**Theme Labels**

**Distinguished Characters**

Wealthy Europeans, military leaders, and Ethiopian royalty are a few of the characters seen repeatedly in these photographs. From political meetings to formal dinner parties, Rikli documents the interactions and relationships of these distinguished characters to create a complex social narrative.

**Vacation and Leisure**

In Rikli’s time, Ethiopia was advertised as an exotic vacation spot, complete with water sports, horseback riding, and leisurely days on the beach. However, these activities were marketed exclusively to wealthy Europeans. Rikli’s photos capture Ethiopians as onlookers, not participants in these recreation activities.

**Exotic Ethiopia?**

Rikli took photos of scenes in Ethiopia that were strikingly dissimilar to life in Europe at the time in an effort to prove that Europe was culturally superior. Images of African animals such as lions and monkeys, as well as nude portraits of Ethiopian women were a departure from the accepted social standards of European life. Rikli’s photographs were intended to portray a world that Europeans could only imagine—a place that was wild, uncivilized and exotic.

**Culture Clash**

Though relatively brief, the second Italo-Abyssinian war left many scars on the Ethiopian landscape. Graphic images of Ethiopians casualties left in the streets of the devastated capital city of Addis-Ababa are a visual reminder of the violence that took place. Rikli’s presence as a colonial European is bolstered by photos that include Swastikas and other Nazi-related imagery.

**Casting the Characters and Scenes of Martin Rikli’s 1930s Ethiopian Photography**

In 1927, German cinematographer, author, and photographer, Martin Rikli, joined a research team traveling to East Africa to film a documentary. Over the next 15 years, he created a number of films for German cinema and in 1935, found himself in Ethiopia. There he began the work of documenting the Italian invasion of Ethiopia (Abyssinia). Later in life, Rikli was behind the creation of much Nazi propaganda before and during WWII.

During his time in Ethiopia, Rikli took more than 800 photographs, compiled here into three albums entitled "Abessinien 1935-1936”. A fourth album contains Rikli’s notes and descriptions of the photos. These albums serve as a valuable visual history of the second Italo-Abyssinian War.

The photographs in these albums depict a variety of people, places, and events as seen through the lens of Martin Rikli’s camera. While there are hundreds of unique photos in this collection, four major themes emerge to tell the story of 1930s Ethiopia.

You are invited and encouraged to draw your own conclusions about Martin Rikli and his photography collection. The people and events he chose to capture, and the way he often chose to frame them, send a very strong message about Ethiopia and its place in the world as a colonized nation during this tumultuous time in history.