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Fruit of Fascist Empire: Bananas and Italian Somaliland

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates Italian banana plantations in Somalia and the Mediterranean fruit trade under Fascism. Bananas were the first African addition to Benito Mussolini's culinary battles for "homegrown" crops like grain, rice, grapes, and oranges. To brand Somali bananas as Italian, the regime promoted its own agricultural techniques and technology in the empire. The Istituto Agricolo Coloniale in Florence developed new banana cultivars for the Centri di Raccolta Banana (experimental banana plantations) in Somalia. The Regio Azienda Monopolio Banane then imported the engineered fruits to Rome on refrigerated flotillas. Marketing campaigns like "La banana è il pane degli dei" pushed Italian housewives to purchase fruit at banana kiosks, known as La Casa della Banana. Today, the Duce's culinary battles continue, as politicians use bananas to symbolize sub-Saharan African migration to Italy. At stake in the Somali banana lies the question of what is, and is not, Italian.

SOMMARIO

Questo articolo svolge un'indagine sulle piantagioni di banane italiane in Somalia e il commercio della frutta nel Mediterraneo durante il fascismo. Le banane furono il primo prodotto alimentare che si aggiunse ad altre produzioni "locali", per esempio grano, riso, uva e arance, promosse dalle battaglie culinarie di Benito Mussolini. Al fine di promuovere le banane somale come un prodotto italiano, il regime mise in atto specifiche tecniche agricole e tecnologie alimentari attraverso l'impero coloniale. L'Istituto Agricolo Coloniale di Firenze sviluppò nuove cultivar di banane per i Centri di Raccolta Banana (piantagioni di banane sperimentali) localizzate in Somalia. La Regio Azienda Monopolio Banane importava questi nuovi prodotti frutticoli a Roma su imbarcazioni dotate di refrigeratori. Campagne di marketing come "La banana è il pane degli dei" incoraggiavano le casalinghe italiane ad acquistare questi frutti presso chioschi specializzati chiamati La Casa della Banana. Oggi, gli effetti culturali delle battaglie culinarie del Duce sono ancora evidenti nel modo in cui varie figure politiche usano le banane come simbolo per rappresentare la migrazione sub-sahariana in Italia. Quello che, in ultima istanza, la banana somala porta a domandarsi è che cosa è, e non è, italiano.

KEYWORDS

banana; Somalia;
colonialism; Fascism;
farming; agriculture; food
technology

PAROLE CHIAVE

banana; Somalia;
colonialismo; fascismo;
coltivare; agricoltura;
tecnologia alimentare

Benito Mussolini launched the ten-year Battaglia del Grano (Battle for Grain) in 1926, exhorting Italians to conserve bread and grow rice as a substitute. Fascist Italy lacked sufficient grain to feed the populous, and its effects were most acutely visible in newborns and the elderly. At home, alimentary autarky – i.e. producing and eating only Italian foods – started with exhausting labour in muddy paddies and ended with gray bowls of gluey rice. What if ‘Italian’ foods – but brighter, tastier, and more nutritious – could come from the colonies?

Before the Fascist regime’s occupation of Italian Somaliland, most Italians had never tasted a banana.¹ Grapes and oranges dominated domestic production, along with apples, pears, and other orchard fruits. It was not until 1943 that *bananeto*, the simplified term for a banana plantation, entered the Italian language.² As a colonial fruit, the Italian banana was a contradiction in terms, both foreign and autarkic. Bananas first appeared on the pages of *La Cucina Italiana* in the early 1930s, when the Milanese marketing group Enneci ran the famous ‘Banana: Il pane degli Dei’ (‘Banana: The Bread of the Gods’) campaign. The slogan, termed a ‘Somali legend’, was an Italian invention. So too were the illustrations, featuring either Italian maritime infrastructure in the empire, like steamships and ports, or racist imagery of walleyed, spear-wielding warriors (Figure 1a–b). The tone of Enneci’s cartoons made the accompanying dietary analysis of bananas appear all the more modern by comparison: ‘World medical science recognises in the banana the virtues proclaimed by the savages by baptising it “The Bread of the Gods”’. This campaign cast Somali bananas as Italian commodities, the fruits of Fascist empire.

Under the Fascist administration of Somalia, banana farming became a key colonial agro-industry. Plantations were established through land seizure, then maintained through forced labour. Industrial-scale banana production also relied on environmental change, and these engineered landscapes led to environmental degradation. Here, I build on the work of Tiago Saraiva, and his argument that Fascist agricultural projects were not timeless and traditional, but rather ‘as modernist as the aviation craze’.³ Expanding banana production meant monocropping. This agricultural system quickly depletes soil, leaving weak plants vulnerable to pests. Farmers must then add synthetic fertilisers to promote high yields, and spray pesticides to discourage crop loss. Erosion from deforestation leads to flooding, and seasonal rains sweep the chemicals from banana plantations to water sources. Eutrophication, wherein a body of water becomes oversaturated with nitrogen and phosphorus, results. When the algae blooms, nearly all other kinds of aquatic life perish. Further down the supply chain, discarded packaging materials jam dumpsters.

According to the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), contemporary banana production creates more garbage on a global scale than any other agricultural market. And yet, banana peels can filter heavy metals from river water, with recent studies showing an extraction rate of 65% in less than one hour.⁴ Bananas are a key element of Somali foodways today, as well as a significant economic sector. By 1990, Somali banana exports were worth \$96 million.⁵ Still, as noted by Wyatt Constantine, ‘even in its best years, Somali banana production was dwarfed by the “dollar banana” countries of Central and South America, who control the majority of exports’.⁶ The colonial features that made the banana trade profitable were the same features that meant that the market was neither ethical nor sustainable.

30 LA CUCINA ITALIANA 1 Giugno 1934-XTT

Le banane, oltre che un frutto squisito, sano, facilmente digeribile e grandemente nutritivo, sono utilizzate in quasi tutti gli altri Paesi come uno dei più utili ingredienti della Cucina.

Centinaia di ottime ricette esistono per l'impiego delle banane nella preparazione dei dolci, della pasticceria, dei gelati, delle insalate, dei piatti di contorno, ecc.

Il loro aroma caratteristico, il loro gusto squisito, la loro polpa morbida e butirrosa costituiscono una variante graditissima per qualunque cucina. Ecco alcune di queste ricette che in gran parte costituiscono una novità per le massate italiane:

INSALATA ALLA SPAGNUOLA
Tagliate in pezzi abbastanza grandi un eguale quantitativo di banane somale, di mele, cipolle grandi, pomodori e condite il tutto con una salsa di aceto. Anche la cipolla dev'essere, naturalmente, servita cruda.

FUNGHI
Spargete su di un piatto della panna montata colorata con del Curaçao verde e cospargete la panna con cioccolata in polvere. Mettete nella panna alcuni pezzi di banane su ognuno dei quali porrete mezza pesca o mezza albicocca come cappello. Aggiungete dei pistacchi tagliati in piccolissimi pezzi e servite a freddo.

INSALATA DI FRUTTA
Mescolate in una scodella delle mele tagliate in dadi, delle banane nonché dei pezzi di noci. Versatevi del vino bianco e servite il tutto con uva, ciliege e fette di banane somale.

INSALATA DI VERDURA
Prendete 6 banane somale, 2 teste di insalata, mezz'etto di spinaci, due mazzi di carote, 1 mazzo di ravanelli. Lavate con cura l'insalata, gli spinaci ed i ravanelli e tagliate il tutto in piccoli pezzi. Sbucciate le banane e le carote e mescolate in una scodella. Fate sciogliere in acqua un poco di sale, zucchero ed aceto e con detto composto condite l'insalata sopra descritta. Servite all'antipasto.

BANANE SOMALE CON GELATO E CREMA AL CIOCCOLATO
Prendete 4 banane somale, 4 cucchiaini di marmellata di fragoloni e due porzioni di gelato. Le banane le sbuccerete e dimezzerete nel senso longitudinale scavandole leggermente. Ponete le banane su di un piatto e versate nell'incavatura fatta il gelato o la marmellata. Invece del gelato potrete pure usare della panna montata con odore di vaniglia.

Preparate e servite separatamente la crema che otterrete prendendo mezz'etto di cioccolata, due tuorli d'uovo, un cucchiaino di zucchero in polvere, un cucchiaino di fecola, mezzo litro di panna. Mettete al fuoco quanto sopra e sbattete fino a formare un tutto unito. Raggiunta l'ebollizione la crema la verserete in una coppa fino a che sia raffreddata.

A PERCENTUALE
altissima di zucchero e di idrocarburi contenuti nella polpa delle banane, mettono questo frutto al primo posto nella scala dei cibi più nutrienti, facilmente assimilati ed i benefici effetti sull'intestino sia dei piccoli, sia dei giovani che dei vecchi, sia degli ammalati che dei sani.

La scienza medica mondiale riconosce nella banana i pregi proclamati dai selvaggi battezzandola "il pane degli Dei,"

Le banane sono il cibo più completo e nutriente dopo il latte materno.

LA BANANA È IL PANE DEGLI DEI

Enneci - Milano

Figure 1. (a) 'La banana è il pane degli dei' ('Banana Is the Bread of the Gods'). Advertisement designed by Enneci, Milan, in *La Cucina Italiana*, June 1934, p. 30. (b) 'La banana è il pane degli dei' ('Banana Is the Bread of the Gods'). Advertisement designed by Enneci, Milan, in *La Cucina Italiana*, May 1934, p. 28.

During the colonial period, the government provided plantation owners with privileged access to Italian and Mediterranean markets. In the specific case of the Italian banana, magazines heralded the nutritional value of a new 'domestic' fruit, grown an ocean away.

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BANANE SOMALE CON SALSA DI ACETO

Tagliate a fette od a dadetti delle banane somale che porrete in una fondina. Versate sulle banane della salsa di aceto che otterrete prendendo una parte di aceto, tre parti di olio d'oliva, un poco di sale ed un poco di pepe. Desiderandolo potrete aggiungere anche della senape.

L'insalata così ottenuta è ottima quale contorno per un piatto di selvaggina o di carne.

INSALATA DI BANANE CON MAIONESE

Tagliate a fette delle banane e delle mele in dadetti. Fate bollire alcuni minuti in acqua salata, dopo averlo sbucciato e tagliato a strisce, del sedano che, dopo l'ebollizione laverete in acqua fredda. Togliete l'acqua dal sedano ed unitelo alle banane ed alle mele servendo il tutto con della maionese.

BANANE AL FORNO

Dopo aver unto una padella con del burro freddo, mettetela nella stessa delle mele tagliate in pezzi piccolissimi e delle banane Somale tagliate in pezzi della lunghezza di circa 2-3 centimetri. Aggiungete un cucchiaino di cannella polverizzata e ponete la padella in un forno caldissimo. Lasciate cuocere per circa 15 minuti e servite mettendo sul composto il sugo che si forma.

TORTA DI BANANE

Prendete 150 gr. di burro, 150 gr. di zucchero, 4 uova, 6 banane somale ben mature. Mescolate il burro e lo zucchero fino ad ottenere un composto denso. Aggiungete ad uno ad uno i tuorli, della farina ed infine i bianchi d'uovo montati a fiocca. Ungete una padella e cospargete del pane grattugiato e versatevi la pasta sopra ottenuta; ponete al forno per circa un'ora a calore normale. Lasciate raffreddare la torta e poi tagliatela a metà. Ponete nella parte inferiore delle fette di banana e ricoprite con la parte tolta. Ricomponete la torta aggiungendo panna montata mista a fette di banana.

NEL processo di maturazione le sostanze amidacee della banana si trasformano in zucchero fondendosi con le altre materie nutritive in modo da formare l'alimento più perfetto che il palato possa gustare e che lo stomaco assimila con la massima facilità e coi migliori risultati. Queste caratteristiche rendono la banana non solo una ghiottoneria per il suo gusto squisito, ma il cibo più sano e leggero che può essere dato ai bimbi, ai vecchi, agli ammalati e ai deboli di stomaco.

LA BANANA È IL PANE DEGLI DEI

(Leggenda Somala)

ENNECI - MILANO

Figure 1. Continued

An Italian Banana Republic?

This article takes as a premise that Fascism should be studied beyond 1922 to 1945, the closed temporal arc of the *ventennio* that comprised Benito Mussolini's dictatorship. In line with Eric Hobsbawm's canonical characterisation of 'the long nineteenth century', there exists a long Fascism that does not conform neatly to cardinal dates.⁷ Scholars of

Fascism have debated the warning signs that predate autocratic rule, and the material traces of dictatorship in the cityscape.⁸ Liberal-period colonial projects and the postwar legacies of Fascist period fruit trade monopolies help to explain how and why the Italianisation of the Somali banana reached an apex under the Fascist regime.

Prior to Fascism, Italians gained a commercial foothold in Somalia through industrial expansion. The Liberal government envisioned Italian maritime infrastructure as the means one day to bring Somali plantation crops, like cotton and sugar, to European markets. Their first venture placed the Italian Filonardi Company in charge of the Benadir Concession in 1896. Over the next few months, Filonardi established commercial treaties with Sultan Said of Zanzibar, gaining Italian access to ports up and down the Somali coastline. Later that year, the larger Società Anonima Commerciale Italiana per il Benadir absorbed Filonardi, along with the new maritime network. More port acquisitions followed, including the strategic purchase of Benadir in 1905.⁹ In 1908, Benadir and its protectorates were declared an Italian colony: Italian Somaliland. Governmental rule followed the approach established by early commercial control, as Italian companies continued to establish new factories and trade networks, particularly in Mogadishu, the capital port city, and Merca. But the new colonial governorship of Giacomo De Martino (1910–12) differed from former regimes in one key respect. No longer satisfied with coastal dominance, government interventions looked inland to create a plantation empire.

The Colonial Agriculture Institute in Florence served as the regime's think-tank for designing new approaches to Italian agriculture in the colonies, and measures to test their efficacy.¹⁰ Here, Italian agronomers debated the merits of two different agricultural plans for the new Somali territory, trying to decide which model would produce the most crops.¹¹ Historian Lee Cassanelli has observed that two models predominated.¹² Under the first model, the Italian state would create estates for Somali farmers to grow a mixture of cash crops for Italians in exchange for a secure commercial market and a host of medical, social, and agricultural services.¹³ In lieu of wages, Somali farmers would be permitted to grow subsistence crops to support their families. Created by agricultural economist Romolo Onor, the *compartecipazione* model evoked Italian agricultural relations on the *latifondi*, the large Southern Italian plantations that relied on semi-indentured labour to manage the wheat harvest.¹⁴ Under the second model, European plantation owners stood at the centre of Somali agricultural development. Colonists would receive large tracts of land on long-term leases, and hire Somali farmers to deforest terrain, then to plant and harvest commercial crops for export to Italy. The domestic Somali food market would rely on local farmers growing subsistence crops. Ultimately, the second model was adopted by De Martino and subsequent Italian governors in the early 1920s.¹⁵

Italian banana cultivation in Somalia began with new laws that moved Italian farmers onto Somali land, followed by infrastructural changes like the construction of roads and canals. This agricultural choice shaped a growing territory. In 1911, the colonial government enacted law no. 820, a work-to-own scheme that provided Italian farmers with Somali land for an annual fee. Farmers planted a variety of crops, including cotton, grain, peanuts, coconuts, and citrus.¹⁶ The British Empire ceded the Trans-Juba territory of their East African holdings to Italy, purportedly in thanks for their having joined the Allied side of World War I. Port towns were rapidly developed, as Somali and

Italian labourers built factories, hospitals, and schools to serve maritime centres. Geographers and self-proclaimed explorers descended to examine the new territorial holdings, and pushed coastal infrastructural inland towards the forests, seen by the Florentine agronomers as a natural laboratory for agricultural experimentation.

The first major Italian banana scheme in Somalia was established on the eve of the Fascist *ventennio*. In 1920, Prince Luigi Amedeo, the mountaineering cousin of King Vittorio Emanuele III, established an agricultural research station in Italian Somaliland. With a capital investment of 24 million lire, Amedeo leased 25,000 hectares of land from chieftains whose lands bordered the city of Jowhar, establishing the Villaggio Duca degli Abruzzi in the fertile soils of the Shabelle river valley. The Prince also installed the Società Agricola Italo-Somala (SAIS) to govern agricultural activities in the colony.¹⁷ Together, the settlement and the governing body aimed to improve the quality and quantity of cotton and sugar – and soon, bananas.

The SAIS project mattered because it was heralded as an exemplar, and then used as a blueprint for new colonial Italian banana plantations over the next two decades. As noted by Cassanelli, many European contemporaries considered SAIS to be the most successful agricultural scheme in colonial Somalia. Its comparative success, Cassanelli has argued, derived from two factors.¹⁸ SAIS was uncommonly well subsidised, outpacing other Italian agricultural experiments in the Somali empire. Amedeo's activities attracted investment from the Banca d'Italia almost immediately, and they set up their first branch in Mogadishu in November 1920, just months after the Villaggio was established.¹⁹ The Banca d'Italia also aided the Villaggio directly, providing an additional 11 million lire infusion to support the initial private investment. Italian workers received housing and medical care, agricultural tools, seeds, and a well for water.²⁰ Further, SAIS hewed to Romolo Onor's agricultural model.²¹ Labour relied on a paternalistic system wherein local Somali farmers were encouraged to settle on the estate.²² They received a hectare of land to be divided between commercial cotton production to be sold back to SAIS at a fixed price, and the family's own foodstuffs. Contracts determined families' working and living arrangements, including leave for family marriages and funerals.

Following the SAIS model, the three agricultural, legislative, and economic gears turned in tandem throughout the 1920s, granting expansive landholdings to Italian colonists to develop as *aziendas* like the Villaggio. In 1923, the first Fascist Governor of Somalia, Cesare Maria De Vecchi, was installed in the Italian territories of Somalia, establishing direct rule over much of the south. The following year, he pushed the disarmament of Somali sultanates in the north. Locally at the Villaggio, SAIS experimented with different forms of colonial labour management. In 1924, the Shabelle flooded, and a plague struck Jowhar, leading many Somali farmers to return to their family plots elsewhere. First, SAIS dangled a carrot: additional daily wages of 3.5 lire for men, 2.5 lire for women, and 2 lire for children. Bonuses encouraged farmers to marry, to take second wives, to have more than three children on the estate, and to marry children to fellow estate residents.²³ Then, in 1925, SAIS produced the stick. It declared its agricultural projects to be a critical public service. This move allowed the colonial government to conscript farmers from all nearby villages in a paid *corvée*. It also diminished diversified approaches that intercropped multiple plants. From 1925 onward, business meant bananas.²⁴

Early East African banana cultivation centred on the corm, the banana plant's rhizome or root, which could be fermented, baked, and then served as *kocho*, a flat bread similar to Ethiopian *injera*.²⁵ Corms' edibility is the original reason that humans spread the banana plant. Moreover, they can be planted to establish a banana plantation.²⁶ Like most plants, banana 'trees' have roots. But banana trees are not true trees, because they lack a trunk. Rather, the plant is supported by a pseudo-stem that grows out of the underground corm. One corm produces another, so a handful of corms can create a plantation. Like strawberries, bananas are perennials. They grow, flower, and fruit across multiple seasons. In fact, banana fruits are – despite their starchiness – berries. As with berry farms, banana plantations grow through three-step replanting: the farmer digs up the corm, transports it to a new place, and then reburies it. When Italian agronomers argued for rationalist banana planting, this meant burying the new corms along grids at carefully measured intervals.²⁷

At the Villaggio and on the *aziende*, farmers tended grids dedicated to bananas from 1925 onward.²⁸ Still, there were many kinds, including dessert bananas like the sweet, soft, thumb-sized *Musa nana*, and plantains like the starchy, corn-cob-sized *Musa paradisiaca*. In contrast to the Central American bananas then dominating the world market, Somali cultivars offered a commercial advantage. The fruits matured slowly and well, with an intense perfume. But their elegant aging came at a cost, namely a delicate peel and a tendency to crumble. Difficult transport meant bottlenecks, and market control lay not with farmers, but with shipping companies.

By 1926, the Villaggio Duca degli Abruzzi was less of a village and more of a city. It had absorbed sixteen townships, and counted on 3000 Somali and 200 Italian resident workers, making it a true agricultural colony. Beyond the Villaggio, private Italian plantation land coverage in Somalia also rose rapidly, from 53 hectares in 1927, to 617 hectares in 1930, to 2130 in 1932, and then to 4000 in 1935.²⁹ The colonial government financed a new railway to connect the Villaggio directly to Mogadishu, with 114 km of track.³⁰ Development connected the fertile valley between the Juba and Shabelle rivers to the sea. This area would soon become the centre of colonial Fascist banana plantation agriculture.³¹

Labour, not land, presented the foremost problem for Fascism's colonial agro-industry in Somalia. Many Somalis in the Italian-occupied south had their own small farms. During the laborious planting season, many Somali farmers left Italian plantations to prepare their own fields or help on their relatives' farms, while many farmers refused to engage in wage labour for the plantations as a matter of anti-colonial principle. Lacking willing labour, De Vecchi introduced harsh methods to engage Somali farmers in rural projects. Fascist state strategies to obtain labour for the expanded agricultural ventures ranged from socially invasive incentive systems at the SAIS agricultural scheme to the physical threats and legal coercion at Jenaale, a port town with access to Indian Ocean steamship routes. Cassanelli notes that forced labour also spread through the hut tax, a new annual tax on Somali farmers that pushed many to move to plantations. It was, he further observes, 'the first time [that] the colonial state assumed a leading role in recruiting labor for private as well as public enterprises'.³² In 1920, Italians operated four agricultural concessions in Somalia. By June 1933, they operated 115 concessions. Over 30,000 hectares of Somali land were now under Italian-run cultivation, and much of it was devoted to bananas.

Fascist colonial law and infrastructure drove land and labour on Somali banana plantations towards the regime's goals for hyper-productivity. Industrial banana farming boomed in the early 1930s, when Italians dammed the Uebi Scebeli river at Jenaale. At the Jenaale concession, plantation recruitment was difficult, with many European plantation owners competing for little Somali labour. Italian colonial recruitment methods became increasingly severe. Planters often offered workers a week's or month's advance. In theory, this looked like a sign-on bonus, a common enticement for tight labour markets. In practice, advance payment brought the force of the colonial legal system to bear on farmers. Now, abandoning the plantations to care for their farms made them liable for breach of contract. Colonial law could compel their return to the Italian plantations. By 1933, Jenaale would export 126,500 quintals of product each year, ten times more bananas than any other Somali plantation centre.³³

The Banana Boat Flotillas

During the 1930s, the geographic focus of Italian colonial interventions shifted from labour and infrastructure on plantations in inland Somalia to Mediterranean trade networks and maritime technologies for food preservation. At first, industrial banana production was impeded by overland transport issues, stretching from plantation to port. Only two companies, the Compagnia Italiana Transatlantica (CITRA) and the Libera Triestina, offered steamships to ply the waters between Italy and Somalia, and their tiny, refrigerated holds were built for meat, not fruit. Exportation could not keep pace with production, and bananas rotted in the fields.³⁴ Some planters sold the bananas at low prices locally, or pushed them onto Somali workers in lieu of cash wages.³⁵

The tides turned in 1931, when *azienda* owners banded together to form the Società Anonima Cooperativa Consorzio Agricolo Somalo (SACCAS), and pooled their resources for an experiment, the first dedicated banana boat. They rented the Lanstejan Casùe steamship, stuffing 2532 tons of bananas into its refrigerated hold. The fruits were enthusiastically received in Italy. Encouraged, the Somali Agricultural Consortium invested in Italy's first regular banana supply service, renting ships from the Silver Line fleet, with arrivals every fifteen days. Italian consumers delighted in the Somali product, which SACCAS admirers hailed as tastier, more reliable, and more affordable than the bananas that had previously come from the far-away Canary Islands.³⁶ As Enrico Cibelli, head of the Italian Banana Monopoly, would later put it, 'grapes cost around ten lire per kilo on the market, apples and pears half. Prices that certainly do not favor mass consumption. The cheapest fruit is always the banana'.³⁷

A flotilla of refrigerated ships run by two Italian companies carried Somali bananas to Mediterranean markets. The first, Società Anonima Navigazione Italo-Somala (SANIS, established in 1932), focused its business model on its steamships, specialised for long-duration fruit storage. The Duca degli Abruzzi, its first banana boat, carried 5000 quintals of bananas to Italy on May 23, 1933.³⁸ SANIS was known for its cooling technologies, and in the 1950s and 1960s became a major Italian kitchen appliance brand, specialising in refrigerators. The second, Società Anonima Banane Italiane (SABI, established in 1933) purchased bananas in Somalia for sale in Italy. SABI focused on packing and chemical preservation technologies to ensure that uniform, yellow bananas arrived on Italian shores. At Jenaale, SABI opened a Centro di Raccolta to

transport, disinfect, and pack bananas locally, before loading them onto Italian ships.³⁹ SANIS pioneered a new way of loading bananas. Instead of laying the bunches on cushioned beds, they installed bars to allow the bananas to hang in closets in trucks and ships, as they did from trees – a solution that lowered the percentage of discarded bananas to below 5% per load.⁴⁰ The two shipping companies, initially competitors, agreed that they could expand the market by advertising bananas together. They hired the Turinese marketing firm Gros-Monti & Co to introduce their iconic yellow product to Italian audiences in the early 1930s.

'Here is the Somali banana! Delicious and nutritious fruit!' booms the bright red text of SABI's 1934 banana spot (Figure 2).⁴¹ A giant bunch of bright yellow bananas, enlarged with hierarchical scale, draws the eye to the Somali product first. Next the viewer notices the man who holds the bananas, beckoning the curious consumer to inspect this new food. By trade, the banana-pusher might have been a farmer or shipper. Either way, he was an Italian colonist, clad in a white pith helmet, a white shirt, and voluminous red pants. The viewer peers up at him, from a low perspective to emphasise his double chin and stocky build. His physical features embody the ideals of Italianness in the empire, with his suntanned forearms and a toothy smile below a black, pencil-line mustache.⁴² His girth visually proves that bananas are nutritious. His grin suggests that they taste delicious. The robust physicality of this male Italian colonist, along with his facial shadowing, might be considered a corollary to the pith-helmeted female colonist in Boccasile's 1936 advertisement for Ramazzotti Amaro Felcina.⁴³ In the minimised background appeared the Indian ocean, with a SABI steamship setting forth from the Somali coast. Small white towns dot the green interior, feathery gray fumes imply the presence of urban industry and rural railway infrastructure. While Somali bananas are the primary focus, and the Italian colonist the second, the lingering memory of the ad centres on the Genovese SABI steamship company. Here, the bananas advertise not only the fruit but also the infrastructure that connects Italian plantations in Somalia to fruit markets of the metropole. In style, this advertisement recalls the graphic designs of famed artist Gino Boccasile, who produced *pugno nell'occhio* (punch in the eye) posters for the Fascist regime and private companies alike. This style was considered to be the cutting edge of marketing at a time when brand identity was a new concept. Its bright colours burned bananas into consumers' brains, making them easy to remember later at the grocery store.

Throughout the 1930s, Italians consumed a heavy diet of propaganda, including colourful print advertisements like SABI's, as well as black and white films, newsreels, and photographs made by Luce. Many Italians spent Saturdays at the movies, and Mussolini required Luce movie houses to play such newsreels before all feature films. Just as SABI's advertising marketed bananas and maritime infrastructure specifically, Luce newsreels and photography promoted the Somali agricultural labour and the colonial project as a whole.

Director Arturo Gemmiti was the leading director of colonial newsreels during the 1930s, and his 1935 Banana Cultivation newsreel fits within this larger opus.⁴⁴ He framed colonial agricultural labour – in this case, banana plantation work – as picturesque. The clip opens with a pan shot; the camera sweeps across a waving sea of palms (Figure 3). Despite the black and white footage, the viewer feels immersed in a tropical, green world, a sharp tonal contrast to the ochre deserts comprising much of



Figure 2. 'Ecco la banana somala! Frutto squisito e nutriente!' ('Here Is the Somali Banana! Delicious and Nutritious Fruit!'). Promotional poster designed by Gros-Monti & Co for Società Anonima Banane Italiane, Genova. Turin, 1934. Collezione Salce, Treviso, Italy: Catalogue:05 00665858 Inventory: 03292. Collocation: 9_A_q. Photography by Luigi Baldin, 2014: 03292_VE 44141 ©MIBACT).

the inland. In other words, this opening anchors the viewer in a certain kind of Somali landscape, one that has been engineered for hyper-productivity by Italian agronomers. In publications, Armando Maugini and his acolytes from the Colonial Agriculture Institute in Florence argued for rationalist agronomy like the kind practised on the plantation shown in this newsreel. The narrator reminds the viewer that Italian



Figure 3. Film stills from Arturo Gemmiti, 'La coltivazione delle banane'. Giornale Luce B: B0603, Luce RCA Photophone. January 1935. Somalia. 1 minute 19 seconds. Film code: B060302.

damming projects are responsible for these plantations, as the camera jumps across row after gridded row of trees. Next, the female voiceover describes how agricultural workers harvest bananas, as merry, up-tempo music plays.⁴⁵ Somali men and women cut heavy bunches of bananas from the trees with machetes (Figure 4), and then load them on their backs using slatted, wooden carriers. Although the film title signals content related to banana farming, most of the clip focuses on banana transport. The viewer watches as the workers trundle across the plantation in an orderly line, up to the boxing centre. At this stage of production, the Somali workers are joined by Italians in white pith helmets. Together they pack the bunches into wooden boxes, nail them shut, then haul the cargo onto trucks (Figure 5). The final shot mirrors the first, but this time it heralds the triumph of Italian road infrastructure and transportation technology rather than agronomy (Figure 6). The camera pans across the motorcade, a techno-colonial cowboy caravan, riding for the sea.

Newspapers and magazines also printed Luce photography of Somali labour overseen by Italians in pith helmets, accompanied by narratives of Italy's agricultural projects in East Africa.⁴⁶ Most photography focused on banana trees rather than workers. In Gemmiti's



Figure 4. Film stills from Arturo Gemmiti, 'La coltivazione delle banane'. Giornale Luce B: B0603, Luce RCA Photophone. January 1935. Somalia. 1 minute 19 seconds. Film code: B060302.



Figure 5. Film stills from Arturo Gemmiti, 'La coltivazione delle banane'. Giornale Luce B: B0603, Luce RCA Photophone. January 1935. Somalia. 1 minute 19 seconds. Film code: B060302.

newsreel, human workers served as compositional elements, providing a frame for the viewer to focus on the banana bunches (Figure 7). Here, two Somali workers flank a stalk of bananas, cutting the fruit from the tree. An Italian in a pith helmet peeks from behind the bunch. The photographic shot of this moment breaks down the continuity of agricultural labour, rendering it taxonomically identifiable to non-experts. It taught Italian filmgoers the stages of banana cultivation, preparing them to become consumers of this colonial product.⁴⁷

Periodicals like *L'Autarchia Alimentare* carried Luce photography to specialised audiences. Published by the Regia Azienda Monopolio Banane, the 1938 Comitato Patrocinatore included key figures in colonial government and industry, such as General Attilio Terruzzi, Undersecretary of State for Italian Africa; Marshals Emilio De Bono and Rodolfo Graziani; and Angelo Ferrari, President of the National Fascist Federation of Agricultural and Various Food exhibitors. Enrico Cibelli, president of the Banana Monopoly, was a frequent contributor, as was Ferruccio Lantini, Fascist Minister of Corporations.⁴⁸

The impact of this blend of propaganda on the Italian populace was significant. As noted by Emanuela Scarpellini, 'These advertisements – and the numerous products



Figure 6. Film stills from Arturo Gemmiti, 'La coltivazione delle banane'. Giornale Luce B: B0603, Luce RCA Photophone. January 1935. Somalia. 1 minute 19 seconds. Film code: B060302.



Figure 7. 'Raccolta banana' in Reparto Africa Orientale. April 1936–May 1936. Archivio Luce: Photo Code AO00007167.

with names and images redolent of Africa [...] visually underline racial differences [...] the construction of a colonial image was also passed on through consumer products'.⁴⁹ Media featuring colonial foods and their agricultural origins fostered a false sense of familiarity with East Africa by domesticating the regime's colonial projects. Featuring bananas in newsreels encouraged Italians to stock them in their cupboards, making this foreign fruit part of everyday life.

The Royal Banana Monopoly: Transitioning from the Duca to the Duce

In the final stage of Fascist colonial interventions to the banana farming and trade, the two competing Italian maritime firms merged into one entity under state control. By the time that Benito Mussolini declared the establishment of Italian East African Empire in 1936, the Italian shipping companies SANIS and SABI were consolidated to create a private banana monopoly. Rather than disintegrate the trust, the Italian colonial government absorbed it, founding the Regia Azienda Monopolio Banane (RAMB) and at the same time subsumed Italian Somalia into the Africa Orientale Italiana.⁵⁰

RAMB controlled the Italo-Somali banana trade at every step from production to consumption. They oversaw cultivar experimentation, overseas transport, the invention of industrial food products based on bananas, and sales. They published articles heralding these projects in a dedicated periodical, *L'Autarchia Alimentare*.⁵¹ A new law mandated the direct sale of all bananas to the regime's colonial government.⁵² RAMB consolidated the geography of banana plantations in Somalia. It shuttered old inland plantations. Closer to the steamship docks, it opened and expanded new ones. RAMB's policies terminated the Consorzi Agrari di Colonizzazione, including Afoi, Havai, and the famous Villaggio Duca degli Abruzzi. Farmers moved to Genale-Merca, now managing 90% of exports, while the remaining 10% moved through Giuba-Chisimaio.⁵³ RAMB compiled lists of names of all banana plantation owners, plus their annual export figures of each plantation. If a plantation owner violated the decree by shipping bananas to private markets, they were fined at two to ten times the cost of the fruit. The contraband bananas, and the boat they traveled on, became the property of the Fascist state. Within the decade, Italian banana cultivation rose dramatically, from forty-five hectares of cultivation in 1926 and zero imports to ten times that in 1937, with 4500 hectares devoted to banana plantations in Somalia producing 226,525 quintals of banana exports to Italy per year.⁵⁴ With RAMB consolidation, total Italian plantation coverage continued to rise, but at a slower rate. By 1939, Italian Somalia produced 320,000 quintals of bananas for export each year.

Concurrent with plantation reorganisation, RAMB invested to expand maritime transportation capacity. They procured a fleet of refrigerated banana boats to carry Somali bananas to Italian markets. They publicised this infrastructural project using geographic imagery showing how their boats connected different world regions (Figure 8). The back cover of *L'Autarchia Alimentare* mapped 'Italian maritime banana traffic'. Two boat lines plied the waters, one traveling from Genova via Naples and Port Said, another from Trieste via Venice and Fiume. They converged in the Indian Ocean, docking at Massaua, Mogadishu, Chisimaio, and Merca, before returning to Italy. At the docks in Merca, RAMB built industrial drying plants to prepare dried bananas, banana flour, and livestock feed, processing two hundred quintals of banana every eight hours, to be sold in local markets, and in Italy alongside the fresh fruit, which the centres would package and prepare for shipping. In RAMB's illustration, both East Africa and Italy are coloured banana-yellow, connecting the colonies and the metropole through the fruit trade.

Yellow bananas are never seen on trees. The bright yellow colour that we associate with bananas today is not found in nature. It is the result of the ethylene ripening process, first popularised in 1930s, and still in use today. It takes exactly seven days for a banana to cycle through the colour range, from green on Monday to yellow on



Figure 8. 'Il traffico marittimo bananiero italiano' ('Italian Maritime Banana Traffic'). Back cover of *L'Autarchia Alimentare*, December 1938.

Thursday and brown on Sunday. Plucking a banana from a tree normally triggers the fruit to release of ethylene gas, the chemical that triggers ripening. But low temperatures discourage ethylene production, allowing fruit to mature slowly after picking. Unlike grapes and apples, bananas ripen at an even rate, which made their looks and flavour predictable, and thus manipulable.

Refrigeration technologies invented at Merca and Mogadishu controlled the ripening process.⁵⁵ Green bananas were placed in air-tight rooms refrigerated to between 13.5 and 15 degrees Celsius, a temperature range determined by extensive experimentation.⁵⁶ Cooler temperatures permanently stalled ripening, causing the plant cell walls to break down. It turned green bananas gray. Warmer temperatures, roughly 15 degrees Celsius, blackened the peel, though they did not impact fruit taste or texture. Contemporary refrigerators run in this range, which is why we ripen bananas on countertops. RAMB's refrigerated fleet ensured that Somali bananas arrived in Italian markets on their final green day.⁵⁷ This consistency and reliability made bananas brandable under the RAMB name in a way that would have been impossible for any other fruit.⁵⁸

Cooling technologies to suspend ripening on transoceanic transit preceded chemical controls to initiate ripening on the docks. When the green bananas arrived in Italy, they were placed in sealed rooms pumped full of ethylene gas to induce ripening. This simple hydrocarbon breaks down chlorophyll, turning the green fruit creamy yellow. Ethylene also changes how bananas taste. It softens banana flavour, by mellowing acids, and texture, by decreasing pectin content. Starch converts to sugar. Over one week, fructose content rises from one percent to eighty. The Italian market's desire for perfectly ripe, bright yellow bananas profoundly shaped the fruit ripening cycle.⁵⁹

These chemical innovations attracted attention at the highest ranks of the Fascist party. In spring 1938, Benito Mussolini inspected the RAMB banana flotilla in a tour led by Attilio Terruzzi, Secretary of the Ministry for Italian Africa. Fascist dignitaries of the colonial state, like Galeazzo Ciano and Achille Starace, nodded along as Terruzzi explained the new technologies. Mussolini concluded the tour by authorising a reduction to the state price for bananas, so that 'this characteristic and appreciated product of our Colonies may become very popular'.⁶⁰

For RAMB, the Duce's banana price reduction was a coup. RAMB applauded price reductions, taking credit for lowering banana prices from 6 lire per kilogram in 1931 to 4.25 in 1937, because they made the fruit accessible to more people. RAMB's project in Italy was to create, as Cibelli put it, 'a monopoly of social character'.⁶¹ They aimed to follow the French colonial model of banana trade. Production incentives and price controls used by the French empire rapidly increased the availability of bananas in interwar Paris.⁶² As one cookbook author observed in 1935, 'in the past [bananas] were regarded as rarities, the same as pineapples and all colonial fruits, which we now look upon with the same indifference as apples and pears'.⁶³ The average Frenchman consumed 5–6 kilograms of bananas per year in 1938, while Italians ate less than half a kilo.⁶⁴

By the decade's close, the French empire was self-sufficient in banana production, a model for Fascist Italy's goal of alimentary autarky. There were domestic models: salt and tobacco monopolies leveraged protectionist tariffs to increase product rarity and price. But these were familiar products that Italian consumers knew and desired. They might grumble about high prices, but they would not stop salting their *minestra* or quit smoking. The banana monopoly thus had a very different task. RAMB had to introduce bananas to as many Italians as possible, and establish a role for the fruit in Italian cuisine.

La Casa della Banana

Bananas arrived in Italy at major ports like Genoa and Trieste, where they were further processed for consumption. Here as in Somalia, industrial plants dried bananas and ground them to make flour and animal feed. But for the most part, fresh bananas were shipped to licensed vendors at RAMB sales points, called Case della Banana (Figure 9).

L'organizzazione industriale per la maturazione e vendita delle banane della ditta

BREGA ANDREA & FIGLI

IN PIACENZA E CREMONA



Negozio di vendita delle banane in Cremona

Negozio di vendita in Crema

Le banane maturate dalla ditta in vendita sul mercato di Piacenza

Negozio di vendita in Piacenza

Dalle celle di maturazione gli autocarri della Ditta giornalmente riforniscono i mercati della Zona

La Ditta ha impiantati magazzini di maturazione in Piacenza - Cremona - Crema e Castel San Giovanni • Complessivamente sei grandi celle di maturazione munite di impianti termici e igrometrici • Gli impianti della Ditta consentono di maturare contemporaneamente circa 1500 caschi di banane (Kg 225.000)

Figure 9. Advertisement for Brega Andrea and Sons, 'La Casa della Banana', RAMB sales points in Piacenza and Cremona. *L'Autarchia Alimentare*. 1938.

Although these photographs appeared in black and white, one can imagine how the shops they portrayed likely looked in real life. In the foggy gray of the Milanese cityscape, the sunshine-yellow banana stands must have set bleary-eyed factory workers agog. Bright bunches hung from dedicated poles in shop windows, like tropical prosciutto. Along with fresh fruit, stores sold a cornucopia of industrial banana products, like dried bananas, banana jam, banana flour, banana liquor, and banana-based pet food. Inventors also developed a host of non-edible banana products, including banana-based dyes, textiles, and solvents. None of these worked particularly well. Novelty rather than utility marked the Case della Banana. It stood out from other shops, a yellow parrot among gray pigeons.

By 1938, you could buy a banana in every region of Italy. Even Sicily and Sardinia each had a Casa della Banana. RAMB sales charts show that it was easiest to find the fruit in Northern, industrial zones. Lombardy led with eleven sales points, selling 23% of the banana imports. Piedmont followed close behind with seven sales points and 16.5%. At the opposite end of the scale, the hilly interior of the centre (Umbria, Marche) and centre-south (Abruzzo, Molise) had only one Casa della Banana each, as did the islands.⁶⁵ Despite uneven coverage, there were no banana deserts in Fascist Italy.⁶⁶

Tropical Potatoes for Weak Stomachs: Italian Banana Marketing

Bananas came to European markets later than American ones, and were less popular once they arrived.⁶⁷ This may be because of differences in American and Italian foodways. Packaged cereal featured prominently in American breakfasts. United Fruit promoters took advantage of cereal's ubiquity to push bananas. They paid the Post cereal company to slip banana coupons, with pictures showing cereals topped with sliced bananas, into cereal boxes.⁶⁸ The venture was so successful that orange companies, like Tropicana, followed their lead. Today, even Americans living in cold-weather climates consider tropical foods like sliced bananas and orange juice to be traditional parts of American breakfast. In marketing bananas to Italians, RAMB had to take a different approach.⁶⁹ Not only did Italy not have the American breakfast tradition of a morning bowl of cereal, but the Fascist state was actively trying to encourage Italians to eat less wheat, and more alternative grains like rice.

Dieticians in interwar Italy did not slot bananas alongside other brightly coloured fruits. Instead, they pointed to banana's creamy mildness, likening it to a 'tropical potato'.⁷⁰ They were a therapeutic food, suitable for weak stomachs. The elderly and the sick could benefit from banana's ability to counteract diarrhea and intestinal ailments.⁷¹ Unripe bananas could be ground into banana flour, and then processed in the same way as milk-based products like Ovomaltine.⁷² This approach meant that Italian dieticians would now market bananas to mothers seeking highly nourishing, calorie-dense foods to feed their growing children. Popular audiences encountered similar messages on the pages of *La Cucina Italiana*, where advice columns like 'Il dovere di ogni madre' recommended bananas as an ideal food for children during wartime scarcity.⁷³

Bananas and Baby Food: Fascist Substitute Milks

Children stood at the centre of banana advertising, and show how colonialism linked with Fascism's dreams of stronger and more numerous Italian bodies. New autarkic

foods, like bananas, connected the regime's imperial and eugenic projects, by promising that this digestible, high-calorie fruit could fortify the next generation of Italians. *L'Autarchia Alimentare* and RAMB commissioned articles by doctors and scientists with a eugenic bent, like Giuseppe Fabriani, head of the National Biology Institute, to write articles lauding the nutritive benefits of bananas for the next generation of young Italians.⁷⁴ In an article featuring an interview with S. E. Martino Mutinelli, the Secretary General of the Colonies and the General Director of Opera Nazionale per la Protezione della Maternità e Infanzia (ONMI), we see the connections made between what the Fascist regime deemed to be the most child-friendly foodstuffs – milk, sugar, and grains – that were lacking in Italy, and the



Figure 10. Photograph of a young boy eating a banana at an ONMI childcare centre. Fantasio Azzardita, *L'Autarchia Alimentare* (1939). Interview with S. E. Martino Mutinelli, pp. 7–9.

hope for the colonies to solve these problems with bananas. Photographs show ONMI childcare centres during snack time, with an endless parade of children chomping on bananas (Figure 10).

If, as it seems, there will be further development in the lands of the Empire of cultures and industries related to sugar, a precious element for children, there will be a great advantage also in this food sector. [...] I will only mention the nutritional importance of bananas, the wealth of the Empire and a food of primary importance for children. Even at the cost of repeating well-known things, I would like to underline the nutritional value of bananas for the health and strength of our new generations. For the readers of your magazine, I do not need many words to say about the extraordinary and highly effective vitamin content and substances particularly suitable for children in bananas.⁷⁵

Mutinelli went on to emphasise that, given its youthful clientele, ONMI centres needed to stock a lot of milk. This was difficult to do. As such, he turned from human and animal milks to the industrial production of vegetable and grain-based milks, 'composed of substances from our soil', like legumes, eggs, and fruits – like bananas.⁷⁶ It is a set of propagandistic points, aiming to popularise bananas.⁷⁷

To spread banana-milk blends among Italian children, savvy marketers added chocolate. The banana-milk-chocolate trend took off. Soon, drinks for children became desserts for all. A 1930s product recipe pamphlet (Figure 11) produced by the Milanese company *Delizia* described how this sugary mix of powdered cocoa and dried banana pulp could be turned into a variety of healthy and delicious desserts: just add milk! 'With half a liter of milk, tasty puddings, or cold crèmes or ice creams of great nutritional efficacy are made for the richness of vitamins,



Figure 11. Recipe pamphlet, interior page. *Delizia*. C. Lovensio and Sons. Milan, c. 1930s. Wolfsonian.

phosphates and anti-fungal azote materials. It is available for sale plain or cocoa'.⁷⁸ The product's rectangular packaging broadcast the banana on the side of the box. Although the product inside was a white powder, the box reminded consumers that bananas, that highly nutritious ingredient, composed the drink mix. For cooks at home, magazines like *La Cucina Italiana* added bananas to desserts like 'Bavarese di mele e banane' and 'Banane alla crema'. In these recipes, bananas were sublimated into a sweet sugary mass, losing their characteristic yellow colour and oblong shape. It is here that they are quite literally absorbed into pre-existing Italian recipes.⁷⁹ On the tabletop, bananas could be presented as part of Italian cuisine in a way that pineapples and coconuts – tropical fruits that held their physical form after baking – could not.

The banana–milk–chocolate combination spawned new industrial food products, whose advertising frequently framed bananas in the colonial and racial terms of the Fascist empire. This flavour trinity was widely adopted. In Italy, Bananacacao, Musarina, Bananose, and Bananina dry drink mixes followed the strategies used by their French antecedent, Banania.⁸⁰ These products anchored bananas – along with advertising tropes that cast Africans as primitive and exotic – in Italian cuisine and culture. Around this time, the Perugina chocolate company introduced banana as an ingredient in their chocolates. Federico Seneca created a racist advertising campaign featuring a naked, emaciated black man, grinning as he hugs a banana, the bright yellow fruit drawn to match the size of his entire body (Figure 12). Hierarchical scale renders the banana as large as the man, visually implying that both hold equal value. As noted by Cristina Lombardi-Diop, Gaia Giuliani, and Karen Pinkus, Fascist period advertisements visually conflated colonial people and goods.⁸¹ The economics of alimentary autarky, and Fascism's need to seek alternate, supplementary carbohydrates in the empire, informed these messages. As Filippo Bottazzi framed the issue in his widely cited book heralding the nutritional benefits of bananas, 'By increasing the production of the precious fruit in our colonies in East Africa [...] to the level it has reached in other European countries, thus achieving considerable savings of cereal'.⁸² By setting the promotion of bananas against the Battle for Grain, Bottazzi connected two regime projects (autarky and empire) and implied that colonial fruits, like Somali bananas, could help to solve domestic problems of Italian cereal supply. Luigi Fiorese echoed Bottazzi's sentiment in *L'Autarchia Alimentare*, emphasising the success of the colonial Italian banana schemes on the world market, 'Our country [...] entered last in the number of banana producing and consuming nations, but how far and how much progress in a short time!'⁸³

This clarifies the references and stakes of the 'Banana: Bread of the Gods' campaign. It celebrated bananas for their 'very high percentage of sugar and hydrocarbons', another word for ethylene, the chemical catalyst for RAMB's artificial ripening process.⁸⁴ In the May 1934 advertisement (Figure 12), the viewer sees a pen-and-ink drawing of a dockside colonnaded building. Here a steamship floats, ready to carry bananas to Italy.⁸⁵ The accompanying text emphasises refrigeration technology and maritime infrastructure, and explains how they benefit Italian consumers, 'During the ripening process, the starchy substances of the banana are transformed into sugar, merging with the other nutrients in order to form the most perfect food that the palate can taste and that the stomach assimilates with the utmost ease and with the best results'.⁸⁶ Put simply, the

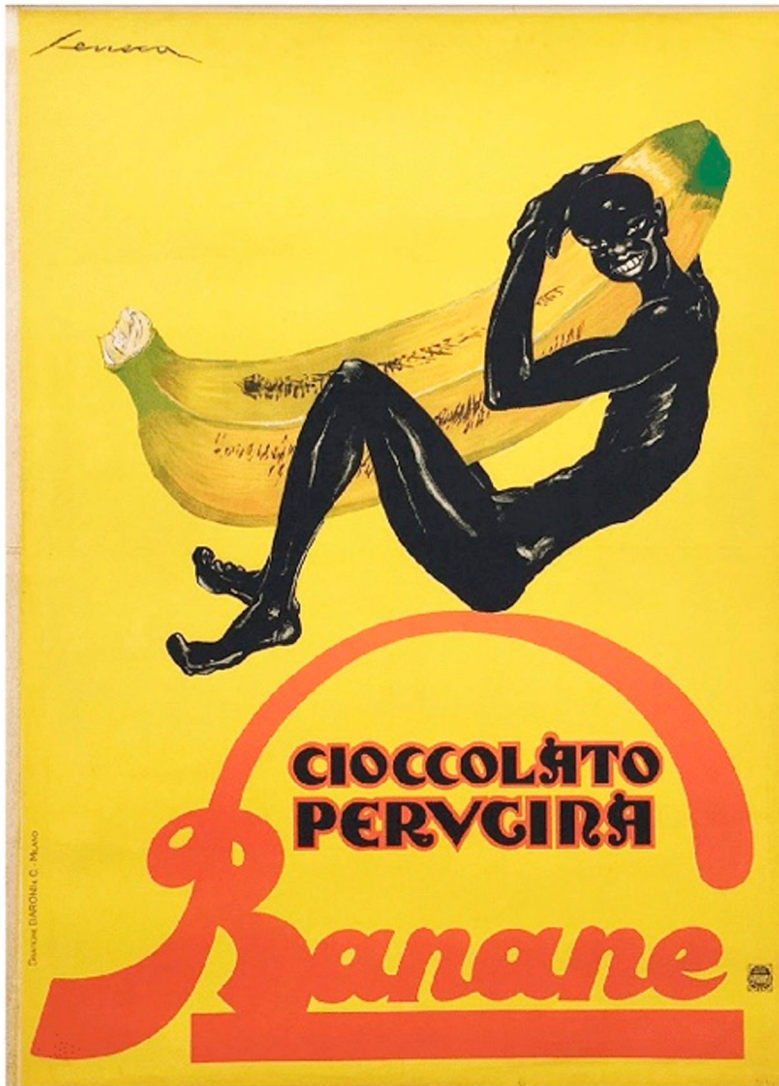


Figure 12. Bananas Chocolate advertisement. Designed by Federico Seneca for Perugina Chocolates. 1931.

advertisement argues that refrigerated Italian ships improve the taste and nutrition of Somali fruit. The June 1934 ad expands on this message, asserting that the banana stands 'at the first place in the scale of the most nutritious foods, easily assimilated and [with] beneficial effects on the intestine both of the small, the young and the old, the sick and healthy'. This text explains the science of banana ripening to Italian consumers to persuade them of this new fruit's delicious flavour and high nutritional value. In other words, it echoes the pedagogical vein of the Luce newsreels and regime propaganda, but applies it to the realm of new technologies that benefitted Italian consumers. It was a difference they could taste.

The Banana Scandal and Legacies of the RAMB Monopoly

Italian colonial rule officially came to an end in the spring of 1941, when the British military administration took control of Italian Somaliland. But an Italian presence remained in Somalia, anchored in the plantations. Vegetation provided cover for Italian guerrilla warfare against the British in the early years of the administration. Less than a decade later, Somalia returned in part to Italian rule in 1950, when the United Nations Trusteeship placed the Trust Territory of Somalia under Italian administration.⁸⁷ On 1 July 1960, the Somali Republic united the Trust Territory of Somalia and the former British Somaliland protectorate, gaining independence.⁸⁸ From 1941 through the early 1960s, the Fascist colonial government's monopoly continued to operate as a commercial entity. The old RAMB monopoly was renamed in 1945, becoming the Azienda Monopolio Banane (AMB). By 1949, 75,000 quintals of bananas were being exported each year. Despite official changes in governance, the Italian Banana Monopoly Company continued to grant exclusive Somali land concessions to Italian companies in the fruit sector.⁸⁹

Somali independence overlapped with massive shifts in the global fruit trade. Through the 1950s, hardy *Gros Michel* banana cultivars dominated. Thanks to their thick, bruise-resistant peels, bunches of 'Big Mikes' could be cut from trees and tossed into ship holds. But in 1958, Panama Disease wilted entire plantations, bringing an end to the cultivar's global hold on the trade. Its delicious flavour made the *Cavendish* cultivar the new top banana, but change came at a cost. *Cavendish* bananas had thinner peels and bruised more easily, requiring the fruit trade to adopt boxing and bagging technologies for delicate handling. More packaging meant the opportunity to brand bananas through tracking technologies, with numerical codes that identified banana origin, harvest, destination, and price. Soon, stickers with bar codes were stuck to every supermarket bunch. Somali cultivars merged the *Gros Michel* and *Cavendish* models. Of medium hardness, they could travel by the bunch or by the box, and their flavour was excellent: 'sweet, slightly sour, creamy vanilla', as described an agricultural engineer.⁹⁰

The so-called 'Banana Scandal' finally brought the Banana Monopoly Company to an end. In 1963, Assobanane concessioners affiliated with the Christian Democrats (DC) engaged in a form of insider trading, sharing the secret values of the different fees charged with the AMB president, Franco Bartoli Avveduti.⁹¹ The financial police apprehended Avveduti in Rome, and Alessandro Lenzi, his secretary, along with a number of banana merchants from Italian port cities and market hubs, and marched them all to the Regina Coeli prison.⁹² The courts prosecuted according to seniority, with ten years of prison time requested for RAMB executives, and five years for the 124 local dealers arraigned.⁹³ Behind the scenes, Prime Minister Giulio Andreotti pulled strings to aid the DC fruit affiliates.⁹⁴ When the judge's gavel banged, the banana traders walked free. Still, RAMB was officially abolished.

After the fall of the Banana Monopoly, the Somali banana trade became enmeshed in yet another despotic government, whose leader received military training from the Italian colonial regime. In 1969, Somali general Mohamed Siad Barre seized power in a military coup. He nationalised the Shabelle River valley banana plantations under the National Banana Board, itself under the aegis of the Somali Democratic Republic, a one-party state that espoused scientific socialism, nationalisation, and modernisation. Biographers like Mohammed Ibrahim Shire have connected the

brutality of Siad Barre's regime with his coming of age under the Italian Fascist colonial rule.⁹⁵ With economic and agricultural goals that evoked more continuities than breaks from the Italian dictatorship in the empire, working conditions on the banana plantations remained practically the same from the 1930s to the early 1970s.⁹⁶ Poor management and rising costs were coupled with declining prices for bananas on the global market. Together these factors pushed production down, decreasing exports during the socialist era.⁹⁷ In the 1980s, a series of debt crises pushed the Somali banana trade into the International Monetary Fund–World Bank-mandated Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs), unlocking the national markets.⁹⁸ With liberalisation came privatisation. The National Banana Board joined with the Italian firm De Nadai, forming a public–private partnership with the Somali government under the brand name Somalita. Through the 1980s, Somalita, and the Somali banana trade, boomed, with international credit and machinery, before crashing with the civil war.⁹⁹ In other words, Italian commercial presence in Somalia far post-dated the colonial empire.

Today, bananas are far more culturally and economically central to Somali cuisine and agriculture than Italian cuisine and culture. In Somali cuisine, bananas are often served with lunch and dinner, to be sliced up and mixed into savoury dishes like rice and pasta. But they are also part of Italian cuisine, particularly in sweet desserts that make use of the banana–milk–chocolate combination of the 1930s. In Italian culture beyond the kitchen, bananas continue to be potent and contested symbols, often as racist shorthand for Africanness.¹⁰⁰ In 2014, soccer fans hurled bananas onto the field. Fruit-based attacks like these are widespread across public arenas ranging from sports to politics. In July 2013, a Lega Nord voter in the audience hurled a stalk of bananas at the Democrat Minister of the Interior, Cécile Kyenge (originally of the Democratic Republic of Congo) during a political rally in Cervia.¹⁰¹ She took to Twitter, arguing that 'The courage and optimism to change institutions has to come from the bottom up'.¹⁰² Lega politicians ignored the call, and in 2018 sued Kyenge for defamation, based on her characterisation of La Lega as racist. In September 2019, Italian sports commentator Luciano Passirani 'complimented' Inter Milan forward Romelu Lukaku by exclaiming that he could only be stopped by giving him bananas to eat.¹⁰³ Part of the persistence of the banana as negative denotation for Africanness derives from the sediment of the old RAMB campaigns, put into place under Italian Fascism. The extensive visualisation of the banana trade in newsreels and food advertising, its spread and success, persists into the present day. In her much-cited article, Ruth Ben-Ghiat asked, 'Why are there still so many Fascist monuments standing in Italy?'.¹⁰⁴ In some ways, the persistence of the conflation between bananas and Africanness in Italian culture might be considered a visual corollary to this political and architectural problem. This legacy is transnational, found not only in Italian and Somali culture, but also in Somali agriculture.

The Italian Banana Monopoly had a huge impact on the Somali ecosystem: deforesting jungle, damming rivers, paving roads, and erecting port infrastructure that brought Italian colonial power to bear on previously protected forests, paths, and rivers. Colonial agronomers did not just invent new ways of planting bananas; they introduced completely different agricultural and chemical technologies – new cultivars to the landscape, and artificial means to control their taste, colour, and texture. All of these changes reconfigured Somali bananas towards the aesthetic

tastes of European markets. They also created a new market. In mainland Fascist Italy, there was no such thing as a fruit industry. The banana plantations of colonial Somalia were Italy's first. The regime treated them as a *tabula rasa*, blank slates for new approaches to farming food. Fascist Italy's wildest experiments with banana biology and chemistry occurred in the empire, not in Italy. Interoceanic refrigeration, ethylene chambers, numerical tracking: none of these environmental technologies existed before bananas.

Notes

1. For the first two decades of the twentieth century, American, British, French, German, Argentine and Japanese consumers gobbled up the majority of the global banana crop. Still, bananas were not wholly unknown in Italy. Until 1933, Italy annually imported 7000 quintals of bananas from the Canary Islands. Enrico Cimbelli, 'La Visita del Duce', in *L'Autarchia Alimentare* 1 (1938), pp. 21–24.
2. 'Banana', *L'Etimologico minore Zanichelli*, ed. by Manlio Cortelazzo and Michele A. Cortelazzo (Bologna: Zanichelli, 2004), p. 125.
3. Tiago Saraiva, *Fascist Pigs: Technoscientific Organisms and the History of Fascism* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016).
4. Anne Minard, 'Is That a Banana in Your Water?' *National Geographic*, 11 March 2011, <<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/science/article/110311-water-pollution-lead-heavy-metal-banana-peel-innovation/>> [accessed 31 January 2023].
5. Figure from Mohamood Abdi Noor, cited by Isma'il Kushkush, 'After Barren Years in Somalia, Signs of Growth by the Bunch', *The New York Times*, 13 December 2014, <<https://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/14/world/after-barren-years-in-somalia-signs-of-growth-in-bananas.html/>> [accessed 31 January 2023].
6. Wyatt Constantine, 'Sustainable Development and Commodity Production? A Critical Look at the Role of the Banana Trade in Somalia', *SAIS Perspectives*, 17 May 2021 <<http://www.saisperspectives.com/2021-issue/2021/5/17/sustainable-development-and-commodity-production-a-critical-look-at-the-role-of-the-banana-trade-in-somalia/>> [accessed 31 January 2023].
7. Historian Eric Hobsbawm coined the notion of the 'long nineteenth century' to address the period from 1789 to 1914. He divided this period into three distinct ages: revolution, capital, and empire.
8. Robert O. Paxton, 'The Five Stages of Fascism', *The Journal of Modern History* 70.1 (1998), pp. 1–23; Ruth Ben-Ghiat, 'Why Are so Many Fascist Monuments Still Standing in Italy?' *The New Yorker*, 5 October 2017, <<https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/why-are-so-many-fascist-monuments-still-standing-in-italy/>> [accessed 31 January 2023].
9. Novelist William Sydney Porter, pen name O. Henry, wrote *Of Cabbages and Kings*, a short story collection based on Honduras' banana plantations. The Republic of Anchuria provided a fictitious venue to describe the real-life tragedy of foreign nations that agreed to the terms set by American fruit companies. He termed the territory 'a banana republic'. See William Sydney Porter [pseudonym: O. Henry], *Of Cabbages and Kings* (New York: A.L. Burt, 1910).
10. In reflection of the centrality of this institute to Fascist agricultural projects in the colonies, this article draws extensively from the Istituto Agronomico per l'Oltremare (IAO) archive in Florence, Italy.
11. Armando Maugini, 'Introduzione', in *La bananicoltura della Somalia*, Giuseppe Bocchetti (Florence: IAO, 1954).
12. Lee Cassanelli, 'The End of Slavery and the "Problem" of Farm Labor in Colonial Somalia', in *Proceedings of the Third International Congress of Somali Studies*, ed. by A. Puglielli (Rome: Il Pensiero Scientifico Editore, 1988), pp. 269–82.

13. As Cassanelli notes, 'Only in the 1920s was an attempt made to implement the *compartecipazione* model, and this was the famous estate of the Società Agricola ItaloSomala (SAIS) at Jowhar', p. 276. By 1934, more than 2600 Somali families lived on the SAIS agricultural scheme.
14. Romolo Onor, *La Somalia italiana: Esame critico dei problemi di economia rurale e di politica economica della colonia* (Turin: Fratelli Bocca, 1925), cited in Cassanelli, p. 275.
15. 'Accordo del Governatore della Somalia Giacomo De Martino con L'Istituto Agricolo Coloniale Italiano di Firenze per la preparazione del personale agrario e l'opera di assistenza tecnica', 1912 (IAO, b. 'Somalia', f. 2314).
16. R.D. 8 June 1911, n. 820, cited in *La bananicoltura della Somalia*, p. 36.
17. Ernesto Cucinotta, 'Nuovi Aspetti della Politica Coloniale Italiana', *Rivista Coloniale* (Rome: Istituto Coloniale Italiano, January–February 1926), pp. 1–27.
18. Cassanelli, p. 276.
19. Giuseppe Scassellati-Sforzolini, 'La S.A.I.S. in Somalia', *L'Agricola Coloniale*. N. 4-5, April-May 1926.
20. Ibid.
21. Onor cited in Cassanelli, p. 275.
22. Scassellati-Sforzolini, pp. 121–91.
23. Giuseppe Rapetti, 'Promemoria: Condizioni mano d'opera colonica', Centro di Documentazione dell'Istituto Agronomico (CDI) n. 1882, 1934, cited in Cassanelli, p. 277.
24. Unlike bananas, cotton and sugar required extensive infrastructural investment for processing. R.D. 8 June 1911, n. 820, cited in *La bananicoltura della Somalia*, p. 36.
25. On *kocho* in East African foodways contextualised within Italian Fascist agricultural projects, see Valentina Peveri, *L'Albero delle donne* (Città di Castello: Emil, 2012), p. 33.
26. On banana corms and pseudostems in plantation agriculture, see Michael Pillay, George Ude, and Chittaranjan Kole, *Genetics, Genomics and Breeding of Bananas* (Enfield: Science Publishers, 2012).
27. Mario Pavirani, Capo Ufficio Agrario, 'Centro di raccolta banana in Somalia', 1936 memo to Direzione di Colonizzazione, Mogadishu (IAO, b. 'Somalia', f. 1615).
28. *La bananicoltura della Somalia*.
29. Ivi, pp. 12–13.
30. 'Documenti: La Colonizzazione Agricola dell'Impero', in *L'Autarchia Alimentare*, pp. 14–16.
31. Ibid.
32. For description of the hut tax, see Cassanelli, p. 276.
33. A memo sent from colonial agriculturalist Enrico Bartolozzi in Florence, Italy to Mario Pavirani in Mogadishu, Somalia sets the figures as follows: Genale, 126,500 quintals, Giuba 19,000, SAIS 9,600, Havai 3,750, and Afgoi 1,150. Enrico Bartolozzi, 'Movimento bananiero dalla Somalia', 1933 (IAO, b. Somalia. f. 1107).
34. Ernesto Milanese, *La società agricola Italo-Somala e l'Opera del Duca degli Abruzzi in Somalia tra 1920 e 1933* (Genoa: Miscellanea di storia delle esplorazioni XXIV, 1999), pp. 239, 247.
35. Ibid.
36. Italians had also attempted to grow bananas in Sicily and Libya, but without much success. See Enrico Cibelli, *La banana e il traffico bananiero italiano* (Genoa: G. Lang, 1938).
37. 'L'uva costa in mercato intorno alle dieci lire al chilo, le mele e le pere la metà. Prezzi che non favoriscono certo il largo consumo. Il frutto più economico è sempre la banana'. Enrico Cibelli, 'I nuovi compiti del monopolio statale bananiero', in *L'Autarchia Alimentare*, p. 43.
38. Boats were named for banana agriculturalists and colonial promoters like Vittorio Bottego and Antonio Cecchi. See Bartolozzi, 'Movimento bananiero dalla Somalia'.
39. Early experimentation in fruit preservation included on-sight chemical baths in 'soluzione saponosa di petrolio al 21% di latte anti-coccidica' to get the bananas from Somalia to Italy without calcium problems. Mario Pavirani, 'Centri di raccolta banana', Letter sent from Florence, Italy to Direzione di Colonizzazione, Mogadishu, Somalia, 1936, p. 2 (IAO, b. Somalia. f. 1615).

40. Pavirani, 'Centri di raccolta banana': 'I trasporti della frutta al centro sono stati fatti in un primo tempo appoggiando i caschi nudi su un piano di cuscini nel fondo del camion, ora invece si è perfezionata tale operazione caricando sul camion le stesse gerle con cui si trasportano i caschi tagliati ... Lo scarto per ammaccature si è così ridotto a meno di 5%'.
41. 'Ecco la banana Somala! Frutto squisito e nutriente!'.
42. On the idea of Italianness in the empire, see Francesco Cassata, *Building the New Man* (New York: CEU Press, 2011), pp. 246–63.
43. Gino Boccasile, Ramazzotti advertisement, 1936. For analysis see Gaia Giuliani and Cristina Lombardi-Diop, *Bianco e Nero* (Florence: Le Monnier, 2013).
44. Diana Garvin, 'Black Markets', *Journal of Modern European History*, 19 (2021), pp. 103–24.
45. Employing a female voiceover perhaps aimed to address Italian women as the family shoppers, establishing an Italian market for Somali bananas.
46. For example, see Luce photographs in *Somalia* (Florence: Istituto Agricolo Coloniale, 1946).
47. Although understanding banana cultivation might seem unnecessary for becoming a banana consumer, the Fascist regime viewed colonial production and consumption as connected. Propaganda to persuade Italians of the desirability of colonial foods aimed to enhance the popularity of the regime's push for the Italian empire in East Africa.
48. See, for example, Enrico Cibelli, 'I nuovi compiti del monopolio statale bananiero', in *L'Autarchia Alimentare*, pp. 41–46 and 'Per L'autarchia alimentare', in *L'Autarchia Alimentare*, pp. 3–6; Ferruccio Lantini, 'Problemi della autarchia alimentare', in *L'Autarchia Alimentare*, pp. 7–8.
49. Emanuela Scarpellini, *Material Nation: A Consumer's History of Modern Italy*, trans. Daphne Hughes and Andrew Newton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 90.
50. Cibelli, 'I nuovi compiti', pp. 41–46. Also from Cibelli, see 'La Visita del Duce', pp. 21–24, 'Per L'autarchia alimentare', pp. 3–6.
51. Established in 1939 to promote RAMB's activities, *L'Autarchia alimentare: Rassegna dei contributi alimentari dell'impero* published monthly editions heralding Italian innovations to agriculture and technology in the colonies. Among the members of the periodical's sponsoring committee (Comitato Patrocinatore) were powerful figures in Italian Fascist colonial government: Generale Attilio Terruzzi, Sottosegretario di Stato per l'Africa Italiana, Marasciallo d'Italia Emilio De Bono, and Marasciallo d'Italia Rodolfo Graziani.
52. Enrico Bartolozzi, 'Concessioni della Somalia', sent from Florence, Italy to Mario Pavirani in Mogadishu, Somalia, 1936 (IAO, b. Somalia, f. 832).
53. *La bananicoltura della Somalia*, Bocchetti, p. 14.
54. Jumps occurred in 1928 and 1932, but otherwise land accumulation occurred at a steady rate. The statistics are as follows, with the first number (following the year) referring to total annual hectares of Italian banana plantations in Somali, and the second referring to total annual quintals of Somali bananas imported to Italy: 1926 – 45 – 0; 1927 – 53 – 45; 1928 – 253 – 450; 1929 – 376 – 2115; 1930 – 584 – 7176; 1931 – 1235 – 16,884; 1932 – 2130 – 51,427; 1933 – 2644 – 117,970; 1934 – 3834 – 128,922; 1935 – 3997 – 142,561; 1936 – 3976 – 181,957; 1937 – 4500 – 226,525. Statistics in Luigi Fiorelli, 'Il commercio mondiale delle banane', in *L'Autarchia Alimentare*, p. 38.
55. Cibelli, 'Per L'autarchia alimentare'. pp. 3–6.
56. Cibelli, 'La Visita del Duce', pp. 21–24.
57. Cibelli, 'I nuovi compiti', pp. 41–46.
58. Cibelli, 'Per L'autarchia alimentare', pp. 3–6.
59. 'Accresciuto incremento nel commercio delle banane' and 'Dati relativi alla coltivazione ed esportazione delle banane dalla Somalia', 1935. For a retrospective analysis of this change, see 'Esportazione delle banane dalla Somalia', 1949 (IAO, b. 'Somalia', f. 1107).
60. The original text reads, 'poichè questo prodotto caratteristico ed apprezzato delle nostre Colonie deve diventare di consumo popolarissimo a mano a mano che se ne sviluppa la produzione', cited in Cibelli, 'La Visita del Duce', p. 24.
61. As Cibelli, 'I nuovi compiti', p. 42, put it, 'un monopolio a carattere sociale'.

62. As Lauren Janes notes, French colonial banana trade increase during the 1930s was in part due to the Great Depression, which 'increased interdependence between France and colonies', cited in Lauren Janes, *Colonial Food in Interwar Paris* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2016), p. 9.
63. C. Rivière, 'L'entremets de cuisine', *Le Cordon bleu*, 919 (Paris, 1935), pp. 332–333, cited in Janes.
64. For French figures, see *Conférence économique de la France métropolitaine et d'outre-mer*, 1.89, cited in Janes. For Italian figures, see Cibelli, 'I nuovi compiti', 41–46.
65. Cibelli, pp. 41–46.
66. Ibid.
67. Dan Koeppel, *Banana: The Fate of the Fruit that Changed the World* (New York: Hudson Street Press, 2008).
68. Bruce Scott and Bill Crawford, *Cerealizing America: the Unsweetened Story of American Breakfast Cereal* (Boston, MA: Faber and Faber, 1995).
69. Cibelli, 'Per L'autarkia alimentare', pp. 3–6.
70. Columnists often repeated the descriptions from Filippo Bottazzi, *Le banane frutto di alto valore alimentare* (Ministero delle Colonie R. Azienda Monopolio Banane). For example, see 'Dolci Casalinghi', *La Cucina Italiana* (Milan, October 1937), p. 31.
71. Bottazzi supported his much-cited arguments for bananas as the ideal food for weak stomachs using nutritional tables.
72. 'La farina di banane', 1934 (IAO, b. 'Somalia', f. 1107).
73. After all, the text noted, the woodcutters of Ancient Greece had been able to survive on 'a few dates and bananas'. Ave Longhi, 'Il dovere di ogni madre', in *La Cucina Italiana* (Milan, September 1939), p. 259.
74. Giuseppe Fabriani, 'Le banana della Somalia', in *L'Autarchia Alimentare*, p. 19.
75. 'Se, come pare, vi sarà un ulteriore sviluppo nelle terre dell'Impero delle culture e delle industrie relative allo zucchero, elemento prezioso per l'infanzia, ci sarà da avvantaggiarsi moltissimo anche in questo settore dell'alimentazione [...] accennerò soltanto all'importanza alimentare della banana, ricchezza dello Impero ed alimento di primaria importanza per l'infanzia. Anche a costo di ripetere cose notissime, mi preme sottolineare, agli effetti della salute e della forza delle nostre nuove generazioni, il valore nutritivo della banana. Non ho bisogno, per i lettori della vostra rivista, di molte parole per dire dello straordinario ed efficacissimo contenuto vitaminico e di sostanze particolarmente adatte all'infanzia della banana'. Fantasio Azzardita, Interview with S.E. Martino Mutinelli, in *L'Autarchia Alimentare*, pp. 7–9.
76. 'composte di sostanze del nostro suolo', Azzardita, pp. 8–9. Having read Bottazzi's work, Mutinelli concludes that Somali bananas, dried into flour blended with powdered milk, might counterbalance Italy's food shortages.
77. Despite its ring of a pen name, Fantasio Azzardita appears on the January 1939 *L'Autarchia Alimentare* masthead as the Head of the Editorial Board and an ONMI affiliate.
78. 'Composizione zuccherata a base di polpa di banana essicata e ridotta in polvere. Con mezzo litro di latte si confezionano gustosi budini, o crème fredde o gelati di grandissima efficacia nutritiva per la ricchezza di vitamine, di fosfati e di materie azotate. Si trova in vendita semplice o al cacao'. Recipe Pamphlet, interior page. Delizia. C. Lovensio and Sonsm Milan, c. 1930s (Wolfsonian Museum, Miami, Florida).
79. 'Dolci Casalinghi', *La Cucina Italiana*, p. 31.
80. The French product Banania predates the Italian versions of this chocolate-banana drink. Since World War I, advertising featured a Senegalese infantry soldier enjoying the drink. Theorist Frantz Fanon cites the Banania Senegalese tirailleur as an example of how advertising can frame colonised people as 'an object in the midst of other objects'. See *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (London: Pluto Press, 1986), p. 109.
81. Gaia Giuliani and Cristina Lombardi-Diop feature this image on the cover of *Bianco e Nero* (Florence: Le Monnier, 2013), Karen Pinkus, *Bodily Regimes* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

82. 'Acrescendo la produzione del prezioso frutto nelle nostre colonie dell'Africa Orientale [...] a quel livello che ha raggiunto negli altri paesi d'Europa, realizzando così un risparmio non indifferente di cereale'. Bottazzi. *Le banane frutto di alto valore alimentare*. For citation of Bottazzi, see Azzardita, pp. 7–9.
83. 'Il nostro paese [...] è entrato per ultimo nel numero delle nazioni produttrici e consumatrici di banana, ma quanta strada e quanti progressi in poco tempo!' in Fiorelli, p. 37.
84. Bananas are lauded for their 'percentuale altissima di zucchero e di idrocarburi' putting them 'al primo posto nella scala dei cibi più nutrienti, facilmente assimilate e di benefici effetti sull'intestino sia dei piccolo, sia dei giovani che dei vecchi, sia dei ammalati che dei sani'. See [Figure 1](#), 'Banana pane degli dei' advertisement, *La Cucina Italiana* (Milan, June 1934), p. 30.
85. See 'Banana pane degli dei' advertisement, *La Cucina Italiana* (Milan, May 1934), p. 28.
86. 'Nel processo di maturazione le sostanze amidacee della banana si trasformano in zucchero fondendosi con le altre materie nutritive in modo da formare l'alimento più perfetto che il palate possa gustare e che lo stomaco assimila con la massima facilità e coi migliori risultati'.
87. 'Transfer to Italy of Provisional Somalia Administration', 1950 (IAO, b. 'Somalia', f. 1107).
88. For the military history of the Italian and British administrations, see Robert Hess, *Italian Colonialism in Somalia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966).
89. 'Esportazione delle banane dalla Somalia', 1949 (IAO, b. 'Somalia', f. 1107).
90. Agricultural engineer Edward Baars, cited in Kushkush.
91. 'E' una tradizione l'appalto truccato al Monopolio banane: Si comincia a far luce su uno dei 'carrozzone' della DC', *L'Unità*, 23 May 1963, p. 3.
92. Notable arrests included Angelo Tonini (Naples), Angelo Panattoni (Lucca), Cherubino Pagni (Rome), Diego Sartori (Padua), Antonio Bignami (Genoa), Bartolo Saccà (Messina).
93. Ibid.
94. 'Dopo l'arresto del Presidente dell'Azienda monopolio', *La Stampa* (Turin: GEDI, 21 May 1963), p. 10.
95. Fluent in Italian, Barre fought in the southern theater of the Italian conquest of Ethiopia in 1936. See Mohammed Ibrahim Shire, *Somali President Mohammed Siad Barre* (London: Cirfe, 2011).
96. Remo Roncati, 'Aspetti e problem della bananacoltura somala e del commercio bananiero', *Africa*, 29.3 (1974).
97. Christian Webersik, 'Fighting for the Plenty: The Banana Trade in Southern Somalia', *Oxford Development Studies*, 33.1 (2005), pp. 81–97.
98. Constantine, 'Sustainable Development'.
99. 'Banana wars in Somalia', *Review of African Political Economy*, 22.64 (1995), pp. 274–75.
100. In 2019 at Miami's Art Basel festival, Italian artist Maurizio Cattelan taped a banana to a wall, titling the concept art *Comedian*. New York artist David Datuna plucked it from the wall and ate it, titling his stunt *Hungry Artist*. See Luke O'Neil, 'One banana, what could it cost? \$120,000 – if it's art', *The Guardian*, 6 December 2019, <<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2019/dec/06/maurizio-cattelan-banana-duct-tape-comedian-art-basel-miami/>> [accessed 31 January 2023].
101. Tom Kington, 'Italy's First Black Minister: I Had Bananas Thrown at Me But I'm Here to Stay', *The Guardian*, 7 September 2013 <<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2019/dec/06/maurizio-cattelan-banana-duct-tape-comedian-art-basel-miami/>> [accessed 31 January 2023].
102. Cécile Kyenge, 'Il coraggio e l'ottimismo per cambiare le cose deve soprattutto partire dalla base e arrivare alle istituzioni', Twitter, 26 July 2013 < <https://twitter.com/ckyenge/status/360867776463765504/>> [accessed 31 January 2023].
103. Marcus Christenson, 'Italian Football Pundit Sacked for Racist On-Air Remarks about Romelu Lukaku', *The Guardian*, 16 September 2019, <<https://www.theguardian.com/football/2019/sep/16/italian-pundit-sacked-saying-only-way-to-stop-lukaku-is-to-give-him-bananas/>> [accessed 31 January 2023].
104. Ben-Ghiat.