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**Christopher Columbus and the Confederate  
Generals versus Native Peoples? The struggle  
of memories amid removal, replacement and  
resignification of their monuments**

Luciano Gallinari

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Direzione e Segreteria | Management and Editorial Offices: via G.B. Tuveri, 128- 09129 Cagliari (I).

Telefono | Telephone: +39 070403635 / 070403670.

Invio contributi | Submissions: [rime@isem.cnr.it](mailto:rime@isem.cnr.it)

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### Special Issue

#### Memorias históricas, Memorias incómodas

Historical memories, Inconvenient memories

A cargo de / Edited by

Maria Betlem Castellà i Pujols

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## Christopher Columbus and the Confederate Generals versus Native Peoples? The struggle of memories amid removal, replacement and resignification of their monuments

Luciano Gallinari

(CNR - Istituto di Storia dell'Europa Mediterranea)

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### *Abstract*

This article proposes an analysis of the several episodes of damage and removal of various monuments dedicated to personalities - whose memory has always been or has recently become 'inconvenient' - in the light of the exegetical tools of social sciences such as Philosophy, Cultural Anthropology and Sociology.

This methodological approach highlights all the limits of the current readings of the past and its protagonists based on concepts of political or gender correctness, whose proponents have hardly ever proposed a new reading of the past that would integrate the vision of the "winners" and that of the "losers".

### *Keywords*

Christopher Columbus; Confederate Generals; Gender correctness; Presentism; Sites of Memory; Argentina; United States of America; Monuments Removal

### *Riassunto*

Il presente articolo propone una lettura dei numerosi episodi di danneggiamento e rimozione di diversi monumenti dedicati a personaggi, - la cui memoria è sempre stata o è divenuta in tempi recenti "incomoda" - alla luce degli strumenti esegetici di scienze sociali quali la filosofia, l'Antropologia culturale e la sociologia.

Un approccio metodologico che consente di mettere in evidenza tutti i limiti delle attuali riletture del passato e dei suoi protagonisti basate su concetti di correttezza politica o di genere, i cui sostenitori non hanno quasi mai proposto una nuova lettura del passato che integrasse la visione dei "vincitori" e quella dei "vinti".

### *Parole chiave*

Cristoforo Colombo; generali confederati; correttezza di genere; Presentismo; luoghi di memoria; Argentina; Stati Uniti d'America; rimozione di monumenti.

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*Premise. - 1. Christopher Columbus and Juana Azurduy, or the ballet of the statues. - 2. Not only removal but also demolition and vandalism: the monuments of Columbus in the United States. - 3. Columbus and the Confederate Generals as "symbols of hatred". - 4. Christopher Columbus and the Confederate Generals, or the shame of one's ancestors. - 5. The reaction of ethnic minorities in city councils. - 6.*

*The academics have the floor.... - 7. Political correctness... Gender correctness and the reaction against them. - 8. Conclusions. - 9. Sources. - 10. References. - 11. Curriculum vitae.*

*Premise.*

The motivation that drove us to participate in the *Seminari Permanent "Memòries històriques, Memòries incòmodes..."* which took place both in Barcelona and on-line between November 2018 and June 2019, and to write this text is that Christopher Columbus, in our opinion, is an extremely significant case of uncomfortable memory<sup>1</sup>. Indeed, we would almost say that he has always embodied this discomfort and, recently, he has become (actually, he has never stopped being so) the battleground of clashes between cultures and minorities within a globalised world, with all that it means when we talk about concepts such as Memory, Identity, Cultures, Ethnicities...

The original inspiration for this new research on Christopher Columbus came after I read several news concerning the removal of some monuments to the Admiral, firstly in Argentina and later in the United States that had been published in some Italian and foreign newspapers, websites and blogs. A removal that ran parallel to that of the statues dedicated to Confederate generals, protagonists of the Secession War<sup>2</sup>. Not to mention the growing number of replacements of national celebrations, such as the *Columbus Day* or the *Australia Day* with as many cultural events dedicated to Native Americans and the Australian Aborigines.

The reading of these texts, published in American and European countries, immediately brought some links out with concepts such as Collective Memory, Social Identity, Removed Memories, Globalisation, Presentism and Historical

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<sup>1</sup> <[https://www.upf.edu/web/geiscam/activitats/-/asset\\_publisher/bFmscFYffx94/content/id/218055810/maximized#.X-xbuVjSLIU](https://www.upf.edu/web/geiscam/activitats/-/asset_publisher/bFmscFYffx94/content/id/218055810/maximized#.X-xbuVjSLIU)> (20 December 2020). All in all, Christopher Columbus at least for over the last thirty-five years did not enjoy great fortune, as he has been at the centre of international studies level mainly on special occasions. Think of the celebration of the Fifth Centenary of the "Discovery" of America, and the much more limited revival of interest that took place in 2006 on the occasion of the Fifth Centenary of his death. After that, the curtain fell again on this extremely controversial figure in world historiography. Recently, similar observations have also been made by Musarra, 2018, p. 19.

<sup>2</sup> These are cases of what is currently called "Dissonant Heritage" that is "artefactos políticamente incómodos dado su relato, su uso o su re-significación" ("politically uncomfortable artifacts given their narrative, their use or their resignification") according to the definition given by Guixé -Ricart, 2020 in this same booklet, to whom we refer for further methodological and bibliographical information.

Revisionism. This prompts me to consider that it is not a question of recalling an increasingly conflictive scenario between History and Memory, but of asking whether a bent history of human rights and moral education is not an indication of intolerance, and the inability of contemporary society to make history as it seems to happen all too often in the case of great crimes [e.g. the accusations of genocide for Columbus, seen as the prototype of European colonisers]<sup>3</sup>.

Despite many criticisms received, the concept of "sites of memory" -in our case streets, squares or parks where monuments or signs commemorating people or events have been placed- has proven to be extraordinarily useful for understanding the symbolic structure of social spaces, and the practices of celebration and commemoration. It is no coincidence, then, that in recent years there was a great flourishing of studies on monuments, museums, memorials, places and streets names, and elements of cultural heritage. All they have a strong capacity for emotional involvement, and allow the imagination of a modern community<sup>4</sup>.

We find interesting some historical and sociological considerations about the *Shoa* that, in our opinion, can also be applied to cases of memory removal of characters and events that has been perceived as strongly negative as the Discoverer, and the alleged "genocide" perpetrated by him against the Natives.

So let us begin, with some considerations of an Italian scholar on the Holocaust:

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<sup>3</sup> Jedlowski, 2001, p. 34 points out that collective representations of the social past are designed to give legitimacy to society's beliefs and inspire its projects, thus legitimising the elites that represent them. Furthermore, the most important strategies in terms of building national identity are undoubtedly commemorative practices such as feasts, occasional ceremonies, monuments, exhibitions and museums.

<sup>4</sup> Gillis, 1994, p. 7; Hobsbawm - Ranger, 1987; Tonkin, 2000, p. 166 and Dei, 2004, p. 39. With regard to Columbus statues in the U.S., we do not agree with Pierre Nora's statement that those monuments (and sites) indicated the need 'to recapture a ruptured past'. In these cases, in our opinion, for the "Italian" immigrants it was rather a matter of reconnecting to a specific part of their "national" history that was partially unknown to the Americans, in order to qualify themselves as the legitimate descendants of it. A partially similar discourse may apply to the Americans who allowed the erection of those monuments that recognised Columbus as a precursor of their values of personal initiative. Moreover, there was no threat to the memory of Columbus in America in the 19th century, when the first historical links between Italian immigrants, the "discoverer" and what he represented according to them, began. For further details see Jiménez Frei, 2019, pp. 610-611.



(...) tutto il fervore attorno alla memoria della Shoah, invocata e rievocata da ogni parte e in ogni circostanza, non è quasi mai ancorato a un'esigenza di conoscenza storica, né tantomeno a una riflessione politica sulla formazione intellettuale dei carnefici, o a una disamina dei sistemi di valore del nostro presente; (...) tale memoria rappresenta invece un pretesto per impartire una lezione morale (Fontana, 2010, p. 94)<sup>5</sup>.

By paraphrasing this text and substituting the terms "Shoa" with "Genocide" (of all native peoples of different continents) and "executioners" with the names of conquerors/explorers (Columbus, Cook, Cortés, Magellan, Pizarro...) these considerations can also be made about the sources that we will present and comment here, in relation to the removal of monuments and some celebrations commemorating famous people who are now no longer considered politically correct.

Not to mention also the theme of the "moral lesson" that has been made by formulating ethical interpretations of Columbus and his feats, which appear to lack any historical contextualisation necessary to understand characters and events of the past.

The parallelism - and the relative substitution of terms - between the *Shoa* and the genocide of Native peoples, and that between their respective executioners can continue:

L'insegnamento della Shoah pare dunque soffocato dalla contraddizione tra la «visibilità accecante» della sua memoria, ridondante e ossessiva tanto è onnipresente nel discorso pubblico, e la «comprensione vacillante», spesso superficiale e banalizzata, della maggior parte di coloro che, invocando il «dovere di memoria», sfuggono sia la conoscenza rigorosa di come è avvenuto il genocidio, sia i contesti politici e culturali che lo hanno reso possibile (Traverso, 2002, p. 14)<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> "(...) all the fervour around the memory of the Holocaust, invoked and evoked by all sides and in every circumstance, is almost never anchored to a need for historical knowledge, nor even less to a political reflection on the intellectual formation of the executioners, or to an examination of the value systems of our present; (...) instead, this memory represents a pretext for imparting a moral lesson".

<sup>6</sup> "The teaching of the Holocaust [the alleged genocide perpetrated by Columbus, in our case] therefore seems to be suffocated by the contradiction between the "blinding visibility" of his redundant and obsessive memory, as it is omnipresent in public discourse, and the "wavering understanding", often superficial and trivialised, of the majority of those who, by invoking the "duty of memory", escape both the rigorous knowledge of how the genocide took place and the political and cultural contexts that made it possible. See also Traverso, 2006.

We are dealing with a case of a clear disproportion between the public memory of a historical event and its critical study on one hand, and the crisis in politics on the other, as pointed out by Charles Maier (1995).

But the clash between different historical memories that we will analyse in this work -Columbus and Eurocentric memory, on one hand, and the Native Americans and their ethnic memories, on the other- and the difficult elaboration of a new common narrative, recall John Bodnar's considerations on public memory that emerges at the intersection of official and vernacular cultural expressions<sup>7</sup>.

Yet, there are those who encouraged this new intertwined narrative of history because it would bring a great improvement to the discipline. In fact

to be able to tell the story of a group hitherto overlooked, to be able to master the problems of crafting such narratives [those of Minorities with those of Majorities] is how the discipline of history renews and maintains itself (Chakrabarty, 2018, p. 16).

In the light of such interpretation of memory, sites of memory, streets, monuments and memorial signs are shaped as scenarios of confrontation, protest, negotiation between different interests and interpretations of memory (and, in our case, as interpretations of history. They are an expression of the conflictive dynamics that run through the social fabric on the Majorities / Minorities axis.

The removal of monuments (to Columbus or whoever) shows to be an interesting point of deep connection between the psychological study of memory, and the historical and social studies. In fact it shows very efficiently that the past never remains "one and the same", but it is constantly selected, filtered and restructured in terms established by the questions and needs of the present both on individual and social level. But also, especially in the case of our subject of analysis, it is reconstructed according to the needs and pressures of political correctness, as we shall underline below.

The phenomenon of the removal/replacement of monuments, the attempts to resignify them, and the debates arisen around these initiatives are also ex-

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<sup>7</sup> According to Bodnar, 1992, pp. 14-15, the official cultural expressions "arise from the interests of cultural leaders or authorities at all levels of society (...) [whereas] vernacular culture represents a range of special interests, rooted in parts of the social whole. (...) Vernacular expressions convey a sense of how social reality is perceived, not how it should be".

tremely interesting because they make clear that our memories are social, as they encode perceptions on the basis of their meanings, namely of a structure of knowledge of the world that is the expression of a culture (Halbwachs, 1997, p. 3). Furthermore, these operations of removal/replacement/demolition express the desire to change the external memory of the American society, represented by the memory tools above mentioned with a symbolic charge. These changes cannot be studied without also analysing the internal memory of American society, i.e. its psychic mechanisms of remembering (Dei, 2004, p. 33).

Another concept closely linked to that of memory, about which the events examined and the sources of information selected can offer several interesting stimuli for reflection, is undoubtedly that of Identity, which is a much more complicated concept to define, especially if we try to do it in a diachronic key (the so-called phenomenon of the Persistence of Identity)<sup>8</sup>.

Yet, dealing with this issue also means dealing with the attempt of different ethnic minorities to achieve a greater and better visibility within the states in which they live, or rather, dealing with what for Charles Taylor (2008 p. 9) was a request for recognition, which "emerges in various ways, in defence of minority or 'subordinate' groups, (...) and in what is now called the policy of 'multiculturalism'". This request is growing because of the link between the recognition by the Others and the identity or vision of oneself and one's own characteristics, as it is shaped "by recognition or non-recognition or, often, by a lack of recognition" which are carried out by the societies to which peoples belong. That refers to these ethnic minorities an image of them that limits, belittles or humiliates them.

The Canadian philosopher also adds that

L'uguale riconoscimento non è soltanto la modalità appropriata di una società democratica sana; secondo un punto di vista oggi molto diffuso, (...) il suo rifiuto può danneggiare coloro ai quali esso viene negato (...), [e] anche ai rapporti fra le razze e ai dibattiti sul multiculturalismo è sottesa la premessa che il rifiuto del riconoscimento può essere una forma di oppressione (Taylor, 2008, pp. 21-22)<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> From this point of view, we could say that the "something" that links a present object [a current society] with a past or future object [the same society in the past or in the future] is the identity. One of the most intuitive explanations of identity is our memories, as the experience seems to suggest that identity is based on memory. See Klein - Nichols, 2012.

<sup>9</sup> "Equal recognition is not only the appropriate form of a sound democratic society; according to a widespread point of view today, (...) its rejection can harm those who are deprived of it (...), [and] the premise underlying even the relations between races and the debates on multiculturalism is that the rejection of recognition can be a form of oppression".

Empirical confirmation of such assertions can be found in statements and attitudes by certain representatives of some American ethnic minorities mentioned in a few sources published in some European and American newspapers about the removal or demolition of Columbus statues, and above all the debate, really interesting from the historian's perspective, which these events have generated.

Before going into our topic, we would like to underline that our research has been based on the consultation of news published in newspapers and magazines with national circulation as well as in blogs or other Argentinean, Italian, Spanish and American social resources. The sources examined refer to a chronological period between 2013 and 2019 with the reappearance of episodes of vandalism, removal and destruction of monuments dedicated to Columbus following some violent events in the United States<sup>10</sup>.

### 1. *Christopher Columbus and Juana Azurduy, or the ballet of the statues*

Even if we will focus especially on events that happened in the years 2017-2019, we want to start with a first news about the removal of the statue to the "Discoverer" in Buenos Aires in 2013, given the paradigmatic and very interesting character of the initiative taken by the Presidency of the Argentine Republic for the topic of this text.

On 4 April 2013 the Argentine newspaper *Página 12* dedicated an article to the removal of the Columbus statue that was behind the *Casa Rosada*, its transfer to the city of Mar del Plata, and its substitution with the monument dedicated to Juana Azurduy, a Bolivian anti-Spanish patriot. An operation that was defined "un disparate doble" ("a double nonsense") strictly connected to

esa otra, igualmente necia manía argentina de cambiar no sólo emplazamientos sino incluso los nombres de calles y avenidas. Como si la Historia se pudiera mutar, o imponer, a gusto de coyunturales gobernantes, legisladores, concejales o jefes de Gobierno. (...) No es así como se afianza una identidad nacional (Giardinelli, 2013)<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> We refer to the violent street protests after George Floyd's death on 25 May 2020 during a police operation in Minneapolis.

<sup>11</sup> "that other, equally foolish Argentine mania of changing not only locations but even the names of streets and avenues. As if history could be mutated, or imposed, to the liking of those in power, legislators, councillors or heads of government. (...) That's not how you consolidate a national identity".

As much as we can agree on a moral level with the columnist, we have already pointed out that history is reconstructed according to the needs of the present time and often, preferably, of those who manage History, as we will see now.

On 5 June 2013 the story is also presented in similar tones by the Italian newspaper *La Stampa*, which recounts the failed attempts of the Italian Ambassador Guido La Tella to be received by President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner in order to convince her to recede from the removal of the monument to the Genoese. In confirmation of what we have already said about the conscious use of memory and history for contemporary purposes, the columnist inserted the clash between the symbols of the past (Columbus: an European anti-native genocide vs Azurduy: a Latin American anti-Spanish fighter) within the then current political confrontation between President Kirchner and the mayor of the Federal Capital ('Cristoforo Colombo non si tocca', 2013)<sup>12</sup>.

Despite reactions against the initiative, President Kirchner continued as planned and at the beginning of June another Argentine newspaper - *LaPoliticaOnline* - spoke openly of a "cultural" struggle (*batalla "cultural"*) between Columbus and Azurduy. Moreover, it also wondered if the Argentine Government was "willing to deconstruct everything: history, memory, citizen's mandates, collective imagination":

Pretender mover y reemplazar monumentos, (...), no es ingenuo. Significa que el "nuevo", el que desplazará al anterior, posee un mayor interés para ocupar ese espacio público (...). También señala una mirada oportunista del presente y su relación con el pasado. (...). La opción de Colón/Azurduy es una nueva batalla del Gobierno Nacional? ¿Significa acaso que el Gobierno Nacional, como siempre, embanderado en la construcción de un nuevo relato está dispuesto a deconstruir todo: historia, memoria, mandatos ciudadanos, imaginarios colectivos? (Polledo, 2013)<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> "Da un lato i bolivariani che "odiano" Cristoforo Colombo come simbolo della sottomissione degli indios e della "conquista" spagnola, dall'altra gli anti-bolivariani che rivendicano le radici europee della loro storia e accusano il governo argentino di sterminare invece gli ultimi indios rimasti nel Chaco, i Qom/Toba" ("On one hand the Bolivarians who 'hate' Christopher Columbus as a symbol of the submission of the Native Americans and the Spanish 'conquest', on the other hand the anti-Bolivarians who claim the European roots of their history and accuse the Argentine government of exterminating the last remaining Indians in Chaco, the Qom/Toba.").

<sup>13</sup> "Pretending to move and replace monuments, (...), is not naive. It means that the "new" one, the one that will displace the previous one, has a greater interest in occupying that public

In fact on 22 June 2013 the Argentine newspaper *Clarín* informed its readers on three topics that immediately confirm the close intertwining of Memory, Identity and Political Correctness: 1) the above mentioned removal of Columbus statue and its transfer to Mar del Plata; 2) its replacement with the statue of Juana Azurduy who fought under Manuel Belgrano, and who in 2010 was elevated to the rank of general by the Argentine president Cristina Fernández de Kirchner<sup>14</sup>; and 3) this latter monument had been financed by Bolivian Government that approved by decree on 27 February of the same year a non-refundable contribution of up to one million dollars (seven million Bolivars) to build the monument in Buenos Aires on the occasion of the "Argentine-Bolivian Confraternity Day" on 12 July<sup>15</sup>.

These few news are paradigmatic of our discourse for different reasons.

First of all, the replacement of the Admiral by Juana Azurduy has a double value: 1) as we said before, a Latin-American "heroine" replaces an European "discoverer/coloniser", considered the prototype of all following conquerors, those against whom the fighter for American emancipation will clash three centuries later; and 2) the monument to a woman replaces that to a man, all in the perspective of a very careful gender policy.

A week later, 29 June 2013, probably imagining the controversy that would arise with the removal of Columbus memorial, the Argentine President in contravention of a judicial order had the statue removed arguing the need to restore the monument which had been offered by the very large Italian community to the South American country in 1910<sup>16</sup>, on the occasion of the first Cen-

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space. (...). Moving the monument of Columbus is a sign of the National Government's arrogant, conflictive, and recurrent attitude. (...). It also points to an opportunistic view of the present and its relationship with the past. (...). The choice between Columbus and Azurduy is a new battle for the National Government. Does it mean that the National Government, as always, is willing to deconstruct everything: history, memory, citizen's mandates, collective imagination?"

<sup>14</sup> 'Reemplazo de estatua de Cristóbal Colón causa polémica en Argentina', 2013. The Equatorian newspaper also added that the rank of general was granted to Azurduy because she was part of the Argentine militia in the fight for independence against the Spanish Crown in the 19th century, and in Bolivia she commanded with her husband Juan Asencio Padilla a guerrilla column against Spanish rule.

<sup>15</sup> 'Confirman que el monumento a Colón se muda a Mar del Plata,' 2013: "el Gobierno boliviano aprobó por decreto una contribución no reembolsable de hasta un millón de dólares (7 millones de bolivianos), para construir el monumento en Buenos Aires con motivo del 'Día de la Confraternidad Argentino-Boliviana', que se celebra el 12 de julio".

<sup>16</sup> Jiménez Frei, 2019, pp. 618-624 points out that was Antonio Devoto, an 'Italian-born businessman', who personally chose Columbus as the subject of the statue to be donate by



tenary of the May Revolution (Parera, 2013)<sup>17</sup>. Regarding the period around the Centenary and Columbus, it is important to note what has been pointed out by Federica Bertagna according to which following the strengthening in the South American country of the “correnti nazionaliste che identificavano nell'hispanidad la sola matrice dell'identità Argentina (...) nel 1917 l'Argentina consacrò il 12 ottobre come ‘Día de la raza’, invece di farne il giorno colombiano, secondo le intenzioni della collettività italiana”<sup>18</sup>.

On the same day the Italian newspaper *La Stampa* informed that the statue of Columbus had been removed despite Italian-Argentinian protests and a judicial order. The daily while mentioning the opposition between the Presidency of the Republic and the *Intendencia* of Buenos Aires, maintained an extremely equidistant and diplomatic tone<sup>19</sup>.

The next day, 30 June, the two main Italian newspapers reported the news in more or less strong tones. The *Corriere della Sera* published a neutral report that merely re-proposes the topic of the "opposite symbols", by representing two worlds that seem irreconcilable. On the contrary, *La Repubblica* used stronger emotional tones in the headline of the article by talking of "a slap to Italians", while the content is substantially similar to that of the *Corriere*<sup>20</sup>.

Emotional tones even more intense can be found in a Bolivian newspaper that dealt with the matter because of the involvement of its government. An article published on 15 July 2014 in the daily newspaper of Cochabamba -the *Opinión*- is very representative of a pro-Native vision as opposed to a pro-Colonizers one (Torrez, 2013). The columnist is a scholar of social sciences, and

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the Italian community. The Italian entrepreneur motivated his choice by defining the Discoverer as “the immortal writer of America” of whom “Italy has the right to be proud”. After a detailed analysis of the monument to Columbus, the American scholar highlights the “discourse” elaborated by the sculptor, according to which his work affirmed that “Columbus (and by extension, Italians) had brought democracy and civilisation to Argentina, and done so through divine, prophesied intervention”. Moreover, she emphasises that the monument made no reference to Argentina and its history, “as a reaction to social and racial discourses of the time”.

<sup>17</sup> Further comments also in ‘Críticas por la remoción de la estatua de Colón’, 2013.

<sup>18</sup> Bertagna, 2009, p. 49: “nationalist currents that identified the *Hispanidad* as the only matrix of the Argentine identity, in 1917 Argentina consecrated the 12 October as “Día de la raza”, instead of making it the Columbus day, according to the intentions of the Italian community”.

<sup>19</sup> ‘Argentina, rimossa statua di Colombo. La vicenda dello spostamento’, 2013.

<sup>20</sup> ‘Buenos Aires, rimossa la statua di Colombo’, 2013. Other articles that merely report the news of the removal of the monument to Columbus are: ‘Buenos Aires, rimosso il monumento a Cristoforo Colombo’, 2013; ‘Cristina Kirchner retira la estatua de Colón en Buenos Aires’, 2013.

we can see that by the use he makes of the terms, however, he betrays a personal and emotional involvement in the topic that we can grasp in the choice of some words.

Let us see some examples. Firstly, by talking about the legal opposition that the autonomous government of the city of Buenos Aires had made to President Kirchner's initiative, he raised the alarm that

El funesto fénix del absolutismo colonial renace de sus cenizas aventadas a los cuatro vientos, concitando las sombras y los manes de aquellos espectros que reaparecen, como señales inequívocas de que aún perviven intactos en el imaginario social<sup>21</sup>.

This language, immediately characterised by negative tones (dismal, colonial absolutism, ghosts) creates an immediate opposition between sides, between We and You, in the sense of a confrontation between ethnic Identities<sup>22</sup>. These tones continue with in the columnist sketches the physical and temperamental description of Mauricio Macri, the then mayor of the Argentine capital, who appears to have blue eyes - a sign of belonging to the European ethnic group, that of the colonizers? - and a stubborn insistence. The description of the politician still proceeds in similar tones, when the columnist attributes to him an "Europeanised idea" with which he "prefers to reinforce the suggestion that Argentines descend from ships"<sup>23</sup>.

We see clearly expressed by the columnist the concept that Memory and History are re-constructed according to needs and purposes - conscious and unconscious - typical of the author's time, when he stated that

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<sup>21</sup> Torrez, 2013: "The dismal phoenix of colonial absolutism is reborn from its ashes, blown to the four winds, raising the shadows and hands of those ghosts that reappear, as unmistakable signs that they still survive intact in the social imaginary (...)"

<sup>22</sup> A contrast -that between We and You- which is highlighted by Jiménez Frey, p. 628 when she comments in detail on the different figures that compose the monument to Azurduy. A special attention is given to the Native Americans who are represented in this way: "With fearless expressions and raised arms, the indigenous figures bravely accompany her - a marked departure from the powerless, supplicant depictions on the Columbus monument (...)". The analysis of the monument to the native heroine continues in the following pages of the North American scholar's work, and provides many other interesting stimuli for reflection on the representativeness of identities, and the percentage of indigenous genetic material in today's Argentinians.

<sup>23</sup> Jiménez Frey, pp.632-634 stresses that President Kirchner tried to establish a new contrast within the Argentine Bicentennial that "became the centennial's contradiction, questioning elite historical constructions to reclaim official narratives in public space".



Colón (...) se erige casi como un referente simbólico a defender por aquellos sectores que ven a la Argentina con ojos eurocéntricos sin percibir o, mejor dicho, invisibilizando a aquella diáspora de emigrantes que vienen desde la zona andina de América del sur, especialmente desde Bolivia. O aún peor, detrás de estos argumentos históricos tal vez quieren reproducir simbólicamente aquel hostigamiento cotidiano -casi perverso- que sufren los miles de bolivianos emigrantes en la Argentina. (...). El reemplazo de la estatua de Colón por la de Juana Azurduy es una acción que apunta a hurgar el avispero. Devela la tensión no solamente social, sino racial que existe hoy en una Argentina que paulatinamente va perdiendo su esencia europea para fundirse en una Argentina más diversa (Torrez, 2013)<sup>24</sup>.

In these last affirmations by the columnist, one grasps all the humanly legitimate emotional participation in the problems of marginalisation suffered by his fellow countrymen who have emigrated to Argentina in recent decades. An emotionality, which however leads -unfairly in our opinion - the author to minimize the massive European migratory phenomenon between the end of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century, all too well known for further comment.

That the situation was complicated and that there were different forces in the field was demonstrated by the fact that - in spite of the removal of Columbus monument in June 2013 - its replacement with the statue of Azurduy was not simultaneous, but it took two years: only in July 2015 her monument was placed near the *Casa Rosada*.

On 16 July 2015, the Madrid newspaper *El País* announced the inauguration of the new monument. The article maintains an aseptic tone and gives a brief biographical description of Juana Azurduy, and the reasons for President Kirchner's decision to erect the monument in her honour (Rebossio, 2015).

The next day - 17 July 2015 - the Barcelona newspaper *La Vanguardia* published an article signed by Robert Mur that, basically, is similar to the one

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<sup>24</sup> "Columbus (...) stands almost as a symbolic reference to be defended by those sectors that see Argentina with Eurocentric eyes without perceiving or, more precisely, making invisible that diaspora of immigrants coming from the Andean area of South America, especially from Bolivia. Or even worse, behind these historical arguments they perhaps want to symbolically reproduce that daily harassment -almost perverse- suffered by thousands of Bolivian immigrants in Argentina. (...). The replacement of the statue of Columbus with that of Juana Azurduy is an action that aims to stir up the hornet's nest. It unveils not only the social, but also the racial tension that exists today in an Argentina that is gradually losing its European essence to merge into a more diverse Argentina".

above, with some small details that turn out to be interesting. First of all, the subtitle contains a comment by Bolivian President Evo Morales, according to which the erection of a monument to Juana Azurduy was “una forma de descolonizarnos” (“a way to decolonising ourselves”)<sup>25</sup>. A statement that reaffirmed his desire to write a counter-history of all Latin America, re-signifying it in a Native and anti-European key. Secondly, in the article there was the hint at the rumour that the first to inspire the Argentine President would be Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez who, on the occasion of a visit to Buenos Aires, would draw the attention of his counterpart to the presence of the statue of the man he considered a genocide not far from the Argentine presidential palace (Mur, 2015)<sup>26</sup>.

So all settled, finally? Not even close.

The whole operation had an explicit political purpose: President Kirchner's decision was taken in the last year of her second term of office, while she was trying to achieve a constitutional amendment that would allow her to win a third term, also thanks to the support of the numerous Latin American migrants present in Argentina. Unfortunately for her the reform was not accepted and so in 2017, only two years after the erection of the monument to Azurduy, her statue was removed and that of Columbus found its definitive location. Why? Because in December 2015 Mauricio Macri - the former mayor of Buenos Aires who was so opposed to Kirchner's decision - became president of the Argentine Republic. The statue of Azurduy was relocated in the Plaza del Correo, in front of the Kirchner Cultural Center (CCK) and along with the monument to Juan de Garay<sup>27</sup>.

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<sup>25</sup> Jiménez Frei, 2019, p. 608 also reports the statement of Andrés Zerner - the sculptor of the statue to Juana Azurduy - according to which the ‘monument provided Argentines with “a way of seeing our identity”, and was “not just a representation of our shared past, but also a call for future action”’. These statements are very interesting although inaccurate, since even Columbus and his “discovery” are part of the shared past of the Argentines, like it or not. In this case it was simply a matter of replacing a part of this shared past with another, which was considered more suitable for the then historical-cultural moment.

<sup>26</sup> Jiménez Frei, 2019, p. 608 underlines that “(...) organisations representing the nation’s diverse indigenous groups lauded it as ‘historical reparation’, reflecting debates over historical memory that have intensified since 1992’s quincennial celebrations of Columbus’ ‘discovery’ sparked protests across the Americas (...)”. However, she also pointed out that “views on its removal were far from unanimous”. Other interesting data about the difficulties and the problems faced by Italo American communities to celebrate Columbus Day in 1992 and in subsequent years at the beginning of the third millennium are stressed by Kubal, 2008, pp. 122-132.

<sup>27</sup> ‘Tras años de polémica, removieron la estatua de Juana Azurduy que estaba detrás de la Casa Rosada’, 2017.

And the monument to Columbus, dismantled in 2013 to be restored, because of its worrying condition? "En tanto, la estatua de Cristóbal Colón continúa todavía desmantelada en 186 partes en el espigón Puerto Argentino, en Costanera Norte, frente al Aeroparque Jorge Newbery"<sup>28</sup>.

It was only at the end of 2017 that the monument to the Genoese was reassembled in its final location, which is the one mentioned above, in an area on the banks of the Rio de la Plata that has been affected by numerous important redevelopment works, despite the repeated protests of various Italian-Argentinian associations who uselessly asked that the statue be repositioned where it was until 2013. To avoid any further controversy, on 17 November 2019 the Argentine government declared the statue of the Admiral as a national monument, proclaiming that it could no longer be removed (Mejia, 2019).

From the beginning this event was a political opposition, but it was disguised as a historical and cultural confrontation and, at least from what appears from the sources consulted, neither of the two contenders showed the desire to create an inclusive solution of compromise. It would have made it possible both to preserve the monument to the Discoverer and all that it historically represented, and to find an equally visible and important space for Juana Azurduy. This would have favoured the coexistence of these two identitarian "layers" of the contemporary Argentinean people, and would have avoided placing them in opposition.

After he replaced President Kirchner at the *Casa Rosada* in December 2015, Macri - who, as mayor, supported the intransigent positions of the Italian-Argentinean people who were clearly opposed to the monument removal - ended up taking a lukewarm position, since he did not have the statue of the Genoese relocated in its original position. On the contrary, if we observe carefully, it was Columbus and not Azurara that got the worst of it, since the statue of the latter was placed half a kilometre from the *Casa Rosada*, while the statue

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<sup>28</sup> *Ibidem*: "Meanwhile, the statue of Christopher Columbus is still being dismantled in 186 parts at the Puerto Argentino breakwater on Costanera Norte, in front of Jorge Newbery Airport". On the same day, the Argentinean daily newspaper *La Nación* openly defined the renovation of the Paseo del Bajo as a "perfect excuse" ("perfecta excusa") offered to the *Intendencia* of Buenos Aires to move the statue of Azurduy from the place where the monument to Columbus previously stood to its current location in front of the Kirchner Cultural Center: 'El monumento de Juana Azurduy ya está frente al Centro Cultural Kirchner', 2017. Other news also in: 'Tras años de conflicto, Cristóbal Colón vuelve a mirar a Europa', 2017; 'Reubicar en Buenos Aires polémica estatua de Cristóbal Colón', 2017. Definitely more ironic is the title of an article by *Clarín*: Gómez, 2017, 'A dos años del polémico traslado de la de Colón'.

of the Discoverer was reassembled in an area that did not have the centrality and prestige of the original one.

## *2. Not only removal but also demolition and vandalism: the monuments of Columbus in the United States*

After devoting some attention to the story of the removal of Columbus statue in Buenos Aires, we now want to focus our attention on some similar events that took place in the U.S. in the years 2017-2019.

Events that allow us to make other interesting observations on some attempts - unscrupulous in a number of cases - to rewrite national history, with deletions and manipulations aimed at drawing up new political and social narratives more politically correct.

Here are the facts

While the destinies of the statues of Columbus and Juana Azurduy were being resolved, in the summer of 2017 another very hot front was opened in the United States regarding the removal, vandalism and even the destruction of some symbolic monuments. The protests first concerned the removal of commemorative works dedicated to some Confederate army generals in the Secession War that were located in public spaces of American cities.

A first, important, difference with Argentina is that in the U.S. the initiative did not start from the Presidency of the country, while the second is that there was a formal intervention in the matter by the American Historical Association.

On the contrary, on 17 August 2017 President Donald Trump intervened to express his clear disagreement with such actions that could not change history, and stressed that it was necessary to learn from the past. By confirming his provocative nature, the American president placed two Confederate generals alongside two former US presidents - Washington and Jefferson - since the latter two were also slave-drivers, by suggesting that their monuments might also run the risk of being removed<sup>29</sup>.

In addition to these statements by Trump, the article in question provides other food for thought. First, because the columnist reported that some historians "have scratched their heads at his recent comments drawing equivalency between two founding fathers of the U.S. and two Generals who rebelled against the country". Secondly because two great-grandchildren of General Stonewall Jackson had urged their city - Richmond, Va. - to remove every Con-

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<sup>29</sup> Zorthian, 2017: "You can't change history, but you can learn from it. Robert E. Lee, Stonewall Jackson - who's next, Washington, Jefferson? So foolish".

federate statue, because they “(...) were never intended as benign symbols, (...)”, but on the contrary “(...) they were the clearly articulated artwork of white supremacy” (Zorthian, 2017).

The mentioned stimuli for reflection come from the opinions expressed by some American historians for the comparisons made by their president, and from those formulated by General Jackson's descendants. They did not contextualise the characters and events they spoke of, and that are immortalised in the monuments whose removal they required.

As Trump pointed out, the removal of statues, commemorative plaques or other monuments from sight cannot erase the History, nor, in this case, the white supremacy that shaped many societies in that historical period not only in America.

Very few historical figures would survive such a vision. The debate in the United States on the removal of this kind of statues reached such a point that the American Historical Association decided to intervene with some explanations, in order to encourage a more scientific and serene debate.

Also in August 2017 the AHA decided to put a few points on the matter by expressing positivity for the political and civic debate that was opening up in U.S. society. However, it called for some firm points to bear in mind in order to make a proper assessment.

Among these, for instance, some with whom we agree such as that “(...) Debates over removal of monuments should consider chronology and other evidence that provide context for why an individual or event has been commemorated”, or that “History comprises both facts and interpretations of those facts”, or even that point for which “to remove a monument, or to change the name of a school or street, is not to erase history, but rather to alter or call attention to a previous interpretation of history”<sup>30</sup>.

On one point, however, we do not totally agree with the statement made by the AHA, according to which

A monument is not history itself; a monument commemorates an aspect of history, representing a moment in the past when a public or private decision defined who would be honored in a community's public spaces.

This definition contains in itself a contradiction, since the monument X is also a product of history, and a historical source that contains several layers of nar-

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<sup>30</sup> <<https://www.historians.org/news-and-advocacy/statements-and-resolutions-of-support-and-protest/aha-statement-on-confederate-monuments>>.

rative: the most obvious are the individual(s) and / or event(s) represented; a second level is, as the AHA itself states, the "(...) moment in the past when a public or private decision defined who would be honored in a community's public spaces". This contradiction seems to be confirmed by the exhortation made by the AHA itself to the American communities hosting controversial monuments, by encouraging them "(...) to remember that all memorials remain artifacts of their time and place. They should be preserved, just like any other historical document, whether in a museum or some other appropriate venue".

Another aspect of the interest of this AHA text is that it wants to be too "politically correct" towards an ethnic minority (the African Americans) in a way that does not historicise the subject:

Nearly all monuments to the Confederacy and its leaders were erected without anything resembling a democratic process. Regardless of their representation in the actual population in any given constituency, African Americans had no voice and no opportunity to raise questions about the purposes or likely impact of the honor accorded to the builders of the Confederate States of America.

How many monuments of the past were erected by the then ruling classes without seeking the opinion of ethnic, cultural and religious minorities of their societies?

If it was applied this fair but actual criterion of not erecting monuments that might offend the minorities - which is the result of a cultural change over time - how many historical monuments would have to be removed throughout the world?

### *3. Columbus and the Confederate Generals as "symbols of hatred"*

Ten days after the riots in Charlottesville, Va., between white nationalists and supporters of the removal of the Confederate General Robert E. Lee statue, the centre of an unfriendly attention was a monument dedicated to Christopher Columbus in the city of Baltimore. On 21 August 2017 the *Baltimore Brew*, an independent website, reported that the 225-year old monument, which "is said to be the oldest in the country and the oldest in the world dedicated to the explorer that is still standing, has been severely vandalized" (Shen, 2017). The photo of the article showed the pedestal of the damaged monument, on which two signs had been placed reading: "Racism: Tear it down", and "The future is racial and economic justice". In addition, the news was completed by a video posted the same day on the YouTube channel *Popular Resistance* showing "one person



[that] smashes the monument with a sledge hammer as another holds a sign. An unidentified narrator explains why the action was being taken:

Christopher Columbus symbolizes the initial invasion of European capitalism into the Western Hemisphere. Columbus initiated a centuries-old wave of terrorism, murder, genocide, rape, slavery, ecological degradation and capitalist exploitation of labor in the Americas. That Columbian wave of destruction continues on the backs of Indigenous, African-American and brown people.

As we can easily see, the message of the destroyers of Columbus monument was simple and effective, but completely devoid of any historical value. The discoverer was guilty of practically all the faults that the Old World had towards America<sup>31</sup>.

No reference to the role played by the real holders of the North American continent for centuries: the Crowns of England and Spain. We will come back again to this point about the real Spain's responsibilities in the history of the double American continent. Especially when we will emphasise the "political" use of the figure of Columbus as a sort of scapegoat for all the faults and misdeeds perpetrated by the Spaniards - *Conquistadores* or settlers as they may be - in order to avoid any friction with the ethnic "minority" of Latinos widely present in North American society. From this point of view, it is easier and harmless to blame all the European faults on Columbus who is an Italian<sup>32</sup>.

From this moment on, a number of articles were published almost daily in America and Europe on the removal of monuments to the Discoverer and the revisiting of history.

On 23 August 2017, as a result of the events that occurred during the month, the *Corriere della Sera* dedicated an article to the outbreak of protest against some monuments, including those of Columbus in several American places. The newspaper used a strong headline to make people understand what kind of atmosphere one breathes, with a call to a situation of strong opposition: 'USA,

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<sup>31</sup> According to Musarra, 2018, p. 150 what appears to be "una guerra 'delle' minoranze. Potrebbe assumere, forse, il carattere di guerra 'per' le minoranze" ("a war 'of' minorities. It could perhaps take on the character of a war 'for' minorities"). This observation seems to suit to many of the episodes that we will mention in this text.

<sup>32</sup> Kubal, 2008, p, 107 stresses that between 1955 and 1985 in the American society there was a great increase in the number of professional minority rights organisations from 98 to 688 that "met the needs of African Americans, Hispanic Americans, and American Indians, but by the mid-twentieth century, federal civil rights bureaucrats mostly ignored Italian Americans, who were considered assimilated whites".

perché nella guerra delle statue nel mirino ora c'è Cristoforo Colombo' ('USA, Why in the war of the statues in the sights now there is Christopher Columbus'). The columnist speaks openly of the "heat" of the American society that had overwhelmed the Confederate monuments, and was preparing to go against the Admiral.

The final part of the article is of special interest, as it contains some interesting comments on the confrontations between ethnic communities in New York due to the inclusion, by the president of the city council Melissa Mark-Viverito, of the Discoverer statue in the list of hate symbols to be evaluated by a commission wanted by the mayor of the American metropolis. The latter's aim was to decide which of them should be removed. The Genoese had ended up at the centre of attention, because according to her he was

considerato una figura controversa per il trattamento riservato ai nativi americani al momento dello sbarco nel nuovo continente ed è diventato l'obiettivo di manifestazioni e petizioni contro 'i simboli d'odio e di divisione razziale (...), che vanno avanti da due anni e che si sono intensificate nelle ore successive ai tragici scontri di Charlottesville, in Virginia (Marinelli, 2017)<sup>33</sup>.

The Italian-American community, which felt profoundly outraged by what it considered an attack, replied in different ways to President Mark-Viverito, with Caribbean origins. The removal of the monument "sarebbe uno schiaffo in faccia alla comunità italoamericana e non lo tolleremo, ha affermato John Fratta, a capo della commissione statale per la giustizia sociale" ("would be a slap in the face to the Italian-American community and we will not tolerate it, said John Fratta, head of the State Social Justice Commission").

A more balanced response that tried to historicize a possible evaluation of the Genoese's behaviour was given by the councillor

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<sup>33</sup> "considered a controversial figure for the treatment of Native Americans at the time of the landing on the new continent and has become the target of demonstrations and petitions against 'symbols of hatred and racial division (...)', which have been going on for two years and have intensified in the hours following the tragic riots in Charlottesville, Virginia (...)". The next day, another article dedicated to the same subject appeared in a Genoese daily newspaper, which however does not add any interesting data. See Gnecco, 2017.



Ron Castorina, che rappresenta il distretto - molto italoamericano - di Long Island. "È difficile giudicare Cristoforo Colombo, un uomo vissuto nel 1400, e utilizzare i principi odierni per stabilire che tipo di uomo fosse" (Marinelli, 2017)<sup>34</sup>.

Two days later, 25 August 2017, the Spanish newspaper *El País* published the news of the violence against the statues of Confederates generals and Columbus. The headline itself of the article seemed to overturn the accusations of racism levelled at Columbus against the destroyers of his monument: 'La escalada racista en EE UU salpica a la estatua de Colón de Nueva York' ('Racist escalation in the U.S. splashes Columbus statue in New York'). The newspaper used a strong, impactful vocabulary when talking about events:

La caja de Pandora está abierta. La violencia racista en Charlottesville fue acompañada por la retirada de monumentos dedicados a figuras controvertidas de la Confederación. (...) el alcalde Bill de Blasio anunció una revisión de todos los 'símbolos de odio' que hay en la gran metrópoli para retirarlos (Pozzi, 2017)<sup>35</sup>.

Two days later, 27 August 2017, *The Guardian* published an interesting article that offered a number of food for thought<sup>36</sup>. First of all, it announced that Bill De Blasio, the mayor of New York with Italian origins, had declared that he could order the removal of the Genoese statue placed in Columbus Circle, since it had been included in a list of one dozen monuments considered by the Big Apple as "symbols of hate". Again, as in Buenos Aires (§1), politics was playing a very active role in trying to manipulate history because, as the newspaper reported

(...) De Blasio, who is running for re-election in November, ordered the study [on the symbols of hate] after the Charlottesville rally over a decision to remove a statue of Confederate general Robert E. Lee

Basically, the mayor was trying to feel the pulse of New York City in order to calculate what position to take in order not to lose too many voters.

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<sup>34</sup> "Ron Castorina, who represents the - very Italian-American - district of Long Island. 'It is difficult to judge Christopher Columbus, a man who lived in 1400, and use today's standards to determine what kind of man he was'".

<sup>35</sup> "Pandora's box is open. Racist violence in Charlottesville was accompanied by the removal of monuments dedicated to controversial figures in the Confederation. (...). [the mayor of New York] Bill de Blasio announced a review of all the "symbols of hate" in the great metropolis to remove them".

<sup>36</sup> 'New York mayor considers Christopher Columbus statue removal', 2017.

Further stimuli are also provided by some interviews with “city residents and visitors to New York”, which show an inaccurate historical knowledge of the respondents. See as examples:

- Jose Simen of the Bronx: “It wouldn’t be a bad idea to take it [the statue] down,” as “He [Columbus] brought slavery to this country but he also founded it”.
- Maya Sparks, “a Spanish teacher who lives in Queens”: “Columbus represents the start of the pillaging of native cultures in the US, and it’s something I don’t think we should celebrate”.

It's hard to find so many historical inaccuracies in so few words: Columbus didn't discover the territory of the US, let alone found it. And, only in a very abstract way he can be considered guilty of the pillaging of Native Americans living in the USA. Statements such these absolve the Crowns of England and Spain and, of course, the Americans themselves from any responsibility for the massacres of Natives and the racial discrimination up to mid-20th century.

The following day - 28 August 2017 - the debate flared up also in Italy following the escalation of American demonstrations in favour of the removal/demolition of the statues to Columbus scattered throughout the United States. The newspaper *Il Fatto quotidiano* hosted an article characterised by a somewhat emphatic style and terminology, but that offers some points for reflection.

Let's start with the headline: ‘Con la rimozione delle statue l’America ricusa se stessa’ (‘With the removal of the statues, America is rejecting itself’). The explanation for such a statement is offered from the very beginning of the article:

(...) La furia iconoclasta, che solleva dilemmi essenziali, raggiunge così un epilogo paradossale: condannando il suo scopritore, l’America ricusa se stessa quasi desiderasse di non essere mai venuta al mondo. (...). Ma cosa succede quando una società rinnega proprio in nome del pluralismo l’incrocio multietnico alle sue origini? Qui entriamo in un terreno sconosciuto, mai esplorato (Verde, 2017)<sup>37</sup>.

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<sup>37</sup> “(...) The iconoclastic fury, which poses essential dilemmas, thus reaches a paradoxical epilogue: by condemning its discoverer, America rejects itself almost as if it wished it had never been born. (...). But what happens when a society rejects precisely in the name of pluralism the multi-ethnic crossroads at its origins? Here we are entering unknown territory, never explored (...)”.

The article proceeds in these somewhat excessive tones, and several times its author enters into open contrast with himself (unintentionally or unconsciously, we suppose). Let's dwell a little on this source of information.

Speaking of excessive tones, see the comparison that the columnist makes between the USA and the Taliban and ISIS who had destroyed monuments to Buddha with bombs, "(...) secondo fenomeni certamente incomparabili, ma che appartengono a una stessa stagione culturale" ("according to phenomena that are certainly incomparable, but which belong to the same cultural season") (Verde, 2017).

On the other hand, the columnist's reasoning contradicts itself when he considers that the discussion in Chicago on the possibility of removing the Cesare Balbo statue praising Fascism is

(...) un'ottima cosa, per quanto tardiva, segno di una più matura consapevolezza rispetto all'Italia, dove si fa a gara per dedicare piazze a ex gerarchi e dove l'ideologia di uno storicismo acritico attribuisce le stesse cure a ogni tipo di passato (Verde, 2017)<sup>38</sup>.

The columnist's last statement reveals a politicised vision of history. Every kind of past, to use its expression, must be studied with the same care, just to know and understand it and "historicise" it, so that it is better accessible also to the laymen of History.

This is also confirmed by the following declaration, according to which "Il monumento di Chicago (...), starebbe meglio nel deposito di un museo che in un giardino pubblico (...)" ("The Chicago Monument (...) would look better in a museum store than in a public garden"). Not even in a museum, but it should be removed from people's sight. Exactly the same as the American demonstrators were asking for the Admiral statues, whose actions - curiously very similar to the columnist's ones - are not understood by the journalist, who in fact wonders "(...) perché spingersi fino a devastare i simboli della scoperta dell'America?" ("(...) why go so far as to devastate the symbols of the discovery of America?").

Finally, the article ends with another very interesting remark about what we were saying earlier on minority of gender and "politically correct" behaviours. Coming back to the possibility of the removal of the two equestrian statues of the Southern generals Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson, sculpted in 1936 by

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<sup>38</sup> "(...) an excellent thing, however late, a sign of a more mature awareness than in Italy, where they compete to dedicate squares to former hierarchs and where the ideology of an uncritical historicism attributes the same care to every kind of past".

Laura Gardin Fraser, the columnist stated that “The removal of the statue, (...), lends itself to another paradox: in order to strike the subject depicted, one of the rare monumental achievements of a female artist is censored post mortem. (...)”. How to solve the problem?

Sarebbe bastato spostarla in un museo o musealizzarla in situ, per raccontarne la storia, sia positiva che negativa, e “rigenerarla” come elemento di consapevolezza, magari sottolineando il lavoro dell’artista più che la figura del personaggio rappresentato (Verde, 2017)<sup>39</sup>.

This last proposal to save the double monument to the Southern generals, confirms once again, if need be, that actually is more important than ever to act in a politically correct way and compensate the minorities, whatever they may be. And to do this, one can think of leaving the monument to the Southern generals in situ or in a museum, while the monument to Balbo and Fascism must be kept in a museum warehouse, because it does not offer any expendable argument in today's society that could make us forget its "original sin".

The month of September began with other articles with news of vandal attacks and the hypothesis of removal of the Columbus statue located in New York, published in two major Italian newspapers. It must be said that they simply chronicle the turbulent events that took place in August, and show a very similar internal structure in the treatment of topics and the use of the term “*guerra*” (“war”) within the headlines and texts (Riccardi, 2017)<sup>40</sup>.

In the wake of this wide-ranging debate in American society on 1 September 2017 an interesting appeal by renowned artists and scholars in favour of the demolition of these memorials was published on the website *Hyperallergic* (Sut-

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<sup>39</sup> “It would have been enough to move it to a museum or to turn the site that housed it into a museum, to tell the story, both positive and negative, and “regenerate” it as an element of awareness, perhaps by emphasizing the work of the artist more than the figure of the character represented”.

<sup>40</sup> For instance, the columnist spoke of “L’inutile ultima guerra degli Stati Uniti contro i simboli che non possono neanche cambiare espressione, alzare un sopracciglio, difendere la storia. (...) [e] contro fantasmi di pietra” (“The useless last war of the United States against symbols that cannot even change expression, raise an eyebrow, defend history. (...) [and] against stone ghosts”); see also ‘Guerra delle statue, vandalizzati monumenti di Colombo a New York’, 2017.

ton, 2017). The interest lies in the terminology used and in the ignorance of history shown by people with high cultural backgrounds.

In detail, “more than 120 prominent scholars and artists have signed and sent a letter to the” Mayoral Advisory Commission on City Art, Monuments, and Markers” established by the New York’s mayor Bill De Blasio to provide professional opinions on the removal/demolition of some monuments considered “an affront in a city whose elected officials preach tolerance and equity”. The letter’s signatories urged the Commission “to seize this opportunity to make a brave, even monumental, gesture that will resonate for generations to come, rather than a politically expedient fix that will be easily absorbed - and quickly forgotten - by the status quo”.

For reasons of space we will only deal with the statements about Columbus and his monument. However, we precede it with a remark by one of the signatories of the aforementioned Letter: Carin Kuoni "the Director/Curator of the Vera List Center for Art and Politics at the New School". Her statements on the role of museums explains very clearly what function such institutions would have and what relationship with societies (the American one, in this case) they should play:

[F]or all the infiltration of corporate philanthropy and so-called public ‘partnerships,’ museums and public spaces are still considered society’s foremost public fora (...) As such, they must remain pertinent to contemporary society, responsive to the demands, hopes, and visions of ‘the public’ — citizens, visitors, moving populations alike. These institutions cannot insist on the duty to enshrine and preserve the ethical values of periods past, if they want to be thriving spaces of encounters for the people of our time.

It is particularly interesting the passage stating that these institutions should respond to the needs and visions of the users, and not of contributing to shaping them, by proposing scientifically reliable content. Otherwise they cannot consider themselves as current meeting places. Therefore, it would be the users who would have to condition the content of museums, and other similar cultural institutions. It seems a broad application of liberalist principles to the field of culture, and the triumph of the "Socially correct" according to the customers’ needs.

The Letter’s signatories were strongly opposed to the possibility of such monuments being musealised *in situ*, since they express dangerous messages of racial superiority/inferiority that could reproduce harmful divisions.

The solution found by the signatories was to place the monuments within museums "that would offer a less edifying, more educational framework".

With regard specifically to Columbus and his monument, the signatories expressed themselves as follows

By far the most controversial of the monuments [to be removed] is that to Christopher Columbus, who served the Spanish crown, and spoke and wrote only in Catalan. Because he was born in Genoa in 1451 - a city that did not become "Italy" until the unification of the country in 1861 - he was adopted as a patriotic symbol by Italian immigrants in the nineteenth century.

By paraphrasing the Letter's signatories "it takes only a little understanding to see" how much historical ignorance emerges about this figure. How can you say that the Admiral only spoke and wrote in Catalan. On what sources would such a statement be based? Columbus spoke and wrote in different languages as proved by several sources.

A second consideration, however, has a tendentious nature because it attributes "at least 50 million Indigenous people died in this hemisphere as a result of the Columbian encounter with Europeans (...)" without the slightest reference at least to the historical and ethical responsibilities of European Kingdoms in that hemisphere...

Here, once again we see the choice of which arguments to highlight in a positive key and which others, instead, to pass over in silence as socially embarrassing and harbinger of possible fronts of social confrontation with other ethnic groups within the actual American society.

In essence, those would almost be just words in freedom if among the signatories there were not even professors of important American universities, whose names give support to ideas and statements that we might at least call "curious"<sup>41</sup>.

On 11 September 2017 in the website of the "Fondazione Giangiacomo Feltrinelli" it was published an editorial dedicated to the damage of Columbus statues in the USA which is interesting for the concepts it introduces and, even more so, for the way it deals with them.

Let's go a little more into details.

Despite the headline - 'La "guerra delle statue" in USA' ('The "War of the statues" in the USA') - the columnist immediately mitigates the scope of the

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<sup>41</sup> Among them we mention: Columbia University, Princeton University, Yale University...

term war, and on the contrary he focuses on the effects of the removal of monuments.

(...) Al di là del contesto specifico in cui è maturato, tuttavia, il fenomeno è interessante perché rappresentativo dei modi con i quali la memoria pubblica di fatti anche lontani nel tempo resta viva nello spazio urbano – e una memoria pubblica viva è precisamente il motivo per esistono i monumenti. (...) la rimozione delle statue sudiste a Baltimora è una scelta di ‘politica della memoria’ istituzionale, che ha un valore uguale e contrario all’erezione di un monumento o dell’inaugurazione di una targa. Si tratta di connotare lo spazio in cui vivono i cittadini nel senso che la parte che amministra la città reputa più ‘giusta’, o più utile politicamente<sup>42</sup>.

The columnist refers in his text to two concepts that are extremely relevant to the theme of this work: public memory and the politics of memory, i.e. the use of it by the ruling class of a given community at a given historical moment. And here the discourse becomes even more interesting because, the author does not seem to grasp the inescapable failure of that same public memory, since memory is always social, even that of the individual, when he states that “Quanto poi questa politica [della memoria istituzionale] risulti divisiva e non costruttiva rispetto alla comunità a cui vuole rivolgersi, tutto sommato non ne cambia la sostanza”<sup>43</sup>.

In fact, remembering for an individual corresponds to re-actualising the memory of a social group to which he belongs or has belonged in the past; therefore memory expresses solidarity between the individual and the social group or groups to which he belongs. And when the collective memory of a community is not updated with the consent of its different parts, among the results are precisely the removal and/or destruction of cultural symbols that are no longer shared. As it happened for those who vandalised Columbus statues;

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<sup>42</sup> Colombi, 2017: “Beyond the specific context in which it [the removal of monuments] has developed, however, the phenomenon is interesting because it is representative of the ways in which the public memory of events even far away in time remains alive in urban space - and a living public memory is precisely why monuments exist. (...) the removal of the Confederate statues in Baltimore is a choice of institutional “memory policy”, which has the same value and contrary to the erection of a monument or the inauguration of a plaque. It is a matter of connotation of the space in which citizens live in the sense that the party that administers the city considers more ‘right, or more politically useful’”.

<sup>43</sup> Colombi, 2017: “how this policy [of institutional memory] is divisive and not constructive with respect to the community to which it wants to address, all in all, it doesn't change the substance of it”. On the relations between individual and social memory see Jedlowski, 1996, p. 26, and, 2001, p. 31.



acts that the columnist attributes to a "rebellious, anti-system or subversive imaginary" ("immaginario ribelle, antisistema o sovversivo"): a definition that has a negative connotation but does not adequately explain the extent of the protests of some layers of American society that no longer recognised themselves in it.

#### 4. *Christopher Columbus and the Confederate Generals, or the shame of one's ancestors*

The next two articles examined - one Italian and one American - introduce in the analysis we are carrying out a concept of anthropological interest such as that of the Ancestors, and try to show how the celebration of certain monuments and anniversaries reveal an unbalanced relationship with them.

The first article was published in *Tempi*, an Italian catholic periodical, on 18 September 2017. The title itself 'Uccidere i padri. L'Occidente ha perso la testa' ('Killing the fathers. The West has lost its mind') - reveals clearly the conceptual approach to the subject matter (Casadei, 2017). But also the subtitle is very evocative: 'Perché mezza America si è messa a cancellare feste, monumenti e ogni ricordo dei suoi fondatori ed eroi? Indagine sopra un fenomeno talebano che nessun "allarme razzismo" può giustificare.' ("Why did half of America start erasing celebrations, monuments and every memory of its founders and heroes? An investigation into a Taliban phenomenon that no "racist alarm" can justify"). It recalls tones used by the journalist of *Il Fatto Quotidiano* examined earlier when he compared the U.S. to the Talibans who destroyed the giant Buddha statues (Verde, 2017)

The above article opens with a review of events that took place in the U.S. that, to date, had led several major American cities (Los Angeles, Seattle, Minneapolis, Albuquerque, Phoenix and Denver) to abolish the Columbus Day, and introduce a commemoration of the native peoples in its place. At the same time, the author recalled that some "statues of Christopher Columbus were beheaded, torn to pieces or smeared in Baltimore, Houston, New York, Yonkers, etc.". He also pointed out that such episodes of vandalism had also been recorded in Australia where in Sydney the monuments of James Cook, Queen Victoria and Lachlan Macquarie, the first colonial governor of New South Wales, had been defaced with spray paint. The "vandals" with these actions demanded that the date of the *Australian National Day* celebrated on 26 September be changed because it was the day in 1788 when the Union Jack flag was hoisted on Australian soil. He pointed out that three city councils had agreed to the Aboriginal people's requests not to celebrate that holiday, which they called "invasion day".



While considering that these operations of removal/destruction of monuments were solicited by groups of native activists, supported in this by non-European ethnic minorities -it was pointed out by the columnist that these actions were mainly due to the representatives of the current "civiltà occidentale e dentro a questa specificamente [alla] sua componente anglosassone" ("Western civilisation and within it specifically [in] its Anglo-Saxon component"). To the latter he ascribed that approach of "self-hatred", an attitude that "nel mondo anglosassone (...) [assume il volto] della iconoclastia che spazza via i simboli dell'identità storica" ("in the Anglo-Saxon world (...) [assumes the face] of iconoclasm that sweeps away the symbols of historical identity") (Casadei, 2017).

The solution to this situation - this is the first time we find it exposed so explicitly in the examined sources - would be that indicated by Malcolm Turnbull, then Australian premier, and the American writer Paul Theroux, that is, not only to respect and preserve the monuments that have existed until now, but also to dedicate new monuments "per tutte le vittime della storia" ("for all the victims of history") (Casadei, 2017).

Moreover, the columnist proposed another subject with which we fully agree and which, with some variations, matches what we have discussed previously regarding Columbus / Azurduy statues in Buenos Aires in §1:

i neo-iconoclasti d'Occidente non erigono nuove statue ma distruggono quelle esistenti, e non affiancano nuove commemorazioni a quelle tradizionali, ma slogano da una determinata data la vecchia celebrazione e la sostituiscono con quella nuova. Questo è il chiaro segno che in loro l'odio per la propria storia prevale sulla pietà per i popoli indigeni spossessati<sup>44</sup>.

What is the origin of such hatred of their own historical and cultural roots? According to the columnist it would be a very strong emotion: the shame. The shame for what the European Ancestors did to the native peoples of all continents where their colonialism expanded<sup>45</sup>.

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<sup>44</sup> Colombi, 2017: "The Western neo-iconoclasts do not erect new statues but destroy those that already exist, and do not add new commemorations to the traditional ones, but remove the old celebration from a certain date, and replace it with the new one. This is a clear sign that in them hatred for their history prevails over pity for the dispossessed indigenous peoples".

<sup>45</sup> According to Taylor Gabriele, 1985 "there are basically two factors in each case of shame. First, there is a self-regarding adverse judgement that one is degraded, being not the sort of person one believed or hoped one should be. Second, there is the notion of the audience, which can be described as awareness that one ought not to be in a position where one could

The article ended with a hypothesis of explanation for the Americans' behaviour: perhaps it was due to a lesser weight that history exerts on their society, and to a strong individualism. These two elements would have facilitated the action that psychology defines the "killing of the father" that leads to the achievement of an independent adult condition.

The second article we mentioned earlier was published on 6 October 2017 by the weekly *America. The Jesuit Review*. By reading it - 'Goodbye? Why Italian-Americans deserve a better holiday' - we dive deeper into an aspect of the theme of this work that is more focused on the relationship between different Minorities - ethnic, in this case - within a cosmopolitan and globalised society, and between the majority of that same society and single minorities (Mc Dermott, 2017).

Conflicts between minorities appear from the beginning of the article where the columnist recalled that in the previous month of August "the Los Angeles City Council voted 14-1 to replace Columbus Day with Indigenous Peoples Day", and added an interesting detail to our work: "The Los Angeles council member who authored the bill to replace Columbus Day is himself a member of the Wyandotte Nation".

By paraphrasing the philosopher Charles Taylor (2008, p. 53), this event - together with other similar ones that had already happened, and will happen later in the U.S. - represented an occasion for the Native Minorities to obtain their own cultural and social "recognition" by the "dominant" eurocentric and "white" culture after repeated explicit requests in this sense.

As well as by highlighting this contrast between minorities, the columnist wanted to underline that in 1892, when the Columbus monument was erected at the behest of the Italian-American community, the latter used it as a means of emancipating itself from the strong political segregation that it had suffered in 19th century American society and, furthermore, in order to claim an important role in the service of the U.S. from the very beginning<sup>46</sup>.

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be seen by a possible detached observer". Knuuttila, 2012, p. 244. See also Tracy - Price Tangney - Robins (eds.), 2007.

<sup>46</sup> In this attempt the interests of Italian-American community intertwined with those of the Knights of Columbus who -founded ten years earlier- were committed to protecting Catholic minorities, and to convincing the rest of American society that they too could be loyal to the institutions. On the Knights of Columbus see <<https://www.kofc.org/en//index.html>> and also <[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Knights\\_of\\_Columbus#Early\\_years](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Knights_of_Columbus#Early_years)> (18 October 2020): the "Irish-American priest Michael J. McGivney founded the Knights of Columbus in 1882 as a mutual benefit society for Catholic immigrants in New Haven, Connecticut". Kubal, 2008, p. 110 recalls the cultural and racial discrimination suffered by Italians who emigrated to the

The article ended with an extremely interesting statement by one of the members of the Los Angeles City Council, who said he received an e-mail with which he was asked not to vote in favour of the removal of Columbus Day, and therefore not to "take away the American Dream of our ancestors and their history". The councillor, whose last name was Bonin and who was a great-grandson of Italians, elaborated the following answer full of judgment without any attempt to historicize characters and events, and imbued with feelings of political correctness.

I've thought about my ancestors and their history. And to me, celebrating Columbus Day does not honor their story and their struggle and their history; it insults it, and it besmirches it. They came here to build something, not to destroy something. They came here to earn something and not to steal something.

Needless to say, no reference was made by Councillor Bonin to the responsibilities of all the other Europeans who came to America in the following centuries. Columbus was the only guilty.

Three days later, 9 October 2017, John M. Viola, then president and chief operating officer of the National Italian American Foundation made a very balanced analysis of what could become the phenomenon of damaging the statues of Columbus and the image of him that was intended to spread (Viola, 2017).

He correctly pointed out that "Columbus was a figure to rally around against the prevailing anti-Italianism" which struck Italian immigrants to the USA between the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th. When Italians were a real ethnic minority in a country they perceived hostile to them. A community, that of the Italian-Americans, which is evidently no longer perceived as a minority in the first decades of the 21st century or, at best, as a minority that can be politically disconcerted with fewer consequences than those of African-Americans and Latinos.

The analysis made by the author is very balanced, and also recalls some episodes in which the victims were the Italian-Americans, but they did not come to ask for the removal or demolition of monuments to President Theodore Roosevelt "(...) who, in 1891, after 11 falsely accused Sicilian-Americans were mur-

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United States in the second half of the 19th century, when the first Columbus Day was celebrated in New York in 1866 in reaction to that situation. He reports the effective testimony of a leader of the Italian community in the Big Apple, Carlo Barsotti.: "(...) We soon got the idea that 'Italian' meant something inferior, and a barrier was erected between children of Italian origin and their parents. This was the accepted process of Americanization. We were becoming Americans by learning to be ashamed of our parents".

dered in the largest mass lynching in American history, wrote that he thought the event was ‘a rather good thing’<sup>47</sup>.

This particularly bloody event fuelled the reaction of the Italian-Americans who donated the statue of Columbus to the city where they lived. In this regard, also the observations made by the author on the resignification of the monument to the Admiral over a little more than a century are interesting:

So this statue now denigrated as a symbol of European conquest was from the beginning a testament to love of country from a community of immigrants struggling to find acceptance in their new, and sometimes hostile, home.

With equal balance he acknowledged that some monuments of the past required a re-evaluation in the light of current parameters, but this had to be done without violence, because the uncontrolled demolition of monuments does not change the past. However, it or the unilateral reinterpretation of American history does damage to democracy itself by limiting discussions and comparisons. And furthermore, we add, it leads to the replacement of one layer of the historical and cultural identity of one country with another, rather than trying to homogenise the two (and possible more layers) in a balanced and multi-cultured way<sup>48</sup>.

On the same day, 9 October 2017, another important American newspaper, *USA Today*, dedicated an editorial - signed by a professor of Political Science at Rutgers University - to the issue of the removal of monuments to Confederate figures and Christopher Columbus, with some political and sociological considerations that gravitate towards some useful key words for reflection (Baker, 2017).

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<sup>47</sup> On the description of Italians see the following web page: ISDA Staff (2019) ‘The New York Times Should Apologize for Sympathizing With a Lynch Mob’, *Italian Sons and Daughters of America*, 6 April: “These sneaking and cowardly Sicilians, the descendants of bandits and assassins, who have transported to this country the lawless passions, the cut-throat practices, and the oath-bound societies of their native country, are to us a pest without mitigations (...) These men of the Mafia killed Chief Hennessy in circumstances of peculiar atrocity (...) Lynch law was the only course open to the people of New Orleans to stay the issue of a new license to the Mafia to continue its bloody practices”, <<https://www.orderisda.org/culture/news/the-new-york-times-should-apologize-for-sympathizing-with-a-lynch-mob/>> (20 October 2020).

<sup>48</sup> See the reflections on this topics by Taylor, 2008 pp. 52-54.

Let's see them in a little more detail, one by one.

The columnist used the term Atonement to define the attitude - emotional even before than political, in our opinion - of some American cities that had seized the occasion of vandalism against the statues of Columbus "to officially rename it [the Columbus Day] 'Indigenous Peoples' Day' in atonement for the many wrongs inflicted upon Native Americans".

The columnist advanced the hypothesis that such a gesture could be an opportunity for American society, which might have wondered about the real benefit that the destruction of such monuments would bring to African-Americans and Native Americans, "(...) who are disproportionately poor, sick and lacking in opportunity". In addition, we can include the following consideration that concerned the changes made by progressive politicians in neighbourhoods of some cities and towns ruled by them with a majority (or totality) of black inhabitants, in which the street namesake was dedicated to civil rights heroes. All this according the columnist were in reality

(...) symbolic changes [that] are a cheap and easy way to compensate people for centuries of mistreatment, and they might make us feel momentarily virtuous when a plaque comes down or a street sign is changed.

This would therefore be a very visible expression of moral and social guilt on the part of the majority of American society towards some of its ethnic minorities<sup>49</sup>.

The editorial concluded with a final reflection focused on the fleeting satisfaction that the descendants of victims "of the ignoble chapters of our racial history" would feel. An emotion that would soon give way to the great challenges and struggles that they will still have to face in order to obtain a worthy social recognition.

One year later, 8 October 2018, the *Huffington Post* published an article entitled 'Columbus Day is A Monument To White Supremacy' written by a person who qualified herself as a member of the Yuma Nation, as if this was an important

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<sup>49</sup> According to Knuuttila, 2012, p. 244 "A person is guilty if he or she breaks a law, which may be a social or religious institution or a moral principle of right". In this case, however, would also act the shame for the actions committed by the ancestors, an emotion that "includes an idea of social discredit, because of according Aristotle 'Shame dwells in the eyes', of all people" about a thing when it is done. Wettlaufer, 2015, pp. 38-39: "Shame can indeed be a strong incentive to alter behaviour; it can effectively remind a person of shared norms and help them to regain control over body and mind in the way it was learned during Childhood".

element in order to understand the assertion she would make later<sup>50</sup>. We interpret this statements in this way because it could also not be inserted, or placed at the end of the text so as not to influence the readers beforehand.

Moreover, in this same perspective, we find interesting a subsequent statement that was supposed to demonstrate to readers the author's objectivity when she made some considerations about Columbus: her husband is an Italian immigrant born and raised in Italy, so... she cannot be accused of a preconceived hostility towards Italy and the Admiral...

Even the headline shows the interpretative perspective of the author, who hoped that the educational texts of her country return to using reliable primary sources when dealing with discussions about Columbus. Nevertheless, she made a stereotypical description of the Discoverer by using some passages of the large work of Bartolomé de Las Casas, to denounce that Columbus and the *Conquistadores* disfigured native slaves who were thrown alive to the dogs. A passage of text relating to a period after Columbus, but she did not mentioned the number of passages by the clergymen containing positive description of the Admiral. In addition, the author reported that Columbus "was eventually arrested by the Spanish Crown and stripped of his governorship for executing Spanish citizens without a trial"; but she did not explain what were the reasons for such a punishment.

The following statements show not only a fair historical confusion of the author about Columbus and his responsibilities. A historical confusion to which we hope to ascribe some statements and a number of connections between characters and events that leave much to be desired.

Let's take an example.

The author stated that "It's not only Native populations that are harmed when we continue to celebrate Columbus year after year", and that the monument to the admiral of Saint Louis had been repeatedly damaged since a young African-American was killed by a policeman near Ferguson, Missouri in 2014. She also added that in 2017 the statue was messed up with some red graffiti spelling out: "'Black Lives Matter' and 'murderer,' calling attention to the atrocities the explorer committed against African slaves".

There is no historical relationship between Columbus and the beginning of black slavery in the USA, which is historically dated at 1619, One hundred and thirteen years after the Genoese's death in 1506, when the so-called "conquest" of American continent was still to come.

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<sup>50</sup> Taffa, 2018: "I come from Laguna Pueblo and the Yuma Nation. (...)"



After all these considerations, the author -who is also a lecturer in creative nonfiction at Webster University in St. Louis- concluded this interesting article, for the purpose of the present work, by suggesting that the monuments to Columbus should be removed and placed in museums after it was added a "proper historical context" to them. Finally, she affirmed that it was necessary to consider the advantages of these removals, and the change of name of Columbus Day to Indigenous Peoples Day.

Let's consider Native children across the country, whose sense of self and worth would be greatly improved by the renaming of this federal holiday. Columbus Day honors one man with a violent and controversial past; Indigenous Peoples Day honors many who have died and who have survived historic discrimination and violence. Let's make it Indigenous Peoples Day once and for all (Taffa, 2018).

##### *5. The reaction of ethnic minorities in city councils*

While the controversy about the removal of several monuments in the USA continued, on 12 January 2018 the *The New York Times* published good news for the statue dedicated to the Admiral in the Big Apple: following also the tenacious opposition of the Italian-Americans and the Governor of the State of New York himself - Andrew C. Cuomo, another Italian-American - the mayor took a solomonic decision, which was substantially in line with the most current principles of musealisation of monuments dedicated to divisive characters or events:

Mr. de Blasio said (...) that he would keep the Columbus Circle statue where it is, while placing "new historical markers in or around Columbus Circle explaining the history of Columbus and of the monument itself." He said that the city would also commission a new monument "recognizing indigenous peoples," but he did not say where it would be located (Neuman, 2018).

With the statue of Columbus, the commission charged by the mayor to analyse all possible "symbols of hate" had to deal with a politically sensitive issue, as Richard Alba, a panel member, declared. He made an interesting statement, as he pointed out that there were different interpretations of the character and his feats:

[he] said the Columbus statue was an "acid test" for the panel because "you had directly opposing meanings brought to the statue by different groups of people." The commission also recommended that the statue remain but that explanatory

material be added. "I think that, as well as it can be done, that the commission threaded the needle on what was a very fraught question".

A confirmation of the delicate nature of this affair and its interpretation is the statement made by Rick Chavolla, the board chairman of the American Indian Community House in Manhattan, who tried to defuse a possible clash between ethnic groups (Italian Americans against Native Americans) and put his judgement on the Discoverer on a moral level, totally devoid of historicisation:

(...) it was wrong to cast the dispute as one pitting Native Americans against Italian-Americans. "It's between what's morally right and what's morally wrong," he said. "Columbus is just morally wrong. He sold underage girls into sexual slavery. He forced people into labor until they died"<sup>51</sup>.

On 1st February 2018, the newspaper *The Daily Signal* entered our intriguing debate with a very thought-provoking article. Firstly, it informed that on the previous Tuesday (30 January) "the San Jose City Council voted to remove a Christopher Columbus statue from City Hall" (Stepman, 2018). The motivation for this decision was taken from an article of the previous day published by *SFGate*, "the Hearst-owned website sister-site of the San Francisco Chronicle": "The vote came after activists repeatedly denounced the explorer, whose conquests in the Caribbean led to the deaths of hundreds of thousands of indigenous people, and declared him not statue-worthy" (Graff, 2018).

Even the mayor of the city - Sam Liccardo with Italian origins - supported the measure with a very interesting statement: "I think that our understanding of history evolves as we learn more". He was not talking about the knowledge but the interpretation of history, without, however, the scientific criteria of the professionals who drop events and protagonists that go back centuries or even millennia in the respective cultural, economic, moral and spiritual spheres of the times and places to which they belonged. And not according to the criteria of ordinary citizens who, instead, evaluate them almost exclusively on the basis of actual parameters. Local museums, none of which wanted the statue, curiously enough, behaved similar to the latter.

The columnist in another previous article underlined an interesting element to think about: "modern, anti-Columbus activists have adopted the rhetoric of

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<sup>51</sup> Claims like these seem to confirm what was asserted by Bloch, 1996, p. 217, according to which the phenomenological production of memory is largely influenced by people's views of themselves in history and, through notions of person and place, by their diverse conceptions of ethics and intentions.



anti-immigrant and white supremacist groups from the 19th and early 20th centuries to denounce the famed adventurer” (Stepman, 2017b)<sup>52</sup>.

The journalist proceeds further with his analysis of the reasons that led him to consider the demolition / removal of the monuments of a personality revered until recently as a sort of founding father of North American culture for his enterprising spirit, and his constancy in achieving his goals. The responsibility would be attributed to far-left political groups and intellectuals who have re-narrated Columbus and his feats in an exclusively negative key, by depicting him only as a coloniser, genocide, slave-driver... Among the main responsables the columnist identifies a far-left historian - Howard Zinn - author of the book *A People's History of the United States*, widely disseminated in American junior high schools (Stepman, 2017)<sup>53</sup>.

The controversies about the destiny of these monuments did not appease with the passage of time, as demonstrated by many other articles published in the following months that offered different images of Columbus and his achievements, according to the different degree of historical knowledge of their authors, and their more or less direct emotional involvement in the story.

On 8 October 2018 the *MinnPost* published another article on our topic. It is a text that offers many stimuli for reflection, and very balanced statements by the two authors (DeCarlo - Harper, 2018)<sup>54</sup>. The article begins with a detailed description of the causes that led to the erection of a monument to the discoverer in front of the Minnesota State Capitol in the city of Saint Louis. It was placed within the vast phenomenon of Italian immigration between the last decades of the 19th century and the first decades of the following one, during which “more than 4.1 million Italians immigrated to the United States, the highest of any ethnic group in the history of the country”. Simultaneously with this “invasion” of Italians in the U.S., a number of racially motivated ideas became radicalized in this country, converging on the concept of “Whiteness”, based on an Anglo-

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<sup>52</sup> Among these groups there was also the Ku Klux Klan “that worked to stop Columbus Day celebrations, smash statues, and reverse his growing influence on American culture”

<sup>53</sup> In the article there is also a video made by the columnist on the scholar which was considered as the responsible for this recent anti-Columbus narrative: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vdBr6nhv5NI>> (18 October 2020).

<sup>54</sup> “Peter DeCarlo is a historian whose work centers on the history of colonialism in Minnesota. (...) He is a descendant of Sicilian immigrants and works at the Minnesota Historical Society as a research historian. Mattie Harper is a citizen of the Bois Forte Band of Ojibwe and has a PhD in Ethnic Studies from UC Berkeley. She is a historian of the Western Great Lakes region and works in Native American Initiatives at the Minnesota Historical Society”.

Saxon, Germanic and Northern European cultural base in general. This heavily discriminated against immigrants from other areas of the world and from Southern Europe itself, who were called "Blacks" in the Iron Range region of Minnesota. The aforementioned Columbus monument was conceived as a response to the Immigration Act of 1924 which exaggerated the social conditions of those who were not recognised as "White".

How was the Italians' response conceived? Here lies a very interesting element confirming the use of History to shape a social identity in accordance with the needs of the present. And what were the needs of Italians living in the U.S. and, especially, in the state of Minnesota at that time? According to the Italian-American community, the monument to Columbus, which also served our emigrants to develop and strengthen their original Italian identity (which represented their past), nevertheless

[it] was mostly about becoming American and being included in the political, economic, and racial orders. It was also about being viewed as "white."

Members of the memorial association made it clear that they considered Columbus to be the first American and that Italians as a people had helped found and shape the United States. The memorial, embraced by the power of the state and federal governments, and accepted by the state historical society, affirmed Italians' place in the nation's history. (...) For the state officials present, the memorial represented a symbolic acceptance of Italian immigrants as Americans.

It was an operation aimed at giving a new identity to this ethnic community that would allow it to be finally accepted in the new host country. A prestigious identity also in the eyes of their non-Italian compatriots, as in fact their discourse revolved around a direct lineage of the Founding Father (or ancestor, anthropologically speaking) par excellence: nothing less than the one who had "discovered" the double continent<sup>55</sup>.

Another interesting text was also published on 8 October 2018 in her blog by Chelsea R. Miller (2018), who defines herself as "a storyteller, abolitionist, and public historian" but not as an Italian-American, as we can grasp by some of her following claims. It is a text full of reflections not only on the historical content, but also on the process of resignification of monuments or festivals. From the very beginning the author shows her adversity to the celebration and

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<sup>55</sup> According to Zerubavel, 2005, pp. 102-108 " the intergenerational transitivity allows diverse elements, 'generationally adjacent (fathers-sons[...])' and arranged in a line of succession, to become a source of status and legitimacy.

monuments in honour of Columbus "a man with blood-stained hands" who cannot honour the commitments of Italian-Americans in building a better world without oppression. So, who would really deserve to be celebrated as representatives of Italian cultural heritage?: "our twentieth-century predecessors, the Italian immigrants and their American-born children who faced discrimination and violence from the US government and citizens alike".

Even more interesting - because even more closely linked to contemporaneity - are the reasons for this choice:

In the age of #BlackLivesMatter, the emergence of Indigenous Peoples' Day, and increasingly hostile US policies toward non-white immigrants, it's time for Italian Americans to return to our radical heritage and stand in solidarity with Black, Indigenous, and Latinx people of color.

So, once again, I choose according to my needs which parts of the historical past are worthy of attention for their possible implications in the current political struggle (in this specific case). I remove the others hoping that they will fall into oblivion because they are no longer useful, or are even "cumbersome" (as in the case of Columbus).

As the author herself confirms a little later in her text

Monuments - and holidays - represent a particular interpretation of the past and maintain that narrative's influence in the present and future. Columbus Day and Columbus monuments were created to enable Italian Americans to secure their place in American history and heritage in an era of anti-Italian sentiments. But we are no longer living in that time, and we don't need holidays and statues to secure our place in the U.S.

The possibility of contextualising and uniting the two parts of the story is not even considered<sup>56</sup>.

Also very interesting is the critical consideration of current Italian-Americans, who tend to belittle the racial discrimination suffered by African Americans and Latinos, based on their acceptance within American society, even after long struggles. The blogger, in fact, emphasised that they "gained ac-

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<sup>56</sup> Also Musarra, 2018, p. 15 underlines that "Più che imbrattare e divellere statue (...) meglio sarebbe costruire nuovi luoghi della memoria, riconoscendo il dolore dei popoli sottomessi. Di tutti i popoli sottomessi. A ciascuno il proprio giorno della memoria" ("Rather than smearing and tearing up statues (...) it would be better to build new sites of memory, recognising the pain of the subjugated peoples. Of all the subjugated peoples. To each one his own day of memory").

ceptance in mainstream white America by accepting capitalism, anti-radicalism, patriarchal authority, and white racial supremacy” (Chelsea R., 2018). That is, by assimilating with those who had discriminated against them for a long time.

The long article ended with a call to replace Columbus with other "heroes", much more worthy than him to receive a monument in their honour.

Who were they?

Our heroes should be the working-class Italian women striving for *emancipazione*, who taught revolutionary values to their daughters, ensuring that their commitment to freedom from oppression would be passed down to the next generation. Our heroes should be the *soversivi*, a transnational generation of leftists ranging from anarchists, socialists, and syndicalists to anti-fascist and communist refugees after World War I, who opposed state violence, fascist regimes, and capitalist exploitation. Our heroes should be our parents, grandparents, or great-grandparents (or great-great-grandparents, for those of us who are younger) who made the journey from Italy to the US. Without them, we wouldn't be here

An interpretation of history in perfect harmony with the current concept of political correctness: attention to the role of the female "gender" in a given historical moment; attention to the political ideology for which one sympathises, and attention to certain types of ancestors.

Although these same ancestors had previously been stigmatised because they had assimilated themselves to the Whites...<sup>57</sup>.

Just over a month after the removal of monuments dedicated to the Admiral continued undeterred. On 9 November 2018 a very interesting article was published in the *Los Angeles Magazine*, which proposes more than one Native American point of view on Columbus, and what he represented. The columnist emphasized the firm decision of Councillor Mitch O'Farrell not only to remove the statue of Columbus but also to make it inaccessible:

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<sup>57</sup> A more balanced position aimed at harmonising the Italian cultural legacy and not limiting it to the figure of Columbus, which could give rise to controversy in other ethnic groups of American society, was expressed by Mary Anne Trasciatti, professor at Hofstra University, who “doesn't believe the monument [to the Admiral in NYC] should be taken down, but she does think another one that honors Italian laborers should be built nearby. A second monument in conversation with the first, she said, could tell a more complex story about the history of migration to America - and the ways our identity is shaped by which history we choose to embrace”. See Vanasco, 2017.

(...) To remove it [the statue of Columbus] is just the first step, says O'Farrell's director of legislation, David Giron, who adds (..) O'Farrell wants the statue removed and deaccessioned. "This Saturday we're removing the statue, but the question of deaccessioning it isn't being handled yet," Giron says over the phone (Avila, 2018).

It may help to understand O'Farrell's resolution that he was a Native belonging to the Wyandotte Nation. However, the removal of the Columbus statue was not enough for other LA citizens and organisations. The Native Joel Garcia declared openly

Success for me and many others goes beyond the removal of the statue. For me, success would be for the county to establish a Decolonial Task Force to address other monuments such as this kind and the lack of equity, inclusion, and decision making for Indigenous people in LA.

As always, the words are very indicative. the expression "task force" has a vaguely militaristic / warlike sense that - perhaps unintentionally - gives a good idea of the opposition between the parties. Equally significant is the need to "decolonise" the history by eliminating all monuments similar to the Columbus one. Concepts similar to those expressed by the president of the Los Angeles City/County Native American Indian Commission (LANAIC), who spoke of correcting history and giving birth to "truth".

The removal is a major step in correcting history, said the chairman of LANAIC and Tribal President of the Fernandeño Tataviam Band of Mission Indians. "By removing statues, street signs, and mascots that have disrespected Native people, the truth is allowed to rise".

I repeat what I said before: if this concept of the disrespectful nature of monuments towards different peoples, social classes, and ethnic groups were applied... how many monuments of the past would be saved from removal, destruction, inaccessibility...?

Even in these voices coming from the Native American communities there are no reconciling words that propose to rewrite together the history with lights and shadows. Above all, there is a desire for revenge rather than justice. For if they were seeking justice, they would not have to hurl themselves primarily against Columbus, but against more than two centuries of North American rule.

The day after, 10 November 2018, the statue dedicated to the Genoese and placed in Grand Park in Los Angeles was dismantled (Davies, 2018). At the

helm of the removal supporters was the aforementioned councilman Mitch O'Farrell. This initiative followed the decision of the previous LA City Council and County Board of Supervisors by just over a year, which replaced Columbus Day with Indigenous Peoples Day. It was a due initiative, because "Columbus' connection to slavery and brutality makes him unworthy of celebration".

Los Angeles in little more than one year made two extremely symbolic gestures, by choosing to rearrange two of its cultural and identitarian layers in order of importance. However, the city did not do so in such a way as to harmonise these two elements (and the others) with each other - with an appropriate historical contextualisation of characters and events - but in an oppositional manner: one identity layer would have (theoretically) replaced the previous one, which hopefully would ended up in oblivion.

#### 6. *The academics have the floor...*

As a result of this continuous escalation of tones and accusations against the historical figure of Columbus, on 13 November 2018 *El País* published a detailed article in which the word was given to professional Spanish historians (Morales, 2018).

Two of these scholars, Carlos Martínez Shaw and Pablo Emilio Pérez-Mallaína openly cited the existence of a negative side of Columbian enterprises linked to the search for gold, spices... and the killing of many indigenous people. Nevertheless, they rejected the accusation of genocide because "no hubo el deseo de exterminar una raza, entre otras razones porque se les necesitaba como mano de obra"<sup>58</sup>. Borja de Riquer, a professor at the Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona, considered the status of genocide to be excessive, and instead he moved the issue to a terminological level. It was not a discovery, but a conquest with the usual characteristics.

More articulate were the arguments proposed by Carmen Sanz Ayán, who declared that she foreseen such "historical revisionism" about Columbus that according to her "procede desde hace tiempo de algunos departamentos de universidades americanas, aunque es curioso que venga de descendientes de

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<sup>58</sup> The first is professor emeritus of Modern History at the Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia (UNED) and member of the Real Academia de la Historia: ("there was no desire to exterminate a race, among other reasons because they were needed as labour"). The second is professor of History of America at the Universidad de Sevilla. An opinion shared also by Antonio Espino López, full professor at the Universitat Autònoma of Barcelona, who also proposes to re-examine all imperialisms and not only the Hispanic one, which were all equally negative.



comunidades que casi fueron exterminadas por otras civilizaciones"<sup>59</sup> with a clear reference to Native Americans. The scholar emphasised other very important concepts about the role of history in contemporary societies. According to her "en esos ámbitos universitarios "se está dando peso a quienes quieren imponer interpretaciones unívocas desde el presentismo y en clara descontextualización. Esto es algo que va en contra de nuestra ciencia y los historiadores no nos lo podemos permitir"<sup>60</sup>.

The scholar saw in similar attitudes a greater danger: "la construcción de lo nacional desde lo etnoculturalista"<sup>61</sup>, something that happened in 20th century Europe with the outcomes well known to all.

Finally, Pérez Mallaína and Borja de Riquer at the same time stressed the groundlessness of a historical judgment on Columbus according to the morals and laws of the 21st century. The second scholar added that if these parameters of judgement were applied to personalities of the past "very few [of them] would be saved" ("se salvarían muy pocos").

About ten days later, on 22 November 2018, another Spanish newspaper, the *ABC*, published an article entirely focused on the phenomenon of historical revisionism against Columbus developed in the US in recent years, as it was showed by the title itself: "'Genocida" y "pedófilo": Colón, enemigo público número uno del revisionismo' ("Genocide" and "pedophile": Columbus, public enemy number one of revisionism') (Ansorena, 2018).

The article takes its cue from an evaluation of the show *Latin History for Morons* written, directed and performed by the actor John Leguizamo, of Puerto Rican and Colombian origins, who proposed a very stereotypical image of Hispanic history and culture and of Columbus as well, who he defined as "'violador genocida pedófilo', responsable del 'Holocausto caribeño' y 'el Donald Trump del Nuevo Mundo'" ("rapist genocidal pedophile", responsible for the 'Caribbean Holocaust' and 'the Donald Trump of the New World').

The journalist pointed out that "En EE.UU., el revisionismo histórico es una tendencia en alza en organizaciones indigenistas, en el discurso de la corrección

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<sup>59</sup> "has long come from some departments of American universities, although it is curious that it comes from the descendants of communities that were almost wiped out by other civilisations". The scholar is member of the Real Academia de la Historia, and full professor of Modern History at the Universidad Complutense of Madrid.

<sup>60</sup> Morales, 2018. "In these university settings "importance is being given to those who want to impose univocal interpretations from the presentism and in a clear decontextualisation. This is something that goes against our science and we historians cannot afford it".

<sup>61</sup> "the construction of what is national from what is ethno-culturalist".



política del progresismo estadounidense y hasta en el mundo del entretenimiento”<sup>62</sup>. According to him, this historiographic approach that is widespread in a large part of American academic world was based on the large diffusion of Howard Zinn's previously mentioned work. This statement seem to be confirmed by the news that Stanford University decided to remove the name of Fray Junípero Serra - in charge of the Franciscan missions in California - from the streets and buildings of its campus. Very interesting were the motivations given by the Commission appointed by the Rector to decide on this matter. Among them were

“el dolor, el trauma, el daño emocional y el perjuicio a la salud mental” que los estudiantes y profesores nativos (...) sufren al encontrarse con una calle dedicada a Serra, (...), [y] “defender la dignidad de la comunidad nativa y protegerla de aquellos que la maltrataron y abusaron”<sup>63</sup>.

Felipe Fernández-Armesto, professor at the University of Notre Dame, in an interview ascribed such gestures to the sense of guilt for the extermination of the Natives and the slavery of African Americans. A condition of uneasiness that could be "cured" by using Columbus as a scapegoat that allowed not to admit the guilt of all the others, compatriots and family members who were the real authors of genocide and slavery.

The explanation given by this scholar to the reasons why Stanford University and Los Angeles City Hall were able to remove statues and street names are equally disquieting. Basically, these are operations of "political correctness" which means that even such institutions must adapt to the logic of the host society: which for the University is the possibility of obtaining more funding and students, while for the City Council means being able to get more political support from the population, i.e. more votes for its members.

But the attacks on the monuments to the Discoverer seem not to be over yet. And there were several attacks during 2019 as well.

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<sup>62</sup> Ansorena, 2018: “In the U.S., historical revisionism is a growing trend in Native American organizations, in the discourse of political correctness of American progressivism, and even in the entertainment world”.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibidem*: "the pain, trauma, emotional damage and mental health detriment" that Native American students and teachers (...) suffer when they encounter a street dedicated to Serra, (...), [and] "to defend the dignity of the native community and to protect it from those who mistreated and abused it".

### 7. *Political correctness... Gender correctness and the reaction against them*

A very interesting article always on the side of the "Political Correctness", declined as "Gender Correctness", if we can say... was published on 16 September 2019 (Marsh, 2019).

The centre of attention and initiative was once again New York and some of its monuments, including the one to Columbus inside Central Park, on the initiative of a member of the Public Design Commission. The painter Hank Willis Thomas, in a meeting at the City Hall of the American metropolis, not only proposed to add monuments to important female figures but also stated that "There are what, five or six [male] statues that I think could easily be replaced by individual statues of each of these women, (...) some people may not miss the Columbus statue if there's another one just a few hundred yards away [in Columbus Circle]".

Mayor De Blasio did not endorse this proposal, since already two years earlier he declared himself in favour of contextualising the existing monuments by adding new ones. Another interesting element reported by this article confirms that cultural and ideological bases of such requests for removal/demolition were too much subject to the pressure of trends of the moment, with a continuous pulverisation of aims and results.

The columnist reported that the Commission proposed to increase the statues dedicated to female characters, suggesting two pioneers of women's rights: Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony. But this proposal faced resistance because both were white women and when it was added the name of a black abolitionist, Sojourner Truth, the Commission thought it was better to avoid bringing them together in a single monument, and suggested individual monuments because of the diversity of their professional approaches<sup>64</sup>.

In short, one authentic cascade of a "politically correct" opinion after another, which increasingly fragmented the initial proposal, and greatly delayed the elaboration of a final project for this monument, even going so far as to talk about discrimination in the design of the monument itself, and in the disposition of the three women in it<sup>65</sup>. The inauguration of the monument is scheduled

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<sup>64</sup> Six months earlier the American news agency Associated Press had informed of the decision of New York State Governor Andrew Cuomo to erect a monument to this protagonist of the slavery abolitionist movement, which "helped blaze a trail for women and people of color across the country." The monument would have been placed "at the Walkway Over the Hudson State Historic Park". See 'Sojourner Truth monument to honor abolitionist, suffragette', 2019.

<sup>65</sup> In addition to the article cited in the previous note, other stimulating echoes of the discrimination against black activists, not adequately represented in the monument designed for

for the end of August 2020, the 100th anniversary of the ratification of the 19th Amendment.

The progressive dismantling of the figure of the Genoese and the monuments or memorials dedicated to him continued at the end of that year. On 8 October 2019 the District of Columbia City Council abolished Columbus Day celebration scheduled for the 14th of that month and replaced it with the Indigenous Peoples Day (Stepman, 2019).

A few days later, still on the occasion of the former Columbus Day and despite that in San Francisco the Indigenous Peoples Day was celebrated, the local monument to Columbus was defaced on 12 October 2019 with red paint and some graffiti that read: "Destroy all monuments of genocide" and "Kill all colonizers". But that's not all: another statue of the Genoese was defaced in Providence, R.I., again with red paint and signs at its base that read "Stop celebrating genocide" (Fry, 2019)<sup>66</sup>.

We can therefore understand that such anti-Columbus and anti-European positions fed equally partisan responses that tended to emphasise the wildness and primitiveness of Native Americans before the Admiral's arrival, with a reading that is not concerned with historicising and contextualising certain aspects of American-Indian cultures that are *tout court* totally unacceptable and inexcusable today. An example in this sense can be the article published on 28 November, 2019 in an Italian online newspaper with a conservative political right-wing approach. The columnist, at first, pointed out that

Cristoforo [Colombo è] bersagliato ormai da diversi anni dal vizio liberal di leggere la Storia di secoli fa con l'occhio della contemporaneità, un approccio partigiano e antistorico, asservito alla propaganda politica più grezza ed ignorante. (...). Cristoforo è responsabile di tutti i mali che si sono abbattuti sull'America dal 1492, (...) non merita statue alla memoria, ma l'eterno disprezzo di chi rimpiange i bei tempi andati (Maggi, 2019)<sup>67</sup>.

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Central Park, are also found in Small, 2019, which recalled that "For almost a year, controversy has plagued the statue, which some have accused of whitewashing history due to its spotlight on the suffragists Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, without paying equal tribute to the many women of color who contributed to the movement". See also Brown, 2019.

<sup>66</sup> The Statue of Columbus in Providence was also damaged by vandals on Columbus Day in 2010, 2015 and 2017. See Taylor Hayes, 2019.

<sup>67</sup> "Christopher [Columbus is] targeted for several years now by the liberal vice of reading the History of centuries ago with the eye of the contemporaneity, a partisan and anti-historical approach, subordinated to the most crude and ignorant political propaganda. (...). Christo-

Then, on the basis of this last statement, the author of the article began his "counter-narrative" of the "mythical" pre-Columbian golden age with a list of cruelties and customs of different American Indian peoples. He repeatedly insisted on human sacrifices and cannibalism which would prove that "la 'innocenza violata dei popoli indigeni' è la bufala più scandalosa" ("[the] violated innocence of indigenous peoples is the most scandalous hoax"). Undoubtedly, such practices listed in this way, without any cultural contextualisation, can only generate a severe judgment of condemnation and reprobation. From this it followed, moreover, a last favourable consideration by the columnist on the arrival of European culture in the New World: "dopo millenni di tribalismo spietato, dalla Terra del Fuoco al Canada" ("after millennia of ruthless tribalism, from Tierra del Fuego to Canada") in less than three hundred years United States was born, in less than four hundred years slavery was abolished and in about four hundred and fifty years civil rights were attributed to ethnic minorities.

All in all, the balance for him was positive...

## 8. Conclusions

After this long examination of sources and our historiographic and methodological remarks on them, we would like to draw some final considerations that highlight certain red threads within the processes of memory elaboration present not only in today's Argentinean or American societies.

The numerous events that have occurred in recent years concerning the removal or demolition of monuments and, above all, the way they have been narrated and interpreted by exponents of different social layers, of diverse ethno-cultural groups present in the two American states at the centre of this work, allow us to grasp the concrete action of some concepts elaborated by Philosophy and Sociology.

The radicalisation of the contrast between different memories that we could define as "collective"<sup>68</sup> (the "Italian" and the "Native", in the case of the Argentine events on the one hand, and the "Italian", the "Native" and the "Afro-

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pher is responsible for all suffering that have struck America since 1492, (...) he does not deserve statues in memory, but the eternal contempt of those who regret the good old days".

<sup>68</sup> According to Guzzi, 2011, p. 35 collective memory "designa il patrimonio memoriale di gruppi connotati da un forte collante identitario – una famiglia, una comunità religiosa o una classe." ("designates the memorial heritage of groups with a strong identity bond - a family, a religious community or a class.")

American" in the US case, on the other), and as "social" memories dominant in that particular historical moment in the two great American countries, enable us to understand the methods and the place of confrontation/clash between them<sup>69</sup>. All actions that were aimed at seeing the legitimacy of the claims of those ethnic communities recognised within the "cultural" memory of their countries<sup>70</sup>.

Most of the confrontations described in the previous pages seem to confirm the considerations made more than twenty years ago by Chakrabarty, according to which

Post modern critiques of 'grand narratives' have been used as ammunition in the process to argue that the nation cannot have just one standardised narrative, that the nation is always a contingent result of many contesting narratives. Minority histories, one may say, in part express the struggle for inclusion and representation that are characteristic of liberal and representative democracies (Chakrabarty, 1998, p. 15).

In this regard, we can add a reflection by Habermas that suits the theme of the social composition of Argentina and the United States, and the "ethnic" struggles that have developed within them. According to the German philosopher and sociologist in fact

la casuale composizione demografica della popolazione di uno Stato [Staatsvolk] (...) determina anche l'orizzonte degli orientamenti di valore in cui si svolgono le battaglie culturali e i discorsi etico-politici di autochiarimento. Se modifichiamo la composizione sociale [e quindi anche quella culturale] della cittadinanza modifichiamo anche questo "Orizzonte dei valori" (Habermas, 2008, p. 157)<sup>71</sup>.

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<sup>69</sup> Social memory is "la più ampia sfera di comunicabilità che delimita l'arena in cui le diverse memorie collettive competono per la rilevanza e la plausibilità dei propri discorsi" ("the wider sphere of communicability that delimits the arena in which the different collective memories compete for the relevance and plausibility of their discourses"). Guzzi, 2011 p. 35.

<sup>70</sup> The "cultural memory" - which is based on elements that guarantee a lasting support: rites, texts, images, monuments, libraries, museums and archives -, indicates the influence that the past has on the present through symbolic legacies, mystifications of history and hard to die customs. See Assmann, 2002, pp. 381-386 and Guzzi, 2011 p. 36.

<sup>71</sup> "the random demographic composition of the population of a State [Staatsvolk] (...) also determines the horizon of the values orientations in which cultural struggles and ethical-political discourses of self-explanation take place. If we modify the social composition [and therefore the cultural one] of citizenship we also modify this "Horizon of values".

And both in the case of Argentina and the United States in these first decades of the 21st century their societies have been subjected to new waves of massive immigration which have created phenomena of adaptation and renegotiation of the social and cultural structure, with obvious repercussions also in the cultural memory and in the Horizon of Values of the two countries.

Think quickly of immigrants from Bolivia and other South American countries that President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner addressed with her operation to dedicate the monument to Juana Azurduy, with which she sought to modify Argentina's social and cultural memory, by increasing the importance of Natives' collective memory.

But think also of the demonstrations against the monuments to Columbus and the Confederate generals, and the growing immigration to the U.S. from the border with Mexico. Events that have greatly worried the North American authorities for the "danger" of a change in their social identity and memory by a growing "Afro-Americanisation" and "Latinisation" of their society and culture, which would have taken place at the expense of the hitherto predominant white and Protestant component.

These "Afro-Americanisation" and "Latinisation" of today's United States society were found to be at the root of various unhistorical attitudes and judgments towards certain figures to whom monuments were dedicated, and whose removal and/or demolition was requested in the name of a misunderstood sense of "social justice" in favour of certain ethnic minorities so far discriminated against in the narrative of national History

But the Horizon of Values or "Philosophical Horizon", as Taylor defines it, is not only modified from within a given society but can also be questioned by more and more parts of it, in order to arrive at what Gadamer has called the "fusion of horizons" which allows us to broaden our cultural horizon, in which

ciò che prima era lo sfondo, dato per scontato, delle nostre valutazioni può essere riclassificato come una delle possibilità esistenti, insieme allo sfondo (diverso) della cultura che ci era prima estranea (Taylor, 2008, pp. 55-56)<sup>72</sup>.

With regard to the "fusion of horizons" between different components of the multi-ethnic societies examined in this text, we would like to reiterate once again that only in very few cases, among those we examined, we could find the intention to attempt a new narrative of events and protagonists. Nearly always

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<sup>72</sup> "what used to be the background, taken for granted, of our evaluations can be reclassified as one of the existing possibilities, together with the (different) background of the culture that was previously alien to us".

the protagonists of our sources limited themselves to proposing the removal of monuments or festivals in honour of the past they did not recognise, but of which they are nevertheless a part. Thereby making the same mistake as their “opponents”: not recognising the history and the culture of the alleged “other”.

Although several of the sources examined in this paper refer to museums and places of memory, and to the need to musealize streets and squares that host monuments of “inconvenient” personalities instead of removing them, we have intentionally avoided delving into these topics as well, even though they are closely related to the subject of this essay, since it would have taken up the dimensions of a monograph.

However, we do not rule out returning to these topics because they are also of considerable interest for the creation of active and participatory citizenships.

Finally, we would like to conclude with a last consideration more topical than ever by the anthropologist Fabio Dei (2004, p. 45) who recalled how

Ci confrontiamo gli uni con gli altri corazzati all’interno di identità, le cui somiglianze ignoriamo o non vogliamo vedere, inventando o distorcendo invece le differenze per sottolineare la nostra superiorità. Esaltando le nostre eredità ed escludendo quelle degli altri, creiamo una situazione endemica di rivalità e conflitto<sup>73</sup>.

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<sup>73</sup> “We confront each other armoured within identities whose similarities we ignore or do not want to see, instead inventing or distorting the differences to emphasise our superiority. By exalting our inheritances and excluding those of the others, we create an endemic situation of rivalry and conflict”.



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## 11. *Curriculum vitae*

Luciano Gallinari, Doctor in Medieval History from the University of Cagliari (1998) and PhD in History and Civilisations from the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris, is currently a researcher at the CNR's Istituto di Storia dell'Europa Mediterranea. He is the author of numerous essays and the editor of medieval history books on the Mediterranean and Christopher Columbus' voyages, as well as on the image and feats of the Admiral in Italian

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