

## Relocating Violence:

### A Reflection on the Mapping of Colonial Traces in Italy

In Italy, colonial history and its consequences are often overlooked in public debates or confined to academic research and anti-racist activist movements. However, the Italian colonial empire left a large number of material traces across the country, among them street names, monuments, and buildings. Initiated in Florence in 2018 by myself and fellow researcher Markus Wurzer, *Postcolonial Italy: Mapping Colonial Heritage* is an online project that captures and documents these traces, with the aim of raising historical awareness and stimulating debate about Italy's colonial past and its legacies.

#### Making colonial violence visible

The revival of the Black Lives Matter movement following the murder of George Floyd by police officer Derek Chauvin in May 2020 had a knock-on effect beyond the US. In Europe, the persistence of discrimination and racial violence was quickly attributed to the continent's failure to come to terms with its colonial past. If racism is a vestige of European imperialism, the difficulty of overcoming the lasting legacy of White supremacy can arguably be explained by an enduring continuity of coloniality – the “colonial matrix of power”, to use Mignolo and Walsh's term – on which European systems of domination have been built.<sup>1</sup> Inspired by the 2015 South African #RhodesMustFall movement, anti-racist activists in many European cities targeted statues of historical figures who played an active role in the transatlantic slave trade or European colonial ventures. Eventually, these protests also reached Italy.<sup>2</sup>

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- 1 Walter Mignolo/Catherine E. Walsh, *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis*, Durham 2018. See also: Jacqueline Andall/Derek Duncan (eds.), *Italian Colonialism: Legacy and Memory*, Oxford/New York 2005; Valeria Deplano/Alessandro Pes (eds.), *Quel Che Resta Dell'impero: La Cultura Coloniale Degli Italiani*, Milano 2014; Ann L. Stoler, *Duress: Imperial Durabilities in Our Times*, Durham 2016.
- 2 Roseanne Chantiluke/Brian Kwoba/Athinangamso Nkopo, *Rhodes Must Fall: The Struggle to Decolonise the Racist Heart of Empire*, London 2018.

On 13 June 2020, activists in Milan covered the statue of Italian writer and journalist Indro Montanelli with paint and scrawled the words “racist rapist” on the pedestal.<sup>3</sup> It was not the first time that protesters had targeted the monument to a literary figure known for his racist views, and for having bought an underage Eritrean wife-slave in the 1930s. Following Montanelli, activists carried out the same intervention in Rome on the bust of Antonio Baldissera.<sup>4</sup> A general in the Italian army, Baldissera was a central figure in Italy’s early campaigns in East Africa. In 1886, he led military operations which culminated in the occupation of many territories, including the Eritrean cities of Asmara and Keren. During his lifetime, Baldissera was accused of using methods of extreme brutality and terror, notably ordering the massacre of hundreds of Eritreans. Acquitted of these atrocities, he nevertheless justified the use of violence as a necessary method of ‘controlling’ the indigenous population. Following the Italian defeat of Adwa against Ethiopian troops in 1896, he was appointed governor of Eritrea and became a figure of hope for Italy’s weakened colonial power.<sup>5</sup>

National and international media frequently referred to these symbolic protests as “acts of vandalism.”<sup>6</sup> The use of the term, although common in most European languages, is not without significance. Indeed, etymologically, *vandal* comes from Latin and refers to the name of a Germanic tribe, the Vandals, who sacked Rome in 455 CE. The word *vandalism* first appeared in the late eighteenth century to denounce the pillage and destruction of art during the French Revolution.<sup>7</sup> Since then, the term has never lost its derogatory overtone and continues to refer to an

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3 Original: “razzista stupratore” / Statua di Montanelli vandalizzata a Milano. Il gesto rivendicato dalla rete degli studenti: “Sia abbattuta”, in: La Repubblica online (14 June 2020), [https://milano.repubblica.it/cronaca/2020/06/14/news/milano\\_statua\\_montanelli\\_imbrattata-259189501/](https://milano.repubblica.it/cronaca/2020/06/14/news/milano_statua_montanelli_imbrattata-259189501/) (1 June 2022); Andrea Galli/Maurizio Giannattasio, Indro Montanelli, a Sali la statue à Milan (13 June 2020), in: Corriere Della Sera online (20 June 2020), [https://www.corriere.it/cronache/20\\_giugno\\_13/indromontanelli-statua-imbrattata-81a5c120-adad-11ea-84a7-c6d5b5b928b0.shtml](https://www.corriere.it/cronache/20_giugno_13/indromontanelli-statua-imbrattata-81a5c120-adad-11ea-84a7-c6d5b5b928b0.shtml) (1 June 2022).

4 Arianna Di Cori, Roma, imbrattato busto di Baldissera al Pincio, via Amba Aradam diventa via George Floyd, in: La Repubblica online (19 June 2020), [https://roma.repubblica.it/cronaca/2020/06/19/news/imbrattato\\_busto\\_di\\_baldissera\\_al\\_pincio\\_via\\_amba\\_aradam\\_diventa\\_via\\_george\\_floyd-259626617/](https://roma.repubblica.it/cronaca/2020/06/19/news/imbrattato_busto_di_baldissera_al_pincio_via_amba_aradam_diventa_via_george_floyd-259626617/) (1 June 2022); Alessandra Benighetti, Vernice rossa e vie per Floyd: il blitz vadalico al Pincio, in: il Giornale.it online (19 June 2020), <https://www.ilgiornale.it/news/roma/blitz-antirazzista-roma-vernice-sul-busto-generale-che-guid-1871514.html> (1 June 2022).

5 Angelo Del Boca, Italiani, Brava Gente? Un Mito Duro a Morire, *Vincenza* 2005, 78–79.

6 Olivier Tosseri, En Italie aussi, la statue d’un journaliste vandalisée, in: Les Echos online (16 June 2020), <https://www.lesechos.fr/idees-debats/edits-analyses/en-italie-aussi-la-statue-dun-journaliste-vandalisee-1215090> (1 June 2022); Lorenzo Tondo, Milan mayor refuses to remove defaced statue of Italian journalist, in: The Guardian online (14 June 2020), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jun/14/milan-mayor-refuses-remove-defaced-statue-italian-journalist-black-lives-matter> (1 June 2022); La Repubblica online (14 June 2020); Corriere Della Sera online (20 June 2020); La Repubblica online (19 June 2020); il Giornale.it online (19 June 2020).

7 Louis Réau/Michel Fleury/Guy-Michel Leproux, *Histoire Du Vandalisme: Les Monuments Détruits de l’art Français*, Paris 1994 [1959].

illegitimate expression of violence and violation of property. Describing a protest gesture as vandalism undermines its political significance while also implying an inability to recognize the cultural value of an artefact. When it comes to secular iconoclasm – the intentional degradation of images associated with the state, regime, or political authority – these anti-hegemonic interventions are commonly labelled as being ‘uncivilized’. Specific instances are framed as morally reprehensible acts that violate the alleged decency, laws, and values of modern Western nations. From this perspective, attacks on monuments to colonists and slaveholders have largely been portrayed as gratuitous acts of violence not only against common property but also against the nation’s integrity and its values. Because most of these *lieux de mémoire* served to foster a positive but one-sided history of the country, the activists responsible for their degradation are implicitly accused of dismantling the nation’s bedrock. Put simply, the widespread use of the terms ‘vandalized/vandalism’ contributes to forging an association between reckless and aggressive behaviour and anti-racist activism, thereby diverting public attention from the real issue: the acknowledgment of colonial violence and of its material and cultural legacies.

Words matter, particularly when it comes to the writing of colonial histories, where dominant narratives have long succeeded in watering down historical facts. Armed struggles against indigenous resistance have been referred to as ‘pacification’ campaigns; expropriation of lands as territorial and population management; Christian proselytism was presented as an act of benevolence and the imposition of Western cultural norms as a civilizing mission, the so-called ‘White man’s burden’. These persuasive euphemisms obscure the fact that colonial history is primarily a history of violence – be it collective or individual, military, sexual, symbolic, state sponsored or unsanctioned. In this respect, the defacing of public monuments is nothing less than a public denunciation of past acts of colonial brutality and the long-lasting violence of White supremacy. The pink and red paint poured on Montanelli’s and Baldissera’s statues in June 2020, and on other monuments across European cities, serves as an explicit metaphor for the blood that these historical figures have on their hands. The primary display of violence arguably lies in the colonial monuments themselves; symbolic acts of defacement simply seek to make this violence visible.

## Mapping the colonial heritage legacy in Italy

Although the debate on colonial legacies in Italy appears less fierce than in other former European colonial powers, attacks on monuments have revealed lingering social and political tensions about the country’s imperial past and the way it is remembered. The misleading myth of *Italiani brava gente* – the idea that Italians were ‘good

people' who behaved with humanity and benevolence during World War II and the Italo-Ethiopian War – continues to influence the way Italian civil society perceives this past.<sup>8</sup> While it is true that the Italian colonial empire was short-lived compared to the vast and longer-lasting empires of France or Britain, it remains no less true that the Italian colonial campaigns were particularly brutal and murderous, especially during the fascist period. Furthermore, the late entry of a barely unified Italy into the European colonial race in the late nineteenth century resulted perhaps all the more in the young country's extensive marking of urban landscapes with commemorative monuments and toponymic interventions glorifying Italian imperialism. With the fall of the fascist regime in 1943, Italy lost most of its former colonies without going through a process of decolonisation. Indeed, in the post-war period, the struggles for independence in the territories colonized by European powers led to bloody conflicts that left their marks on the national memories of the metropolises. In the case of Italy, not only did the country not take part in European decolonisation, but the Italian post-war transition to democracy was also characterized by a continuity of institutions and colonial officials.<sup>9</sup> As a consequence, large quantities of material traces of Italian colonialism continue to shape urban landscapes across the country without being challenged.

Initiated in Florence in December 2018, *Postcolonial Italy: Mapping Colonial Heritage* is a digital public history project that captures and documents material traces of colonialism visible on maps of Italian cities, in order to stimulate a public debate about the country's silenced colonial past.<sup>10</sup> Markus Wurzer and I started the project spontaneously after realizing that Florence, in addition to its illustrious early modern heritage, was also heavily marked by Italy's colonial history. The city commonly referred to as the 'cradle of the Renaissance' appears to have been a real colonial hub in more recent times, a fact that is reflected in street names, monuments, public institutions, and the marketing of private businesses.

Drawing on the results of this informal research, we first organized a guided tour through the city in December 2018 for colleagues from the European University Institute. Initially conceived as a single event, the material collected was too abundant to be integrated into a coherent route for a walking tour. The thirty or so sites identified were thus marked on a paper map, providing a geographical visualization of the multiple colonial traces throughout the city. In order to make this knowledge accessible to a wider public, we then wrote historical accounts contextualizing the colo-

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8 Del Boca, *Italiani, Brava Gente?*, 2005; Patrizia Palumbo (ed.), *A Place in the Sun: Africa in Italian Colonial Culture from Post-Unification to the Present*, Berkeley/Los Angeles 2003. See also Markus Wurzer's article in this special issue.

9 Ruth Ben-Ghiat/Mia Fuller (eds.), *Italian Colonialism*, New York 2005.

10 <http://www.postcolonialitaly.com/> (1 June 2022).

nality of each site and published them online as part of an interactive map that was later integrated on a website.

In early 2019, inspired by the positive feedback and the general interest generated by the colonial map of Florence, we developed the idea of expanding the map into an open-source online platform that could integrate other Italian cities. Since then, *Postcolonial Italy* has kept growing thanks to the many historians who have contributed with their research on colonial material heritage. At present it includes the cities of Venice, Bolzano, Turin, Rome, Cagliari, Trieste, Parma, Affile and Filetino, and has become an ongoing collaborative project that, without seeking to be exhaustive, continues to map and document colonial traces in Italy for the purpose of facilitating access to such knowledge.<sup>11</sup>

*Postcolonial Italy* is not the only project of its kind. Over the past few years, local activists have launched several initiatives addressing colonial traces in Italy, including the *Guerriglia Odonomastica* in Bologna and *Viva Menilicchi!* in Palermo, which were both set up in 2018. In February 2021, the Wu Ming collective published *Viva Zerai!*, a map of colonial toponymy in Italy. More recently, *Decolonize Your Eyes* in Padua started organizing a guided tour.<sup>12</sup> As foreigners who, at the time, had recently moved to Florence, Markus' and my initial approach might have been slightly different from that of the initiatives led by militant Italian groups. With the project being carried out in English, our very first audience was colleagues from the international university community and Italian scholars working on colonial history (some of whom later became contributors). It is interesting to note that, although the website has been available in Italian since February 2021, the traffic data shows that the vast majority of visitors are still viewing the English version. *Postcolonial Italy*, although not hosted or funded by any institution, appears to be *de facto* quite academic and to a certain extent less locally grounded. Nevertheless, the fact remains that in the aftermath of 2020 wave of anti-racist protests in Europe, *Postcolonial Italy* quickly gained visibility and political relevance beyond the academic sphere in Italy and abroad.<sup>13</sup>

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11 This was possible thanks to the work of Serena Alessi, Sofia Bacchini, Carmen Belmonte, Elena Cadamuro, Valeria Deplano, Sebastian De Pretto, Marco Donadon, Nikolaos Mavropoulos, Elisabetta Pautetti, Alessandro Pes, Iris Pupella-Noguès, Eleonora Sartoni, and Victoria Witkowski. Thanks also to Serena Calaresu, Deborah Block, Moritz Deininger, and Livia Dubon for helping with translation and proofreading.

12 Wu Ming 2, Una mappa per ricordare i crimini del colonialismo italiano, in: Internazionale online (15 February 2021), <https://www.internazionale.it/opinione/wu-ming-2/2021/02/15/mappa-colonialismo-italiano> (15 September 2022); <https://resistenzeincirenaica.com/della-guerriglia-odonomastica/> (15 September 2022). See also <https://resistenzeincirenaica.com/decolonize-your-eyes/> (15 September 2022).

13 In 2021 the project, along with Wu Ming's map, was put on the agenda of Florence's city council by Antonella Bundu and Dmitrij Palagi, leaders of the left-wing opposition Sinistra Progetto Comune,

## Identifying colonial traces in the Florentine landscape

The process of mapping the colonial heritage in Italy raised some methodological questions, starting with the need to define what should be regarded as a colonial trace. The sites we originally identified in Florence have different characteristics. Their temporality and the way in which they are related to Italian colonial history also vary significantly. We chose to refer to the objects as ‘traces’ not only in the sense of the physical marks left intentionally or unintentionally by someone or something (representing colonial power), but also as the material evidence of a certain discourse (stemming from colonial propaganda). We then grouped these colonial traces into four categories. First, toponyms: streets, squares, and buildings named after colonial events or historical figures involved in Italian colonialism. Many of them commemorate so-called great men – military officials (Caserma Antonio Baldissera, Via Pietro Toselli, Via Antonio Locatelli, Via Carlo del Prete, Via Luigi Michelazzi), politicians (Via Ferdinando Martini), scientists whose work contributed to European domination (Via Paolo Mantegazza, Via Odardo Beccari) – or refer to significant places, including battlefields, in the colonies (Piazza Adua, Via Dogali, Via Tripoli). The second category consists of monuments dedicated to historical figures or commemorating colonial events: statues (the bust of Paolo Mantegazza, the statue of Hercules strangling the Nemean lion), commemorative plaques or memorials (including the memorial dedicated to the soldiers who died in the 1935–1941 Italo–Ethiopian War in Piazza Tasso, the plaque of Antonio Baldissera, or the obelisk in Piazza dell’Unità Italiana).

Toponyms and monuments are the most obvious types of colonial traces and the ones generally targeted by anti-racist activists. They are objects of commemoration and reflect a political willingness to publicly remember and, by extension, impose a certain historical narrative that is ideologically aligned with the agenda of the governing power that decides to erect them. In the case of Antonio Baldissera, whose memory is largely celebrated across the country, several sites showcase his relationship with the city of Florence, where he died in 1917. In 1920, shortly after his death, a military barracks, the Caserma Antonio Baldissera, was named after him. Moreover, a commemorative stone was installed inside the building, describing in detail his military exploits “in the African campaign of 1887–88–89” and “his quality as an energetic and wise governor” in Ethiopia after the Italian defeat of Adwa.<sup>14</sup>

Another commemorative plaque dedicated to Baldissera can be found in Piazza San Marco, which similarly elevates him to the status of national hero, while clearly

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who called for a political response towards local commemoration and toponymy. Similarly, in February 2023, it was mentioned in a proposed motion submitted to Turin’s city council. Furthermore, the project has been used as a pedagogical resource by teachers and cultural mediators in Italy.

14 Original: “alla campagna d’Africa del 1887–88–89”; “le sue qualità di energico e sagace Governatore”.

referring to his role in colonial campaigns: “In the Eritrean war he wisely and bravely restored our precarious fortunes.” The plaque on the facade of the building where he commanded the 7<sup>th</sup> Bersaglieri Regiment, mobilized in Eritrea in 1886, emphasizes this fact: “Florence remembers him here, where he held his command.”<sup>15</sup> This text can be understood as glorifying the role of Florence in the context of both Baldissera’s life and the history of Italian colonialism more generally. Baldissera’s memorials illustrate the way in which the colonial venture has been commonly framed as a source of national pride for which military interventions can be justified (namely as a form of legitimate violence).

The third type of trace identifies public institutions that were historically involved in Italian colonial enterprises. Most of them are still active today, such as the Istituto Agronomico per l’Oltremare (Overseas Agronomic Institute), previously the Istituto Agronomico per l’Africa Italiana (Agronomic Institute for Italian Africa), or the Istituto Geografico Militare (Military Geographic Institute), founded in Florence in 1872. Its tasks included the geodetic, topographic, and cartographic needs of the recently unified kingdom but also the production of maps of overseas territories of governmental interest. In the context of the Italian colonial enterprise, the practice of mapping was an instrument of power. The institute produced thousands of maps that served to legitimize Italian rule over foreign lands and populations by creating ‘colonial realities’ and conveying to Italian society the idea of a strong and vast colonial empire. In fact, as scientific research in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was often closely tied to colonialism, many research institutes can be seen as colonial legacies in and of themselves. Botanical knowledge, for instance, was developed to determine the natural resources for further development of agriculture and the living conditions of settlers in the colonies.<sup>16</sup> In this sense, the fact that the Centro Studi Erbario Tropicale (Tropical Herbarium Studies Centre) was originally known as the Erbario Coloniale di Firenze (Colonial Herbarium of Florence), from its foundation in 1918 to 1969, shows that colonial imperatives and agendas were commonly at the heart of scientific projects. Another example is the Museo di Antropologia e Etnologia (Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology), founded in 1869 by scientist Paolo Mantegazza. Not only does the museum hold a large collection of African artefacts, testimony to the Italian colonial possessions in the early twentieth century, but it was also a privileged site for the popularization of racial theories. Mantegazza was a social Darwinist; he believed that human races reflected different stages of human

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15 “fu nella guerra eritrea restauratore sapiente animoso delle pericolanti fortune”; “Firenze ne fa memoria qui dove tenne il comando”.

16 Riccardo M. Baldini, The Contribution of the Florentine Collections to the Knowledge of the Flora of Ethiopia and Eritrea, in: *Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis. Symbolae Botanicae Upsalienses* 35/2 (2011), 161–171.

development. A few decades later, Lidio Cipriani, a leading figure in Italian anthropology during the fascist era, became director of the museum. His research went further, supporting the idea that the assumed racial inferiority of non-White populations was the result of allegedly underdeveloped parts of certain areas of their brains. In short, anthropology gave birth to scientific racism, a tool to legitimize the domination of European powers over allegedly less advanced populations. The coloniality of research institutes therefore arises from the mutual production of scientific knowledge and colonialism. After Italy lost its colonies, many of these buildings continued to be used by the state and its colonial inheritance, a fact that is still noticeable in public space to this day. Colonial traces are not only hidden in the archives of these institutions. Some remain evident in architectural features, for example the imposing imperial reliefs of the Istituto Agronomico per l'Oltremare (Overseas Agronomic Institute), which depict men loading bananas onto horses.

In addition to public sites, colonial legacies can also be found in contemporary advertising, product branding, and popular culture more broadly. This is the last category of colonial traces identified on the *Postcolonial Italy* digital map. In Italy, colonial imagery – including discriminatory racial representations – continues to be used for marketing purposes, particularly for the sale of ‘exotic’ products such as coffee, chocolate, or liquorice. A colonial aesthetic, although not always from the colonial period, has commonly reproduced a certain ideology of dominance over people of African descent. Furthermore, private businesses, such as coffee shops, sometimes explicitly refer to their colonial heritage without distancing themselves from it. Take, for example, Caffè Dogali, a restaurant founded in 1914, whose name commemorates the “colonial adventure in distant lands of the daring grandfather”, who presumably fought against the Ethiopian troops in Dogali (Eritrea) in 1887.<sup>17</sup> It is interesting to note that such narrativization of the colonial past (that is the making of a narrative) has persisted through time. In 2021, the pasta brand La Molisana caused some controversy on account of a marketing strategy which harked back to the fascist era. That year, the company introduced new shapes named after former colonies – such as Abissine or Tripoline – which were described as evoking “distant, exotic places” and eliciting “a colonial flavour”.<sup>18</sup> In many cases, colonial nostalgia continues to serve a commercial strategy.

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17 “funavventure coloniali in terre lontane vissute dall’ardito bis nonno”; <https://www.caffedogali.it/ristorante/> (15 September 2022).

18 Original: “Il nome evoca luoghi lontani, esotici ed ha un sapore coloniale”; Eleonora Cozzella, ‘Pasta dal sapore littorio? La Molisana: nessuna volontà di celebrare il fascismo’, in: *La Repubblica online* (4 January 2021), [https://www.repubblica.it/sapori/2021/01/04/news/il\\_caso\\_della\\_pasta\\_dal\\_nome\\_coloniale-281101866/](https://www.repubblica.it/sapori/2021/01/04/news/il_caso_della_pasta_dal_nome_coloniale-281101866/) (15 September 2022).



This category of traces differs significantly from the others because of the nature of the sites (private businesses rather than public or state properties), and the fact that they mirror popular rather than institutional memories. Moreover, these traces are often cultural representations and therefore not strictly material, but relate to a form of colonial heritage that is primarily ideological. The collection and mapping of commercial appropriations of the colonial past appears to be more complicated and to a certain extent ethically problematic, especially when the narrative merges with private or family memory. The aim is not to pinpoint and incriminate existing private businesses or to place them on the same level as historical perpetrators of colonial brutality. Nevertheless, we choose to include these traces because they testify to the persistence of a symbolic form of colonial domination. Put differently, these sites reflect a social imagination illustrative of the relationship that a broad segment of Italian society has with the nation's colonial past.

## Conclusion

The process of mapping and documenting colonial traces in Florence entails a reflection on the coloniality of each site. It turns out that in most cases these traces testify to the violence of Italian colonial history. Many toponyms or monuments refer to military campaigns in East Africa, celebrating high ranking officials like Baldissera or fallen soldiers as key protagonists. Military interventions are portrayed as acts of bravery and, more importantly, as legitimate and necessary forms of violence. Given that these commemorative sites were created as a result of the political will to memorialise a certain historical narrative, they should, by extension, be regarded as objects of colonial propaganda that leave no room for criticism: they present a one-sided, glorifying version of the Italian colonial venture that justifies the loss of thousands of Italian lives. Yet, the dramatic toll of Libyan, Ethiopian, and Eritrean death remains absent from this official memory.<sup>19</sup> As for the institutions, their activities and interests were not only linked to imperial progression, they also served the colonial effort by producing knowledge in the service of the (imperial) state. Regarding colonial and racist reminiscence in popular culture, this type of trace maintains

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19 Italian bombing and mustard gas attacks during the Second Italo-Ethiopian War (1935–1941) are estimated to have caused as many as 275,000 Ethiopian military and civilian casualties. Micheal Clodfelter, *Warfare and Armed Conflicts: A Statistical Encyclopedia of Casualty and Other Figures, 1492–2015*, North Carolina 2017, 355. On colonial violence and massacres perpetrated by Italian military see David Forgacs, *Two Italian Colonial Massacres*, in: Mattia Roveri (ed.), *Italy and the Military*, Cham 2020, 179–203; Nicola Labanca, *Italian Colonial Internment*, in: Ben-Ghiat/Fuller (eds.), *Italian Colonialism*, 2005, 27–36; Alberto Sbacchi, *Poison Gas and Atrocities in the Italo-Ethiopian War (1935–1936)*, in: Ben-Ghiat/Fuller (eds.), *Italian Colonialism*, 2005, 47–56.

an ideology of dominance while minimizing the brutality of colonialism through misleadingly innocuous representations of the so-called “Other”.

Finally, the large number of colonial traces foregrounded in the *Postcolonial Italy* interactive map challenges the common belief that Italian colonialism was a minor, inconsequential episode in Italian history. The ongoing project of researching, collecting, and mapping these sites shows that, despite the traces left in public space, Italy’s colonial past has been selectively remembered and the violence at its heart has been largely overlooked. In this respect, it can be argued that colonial traces, especially in the form of commemorative sites, reproduce colonial violence on a symbolic and epistemological level by imposing a normative version of the past. Considering that Italy’s colonial past is far less glorious than the propaganda suggests, one might wonder whether public celebrations of colonial ventures should not be deemed more violent than the recent attacks on their symbols. Indeed, the so-called acts of vandalism against the statues of Baldissera and Montanelli respond to the need to foster counter-narratives of the past that relocate violence within the history of Italian colonialism. Ultimately, regardless of the method, making colonial traces visible is one way of raising historical awareness and questioning the lasting legacies of European colonialism.