

THE ART OF SMEARING: HOW IS FEMINIST DECOLONIZING ARTIVISM RECEIVED BY ITALIAN NEWSPAPERS? THE CASE OF MONTANELLI'S STATUE

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ABSTRACT

On March 8, 2019, during a demonstration organised on occasion of the International Women's Day in Milan, members of the feminist collective Non Una Di Meno (not one woman less) Milano threw washable pink paint on the statue that commemorates the Italian journalist Indro Montanelli (1909–2001). The aim of exposing at a visual level the acclaimed writer's controversial past was crucial to the group's symbolic action. In fact, despite being a reference figure for many Italian intellectuals, Montanelli participated in the Abyssinian war in 1935 and, as a member of the fascist army, he engaged in a relationship with a 12-year-old local girl who acted as his wife and sexual object. The collective's action, which can be labelled as a feminist decolonizing performance, has already been read as a form of activism that manipulated the Italian's artistic heritage with the objective of criticising the existing narrative on Italy's colonial past. In this sense, an analysis of the resonance that journalistic coverage assigned to the event proves crucial for understanding the impact that such an action has had on Italian public opinion and the progress towards the country's mental decolonization. This article presents the findings of a qualitative analysis conducted on a corpus of 10 online newspaper articles published in the aftermath of the activist performance on Montanelli's statue. The study employs Foucauldian critical discourse analysis in order to identify the rhetorical strategies used by journalists to criticise or legitimate the feminist collective's action. Among these strategies, particular attention is paid to those discursive techniques adopted to portray the act as a form of vandalism or, on the contrary, as a form of art. The aim is to show how the discourse on art versus non-art/vandalism is used to confirm (or overcome) the discursive limits imposed by the still dominant narratives on the nation's colonial history as well as on the disposability of "othered" women's bodies.

KEYWORDS

Indro Montanelli, feminist activism, gender-based violence, Italian
journalism, decolonizing, Italian colonialism

A ARTE DE MACULAR: COMO É RECEBIDO O ARTIVISMO DESCOLONIZADOR FEMINISTA PELOS JORNAIS ITALIANOS? O CASO DA ESTÁTUA DE MONTANELLI

RESUMO

No dia 8 de março de 2019, durante uma manifestação organizada no âmbito do Dia Internacional da Mulher em Milão, membros do coletivo feminista Non Una Di Meno (nem uma mulher a menos) de Milão lançaram tinta rosa lavável sobre a estátua em homenagem ao jornalista italiano Indro Montanelli (1909–2001). O objetivo de expor visualmente o passado

controverso do aclamado escritor foi crucial para a ação simbólica do grupo. Apesar de ser uma figura de referência para muitos intelectuais italianos, Montanelli participou na guerra abissínia em 1935 e, como membro do exército fascista, manteve um relacionamento com uma menina local de 12 anos que desempenhou o papel de esposa e objeto sexual. A ação do coletivo, que pode ser rotulada como uma performance feminista descolonizadora, já foi lida como uma forma de ativismo que manipulou a herança artística italiana visando criticar a narrativa vigente sobre o passado colonial italiano. Assim, para compreender o impacto que a ação teve na opinião pública italiana e o progresso para a descolonização mental do país, é crucial uma análise da ressonância que a cobertura jornalística atribuiu ao evento. Este artigo apresenta os resultados de uma análise qualitativa realizada sobre um corpus de 10 artigos de jornal online publicados na sequência da performance ativista sobre a estátua de Montanelli. O estudo utiliza a análise crítica do discurso foucaultiano para identificar as estratégias retóricas utilizadas pelos jornalistas para criticar ou legitimar a ação do coletivo feminista. Entre estas estratégias, é dada particular atenção às técnicas discursivas adotadas para retratar o ato como uma forma de vandalismo ou, pelo contrário, como uma forma de arte. O objetivo é mostrar como o discurso sobre arte versus não arte/vandalismo é usado para confirmar (ou superar) os limites discursivos impostos pelas narrativas ainda dominantes sobre a história colonial da nação, bem como sobre a disponibilidade de corpos de mulheres “alheias”.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Indro Montanelli, ativismo feminista, violência baseada no gênero, jornalismo italiano, descolonização, colonialismo italiano

1. INTRODUCTION

On March 8, 2019, during a demonstration held in Milan and organised by the Italian feminist network Non Una Di Meno¹ (not one woman less) on occasion of the International Women's Day, a few participants in the event engaged in an organised performative action that consisted in throwing washable pink paint on a statue that commemorates the Italian journalist Indro Montanelli. In order to understand the reasons that drove the feminist collective to temporarily modify the aesthetics of the statue, we need to look at the acclaimed but controversial figure of Indro Montanelli. Born in Fucecchio (Tuscany) in 1909, he started his career as a journalist during the fascist “Ventennio”, as the 20 years of Benito Mussolini's dictatorship (1922–1943) are commonly known in Italy. He participated as a volunteer in the Abyssinian war in 1935 as a member of the fascist army that invaded Ethiopia². After his brief experience in the colony, he went back to Italy and progressively dissociated from fascist politics, which he started to criticise to the point of being expelled from the national association of journalists and deprived of the fascist party's membership. During the years after the Second World War, Montanelli distinguished himself as a conservative journalist and founded the right-wing newspaper

¹ Non Una Di Meno is a network that brings together feminist collectives and groups scattered in the Italian peninsula. Non Una Di Meno was established in 2016 and, since then, it gained national recognition thanks to the organisation of a series of demonstrations and campaigns. The name, which literally translates as “not one woman less”, testifies to the connection of the Italian movement with the Argentinian feminist movement against femicide Ni Una Menos. For more, see the network's website: <https://nonunadimeno.wordpress.com/>.

² The Ethiopian war happened between October 1935 and May 1936. On the historical event, see Labanca (2015).

Il Giornale in 1974. Despite his clear political orientation, his figure was rehabilitated even in the circles of the Italian left when, at the beginning of the 2000s, he openly criticised Silvio Berlusconi. After his death, which occurred in 2001, Montanelli ended up being generally considered the biggest and most authoritative figure of Italian journalism³.

This happened notwithstanding the controversies associated with his involvement in the practice of concubinage, commonly referred to as *madamato* by Italian historians (Trento, 2011), and, in particular, a relationship with Destà, a 12-year-old Abyssinia girl who acted as Montanelli's wife, slave and sexual object during the months of his colonial enterprise. The journalist never publicly regretted his participation in the racist and sexist practice of *madamato*, as the following statement, released in 1969 during an interview, demonstrates:

it seems that I chose well. She was a very beautiful local girl, and she was 12 years old (I am sorry, but in Africa, things work differently). I regularly married her, which means that I bought her from her father, and she accompanied me together with the wives of other members of the troop. The wives did not follow the troop every day. They used to reach us every fifteen days. I've never really understood how they managed to find us in those infinite lands of Abyssinia, but they did, and with them, my wife, who, with a basket on her head, used to bring me clean laundry. (Bisiach, 1969, 00:47:43)

It is on the basis of Montanelli's behaviours and declarations that the Milanese branch of the network Non Una Di Meno decided to organise the feminist and decolonising performance of the pink paint, which can be described as an act of re-symbolisation aimed at challenging the current regime of visibility that regulates the negotiation of cultural memory in Italian public spaces. In other words, the pink paint functioned as a tool to subtract, at an aesthetic level, the visibility and prestige assigned to the figure of a white, male and patriarchal coloniser while at the same time retrieving from invisibility the forgotten figure of Destà. A form of feminist symbolic decolonisation, the collective's action has already been read, in academic circles, as a form of activism that manipulated Italian's artistic heritage with the objective of sparking "the debate in the general public around the canonized narrative of Italy's colonial past" (Lissi, 2019, p. 6). As Stefano Lissi (2019) stated, this canonised narrative revolves around the misleading myth of Italy's mild colonising practices and was fostered by institutional historical reconstructions that depicted Italians as "good colonisers" who were interested in promoting a process of civilizations rather than in implementing those violent actions of conquest that infamously characterised French, Belgian and British occupations of the African soil. Historians and activists started challenging this dominant rhetoric only in recent years (namely, from the 1990s onwards), when they started unveiling the cruelties carried out by Italian soldiers in Ethiopia, thus operating a full disclosure on the false narrative promoted by Fascism and continued by the political elites in the post-war period (Del Boca,

³ On Montanelli and his life, see the biography by S. Gerbi and R. Liucci (2014).

1998; Endaylalu, 2018; Jedlowski, 2011; Leone, 2011; Pankhurst, 1999). Even more recently, the intersection of racist acts of invasion and gendered practices of objectification of Ethiopian and Eritrean women has been brought to the surface of historical discourse in Italy (Giuliani, 2018; Houérou, 2015; Ponzanesi, 2012; Trento, 2012). Scholars such as Gaia Giuliani (2018, p. 67) highlighted how the sexist myth of the fascist virile coloniser, who was portrayed as in charge of dominating nature and promoting a good modernisation, perfectly sustained subtle and dangerous operations of subjugation against the colonised others, especially if female.

Non Una Di Meno's performance of the pink paint should be read as a successful attempt to inscribe in the "city-text", which is to say street names and statues that commemorate past events or individuals (Palonen, 2008, pp. 219–220), the signs of a counter-discourse that contributes to problematize the official chronicles. In other words, it is an action that, with Chantal Mouffe (2007), we can consider as part of that continuous "agonistic struggle" that opposes "hegemonic projects [the hegemonic order and a counter-hegemonic one] which can never be reconciled rationally" being them "precarious and pragmatic constructions that can be disarticulated and transformed" (p. 3). And it is precisely this irreconcilability that was visually exposed through the feminist collective's action, which significantly differed from the famous phenomenon of boxing up statues of racist colonisers that spread throughout the globe between 2019 and 2020 as a result of the insurgence of the Black Lives Matter wave. The act of toppling or removing statues that marked the practices of the recent decolonising movement aimed at erasing from the city-text the presence of the colonial symbol, thus neglecting or ignoring the relevance that those symbols, whether we like it or not, still have in other spheres of our societies' cultural memory. As opposed to this, Non Una Di Meno's performance temporarily modified the monument and, in so doing, it made the continuous and productive dialectic between hegemonic and counter-hegemonic discourses visible. The Italian feminist collective's action, being a noticeable and eye-catching sign of the ongoing controversies on the colonial legacy, amplified the debates on Italy, its ex-colonies, racism and gender, quickly reaching the sphere of mainstream media.

2. OBJECTIVE AND METHODOLOGY

In light of the aforementioned theoretical framework, this article proposes a study of the response to the pink paint operation with the aim of understanding what effect the performance had on an extremely popular discursive plane, that of online journalism, and which discourse (if the hegemonic, the counter-hegemonic one or both, to use the categorisation proposed by Mouffe, 2007) did the coverage of the event reproduced or echoed. It presents the findings of a qualitative analysis conducted on a corpus of 10 articles published in the aftermath of the activist performance on Montanelli's statue on 10 of the most popular Italian online newspapers. The selected newspapers are mostly without specific political connotations, such as *Il Post*, *La Repubblica*, *Il Giorno*, *Il Corriere della Sera*, *Ansa*, *Milano Today*, *Globalist* and *Fanpage*. However, the corpus includes a newspaper

traditionally associated with the Italian left-wing, *Il Manifesto*, and *Il Giornale*, the newspaper founded by Indro Montanelli, which is linked to the *milieu* of Italian conservative and right-wing politics. The reasons for this choice can be referred back to Daniel Hallin and Paolo Mancini's (2004) observations on the peculiarities of Italian journalism, which belongs to the "mediterranean or polarized pluralist model" and is historically influenced by political affiliations (p. 210). In this sense, the inclusion of *Il Manifesto* and *Il Giornale* allows for evaluating the differences in the reception of Non Una Di Meno's action between liberal and conservative discursive planes. The articles were selected through a keyword-based search (keyword: "Montanelli statua" [Montanelli statue]/"Montanelli statua" + newspaper name) conducted on the newspapers' websites and Google. The search resulted in a corpus of 10 articles, and no further selection was made by the author of the current study. The selected time frame for the articles' publication is March 1, 2019, to March 31, 2019, which provides the research with a sample of journalistic reactions produced in the aftermath of the artistic event.

The study availed of the methodology of Foucauldian critical discourse analysis (Jäger & Maier, 2009). This was used to identify the rhetorical strategies employed by journalists to legitimise or criticise the feminist collective's action, which corresponds to embracing the counter-discourse or reproducing the hegemonic discourse, respectively. Among these rhetorical strategies, particular attention was paid to those discursive techniques adopted to portray Montanelli and his deeds. Lexical choices, as well as the inclusion and endorsement of external statements on the journalist's behaviour, were considered in order to investigate the coverage's proximity to the feminist group's ethos of denouncing Montanelli's colonising and misogynous attitude. Moreover, the article analyses the description of the artistic act by paying specific consideration to the range of collective symbols or *topoi* used by journalists. According to Sigfried Jäger and Florentine Maier (2009), collective symbols "provide the repertoire of images from which we construct a picture of reality for ourselves. Through collective symbols, we interpret reality and have reality interpreted for us, especially by the media" (p. 49). By investigating how collective symbols are employed in the newspaper coverage to categorise the artistic act either as a form of vandalism or as a form of art, the aim is to show how the common trope that opposes dirt to cleanness or disfiguration to beauty is used to confirm or challenge the "discursive limits" (Jäger & Maier, 2009, p. 47) imposed by narratives on the nation's colonial history.

3. ANALYSIS. EMBRACING THE COUNTER-DISOURSE

The analysis shows how Non Una Di Meno's action resulted in a journalistic coverage that generally condemns Indro Montanelli for his participation in the practice of *madamato* with a minor. This fruitfully contributes to the problematisation of the dominant rhetoric that depicts Italian colonialism as non-harmful or gentle, and it helps identifying the sexist and racist attitudes that characterised the fascist invasion of Ethiopia and Eritrea.

The main and most frequent strategy employed by journalists to denounce Montanelli's acts and controversial declarations consists of the inclusion in their articles of Non Una Di Meno's statement. This is the statement how it is, most often, reported by the majority of the newspapers considered in the analysis, which shows how neatly Montanelli's exploitative practice is described.

These are the words that Indro Montanelli pronounced about his colonial experience: "She was twelve years old...at twelve, those [African women] were women already. I bought her from his father in Saganeiti, together with a horse and a rifle. I paid everything 500 *lire*. She was an obedient little animal, and I built for her a *tucul* (a simple circular building with a conic roof made with clay and straw) with some chickens. Then, every fifteen days, she used to reach me wherever I was, together with the other wives... she used to arrive with a basket on her head and clean linen" (interview released to Enzo Biagi for the broadcaster RAI in 1982). Are these the men we should admire? (Non Una Di Meno – Milano, 2019)

This statement, which contains Montanelli's declarations as well as the feminist collective's criticism of it, is often reproduced by the journalists without the presence of further judgments, which can be interpreted, at a discursive level, as an implicit endorsement. Eight, out of 10 articles use this technique (*Il Post*; *Il Giornale*; *Il Manifesto*; *Milano Today*; *Ansa*; *Globalist*; *La Repubblica*; *Il Giorno*). Among these, the article by the conservative *Il Giornale*, where the statement is reported without comments despite being anticipated by an adversative title ("Montanelli Imbrattato e Delirio 'Rosa'"; Montanelli Smear and "Pink" Insanity; *Il Giornale*, March 10, 2019). In the same article, the statement is followed by a paragraph in which the collective's action is described as stemming from the same climate of feminist protests from which originated an action against a roundabout named after the ultra-right militant Sergio Ramelli, in Perugia.

Another demonstration of the general tendency expressed by the authors of the analysed articles to implicitly blame Montanelli is the fact that Non Una Di Meno's statement is often followed by other indirect strategies to condemn the man's behaviour, such as the inclusion of other openly problematic words that Montanelli said on the case (*Il Manifesto*), or the mention of other feminists' opinions on the journalist's figure (*Il Post*). Among the most poignant ones is the reference, mentioned by *Il Post*, to the challenging questions that the feminist and African descendent Elvira Banotti asked Montanelli during the previously quoted television interview released in 1969 for Giovanni Bisiach. Here is an excerpt as it is reported by *Il Post* (March 10, 2019):

Banotti: "You have just stated that you had a 12-year-old wife (let's say this) and that at 25, you just did not worry about it because 'In Africa, you do these kind of things'. I would like to ask you how you conceive your relationships with women"

Montanelli: "I am sorry, madam, but on violence... there was no violence because girls in Abyssinia marry at 12"

Banotti: "This is what you say"

Montanelli: "At the time, it worked like that"

Banotti: "At the level of personal consciousness, the relationship with a 12-year-old is a relationship with a 12-year-old. If you do this in Europe, you would think of raping a girl, right?"

Montanelli: "Yes, in Europe, yes, but..."

Banotti: "Precisely. Which differences do you think there are at a psychological or even physical level?"

Montanelli: "No, look. There, they marry at 12. That's it".

Aside from this, which clearly contributes to the depiction of the man's conduct as despicable, most journalists decide to report in their articles material such as Montanelli's questionable reply to a women reader who commented on his figure in the newspaper where he was writing (*Il Post*); the opinion of historians or experts who contextualised Montanelli's behaviour stressing on the existence of a law against sexual relationships with minors of 14 years of age that at the time was in place in Italy (*Il Manifesto*; *Il Post*); the statement of I sentinelli (the sentinels), a group that supported Non Una Di Meno's action (*Il Giorno*; *Globalist*; *La Repubblica*; *Il Giornale*; *Ansa*). All this, which is present in 6 articles out of 10, constitutes an implicit condemnation of Montanelli's deeds.

Lexical choices also highlight the article's propensity to condemn Montanelli's act of buying and marrying a 12-year-old girl. In some cases, the journalist's lexical choices involve the employment of strong adjectives such as "pedofilo" (pedophile) or "schiavista" (slaver), as well as the use of words like "stupro" (rape; *Il Post*, March 10, 2019; *Milano Today*, March 9, 2019; *Globalist*, March 9, 2019), which, in two occasions, are clearly exposed in the section of the title (*Milano Today*). The aforementioned lexical choices highlight the intention to build discursive knots (Jäger & Maier, 2009, p. 48), which is to say to entangle the discourse on the colonial enterprise with those on violence. That is confirmed by the fact that three articles out of 10 (*Il Post*; *Il Manifesto*; *Fanpage*) use implicit or explicit references to the phenomenon of gender-based violence as a discursive technique to showcase the problematic aspects of Montanelli's behaviour. In the case of the progressive/left-wing newspaper *Il Manifesto*, for example, the link with the discussed issue of violence against women is suggested not only in the text but also by the choice of the image, which belongs to the limited repertoire of pictures that Italian journalists employ in coverages of cases of violence against women. *Il Manifesto* also

discusses the issue of female genital mutilations, and infibulation in particular, which is generally considered under the umbrella category of gender-based violence, being it a “manifestation of gender inequality” (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights et al., 2008, pp. 5–6). Infibulation is described by the World Health Organization as follows: “narrowing of the vaginal orifice with creation of a covering seal by cutting and appositioning the labia minora and/or the labia majora, with or without excision of the clitoris” (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights et al., 2008, p. 24). The reference to infibulation is made possible by Montanelli’s own words, which describe, in a piece written for the column “La Stanza di Montanelli” (The Montanelli Room), for the newspaper *Il Corriere della Sera*, and subsequently re-published online by *La Voce Della Sera* (Montanelli, 2020), the difficult process of initiating sexual intercourse with an infibulated girl like the one he married. The brutality to which infibulated girls are condemned when they have intercourse (the man should, in fact, cut the reduced vaginal entrance to make penetration possible), together with the girl’s complete inability to experience sexual pleasure which results from clitoris removal, are mentioned in the article, and they have the effect of fostering the denunciation of Montanelli’s complicity to the patriarchal system of exploitation:

infibulation involves the cut of the clitoris, small labia and big labia, as well as the act of sewing the vagina, which leaves an orifice big as a buttonhole. When the woman gets married, the husband needs to open the flashy buttonhole with a knife, so to be able to penetrate her. The first abolition of this type of excision was promulgated by Guinea in 1965. Do we need to add more to question how a famous journalist, in 2000, when he was 91, can tell such an experience without showing a bit of remorse? (*Il Manifesto*, March 12, 2019)

Furthermore, both *Il Manifesto* and the newspaper *Il Post* define Montanelli’s act as sexual violence in light of historical research that demonstrates that at the time, paedophilia was identified as a crime by the fascist penal system (Codice Rocco, Article 519) and that intercourse with minors of fourteen was automatically considered abuse according to law.

4. ANALYSIS. CONFIRMING HEGEMONIC DISCOURSE AND ITS “DISCURSIVE LIMITS”

All the analysed articles showcase a clear discursive focus on the figure of Indro Montanelli, while rhetorical strategies that turn the narrative focus on the figure of the victim are absent. That can be interpreted as a betrayal of Non Una Di Meno’s performative action, which, as already stated, aimed at assigning new visibility to the 12-year-old girl that the Italian journalist subjugated as his “madame”. This is clear from the fact that the girl’s name, Destà, is never mentioned in the corpus and by the overwhelming presence of syntactic constructions where Montanelli appears in the role of the subject and Destà in that of the object. In light of existing scholarship (Abis & Orrù, 2017, p. 21;

Boyle, 2005, p. 84; Bullock & Cubert, 2002, p. 493; Mandolini, 2019, p. 262; McNeill, 1992; Meyers, 1996, pp. 65–66), this is among the most widespread tendencies in media coverage of gender-based violence, and it can be described as problematic because it fails to acknowledge female subjectivity and, consequently, the victim's experience of violence. However, this propensity to privilege an implicit or explicit accusation of the perpetrator highlights the general criticism with which Montanelli's deeds are treated, which testifies to the generally positive impact that Non Una Di Meno's operation seems to have had on the portrayal, by Italian online newspapers, of Montanelli's figure as problematic and, consequently, of the colonial enterprise he participated in as exploitative.

Despite this overall positive impact, the analysis suggests the presence of a significant bias towards the performance of the pink paint, which is often described as a form of vandalism and deprived of its aesthetic values. If we exclude the left-wing *Il Manifesto*, all the newspapers of the corpus label the action of throwing washable pink paint on the journalist's statue as an act of vandalism, smearing or uncivilised behaviour. The recurrence of the verb "imbrattare", which in Italian means "to smear" and is generally associated with the negative act of making something dirty or visually unpleasant, is striking as it is used in nine out of 10 articles (*Il Post*; *Il Giorno*; *Il Giornale*; *Milano Today*; *La Repubblica*; *Fanpage*; *Globalist*; *Ansa*; *Il Corriere della Sera*) and it recurs more than once in most of them. On a similar note, references to vandalism are common as the word or its derivatives is used by seven newspapers (*Il Corriere della Sera*; *Milano Today*; *Ansa*; *Globalist*; *La Repubblica*; *Il Giornale*; *Il Giorno*). If in three of them (*Ansa*; *Globalist*; *La Repubblica*), the inclusion of the term is the result of the reproduction of other subjects' or associations' statements, in the remaining four (*Il Corriere della Sera*; *Milano Today*; *Il Giornale*; *Il Giorno*), it appears as a clear lexical choice of the journalist. In the case of the second group of articles, the word "vandalism" is clearly employed to describe the act and, consequently, to belittle the feminist collective's initiative of organising a demonstration. Examples include these taken from *Il Giorno* and *Il Corriere della Sera*, where it is clear the journalist's intention to present Non Una Di Meno's operation as vandalism:

on March 8, a demonstration with 15,000 people took the streets of the city to reclaim rights for women: but the event organised by *Non Una Di Meno* in Milan also included a vandalising act against the statue dedicated to Indro Montanelli. (*Il Giorno*, March 9, 2019)

The commemoration for the day dedicated to women last Friday was characterised not only by the parade that counted on the presence of 15,000 people but also by acts of vandalism. Among these was the smearing of Montanelli's statue. On Saturday morning, the workers of Amsa intervened to clean it. (*Il Corriere della Sera*, March 9, 2019)

This depiction of the artistic operation as smearing and vandalism, together with the use of the trope of the uncivilised behaviour (which recurs once in the corpus, namely in the article published by *Milano Today*), is generally associated with a tendency to

insist on the semantic category of cleanness. *Il Corriere della Sera's* article, for example, is completely centred on the description of the cleaning process that the city council of Milan ordered a day after the feminist collective's act. Similarly, *Milano Today* starts by reporting the news of the cleaning and continues by treating the act as mischief. The repetition of this trope or collective symbol exhibits the reporters' decision to furtherly confirm the categorisation of the feminist collective's performance as a staining and adulterating act that needed to be washed out and polished. Moreover, only one article (*Il Post*) mentions the fact that the pink paint was washable. This omission is a non-insignificant detail that clearly would have restricted the possibility of labelling the action as uncivilised vandalism.

In the corpus, textual references to the aesthetic dimension of the operation ideated by the Italian feminist collective are rare, and, when present, they are never explicit. Notwithstanding the fact that, at a scholarly level, the operation can be easily labelled as a form of activism or art activism, which is to say, an activist-based action that employs the tools of artistic creation, thus directly interfering with the aesthetic and symbolic spheres of political communication (Groys, 2014, p. 1), this aspect is almost completely erased from the newspaper coverage of the event. A vaguely aesthetic description of the act of throwing washable pink paint on Montanelli's monument is made in a statement released by I sentinelli di Milano, a Milanese group that supported Non Una Di Meno in the organisation of the street protest. This declaration, which is often reported in the analysed articles, reads: "Indro Montanelli's statue became pink in order to cover the black of the horrible things he did in his life. We shouldn't forget" (I sentinelli di Milano, 2019). Here, the insistence on the choice of pink versus black colours that clearly underpins the activist action is highlighted and used rhetorically to suggest a link between the aesthetic and the political dimensions, which is precisely the aim of activism. However, the reference to activism remains cryptic and implicit, which does not allow to consider the reproduction of the statement as an actual recognition of the protest as a form of activism.

Another aspect that the analysis of the corpus showcased is the propensity of some newspapers to condemn the action as vandalism on the plane of textual discourse while, at the same time, legitimising it as aesthetically relevant at a visual level. This is made by means of photo galleries that journalists include in their articles and that document in detail the activist action, visually treating it as an object that deserves aesthetic contemplation, as in the cases of *Il Giorno* and *La Repubblica*. This treatment is made clear by the photographers' selection of different framings, contexts and lights, which assign the half-pink statue multiple aesthetic connotations and represent it as an object of photographic interest. This is strikingly emblematised by a picture taken from the newspaper *La Repubblica*, where two passers-by are caught while taking a photograph of the re-symbolised monument. Curiously enough, *Il Giorno's* photo gallery accompanies the pictures with a caption that reproduces, at a textual level, the accusations of vandalism, as the statue is described as "imbrattata di rosa" (smeared with pink paint). This contradictory discursivity, which avails of different modalities (the textual and the visual) to communicate opposite messages, can be considered emblematic of the tendencies that regulate the entire corpus of articles analysed, where a propensity to consider Non Una Di Meno's accusations against

Montanelli and his deeds is paradoxically counterbalanced by a discursive resistance towards the feminist group's methods and activities.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The analysis clearly showcases the co-existence, in the reporting practices employed by journalists who covered the case of March 8, 2019, of two opposite discursive directions: on the one side, the neat condemnation of Montanelli's behaviour, which can be interpreted as the result of Non Una Di Meno's effort to challenge with a counter-discourse the rhetoric of the good Italian coloniser. On the other side, a propensity to disregard the aesthetic dimension of the activist operation ideated by the feminist collective, which is only partially and indirectly nuanced by the presence of scattered aesthetic depictions of the painted statue. This last propensity can be labelled as a "discursive limit" (Jäger & Maier, 2009, p. 47) because it imposes a taboo, circumscribes the possibilities of the discourse by implicitly saying that it is not possible to go as far as labelling the collective's action as art. This discursive restriction is recursively implemented by means of frequent references to the semantic areas of vandalism, smearing, uncivilised behaviour and dirtiness. The failure to recognise the activists' operation as artistic is particularly problematic because it highlights the journalists' inability to accept any visible change in the regime of iconicity that dominates the city in relation to the Italian past. This, in turn, corresponds to affirming the inalterability of the symbolic order that legitimises the cultural memory of Italians as good colonisers. In light of this co-existence of opposite discursive stances, Chantal Mouffe's ideas of irreconcilability and antagonistic discursive processes can be applied to the case of Montanelli's statue, where the city, as well as the more traditional platform of the text, is clearly a battleground for the slow and gradual affirmation of new, more respectful, inclusive and truthful, historical narratives. If looked at from this perspective, Non Una Di Meno's activist practice proved successful as it achieved the goal that, according to Mouffe (2007), should guide critical art, that type of art "that foments dissensus, that makes visible what the dominant consensus tends to obscure and obliterate" (p. 4).

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