’Africano*, p. 252.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid, p. 253.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

April, where Mussolini was outraged to learn that the Germans had already been planning such formal withdrawal.<sup>123</sup> It remains unknown whether Graziani was aware of this information prior to the meeting, but his apparent willingness to surrender his troops on the 1<sup>st</sup> of May suggests perhaps more than just a seasoned soldier's intuition.<sup>124</sup> That evening Mussolini, Graziani and other leading RSI members headed for Lake Como, in view of regrouping and crossing the Swiss border. On the morning of the 27<sup>th</sup> of April, Graziani woke up at General Wolff's residence in Cernobbio surrounded by partisans.<sup>125</sup> He was kept as a prisoner there along with Generals Ruggero Bonomi and Rosario Sorrentino 'dove aveva ancora una carta da giocare, quella della sua persona'.<sup>126</sup>

Despite the desperate situation he still attempted to use his authority and contacts to negotiate his imminent transfer to Allied forces through fear of his fate at the hand of the partisans.<sup>127</sup> He did this by writing a memorandum to Cardinal Schuster, the cardinal who had hosted Mussolini's negotiation with the CLNAI only days prior, and with whom Graziani had long retained amicable relations which had initially begun due to the Cardinal's avid support for the Ethiopian invasion. The memorandum appeared less as a personal plea and more as a series of demands as he declared himself 'pronto a trasferirmi senz'altro a Milano' to be handed over to Raffaele Cadorna Junior, a key and respected member of the partisan delegation.<sup>128</sup> In a conspicuous attempt to mask his deceitful cowardice with sincere dignity, he expressed his fear that:

L'atteggiamento popolare e partigiano locale nei miei riguardi potrebbe diventare ostile, perché possono ritenermi o fuggiasco di passaggio per la Svizzera, o nascosto sotto la tutela delle SS, mentre la mia volontaria situazione è dovuta all'opera che sto svolgendo per le note finalità.<sup>129</sup>

And in doing so, presumptuously ordered that 'il mio viaggio Como-Milano per le condizioni stradali non può essere compiuto se non sotto protezione'.<sup>130</sup> General

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid, p. 256.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> ibid, p. 258.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid, p. 259.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid, p. 260.

Cadorna immediately refused Graziani's request, responding that if he wanted to formally surrender himself he should do so directly in Como.<sup>131</sup> As it would happen, Graziani was much luckier than Mussolini, as shortly after these written exchanges, an Italian American officer, Emilio Daddario arrived under order of the US consulate in Lugano to organise Graziani's immediate transfer to Milan.<sup>132</sup> Daddario had been sent to capture the leading members of the RSI high command and naturally Graziani fell immediately after Mussolini on the list of the most wanted. As predicted by Graziani himself, his return to Milan was met with immense peril as his car was attacked with gunshots, and his hotel room at the Grand Hotel, where he was initially taken to, was almost immediately stormed by artisans 'con minacce di morte'.<sup>133</sup>

The fact that 'era assolutamente necessario che un prigioniero degli Alleati venisse rispettato' ultimately saved Graziani's life, as Daddario insisted on his transfer to a safer location on the 29<sup>th</sup> of April.<sup>134</sup> Even so, his transfer car contained hidden bombs which proved testament to the fact that 'Graziani doveva essere fucilato già al momento della cattura' by the partisans just as Mussolini had been.<sup>135</sup> Their hatred for the Duce may have been unrivalled, but the partisans' thirst for justice during the heightened tensions of those last days of April would have been almost equally quenched by revenge against il maresciallo, the RSI's highest military authority figure responsible for the unbridled violence against liberation forces. A statement made in 1948 by a prominent mediator between the RSI and partisans, Corrado Bonfantini, justified his reasoning along with a few other CLNAI leaders that they saved Graziani from the same fate of 'fucilazione' as the Duce following capture.<sup>136</sup> Apparently, they did this "di rendere possibile, in un periodo successivo, un processo completo alla Repubblica di Salò".<sup>137</sup> I find this affirmation highly unlikely, firstly given the date of the statement on the 21<sup>st</sup> October 1948 conveniently made in the exact month in which Graziani's post-war trial was taking place, and secondly due to the rapid execution of many other leading members of similar RSI rank as Graziani, such as Achille Starace and during those last days of April 1945.

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid, p. 262.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid pp. 262 – 263.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid, p. 265.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid, p. 266.

<sup>137</sup> 'Dichiarazione di Bonfantini nella Stampa' (21 Ott. 1948) cited in Ibid,

After a brief stint at the prison of San Vittorio, Captain Daddario decided the safest option would be to first transfer Graziani to Allied quarters in Brescia, and then those in Mantova, and back to Rome, where he was further moved around in various prisoner of war camps until June when he was finally transferred to a British camp in Algeria. This time, and perhaps for the first time, ‘era un ben triste ritorno in Africa’.<sup>138</sup> His tent was no longer a private glorified marquee, but tent number 30 shared with the much younger Decima Mas Captain Alberto Marchesi. His garden was no longer a tropical paradise of palms and sand dunes, and was now an arid inferno ‘dove non c’era modo di stare all’ombra, dal deserto arrivava un vento soffocante, l’acqua era scarsa e cattiva’.<sup>139</sup> The late Marshall was, however, aware enough of the extent of current animosity against him in Italy to lament his new living conditions as he was undoubtedly treated rather decently. This is evident in the one of the only known photographs taken of a well-kept Graziani as a prisoner of war outside his tent in Algeria in his elegant military overcoat, which he had often worn before the war (*figure 70*).<sup>140</sup>



*Figure 70: ‘Nel Campo Prigionieri di Algeri’ Graziani, Rivista Romana, p. 363*

<sup>138</sup> Ibid, p. 268.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Figure 70: ‘nel campo prigionieri di Algeri’, *Graziani, Rivista Roma*, p. 363.

In fact, as soon as he arrived at the prison camp he wrote a letter to Captain Daddario which read:

I am writing to you from this camp. I want to thank you again from the bottom of my heart for all you have done for me in those very perilous moments. There is no doubt that during the days of 26, 27, and 28 April I owed my safety to you. For this my heart is full of gratitude and thankfulness and I will never forget you for whatever time I have left to live. I am well in this camp and I am treated with much respect. I hope that God will assist me for the future and that Human Justice will consider my case and judge it fairly...I embrace you dearly and do not forget me.

Your most affectionate,  
Rodolfo Graziani <sup>141</sup>

Algeria remained his home for the next six months until the Allies finally decided what to do with him in January 1946.

Back in April, all Italian anti-Fascist newspapers, no longer underground and now back in open circulation were all keen to announce Graziani's arrest. Unsurprisingly, Graziani and Mussolini were the most common two leading names to appear in the headlines as the most potent buzzwords to attract Italian readers, sometimes followed by the news of capture of other prominent but less provocative RSI members. The partisan paper *l'Italia Libera*, for example, headed its newspaper with 'Mussolini, Graziani, Pavolini e Farinacci nelle mani dei patrioti' on the 28<sup>th</sup> of April.<sup>142</sup> Then, the Socialist newspaper *Avanti* incorrectly reported that Graziani was caught immediately after being refused entry to Switzerland at the border.<sup>143</sup> In this case, like in many others of the period, it was common to hear a different tale events given the anarchic conditions and high emotions running across Northern Italy on the last days of April. *L'Unità* of the Partito

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<sup>141</sup> 'Letter to Captain Daddario from the 15th June 1945' TNA, GFM 36/175.

<sup>142</sup> 'Mussolini, Graziani, Pavolini e Farinacci nelle mani dei patrioti', *l'Italia Libera* (28 Aprile 1945), p. 1.

<sup>143</sup> 'Mussolini attende il giudizio del Tribunale del Popolo', *Avanti* (28 Aprile 1945), p. 1.

Comunista Italiana (PCI) was the most militant in its use of imagery and language, publishing violent photographs of decapitated partisans in the last days of the war, hoped and assured its readers that ‘Mussolini tradotto a Milano...Graziani e Pavolini anche essi tradotti a Milano – il plotone d’esecuzione partigiano fa spietata pulizia dei traditori fascisti’.<sup>144</sup>

However, when Graziani was intercepted by the Allies however, sensationalist news of his whereabouts died down and soon turned to his post-war fate and a list of the accusations which were to be held against him. By the end of May, *l’Alto Commissario per la Punizione dei Delitti Fascisti*, which had begun its activities before the end of the war, was in full swing with trials against less prominent offenders. Pietro Koch for example, who was captured by the Allies and given to the Italian tribunal, was tried by the Commission and sentenced to death in June for his crimes of torture and assassination as an RSI police officer during the war. On the eve of such trials *Il Corriere d’Informazione* expressed the Commission’s desire to Graziani’s return and trial ‘dopo aver iniziato l’istruttoria contro l’ex-Maresciallo Rodolfo Graziani ...(e) ha avocato a sua competenza il procedimento’.<sup>145</sup> Unlike Koch, Graziani was far too valuable and potentially volatile on a geo-political level to be immediately returned to the new Italian government, as we shall see in the next chapter.

A further update in July was issued by the paper affirming that ‘l’istruttoria a carico dell’ex Maresciallo d’Italia, Rodolfo Graziani, è stata chiusa in questi giorni dall’alto commissario aggiunto per la punizioni dei delitti fascisti’.<sup>146</sup> The sentence foreseen by the Commission was ‘la pena di morte con degradazione’, but fortunately for the Ex-Maresciallo, by this point he was safely on another continent, with a strong assurance from the Commission that ‘nel caso in cui egli venga da questi (alleati) rilasciato alle autorità italiane, l’alto commissariato procederà con la massima celerità a inviarlo innanzi all’Alta Corte di giustizia’.<sup>147</sup> The inquest and its conclusion thus confirms that if Graziani was still in Italy at the time and under jurisdiction of Italian authorities, his

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<sup>144</sup> ‘Mussolini tradotto a Milano e consegnato dai patrioti al C.L.N.A.I.’, *l’Unità* (29 Aprile 1945), p. 1.

<sup>145</sup> ‘L’istruttoria contro Graziani: La richiesta dell’alto Commissario pei delitti fascisti al Comando alleato’, *Il Corriere d’Informazione* (27 Maggio 1945), p. 2.

<sup>146</sup> ‘La pena di morte prevista per Graziani’, *Il Corriere d’Informazione* (4 Luglio 1945), p. 1.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*



destiny and the outcome of this story would have been vastly different from this point onwards.

On an international level, as a ‘protagonist(s) of the axis’ and ‘amongst the most prominent...member of Mussolini’s Republican Fascist Council’. news of Graziani’s imprisonment was noteworthy as leading news on the cusp of the war.<sup>148</sup> When *The Chicago Daily Tribune* announced his capture, they introduced him as ‘Mussolini’s No. 1 assistant and heir...the man who would succeed Mussolini’.<sup>149</sup> Symbolically, his imprisonment by the Allies thus proved an unparalleled defeat, almost as if they had caught the Duce himself. With the confusion in communication lines and events across Europe, it was no surprise that when U.S. newspapers reported that Mussolini was shot and hung up at Piazzale Loreto in Milan along with Clara Petacci, that international rumours also circulated and were printed that Graziani was also ‘slain’, ‘tried and executed a few hours after Mussolini.’<sup>150</sup>

When interviewed from the hotel in Milan where he was initially taken, an American correspondent for *The Chicago Daily Tribune* reported that a ‘weary’ Graziani was still preoccupied with his honourable image as a soldier and military leader when recounting the last days of the RSI.<sup>151</sup> He did not hesitate in stating that when Mussolini attempted to escape for Switzerland, he stayed behind as he ‘said I could not go. I had a soldier’s responsibility’, before apparently attempting to offer his surrender to the partisans several times ‘despite the Germans’ constantly interfering with these attempts’.<sup>152</sup> However, in another newspaper report of the ‘ex-Duce’s last hours’, Graziani was noted as the only unreasonable member of the RSI council with ‘the only loud voice in the room’ contrary to the Duce who seemed subdued and ‘spoke in a low voice’ when negotiations with the partisans were being described.<sup>153</sup> As we have seen before, his own view of his character and comportment always vastly differed from other witness accounts.

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<sup>148</sup> ‘Personalities and Events of the Week: People in the Public Eye’ *The Illustrated London News* (5<sup>th</sup> May 1945), p. 490; ‘Protagonists of the Axis: German & Italian Leaders in the Great World War’, *The Illustrated London News* (12<sup>th</sup> May 1945), p. 513.

<sup>149</sup> ‘Graziani Seized’, *The Chicago Daily Tribune* (29<sup>th</sup> April 1945), p. 5.

<sup>150</sup> ‘Mussolini Hung Upside Down in a Milan Garage; Graziani also Slain’, *The N.Y. Herald Tribune* (1<sup>st</sup> May 1945), p. 1.

<sup>151</sup> S. Barber, ‘Yanks Capture Graziani’, *The Chicago Daily Tribune* (30<sup>th</sup> April 1945), p. 4.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>153</sup> ‘Mussolini Hung Upside Down’.

When the Allies officially confirmed that Graziani was in their hands, *The New York Herald Tribune* stated that ‘they considered him a military prisoner rather than a political one’, a notion which would impact upon his public persona and memory for years to come, as we shall see in the next chapter.<sup>154</sup> In fact, *The New York Times*’ biography about him mentioned that ‘he was notoriously cruel and his inhumane treatment of the Arabs in Libya ... long will be remembered’, but ironically never mentioned his crimes in detail, nor did it mention any cruelty from the Ethiopian Campaign, other than applauding him ‘for his thrust that broke the embarrassing four month stalemate’.<sup>155</sup> Later accounts of his Italian indictment in June mentioned that the ‘one-time military idol of all of Italy...earned his reputation for savagery when he drove thousands of Arabs into the desert to starve to make room for his forces’.<sup>156</sup> The reason given for starving Libyans is definitely not true and sensationalistic jargon but this article at least mentions that he executed ‘3,000 natives’ in Ethiopia following his assassination in 1937, even if the number of victims was grossly underexaggerated.<sup>157</sup> In general, the lack of photographic images of him in the press at the culmination of the war, other than an occasional headshot in order for readers to identify him, is perhaps due to the shortage of images of the period.

His overall ‘light’ official treatment and that of the press reflected indecision in how to treat a prominent prisoner of war like Graziani and proved a foresight to his post-war fate and remembrance on a global level. Therefore, his dual role in World War II grossly overshadowed his career in the colonies and any related controversies. On the contrary, returning to Africa in 1940 thrust him back into the international spotlight as he became the Italian military ‘poster boy’ for the conflict. Then, he disappeared just as quickly upon his return from Libya, and by doing so avoided further scrutiny for any military shortcomings there. By this point, he had become a mere propagandistic tool for Mussolini, albeit a powerful one which proved useful upon the foundation of the RSI when other such tools had become scarce and the Duce had been brought to his knees. Thus, his last role in the war as the ‘poster boy’ of the RSI, was the role for which he

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<sup>154</sup> ‘Ex-Duce Dies with Mistress and 16 Aids’, *The N.Y. Herald Tribune* (30<sup>th</sup> April 1945), p. 1.

<sup>155</sup> ‘Allies Confirm Graziani’s Capture’, *The N.Y. Times* (29<sup>th</sup> April 1945), p. 13.

<sup>156</sup> ‘Italy Indicts Graziani’, *The N.Y. Times* (20<sup>th</sup> June 1945), p. 3.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*

would be remembered and questioned in post-war Italy and beyond, obscuring all which he had done before from popular memory.

## 6. Graziani's Fate in the Post-War Republic

International actors were responsible for the implementation of post-war justice and the 'defascistisation' which took place in the nation-states of the Axis powers, following the surrender of Nazi Germany, Japan, and Italy's RSI. Consequently, this decision-making process and those involved in the wider pre and post-war contexts will be accounted for in relation to Graziani's uncertain future, whilst he awaited his unknown destiny in post-war Italy. Although my research is primarily focused on Italy, attention must also be given to the Allied treatment of the other fallen Axis of the Second World War to provide adequate comparison and reveal why Italy ended up being treated differently to its previous Allies and counterparts. These events in Italy and further afield provided a prelude to Graziani's fate in post-war Italy and were crucial step in the manipulation of historical consciousness which pervades the Italian peninsula today.

The next section of the chapter will analyse Graziani's post-war trial, through an examination of the lengthy published transcript of the trial, which has never previously been examined by historians to date. This transcript will be analysed in conjunction with journalistic portrayals of the event, as they keenly followed what was deemed by national newspapers as 'the trial of the century' at home and abroad.<sup>1</sup> It was perhaps deemed as such due to the fact that Graziani was the only RSI member in Italy to be put on trial by the Supreme Court, and in turn the trial and Graziani himself came to represent the regime symbolically and in its entirety. Hence, the historical context and sources suggest that Graziani's fate at the Supreme Court were emblematically yet inconspicuously known as the trial and historical reckoning of the Italian Fascist regime as a whole. As we will see, the rather 'light' treatment and questioning of Graziani throughout the proceedings, lead to the conclusion that it was largely a show trial, designed to appease popular anti-Fascist sentiment at home and abroad in the immediate post-war period and publicly to provide accountability for the *ventennio*, if only superficially. In fact, Graziani's behaviour in the colonies went completely unquestioned throughout the trial and the interrogation of his choices undertaken during the RSI was vague and moderate, especially given the violent nature of what was being discussed. Moreover, Graziani's

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<sup>1</sup> *Corriere della Sera* (Ottobre 1948).

choices and behaviour throughout the proceedings demonstrate that he used his cult of personality and the myth which had been created around him in the 1930s to his advantage. I argue that Graziani successfully utilised the trial, its space and the publicity which ensued, not only to defend himself and distance himself from any criminal condemnation, but also to further his myth to ensure its survival, at least with some sections of society. This warped memory became intrinsically linked to the Italian imperialist project, and how it was remembered in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century right up till the present-day across Italy.

*The International Treatment of War Crimes in Post-War Germany and Japan*

As early as 1942, the Allied powers had openly announced their plan to punish alleged Axis war criminals for criminal conduct directed against civilians on their own soil and abroad in all occupied zones. Therefore, *the War Crimes Commission* was set up in London to ‘take all necessary steps to ensure the apprehension and surrender for trial of persons accused of having committed, ordered, or abetted war crimes or crimes against peace of humanity,’ with ‘attention in particular to organized atrocities’.<sup>2</sup>

These investigations provided the preparation for international tribunals which would be convened at the culmination of the Second World War. The most evident examples of this international judiciary system, set up immediately as planned, ended up being the Nuremberg Military Tribunals and the Tokyo Military Tribunals. The trials began in 1945 and were closely followed by all the prominent national newspapers of countries all over the world, with the obvious intention of publicly exposing perpetrators of the warmongering ‘totalitarian’ nations who had upset the global balance of power and to ensure that this stability would not be threatened again. Since the outset, the trials which took place in Germany and Japan were deemed as unsuccessful by contemporary commentators and scholars due to the undeveloped nature of international law regarding war crimes in 1945, the inherent difficulties of identifying all individuals involved in the countless injustices executed under the Nazi regime, and criticisms that the trials resulted in victors’ justice.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Lord Chancellor John Simon, Lords Sitting, (7<sup>th</sup> October 1942).

<sup>3</sup> L. Yavnai, ‘U.S. War Crimes Trials in Germany, 1945-1947,’ in P. Heberer & J. Matthaus (eds.) *Atrocities on Trial: Historical Perspectives on the Politics of Prosecuting War Crimes* (Nebraska, 2008).

In Germany at the time, it was estimated that twelve million German citizens had been active participants in supporting or executing policies stipulated by the National Socialist government, which is one fifth of the total population, making it a difficult task from the start.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, the trials proved to be lengthy, resulting in a series of thirteen tribunals lasting from 1945 to 1949.<sup>5</sup> The first trials took place in an international criminal court at Nuremberg and featured judges from each of the powers to occupy Germany after the fall of Hitler; France, Great Britain, the U.S. and the USSR. These initial Nuremberg trials targeted those of who were deemed to be the ‘major ‘war criminals or perpetrators of justice, namely high-ranking Nazi officials or head of organisations which had been implicit in criminal activities committed by Hitler’s regime. This trial, known as the International Military Tribunal (IMT) swiftly resulted in the conviction of over twenty leading members of the Nazi Party, the SS, the SA, the SD and the Gestapo, including Hermann Göring, Joachim Von Ribbentrop and Albert Speer.<sup>6</sup>

The subsequent twelve trials which took place in the following three years were instead presided over by an American military tribunal due to disputes between the Allies, and were known as the Nuremberg Military Tribunal (NMT).<sup>7</sup> They oversaw other groups of trials of Nazi Party members and important members of the Reich and famously included the Judges Trial and the Doctors Trial, all groups who were responsible for the implementation of Nazi Germany’s eugenic programmes and racial laws.<sup>8</sup> By openly trying and convicting these perpetrators, the didactic intent of these trials was important in ‘re-educating’ the German population about the crimes of the Nazi regime.<sup>9</sup> The extent and tactics of the so called ‘re-education’ differed in each Allied occupation zone, but broadly speaking it included a direct re-distribution of didactic tools and resources in schools, a reorganisation of public affairs and activities, and the complete realignment

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<sup>4</sup> M. Balfour & J. Mair, *Four-Power Control in Germany and Austria 1945-1946* (Oxford, 1956), pp. 170-171.

<sup>5</sup> K. Heller, *The Nuremberg Military Tribunals and the Origins of International Criminal Law* (Oxford, 2011), p. 103.

<sup>6</sup> K. Jarausch, *After Hitler: Recivilising Germans, 1945 – 1955* (Oxford, 2006), p. 54.

<sup>7</sup> D. Junker, ‘The United States, Germany, and Europe’ in R. Moore, & M. Vaudagna (eds.) *The American Century in Europe* (N.Y. 2003), p. 97.

<sup>8</sup> Priemal & Stiller, *Reassessing the Nuremberg Military Tribunals*, Introduction.

<sup>9</sup> Jarausch, *After Hitler*, p. 54.

of all popular culture. In addition, entire school groups and communities were obliged to attend viewings of film clips documented by the Allies who filmed holocaust upon their arrival in concentration camps at the end of the war and witness evidence of other atrocities committed by the National Socialist government.<sup>10</sup> The obvious aim of such measures was designed to prevent the rise of another totalitarian eliminationist state in Europe or beyond.<sup>11</sup>

In U.S. occupied post-war Japan, a similar set of trials was organised in Tokyo with the same model used at Nuremberg, called the International Military Tribunal for the Far East (IMTFE), between 1946 and 1948. Similar to Germany, just over twenty former politicians and military leaders were tried by an international tribunal. They were primarily led by the U.S.A but had prosecutors and judges from eleven countries, including the USSR, the U.K., India, China, Australia and the Philippines and accused those on trial with conventional war crimes against prisoners of war and civilians in occupied territories. Other than the same criticism used at Nuremberg, that of victors' justice, for the Tokyo Trials, there was also strong controversy regarding the post-war treatment of Emperor Hirohito.<sup>12</sup> He had been in power during Japan's imperial expansion into China where some historians argue that he was very involved in Japanese military matters and should have been held responsible at Tokyo for war crimes and aggressive warmongering in China.<sup>13</sup> He was, however, never tried at the IMTFE as it was equally argued that during the war he had been more of a powerless symbolic figurehead than a political leader.<sup>14</sup> Scholarly discourse over the topic of Hirohito is still disputed, but some scholars argue that he was 'let off' due to the Cold War context and the pragmatic decision on behalf of the U.S. to keep their influence and support a strong Imperialist Japan in the Far East to help them combat communist China.<sup>15</sup> The historian John Dower argues that 'It is difficult to exaggerate how subtly but significantly this bi-national imperial cover-up impeded serious Japanese engagement with the issue of war responsibility, both at the time and in the decades that follow'.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p. 48.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p. 58.

<sup>12</sup> H. Bix, *Hirohito and the Making of Modern Japan* (N.Y. 2001) p. 17.

<sup>13</sup> J. Dower, *Ways of Forgetting, Ways of Remembering: Japan in the Modern World* (N.Y. 2012), p. 124.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Dower, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II* (N.Y. 1999) p. 562.

<sup>16</sup> Dower, *Ways of Remembering, Ways of Forgetting*, p. 125.

As we shall see, these long-term ramifications of the lack of post-war justice or re-education in post-war Japan are much more comparable to the case of Italy than that of Germany. Indeed, the case of Emperor Hirohito and his fate is similar to that of Graziani, as Dower states that ‘Emperor Hirohito became post-war Japan’s preeminent symbol and facilitator, of non-responsibility and non-accountability’.<sup>17</sup> Likewise, the lack of inquest into Graziani’s imperial crimes and the outcome of his trial led to a lack of post-imperial consciousness after the loss of Italy’s colonies and a further emblematic indulgence of his personal character among the public.

One commonality that German case has with that of Italy and Graziani, however was that of the prestige of the army and its leading members, and in turn this effect this prestige had on post-war justice amongst members of the military. It is no secret that the Wehrmacht played a significant role in Nazi aggression against other countries and the persecution of the Jews. Putting them on trial, however, was especially controversial from the beginning, because as the national army, the institution was often construed as outside of the political spectrum of the nation, and thus devoid of state responsibility in the public eye.<sup>18</sup> In German propaganda throughout the Nazi regime, just like Graziani and his troops, the ‘men of the Wehrmacht were constantly lionised as the armed first of reborn Germanic man, at once brave and self-sacrificing...racially pure, loyal...he knew no fear and was imbued with but one idea; to serve the fatherland’.<sup>19</sup>

This positive image and the potency of Nazi propaganda affected how their trial would be received in the post-war period. Consequently, apart from the leaders of the Wehrmacht who were tried at the High Command trial due to their direct role in the Holocaust, the IMT decided that the Wehrmacht itself had not been a criminal organisation and would thus not be punished.<sup>20</sup> When only a few members of the Wehrmacht were convicted at the high command trial, ‘the fields of Nuremberg resounded with shouts of devout Hitler youth, bronzed SA, and SS’.<sup>21</sup> This is not to say

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> J. Forster, ‘Complicity or Entanglement? The Wehrmacht, the War & the Holocaust’, in M. Berenbaum & A. Peck, (eds.) *The Holocaust and History: The Known, the Unknown, the Disputed & the Re-examined* (Indiana, 1998), p. 266.

<sup>19</sup> J. Baird, *To Die for Germany: Heroes in the Nazi Pantheon* (Indiana, 1990), pp. 202-203.

<sup>20</sup> W. Wette, *the Wehrmacht: History, Myth, and Reality* (London, 2006), pp. 211-212.

<sup>21</sup> Baird, *To Die for Germany*, p. 243.



that it was just right-wing extremists who continued to support the Wehrmacht. As Wette notes:

While no one disputed the facts of the holocaust, the record of the Wehrmacht was regarded as relatively clean. The distinction between many <good> Germans in the Wehrmacht and the far less numerous <bad> Germans in Nazi organisations had allowed the post-war generations to both recognise the complicity and to contain complicity. In fact, ordinary soldiers of the Wehrmacht were often perceived as victims themselves, the unwilling instruments of a Nazi inspired race war.<sup>22</sup>

It was only in the late 1990's that the German population finally broke 'the cycle of reiteration and repetition' as a travelling photographic exhibition was opened across Germany, visually displaying atrocities committed by the 20 million Germans who served in the Wehrmacht from 1939-1945 in all the countries the regime had invaded, in particular the horrors committed on the Eastern Front.<sup>23</sup> One relevant reason for this is the fact that following the war, many Wehrmacht leaders helped develop and disseminate the idea that 'the army kept its hands clean' by publishing their own memoirs, and narrating their own tale of events. This strategy is strikingly similar to Graziani's defensive hagiography that he wrote awaiting trial whilst he was in prison in 1946, *Una Vita per L'Italia: Ho Difeso la Patria (1947)*, which will be analysed later.<sup>24</sup>

An example of one of these German works were *the Memoirs of Field Marshal Kesselring*.<sup>25</sup> This was the published diary of the World War II experiences of Kesselring, the popular and leading commander of the army and Luftwaffe heavily mentioned in the previous chapter. After the war he was tried and convicted for war crimes committed on Italian soil, mainly the order of unlawful killings of 400 infamously known as the Ardeatine Massacre, as a reprisal for unprovoked attacks on Nazi officers days earlier, and the deportation of the native Jewish population from Rome in October 1944.<sup>26</sup> The British military court that tried him in Venice in 1947 found him guilty and

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<sup>22</sup> Wette, *The Wehrmacht*, p. XVI.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, VII.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, p. 195.

<sup>25</sup> A. Kesselring, *The Memoirs of Field-Marshal Kesselring* (1953).

<sup>26</sup> K. Von Lingen, *War Crimes Trials and Cold War Politics 1945-1960* (Kansas, 2009).

sentenced him to death by hanging, but this verdict was eventually annulled due to popular protests in Britain for the harsh sentencing.<sup>27</sup> He had long been well respected amongst British army officials in Britain who contested his conviction and thus had a personal following. Shortly after, he was released he began to write his memoirs in order to regain control of his reputation.

Nowadays, whilst the memories of Kesselring have largely been debunked by the published evidence of Italian and British historians, the myth of Erwin Rommel, remains intact to this very day. In the Second World War, Rommel had helped lead the aggressive invasions of Poland, France and Belgium. He never lost a battle until the failure of the Battle of El Alamein on the North African front and became known for his ‘military genius’, namely his quick thinking, apparent invincibility, bravery and risk-taking on the battlefield.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, he had initially been chosen by Goebbels to elevate the Wehrmacht to greatness as according to the German historian Reuth) he proved ‘the perfect advertisement for Hitler’s military might’, just as Graziani had been chosen to be the military Fascist poster boy.<sup>29</sup> As illustrated in the hagiographical work written by British historian John Pimlott, many scholars, policy-makers and members of the military in Germany and abroad still pay homage to him :

Rommel’s death in 1944 robbed the Germans of one of their most adventurous and impressive commanders. The desert fox was a genuine hero, revered not just for his personal bravery in battle but also for his apparent ability to outfight a succession of army generals.<sup>30</sup>

Rommel is still widely and fondly known today as the ‘desert fox’, just as Graziani is still frequently referred to as the ‘lion of the desert’ for their skills and experience in one of the toughest battlefields of World War II, the African desert. In turn, much like the important role Graziani had in the making of his own myth or self-fashioning, it is said

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pp. 200-215.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, p. 359.

<sup>28</sup> J. Pimlott, *Rommel and His Art of War: Based on Rommel in His Own Words* (London, 1994), p. 103.

<sup>29</sup> G. Reuth, *Rommel: The End of a Legend* (London, 2005), p. 121.

<sup>30</sup> Pimlott, *Rommel and His Art of War*, p. 218.

that ‘Rommel enjoyed posing for the camera’ and often, in letters to his wife, happily noted that ‘the worlds press were talking about his success’.<sup>31</sup>

This overwhelmingly positive memory of Rommel was preserved due to a number of reasons. It was partly due to his forced suicide at the hands of Hitler in 1944 which wholly distanced him from the evils of the Nazi regime, partly due to the wide dissemination of his memoirs and hagiographical books written about him, and finally due to the fact that he was a member of the national army, and thus not associated with the Nazi Party, but with the nation itself. There remains little doubt that Rommel was sympathetic to the ideals of the Nazi Party, although it has been suggested that he viewed the SS and Führer with some suspicion, and like many others, was coerced into taking the loyal army oath to him in 1934.<sup>32</sup> Nowadays, his damning political allegiances have long since been erased from the mainstream memory of this man, leaving only the memory of Rommel the war hero.

### *The ‘Missing’ Italian Nuremberg*<sup>33</sup>

Despite a wealth of scholarly focus on the Nuremberg and Tokyo trials, relatively little attention has been paid to the post-war treatment of Italians who committed alleged crimes abroad under Mussolini’s government, or indeed that of individuals who took part in the Nazi occupation of Italy between 1943 and 1945. One reason for this may be due to the fact that no international war crimes tribunal was ever set up in Italy. This is surprising given that the governments of Ethiopia, Greece, and former Yugoslavia all petitioned the United Nations to investigate allegations after the war, and Ethiopia did so again in a countless attempt since its first request in 1936. In 1936, the League of Nations had rejected Hailie Selassie’s first complaint “regarding violations by the Italian troops of the conventions on the law and customs of war”, as Graziani used poison gases, illegalised by the Geneva Protocol of 1925, upon Ethiopian civilians during the Italian invasion of the country.<sup>34</sup> As we know from a previous chapter, at the time the League of Nations instead chose to investigate and condemn the Ethiopian use of the dum-dum

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<sup>31</sup> Reuth, *Rommel*, pp. 123-133.

<sup>32</sup> Pimlott, *Rommel and His Art of War*, p. 34.

<sup>33</sup> Title of M. Battini’s book, *The Missing Italian Nuremberg: Cultural Amnesia & Postwar Politics* (N.Y. 2007).

<sup>34</sup> Annex 56, ‘Documentation relating to the Dispute between Ethiopia & Italy’, *The League of Nations official Journal*, (February 1936), p. 241.

bullet against invading Italian forces, and evidently little changed after the fall of fascism as no international investigation took place.

Some sort of ‘Italian Nuremberg’ was, however, planned. Ample documentation held in the National Archives in London and reviewed by the Italian historian, Michele Battini, has revealed that a list of ten possible Italian war criminals had been compiled by the *War Crimes Commission* (UNWCC) by 1945.<sup>35</sup> The Commission had in fact been set up prior to the formal foundation of the United Nations in 1943 and was an international initiative intended to investigate evidence of allegations of war crimes committed by the Axis powers.<sup>36</sup> The Commission itself, however, had no legal power to try these nations themselves, and provided a mere precursor to the Tokyo and Nuremberg trials among others.<sup>37</sup> For the case of Italy, an ‘Italian Nuremberg’, which was the name used by British officials in the documents reviewed by Battini, was meticulously organised.<sup>38</sup> The ‘wanted’ list included Graziani, Badoglio, Nasi, Lessona, Ceruli, Cortese, Gallina, Roatta, Tracchia, and Gelosi, all of whom had been important military officers during the *ventennio* and were believed to have committed crimes against humanity in Italian occupied territories. Graziani and Badoglio were on the top of the list, as they were the only two who had been honoured by Mussolini with the prestigious titles of *Marescialli d’Italia*, and thus enjoyed almost as much responsibility and freedom in military initiatives and tactics at home and abroad as the Duce himself. Therefore, they were deemed by the British government as high priority cases as they had been the highest-ranking Fascist officers.<sup>39</sup> Nevertheless, despite such plans, none of these men were ever tried by an International court. Graziani, although caught and imprisoned by the Allies in 1945, was handed to Italian authorities who were given the responsibility of what to do with him.

Battini’s thesis, along with research into Britain’s role in Italian war criminals in Yugoslavia conducted by Pedaliu, suggest that the emergence of the Cold War halted the original plan to carry out the trials in order to prevent a radicalisation of Italian public

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<sup>35</sup> Battini, *The Missing Italian Nuremberg*, p. 20.

<sup>36</sup> D. Plesch, *Human Rights after Hitler: The Lost History of Prosecuting Axis War Crimes* (Washington, 2017).

<sup>37</sup> Plesch, *Human Rights After Hitler*, introduction.

<sup>38</sup> Battini, *The Missing Italian Nuremberg*, p. 20.

<sup>39</sup> R. Pankhurst, *Silvia Pankhurst, Counsel for Ethiopia: A Biographical Essay on Ethiopian Anti-Fascist and Anti-Colonial History* (Los Angeles, 2003), p. 227.

opinion and politics to the left.<sup>40</sup> Additionally, John Harper's research into America and the economic rehabilitation of Italy in the post-war period notably highlights that 'in view of Italy's strategic location (in Europe) and great importance to Italian-American voters, the fate of the peninsula was too important for Italians to decide alone'.<sup>41</sup> This belief amongst American policy makers influenced the American liberal approach to post-war Italian reconstruction through U.S. trade and investment to prevent Western European communism.<sup>42</sup> Thus, given that during the occupation by both Allied and Nazi forces during World War II, Italy's civil war between loyal fascists and partisan resistance fighters preoccupied British and American officials as a potent source of political legitimisation and power in the post war Republic.<sup>43</sup> As also noted in Roy Domenico's inquest into the trial of Italian Fascists, Italy was seen by the Allies as particularly vulnerable to a socialist coup so any action was treated with extra caution.<sup>44</sup> In addition, given that the USSR had initially not been in favour of the international tribunals and believed that each nation reserved the right to try its own perpetrators, a trial run by an international judiciary, or namely British and American judges and persecutors, ran the risk yet again of being seen as 'victors justice,' and possibly resulting in anti-western sentiment and resentment.<sup>45</sup> All of these reasons worked against post-war justice for Italian Fascists such as Graziani after 1945.

My review of contemporary British articles also suggests that the British authorities were worried that the Italian government was in danger of moving to the left. For example, *The Times* praised the moderate and centre parties and even several small extreme right-wing groups who "wish to rebuild a free and independent Italy upon the traditions of the period before fascism, whilst the left-wing parties hitch their political chariot to the Soviet star" in the immediate post-war period.<sup>46</sup> Anxieties were expressed that "this would carry Italy a long way towards the present condition of the peoples democracies of Eastern Europe", with further journalistic warnings that "the leftward pull should not be underestimated".<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, Pedaliu believes that on a practical 'the scope of war

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<sup>40</sup> E. Pedaliu 'Britain and the Handover of Italian War Criminals to Yugoslavia 1945-48', *The Journal of Contemporary History*, 39/4 (2004), pp. 503 - 529.

<sup>41</sup> J. Harper, *America and the Reconstruction of Italy 1945 - 1948* (Cambridge, 1986), p. 4.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, p. 149.

<sup>43</sup> Pedaliu 'Britain and the Handover of Italian War Criminals to Yugoslavia'.

<sup>44</sup> R. Domenico, *Italian Fascists on Trial, 1943 - 1948* (Chapel Hill, 1991).

<sup>45</sup> Battini, *The Missing Italian Nuremberg*.

<sup>46</sup> 'The Italian Government', *The Times* (31<sup>st</sup> March 1948), p. 5.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*.

crimes had to be contained with manageable proportions', making Italy less of a priority for the Allied governments.<sup>48</sup> She argues that the armistice of 1943 and the large resistance movement in Italy, absent in Germany or Japan, allowed Italy to be seen as the lesser evil amongst the Axis nation states and was thus pardoned.<sup>49</sup> Even so, this research only provides a preliminary overview of this 'missing Italian Nuremberg' as Battini's thesis focuses primarily on the prosecution of Nazi crimes on Italian soil during the war and Pedaliu's on the case of Yugoslavia. Thus, the state of relevant research is still in relatively early stages as much is yet to be done in order to further comprehend this aspect of the complicated post-war context.

Battini's analysis, however, did not reveal some of the illuminating details concerning Graziani in the National Archives in London. These show that the British government's main motivations for relinquishing Graziani to Italy (instead of trying him in a British military tribunal) were motivated by various political conveniences. For example, a letter from the War Office in Whitehall in June 1945 wrote that 'he (Graziani) is not listed by the United Nations War Crimes Commission' signifying that he had already been taken off the list.<sup>50</sup> One leading motivation for his release is explained in a further report from a conference held in the military office later in 1946:

decided that for political reasons it would be better if the British Military Courts did not try Graziani in whose Army Group area a certain number of atrocities were committed...there is no doubt that Graziani will be required to be interrogated in connection with the atrocities and he will probably be able to give evidence against Kesselring and possibly German divisional commanders serving under his command. It follows therefore that there is no reason why he should not be handed over to the Italian Government for trial, provided an undertaking is given by them that if he is tried and sentenced to death the sentence is not put into effect until he has been interrogated fully as to conversations and discussions with Kesselring and other commanders.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Pedaliu, 'Britain & the Hand-over of Italian War Criminals to Yugoslavia'.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> 'Cipher Telegram', War Office, TNA, WO 311/825 (6<sup>th</sup> June 1945).

<sup>51</sup> Ibid (1st February 1946).

First, this report is explicit in highlighting the British government's awareness of Graziani's atrocities committed on Italian soil during World War II, whilst his colonial crimes were not even deemed necessary to mention. Secondly, it appears evident that Britain's political priority was incriminating the Nazis over the Fascists as only one Axis regime was needed to be globally incriminated to ensure minimal disruption to geo-politics in the fragile post war world. Furthermore, when Graziani was sent back to the Italian authorities in mid-February 1946 the telegrams which organised the transfer repeatedly urged that 'most undesirable bring him Italy until last possible moment in view risk of disturbances' and 'any publicity of move most undesirable'.<sup>52</sup> This preoccupation indicates the perceived destabilising effect Graziani's return might have on Italian politics and society during the highly fragile period when political extremism at both ends of the spectrum was rife. My findings thus corroborate Battini's argument that the dawn of the Cold War affected British decision making in regard to the fate of Fascist figures such as Graziani.

Whilst mainstream press outlets were careful not to openly subject their governments to any embarrassment by awarding them culpability for their lack of justice to Graziani or other war criminals, it was no secret. In fact, since Italy's formal retreat from the African continent in 1941, African American newspapers had repeatedly been publishing Haile Selassie's request for the hand-over of Italian war criminals 'responsible for the bombing of defenceless black men, women and children during the unprovoked aggression against his people in 1936 and 1937'.<sup>53</sup> By the end of the war, Britain's 'do-nothing policy' was picked up by *The Chicago Defender* who was informed that this decision was taken partly due to Badoglio's inclusion on the list of Italian war criminals.<sup>54</sup> Along with Graziani, Badoglio had also authorised the use of poison gas on Ethiopian civilians during the Ethiopian War, but his signing of the armistice with the Allies further complicated his possible incrimination after World War II, as he had been responsible for Italy's surrender. Thus, as Britain decided not to authorise the trial for Badoglio's colonial crimes, Graziani could not be tried on

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid (12 January 1946).

<sup>53</sup> 'War Criminals and Ethiopia', *The Pittsburgh Courier* (10<sup>th</sup> February 1945), p. 6.

<sup>54</sup> 'Ethiopia asks Badoglio for Trial', *The Chicago Defender* (10<sup>th</sup> February 1945), p. 2.

the same basis. An opinion piece published in *The Pittsburgh Courier* was critical of the Allies decision as follows:

Granted that the German and Japanese leaders are guilty of instigating atrocities and carrying on aggressive warfare, why are the Italian war criminals getting such nice treatment? That the latter are guilty of the same charges as the others goes without saying... There is certainly no question about the crimes committed by the Italian aggressors...natives were bombed and machine-gunned indiscriminately...Italian officers rode around with their wives and watched the slaughter...there is no record of any condemnation of these atrocities...the British permitted these bandits to go through the Suez Canal to and from Ethiopia...why is this whole ghastly chapter hidden and soft-pedaled by those who mourn for the victims of Himmler?

This powerful text is indicative not only of the wider awareness of the lack of punishment of these crimes, but also reflects the pain, anger and unhealed wounds that these actions and their lack of reckoning on global anti-imperialist communities. Consequently, the lack of implementation of Graziani's international trial among others and the general lack of defascistisation which took place in Italian society and politics following the war undoubtedly 'produced grave consequences, first on judiciary grounds, and later regarding the assessment of the historical truth'.<sup>55</sup> This contextualisation of post-war justice, or lack thereof, is crucial to my project as by not getting involved in implementing such measures the Allies consequently allowed the new Italian State to try its own criminals, men who had been revered as national heroes for years beforehand.

As Italy was left to its own devices and was devoid of any extra-national pressure to 'de-fascistise' the legal, bureaucratic, or largely the political realm, naturally only half-hearted efforts were made to try those suspects who had generated the most controversy regarding their conduct at home and abroad. This did not mean that

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<sup>55</sup> Battini, *The Missing Italian Nuremberg*, p. 20.



following the armistice in September 1943, legislation was not implemented to ensure the eventual trial of collaborators:

Il 24 novembre 1943 il consiglio dei ministri pronunciò a Bari una dichiarazione, subito diffusa nel nord, per rendere noto che <i responsabili di codardia di fronte al tedesco, i fascisti che hanno impugnato le armi fratricide, collaborato con truppe e autorità tedesche, dopo l'armistizio> sarebbero sottoposti alla giustizia militare. In base alle norme dei codici penali militari che puniscono i delitti contro la fedeltà e la difesa militare dello stato, risultavano responsabili di tradimento tutti color che, consapevolmente e volontariamente, prestavano aiuto militare e politico ai tedeschi. Il 27 Aprile 1944 il governo del re, nell'annunciare il suo programma, stabilì come punto fondamentale la punizione dei collaborazionisti e la epurazione.<sup>56</sup>

The declaration was legally enacted on the 27th of July 1944 and was applicable to 'tutti i cittadini italiani, in qualunque parte del territorio dello stato essi risiedano o abbiano risieduto durante la guerra, non avendo mai cessato di essere tali, per l'occupazione'.<sup>57</sup>With the war-torn nation still in an immense state of political and social confusion, the only way forward appeared to be the trial and accusation of military officials who had directly collaborated with the condemned Nazi Party till the very end. As Badoglio had signed the armistice in 1943, this only left Graziani to be put on trial.

Before embarking on a thorough analysis of Graziani's trial, attention must be briefly paid to the Italian legal system in order to comprehend both the legal context and the laws which Graziani was on trial for having broken. Graziani was first tried at the Supreme Court, Il Corte di Cassazione in Rome in October 1948. The Court of Cassation is the highest court of appeal and is housed at the impressive Palazzo della Giustizia on the Tiber River, a few doors down from Castel Sant' Angelo and Vatican, thus enjoying a prominent and symbolic position in the city centre. As the main judicial organ, 'the Corte di Cassazione is competent over the whole national territory', and therefore only

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<sup>56</sup> Z. Algardi, *Processo ai Fascisti* (Firenze, 1973), p. 8.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid*, p. 9.

the most important cases take place there.<sup>58</sup> This suggests not only the importance of Graziani himself but also the crimes he was tried for and consequently explains the heavy journalistic and public interest in his trial. Furthermore, the Pubblico Ministero intervenes in all proceeding at the Supreme Court and must give its conclusions, given that all cases taken to the Court are considered to be of public interest.<sup>59</sup>

After the fall of fascism, the Supreme Court even stipulated the terms under which one would be put on trial which were those who had committed ‘rastrellamenti, le arsioni di fabbricati, le catture, le soppressioni, le rappresaglie’, of which Graziani would have been guilty of four out of the five acts.<sup>60</sup> At the time, the judges who presided over this court were stated to be of ‘good moral conduct (and) free to decide upon the admissibility of evidence’ as there are no general exclusory rules regarding evidence, and ‘the accused must be acquitted for insufficiency of evidence’.<sup>61</sup> Investigations and the collection of evidence were carried out by the judicial police, and given the lack of de-Fascistisation especially of the judiciary after the fall of Mussolini, their bias was highly likely in the Graziani case.<sup>62</sup> A few criticisms were also famously noted in the Fascist system in regard to the collecting of evidence as Certoma’s legal review of the *ventennio* stated that Italian lawyers and judges ‘usually avoided subjecting accused to harmful publicity’ and have been long known for a lack of professionalism.<sup>63</sup> Additionally, when answering questions related to the charges, Graziani was under no obligation to tell the truth, as in Italian courts it was not customary for the accused to be under oath.<sup>64</sup>

#### *‘Fascism On Trial’<sup>65</sup>: Graziani Takes the Stand*

Graziani was first put on trial in 1948 for breaking article 41 of the Italian penal military code of war, for which the supposed punishment was the death sentence and military degradation as stated by law: ‘un fatto diretto a favorire le operazioni militari del nemico

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<sup>58</sup> G. L. Certoma, *The Italian Legal System* (London, 1985), p. 65.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid*, p. 68.

<sup>60</sup> Algardi, *Processo ai Fascisti*, p. 109.

<sup>61</sup> Certoma, *The Italian Legal System*, pp. 225-234.

<sup>62</sup> C. Pavone ‘The General Problem of the Continuity of the State and the Legacy of Fascism’ in J. Dunnage, (eds.) *After the War: Violence, Justice, Continuity and Renewal in Italian Society* (Market Harborough, 1999), p. 6.

<sup>63</sup> Certoma, *The Italian Legal System*, p. 232.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid*, p. 236.

<sup>65</sup> Taken from the newspaper article: ‘Italy: Fascism on Trial as Graziani Faces Bar’, *Christian Science Monitor* (12<sup>th</sup> October 1948), p. 1.

o a nuocere altrimenti alle operazioni delle forze armate dello stato Italiano'.<sup>66</sup> Although he did indeed lose his title of Maresciallo d'Italia, he was not sentenced to death for his collaboration with the Nazis during their occupation of Italy from 1943 to 1945. The allegations against him were those which took place after the armistice when the majority of the Fascist Party was in disarray, Graziani continued to follow the Duce's orders and accepted the position of the Minister of Defence and leader of the armed forces of the Republic of Salò. More specifically, he was tried for 'le responsabilità delle razzie, deportazioni, spoliazioni e assassini di cittadini e di patriotici che combattevano e boicottavano il nemico per riscattare l'Italia'.<sup>67</sup> The typewritten record or stenography accompanying the trial will be used here, in conjunction with secondary literature and newspaper accounts in order to paint a picture of events. As evident in the excerpt, the documents of Graziani's trial opened dramatically with the statement that 'questo episodio giudiziario è stato definito il processo più importante della nostra epoca e tale da portare il più prezioso contributo alla storia del fatale periodo della vita italiana che va dalla meta del 1943 alla fine della guerra.'<sup>68</sup>

By deeming his the most important trial in 20<sup>th</sup>-century Italian history 'che ha scosso e scatenato le passioni del popolo italiano', the prominence of Graziani's case in the public eye cannot be underestimated.<sup>69</sup> As a prelude in the year before his trial, he remained somewhat in the public eye with the frequent sensational article in popular magazines such as *l'Europeo* which ruminated over his decision to leave his farm in Affile to join the RSI, with headlines such as 'Graziani abbandonò le patate: moglie e la figlia disapprovarono' and 'la verità su Graziani: due marescialli e una pistola'; the other maresciallo referenced was Kesselring.<sup>70</sup> So by the eve of the trial there had been years of public anticipation which resulted in high emotions. For example, on the eve of the trial various New York newspapers reported upon public resistance to the trial, which ended in a violent encounter between civilians and policemen outside the courthouse.<sup>71</sup> *The New York Herald Tribune* published that the demonstration 'threw main streets into

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<sup>66</sup> Algardi, *Processo ai Fascisti*, p. 109.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 110.

<sup>68</sup> N. Ruffolo (ed.), *Il Processo Graziani Vol. I: l'Auto Difesa dell'ex Maresciallo nel Resoconto Stenografico* (Roma, 1950), p. VII.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> 'Graziani abbandonò le patate: moglie e la figlia disapprovarono', *l'Europeo* (27 Aprile 1947) p. 9; 'La verità su Graziani: Due Marescialli e una pistola', *l'Europeo* (20 Aprile 1947) pp. 1-3.

<sup>71</sup> 'Victims of Riot started by Fascists in Rome' *The N.Y. Times* (16<sup>th</sup> October 1948), p. 5.

a turmoil for more than an hour last tonight' when 'neo-Fascists swarmed to the Piazza Colonna...completely disrupting traffic and began to shout the name of Graziani'.<sup>72</sup> This further demonstrates just how much fascist sentiment lingered in the capital and how many public emotions were stirred by the event even before it had begun. This is precisely because, on an emblematic level, as 'the biggest war-crimes trial of an Italian yet held in Italy', Graziani's trial represented the entire reckoning of the Fascist Regime.<sup>73</sup> For the Italians, according to the lengthy spread dedicated to the trial in *La Tribuna Illustrata*, 'il processo Graziani diventa effettivamente il <processo ai 600 giorni di Mussolini>', given that was main charge of the accused.<sup>74</sup> The article was accompanied by a watercolour image of a imponent Graziani speaking and gesticulating on his feet from the stand (*figure 71*).<sup>75</sup>



*Figure 71: 'Il vero processo ai 600 giorni', La Tribuna Illustrata (31 Ottobre 1948) p. 2*

<sup>72</sup> 'Fascists Acclaim Graziani in Rome Streets on Eve of Trial', *The N.Y. Herald Tribune* (11<sup>th</sup> October 1948), p. 1.

<sup>73</sup> 'Italy: Fascism on Trial as Graziani Faces Bar', *Christian Science Monitor* (12<sup>th</sup> October 1948), p. 1.

<sup>74</sup> 'Il vero processo ai 600 giorni', *La Tribuna Illustrata* (31 Ottobre 1948), p. 3.

<sup>75</sup> Figure 71: 'Il vero processo ai 600 giorni', p. 2.

*The Christian Science Monitor* was also one of the very newspapers to note the emblematic significance of the trial by calling the proceedings ‘Fascism on Trial’.<sup>76</sup> According to the U.S. paper ‘Marshal Graziani typifies much of what went to make up fascism’ and its ‘warped idealism’.<sup>77</sup> Given this, the same paper predicted that once the trial started ‘it should turn out to be sensational, not just from an international viewpoint, but from one of self-examination for the Italian nation’ as global attention turned to Italy, and Italians themselves watched as Italy’s former ‘national hero’ answered for the crimes of the Fascist regime.<sup>78</sup> Another accurate prediction surrounding the trial was given by *The Times*, which published a warning about the trial from the leader of the Italian Communist Party and former deputy Prime Minister at the end of World War II, Palmiro Togliatti.<sup>79</sup> He was preoccupied that broadcasting the trial and the lack of documentary evidence available against Graziani ‘meant “placing an important means of propaganda at the service of Fascism”’.<sup>80</sup>

A full account of the proceedings was published in a three-part volume in 1950 and its daily feature in the national and international press point to the likelihood of the trial’s wider acknowledgement, importance and recognition. The developments, details, and outcome of the trial undoubtedly impacted upon how the Graziani and the purpose of his life was collectively remembered. I suggest that charge itself, that of collaborationism, and the judicial preoccupation with Graziani’s activities in Italy between 1943-1945, resulted in a partial obliteration of the memory of his colonial career and of Italian imperial enterprises in general. The first volume detailing the trial comprises Graziani’s self-defence with a total of four hundred typed pages. The first hundred gave an overview of his life in Eritrea, Libya, Somalia and Ethiopia, and the last three hundred are focused on his decision to ally himself with Hitler after the 8<sup>th</sup> of September 1943. Here, as he chose to represent himself, he was allowed to present a theatrical overview of his career by not only attempting to redeem himself in front of the court but also by using the publicity of the trial for further self-promotion.

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<sup>76</sup> ‘Italy: Fascism on Trial as Graziani Faces Bar’.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> ‘Scuffle in Italian Chamber’, *The Times* (12<sup>th</sup> October 1948), p. 3.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

From the moment he entered the courtroom and apparently ‘smiled and bowed for a battery of photographers’ Graziani utilised the trial as just another public propaganda stunt for the public, as he had done throughout his career.<sup>81</sup> Despite this reference to the many photographers present, relatively few photographs of the trial were published in the national and international press. *Corriere d’Informazione* opened the trial with a photograph of Graziani at the beginning of the trial (figure 72) and *The Illustrated London News* followed with an image of him during the proceedings (figure 73).<sup>82</sup> Contrary to the majority of images of Graziani, here he wasn’t always posing for the camera and was instead captured naturally, looking rather disgruntled and serious. As notable from the photographs, this was perhaps the first time he wasn’t seen in his military uniform as it was noted by *The New York Times* that ‘he appeared before the court in a dark blue suit and a white shirt, open at the neck’.<sup>83</sup> In fact, foreign newspapers couldn’t avoid reporting on certain aspects of his physicalities or charisma which appealed to the public throughout the trial. For example, one reporter from *The Irish Times* commented that ‘one only had to meet Graziani to understand his appeal to the masses, over six-feet tall, broad-shouldered, a remote look in his deep-set hard eyes, a belligerent jaw, he combined Prussian discipline with a Roman temperament.’<sup>84</sup> *The Daily Mail* also wrote that ‘the most distinguished survivor of fascism ... (was) a well-fleshed vigorous man in spite of his 66 years’ and *The New York Times* published that ‘he appeared to be in excellent shape’.<sup>85</sup> Therefore, his comportment, attitude, and self-presentation, no matter how staged not only attracted global attention to the trial but also rendered it a spectacle of sorts, in which Graziani was the protagonist.

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<sup>81</sup> ‘Graziani Denies Treason Guilt as Trial Opens’, *The N.Y. Herald Tribune* (12<sup>th</sup> October 1948), p. 5.

<sup>82</sup> Figure 72: ‘Il Processo Graziani iniziato oggi a Roma’, *Corriere d’Informazione* (12 Ottobre 1948), p. 1 & Figure 73: ‘Trials and Release, Peace and Intervention’, *The Illustrated London News* (23<sup>rd</sup> October 1948), p. 455.

<sup>83</sup> ‘Graziani Lays Acts to Military Duty’, *The N.Y. Times* (12<sup>th</sup> October 1948), p. 13.

<sup>84</sup> R. Hock, ‘The Way of the World’, *The Irish Times* (16<sup>th</sup> October 1948), p. 5.

<sup>85</sup> ‘Graziani Gets Cheers at his Trial’, *The Daily Mail* (12<sup>th</sup> October 1948), p. 3; ‘Graziani Lays Acts to Military Duty’, *The N.Y. Times*.



All'udienza di stamane: l'imputato è introdotto nell'aula

Figure 72: 'Il Processo Graziani iniziato oggi a Roma', *Corriere d'Informazione* (12 Ottobre 1948), p. 1



Figure 73: 'Trials and Release, Peace and Intervention', *The Illustrated London News* (23<sup>rd</sup> October 1948), p. 455

Throughout his defence he managed to talk at least once about each of the multiple books he had authored and gave extensive publicity to his autobiography he had most recently written and published, which was a contemporary best-seller.<sup>86</sup> He would casually mention them by proclaiming that “si può supplire ad essa richiamandosi precisamente al volume: *Ho difeso la patria*, che i giudici popolari avranno letto”.<sup>87</sup> His preoccupation with journalistic representations of him were evident in his statement that ‘io vorrei che i giornalisti comprendessero che questa per me è una necessita, e non è amore polemica: è necessita, per chiarire la mia posizione.’<sup>88</sup> In fact, every time he mentioned them, he tried to converse with the journalists directly, engaging them in what he was saying, for example: “è la roba pubblicata dalla stampa attuale, che compatisco perché non è tutta colpevole. E con questo non voglio fare della demagogia, signori giornalisti”.<sup>89</sup>

<sup>86</sup> 'Italy at War Exhibition', *Reading University* (2014).

<sup>87</sup> Ruffolo *Il Processo Graziani Vol. I*, p. 19.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid*, p. 38.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid*, p. 70.

In fact, New York state papers strongly suggested that he successfully managed to manipulate the proceedings from the outset of the trial, as *The New York Herald Tribune* asserted that ‘the stern-faced, gruff-voiced former Marshal completely dominated the crowded courtroom’.<sup>90</sup> It was also reported that Italian journalists responded uncritically to these attempts at self-promotion, as according to *The New York Herald Tribune*, ‘Anti-Fascist members of parliament today called on the government to say whether something could be done ...to keep newspapers from giving such “open-mouthed” treatment to Graziani’.<sup>91</sup> In fact, as we shall see, throughout the trial the mainstream Italian press’ way of reporting on the trial was to merely copy and paste entire selected sections of the discourses between Graziani and the other members of the court, which allowed the accused ample space to justify his actions repeatedly to Italian readers. Thus, the journalists present in the courtroom may have served Graziani’s purpose of providing a convincing self-defence and bolstering of his reputation amongst sympathetic spectators, intentionally or not. The members of the public who had entered the courtroom to witness the trial also apparently did not hesitate to interact with Graziani’s discourses and responded even more directly than the press to his initiatives. According to *The New York Times*, they did this by cheering and applauding him, and ‘giving him a warm ovation when the judges withdrew’.<sup>92</sup> This demonstrates that Graziani’s efforts were met with open support for him amongst some members of the public, who were also relevant in preserving his reputation.

During his main interrogation as to why he decided to join Mussolini in the RSI, Graziani claimed that he hadn’t wanted to take sides desired to remain in his hometown with his family, but when he came to believe that Hitler was pursuing a scorched earth policy and heard that Field-Marshal Kesselring was looking for him he thought himself to be more useful fighting for the Nazis rather than imprisoned by them.<sup>93</sup> This justification for his decision was maintained throughout the trial as Graziani attained that “abbiamo fatti per frapporre più ostacoli possibili alla violenza tedesca; abbiamo fatto quello che è stato possibile. è cioè significa, perdinci cioè che vi è in Italia di salvato!”<sup>94</sup> *Corriere della Sera* uncritically emphasised this stance by directly reporting his claims that he had

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<sup>90</sup> ‘Graziani Denies Treason Guilt as Trial Opens’.

<sup>91</sup> ‘Graziani Ends 30-hour Plea in Own Defense’, *The N.Y. Herald Tribune* (17<sup>th</sup> October 1948), p. 15.

<sup>92</sup> Graziani Lays Acts to Military Duty’, *The N.Y. Times* (12<sup>th</sup> October 1948), p. 13.

<sup>93</sup> Ruffolo, *Il Processo Graziani Vol. I*, p. 203.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid*, p. 200.



collaborated in order to “salvare il popolo italiano dalle mani dei tedeschi che si ritenevano traditi da noi”.<sup>95</sup> The Communist paper *l’Unita* was however much more critical in its stance against Graziani calling him ‘il traditore’ with its assertion that ‘Graziani si confessa collaborazionista dal 1940, coi i tedeschi fino alla morte’.<sup>96</sup> This is unsurprising given that for the PCI, Graziani had become one of their most prominent enemies for his collaborationism with Hitler against the partisans. Nevertheless, the influence of this paper remained rather more niche compared to the likes of *Corriere della Sera* which enjoyed a much wider readership.

The tone of mainstream British and U.S. papers were also rather tactfully reserved in criticising Graziani during the trial, given their prior role which had resulted in Graziani’s fate, and stuck to soberly reporting the obvious facts and events which ensued albeit being continuously interested throughout the proceedings. *The Times* of Britain, for example, which reserved a daily column on the trial on page 3 and wrote that Graziani’s ‘sudden change of heart was forced upon him by the grave prospects before Italy’ and had joined the RSI only in order to reduce German brutality.<sup>97</sup> The British paper also quoted a ‘credible’ and societally ‘respected’ witness for the defence, the Vatican acting Secretary of State at the time, Monsignor Montini, who confirmed that “I never doubted the sincerity of Graziani when he made this statement”, in response to Graziani’s affirmation that he only accepted his role in the RSI due to fear of a Nazi-led scorched earth policy in Italy.<sup>98</sup> The title of both *Times* articles, ‘Italy Saved from German Reprisals’ and ‘Graziani’s Efforts to Save Rome: Defence Evidence’, are highly indicative of their acceptance of Graziani’s narrative. *The New York Times* corroborated this story further by stating that ‘he did nothing more than carry out his duty as a soldier’ in the face of threat of German reprisals.<sup>99</sup>

This popular demonisation of the German invaders compared to Italian Fascist soldiers became a common notion as the Nazis proved a most convenient scapegoat to blame for the war. It was easier for post-war Italian society to bury the wounds of the civil war,

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<sup>95</sup> ‘Graziani parla del Colloquio con Schuster e dell’incontro avuto con Mussolini a Como’, *Corriere della Sera* (12 Ottobre 1948), p. 2.

<sup>96</sup> ‘Graziani si confessa collaborazionista dal 1940’, *l’Unita* (14 Ottobre 1948), p. 1.

<sup>97</sup> Correspondent, ‘Italy saved from German Reprisals’, *The Times* (14<sup>th</sup> October 1948), p. 3.

<sup>98</sup> ‘Graziani’s Efforts to Save Rome: Defence Evidence’, *The Times* (25<sup>th</sup> October 1948), p. 3,

<sup>99</sup> ‘Graziani Lays Acts to Military Duty’.

superficially at least, by choosing an external enemy or villain outside of the state to blame. The popular neo-realist literary and film movement which began in 1946 reinforced this view, as even though representations often portrayed the Italian Fascists in a negative light, this never went beyond comical portrayals of disorganised and delusional soldiers.<sup>100</sup> As noted by Filippo Focardi, in these works, their Nazi counterparts were instead always juxtaposed as inhumane and unreasonable which allowed for the initial foundation what was to become a potent myth of *Italiani brava gente*, of which Graziani became an important player.<sup>101</sup>

When questioned about specific cases such as the deportation of 7000 Roman policemen to Germany in October 1943, Graziani diverted the blame to his superiors and claimed that he was not notified.<sup>102</sup> In this case, Rommel was apparently responsible for having given this order. The first time he was asked about the deportations, Graziani firmly told the court that ‘quando si parla di rastrellamenti, si parla di lotta partigiana. Ora io non voglio anticipare i tempi. Della lotta partigiana parleremo domani’.<sup>103</sup> This statement illustrates how he successfully attempted to control the contents of his interrogation, as the presiding judge then swiftly moved on to the next question. In *Volume II* of the trial, which includes all testimonies, an ex-partisan testified against him by claiming that Graziani often visited Rome’s surrounding hill towns to give RSI soldiers and policemen precise anti-partisan orders. On one occasion he noticed that after Graziani’s visit, “l’attività delle divisioni coscritte contro i partigiani si è intensificata...diversi parenti di partigiani che erano stati lasciati tranquilli furono internati nel campo di concentramento”.<sup>104</sup> Whilst talking about Graziani’s anti-partisan measures the Italian press was rather accusatory with titles such as ‘Graziani incitava i soldati a sterminare i partigiani’, as his brutality against other Italians was the most contentious issue of the trial.<sup>105</sup> Unsurprisingly, *l’Unita* also eagerly confirmed that ‘dopo le ispezioni di Graziani i rastrellamenti furono intensificati’, as the left-wing paper’s prime

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<sup>100</sup> See F. Focardi, *Il cattivo tedesco e il bravo italiano: La rimozione delle colpe della Seconda Guerra Mondiale* (Roma, 2016).

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Ruffolo, *Il Processo Graziani Vol. I*, p. 354.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid, p. 254.

<sup>104</sup> Ruffolo, *Il Processo Graziani Vol. II: il testimoniale e gli incidenti procedurali* (Rome, 1950), pp. 479 – 480.

<sup>105</sup> ‘Il Processo di Roma: Graziani incitava i soldati a sterminare i partigiani’, *Corriere della Sera* (25 Novembre 1948), p. 4.

preoccupation during the trial was to detail Graziani's crimes against the partisans.<sup>106</sup> Nevertheless, the lack of documentary support in this case meant that the accusation was dropped.

Wartime pamphlets and leaflets signed by Graziani were also presented at the trial to support the notion of unbridled violence against Italian partisans and suggest that Graziani was personally responsible for issuing a decree which introduced the systematic death penalty for refusal to answer the Fascist call to arms.<sup>107</sup> But the difficulty, in light of this information, of directly attributing such initiatives and sole responsibility to Graziani was inherent, as he argued that as a national soldier, he always just followed orders. *Corriere della Sera* frequently corroborated this argument with headlines such as 'l'ex Maresciallo addossa a Mussolini la maggiore responsabilità della Guerra civile', which was convenient as the accused was the most contentious man in Italy at the time and was no longer alive in order to defend himself.<sup>108</sup> However, given previous account of Graziani's stubborn character, rogue personality, and instances in which Mussolini had sent him telegrams asking him why he did not follow protocol, doing just as he was told proved highly unlikely. Again, the fact that the trial suffered from a severe lack of presented evidence signified that it was impossible to directly attribute responsibility for orders during the war, regardless of who personally signed the decrees. Either way, 'l'amore per la patria' was his justification throughout the whole trial and the questioning of his primary role in the Salò Republic.

He also had the support of plenty of witnesses who came to Graziani's defence, most of which were typically from the military themselves. For example, General Ciconetti who had fought with Graziani in AOI sung his praises by claiming that 'egli ha quattordici volte vinto il nemico, e il suo nome brilla di vivida luce gloriosa e di alto prestigio in colonia che prova per lui gratitudine e ammirazione giustificatissime'.<sup>109</sup> Il General Taranto added that:

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<sup>106</sup> 'dopo le ispezioni di Graziani i rastrellamenti furono intensificati', *l'Unita* (18 Novembre 1948), p. 2.

<sup>107</sup> Ruffolo, *Il Processo Graziani Vol. III: il testimoniale e gli incidenti procedurali* (Rome, 1950), p. 1397.

<sup>108</sup> 'Il Processo Graziani: l'ex Maresciallo addossa a Mussolini la maggiore responsabilità della Guerra civile' *Corriere della Sera* (6 Novembre 1948), p. 3.

<sup>109</sup> Ruffolo, *Il Processo Graziani Vol. I*, p. 89.

Anche nel campo politico Graziani seppe mostrare le più spiccate qualità, informandosi intelligentemente alle direttive politiche del governo della Tripolitania. Seppe sbrigare l'azione sempre in modo efficace anche in situazioni delicate e difficili. Se essere a un tempo fermo e rigoroso e, secondo le mutevoli contingenze, equo e conciliante.<sup>110</sup>

The Ex-Marshall's apparent mercy and kindness was shown in General Paladino's report which told of when Paladino was arrested by the Germans and was ready to be taken to a concentration camp, but when he told his wife to contact the Marshall as he had met him previously in Ethiopia, and Graziani intervened at once and called for his release.<sup>111</sup> Many more witnesses told similar stories on the stand in numbers which outweighed those condemning him for Graziani's brutality. General Cerica, the former G.O.C. of the carabinieri who remained faithful to the King continued to praise Graziani despite having gone their separate ways in wartime:

Gli eventi del 1943 ci hanno separati. Io ho seguito una strada che ha tutto un mondo dietro di se. Il Maresciallo Graziani ha seguito un'altra strada, che ha un altro mondo. Siamo nemici. Ma io sono un vecchio soldato, e qui debbo protestare contro tutte le infamie di gente che era stata lontana dalle linee e cha ha tentato di gettare del fango su un grande soldato che ha onorato il Paese!<sup>112</sup>

The fact that not only RSI supporters defended Graziani's honour even after the end of the war implies that he was a widely respected military figure amongst other sections of the population, in this case respected members of Italian society, and not just the hero of a small group of fervent neo-Fascists. *The Times* also dedicated an article to Cerica's protest of Graziani's trial as the 'mud-slinging which has taken place against a great soldier who has honoured Italy'.<sup>113</sup> The foundation of his appeal beyond the political realm lay in his career as a professional, highly skilled, and effective military leader.

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid, p. 82.

<sup>111</sup> Ruffolo, *Il Processo Graziani Vol. II*, p. 759.

<sup>112</sup> Ruffolo, *Il Processo Graziani Vol. II*, p. 119.

<sup>113</sup> 'Mudslinging Against a Great Soldier', *The Times* (23<sup>rd</sup> October 1948), p. 3.

As he had spent most of his career abroad, it was not so difficult for him to distance himself ideologically from the Fascist regime itself, as he had already become involved in Italy's colonial campaigns before the dawn of the *ventennio*. He used his earlier military successes to his advantage by lacing his defence with passionate speeches, detailing patriotism and nationalism more generally at the core of his beliefs and actions, rather than the condemned Fascist regime or the RSI. He identified himself with ordinary combat soldiers who, like him, had left their modest upbringing to serve their nation and bring glory to Italy:

Io sono un soldato al servizio della Patria. Sia nel Governo democratico, sia nel Governo fascista, sia in qualunque altro governo, perché un soldato serve la Patria: e la Patria è personificata da qualsiasi Governo, e un soldato non dover fare della politica. Il soldato marcia dove gli viene comandato di marciare nell'interesse della Patria.<sup>114</sup>

The public association of him primarily as a soldier and not a political figure in the regime thus absolved him of a significant amount of association with the Fascist Party. Baldassini has argued that even after the fall of Fascism, “l'opinione pubblica italiana era rimasta sentimentalmente legata alle forze armate come un punto di riferimento per il presente e il futuro” and thus they remained untainted in the public eye.<sup>115</sup>

As well as arrogantly praising himself for having saved many fellow soldiers due to his abilities on the battlefield, Graziani portrayed a romantic image of himself valiantly leading his troops across African plains. By doing so he romanticised Italian exploits in Africa. He took the court through a series of rosy depictions of riding through the desert on a white horse, and even compared himself to Napoleon.<sup>116</sup> His national sacrifice is evident here as he passionately stated:

Dal giorno in cui mi sono arruolato, nel 1902, al 1945, ho servito continuamente la patria, sui campi di battaglia, in mezzo ai deserti, nella

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<sup>114</sup> Ruffolo, *Il Processo Graziani Vol. I*, p. 33.

<sup>115</sup> C. Baldassini, *L'Ombra di Mussolini: l'Italia Moderata e la Memoria del Fascismo* (Milano, 2008), p. 224.

<sup>116</sup> Ruffolo, *Il Processo Graziani Vol. I*, p. 140.

boscaglia, lontana da tutte le mollezze, da tutte le cattive abitudini della metropoli, disinteressandomi della vita familiare, rinunciando a persone ad avere dei figli.<sup>117</sup>

The image he conjured up implies that Graziani remained openly proud of his career and throughout the hearing he repeated that he was responsible for the victorious Ethiopian War and the country's declaration of empire. These vocalisations glorifying his role in the Italian empire proved to be timely calculations, as his trial fell at a time where nostalgia for the colonies pervaded the political spectrum and public sphere as they had just been removed by the UN.<sup>118</sup> In fact, even members of the Italian Communist and Italian Socialist Party (PSI), which in other parts of the world would have been fundamentally anti-imperial in its political stance, openly supported the return of the African colonies to Italy. For example, the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs and secretary of the PSI, Pietro Nenni, addressed the Camera dei Deputati to 'ripropone il diritto della nostra permanenza in Africa' in September 1948 just before Graziani's trial had begun.<sup>119</sup> In the same discussion, Giuseppe Berti of the PCI agreed with Nenni by stating that the Italian government should approach the UN with the issue as regaining the colonies were vital 'per la difesa degli interessi Italiani'.<sup>120</sup> According to *The Washington Post* Graziani even utilised this widespread belief in order to justify his African exploits as he reportedly stated that 'his conquests in Africa made it possible for Italy to demand her colonies back today'.<sup>121</sup> Naturally given the intense national propaganda campaign of the 1930s, the Italian public also remained supportive of the Italian empire in the post-war period which benefited Graziani's position and public image during the trial proceedings. In fact, *The Times* highlighted Graziani's colonial career as the leading reason for public sympathy for 'Italy's most popular general' by stating that 'much sympathy with the accused exists among the general public who still remember, especially, his exploits during the Abyssinian campaign'.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid, p. 38.

<sup>118</sup> Del Boca, *L'Africa nella coscienza degli italiani*, (Roma, 1992).

<sup>119</sup> Discussioni: Nenni, Pietro. Seduta di Venerdì 24 Settembre 1948. Camera dei Deputati. Atti Parlamentari, p. 2441. <[http://legislature.camera.it/\\_dati/leg01/lavori/stenografici/sed0085/sed0085.pdf](http://legislature.camera.it/_dati/leg01/lavori/stenografici/sed0085/sed0085.pdf)>, date accessed: 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2020, p. 2429

<sup>120</sup> Discussioni: Berti Giuseppe. Seduta di Venerdì 24 Settembre 1948.

<sup>121</sup> 'Graziani Cites Conquests in Treason Trial', *The Washington Post* (12<sup>th</sup> October 1948), p. 3

<sup>122</sup> 'Sympathy Among Public for the Accused', *The Times* (12<sup>th</sup> October 1948), p. 3

Knowing and manipulating this fact, allowed Graziani to appear not only completely unapologetic but thoroughly nostalgic about his time spent in Africa, by hypothetically evoking that ‘e se oggi noi andassimo in Somalia, se io tornassi in Somalia’, which received a warm applause from all his ‘fans’ in the stand.<sup>123</sup> Therefore, one of the few things he wasn’t afraid of admitting during the trial was having been ‘malato di espansione coloniale’.<sup>124</sup> The difference in Graziani’s tone of voice and mood changed depending on which parts of his life he was talking about and it was his career in Africa which took the limelight of his lengthy ‘impassioned’ defence speeches, sometimes up to four hours long.<sup>125</sup> As noted by the transcript, ‘la voce dell’ex si fa sempre più concitata e commossa nella rievocazione dell’avventura Africana’.<sup>126</sup> *The Daily Telegraph* also corroborates this statement by recounting that whilst talking about ‘his Abyssinian heyday...he became so excited that even his own counsel had to intervene to calm him...limp and perspiring when he had finished’.<sup>127</sup> Thus, it appeared that it was the colonial part of his career that was personally the most important for him, and it was also the part which he wanted the judges and audiences to focus on and remember him for.

Italian imperial foreign policy in general was not questioned at all, but his colonial conduct, albeit not being nowhere near the primary focus of the investigation, was however, questioned on a few occasions. Graziani was not asked about the use of brutal weaponry and tactics during the African campaigns, despite the ample evidentiary support from the archives of the Ministero degli Affari Esteri.<sup>128</sup> This is because the fundamental foreign policy behind the colonial conquest of Italian territories in Africa was continually upheld as an official view in post-war Italy, as evident in the Italian parliamentary discussions mentioned above. What did, nevertheless, appear were questions regarding violent and unnecessary conduct which had taken place once the colonies had been consolidated, as it had attracted some international attention at the

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<sup>123</sup> Ruffolo, *Il Processo Graziani Vol. I*, p. 48

<sup>124</sup> Ruffolo, *Il Processo Graziani Vol. I*, p. 38

<sup>125</sup> ‘Graziani’s Role in Abyssinia’, *The Times* (13<sup>th</sup> October 1948), p. 4

<sup>126</sup> Ruffolo *Il Processo Graziani Vol. I*, p. 48.

<sup>127</sup> ‘Graziani’s Five-Hour Speech’, *The Daily Telegraph* (13<sup>th</sup> October 1948).

<sup>128</sup> Rochat & Del Boca were the first historians to reveal Italian atrocities committed in North and East Africa in post-war Italy. Rochat became the first historian to reveal that gases, illegalised by the Geneva protocol of 1925, had been extensively used on Ethiopian civilians during the conquest of Abyssinia in his essay entitled *Il Colonialismo Italiano* (1973) and after over three decades in the archives, Del Boca wrote a monumental work of three volumes on *Italiani in Africa Orientale* (1992).

time and therefore had to be somewhat addressed. When the general Casiota was asked about the conditions of the concentration camps set up by Graziani in Libya, he defended him by painting a rosy picture of well provisioned camps, with schools, mosques and the highest regard for the sanitation of the inhabitants.<sup>129</sup> He even stated that the Arab legions which fought for him fondly called him ‘Baba Graziani’.<sup>130</sup> Another instance which was brought to light were the reprisals by Italians on Ethiopian intelligentsia following the attempt on Graziani’s life in Addis Ababa in 1937. The attention to the events of 1937 were a likely ‘necessary’ reckoning of a time in which international public opinion questioned Graziani’s reprisals following his attack, as analysed in chapters prior. Thus, by acknowledging them at least on a superficial level, the Italian judiciary could somewhat address international allegations in order to perhaps appease international onlookers.

The first incident of 1937 was extensively described by Graziani, but he quickly and successfully absolved himself of any responsibility of ordering the systematic hangings, burning, and slaughter of entire neighbourhoods of the capital which resulted in the death of up to 20,000 Ethiopians. Graziani had the excuse of having been in hospital with three hundred fragments of shrapnel in his body and acute pneumonia.<sup>131</sup> When visited by General Fadda in hospital he reported to have said: “mi raccomando, non commettete eccessi, perché se commettete degli eccessi, tutto quello che abbiamo guadagnato nel processo della pacificazione sarà rovinato”.<sup>132</sup> One shocking revelation was aired, however, by General Sorrentino during the trial, which, in light of the evidence available today appears to be closer to the truth than the defensive accounts of the other generals. He said that ‘in quella occasione, il Maresciallo Graziani, con una brutalità che è riuscita una sorpresa per lo stesso Hitler’.<sup>133</sup> As with most of the trial, a lack of provided evidence here may have also resulted in the lack of deeper inquest into these incidents as they only reserve a small space in the stenographical account and the subject was changed.

The many Italian newspaper articles which I reviewed also largely ignore the accusation of Graziani’s colonial crimes, as they were not seen by most Italians as a ‘problematic’

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<sup>129</sup> Ruffolo, *Il Processo Graziani*, Vol. II, p. 100.

<sup>130</sup> Ruffolo, *Il Processo Graziani*, Vol. I, p. 48.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid pp. 62 – 65.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid, p. 66.

<sup>133</sup> Ruffolo, *Il Processo Graziani*, Vol. II, p. 27.



issue at the time. The only Italian articles dedicated to Graziani's conduct in the colonies were directly related to the reprisals of 1937 and *Il Corriere della Sera* copied and pasted excerpts from the transcript of the trial. It directly quoted the President of the court who gave Graziani the freedom to dictate the narrative with an open-ended question by merely asking "ci parli degli attentati contro lei in Africa orientale" to which Graziani recounted his narrative of events in which he portrayed himself as the victim in each instance.<sup>134</sup> The President, did, however, ask one damning question which read: "è vero che ordinò di adoperare gas asfissanti contro le popolazioni civili?" to which Graziani replied "è assolutamente falso" and went on to deny the allegations and which point no further questions were asked.<sup>135</sup> So the issue of the utilisation of illegal gas was raised, although in completely the wrong context as there is no evidence to suggest that gas was used in Ethiopia after 1936. The main scope of the article, however, focused on Graziani's rivalry with Badoglio, just like many others where the more important issues of colonial crimes were replaced by what was deemed more controversial.

Great Britain, however, found the topic of colonialism a sensitive one for a different reason entirely. Economic debt from the war and pro-independence movements had begun the demise of colonial Britain with the loss of the jewel of the crown which had been colonial India one year before. This typically resulted in a general omission of the taboo topic of colonialism in mainstream British articles relating to Graziani's trial. Negative language was occasionally used to denounce 'the once terrible Graziani' but no further explanation for the criticisms were ever given.<sup>136</sup> When his colonial career was mentioned, *The Times* did vaguely mention accusations of 'evil done in Libya' but immediately dismissed his role by directly quoted him that he couldn't have been responsible 'when he was only a zone commander under the orders of a Governor-General and a High Command'.<sup>137</sup> The article noted Graziani's arrogance but uncritically accepted his narrative that he 'took credit for disobeying an order from Rome to shoot all Abyssinian chieftains who did not submit before capture', and therefore portrayed him in a forgiving light.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> 'Graziani attacca Badoglio e lo chiama come testimonia di difesa', *Corriere della Sera* (13 Ottobre 1948), p. 3.

<sup>135</sup> 'Graziani attacca Badoglio e lo chiama come testimonia di difesa'.

<sup>136</sup> 'Graziani Gets Cheers at his Trial', *The Daily Mail* (12<sup>th</sup> October 1948), p. 3.

<sup>137</sup> 'Graziani's role in Abyssinia', *The Times* (12<sup>th</sup> October 1948), p. 3.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

U.S. papers were more vocal in openly publishing what they knew about Graziani's colonial crimes in Africa. *The New York Times*, for example, asserted that 'Il Conquistatore dell'Africa... became famous for the cruelty in which he treated the natives' and gave the example of the 1937 reprisals to his attempted assassination as evidence.<sup>139</sup> It was also the first paper to point out that 'his alleged brutalities during the war against Ethiopia do not form part of the charges against him, but they have been extensively aired in evidence'.<sup>140</sup> *The New York Herald Tribune* also highlighted that Graziani had been 'Italy's cruellest general', mentioning that 'at one time he put 80,000 men, women and children into concentration camps' and had 1,600 residents of Addis Ababa slaughtered in revenge for his having been wounded by an assassin'.<sup>141</sup> Italian-American papers also included the incident in one of its articles on the trial as *Il Progresso Italo-Americano* wrote that 'ha fatto mettere a morte mille indigeni per due attentati sulla sua vita'.<sup>142</sup> The only newspaper to give a detailed and lengthy account of Graziani's crimes in Ethiopia was the African-American *New York Amsterdam News*. It highlighted that 'Graziani is being tried in Italy for crimes committed years after the atrocities which, under his direct orders, were visited upon thousands of helpless people in Ethiopia'.<sup>143</sup> The article then rightly predicted that 'Graziani will never face the verdict of an honest and unbiased court' and argued that 'his case should highlight the hypocrisy of European rulers whenever their relations cross those of non-Europeans'.<sup>144</sup>

This illuminating article, however, was an isolated case. The comments printed in the national North American newspapers above, remained infrequent; mere generalised footnotes and sensationalist language which was shadowed by much more focus other accusations from World War II. In fact, papers such as *The Toronto Daily Star* referred to Graziani during his trial with the famous nicknames which had once been utilised in order to celebrate him, such as 'fascism's lion of Africa'.<sup>145</sup> Thus, these references to the days in which Graziani was an imperial hero coupled with the lack of serious inquisition into his actions as a colonial general during the trial was largely reflected by the

<sup>139</sup> 'Graziani on Trial', *The N.Y. Times* (17<sup>th</sup> October 1948), p. 1.

<sup>140</sup> 'Ethiopia's Charged decried by Italians', *The N.Y. Times* (24<sup>th</sup> December 1948), p. 9.

<sup>141</sup> 'Rodolfo Graziani', *The N.Y. Herald Tribune* (17<sup>th</sup> October 1948), p. 3.

<sup>142</sup> 'Non sono mai stato servo dai Nazi, dice Graziani', *Il Progresso Italo-Americano* (10 Ottobre 1948).

<sup>143</sup> A.M. Wendell Malliet, 'World Fronts', *N.Y. Amsterdam News* (16<sup>th</sup> October 1948), p. 11.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>145</sup> 'Marched as Soldier is Graziani's Defence', *The Toronto Daily Star* (12<sup>th</sup> October 1948), p. 27.

mainstream Italian and global press. The mainstream journalistic portrayal of this aspect of the trial proved crucial in preserving the untainted memory of Graziani and his colonial career.

As noted by Algardi, the whole ordeal ‘resulta della sentenza una figura di Graziani molto contraddittoria.’<sup>146</sup> What she means by this is that on the one hand, his moral integrity in AOI was preserved, but on the other, an image of an ardent Fascist who followed Mussolini till the end somewhat resonated. Although, throughout the trial she attains that ‘egli dimostra di avere un temperamento distruente’, I disagree.<sup>147</sup> At times he showed the more volatile and erratic side of his character, as suggested by an incident written in *The Daily Telegraph* which reported him ‘snapping: “be quiet” to an audience member who interrupted one of his speeches by shouting “Viva Graziani”’.<sup>148</sup> *The New York Times* also accused him of being ‘vigorous and aggressive’ at times and frequently threatening to leave the court.<sup>149</sup> However, these impressions never seriously jeopardised the outcome of the trial or general impressions of him. I believe that he managed to control the court room in the sense that he was successful in portraying the exact side of himself and his life purpose in the way he desired. He displayed passion in his speeches and conjured up powerful images of his defence of the Patria both at home and abroad.

The only other historical trial which resembles this one so closely is that of Warren Hastings, the British governor-general of Bengal in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. He was tried for general colonial misconduct and misdemeanours when he came back to Britain and was succeeded by Clive of India, the trial taking place over seven years. As with the Graziani trial, the historian Nicholas Dirks named it the trial of the century, which conjured up ‘the most extraordinary political spectacle in Britain’.<sup>150</sup> Dirk’s attention, however, is focused on Edmund Burke, the man responsible for impeaching Hastings. With his mere oratory, Burke transformed the courtroom and its audiences. the countless numbers of public supporters in the courtroom were impressed:

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<sup>146</sup> Algardi, *Processo ai Fascisti*, p. 149.

<sup>147</sup> Algardi, *Processo ai Fascisti*, p. 113.

<sup>148</sup> ‘Graziani’s Five-Hour Speech’, *The Daily Telegraph* (13<sup>th</sup> October 1948).

<sup>149</sup> ‘Graziani Lays Acts to Military Duty’.

<sup>150</sup> N. Dirks, *The Scandal of Empire: India and the Creation of Imperial Identity* (London, 2006), p. 87.

When he narrated, he was easy, flowing, and natural, when he declaimed, energetic, warm and brilliant. Apt and ingenious, and the will and sudden flights of his fancy, bursting forth from his creative imagination in language fluent, forcible, and varied.<sup>151</sup>

He thus eloquently knew how to seize and ‘shape the spirit of the moment’ to his advantage, transfixing viewers and transforming public opinion, turning the Indian victims of Warren’s crimes into household names in Britain.<sup>152</sup> It might seem odd then that Warren was acquitted, and in the end Burke’s attempts at impeachment did not work but Dirks claims that the ‘trial was no failure at all as in some ways Burke became an unlikely champion for India’.<sup>153</sup> The relevance therefore, to the trial of Graziani is in my opinion as follows: with his oratorical skills and genuine passion for empire which consequently disseminated into the courtroom, Graziani utilised the trial as a show trial, or public theatre so to speak, to his own advantage for the imperial cause across Italy.

The court was concluded in February 1949, when Graziani was initially sentenced to nineteen years in prison, found to be “colpevole del reato di collaborazione militare col tedesco posteriormente all’8 settembre 1943”.<sup>154</sup> Being accused of only ‘military’ collaboration thus formally absolved him of any political involvement with the condemned RSI and the Nazi regime and preserved his image as a respected military leader. The verdict then went on to state that due to various ‘atti di valore morali e sociali’ his sentence was reduced to only eight years.<sup>155</sup> These ‘benevolent’ acts must have referred to his only career before the Second World War as a leading colonial general who aided the conquest of overseas territories, signifying that support for this aspect of Graziani’s career remained strong amongst influential members of Italian politics and the judiciary. This sentence was then overturned as the civil court deemed itself inept for ‘la propria incompetenza di materia’.<sup>156</sup> The vague reason for this dissolution is still undetermined, perhaps testament to the unprecedented circumstances and protagonist of the trial.

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid, p. 88-90.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid, p. 90.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid, p. 92.

<sup>154</sup> Ruffolo, *Il Processo Graziani, Vol. III*, p. 1425.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

<sup>156</sup> Del Boca, ‘Graziani, Rodolfo’, *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*.

Therefore, Graziani was tried again, this time at a military tribunal in 1950, which still received ample press attention from both the national and international press. This time round Graziani's confidence was even stronger than in the previous trial, given the familiarity of a military context and judgement. This was evident in his different choice of clothing compared to the trial of 1948, as he wore 'military uniform without any insignia of rank, but with several rows of medal ribbons', as seen on the front cover of *Oggi* magazine in March (figure 74).<sup>157</sup> Although he had been stripped of his rank, his decision to wear a military uniform was clearly designed to appeal to the sympathies of military judges and fall in line with his overall defence, a military servant of the nation. This is evident in a posed image of Graziani published in *The New York Times* with a stern facial expression and pose for the cameras, reminiscent of images of him in during the Fascist Regime (figure 75).<sup>158</sup>



Figure 74: 'Durerà fino ad aprile il secondo processo di Rodolfo Graziani', *Oggi* (9 Marzo 1950)

'LION OF AFRICA' ON TRIAL IN ITALY

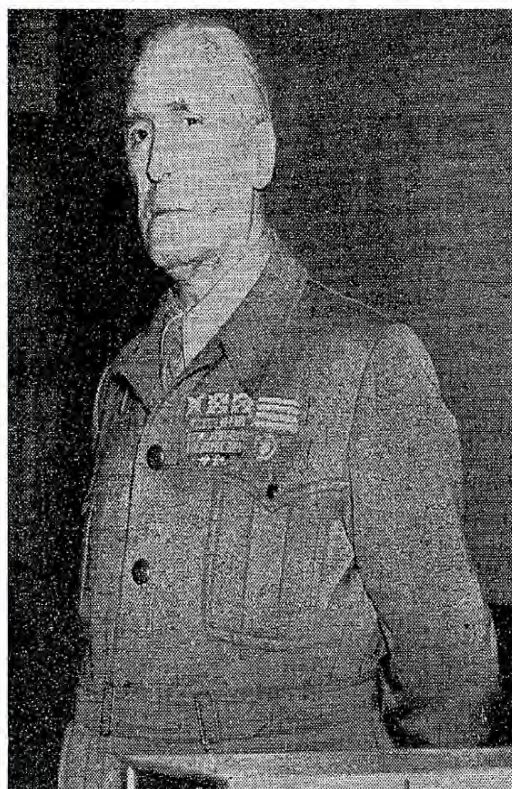


Figure 75: "Lion of Africa" on Trial in Italy', *The N.Y. Times* (28<sup>th</sup> February 1950), p. 16

<sup>157</sup> 'Graziani again on Trial', *The Times* (24<sup>th</sup> February 1940), p. 5; Figure 74: 'Durerà fino ad aprile il secondo processo di Rodolfo Graziani', *Oggi* (9 Marzo 1950).

<sup>158</sup> Figure 75: "Lion of Africa" on Trial in Italy', *The N.Y. Times* (28<sup>th</sup> February 1950), p. 16.

After the trial of 1950 his sentence changed yet again to the following:

Dichiaro Rodolfo Graziani colpevole del reato di collaborazionismi, la stessa sentenza dichiaro invece Graziani assolto dai fatti indicati...ossia Graziani fu assolto <perché il fatto non costituisce reato? Quando Graziani si dichiarò Il Ministro della Difesa della Repubblica di Salò, non era ancora intervenuta la dichiarazione ufficiale di guerra alla Germania, cosicché lo stato di guerra non aveva avuto ancora inizio.<sup>159</sup>

This loophole was due to the fact that Graziani had joined the Salò Republic on the 27<sup>th</sup> of September 1943 and the King did not formally declare war on Germany and its collaborators until the 11<sup>th</sup> of October 1943 so there was insufficient evidence to convict him in the end.<sup>160</sup>

*The Times* added that the court took into consideration as extenuating circumstances the serious wounds which Graziani received, his distinguished military career' as well, further testament to continued respect for his colonial military career.<sup>161</sup> According to the British paper, the verdict proved controversial due to 'some Italian comment on the trial, not all from left extremists, is critical of the leniency of the sentence and of the eulogy of Graziani by defence counsel'.<sup>162</sup> As evident in the accusation, detail of proceedings, choice of witnesses, and overall charge which failed to condemn Graziani for almost any of his crimes it can be concluded that there is some truth in this statement. Earlier on in the first trial there had also been complaints 'about the special treatment afforded to Graziani in court', which included his placement 'in an easy chair placed in the middle of the court room, instead of the usual prisoner's box, hands unmanacled. Mineral water and reference books have been at his elbow', and him being allowed to 'frequently shout at his judges when embarrassing questions have been asked'.<sup>163</sup> According to the presiding magistrate, these decisions were made 'in consideration of Graziani's 65 years of age' and ill health, although this argument is unconvincing as he

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<sup>159</sup> Algardi, *Processo ai Fascisti*, p. 141.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

<sup>161</sup> 'Graziani Sentenced', *The Times* (3rd May 1950), p. 5.

<sup>162</sup> 'A Graziani Supporter Arrested', *The Times* (3rd May 1950), p. 3.

<sup>163</sup> 'Graziani Ends 30-hour Plea in His Defence', *The N.Y. Herald Tribune* (17<sup>th</sup> October 1948), p. 15.

was deemed fit enough to defend himself with uninterrupted hours of animated discourse.<sup>164</sup> *The New York Herald Tribune* also interestingly highlighted that during the trial of 1948, the presiding judge, Luigi Marantonio, ‘was himself one of the highest judges of the government which Benito Mussolini set up behind German lines in Northern Italy in 1943’.<sup>165</sup> Although this ‘special treatment’ cannot be fully accounted for, the lack of defascistisation of the Italian judiciary and Italian society and the overall support respect which people had for Italy’s general over the years definitely contributed to this favouritism and the trial’s final outcome. Therefore, after only four months in prison in 1950 Graziani was released. This swift vindication, or ‘wrist tapping’ which was only noted by the African-American press signalled and started to facilitate the repression of the memory of Graziani the alleged Fascist war criminal in the public realm in Italy and further afield.<sup>166</sup>

#### *Preservation through Publication*

Two important books were published in the year prior to Graziani’s trial which both aided his defence and preservation of innocence in the public realm. They were crucial to a thorough comprehension of the extent to which Graziani’s role in his mythmaking led to his vindication and his long public legacy he left after his death. These were Graziani’s memoirs *Una Vita per l’Italia: Ho Difeso la Patria (1947)* and the Fascist supporter and General Emilio Canevari’s work called *Graziani mi ha detto (1947)*. Both works are implicitly hagiographical in nature, focused purely on his period in AOI, further exemplifying how he wanted to be remembered, as a colonial leader and not a Fascist one, and were published by large Roman publishing houses with his autobiography selling over 30,000 works just in the year of publication.<sup>167</sup> Graziani’s memoirs, which he wrote in his Algerian British prison in 1945, were a clever precursory move to safeguard his own narration of his career and actions as he lay uncertain of his fate in the post-war world. The book was thus designed as a ‘safety measure’ to ensure the survival of his own version of events in permanent literary form if they were to be challenged in the near and even distant future.

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<sup>164</sup> ‘Graziani Lays Acts to Military Duty’.

<sup>165</sup> ‘Graziani Judge also Served as Mussolini’s Aid’, *The N.Y. Herald Tribune* (21<sup>st</sup> October 1948), p. 16.

<sup>166</sup> ‘Graziani’s wrist is tapped’, *Pittsburgh Courier* (13<sup>th</sup> May 1950), p. 18.

<sup>167</sup> ‘Italy at War Exhibition’, *Reading University* (2014).

His autobiography began with a preface from the famous journalist who accompanied Graziani's troops during the invasion of Ethiopia, Indro Montanelli. Montanelli was quick to authoritatively assert what he should be known for: 'Questo fu Graziani: un grande guerrigliero coloniale. Lo fu per mentalità, per esperienza e anche per i mezzi a sua disposizione, dimostrandosi abilissimo contro i ribelli cirenaici e, di lì a poco, contro le orde abissine'.<sup>168</sup> Early on in the autobiography, Graziani also included the positive remarks from his now enemy, Badoglio, at the beginning of his career in January 1932. These citations by well-known figures were attempts to legitimise his widespread popularity, even amongst those who he had fallen out of favour with. For example, in the publication Badoglio apparently once publicly said:

Indico alla riconoscenza di tutti gli italiani residenti in Tripolitania ed in Cirenaica il nome del Generale Graziani che seguendo con intelligenza, con energia, con costanza, le direttive da me impartite e riuscito pienamente nella missione affidatagli.<sup>169</sup>

He also added that Badoglio wrote him a private letter stating that Graziani was the best and youngest warrior he had ever seen, of an undisputed prestige and unrivalled physical resistance, modest, studious, and was without a doubt the only general who wholly understood the political and military state of Libya and thus opened up the army to an array of new possibilities in AOI.<sup>170</sup> Furthermore, he strategically included a congratulatory letter from General Lyautey upon Graziani's completion of the 'pacification' of Libya, the most prominent general from the French army, known as the 'maker of Morocco' for his rapid and successful invasion of the country in 1903. Graziani sent Lyautey a copy of his book *Cirenaica Pacificata*, citing him as one of his inspirations in military strategy, to which Lyautey replied: 'Sono molto onorato e commosso per la vostra amabile dedica' di vista circa i metodi di occupazione, pacificazione, e politica verso gli indigeni, ho capito che avevamo, voi ed io, i medesimi concetti e ciò mi fa molto onore'.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> Preface by I. Montanelli, in R. Graziani, *Ho Difeso la Patria* (Milano, 1986) p. 6.

<sup>169</sup> Graziani, *Ho Difeso la Patria*, pp. 38-39.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

<sup>171</sup> 'Letter from Lyautey' (6<sup>th</sup> May 1934) cited in *Ibid.*, p. 40.



Graziani then turned to a celebration of himself, calling his own military operations ‘brillanti’ and arguing that he couldn’t ensure such successes without the use of force, in which he defended his forced removal of 100,000 Cirenaicans from their homeland.<sup>172</sup> Further justifying his actions he stated:

ma la mia inflessibilità suscitava troppe invidie, turbando troppi loschi interessi all’ombra della ribellione. La mia rabbia di vendetta sarebbe stata più che giustificata da una suprema offesa alla mia personalità fisica, la mia integrità, Il mio fremo ma equo modo di governare le popolazioni libiche m’aveva creato un alone leggendario d’uomo, forte e giusto, le esse concepiscono e stimano un capo. La mia influenza e il mio ascendente personale.<sup>173</sup>

Here, he attempted to paint a portrait of himself as the leader of the ‘civilising mission’ in Libya, and by doing so, in his own words, ‘ho dato vita in Cirenaica’, by constructing roads, organising the funding of agricultural projects and defeating the ‘rebels’ who, according to him, were the root of Libya’s political, social and cultural problems, all of which he assured the reader was received so warmly by the grateful populace.<sup>174</sup> He gracefully ended his written self-defence by patriotically pleading that the reader remembers that all he did was in the name of the preservation of the honour of the nation, ‘mi appello alla patria, e solo alla patria proclamando netto che per essa e solo per essa noi giureremo e combatteremo’.<sup>175</sup>

Canevari’s work, whilst being slightly less audaciously arrogant than Graziani’s, also adamantly defended his actions and corroborates Graziani’s conclusion by stating that all he did was to ‘salvare onore d’Italia’.<sup>176</sup> His noble defence of Graziani is due both to his political leaning and the fact he was a self-proclaimed personal follower. He was quick to attain that the birth of the Salò Republic and Graziani’s noble role within it was an inevitable consequence of the grave judgement and errors of Badoglio and the King

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<sup>172</sup> Ibid, p. 39.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid, p. 38.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid, p. 39.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid, p. 177.

<sup>176</sup> E. Canevari, *Graziani mi ha detto* (Roma, 1948), p. 28.

of Italy, Vittorio Emanuele III.<sup>177</sup> He blamed the new Republic for their intentional and dishonest attempt ‘di rintracciare argomenti per montare il solito processo per criminalità di guerra’ as he argued that Graziani, was in fact completely apolitical.<sup>178</sup> He described Graziani’s days in prison whilst writing his memoirs, agreeing that he was right to defend his actions in Libya. He did, however, attempt to be pragmatic by admitting that:

La conquista coloniale non è una impresa di beneficenza i cui apostolici siano disposti a farsi massacrare dalle tribù indigene emanando con l’ultimo respiro grido di “viva la democrazia” o, per lo meno, non risulta che sia il sistema applicato dagli inglesi. è invece una operazione militare che ha per compito di raggiungere, con le minime perdite di vita umana dei soldati, la pacificazione del paese, la quale permette l’introduzione di quelle forme e mezzi di civiltà che tornino a beneficio così del popolo sottomesso come della madre patria.<sup>179</sup>

This sentence is highly interesting as it attempts to be modest, honest, and thus convincing, whilst ending in such a manner which is actually unapologetic for Graziani’s actions in Libya. In Ethiopia, however, he justified Graziani’s cruelty by other means. He attained that Graziani inherited an unfortunate situation, arriving in the capital with a small, tired, and underequipped army and being left alone to manage the highly volatile situation, and during the rainy period with extreme weather conditions.<sup>180</sup> He eloquently tried to conclude his thesis by suggesting that figures such as Graziani are in fact crucial to the history of Italy and the preservation of national identity:

In Italia l’autorità fu sempre incarnata da individualità. La storia italiana è appunto quella di grandi personalità al contrario della francese che è storia di una cultura: quando i capi mancarono, la vita italiana fu senza storia, come quella dei contadini.<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> Ibid, p. XII.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid, p. 9.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid, p. 14.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid, p. 23.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid, p. 189.

It is thus safe to say that both of these works attempted to preserve and defend the honour and memory of the general as a prelude not only to his trial but also to the future writing of Italian national histories. It is also important to note the title of Canevari's work, as it suggests that Graziani yet again was in charge of the making of his own memory through his narrative. Even if the books were not read by the entire Italian population and indeed foreign onlookers who did not read Italian, the main events in this chapter served to only temporarily shake the myth of Graziani and proved futile, as their outcome proved futile as mainstream society remembered him as he himself wished to be remembered, as the *Condottiere d'Africa*.

To conclude, the decision-making process taken by British policymakers at the culmination of World War II was responsible for the beginning of the warped memory of Graziani in post-war Italy and beyond. They consciously chose to prioritise international economic stability and political ideology over holding war criminals, such as Graziani, accountable for their unbridled violent actions. Although they could not predict Graziani's fate in Italy, by handing him back to the Italian government, they completely washed their hands of his adjudication. Likewise, the Italian government and judiciary not only failed to duly incarcerate him for his leading role in the RSI, but almost completely ignored all accusations against his career in the colonies. His trial in 1948 showed, that by giving Graziani the spotlight once more, he attempted and somewhat managed to manipulate it in his favour in order to preserve his positive image. These events cannot be overestimated enough due to the consequences they had on the popular memory of Graziani as a soldier who obediently followed orders, one who was devoid of wider responsibilities, and released as a free man back into the public realm.

## 7. Afterlife

The years which followed Graziani's 'blockbuster' trial and anticipated his death proved still rather eventful. His presence in the international press in this period may have waned significantly but this was far from reflective of his political life and significance in Italy, and more importantly, the wider space he retained in popular imagination near and far. The only changes we can see in this chapter compared to the previous ones are in fact the nature, focus and medium of Graziani's representation in the public eye during the last six years of his life and beyond.

Domestically, the same selective judicial accusations and judgement of his deeds and decisions in the chapter prior followed Graziani for a short while to no avail. Meanwhile, the staunchest and most relentless Fascists from the old order had regrouped and were hard at work attempting to restore their few surviving and untainted past glories, of which Graziani remained amongst the most prized. Having somewhat lost his prime position in the spotlight of the daily press which he had long enjoyed in previous years, the Ex-Maresciallo wholeheartedly embraced his new prominent role in these smaller political circles in the last years of his life. His related activities here reflect a blatant drive to retain the public attention and devotion which a narcissistic personality like his had grown to depend on. On a political level, the rupture with his past life, that also set the precedent for his memory in present day Italy, is seen in terms of scale. His platform of personal advocates and supporters for his political and colonial ideologies receded greatly from a national to a more concentrated local level. On a more cursory level, however, general popular interest in Graziani the celebrity remained consistent on a wider level for years to come.

Whilst his death early in 1955 marked an existential break with the past, as his funeral marked the last time that his name would appear on international headlines and his image stopped appearing in the immediate actualités of Italian public life, he stayed very much alive in various cultural forms worldwide. His legacy lived on in numerous publications which continued to be written by Italian supporters new and old, and in historical documentaries and dramas across continents in recent decades. Given the sheer volume and cultural forms available in recent years, every single mention cannot possibly be

accounted for. This chapter will therefore highlight and comment on the most prominent, controversial, and relevant cultural productions relating to the scope of this thesis.

*Prelude: The Movimento Sociale Italiano*

The *Movimento Sociale Italiano* (MSI) was formally founded as a political party in 1946 by previous prominent RSI members such as Giorgio Almirante and Arturo Michelini, the former having been a leading journalist during the *ventennio* and a key member of the RSI's Ministero della Cultura e Popolare. From the party founders themselves to Almirante's choice of the tricoloured flame as their formal emblem in 1947, which directly referenced the Arditi Association of Combatants from WWI (who were largely responsible for the Fascist take over in 1922), the nascent party unashamedly disclosed both its legacy and intent.

<sup>1</sup> One of the few scholars to conduct a thorough analysis of neo-fascist culture in Italy in the post-war period, Francesco Germinario, wrote that it relied on 'temi nostalgici' resulting in 'nessun' dubbio, quindi, che la RSI abbia svolto un ruolo centrale nell'immaginario politico-culturale del neofascismo italiano'.<sup>2</sup> Highlighting the obvious but necessary fact that the RSI bore the responsibility of having plunged the nation into a bloody world war which was then lost, Germinario argues that the MSI promoted 'un immagine lirica e estetizzata della RSI, ossia, l'Italia dei giovani volontari...accorsi a Salò per difendere l'onore della nazione'.<sup>3</sup> It thus desperately sought out the few remaining blatant and untarnished national symbols which provided their desired linearity between past and present.

As a military leader of the MSI's forebearers and surviving veteran, the recently released Graziani was warmly welcomed as an ideological weapon for such objectives. Germinario importantly notes that during his trial 'tutta l'autodifesa di Graziani ruotava dattorno alla rivendicazione della sua scelta provocata dalla necessita di difendere la patria minacciata dagli invasori, non il regime fascista'.<sup>4</sup> He had been vindicated from all legal accusations and tirelessly reiterated throughout the trial unwavering patriotism instead of politicism behind his actions during the war, and so proved himself once again

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<sup>1</sup> A. Mammone, *Transnational Neo Fascism in France and Italy* (Cambridge, 2015), p. 54.

<sup>2</sup> F. Germinario, *l'Altra memoria: l'estrema destra, Salò, e la Resistenza* (Torino, 1999), pp. 7-8.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 20 – 29.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, p. 53.

as a staunch war hero to devoted individuals of the far right. If he was not already a forerunner in a contest with limited candidates, his unanimous election as president of the *Federazione dei combattenti Repubblicani* in 1949 further cemented his prestige in neo-fascist circles.<sup>5</sup> His continued prominence in the public sphere in Italy continued to also be noted abroad, as evident in *The Illustrated London News* who published a smiling picture of him upon his acceptance of the presidency of the Republican veteran association (*figure 81*) and *The New York Times* who published the same photograph in their ‘personalities’ section.<sup>6</sup>



*Figure 76: ‘People in the Public Eye and Occasions of Note’, The Illustrated London News (5<sup>th</sup> January 1952), p. 23*

On a personal level, with his last trial behind him and the final amnesties from the war passed, by the beginning of 1952, Graziani found himself ‘fra i più odiati da una parte e fra i più idolatrati dall’altra’.<sup>7</sup> According to Gayda, his lack of acceptance of ‘la vera sentenza implicita nei suoi processi’ left ‘le sue certezze, le sue motivazioni, le sue idee,

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p. 43.

<sup>6</sup> Figure 76: ‘People in the Public Eye and Occasions of Note’, *The Illustrated London News* (5<sup>th</sup> January 1952), p. 23; ‘Personalities’, *The N.Y. Times* (6<sup>th</sup> January 1952), p. 26

<sup>7</sup> Mayda, *Graziani l’Africano*, p. 292.

le sue passioni' thoroughly intact.<sup>8</sup> He remained stubbornly ignorant, at least externally, to the fact that he was only in the fortunate position in which he found himself because he had been 'più fortunato di parecchi altri, più favorito di varie circostanze, e anche più capace di volgere a proprio vantaggio i casi della vita e le contingenze della propria carriera, ma non un soldato di prima grandezza'.<sup>9</sup> Most importantly, it is my contention that such a conceited man with such an immensely colourful and inescapably notorious past, knew no other alternatives other than survival in the spotlight. By this point, a public career was the only existence the 72-year-old saw for himself, the negative attention was worth it as long as his ego continued to enjoy a personal popular following.

Interestingly, nowadays Italian scholars and journalists continue only to relate Graziani to Italian politics from this moment onwards, as his whole career prior operating under Mussolini is still seen as completely separate from the political scene due to the Marshall's status primarily as a soldier. Mayda, for example, describes Graziani's formal adherence to the MSI as 'una nuova avventura: entrare in politica' and *Enciclopedia Treccani's* biographical account only references his participation 'alla vita politica' upon Graziani's nomination as the MSI party president in 1953.<sup>10</sup> This is testament to the perceived 'apolitical' nature of Graziani's life and career beforehand even amongst respected Italian writers and institutions. The broader implication of which, given what Graziani has grown to personify, is the continued belief in fascism and colonialism as two ideologies and entities which operated independently from each other during the *ventennio*.

As a consequence, Graziani formally announced his perceived 'political' career to *Il Giornale d'Italia* in October 1952 after being spotted in Milan at an MSI meeting, which he had previously tried to deny.<sup>11</sup> It hardly came as a surprise to the Italian public by this point, however, as he had also been the honorary speaker at a meeting of the *Ex-combattenti della Repubblica di Salò* earlier in April. There was also an account of him making 'an unscheduled speech in a crowd of pro-Fascists in Rome's ancient colosseum' in May 1952.<sup>12</sup> *The Baltimore Sun* reported that 'the ex-marshal addressed more than

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p, 294; Del Boca, 'Graziani, Rodolfo', *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*.

<sup>11</sup> 'Graziani s'iscrive al M.S.I.', *Corriere della Sera* (15 Ottobre 1952), p. 5.

<sup>12</sup> 'Graziani addresses Pro-Fascists in Rome', *The Baltimore Sun* (24<sup>th</sup> May 1952), p. 11.

100.000 persons by torchlight at the windup of the hotly-fought Italian municipal election campaign'.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, the most explosive political event to take place in 1952, when Graziani became the guest of honour a political rally which took place at his house in Arcinazzo early on the 5<sup>th</sup> of October, mere days before declaring his public allegiance to the MSI.<sup>14</sup> The rally immediately hit the national headlines in describing the event, where 175 neo-fascists who declared themselves 'arditi d'Annunziani' (after those who followed D'Annunzio during his nationalist takeover of the city of Fiume in 1919) travelled all the way from Milan by night in a convoy of vehicles to one of Graziani's houses near Rome armed with 'i fez neri...trombe, bandiere e gagliardetti'.<sup>15</sup> According to the article, Graziani was only notified of the event minutes beforehand, but seemed more than compliant as he:

Comparve verso le 8, dopo l'alzabandiera, in vestiti borghesi, ricoperti dal capotto militare...e ogni ardito stringendo la mano all'ex-comandante delle forze armate di Salò, elencò le guerre combattute. Più tardi fu servito il rancio mensa agli ufficiali, sottoufficiali e truppa distintamente con Graziani al tavolo degli ufficiali...alla fine, i centosettantacinque <fedelissimi> sfilarono davanti al cancello della tenuta mentre Graziani, sul piano rialzato della villa, li passava un'ultima volta in rivista.<sup>16</sup>

Even the mere title of the article, 'la marcia su Arcinazzo' cried fascist nostalgia as it recalled the staged coups which foresaw the fascist take over back in 1922. Notably 'Fascist' in nature was the ritualism of the synchronised journey of Graziani's followers, the military attire, the props and their utilisation at the event; namely the patriotic flag raising, and his final review of his 'soldiers' which LUCE newsreels had captured countless times before from his days in Africa. The presence of 'un operatore cinematografico (che) riprendeva le scene più interessanti della parata' alone suggested the organised nature of the political demonstration.<sup>17</sup> It was the primary focus of the weekly news magazine *l'Europeo*, which described with more detail the extent of

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> 'Un testamento ignoto di Mussolini?' *Il Corriere d'Informazione* (4 – 5 Aprile 1952), p. 1.

<sup>15</sup> 'Nella tenuta dell'ex-maresciallo Graziani: la marcia su Arcinazzo di centosettantacinque 'arditi', *Il Corriere d'Informazione* (7-8 Ottobre), p. 1.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.



orchestration and ‘carattere del riunione’; from the ‘esattezza militare’ and the instruction that ‘il viaggio doveva svolgersi a 55 chilometri all’ora, non un metro più non un metro meno’, to the synchronised unveiling of the military fez by each participant as soon as the convoy had visibly left the suburbs of Milan.<sup>18</sup> Although Graziani’s prior knowledge of the event remains in doubt as he addressed his audience in everyday clothing other than his military overcoat (*figure 77*), what remains clear is that the rally was organised to pay homage to him. This is evident not just from the behaviour of his visitors, but also from the chosen date on the anniversary of his first public discourse as Minister of Defence of the RSI at the Adriano which had taken place one year shy of a decade earlier.<sup>19</sup>



*Figure 77: ‘Il Caso Graziani’, l’Europeo (22 Ottobre 1952), front cover*

There were a few repercussions and significance of the event. Legally, public apologies of fascism had been banned under the Scelba Law of June that same year which

<sup>18</sup> Figure 77: ‘Il Caso Graziani’, *l’Europeo* (22 Ottobre 1952), front cover.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, p. 24.

specifically pointed to ‘manifestazioni esteriori di carattere fascista’ amongst other anti-fascist written measures.<sup>20</sup> Consequently, Graziani, along with 83 other people were investigated, but he defended the demonstration as ‘soltanto un omaggio di veterani un loro commilitone’, a declaration which will be eerily paraphrased over fifty years later to justify the monument built to him by his present-day followers, as we shall see.<sup>21</sup> According to *Il Corriere d’Informazione*, half of Graziani’s estate was to be confiscated in punishment of his participation in the offence, although no more details were disclosed other than the acknowledgement of his ownership of multiple properties in and around Rome.<sup>22</sup> However, further legal action could not be taken, given the fact that the manifestation took place on Graziani’s private, and not public property, but given no further mention of the fact in other relevant articles which followed, the measure was perhaps more of a warning given to appease the relatively strong and vocal Italian left. In fact, less than a month after his investigation, Graziani was called and granted by the Corte d’Assise as a reliable testimonial witness to the trial of partisans on trial for massacring a family who had strong ties to the RSI during WWII.<sup>23</sup> This is just one example of the state’s contradictory attitude to prominent Fascists like Graziani in the post-war period.

Another controversy which took place in the same period highlighting such hypocrisy was the case of MSI member and director of the southern newspaper *Il Meridiano d’Italia*, Francesco Servello was tried just 10 days after the event at Arcinazzo for ‘pubblica esaltazione d’un noto esponente del regime Fascista e della cosiddetta repubblica sociale italiana, nel campo politico e militare’.<sup>24</sup> He was accused of openly favouring Graziani during his trial in 1948 by releasing articles entitled ‘Viva Graziani, Viva L’Italia – Il cuore d’Italia è con Graziani’ and ‘Plebiscito di combattenti per il condottiero’.<sup>25</sup> The legal issue was the overt exaltation of a current member of the neo-fascist MSI Party, and therefore a Fascist apology prohibited under the recent Scelba

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<sup>20</sup> ‘Legge Scelba L. 645: Divieto di Riorganizzazione del disciolto partito fascista’, *La Gazzetta Ufficiale* (23 Giugno 1952), n.143.

<sup>21</sup> ‘La Manifestazione d’Arcinazzo: ex-maresciallo lungamente interrogato’, *Il Corriere d’Informazione* (13-14 Ottobre 1952) p. 1.

<sup>22</sup> ‘Meta dei beni di Graziani confiscati al favore dello stato’, *Corriere della Sera* (11 Ottobre 1952), p. 5.

<sup>23</sup> ‘Il Processo per la Strage Biamonte: L’ex-maresciallo Graziani citato come testimone’, *Il Corriere d’Informazione* (10-11 Novembre 1952), p. 1.

<sup>24</sup> ‘Si trascina dal 1948 una causa per l’esaltazione di Graziani’, *Il Corriere Milanese* (18 Ottobre 1952) p. 2.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

law. The accused defended himself by assuring the court that ‘egli intendeva esaltare soltanto virtù e gesta guerriere dell’ex-Maresciallo’, which was still seen by Italians as an accepted virtue of his.<sup>26</sup> Servello was, however, eventually given a one month prison sentence on the grounds which the judges believed that ‘l’imputato aveva fatto l’apologia di Graziani soprattutto per la sua opera al servizio del fascismo e non per la sua attività militare’.<sup>27</sup> A continuity can be seen here in what was largely perceived as problematic about Graziani as a public figure and what was not. Institutionally, the government and its organs had decided to take a firm stance on the unapologetically Fascist nature of the Marshall’s persona, and yet his military persona was permitted to remain completely intact and remained even admirable.

Popular support for left-wing politics was especially strong in this period due to the partisan victory during the recent war, mostly united under the common cause of anti-fascism. *Corriere della Sera* noted that left-wing newspapers were in fact the first to comment on the Arcinazzo rally and an unauthored journalist published an article in an issue of *l’Europeo* naming the participants ‘arcinazzisti’, fearing that this manifestation proved that:

oggi ci sono molti italiani che, anche se si offendono se li chiamate neofascisti, nel fondo del loro cuore sono pieni di nostalgia per il passato; e simpatizzano o per il MSI o per la monarchia. Ci sono infine gli altri, gli implacabili, coloro che sognano vasti massacri col pugnale fra i denti e le bombe a mano. Sono gli stessi che ieri si gloriavano del nome dei nazisti e che oggi, con emblemi funerei, fanno adunate nella tenuta di Graziani ad Arcinazzo.<sup>28</sup>

Graziani as a neo-fascist figure head and hero thus sparked considerable fear and discomfort amongst Italian anti-fascists. The incident at Arcinazzo even inspired an important scene in a controversial film called *Anni Facili*, released in 1953, which angered the right and led to Graziani denouncing the film which was seen by many as ‘volutamente scandalistico ferocemente autolesionistico sul clima morale degli

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<sup>26</sup> ‘Esaltazione continuata dell’ex-Maresciallo Graziani’, *Il Corriere Milanese* (8 Novembre 1952), p. 2

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> ‘Nella tenuta del ex-maresciallo’; ‘Parole nuove: l’Archinazzista’, *l’Europeo* (22 Ottobre 1952).

italiani'.<sup>29</sup> The plot alone was polarising enough as one of the protagonists, who had been a podestà under Mussolini, immediately ran for mayor with left-wing votes after WWII, and then found himself at the 'raduno' at Arcinazzo. This thus commented on the whimsical political allegiance of contemporary politicians and other prominent members of Italian society after the war. Graziani's personal reasons for reporting the film are unclear and possibilities are numerous: issues of representation, general ridicule of the neo-fascist reunion or Graziani himself, or even the notion that he lamented this cultural production relating to him, like many others beforehand on the simple basis that he was not involved in the making of the film, and thus as he had no control over the representation of his character.

The overall significance is that Graziani's public appearances in neo-fascist circles had managed to spark a considerable wave of anxiety amongst political opponents who believed him to be a potent enough threat to the vulnerable post-war Italian political context, given all which he had come to symbolise. According to *The Baltimore Sun*, the reasons for this were that his presence and stance with the MSI 'has thrown behind the neo-fascists such prestige as he retains as the highest-ranking old-time Fascist still alive'.<sup>30</sup> *The Christian Science Monitor* also commented on his undeniable attraction during these later appearances as in an article entitled 'Graziani's Fascist Halo Refurbished', it stated that 'Graziani not only can compose flamboyant prose – he has a flair for the theatre...there is something about Graziani – in his gestures and in his way of expressing himself'.<sup>31</sup>

From 1953, when he was named honorary president of the MSI, his politically campaigning on their behalf became ever more conspicuous. In April 1953, he ceremoniously raised the MSI flag in Perugia in Piazza Italia where 10,000 spectators watched and shouted <Viva Graziani>.<sup>32</sup> By doing so, he continued to polarise the Italian public as one of his rallies was halted by anti-fascist groups shouting <traditore> at him in May, and in June he was evacuated from Sicily 'per motivi di ordine

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<sup>29</sup> P. Cavallo, *Viva l'Italia: storia, cinema, e identità nazionale 1932-1962* (Napoli, 2009) p. 236.

<sup>30</sup> 'Today's Voting in Lower Italy', *The Baltimore Sun* (25<sup>th</sup> May 1952), p. 16.

<sup>31</sup> 'Graziani's Fascist Halo Refurbished', *The Christian Science Monitor* (27<sup>th</sup> October 1952), p. 9.

<sup>32</sup> Mayda, *Graziani l'Africano*, p. 301.

pubblico'.<sup>33</sup> The government, however, did nothing to intervene and in fact even legitimised his public presence on occasion. In May 1953, for example, he assisted Giulio Andreotti, senior member of the Democrazia Cristiana (DC) and undersecretary of the Prime Minister of the time, De Gasperi, again in Arcinazzo at a rally against the re-birth of fascism.<sup>34</sup> He did this by inviting Graziani to read a few pages from his book to which Graziani had the last words concluding that 'è semplicemente assurdo che si possa parlare di rinascita del fascismo'.<sup>35</sup> This cordial debate appears to have been a political warning on behalf of the DC, which was the party in power at the time, against political extremism either left or right, as the Christian Party was notoriously anti-communist.

*Time Magazine's* article on the event suggests that Graziani's involvement was due to the fact that locally he was 'Arcinazzo's best-known citizen' and therefore his fame was utilised by even the political opposition for electoral campaigning ahead of the national elections merely weeks later.<sup>36</sup> The government's utilisation of Graziani as a political aid at the public meeting not only suggests his continued symbolic importance in post-war Italian politics, but also the state's formal appeasement or reconciliation with his Fascist past, and by doing so certainly aided his rehabilitation in the eyes of the Italian public. Furthermore, Graziani's willing participation in the political event, despite heavy criticism by MSI members that justified his actions by stating he was 'undergoing a period of depression', signified that as was common with Graziani by this point, he was less politically driven but more personally driven by his desire for continued fame.<sup>37</sup>

What of the wider political relevance of the MSI in this period and Graziani's association with it? Constitutionally, the party was small but potent enough to receive more than 500,000 votes in the general election of April 1948. Culturally, however, the extreme right 'è rimasta costituzionalmente estranea alla cultura nazionale' for the time being.<sup>38</sup> Hence, Graziani's image as an active participant and leading figure of the party

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<sup>33</sup> 'Comizia di Graziani impedito dalla folla ad Alatri', *Corriere della Sera* (27 Maggio 1953), p. 6; 'L'ex-maresciallo allontanato dalla Sicilia', *Corriere della Sera* (6 Giugno 1953), p. 7.

<sup>34</sup> 'A un comizio di Andreotti interloquisce Rodolfo Graziani', *Il Corriere d'Informazione* (4-5 Maggio 1953).

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> 'The Marshall's Interruption', *Time Magazine* (18<sup>th</sup> May 1953)

<sup>37</sup> 'The Marshall's Interruption'

<sup>38</sup> Germinario, *Da Salò al Governo: Immaginario e cultura politica della destra italiana* (Torino, 2005), p. 2.

automatically led to his vilification amongst popular anti-fascist groups, a creed which now had to be institutionally upheld in the immediate post-war period, superficially at least. Anti-fascist government measures were, however, continuously undermined by a concrete lack of action against Graziani's political involvement and then further contradicted by his occasional recognition. This not only reflects general confusion in the post-war treatment of important members and pillars of Italian society and identity who had once been fervently Fascist, but also gives a clear indication of some clarity and continuity about one aspect of Graziani's character in particular. Official, national, and anti-fascist opinion was not preoccupied or confused about how it felt about Graziani the colonial soldier, who remained as honourable as ever in national consciousness.

### *Death, Funeral and Hagiographical Accounts*

Autumn 1954 marked the time in which Graziani 'sembrava d'aver dimenticato Roma e il mondo politico'.<sup>39</sup> He tended to his family land and according to his wife 'faceva la vita del proprietario di campagna. I suoi contadini gli volevano bene. Ogni tanto dei soldati che avevano combattuto sotto il suo comando e non lo avevano dimenticato gli scrivevano e venivano a trovarlo'.<sup>40</sup>

At the end of November, his recurring stomach ulcer began to cause the 72 year old severe health complications which drove him in and out of hospital between then and the 11<sup>th</sup> of January 1955, when he died at 6.10 am at the Sanatrix Clinic in Rome.<sup>41</sup> As with other important deaths which took place in Italy at the time, his was no different and was ritualistically orchestrated, deemed worthy of elevated treatment. His body was ceremoniously surrounded in a shrine of elegant black veils, the tricolour flag, and rose bouquets and candles, where nuns stayed by his bedside and prayed (*figure 78*).<sup>42</sup> According to *Corriere della Sera* 'come aveva desiderato poco prima della morte è stato vestito con la divisa sahariana', a field jacket typically worn by Italian soldiers on the North African campaign of WWII which he also wore during his second trial.<sup>43</sup> He reportedly received 'molti visitatori (chi) si sono recati a rendere omaggio alla salma,

<sup>39</sup> 'Resoconto di Ines Graziani sugli ultimi tempi del maresciallo e sulla morte', quoted in Mayda, *Graziani l'Africano*, p. 311.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> 'Stamane alle 6 in una clinica di Roma è morto Graziani', *Il Corriere d'Informazione* (11 Gennaio 1955) p. 2.

<sup>42</sup> Figure 78: *Graziani*, Rivista Roma (Roma, 1956), p. 427.

<sup>43</sup> 'l'Ex-Maresciallo è morto ieri in una clinica di Roma', *Corriere della Sera* (12 Gennaio 1955).

non appena la notizia si è diffusa nella città', among whom were all leading MSI members such as Valerio Borghese, but no official military representatives, other than the guards who stood outside the hospital to prevent any possible public disorder which his death may have caused.<sup>44</sup>



Figure 78: *Graziani*, Rivista Romana, p. 427

As with all famous deaths, newspapers accompanied the news with a shortened biography for readers. His biography published in *Corriere della Sera* traced his life using largely complimentary language about his early ventures in Africa and conveniently evaded more damning details. Whilst detailing his leadership in Libya in the 1920s, it stated that ‘Graziani combattè con grande energia e con metodi drastici per sottomettere nuovamente le popolazioni arabe dell’interno alla sovranità italiana’.<sup>45</sup> It continued with no mention of the atrocities he committed during his primary role in the conquest of Ethiopia or indeed following his attempted assassination in 1937. Further compassion followed for the Ex-Maresciallo as the article mentioned that ‘Mussolini

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> ‘Stamane alle 6 in una clinica di Roma è morto Graziani’.

mandava Graziani a coprire quel posto pieno di responsabilità al quale andava anche connesso il comando di tutte le Forze armate dell’Africa Settentrionale’.<sup>46</sup> The account absolved him of all accused crimes and even argued that the only reason Graziani accepted his controversial post in the RSI was because he was ‘interrogato’ and so ‘si dedicò con ardore (e) fece quanto potè’ given the circumstances.<sup>47</sup> Additionally, *Oggi* published a photographic spread about ‘una delle figure più rappresentative del periodi di storia italiana’ (figure 79).<sup>48</sup> The illustrated weekly importantly noted that ‘la parte più discussa della vita dell’ex Maresciallo è quella che riguarda la sua collaborazione col governo della repubblica di Salò ch’egli potenziò, col prestigio che gli veniva dal suo passato militare indubbiamente glorioso’.<sup>49</sup>



Figure 79: ‘La sua guerra è finita adesso’, *Oggi* (20 Gennaio 1955), pp. 26 - 27

Unlike mainstream Italian papers and magazines, The Communist Party (PCI) Paper *l’Unità* at least revealed the ‘sanguinose, incivili repressioni’ carried out by Graziani during the Ethiopian War in its biographical account.<sup>50</sup> It also mentioned the ‘nuove violente repressioni contro i patrioti abissini’ in February 1937, and by utilising the term ‘patrioti’ to reference communist anti-colonial sentiment which it now shared in the 1950s with other international leftist political groups.<sup>51</sup> The paragraphs dedicated to Salò were, however, much more lengthy and included a long list of his offences in Italy during

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Figure 79: ‘La sua guerra è finita adesso’, *Oggi* (20 Gennaio 1955), p. 26 - 27

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> ‘è morto Graziani’, *l’Unità* (12 Gennaio 1955), p. 2.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.



WWII such as ‘collaborando con i tedeschi, facendosi animatore...ordini reclutamento e bandi con minacce di pene terroristiche, dispendendo rastrellamenti sistematici’, all of which were condemned as ‘infamanti delitti’.<sup>52</sup> The next day *l’Unità* also expressed its discontent that the head commissioner of Rome allowed a manifesto that ‘i neofascisti del MSI hanno affisso sui muri di Roma ... per esaltare la figura dell’ex maresciallo traditore’.<sup>53</sup> It was not clear what the exact nature of the intended ‘omaggio alla memoria del Graziani’ was, but it apparently read that ‘il grande soldato della patria’ deserved to be commemorated due to his work ‘a promuovere oltre i confine la potenza e la dignità di Roma’.<sup>54</sup> Thus, whilst written attention was paid by *l’Unità* to Graziani’s committed atrocities in Africa, they remained merely a side note to the more conspicuous purpose the left-wing had of him as a national ‘traditore’ highlighting his crimes against anti-Fascists.

On an international scale sensationalist headlines of his passing exploded on foreign papers. For example, *The Daily Mail* of Britain entitled their article “the Butcher of Libya’ is Dead. Graziani...a name that Held Terror” (*figure 80*).<sup>55</sup> It rather accurately opened by stating that ‘Graziani, Viceroy of Mussolini’s African Empire, lived a life of cruelty and dazzling success’.<sup>56</sup> The article wrote vaguely of how ‘he ruled mercilessly’ in Ethiopia but with no further detail of specific evidence.<sup>57</sup> It noted rather sarcastically that ‘the national hero... was hailed in Italy for the Italian Army’s victories over spear-carrying Abyssinians’, a comment that patronised both the Italians for their military performance and Abyssinians for their underdeveloped methods of warfare.<sup>58</sup> *The Manchester Guardian*’s obituary also reported that in Libya he was responsible for ‘the filling up of wells so that human refugees died of thirst and the dropping of rebels on their villages from aircraft’.<sup>59</sup> Although it is important that Graziani’s violent excesses during the Libyan campaign were mentioned here, they were done so rather sensationally, briefly and inaccurately. It is undeniable that Graziani committed such horrific acts, given the abhorrent nature of his other crimes, but the complete lack of

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> ‘Manifesti per un traditore’, *l’Unità* (13 Gennaio 1955), p. 2.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Figure 80: ‘Butcher of Libya’ is Dead. Graziani...a name that held Terror’, *The Daily Mail Reporter* (12 January 1955), p. 5.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> ‘Obituary: Marshal Graziani’ *The Manchester Guardian* (12<sup>th</sup> January 1955), p. 4.

evidence surrounding these particular assertions compared to the overwhelmingly evidentiary support of his use of poison gas, suggests that these were just journalistic fabricated rumours to indulge readership.



Figure 80: "Butcher of Libya' is Dead. Graziani...a name that held Terror", *The Daily Mail Reporter* (12 January 1955), p. 5

Of prime importance to the British, however, was reminding the British public of a quote from his trial that "I have always and will always hate the English".<sup>60</sup> The relevance of Graziani's death to British commentators was thus his past relationship with Great Britain and their victory over him in the North African campaign. This is most evident in *The Times* obituary which opened with the boastful sentence: 'Marshal Rodolfo Graziani was a successful colonial soldier who found that his tactics were outclassed when he was opposed by a European enemy'.<sup>61</sup> *The Manchester Guardian's* obituary further emphasised this notion by writing that 'Marshal Rodolfo Graziani, who led

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> 'Marshal Graziani: The War in the Desert', *The Times* (12<sup>th</sup> January 1955) p. 10.

Italian troops against Abyssinia in 1936, was defeated in the desert by General Wavell in 1940-41'.<sup>62</sup> Over half of the whole article was then dedicated to a thorough analysis of his military failure against the Allies in 1940 as according to the writer 'against General Wavell Graziani's natural caution overcame him'.<sup>63</sup> It was clearly deemed vital to mention that Graziani's military talent had not matched that of the British, and less important to accurately report his colonial crimes.

Mainstream North American papers followed in a similar vein by reporting on both Graziani's colonial crimes and his role against the Allies in World War II. *The New York Times* accurately observed that in Italy 'he reached his pinnacle of fame and glory after his ruthless conquest of Ethiopia in 1936' before moving on to the North African Campaign by concluding that 'Allied power proved too much'.<sup>64</sup> The paper's dual focus on his fight against the Allies was also coupled with that of his brutal behaviour, when he 'began his last-ditch struggle (in Libya) which typified the vigorous aggressive man, whose tactics of extermination in the 'pacification' of foes had carried for him the title, the Butcher of Libya'.<sup>65</sup> *The New York Herald Tribune* echoed this dual emphasis by opening the news of his death with the statement that 'former Marshal Rodolfo Graziani, seventy-two, grizzled old "Desert Lion" who commanded Mussolini's last-ditch Fascist stand against the Allies in World War II died in a clinic today'.<sup>66</sup> The paper then accurately described how he was perceived differently in Italy and in Africa by stating that 'Graziani, who stood six feet four inches tall, had a period of rather tawdry glory when he was regarded as Italy's most colorful soldier. Described seriously as "the Scourge of Libya", "The African" and "The Butcher", he made his reputation largely in Africa through the pacification of Libya in 1922 and the conquest of Ethiopia in 1935-36'.<sup>67</sup> However, no more details of his colonial crimes were given in the article, again suggesting that journalistic sensationalism led the decision to print the more damning titles which had been given to him rather than the desire to publish the atrocities he committed.

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<sup>62</sup> 'Obituary: Marshal Graziani'.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> 'Marshal Rodolfo Graziani Dies; Leader of Italy's Army in Africa' *The N.Y. Times* (12<sup>th</sup> January 1955), p. 12.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> 'Marshal Graziani, 72, Dies', *The N.Y. Herald Tribune* (12<sup>th</sup> January 1955), p. 20.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

Interestingly and rather surprisingly, the popular New-York based *Progresso Italo-Americano*, which had been previously damning of the marshall, now ignored Graziani's colonial crimes completely during its long article surrounding his death and rather exalted him for 'la prima organizzazzione civile ed economica' upon becoming Vicere.<sup>68</sup> It continued in this vein during a follow-up about Graziani's funeral by reintroducing him as 'uno dei principali artefici dell'Impero', just as Fascist propaganda had referred to him from 1936 onwards.<sup>69</sup> The account also emphasised his vast popularity amongst Italians of all ages as spotted 'tra la folla si vedevano uomini dalla barba bianca e ragazzi'.<sup>70</sup> Conversely, the only African-American paper to comment on Graziani's death was *The Pittsburgh Courier* as the majority were perhaps uninterested in the death of a foreign figure, who had caused their communities so much trauma that they were all too keen to forget for the moment. *The Pittsburgh Courier*, however, was rather blunt in announcing that the 'determined supporter of neo-fascism in Italy died in bed last week in Rome instead of perishing on the gallows for his crimes'.<sup>71</sup> It candidly stated that:

Here was a ruthless butcher who bombed defenceless Ethiopians from the air, rounded up and slaughtered thousands of black men and women fighting for their native land ... and he faithfully served the Sawdust Caesar Mussolini until the latter met his deserved reward. While other war criminals with less blood on their hands were tried as war criminals, jailed or executed, Graziani was tapped on the wrist and served in all but fourteen months, the Allies having refused to turn him over to Ethiopia for trial.<sup>72</sup>

The last sentence of the excerpt emotionally evoked the continued pain that those affected by Graziani's terror harboured upon his death; 'it is a measure of the injustice of the post-war world that this butcher should have died so peacefully in bed'.<sup>73</sup> The

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<sup>68</sup> 'è morto Rodolfo Graziani per collasso cardiaco', *Il Progresso Italo-Americano* (12 Gennaio 1955), pp. 1-2.

<sup>69</sup> '100.000 persone presenti ai funerali di Graziani', *Il Progresso Italo-Americano* (14th Gennaio 1955), p. 3.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> 'The Butcher Dies in Bed', *The Pittsburgh Courier* (22<sup>nd</sup> January 1955), p. 14.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

article therefore openly reflects the enduring grievances that the dead Marshall left in his wake, unreconciled burdens which would long outlive him.

When it came to his funeral, the press' focus shifted from interest in the life of Graziani to the immensity of the public event and commotion that it caused. Initially there was much deliberation over the possible location of his funeral which was meant to take place at the centrally located church designed by Michelangelo, Santa Maria degli Angeli. Continued preoccupation over the possible threat to public order that the event would cause, however, led to the choice of the perhaps more appropriate and modest Fascist Era church of San Roberto Bellarmino in the Parioli district of Rome, near where he had once lived.<sup>74</sup> It took place on the 13<sup>th</sup> of January and was attended by all MSI members, including Mussolini's wife and the mayor of Naples.<sup>75</sup> Afterwards, his body was carried out of the church 'avvolto nel tricolore e recato a braccia da sei veterani delle campagne d'Africa' which ended up in a street procession across the city.<sup>76</sup> According to the New York Times, the procession 'turned into one of the greatest neo-fascist demonstrations since World War II'.<sup>77</sup> *The New York Herald Tribune* described it further as 'a hundred thousand Romans raised their arms in the forbidden blackshirt and roared Fascist battle hymns in a funeral demonstration today for ex-Marshal Rodolfo Graziani' for many hours of the day.<sup>78</sup> Although most newspapers, such as *The Times* stated that the crowds who went to see Graziani's coffin were primarily 'youths of the neo-fascist party' and 'ex-combatants', *The Chicago Daily Tribune* wrote that women of all ages were present and many 'women pushed through the crowd to through mimosa and violets on the flag draped coffin as it was carried past on the shoulders of Italy's new fascist leaders'.<sup>79</sup> This suggests that his 'fan base' in this period was still large not the mere preserve of extreme-right wing supporters, and his appeal to women remained. A photograph of the crowd of people during the procession from above demonstrates just how many people came to pay their respects, although the many of them are performing the fascist salute (*figure*

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<sup>74</sup> 'L'Ex Maresciallo è morto ieri in una clinica di Roma'.

<sup>75</sup> 'L'ascaro Abdallameh sviene dietro il feretro di Graziani', *Il Corriere d'Informazione* (13 Gennaio 1955), p. 1.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> 'Funeral of Graziani in Rome Sets off Big Demonstration of Neo-Fascist Party', Special to *The N.Y. Times* (14<sup>th</sup> January 1955), p. 8.

<sup>78</sup> 'Graziani Hailed at Funeral: 100,000 Give Fascist Salute', *The N.Y. Herald Tribune* (14<sup>th</sup> January 1955), p. 8.

<sup>79</sup> 'Funeral of Marshal Graziani', *The Times* (14<sup>th</sup> January 1955), p. 11; 'Fascists Sing and Salute at Graziani Rites', *The Chicago Daily Tribune* (14<sup>th</sup> January 1955), p. 4.

81).<sup>80</sup> One can only just see a tiny white rectangle, which was Graziani's covered coffin with his military hat placed on top.



Figure 81: 'un aspetto della folla: funerali di Graziani', *Graziani*, Rivista Romana, p. 386

After the procession, as reported by *The New York Herald Tribune* 'Graziani's body was taken to Affile and buried in the local cemetery. Church bells tolled as the hearse passed the villages on the way'.<sup>81</sup> The street procession was discussed to no avail in the Italian parliament in order to trace the instigators as it would have been prohibited under the Scelba Law as an act of Fascist apology, given the uniforms worn by many of the participants and the open display of the Fascist salute.<sup>82</sup> It was reported though, that the large police force present appeared to be more eager to prevent disorders than to enforce the legal ban on neo-fascist demonstrations', so no action was taken to halt the event.<sup>83</sup> Although the accused instigators maintained that it was 'improvvisato', *The Times*

<sup>80</sup> Figure 81: 'un aspetto della folla: funerali di Graziani', *Graziani*, Rivista Romana, p. 386.

<sup>81</sup> 'Graziani Hailed at Funeral: 100,000 give Fascist Salute'.

<sup>82</sup> 'Strascichi parlamentari dei funerali di Graziani', *Corriere della Sera* (16 Gennaio 1955), p. 5.

<sup>83</sup> 'Funeral of Graziani in Rome Sets off Big Demonstration of Neo-Fascist Party'.

highlighted the unlikelihood of this affirmation given the sheer quantity of participants, as it stated that ‘there were many notices in Rome to-day calling on “Combatant Italians” to salute the former marshal’, suggesting the event had been organised.<sup>84</sup> So, Graziani’s funeral not only demonstrated how popular he was in the capital and surrounding areas, but also shows that his death provided a political opportunity for neo-fascists to turn the funeral into a political statement, given what Graziani had come to symbolise for them, and consequently onlookers.

There were a few immediate public attempts to commemorate Graziani shortly after his death and funeral which mostly caused violent heated discussions that had to be forcibly ended by intervention. At the end of January, less than a fortnight after his passing there was an incident at Castellammare just outside Naples when a Graziani sympathiser raised the proposition of locally commemorating him at a communal meeting.<sup>85</sup> Consequently, ‘i consiglieri comunisti e socialisti si sono levati in piedi per avventarsi sull’assessore, e uscieri e consiglieri democristiani sono dovuti prontamente intervenire per evitare l’urto’, and in the end ‘è stato necessario un massiccio intervento della forza pubblica per fare eseguire l’ordine del sindaco di sgombrare l’aula’.<sup>86</sup> Shortly afterwards, in February, another attempt to commemorate Graziani in the southern city of Benevento was also noted in an article in *Corriere della Sera*.<sup>87</sup> The late Marshall had only just passed away and there were already calls for the concretisation of his memory which caused contention and violence. It reached the headlines as it caused ‘le proteste dei rappresentanti della sinistra’ and ‘violenti scontri tra il pubblico foltissimo’.<sup>88</sup> *The Daily Telegraph* also noted the violent result of an attempt to honour Graziani’s death, when a riot broke out in the Italian Chamber of Deputies as ‘a spokesman for the MSI tried to make an ovation in honour of the late Marshal Graziani who died last week’.<sup>89</sup> The event ended in a ‘brawl’ and in an attempt ‘to fight on the floor of the house’ before ‘order was restored after ten minutes’.<sup>90</sup> These events, albeit localised, not only foresaw his commemoration and the controversy it created, but also highlight the contentious

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<sup>84</sup> ‘Funeral of Marshal Graziani’.

<sup>85</sup> ‘Incidenti a Castellammare per la commemorazione di Graziani’, *Corriere della Sera* (25 Gennaio 1955), p. 7.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> ‘Tafferugli a Benevento per la commemorazione di Graziani’, *Corriere della Sera* (1 Febbraio 1955), p. 4.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> ‘Graziani Praise Starts Brawl’, *The Daily Telegraph* (19<sup>th</sup> January 1955), p. 7.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

aspect to his memorialisation, as the debates all took place between the political Italian left and right.

Once the commotion caused by his death, funeral and various commemorations died down, the next few years saw the Graziani name printed on Italian papers as hearsay and gossip regarding his surviving family, will, and the confiscation of his property by the state. Additionally, all of his documentation or 'carteggio' became the centre of controversy as it was unwillingly confiscated from his family and deposited in the state archive, which is where it remains today.<sup>91</sup> However, my research experience strongly suggests that the files held in the archive are not complete as there seem to be large missing pieces of information and general disorganisation, perhaps due to his family retaining some documents and others residing in Allied archives in Washington and London. Therefore, in the 1950s, the memory of Graziani the man, soldier, and politician was largely transferred from the headlines to the pages of printed books and special issues in various magazines. These publications were all hagiographical accounts published by right-wing sympathisers who attempted to keep their version of memory alive on its pages. One such example was a 35 page illustrated supplement to neo-fascist satirical weekly magazine *l'Asso di Bastoni* entitled 'Il Leone Bianco: Vita eroica di Rodolfo Graziani' (figure 82).<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> 'Il carteggio di Graziani a disposizione dell'archivio di Stato', *Corriere della Sera* (7 Agosto 1957), p. 6

<sup>92</sup> Figure 82: 'Il Leone Bianco. vita eroica di Rodolfo Graziani', *l'Asso di Bastoni* (Gennaio 1955) Suppl. al fasc. n. 16.





Figure 82: 'Il Leone Bianco. Vita Eroica di Rodolfo Graziani', *l'Asso di Bastoni* (Gennaio 1955) Suppl. al fasc. n. 16

From the outset, it opened devotedly with his death when:

Il grande cuore di Rodolfo Graziani ha cessato di battere. La coscienza nazionale è stata folgorata dalla triste e inaspettata notizia e dall'un capo all'altro dell'Italia milioni di ex combattenti, di italiani degni di questo nome, hanno chinato il capo per onorare la memoria del soldato, che ha grandemente onorato la Patria.<sup>93</sup>

It then immediately adopted a political tone as it continued by stating that:

La patria vera s'intende, non quella di princisbecco confezionataci dalla cosiddetta <liberazione> e rappresentata da una classe dirigente troppo vile

<sup>93</sup> Ibid, p. 3.

e troppo meschina per esser capace di sollevarsi al livello di un gigante dello spirito qual' era il Maresciallo Graziani.<sup>94</sup>

This statement utilised Graziani's as a 'moral' counterpoint to anti-fascist partisans and left-wing supporters in the continued struggle between the Italian left and right for the establishment of a 'national' memory of World War II. It encouraged the official neo-fascist version of Graziani's memory to its readership by continuing:

Graziani è sempre rimasto per il popolo, il Maresciallo: non <uno> dei Marescialli d'Italia, ma <il> Maresciallo, l'unico a cui potesse correre istintivamente il pensiero degli italiani non appena accadeva di sentire o di leggere di questo grado supremo.<sup>95</sup>

The writer also noted and predicted that:

la verità è che per l'enorme maggioranza del popolo italiano, Graziani è sempre stato intimamente legato alla nostra espansione coloniale, e rimarrà quindi nei secoli il simbolo di quello che fu il nostro superbo slancio d'oltremare... perciò Graziani rimarrà per gli italiani un simbolo.<sup>96</sup>

Before turning to the 30-page biography of his life entitled 'il prodigio di Neghelli', the introduction lyrically concluded with a poem which echoed those sent to him by admirers back in 1936 that ended with an atmospheric verse:

e chi addita la strada di Neghelli  
attraverso le macchie e la boscaglia?  
Il tuo gesto, Graziani, e la tua voce.<sup>97</sup>

By this point, 'la memorialistica' of fascism on behalf extreme-right wing groups spoke less of a rebirth of fascism which appeared highly unlikely in the 1950s, and more of

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Mario Castellaci, 'l'Africano' cited in Ibid.

general patriotic ‘temi del sacrificio e della purificazione (che) dominavano i linguaggi della commemorazione dei defunti’.<sup>98</sup> As seen with the excerpts above about Graziani’s life, the primary aim of the writer was to show that ‘non si trattava più di fascismo, si trattava di onore, dignità’.<sup>99</sup>

Similarly, in the year following his death, two monumental hardback volumes, each of them reaching nearly 500 typed pages were published by self-professed personal followers. The first, plainly titled *Graziani*, was written by multiple authors, who all appear to have been members of the RSI during the war, amongst which were the politician Piero Pisenti and writer Emilio Canevari. It was published in a ‘collana di studi storici’ by a right-wing Roman publishing house called *Rivista Romana* and proclaimed itself a ‘libro di storia e memoria’.<sup>100</sup> By categorising the work primarily as a serious historical text, the writers and editorial attempted to legitimise their version of the story of Graziani so the attempted control of history writing on behalf of the extreme right is blatant in this example. The book opened with the photograph of a shrine dedicated to Graziani which included a stone relief of his head and two quotes by Michelangelo, and naturally D’Annunzio, then stating that ‘egli appartene al mondo dei grandi solitari’.  
(figure 83)<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> G. Schwarz, ‘La morte nell’Italia post-fascista’, in O. Janz, & L. Klinkhammer (eds.) *La morte per la patria*, p. 240.

<sup>99</sup> U. Franzolin, ‘I Vinti di Salò’ in Janz & Klinkhammer, *La morte per la patria*, pp. 205-206.

<sup>100</sup> *Graziani*, *Rivista Romana*, premessa.

<sup>101</sup> Figure 83: *Graziani*, premessa.



*Figure 83: Graziani, Rivista Romana, premessa*

The first chapter is also clear with the scope that ‘si è voluto rievocare e difendere l’ultimo tempo della vita di Graziani, quello che è segnato dal più alto spirito di sacrificio, nella certezza di incontrare il consenso del suo animo insonne’.<sup>102</sup> These national ‘sacrifices’ were explained as:

A distanza di cinquant’anni, il grande soldato vigilava le frontiere della Patria: nel deserto, quando tutte le speranze giovanili arridevano al suo destino; sulle Alpi, quando già la certezza della tragica fine della guerra era, in tutti gli spiriti evidente, ma non li piegava.<sup>103</sup>

<sup>102</sup> Ibid, p. 17.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

The references here were to his career in Africa and in the RSI, both deemed as among the most glorious patriotic events of the *ventennio* by neo-fascists. The introduction ends with a decisive line which leaves no ambiguities to the reader of what the intended scope of the book was as it reads: *per chi crede nell'avvento di un nuovo Umanesimo, la vita di Rodolfo Graziani è un esempio e un auspicio sicuro*'.<sup>104</sup> Likewise, on the first page of the first chapter just before the narration of Graziani's childhood, a tenacious line states *'l'eroe, come il poeta, è a mezza strada fra Dio e gli uomini'*.<sup>105</sup> This statement encompasses the intended mythicization of the memory of Graziani in the most direct way possible. The main body of the book then followed with a detailed hagiographical account of his life coupled with many photographs (utilised through this thesis), exalting his character, physique, choices, and actions on every page in similar vein to the many celebratory accounts analysed in previous chapters. It ended with a fifteen-page poem or an *'canto per Rodolfo Graziani presente, oltre le frontiere di ieri, di oggi, e di domani'* as these printed pages were designed for longevity and to ensure the preservation of the future myth of Graziani.<sup>106</sup>

The second published work was similar in many respects. It was written by two authors, Emilio Faldella who had been a military general in the RSI and previously a secret agent for the Fascist government, and Titta Madia, who had been a lawyer, politician and journalist and held a post in the MSI. On this note, the work was clearly also an overwhelmingly positive account of Graziani's life, and similarly began its narrative by comparing him to an infamous historical figure, who was Napoleon in this case, as soldiers they apparently were both *'fulminei nell'esecuzione, ma ponderati nella preparazione'*.<sup>107</sup> The book was divided into two parts, one that examined *'l'uomo'* and the other analysing *il soldato*', an attempt to show the multifaceted attributes and skills of Graziani as *'non solo un comandante: nella terra conquistata è anche un politico e un organizzatore'*.<sup>108</sup> The long mentioned accusations of Graziani's conduct in AOI were fervently denied in favour of mainstream post-colonial narratives that he:

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid, p. 18.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid, p. 23.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid, p. 398.

<sup>107</sup> E. Faldella & T. Madia, *Rodolfo Graziani: l'Uomo, il Soldato* (Roma, 1956), p. 7.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid, p. 31.

vigorosamente affermando il prestigio della potenza italiana, cautamente iniziando la grandiosa mole dei lavori pubblici, accortamente avvicinandosi alla mentalità del popolo. Talvolta gli si avventa contro, rinnovandola, l'accusa di crudeltà.<sup>109</sup>

Despite their obvious political leanings, the authors also typically attempt to distance the memory of Graziani from that of the condemned ideology of fascism as they assert that 'sulla guerra ideologica non esprime giudizi. Non una impostazione contro le democrazie, non un appalto delle dittature. Si direbbe che egli sia estraneo alle ideologie dei due blocchi'.<sup>110</sup>

This book did, however, differ from the previous one in printing some assertions that are coherent with this thesis and have not been seen in other relevant written analyses. It states that 'narrare la vita di Rodolfo Graziani vuol dire sfogliare la storia dell'ultimo cinquantennio italiano'.<sup>111</sup> In my opinion, this affirmation is correct as his life spanned some of the most important events of 20<sup>th</sup>-century Italian History with him acting as a leading protagonist in them. The authors are also sure that 'il popolo non rimane indifferente; o almeno non tutto il popolo rimane indifferente' referring to the immediate post-war period, which is further congruent with this thesis.<sup>112</sup> However, their belief that 'morendo Rodolfo Graziani, moriva un poco lui stesso: ognuno moriva un poco' is one which was certainly felt by the authors as ideological members of the extreme-right and personal followers of Graziani, but not representative of the whole Italian population, as many ex-partisans and their supporters had grown to vilify him and others were undoubtedly indifferent.<sup>113</sup>

Equally important as written text was the production of commemorative memorabilia which marked Graziani's death and came in many forms which is available for purchase online or in second-hand markets and specialised shops today. They ranged from commemoration cards and booklets to postcards and medallions and are openly sold across Italy. One example which I found online is a pocket size death commemoration

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid, p. 47.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid, p. 115.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid, p. 87.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid, p. 233.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid, p. 240.

card which depicts an image reproduction of a commemorative medallion (*figure 84*).<sup>114</sup> On the picture you can see Graziani's romanticised image, utilising the myth of Rome with a classical column behind a sculpted profile of Graziani evoking ancient emperors. The heroic quote which followed beneath was self-explanatory in its aim of fervently justifying his actions during his life for his military service to the nation by stating 'vado sereno al giudizio di dio perché ho sempre fatto il mio dovere'.<sup>115</sup> Another example of a commemorative medallion found for sale is similar in function to the previous one with its aim of 'onore e memoria' of the late marshall (*figure 85*).<sup>116</sup> According to Ganapini all of these 'simboli funerari, insegne di morte, l'iconografia' created a community of guerrieri through which the memory of fascism could continue.<sup>117</sup> Therefore, the emphasis now was on creating a legitimate historical narrative of their past for a 'positive' memory of fascism against the contrasting accounts from the resistance.



Indeed, the two books, along with the other right-wing publications and memorabilia which circulated around the metropole in the period were clearly not reflective of the beliefs of every section of Italian society, even though they were designed to authoritatively appear as such.

<sup>114</sup> Figure 84: Death Commemoration Card Bought on Ebay.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Figure(s) 85 (both sides): Commemorative Medallion bought on Ebay.

<sup>117</sup> Ganapini cited in Germinario, *Da Salò al governo*, p. 22.

Internationally, the only memorabilia pertaining to Graziani was that of a military nature for war enthusiasts. Some sort of playing or collectable card was produced and sold in London in the 1970's, as he emerged as one of the leading military figures of the century (*figure 86*).<sup>118</sup> Although this example doesn't directly exalt Graziani, the mere existence of the card places him uncritically at the forefront of recent global history. All of these material objects, whether they were printed books or much smaller scale goods are significant in the preservation of the myth of Graziani in his afterlife as they circulated both the public private sphere when they were sold and bought by civilians, kept for intended longevity which has allowed them to remain intact and resurface today.



*Figure 86: 'Marshal Graziani: Italian Fascist Commander' Card, Popperfoto London (1977)*

### *Film, State Censorship & Fascist Rehabilitation*

Despite the waning of Graziani's presence in national culture in the 1960s, it was not long before notable interest in him resurfaced, in this case in the form of the first serious historical analyses of the *ventennio*. Across the Western world, the tumultuous 60s was the decade which saw the Eichmann Trial take place in Israel, the Cold War was at its peak, and a general wind of change which brought about a wave of historical revisionism

<sup>118</sup> Figure 86: 'Marshal Graziani: Italian Fascist Commander' Card, Popperfoto London (1977).



of the modern era. A generational transition had taken place across Europe and the mere benefit of time and hindsight had allowed the wounds of war to heal enough to allow fresh insight and stimulated the desire to revisit the depressing era of totalitarianism amongst intellectuals.<sup>119</sup> This trend could also be seen in Italy, but as always national peculiarities played a significant part in moulding the impetus, essence, and reach of scholarly research. Facilitated by an increased access to relevant sources in State archives, ‘the debate on fascism itself began in earnest’ with the likes of De Felice’s infamous biography of Mussolini and Alberto Aquarone’s in-depth study into the organisation of the Fascist regime.<sup>120</sup>

In Italy itself, the late 1960s marked the beginning of the infamous ‘anni di piombo’ which were defined by political terrorism, namely bombings and assassinations by extremist groups of the political right and left wing. Naturally, this ongoing violent conflict sparked a public, and not merely academic preoccupation with the country’s recent Fascist past. As the most extreme and contentious period of Italian Fascism, interest in Graziani exclusively surrounded his role in the RSI, which was picked up by historical magazines specialised in military history such as *Storia delle Forze Armate della R.S.I* who published a 20-page special edition spread to Graziani’s *Armata Liguria*.<sup>121</sup> It gave a very detailed and rather uncritical overview of his movements with his troops between 1943 – 1945 and included maps and public speeches he made. In a similar vein, a 2-hour film entitled *Mussolini ultimo atto* was directed by the ex-partisan Carlo Lizzani in 1974 (*figure 87*).<sup>122</sup> Mussolini and Graziani were the film’s protagonists as it detailed the last few days of the RSI when they were both being hunted, although Graziani continued to be represented as the lesser evil compared to the Duce.<sup>123</sup> It is rumoured that a showing of the film in Savona may have sparked the first of ‘le bombe di Savona’ near the cinema whilst the film was being shown by members of an extreme right-wing terrorist group called Ordine Nero. Shortly after, in 1985, Graziani became the sole protagonist of a similar film, this time shown on the national channel Rai Tre as

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<sup>119</sup> P. Finney, ‘The Stories of Defeated Aggressors: International History, National Identity and Collective Memory after 1945’ in J. Macleod, (ed.) *Defeat and Memory: Cultural Histories of Military Defeat in the Modern Era*, (N.Y. 2008) p. 106.

<sup>120</sup> J. Davis, ‘Modern Italy – Changing Historical Perspectives since 1945’, in M. Bentley (ed.) *Companion to Historiography* (N.Y. 1997), p. 586.

<sup>121</sup> ‘Documenti del Nostro Tempo’, *Storia delle Forze Armate della Repubblica Sociale Italiana* (1 Novembre 1967).

<sup>122</sup> *Figure 87: Mussolini Ultimo Atto* directed by C. Lizzani (1974).

<sup>123</sup> ‘Il film sulla fine del Duce’, *Corriere della Sera* (5 Aprile 1974).

part of a series called ‘teatro-storia: fatti e protagonisti del XX secolo’.<sup>124</sup> Again, the film focused solely on Graziani’s career in the Republic, evident in the film’s title *Graziani - ultimo atto a Salò*, where he was played by the Italian actor Giulio Brogi.<sup>125</sup> These popular representations and events all focused on Graziani during The Salò Republic, signifying that this continued to be the most contentious aspect of Graziani’s career for most Italians.



Figure 87: ‘Graziani, Cardinal Schuster & Mussolini’ in *Mussolini Ultimo Atto* (1974)

Whilst most Italian writers and filmmakers alike, both left and right wing, became involved in scholarly debates on the origins and nature of the Fascist regime, another historian began extensive research on a different but equally fundamental aspect of Mussolini’s Italy, Mussolini’s Africa. Utilising an amalgamation of the numbered state documents available for consultation at the Historical Archive of the Ministero Africa Italiana (ASMAI) supplemented by ‘testimonianze dei protagonisti, italiani, etiopici e somali’, Angelo del Boca published a monumental four volume thesis entitled *Gli Italiani in Africa Orientale* between 1976 and 1984, after a decade of research.<sup>126</sup> In a letter upon opening the first volume, Del Boca wrote ‘un’avvertenza’ warning that:

<sup>124</sup> ‘Giulio Brogi maresciallo a Salò’, *Corriere della Sera* (3 Maggio 1985).

<sup>125</sup> *Graziani - Ultimo Atto a Salò*, Rai Tre TV Film directed by M. Malfatti & R. Tortora (1985).

<sup>126</sup> ‘Avvertenza; Milano, Aprile 1975’ cited in Del Boca, *Gli Italiani in Africa Orientale. Vol 1.*

‘Questa non è propriamente una storia militare delle imprese coloniali italiane in Africa Orientale. Non è neppure e soltanto una storia politico-diplomatica delle stesse. Queste due opere restano da fare e lo saranno quando le chiavi degli archivi di Stato potranno essere alla portata di tutti gli studiosi e non soltanto di pochi privilegiati’.<sup>127</sup>

This note over the ‘scarcity of source materials’ available for consultation provided the first hurdle to the study of Fascist colonialism and reason for a relative lack of interest in the topic at the time.<sup>128</sup> At the national archives Del Boca was told that the lack of access of many files were due to the supposed ‘fase di riordine’ of that particular part of the archive but he believes that ‘il vero motivo è che si teme che studiosi libici ed etopici possano scoprire negli archivi dell’ASMAI quella scomoda verità sugli eccidi, le deportazioni, I furti di terre, che ancora oggi si vuole tenere celata’.<sup>129</sup> In fact, when Del Boca published his findings which undeniably revealed ‘l’impiego dei gas, la micidiale arma proibita dagli accordi internazionali di Ginevra’ through the correspondence between Graziani, Badoglio and Mussolini during the Ethiopian War, government officials and military authorities ‘mi presi spesso del bugiardo, dell’anti-italiano, del nemico dell’esercito’.<sup>130</sup> Even Montanelli, for example, the famous reporter who returned from the Ethiopian War, disillusioned after initially volunteering for the campaign, called him a ‘sbugiardo sostenendo che lui aveva seguito l’intera campagna d’Abissinia e di gas non aveva mai visto traccia’.<sup>131</sup> However, the undeniable negation of the use of poison gases had to be discredited by this point, as Graziani’s utilisation of the deadly substances was not only initially brought to light as it happened by the foreign press in 1936, but the issue continued to be raised from then onwards for the next decades.

At the heart of this struggle over historical accuracy were the alleged individual instigators of the colonial atrocities in question, and where Graziani turned into a focal point for debate. Already having been criticised for his apologism of Mussolini the ‘Africano’ in his biography, De Felice initially agreed with Del Boca and wrote of

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> A. Sbacchi, *Ethiopia Under Mussolini*, p. XIX.

<sup>129</sup> Del Boca, *L’Africa nella coscienza degli italiani*, p. 120.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid, pp. 120 – 121.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid p. 121.

Graziani's complicity and responsibility that 'lo è anche con alcuni dei suoi collaboratori militari'.<sup>132</sup> However, during an interview with the scholar later in 1988, he was asked 'lei insomma assolve Graziani?' to which De Felice ambiguously responded 'io non voglio togliere nulla alle sue responsabilità. Dico soltanto che era un ufficiale, sia pure di alto grado, che obbediva a degli ordini'.<sup>133</sup> Del Boca's accurate reply to this affirmation was that 'Graziani non obbedì agli ordini. Non fu mai un ufficiale disciplinato... (e) quando eseguiva degli ordini, non agiva certo per difetto, ma sempre per eccesso'.<sup>134</sup> The rejection of the allegations by prominent nationalist figures of Italian society in the face of credible government evidence continued to be rife for various reasons. The Italian military continued to be absolved of all crimes of fascism as it remained directly linked to state prestige, so it was convenient that the public saw it as a separate entity, impervious to negative speculation. Hence, Graziani, who was still seen as a highly representative figure of the army, which remained a potent symbol of the nation's identity, was by default also exempt of criticism. In fact, mainstream magazines, such as *Storia Illustrata*, published by Mondadori continued to openly deny Graziani's atrocities in this period, by stating for example that during the reprisals of Addis Ababa in February 1937 'ci fu molta esagerazione da parte dei corrispondenti esteri ... additarono in Graziani il diretto responsabile dell'eccidio...il che non rispondeva a verità'.<sup>135</sup>

This is not to say that Graziani's colonial crimes went completely ignored, as popular Italian publications written by academics started to discuss them openly. For example, a special issue of *Corriere della Sera Illustrata* was published before the release of a controversial film about Graziani in 1979, utilising this movie to accurately detail Graziani's life for the first time (*figure 88*).<sup>136</sup> The 'saggista' who often wrote historical accounts of the *ventennio*, Silvio Bertoldi, dared to ask the crucial question which had long been avoided in Italy: 'che uomo fu, Graziani?'.<sup>137</sup> He correctly highlighted that Graziani was 'un campione di incongruenze', utilising the article to investigate if he was

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid, p. 122.

<sup>133</sup> Corrado Augias interview for *Panorama magazine* with R. De Felice cited in Del Boca, *l'Africa nella coscienza degli italiani*, pp. 122 – 123.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid, p. 123.

<sup>135</sup> B. Pegolotti, 'l'Attentato a Graziani', *Storia Illustrata* (Giugno, 1971), pp. 95 – 101.

<sup>136</sup> Figure 87: 'La Libia si vendica di Graziani: con un film', *Corriere della Sera Illustrato* (15 Settembre 1979), pp. 11 - 14.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid, p. 11

‘solo questo?’, answering the rhetorical question himself that ‘il giudizio su di lui non è anche inficiato dalla tendenza manichea che caratterizza spesso le revisioni della storia?’<sup>138</sup> During his biography of Graziani’s life he accurately highlighted the ‘crudeltà’ and ‘orrori’ that he committed in Libya, the unnecessary utilisation of poison gas in Ethiopia and raised the question as to whether Graziani directly ordered the reprisals for his attempted assassination in 1937.<sup>139</sup> The writer even correctly noted that due to his ‘fisico imponente, atletico, viso stupendo, da antico imperatore...i suoi soldati subirino il suo fascino, molti lo amarono nella disgrazia’.<sup>140</sup>



*Figure 88: ‘La Libia si vendica di Graziani: con un film’, Corriere della Sera Illustrato (15 Settembre 1979)*

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid, pp. 13-14.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid, p. 15.

Bertoldi, did however end his long article on a rather ambiguous note on his judgement of Graziani:

Graziani restò fino alla fine legato al suo tempo, un tempo ora finito per sempre. Non ebbe mai l'acume di capire quali fossero le cause giuste, quando si battè. Ma era un militare, doveva obbedire: e fu un militare sconfitto. Gli sconfitti sono creature che si capiscono e si perdonano.<sup>141</sup>

His committed atrocities are somewhat pardoned by Bertoldi as he suggests that it would be anachronistic to judge him outside of his historical context, especially as a soldier did what he was told. Again here, the justification for Graziani's actions have been reduced to his obligation to obey all orders, due to his military service to the state. My issue with this argument lies in the fact that by this point it was no secret that Graziani enjoyed a large amount of autonomy in his military decisions from the Libyan campaign onwards. Bertoldi's knowledge of this fact is evident in his publication of Graziani's telegram request to Duce to use poison gases in Ethiopia proving that there were not always specific orders given from above. It was however, a step forward in introducing the Italian public to a more accurate narrative of Graziani's life and deeds.

Nevertheless, the Italian government remained adamant in its attempts to thwart negative speculation about Graziani. The most illustrious example of state attempts to counter negative representations of Graziani's military enterprises in Africa regarded the critically acclaimed film that Bertoldi had mentioned in his article, *Lion of the Desert*, released internationally in August 1981. The film had a large budget of thirty-five million dollars and was part funded by a Hollywood production company and Colonel Gaddafi's government (see *figure 89* for a contemporary poster of the film).<sup>142</sup> It followed Graziani's brutal hunt of Omar al-Mukhtar during the 'pacification' of Libya which ended in his public hanging, the former played by the well-known British actor Oliver Reed and the latter by the Mexican-American actor Anthony Quinn. The title of the film was named after Omar al-Mukhtar, who had become a national hero of Libya and a symbol of resistance in the Arab and Islamic worlds for his anti-colonial activities

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Figure 88: 'Omar Mukhtar Lion of the Desert', *Variety Magazine* (14<sup>th</sup> May 1980), p. 82.

as stated earlier in the thesis. Therefore, the choice of the title of the film as al-Mukhtar's nickname among his contemporary followers emanated an obvious politically charged message from the outset.



Figure 89: 'Omar Mukhtar Lion of the Desert',  
*Variety Magazine* (14<sup>th</sup> May 1980), p. 82

Given the Libyan source of funding for the film, it is unsurprising that Graziani's representation is overwhelmingly negative and contrasted the patriotic martyrdom of the Libyan resistance leader al-Mukhtar. From the outset, the Italians are shown as bloodthirsty fanatics in pursuit of a Fascist victory overseas, as the opening scene depicts Libyan leaders being shot and hung by Italian infantry. The Libyans, however, are contrasted to the merciless Italians as one scene shows them setting a young captured Italian soldier free completely unharmed. In the film it was clear that Graziani's presence was conspicuous as 'an ambitious brutal officer who finally triumphs over the Bedouins'.<sup>143</sup> Graziani's lines were indicative of his negative portrayal as early on in the film he assured Mussolini that "when I crush the rebellion I do so with a clear

<sup>143</sup> V. Canby, 'Lion of the Desert, Beduoin vs. Mussolini' *The N.Y. Times* (17<sup>th</sup> April 1981), p. 6.

conscience”.<sup>144</sup> At one point he also narcissistically shouts “my name, main page in military history ... a day in the mind in Rome is more important to than a generation of memory in Libya” to emphasise his narcissism.<sup>145</sup> This image of Graziani was contrasted by the portrayal of a dignified Al-Mukhtar who’s mythicisation and legacy in Libya was made clear by an emphatic quote prior to his execution: “I will live longer than my hangment”.<sup>146</sup> Therefore ‘forthright anti-imperialist theme’ was clear to viewers as ‘it shows the brutal treatment of the Libyan people by their conquerors’.<sup>147</sup> The film did not succeed in box office sales, but was critically acclaimed due to the all-star cast, the film’s famous Syrian-American director Moustapha Akkad, and by war film enthusiasts.

The educational role of the film was positively noted as a critic for *The New York Times* wrote that it was a timely theme as ‘Mukhtar and the Libyan rebellion mean little or nothing to most Americans today’ and praised the director for ‘not distorting to any major degree this forgotten bit of history’ given Akkad’s pro-Arabic sympathies.<sup>148</sup> The critic did, however, inform readers that he believed that:

The Arabs could not have been as good nor the Italians as bad as the film portrays them. For example, the Italian invaders appear as cruel and incompetent louts, prone to break and flee at the first sign of resistance...but there is no reason to believe that in the campaign against Mukhtar they were as undisciplined as they are shown to be in this film...by the same token, the rebels, appear almost infallible and they are unstintingly generous to their foes. But persons with some memory of those times will recall that in actuality the Arabs customarily emasculated their Italian captives, so did the Ethiopians. But no such thing is even hinted at in the film and consequentially there is no motivation for the brutality of the Italians.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> *Lion of the Desert*, [DVD] Director M. Akkad (1981).

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> R. Rubin, ‘Film not to be missed’, *The Daily World* (2 May 1981), p. 13.

<sup>148</sup> D. Middleton, ‘Desert Warfare the Way It Really Was’, *The N.Y. Times* (26<sup>th</sup> April 1981), p. 15.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.



The writer thus appeared convinced of the overall historical accuracy of the film but was in disbelief over the sheer brutality of the Italian army, which likely came as a surprise to Western audiences given the image of benevolent Italians which had become accepted and unquestioned since the end of WWII.<sup>150</sup> The specialised film magazine *Screen International* even categorised the film as a ‘dramatised documentary’ so writers somewhat disagreed on the accuracy of the historical narrative.<sup>151</sup>

Interestingly, a film reviewer for *The Times* also commented on the emblematic nature of *Lion of the Desert*, for the reason that ‘for the Arab world -as I am assured by friends who have witnessed its reception there- the struggle depicted in the film is symbolic, and Omar himself personifies the ideal Arab leader...rational, devout incorruptible, wise’.<sup>152</sup> Thus, Graziani and El-Mukhtar’s emblematic roles were evident here as not only representative of ‘nation fighting against nation’ but also as good versus evil, Graziani being the ‘baddie’ in this case.<sup>153</sup> The critic also noted the relevance of using past conflicts as potent political messages in the present as he wrote that ‘history, particularly when it falls into the hands of film-makers, is a formidable and versatile weapon’.<sup>154</sup>

In terms of audience reception, an interview with the director, *The Times* commented on the success and impact the film enjoyed in the U.S. as ‘more acceptable’ than his other films as ‘American audiences have regarded it as a lively action adventure epic’ although apparently ‘without taking the history lesson in’.<sup>155</sup> *Screen International* also commented on the audience rating but was less convinced about the film’s mainstream success by concluding that ‘apart from the minority interested in the history of this particular struggle, this will appeal most to middlebrows who regard epics as good value and educational with it’.<sup>156</sup> Many viewers in fact noted that the film ‘is virtually an unending series of big battle scenes’ so the film would have largely appealed primarily to military enthusiasts in the West, a noteworthy reflection in itself that Graziani

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<sup>150</sup> See Del Boca, *Italiani brava gente? Un mito duro a morire* (Milano, 2005).

<sup>151</sup> M. Bilbow, ‘Reviews: The New Films’, *Screen International* (29<sup>th</sup> August 1981), p. 19.

<sup>152</sup> D. Robinson, ‘History as Weapon in Symbolic Struggle’, *The Times* (28<sup>th</sup> August 1981), p. 13.

<sup>153</sup> ‘Lion of the Desert, Bedouin vs. Mussolini’.

<sup>154</sup> ‘History as Weapon in Symbolic Struggle’.

<sup>155</sup> G. Perry, ‘Interview: Moustapha Akkad’, *The Times* (24<sup>th</sup> August 1981), p. 6.

<sup>156</sup> M. Bilbow, ‘Reviews: The New Films’.

remained a popular military figure to some members of the foreign public.<sup>157</sup> With regard to the Italian market, however, correctly speculated that:

While its patriotic stance and unshaded black and white characters may succeed in winning an overseas audience, the picture must surmount several hurdles in the domestic market, most notably its militant tone and lack of public interest in its hero.<sup>158</sup>

Moreover, the magazine noted Akkad's fear of 'any action by right-wing terrorist groups' while filming 'the final five-day sequence in the ballroom at the Hotel Plaza in the heart of Rome (which) involved a big reception for General Rodolfo Graziani'.<sup>159</sup>

Ironically, despite filming parts of the film in Rome, it was not released in Italy in 1981 as it was elsewhere. In fact in Italy, the film 'incontrò il veto dell'allora sottosegretario agli Esteri Raffaele Costa, il quale, come riferisce <Panorama> <aveva giudicato la pellicola lessiva dell'onore dell'esercito'.<sup>160</sup> The alleged reason for the film being prohibited in Italy under the Andreotti government was the negative portrayal of the Italian army. This does not signify, however, that knowledge of the film wasn't made public. In fact, *Corriere della Sera* published a highly critical article about the film being released in Paris with the opinion that 'il colonnello Gheddafi ha finanziato (il film) a occhi chiusi e a portafoglio aperto', suggesting that it was historically inaccurate.<sup>161</sup> In regard to Graziani, as the protagonist of the film and the entire 'pacification' of Libya it is obvious here that he was still seen in this period as representative of the national army and so damning portrayals of him were restricted by the State. The film was only publicly shown ten years later at niche events and venues, such as an ex-slaughterhouse in Rome turned event hall and at a local library in the tiny commune of San Donato Milanese near Milan, an initiative led by a prominent historian of Italian colonialism, Giorgio Rochat.<sup>162</sup> The showing in Rome, which was described by *Corriere della Sera* told the

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<sup>157</sup> 'Lion of the Desert, Beduoin vs. Mussolini'.

<sup>158</sup> 'Well-mounted Patriotic War Film. Needs Special Handling in Domestic Market', *Variety* (11<sup>th</sup> February 1981), p. 21.

<sup>159</sup> 'Arabs, Int'l Investors Financing Akkad's \$30-Mil Libyan Saga', *Variety* (10<sup>th</sup> October 1979), p. 39.

<sup>160</sup> <Panorama> (18<sup>th</sup> settembre 1988) cited in Del Boca, *L'Africa nella coscienza degli italiani*, pp. 125 – 126.

<sup>161</sup> 'Un <leone> stile Gheddafi', *Corriere della Sera* (2 Agosto 1982), p. 19.

<sup>162</sup> 'Italiani in Africa: Mostra a San Donato', *Corriere della Sera* (8 Aprile 1989), p. 38

story ‘pieno di atrocità...finora sconosciuto al pubblico italiano per una implicita censura che va avanti da dieci anni’.<sup>163</sup> According to the newspaper, the film was positively received by the audience, ‘un pubblico attentissimo’ who ended the showing ‘con un lungo applauso’, but clearly caused preoccupation about the possible controversy it would cause as ‘le forze dell’ordine accorse davanti ai cancelli del Mattatoio con cinque bindati’ as a preventative safety measure.<sup>164</sup> Apparently a previous attempt to show the film two years earlier in a cinema in Trento had been halted ‘perché il film era <privo dei visti della censura amministrativa e dell’autorizzazione ministeriale>’ according to the local government.<sup>165</sup> The film’s formal national debut didn’t take place until 2009 on Sky Italia as a political display in favour of improved international relations between Libya and Italy which will be further explained in the conclusion of this thesis.

Another similar incident of censorship took place later in 1989, when a BBC two-part documentary about Italian war crimes before and during World War II was bought by the Italian national broadcasting company *Rai* in order to avoid being shown on national public tv.<sup>166</sup> The documentary formed part of a miniseries named *Fascist Legacy* which provided explicit original footage and images to detail both Badoglio and Graziani’s crimes in Ethiopia in addition to Roatta’s atrocities in Yugoslavia during World War II, with photographs of mutilated bodies and the effects of poison gas.<sup>167</sup> The documentary included interviews by both Del Boca and Rochat for their expertise in the field and also addressed the consequential Allied failure to try these men after 1945.<sup>168</sup> Similar to *Lion of the Desert*, the full documentary was only aired in Italy to interested audiences in academic circles, clips of it were shown on the national channel LA7 in 2004 and it is now available to watch in English and Italian on youtube.<sup>169</sup> Indeed, to cement these efforts at state censorship, the myth of ‘Italiani brava gente’ was promoted continued to rule international and Italian screens for the next decades, and thus remained unquestioned. The film *Mediterraneo* which won the Oscar award for Best International

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<sup>163</sup> ‘Proiettato dopo dieci anni <il leone del deserto> sulla guerra coloniale’, *Corriere della Sera* (26 Novembre 1989), p. 30

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

<sup>166</sup> R. Carroll, ‘Italy’s Bloody Secret’, *The Guardian* (16<sup>th</sup> November 2005).

<sup>167</sup> *Fascist Legacy*, BBC Documentary (1<sup>st</sup> November 1989).

<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

<sup>169</sup> R. Carroll, ‘Italy’s Bloody Secret’.

Feature in 1992 was produced by Silvio Berlusconi's film company and depicted the Italian occupation of the Greek islands in WWII, portraying the Italian invaders as completely benevolent occupiers.<sup>170</sup> Similarly, the myth of *italiani brava gente* has become so ingrained in mainstream international media that it was corroborated in the film adaptation of the novel *Captain Corelli's Mandolin* 2004.

In Italy, it is well-known that the early 1990s saw the rehabilitation of fascism in the public sphere with the political context of the time, whereby Berlusconi won the national election of 1994, by forming two separate electoral alliances, one of which included *Alleanza Nazionale*, which was formed of remnants of the MSI. Although he wasn't always in power, 'Berlusconismo' came to characterise Italian politics for more than the next decade as Berlusconi became the longest-serving Italian Prime Minister after Mussolini. One major characteristic of 'Berlusconismo' included 'casi lampanti di apologia del fascismo', especially as with the election of Berlusconi, neo-fascist ministers were back in government for the first time since WWII.<sup>171</sup> These public apologies trivialised fascism with frequent comments by Berlusconi at official functions such as "Mussolini non ha mai ammazzato nessuno" and "il fatto delle leggi razziali è stata la peggiore colpa di un leader, Mussolini, che per tanti altri versi invece aveva fatto bene".<sup>172</sup> These incidents, no matter how irrelevant they may appear, crucially coincided with a rise in the anti-anti-fascist historical revisionism which had been started by De Felice and began to combat the state's official narrative that it was the direct inheritor of the resistance in 1943-45, which had dominated Italian post-war historiography.<sup>173</sup> Thus, new open criticism of the Italian resistance made way for a renewed interest in fascism. This interest is exemplified by a renewed public interest in Graziani, evident in the rise in published books about him in this period from across the political spectrum.

Two biographical works by Alessandro Cova and the journalist Giuseppe Mayda were published in 1987 and 1992 in attempts to shed new light on Graziani. Cova's work was rather brief and aimed to provide 'la prima biografia documentata di uno dei personaggi

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<sup>170</sup> See D. Rodogno, *Fascism's European Empire* (Cambridge, 2006).

<sup>171</sup> A. Mattioli, "Viva Mussolini!" *la guerra della memoria nell'Italia di Berlusconi, Bossi, e Fini* (Milano, 2011) prefazione.

<sup>172</sup> "Mussolini non ha mai ammazzato nessuno", *Corriere della Sera* (11 Settembre 2003); "apologia del fascismo", Pratese denuncia Berlusconi', *La Nazione* (11 Febbraio 2013)

<sup>173</sup> M. Bresciani, 'Fascism, Anti-Fascism and the Idea of Nation: Italian Historiography and Public Debate since the 1980s', *Contemporary European History*, 30/1, pp. 111 – 123.

più violenti e controversi della nostra storia che ha incarnato miti, ferocie, e contraddizioni del periodo fascista'.<sup>174</sup> Given the primary historical interest in the civil war in this period, the book retained its focus on Graziani's period in the RSI. Mayda's work, however, remains the most detailed and balanced biography of Graziani to date and gives equal weight to Graziani's career in the colonies and career in the RSI, although journalistic dramatization of Graziani's personality often presides over the desire to deliver complete historical accuracy.<sup>175</sup> As a more blatant political move, the right-wing publishing house Mursia republished Graziani's autobiography in 1994 as it tactically did so on fertile commercial ground with the similar rise in production and sale of Mussolini memorabilia at the same time.<sup>176</sup> These efforts which undoubtedly came under the crime of Fascist apologism not only went unpunished but were indirectly supported by the new Italian government, making way for competing memories and narratives of the Fascist past.

On an international level, similar to the military memorabilia after his death, publications that were interested in Graziani became the somewhat fetishized reserve of military enthusiasts who continued to revere his skills on the battlefield as unique in written history. The French magazine, *Uniforms: les armées de l'histoire*, for example, dedicated one of their issues to Graziani as they deemed him the 'pionnier de la guerra di rapido corso...un des plus grands chefs de guerre de l'armée italienne'.<sup>177</sup> According to the article this 'guerra di rapido corso' directly referred to his cruel methods in Libya and utilisation of poison gas in Ethiopia for fast results, although obviously the specificities of these methods weren't mention and were only praised by the military magazine. Clearly, examples like these show that some aspects of the Graziani myth had long transcended the boundaries of politics and had become almost irreversibly cemented into mainstream international culture, Italian national history and identity. Thus, official state efforts to hinder critical historical accounts of Italian colonialism and the role of the armed forces throughout the *ventennio* are undeniable and had the effect of hindering critical accounts of Graziani's conduct in the national and international

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<sup>174</sup> A. Cova, *Graziani, un generale per il regime* (Roma, 1987), front cover.

<sup>175</sup> Mayda, *Graziani l'Africano*.

<sup>176</sup> S. Serenelli, "It was like something that you have at home which becomes so familiar that you don't even pay attention to it": memories of Mussolini and Fascism in Predappio, 1922 – 2012', *Modern Italy*, 18/2 (May 2013), pp. 157 – 175.

<sup>177</sup> 'Le Marechal Graziani: Le Lion du Desert', *Uniforms: les armées de l'histoire* (Avril, 1990), pp. 4 – 8.

public sphere. This forced silence has resulted in the current context regarding historical accuracy, popular opinion and general knowledge about the late marshall and indeed the nation's recent colonial past tod



## Conclusion

### *The Graziani Monument of 2012: A Cause for National Debate?*

All the sources in this thesis demonstrate that Graziani's life, career, and afterlife left a persistent and extensive cultural trail on the printed pages and in the images of some of the most important events in 20<sup>th</sup> century Italian and international history. This long linearity counters more superficial analyses by present-day journalists and commentators who have given the impression that the Graziani monument of 2012 sprang up from nowhere. The reasons for Graziani's initial heroisation and what was deemed as important and included in popular portrayals of Graziani in the Western world show remarkable continuity throughout the last century. Instead, the darker aspects of Graziani's career have been actively excluded by national actors, and only recently highlighted by international onlookers and the communities affected by Graziani's crimes across the globe. Consequently, the national political context since the 1990s provided further fertile ground that allowed for his monumentalisation in Affile in 2012. Although my conclusion primarily focuses on this monumentalisation, it also aims to track all 'visible signs of memorial practice, but also absences and silences', a methodology largely taken from John Foot's recent work on *Modern Italy's Divided Memory*.<sup>1</sup> Foot's analysis of various case-studies across post-war Italy and interdisciplinary focus on 'the complicated interplay between history, historiography, memory and forgetting' allows historians to crucially 'understand contemporary historical events and the ways in which they have been understood'.<sup>2</sup> By utilising the multifaceted memory of Graziani domestically and abroad, my conclusion examines 'the ways facts have been interpreted, remembered and contested' through an analysis of the Graziani monument and other examples in order to account for the current state of post-fascist and post-colonial memory in Modern-day Italy.<sup>3</sup>

With some in-depth research I discovered that the idea of the Graziani monument didn't spontaneously materialise and has its own contextual roots which stem from local history. In fact, Graziani's birthplace in the village of Filettino and the nearby village of Affile where he lived as an adult, remain well-known neo-fascist strongholds whereby

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<sup>1</sup> J. Foot, *Italy's Divided Memory* (N.Y. 2009), p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p. 6.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, p. 1.



the majority of residents are supporters of the MSI.<sup>4</sup> According to article from *Corriere della Sera* in 1990, this was due to ‘l’onda lunga dell’ <effetto Graziani>’ who had been the most ‘illustre frequentatore della zona’ until his death.<sup>5</sup> Although the province’s right-wing leanings could not solely be attributed to one historical figure, this article highlights that the myth and memory of Graziani was so symbolically potent in creating some form of national importance for these local communities, which were otherwise insignificant in the peninsula due to their small size. Consequently, in line with local ‘turismo patriottico e nostalgico’ for the hometown hero, the first evident sign of the monumentalisation of Graziani in the area was in 1986 when ‘il museo Rodolfo Graziani’ was planned ‘nel palazzo dell’ex maresciallo d’Italia’ in Filettino.<sup>6</sup> The decision was made by a local government of ‘centro-destra’ but according to an article in *Corriere della Sera* ‘il museo civico rientrava pure nei programmi della vecchia amministrazione guidata da un socialista, Bruno Levistici’ and was approved by local consiglieri from the PCI and PSI ‘(chi) hanno votato SI per Rodolfo Graziani’.<sup>7</sup> Thus, apparently the plans for the celebration of Graziani went back even further than 1986, even though the inauguration year for the museum was deliberately designed to fall on the ‘cinquantesimo della fondazione dell’impero’.<sup>8</sup> As the commemoration was centred around ‘il conquistatore di Addis Abeba’ it is likely that it had some left-wing support as the colonial aspect of Graziani’s career remained uncontroversial amongst most sects of Italian society and politics.<sup>9</sup> This notion of general Italian obtuseness to the possible discomfort this museum may have caused further afield is supported by the commune’s intention to invite ‘il governo di Addis Abeba...(e) chiederà agli etiopi una documentazione che possa essere utile al museo’.<sup>10</sup>

One clear justification and leading inspiration for a museum dedicated to Graziani was given as the town mayor rhetorically asked: ‘a Predappio non si comportano nello stesso modo con i turisti che vogliono andare a vedere la tomba di Mussolini? Per quali ragioni scandalizzarsi se pure noi seguiamo un identico disegno? L’economia del paese va

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<sup>4</sup> ‘La Fiamma Tricolore vince ancora ad Affile, patria del Maresciallo Graziani’, *Corriere della Sera* (10 Maggio 1990), p. 39.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> ‘Un Museo per il Maresciallo Graziani, d’accordo anche i consiglieri comunisti e socialisti’, *Corriere della Sera* (5 Gennaio 1986), p. 6.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

difesa'.<sup>11</sup> This quote not only suggests that there were vocal opponents to the Graziani museum even though they weren't further mentioned, but also conveniently dismisses visitors to these sites as mere sites of tourism for economic purposes and denies their main utilisation as a destination for political extremists, as evident in Predappio. Since Mussolini's burial in the local family tomb in his birthplace of Predappio in 1957, the site has been a neo-fascist pilgrimage to the dead dictator whereby his followers can ceremoniously pay homage to the Fascist leader, with visitor numbers spiking on the anniversary of the march on Rome in October and those of his birth and death.<sup>12</sup> Hence, the town has since become somewhat a fascist tourist attraction with shops selling Mussolini and even Hitler memorabilia of all sorts. The annual rituals at Predappio are also frequently followed by a visit to Villa Carpena, one of Mussolini's main residences near Forlì which has been turned into a museum dedicated to Mussolini run by volunteers. The museum is filled with fascist artefacts ranging from Mussolini's uniform to his wife's kitchen appliances as means to preserve the interior rooms of the villa as they were during the dictator's lifetime. The giftshop on site sells a few of Graziani's books and the paths of the surrounding garden are named with artificial road signs, one being viale Rodolfo Graziani.

Thus, the idea for the Graziani museum was based on the Mussolini model and it apparently opened as planned in 1986 with a small collection of Graziani's diaries, photographs and uniforms on display, although it isn't clear who ran the museum and how long it remained open for. Likewise, the plan for the Graziani 'sacrario' in Affile dates back to the same period with funding from 'un consorzio di cittadini', although the right-wing mayor of Affile, Ercole Viri claimed the idea was born as early as 1957.<sup>13</sup> Although the reasons for the long delay in the execution of the monument are unknown, it seems that the monument of 2012 is strikingly similar to the original one planned as the idea for the location of 'la località Radimonte' remained the same in 2012.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, it appeared that the idea behind the monument in Affile was sparked by the museum in Filettino as the secretary of the commune explained that it was 'una

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> N. Carter & S. Martin, 'Dealing with Difficult Heritage: Italy and the Material Legacies of Fascism', *Modern Italy*, 24/2, (2019), pp. 117 – 122.

<sup>13</sup> Conversation with Ercole Viri, Affile (11<sup>th</sup> April 2013); 'La Fiamma Tricolore vince ancora ad Affile, patria del Maresciallo Graziani'.

<sup>14</sup> 'La Fiamma Tricolore vince ancora ad Affile, patria del Maresciallo Graziani'.

costruzione voluta anche per non essere secondi a Filettino'.<sup>15</sup> Clearly, local competition between the right-wing communities further motivated the desire to immortalise the memory of Graziani.

The current monument of 2012 is not located in the centre of Affile and is formally named 'Parco Radimonte', inconspicuously tucked a walk away from the main piazza and surrounding houses in the countryside, with a lengthy driveway leading up to it. The complex comprises an empty piazza with a few isolated picnic tables and two war canons from the Second World War raised on either side of the piazza. The mausoleum stands to the left of both canons, a small square brick and concrete structure in fascist rationalist style made with local materials, displaying familiar slogans from the *ventennio* with 'patria' and 'onore' accompanied by the national flag (as seen in *figure 90*).<sup>16</sup> Inside the mausoleum there is a sparse collection of artefacts that had once openly celebrated Graziani before 1945 but had been removed due to defascistisation, which mainly included newspaper articles, a road sign, a bust and some medals. Thus, the monument appears to be a modern-day miniature microcosm or neo-fascist recreation of his celebration in the public sphere during the *ventennio*.



*Figure 90: The Graziani Monument in Parco Radimonte, Affile (2012)*

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Figure 90: The Graziani Monument in Parco Radimonte, Affile (2012).

During my visit to the village in April 2013, the local bar in the main piazza of Affile had a biography of Graziani propped up in plain sight and a Graziani annual calendar hung on the wall, a copy of which I was given as a souvenir by the mayor of Affile, Ercole Viri (*figure 91*).<sup>17</sup> In my conversation with Viri, he explained the local reasoning behind the monument by denying the village's connection to neo-fascist sentiment and adhering to local personal veneration solely for Graziani and not his political ideals. Viri claimed that “era un soldato normale, un volontariato che era così bravo che combatteva nelle colone a già 36 anni, il nostro più grande cittadino, non centra il fascismo”.<sup>18</sup> The denial of a connection with local political extremist views are grossly undermined by the fact that in the same year that the Graziani monument was constructed, a new bronze bust to the founder of the MSI, Giorgio Almirante was inaugurated in piazza Almirante in Affile after the previous marble one had been destroyed, named after the same historical figure.<sup>19</sup>



Figure 91: Rodolfo Graziani Calendar (2013)

<sup>17</sup> Figure 91: Rodolfo Graziani Calendar (2013).

<sup>18</sup> Conversation with Ercole Viri.

<sup>19</sup> 'Inaugurazione per il busto in bronzo Giorgio Almirante nell'omonima piazza', *Corriere della Sera* (26 Maggio 2012), <[https://roma.corriere.it/roma/notizie/cronaca/12\\_maggio\\_26/busto-e-via-per-almirante-a-affile-201349099606.shtml](https://roma.corriere.it/roma/notizie/cronaca/12_maggio_26/busto-e-via-per-almirante-a-affile-201349099606.shtml)>, date accessed 12<sup>th</sup> June 2021.

When I asked about Graziani's crimes and whether Viri understood why the monument could be perceived as controversial, random justifications and the normalisation of his colonial crimes were delivered in a nonsensical sentence which went as follows:

purtroppo il soldato deve sempre uccidere e come lavoro Graziani è stato mandato in Etiopia e Libia con il esercito italiano non fascista. Si ha ammazzato partigiani durante la guerra civile perché tutti l'hanno fatto...anche gli Americani hanno usato il gas. L'esercito non aveva nemmeno maschere del gas allora come l'hanno potuto fare ma nessuno ci credeva a un vecchio soldato come lui. Non ha discriminato a base di colore di pelle, era il periodo internazionale di colonizzazione.<sup>20</sup>

Given our research in previous chapters, we now know that most of these affirmations are false given the circumstances, excesses and patterns of Graziani's crimes and the constant justification and normalisation of his colonial crimes due to his soldier status are arguments we have seen before. I ended my conversation with Viri with an open invitation for me to return to Affile in the near future as the local commune planned to open a hotel for tourists. Evidently, there is no denying the unrivalled parallel between the monument in Affile and Mussolini's site of pilgrimage in Predappio, as the intended scope that the erection of the Graziani monument appears to have been neo-fascist tourism with the early signs of Graziani memorabilia and Viri's hope of a hotel.

For the local community of Affile the symbolic importance of Graziani in collective memory remains rife. He is proudly included in the commune's website under the short list of 'i personaggi illustri d'Affile' along with the local medieval churches and other historical sites of interest.<sup>21</sup> The website, in fact dedicates more space to the story of Graziani's life than any other references to local cultural heritage. It accepts that Graziani was a 'figura tra le più amate e più criticate a torto o a ragione, fu tra i maggiori protagonisti dei burrascosi eventi che caratterizzarono quasi mezzo secolo della storia italiana inclusa tra i due conflitti mondiali'.<sup>22</sup> However Graziani's continued veneration

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<sup>20</sup> Conversation with Ercole Viri.

<sup>21</sup>G. Sozi, 'Rodolfo Graziani', *Comune di Affile Website*, <<https://www.halleyweb.com/c058001/zf/index.php/servizi-aggiuntivi/index/index/idtesto/34>>, date accessed: 20<sup>th</sup> June 2021.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

is deemed worthy due to his apparent ‘inflexibile rigore morale e la puntigliosa fedeltà al dovere di soldato’.<sup>23</sup> The long text evocatively ends with the assertion that he is ‘forse troppo dimenticato, come dimenticato fu durante la vita nonostante l’esistenza intera spesa per il bene e la grandezza della Patria’.<sup>24</sup> By default, the name of his nephew Giulio Cesare Graziani, who was also a soldier, is below Graziani on the list of notable citizens of Affile.<sup>25</sup> According to the text, the writer of the commune’s website believe that Graziani deserves even more laudatory commemorations, perhaps on a national level. The Affilian writer may be correct that Graziani has been forgotten by the Italian public who failed to react either way to the monument for reasons that will be explained below, but he fails to mention that the general is most definitely remembered by the families of the victims of his reigns of terror in Africa, or indeed the assassinations of Italian partisans under his command.

In 2013, the president of the Lazio region Nicola Zingaretti suspended the funding for the Graziani monument despite the fact it had already been finished, following external pressure and a petition from members of parliament.<sup>26</sup> A spokesperson for the Partito Democratico in parliament who had signed the petition to stop funding stated that he did so because “il monumento intitolato a Graziani, Ministro della Difesa della Repubblica di Salò, è una inaccettabile offesa alla memoria”.<sup>27</sup> The funding, however, was not formally ended until 2015 on the grounds that “la Giunta comunale aveva chiesto finanziamenti generici nel 2009 per un monumento ai caduti e invece votò una delibera per intitolare il parco a Graziani, commettendo una scorrettezza anche da un punto di vista istituzionale”.<sup>28</sup> The suspension of funding after the monument’s construction and completion appears to have been merely a hollow symbolic move in order to appease its opponents near and far.

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> ‘Giulio Cesare Graziani’, *Comune of Affile Website*, <https://www.halleyweb.com/c058001/zf/index.php/servizi-aggiuntivi/index/index/idtesto/37>, date accessed: 20<sup>th</sup> June 2021.

<sup>26</sup> ‘Affile, stop fondi per mausoleo Graziani’, *La Repubblica* (16 Maggio 2013).

<sup>27</sup> Michele Meta quoted in Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> N. Zingaretti quoted in ‘Affile, revocato dalla Regione il finanziamento al monumento Graziani’, *Roma Today* (24 Aprile 2015), <https://www.romatoday.it/politica/monumento-rodolfo-graziani-affile-finanziamento.html>, date accessed: 20<sup>th</sup> June 2021.

To follow, Viri and ‘due assessori’ from the local giunta, Giampiero Frosoni and Lorenzo Peperoni, were sentenced at a tribunal in Tivoli to eight months in prison and six respectively for the other two with high fines, for ‘apologia del fascismo’ in 2017.<sup>29</sup> The historic Italian national partisan association (ANPI) which is largely responsible for revealing crimes committed by the Nazis and the Salò Republic against partisans and civilians since 1945, was represented as the primary victim(s) affected by the monument at the trial and was the intended recipient for a large proportion of the fines.<sup>30</sup> The accused were instead represented by former members of the MSI and notable members of Berlusconi’s government, Vittorio Messa, Ignazio La Russa, and Alessandro Palombi. When the sentence was announced, the president of ANPI at the time, Carla Nespolo, expressed her “grande soddifazione” at the result of the trial as she concluded that Graziani had been “responsabile di efferati crimini contro l’umanità in Italia e nel mondo”.<sup>31</sup> The president of ANPI thus gave weight to Graziani’s colonial crimes as well as the ones committed on Italian soil. Due to the original scope of the organisation, however, the majority of ANPI’s publicised conclusions about the monument, pay much more attention to his crimes during the civil war, as his colonial ones provided mere evidentiary support to their main argument that ‘questo sacrario costituisce un insulto alle sue vittime, ai partigiani e alla nostra Repubblica nata dalla Resistenza’.<sup>32</sup>

This all suggests that the government action which was taken against the monument was largely due to ample pressure from the rather vocal ANPI and *La Repubblica*’s perhaps unintended implication of international disdain. The newspaper noted that national attention was paid to the monument ‘dopo essere approdato sui giornali inglesi...(la notizia) era finita, non solo sul Daily Telegraph e la Bbc, ma anche sulla stampa Spagnola e Americana’.<sup>33</sup> This comment notably highlights that international journalistic outcry from European and American newspapers put external pressure on the Italian regional government to act in order to avoid embarrassment to the nation’s

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<sup>29</sup> ‘Fondi regionali per il sacrario gerarca fascista, condannato il sindaco d’Affile’, *Today Quotidiano Online* (7 Novembre 2021), <<https://www.today.it/politica/ercole-viri-condannato-fascismo.html>>, date accessed: 20<sup>th</sup> June 2021.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Carla Nespoli quoted in Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> ‘Svolta ad Affile, Zingaretti annuncia: “stop ai fondi per il mausoleo Graziani”’, *La Repubblica* (22 Aprile 2013), <[https://roma.repubblica.it/cronaca/2013/04/22/news/affile\\_zingaretti\\_stop\\_ai\\_fondi\\_per\\_il\\_mausoleo\\_di\\_graziani-57227641/](https://roma.repubblica.it/cronaca/2013/04/22/news/affile_zingaretti_stop_ai_fondi_per_il_mausoleo_di_graziani-57227641/)>, date accessed: 4<sup>th</sup> June 2021.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

image, so the decision was not primarily prompted internally as it may have been if there had been widespread historical reckoning of the story of Graziani's life.

In the end, in a manner which eerily mirrored Graziani's trials of 1948 and 1950, the conviction against the Affilian mayor and his aids was revoked last year in 2020 on the grounds that too much time had passed between the creation of the monument, the accusations against it, and the subsequent investigation and trial.<sup>34</sup> Thus, the sentence was annulled and earlier plans to modify or remove the monument entirely were also dismissed 'perché non è l'edificio il prodotto del reato, bensì l'intitolazione ad un fascista attraverso la delibera che ha attribuito all'immobile una valenza storica e rievocativa'.<sup>35</sup> This legal loophole is based on the fact that Graziani's name is not inscribed anywhere on the monument itself and therefore cannot be removed by the government as an example of clear fascist apology, despite the memorabilia inside which clearly indicates the scope of the construction. Thus, the Italian High Court has failed yet again to sentence anyone for the Scelba Law of 1952 for fascist apology in the public sphere since its passing into effect.<sup>36</sup> Given the chaotic state that the global community was plunged in last year due to the unprecedented COVID pandemic, the news of the annulment was barely commented on by the Italian press and perhaps never became known to international journalists as the focus of the press remained elsewhere. Therefore, the monument is still standing after nearly a decade of political debate and deliberation and Ercole Viri is still the mayor of Affile. Sadly, the continued existence of the memorialisation will undermine all the competing memories of Graziani which will be discussed below as long as it still stands as monuments indeed mark 'the transmission of memory to the public stage'.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> 'Affile Mausoleo dedicato al fascista, annullate le condanne ai politici', *Tiburno TV* (26 Settembre 2020), <<https://tiburno.tv/2020/09/26/affile-mausoleo-dedicato-al-fascista-annullate-le-condanne-ai-politici/>>, date accessed: 4<sup>th</sup> June 2021.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> 'il mausoleo fascista non è apologia del fascismo: la Cassazione annulla la condanna al sindaco di Affile', *La Stampa* (27 Settembre 2020), <<https://www.lastampa.it/cronaca/2020/09/26/news/fascismo-la-cassazione-annulla-la-condanna-al-sindaco-di-affile-per-il-mausoleo-di-graziani-1.39353238>>, date accessed 4<sup>th</sup> June 2021.

<sup>37</sup> Foot, *Italy's Divided Memory*, p. 4.



*Contrasting Memories of Graziani in Italy and Abroad*

The only notable domestic protests came from ANPI mainly in 2012 when small but notable groups descended on Affile with slogans such as ‘non in mio nome’ and ‘nessun monumento ai crimini del fascismo’, sometimes with red paint on their hands to symbolise the bloodshed Graziani had been responsible for.<sup>38</sup> The most recent protest, however, took place last month in May 2021 to mark the 84<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Massacre of Debra Libanos, although with every year that passes the number of protesters continues to dwindle.<sup>39</sup> The Union of the Italian Jewish Community (UCEI) also formally called for a demolition of the monument based on Graziani’s role in signing the racist anti-Semitic legislation, *il Manifesto della Razza* in 1938 and his role in deportations in Rome during the civil war.<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, the monument has been repeatedly vandalised since its creation, but ANPI have repeatedly denied responsibility. Slogans such as ‘chiamate un eroe un assassino’, ‘macellaio’ and ‘no al fascismo’ have been written in graffiti across the mausoleum in the past few years. On one occasion, multiple large paper silhouettes of figures being hanged to death were stuck on the exterior walls around the monument. (*Figure 92*)<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> ‘Affile, imbrattato il Monumento a Graziani. L’Anpi: “fu l’uomo delle carneficine. Ma non siamo stati noi a vandalizzarlo”, *La Repubblica* (29 Maggio 2021), <[https://roma.repubblica.it/cronaca/2021/05/29/news/roma\\_monumento\\_a\\_rodolfo\\_graziani\\_imbrattate\\_le\\_lapidi\\_affile-303328642/](https://roma.repubblica.it/cronaca/2021/05/29/news/roma_monumento_a_rodolfo_graziani_imbrattate_le_lapidi_affile-303328642/)>, date accessed: 11<sup>th</sup> June 2021.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> ‘Gli ebrei italiani: via il sacrario a Graziani’, *Corriere della Sera* (29 Ottobre 2012), p. 7.

<sup>41</sup> Figure 92: ‘La regione Lazio e il monumento fascista di Affile’, *Contropiano Giornale Comunista Online* (11 Ottobre 2013), <<https://contropiano.org/news/politica-news/2013/10/11/la-regione-lazio-e-il-monumento-fascista-di-affile-019623>>, date accessed: 11<sup>th</sup> June 2021.



Figure 92: ‘La regione Lazio e il monumento fascista di Affile’, *Contropiano Giornale Comunista Online* (11 Ottobre 2013)

Each figure was displayed as holding a sign to represent each event in which Graziani was culpable of violent crimes, as one read ‘Ethiopia rappresaglie 1937’ whilst others read ‘Italia 1938 – 1943 firma il manifesto della razza’, ‘Libia 1925 pulizia etnica’, and ‘Italia 1943 – 1945’.<sup>42</sup> In addition, his tomb in the local cemetery was vandalised with red paint and the piazza surrounding the monument was anonymously named ‘piazza Sandro Pertini’ after the famous partisan and socialist politician who was also president of the country in 1978 for seven years.<sup>43</sup> Although the defacing or indeed toppling of monuments has hit newspaper headlines recently as last year the Western world experienced the mass destruction of imperialist statues, from England to the U.S. in support of the Black Lives Matter movement, it has long been used by public audiences as a potent ‘political strategy’ to contest official versions of the past.<sup>44</sup> So the attacks of vandalism against the Graziani monument symbolise political protest of this positive version of his memory, even if only on a small scale.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> ‘<sacrario fascista>, confermata la condanna al sindaco di Affile per il monumento al gerarca Graziani’, *Corriere della Sera* (14 Marzo 2019).  
<[https://roma.corriere.it/notizie/cronaca/19\\_marzo\\_14/sacrario-fascista-confermata-condanna-sindaco-affile-il-monumento-gerarca-graziani-df0cdc62-464e-11e9-a4ff-e29a115180ab.shtml](https://roma.corriere.it/notizie/cronaca/19_marzo_14/sacrario-fascista-confermata-condanna-sindaco-affile-il-monumento-gerarca-graziani-df0cdc62-464e-11e9-a4ff-e29a115180ab.shtml)>, date accessed: 20<sup>th</sup> June 2021.

<sup>44</sup> Foot, *Italy's Divided Memory*, p. 14.

Internationally, small protests against the Graziani monument took place in London and New York outside the Italian embassies and consulates, the former led by the wife of the well-known British historian of Ethiopia, Richard Pankhurst and the latter largely by Ethiopian communities living in New York.<sup>45</sup> In Ethiopia, protests outside the Italian embassy were also small and the forty-three demonstrators were detained by police overnight for their actions, which is surprising given the protest's peaceful nature.<sup>46</sup> Protesters and awareness against the monument domestically and abroad are therefore the sole preserve of the communities directly or indirectly affected by Graziani's atrocities. In Italy, citizens who protest the continued positive memory of Graziani are almost exclusively vocal ANPI members who are actively contributing to the alternative memory of Graziani which has been repressed for so long in the public sphere. The lawyer and vocal ANPI campaigner Francesco Mandarano, for example, has written a self-published work entitled 'onoriamo un traditore' and focuses on 'l'opera negativa di Rodolfo Graziani'.<sup>47</sup> The lengthy work begins with the writer's disdain at the inauguration of the monument and the trial which ensued, before turning to Graziani's career, two thirds of which focuses on his crimes against partisan under the RSI and political contempt for the Italian legal system which he deems 'il medioevo italiano' as the title of one of his chapters.<sup>48</sup> Mandarano's conclusion also focuses almost solely on promoting anti-fascist memory in Italy with his urgency that Italians '(dovrebbe) evitare che scompaia quella cultura antifascista che ha animato la guerra di Liberazione e lo spirito stesso della nostra Costituzione'.<sup>49</sup> Upon reading about my thesis online, I was actually invited to meet Mandarano, other ex-partisans and left-wing sympathisers in Florence in 2017, whereby he and the others spent the afternoon explaining to me why they thought that promoting the negative memory of Graziani was so important. His colonial career in Africa was barely mentioned at all.

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<sup>45</sup> 'Mausoleo a Graziani ad Affile la protesta arriva a New York', *Corriere della Sera* (5 Febbraio 2013), <[https://roma.corriere.it/roma/notizie/cronaca/13\\_febbraio\\_5/20130205ROM05\\_10-2113852900808.shtml](https://roma.corriere.it/roma/notizie/cronaca/13_febbraio_5/20130205ROM05_10-2113852900808.shtml)>, date accessed: 20<sup>th</sup> June 2021.

<sup>46</sup> 'Ethiopians Jailed for Protesting Italy's 'Butcher of Ethiopia' Memorial', *Global Voices* (23<sup>rd</sup> March 2013), <<https://globalvoices.org/2013/03/23/ethiopians-jailed-for-protesting-italys-butcher-of-ethiopia-memorial/>>, date accessed: 20<sup>th</sup> June 2021.

<sup>47</sup> F. Mandarano, *Onoriamo Un Traditore* (1 Aprile 2016).

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, Conclusione.

Another Italian memory of Graziani's colonial atrocities and career was released as a documentary by the Italian filmmaker Valerio Ciriaci in 2015.<sup>50</sup> Ciriaci utilises the Graziani monument as a famous 'hook' in order to explore other issues related to post-colonial Italy and does so to attract viewers by utilising images of him on some of the posters of the film (as seen in *figure 93*).<sup>51</sup>



*Figure 93: Poster for If Only I Were That Warrior, Awen Films (2015)*

In the documentary, Ciriaci successfully demonstrates the global reach of Graziani's atrocities, as scenes move from his archive in Rome and the monument in Affile to New York and Addis Ababa.<sup>52</sup> The notable protagonists include an Italian living in Ethiopia who remains in somewhat positively fascinated by Italian colonialism, an Ethiopian radiobroadcaster living in Rome who has brought some public awareness to the monument, and an Italo-American who aided the small protest campaign in New York against the monument, as he was made aware of Graziani's crimes as his grandfather emigrated to Ethiopia under Mussolini's regime. Thus, the documentary effectively highlights the international nature and implications of the continued celebration of Graziani in Italy, although it focuses little on the peculiarities of Graziani's life in

<sup>50</sup> *If Only I Were That Warrior*, Awen Films (2015), <<https://vimeo.com/ondemand/ifonlyiwereathatwarrior>>, date accessed: 8<sup>th</sup> June 2021.

<sup>51</sup> Figure 93: Poster for *If Only I Were That Warrior*.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

general, providing little historical context to the public, and moves directly from Graziani's death to the monument of 2012. The documentary won the Italian annual film award which was judged by the Roman foreign press Association and an award at the niche festival dei popoli.<sup>53</sup> It is available to watch online on vimeo at a very low price which suggests that unfortunately it has not reached a large audience.

Moreover, the Arab Spring and civil war that started in Libya in 2011, almost a century after Italy's first attempt at invading the country, sparked further Italian remembrance of Graziani's legacy in Northern Africa as journalists rhetorically questioned the recent event as 'un ritorno al passato?' before making the historical comparison and giving the opinion that:

si potrebbe ripristinare la situazione esistente prima dell'intervento di Rodolfo Graziani, durante il fascismo. Graziani unificò, oggi converrebbe dividere: la Cirenaica, la Tripolitania e la zona meridionale, dove le tribù sono armate le une contro le altre.<sup>54</sup>

The recent war in Libya also highlighted the unresolved nature and legacy of the Italian 'pacification' as Italian journalists noted that the chaos provided an opportunity for unknown instigators 'di profanare le tombe del cimitero italiano di Tripoli'.<sup>55</sup> The deliberate destruction of the chapel and complex in 2015 followed the restoration of the cemetery after Berlusconi's formal reconciliation with Gaddafi in 2008. When Gaddafi came to power in 1969 he expelled and confiscated the property of all the Italians living in Libya as supposed 'reparations' for Italy's colonial conduct during the *ventennio*, given that the Italian government had not formally acknowledged any responsibility. No reconciliatory measures were taken until the Treaty of Benghazi in 2008 when Berlusconi publicly confessed and apologised for the damages caused by Italian colonialism, in addition to monetary reparations over a twenty-year period for the Libyan government and the families who had been directly affected.

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> 'Il Fronte Libico', *Corriere della Sera* (24 Febbraio 2016), p. 6.

<sup>55</sup> 'Cimitero ancora profanato della Tripoli italiana restano ville chiuse e otto superstiti', *Corriere della Sera* (2 Novembre 2015), p. 6.

The next year, Gaddafi conducted a state visit to Rome in view of improved international relations, but a propagandistic display by the Libyan leader upon his arrival at Fiumicino suggested that official Libyan memory of Italian colonialism is still contentious. Gaddafi ceremoniously left his airplane wearing a picture of El-Mukhtar upon his capture by Graziani pinned to his chest.<sup>56</sup> This show of protest by Gaddafi is due to the continued problematic memory of Italian colonialism in Libya, as despite recent improvements, enormous discrepancies between popular memory of the Italian ‘pacification’ in Libya and Italy remain. Furthermore, to contrast Graziani’s memorial in Affile, multiple statues of El-Mukhtar are evident in public spaces across modern-day Libya and are even present in Caracas and Havana. In Cuba, El-Mukhtar is placed in the Park of African Heroes which displays the busts of anti-colonial figures of resistance in recent history including the first president of Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah and the Congolese revolutionary Patrice Lumumba.<sup>57</sup> The political message that communist Cuba shares with this memorial park is a clear propagandistic display of solidarity with anti-colonialism and its heroes, and El-Mukhtar’s inclusion in sites of memory outside of Libya mark his status as a transnational hero, whose antithesis is Graziani.

In Ethiopia, the current state of official Italo-Ethiopian relations is even more fragile due to the state of divided memory of the Ethiopian war between the two countries. Some reparations have since been paid and formal acknowledgement of the utilisation of poison gas were finally given by the Minister of Defence, Domenico Corcione, in 1996.<sup>58</sup> Yet, there has never been a state apology on behalf of the Italian government for the aggression itself and the horrific methods utilised. Thus, an accurate creation of a collective Italian public memory of the Ethiopian war has been left to dedicated academics such as Del Boca and interested journalists who insert the occasional article at the back of national newspapers calling for remembrance. Del Boca has continued to argue that even the majority of recent scholarly accounts of the war based on documents from Italian military archives have much left to be desired as they ‘tendono a giustificare gli eccessi italiani sulla base dell’arretratezza e dei costume guerrieri tipici della società aggredita’.<sup>59</sup> This suggests that the Italian army continues to justify its means of warfare

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<sup>56</sup> N. Vivarelli, ‘Caged Lion Unloosed’, *Variety* (15-21<sup>st</sup> June 2009), p. 3.

<sup>57</sup> ‘Another Nelson Mandela statue unveiled – In Cuban capital Havana’, *Africa News* (15<sup>th</sup> November 2019).

<sup>58</sup> Del Boca, *Italiani Brava Gente?* p. 198.

<sup>59</sup> ‘Ethiopia, l’esercito corregge i storici’, *Corriere della Sera* (6 Gennaio 2011), p. 33

in Ethiopia, and therefore those of Graziani, which not only undermines their devastating effect and horrific nature, but also deliberately ignore any critical views of the purpose of the colonial enterprise in its entirety.

The antagonistic relationship between the two countries is further exemplified by the issue of war booty which endured until very recently. Many important Ethiopian objects of 'cultural importance were transported to the metropole from Ethiopia after 1936, including a highly symbolic bronze statue of the Lion of Judah taken from Addis Ababa and the ancient Axum obelisk when Graziani was viceroy in 1937.<sup>60</sup> The lion was victoriously placed at the foot of the Dogali monument which commemorated Italy's fallen soldiers from the first failed attempt at invading Ethiopia in 1887, whilst the obelisk was equally propagandistically placed in front of the Ministry for Italian Africa 'come segno visibile di sottomissione etiopica'.<sup>61</sup> After World War II, in an agreement initiated by the UN in 1947, Italy agreed to return the looted treasure, but did not make efforts to do so until twenty years later when the lion was returned.<sup>62</sup> The repatriation of the obelisk, however, caused more controversy as repeated calls for its return were ignored and various excuses made on the cost and difficult logistics of moving the large fragile object.<sup>63</sup> After alterations to the runways of both Fiumicino and Axum, the obelisk was finally dismantled and returned on three separate dates in April 2005. A *BBC* article explained the emblematic importance of the return of the obelisk as a national celebration with 'traditional dancers... pealing bells and chanting priests' took place because 'many Ethiopians see the obelisk as a vital national symbol'.<sup>64</sup>

Furthermore, in order to contrast non-existent public Italian memories of the Ethiopian war where no national remembrance days or monuments exist to the victims of Italian colonialism, the Ethiopian state has countered this with a monument and remembrance day for the victims of the reprisals of February 1937. It was actually built back in 1955 under Haile Selassie's reign when he invited a sculptor from Yugoslavia to design the monument given ex-Yugoslavia's equally bleak recent history with Fascist Italy.

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<sup>60</sup> R. Pankhurst, 'Ethiopia, the Aksum Obelisk, and the Return of Africa's Cultural Heritage', *African Affairs*, 98/391 (April 1999), pp. 229 – 239.

<sup>61</sup> 'Obelisco di Axum: e se restituirlo fosse un atto di forza?', *Corriere della Sera* (22 Novembre 2003).

<sup>62</sup> 'Ethiopia, the Aksum Obelisk, and the Return of Africa's Cultural Heritage'.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> 'Obelisk arrives back in Ethiopia', *BBC News Online* (19<sup>th</sup> April 2005), <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/4458105.stm>>, date accessed: 14<sup>th</sup> June 2021.

Therefore Selassie reportedly and rhetorically asked Antun Augustinčić “who better than you will be able to portray the suffering of victims of fascism?”.<sup>65</sup> The memorial was created by Augustinčić and his colleague Frano Kršinić who built an obelisk with reliefs at the base narrating the scenes of the massacres of 1937 and entitled it the Martyr’s Monument, or Yekatit 12, which translates as the date of Graziani’s attempted assassination in the Ethiopian calendar. The obelisk was placed in a central square in Addis Ababa and the reliefs explicitly depict scenes from the multiple day massacre that took place showing civilians being dragged behind Italian vehicles, children being shot, and men being hung (*figure 94*).<sup>66</sup> Selassie established a commemorative ritual which involves the placement of wreaths around the monument and has taken place annually on the 19<sup>th</sup> of February since 1955, which indicates the explicit political nature and scope of the monument and reflect the open wounds of the memory of Graziani in Ethiopia that have yet to heal.



*Figure 94: Close up of a relief on the Yekatit 12 monument.*

Unfortunately, however there is a long way to go in order to reconcile the official and popular memory of Graziani in Africa and in Italy, which has further been hindered by the monument of 2012. Sadly only few Italian commentators are aware of the fact, such

<sup>65</sup> A. Mohammed, ‘Architectural Lens to Memorize Martyrs’, *The Ethiopian Herald* (15<sup>th</sup> February 2019).

<sup>66</sup> Figure 94: Close up of a relief on the Yekatit 12 monument.



as the historian Andrea Riccardi who has correctly and rather poignantly highlighted that:

non basta ridare agli etiopici il Leone di Giuda o l'obelisco di Axum; c'è un intero patrimonio da recuperare anche presso enti civili o religiosi. Soprattutto lo Stato, il ministero della Difesa e le forze armate, hanno il dovere di ricordare la storia di quella <liquidazione completa> come diceva Graziani – fatta da disprezzo e violenza. Con gesti concreti e una documentata conoscenza storica della tragedia, si deve dire che questa non è l'Italia in cui ci riconosciamo.<sup>67</sup>

Therefore, although some progress has been made by individuals and vocal groups in regard to raising public awareness about Graziani's crimes in Italy, there is still much left to be desired, a responsibility which lies solely with Italian policy makers and government entities which primarily include the armed forces.

#### *Men, Monuments and Memories of Italian Colonialism in the Public Sphere*

This is primarily due to the fact that the current state of public memory of Italy's colonial past remains more or less as it was during the *ventennio* and a clear continuity can be seen in the state heroisation of male fascist colonial figures since 1945. The peninsula is still littered with monuments, museums and street names celebrating the Italian empire in Africa and its colonial heroes from north to south, old and new. These sites of memory were either initiated by the Fascist government or have been regionally funded if they were constructed after 1945. Badoglio's hometown of Grazzano in the northern region of Piemonte, for example, was renamed to Grazzano Badoglio in honour of the general in 1939 following his role in the Ethiopian war and has never been changed back.<sup>68</sup> The name of the town was only seen as problematic in 2016 when a facebook petition was initiated by local inhabitants to remove Badoglio's name as 'la denominazione Badoglio ricorda solo atrocità ed esalta un personaggio negative nella storia del nostro Paese'.<sup>69</sup> Yet any sign of action to change the town's name has yet to be taken.

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<sup>67</sup> A. Riccardi 'Ricordare con gesti concreti il massacro dei monaci etiopi', *Corriere della Sera* (7 Marzo 2017), p. 26.

<sup>68</sup> 'Appello su Facebook contro Badoglio: <via il suo nome dal nostro Comune>', *Corriere della Sera* (27 Settembre 2016), cronache.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

On a more transnational level, more examples of the heroisation of the Ministro dell'Aeronautica Italo Balbo, who had been one of the first prominent fascists and the governor of colonial Libya, have taken place even after the fall of fascism and have had mixed reactions.<sup>70</sup> In Italy Balbo's celebration in the form of a bronze bust in Rome in 1996 caused almost no controversy other than amongst members of the Italian communist party as even centre left party members attended its inauguration, however his monument in Chicago given to the city by Mussolini in 1933 to propagandistically mark his transatlantic flight caused public protests.<sup>71</sup> Recent requests for the removal of the ancient Roman column named after Balbo took place in 2017 amongst the contextual background of the removal of Confederate monuments in the U.S. and opposition to these initiatives by white supremacists in 2017. Therefore, the example of Balbo's memorialisations and contrary reactions in Italy and abroad are indicative of the discrepancies of what is seen as contentious about the continued heroisation of fascist colonial figures by different national public audiences.

More recently in Milan however, a bronze statue to the famous journalist Montanelli was placed in the city's public gardens in 2006, and caused more controversy than either Graziani or Balbo's recent commemorations.<sup>72</sup> Since its erection, the statue has been vandalised on more than one occasion with a bomb, red paint and graffiti that read 'razzista' and 'stupratore', given his unapologetic role in the Ethiopian war and his romantic relationship with a twelve-year-old Eritrean girl.<sup>73</sup> Most recently in 2019 pink paint was poured over the monument in protest of its existence on international women's day and last year there were more calls for the removal of the statue following the antiracist protests that were sparked by the death of George Floyd in the U.S.<sup>74</sup> The recent case of Montanelli demonstrates the first example of the celebration of a colonial

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<sup>70</sup> N. Carter, 'The Meaning of Monuments: Remembering Italo Balbo in Italy and the United States', *Modern Italy*, 24/2, (May 2019), pp. 219 – 235.

<sup>71</sup> 'Future of Balbo monument, a gift from Mussolini, uncertain', *The Chicago Tribune* (18<sup>th</sup> August 2017), <<https://www.chicagotribune.com/entertainment/ct-ent-balbo-monument-20170817-story.html>>, date accessed: 30<sup>th</sup> May 2021.

<sup>72</sup> 'Milano: in un video l'imbrattamento della statua di Montanelli', *Ansa Lombardia* (15 Giugno 2020), <[https://www.ansa.it/lombardia/notizie/2020/06/13/a-milano-imbrattata-la-statua-dedicata-a-montanelli\\_a281012f-ccf7-4bf0-9992-037451dd3f2b.html](https://www.ansa.it/lombardia/notizie/2020/06/13/a-milano-imbrattata-la-statua-dedicata-a-montanelli_a281012f-ccf7-4bf0-9992-037451dd3f2b.html)>, date accessed: 13<sup>th</sup> June 2021.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

figure being openly contested in Italy purely for moral reasons of continued racial and gender injustice rather than political leanings, as it was sparked by worldwide events.

These examples all signify that the Graziani monument is unfortunately not unique and the Italian government at all levels, national, regional and local should be much more selective in its current exaltation of individual historical figures and review old ones which appear anachronistic in modern day-Italy. In the Italian capital, Fascist remnants of empire are plentiful, from the entire EUR complex which was built as a ‘mirror image of classical Rome’ and littered with architectural references to the Fascist imperial project, to the Foro Italico which houses the Mussolini obelisk and the Stadio dei Marmi which also hark back to Imperial Rome and the myth of the third Rome.<sup>75</sup> Some of the museums throughout the province also provide reminders as sites of memory of Italy’s colonial past, such as the Museo preistorico etnografico ‘Luigi Pigorini’ which houses African artefacts of all sorts and trophies of colonial conquest from the beginning of the Italian exploration of the continent and provides the same official interpretation and narrative of Italy’s ‘civilising’ mission in Africa. Furthermore, in nearby Frascati the small Museo Etiope Guglielmo Massaia pays homage to the 19<sup>th</sup> century catholic missionary’s work in Ethiopia. Although Massaia died in 1889, he was repeatedly honoured for his dedication to the ‘civilising’ mission both during and after the *ventennio* when his local village in Piemonte was renamed after him to Piovà Massaia in 1940, a national commemorative stamp issued for him in 1952 and various roads named after him across the country, from Turin to Rome. Other than the obelisk inscribed with Dux at the Foro Italico, none of these colonial sites of memory have ever been contested as only the ‘fascist’ aspect of Italy’s past is widely perceived as problematic, and the ‘colonial’ much less so unless international actors or events are involved.

A perfect example of this which involves Graziani is the Casa Madre dei Mutilati e Invalidi di Guerra sandwiched between the Corte della Cassazione and Castel Sant Angelo along the Tiber in the centre of Rome. The austere building was concluded in 1928 by the prominent Fascist architect Marcello Piacentini to mark the tenth anniversary of the conclusion of World War II. Built as a shrine to Italian soldiers and

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<sup>75</sup> A. Kallis, ‘The “Third Rome” of Fascism: Demolitions and the Search for a New Urban Syntax’, *The Journal of Modern History*, 84/1 (March 2012), pp. 40 – 79.

the nation's military enterprises, the outer walls of its interior courtyard are decorated with frescos detailing all of Italy's wars since unification and include the 'pacification' of Libya and the Ethiopian war. (see for example *figure 95*)<sup>76</sup>



*Figure 95: A Relief in the courtyard of the Casa Madre dei Mutilati, Roma.*

The frescos were once accompanied by pillars with busts of the Italian military heroes who led these wars, with one column that is still inscribed with the name 'R. Graziani' (*figure 96*).<sup>77</sup> Due to the defascistation of the public sphere after 1945 the bust of Graziani that lay on top of the column has since been removed and is now hidden from public view inside the building, which is not open to the public, along with those of Badoglio and Balbo (*figure 97*).<sup>78</sup>

<sup>76</sup> Figure 95: A Relief in the courtyard of the Casa Madre dei Mutilati, Roma.

<sup>77</sup> Figure 96: R. Graziani Column (without bust) in the courtyard of the Casa Madre dei Mutilati, Roma.

<sup>78</sup> Figure 97: Bust of R. Graziani inside the Casa Madre dei Mutilati, Roma.



*Figure 96:* R. Graziani Column (without bust) in the courtyard of the Casa Madre dei Mutilati, Roma.



*Figure 97:* Bust of R. Graziani inside the Casa Madre dei Mutilati, Roma.

This case not only demonstrates the haphazard and incomplete nature of post-war defascistisation as his name is still inscribed on the exterior of the building and his bust was not completely destroyed, but it also shows that Graziani's bust was primarily removed due to his association with fascism not colonialism. Nevertheless, defascistisation was at least attempted here, but no efforts of the decolonisation of the public sphere have been found. If the colonial past had been seen as problematic the frescos celebrating Italian colonial conquest would have been removed or at least covered from view. Likewise colonial road signs were never removed after 1945 and have remained uncontested as Piazza Addis Abeba and Viale Libia still stand in Rome and the last remaining road dedicated to the general exists in the centre of Neviano in the south of the country. The south also houses the remains of the fascist Mostra Oltremare complex outside Naples and the Museo sacrario dei caduti di oltremare di Bari which commemorates Italy's colonial wars since unification with military artefacts that have expanded in number throughout the years through private donations from the Italian public. Thus, a coherent line of continuity in the state commemoration of Italian

imperialism can be seen in the public sphere to date which continues to justify the colonial past.

*Post-Colonial Memory in Italy Today: An Exception to the Rule?*

In response to the positive memories of colonialism that continue to be imposed in the Italian public sphere, the examples I have given indicate that critical reactions primarily stem from interested political parties, social groups, various individuals and international audiences. But what about the wider Italian public and their apparent apathy to the memorialisation of Graziani and other related monuments? The answer to this question is hard to answer as systematically gaging the public opinion and awareness of an entire population remains almost impossible. Recent studies on post-colonial Italy and comparisons with other post-colonial nations, have however, given strong indications as to why the inauguration of the Graziani monument failed to incite any emotions amongst the Italian public.

As mentioned in chapters prior, Italy lost her colonies during World War II with the Allied victory on the African front, but they were formally removed by the Treaty of Paris in 1947, other than Italian Somaliland which remained under Italian administration until the territory became fully independent in 1960. In most other European countries, the end of the colonial era after 1945 was marked by wars or independence movements by nationalists in the occupied territories to gain independence, taking place in the majority of African countries under French and British rule. For Italy, however, the UN's removal of her colonies signified a lack of these wars of independence which crucially 'meant that an extended period of decolonisation was not experienced and its implications were never discussed'.<sup>79</sup> The historians Jacqueline Andall and Derek Duncan were the first scholars to dedicate an entire edited volume to the exploration of the unexplored postcolonial debate in Italy which still appear to be 'rather under-developed, contrasting starkly with the situation of postcolonial studies in relation to other European empires'.<sup>80</sup> According to their study the way that Italian colonialism ended had a profound effect on 'the nation's collective consciousness and was absent

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<sup>79</sup> J. Andall & D. Duncan (eds.) *Italian Colonialism: Legacy and Memory* (Bern, 2009), p. 9.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid*, p. 10.

from public discourse', as there were no decisive events to mark its end.<sup>81</sup> They argue that:

While recent years have seen a reawakening of scholarly interest in what Italy did in its colonies and what such activity meant in the peninsula, it has been a favourite shibboleth of this work that post-war Italian society had repressed the memory of this experience. This repression has been understood as relating to something that has been wilfully forgotten, or, somewhat differently, as something that remains latent albeit silenced in the public domain.<sup>82</sup>

My research in this thesis supports this argument that a large gap remains between the state of post-colonial reckoning between Italian academia and the Italian public as the entire nature of Italian colonialism, its effect, and implications was an issue that was actively ignored in post-war Italian politics, culture and society. I also agree with Andall and Duncan's theory that contradict previous hypotheses suggesting that the memory of Italian colonialism has been completely 'silenced' in the public sphere as my research indicates that that state of post-colonial memory in Italy is also more complex and multi-faceted than it appears to be. My analysis in fact dictates that certain official versions of Italian colonialism have been indeed actively remembered, from the 'civilising mission' to the glorification of colonial military heroes and indeed the myth of *Italiani brava gente*, which has been combined with the active repression of the darker aspects of Italian colonialism. As I have previously demonstrated, this is most evidently emphasised in the post-war trial(s) of Graziani and all the events and Italian popular cultural reproductions relating to him thereafter.

The first major effect of the delay of post-colonial consciousness and the continuation of colonial ideology has been most poignantly highlighted by cultural studies of other national cases. Germany provides a comparable model to Italy as her colonies were also forcibly confiscated by the Treaty of Versailles in 1919, which hindered the internalisation of a national post-colonial consciousness, allowing for the continuation

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid, p. 9.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid, p. 10.

of ‘well-known colonial stereotypes of earlier decades’.<sup>83</sup> Lombardi-Diop’s analysis of commercial adverts for hygiene and cleaning products in Italian post-war culture reveals a similar pattern. Her argument of the existence of a clear linearity in colonial era and post-colonial advertising is illustrated by the work of the sociologist ‘Paola Tabet (who) conducted a national survey among Italian school children aged seven to thirteen on the possible Fascist legacy of racist thought and their perception of blackness’ in the 1990s.<sup>84</sup> The answers to Tabet’s hypothetical questions which included “if your parents were black, what would you do?” were met with responses of ‘fear, shame, rejection’, stereotypes ‘which seem to hark back to colonial propaganda, attribute to Africans a constitutive savagery and a pervasive lack of civility’.<sup>85</sup> The direct connection of Tabet’s study to Lombardi-Diop’s research is indicated in some of the children’s responses such as one who said “se i miei genitori fossero neri, io penserei che sarebbero arrivati dall’Africa. Oppure li metterei in lavatrice”.<sup>86</sup> The last comment from the interviewee about washing away the hypothetic blackness of their parent not only suggests colonial racist continuities but also the widespread and potent effects of racialised imagery across the national realm which pervaded all sects of Italian society, even younger generations who had not been subject to fascist propaganda.

The continuation of colonial and racist propaganda in Italy well into the 1990s consequently affected public opinion and perceptions of Africa, which delayed more lenient immigration policies until the late 1980s.<sup>87</sup> In addition, contrary to other European nations who had long historical ties with their colonies, such as France with Algeria, the relatively brief period of Italian colonial conquest in Ethiopia, Libya and Italian Somaliland did not provide a pull factor for migration to Italy. This is generally due to ‘the degree to which immigrants are familiar with, and have knowledge of, the language, customs, and religion of host countries’.<sup>88</sup> As Italy’s presence and influence in Africa did not last, as her longest standing colony was Eritrea which only formally lasted fifty-seven years, Eritreans, Ethiopians, Somalians and Libyans migrating to

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<sup>83</sup> V. Langbehn, ‘Introduction’, in V. Langbehn (ed.) *German Colonialism, Visual Culture and Modern Memory* (N.Y. 2010).

<sup>84</sup> C. Lombardi-Diop, ‘Spotless Italy: Hygiene, Domesticity, and the Ubiquity of Whiteness in Fascist and Postwar Culture’, Research Paper presented at the British School in Rome (24-25<sup>th</sup> June 2010).

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> D. Riley & R. Jean Emigh, ‘Post-Colonial Journeys: Historical Roots of Immigration and Integration’ *Comparative Sociology*, 1/2, (August 2002), pp. 169 - 191.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 186.



Europe after 1945 were not more likely to move to Italy than any other European country. Therefore, the relatively low migration rates from Italy's ex-colonies had the further effect of hindering these ethnic groups from 'establishing an organized presence in Italy' and representation on their behalf at a social, cultural and political level. This explains why there was no Italian public resistance to the Graziani monument and there was no notable protest from domestic Italian groups of African descent.

In contrast, whilst in France there may still be a 'lack of a collective national memory', more progress has been made in comparison with Italy due to the largescale migration of Algerians after the country gained independence in 1962.<sup>89</sup> These migrant groups and their gradual entrance onto the 'historico-political stage' in France have allowed the Algerian war to no longer be a taboo subject in the public realm.<sup>90</sup> Eventually, more representation on the behalf of migrants and their families have recently allowed for public memories of those who fought for Algerian independence, such as the Paris city council which renamed a piazza in the centre of the capital in honour of Maurice Audin in 2004. Audin was an anti-colonialist who was among the many tortured to death during the Algerian war of independence, whose story eventually emerged following a debate made public by activists, which ended a long silence by the French government who 'avoided assuming any official responsibility for individual acts of torture'.<sup>91</sup> Hence, although there are still cases of colonial-era monuments in France which continue heroise colonial soldiers and missionaries, like in Italy, at least 'an atmosphere has emerged since the 1990s in which the issue of colonialism is intensely discussed and remembered', contrary to the case of Italy.<sup>92</sup>

Lastly, another crucial way of raising awareness about a nation's colonial past is through state education which can be analysed by scholars via national textbooks providing 'authoritative narratives of the nation', and therefore also acting as state sites of

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<sup>89</sup> R. Aldrich, *Vestiges of the Colonial Empire in France: Monuments, Museums and Colonial Memory* (N.Y. 2005), p. 20.

<sup>90</sup> J. Jansen 'Politics of Remembrance, Colonialism and the Algerian War of Independence in France' in M. Pakier & B. Strath (eds.) *A European Memory? Contested Histories and Politics of Remembrance* (N.Y. 2010), p. 280.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid*, p. 284.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid*, p. 290.

memory.<sup>93</sup> For example, in relation to Japanese revisionism of their imperial conduct against East Asia during World War II, by the end of the 1990s ‘high school and middle school textbooks contain(ed) information critical of the war’ with ‘nearly all of them mentioning harsh colonial policies, the Nanjing massacre and military comfort women’, primarily from China and Korea.<sup>94</sup> Recent apologies by the Japanese government have been half-hearted in attempts to protect the reputation of the armed forces, who are highly respected in Japanese society, but recent didactic developments indicate some progress in critical re-evaluations of Japan’s wartime past.

Unfortunately, in Italy however, Labanca’s study of school textbooks from the Italo-Turkish war over Libya of 1911 until 2001 highlights a strong continuity in imperial ideology and nostalgia for the colonies after 1945 which was translated in the school curricula until the 1970s.<sup>95</sup> Afterwards, however, both Labanca’s study and Igiaba Scego, an Italian writer and activist of Somali origin, agree that nostalgia faded into almost a complete omission of the colonial period in Italian schools. In an interview Scego commented upon her personal experience at school by remembering that “da anni si ripete questa storia che il colonialismo italiano non è studiato a scuola. In realtà questo era vero ai miei tempi negli anni ’90. All’epoca effettivamente c’era una sola paginetta”.<sup>96</sup> According to another scholarly analysis of Labanca’s work, ‘l’analisi dei manuali diviene per Labanca la chiave per esaminare l’azione della scuola nella costruzione dell’opinione pubblica’ rendering it highly relevant to the lack of awareness of Graziani’s crimes amongst Italy’s post-war generations.<sup>97</sup>

Due to this rather complex story, the continued existence of the Graziani monument and other official memories which continue to contribute to the positive memory of Graziani the imperial war hero, have led me to the conclusion that the historical myth of Graziani was largely successful in Italy and abroad throughout the twentieth century. The potency of fascist colonial propaganda lingers to this very day through the many cultural means

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<sup>93</sup> L. Hein & M. Selden, ‘The Lessons of War, Global Power, and Social Change’, in Hein & Selden (eds.) *Censoring History, Perspectives on Nationalism and War in the Twentieth Century* (N.Y. 2011), p. 3.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>95</sup> Labanca (a cura di), *La Libia nei manuali scolastici italiani (1911-2011)* (Roma, 2003).

<sup>96</sup> I. Scego quoted in A. Fioravanti, ‘Cosa è stato davvero il colonialismo italiano e perché sappiamo poco o nulla dei quei 75 anni’, *Linkiesta* (16 Settembre 2020).

<sup>97</sup> Gabrielli, *Insegnare le colonie*, p. 23.

that I have analysed in this thesis, as the Graziani myth, along with other myths disseminated during the dictatorship, eventually ‘remove(d) other windows on the past – leading to absences, silences and gaps’.<sup>98</sup> Through the first historical analysis of all aspects of this important figure’s life and afterlife, my thesis aims to have somewhat filled these absences that pervade Italian public awareness of the nation’s colonial and fascist past in modern-day Italy. By utilising the global cultural representation and public memory of Graziani as my case-study through the examination of countless sources somewhat neglected in other historical analyses to date, I hope to have shed important light on ‘a powerful set of indications concerning Italian national and political identity, and the stereotypes that have marked that identity.’<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Foot, *Italy's Divided Memory*, p. 18.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

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