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*Oltre i bordi / Beyond the Frame*. Directed by Simone Brioni and Matteo Sandrini. 5e6 and Stony Brook University, 2023. 40 minutes.

During each mayoral election campaign in Brescia, a city of approximately 200 thousand inhabitants in northern Italy, the debate around the *Bigio* cyclically resurfaces. The *Bigio* is a statue created in 1932 by Arturo Dazzi, representing a muscular, virile, white man in a proud and brazen pose. Because it embodies the fascist white supremacy ideology and the physical ideal that all men had to aspire to at the time, the statue was praised by Benito Mussolini when he visited Brescia. Before its removal in 1945, the statue's location was the central Piazza della Vittoria, which presents several other buildings erected following a fascist aesthetics. For instance, near the *Bigio*'s original location, there still is the Caffè Impero, a café founded in 1932 and whose name celebrates the fascist colonial wars in Eritrea, Ethiopia, Libya, and Somalia. The café's presence and name allow for a further interpretation of the statue: white supremacy was not only a key part of the fascist ideology in Italy, but it was also instrumental in Italy's colonial expansions beyond its borders. After the *Bigio*'s removal, its location has been the subject of several debates, the latest of which has taken place during this year's mayoral campaign. Contrary to his left-wing opponent, the right-wing mayoral candidate, Fabio Rolfi, expressed his desire to place once again the *Bigio* in Piazza della Vittoria (Gorlani), thus replicating its fascist history. The disputes around the statue, and even the name of the Caffè Impero itself, testify Italy's lack of critical and proper engagement with its fascist colonial past. While traces of this part of Italian history are still present in everyday life, they are often overlooked. Providing an alternative to this uncritical perspective, the docu-film *Oltre i bordi / Beyond the Frame*, places Italy's fascist colonial past front and centre.

The film, created by Simone Brioni and Matteo Sandrini and produced by 5e6 and Stony Brook University, is an auto-ethnographical exploration of Italy's colonial past through the eyes of Brioni and his family. Brioni, who is from Brescia (or, more precisely, from Borgosatollo, a town in the city's province), recounts at the beginning of the film of stumbling upon an old box of photographs of a distant relative, Giulio Brioni, depicting him as a soldier in Eastern Africa in the 1930s. The photographs do not only portray Giulio, but they also display his surroundings: the colonised locals, the military hospital, and a military funeral. While they do not explicitly depict the battles, the images show the violence of colonialism and its consequences on the local population.

By investigating both Giulio's story and the wider Italian colonial wars, the film highlights how the story of an individual embodies wider socio-cultural phenomena. Indeed, a key part of the film is the connection between the Brioni family history and the forgotten colonial history of Brescia, as exemplified by *Oltre i bordi*'s poster. The promotional image reproduces a photograph of Giulio Brioni as a soldier, wearing a wide-brimmed hat and shorts, which appear better suited for an explorer rather than a soldier ready for battle. Moreover, he is not looking at the camera, but ahead, mimicking a conqueror's pose. His figure is coloured in green, in stark opposition to the pink background, which is formed by a map of Brescia's streets that still bear colonial names: via Somalia and via Eritrea.

Indeed, *Oltre i bordi* does not limit itself to uncovering Italy's colonial past in Eastern Africa, but it also focuses on the traces that are still present today. Adopting a practice that is frequently used in the works by the Italo-Somali writer Igiaba Scego (for instance, in *Roma negata. Percorsi postcoloniali nella città*, 2014), the film follows Brioni's wanderings through Brescia. By exploring his city on foot, Brioni is able to study in depth sites that are connected to a colonial past: Piazza della Vittoria, Caffè Impero, and the funeral monument to the soldiers who died during the Fascist 'ventennio' in the Cimitero Vantiniano, just to name a few. Brioni's walking creates a postcolonial map of Brescia, as he critically looks at architectural elements that go unnoticed in everyday life.

Following his explorations, several close-up scenes in *Oltre i bordi* depict Brioni looking at the fascist and colonial traces. In this way, the film aptly promotes an active form of looking, one that questions and engages with its objects. For instance, the photographs taken by Giulio are criticized by Brioni, as they foster a colonizer's perspective on the colonized populations. He argues that the "fotografie esprimevano una ambizione di dominazione coloniale" (14:26-14:27).<sup>1</sup> While *Oltre i bordi* does have to rely on Giulio's photographs and on the fascist propaganda footage of the Istituto LUCE due to a lack of alternative resources, nonetheless, it keeps questioning these images and the meaning that they provide. The film's looking politics is immediately situated by its opening quote, which also forms *Oltre i bordi*'s title. The quote is by writer Maaza Mengiste, the author of *The Shadow King* (2019), a novel on the Second Italo-Ethiopian War, stating that "no story is ever simple. Every photograph extends beyond the frame" (0:19-0:22). Indeed, the film's main aim is not only to uncover the traces of Italy's colonial past, showing what lies beyond the official history, beyond the official photographs, but also to recover the point of view of those that were colonized and marginalized.

In order to further probe the fascist gaze, but to also interrogate his own white perspective, Brioni invited the Italo-Somali writer Ubah Cristina Ali Farah to take part in the film. Her presence is gradually introduced throughout the work, initially only through two voice notes. Almost like Italy's colonial conscience, her presence is initially only a whisper, before she is able to fully in person. Once on screen, seated next to Brioni and sharing a coffee with him, Farah comments that the photographs of Giulio Brioni make her uncomfortable, but that they are nonetheless important to look at, since every family in Italy probably has a similar box. Furthermore, Farah significantly points towards an aspect that was mostly overlooked up until her arrival: the absence of a gendered perspective on Italian colonialism. The photographs in *Oltre i bordi* were all seemingly taken by men and lacked completely a woman's perspective, an active role for women, beyond their configuration as objects. The conversation between Brioni and Farah highlights the double marginalization suffered by colonised women, not only at the time, but also in the history books of today. While the women's perspective might be lost, its importance is significantly reclaimed in the film.

In the final section of the film, Brioni and Farah's conversation moves towards the monuments that carry a fascist legacy, such as the Stele di Axum and the Leone di Giuda. They discuss the way we should approach such monuments. According to Farah, instead of demolishing them, the fascist monuments should be shown alongside a critical analysis or an artistic reinterpretation. In this way, *Oltre i bordi* has not only successfully and masterfully investigated the Brioni family's colonial history, as well as Brescia's, highlighting the powerful connections between the political and the personal, but it has also indirectly suggested a solution to the *Bigio* debate. The film reminds us of the importance of critically engaging with Italy's uncomfortable past and of not overlooking its traces.

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<sup>1</sup> Photographs expressed an ambition for colonial domination.