

From Colston to Montanelli: public memory and counter-monuments in the era of Black Lives Matter

Angelica Pesarini

University of Toronto

Carla Panico

CES – University of Coimbra¹

ABSTRACT

During the protests that occurred in Bristol in June 2020, in the name of Black Lives Matter, the statue of the slave-owner Edward Colston was pulled down by protestors and thrown into the river Avon. A week later, in Milan, the statue of the journalist Indro Montanelli was spray-painted with the words “racist” and “rapist” due to his sexual relationship with an Eritrean child-bride he bought in the 1930s while fighting as a *camicia nera* (black shirt) for Mussolini. These two acts caused heated debates on both mainstream/traditional media and social media, producing that hybridisation of culture theorised by Henry Jenkins. As feminist scholars, we were directly involved in these debates as we publicly shared some critical reflections on the use of monuments in connection with race, gender and colonialism in Italy. Using collaborative autoethnographic approaches and thematic analysis, we discuss our own experiences within a wider investigation, concerning Italy and the UK, on the use of social media (Twitter and Facebook) as tools that shape specific forms of public memory at the expense of others. Yet, drawing from Linda Alcoff’s “epistemologies of ignorance” and Charles Mills’ “white ignorance,” we also highlight the importance of counter-memories and practices of decolonisation of public spaces in order to challenge hegemonic forms of white amnesia.

Keywords

colonialism, slavery, racism, public spaces, memory, decolonisation

Introduction

Bristol, UK, 7 June 2020

The statue of the British slave-trader and member of the British parliament Edward Colston is smeared, torn from its pedestal and thrown into the Avon River. Colston had been awarded of the statue in 1895 mainly as a result of his philanthropic works that benefitted the city, informally remembered as “the capital of the slave trade” (Krishan 2017). Colston’s heritage stems from his role in the slave trade and he invested a considerable part of his wealth in charitable and philanthropic actions for the city of Bristol.

Milan, Italy, 14 June 2020

The statue of the journalist Indro Montanelli is covered in red paint with the words “razzista” and “stupratore” (“racist” and “rapist”) written on its base. Indro Montanelli (1909-2001), who is

considered one of the most influential Italian journalists of the twentieth century (Mazzini 2002), took part in the fascist invasion of Ethiopia as a voluntary conscript. During his stay, from May 1935 till October 1936, 26-year-old Montanelli took as his ‘wife’ a 12-year-old Eritrean child named Destà, whom he had ‘bought’ from her father and who the journalist himself described as a “little docile animal” (Pesarini 2020a, 174). On several occasions, Montanelli justified his act claiming it was an African custom.

Both events occurred following the wave of protests in the United States and organised by the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement in reaction to the murder of George Floyd by the police officer Derek Chauvin on May 25, 2020. In the days after the murder, people marched in the streets across the globe expressing indignation and anger at the death which had been filmed live by 17-year-old Darnella Frazier. In the European context, such political actions have been transformed into claims relating to the anti-racist and anti-colonial struggles present in the various nations of the continent. Although inspired by the fights of racialised communities in the US, in Europe these acts have been resignified vis-a-vis different cultural and historical contexts, and therefore expressed and performed in specific and contingent ways (Hawthorne and Pesarini 2021). In this paper, we focus on some specific resignifications occurred in Italy and in the UK. To do so we will provide a thematic analysis of the media debates and the reactions on social media towards issues of slavery, colonialism, and actions performed on statues of historical figures involved in colonial and racist practices, in the United Kingdom and in Italy respectively. We have examined and compared the material on the events involving Colston and Montanelli produced by local and national mainstream media (MSM) in the UK (e.g., *The Guardian*, *The Independent*, BBC, *The Bristol Post*) and in Italy (e.g., *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, *Il Corriere della sera*, *La Repubblica*). We have also analysed the reactions of social media users (Twitter and Facebook) in response to the narrative of the events put forward by MSM, as well as alternative narratives provided by different voices on cultural and online platforms. Our work was theoretically underpinned by the “epistemologies of ignorance” developed by the intersectional feminist Linda Martin Alcoff, who considers ignorance not as a lack of knowledge but as a “substantive epistemic practice that differentiates the dominant group” (2007, 47). Moreover, the concept of “White ignorance” conceived by the philosopher Charles Wade Mills (2007) was useful to understand dynamics of race and power embedded in cognitive practices of remembrance. Drawing from Mills, we intended “white ignorance” as an epistemic racialized attitude towards knowledge production and memory able to produce situated collective ideas of memory. Mills defines it as ‘white’ since the selective exclusion of certain historical facts from collective memory is the result of centuries of white oppression and racial domination. As a consequence, only certain forms of knowledge and ways of remembering have been deemed as the valid ones. In opposition to hegemonic epistemologies, Mills advances the idea of “counter-memories,” considered as the memories

produced by non-dominant social groups and able to challenge hegemonic forms of collective memory.

As scholars and intersectional feminists, we were directly involved in this debate as we both shared our considerations at the time on politically engaged platforms (such as *Lavoro Culturale*, *Dinamopress*, *Radio Onda d'Urto*, *Fondazione Feltrinelli*). Angelica Pesarini is a Black Italian female sociologist and Assistant Professor, who lived in the UK for 10 years, whilst Carla Panico is a southern Italian white woman, historian by training, and PhD candidate in Portugal. Both our positionalities triggered an unexpectedly high number of reactions on social media. Although many appreciated our considerations, a significant number of white Italian male commentators infantilised, patronised, and in some cases, insulted us, devaluing our expertise and capabilities as scholars. Therefore, by using collaborative autoethnographic practices and self-reflexivity, we treated our own experiences as data to be explored and analysed (Chang et al. 2013). The analysis of our experiences in addition to the media debates reveal different perceptions of colonial history and structural racism embedded in patriarchal paradigms and the legacy of these phenomena in the media (Giuliani 2019). Furthermore, the actions performed on the two statues question the ways in which, both in Italy and the UK, the racial question and colonial heritage have been approached, represented, and discussed, with the colonial legacy still casting its shadow on contemporary cultural debates (Deplano and Pes 2014).

Research methods and data analysis

In order to analyse our own experiences as writers engaged with the debate on race, colonialism and the statues, and as researchers and scholars working on issues of race and gender in Italy, we explored the assets of the collaborative autoethnographic approach. Autoethnography is a research method that uses researchers' autobiographical experiences as data, in order to analyse and interpret certain cultural aspects and assumptions, located within specific social contexts (Ellis et al. 2011, 1; Chang 2008, 9; Reed-Danahay 1997, 9). The aim is not simply a retelling of someone's personal narratives for the sake of it; rather, the researcher's personal autobiography can be used and analysed in order to facilitate the understanding of specific cultural constructions (Ellis et al. 2011, 1-4). This may enhance new theorisations about the development of general processes and the ways in which culture and performance work together (Atkinson 1998). One of the key aspects of autoethnography is to recognise the researcher's influence on the research process by acknowledging subjectivity, emotions, and the feelings involved in the experiences analysed (Coffey 1999). Moreover, the emphasis on the personal helps the researcher to be reflexive and analytical of her own practices by acknowledging and reflecting on her own biases rather than erasing them (Scott 1998). In order to express and acknowledge the feelings involved in our experiences, and to

historically contextualise the latter, we also used “thick description” following Denzin’s interpretative interactionism (1989). Rather than simply describing the social actions we were involved in, thick description helped us to evoke “emotionality and self-feelings” and to historicise our experiences (Denzin 1989, 83). As Denzin explains, thick description “establishes the significance of an experience [...] the voices, feelings, actions, and meanings of interacting individuals are heard” (1989, 83).

Within the range of methodological approaches related to collaborative autoethnographic practices, we decided to adopt “duoethnography” (Norris and Sawyer 2012). Grounded in self-reflective and dialogical practices, duoethnography investigates social phenomena by situating the data within two (or more) researchers’ personal experiences. Through dialogue and “collaborative critique,” duoethnographers challenge and question “the meaning they give to social issues and epistemological constructs” (3). Following this approach, we reflected together and exchanged thoughts in relation to the shared common experience of publishing online critical considerations on issues of race and colonialism in June 2020. On June 6, Angelica Pesarini published an article on the blog *Il Lavoro Culturale* reflecting on the impacts of the death of George Floyd and BLM in Italy, while on June 11 Carla Panico shared on a 699 words Facebook post her critical considerations on the social and political use of monuments. Through written messages and online video calls, we compared and reflected on our personal narratives and analysed users’ responses adopting an intersectional framework. Intersectionality helped us to challenge the limits of the “single-issue” interpretation and to further understand how different social categories mutually shape and affect the formation of social identities (Crenshaw 1989). In this case, we analysed how issues of race, gender, identity, class, and age, among others, simultaneously affected our experiences and shaped the identities of social media users responding to our texts. In order to make sense of the comments considered as data, we decided to use thematic analysis. This technique is particularly useful to identify patterns and meaning within the data (Mills et al. 2010) by “drawing connections at a deeper level, where two fragments of text using different words can be seen to be related at the level of meaning or a common phenomenon” (Fugard and Potts 2019, 3). Our experiences were framed within the overall media debates on the two statues occurring in Italy at the time. Thus, we observed the use made of social media by professionals and intellectuals to express certain views on race, identity and ways of remembering. As research shows, on social media journalists, columnists, experts and commentators have been more open about their opinions in comparison to traditional media; and channels like Twitter have been used to filter news and information (Farhi 2009; Hermida 2010). These frictions between old and new media produce that hybridisation of culture as theorised by Henry Jenkins (2006) and useful here to debunk power dynamics within processes of knowledge and information production (Reed-Danahay 1997, 9).

From Colston to Montanelli: the “cognitive disfunction” of white oppression

The analysis of the events occurred on June 7 and June 14 in Bristol and Milan respectively, demonstrates the presence of different histories, different degrees of awareness and, therefore, a variety of reactions towards symbols of slavery and colonialism. Certainly, the development of ideas and application of democracy in the two countries affected the dynamics of the public sphere. While the UK has been a constitutional monarchy since 1688 with the English Parliament being convened for the first time in 1215, Italy can be considered as a ‘young’ Nation State, formed in 1871, whose colonial history played a crucial role in building national memory (Giuliani 2013, 2019; Deplano and Pes 2014). Furthermore, it is important to bear in mind that Italy has been characterised by a history of authoritarianism, culminating in the twenty years of the Fascist regime, which corresponds to the second colonial enterprise in Africa and ended only after WWII (Baratieri 2010).

The coincidental timing between the events in Bristol and Milan generated parallel debates, with occasional cross-references. In both cases, the MSM and social media played a fundamental role in creating a high number of contrasting reactions from their consumers, including not only scholars, journalists and activists, but also online users approaching these issues for the first time. Nevertheless, we noted some important differences in the characterisation of the two events.

A fundamental divergence between the two cases was how they were broadcast (or not) (Castells 2012). In the case of the statue of Colston in Bristol, the action of removing the statue was broadcast live by various national MSM channels, including BBC Radio Bristol, which shared several videos on its social network profile. The live demolition of the statue received about 8.5 million views on their Twitter feed and the media coverage provoked a plethora of live comments. The physical removal of the statue was followed by immediate digital consequences. The day after the event, in fact, the location of Colston's statue on Google maps was modified several times, as highlighted by users. While looking for the statue on the app, some noticed that it no longer appeared located in the square, but rather inside the river, and the nearby area was marked as “permanently closed” (Mustafa 2020), as it still appears in the present day. On Twitter and Facebook, the use of the two hashtags #blacklivesmatter (Scottie 2020) and #Rhodesmustfall also contributed to making the event go viral (Hall 2015; Rhoden-Paul 2015).

In Italy, the situation was quite different. The action against the statue of Montanelli took place around dawn by a small group of students with their faces covered who belong to the Milan-based student collective LUME (*Laboratorio Universitario Metropolitano, Rete Studenti Milano*). The action did not have a collective dimension nor was it followed by MSM, as in the case of Colston. The students claimed authorship by publishing a video documenting their action, using the song “The Revolution will not be Televised” by Gil Scott Heron. It was posted

on their Facebook page, and it reached only 26,200 views.² Nonetheless, the reaction of the Italian MSM was quite prominent and it happened to be strongly hegemonized by a handful of prominent voices of high-profile white Italian middle-aged male journalists and intellectuals working for national newspapers and television. It is important to notice that on previous occasions, they had previously self-identified as “sons of Montanelli” (Panico 2019) as he mentored them in their professions. These figures include the journalist and TV presenter Enrico Mentana, director of the national news program *TG La7* and of the online newspaper *Open*; journalist and essayist Beppe Severgnini, working for the national newspaper *Corriere della Sera*; and journalist, writer, opinion leader and editor of the independent journal *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, Marco Travaglio. As with their mentor, these intellectuals perceive themselves too as the entitled storytellers of their time, and firmly believe to be the holders of a certain historical ‘truth’ (Panico 2021). Moreover, due to their privileged access to MSM, they unequivocally defend Montanelli in their editorial pieces, columns, and TV programmes.

Yet, despite their high-power position, they occupy a fragile epistemological position due to what Alcoff defines as a “cognitive dysfunction” (2007, 48). Drawing from Mills’ *Racial Contract* (1997), this dysfunction is manifested through “an inverted epistemology,” an epistemology of ignorance, indeed, able to produce what Mills defines an “ironic” result. Namely, white people’s inability to understand “the world they themselves have made” (Mills 1997, 18 cited in Alcoff 2007, 48) by relegating and overlooking certain important aspects of the world to “a murky nether region” (Alcoff 2007, 48). Furthermore, Alcoff also highlights how subjects located in a position of cognitive dysfunction end up reinforcing their “inability to recognise themselves as oppressors,” a key feature of hegemonic groups (48). In light of this, we may notice how the so-called “Montanelli question” in the MSM deliberately overlooked issues of colonialism, heteropatriarchy and sexism in Italian history, as well as the debate on symbols in public spaces, by delegitimising those who defended the action on social media. Interestingly, on social media, the conversations took a different direction since many users and organisations sought to speak out against the narrative provided by the MSM, acknowledging the voices of anti-racist feminist activists and scholars.

Who is entitled to remember? “Memory management” in the time of social media

As feminist Italian scholars, we were directly involved in these debates from our own different disciplinary perspectives and positionalities. We noticed the influence of the MSM’s narrative on the general audience, and in particular on the reactions of some white Italian males who seemed to mirror the opinions of the male intellectuals above mentioned, delegitimizing our critical position as ignorant or irrational. These reactions fall within the paradigm of white ignorance, by which a group of “potential witnesses” is immediately discredited as being

epistemically suspect, and whose testimony is usually dismissed or never solicited to begin with (Mills 2007, 31).

On June 6, 2020, Pesarini published a piece on the online blog *Il Lavoro Culturale* (ILC), an online space created in 2011 by a group of Italian scholars and intellectuals whose aim is “to investigate the present through cultural and political analysis.”³ Pesarini’s article, titled “Issues of Privileges. Italy and its George Floyds” (2020b), featured a series of considerations on the impact of BLM in Italy and the numerous protests organised in the first weekend of June to support the movement. In her article, Pesarini asked why so many white Italians were protesting the murder of George Floyd, an African-American man killed on the other side of the ocean who had no connection with Italy, whereas a similar degree of empathy, indignation or anger was not shown for the death of the many Black men killed in Italy. The piece questioned performative anti-racism and pointed to a lack of awareness of the left’s own positionality and to the denial of racism in Italy.

The article gained traction on social media, and it was reposted 191 times by Facebook users using ILC’s Facebook page, and 167 times from Pesarini’s Facebook page, whose post providing a link to the article was acknowledged by 182 users through Facebook’s reaction feature. The majority of social media users who read and reposted the article on their social media pages appreciated the author’s reflections on performative anti-racism, the need for white Italians to position themselves and the acknowledgement of white privilege. Interestingly, the only eight users who expressed criticism of the article were all white Italian men, seemingly ranging from mid-twenties to mid-sixties. In their criticisms, these users pointed out Pesarini’s alleged lack of historical knowledge and her inappropriate focus on racism, believing that the death of George Floyd was an issue of class and not racism (O.P., male, and M.M., male). She was also deemed a racist (M.M., male). The issues that triggered the most heated responses by the eight males related to the mentioning of white privilege, which was seen as a form of “reverse racism” (Ansell 2013, 57). One user was outraged by the fact Pesarini argued in her piece that a white person will never be able to experience the effects of structural racism. He wrote: “Your claim is an insult to history and a new vulgar form of racial prejudice” (M.M., male).⁴ Another asked why the author, rather than adding her voice to the ones protesting in the squares, was instead singling herself out by mentioning race and questioning privilege, as if it were an “original sin” (M.B., male). A seemingly young male, G.S., wrote the longest set of comments, totalling 1537 words, explaining to Pesarini why her analysis was “poor” and “intellectually lazy” due to her “accusations” towards privileged, white, straight Italian men (never mentioned in the original article), and her alleged lack of historical knowledge. Therefore, he proceeded to inform Pesarini of the relevant historical events she omitted in her analysis, such as Spain’s and Portugal’s different colonisation processes in comparison to Italy, Bismarck and the Berlin conference, and Italy’s lack of resources and

tardive birth as a Nation-State. All these factors, according to this user, determined minimal Italian involvement in colonial matters and such an approach, he concluded, “may be [seen as] an approach with some foundations.”

In the aftermath of the attack on the statue of Montanelli, Carla Panico offered a brief reflection on Facebook on the social function of monuments, inviting the readers to not consider statues and monuments as the sole expression of a one-sided history (Carla Panico, Facebook post, 11 June 2020). Panico’s post was shared 633 times, received 280 comments and was acknowledged by 1429 users through Facebook’s reaction feature. Although the post was largely liked by users, it also generated a wave of indignation and digital harassment, with negative comments from some women and an overall majority of men questioning whether Panico was a professional historian. One user expressed feelings of disgust towards Panico’s reflections: “It disgusts me to think that a historian could write such a thing” (S.C., female, declaring to be an archaeologist). Another user, a man in his forties, affirmed that it worried him to think that “Those are the kind of historians of the future” and that he intended to collect “all the old history books which narrate the actions of all those supposed racists like Christopher Columbus” in order to save these figures from the “*damnatio memoriae* of the fanatics” (N.C., male, 40-45). Another commenter, G.B. (male, seemingly 50-60), affirmed that it was shocking that “this iconoclastic fury also affects those who define themselves as ‘historians’.” As a female user pointed out in her comment, “Randomly, almost all the people who are expressing negative reactions are men” (F.B, 20-30). This user then became a target of attacks herself. Due to the harassment Panico received on her Facebook’ profile and by private messages, she had to temporarily close her account.

The reactions of the users who judged our competences and abilities and felt entitled to claim ‘what’ and ‘how’ to remember, seem to reflect the position of the white male media professionals and intellectuals who dominated the debates in June 2020. Following Mills’ conceptualisations, the denial of certain crucial historical facts is made possible and perpetuated by what he defines as the “management of memory” (2007, 28). Collective and social memories not only provide the framework for individual memories but are also closely connected with systems of knowledge production. Thus, as Mills argues, social memory is learnt and inscribed in textbooks, and it is emphasized and made present in everyday life through ceremonies, national holidays, statues and monuments (29). The analysis of the debates on the two statues, in the UK and Italy, revealed different perceptions on the idea of memory and the use of history). It is important to highlight that memory, like identity, is not a fixed entity, but rather a representation of reality “embedded in complex class, gender and power relations that determine what is remembered (or forgotten), by whom, and for what end” (Gillis 1994, 3).

Thus, it is interesting to notice the different reactions of scholars in the UK and in Italy vis à vis the actions on Colston's statue. In the UK, since the eighties British historian and Bristol resident David Foot⁵ has been trying to challenge Colston's celebration and remembrance in Bristol (Cork 2018), while in relation to the use of statues as tools of memory and the celebration of Colston in the era of BLM, another historian, John Foot, aptly underlined the fluidity of history in contrast with the rigidity of statues and monuments:

That of 7 June 2020 is an historical event, not against history. Statues don't stay in the same place forever. They are continuously modified, attacked, changed, moved, knocked down and put back on their feet. Italy is full of places where monuments once stood, or where they still exist but have changed meaning. Sometimes the damage itself becomes part of history and memory. (2020)

In Italy, however, the hegemonic left-wing mainstream media framed the facts that occurred in Bristol as an "attack" on History and a "lack of historical knowledge" defined as overall "ignorance" (Tobagi 2020). It is interesting to note here how the term "ignorance" is used by white male media professionals and intellectuals to condemn criticisms to official memory. Massimo Teodori, a political scientist and professor of American History, for instance, wrote on the *Huffington Post Italy*: "Political stupidity and historical ignorance generated the movements that tear down statues, ban films and perform other similar acts (i.e. Black Live Matters) against what they judge as 'incorrect' within an approximate view of the history of the United States" (Teodori 2020).

One of the few prominent white male historians who publicly disagreed with such views was oral historian and Americanist Alessandro Portelli. On the pages of *Il Manifesto*, a critical left-wing newspaper, he wrote about the "statues of shame" and reminded the readers that "memory is not simply the deposit of a time past, of a closed era, but an active force in the present" (*Il Manifesto*, June 12, 2020). Other intellectuals, such as Tomaso Montanari, also disagreed. Montanari intervened in the debate defending the paint on the statue as a good way to "historicize" the monument and the figure of Montanelli.⁶

The debates on statues clearly show that it was not just a matter of conflicting memories. Race played a crucial role in it, since white amnesia and white memory are at the core of mainstream processes of knowledge production and remembrance. Mills aptly explains this phenomenon using the memory of the Holocaust as an example. He highlights how the genocide of Jews, during the Nazi regime, is widely remembered unlike other massacres involving non-white victims, such as the genocide of Roma people, Armenians or colonial massacres perpetrated by Europeans (Mills 2007, 29). Interestingly, in relation to the Holocaust, in the UK the demolition of statues has been compared by some to the whitewashing of history with claims that the removal of statues would be tantamount to "bulldozing" Auschwitz (Vine 2020). Alasdair Richardson, research specialist in Holocaust Education at University of Winchester, aptly explained on Twitter (tweet on 10 June 2020) how

such a comparison missed the point, highlighting the crucial difference between remembering those who died and celebrating uncritically those who committed massacres or were involved in slavery and colonial violence: “Auschwitz doesn’t remain standing – Auschwitz Museum sits on the former site, commemorating those who were murdered and telling the story of the place. That is *not* the same as British monuments celebrating perpetrators of slavery.”⁷

Therefore, we can argue how memory is not a neutral fact, rather it is deeply embedded in power dynamics and issues of race, gender and class. This is confirmed by Mills, who points out how collective memory is always divisive since those in power systematically seek to suppress subaltern memory or what he calls “counter-memory” (2007, 29). The frictions caused by conflicting memories produce opposite perceptions of what had happened or not, and what is important to remember or not. The visibility of racialized counter-memories in the post-George Floyd era in Europe challenges hegemonic white amnesias and it can be seen as the ultimate political sense of the two actions analysed in this article.

Mapping counter-memories through a new epistemological justice

During the Covid-19 pandemic, British scholar Victoria Grace Walden from the University of Sussex founded the blog “Digital Holocaust Memory.” In her piece on digital memory in the BLM protests against monuments, Walden underlines that those complaining about the erasure of history fail to recognise something crucial, namely the meaning of history itself, intended as “an ever-expanding multitude of narratives about the past, not simply from the past” (2020). By focusing on the decolonisation of monuments across the world, Walden stresses the idea of counter-monuments considered as a new way to rethink the future of statues in the digital age. For instance, she underlines how hashtags such as #RhodesMustFall appear disappear and reappear, acting as digital counter-monuments in the new “digital archives of memory” (2020). The ever-growing and hyperconnective character of the hashtag allows the creation of living memory in constant evolution and in opposition to the permanence of the bronze statues. While visitors in interactive museums may learn about slavery through the presence of statues on site, Walden notes that the removal process of the statues itself has already produced new digital maps. In this regard, the marking on Google Maps of Colson’s statue in the river Avon represents a form of counter-memory, as it documents the social life of this object in the public space.⁸ Similarly, the images of Montanelli’s statue covered in paint and the debate that it caused on social networks, left traces within digital archives. The documents contained in these archives not only contribute to the writing and shaping of a new collective memory, but these also invite reflections on the absence of the colonial-fascist past in the Italian public debate (Giuliani 2015; Lombardi-Diop and Romeo 2014) as a form of “social amnesia” (Mills 2007, 49). That is the importance of the “politics of memory,” seen as a tool capable of bridging the gap between the “academic historical scholarship” and “public historical

consciousness” (McCarthy 2002, 641). Mapping and pointing out to signs of social memory is a diffuse practice of counter-memory, and new architectural and digital archives produced in Europe have been challenging the one-sided story written by white amnesia.

In Italy, for instance, the past few years have seen a number of projects created by social collectives and associations in order to stimulate public debates on the silenced colonial history. The collective *Resistenze in Cirenaica* launched the project “Guerriglia Odonomastica,”⁹ with the aim of giving visibility and changing the colonial toponymy of Bologna’s urban landscape, while in Padua, the project “Decolonize Your Eyes,”¹⁰ organised guided tours of colonial sites located in the city. In 2020, in Milan, the association *Il Cantiere* launched “Decolonize the City,” a study-day on Italian colonialism and the resignification of public space. The event was purposely held in the public gardens of Piazza Venezia, named after Indro Montanelli, where the statue is located.¹¹ In December 2018, “Postcolonial Italy – Mapping Colonial Heritage” was launched,¹² a collaborative project that falls into the field of digital public history. The project captures and documents material traces visible in the public space, such as street names, monuments, and buildings, and it includes digital maps of six Italian cities (Florence, Turin, Cagliari, Venezia, Bolzano, Roma). *Postcolonial Italy* is part of a wider project named *Postcolonial Potsdam*, an “interest group which deals with parts of the colonial history of Prussia,”¹³ and it collects similar experiences of postcolonial tours around the world.

The processes facilitating new perceptions of history are ongoing and challenging. It is essential for us to underline here that the struggle for new counter-memories, inscribed in marble as well as in the digital archive, is not an accessory in the global struggle for all social justice. On the contrary, as Meneses argues, the overlooking and denial of cultural and epistemic diversity demonstrates the urge for social and political changes in relation to citizenship and belonging, since “no global social justice may exist without a global cognitive justice” (2016).

Notes

¹ In the case of Carla Panico, the author acknowledges the support of the Portuguese Science and Technology Foundation (FCT) through the PD/BD/142794/2018 scholarship.

² This is linked to the movement started at the University of Cape Town in 2015 and adopted in 2016 by a group of students at Oxford University, calling for the removal of a plaque and statue named after the British imperialist Cecil Rhodes. The media coverage of this movement and the long-term protests and boycott by the part of activists and musicians forced the Bristol Music Trust to rename the music venue, formerly known as “Colston Hall,” to “Bristol Beacon.”

See <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=571620127126586>. Accessed July 20, 2021.

³ See <https://www.lavoroculturale.org/chi-siamo/>. Accessed July 20, 2021.

⁴ All the translations are by the authors.

⁵ *Bristol Evening Post*, August 6, 1981: “Whatever the dotting contemporary history book writers might imply, his generosity should not obscure the shadier facts of his character. He grew rich and fat on the slave trade, conveniently ignoring it, or even condoning it like many leading churchmen of his day” (Cork 2021).

⁶ See <https://mobile.twitter.com/tomasomontanari/status/1272773144240062464>. Accessed September 10, 2021.

⁷ See <https://twitter.com/drajrichardson/status/1270596223683174401>. Accessed September 5, 2021.

⁸ A crowdsourced interactive map called Topples the Racists lists statues and monuments its creators say need to be considered for removal. As the map's creators note, the toppling of the Colston statue was the inspiration for their project. See <https://www.topplesracists.org/>. Accessed August 31, 2021.

⁹ See <https://resistenzeincirenaica.com/della-guerriglia-odonomastica/>. Accessed August 31, 2021.

¹⁰ See <https://resistenzeincirenaica.com/decolonize-your-eyes/>. Accessed August 31, 2021.

¹¹ See <https://www.cantiere.org/31982/decolonize-the-city/>. Accessed August 31, 2021.

¹² See <https://postcolonialitaly.com/>. Accessed August 31, 2021.

¹³ See <https://postcolonialpotsdam.org/en/tours/tours-world/>. Accessed 31 August 2021. Another similar German project is the one called "Mapping Postkolonial: An Archive of Post/Colonial Traces, Layers and Spectres in Munich," founded by a collective of artists, it contains a digital archive of photographs and images related to the Colonial History of the city. See <https://notanatlans.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Mapping-Postkolonial.pdf>. Accessed August 31, 2021.

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Carla Panico is a PhD candidate in Postcolonialism and Global Citizenship at the Centre for Social Studies, University of Coimbra, and a FCT scholarship holder. She is a member of "ITM – Inter-thematic Group on Migrations" and she is part of the organizing and scientific committee of the "2020. Migrating Rights | Keywords" series. She holds a master's degree in Contemporary History from the University of Pisa, Italy, with a thesis titled "The autonomy of the subalterns. The Southern Question from Gramsci to Postcolonial Studies." Her research interests include migrations, nationalism, whiteness and precarious belongings in Southern Europe, i.e. in contemporary Italy. She is currently a collaborator of the international research network Compolíticas for the project "Cibermov – Cyberactivism, Digital Citizenship and New Urban Movements" and a member of the "Società Italiana delle Storiche," the Italian research society of women historians. Email: carlapanico@ces.uc.pt

Angelica Pesarini is a Lecturer in Social and Cultural Analysis at NYU Florence, where she teaches *Black Italia*, a course entirely devoted to the intersectional analysis of racial identity in Italy. She previously worked at Lancaster University as a Lecturer in Gender, Race and Sexuality. Her current work investigates dynamics of race performativity with a focus on colonial and postcolonial Italy and she also examines the racialization of the Italian political discourse on immigration. Pesarini has previously conducted research on gender roles and the development of economic activities within some Roma communities in Italy, and has analysed strategies of survival, risks and opportunities associated with male prostitution in Rome. Her work appears in several journals and edited volumes; she is currently writing a monograph on the negotiations of race, gender and identity in colonial and postcolonial Italy.