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Reframing Culture: The Decolonization and Repatriation Process in the Italian Museum System

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REFRAMING CULTURE: THE DECOLONIZATION AND REPATRIATION PROCESS IN THE ITALIAN MUSEUM SYSTEM

by
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Abstract

In 2022, the collections of the former Museo Coloniale, Colonial Museum, were reopened to the public as a part of the Museo delle Civiltà in Rome. This reopening, viewed by many as an exhumation of fascist dictator Mussolini's former collection, in the neighborhood he built for the World Fair, reinvigorated the debate surrounding museum decolonization and brought Italy into the spotlight for this topic. This thesis seeks to explore the conversation surrounding the topic of Italian museum decolonization, using the Museo Coloniale's collection as the primary example of a colonial museum in a post colonial world. Through this, it asks the question of where and in what ways can Italian museums decolonize their collections? Using a qualitative approach, this research seeks to understand both the history of colonialism in Italy and the advent of the Italian museum system, follows the Museo Coloniale's collections from their original display to the current display, and incorporates modern issues with museum decolonization. Evaluating each of these topics using the European Commission's six aims for museum decolonization, this research is an attempt to answer the question at hand. Findings show that in order for Italian museums to properly decolonize, it is necessary they confront the colonial mindset present in the country, diversify their staff makeup, and improve transparency within the Italian museum system.

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Introduction

Current museum studies conversations often find themselves centered around the topic of decolonization. Over the past several decades, the field has been looking at methods of decentering the Western narrative that fills so many of our museums. The National Gallery of Art's 1991 exhibition 'Circa 1492: Art in the Age of Exploration,' in Washington D.C. is one of these narratives. It told one story of the creation of global culture, but in doing so contributed to the Western museum's depiction of marginalized groups from the colonized world. Rooting itself in the narrative that the European Renaissance gave way to the birth of the artist, it does little to contextualize the art found outside of this area. By "exhibiting art from the colonized or postcolonial world, displaying the work of the marginalized or the minority, disinterring forgotten, forlorn 'pasts'"[1] from a Western perspective, this exhibition continues to support the centrality of the Western museum. In analyzing this particular exhibition, many museums and cultural institutions across the globe find themselves seeking to identify the ways in which they have also contributed to this depiction. Looking towards Rome and Italy, the discussion shifts to the presence of the colonial and fascist legacy present in the country and its cultural institutions. When considering these two legacies, one asks the question of where and in what ways can Italian museums decolonize their collections?

In order to do so, it is important to first understand how decolonization is defined in the museum world. One key factor in museum decolonization is the restitution, or repatriation, of physical objects. However, this process goes beyond the return of objects,

[1]Donald Preziosi and Claire J. Farago. *Grasping the World: The Idea of the Museum*. 240.

requiring "changed narratives and word usage in exhibitions, different hiring policies, new educational programs, and above all an awareness of colonial inheritances and problems that are openly discussed and highlighted."[2] The theory of museum decolonization diverges from general theories of decolonization, incorporating facets of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion practices, but going a step further, not just seeking to include people in telling the museum's story, but specifically to change the way in which the story is told.

This research aims to answer the question of museum decolonization through discussions of the process of decolonization in the Italian museum system, in response to Italy's colonial history, postcolonial position, and the global call for greater representation of black and brown artists and creators in the museum world. Considering Italian political stances over the past eight decades, the treatment of immigrants in Italy, and a general neglect in regards to education about Italian colonialism, it is my hypothesis that the process of decolonization within Italian museums cannot occur without a proper postcolonial consciousness, diverse hiring practices, and increased transparency from within the Italian museum system.

Background

Italy's history causes this study to become even more complex as its colonial reign followed a contrasting path to the majority of European colonial empires. Beginning later than most European countries, Italy's colonial efforts did not start until

[2] Csilla E. Ariese, and Magdalena Wróblewska. "Practicing Decoloniality in Museums: A Guide With Global Examples."

after its unification in 1861. Before this time, the Italian peninsula was made up of separate nation-states. From this period of unification through the 1940s, Italy had colonies in Eritrea, Somalia, Libya, Ethiopia, Albania, and the Dodecanese Islands. The country's colonial empire also ended in a different method than most, with military defeats leading to the decline of Italian colonization, rather than the colonies gaining independence formally as they did from countries such as France and Britain. These factors, accompanied by an increase of emigration of Italian citizens to "Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, the United States, Canada, Australia,... and Northern Europe"[3] at roughly the same time helped to "[confine] colonial history to the periphery of the process of national identity formation."[4] This lack of consideration for and study of the effects and impacts of colonization have led to a deeply subconscious colonial perspective in Italian cultural institutions. Essentially, Italy has been able to move forward without addressing their colonial history, allowing for a general consciousness that ignores or excuses this history. When referring to Italy's postcolonial mindset, this ignorance or excusal is what is being spoken of.

In addition to the country's colonial history, contemporary catalysts are contributing to discussions of decolonization within Italy and its cultural institutions. Three of these factors have most significantly instigated further conversations surrounding Italy's postcolonial history and the responsibility of the country's museums to address this in recent years. The first of these is the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result

[3]Cristina Lombardi-Diop and Caterina Romeo, "Italy's Postcolonial 'Question': Views from the Southern Frontier of Europe," *Postcolonial Studies* 18, no. 4 (February 2015): 370

[4] Cristina Lombardi-Diop and Caterina Romeo, "Italy's Postcolonial 'Question': Views from the Southern Frontier of Europe," 369.

of this pandemic, and the quarantine that ensued, museum attendance was gravely affected. Particularly in Italy, where institutions had to remain closed for a longer period of time than in other countries, museum patronage was inevitably reduced. During this time of closure, museum professionals were given the opportunity to reassess the social and active role that museums play in defining culture. Impacted by global protests that will be further discussed, museum curators were tasked with taking greater steps in supporting black and brown creators, as well as increasing diversity within their institutions. This was seen through initiatives in various Italian museums such as the MAXXI's "#MAXXIforBlackLivesMatter" social media project. Curators were charged with the task of determining how and when to get visitors to return to their museums. In addition, they had to find methods of keeping audiences engaged while their physical locations were shut to the public, whether that be through online exhibitions, live streamed talks, or other virtual programming. These tasks reinvigorated the conversations surrounding decolonization, as museum professionals were realizing the part that they played in shaping national and international conversations coming out of an experience that impacted people in every corner of the world.[5]

The second of these factors are the global protests that emerged during the summer of 2020. Sparked by the killing of Black-American George Floyd, protests from the Black Lives Matter group gained international attention. Focuses shifted towards an anti-racist rhetoric in the United States and caused many European countries to readdress their own racist histories in conjunction with their colonial legacies. Racism in the United States is often linked to the roots of slavery, which ultimately ties to the European

[5] CourtauldInstitute, "Looking Back, Looking Forward: Decolonising the Museum."

countries who first brought those enslaved peoples to the "New World." As a result of this, these protests and conversations made their way across Italy, occurring in two dozen cities and involving thousands of Italians, showing the necessity of and want for decolonization within sectors of Italian culture. Italy's lack of racial diversity, with foreigners making up under 9% of the population, coupled with a recent resurgence in nationalistic ideologies, makes this a complicated subject that museum officials are currently discussing, in an attempt to fit their understanding of history and culture into the modern age.

The last of the three factors, but certainly not the least, the current refugee crisis that is leading to a change in population, has also helped to shift this focus in Italy and further complicates this subject. In 2022 alone, nearly one-hundred thousand migrants applied for asylum in Italy. Over one-hundred thousand came to Italian shores by boat. In late February of 2023, at least sixty-four migrants died in a boat wreck off the Italian coast. This voyage "is the deadliest migrant crossing route in the world, but also increasingly the only option for migrants hoping to escape conflict in their homelands."[6] Italy's current far-right government has continually pushed an anti-immigrant stance that makes it more difficult for those completing this difficult voyage to seek shelter in Italy, and often places them in more precarious situations by "off-shoring" them. The lasting effects of these policies on immigrant representation in cultural institutions make it incredibly difficult for perspectives to shift from the dominant white European one that is

[6] Shah, Simmone. "How Italy's Far-Right Government Is Pushing Back Against Migrants."

common in many Italian cultural institutions. These impacts will be further discussed later.

The postcolonial question in Italy stems from a bigger question of what it means to be "Italian." The current Italian Republic is incredibly young, founded in 1946 after the fall of the monarchy and fascism. Its unification happened earlier, in 1861, which is regarded as the formation of the formal Italian state. Due to its unification occurring fairly recently, there are still many divides amongst Italians as to what makes them truly citizens of the state. With questions surrounding Italian identity within the country's borders, it makes these questions even more prevalent for those immigrating to Italy. Following the time of colonization, many countries offered some degree of rights to members of their colonies, allowing them to become citizens to some extent. Italy did not have this policy for its immigrants, as their citizenship is primarily based on a "jus sanguinis" policy, citizenship by birthright. This concept still prevails, and even as newer generations are making attempts to redefine what it means to be Italian, "institutions are resistant to the inclusion - not just symbolic but also physical - of black bodies into Italy's national body."[7] This widely-ruling anti-immigrant stance pushed by political groups from the right has made it incredibly difficult for the country to address decolonization and to provide the diversity that is necessary for the deconstruction of these colonial mindsets.

Over the past two decades, changes have been occurring regarding citizenship status, immigration policies, and racial tolerance, but the COVID-19 pandemic and

[7] Cristina Lombardi-Diop and Caterina Romeo, "Italy's Postcolonial 'Question': Views from the Southern Frontier of Europe," p. 372.

protests of 2020, as well as the recent election of a far-right Prime Minister, have made it evident that there is still a long way to go in Italy's decolonization process. Museums hold a particularly important role in doing so, as they are the main staging grounds of culture. As such, they are now tasked with the responsibility of reshaping the narrative of Italy's national identity as it relates to the postcolonial world and the lives of those nine-percent who are not "Italian."

Definitions and Framework

In both museum studies and postcolonial studies, there are important definitions to consider when discussing decolonization. Most evident, what exactly does it mean to decolonize a museum? While there is no "correct" way to decolonize a museum, for the purposes of this research, I will be utilizing the European Commission's framework on museum decolonization. As a subset of general decolonization theories, museum decolonization looks a bit different, utilizing what can be understood as DEI concepts to further the work of decolonization in a museum setting. The European Commission's framework bases itself on six aims: Creating Visibility, Increasing Inclusivity, Decentering, Championing Empathy, Improving Transparency, and Embracing Vulnerability.[8] Creating visibility is defined by making "things that were not inherently part of Western society,"[9] seen and showing them "from a perspective other than the

[8] Csilla E. Ariese, and Magdalena Wróblewska. "Practicing Decoloniality in Museums: A Guide With Global Examples."
[9] Csilla E. Ariese, and Magdalena Wróblewska. "Practicing Decoloniality in Museums: A Guide With Global Examples." 9.

dominant."[10] Increasing inclusivity requires that museums give up "authority and power to new actors, for brief or long periods of time."[11] Decentering is the process of moving away from societal norms and instead confronting the perspective of Western visitors. Championing empathy relates to visitor experiences, but more so "begins with the institutional mission and vision and the way in which staff members are treated within the museum."[12] This idea takes into consideration hiring practices, HR policies, wages, and work environment. Improving transparency in terms of decolonization practices relates to "undertaking provenance research and sharing knowledge about object biographies,"[13] to ensure that collections' histories are known and are properly recontextualized or repatriated. Finally, embracing vulnerability is the openness of an institution to critiques and dealing with uncomfortable situations because often through this, change can be made.

I have chosen this framework as it directly relates to European museums and outlines a concise method of understanding museum decolonization, as well as providing examples of global museums that have implemented these tactics. Looking at the Italian museum system through the lens of these aims, I will measure where they meet this criteria and where they do not. In addition to the decolonization framework, repatriation is an important component of all decolonization work. Repatriation, as considered in this

[10] Csilla E. Ariese, and Magdalena Wróblewska. "Practicing Decoloniality in Museums: A Guide With Global Examples." 11.
[11] Csilla E. Ariese, and Magdalena Wróblewska. "Practicing Decoloniality in Museums: A Guide With Global Examples." 25.
[12] Csilla E. Ariese, and Magdalena Wróblewska. "Practicing Decoloniality in Museums: A Guide With Global Examples." 54.
[13] Csilla E. Ariese, and Magdalena Wróblewska. "Practicing Decoloniality in Museums: A Guide With Global Examples." 69.

research, is defined as "the process by which important cultural items and human remains are returned to lineal descendants or descendant communities."[14] Other museum studies concepts will be defined as needed throughout this research. It is also important to note that the term "postcolonial," refers specifically to the time period after the fall of Italy's colonies.

Methodology

This study is based on developing an understanding of Italian colonial history and its current postcolonial studies, and how both serve to reinforce the colonial mindset of the country's past in the present museum system. Through a study of the recently reopened collections of Benito Mussolini's Museo Coloniale, this work aims to understand the processes behind its initial opening, subsequent closures and name changes, and its reorganization and reopening as a part of the Museo Della Civilta (MuCiv). Accompanying this main case study will be analyses of the Italian museum system, a history of Italian colonialism, and current postcolonial demographics relevant to the cultural realm. Through these analyses, I will address Italy's colonial past as it is presented in a museum setting, the present state of museums in postcolonial Italy as they relate to the colonial mindset, and the process of future decolonization within the Italian museum system.

In order to conduct this research, I have opted for a qualitative analysis of both primary and secondary sources from the time of Italian colonies up to the current day. I will rely on sources from the museum studies field to determine the history of museums

[14] "What Is Repatriation?" Repatriation.

as colonial and cultural institutions. Taking this background into account, I will then conduct comprehensive research regarding the Museo Coloniale's background, Italy's postcolonial history, and the effects of both Covid-19 and anti-racist movements on the museum world. Using a mix of both primary and secondary sources for each of these topics, from both inside and outside of Italy, I will be able to pinpoint where each of these issues intersect. Taking these intersections, determinations will be made about the ways in which Italian museums can begin the process of decolonization both in their physical collections and through their staff, digital presence, and exhibition language. All works originally in Italian, I have translated to English myself. In addition to these written works, I am incorporating visual sources as a comparison point of past and present displays of artifacts within the Museo Coloniale's collections. This use of images is limited to what is currently made accessible by the MuCiv, as well as what is available online from the original displays in the Museo Coloniale.

Thesis Overview

Chapter one of this work provides background information on Italy's colonial history. Before one can do the work of decolonization, it is necessary to understand what occurred during the time of Italian colonies. This chapter specifically aims to explain the processes and legacies of Italian colonialism and the fascist regime as they relate to Italian cultural institutions. It moves chronologically from the Unification of the Italian Kingdom to the fall of Italian colonies, addressing the treatment of colonial subjects and incorporating the large population of emigrants into this history. Beginning with a history on Italian colonies allows for an understanding of the mindset that emerged during the

time of colonization, as well as how that mindset has remained in Italy today. This chapter is the first half of the information needed to understand the analyses that occur in both chapters three and four.

Chapter two is a brief overview of the history of Italian museums and cultural institutions. This chapter also moves chronologically, but begins in a much earlier time period. Starting with the emergence of cultural institutions in Ancient Greece and Rome, moving through the Renaissance, discussing 18th-20th century museums, and ultimately leading us to the modern museum, this chapter will explain how museums of today developed. Understanding systems of collection and methods of display help to identify where colonialism is present in these practices, thus showing where decolonization may be necessary. With these two chapters that focus mainly on the history of the topic at hand, it is possible to then move into an analysis of the current day.

Chapter three is an analysis of the Museo Coloniale, in its past iterations and current presentation. This research is a direct reflection of how the colonial mindset developed in Italy and how it is presently displayed, as well as the implications of politics and architecture. It begins with an introduction of colonial collecting practices and then follows the Museo Coloniale through its various name and location changes. Through this research, the aim is to discover how these changes have contributed either to the process of decolonization, or to the reinforcement of the colonial mindset. Understanding the conception of a truly colonial museum and how its collection functions in what is considered to be a "postcolonial" world, is paramount to this research.

Chapter four discusses the state of postcolonial Italy, by way of a case study on The National Museum of 21st Century Art (MAXXI), an analysis of museum hiring

practices within the country, the current Italian political climate, and the treatment of immigrants to Italy. This chapter is majorly concerned with external forces that effect the decolonization process within the museum system, helping to identify what futhers the work of decolonizing and what hinders it. While offering a specific case study on one museum, it also provides explanations of the political and sociocultural world in which these museums must function. This allows one to recognize where and in what ways the Italian museum system can decolonize.

The conclusion of this research will revisit the aforementioned six aims of decolonization and detail how both the Museo Coloniale and the MAXXI have implemented them. It will identify successes and failures, as well as potential drawbacks and solutions to meeting these aims. Lastly, the conclusion will pose further questions and identify areas in which more research is necessary.

Chapter One: A Brief History of Italian Colonialism

While rich in history and often perceived as one of the world's oldest nations, Italy is relatively young, especially by European standards. The modern state was formed during its unification in 1861, when it became known as the Kingdom of Italy. The current Italian Republic was not formed until 1946, when the Kingdom and fascism fell from power. Prior to the Unification and formation of the Republic, what is now known as Italy was a collection of separate states coexisting in the peninsula. As a result of the country's youth, its "imperial enterprises have received little attention in comparative colonial studies and in histories of the [European] continent."[15] This is also due to the unique nature of Italian colonialism. Beginning later than most European countries, Italy's colonial efforts did not start until after its Unification and the country did not acquire an official colony until 1890. From this period of Unification through the 1940s, Italy had colonies in Eritrea, Somalia, Libya, Ethiopia, Albania, and the Dodecanese Islands. Italian colonialism took place through several different steps, beginning with the emergence of Catholic Priests in North Africa, followed by state representatives with imperial aspirations, and culminating in a fascist regime that eventually led to the end of Italian colonies.

In addition to these colonizing processes, Italy's emigrant population was increasing exponentially. This was due in large part to the lack of upward mobility possible in the new country, with Italians leaving in order to find new opportunities for themselves and their families. This growing emigrant population was a great factor in contributing to the country's belief that colonies were necessary in order to cement

[15] Prem Poddar et al., "Italy and Its Colonies," 263

themselves as a European power. Throughout each step of the colonization process from 1861 until World War II, Italy struggled to establish their hold in Africa due to their position as a very young and relatively poor country, lacking in economic capital, a national identity, and clear governmental organization.

When the "scramble for Africa" began in the 1880s, Italy was not nearly as prepared to colonize as other European powers. The "scramble for Africa" refers to the period of time from around 1875 to the First World War, during which European powers invaded and colonized the African continent in an attempt to control the most land. During this period following Italian Unification, the country was impoverished for a number of reasons. The first and most clear reason for poverty was the lack of unified infrastructure and economy coming from within the newly established nation. This poverty helped to fuel Italy in becoming a nation of emigrants, with the country "sending millions not only to North and South America, but also to French colonial territories."[16] As a new country struggling to find their identity and with large parts of its population living in poverty or leaving the country, many Italians were nervous about their standing in comparison to other European countries. This mindset resulted in Italians "making the maintenance of authority and prestige central concerns"[17] of theirs. While colonization and displays of power were important to the country as a way of establishing themselves among other European powers, Italy's "lack of capital and infrastructure hampered the kind of spontaneous colonization occurring in Africa."[18]

[16] Prem Poddar, et al. "Italy and Its Colonies." 265.
[17] Prem Poddar, et al. "Italy and Its Colonies." 264.
[18] Giuseppe Finaldi, *History of Italian Colonialism, 1860-1907: Europe's Last Empire,* 3.

Missionaries as Colonizers

Thus in the earliest period of Italian colonialism, it was not representatives from the new Kingdom beginning the work of colonizing Africa for Italy, but rather missionaries from the Catholic church. In 1866, before the massive rush to colonize Africa began, Italian priests were able to establish a colony in Ethiopia, called the "Italo-African Colony of Sciotel."[19] While this colony failed, it is important to note that through its existence "the first seed of Italian direct involvement in Africa had been planted."[20] These Italian priests were in Northern Africa primarily for the purpose of missionary work, but often that was not at the top of their list of priorities. Some spent their time in African settlements taking advantage of those who they were supposed to be evangelizing to through manipulation, sexual and emotional, because for them, "proselytising under the banner of the red, white, and green flag required no obedience to the oath of chastity taken under Catholic aegis."[21] Others, "men of science,"[22] did not concern themselves with evangelization, but rather with exploring the biodiversity and newness that Northern Africa had to offer them. Through this process of exploration, many Catholic priests and explorers who accompanied them began collecting artifacts, particularly those related to natural science. Prominent explorers and collectors among these missionaries include Orazio Antinori and Giussepe Sapeto. Their collections of flora and fauna, as well as

[19] Giuseppe Finaldi, *History of Italian Colonialism, 1860-1907: Europe's Last Empire*, 15.
[20] Giuseppe Finaldi, *History of Italian Colonialism, 1860-1907: Europe's Last Empire*, 16.
[21] Giuseppe Finaldi, *History of Italian Colonialism, 1860-1907: Europe's Last Empire*, 6.
[22] Giuseppe Finaldi, *History of Italian Colonialism, 1860-1907: Europe's Last Empire.*

written works, are some of the first colonial objects to return to Italy. The question of ethics in relation to the collection of these objects will be discussed in a later chapter.

This period is not often considered a part of Italy's colonial history as very few colonies were established and those that were, such as the colony at Sciotel, were not long-standing, with that specific settlement lasting only three years.[23] However, this period is particularly important to this research because it sets the stage for the process of collecting items within Northern Africa and bringing those items back to mainland Italy. In addition to this, many Italians were of the belief that these places populated by Italian missionaries were in some way "reserved for Italy."[24] The work of Catholic priests in the 1860s and 1870s made an effort to lay the foundation for later groups of colonizers emerging from the Italian Kingdom during the 1880s and beyond.

Imperial Aspirations

Following this early period of Italian colonialism, the young country struggled to gain more territory in Africa. At this time a common thought process led many Italians, in relation to their newly developing national identity post-unification, to a shared "desire to emulate their [forefathers] exploits… across the Mediterranean."[25] It was not uncommon for Italians to reminisce on the glory of the Roman Empire and many saw colonization as a way to return to that. This idea that the Italian Kingdom needed to

[23] Giuseppe Finaldi, *History of Italian Colonialism, 1860-1907: Europe's Last Empire*, 15-16.
[24] Giuseppe Finaldi, *History of Italian Colonialism, 1860-1907: Europe's Last Empire*, 13-14.
[25] Giuseppe Finaldi, *History of Italian Colonialism, 1860-1907: Europe's Last Empire*, 25.

model itself on the image of the ancient Romans was a motivating factor in regards to much of the Italian colonization process. Despite Italy's dreams of returning to their former status as an Empire, the reality of Italian colonialism was not nearly as glorious. In an effort to keep up with the scramble for land occurring on the African continent, Italian ambassadors and emissaries "undertook [their] first incursion in the colonial world without a clearly articulated project of overseas expansion."[26] This lack of a clear plan is in direct relation to the lack of infrastructure present in the Italian country during the late 1800s. Even though Italy was joining the scramble for Africa at a distinct disadvantage to most European nations, the country pushed for colonization as a modern take on empire-building.

After struggling to find a foothold in the African continent during the initial grapple for territory of the 1880s, Italy managed to settle its first colony, Eritrea, in 1890. This colony "became the base during the last decade of the nineteenth century for further expansion southwards, in the direction of Somalia, and westwards – with an effort to occupy the Ethiopian Empire."[27] These plans for Ethiopia began with diplomatic efforts by Italy to gain status as a protectorate nation for the country, but this was denied by Ethiopia. After this denial, Italy prepared for a military conquest of the country. This campaign was anything but successful, resulting in "the worst military defeat suffered by a European country in a colonial war."[28] Following this grueling defeat, Italy's hopes for

[26] Alessandro Pes. "An Empire for a Kingdom: Monarchy and Fascism in the Italian Colonies." 247.
[27] Alessandro Pes. "An Empire for a Kingdom: Monarchy and Fascism in the Italian Colonies." 247.
[28] Alessandro Pes. "An Empire for a Kingdom: Monarchy and Fascism in the Italian Colonies." 247.

a renewed empire were quickly being diminished, but the country pushed onward, still attempting to colonize on the Horn of Africa. For so many Italians, the colonization of Africa was a way for them to participate in the great exploration that they had long read about, enforcing a colonial mindset as a part of the Italian national identity and encouraging further efforts in East Africa.[29] Other regions of Africa were eyed by the Italians, but due to the influence of other European powers - for example, a French protectorate over Tunisia - efforts outside of the Horn of Africa were minimal.[30] Other small colonies were held in Asia and on islands scattered across the Mediterranean, but these were not incredibly beneficial for Italy.[31]

Colonial Racism in Early Italian Colonies

Which colonies were held and how they benefited Italy are less important to this research as other issues. Rather, the concern lies in how people and objects in these colonized territories were treated and how that treatment contributed to the colonial mindset of the time. It also aims to deduce how that mindset has endeared through museums. In order to analyze this mindset, it is necessary to separate the period before fascism from the Fascist period, as the fascist regime greatly altered the treatment of subjects and objects in Italian colonies. Thus, this section considers the presence of colonial racism in Italian colonies from the year 1890 to the year 1922, often regarded as

[29] Giuseppe Finaldi, *History of Italian Colonialism, 1860-1907: Europe's Last Empire*, 25.
[30] Alessandro Pes. "An Empire for a Kingdom: Monarchy and Fascism in the Italian Colonies." 248-9.
[31] Nancy Isenberg. "'Caesar's Word against the World': Caesarism and the Discourses of Empire." 90.

the more liberal era of Italian colonialism. These two distinct periods of Italian colonization, the liberal period and the fascist period, also contributed to the uniqueness of the Italian colonial case.

From an anthropological standpoint, Italian colonialists prided themselves on establishing colonies that were made up of those from a superior race. They did not regard the subjects of their colonies, particularly Ethiopians, as "real Africans,"[32] but rather as members of the Hamitic race. The Hamites are defined through a biblical understanding as the children of Ham, who was a son of Noah. This definition was used to define a cultural bond between Europeans, considered the children of Japeth (another of Noah's sons), and Northern Africans. Through this, Northern Africans, including those who occupied the Horn of Africa, were considered racially superior to "real" black Africans. Italian (and other European) anthropologists used this concept to imply that "if Africans had once needed a foreign group (the Hamites) to improve themselves, they now similarly needed the Europeans."[33] Despite the belief that their subjects were superior to other Africans, Italians still treated the people in their colonies as inferior. In Italian colonies prior to the rise of fascism "everyday life was dotted with acts of abuse by the colonizers against the colonized, and racial discrimination was one of the founding pillars of the colonial edifice."[34] The presence of racism at this time was not codified as it would become during the fascist period, but rather understood as a "natural" occurrence.[35] These

[32] Prem Poddar, et al. "Italy and Its Colonies." 271.
[33] Prem Poddar, et al. "Italy and Its Colonies." 271.
[34] Patrizia Palumbo, ed. 2003. *A Place in the Sun: Africa in Italian Colonial Culture from Post-Unification to the Present*, 82.
[35] Patrizia Palumbo, ed. 2003. *A Place in the Sun: Africa in Italian Colonial Culture from Post-Unification to the Present*, 82-115.

occurrences presented themselves most often in the form of segregated neighborhoods based on racial lines. While racism was not necessarily institutionalized during this period, African subjects were still considered the cultural other and their presentation in Italian popular culture reflected this belief, with Italian colonizers regarded as caretakers and protectors of the "inferior" African people. The sense that divides along racial lines were simply what was "natural" in Italian colonies would drastically change with the introduction of fascism in Italy and its colonies.

The Rise of Fascism

The word "fascism" comes from the Italian word "fasci," most directly translated to mean "block" or "bundle." Used sparingly throughout the late nineteenth century, the word entered the general lexicon with Benito Mussolini's "fascio di azione rivoluzionaria" (Block of Revolutionary Action), formed in the fall of 1914.[36] "Fascism" in word and meaning was born on the Italian peninsula with "Italians [having] the most direct and earliest experiences of the movement which gave the concept to the modern world."[37] While Mussolini was forming his fascist party throughout the 1910s, it did not take off until after the First World War. This is because much of his organizing was halted as he served on the warfront, but also because Italy's social and economic conditions post-World War I contributed to a society that was more accepting of fascist ideals, with "much of the Italian urban and rural middle class [turning] to Mussolini's Fascists as a last defense."[38] Having lost nearly 600,000 men to conflict and spending

[36] Norman Kogan. "The Origins of Italian Fascism." 101.
[37] Norman Kogan. "The Origins of Italian Fascism." 100.
[38] Brustein, William. "The 'Red Menace' and the Rise of Italian Fascism." 652.

millions on the war effort, Italy was once again facing issues of inadequate infrastructure and employment opportunities. The ideals of fascism, defined by Mussolini as a collectivist mindset that opposes liberalism, socialism, and democracy, became their only appealing option. He aimed for Italians to be bound together in a nationalistic fashion as a "bundle," or "fasci," an attractive concept for a country still seeking a defined national identity. Mussolini grew in popularity, offering a solution to the losses the country faced during World War I and his concept of fascism began to catch on. With this shift in ideologies, "the Italian royal house had to share both its real and symbolic power, as the figure of Mussolini became increasingly central to the way the regime exercised power over its citizens."[39]

In the 1920s, fascism took a hold in Italy, both on the mainland and in colonies abroad. This was evident through the transition of colonies from non-settler colonies, where very few Italian elites lived, to settler colonies, with large numbers of Italians moving to Africa to live and work. These Italians were able to find work in the colonies that was largely unavailable in their home country. This was also an effort made by the fascist regime in order to differentiate themselves from other European colonial powers, "to distinguish Fascist Italy's form of colonialism from the sort practised by capitalist countries."[40] In addition, this outsourcing served the aforementioned imperial aspirations held by many Italians and emphasized by Mussolini. However, chasing an empire was likely not Mussolini's true goal, but "more the most visible aspect of propaganda aiming

[39] Alessandro Pes. "An Empire for a Kingdom: Monarchy and Fascism in the Italian Colonies." 249.
[40] Alessandro Pes. "An Empire for a Kingdom: Monarchy and Fascism in the Italian Colonies." 250.

to galvanise the nation in support of colonialism."[41] In addition to this, Mussolini established the Museo Coloniale (Colonial Museum) located in Rome, in 1923, furthering the work of propaganda through the display of colonial artifacts. These collections were intended to show the wealth acquired through colonization, rather than the stories of those who lived in the colonies, an issue that this research will dedicate itself to in a later chapter. Through all of this Mussolini was working to expand his power abroad, establishing more colonies and deflecting from the domestic issues that the country was facing post-war. From the acquisition of new territories and the shift from a more liberal perspective on colonization to a fascist one, the treatment of people in Italian colonies also shifted drastically.

Later Forms of Colonial Racism

If, in the earlier days of Italian colonization, racism in the Italian colonies seemed as if it was a natural occurrence, "during the days of fascism there was a vicious racism…this division was a heritage of fascism."[42] This division was born out of new racial policies established during the 1920s and 1930s that enforced a separation of black and white citizens in almost every aspect of life. This included the workplace, neighborhoods, restaurants, and more. As Italy was changing, "such segregation was essential to the maintenance of power within the changed imperial setting."[43] Under these new policies, natives of Italian colonies were not given the opportunity of gaining Italian

[41] Alessandro Pes. "An Empire for a Kingdom: Monarchy and Fascism in the Italian Colonies." 251.
[42] Patrizia Palumbo, ed. 2003. *A Place in the Sun: Africa in Italian Colonial Culture from Post-Unification to the Present,* 81.
[43] Prem Poddar, et al. "Italy and Its Colonies." 307.

citizenship and some Italians who had intermarried risked the possibility of losing their citizenship. Racial lines were clearly defined and "any behaviour considered detrimental to racial prestige could be punished with imprisonment, thus introducing highly arbitrary principles into colonial jurisprudence."[44] In addition to racial separation on the basis of black and white, these policies included the ostracization of Jewish-Italians, stating that the Jewish "race" was not included within the Italian national identity. These policies were a part of Mussolini's Manifesto della Razza, Manifesto of Race, put forth in 1938, that emphasized the superiority of the "Italian race," and the inferiority of the African and Jewish "races."

In many ways, these new policies were born out of Mussolini's ties to Adolf Hitler and the Nazi regime, as ideologies of white superiority were heightening ahead of World War II. Overall, these ideas were rooted in displays of power with "the new 'racial consciousness' and notions of Italian racial purity promoted by the fascist regime [resting] on a clear separation - on merely biological grounds - of citizens and subjects."[45] Mussolini needed to maintain power in his colonies and creating clear divides based upon racial lines was one method of doing so. However, the aftermath of the Second World War would result in a near complete loss of colonial power for the fascist regime, with the rest of the losses following shortly thereafter.

[44] Prem Poddar, et al. "Italy and Its Colonies." 307.
[45] Prem Poddar, et al. "Italy and Its Colonies." 271.

Italy Loses its Colonies

Yet another unique aspect of the Italian colonial case, the country lost its colonies sooner than a majority of other European powers. These losses came through defeats, as "the Allied powers had taken over Eritrea, Somalia and Libya as they routed Italy in Africa during World War II."[46] Eritrea was taken first in 1941 and Somalia and Libya subsequently fell. Ethiopia, Italy's hardest won colony, was returned to Emperor Haile Selassie's rule in 1947. Somalia was returned, in part, to Italy under a United Nations trusteeship in 1950, but ultimately this colony was lost completely in 1960. With the loss of Somalia, Mussolini's empire and hopes for Italy to be a great colonial power fizzled out. The country was once again struggling to keep up with European leaders due to the effects of its own youth and the taxes of war.

In many ways, the hardest hit Italy took through the loss of its colonies was that to its newly developed identity as a deeply nationalistic country. As quickly as Italy had taken over territories, it had just as soon lost them entirely. Former colonies quickly adopted new languages and "Italian did not remain the official language in any of Italy's former colonies."[47] The Italian identity had not established itself on the African continent, most likely in relation to the harsh racial policies established under fascism. In addition to losing their colonies, fascism fell nearly as rapidly as it had risen. Mussolini was ousted from power in 1943, long before the last of the Italian colonies were truly lost. This swift rise and fall of both Italian colonization and fascism helped to "[confine] colonial history

[46] Prem Poddar, et al. "Italy and Its Colonies." 265.
[47] Prem Poddar, et al. "Italy and Its Colonies." 266.

to the periphery of the process of national identity formation."[48] This is in part due to the fact that "no figure emerged from the former colonies to accuse the Italians in their own language,"[49] allowing Italians to largely ignore the consequences of their colonialism. In many ways, the country was able to begin again after the fall of fascism and colonialism, turning a blind eye to the legacy that both left behind, particularly in cultural institutions. As a result of this, "Italy has had the slowest decolonisation of historical studies on colonialism… [and] great gaps remain in our knowledge of Italian colonialism."[50] With study of the Italian colonies occurring slowly, it is difficult to then attempt decolonization in a museum. For example, conducting proper provenance research is difficult when accurate geographical information regarding these colonies is not available. Thus, the slow decolonization of historical work regarding colonialism has a direct effect on the speed at which museums may be able to decolonize their institutions.

A Nation of Emigrants and Immigrants

Amidst the Italian colonial period, the country was also experiencing mass waves of emigration. From the earliest days of Italian colonization to the period shortly after the last colony was lost, "some 26 million Italians left Italy to work in other parts of the world."[51] Some of this emigration can be attributed to Mussolini's shift towards Italian colonies being settler-colonies, during which many Italians moved to the Horn of Africa in order to join the labor force. These emigrants can be considered one form of colonial

[48] Cristina Lombardi-Diop and Caterina Romeo, "Italy's Postcolonial 'Question': Views from the Southern Frontier of Europe," 369.
[49] Prem Poddar, et al. "Italy and Its Colonies." 266.
[50] Prem Poddar, et al. "Italy and Its Colonies." 286.
[51] Prem Poddar, et al. "Italy and Its Colonies." 287.

expansion. However, many other Italians were not leaving for African colonies, but rather headed to "Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, the United States, Canada, Australia,... and Northern Europe."[52] These emigrants greatly outnumbered those who were moving to African colonies, thus the argument for emigration being a part of colonial work does not really stand its ground. In contrast to this, Italy's immigrant population was not growing as exponentially as its emigrant population, and it was not following trends seen in other European countries. Many countries, following the Second World War, saw an increase of immigrants from their colonial holdings. In Italy, "most foreign nationals are from countries with no previous colonial link to the country."[53] The question of why this is can be related to the racial policies of Mussolini's fascist regime and to the nationalism that surrounded the concept of Italian identity. These concepts gave way to "particular concerns that shaped Italian colonial ideologies and policies, such as deleterious effects of Italian mass emigration and insecurities over Italy's European status."[54] As immigration from more diverse locations increases in Italy, questions surrounding the ability for immigrants to gain citizenship are still central with old policies remaining "visible today in restrictive contemporary Italian laws regarding nationality and immigration."[55]

These laws and the mindset that accompanies them are one way in which the colonial mindset in Italy remains eight decades out from the fall of their last colony. This mindset helps to shape the understanding of collections acquired during the period of

[52]Cristina Lombardi-Diop and Caterina Romeo, "Italy's Postcolonial 'Question': Views from the Southern Frontier of Europe," 370.
[53] Prem Poddar, et al. "Italy and Its Colonies." 289.
[54] Prem Poddar, et al. "Italy and Its Colonies." 267.
[55] Prem Poddar, et al. "Italy and Its Colonies." p. 267

Italian colonialism and influences the current treatment of works by those considered the cultural "other" - Africans, Jewish people, and other immigrants - in Italian cultural institutions today. The decolonization of this mindset, or lack thereof, will be discussed in later chapters through an analysis of the aforementioned Museo Coloniale, as well as reflections on the collections of priests and explorers and the collections of the MAXXI: the National Museum of 21st Century Art in Rome. These will be used in order to determine how and to what extent the legacy of colonialism and the skeletons of fascism continue to influence methods of collection and display in Italian museums today. In many ways, it can seem that little has changed, or that the country may even be backtracking (with the reopening of the Museo Coloniale's collections), but this analysis shows that work is being done, in varying capacities, towards a decolonized museum.

Chapter Two: A Brief History of the Italian Museum

Museums in Italy date back long before the birth of the Italian kingdom and the current republic. This makes sense as the country is one filled with cultural heritage sites and artifacts. While they have not always been referred to specifically as "museums," Italians have been storing valuable pieces of material culture in temples, monuments, and courtly palaces for centuries. In many ways, Italy has also functioned as an open-air museum, with statues and artifacts on display in public spaces around many of their cities, before this concept was even named. With a long history of storing and displaying artifacts, it is necessary to delve into the history of the Italian museum, how it was conceptualized and defined, how collections were amassed and displayed, and who was responsible for running them. Knowledge of this museum system from its beginnings, identifying how they have changed over time, and defining what they look like today is essential to research surrounding the concept of museum decolonization. In order to look at this, we must first begin with how museums were initially defined by Italians and what these first iterations looked like, as well as highlighting specific moments within this history that have helped to define Italian museums in the colonial and fascist period.

Birth of the Museum

The word "museum" is derived from the Greek word "mouiseon," which refers specifically to the house of the muses. The muses were nine Greek goddesses who devoted themselves to science, the arts, and literature, making it fitting that the term "museum" traces its lineage back to them. The use of "museum" in relation to collecting and study of artifacts most likely began "with Aristotle's travels to the island of Lesbos in

the mid-340s BCE."[56] Thus, museums and the systems of collection that accompany them have been in existence for much longer than many assume. Systems of collection refer to the ways in which museums acquire objects. These include, but are not limited to: gifts, bequeathments, donations, purchases, exchanges, fieldwork acquisitions, or (some less acceptable methods) such as looting and theft.

Acquisition and the study of objects was occurring in the Roman Empire during the 300s BCE, but museums truly became public in nature with Roman expansion in the 200s BCE. During this period, many items were brought back to Rome from Greece and the empire responded by displaying these statues and paintings in public areas. In doing so, the Roman Empire was establishing an open-air "museum of Greek art."[57] This instance of looting and display of war spoils relate directly to the conversation surrounding decolonization, as it shows the ways in which looted materials can be used as a tool to show power, wealth, and prestige. This concept of museums as repositories of power will come back into play with the way museums were used as tools of propaganda during the fascist regime. It was during this time that "the public display of symbolic or precious objects… was acquiring a significant rhetorical power in its own right."[58] Collections acquired and used for study, as well as the public display of statuary are some of the first instances of the birth of what we now refer to as museums. These initial "museum" spaces radically transformed during the Renaissance into museums that more closely resemble our modern museums.

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[56] Sharon Macdonald, ed. *A Companion to Museum Studies*, 116.
[57] Sharon Macdonald, ed. *A Companion to Museum Studies*, 117.
[58] Sharon Macdonald, ed. *A Companion to Museum Studies*, 119.

The Renaissance Museum

During the Renaissance, musealized collections that were semi-open to the public took on a variety of names: pandechions, studiolos, gabinettos, Wunderkammers, gallerias, and Kunstkammers, to name just a few. These collections were filled with artifacts of "naturalia," relating to natural sciences, and "artificialia," relating to that which is man-made. This process of collecting took hold on the Italian peninsula when a "passion erupted among well-to-do Italians for amassing collections of classical and ancient art and artifacts."[59] One of the most notable of these collections is that of the Medici family in Florence. Their collections were one of the first to which the term "museum" was used, referring to "collections whose contents were delimited in terms of thematic or investigatory purposes."[60] The Medici family's holdings consisted of various artifacts relating to science and the arts, but it was not typically open to the public. As time went on Lorenzo the Magnificent would open part of his collections to artists and creators, and eventually these collections would be open to travelers for viewing. At the same time, the Catholic church was establishing its collections in what would later become the Capitoline and Vatican Museums, two of the world's oldest, formally established in 1491. Initially, these were not available for public viewing either, but in similar fashion to the Medici's holdings, gradually gained visitors.

This is consistent with practices during the Renaissance, as items that were previously outdoors on view for the public were "moved indoors or to less approachable locations."[61] What had once been open-air displays of artifacts were being stored in

[59] Ben Mauk. "What Was the First Museum?"
[60] Sharon Macdonald, ed. *A Companion to Museum Studies*, 121.
[61] Sharon Macdonald, ed. *A Companion to Museum Studies*, 121.

private galleries and residential areas. Similarly to the time of the Roman Empire, however, these collections were often still tied to the government, as is seen through the Medici family collections. They were housed in the Palazzo Vecchio, which also housed the Florentine government, and were utilized during state visits as a display of wealth and power. This relationship may explain why the collections were later moved into the Uffizi, a former administrative office space, when they became accessible to the public.

The Renaissance, or "rebirth," of European culture following the Middle Ages saw the rise of artistic expression and scientific investigation to a new level. It makes sense that collecting would experience a similar rise in popularity. These collections were primarily works by Italian and European makers, differentiating collections of this era from those typically discussed regarding decolonization, as they came from within the region, however their use as tools of strength and statesmanship mirror that of how looted items from the colonial period are used. In addition to these works by Italian artists, objects from non-Western cultures began to enter these "Cabinets of Curiosity." The Medici family in particular had a noted interest in the "New World and to Asia as well as a comparable approach to collecting goods and artefacts from these regions."[62] Items they collected included Mixtec masks from Mexico, jewelry from India, and Persian rugs. Thus, their collections included both works made by Italian creators, as well as those found across the globe. The Medici family's collections, as well as those of other notable Italian families, are still on display in Italy and across the world. These holdings led to the creation of some of the world's first public museums, a phenomenon that truly took

[62] J. Keating and L. Markey. "'Indian' Objects in Medici and Austrian-Habsburg Inventories: A Case-Study of the Sixteenth-Century Term." 285.

hold during the 18th century. The advent of the public museum takes us closer to the conceptualization of modern museums, but their roots of collection and display are tied to these Renaissance era studiolos, gallerias, and princely collections.

18th Century Museums and Institutions

In the early 18th century, these Renaissance collections gave way to the public museum model that, in many ways, we still use today. These museums were often princely or stately collections that had been given to the city, state, or country upon someone's death, as were the Medici collections to the Uffizi in 1743. The Capitoline and Vatican Museums were also opened to the public by the Catholic church in 1734 and 1771, respectively. Each of these three collections is still open for viewing today. Why was it that during this period of time these museums were open for all to see? Museum studies scholars often relate this emergence of museums for the public good to the American and French Revolutions. At this time, those who did choose to donate works to public museums, were incentivized to do so as a way of solidifying their position in society. In this way, the rise of public museums in the 18th century "provided an institutional form that enabled the donor to perpetuate his legacy and the university to add a facility which integrated inquiry and its objects."[63]

Within these public institutions, there is often the idea of "nation-building," through which the countries use the narrative of history, wealth of art and science, and its display in order to establish a national identity.[64] This was interesting in Italy as,

[63] Sharon Macdonald, ed. *A Companion to Museum Studies*, 125.
[64] Brenda Trofanenko. "Chapter 7: The Public Museum and Identity: Or, the Question of Belonging."

previously discussed, it was a collection of nation-states rather than a united nation. The lack of a truly national museum that represented the Italian identity may have some part to play in the later confinement of colonialism to the margins of identity building in the country. In Italy, and in other European countries, museums became a place in which the important and powerful could choose a selective history of the nation and disseminate it to the masses. During this time, museums also became a place which the public came to place immense trust in. Objects began to be regarded as public possessions, or owned by the nation as a whole, allowing for everyone to feel vested in their safekeeping and display. It is because of this that the collection and display of colonial artifacts that would come about in the 19th and 20th centuries in Italy could be particularly harmful. Now that the museum is considered a public entity and items are owned by the state, what you possess has even more power in terms of national identity.

One European example of this form of displaying power is the looting done by Napoleon Bonaparte during the 18th century. His army was accompanied by historians, of sorts, who had "instructions to select works of art from every subject state."[65] They did just that, amassing the "greatest exhibition of European works of art ever assembled in one place."[66] This mass looting was a way in which the French could show their power over other European nations, not only by winning the war, but by also having the spoils to show for it. In Italy, this concept connects back to the perception of the display of objects as a display of power that was identified during the time of the Roman empire. In

[65] Katharine Eustace. "The Fruits of War: How Napoleon's Looted Art Found Its Way Home."
[66] Katharine Eustace. "The Fruits of War: How Napoleon's Looted Art Found Its Way Home."

a period prior to the unification of the Italian Kingdom, this concept of nation-building through museums is particularly important, as the country, not yet established, was functioning as separate nation-states, all attempting to show their own identity and power.

Museums of the 19th Century through the Rise of Fascism

In the 19th and 20th centuries, museums were no longer interested in only displaying objects from former princely collections and displaying their own national wealth, but also with collecting and displaying items from other countries and cultures. Some of this was born out of genuine curiosity, but in other instances it was a way to prove their nation's superiority over other cultures. Historical reenactments entered the museum field, sometimes focusing on prehistoric crafts and practices, and other times modeling the societies that Europeans found within their colonies or Americans within indigenous populations. This became prevalent in Italy through a series of exhibitions. Open-air museums of their own, these exhibitions "displayed material that was seized during domination wars including the weapons of the peoples of Eritrea, Somalia, and what was then known as Cyrenaica and Tripolitania (now called Libya)."[67] From exhibitions like this, colonial museums were born - most notably the Museo Coloniale in Rome, which will be discussed further in a later chapter. With the country being newly unified, the 19th and 20th centuries were the ideal time for it to display not only internal wealth but also to signify their position as a world power in displaying colonial acquisitions. During the late 19th century and early 20th century, museums became the

[67] Reverb Effect, "Revival and Reckoning: A Colonial Museum in Postcolonial Italy."

place where empires were put on display.[68] While colonial museums are not the only institutions to have come about during this time period, they are the most relevant to the research at hand. Their rise and use as a tool for nation-building helped to shape the colonial mindset in Italy and are at the center of the conversation around decolonization. Moving now into a chapter that focuses on the movement of one collection throughout the 20th and 21st centuries, how this history comes into play will be considered.

[68] Krystyna von Henneberg. "Monuments, Public Space, and the Memory of Empire in Modern Italy."

Chapter Three: Colonialism in the Italian Museum

With the Unification of the Kingdom of Italy and the Scramble for Africa occurring within the same timespan, the development of the Italian national identity was inherently tied to the process of colonization in such a way that, "the emergence of the nation state, the colonial enterprise and the creation of a 'unitarian identity' and culture in the second half of the nineteenth century are intimately bound together."[69] This binding means that the process of decolonization in Italy will in some ways require a breakdown of the national identity. In many ways, the development of the Italian identity was deeply influenced by acts of colonialism and efforts by Italy to establish itself as a world power. This time period also coincided with the opening of "national museums" across the world, the first of these being the British Museum in London and the Louvre in Paris, during the eighteenth century. Museums provided a way for a country to present their national history and prove their place in a way that "justified the autonomy of the state on the basis of being distinctive, unique and necessitated by historical logic."[70] Thus, for Italy to develop a national identity that proved itself by those standards, it was necessary to not only organize their own collections for display, which they had been doing since the time of the Italian Renaissance (if not before), but to expand and display them in such a way that both expressed themselves as a formidable world power and served to enlighten those who were deemed less civilized, whether that be their own citizens or

[69] Beatrice Falcucci, Bringing the Empire to the Provinces, 115.
[70] Peter Aronsson and Gabriella Elgenius, *National Museums and Nation-building in Europe.*

African inhabitants, of the strength the young country had to offer.[71] It was through this process that the colonial mindset took hold within the Italian museum system.

From the beginning of colonization through the fall of the country's colonies, museums were founded across the Italian peninsula aiming "to provide vitrines of the colonies around Italy, and recollections of the Italian overseas territories… each [presenting] their own, different, version of the colonial empire."[72] These institutions include the Museo Coloniale, the focus of this chapter, as well as Colonial Exhibitions in Genoa, the Museum of the African Society of Italy in Naples, the Tropical Agricultural Museum in Florence, and the Guglielmo Massaia Museum in Frascati, to name a few. Knowing that colonial collections and cultural institutions were being created and patronized during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, questions remain of how these institutions shaped Italians' mindsets surrounding colonization, what objects entered Italian society through this collection process (and which still remain), and how both artifacts and attitudes have influenced current Italian museum practices. An introduction of early colonial collecting practices and an analysis of the Museo Coloniale aim to address these questions.

Early Colonial Collections

To begin the work of analyzing the Museo Coloniale and its place in the conversation around decolonization, it is important to first see how colonial collections began to enter the country. As previously mentioned, Catholic priests were among the

[71] Beatrice Falcucci, Bringing the Empire to the Provinces, 114.
[72] Beatrice Falcucci, Bringing the Empire to the Provinces, 116.

first Italians to enter the Horn of Africa under the country's flag and as such they were some of the earliest Italian collectors in the region. In addition to priests, explorers were making their way across Africa and collecting as they went. Two notable men from this time period are explorer Orazio Antinori and missionary Giuseppe Sapeto. Both were interested in the sciences, particularly ornithology (the scientific study of birds) and language studies, respectively.[73] Their collections, primarily located at universities across the Italian peninsula, raise questions surrounding the position of colonial artifacts in educational institutions but this research is more concerned with how those collections found their way there.

Beginning first with the collections of Orazio Antinori, it is important to look at when and how he began the process of collecting artifacts in Africa. Antinori was born in Perugia before the Unification of the Italian Kingdom and studied natural history in Rome. He participated in democratic uprisings during the 1840s, which resulted in his exile to Greece.[74] It was not until 1858 that Antinori found himself on the African continent, moving to Egypt to begin exploring the continent that was vastly unknown to Europeans. From his arrival in Egypt until his death in 1882, Antinori was "collecting and noting everything as much as possible on the fauna and flora of the region, still semi-unknown, but above all [was] establishing relationships with the indigenous potentates and investigating the complexities of society."[75] Although Antinori spent a large portion of his life on the African continent and died in Ethiopia, he remained loyal to Italy,

[73] Giuseppe Finaldi, *History of Italian Colonialism, 1860-1907: Europe's Last Empire*
[74] Mark. "Libero Come La Natura, Orazio Antinori: Scienziato, Avventuriero, Romantico."
[75] Marco Valle. "Orazio Antinori, il Patriarca Degli Esploratori Italiani."

sending "reports… together with cases of precious finds, to the Geographical Society (Societa Geografica Italiana)."[76] The most comprehensive collection of Antinori's finds is located at the Natural History Museum of the University of Pisa. Within this collection there are fifty specimens, collected between 1859-1882.[77] Other items are held at the Museums of Natural History at the University of Florence and Pavia. Antinori's collections were labeled scientifically and thoughtfully, meaning that they still offer educational insight for those who study them today. These collections entered Italy through a methodical process, in which Antinori established good relationships with natives and offered educational materials to his home country.

The case of Giuseppe Sapeto is significantly different. He entered Ethiopia as a priest in 1838 and later served a large role in the colonization of the area.[78] Traveling in 1869, not under orders from the Catholic church, but this time as a consulate for the Italian government, Sapeto made it clear he "felt that alliance with or dominance of Ethiopia would be the key to control of the Red Sea trade."[79] This was important to the newly formed Italian Kingdom as they were trying to assert their position as a world power. Sapeto's ideas were initially ignored, but later revisited. He played a key role in the colonization of Eritrea, overseeing the signing away of the land to Italy. Amidst his missionary work and time spent working for the Italian government, Sapeto remained a man of science, focused heavily on translating native African languages into Italian for study. When Sapeto returned to Italy in the 1890s, he brought with him several Gəʿəz

[76] Marco Valle. "Orazio Antinori, il Patriarca Degli Esploratori Italiani."
[77] Lorenzo Vanni and Simone Farina. "Birds Collected by Orazio Antinori in the Natural History Museum of the University of Pisa."
[78] Robert L. Hess. "Italian Imperialism in Its Ethiopian Context."
[79] Robert L. Hess. "Italian Imperialism in Its Ethiopian Context," 98.

manuscripts. Gəʿəz is the written language of Ancient Ethiopia and was "produced in the cultural framework of the Ethiopian Christian (Täwahədo) Church throughout its history."[80] Sapeto's manuscripts "have not been studied so far,"[81] as they were largely forgotten in libraries across Italy, making them a primary source from which linguists and historians can learn about both the written works of Ethiopians and culture of the Ethiopian christians. However, they should not be studied without also studying Sapeto's history on the African continent and the part that he played in colonizing the Horn of Africa, as his history makes them a part of the larger problem with items acquired during colonialism. While some were acquired legally and ethically, as Antinori's collections seem to have been, others were done through threats of violence, or simply illegally, being taken from the continent without permission from or against recommendations by local leaders. It is important to know the history behind the collections in order to determine whether or not their acquisition was legal and ethical. This question is important in regards to the aims of transparency outlined by the European Commission. Provenance research is essential to museum decolonization and in order to determine whether or not these collections reach that aim, it is necessary to know their history.

Inception of the Museo Coloniale

In considering the decolonization of Italian museum collections, our attention shifts to the Museo Coloniale in Rome. Inaugurated during the fascist period in 1923, the

[80] Nafisa Valieva. "Gəʿəz Manuscripts in Ethiopia: What a Trained Outsider Can See Today."
[81] A. Brita, Hummel, S., Helmholz, K. and Villa, M. 2017. Three Collections of Gəʿəz Manuscripts Recently Surveyed in Italy, 172.

Museo Coloniale was not the first, nor, as previously mentioned, the only colonial collection on display in Italy during the early twentieth century. On the contrary "over 90 museums spread throughout the Italian Peninsula housed colonial collections,"[82] and Falcucci makes note that many continue to do so, as seen through the still intact collections of the Museo Coloniale. However, this museum holds great importance in this discussion as it was situated in the country's capital city, was the only to bear the name "colonial," and functioned primarily as a tool of fascist propaganda. It becomes even more important now, as its collections have recently been reopened for display. Opened following the example of other colonial institutions across Europe (namely "the Museum Volkenkunde in Leiden, the Congo Museum in Tervuren, and the Musée d'Ethnographie Trocadero in Paris"[83]), the Museo Coloniale was intended not to educate Italians on the people who occupied their colonies, but rather "to confirm their superiority in a racist taxonomy that depicted African peoples at the lowest level of a false evolutionary chain."[84] This emphasized Mussolini's goal of binding Italians together to a nationalistic identity by enforcing their position as members of a superior race. Created in name only prior to World War I, the Museo Coloniale opened for public use after the war, pushing fascism and awakening a national "colonial consciousness."[85] From 1923 until the present day, the Museo Coloniale has closed and reopened, taken on various names, and shifted missions, yet the objects inside the collection have remained the same.

[82] Beatrice Falcucci, Bringing the Empire to the Provinces, 124.
[83] Beatrice Falcucci, Bringing the Empire to the Provinces, 124.
[84] Reverb Effect, "Revival and Reckoning: A Colonial Museum in Postcolonial Italy."
[85] Beatrice Falcucci, Bringing the Empire to the Provinces, 126.

But what exactly does this collection house, what is the provenance of these objects, and how have they been presented? Visual representations of the original display are available online, showing a museum that more closely mirrors the cabinets of curiosities from the Renaissance era [Fig. 1 & 2]. Within the original museum space,

> The colony was presented through documents and treatises, telegrams, paintings, raw materials carefully placed in bottles and cases, a series of ethnographic objects, and weapons. Unlike when objects are presented "in situ", displaying objects as "relics" in glass cases and stripping of their contexts generates more distance and obstructs emotional participation. Indeed, the colonial museum of Rome presented itself more as an "ordered warehouse" of objects than as a museum, with limited capacity to involve and engage the public.[86]

There are almost no wall labels, object organization is unclear, with paintings and photographs lining the walls from top to bottom and cabinets stuffed with artifacts that have no accompanying text to contextualize them. Of these artifacts housed inside of the "ordered warehouse," most can be traced back to Italian colonies. In fact, "nearly all of its approximately 11,000 items are from Italy's former colonies of Eritrea, Somalia, Libya, and briefly, Ethiopia."[87] These objects span various fields "that can be classified as ethnographical, historical, artistic, anthropological, archaeological and architectural."[88] Works were brought back and "presented as an exotic contextualization for the celebration of the exploits of Italian explorers or soldiers,"[89] rather than examples of creations made by Africans. Housed in large display cases, or scattered around rooms, the objects were displayed in a way that mimicked a cabinet of curiosities. Offering little contextual information, this method of display did not offer an African perspective, but

[86] Beatrice Falcucci, Bringing the Empire to the Provinces, 126.
[87] Reverb Effect, "Revival and Reckoning: A Colonial Museum in Postcolonial Italy."
[88] Rosa Anna Di Lella, "Unveiled Storages. How to Imagine a De-Colonial Museum?"
[89] "Le Collezioni Dell'ex Museo Coloniale Di Roma."

rather provided a space for Italians to ogle at the artifacts that were being brought back from "far away lands." The storage of these objects, affected greatly by the number of moves they were forced to undergo, amd the lack of archival work done by those in charge of the Museo Coloniale have left us to "know little about these colonial collections, almost no information on who collected the objects, in what context and for what purpose."[90] This is consistent with the erasure of colonial subjects throughout most of Italy's colonial history, taking away the importance of the objects and people who created them and instead placing that importance on the Italians who possessed them.

Changing Names and Locations

Having seen the beginnings of the Museo Coloniale and the collections it houses, we now move into a period in which the collections were moved to various locations and labeled under ever-changing names. These locations and names each say something about the colonial mindset in Italy at the time they occurred, as well as about the people who incited the change. So what were these locations and names? Who were the people behind them? And what do each of these factors tell us?

The most obvious is the original name and location: the Museo Coloniale located at the Palazzo della Consulta. It is exactly what it claims to be - a colonial museum. The location here is important, as at the time it housed the Ministry of Colonies and is located across the street from the Quirinal Palace, which was home to the kings of Italy. The voices behind its inception, name, and location were primarily from the fascist government, Mussolini included, and this is reflected in the museum's role as a

[90] Rosa Anna Di Lella, "Unveiled Storages. How to Imagine a De-Colonial Museum?"

propaganda tool. From here, the collections' travels become more obscure and their display less regular.

In 1935, the collection was moved to a new location at Via Aldrovandi where it was later renamed the Museo dell'Africa Italiana (Museum of Italian Africa). This name came from the declaration of the Empire of Italian Africa which occurred in 1936. The location at Via Aldrovandi was larger than that of Piazza della Consulta and positioned just outside of the Villa Borghese. In many ways this move was necessary after "the invasion of Ethiopia in 1935 [that] brought such a wave of new objects that the museum closed… to inventory and reorganize its immense holdings."[91] Displays here are similar to that of the first iteration, seeing very few labels and little didactic text to make clear what items are and what they were used for [Fig. 3]. Again, the people behind this move came from within the fascist regime, aiming to expand the museum's reach as its collections were growing. However due to the effects of the Second World War and the fall of fascism, the Museo Coloniale's collections remained closed until 1947.

When the museum did reopen, it again took a new name, Museo Africano (African Museum). The intention of this variant of the museum served to "portray this romanticized memory of Italy's colonial past [that] remained intact, without any re-interpretation or re-installation."[92] While it took on a new name, it remained at the location at Via Aldrovandi until its closure. This point in time was rather tumultuous for the Italian people as the monarchy was dissolving, fascism had fallen out of power, and the country was transitioning into a republic. The museum's reopening and change in

[91] Reverb Effect, "Revival and Reckoning: A Colonial Museum in Postcolonial Italy."
[92] Reverb Effect, "Revival and Reckoning: A Colonial Museum in Postcolonial Italy."

name reflected the country's loss of colonies, changing governmental structure, and overall shift in national identity. During this time of turbulence in Italy, the museum continued to tell a colonial narrative, but one devoid of fascist symbols and propaganda, maintaining the previously instilled colonial mindset. Its location helped to do this as Via Aldrovandi was a more modern area with lots of museums and institutions, such as the Etruscan Museum and the National Gallery of Modern and Contemporary Art. In this area, the Museo Africano told the same story of colonialism, but erased fascism from the account.

The museum remained open at this location until it was closed permanently in 1971 and its collections were sent to the Italo-African Institute. An organization primarily "concerned with cooperation with the African continent,"[93] the Italo-African Institute held documentation of much of the African research conducted on the Italian peninsula. This documentation included studies on food security, macroeconomic research, African politics, and more. The Institute dedicated itself to researching African and Italian relations, publishing periodicals and newsletters about this research. It evolved into the Italian Institute for Africa and the Orient (IsIAO) in 1995, with its mention remaining the same, but taking on countries in Asia as well. The Museo Coloniale's collections were available for research here until the IsIAO closed permanently in 2012. Although available for research purposes, the collection's time at the Italo-African Institute and IsIAO decreased social consciousness of the country's colonial past. In many ways, their presence in this setting allowed for a further erasure of this history, hindering transparency on the part of Italian cultural institutions. Once the IsIAO closed, the objects

[93] "The Italo-African Institute." *Spore*

were placed in the care of the Museo delle Civiltà (MuCiv) where they were essentially locked away from the world, continuing this erasure. Now, as of October of 2022, these collections have once again been given a new name, new display, and new location, which will be addressed in the next section.

As for the collection's evolving names and locations, they served first as instruments of fascist propaganda, then as representations of Italian colonial power, and lastly were intended for use as research materials. During each of these moves their provenance became more convoluted, with many of the items having no specific provenience, the place where the item was initially found (or taken from), and their contextualization served to benefit the Italian political project at the time. The Museo Coloniale's 12,000 piece collection did not undergo a proper accessioning process, making it hard to know from where these items came, how they were acquired, and what their makers' purpose for them was. These are several of the issues that curators and directors at the collection's new location will have to approach in order to begin the work of decolonization.

Current Display of Colonial Collections

Located in the MuCiv facilities, under the name Museo Italo Africano "Ilaria Alpi," the Museo Coloniale's collections are on display once again. Considering the history of the museum's collections, many are left wondering how another new name does any good in recontextualizing the objects within. Looking first at this new name, there is the addition of "Ilaria Alpi," who was an Italian journalist killed in Somalia in 1994. Alpi had been investigating "the effects of Italian cooperation with Somalia," so

the inclusion of her name here may be used as a way of proving Italy's commitment to work in their former colonies.[94] However, the inclusion of this name may have very different political aims. It may be a way for Italians to point out that there was violence on both Italians' and Africans' parts. To include an Italian journalist who was killed on the African continent seems pointed. There has been no definitive answer to why Alpi's name was included, but Former Minister of Culture Dario Franceschini, who was a part of the reopening of this collection, stated that it was with the intention of "the recovery and restitution of cultural heritage,"[95] hoping to reconnect immigrants in Italy with the history of their home countries. Current anti-immigrant stances in Italy make this work more difficult. These will be further expanded upon in the next chapter.

In terms of decolonization and the global anti-racism protests, "using words like 'decolonise' with an institution with this sort of lineage—especially when you consider the whiteness of the staff and the lack of equal opportunity policy—feels hypocritical."[96] Of the employees who were made public knowledge at the announcement of the museum there was a noted "absence of specialists in the fields of colonial history, postcolonial and decolonial studies, as well as experts from former colonies."[97] In the time since that 2020 announcement, this absence has not been filled. The opening of this museum seems to be at the very least misguided, if not hypocritical, considering the state of museum decolonization globally. The former Museo Coloniale may be following in the steps of

[94] Rainer Maria Baratti, "Il Caso Alpi-Hrovatin e Il Traffico Di Rifiuti in Somalia"
[95] "Ex Museo Coloniale." Museo delle Civiltà
[96] James Imam. "Racist or Responsive? Italy to Exhume Mussolini's Colonial Museum Collection in 'Critical' New Display."
[97] Alessandra Ferrini. "White Tinted Glasses: On the 'Difficult' Heritage of Italian Colonialism"

the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam, an ethnographic museum that displays many colonial artifacts and has "cooperate[d] intensively on the writing and editing of new museum texts," to comply with demands for decolonization.[98] However, unlike the Tropenmuseum, the Museo Coloniale is guilty of a lack of transparency in regards to cooperation with activists, scholars, or people in general who are from their former colonies.

Opening this collection again, at this point in time, leaves many feeling as if this is a rebirth and re-presentation of fascist and colonial pasts. Curators of this new exhibition have given it a different purpose statement, emphasizing the necessity of reflecting on the violence associated with colonization, such as the Second Italo-Ethiopian War during which nearly 400,000 people were killed, devoting space "to the consequences of colonialism, with a look at the contemporary world and the production of economic imbalances, demographic movements and different access to resources that have their roots in the colonial era."[99] The current display of the collection is in the first stage of a process that curator Rosa Anna di Lella states is "the starting point of a series of meetings with scholars, intellectuals and experts about dealing with the colonial heritage in a contemporary world."[100] Plans for further development of the Museo Italo Africano "Ilaria Alpi" are "imagined as a space… trying to avoid the perpetration of the mechanisms of violence and oppression that have characterized the collection and the exhibition of objects in colonial propaganda speeches."[101] What is seen now, in the

[98] Csilla E. Ariese, and Magdalena Wróblewska. "Practicing Decoloniality in Museums: A Guide With Global Examples." 13-14.
[99]Viviana Gravano and Giulia Grechi, eds. "Mostrare Una Collezione Coloniale."
[100] Rosa Anna Di Lella. "Unveiled Storages. How to Imagine a De-Colonial Museum?"
[101] Rosa Anna Di Lella. "Unveiled Storages. How to Imagine a De-Colonial Museum?"

museum's earliest stages, are shelves full of objects with very few labels [Fig. 4]. However, this initial exhibition is full of didactic text that does some of the work in beginning the conversation of decolonization. While there is still work to be done, plans that have been provided by di Lella show the museum is moving in a positive direction.

In addition to this new name and new purpose statement, the collections have yet again moved to a new location, finding themselves in the Esposizione Universale Roma (EUR) neighborhood. This neighborhood is inherently tied to the fascist regime as it was built for the 1942 World Fair in order to display its "cultural and technical accomplishments… to the world."[102] While the World Fair of 1942 never occurred, as a result of the Second World War, the project was completed during the post-war period. The area connects itself to the Roman Empire, in relation to the fascist party's imperial aspirations, by using architectural styles that call to mind those of Ancient Rome. One of the most notable buildings in the area is Mussolini's Colosseo Quadrato, or Square Colosseum. This Roman neighborhood, filled with iconography that ties the city to the fascist regime, now houses the collections of the former Museo Coloniale. With this in mind, what work must be done by curators and museum directors to properly decolonize a museum that is housed in the graveyard of a former colonial power?

Those who come to the museum are often left wondering the same thing. Visitor experiences are hard to find considering the museum's infancy, but several blogs and reviews have arisen regarding the current display. From these it is evident that, in similar fashion to the rebranding this collection has undergone, Italy is not yet reckoning with

[102] Kay Bea Jones, and Stephanie Pilat. *The Routledge Companion to Italian Fascist Architecture: Reception and Legacy*, 44.

their colonial past. One patron stated when discussing struggles to find the museum's entrance that "yes, we tried asking there about the "*Museo Africano*," which the visitor desk had never heard of, [because it is] rebranded as '*MuCiv*'."[103] This erasure is simply another in a long string of erasures and ignorances committed by the Italian government when it comes to addressing their colonial past. It is clear through current museum leadership that efforts are continually being made in order to amend this, but the entire case begs the question of whether or not Italy should be in possession of this collection to begin with. Based on what is known about the Museo Coloniale's history and the current exhibition, "it will be difficult for Italy, given its current custody arrangements, to make the claim that it can do a better job of preserving these materials than can their places of origin."[104] All things considered, history, context, and current display, one can determine that the display methods for the Museo Coloniale's almost 12,000 piece collection have a long way to go before decolonization is met. This must start first with thorough provenance research. Without knowing the provenance and history behind so many of the objects within this collection, it is difficult to decipher which pieces should be repatriated. In addition, there must be greater transparency in regards to the history of the collection, embracing its tough backstory, in order to tell the true story behind it. One of the pieces most lacking in this research is the ability to reference the works within this collection, due in large part to the lack of accessibility to that information. Increasing transparency and providing more historical context are two potential next steps for the

[103] Dianne Bennett and William Graebner. "The Colonial Museum in a Post-Colonial World."
[104] Dianne Bennett and William Graebner. "The Colonial Museum in a Post-Colonial World."

museum that would help move towards it being decolonized, but the work cannot stop there. Further recommendations will be addressed in the conclusion of this research.

Chapter Four: Postcolonial Italy: Museums and Politics

The conversation surrounding decolonization has been reignited by various incidents, many of which will be further discussed within this chapter, but it is not a new concept. Almost two decades ago, in 2005, the Obelisk of Atum was repatriated to Ethiopia. An artifact that was looted from Ethiopia during the Fascist period, its return was heavily debated and highly anticipated from those on the side of decolonization. Revered as a religious treasure, the people of Ethiopia fought for the return of this obelisk and eventually succeeded.[105] This case makes it clear that repatriation, even case by case, is possible on the Italian peninsula. However, modern issues can have an effect on this progress. Having addressed both early colonial collections and the ever-changing conditions of the collections of the Museo Coloniale, it is necessary to now consider the state of Italy and Italian museums eighty-years past the period of colonies. In order to do so, it is important to look at a modern Italian museum, postcolonial demographics, hiring practices and current Italian politics, and how each relates to the topic of museum decolonization.

The Modern Museum

Following the surge of museums and cultural institutions popping up across the globe during the 18th through 20th centuries, the 21st century was a period of change for many countries. In Italy, "visitor numbers at Italian museums declined markedly,"[106] with the turn of the century. Thus, work needed to be done in order to have visitors return to

[105] "Obelisk Arrives Back in Ethiopia." BBC News.
[106] Christine Burton and Carol Scott. "Museums: Challenges for the 21st Century."

these museums. Furthermore, with the global pandemic that occurred in 2020, museums were closed for a significant period of time and have struggled to regain their normal patronage by pre-pandemic standards. This is due in part to the need for regulating how many people come in and out of a space, restrictions on travel, and a generally slow return to leisure activities post-Covid. In a post-pandemic world "cultural operators have to manoeuvre their institutions within complex economic, sociopolitical contexts, already fraught in Italy…before the Covid-19 emergency."[107] Museums were forced to shift more heavily into the digital realm as a result of the pandemic and it is becoming clear that these digital efforts are here to stay. Social media campaigns, online exhibitions, and live streamed gallery talks are becoming commonplace in museum settings even though most are open normally again.

Dealing with fluctuation in visitors for internal and external reasons is a job left up to museum management. In Italy, a majority of the museums are public institutions, meaning that they are in some part overseen by the government. This is yet another factor that can complicate how museums are run and their individual decolonization. Answering to the Minister of Culture means that Italian museums are not autonomous establishments, but rather must adhere to the stances of the state when it comes to their staffing, what is on display, and how acquisitions are made, among other things.[108] While this could be considered beneficial as museums are intended to serve the public good, as is the government, it also means that they could be tied down by the limits of bureaucracy

[107] Angeria Rigamonti di Cutò. "The Effects of Covid-19 on Italian Museums: Interviews with the Directors of the Accademia Carrara, the Uffizi and the Peggy Guggenheim Collection."
[108] Naomi Rea. "Why Italy's Foreign-Born Museum Directors Fear They Are No Longer Welcome in the Land of the Renaissance."

or forced to follow the political stances of the current government. The implications of politics in the museum world will be further analyzed later.

Italy has a long and rich history when it comes to the museum world, housing some of the planet's oldest collections and hailing many of the world's masters and geniuses. Throughout this history, museums have evolved and are continuing to do so even now. What they house, how they display it, and who for is the heart of these changes. Thus, when considering the possibility of decolonization in Italian museums, it is important to know each of these things to determine how and in what ways Italian museums can decolonize their collections. The following research attempts to do so by identifying colonialism within the Italian museum system, in a museum space that is fully modern.

The MAXXI: Present Day Problems

The MAXXI: the National Museum of 21st Century Art in Rome, allows us to reflect on the longstanding effects of the colonial mindset in Italian museums and ask the question of how a modern museum handles the topic of decolonization. The MAXXI is important because of its position as a purely contemporary museum, opened in the twenty-first century, as well as its perceived stance on anti-racism and decolonization. This museum was founded in 1998 following an international competition hosted by the Ministry of Culture that served to find the building's architect. The architect chosen, Zaha Hadid, is of British-Iraqi descent.[109] Her position as architect is the first of many

[109] "Il Maxxi." MAXXI

indicators that the MAXXI seemingly has a vested interest in including foreign-born creators in their institution's internal work.

In the summer of 2020, the museum was one of many to make a public statement "in favour of inclusion and equality, especially in such a difficult historical moment for all like the one we're living."[110] Following such a statement, one cannot help but wonder if these claims are grounded, or if they are simply performative. In order to determine whether or not the MAXXI has made any concrete changes, it is necessary to first look at the museum's history and mission. Planning for the museum began in 1998 and upon its opening in 2009, the MAXXI was intended to serve as an institution "devoted to the national centre for contemporary art and architecture."[111] It houses over 400 artistic works from Italian and foreign artists created between 1960-2000, as well as over 100,000 architectural works (sketches, photographs, and designs) from the same period that are available for study by the public.[112] Displays are consistently changing meaning that visitors to the museum typically experience different themes or exhibitions. While their collections are fairly diverse in nature, with a number of African artists present in the collections, the artists that the museum highlights on its "Collections" page are majority Italian and all white men, such as Alighiero Boetti (Italian), Mario Merz (Italian), and Gerhard Richter (German). In a similar fashion, all but two members of the MAXXI's directors are Italian. Broken down, the directors are five men, four women, seven Italians, one German, and one Chinese person.[113] While the website states that the

[110] "Against Racism." MAXXI
[111] "Il Maxxi." MAXXI
[112] "Collezione." MAXXI
[113] "Organizzazione." MAXXI

"content [is] currently updating,"[114] this lack of diversity in positions of leadership and power makes it unclear if the MAXXI is dedicated to inclusion and dismantling the colonial mindset that still has a hold in much of Italy. In so many ways, this work needs to be done from the top down and it is difficult to see how the MAXXI could do so when there is no African perspective in their leadership.

When it comes to their social media movement "#MAXXIforBlackLivesMatter," very little has occurred since its inception in 2020. A collection of ten works posted on the museum's Instagram account with information about the art and artist, this movement was intended to "address and investigate the theme of discrimination."[115] Of these ten works, two artists are American, two are South African, one is British, one is Ugandan, one is Angolan, one is Nigerian, one is Moroccan, and the duo included are German. While decolonization was not the specific focus of this campaign, it is interesting to note that none of the artists included come from a former Italian colony. Following this effort to raise awareness for black creators following 2020 anti-racism protests, the Instagram page and the MAXXI as a whole have seemingly gone silent where diversity and inclusion are concerned. There have been no further mentions of the museum's stand against racism, efforts to address racial disparity in their staff, or pledges to continue highlighting black artists more intentionally, making this movement seemingly performative in nature. Considering that the MAXXI is a public institution, owned by the Italian Ministry of Culture, but managed by a private foundation, it is interesting to consider whether or not the Italian government will affect any future progress to be made.

[114] "Organizzazione." MAXXI
[115] Martina. "Art against Racism."

The position of the current Italian government and its effects on the museum system will be further discussed later.

With the MAXXI's current mission statement claiming that the,

> MAXXI aims to be a centre of excellence, an interactive hub in which the most diverse forms of expression, productivity and creation may converge, combine and reproduce. Art also has a vital role as a means of communication. Art is an iconic and symbolic idiom and therefore more readily comprehended than a spoken or written language. It is clear, therefore, that the immediacy and universality of artistic communication may contribute to the comprehension of worlds and cultures otherwise foreign and potentially conflictual, favouring the coexistence of differences.[116]

It will be interesting to see how the museum evolves to fit these aims, or if this statement is much like the "#MAXXIforBlackLivesMatter" campaign - just a statement. For the MAXXI, it is not so much a case of artifacts needing repatriation, or proper contextualization, but rather a need to break away from the colonial mindset when it comes to the artists that they consistently highlight and the makeup of their staff, particularly in leadership positions. By increasing the diversity of their staff, new perspectives will be allowed to enter the discussion, contributing to the overall decolonization of the MAXXI's less tangible facets.

Knowing the position of a modern museum and the history of the Museo Coloniale, looking now at how postcolonial Italian society functions could shed some light on why decolonization is progressing as it does. What exactly does this lack of a diverse staff tell us in comparison to the demographics of people working in the Italian cultural sector now? How are immigrants, particularly those from former colonies, treated in society? What does the rise of a right-wing political party mean for both people and cultural institutions on the Italian peninsula? How have all of these factors been

[116] "Mission." MAXXI

affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, subsequent closures, and anti-racist protests from that time? The rest of this chapter aims to answer these questions.

Postcolonial Demographics in the Cultural Sector

The following research contains an analysis of the current hiring practices in Italian museums and cultural institutions based on nationality, age, and gender in comparison to other European Union countries. It also examines what positions minority populations hold, determining how levels of diverse employment are dispersed across positions of power. Finally, it contemplates the effects that the current Italian government could have on this topic. Considering these three measures, it is evident that current hiring practices in Italian cultural institutions place minority populations at a distinct disadvantage.

In order to analyze current hiring practices, it is necessary to see first how many people are employed in the cultural sector across EU countries and in Italy. In 2018, 8.7 million people in the European Union had some form of cultural employment, about 3.8% of the total employment numbers for those Member States. In Italy, there were around 831,000 people employed in this sector, making up 3.5% of the total Italian workforce.[117] Thus, Italy is on par with the EU as a whole when it comes to the number of employees in cultural industries. Analyzing these numbers based on demographics allows a glimpse into the hiring practices present. The first measure accounted for is based on gender. It is important to note that currently, a majority of statistics follow the gender binary, only accounting for women and men, not including notations for those

[117] Marta Beck-Domżalska. "Cultural Employment."

who identify as non-binary. In the EU, women made up 46.1% of those in the cultural sector. When looking at how Italy compares it is found that "the share of women in cultural employment was lowest in three southern Member States - Spain, Italy, and Portugal."[118] Italy comes in at women making up just over 40% of employment in the cultural field. The next factor, age, sees the EU with nearly one-fifth of the cultural workforce being composed of people aged 15-19 years. Italy, once again lower, has about 12%, meaning that jobs are more often held by older citizens.

"In Italy data [is] gathered on the basis of nationality but not on ethnicity," making it particularly difficult to measure the races present within the labor market. Therefore, it is necessary to look at race through employment of Italians in comparison to employment of foreigners. In Italy, for those considered Italian, unemployment in 2021 was 8.7%, but for foreigners it was 13.1%.[119] These numbers are particularly alarming considering that foreigners make up only 8.7% of the Italian population. This staggering difference in employment levels shows that foreigners, composed mainly of immigrants from African and poorer European countries, fill less positions in the Italian workforce based on percentages present within the country. Unfortunately, there are no current statistics solely measuring cultural employment, but if trends follow the general employment in Italy, foreigners are less likely to find cultural employment and "more likely than Italians to lose their jobs," than Italian nationals.[120] This carries a distinct threat to diversity because nationality in Italy is based on birthright and foreigners

[118] Marta Beck-Domżalska. "Cultural Employment."
[119] Integrazionemigranti.gov.it. "Pandemic Consequences More Serious for Migrant Workers."
[120] Integrazionemigranti.gov.it. "Pandemic Consequences More Serious for Migrant Workers."

typically have a very difficult time gaining citizenship regardless of where they are born, meaning that even "foreigners" who are born in the country are still at a disadvantage when it comes to employment.

Despite the lack of statistics regarding race and employment in Italy, there is a study regarding the demographic makeup of Boards of Directors of Cultural Institutes in the country. This provides some insight into racial statistics, as well as giving a metric to dispersals of power in Italian cultural institutions based on the other two measures. Looking first at age, on average, leaders were 72 years old and members as a whole ranged from 61-66. Second, in regards to gender, men made up 82.35% of board leadership and women made up only 17.65%. Overall, 75% of board members were men, leaving only 25% as women. Finally, considering nationality, "only 2.6% of the board members were non-Italians." This study collected data from 918 board members, meaning from that number, only around twenty-three were not Italian.[121] Considering this information, it is evident that Italian men hold the most power in Italian cultural institutions, while women, young people, and other minority groups hold very little. This study was conducted and published in 2020 so it would be interesting to see if much has changed in the two years since then. However, considering the current political climate on the Italian peninsula, it seems as if this standard will remain.

[121] Monia Castellini, Marianna Marzano, and Nicola Valentini. "Searching for Diversity: An Overview of Italian Cultural Institutes Boards of Directors."

The Emergence of a Far-Right Government

In the fall of 2022, Italy elected Giorgia Meloni to serve as the country's Prime Minister. While she is the first woman to hold the position, arguably a progressive statement, her election spells out the possible return of fascist ideologies in Italy. Meloni is the leader of the Brothers of Italy (FdI) party, a conservative, nationalistic, right-wing group, with neo-fascist roots. In fact, the party holds a nearly unbroken lineage from the days of Mussolini seeing as it was formed out of the remains "of the Italian Social Movement, a now-defunct mass party founded in 1946 by wartime fascist generals who harboured rosy memories of the Mussolini years."[122] Meloni has taken her position in stride, appointing many right-wing leaders as officers and ministers in the Italian government. With her party's harsh stance against immigration, it makes sense to worry about the position of non-Italians in the country. This is troubling, seeing as nearly four-fifths of Italian cultural institutions are government owned, her election and who she is appointing in positions of power could have a direct effect on decolonization efforts within them.

Meloni appointed journalist Gennaro Sangiuliano as the country's newest Minister of Culture shortly after her election. A former member of the far-right Youth Front, known for "efforts to normalize right-wing discourse,"[123] Sangiuliano has already tied himself to fascist beliefs, highlighting artworks by members of the Futurism movement, such as Umberto Boccioni, who were said to inspire Fascist thinkers of the

[122] Ben Munster. "Italy and the F-Word."
[123] Hili Perlson. "Here's What We Know about Gennaro Sangiuliano, Italy's New Culture Minister, and What the Country's Art Scene Can Expect."

1900s. He also has pushed the "Italians First" narrative of his party, "wishing to reverse the previous Italian government's decision to open up posts to the wider international museum community that have traditionally been filled by Italians only."[124] This reversal would mean that the minorities who currently fill these positions are facing the loss of their jobs and it would also halt possibilities for more diverse leadership in Italian museums. Considering that the minority population holding these jobs is already minimal, the stance of the current far-right government would essentially decrease ethnic diversity in leadership to almost non-existent.

The party's views on culture as a whole are concerning in regards to decolonization efforts. Outlined throughout Meloni's campaign, her culture strategist and the party "portray anti-colonial and anti-racist activists as enemies of the state."[125] They express wants for a Christian Rome, a thinly veiled indicator of Islamophobia. Mentions of former incidents with racist undertones, calls to raise attention around monuments prized by Mussolini, and general dislike of foreigners working within the cultural sector are the bread and butter of Meloni's cultural strategies. She and the FdI ran their campaign based on ideas of protecting Italy's national heritage with a program "shot through with nationalist language and symbolism,"[126] that deeply discredits and stifles the work of scholars and museum staff who make any effort towards deconstructing the colonial mindset within Italy and its museums. As Meloni's term unfolds and her right-wing ministers have time to enact change in the museum system, it will be interesting to

[124] Naomi Rea. "Foreign Museum Directors in Italy Face Losing Their Jobs after the Country's Culture Minister Says He Wants More Italians in Charge."
[125] James Imam. "Italy's Far Right Weaponises Culture in the Interests of Nationalism."
[126] James Imam. "Italy's Far Right Weaponises Culture in the Interests of Nationalism."

see what old and new problems come to the surface when considering the process of decolonization.

Treatment of Immigrants

When considering Italy's colonial legacy, its status as a country of immigrants and emigrants, and its current political milieu, one is left to think about the state in which immigrants to Italy currently live. In terms of employment, it is already evident that non-Italians are at a much higher risk of finding themselves unemployed than Italian nationals, as well as being less likely to be hired in the first place. Outside of the job market, our focus moves now to the social sector. What social status is afforded to immigrants in Italy? How does one gain Italian citizenship? How do Meloni and the FdI's anti-migrant stance affect this?

There are several factors that affect integration into an immigrant's new society such as housing and legal status. In terms of housing, many non-Italians live in situations that are almost unacceptable. More often than not, "immigrants in Italy often live in conditions of overcrowding, exposing a clear housing discomfort."[127] This discomfort when it comes to residential life bleeds into and is directly tied to low employment levels for "foreigners." Because they are often working low-skill, high-labor jobs where they are paid less than Italian citizens, most immigrants to the country are at a disadvantage when it comes to improving their housing situation. In terms of legal status, it can be incredibly difficult for non-Italians to gain Italian citizenship. There are only three methods through which one can become an Italian citizen (excluding special

[127]Luca Rossi. "The Social Impact of Immigration in Italy, a Composed Index."

circumstances) and these are: by descent, through marriage or civil partnership, or by naturalization. For non-EU citizens, this process of naturalization is much stricter, requiring residency in Italy for at least ten years, a certain level of Italian fluency, and a minimum yearly income. Knowing that non-Italians often have poor living conditions and lower wages, it can be incredibly difficult for them to meet these requirements.

The current Italian government's stance on immigration is adding to the already burgeoning refugee crisis in Italy. As previously stated, many migrants from the Horn of Africa enter Italy by crossing the Mediterranean. This process is dangerous in and of itself, but off-shoring by the Italian government is making it more so. As of her election in 2022, "Meloni has called for a naval blockade of North Africa to prevent migrants from putting to sea and for renewed curbs on charity rescue ships."[128] A journey through which many do not make it is becoming increasingly difficult under this political regime. Those who do make it to Italian shores as asylum-seekers are often faced with even more suffering upon arrival. Under current Italian law, "most are denied refugee status, barred from legal employment and, polls suggest, face discrimination."[129] Taking into consideration the dangers that come with attempting to reach Italian shores, the possibility of being barred from entering, and the poor treatment received upon reaching the county, there are many questions surrounding the display of colonial and modern African artifacts in Italy. "What does it mean for north and east African objects to be housed in beautiful, spacious halls, protected by glass and guards in Italy's capital, but for North and East African people to be turned away at Italy's southernmost shores?"[130]

[128] Crispian Balmer. "Migrants Face Tougher Times in Meloni's Italy."
[129] Crispian Balmer. "Migrants Face Tougher Times in Meloni's Italy."
[130] Reverb Effect. "Revival and Reckoning: A Colonial Museum in Postcolonial Italy."

In a country that has majorly ignored its colonial past and continually takes an anti-immigrant stance, is it possible to decolonize and display colonial collections? With current treatment of immigrants to Italy in mind, this seems almost impossible.

A Post-Pandemic World

One other factor has greatly affected the modern museum and its practices, the COVID-19 pandemic. Following the COVID-19 crisis, out of the world's nearly 95,000 museums, 90.9% were forced to close in some capacity as a response to the pandemic.[131] Understandably, this caused severe economic losses for these museums seeing as they were no longer able to welcome patrons, their main source of revenue. This was not the only loss seen by these closure measures. Due to the fact that "museums around the world are both repositories of works and artifacts, as well as spaces for meeting, knowledge sharing and building social ties,"[132] their inability to remain open caused an immeasurable impact on the ways in which museums express and understand culture.

Italy, as a home to over four-thousand museums that house some of the most notable artifacts in the world, was severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The country has seen nearly 200,000 deaths from the virus since its emergence in 2020, an immense toll on their population of just under 60 million. As a result of the rapid spread and high death count in Italy, almost every museum in the country was forced to close its doors. Over the past few years, most museums have reopened, first with strict social distancing measures in place to protect against the spread of the virus, and then with

[131] UNESCO, "Museums around the World in the Face of COVID-19."
[132] UNESCO, "Museums around the World in the Face of COVID-19."

loosened restrictions. Currently, most museum practices are returning to what they were before the pandemic. Although many institutions have reopened their doors, it is estimated that one in every ten museums internationally will never reopen.[133]

All of these factors leave museums questioning what role they play in society. Museum professionals are having to re-engage with visitors in new ways, attempting to raise attendance numbers to what they once were before the pandemic. Many museums have turned to the digital world as a place for outreach and active participation. This has many confines, as access to the internet varies based on many reasons, such as a person's gender, race, class, or location. In addition, there are many restrictions placed on museums themselves in trying to create these digital platforms. Even in Western Europe, where museums are most densely populated, only 26.6% had active sites during the time of major closure.[134] The rise of digital use also calls for museums to reassess their digital policies in place.

Overall, COVID-19 has reminded museums of the necessity for them to be both resilient and flexible. This has only been furthered by the accompanying international protests surrounding racism across the world. Beginning in 2013, the Black Lives Matter group has been protesting for equity and equality for black people across the globe. This fight was reinvigorated in May of 2020 following another act of police brutality in the United States. Initially beginning in the USA, this new wave of protests gained global attention very quickly. Due to restrictions in place as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, protests and marches looked very different than they had before. This was certainly the

[133] UNESCO, "Museums around the World in the Face of COVID-19."
[134] UNESCO, "Museums around the World in the Face of COVID-19."

case in Italy where quarantine guidelines were so strict that protesting was typically banned. Despite this, many black Italians (as well as members of many other social, ethnic, and cultural groups), still gathered to join in the global conversation and "monuments from Richmond, Virginia to Milan, Italy [were] defaced and reclaimed."[135] Protests were seen on every continent and in nearly every capacity imaginable. These actions only further proved that "there is a global need to deal with an oppressive past, one that is still alive in the present."[136] So, how does the museum world fit into this? Some scholars consider that,

> Museums themselves can be seen as types of monuments. As such, they have also become sites for protest. Individuals in England, France, and the Netherlands have staged museum actions over the past few months, physically removing African heritage objects from museums and walking away with them while reciting European acts of colonial theft. Though these individuals were all stopped and arrested, their actions continue to force a reckoning that is centuries in the making.[137]

If we consider museums to be monuments, as the above statement does, then the issues highlighted directly relate to the museum's practices. The conversation around decolonizing museums has only been furthered by the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the anti-racist protests that were occurring at the same time.

Each of the factors discussed in this chapter play some part in the conversation at hand. Looking primarily at the museum world, Italian museums and cultural institutions have often been slow to respond to issues of race, diversity (or lack thereof), and colonialism and the refugee crisis, political climate, COVID-19 pandemic, and anti-racist protests have continually drawn attention to this issue. These problems arise due in part

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[135] Reverb Effect. "Revival and Reckoning: A Colonial Museum in Postcolonial Italy."
[136] Johanne Affricot, "Black Lives Matter and the Delay of the Italian Art Sector with Its Black Italian Artists,"
[137] Reverb Effect. "Revival and Reckoning: A Colonial Museum in Postcolonial Italy."

to a shutting out of minority voices from decision-making and to the overall lack of diversity in Italy's population, which contributes to the struggle of "championing empathy," or utilizing equitable hiring practices as outlined by the European Commission. However, creators who align themselves with the mission of the Black Lives Matter group have "linked the issue of citizenship [in Italy] to the scarce and/or total absence of representation and inclusion of black artists, of the Afro-descendant creative and cultural class, in the media, arts, creative, and culture industries."[138] Essentially, a lack of representation in museums and other cultural institutions has played a role in the lack of acceptance of black Italians as citizens. Keeping this in mind, it is evident that Italian museums and cultural institutions now hold a certain responsibility - to reframe culture within museums to support the stories of all perspectives and all peoples on a global level.

[138] Johanne Affricot, "Black Lives Matter and the Delay of the Italian Art Sector with Its Black Italian Artists."

Conclusion

Through this research, a brief history of Italian colonization has been presented, in an effort to explain how colonialism and the colonial mindset shape the museum space. The conception of the Italian museum is identified, further outlining the ways in which the institution of colonialism found its way into the cultural sector.

Two in depth case studies show tangible examples of work both towards and away from the goal of decolonization. These case studies show the effects of colonialism in a truly colonial museum, as well as a wholly modern museum. Supplementary studies and relevant information help to understand the limitations to decolonization, as well as the factors that increase the push for it.

With all of this information in mind, it is important to now return to the European Commission's six aims for decolonization, it is evident where these case studies meet the mark and where they fall short. Measuring against these six aims, Creating Visibility, Increasing Inclusivity, Decentering, Championing Empathy, Improving Transparency, and Embracing Vulnerability, examples are found of where Italian museums have done the work of decolonization, as well as what work there is still left to complete. Through analyses of both the Museo Coloniale and the MAXXI, these examples can be found throughout this research. Here, they are summarized and shortcomings are accompanied by potential solutions. In addition, challenges in research, as well as further research needed are identified.

Findings and Recommendations

Beginning with the concept of Creating Visibility, or the work of providing a perspective outside of the dominant vision, here are some findings. The MAXXI's Black Lives Matter campaign is a clear example of this endeavor, displaying works by artists of African descent on a large scale. In order to continue this effort, creating exhibitions that highlight these and more artists on an even larger scale would be a fitting next step. The collections of the Museo Coloniale have done less in this regard, currently displayed in the Museo Italo Africano Ilaria Alpi on shelves stocked full of objects. From photographs of the display, it is known that text is present, but has not been made available online so the perspective offered through this text is largely unknown. With a lack of scholars from former colonies involved in the museum's management, it is difficult to see how a different perspective can be included in the new display. Changing this, including those scholars in the work being done at this institution, funding opportunities to connect these objects to collections in former colonies, sponsoring exchange programs, and hosting conferences and exhibitions to further conversations around this topic are several ways to work towards creating visibility.

This recommendation leads to the next aim in museum decolonization, Increasing Inclusivity. Within this aim, the goal is to change who holds the power in a museum, requiring those who most often hold that power to relinquish control, creating new positions and scholarships for minority groups. The MAXXI currently has no member from a former African colony on their board of directors, or in their curatorial team. The Museo Italo Africano Ilaria Alpi's board of directors is not accessible, but their curatorial team similarly has no representation from a former African colony. In order to work

towards the aim of increasing inclusivity, putting someone with this background in a position of power is necessary. It is important to acknowledge that political stances, particularly the possible ban of foreign-born curators,[139] may leave this factor outside of the museums' control.

The third aim outlined by the European Commission is the idea of Decentering. In order to decenter a museum's focus, it must shift away from the Eurocentric norm and in doing so confront the standpoint of Western museum patrons. On the MAXXI's website, the only artists highlighted are those that fit current societal norms, seeing as they are majorly Italian, and all White. In addition, none of the creators featured in their social media posts hail from a former Italian colony. This institution could move towards a decentralized perspective by highlighting a more diverse group of artists, both on their website and their social media. The Museo Italo Africano Ilaria Alpi, while in a transitional phase, can ensure that they are decentering the narrative by telling the truth about the colonial era without sugarcoating. If they do this, they will be able to confront Western and Italian perspectives, making clear the atrocities committed during the colonial era, an important step in the decolonization process.

The next step, Championing Empathy, ties into the visitor experience, but ultimately begins with the internal workings of the museum. The MAXXI and the Museo Italo Africano Ilaria Alpi have strong mission statements that point towards the ideas of decolonization. The question that lies is whether or not they act on them. Currently, as previously mentioned, both are severely lacking when it comes to hiring directors and

[139] Naomi Rea. "Foreign Museum Directors in Italy Face Losing Their Jobs after the Country's Culture Minister Says He Wants More Italians in Charge."

curators that have an African heritage. This relates to the overall experience of immigrants to Italy, as they struggle to find work, especially in positions of power. In consideration of this aim, both museums need to work to uphold their mission statements and expand who they hire well outside of their current pool. This will in turn improve their visitors' experiences. Particularly in the Museo Italo Africano Ilaria Alpi, where one of the outlined goals is to reconnect immigrants to Italy with their history, having someone in a position of power from one of the former colonies would certainly help them move closer to achieving this goal.

Progressing to the next goal of decolonization, Improving Transparency, provenance research is the most important part of this step. Within the Museo Coloniale's collections very little is known about their histories. This is due in large part to the lack of research that has been done surrounding the colonial era and the subsequent ignorance regarding the topic. Here, it is recommended that the current owners of these items take the time to conduct this provenance research, as well as working to make more information about the collections accessible online. This must happen before repatriation can truly be considered. How is the museum supposed to return objects when it is not even clear where they are from? Conducting this research would allow for greater knowledge, not only about the objects and their functions, but about the people who created them. In addition, it would make clear what objects within these holdings should be restituted. On the contrary, the MAXXI has expansive provenance available and a fair number of object biographies accessible online. While making more information available digitally would help in their efforts towards transparency, this institution is already making great strides in this area.

The last of the six aims laid out by the European Commission is that of Embracing Vulnerability. In order to do this, an institution must be open to questions and criticisms regarding their holdings, staff makeup, display, and other factors. This is one area in which the Museo Italo Africano Ilaria Alpi is currently excelling. The current display, with items still in their storage bags, prompts questions and from what is known of the text that accompanies them it is clear that the institution is begging for them. In creating their display plan in phases, the curators at this institution have created a space in which a dialogue is encouraged and critiques are welcome. The only recommendation here is that the Museo Italo Africano Ilaria Alpi listen to these questions and approach conversations openly. If they do this, in conjunction with efforts to meet the other six aims, their display should progress towards a decolonized one. The MAXXI, with changing temporary exhibitions happening often, has the opportunity to invite similar questions and conversations into their space. It is unclear if they are doing so, but if they are not, creating room for vulnerability is an important step towards overall decolonization.

From these findings, it is evident that neither museum is a lost cause and that decolonization is a possibility for both. By continuing with their successes and implementing necessary changes, as recommended above, these two institutions, as well as other Italian cultural institutions, have the ability to shift the conversation from one centered around colonial and fascist legacies to one that tells the full story of Italy's colonial history and celebrates the growing diversity within the country.

Further Research Needed

As both of these museums are ever-evolving, continued study of their progress towards or away from decolonization is necessary to see how changes are implemented. It would be interesting to revisit these two museums in five or ten years to identify whether or not they have actually followed their mission statements. Long-term study would be particularly beneficial in the case of the Museo Italo Africano Ilaria Alpi, as it is only in phase one of display. Other factors, such as the political atmosphere or the effects of immigration to Italy, are important to consider when looking at changes made. More comprehensive research concerning both of these factors, as well as possible economic indicators, are compelling facets of this topic that were not able to be clarified fully, as they were outside of the scope of this project. If it were possible to expand this research, those are the factors that would be most relevant to include, as they affect the political, cultural, and financial spheres of the museum world. Overall, this type of research would be strengthened by a long-term study, over several years, as work towards decolonization is currently happening through incremental adjustments.

The biggest challenge to this research were geographical constraints. In-person visits to both museums were not possible and would have been incredibly beneficial to this research. In addition, information accessible online was lacking, severely so in the case of the Museo Italo Africano Ilaria Alpi. It is nearly impossible to find catalogues of the Museo Coloniale's previous holdings and the images of the new museum's current display, hindering this research. Seeing the museum in person would have been advantageous to the research at hand, but was unfortunately not doable. If given the

chance to conduct this research again, a visit to both museums would be at the top of the list of things to do. In addition, further information regarding both institutions' acquisition campaigns would be helpful in understanding their perceived stances on decolonization.

Regardless of these challenges and of the further research needed in this field, this research has contributed a comprehensive study of two Italian museums, the work that they are doing to decolonize, and the work that is still needed in this effort. Initially, it was hypothesized that in order for museums to decolonize in Italy, a proper postcolonial consciousness, diverse hiring practices, and increased transparency were necessary. While this work has proven that to be true, it has also proven that in many ways, both case studies are moving in that direction. It has also highlighted that many of the hurdles that must be cleared come from outside influences, rather than from within the museum. In museum spaces, decolonization and repatriation have entered the collective consciousness, the lack of foreign-born curators is being discussed (in spite of barriers set by the Italian government), and institutions are speaking out about social issues that hinder the work of decolonization. While there is still much to be done, this research makes it clear that, if decolonization is the aim, institutions are slowly, but surely, moving towards it.

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Images

Figure 1: The Museo Coloniale in 1923.

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Figure 2: The earliest illustration of a “cabinet of curiosities.”

Imperato, Ferrante, Dell’Historia Naturale, 1599.

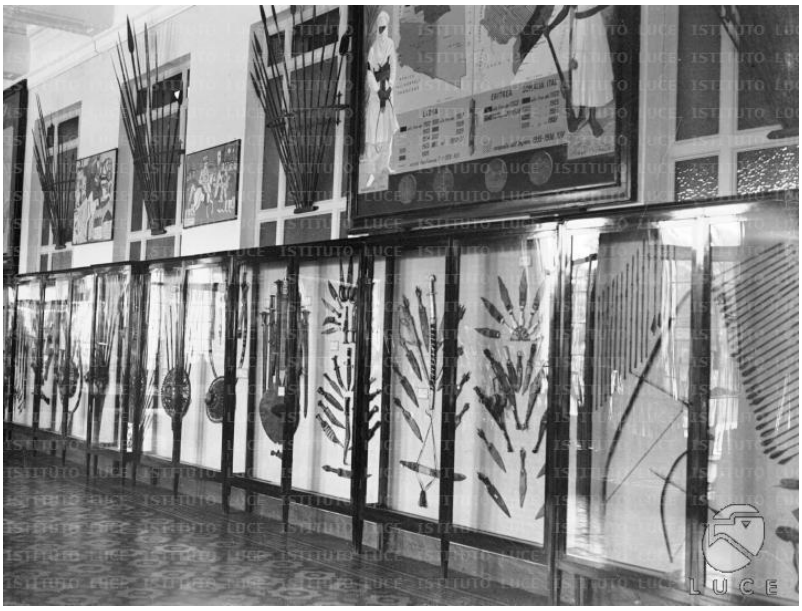

Figure 3: Photo from the opening of the collections at the Via Aldrovandi location.

“Museo Coloniale - Inaugurazione Nuovi Locali.” Archivio Storico Luce, July 17, 1937.

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Figure 4: The Museo Coloniale’s collections in the Museo Italo Africano “Ilaria Alpi.”

MuCiv, ‘Unveiled Storage,’ 2022.