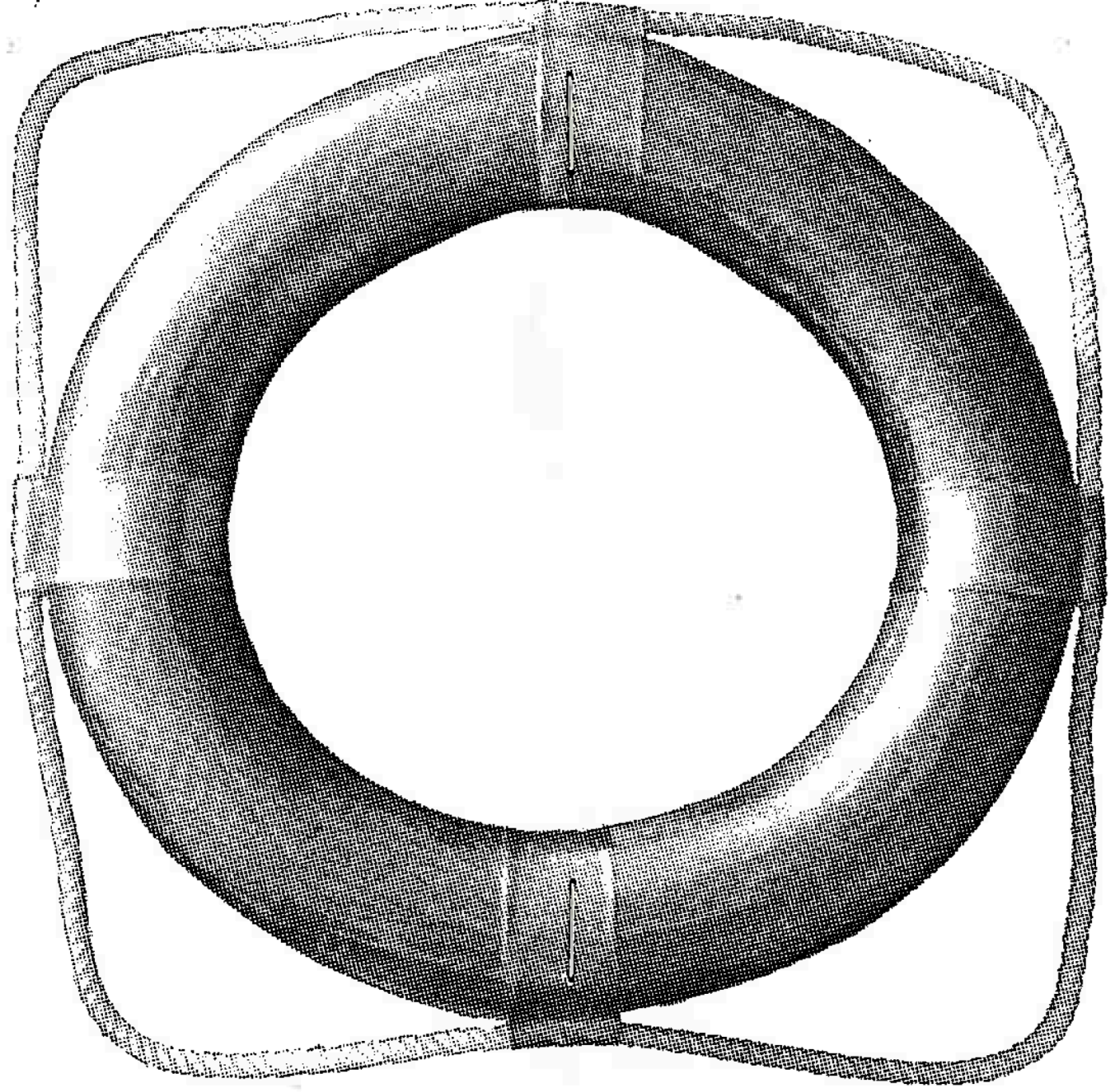


[www.nelventredelfascismo.noblogs.org](http://www.nelventredelfascismo.noblogs.org)

[vulcanitserupziona@riseup.net](mailto:vulcanitserupziona@riseup.net)



In the Belly of Fascism and Colonialism

The investigation I carried on during these months at the international fellowship residency at Künstlerhaus Büchsenhausen is an extension of a project I started two years ago as part of my diploma at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. The title I had chosen at that initial point, and that continues to frame the research up to this day is *In the Belly of Fascism and Colonialism*.

The attempt here is to understand the visceral relation between these two historical phenomena, their enduring nourishment by oppression and violence, and present-day necrocapitalist practices. My interest is to analyse historical colonialism and fascism, with a particular reference to the Italian context, and their intersection with contemporary forms of coloniality and modes of fascistation, and to envision a de-colonial thinking in all spheres of our life (from education, to politics, love, relations, work, etc). I find that these concerns are gaining space in white dominated societies through the cultural work and activism - in this particular context - of people who have a (post)-colonial lineage and counteract hegemonic narratives given as "natural" and unquestioned. In this regard, I would like to mention the three people I invited as guests of the program *Italian De-colonial Memory Politics* that I organised during my stay in Innsbruck in collaboration with the Künstlerhaus Büchsenhausen and the Italien Zentrum: Dagmawi Yimer, Antar Mohamed Marincola and Igiaba Scego (the latter unfortunately had to cancel her participation for personal reasons).

Dagmawi Yimer, a documentary film maker based in Verona, was invited to present two of his movies: *Va'Pensiero-Walking stories* tells the story of two violent racist attacks in Milan and Florence, the last resulting in the killing of two men, Samb Modou and Diop Mor, by the hand of a fascist nostalgic affiliated with the extreme right political organisation called Casa Pound; *Like a Man on Earth* lends a voice to Ethiopian refugees living in Rome and through this provides direct insights into how the former Libyan government, with the support of Italy and the European Union, often resorted to brutal measures in efforts to control the immigration attempts made by people coming from different African countries.

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Annalisa Cannito

June 2015

Antar Mohamed Marincola was invited to read from his book *Timira-Romanzo meticcio*, written in collaboration with Wu Ming 2, with musical accompaniment from Maurizio Nardo. *Timira* is a hybrid novel that combines memories, documents from archives, and fiction. The novel covers seventy years of Italian (post-colonial) history from the beginnings of fascism to the end of the Cold War, and is written from the standpoint of a black Italian woman. Her Italian name is Isabella Marincola, Antar's mother; in Somalia, the country of her birth, she calls herself *Timira*.

Igiaba Scego was invited to present her last book *Roma negata*, done in collaboration with the photographer Rino Bianchi, which is a journey through the city of Rome that aims to bring its suppressed colonial past back from oblivion. Here, Igiaba Scego describes highly symbolic places and tells of their colonial past; Rino Bianchi takes photos of them together with the heirs of this history.

These events did not take place exclusively at the center Büchsenhausen, rather the plan was from the very beginning to reach a wider audience also by choosing different locations in the city. We have been hosted for the screening of the first Dagmawi Yimer's film at the repertory cinema Leo Kino and for the reading with Antar Marincola at the venue P.m.k. (Plattform mobile Kulturinitiativen).

Each event was followed by an open discussion in which the audience put forward their own questions and comments.

What you see here at the Kunstpavillon are some of what I call manifestations of "global coloniality" and "inherited violence". Not an end result or product of the residency program, rather fragments of the process of thinking, acting, learning and de-learning I went through during the all period of my stay at the center.

The program I mentioned above is integral part of this process as well as other activities such as the workshop I conducted with the students of the Media/design-class of the Ferrarischule in Innsbruck and the extensive talks I had with my peers at the center.

In the *Belly of Fascism and Colonialism* departs and insists on an almost absent critical debate in Italian society of the impact of the colonial/fascist heritage on:

- contemporary migration flows;
- the racialised and gendered perceptions of the constructed representation of the "Other";
- the ever-increasing restrictive racialised laws in the field of immigration policy;
- the violent racist attacks that have been occurring since the eighties, which in many cases resulted in the murders of black people;
- the spreading of fascist ideology and organisations, especially among the youth, throughout the country.

In the Italian society, with reference to the colonial time, the rhetoric of the "short duration", "lacking economic productivity", "limited geographical extension", has been masked for more than a century as "colonialismo buono", that means a "good colonialism," and the Italian colonialists as "brava gente," "good-natured people". People recall the time when Italians were there to build bridges, roads, schools, and churches as if they were "civil" and "good" works done to "modernize" the countries and "help" local communities. These works were made because the occupations were both of settlement and of exploitation and so it served for the wealth of the colonizers and a greater benefit for the motherland. With the construction of roads and bridges for example, the transport of material was facilitated and the time needed shortened. Moreover it was possible to have a more extended control on a broken ground, difficult to be accessed by the military vehicles.

Churches were built to give spaces to the missionaries to carry on their work of evangelization and "civilization" of the populations considered "wild" and deprived of human values. The schools, first and foremost built for the education of the colonizers children, the next generation of oppressors, were places of indoctrination where the superiority of western knowledge was imposed, both through the language of instruction and the subjects taught.

The cultural heritage of local communities was completely concealed, as were their languages and their oral histories.

Italy started to fulfil its colonial imperialist ambitions from the 19th century, during more liberal governments, and expanded through out of the 20th century culminating with the most brutal atrocities committed during the fascist dictatorship of Benito Mussolini. Lands and people were appropriated by force in Somalia, Eritrea, Ethiopia and Libya. Occupations occurred also in Slovenia, Croatia, Albania and some Greek islands.

The installation at Kunstpavillon relates to several historical and contemporary events connected among each other that I will contextualise here.

Modern Italy, as a unified state, had only existed from 1861. The unification brought with it a belief that Italy "deserved" its own overseas empire. The Italian Empire was created after the Kingdom of Italy joined other European powers in establishing colonies overseas during the Scramble for Africa.

By the outbreak of World War I in 1914, Italy had annexed Eritrea, Somalia, Libya and the Dodecanese Islands. It had initially been defeated in its first attempt to conquer Ethiopia during the First Italo-Ethiopian War of 1895-1896. In 1895 the Prime Minister Francesco Crispi ordered Italian troops to enter into the country which resulted in a humiliating defeat for Italy at the hands of Ethiopian forces. The Battle of Adwa in 1896, one of the greatest defeat of the colonial troops in the history of European colonialism, became known as the *African's victory*.

The Second Italo-Abyssinian War occurred between 1935 and 1936 when Italy, under the fascist dictatorship of Benito Mussolini who in his wounded pride wanted to revenge the earlier defeats, entered with its armed forces in Abyssinia and occupied it militarily for five years.

During this war the League of Nations imposed economic sanctions on Italy, guilty of open hostilities against Ethiopia.

On this occasion Mussolini made an appeal to national solidarity and claimed Italy to be an autarky. Consequently, some supplies of raw materials left office. The effectiveness of the sanctions, however, was diminished by the fact that they did not relate to oil and coal, which were essential to the Italian industry, and that a number of countries with which Italy had close business relationships (for example, Germany, Japan, the United States), did not adhere to the League of Nations and did not respect the block.

However, this act set off the resentment of Mussolini and consequently of the Italian population against the League and aroused waves of patriotism in the all country and the "Italianess" myth. To overcome the economic difficulties resulting from the sanctions the regime started a campaign called *Oro alla patria* (*Gold to the Fatherland*) in order to collect gold and other precious metals to finance the war against Ethiopia. In particular on the 18th December 1935 a very high emotional ritual mass was established with the name *Giornata della fede*. The translation of "giornata" is "day", the word "fede" has different meanings, it can be translated with the word "faith" as well as with "wedding ring". The main ritual took place at the Altar of the Fatherland in Rome and consisted in the donation to the regime of wedding rings and other objects in gold and silver such as bracelets, necklaces, but also objects in copper and bronze such as pots, jugs, candlesticks.

It became one of the most effective propaganda campaigns among those developed by the fascism and it found a new liturgy of the Nation. The ritual was highly symbolic on many levels. With the request of the wedding rings the regime penetrated inside the institution of the family. The union between the population and the regime was sacralised.

The *Giornata della fede* on the 18th December entered in the fascist holiday calendar and have been celebrated with solemnity until 1938. It was on the 9th May 1936 when Mussolini declared, from the balcony of his personal office called Sala del Mappamondo (the World Map Room), the conquest of Ethiopia and the birth of the "Italian Empire". This was one of the moments of major mass consensus during fascism. The nationalistic feeling of revenge was shared by Italian society in its whole.

During the Ethiopian occupation, the fascist military commander Rodolfo Graziani was the author of the ruthless repression of the anticolonial revolt and who decided, among other atrocities, to sprinkle poison gas, prohibited by the Genève Convention, on the unarmed Ethiopia populations causing the death of thousands of people and the destruction of lands. In 1950 he was sentenced to 19 years, of which he served just four months. Graziani for these and other atrocities earned the name of the "Butcher of Ethiopia" and the "Executioner of Libya".

The movie *The Lion of the desert* (1981) of the Syrian-American filmmaker Mustafà Akkad, describes through an accurate historical research the crimes and violence perpetrated by Italians in Libya between 1929 and 1931 lead by general Rodolfo Graziani as well as the anti-colonial resistance lead by Omar el-Mukhtar, who fought the Italian occupation for more than 20 years.

In Libya Graziani ordered to use chemical weapons such as mustard gas; destroyed plantations; poisoned water wells; decimated and burnt down villages; deported the entire population of Gebel in a concentration camp and executed most of the people; built a barbed wire fence 270 kilometres long to isolate the Libyan partisans; captured and publicly hanged el-Mukhtar.

The Italian authorities banned the screening of the film in 1982 because, in the words of the then Prime Minister Giulio Andreotti, the film "harms the honor of the army".

This act of censorship last for almost 30 years. The film was never distributed in the country and was difficult to find in video stores.

In June 2009, during his first official visit to Italy, Muammar Ghedaffi kept pinned on his chest the historic photos of the arrest of el-Mukhtar by the Italian colonial troops. He was accompanied by the son of el-Mukhtar at meeting with the Italian authorities. On that occasion, the private Sky television platform, announced the screening of the film *The Lion of the Desert*, one the day after the visit of the general. Nevertheless, as Italian colonialism and its implication were kept in silence for many years, the event has not triggered a deep critical debate at the public level. In the following case rather the contrary.

In many Italian cities, streets, squares, theatres, cinemas recall our colonial past without any kind of contextualization. Brutal generals are still celebrated as the saviours of the country. So here we come in the 21st century when a monument is built to rehabilitate fascism in public memory. In August 2012 a mausoleum and park in the village of Affile, a small town in the region of Rome, was dedicated to the memory of Marshall Rodolfo Graziani, who was born in the village of Filettino, near Affile, on August 11th 1882. The memorial, strongly desired by the mayor Ercole Viri, has been built with public funds. It shows clearly the imposition of one or few person's interpretation of history on the collective mind and so the political control of a public space.

On Affile's web site Graziani is listed as one of the village's "famous sons". An article dedicated to him states that "Graziani was able to direct his every act for the good of the Fatherland through his inflexible uprightness and scrupulous fidelity to duty as a soldier (...)". The words *patria e onore* (*fatherland and honour*), a phrase that in the Italian political lexicon is closely associated with Fascism, are engraved on the mausoleum.

The two new buildings erected, the memorial and the toilette, look the same: squared rigid cubes, typical look of imperial/fascists architecture.

The building was initially hosting relics from Graziani such as honour medals and pictures and other objects such as a Graziani half-bust, old newspapers articles and a street plaque bearing his name.

After some interrogations the small historical archive museum was closed in order to clean up its image, as request from the regional authority that was sponsoring the construction and the maintenance of the building.

Nevertheless, since then, the memorial has been used as a meeting point for nostalgic fascists. Several events have been organised to celebrate Graziani by the association named after him. The local mayor is also a member of this group.

After the inauguration of the monument, a small group of individual quickly formed the *Anti-fascist Committee* in Affile and contested the memorial and the mentality it represented. Despite this and other actions against it, including a petition initiated by Igiaba Scogo, the monument still exists.

Not enough, on the 11th December 2014 the fascist nostalgic association "Campo della Memoria" awarded the mayor of the city of Affile Ercore Viri, as part of the members of the "Cultural Association Italy's sergeant major Rodolfo Graziani", for the "constant search of truth for the sake of Memory." The celebration took place without obstacles in Rome in a room of Musei Capitolini - the world's oldest public museum.

The story of Affile is paradigmatic of a more complex system of oppression, colonial amnesia and fascistation of conscience.

The historical archive material, available in small part here and on the web site (see link in the back cover), is a useful tool to investigate how the fascist and colonialist propaganda was ideologically perpetuated. I was specifically drawn to those materials designed for school pupils such as books, notebook covers and the essays elementary pupils were asked to write.

In this context I am showing a postcard from the beforehand mentioned fascist campaign *Gold to the Fatherland* and an elementary school notebook, which cover refers to the North African military campaigns of World War II that occurred between 1940 and 1943, strategically important for both the Western Allies and the Axis powers.

What is at stake here is also to unveil the covert way how racist ideology is spread all around through the politicians speeches assisted by the media which say in tears that catastrophes such as the one from October 2013 where hundreds of people lost their lives should not happen again and that they act in the name of justice, peace and freedom (let us remember that the EU received even the Nobel Price for peace in 2012). At the same time they have exponentially increased border control with security and deadly technologies whereby giving even more power to repressive Frontex organization and letting Europe becoming more and more an impermeable Fortress for non- European citizens.

Following the 2013 Lampedusa shipwreck where most of the victims were from Eritrea, Somalia, Ethiopia (all three former Italian colonies), the Italian government, has decided to strengthen the national system for the patrolling of the Mediterranean sea by establishing *Operation Mare Nostrum*. The Operation, in function from October 2013 to November 2014, was managed by the Italian Military Navy in collaboration with Frontex, the European agency for external border control. The military deployment included helicopters, airplanes, naval aircrafts, drones and many different technologies of surveillance, control and defense, like those developed from the Spanish company Indra.

Some politician's speeches and actions are quite paradoxical. The day after that very Lampedusa shipwreck the ex-president Letta said - during a speech hold at the University of Siena - that from that precise moment all those death bodies acquired the Italian citizenship (this was done in order to buried them in Italy, so to save money for the transport of the corpses). This while the survivors were criminalised and persecuted by the "Illegal immigration" crime, defined by the old dated Italian law Bossi-Fini.

Although the media have been mostly referring to *Mare Nostrum* as a humanitarian operation for the search and rescue of migrants, one of the major objectives was to actually prevent the migrants to arrive at the Italian coast by blocking the ships directly in Libya or intercepting the ships as soon as they left the North African coast.

The drones could monitor constantly the costs allowing the military navy to reach the ships when still in international waters. In this way, migrants could be identified directly on the ships and brought back to the North African costs with the aim of sending them back to the countries of origin (the same countries from which they are escaping from) through the Libyan authorities. The migrants, once in Libya, are confined in detention centers with inhuman conditions, subjected to violence and abuses of any kind, as it is well shown in the documentary movie of Dagmawi Yimer *Like a man on earth*.

*Mare Nostrum* (Latin for Our Sea) was a Roman name for the Mediterranean Sea. In the years following the unification of Italy the term was revived by Italian nationalists and later used by Benito Mussolini who wanted to re-establish the "greatness" of the Roman Empire by promoting the fascist project of an enlarged Italian Empire. He believed that Italy was the most powerful of the Mediterranean countries after World War I and created one of the most powerful navies of the world in order to control his *Mare Nostrum*.

During the semester of the Italian presidency of the EU council, the Italian Government has lunched from the 13th to the 26th October 2014 an European police operation called *Mos Maiorum*, supported by Frontex, which aim to identify the transit flows of "illegal" migrants through the major routes (land, nautical and aerial) of the Member states. It mapped countries of destination, origin and transit, means of transports, etc. It was a real discriminatory violent measure adopted by the security forces based on racial/ethnic profiling and resulting with the arrest of many of the so-called "illegal" migrants.

In the Roman patriarchal society the *Mos Maiorum* (from the Latin *Ancestral Custom*) was the behavioral model and social practices that affected private, political, and military life in ancient Rome. Today it is manifested in the social and institutional norms, which implement racialised and gendered regimes of control and repression.

When *Mare Nostrum* Operation came to an end, it was substituted by another border security operation called Triton, conducted by Frontex.

On April 2015, a ship carrying migrants capsized in Lampedusa, resulting in over 1,000 deaths. Since then EU ministers have proposed to double the size of Operation Triton.

They are trying to realize what they actually had started to develop and practice many years ago, including the naval blockade in Libyan territorial waters and the creation of detention centers on the territory of Libya. That is, to dismiss the unstoppable political subjectivity of migrants, out of sight of the people living in European countries. The "humanitarian"-military action of the European policy is to push away the conflict that these people bring, to deny it, to bury it in the desert sands of Libya, as well as at the bottom of the Mediterranean sea. A situation which is a direct result of the Western capitalist system, the colonial past and its legacy.

Right after the aforementioned shipwreck the Italian extreme right politician Daniela Santanchè, who was deputy of the Chamber from 2001 to 2008, elected on the lists of the National Alliance (a political party formed in 1994 consisting primarily of the Italian Social Movement, the latter founded in 1946 by veterans of the Italian Social Republic, state led by Benito Mussolini and wanted by Nazi Germany) and currently responsible for the fundraising of the Berlusconi's party Forza Italia, has made disconcerting statements urging the air force and the Italian navy to sink all the boats used by migrants, directly on the Libyan costs. Furthermore she refers to the *Katër i Radës*, a boat of refugees fleeing from Albania in 1997, intentionally rammed by the Italian navy, capsizing and taking with it over a hundred people. She callously presents this as an example to follow in the future.

Right wing (and in many cases also leftists-masked) white superior policies are reinforced and perpetuated in institutional politics from the local to the European level. They are "legal" but not for this reason legitimate.

At the same time, some people are made "illegal" and looted of the legitimacy of existence. Treated either as dispensable lives (let to die) or as commodities (source for super profit). They are continuously blackmailed and subjected to miserable living and working conditions without any right to appeal for a better situation. They are deprived of all citizenship rights and therefore made non-citizen. The hysteria around "illegal" migration thus is used to justify increases in defence budgets and spending on security technologies.

Whether it is forced or not, mobility has become a product and vehicle of global capitalism.

It is not a coincidence that those with mobility privilege today, come from countries that are former colonisers and still own most of the global economic power (see United States of America, United Kingdom and France).

While in Europe structural violence, acting through media, politicians and laws, nourishes public opinion with the hate against a constructed enemy, contemporary "humanitarian interventions" are launched by male white "criminals" in high offices.

What is also necessary is to start to think about us the "natural white" citizens of Italy and the EU differently; to see that our privileges and hegemonic positions are an outcome of the fully brutally conducted processes of dispossession, exploitation, discrimination, death and subjugation. Processes that were carried out historically and that are presently reinforced and perpetuated.

Special thanks to the Künstlerhaus Büchsenhausen crew, Andrei Siclodi, Andrea Perfler, Carmen Sulzenbacher, Manuel Gspan, Stefan Spiss; to the photographer Daniel Jarosch; to my peers, Bisan Abu-Eisheh, Raja'a Khalid, Emma Wolukau-Wanambwa; to the guests Antar Mohamed Marincola, Dagmawi Yimer; to the collaborators for Antar's performance, Maurizio Nardo, Maria Kirchmair; to my parents, Maiullari Maria, Cannito Saverio; to the partner Italien Zentrum and Francesca Bagaggia; to the FreiRad and Sónia Melo, to the hosting venues p.m.k, Leo Kino and Kunstpavillon.