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Re-placing Race in the Public Space: Borders, Translation and Globalization

By
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Abstract

In this article I engage with the un- and re-making of monuments in the context of the globalization and mediatization of Black Lives Matter and anti-racist activism. I analyze in particular two examples that display transcultural negotiations of antiracism against the background of different colonial histories and postcolonial trajectories:

1. The induction of Josephine Baker to the French Pantheon in November 2021, which opens the space of a key monument of French heritage to a black woman for the first time.
2. The defacing of the statue of the Italian journalist and prominent intellectual Indro Montanelli in Milan in June 2020.

The analysis emphasizes, on the one hand, the fluidity characterizing the transnational circulation of language, media and spatial practices. On the other, it shows how the transnational circulation of Black Lives Matter activism, by impacting on different colonial histories and postcolonial realities, stimulates distinctive processes of re-making heritage at the local and national level. In order to take into account both the fluidity and the asymmetries, I expand the category of 'monument' to consider discursive and material spaces of representation. Lastly, by emphasizing significant differences between French and Italian post-coloniality, the article contributes to differentiate 'European' (post)colonialism and to integrate non-Anglophone voices into Anglophone postcolonial theory.

Keywords: heritage, politics of memory, Josephine Baker, Indro Montanelli, Black Lives Matter, globalization.

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Introduction

In this article I engage with the re-making and un-making of monuments and heritages in light of anti-racist and decolonial struggles. In particular, I compare two different performances of anti-racism which display transcultural negotiations of race, identity, and heritage in urban public space:

1. The induction of Josephine Baker to the French Pantheon in November 2021, which opens the space of a key monument of French heritage to a black woman for the first time.
2. The defacing the statue of the Italian journalist and prominent intellectual Indro Montanelli in Milan in June 2020.

However, the focus of my analysis is not the national monuments of the French Pantheon and the statue of Indro Montanelli, but rather the performative acts of re-making and un-making these monuments in the context of transnational anti-racist and decolonial struggles. Such struggles can be grasped only by expanding the category of monument, and complicating it in light of transcultural and postnational dynamics.

When the images of the homicide of George Floyd spread worldwide in the summer 2020, and Black Lives Matter's activism increased in many places outside the US, we witnessed a moment of rupture in the way race and racism were publicly debated in Europe. The reports and images of systemic violence towards people of color in the US didn't just heighten public awareness of racism, but also changed the public discourse. The word *race* itself seemed to be re-discovered and openly problematized, even in contexts in which racism had remained hidden behind the category of ethnicity or 'ethnical differences'. An example of what I mean here, is the study by Jan Blommaert and Jeff Verschueren (1998) about the discourse on diversity in Belgium. This study stresses how the "tolerant majority", while denying racism, regularly culturalizes and racializes differences, when reasoning about the 'realistic' chances for non-Western individuals and communities to integrate themselves in Western societies. The "tolerant majority" considers "ethnical differences" as a potential threat to the unity of the state and argue, accordingly, that there must be "limits of tolerance" in immigration politics. Even if the word *race* is not explicitly mentioned in these debates, racializing ways of thinking characterize many assumptions about nation, ethnicity and culture. In this regard, Stuart Hall (2017) refers to race as a "sliding signifier", and points to the fact that, historically speaking, race, ethnicity and nation have constituted the corners of a "fateful triangle": this triangle has characterized the discourse on difference, and the construction of Otherness, within the systems of meaning that have sustained the classifications of culture from the Enlightenment until today. Therefore, if we want to decolonialize heritages and contest racism, it is not sufficient to engage with the discursive construction of race. Instead, we need to comprehend the racialization processes characterizing the intersectional construction of Otherness (including nation, ethnicity, gender, etc.).

By putting *race* – instead of ethnicity – at the core of discourses on discrimination and violence, the increased mediatization and globalization of US-Black Lives Matter discourse in the summer of 2020 brought about a confrontation with European colonial past, and also stimulated a process of re-negotiation of cultural heritages in countries such as Italy, in which the colonial past had to a large extent remained silenced in public discourse. One of the most evident examples of this process is the symbolic act of toppling and staining statues and monuments paying tribute to historical personalities who, in light of the mentioned raise of consciousness, are perceived as not deserving to be celebrated in a public space.

Not only statues or monuments, but also other forms of heritage have been, and still are, at the core of debates. In Germany, for example, the Green Party has called for the removal of the word 'race' from the Constitution, which asserts that nobody shall be discriminated, among others, because of their race. The argument here is that race is not a 'real' fact, but an ideological construction and, as such, should not be mentioned in the Constitution as if it were an objective reality.

Against this background, my analysis of the staining of the monument dedicated to Indro Montanelli and of the Pantheonization of Josephine Baker addresses the following questions:

- What happens to anti-racist discourses and performances when they circulate globally and become transculturalized?
- How do languages, styles, semiotics, and their respective regimes get translated?
- What voices and agencies intertwine in the negotiation of race, diversity, collective memory, urban and public space?
- What kind of Otherness get included in or excluded from heritage formations following anti-racist struggles? What kind of Self gets excluded from heritage formations, for example because of the recognition of racist histories?
- What are the (historical, institutional, geopolitical etc.) limits and the conditions (im)posed by whom and to whom in these processes?

In the next two sections I analyze each of the mentioned examples separately. In the final section, I emphasize the similarities and differences among them. Moreover, I stress how the significant differences between the French and the Italian context can be productively addressed to differentiate Anglophone postcolonial theory. This appears particularly important not only theoretically, but also politically, at a moment in which decolonial struggles and Black Lives Matter activism are accused by their detractors of 'importing foreign doctrines' that do not fit local realities.

2. The *Pantheonization* of Josephine Baker in Paris

On November 30th, 2021 Josephine Baker was inducted into the French Pantheon, the mausoleum that contains the remains of distinguished French citizens. She is the first American, the first black woman, and the first performing artist to receive this honor.

Although the philosopher Régis Debray had suggested honoring Baker in the Pantheon as early as 2013 (Debray 2013), it was only in 2021 that President Macron agreed to this proposition, following a petition which gained around 38 000 signatures (Jousserand 2021). Thus, it is not unlikely that the increase in Black Lives Matter activism contributed to the success of the initiative.

Even if the French Pantheon is located, not on a border, but rather at the heart of Paris, the act of honoring Baker in the Pantheon (i.e., the re-making of the monument) can be regarded as an example of *border monument*. Chris Rumford stresses that more and more postnational monuments celebrate global connectivity while emphasizing border(s), and call them therefore "border monuments" (Rumford 2014: 73-87). Although he refers to monuments that are physically located on a geopolitical border, I think that Rumford's concept of border monument can be stretched to include practices of remaking and unmaking monuments such as those under discussion here. Rumford points to a changing relationship between borders and cosmopolitanism: despite the common assumption that cosmopolitanism is a challenge to the unity of the nation state, the increase of *cosmopolitan borders*, celebrated by post-national monuments, "can (re)define borders in terms of non-proximate connections" (Rumford 2014: 76). He defines border monuments, accordingly, as "engines of connectivity".

I want to highlight the tangle of cosmopolitanism and nationalism in honoring Baker's legacy as a French heroine and a symbol of French heritage. I focus in particular on four aspects:

1. The biographical narrative celebrating Baker's legacy,
2. The cenotaph,
3. The ritual of the induction, that is, the performative aspect of the ceremony, and
4. The speech given by French president Emmanuel Macron to celebrate this event.

Josephine Baker was a border-crosser in many ways. The ceremony highlights this aspect of her life[1]. The first part of the ceremony narrates Baker's biographical trajectory, while inscribing it into a spatial trajectory. An offstage voice narrates

Baker's life story while six members of the Air Force march towards the Pantheon carrying her cenotaph: the early years in the US, where she grew up in underprivileged conditions, faced racial segregation, and was married at the age of 13 years old; her first successes as a singer in New York and her move to Paris in 1925. The biographical narration is interspersed with Baker's songs and partisans' songs performed by the Air Force choir. Moreover, original quotes by Baker recall her loyalty to France, such as her reply to Jacques Abtey (Head of the French counterespionage during the Second World War) when he proposed that Baker support the French secret service by strategically using her special status as an artist to spy on German military activities: "Ils [les Parisiens] m'ont tout donné, en particulier leur cœur. Je leur ai donné le mien. Je suis prête, capitaine, à leur donner aujourd'hui ma vie."[2] Black, French and international are the main qualities of Baker's *Otherness* celebrated in this part of the ceremony. Furthermore, a series of symbols pinpoint her cosmopolitanism *and* her patriotism. For example, Baker's song "J'ai deux amours" (I have two loves) points to her love for both "mon pays et Paris": her country (USA) and Paris. Moreover, while a French flag covers the cenotaph, this does not contain Baker's remains, but a handful of earth from the main places of her life: St. Louis, Missouri; Paris; the Dordogne; and Monaco, where her actual ashes rest. The five medals, including the Legion of Honor, which Baker received for her role as a Resistance fighter, recall her efforts on behalf of the French secret service.

A second part of the ceremony is staged at the entrance of the Pantheon. When the cenotaph arrives, a collage of archive materials recalls key moments of Baker's life, including interviews, music, and images which are projected onto the surface of the monument. The most significant moments chosen to celebrate Baker's legacy testify to her commitment to the values of French universalism. For example:

A. A recording in which she states: "Je pense que je suis une personne qui a été adoptée par la France. Ça m'a surtout développé le sens humaniste. Et c'est cela pour moi le plus important de ma vie."[3]

B. An interview in which she replies to the question "why did you join the secret service?" by stating: "Pour défendre la France, mon idéal, la dignité humaine."[4]

C. An original video of the March on Washington in 1963, when Baker spoke in her Air Force uniform after Martin Luther King's famous speech "I have a dream", to encourage the civil rights activists to persevere in their fight.

D. A collage of images of Baker's castle in the Dordogne, showing her large

> family, which she describes as a "rainbow tribe". Baker adopted twelve children from different countries who lived together in the castle. A text accompanying the images projected onto the surface of the Pantheon describes life at the castle as a "village de la fraternité".

The third part of the ceremony is staged inside the Pantheon. Once the cenotaph enters the monument, the camera shows the Eiffel Tower shining in the background through the entrance door. Then, when the cenotaph is placed at the center of the hall, the camera displays, in the background, the flags of France and of the European Union, along with two photographs of Baker, one of which shows her in her Air Force uniform. A handwritten quote by Baker stands between the photographs and is woven into a round red carpet in the Pantheon's Hall: "C'est la France qui a fait de moi ce que je suis. Je lui garderai une reconnaissance éternelle!."[5]

When President Emmanuel Macron takes the floor, he recalls key moments of Baker's life, and explains why she has been chosen to become a symbol of French heritage. Macron's speech and his language choices are highly symbolic in this regard. He states that when Baker moved to Paris: "elle devient l'incarnation de l'esprit français et le symbole d'une époque."[6] In Macron's speech, Baker is American *and* French. She fights to assert herself, not as a woman, a black person, or an American, but as a "citoyenne libre, digne, complétement" (a free and fully dignified citizen). President Macron stresses that Baker enters the Pantheon together with the people who have chosen and defended France. In this sense, it is not only France that made Baker who she was (as the quote exposed in the Pantheon pointedly states), but also the reverse: Macron concludes his speech by pointing to how the *pantheonized* Baker contributes to remaking French heritage: "Vous entrez dans ce Panthéon où s'engouffre avec vous un vent de fantaisie et d'audace. Pour la première fois, ici, c'est une certaine idée de la liberté et de la fête qui entre ici."[7] Such a new idea includes the peculiar mix of cosmopolitanism and nationalism, of which the cenotaph becomes a key symbol. In concluding his speech, Macron states: " Vous entrez dans ce Panthéon parce que, née américaine, il n'y a pas plus française que vous"[8]. Baker thus becomes a *cosmopolitan monument* to the extent that her Pantheonization, to recall Rumford, celebrates global connectivity while emphasizing national borders. She is honored not just as a heroine who fought against fascism and racism, but as a heroine who fought in the spirit of French universalism. The ending of Macron's speech emphasizes the new Frenchness embodied by Baker: "Ma France c'est Josephine" (my France is Josephine).

Baker's biography is a story of happy border-crossing. It is a trajectory that brings her from the poverty and violence that characterized her childhood, and from the racial segregation in the US, to international fame as a performing artist and, eventually, to being a national symbol of courage and heroism in the country where she chose to live for most of her life. This trajectory is expressed, not only by language and discourse, but also by transmedia performances through the different stations of the ceremony. Her trajectory becomes inscribed into the urban space of the rue Soufflot, leading the American-born artist to the heart of Paris and to the most sacred space of French republican heritage: the Pantheon. The sacrality of such a border-crossing moment is emphasized by the choral piece, "In Nomine Lucis," which accompanies the cenotaph's entry into the Pantheon. The piece had been commissioned to the composer Pascal Dusapin on the occasion of the Pantheonization of the writer Maurice Genevoix, who had fought in the First World War, and in memory of the fallen of the First World War (CEN 2022). Despite the republican and secular history of the piece, the musical genre and the use of the Latin language further emphasize the sacrality of the ritual. Latin, after all, has been the language of the Church and of Catholic sacred music for centuries.

In the context of the French 2022 Presidential elections Baker's induction certainly opposed the growing far-right extremism and xenophobia spreading in public discourse. In addition, this act certainly contrasts the prevalently white and male symbols of French heritage reunited in the Pantheon, which the inscription on the Pantheon's tympanum highlights: "Aux grands hommes la patrie reconnaissante" (to great men, a grateful nation). As a matter of fact, Baker is only the sixth woman of altogether 81 personalities honored in the Pantheon.

On the other hand, the prerequisite for the inclusion of female blackness into French heritage is that this happens within the framework of colorblindness. A significant example of this limit is offered by the way in which President Macron speaks about the colonial racism that Baker faced when she performed the wild dancer at the *Revue Nègre*. The image of her dancing only covered by a banana skirt has become iconic (Jerkins 2016). President Macron states in his speech that Baker's dance overturned colonial prejudices animated by the "esprit des lumières" (the spirit of Enlightenment). Pablo Picasso's quote "The Nefertiti of the present times", which is projected onto the surface of the Pantheon during the second part of the ceremony, remains uncommented upon as an example of the muse role played by Baker in the context of the artistic avant garde in the 1930s. However, in the same years in which she danced in the famous banana skirt, the spirit of Enlightenment did not keep ethnographers from showing forcibly displaced naked Africans in museums as examples of an evolutionary step between the ape and the white (hu)man. In fact, the exoticization of the *black beauty* is not an exception, but a product of the classificatory knowledge produced in the context of the Enlightenment (Ponzanesi 2005: 165-171).

In whichever way Baker managed to oppose colonial imagination, she also became exoticized in ways that were racist, although this was a different kind of racism from the one she had faced in the US, where the legacy of slavery exposed black persons to a regime of systematic violence and segregation. In Paris, Baker embodied as an artist a different kind of Otherness than that of black Americans in the US or of Afro-French in France: she was a cosmopolitan Other, not a colonial or migrant Other. It is *this* kind of Otherness that enters the Pantheon. The border does not disappear; it shifts.

The ambivalence between these different forms of Otherness has historical roots. During the First World War, following an agreement between the French and the US Army, black American soldiers emigrated to France (Young 2018). They were trained by the French and served in the 16th Division of the 4th French Army until the end of the war. The entire unit won France's highest award, the Croix de Guerre, and 171 of them were awarded the Legion of Honor. When they went back to the US, their experiences helped to forge an oral history in African American communities about France as an egalitarian society, in contrast with the segregation and violence suffered by black Americans in the US (Young 2018). France thus played an inspirational role in the African-American imagination in the post-war years, especially in cities such as St. Louis, the city in which Josephine Baker grew up, where violence against the black community was particularly intense. In this context, African-American Otherness is profoundly different from colonial Otherness. The philosopher Jeanne Nardal criticized the colonial imagination nurtured by Baker's performances in an article entitled *Pantins exotique* (exotic puppets), which was published in 1928 in *La Dépêche Africaine*, (Boittin 2005: 125-127). In the article, Nardal stresses that the exoticization of blackness exhibited by Baker's performances was not dissimilar from the display of African villagers at Parisian expositions. Both had dramatic consequences for the life of all black women living in the city. She encourages black intellectuals to oppose such exoticization, and to become subjects, rather than objects, in representing contemporary blackness. Jeanne Nardal, together with her sister Paulette, contributed to giving birth to an anti-imperialist counterculture that was able to link Negritude thinkers with anti-imperialist workers and white feminist, middle-class and upper-class women in interwar Paris (Boittin 2005). *La Dépêche Africaine*, the paper in which her article was published, is one of the many projects that flourished in this counterculture, which was to be of great importance in the antifascist movements of the mid-1930s (Boittin 2005: 121-123). In contrast to the exoticizing 'negrophilia' of the *Revue nègre*, *La Dépêche africaine* targeted men and women of all races working in different professional contexts, including administrators, intellectuals and colonials (Boittin 2005: 121).

Baker replies to Jeanne Nardal's critique in a letter pointing out the difference between their respective positions, including the different economic conditions in which they grew up. As a matter of fact, although Nardal's grandmother was born into slavery in Martinique, her parents were both intellectuals, and were able to grant their children an excellent education in Paris. Moreover, Baker explains in the letter her own emancipatory strategy in catering to the racist expectations of white audiences:

> A person cannot be judged solely on the basis of his or her actions: not everyone has the luxury to choose how to lead their lives, and as a result many are forced to comply with undesirable realities simply in order to stay alive. Do I care deeply about the fight for equality for my black brothers and sisters? Of course. But if I choose to renounce, in the name of cultural authenticity, the performances that have brought me my fame, I will not only lose any influence I might hope to later put to use in this struggle, I will also risk my own financial and social stability– maybe even my life. You seem unable to understand this. Perhaps it is because you do not know what it is to grow up in a vermin-infested, one-room shack, to be forced to scrounge through dumpsters in the hope of finding some sustenance, to see your friends and neighbors mercilessly killed as you run for your life from angry white mobs. I do.
>
> […] As you note, a majority of the audience at the *Bal negre* is black. But I doubt that in Paris a black-only audience can financially sustain and socially legitimate performances by black artists: the *Bal negre* will only survive by depending on the financial support of an upper-class white clientele. As a consequence, it has no hope of escaping the cultural conflation and essentialization with which white audiences seem all too eager to label any performance involving black artists. (Baker 1928)[9]

The dispute between Baker and Nardal arises from the difference between their respective positionalities, and from the different strategies of emancipation they adopt: Baker points to the class difference between herself and Nardal to remind the latter of her privilege as a middle-class intellectual who had been educated and was empowered to *voice* her opposition to the legacy of colonialism in art and society. For Baker, coming to terms with the taste of white audiences was not only a strategy of social emancipation, but also a matter of survival. Baker encourages Nardal to acknowledge her own privilege instead of accusing her. She feels the necessity to comply with the expectations of white audiences in order to obtain a public voice that would have been otherwise denied to her. The strategy of compromising has proved to be successful until today, as Baker has become a symbol of black female emancipation in the Pantheon.

In fact, one of the questions that critical intellectuals and activists have posed in this regard is: Why not an Afro-French person into the Pantheon? This article is not the place to tackle this question in an exhaustive manner. However, I want to discuss at least two significant aspects of the problem:

1. Shortly after the announcement of the Pantheonization of Baker, historian Benjamin Stora proposed to also induct into the Pantheon Tunisian-French feminist lawyer, politician, essayist and activist Gisèle Halimi. Halimi was a key figure in legal struggles to promote human rights (e.g. depenalization of homosexuality) and women's rights (e.g. right to abortion). In her long career, she was a member of the French National Assembly, a representative of France to UNESCO, and offered legal support to defend anticolonial movements. It is especially due to the latter that she was denied the honor of being inducted into the Pantheon (Recker 2021). One of Halimi's most notorious legal battles is the defense of Djamila Boupacha, a militant in the Algerian National Liberation Front (FLN), who was arrested by the French Army and accused in a military tribunal of having placed a bomb in Algiers in 1959. During the detention Boupacha was tortured and raped by French officials. Gisèle Halimi was able to prove the illegitimacy of the military trial, and to swap the roles of prosecutor and accused in the case: at her arraignment for criminal association and attempted homicide in May 1960, Boupacha reported that she had been raped and tortured. She did not deny her affiliation with the FNL, nor her commitment to Algerian independence, but declared that her confession of the planned attack had been extorted under torture (Surkis 2010: 43). The case became a *cause célèbre* when Simone de Beauvoir, in an article published in *Le Monde*, publicly attacked Charles de Gaulle and his government, accusing them of covering up torture, and thereby of betraying "French" principles (Surkis 2010: 43). Thanks to the alliance between Halimi and de Beauvoir, Boupacha was granted an amnesty.

Halimi's *engagement* honored the universalism of human rights while challenging the colonial imagination which conceived of France and French culture as the guarantors of such principles. For this reason, while Benjamin Stora saw in Halimi's Pantheonization also a great opportunity for a gesture of reconciliation on the sixtieth anniversary of Algerian independence, the initiative has been opposed by exponents of parties on the right and of Harkis' associations who consider Halimi a traitor (Recker 2021). The Harkis were Algerian Muslims who supported the French Army during the French War of Independence (1954-1962). Upon independence the French government did not grant all Harkis the right to move to France. Only French citizens, civil servants and public officers were given this opportunity. The majority of the Harkis, who had been used in guerrilla fighting but were not officially members of the French Army or administration, were disarmed and left behind in Algeria. Considered traitors by their fellow citizens, tens of thousands were massacred in the aftermath of Independence. Those who were granted the right to be repatriated to France after 1962 were often put in camps for years once they arrived in France. Together with their descendants they are called in today's France *Franco-musulmans rapatriés*, and constitute a significant part of the Algerian-French population. However, their position is ambiguous and controversial with respect to the postcolonial memory culture and French immigration society (Laiß 2021). The *Rassemblement National*, the nationalist, populist far-right party, has strategically paid homage to Harkis' loyalty to France to oppose the celebrations of Algerian Independence, and, in general, to plead for an assimilationist model of integration (Le Pen 2016). Against the background of these controversies, Gisèle Halimi has been denied, so far, a place in the Pantheon, despite the more than 35 000 signatures supporting the initiative (Recker 2021). President Macron announced in August 2021 that she would be honored with a ceremony at the *Invalides*, a complex of buildings that celebrate French military history. The Dome Church of the Invalides hosts, for example, the tombs of Napoleon and other members of the Bonaparte family, together with personalities honored as military heroes. The choice of the place has been highly criticized, among others by members of Halimi's family. Finally, after being postponed several times, the ceremony took place on the symbolic date of 8 March 2023, International Women's Day, in the *Palais de Justice* (Court House), the place where Halimi had conducted many of her battles. Whether she will enter the Panthéon in the future is still the object of discussions. The Presidential office has declared in this regard that if Halimi will eventually be honored in the Panthéon, this should not be misinterpreted as revenge of a part of the country against another one (Parrot 2023).

2. The celebration of Baker's critique of coloniality should be considered also against the background of the contentious discussions about the political use of the veil, or of female nakedness. The *burkini*-gate in summer 2016 is just one of the many examples of juridical and cultural conflicts that arise whenever the prohibition of the veil becomes a symbolic crusade conducted in the name of French secularism (Berg & Lundahl 2016). Dropping the veil has been a highly politicized act since the French-Algerian war, and has remained so until today.

Afsaneh Najmabadi (2006: 252) stresses in this regard that "a Muslim woman can claim Frenchness only if she is willing to drop her veil in public", highlighting that the veil, commonly seen as a religious symbol, is erroneously interpreted as a mark of anti-secularism and anti-republicanism.

By contrast, the critique of coloniality expressed by Baker's performances can be, in this regard, safely accepted by the 'tolerant majority', because it complies with French secularism and reinforces it. She uses her female naked body in emancipatory ways that complies with the ideal of a liberal subject who reclaims her freedom outside the religious or political sphere (cf. Berg & Lundahl 2016: 270).

To sum up, while the Pantheonization of Josephine Baker honors anti-racist activism and opens the doors of French heritage to a symbol of anti-racist struggle, it also perpetuates a clear distinction between different kinds of otherness: the cosmopolitan, republican otherness enters the Panthéon while the (post)colonial otherness does not, or at least not yet.

When Black Lives Matter demonstrations spread across Paris in the summer of 2020 several French politicians and intellectuals (of both right- and left-wing parties), including academics, protested against the importation of 'identitarian politics' from the US to Europe (Younge 2021). In their eyes, concepts like white privilege and intersectionality do not have anything to do with French society. As a matter of fact, speaking of *race* is considered a taboo in the French (as in the Italian) public discourse, which makes it difficult to address and quantify processes of racialization at institutional level. In this context, President Macron expressed an uncompromisingly anti-racist position, but added that anti-racism was unacceptable when "usurped by separatists" in order to divide French society (Younge 2021). The reason why Black Lives Matter discourse appears so divisive is that it bases the fight against racism and colorblindness on the recognition of structural inequalities. In the French context, this implies a confrontation with the legacy of colonialism. Against this background, the Pantheonization of Josephine Baker, an American black woman who has conducted her fight against racism by embracing French republicanism, reaffirms the superiority of the egalitarianism rooted in the universalist values of the Enlightenment. Josephine Baker is, therefore, a powerful symbol to oppose the importation of the US anti-racist discourse in the context of the mediatization and globalization of Black Lives Matter. Evidently, opening the doors of the Panthéon to Josephine Baker does not destabilize its foundations. Gisèle Halimi appears in this regard as a far more challenging symbol. It is not a coincidence that her Pantheonization has been perceived as potentially *divisive*: the same critique expressed towards Black Lives Matter.

3. The staining of the statue of Indro Montanelli in Milan

On 13 June 2020, a group of students defaced the statue of Indro Montanelli in Milan by painting it red and spraying the words “razzista stupratore” (racist rapist) on its base. Montanelli was a prominent Italian journalist and intellectual, who lived between 1909 and 2001. Among other things, he served as both editor-in-chief and writer for one of the most popular Italian newspapers, the *Corriere della Sera*. The statue dedicated to him, which is located in a public park in Milan, was erected in 2009, and represents the journalist sitting and working on his Olivetti typewriter (ANSA 2020).

The defacing of the statue drew attention to a colonial past which had received little attention with respect both to the recognition of Montanelli as a public intellectual, and to a critical confrontation with an ugly part of Italian history. Montanelli enlisted in the Second Italo-Ethiopian War (1935-36) when he was 26 years old. During this time, he raped a 12-year-old Ethiopian girl according to the so-called ‘madamato’: a common practice consisting in a sort of temporary “lease” lasting during the soldiers’ tour of duty in Ethiopia. Montanelli had explicitly spoken about this episode more than once: first, in an interview on public television in 1969 (L’ora della verità: 1969), and then in several other interviews (Questo secolo: 1982). In 2000, he retold the story publicly in response to a letter by an 18-year-old female reader of the newspaper, who asked him to tell the public more about that “adventure” (Montanelli 2020).

It is worth noting that ‘adventure’ is the word that Montanelli and many others repeatedly used to refer to their experiences in the Italo-Ethiopian-War: one that reflects the spirit that animated Italy’s fascist politics in Africa. The fact that a young woman could use this word in 2000 is a striking example of how little collective self-awareness there is, even in recent times, with respect to colonial racism and sexism. In addition, Montanelli claimed to have “married” this girl. The use of such euphemism is not an isolated one: it offers just one example of the collective veterans’ rhetoric that has regularly mystified the violence of what in fact was the rape of a very young – virgin, often infibulated – girl, whom was in most cases abandoned when the soldiers returned home. In the novel “Sangue giusto” Francesca Melandri illuminates such contradictions in the context of the great power asymmetries between the male colonizers and the female colonized (Melandri 2017).

What is particularly striking in this context is that Montanelli never showed any regret or shame about his behavior. On the contrary. In the TV interview and on other occasions, he exhibited a self-confident attitude towards what, in his words, was normal in Africa (L’ora della verità 1969). Ethnicity is used, here as in many other cases, as an alibi to justify colonial violence. The monument dedicated to Montanelli had already been stained in the past. However, the former protests had been framed differently: For example, in 2012, 2013, and 2019 the statue was stained in the context of feminist demonstrations. Racism, and the confrontation of colonialism, had not been at the core of these protests before Black Lives Matter.

On 14 June 2020, a collective of students — Rete Studenti Milano (RSM) and Laboratorio Universitario Metropolitano (LuMe) — in Milan reclaimed the gesture by posting a video on their Facebook page. The video is filmed from the perspective of one of the students, who shows how he reaches the location by biking from the street nearby (La Stampa 2020). Then it displays two other students painting the words "razzista stupratore" (racist rapist) on the base of the statue. The soundtrack of the video is Gil Scott-Heron's "The Revolution will not be televised", which has accompanied many BLM demonstrations in the US after the death of George Floyd.

This act of mediatization symbolically inserts the staining into the framework of a global protest. It establishes a connection between Italian racism and racism in the US, thus contesting the widespread habit, common in Italy and in Europe, of easily seeing racism elsewhere (especially the US), while being blind to its more localized manifestations. In this new global context, the gesture of soiling the statue acquires new levels of significance. At a local level, it contests the permanent occupation of a public space by a public intellectual who had occupied a very central position within the national public sphere. Indeed, the protest has not been limited to soiling the statue, but has initiated a series of sit-ins in other symbolic places of institutional power, such as Palazzo Marino, seat of the city hall, also in response to the public defense of the statue by the mayor Beppe Sala (Il Giorno 2020).

From the local level, the discussion has expanded to a national level, stimulating a debate about the shadows of a national heritage constructed around a delicate balance between remembering and forgetting. It has brought to the public discussion and problematized the deep relationship between current forms of racism and the legacy of colonialism. In the media performance, the local public space — the park in which the statue is located – and the global, mediatized space, intertwine. Combining the piece "The Revolution will not be televised" with the gesture of spraying the words "razzista stupratore" onto the base of the statue creates a connection between Italian colonial history and the assassination of George Floyd. The media performance inserts the story of Montanelli in Ethiopia into a broader transnational history of colonialism, slavery and segregation.

The mediatization and the globalization of Black Lives Matter, including the regime of translation in which its re-territorialization (Tomlinson 1999, García Canclini 2005) takes place, transform what originally was a national, if not a local monument, into a "border monument", that is, an "engine of connectivity" (Rumford 2014: 73-87). Consequently, the anti-racist performance, while originating from two, historically speaking, distinctive discourses (the US-American and the post- and decolonial ones), becomes intrinsically interconnected and cannot be fully understood without overcoming methodological nationalism. In the defacing of Montanelli's statue, the language of Black Lives Matter activism comes from and speaks to a socio-political context that is different from that of French universalism, and as such needs to be contextualized within the historical specificity of Italian colonialism and post-coloniality. In contrast to France, Italy has been until the late twentieth century an emigrant, rather than an immigrant, country. Millions of Italians left their homes from the late 19th century and throughout the 20th century in search of a better life abroad. They moved to Africa, the Americas, Australia, and other European countries. However, not all these migration flows have been equally present in national consciousness, and especially the Italian colonial presence in Africa has remained silenced to a great extent until recently. Angelo Del Boca, one of the first historians to engage deeply with Italian colonial history, has spoken of *rimozione* (*repression*) in psychoanalytic terms to indicate Italy's lack of consciousness with respect to its colonial heritage (Del Boca 2003). Scholarly research sees in the relatively early loss of the colonies after WWII, the consequent absence of anticolonial wars in the post-WWII-period, and the lack of mass migration from the former colonies the principal reasons for such lack of consciousness (Lombardi-Diop & Romeo 2012). Until the last decade of the twentieth century blackness remained invisible in Italy with the exception of only a few young Ethiopian and Somali intellectuals who came to study to Italy and then returned, for the most part, to their home countries (Del Boca 2003: 77-78). On the other hand, a specific form of racism has targeted Italian Southerners who moved to the North of the country in search of work and better economic conditions. Cristina Lombardi-Diop and Caterina Romeo refer to them as "internal colonial migrants" to underscore the similarities between these "internal" migrants and colonial migrants with respect to various forms of discrimination, ranging from restricted access to labor and housing market, to the racialization of their dialects and cultures (Lombardi-Diop & Romeo 2012: 5). It is telling that "Africani" (Africans) has been one of the racialized appellatives which Northerners have used to mock their fellow citizens from the South. Luchino Visconti offers a cross section of such a cultural climate in his movie *Rocco e I suoi Fratelli* (Rocco and his brothers), in which the Parondi family is mockingly called "gli Africani" by their Milanese neighbors (Lombardi-Diop & Romeo 2012: 5-6).

Despite the many different forms in which race and racism have been articulated in the course of Italian history, the relative scarcity of immigration until the 1990s has contributed to Italy's self-perception as a white and homogeneous nation. The maintenance of a clear border between whiteness and blackness has been a crucial element in the construction of a white Mediterranean identity in the nation-building (and branding) process from the liberal to the fascist era, and then after that to the republican one (Giuliani 2015). On the one hand, the invisibility of race and racism in public space has been a constitutive part of the national imaginary in all its visual, linguistic and transmedia forms, including the taboo of using the words *race* and *racism* in the juridical and political-institutional language in the post-fascist, republican era (Giuliani 2015: 167). On the other hand, the colonial Other — whether it is the black women raped by soldiers during colonial wars, or fellow citizens from the South in the Northern cities of the post-war period — has been repeatedly invoked as a point of contrast in order to re-assert the centrality of white identity to the nation. In this context, Gaia Giuliani (2015: 168) speaks of "symbolic anthropophagy", a term borrowed from Latin American postcolonial critique, to stress the multiple ways in which racialized and gendered subjects become incorporated into the national discourse in order to reproduce the superiority of the white subject. This is precisely what Montanelli does in the interview on public television in 1969, when he admitted that he would not have entertained a sexual relationship with a twelve-year-old girl in Italy, but perceived it as normal to do so in Ethiopia.

Since the 1990s, the homogeneity of the nation and the invisibility of blackness in public space have been challenged by strong immigration from Africa and other countries all over the world. However, the tight connections between colonial history and the multiple forms of contemporary racism have not been systematically questioned and investigated. Although urban architecture and toponymy display plenty of colonial traces, this ugly part of Italian history has remained invisible for a long time. Only recently, various artistic and academic works, as well as civil society projects, have engaged with the colonial history of urban landscapes (e.g. Bianchi & Scego 2020, Postcolonial Italy – Mapping Colonial Heritage 2018). Italian academic research has been long characterized by a lack of investment in decolonial work, and race studies have focused on the discrimination of internal and external minorities (e.g. Southerners, Italian Jews, Roma and Sinti), but not on the construction of race and its intersection with gender, class, sexuality, religion, citizenship and other categories (Lombardi-Diop & Romeo 2012: 11-14). In addition, in Italy, postcolonial studies have long been a subject limited to departments of English and American Studies. While this lack has been addressed in academic and artistic works in the past years, colonial racism has remained largely invisible in public and popular discourse. By stimulating awareness with respect to Italy's colonial history, and pointing to the need to decolonize heritage, the unmaking of the monument translates postcoloniality into the Italian context.

4. Re-making heritage and memory: BLM intertwines different (post)colonial trajectories

The staining of the statue of Indro Montanelli and the Pantheonization of Josephine Baker exemplify two different and yet complementary processes of un- and re-making heritage in light of anti-racist struggles. They are comparable because they both participate in a transnational and transmedia discourse which contributes to re-making (re-mapping, re-naming etc.) the urban space according to anti-racist sensitivities. Moreover, both performances can be considered to be examples of "border monuments" understood as "engines of connectivity" (Rumford 2012: 73-87). They are different, because they display significant discrepancies with respect to translating 'global' anti-racism. The Pantheonization of Baker performs a selective inclusion of female blackness into the body of the nation: the inclusion of a cosmopolitan otherness which complies with the universalistic understanding of human dignity and equality developed in the context of the Enlightenment. While the border shifts, it still works as a device of in- and ex-clusion. Sara Ahmed emphasizes this contradictory aspect of inclusion:

> Inclusion could be read as a technology of governance: not only as a way of bringing those who have been recognized as strangers into the nation, but also of making strangers into subjects, those who in being included are also willing to consent to the terms of inclusion. A national project can also be understood as a project of inclusion — a way others as would-be citizens are asked to submit to and agree with the task of reproducing the nation. (Ahmed 2012: 163)

The memory of Josephine Baker offers a perfect example of such a project of inclusion. Baker's fight against racism is honoured to the extent that it confirms the authority of French republicanism at a moment in which:

a. this model is challenged by social divisions and inequalities characterizing the post-migrant society, and
b. the increase of Black Lives Matter and decolonial activism, following the assassination of George Floyd, has spread a different anti-racist language: one that criticizes structural racism and colour-blindness, and denounces that, while all humans should be equal, in fact they are not.

The staining of the monument dedicated to Montanelli, re-mixes Black Lives Matter's codes, languages and styles to contest the *invisibility* of racism and colonial violence inherent to Italian national heritage and its celebration in public spaces. The defacing of the statue has been criticized as an example of 'cancel culture'. However, my analysis emphasizes that this gesture does not *cancel* culture, but *rewrite* memory in order to *insert* what, for decades, has been erased. It is a gesture that reappropriates the public space from the bottom, that is, from a civil society initiative.

The differences between these border monuments demonstrate that the de- and re-territorialization (Tomlinson 1999, García Canclini 2005) of Black Lives Matter happens in different regimes of translation and generate different outcomes. The label 'European (post)colonialism' is too generic, in this context, to take into account the diversity of (post)colonial trajectories. It is important, in this context, that analytical work produced under this label overcomes, systematically, both national and linguistic divides. I fully share in this regard Sandra Ponzanesi's view:

> Understanding this minority position within postcolonial studies helps to prevent postcolonial theory from becoming a new master discourse which privileges the English linguistic hegemony and the chronological ordering of responses over European colonialism along former colonial divides (Britain, France, Netherlands, Italy, etc.). It is therefore also important to study the incongruence within, and the way in which postcolonial theorizing does not fit all European contexts in the same way and needs not only be appropriated and modified but also transformed in order for the Anglophone paradigm to remain effective and alert to an internal rehegemonizing tendency. (Ponzanesi 2012: 56)

In order to avoid a binary distinction between 'the global' and 'the local/the national' in my analysis, I have emphasized the contrast between the fluidity characterizing the transnational circulation of language, media and spatial practices, and the proliferation, disaggregation and heterogenization of borders (cf. Mezzadra & Neilson 2013: 1-25) in the context of the globalization and the transculturalization of communication. According to this perspective, borders are not objects of study, but devices of in- and exclusion. In the case of the analyzed monuments, borders and orders intervene in the negotiation of collective memory, which, despite all the attempts to fix it in solid artefacts and in finished narratives, is in fact plural, fluid and unfinished (Assmann 2018).

To emphasize such fluidity, I have stressed the multiple temporalities, scales and sites of culture simultaneously at play in processes of re-making monuments. Moreover, I have expanded the concept of language to enhance its materiality. In the defacing of Montanelli's statue, for example, the material act of writing, the red paint, the spray, the stone, the music, the act of filming and the medial circulation of the video afterwards are all essential elements in the un- and re-making of memory. While the words 'razzista stupratore' are Italian words, their semantics is translingual because it translates US anti-racist discourse to point to problematic aspects of Italian memory. This process of translation cannot be fully understood by separating single levels of signification according to disciplinary boundaries (e.g. language, urban spaces, media). Marga Munkelt, Markus Schmitz, Mark Stein and Silke Stroh (2013: liv-lv) point to "postcolonial translocations" as the comprehensive set of processes that include discursive spaces and material spaces of representation. They emphasize that while the postcolonial mainstream focuses on textual discourse, far less attention has been devoted to more material expressions of imperial and postcolonial power-relations, which are key in postcolonial urban studies or postcolonial architectural history. They suggest the need to devote more attention to performative practices that play an important role in shaping the production of city-space, besides narrative representations of the urban. As a matter of fact, the transmedia performances analyzed in this article correlate with other local and translocal initiatives (Kelly & Vassell 2023). In Paris, for example, the collective project *Entrée to Black Paris* (2014) offers various activities in digital as well as in in-person format (e.g. guided tours through the city and cooking classes) with the aim of making the many facets of Parisian black culture more visible. A metro station near the Bobino theater has been renamed on occasion of the Pantheonization *Gaîté-Joséphine Baker* (Gaiety-Josephine Baker). The street *Rue de la Gaîté*, which lies in the proximity of the station, owes its name from the numerous theatres and cabarets which in the 19th century livened up the area. The renaming of the station "Gaîté-Joséphine Baker" echoes Macron's laudation "Vous entrez dans ce Panthéon où s'engouffre avec vous un vent de fantaisie et d'audace. Pour la première fois, ici, c'est une certaine idée de la liberté et de la fête qui entre ici ."[10] The toponymy consolidates the celebration of cheerfulness in the re-making of French heritage. In Italy too, projects such as the digital archive *Postcolonial Italy – Mapping colonial heritage* (2018) aim to make the colonial past more visible in urban and public spaces. The border between the discursive and the material expressions of decolonial struggles blur.

The heterogeneity of the linguistic, semiotic, cultural resources and strategies employed to re-make memory demonstrate that it is very reductive to refer to the re-negotiation of memory in terms of subtraction, that is, as a process of *canceling* culture. Culture, as memory, is never stable, and both the archive and the rubbish have been key-figures in the formation of collective memory (Assmann 2018: 22-23). Reconsidering *if* or *why* a statue should occupy a public square is a way of re-negotiating the border between what should have been said and have been silenced, between what should be removed and what should be added to *collective* heritages. Eventually, this process leads to reconsidering the very idea of community whose memory is inscribed into the public space. Iain Chambers

(2006) stresses in this regard that, in order to critically appropriate European modern history and its heritage, it is necessary to engage with the suppression of alterity, often conducted in the name of tolerance towards diversity. This attitude towards alterity explains why honoring the legacy of Gisèle Halimi in the Pantheon appears to some critics as a divisive gesture. Opening the doors of the Pantheon to Halimi would contribute, instead, to enlarging significantly the very idea of community expressed in the Pantheon.

Endnotes

1 The full ceremony is available online (Figaro Live 2021).

2 These and the following translations are mine: "The Parisians have given me everything, especially their heart. I have given them mine. I am ready, Captain, to offer them now my life". Here and in the following, I prefer to insert the original quotes into the body of the text, and to offer the respective translations in the footnote, or in brackets, in order to normalize linguistic hybridity in academic practice, and:
a. Emphasize the polyvocality and the translingual nature of the arguments;
b. Prevent the impression that Anglophone texts originate from monolingual discourses;
c. Offer the readers access to the multilingual sources, thus giving them the opportunity to make sense of them in the ways they will find adequate.

3 "I was adopted by France and because of that I developed a sense as a humanist. And this is the most important part of my life".

4 "To defend France and to defend my ideal and human dignity".

5 "France has made me whom I am. I will be eternally grateful".

6 "She becomes the living incarnation of the French spirit and the symbol of an epoque".

7 "A wind of fantasy and audacity enters with you the Pantheon. For the first time, a certain idea of liberty and of feast enters here".

8 "You enter here because, while being born American, there is nobody more French than you".

9 The quoted online source reports this epistolary exchange in an English translation. I had no access to the original texts in French.

10 "A wind of fantasy and audacity enters with you the Pantheon. For the first time, a certain idea of liberty and of feast enters here".

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