

Decolonize the city. Visual dialogues in Padua

The participatory video "Decolonize the City. Visual Dialogues in Padua" was realized in the autumn of 2020 within the laboratory "Visual research method" held by Prof. Annalisa Frisina at the University of Padua. This experience shows how it is possible to perform decolonization in public spaces and activate counter-politics of memory at the urban level. Visual practices of decolonization are useful not only to falter statues (for example the Rhodes Must Fall Campaign) and street names but more importantly to question the worldviews and social hierarchies that have made it possible to celebrate/forget the racist and sexist violence of colonialism.

The colonial streets of Padua have been reappropriated by the bodies, voices, and gazes of six Italian/Afro-descendant citizens, bringing urban colonial traces out of insignificance and re-signifying them creatively. The video was constructed through visual practices of decolonization that had as a common denominator the activation of counter-politics of memory, starting from personal and familiar, intimately political gazes. The six narrative voices question the social hierarchies that made it possible to forget the racist and sexist violence of colonialism and offer alternative visions of society, as they can aspire to and claim greater social justice, the cultural freedom to choose one's own affiliations, and even the transformative power of artistic beauty. In the video, there are Wissal Houbabi, Mackda Ghebremariam Tesfau' Cadigia Hassan, Ilaria Zorzan, Emmanuel M'bayo Mertens and Viviana Zorzato, who reclaim colonial traces with the presence of their bodies in the city.

Decolonize Your Eyes (Padua Collective)

The participatory video is just one of the tools implemented in Padua to intervene in colonial memory. Yet, an active group is the Decolonize Your Eyes Collective. The Decolonize your eyes collective was born in the Palestro neighborhood in Padua, a neighborhood that has numerous streets named after people and battles related to the colonial liberal and fascist periods. The neighborhood was once referred to as "Chinatown" due to the density of population and leftist thinking that at the time referred back to Mao; neighborhood that has within it Piazza Caduti della Resistenza (formerly Piazza Toselli) to remember the Resistance of which many inhabitants were part of during fascism.

The collective was born in June 2020 with a call to action by A.S.D Quadrato Meticcio, an

association active in the neighborhood since 2012, to which numerous city realities responded. The collective started with organizing free urban 'decolonize' walk around the Palestro neighborhood (for instance crossing: Via Tembien, Via Amba Aradam, Via Lago Ascianghi). During the 'decolonial walks' several multilingual informational signs have been left in the public space to raise a discussion on the colonialist history and its multiple legacies.

The collective's goal is to bring to the streets and the community a repressed and little-known history, that of Italy's colonial past, not out of self-pity or wallowing in guilt, but rather to turn a gaze toward the increasingly multicultural and unequal present. The collective works on a generative memory, one that does not just generate memories that remain fixed in time past. A useful memory to be cherished and known to improve the present and design an active future, always fighting against the many forms of discrimination from new forms of colonialism and imperialism to classism, racism, and sexism. The collective, to reach as many people as possible, not only uses the method of free urban walks but has over time used different tools: stickers and drawings, children's workshops, dance performances, concerts and music, photo and video participation, presentations in informal places and collaboration with schools and universities.

The experience of Decolonize your eyes is, in short, a stage in a long project of decolonizing the imagery and use of public space that involves many local realities which seem to recognize themselves in a common struggle.

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