

Photomontage in the Fascist Magazine La Difesa della razza *Visual Sources, Manipulations, Controversies**

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An Impactful Cover

On August 5, 1938, the new propaganda organ of the Fascist regime and mouthpiece of its racist doctrine, *La Difesa della razza* (Defence of the Race), made its debut.¹ The image featured on the cover of that first issue and which, at the same time, served as a visual and ideological manifesto, was an eloquent photomontage. It consisted of three heads: one of a Jew, one of a black woman, and a third, that of a white man, separated from the others by a sword to preserve the alleged purity of the Italian race (fig. 1). Thus, the hatred machine was set in motion.

That summer, the Ministry of Popular Culture, which had total control over the media, launched a press campaign in support of the infamous racial laws of autumn 1938. The *Manifesto della razza* (Manifesto of Race), signed in July by eminent scholars, had summed up the essence of Fascist racism in ten points and was published in several newspapers.² And many of those scientists ended up on the editorial staff of *La Difesa*

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¹ On the magazine, published from August 1938 to June 1943, see VALENTINA PISANTY, *La Difesa della razza. Antologia 1938–1943* (Milan: Bompiani, 2007); FRANCESCO CASSATA, 'La Difesa della razza.' *Politica, ideologia e immagine del razzismo fascista* (Turin: Einaudi, 2008); MICHELE LORÉ, *Antisemitismo e razzismo ne "La Difesa della Razza" (1938–1943)* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2008); PIETRO FISCHIETTI, *La Difesa della razza. Genesi e analisi di una rivista del razzismo fascista* (Lecce: Youcanprint, 2018); ARIANNA LEONETTI, *Oltre "La Difesa della razza". L'editoria razzista e antisemita in Italia (1938–1945)* (Milan: Creleb, 2019).

² The ten points of the *Manifesto della razza*, first published in *Il Giornale d'Italia* (July 14, 1938), were reprinted in 'Razzismo italiano,' *La Difesa della razza* 1, no. 1 (August 5, 1938): 1. On Italian science and racism, see, among others, ALBERTO BURGIO, *Nel nome della razza. Il razzismo nella storia d'Italia: 1870–1945*, 2nd ed. (1999; Bologna: Il Mulino, 2000); ROBERTO MAIOCCHI, *Scienza italiana e razzismo fascista*

della razza under chief editor Telesio Interlandi, who also edited other anti-Semitic publications, such as *Il Tevere* and *Quadrivio*.³

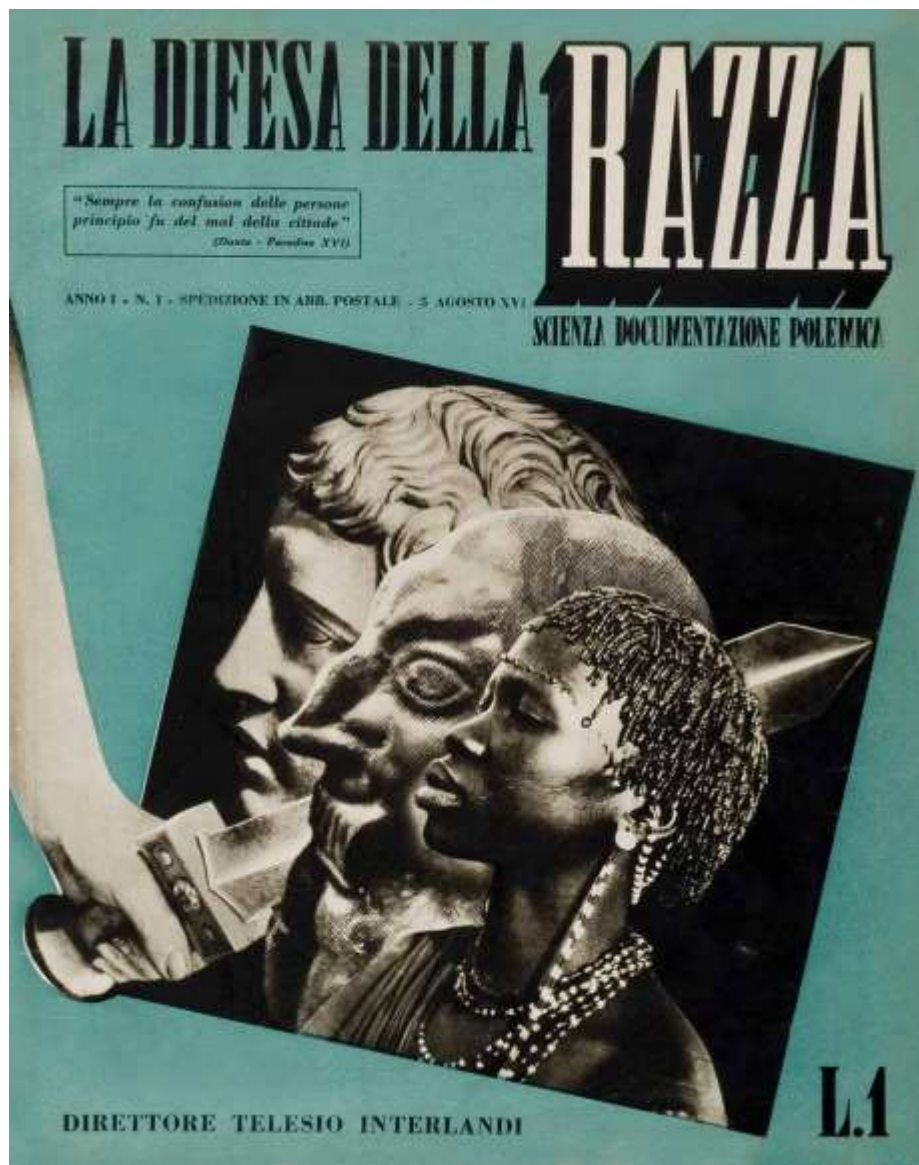


Figure 1. Idalgo Palazzetti, [Untitled], cover photomontage of *La Difesa della razza* 1, no. 1 (August 5, 1938).

(Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1999); FRANCO CUOMO, *I dieci. Chi erano i professori che firmarono il Manifesto della Razza*, repr. (Milan: Baldini Castoldi Dalai, 2005; Acireale: Bonanno, 2017). The historiography on the racial laws and their consequences is abundant. For an extensive bibliography on racial studies, see VALERIA GALIMI, 'Politica della razza, antisemitismo, Shoah,' *Studi storici* 55, no. 1 (2014): 169–81.

³ On Interlandi, see MICHELE SARFATTI, 'Telesio Interlandi,' in *Dizionario del fascismo*, eds SERGIO LUZZATTO and VICTORIA DE GRAZIA, 2 vols., vol. 1 (Turin: Einaudi, 2019), 673–74; MAURO CANALI, 'Interlandi, Telesio,' in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, 100 vols., vol. 62 (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 2004), 519–21; GIAMPIERO MUGHINI, *A via della Mercede c'era un razzista*, repr. (Milan: Rizzoli, 1990; Venice: Marsilio, 2019).

The fortnightly magazine aimed to develop and disseminate a scientific doctrine of race that would justify colonial policy and, above all, discrimination against Jews. As the first article stated,

with the creation of the Empire the Italian race has come in contact with other races; therefore, it should be wary of any hybridism and contamination. ‘Racist’ laws in such a sense have already been elaborated and applied, with Fascist energy, in the territories of the Empire.⁴

After Italy’s 1936 conquest of Ethiopia, and the laws against ‘madamism’ and Jews in 1937 and 1938, according to Interlandi: ‘This magazine was born at the right time. The first phase of the racist controversy is over, science has spoken, the Regime has proclaimed the urgency of the problem.’⁵

The purpose was thus to convince the public that colonialism, the ban on mixed marriages, and recent persecution measures were legitimate and necessary for defending Italians from racial degeneration. In short, it was time to spread the scientific and aesthetic Fascist theories about race: ‘we will popularize, with the help of scholars of various disciplines related to the problem, the fundamental concepts upon which the doctrine of Italian racism is based; and we will prove that science is on our side.’⁶

As we read in the advertisements announcing the release of the new periodical, alongside the articles by journalists and anthropologists, the images would be no less important.⁷

Indeed, they were perhaps the periodical’s most persuasive communication tool, especially thanks to the medium of photomontage, solidified by its success in many of the regime’s exhibitions. This cut-and-paste technique of assembling images and texts offered a way to disassemble, reassemble, and manipulate heterogeneous sources, weaving them into a new texture: a modern language mobilised to engage the beholder through violent visual propaganda.⁸ The first cover by Idalgo Palazzetti, a member of the GUF (Fascist University Groups) in Perugia,⁹ quoted above, serves as a prime example.

⁴ ‘Il partito e il razzismo italiano,’ *La Difesa della razza* 1, no. 1 (August 5, 1938): 2.

⁵ T.I. [TELESIO INTERLANDI], [Untitled], *La Difesa della razza* 1, no. 1 (August 5, 1938): 3.

⁶ T.I., [Untitled]: 3.

⁷ ‘Sabato uscirà la rivista “La difesa della razza,”’ *Corriere della Sera*, August 3, 1938: 2; ‘Il primo numero della “Difesa della Razza,”’ *Quadrivio* 6, no. 41 (August 7, 1938): 1.

⁸ On photomontage in Italian magazines of this period, see SILVIA BIGNAMI, ‘Il fotomontaggio nelle riviste illustrate degli anni Trenta tra ricerche d’avanguardia e cultura visiva di massa,’ in *Forme e modelli del rotocalco italiano tra fascismo e guerra*, eds RAFFAELE DE BERTI and IRENE PIAZZONI (Milan: Cisalpino, 2009), 591–624, republished in *Gli anni Trenta a Milano. Tra architetture, immagini e opere d’arte*, eds SILVIA BIGNAMI and PAOLO RUSCONI (Milan: Mimesis, 2014), 199–222.

⁹ Idalgo Palazzetti, an artist who excelled in poster design, as written by UMBRO APOLLONIO, ‘Trieste. La mostra dei Littoriali,’ *Emporium* 89, no. 533 (May 1939): 330–34 (333), is mostly associated with the famous cover of the racist periodical. Cf. CASSATA, ‘*La Difesa della razza*,’ 342–43; SIMONE DURANTI, *Lo spirito gregario. I gruppi universitari fascisti tra politica e propaganda (1930–1940)* (Rome: Donzelli, 2008), 340.

He arranged the three human faces on a single diagonal, an invitation to observers to make a comparison that would inevitably draw their attention to the evident, striking differences. The idea of a strict hierarchy between the races was also conveyed by the use of different visual sources including a classical statue;¹⁰ a sculpted ‘caricature from the third century, belonging to the Rheinisches Landesmuseum Trier’;¹¹ and an ethnographic photograph by Lidio Cipriani, director of the National Museum of Anthropology in Florence and a contributor to the regime’s racist magazine.¹² Those watching the montage thus ended up associating Italians with the perfect head of a classical sculpture, Jews with the hooked profile of a defamatory caricature, and black people with the prognathic face taken in Africa only a few years earlier.

These images had been circulating for some time. In fact, between 1937 and 1939, the anti-Jewish relief had been published with articles in both *Quadrivio* and *La Difesa della razza*: from Interlandi’s ‘Parliamo del razzismo’ (Let’s talk about racism) to Marcello Ricci’s text on the ‘biological legacies of racism’ (fig. 2), through to Herman de Vries de Heekelingen’s thoughts on the ‘eternal Jewish question’ (fig. 3).¹³ The same is true for the Shilluk woman, who had already appeared in the popular weekly *La Domenica del Corriere* in an article showing the special hairstyles, tattoos, and colourful

¹⁰ Some recognise the Doryphoros of Polycleto: CASSATA, ‘*La Difesa della razza*,’ 343; OLINDO DE NAPOLI, *La prova della razza. Cultura giuridica e razzismo in Italia negli anni Trenta* (Florence: Le Monnier, 2009), 190; MARCO GIUMAN, ‘*La difesa della razza*: come educare all’odio per immagini,’ in *Nigra subucula induti. Immagine, classicità e questione della razza nella propaganda dell’Italia fascista*, eds MARCO GIUMAN and CIRO PARODO (Padua: Cleup, 2011), 165–196 (182–83); MARLA STONE, ‘Italian Fascism’s Wartime Enemy and the Politics of Fear,’ in *Facing Fear. The History of an Emotion in Global Perspective*, eds MICHAEL LAFFAN and MAX WEISS (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 114–32 (123); LUCIA PICCIONI, ‘Images of Black Faces in Italian Colonialism: Mobile Essentialisms,’ *Modern Italy* 27, no. 4 (2022), 375–96. Some, however, identify it as ‘a portrait from the Augustan era’: SIMONE VERDE, *Le belle arti e i selvaggi. La scoperta dell’altro, la storia dell’arte e l’invenzione del patrimonio culturale* (Venice: Marsilio, 2019), 160.

¹¹ As the photograph caption in the article by MARCELLO RICCI, ‘Eredità biologiche e razzismo,’ *La Difesa della razza* 1, no. 1 (August 5, 1938): 19.

¹² Anthropologists like Cipriani were actively involved in the creation of the ‘anthropology of race’: MARIA PIA DI BELLA, ‘Ethnologie et fascisme: quelques exemples,’ *Ethnologie française* 18, no. 2 (1988): 131–36; BARBARA SÖRGONI, ‘Racist Discourses and Practices in the Italian Empire under Fascism,’ in *The Politics of Recognizing Difference: Multiculturalism Italian Style*, eds RALPH GRILLO and JEFF PRATT (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), 41–57. On Cipriani and photography, see LIDIO CIPRIANI, ‘Per la fotografia a servizio della scienza,’ *AFT. Rivista di storia e fotografia* 6, no. 11 (1990): 20 (originally appeared in 1934 in *Rivista di Biologia*); JACOPO MOGGI-CECCHI, ‘La vita e l’opera scientifica di Lidio Cipriani,’ *AFT. Rivista di storia e fotografia* 6, no. 11 (1990): 11–18; PAOLO CHIOZZI, ‘Gli album fotografici di Lidio Cipriani (1927–1955),’ *AFT. Rivista di storia e fotografia* 6, no. 11 (1990): 21–28; PAOLO CHIOZZI, ‘Autoritratto del razzismo: le fotografie antropologiche di Lidio Cipriani,’ in *La menzogna della razza. Documenti e immagini del razzismo e dell’antisemitismo fascista*, ed. CENTRO FURIO JESI, exhibition catalogue (Bologna: Grafis, 1994), 91–94; LUCAS O. IANNUZZI, ‘Lidio Cipriani (1892–1962), the Photographs in His Popular Science Literature,’ *Nuncius* 36, no. 3 (2021): 611–45. On the visual and museum aspects of Cipriani’s collections, see also LUCIA PICCIONI, ‘Dupliquer et hiérarchiser l’humanité,’ *Pasés Futurs*, no. 6 (2019), <https://www.politika.io/fr/article/dupliquer-hierarchiser-lhumanite>; LUCIA PICCIONI, ‘Empreintes de l’altérité. Moulages faciaux Africains et conceptions de la “race” dans l’Italie fasciste,’ in *Valeurs et matérialité*, ed. FRÉDÉRIC KECK (Paris: Éditions Rue d’Ulm, 2019), 81–94.

¹³ TELESIO INTERLANDI, ‘Parliamo del razzismo,’ *Quadrivio* 5, no. 23 (April 1937): 1; RICCI, ‘Eredità biologiche e razzismo,’ 19; HERMAN DE VRIES DE HEKELINGEN, ‘L’eterna questione ebraica e la sua soluzione,’ *La Difesa della razza* 3, no. 1 (November 5, 1939): 29–31. For a discussion of these sculptures, which are not recognised as anti-Semitic caricatures, see GIUMAN, ‘*La difesa della razza*,’ 184–85.

accessories of the indigenous¹⁴ (fig. 4). But the same girl had been immortalised in other similar photographs. One of these, almost identical except for the different direction of the protagonist's gaze, could be found in Cipriani's book *In Africa dal Capo al Cairo* of 1932, next to a page that dwells on the mental inferiority of black women, which bordered 'often on outright stupidity,' we read¹⁵ (fig. 5).



Figure 2. *Caricatura di Ebreo, del III secolo, esistente nel 'Rheinisches Landesmuseum,' di Treviri*, photograph from Marcello Ricci, 'Eredità biologiche e razzismo,' *La Difesa della razza* 1, no. 1 (August 5, 1938): 19.

Figure 3. [Untitled], images from Herman De Vries De Hekelingen, 'L'eterna questione ebraica e la sua soluzione,' *La Difesa della razza* 3, no. 1 (November 5, 1939): 30.

¹⁴ ARMANDO FRACCAROLI, 'Eleganze dei negri,' *La Domenica del Corriere* 36, no. 5 (February 4, 1934): 8–9 (8).

¹⁵ LIDIO CIPRIANI, *In Africa dal Capo al Cairo* (Florence: Bemporad, 1932), 586. The same image would later be reproduced in the photomontage in the article by RITA HAUSCHILD, 'Gli incroci negro-cinesi,' *La Difesa della razza* 3, no. 10 (March 20, 1940): 51–52 (51). While a frontal photograph of the same woman is published in CIPRIANI's article 'Razzismo,' *La Difesa della razza* 1, no. 1 (August 5, 1938): 12–13 (13); EDMONDO VERCELLESI, 'Le razze dell'Impero,' *La Difesa della razza* 2, no. 13 (May 5, 1939): 35–37 (35).



Figure 4. *Questa pettinatura a tetto di capanna, con la quale una giovane Shilluk [...],* photograph from Armando Fraccaroli, 'Eleganze dei negri,' *La Domenica del Corriere* 36, no. 5 (February 4, 1934): 8.

Figure 5. *Donne Scilluk*, photograph from Lidio Cipriani, *In Africa dal Capo al Cairo* (Florence: Bemporad, 1932), 587, figure 278.

The volume and the articles sought to reaffirm racial diversity and inculcate in the Italian masses the regime's political imperatives. The photomontage also aimed to signal the supposed distance between white people and other races, Africans and Jews, and the irreducible inferiority of the latter.

The profile view of the three heads in the montage thus emphasised not only the stereotypical Jewish nose, which has a long tradition in Western visual culture,¹⁶ but also the prognathism of the African face, equally well known thanks to the nineteenth-century obsession with ranking human races. For instance, the Dutch anatomist Petrus Camper systematised faces by facial angle in the eighteenth century

¹⁶ On the stereotypical Jewish nose, see, among others, MELVIN KONNER, *The Jewish Body* (New York: Schocken, 2009); SARA LIPTON, 'The Invention of the Jewish Nose,' *The New York Review*, November 14, 2014, <https://www.nybooks.com/daily/2014/11/14/invention-jewish-nose/>; GIOVANNI TARANTINO, 'From Labelling and Ridicule to Understanding: The Novelty of Bernard and Picart's Religious Comparativism,' in *Through Your Eyes: Religious Alterity and the Early Modern Western Imagination*, eds GIOVANNI TARANTINO and PAOLA VON WYSS-GIACOSA (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 236–66 (238–44); also, on the Nazi case, KONSTANTIN AKINSHA, 'Il naso di Alfred Flechtheim. Antisemitismo e immagini nella propaganda nazista,' *Storicamente* 5, no. 54 (2009), <https://storicamente.org/antisemitismo-akinsha>.

along a spectrum beginning with apes, then black people and finally white people, characterised by the perfect proportions exemplified in ancient Greek statues.¹⁷ His illustrations became famous and inspired many other versions,¹⁸ and were later republished by the racist magazine in one of its articles on prognathism as a ‘distinguishing feature of the race.’ The analysis of facial proportions was therefore based on precise ‘canons,’ on ‘anatomical and artistic laws,’ and ancient masterpieces of art history, such as the Apollo of Belvedere, the Venus de Milo, and even Leonardo’s drawings, were instrumentally mentioned.¹⁹

Greek, Roman, Renaissance works of art: all could become a weapon to claim the superiority of whiteness. Significantly, even the sword-armed hand on Palazzetti’s cover, often overlooked and dismissed as a mere gladius,²⁰ seems to come from a masterpiece of Italian art: specifically, from a reversed photograph of Antonio Canova’s sculpture, *Perseus with the head of Medusa*.²¹ It was the sword of the famous hero of Greek mythology, the slayer of the gorgon Medusa, that divided and defended the civilised races from the lesser ones. An expedient that brought to mind other images from the same period. For example, in this Fips (Philipp Rupprecht) cartoon for the Nazi newspaper *Der Stürmer*, we see a sword engraved with the inscription ‘Nuremberg Laws’ dividing the beautiful, white, Aryan couple from a group of ugly, hook-nosed Jews (fig. 6).²²

¹⁷ For an overview of Camper, see MIRIAM CLAUDE MEIJER, *Race and Aesthetics in the Anthropology of Petrus Camper (1722–1789)* (Leiden: Brill, 1999). On Camper and the introduction of ancient marble masterpieces in the sequence of human faces, see ANNE LAFONT, *L’art et la race. L’Africain (tout) contre l’œil des Lumières* (Dijon: Les presses du réel, 2019), 85–130.

¹⁸ E.g., JULIEN-JOSEPH VIREY, *Histoire naturelle du genre humain*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (Paris: Imprimerie de F. Dufart, 1800), pl. IV, and later editions like JULIEN-JOSEPH VIREY, *Histoire naturelle du genre humain, nouvelle édition, augmentée et entièrement refondue avec figures*, 3 vols., vol. 2 (Bruxelles: Aug. Walen Libraire Imprimeur de la Cour, 1826), pl. VIII.

¹⁹ EDMONDO VERCELLESI, ‘Il prognatismo. Carattere differenziale della razza,’ *La Difesa della razza* 2, no. 8 (February 20, 1939): 27. Camper’s plates also appear in GUIDO LANDRA, ‘Antropologia. Forme esterne nel corpo umano, variazioni nel sesso e nell’età,’ *La Difesa della razza* 4, no. 12 (April 20, 1941): 18–20.

²⁰ From the description of the logo made by the magazine itself: ‘The very title of our magazine and the small coat of arms with the gladius separating the Jew and the Negro from the Roman refer specifically to the problem of crossbreeding.’ GUIDO LANDRA, ‘Studi italiani sul meticcio,’ *La Difesa della razza* 3, no. 10 (March 20, 1940): 8–10 (8).

²¹ Many thanks to Federica Rovati for the correct insight. For an Anderson photograph taken from a similar angle, see STENDHAL, ‘La gloria del Canova,’ *Dedalo* 3, no. 2 (1922–1923): 312–40 (325); Fondazione Zeri, Bologna, <http://catalogo.fondazionezeri.unibo.it/scheda/fotografia/145711/Anderson%20-%20Roma%20-%20II%20Perseo%20-%20Antonio%20Canova%20-%20Museo%20Vaticano%20-%20insieme>.

²² On this cartoon, see ERNST H. GOMBRICH, ‘The Cartoonist Armoury,’ in *Meditations on a Hobby Horse and Other Essays on the Theory of Art*, ed. ERNST H. GOMBRICH (London: Phaidon Press, 1963), 127–42 (138–39) [It. transl. CAMILLA ROATTA, *Le armi del vignettista*, in *A cavallo di un manico di scopa. Saggi di teoria dell’arte* (Turin: Einaudi, 1971), 192–215]; PAOLA PALLOTTINO, ‘Origini dello stereotipo fisionomico dell’“ebreo” e sua permanenza nell’iconografia antisemita del Novecento,’ in CENTRO FURIO JESI, ed., *La menzogna della razza*, 17–26 (22–23).



Figure 6. Fips [Philipp Rupprecht], ‘Rassenschutz,’ caricature from *Der Stürmer*, no. 25 (June 1938): 1.

No doubt for compositional reason, but equally for its symbolic value, *La Difesa della razza*'s first cover was so popular that it was replicated in the next two issues and became the official logo of the periodical.²³ According to a blurb published in *Quadrivio* in September, it had been ‘a huge success due to the happiness of the idea and the sobriety of the realisation’;²⁴ but the work had only just begun. After receiving compliments from Benito Mussolini,²⁵ Interlandi thus announced a ‘permanent competition’ for the future covers of the review, in the hope of recruiting new graphic designers, with one thousand lire up for grabs for each accepted cover.²⁶ The

²³ *La Difesa della razza* 1, no. 2 (August 20, 1938) and no. 3 (September 5, 1938). The first three issues of the magazine and their covers were criticised at the time by FRANK M. SNOWDEN JR., ‘Race Propaganda in Italy,’ *Phylon* 1, no. 2 (1940): 103–11.

²⁴ ‘Concorso permanente per la copertina della Difesa della razza,’ *Quadrivio* 6, no. 47 (September 18, 1938): 8. The same advertisement also appeared in *Il Tevere*, cf. CASSATA, ‘*La Difesa della razza*,’ 343–44.

²⁵ [Untitled], *Quadrivio* 6, no. 42 (August 14, 1938): 1.

²⁶ ‘Concorso permanente per la copertina della Difesa della razza,’ 8. On the magazine covers, see CASSATA, ‘*La Difesa della razza*,’ 342–51; GIUMAN, ‘*La difesa della razza*’; for the anti-Semitic ones, GUIDO GRAMIGNI, ‘L’antisemitismo nelle copertine de “*La Difesa della Razza*,”’ in *Matite razziste. L’antisemitismo nell’illustrazione del periodo fascista*, eds GIOVANNA LAMBRONI and DORA LISCIA BEMPORAD (Florence: Edifir, 2015), 95–109; for some useful hints, see also GIULIANA TOMASELLA, ‘La rappresentazione

advertisement encouraged artists to create photographic montages, either in colour or black and white, and the only recommendation was to create an effective composition, fully consistent with the editorial line, and easily accessible to the ‘great mass’ of readers.²⁷



Figure 7. [Untitled], cover photomontage of *La Difesa della razza* 3, no. 2 (November 20, 1939).

Figure 8. *Ai pozzi di Gullui (Morelli o Fontanesi?)*, photograph from T. Doria, ‘Africa d’oggi (Due diari di viaggio),’ *Rassegna d’espansione italiana. Illustrazione coloniale* 16, no. 10 (October 1934): 36.

Things worked out very differently. The idea of attracting prominent artists foundered. However, the magazine continued to churn out covers, rarely signed, and mostly done with the photomontage technique, which became an everyday pictorial language. The sources were many and varied: from Cipriani’s photographs to readily available images from current newspapers or postcards.²⁸ The compositions, on the other hand, were

dell’alterità africana negli anni fra le due guerre,’ in *Imago animi. Volti dal passato*, exhibition catalogue (Padua: Università degli Studi di Padova; Cles: Comune di Cles, 2018), 28–31.

²⁷ ‘Concorso permanente per la copertina della Difesa della razza,’ 8. The certified print run of the first four issues of the magazine is as follows: 140,500, 140,000, 130,000, and 150,000 copies. See ‘Certificazione,’ *La Difesa della razza* 1, no. 5 (October 5, 1938): 7. This is an impressive print run, at the relatively low price of one lira per booklet, as explained by CASSATA, ‘*La Difesa della razza*,’ 56–57. See Cassata also for further information on the distribution of the magazine in schools and libraries as a result of the circulars issued by the Minister of National Education, Giuseppe Bottai.

²⁸ Two more examples in addition to figures 5–6: the photograph *Barentù: tipo Cunama* from Cipriani’s album *Raccolta fotografica. Africa Orientale: Eritrea* (Archivio Fotografico Toscano, Prato) for the cover of

often unsophisticated, both visually and in terms of content, which hinged on the dualisms of black and white, Aryan and Jewish, to elicit fear and disgust at the practice of miscegenation.²⁹ A small red fence depicted in the very foreground, above the photograph of some African women near a water well, was enough to give the idea of a clear separation: on one side were the white, Italian readers of Interlandi's magazine, on the other the black people (figs. 7–8).

Beauty and Monstrosity

The photomontage technique was not restricted to the covers of the magazine. In July 1941, for instance, a two-page montage extended this technique to the inside pages. On the first page, an image of a white man had been superimposed onto a picture of indigenous huts; on the second, a black woman wearing a lip disc had been superimposed onto a photograph of Modena Cathedral. 'The harmony of the race is also harmony between the race and the environment it creates,' the caption read: 'See how this young Aryan man's face contrasts with the desolate African landscape and how the admirable architectural background repels the deformed face of this negress'³⁰ (fig. 9).

As is evident, both the images and the words revealed a patent hostility towards Africans. This is understood even more clearly by identifying the visual materials used in the assembly. To begin with, the photograph of the woman had been taken by the Austrian anthropologist Hugo Adolf Bernatzik, who had published it in his book *The Dark Continent* a decade earlier.³¹ The cut-out chosen for the montage came from *Le razze e i popoli della terra* (Races and peoples of the earth), a series of volumes edited by Renato Biasutti in 1941, together with other Italian scholars. Here we see that the woman's shoulders and bare breasts were cropped out of the original image³² (figs. 10–11).

no. 24 (October 20, 1939); the postcard *L'Afrique qui disparaît. 92. Ruanda – Un Mutudzi* by C. Zagourski for the cover no. 24 (October 20, 1940).

²⁹ As has been observed, the dualism of black and white had long implied many other dualisms in Western thought since early modern history; for an in-depth study, see GIOVANNI TARANTINO, *Feeling White. Beneath and Beyond*, in *The Routledge History of Emotions in Europe*, eds ANDREW LYNCH and SUSAN BROOMHALL (London: Routledge, 2020), 303–19.

³⁰ From the image caption, *La Difesa della razza* 4, no. 17 (July 5, 1941): 8–9.

³¹ It was also published in Italy: UGO ADOLFO BERNATZIK [HUGO ADOLF BERNATZIK], *Il continente nero. Africa. La Terra e l'Uomo* (Milan: Sperling & Kupfer, 1931), 23.

³² RENATO BIASUTTI, 'I Negri del Sudan centrale ed orientale,' in *Le razze e i popoli della terra*, ed. RENATO BIASUTTI, 4 vols., vol. 2, *Africa Asia* (Turin: UTET, 1941), 204–36 (224). At the time, Biasutti was professor of geography and biology of human races at the University of Florence. On the scholar and his work, see ERNESTA CERULLI, 'Biasutti, Renato,' in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, 100 vols., vol. 10 (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1968), 296–98; CLAUDIO POGGLIANO, *L'ossessione della razza. Antropologia e genetica nel XX secolo* (Pisa: Edizioni della Normale, 2005), 386–402.



Figure 9. *L'armonia della razza è anche l'armonia fra la razza e l'ambiente che essa si crea. Guardate come contrasta il volto di questo giovane ariano con il desolato paesaggio africano e come il mirabile sfondo architettonico respinge il volto deforme di questa negra*, photomontage from Giulio Cogni, 'Armonie di razze,' *La Difesa della razza* 4, no. 17 (July 5, 1941): 8–9.

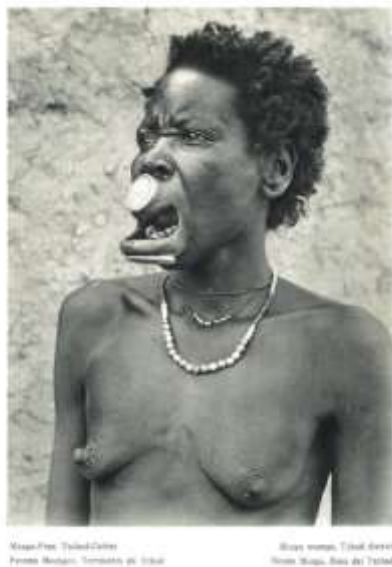


Figure 10. *Donna Musgu, Zona del Tschad*, photograph from Ugo Adolfo Bernatzik [Hugo Adolf Bernatzik], *Il continente nero. Africa. La Terra e l'Uomo* (Milan: Sperling & Kupfer, 1931), 23.

Figure 11. *Donna Musgu, con duplice disco labiale*, photograph from Renato Biasutti, 'I Negri del Sùdan centrale ed orientale,' in *Le razze e i popoli della terra*, ed. Renato Biasutti, 4 vols., vol. 2, *Africa Asia* (Turin: UTET, 1941), 224.

As can be seen from the caption, this was a Musgu woman from the Chad area of central Africa, a place where, as Biasutti wrote, the use of buttons or labial discs was very common. Often, he recounted, the weight made the discs hang downwards; at other times, they broke and, as they could not be replaced, gave the women ‘an even more repulsive look.’³³ Repelling, deformity, repugnance: these are the keywords associated with the images of these women, both in *La Difesa della razza* and in Biasutti’s text, as in many others.³⁴ This was nothing new. Indeed, it was not the first time that Interlandi’s periodical had used the image of a black woman to suggest her presumed physical unpleasantness. The case of the portrait of Saartjie Baartman, a Khoisan woman known since the nineteenth century as the ‘Hottentot Venus,’ is exemplary.

Although some attempts to denigrate African women dated back to the victory in Ethiopia, when the regime had unsuccessfully tried to forbid interracial unions between colonisers and the colonised,³⁵ Baartman’s dark-skinned figure appeared again only in 1938, in the first issue of the racist periodical (fig. 12).³⁶ She had been a genuine icon in the past, with hundreds of portraits and satirical prints of her being disseminated since her presentation to the European public in London and Paris.³⁷ During these exhibitions, she attracted crowds of visitors mainly for her steatopygia (enlarged buttocks), but her body had also been the subject of scientific curiosity, as evidenced by various illustrations by naturalists and scholars. A century later, the Fascist newspaper also drew on this rich iconographic apparatus, and the engraving first published in Étienne Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire and Frédéric Cuvier’s book, *Histoire naturelle des mammifères*, was passed off as a real photograph (fig. 13).³⁸

³³ BIASUTTI, ‘I Negri del Sùdan centrale ed orientale,’ 204–36 (224).

³⁴ E.g., ‘Eva africana allo specchio in cerca di grazie occidentali,’ *Corriere della Sera*, October 21, 1938: 6. See the other examples mentioned by PRISCILLA MANFREN, *Icone d’Oltremare nell’Italia fascista: artisti, illustratori e vignettisti alla conquista dell’Africa* (Trieste: EUT Edizioni Università di Trieste, 2019), 190–91.

³⁵ On the visual consequences of this controversy, see the recent studies by VANESSA RIGHETTONI, *Bianco su nero. Iconografia della razza e guerra d’Etiopia* (Macerata: Quodlibet; Milan: Fondazione Passarè, 2018), 55–80; ALESSANDRO VOLPI, ‘Da Veneri nere a sudice e fetide: immagini italiane delle donne africane negli anni Trenta,’ *Visual History*, no. 4 (2018): 91–111.

³⁶ G.L. [GUIDO LANDRA], ‘I bastardi,’ *La Difesa della razza* 1, no. 1 (August 5, 1938): 16–17 (17).

³⁷ On Baartman’s visual representation, see ZOË S. STROTHER, ‘Display of the Body Hottentot,’ in *Africans on Stage. Studies in Ethnological Show Business*, ed. BERNTH LINDFORS (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 1–61; NICHOLAS HUDSON, ‘The “Hottentot Venus” Sexuality, and the Changing Aesthetics of Race, 1650–1850,’ *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal* 41, no. 1 (2008): 19–41; ALISON E. WRIGHT, ‘The Hottentot Venus: An Alternative Iconography,’ *The British Art Journal* 14, no. 1 (2013): 59–70; ALISON E. WRIGHT, ‘The Face of Saartjie Baartman: Rowlandson, Race and the “Hottentot Venus,”’ in *Burning Bright. Essays in Honour of David Bindman*, eds DIANA DETHLOFF et al. (London: UCL Press, 2015), 115–25; KATHERINE BRION, ‘Courbet’s The Bathers and the “Hottentot Venus”: Destabilizing Whiteness in the Mid-Nineteenth-Century Nude,’ *Word & Image* 35, no. 1 (2019): 12–32.

³⁸ As the image caption said; cf. ÉTIENNE GEOFFROY SAINT-HILAIRE and FRÉDÉRIC CUVIER, *Histoire naturelle des mammifères*, 5 vols., vol. 2 (Paris: C. de Lasteyrie, 1819), plate 39. These plates had already circulated in the late nineteenth century in scientific texts, see RAPHAËL BLANCHARD, ‘Étude sur la stéatopygie et le tablier des femmes boschimanés,’ in *Observations sur le tablier des femmes hottentotes*, eds

This was not the most important misrepresentation, given that the misleading caption presented the woman as the product of a mix between Bushmen and Dutch farmers who had settled in Africa. She was a ‘monster of nature,’ they asserted bluntly, and it was by no means an isolated case; on the contrary, she represented ‘the most genuine specimen of a human type,’ namely a ‘Nation of Bastards.’³⁹ Next to the naked female silhouette, seen only in profile, were photographs of the ‘Rehoboth Bastards’; while on the previous page there was an article by the anthropologist Guido Landra, ‘I bastardi’ (The Bastards), focused on the danger of miscegenation.⁴⁰ As studies have shown, the aim was certainly not to clarify Baartman’s origin. Following the regime’s racist policies, the priority was to prove that crossbreeding between white people and black people produced nefarious, monstrous outcomes.⁴¹

Not surprisingly, in the same years, the exact same image of the Hottentot Venus would be republished on other occasions. In 1941, Cipriani would use it to talk about the ‘impressive’ steatopygia of Hottentot women and their drooping breasts in his essay within Biasutti’s book (fig. 14).⁴² Shortly before it also appeared in *La Difesa della razza* to illustrate Eugene Fischer’s research on the ‘Rehoboth Bastards’ (fig. 15),⁴³ together with even older images, such as a famous frontispiece from Peter Kolb’s 1719 account of Khoikhoi customs depicting the meeting between half-naked Africans and fully clothed Dutchmen.⁴⁴ The purpose was always the same: to point out the

FRANÇOIS PERON et al. (Meulan: Imprimerie de la Société Zoologique de France, 1883), 41, figures 1–2; 70.

³⁹ From the image caption in G.L., ‘I bastardi,’ 16–17 (17).

⁴⁰ G.L., ‘I bastardi,’ 16–17. He never quoted the source of the pictures of the ‘Rehoboth Bastards,’ i.e., Eugen Fischer’s study, because it disavowed Baartman’s ascription to that ‘mixed’ community, as observed by BARBARA SÖRGONI, ‘Defending the race. The Italian reinvention of the Hottentot Venus during Fascism,’ *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 8, no. 3 (2003): 411–24 (420–21). Regardless, the use of German photographic sources in the Italian magazine was extensive, as noted at the time: ‘Editorial Notes. Italian “Racism” and Islam in Africa,’ *Journal of the Royal African Society* 38, no. 151 (April 1939): 216–17.

⁴¹ BARBARA SÖRGONI, ‘La Venere Ottentotta. Un’invenzione antropologica per “La difesa della razza,”’ *Il Mondo* 3, no. 2 (1995): 366–75; BARBARA SÖRGONI, ‘Defending the race’: 411–24. On racist discourse and anthropology in the same newspaper, see also MARIA TERESA MİLICIA, ‘La Maschera e il Volto: l’identificazione del nemico nella “Difesa della Razza,”’ *Voci. Annuale di Scienze Umane*, no. 7–8 (2010–2011): 123–53; MARIA TERESA MİLICIA, ‘Forging the New World: an Anthropological Gaze into *La Difesa della Razza* Panopticon,’ in *World Art and the Legacies of Colonial Violence*, ed. DAN RYCROFT (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2013), 153–73; SOPHIE NEZRI-DUFOUR, ‘La notion de peuple et de race italique dans la revue *La difesa della razza*, publiée en Italie de 1938 à 1943,’ *Cahiers d’études romanes*, no. 35 (2017): 477–91.

⁴² LIDIO CIPRIANI, ‘Gli Ottentotti (Koi-Koin),’ in *Le razze e i popoli della terra*, ed. RENATO BIASUTTI, 4 vols., vol. 2, *Africa Asia* (Turin: UTET, 1941), 378–94. Referring to an ancient stereotype witnessed in many engravings dating back to the early modern age, Cipriani wrote that the breasts of Hottentot women were so saggy that they could be turned backwards to suckle babies resting on their shoulders; for some examples see images in THOMAS HERBERT, *Some Years Travels into Divers Parts of Africa, and Asia the Great* (London: Printed by R. Everingham for R. Scot, T. Basset, F. Wright, and R. Chiswell, 1677), 18; PETER KOLB, *Description du Cap de Bonne-Espérance; où l’on trouve tout ce qui concerne l’histoire-naturelle du pays; la religion, les mœurs & les usages des Hottentots; et l’établissement des Hollandois*, 3 vols., vol. 1 (Amsterdam: Jean Catuffe, 1741), unnumbered plate (between p. 270 and p. 271).

⁴³ EUGENE FISCHER, ‘I bastardi di Rehoboth,’ *La Difesa della razza* 3, no. 10 (March 20, 1940): 12–18.

⁴⁴ PETER KOLBEN [PETER KOLB], *Caput Bonae Spei hodiernum* (Nuremberg: Monath, 1719), frontispiece; and FISCHER, ‘I bastardi di Rehoboth,’ 12–18 (14).

differences between human races, to elicit shock and disgust at the idea of contamination, and to discourage miscegenation in the Italian colonies of East Africa. It did not matter that Italy had no colonies in South Africa or Khoisan people in its empire, or that the same was also true for the Chad territories and the Musgu people cast in the photomontage. All that mattered was stoking the racial discourse through impactful, hateful images.



Figure 12. [Untitled], images from G.L. [Guido Landra], 'I bastardi,' *La Difesa della razza* 1, no. 1 (August 5, 1938): 17.

Figure 13. C.P. de Lasteyrie (engraving), Wermer (drawing), *Femme de race Bôchismanne*, engraving from Étienne Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire and Frédéric Cuvier, *Histoire naturelle des mammifères avec des figures originales enluminées, dessinées d'après des animaux vivants*, 5 vols., vol. 2 (Paris: C. de Lasteyrie, 1819), plate 39.



Figure 14. *La 'Venere Ottentotta' e una donna Ottentotta*, images from Lidio Cipriani, 'Gli Ottentotti (Koi-Koin),' in *Le razze e i popoli della terra*, ed. Renato Biasutti, 4 vols., vol. 2, *Africa Asia* (Turin: UTET, 1941), 381.



Figure 15. *La famosa 'Venere ottentotta,'* engraving from Eugene Fischer, 'I bastardi di Rehoboth,' *La Difesa della razza* 3, no. 10 (March 20, 1940): 12.

Using this visual strategy, the regime's magazine sought to shape the Fascist obsession with the purity and prestige of the race. But that was not all. The montage with the Musgu woman was included in an article by the philosopher Giulio Cogni entitled 'Armonie di razza' (Harmonies of race), that explored the concepts of 'harmony' and 'race' beginning with the question, 'can one speak of inferior and superior races by nature?'⁴⁵ In his text, he distinguished between 'true works of art' full of 'boundless harmony' and, conversely, 'defective works.'⁴⁶ So, just as there were minor and major artworks, there were also minor and major races, inferior and superior races, according to a hierarchy that put the 'perverted,' 'fallen' races in last place.⁴⁷ He alluded to those who were now 'corrupt' and 'bastardised': 'their substance is disharmonious; they are the direct children of the devil.'⁴⁸ The latter were not only inferior to the 'Aryan

⁴⁵ GIULIO COGNI, 'Armonie di razza,' *La Difesa della razza* 4, no. 17 (July 5, 1941): 6–9. On Cogni's role in the racist campaign and the misfortune of his 'biological mysticism,' see CASSATA, *La Difesa della razza*, 24–47.

⁴⁶ COGNI, 'Armonie di razza,' 6–9 (8).

⁴⁷ COGNI, 'Armonie di razza,' 6–9 (8).

⁴⁸ COGNI, 'Armonie di razza,' 6–9 (9).

blondes,' but also to 'any other good race of reds and niggers,' because, he explained, 'the healthy and smiling negro' was better than 'the sick and corrupt European.'⁴⁹

On these dates, during the Second World War, there were many European enemies of Italy. Political and military adversity, linked to the ongoing events, thus added to racial differences. For that reason, the photomontage could be read in this twofold key: unquestionably hinged on the visual comparison with African otherness, but at the same time a clear assertion of Italian supremacy, now more urgent than ever in wartime. As we have seen, anything could be used to claim a strong identity: if the problem of race was 'a problem basically of divine proportion,' as Cogni argued, the presence of a monumental building in those delirious pages illustrating 'the architectural perfection of the race' was soon explained.⁵⁰

Based on the principle of contrast, the assembly conveyed its racist message that tied 'harmony' to 'disharmony,' counteracting the Romanesque church with the face of the black woman, disfigured by the typical lip disc: on one side there was beauty, on the other monstrosity. As stated in the above-mentioned caption, what was intended to be emphasised was the solemnity of the 'admirable' structure. The effect was accentuated by the frontal and distant framing that favoured an overall view of the building, while glossing over the details of the medieval sculptures on the facade filled, this time for real, with fantastic and monstrous creatures.

By inserting the image of an illustrious church, known the world over, the photomonteur thus chose to use cultural heritage instrumentally, and thereby feed into the myth of Italian superiority. He appealed directly to the national pride of observers of his art. In this case we see a medieval building, but it was the same with the works of ancient Romans or Renaissance masters, recurring in the visual apparatuses of the magazine⁵¹ and, before that, in numerous initiatives that delivered a stereotypical image of artistic beauties.⁵² In other words, even the fine arts could be a propaganda tool, aimed at glorifying the greatness of Italian tradition and, consequently, its innate superiority.

⁴⁹ COGNI, 'Armonie di razza,' 6–9 (9).

⁵⁰ COGNI, 'Armonie di razze,' 6–9 (6). For an analysis of this assembly in relation to other photomontages and the architectural debate, see VANESSA RIGHETTONI, "La perfezione architettonica della razza". Alcuni fotomontaggi tra gli anni Trenta e Quaranta,' in *Il confronto con l'alterità tra Ottocento e Novecento. Aspetti critici e proposte visive*, ed. GIULIANA TOMASELLA (Macerata: Quodlibet; Milan: Fondazione Passarè, 2020), 103–15.

⁵¹ For more examples, see PICCIONI, 'Images of Black Faces in Italian Colonialism,' 375–96.

⁵² For example, the Augustan Exhibition of Romanity in 1937. An extensive bibliography exists on the visual rhetoric of Romanity during Fascism. For an overview of the propagandistic use of cultural heritage, see VERDE, *Le belle arti e i selvaggi*, 145–96. On artistic heritage as an instrument of Western cultural hegemony, these recent studies are also useful: MARIA PIA GUERMANDI, *Decolonizzare il patrimonio. L'Europa, l'Italia e un passato che non passa* (Rome: Castelvecchi, 2021); SIMONA TROILO, *Pietre d'oltremare. Scavare conservare, immaginare l'Impero (1899–1940)* (Rome: Laterza, 2021).

Ultimately, while art historians debated the most appropriate measures to take to protect monuments from bombing,⁵³ *La Difesa della razza's* photomontage related race to culture, architecture, and landscape, mobilising the rhetoric of beauty in the context of war. Race, cultural heritage, and environment were inextricably intertwined.

In this context, it seems worth considering the purpose of the African straw piles in the other half of the montage. The visual comparison with the majestic religious house was obviously intended to celebrate Italian primacy above all else. But it also lent legitimacy to the many articles on the poor artistic skills of Africans, insistently depicted as being naturally incapable of creating artworks and building decent houses or buildings of worship. When contemporary newspapers cast their gaze on African artistic production, they often stressed the alleged lack of talent of black people, or, at any rate, their childlike creativity.

Many had expressed themselves in these terms since the time of the Ethiopian War, if not before that, both in art magazines such as *ABC Rivista d'arte* and *L'Artista moderno*, and in publications that gravitated towards Interlandi.⁵⁴ For example, *Quadrivio*, long engaged in artistic controversy, had in 1936 dismissed an African painting as a product of a 'crude artist.'⁵⁵ Yet, the contempt was then more explicitly marked in *La Difesa della razza*: first by lashing out against the art of the so-called 'savages,' equating it with that of 'demented people' and Jews;⁵⁶ then, going so far as to assert that 'the decadence of the races and cultures of the Dark Continent was confirmed by the deficiency in the balance and proportions of the figurative arts and music.'⁵⁷ Ethiopian art, specifically, was thus a clear sign of the 'state of regression of this people,' as the author argued, and the reasons were various: 'the childish technique, the lack of perspective, the crudeness of the colouring, the monotony of the subjects treated, both in sacred and profane figurations.'⁵⁸ Not even the housing structures were spared the harsh criticism. Indeed, in a January 1941 article, the *Rivista delle colonie* singled them out as yet another confirmation of the 'almost primordial primitiveness of the

⁵³ In the late 1930s, after the Spanish Civil War and the bombing of the Prado Museum, an international debate began on the best protection strategies. For a bibliography, see VANESSA RIGHETTONI, *Vittorio Viale e l'Archivio fotografico dei Musei Civici di Torino. Dagli anni Trenta alla seconda guerra mondiale* (Udine: Forum, 2022), 73–74. In Italy, even the Minister of National Education had spoken out on the subject: GIUSEPPE BOTTAL, 'La tutela delle opere d'arte in tempo di guerra,' *Bollettino d'arte*, no. 10 (1938): 429; GIUSEPPE BOTTAL, 'La Protection des chefs-d'œuvre de l'esprit,' *Nouvelles littéraires* (February 12, 1938): 8.

⁵⁴ More information in RIGHETTONI, *Bianco su nero*, 127–28. On the 'art and race' controversy, see CASSATA, 'La Difesa della razza,' 249–314; GIORGIO BACCI, "'L'ansiosa attenzione di tutti": "Emporium" intorno all'ottobre 1938,' in *Emporium II. Parole e figure tra 1895 e 1964*, eds GIORGIO BACCI and MIRIAM FILETTI MAZZA (Pisa: Edizioni della Normale, 2014), 479–507; LUCIA PICCIONI, *Art et fascisme. Peindre l'italianité, 1922-1943* (Dijon: Les presses du réel, 2020), 301–88.

⁵⁵ From the caption, *Quadrivio* 4, no. 27 (May 3, 1936): 1.

⁵⁶ DOMENICO PAOLELLA, 'Espressioni rappresentative di selvaggi, di dementi, di ebrei,' *La Difesa della razza* 2, no. 7 (February 5, 1939): 24–26: photographs of African artworks were near the so-called 'degenerate' ones. Cf. FRITZ KAISER, *Führer durch die Ausstellung Entartete Kunst* (Berlin: Verlag für Kultur und Wirtschaftswerbung, [1937]), 7, 19.

⁵⁷ ALESSANDRO LEONORI CECINA, 'L'arte etiopica e le sue possibilità,' *La Difesa della razza* 3, no. 18 (July 20, 1940): 24–26 (24).

⁵⁸ LEONORI CECINA, 'L'arte etiopica e le sue possibilità,' 24–26 (24).

Ethiopian peoples and their inability to achieve higher forms of living and thinking on their own.⁵⁹

These stereotypes were already established and widespread in Italy well before Fascism. One example is the description of indigenous art that was presented in Italy during the 1891–1892 National Exhibition in Palermo. As mentioned, African works of art were described as ‘naïve,’ ‘childish,’ demonstrating the cultural gap between Italy and the colonies.⁶⁰ For a long time now, the image of the African as a figure largely devoid of culture and certainly devoid of talent had firmly taken root. This was also suggested, at least in part, by the book from which the photograph of the stilts in the photomontage was taken. As with the image of the Musgu woman, it was clipped from one of Bernatzik’s photographs recovered by Biasutti and related, this time, to the Giur (Luo) people (fig. 16). The accompanying text, signed by the ethnologist Renato Boccassino, did not provide much information. Only a few pages further on we find something about the artistic and architectural production of these Nilotic peoples: ‘Neither clay, bronze nor ivory statues are made’; and then, ‘In the huts, human or animal figures are crudely represented, accentuating some of their parts (eyes, limbs) grotesquely. Architecture is missing. Even the houses of the king and chiefs are crude thatched huts, cylindrical with conical roofs, larger than common.’⁶¹

The photograph of the cathedral was chosen from Alinari photographs from the early twentieth century, which had already been used to illustrate art history books and slides for educational purposes (fig. 17).⁶² As was the case for the first cover by Palazzetti, the visual power of this composition also lay in the unusual combination of cut-outs: photographs of indigenous women and dwellings, with a clear ethnographic flavour, were mixed with images of famous Western works of art, created for publications of historical and artistic interest.

The same is true for many other covers and inside pages of the bimonthly. Indeed, within the large corpus of illustrations, we certainly do find images that are unsettling in topic and rendering: ranging from the comparison of photographs of fifteenth-century Madonnas and indigenous women,⁶³ up to the strange relationship between a statuette from Gabon and Michelangelo’s allegory of Night, sculpted for the Medici tombs in the church of San Lorenzo in Florence. This was the montage for the October 5, 1941 front cover, where the sharp contrast between races, cultures, and

⁵⁹ GUIDO GUIDI, ‘Le abitazioni indigene di Addis Abeba,’ *Rivista delle Colonie* 15, no. 1 (January 1941): 93–105 (93). LIDIO CIPRIANI’s book, *Abitazioni indigene dell’Africa Orientale Italiana* (Naples: Edizioni della Mostra d’Oltremare, 1940) was published the previous year.

⁶⁰ CARMEN BELMONTE, *Arte e colonialismo in Italia. Oggetti, immagini, migrazioni (1882-1906)* (Venice: Marsilio, 2021), 118–20.

⁶¹ RENATO BOCCASSINO, ‘I Nilotici settentrionali,’ in *Le razze e i popoli della terra*, ed. RENATO BIASUTTI, 4 vols., vol. 2, *Africa Asia* (Turin: UTET, 1941), 237–59 (257).

⁶² See LAUDEDEO TESTI and NICCOLÒ RODOLICO, *Le arti figurative nella storia d’Italia. Il Medio Evo* (Florence: Sansoni, 1907), 382. On the Alinari slide purchased in 1927 by the Liceo Galvani in Bologna, where it is still preserved, see <https://catalogo.beniculturali.it/detail/PhotographicHeritage/0800365686>.

⁶³ ‘Madri e figli di tutte le razze,’ *La Difesa della razza* 1, no. 3 (September 5, 1938): 24–25.

values was expressed, once again, as a series of oppositions: the whiteness of Carrara marble and the blackness of African wood; the sinuous shapes of the Florentine sculpture and the rigid contours of the fetish, which was replicated some thirty times, almost as if to reaffirm the uniqueness of Michelangelo's work compared to that of Gabon.⁶⁴ With its visual multiplication of the same motif, already experienced in the great exhibitions of the regime, the photomontage technique sought to persuade as much as to provide content.



Fig. 351. — Facciata e campanile del Duomo di Modena. (Pal. Alinari)

Figure 16. *Abitazioni su palafitte dei Giur (Luo) orientali*, photograph from Renato Boccassino, 'I Nilotici settentrionali,' in *Le razze e i popoli della terra*, ed. Renato Biasutti, 4 vols., vol. 2, *Africa Asia* (Turin: UTET, 1941), 253.

Figure 17. Alinari, *Facciata e campanile del Duomo di Modena*, photograph from Laudedeo Testi and Niccolò Rodolico, *Le arti figurative nella storia d'Italia. Il Medio Evo* (Florence: Sansoni, 1907), 382.

A month later, a new photomontage of *La Difesa della razza* contained visual attacks on 'Negro art': African artworks were face to face, this time, with Greco-Roman sculptures (fig. 18). Some of them were two Boyo fetishes from the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology in Florence, which would soon disappear in Naples during the war, together with other artworks from the 1940 Triennial Exhibition of Italian Overseas Lands.⁶⁵ The image of the two African sculptures was cut from a

⁶⁴ For an in-depth analysis of the montage, including images and visual sources, see RIGHETTONI, 'La perfezione architettonica della razza,' 103–15 (112–15).

⁶⁵ On this matter, see EZIO BASSANI, 'Due grandi sculture Buye già a Firenze,' *Critica d'arte* 45, no. 172–74 (July–December 1980): 164–72; GIGI PEZZOLI, "'Arte negra" alla Biennale di Venezia del 1922,' in *Ex Africa. Storie e identità di un'arte universale*, eds GIGI PEZZOLI and EZIO BASSANI, exhibition catalogue (Milan: Skira, 2019): 285–91. The exhibition in Naples, with its impressive architectural achievements,

photograph published in the aforementioned book by Biasutti (fig. 19).⁶⁶ The banal assembly was included in an article by Cogni, 'Inferiori e superiori' (Inferior and superior), which tried with difficulty to reconcile political and racial demands. The attempt was not to identify 'races,' said the philosopher, but rather inferior and superior 'peoples,' taking care to distinguish, for example, between Italians and their French enemies; or, again, warning against the seductions of the 'cheap beauty' of American films, far removed from authentic beauty which 'is also the health of the race,' he asserted.⁶⁷

Ultimately, 'the race-beauty equation' was always valid, according to Cogni; but with the world conflict, the discourse became more complicated, and the visual comparison between Western and African art still played on two rigid polarities—positive and negative values, morality and immorality, beauty and ugliness, light and darkness, humanity and bestiality. The theme of race was thus likened to a struggle between good and evil, while, on these dates, the troops of the Italian army were about to be overwhelmed by the Allied advance in East Africa.⁶⁸ All illusion of empire, and racial policy, was already fading.

indigenous villages, and exotic artefacts, was supposed to consecrate the Italian empire on the international stage. But with Italy's entry into the war and the end of its imperial dream, even the ethnic exhibits known in Europe for almost a century were out of the picture for good, as explained by GUIDO ABBATTISTA in *Umanità in mostra. Esposizioni etniche e invenzioni esotiche in Italia (1880-1940)* (Trieste: EUT Edizioni Università di Trieste, 2013), 381–405. For an overview of colonial exhibitions during Fascism, see, among others, NICOLA LABANCA, *L'Africa in vetrina. Storie di musei e di esposizioni coloniali in Italia* (Treviso: Pagus, 1992); GIULIANA TOMASELLA, *Esporre l'Italia coloniale. Interpretazioni dell'alterità* (Padua: Il Poligrafo, 2017).

⁶⁶ The photograph came from the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology in Florence, as the caption reveals: RENATO BIASUTTI, 'Razze e culture africane,' in *Le razze e i popoli della terra*, ed. RENATO BIASUTTI, 4 vols., vol. 2, *Africa Asia* (Turin: UTET, 1941), 3–41 (35). However, it is no longer traceable in the museum's photographic archive. My thanks to Maria Gloria Rosselli for providing this information. On the museum, part of the University of Florence, see JACOPO MOGGI CECCHI and ROSCOE STANYON, eds, *Il Museo di Storia Naturale dell'Università degli Studi di Firenze. Le collezioni antropologiche e etnologiche* (Florence: Florence University Press, 2014); MONICA ZAVATTARO, 'Le collezioni etnografiche del Museo di Storia Naturale di Firenze: storia e prospettive museologiche e museografiche,' *Museologia scientifica*, no. 8 (2014): 56–66.

⁶⁷ GIULIO COGNI, 'Inferiori e superiori,' *La Difesa della razza* 5, no. 1 (November 5, 1941): 18–21.

⁶⁸ On colonial affairs in these years, see, among others, ANGELO DEL BOCA, *Gli Italiani in Africa Orientale*, 4 vols. (Rome: Laterza, 1976–1984); NICOLA LABANCA, *Oltremare: storia dell'espansione coloniale italiana* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2002); ANGELO DEL BOCA, *Le guerre coloniali del fascismo*, (Rome: Laterza, 2008).



Figure 18. *Inferiori e superiori*, photomontage from Giulio Cogni, ‘Inferiori e superiori,’ *La Difesa della razza* 5, no. 1 (November 5, 1941): 18–19.



Arte plastica negra: feticci scolpiti in legno, maschio e femmina, dei Baluba, Congo (fot. M. N. A., Firenze).

Figure 19. *Arte plastica negra: feticci scolpiti in legno, maschio e femmina, dei Baluba, Congo*, photograph from Renato Biasutti, ‘Razze e culture africane,’ in *Le razze e i popoli della terra*, ed. Renato Biasutti, 4 vols., vol. 2, *Africa Asia* (Turin: UTET, 1941), 35.

Fragments of Caricatures

Things would become even more difficult for Italy in the final years of the war. But, once again, the racist journal was able to find an enemy to point at, drawing on the resources of the racist hate campaign it had been fomenting for some years. One section of the February 5, 1942 issue was entitled, significantly, *Jewmockracy*.⁶⁹ a portmanteau aimed, this time, at distilling into one word two recurring targets of Fascist propaganda: the dreaded Jews and the values they allegedly embodied, in this case democratic principles.⁷⁰

Here too, for the layout of the internal pages, the magazine relied on the modern and eye-catching language of photomontage, mixing photographic fragments with drawings. Pictures and cartoons mingled with text explaining how the Jews had dragged America into the war.⁷¹ They were the real culprits, the real enemies. Thus, amid the tall skyscrapers, the hideous and frightening face of a Hebrew stood tall, towering over two other characters: a white man and a black person depicted, as per stereotype, with large lips coloured white to stand out against the dark skin (fig. 20). It was a full-page collage devoted to Jewish and mixed American society. As Interlandi explained, the issue featured ‘scenes and types of a racial degradation’ that the world war had only made ‘more topical’; in ‘that wretched country the human species had produced the most bastard of creatures.’⁷²

The montage was disguised, almost imperceptible given the inclusion of only graphic inserts. As in the famous first cover of *La Difesa della razza*, in this instance, too, the Jew was represented through caricature, meaning careful and intentional adoption of well-established imagery. In the cartoon, originally published in the Romanian newspaper *Porunca vremii*, the draftsman employed various means to elicit aversion to the Hebrew: first, through the powerful use of stereotypical features such as the hooked nose, curly beard, and fleshy lips; further, by representing the protagonist as a kind of monster with its claws on the planet, in keeping with a very old stereotype related to the so-called ‘world Jewish conspiracy’ and *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*.⁷³ Observers would immediately recognised those stable signs of racial difference.

⁶⁹ ‘Jewmockracy. Ebrei in U.S.A.’, *La Difesa della razza* 5, no. 7 (February 5, 1942): 39.

⁷⁰ For an example of visual propaganda against democratic countries, see VANESSA RIGHETTONI, ‘Le grandi democrazie. La satira antifrancese di Livio Apolloni sulla “Gazzetta del Popolo,”’ *Studi culturali* 16, no. 3 (2019): 429–53.

⁷¹ JOHAN VON LEERS, ‘Come i giudei hanno trascinato gli Stati Uniti in guerra,’ *La Difesa della razza* 5, no. 7 (February 5, 1942): 40–43. In those years, the link between Jews and America was also the focus of many Italian cartoons. For examples, see CENTRO FURIO JESI, ed, *La menzogna della razza*, 153–54.

⁷² T.I. [TELESIO INTERLANDI], [Untitled], *La Difesa della razza* 5, no. 7 (August 5, 1942): 6.

⁷³ This iconography circulated widely in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. For example, the cover by ALBERT ESNAULT, ‘Leur patrie,’ *La Libre Parole illustrée* 1, no. 16 (28 Octobre 1893); the cover by CHARLES LÉANDRE, ‘Rothschild. Dieu protège Israël,’ *Le Rire* 4, no. 180 (April 16, 1898); the caricature ‘Das größte Getreide-Wucherthier der Welt,’ in EDUARD FUCHS, *Die Juden in der Karikatur. Ein Beitrag zur Kulturgeschichte* (München: Albert Langen, 1921), 201; and the cover of *Exposition Le Juif et la France au Palais Berlitz*, exhibition catalogue (Paris: Institut d’étude des questions juives, 1941). Cf. MARIE-

The same cartoon was then republished in 1938 in the anti-Semitic French newspaper *Je Suis Partout*⁷⁴ (fig. 21) and finally picked up again by the unknown photomonteur of the Fascist magazine, who only retained the Jewish facial caricature from the original scene.



Figure 20. *Caos razziale*, photomontage from *La Difesa della razza* 5, no. 7 (February 5, 1942): 7.

Figure 21. *La mainmise sur le monde*, caricature from *Je Suis Partout* 9, no. 386 (April 15, 1938, special issue of ‘Les Juifs’): 5.

This also happens a few pages later, with the publication of a caricature from the Turin newspaper *Gazzetta del Popolo*. Renamed ‘The Wandering Jew’ and removed from its background with Golgotha, the character is sandwiched between two photographs of elegant men with bourgeois attitudes, exponents of the ‘North American plutocracy’ (fig. 22).⁷⁵ The juxtaposition was intended to underscore Jewish involvement in American elections and political power. But the purpose of the original drawing (fig. 23), signed by Italian artist Amerigo Bartoli, had been entirely different.

ANNE MATARD-BONUCCI, ‘La caricature témoin et vecteur d’internationalisation de l’antisémitisme: la figure du “juif-monde,” in *Antisémythes. L’image des juifs entre culture et politique (1848-1939)*, ed. MARIE-ANNE MATARD-BONUCCI (Paris: Nouveau Monde Editions, 2005), 439–57.

⁷⁴ On the French magazine, see VALERIA GALIMI, ‘La “guerre juive”. La propagande antisemita di “Je suis partout” nella Francia occupata,’ *Italia contemporanea*, no. 207 (1997): 258–84; VALERIA GALIMI, ‘Intelletuali e collaborazionismo: l’itinerario di “Je suis partout” tra Maurras e Hitler,’ *Passato e presente* 18, no. 49 (2000): 69–95; VALERIA GALIMI, ‘Une internationale antisémite des images? *Je suis partout* et le cas des caricatures,’ in *Antisémythes*, 427–37.

⁷⁵ ‘I giudei e le elezioni americane,’ *La Difesa della razza* 5, no. 7 (February 5, 1942): 47.



Figure 22. *L'ebreo errante*, photomontage page from 'I giudei e le elezioni americane,' *La Difesa della razza* 5, no. 7 (February 5, 1942): 47.

Figure 23. Amerigo Bartoli Natinguerra, *Il sangue suo su noi e su i nostri figli*' (*Matteo*, XXVII-25), caricature from *Gazzetta del Popolo*, September 15, 1938: 3.

Taken from a series of anti-Semitic cartoons published in 1938, in tandem with the promulgation of the Italian racial laws, it focused on deicide, the oldest of the accusations levelled at the Jewish people. The title, *Il sangue suo su noi e su i nostri figli*' (His blood upon us and our children), was in fact a sentence uttered by the Jews in response to Pilate (Matthew 27:25). And the protagonist, seated and pensive was portrayed as he asked himself a question: 'I wonder why red attracts me...'. Those viewing the picture could imagine the answer: his attraction to red was part of him and his Jewish identity, indelibly stained by the blood of Christ.⁷⁶

As is well known, blood libel is the accusation wielded against Jewish people since the Middle Ages that is constructed around the themes of deicide and ritual infanticide.⁷⁷ It was widely used in twentieth-century racist propaganda. In other issues,

⁷⁶ For an in-depth discussion, see VANESSA RIGHETTONI, 'Le vignette antisemite sulla "Gazzetta del Popolo". 1938-1939,' *L'uomo nero* 12, no. 11–12 (2015): 320–39.

⁷⁷ On anti-Semitic medieval iconography, see BERNHARD BLUMENKRANZ, *Le juif médiéval au miroir de l'art chrétien* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1966) [It. transl. *Il cappello a punta. L'ebreo medievale nello specchio dell'arte cristiana*, ed. CHIARA FRUGONI (Rome–Bari: Laterza, 2003)]; GABRIELLA FERRI PICCALUGA, 'Ebrei nell'iconografia del '400,' *La Rassegna Mensile di Israel* 52, no. 2–3 (1986), 357–95; SARA LIPTON, *Dark Mirror. The Medieval Origins of Anti-Jewish Iconography* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2014). On Jews in Christian art, see also ENRICO CASTELNUOVO, 'Osservazioni in margine alla presenza ebraica nel campo artistico,' in *Ebraismo e antiebraismo: immagine e pregiudizio* (Florence: La Giuntina, 1989), 51–57.

La Difesa della razza had also published ancient and contemporary prints relating to well-known episodes such as the alleged martyrdom of Simon of Trent, itself becoming part of an iconographic and, at the same time, hate tradition, which it thereby renewed and perpetuated.⁷⁸ But not this time.

This choice encouraged the perception of these images not, or not just, as a remnant of old stereotypes like the ‘world Jewish conspiracy’ or ‘blood libel,’ but as expressions of topical issues that concerned everyone closely. Jews were not part of an ancient, far-off tradition, at a safe distance from the readers; on the contrary, they were extremely close, so much so that they were influencing the ongoing war. On the other hand, the reference to red in Bartoli’s cartoon also evoked Soviet communism, that is, Fascist Italy’s supreme enemy. The juxtaposition of Jews and communists had a precedent in Nazi propaganda. Already in 1937, the Jew in the poster for the Munich anti-Semitic exhibition *Der ewige Jude* was flanked by the red hammer and sickle.⁷⁹

The same stereotypes, and even the same images, thus circulated in different countries and editorial offices, ready to be reused, manipulated, and adapted time and again for specific propaganda purposes.⁸⁰ Clearly, the cases described here are just some of the many that can be found in the regime’s magazine, where images and racial hatred were brought to the reader’s attention again and again, throughout its entire run. But they can be considered cases in point for a more general understanding of the use of visual materials and stereotypes as tools in racist communication strategies. Photomontage, in particular, was intended to be quickly grasped. Meaning and message were often immediate: the message could be absorbed in a few seconds. The editorial challenge was thus to engage Italians with assemblies and fragments of photographs and caricatures, making use of distortions and exaggerations right from the magazine’s first, hateful cover.

⁷⁸ For example, the cover of *La Difesa della razza* 5, no. 6 (January 20, 1942), which showed medieval scenes already used by the Nazi *Der Stürmer*, no. 12 (May 1934). For a gallery of images, see MAGDA TETER, ‘Simon of Trent: A Story of an Image,’ *AJS Perspectives*, The Hate Issue (2020), https://www.associationforjewishstudies.org/docs/default-source/ajs-perspectives/ajs-perspectives-hate-issue-teter.pdf?sfvrsn=c42f9306_0. Simon’s case is at the centre of a recent study: *L’imenzione del colpevole: il ‘caso’ di Simonino da Trento dalla propaganda alla storia*, ed. DOMENICA PRIMERANO, exhibition catalogue (Trento: Museo Diocesano Tridentino-Temi Editrice, 2019). In addition, one book that has caused much controversy is ARIEL TOAFF’S *Pasque di sangue. Ebrei d’Europa e omicidi rituali*, rev. ed. (2007; Bologna: Il Mulino, 2008). It deals with the accusation levelled at Jews for centuries that they kidnapped and killed Christian children to use their blood in Passover rites.

⁷⁹ On the poster, see PALLOTTINO, ‘Origini dello stereotipo fisionomico dell’“ebreo” e sua permanenza nell’iconografia antisemita del Novecento,’ 17–26 (23, figure 13).

⁸⁰ On the circulation of anti-Semitic stereotypes, see also MARIE-ANNE MATARD-BONUCCI, ‘L’image, figure majeure du discours antisémite?’, *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d’histoire*, no. 72 (2001): 27–39; VALERIA GALIMI, ‘Transfer e circolazione di temi antebraici nell’Europa fra le due guerre: l’esempio delle caricature,’ in *A settant’anni dalle leggi razziali. Profili culturali, giuridici, e istituzionali dell’antisemitismo*, eds DANIELE MENOZZI and ANDREA MARIUZZO (Rome: Carocci, 2010), 69–87.