

Arcangelo Ghisleri and the ‘right to barbarity’: geography and anti-colonialism in Italy in the Age of Empire (1875-1914)

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Introduction

Drawing on the international literature dealing with geography and empire (Godlewska and Smith, 1994; Livingstone, 1993; Driver, 2001; Butlin, Heffernan and Morag, 1995; Kearns, 2009), and on the postcolonial and subaltern critique of the Enlightenment and its universalistic values (Said, 1979; Spivak, 1999; Chakrabarty, 2000; Buck-Morss, 2009), this paper addresses the question of how anti-colonialist and non-Eurocentric thinking was present and played an influential role within some networks of scientists and militants based in Europe during what Eric Hobsbawm called the Age of Empire (1875-1914). I deal specifically with the example of Italian geography, arguing that Italy and Italian culture, like other European societies, were involved in colonial and postcolonial issues (Lombardi-Diop and Romeo, 2012).

Recent research has proposed the concept of ‘heterodox discourses’ (Ferretti, 2013a and 2013b; Ferretti and Pelletier, 2013; Pelletier, 2013) to stress the strong anti-colonialist concerns of a small, though rather influential part of European scholars, particularly the milieu of the anarchist geographers Elie Reclus (1827-1904), Elisée Reclus (1830-1905), Pyotr Kropotkin (1842-1921), Lev Mečnikov/Léon Metchnikoff (1838-1888) and others. These anarchists were members of a broader scientific community that included university professors and other public intellectuals, and were, in Bourdieu’s (1975) terms, socially recognized as having competence to speak with authority of scientific matters. As such, these anarchists are an early example of some of the ways that geography might challenge not only political power, but also prevailing academic and scientific conformism. For the same period, other studies have identified a powerful anti-colonial (Anderson, 2007) and postcolonial imagination (Hirsch and Van Der Walt, 2010) within anarchism. Such historical research enables modern geographers to draw out a ‘genealogy’ of anarchist geography stretching back to this period of Reclus and Kropotkin (Springer, 2012 and 2013).

My main argument is that similar trends existed in Italian geography as well, through authors who were indebted to the international spread of ideas fostered by Reclus and the anarchist geographers, especially the non-conformist geographer Arcangelo Ghisleri (1855-1938), who has been called an Italian avatar of Elisée Reclus (Casti, 2007). I define a ‘geographer’ at that time as a scholar who published books and papers in the scientific field then acknowledged as ‘geography’, even if such a figure did not always hold an academic post. This was the case of both Reclus and Ghisleri, who earned their livelihood mainly in publishing and hardly

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corresponded to what would be called now a ‘professional geographer’. Thus, I argue that anarchism was influential not only by way of Ghisleri’s direct relation to Reclus, but also by the latter’s affinity with several Italian exponents of the movement, as I will explain. Finally, I stress the influence Ghisleri exercised on a number of younger socialist geographers like Cesare Battisti (1875-1916). The latter, widely regarded as an Italian ‘national hero’ because he died fighting for the independence of his native region, the Trentino, from Austria, was both a geographer and a socialist who was inspired by Ghisleri. In the same vein, I argue that these trends concerned both geographers opposed to imperial conquests in Africa and geographers involved in the struggle against the ‘internal colonialism’ of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, which ruled Italian-speaking regions until the First World War. Finally, I stress the link between the federalist Ghisleri’s and international anarchist geographers’ views and their critique of what we now call ‘internal colonialism’, after Michael Hechter, who defined the concept by drawing on the Marxist Italian theoretician Antonio Gramsci (Hechter, 1975:8-9), who had argued that after Italian unification in 1861, the Savoy monarchy had ‘subjugated Southern Italy and the Islands and reduced them to the status of exploited colonies’ (Gramsci, 1957:28).

Considering Felix Driver’s argument that postcolonial concerns can imply ‘an essentialised model of colonial discourse which obscures the heterogeneous, contingent and conflictual character of imperial projects’ (Driver, 2001:8), and bearing in mind the debate among geographers involved in postcolonial issues on the necessity of lending theory and discourse a ‘materiality’ (Blunt and McEwan, 2002:5-6; Morrissey, 2007:166-167), I argue that in addressing imperial histories of geography, one should avoid essentialising and generalising concepts like ‘Europe’ and ‘Western ideology’. My case study shows that not only were there circles of European geographers who were anticolonialist in the middle of the Age of Empire and criticised imperial politics, but that some of them, especially the anarchist geographers, proposed different discourses, questioning mainstream claims for the existence of a superior civilisation, trying to understand other people through empathy, and avoiding the assumption of a unique standpoint.

I consider the chronological range of the Age of Empire (1875-1914) as especially fit for my research because this was the period in which the majority of the authors that I analyse were scientifically and politically active, and because it is a periodization equally considered as pertinent by other works on transnational and anti-colonial anarchism (Hirsch and Van der Walt, 2010: xxxvi). Moreover, studies on geography and tropicality have considered the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as ‘an age of empire’ when European colonial expansion ‘had a marked impact on the ways in which the tropics were represented’ (Driver and Martins, 2005: 17); I argue that in Italy, in the same period, and more precisely in the years around the 1885 Congress of Berlin, an interest in tropical Africa came in the wake of the colonial politics and provoked Ghisleri’s reaction.

In advancing my argument, I deal in this paper with primary sources like the writings and archives of Ghisleri and Battisti. In the first part, I expose the situation of current research on geography and Italian colonialism. In the second part I analyse the anti-colonial work of Ghisleri. In the third part I examine Ghisleri’s influence on a new generation of geographers who supported Italian ‘irredentism’ through the works of Cesare Battisti, who endorsed Ghisleri’s idea of abandoning colonial enterprises to construct a geography concerned with the social problems

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of Italy, and who at the same time endeavoured to build up a geographical image of his region, Trentino, which would enable him to claim independence from Austrian rule.

In Italy, there exists a historical literature on these authors, but few works address their geography, and none tries to investigate the wider connection between geography and anti-colonialism in Italy. This paper is a first attempt to fill this gap and to call attention to several specific issues which deserve further research.

Italian geography and imperialism

If Italy was indeed a minor colonial power, I would argue that the involvement of Italian geography, and more generally Italian culture, in the colonialist and orientalist mind-set characterising the Age of Empire was no less intense than in other imperial nations like France and Great Britain. Recent research has shown that even in a nation without colonies like Switzerland, a strong colonialist commitment drove explorers, merchants and missionaries, and that the colonialist ideology heavily affected local culture and scientific production (Minder, 2011). As shown by an important historian of Italian geography like Lucio Gambi (1920-2005), an Italian imperial geography did indeed exist and shared with other imperial powers like France a similar historical and cultural rhetoric, for instance the claim that it was the worthy heir of the Roman Empire (Gambi, 1973, 1991 and 1994). The commercial exploration of East Africa's shores was one of the first aims of the Italian Geographical Society, founded in 1867, a few years after national unification (Cerreti, 2000), and anticipating the establishment of the first trading posts along the Red Sea. Then, Italy started its gradual occupation of Eritrea and Somalia. A specificity of Italian colonialism was its difficult military penetration of the hinterland, as the Ethiopian Empire put up fierce resistance to the Italians: the battles of Dogali (1887) and Adua (1896) were the first cases in which a European regular army was defeated in the open field by an indigenous one. Ethiopia was only conquered by Fascist Italy in 1935. In the meanwhile, Italians occupied Libya in 1911. According to Gambi, the Italian Geographical Society played a willing part from the beginning, becoming 'the pioneer, or self-declared pawn in the government's plan for colonial occupation in East Africa' (Gambi, 1994:79). The points made by Gambi in his argument included the 'lack of respect for historical fact and the pulpit-thumping rhetoric' (Gambi, 1994:83) of many geographers who, after the First World War, tried to found their imperial claims on the Adriatic Sea and the Eastern Mediterranean, where Italy, between the two world wars, had the fiduciary administration of Albania and the Dodecanese. These geographers contributed not only to imperial theories, but also to imperial practices, by following the military expeditions in Libya, where they 'served to draw a veil over the atrocities perpetrated by the military occupation' (Gambi, 1994:86) by giving a scientific pretext for the brutalities.

As Gambi has demonstrated, the widely deployed colonialist rhetoric gradually won over the great majority of Italian geographers, which explains their enthusiastic adhesion to the Fascist dictatorship after 1922. During this regime, the introduction of Karl Haushofer's geopolitics was strictly associated with imperialism (Gambi, 1994:89). As the loss of all the colonies following the Italian defeat in the Second World War effaced all colonial issues from Italian geography, Gambi concludes that 'a defeat is sometimes more useful and more beneficial than a victory' (Gambi, 1994:91). If these statements by Gambi concern mainly the involvement of geographers and scientific societies in the colonial enterprise, the critical historian Angelo Del Boca has

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shown that in terms of colonial crimes as well, Italians were not inferior to other European powers. The episodes of tortures, massacres and use of non-conventional weapons like toxic gas against indigenous resistance were particularly frequent in the Italian colonies (Del Boca, 1979).

The first geographer who criticised the politics of the young Italian State was Elisée Reclus in his *New Universal Geography*, and this was firstly in light of what we call now internal colonialism, stressing the brutality of the Italian State in its war against the brigands in Southern Italy, people he considered ‘armed not by vengeance, but by poverty’ (Reclus, 1876:505). Reclus also showed how a phenomenon like the mafia was determined by the worsening of people’s living conditions after these regions were ‘annexed to the kingdom of Italy’ (Reclus, 1876:547). These statements, contradicting the contemporary rhetoric of Italian unification, anticipated some topics of the ‘meridionalist’ thinkers Antonio Gramsci, Gaetano Salvemini and Pasquale Villari (Ferretti, 2009). To decry colonial domination within Europe was not unusual for anarchist geographers, who supported with geographical arguments the Slav and Balkan peoples’ struggle for national independence against the empires of Moscow, Vienna and Constantinople (Ferretti, 2014a) and provided an alternative to ‘Euro-Orientalism’ of the day (Adamovski, 2005) by giving to revolutionary movements in Eastern Europe an important role in inspiring Western ones. Reclus also took a clear position on Ireland, which he saw as a colonised land, as well as India and Algeria; he concluded one of his anti-colonial diatribes by stating that ‘this hatred on the part of the slave who revolts against us is right, and proves at least that there is still hope of emancipation. It is natural that the Hindus, Egyptians, Kaffirs and Irishmen hate Englishmen; it is natural that Arabs execrate Europeans. That is justice!’ (Reclus 1899). As to Italian colonialism’s ‘external’ activity, Reclus, in his review of a book on Eritrea by the explorer Meldi, overtly mocked the latter’s ‘patriotic faith’ (Reclus, 1900).

Gambi dedicated only a few lines to the presence of anti-colonial authors like Arcangelo Ghisleri and Cesare Battisti (Gambi, 1994:80). The following two sections will delve deeper into this statement.

Arcangelo Ghisleri, the anarchist geographers and the defence of the Other

The Ghisleri’s polemic against Giovanni Bovio

Arcangelo Ghisleri was an exceptional figure. In Italy, some studies have addressed his geographical output (Casti, 2001 and 2007; Micelli, 2008), but he is still unknown abroad, and much work remains to be done on his extensive archives, which are conserved in Milan, Cremona and Pisa, and are still not completely inventoried.¹ As I explained, Ghisleri belonged to a generation of geographers and activists who pursued their scientific activities outside of the university. He worked as a teacher in the secondary schools and his scientific texts circulated in non-academic publications like newspapers and pamphlets. He also publicly derided academics, calling them *Barbassori* (Mangini, 2007:58), a satirical nickname which could be translated as ‘bearded and tedious professors’. In this sense he was close to his main model and source of inspiration in the international geographical world, Elisée Reclus, who lived off his writings and

¹ Milano, Museo Nazionale del Risorgimento, Fondo Ghisleri; Pisa, Domus Mazziniana, Archivio Ghisleri; Cremona, Biblioteca Statale, Fondo Ghisleri.

supported an entire network of anarchist geographers through the salary he received from the publisher Hachette (Ferretti, 2014a). Like Reclus, Ghisleri was directly engaged in social struggles, being a member of the ‘intransigent’ left wing of the Italian Republican Party. In this regard, international readers have to bear in mind that in Italy during the 19th century and until the end of the Monarchy (1946), the Republicans were one of the most radical groups of the extreme left, intransigently opposed to the crown and the Church, and boycotting political elections for many years (Ridolfi, 1989). This was a specificity of Italian republicanism which could hardly be found in the American or in the French versions; we should also consider that key figures of the first generation of Italian anarchists, like Errico Malatesta (1853-1932), began their activities in the republican ranks (Masini, 1978). Thus, it is not surprising if some Republicans remained close to the anarchists, as witnessed by the significant correspondence between Ghisleri and the anarchist leader Luigi Fabbri (1877-1935), a close collaborator of Malatesta and great admirer of Kropotkin and Reclus (Fabbri, 2005; Giulianelli, 2005). Like Fabbri and Reclus, Ghisleri drew on federalist positions opposed to the centralism of the recently unified Italian State, finding inspiration in the municipalist and left-libertarian trends characterising an important part of the *Risorgimento*, the Italian movement of national liberation (Lehning, 1974; Riall, 1994). As recent works have demonstrated, the *Risorgimento* was strongly endorsed by a network of geographers trying to establish a sort of ‘independent republic of knowledge’ beyond the frontiers of the pre-Unitarian states (Ferretti, 2014b). The federalist components of this movement, who challenged the more centralist republican tendencies led by Giuseppe Mazzini (1805-1872), were represented by intellectuals who are now seen as either early anarchists, like Giuseppe Ferrari (1811-1876) and Carlo Pisacane (1818-1857), or early geographers, like Carlo Cattaneo (1801-1869), defined by Gambi as the first to organise ‘a scientific field which we can now identify with geography’ (Gambi, 1973:9). Ghisleri thought of himself as something like Cattaneo’s spiritual heir (they also shared roots in Lombardy, Cattaneo being from Milan and Ghisleri from Cremona), and endorsed him as the true representative of the Italian revolution of 1848 (Ghisleri, 1901).

What is important for my argument here is to analyse Ghisleri’s approach to the Other and Otherness in the same years that imperial culture, as Gambi points out, was widespread in all Italian political, economic and intellectual milieus. This phenomenon included the political left. We can take as an exemplary case the heated debate between Ghisleri and his party colleague Giovanni Bovio (1837-1903), an old Republican leader and philosopher inspired by positivism, started in 1887 and collected in 1896 by Ghisleri into a single volume. Bovio took public stands on behalf of the Extreme Left in favour of the Italian colonial enterprise to subjugate the peoples of East Africa, stating that, among human rights, there was no ‘right to barbarity’. According to Bovio, ‘the right to barbarity does not exist, as there is not a right to ignorance or a right to crime. There is only a fundamental right: that civilisation has to spread everywhere its innovating power just as light and warmth spread’ (Ghisleri, 1896a:6). Bovio was even more explicit in stating the right of ‘civilised States’ to subject and kill other people in the name of the superiority bestowed by science and knowledge. ‘Civilisation spreads however it can, either with science, which is civilisation itself, or with violence, which is beyond civilisation. In this sense, the expansion of the great States is the expansion of thinking’ (Ghisleri, 1896a:6).

That was one of the more classic cases of overtly arguing that ‘subaltern’ peoples had no voice in the matter because the Western ruler had science, hence the exclusive right to speak (Spivak, 1988). This implied that the Others were not active citizens, but passive subjects of both knowledge and political action (Said, 1979). Bovio’s statements provoked an indignant response from Ghisleri, and what is even more significant, the latter tried to demolish systematically these arguments in name of the same rational science endorsed by Bovio. Ghisleri was thus one of the first to attempt to use geography to fight against imperialism, applying the same intransigence to it that he applied to his political choices, for instance in his strong opposition in 1911 to the majority of his party, when it entertained the idea of a possible collaboration with the government during its colonial enterprise in Libya (Grandi, 1992).

Ghisleri had started to teach geography in a secondary school in 1880, and he was directly in touch with Elisée Reclus, witness their correspondence, of which at least one letter from Reclus survives in the Ghisleri archives in Cremona.² In his arguments against Bovio, Ghisleri drew extensively on the works of anarchist geographers like Reclus, his brother Elie (1827-1904) and their close collaborator Léon Metchnikoff (also written Mečnikov). Ghisleri’s first argument is an historical confutation of the idea that the ‘Caucasian race has a monopoly on thought’ (Ghisleri, 1896a:26). Ghisleri contested this openly racist statement arguing that the more ancient civilisations were extra-European and extra-Caucasian, like the Egyptians, who considered European peoples at the time, including the Greeks, as ‘savages’ (Ghisleri, 1896a:27). These apparently simple arguments are supported by a series of more recent works which criticise Euro-centrism from a long-term historical perspective, like Martin Bernal’s work on the Afro-Asian roots of ancient Mediterranean civilisation (Bernal, 1987); the same argument, drawing on European ‘barbarity’ with respect to much older civilisations, has often been mobilised by the South American authors of the ‘decolonial turn’, who ironically reappropriated the colonialist claim that the ‘primitive’ alone was the Other (Dussel, 2000; Mignolo, 2011).

Ghisleri made a similar reverse use of colonialist arguments, which drew, for instance, on the supposed anthropophagy practiced by ‘savage tribes’. Ghisleri focused provocatively on the presence of a ‘civic anthropophagy’ (Ghisleri, 1896a:27) in the so-called civilised world, where humans ate each other through the mechanism of capitalist exploitation. There is also an initial denunciation of Italian colonial crimes in East Africa, as when Ghisleri states that an Abyssinian, judging Europe for the behaviour of the Italian soldiers and invaders that he knew, could easily ‘tax our civilisation with the epithets of the deeper barbarity’ (Ghisleri, 1896a:29).

Among Ghisleri’s intellectual references, we find ‘Giuseppe Ferrari, the philosopher of equality’ (Ghisleri, 1896a:35), who ‘scandalously’ underscored the historical inferiority of European civilisation with respect to China. Ferrari’s studies of China also interested Elisée Reclus (Ferretti, 2013c), who endorsed Ferrari’s federalist programme in a letter to Ghisleri, stating that Ferrari was not a forgotten author, but ‘one of the men who remain the most deeply in the minds of those who had the luck to be their readers’ (Reclus, 1925:224), and that his federalist programme would be realised by future generations.

² Cremona Public Library, Ms. Ghisleri 14/33, E. Reclus to G. Ghisleri and P. Maggi, 25 May 1900.

Ms. Ghisleri 14/33

Bruxelles, le 25 V. 1900

UNIVERSITÉ NOUVELLE
—
INSTITUT
GÉOGRAPHIQUE
—
35, rue Ernest Allard
BRUXELLES

Messieurs Arcangelo Ghisleri
et Piero Maggi

Vous m'avez fait le grand honneur
de vous occuper de moi dans la
brochure intitulée *Un Géographe
Contemporain* et vous avez ajouté
à votre bonne grâce par une dédicace
d'anniversaire à l'occasion de mes
soixante-deux années d'âge.

Vous faites des vœux pour ma
bonne santé, mais il s'est trouvé
précisément qu'une maladie de cœur
m'a forcé pour un temps à abandonner
du moins d'affaiblir à peine mon travail,
de par ordre des médecins, les correspondances

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Fig. 1 Reclus's letter to Ghisleri, Cremona State Library, Ghisleri Fund, 14/35, 25 May 1900

In his writings against Bovio, Ghisleri called for greater consistency with the spirit of universal equality, which he attributed to Italian Enlightenment thinkers like Cesare Beccaria and Gaetano Filangieri, whose heirs, he said, simply could not 'go to Massaua with terror and the gallows'

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(Ghisleri, 1896a: 39). This claim for the ‘true’ spirit of Enlightenment recalls the considerations exposed by Susan Buck-Morss in her study of the Haitian Revolution, when the black slaves were paradoxically denied their freedom by the same French promoters of the 1789 Universal Declaration of the Rights of Man. Thus, they applied the Declaration’s principles literally by taking freedom for themselves, ‘unfolding the logic of freedom in the colonies (...) and yet only the logic of freedom gave legitimacy to their revolution in the universal terms in which the French saw themselves’ (Buck-Morss, 2009:39-40). Quoting Cattaneo, Ghisleri likewise stated that ‘we do not recognise any hegemonic people in humankind’ (Ghisleri, 1896a:39). Ghisleri received encouragement from other members of his party, such as Napoleone Colajanni (1847-1921), an Italian philosopher who worked on the relationship between science and socialism, endorsing Reclus, Kropotkin and Metchnikoff (Ferretti, 2014a:33-34); and Gabriele Rosa (1812-1897), who challenged the idea of ‘pure race’ (Ghisleri, 1896a:40). We can thus place this group of progressive intellectuals within the framework of a cultural struggle against the partisans of racial purity and white superiority at a time when, according to Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch, the latter were particularly numerous and virulent (Coquery-Vidrovitch, 2003). On the other hand, Bovio’s counter-arguments included a classical reference to the Roman Empire and an explicit acceptance of the existence of ‘superior races’ in contrast to Ghisleri’s relativism (Ghisleri, 1896a:53).

Laying out the contradictions of the racist arguments, Ghisleri tried to deconstruct the idea of race by dissociating it from the concept of civilisation (Ghisleri, 1896a:63) and then explain cultural particularisms through the difference of ‘social and physical conditions... due to history, not race’ (Ghisleri, 1896a:75). The relativity of physical conditions was important at that time as an argument against racial determinism, i.e., the consideration that the intelligence of different peoples could only be appreciated in their adaptation to different historical or geographical conditions, allowed scholars like Elie Reclus to state, for the first time in Western science, ‘that in several so-called savage tribes, the average individual is not morally, nor intellectually, inferior to the individual of our so-called civilised states’ (Elie Reclus, 1885:xiii).

Ghisleri then linked his discourse with the internal problems of the newly unified Italy and the ‘Southern Question’, which was an argument for federalists and disillusioned republicans against the centralism of the Savoy monarchy subjugating the South of Italy, an area which was also chosen as the place for insurrectional attempts by groups of republicans in 1870 and anarchists in 1877 (Whelehan, 2012:64). Ghisleri put forward ironically an anecdote from his experience as a teacher in the southern town of Matera, theatre of the ‘war against brigands’. There he heard an officer of the Royal *Carabinieri* saying that ‘this country ought to be civilised with ordnance’ (Ghisleri, 1896: 84); stressing how these imperial arguments were deployed both in Africa and in Southern Italy, Ghisleri denounced ‘all the theories of arrogance’ (Ghisleri, 1896a:84), and compared the officer’s statements to Bovio’s own comments. In fact, Bovio denied Ethiopia ‘the right to be barbarous... and for that fine sermons are not enough’ (Ghisleri, 1896a:85-86). Ghisleri mocked this assumed right of naked force, stating that if Great Britain, considering itself ‘more civilised’ than Italy, had then claimed to occupy the Italian colonies, or the southern regions of Italy, with the pretext of ‘civilising’ them, Bovio would have no arguments with which to reply. Ghisleri goes on to press for a true universalisation of the Universal Declaration of 1789, one which could actually apply human rights and legal equality to all the world’s peoples; on the

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contrary, the so-called ‘right of civilisation will forget and humiliate the human right’ (Ghisleri, 1896a:90).

The Cremona geographer’s sarcasm also proved sharp in refuting Bovio and his affirmation of the superiority of European institutions over the ‘despotic’ institutions of extra-European peoples; this was a classic colonialist argument that Ghisleri attacked, stressing the oppressive past and present of European states and armies, without forgoing an anticlerical dig in passing: ‘The Vatican Negus can appear, to a people not subject to him, a Negus of souls even more despotic than the Abyssinian one’ (Ghisleri, 1896a:92).

Ghisleri started by evoking the international debate then going on, quoting Pierre-Paul Broca (1824-1880), the French anthropologist and friend of the Reclus brothers who had, Ghisleri thought, convincingly demonstrated that cranial capacity was not directly linked with the intelligence of an individual (Ghisleri, 1896a:96). If Bovio denied any ‘right to barbarity’, it was therefore in the name of this individual’s freedom that Ghisleri exclaims, ‘Yes, indeed! The man who is willing to remain, as you say, a beast, should remain a beast!’ (Ghisleri, 1896a:106). Here, it is possible to see a questioning of the scientific ‘rationality’ opposed to ignorance and superstition, which, according to Dipesh Chakrabarty, was one of the ideological bases of European historicism (Chakrabarty, 2000: 237); thus, it is significant that a Western ‘rational’ scientist like Ghisleri considered here individual freedom as more important than rational behaviour. Ghisleri also contested the argument of climate as a deterministic cause of the ‘inferiority’ of certain peoples, affirming the ‘the relativity of the influences exercised by a particular place’ (Ghisleri, 1896a:122) and stressing the contradiction in the colonialist arguments, namely by settling in countries that apparently lead to physical and moral degeneration, according to Ghisleri, the ‘civilisers’ ought then to degenerate to the level of barbarity themselves.

The second of Ghisleri’s references to the international debate involves Elie Reclus’s work on so-called *Primitive Folks*, which made clear the need to empathically understand different peoples and criticised the negative, disparaging judgements of travellers like civil servants, missionaries, explorers and soldiers. These sources were decried by Elie Reclus, who points out that ‘these peoples [the colonised] were described only by their invaders, those able to understand them the least’ (Elie Reclus 1885:xiv). Thus, according to Ghisleri, ‘in every act of violence there is an error, due to ignorance, and the more that knowledge is expanded, the more the feeling of humanity expands. Carlo Cattaneo stated that one does not like peoples one does not know’ (Ghisleri, 1896a:126-127).

In an appendix to this controversy, Ghisleri develops several specific arguments, increasingly referring to international authors. On the relativity of European civilisation, he deepens his comparison of Chinese civilisation with the contemporaneous Middle Ages in Europe, drawing on the works of anarchist geographers like Elisée Reclus and Léon Metchnikoff, who contradicted the supposedly progressive nature of European institutions in comparison to others; while Jack Goody (2006) has argued that Europe also arrogates to itself the monopoly on socialism, Reclus and Metchnikoff stressed the early implementation of ancient forms of socialism and cooperation in China. ‘The great geographer Elisée Reclus shows that the

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principles of Robert Owen and Schultze-Delisch have long been applied among Chinese workers. Léon Metchnikoff adds that Chinese people practiced associations at a level still unknown among the current members of our cooperatives' (Ghisleri, 1896a:131). If translating intercultural concepts is difficult and the representations of ancient China (and Japan) by Reclus and Metchnikoff are not free of anachronism (Ferretti, 2013c; Konishi, 2007), they are undoubtedly the most advanced attempt at the time to understand non-European peoples through empathy, that is to say, by drawing on equality and internationalism without cancelling cultural differences. And basing himself on Ferrari, Metchnikoff and Reclus, Ghisleri also uses the example of China to attack another colonialist commonplace, namely the idea that extra-European peoples were 'without history' (Wolf, 1982), because 'it is impossible to deny that China had a history' (Ghisleri, 1896a: 134).

Ghisleri next invokes Elie Reclus's authority to contradict the 'declared immutability of physical types' (Ghisleri, 1896a:136), which Ghisleri viewed as not innate, but as conditioned by social and environmental factors, in order to relativize the numerous ethnographic descriptions focusing on the 'ugliness' or 'degeneration' of native peoples. Following Friedrich Engels and the North American ethnographer Lewis H. Morgan, Ghisleri praised the democratic societies of the Iroquois Indians and launched his final invective against colonisers. 'We were the Vandals, the Visigoths, and the Tartars, the ferocious and ignorant murderers of these peoples' (Ghisleri, 1896a:144). This statement is reinforced by quotations from Elisée Reclus, who argued that 'the so-called civilisers often thought to prove their superiority by destroying other peoples without mercy' (Ghisleri, 1896a:147). To stress the barbarity of the Atlantic slave trade, the French anthropologist Armand de Quatrefages is cited, when he asks rhetorically 'How many savages are guilty of worse crimes than those of Doctor Murray³ and his followers?' (Ghisleri, 1896a:148). Finally, if according to Ghisleri the frontiers between civilisation and savagery were relative, the only well-established issue was another concept posited by the anarchist brothers Elie and Elisée Reclus: 'the murderous nature of civilisation' (Ghisleri, 1896a:p. 150).

Ghisleri's publishing networks and new anti-colonialist cases

In 1890, Ghisleri promoted the important journal *La geografia per tutti* (Geography for All), with strong pedagogical aims. As we can see in Ghisleri's correspondences with other geographers conserved in Cremona, *La geografia per tutti* enjoyed an important international range.⁴ One of its main tasks was to make geography known to a broader public, endorsing Elisée Reclus' statements about the teaching of geography as a challenge for the formation of independent individuals, considered a first step for social transformation (Ghisleri, 1896b). In the same journal, a section called *Geografia di casa nostra* (the Geography of Our Home) allowed Ghisleri to stress the importance of exploring Italy scientifically to solve its social problems, rejecting a colonial geography that is a necessary part of imperial logics. The papers focused also on provocative subjects, witness two 1892 articles entitled 'Deficiency and error of official geographical data' and 'Maybe the mountains' height has become a State secret?' (Mangini,

³ James Patrick Murray was a British medical officer serving in Australia, responsible in 1872 for a massacre of Pacific Islanders and never sentenced. He is used here as an example of colonial brutality.

⁴ Cremona Public Library, MS Ghisleri, 7/44, E. Levasseur to A. Ghisleri, 28 March 1893; MS Ghisleri 6/19, Ch. Knapp to A. Ghisleri, 3 February 1892; MS Ghisleri 9/69, L. Drapeyron to A. Ghisleri, 2 May 1895.

2007, p. 58). The prickliness of Ghisleri's writings can be seen in the critiques levelled at him by the early Italian academic geographers Filippo Porena and Giuseppe Dalla Vedova, conservative scholars who also inveighed against the journal *Cultura Geografica* by Cesare Battisti (Quaini, 1989). Battisti was inspired by Ghisleri, as I explain in the next section.

Another important part of Ghisleri's involvement in a scientific publication dedicated to a broad public was his long collaboration, from 1895 to 1931, with the journal *Emporium*, published in Bergamo by his friend Paolo Gaffuri, an important Italian publisher (Mangini, 1985). Ghisleri's periodical contributions concerned what Paolo Gastaldi has called 'the future of oppressed peoples' (Gastaldi, 1989), both in Europe and beyond. The geographer expressed his solidarity with, among a number of peoples, the Armenians, victims of genocide (Ghisleri, 1916), and Balkan populations like the Albanians, who were still under Turkish rule (Ghisleri, 1913). It is worth stressing that, with respect to the Balkans, Ghisleri's geographical knowledge was mainly based upon Reclus's *Nouvelle Géographie universelle* and *L'Homme et la Terre*, as witnessed by the Italian geographer's work notes.⁵ Ghisleri also wrote the obituary of the anarchist geographer for the same journal (Ghisleri, 1905).

Some papers deal with the explorations and colonisation then underway in Africa. In the early 20th century, a public scandal was sparked by the torture and massacres widely perpetrated by the Belgians in Congo, crimes which provoked public outrage all over Europe (Claparède and Christ-Socin, 1909). Ghisleri, denouncing the 'vulgar preconceptions that one has about Africans' (Ghisleri, 1910a:203), fumed at the politics of the Belgian government in a macabre metaphor in which 'the natives form with their bodies the railway whereon the bloody wagon of white penetration steadily proceeds' (Ghisleri, 1910a:204). Ghisleri likewise addressed Amerindian cultures, decrying the 'Catholic fanaticism' (Ghisleri, 1910b:338) which contributed to the destruction of the ancient Pre-Columbian civilisations.

Giorgio Mangini has observed that Ghisleri was a public reference for several 'eccentric and isolated people' of his time. Among his nonconformist and heterodox correspondents we find the maverick explorer Augusto Franzoj (1848-1911) another left-wing republican, who was imprisoned in 1870 after an anti-monarchist riot and then exiled to Geneva, where he became acquainted with the circle of exiles from the Paris Commune (Mangini, 1989:178). Franzoj, 'the explorer least celebrated by liberal and fascist Italian historiography' (Mangini, 1989:179), was thus one of several dreamers and independent travellers who were not encouraged by colonial administrations, but rather were often considered trouble.

From 1905 to 1909, Ghisleri worked on writing a mammoth *Atlas of Africa*, designed to compete with the German *Atlas Stieler* and the French *Atlas Schrader* (Casti, 2001). Emanuela Casti sees as rather contradictory the production of such a descriptive atlas, potentially useful for further colonial enterprises at the same time that the author was denouncing colonialism in the political debate. Casti explains this choice by supposing a 'pragmatic' position adopted by Ghisleri, who hoped that a better knowledge of the African territory could 'limit the damage' in a continent almost completely occupied by Europeans and where geography could only 'influence the ways

⁵ Cremona Public Library, MS Ghisleri VII.3, Notes on the Balkan Peninsula.

in which colonisation was realised' (Casti, 2001:45). Mangini has also posited an editorial explanation within the organisation of the Istituto di Arti Grafiche, i.e., the space for critical input was provided by *Emporium*, whereas the Atlas was intended as a more descriptive and 'neutral' product. The author also observes that the Atlas was unsuccessful from a commercial standpoint and thus was not appreciated by the commercial and political milieus involved in the Italian colonies (Mangini, 2007).

I can add that in the Ghisleri's and Reclus's generation of intellectuals and militants, the spread of knowledge was taken to be a value *per se*, implying progress even in the absence of explicit political claims, as in the case of Reclus's *Universal Geography* (Ferretti, 2014a). Moreover, Ghisleri does not fail to stress, in the preface of his *Atlas*, 'how many massacres were committed by European colonisers, how many crimes the first exploiters of African soil were guilty of... In this day and age still, in the northeast and the southwest, around the Congo's river trading posts and the inaccessible gorges of the Atlas, dreadful methods and bloody errors are being carried out' (Ghisleri, 1909:11). In any case, if Ghisleri was less farsighted than Reclus, who foresaw the future decolonisation of both British India and French Algeria thanks to the progressive demographic growth and political consciousness of their populations (Ferretti, 2013a; Ferretti and Pelletier, 2013), he was nevertheless one of the most radical and original critical voices within European geography in the Age of Empire.

Ghisleri, the irredentists and the 'geography of our home'

Ghisleri also inspired another form of anti-colonialism, this time within Italy, namely the 'irredentist' movement, which aimed to 'free' from Austrian rule the Italian-speaking regions that remained part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire after formal unification in 1861. Italy only managed to annex these regions after the First World War. In the international literature, it is now widely accepted that colonialism also involved regions of Europe that were subjected to external States which imposed their languages and laws, as in the case of Ireland (Kearns, 2013). In the case of Italy, the arguments made in the 19th century to 'free' the Italian regions ruled by Austria took on contours similar to the anti-colonial ones, namely the right of people to self-determination and independence from foreign rule. The early decolonised republics of Latin America were thus held up as an example, through the experience of the Italian national hero Giuseppe Garibaldi, who had fought for the liberation of Uruguay (Garibaldi, 1860).

Italy was formally unified in 1861 but not all Italian-speaking regions were under the sovereignty of the new State. In 1866, Italy conquered the Veneto region after a new war against the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and in 1870 the fall of Napoleon III following the Franco-Prussian War made possible the conquest of Rome and the momentary end of the Pope's temporal power. Nevertheless, two Italian-speaking regions, Trentino and Julian Venice (*Trento e Trieste*), on the southern side of the Alps, continued to be subject to Austrian rule. Thus, the movement called 'irredentism' (from *Italia irredenta*, or 'unredeemed Italy'), launched in 1877 by Matteo Renato Imbriani, started its struggle to make these lands part of the Italian nation. The saga of the national martyrs who were part of the irredentist movement, like the Triestine activist Guglielmo Oberdan, killed in 1882 by the Austrians, always exerted a great fascination on national public opinion during the so-called 'Liberal Italy' period (1861-1922).

Another celebrated ‘hero’ of irredentism was the geographer Cesare Battisti. If historians generally recognise the continuity between *Risorgimento* and irredentism (Pécout, 1997), and geographical research has stressed the contribution of geographers and cartographers to the first part of this movement until the 1861 unification (Boria and Mennini, 2011; Ferretti 2014b), I would argue that a similar geographer’s contribution affected the post-Unitarian experience of irredentism through important figures like Ghisleri and Battisti. It is worth noting that irredentist geographers remained mostly outside the academies. Battisti, even if he was on good terms with academics like Giovanni and Olinto Marinelli (Proto, 2014), was not concerned with the contemporary process of professionalising and institutionalising Italian geography, which was part of an international trend that arose in the late 19th century (Capel, 1981). This allows me to stress at least two major similarities between the *Risorgimento* geographers and the irredentist ones. First both displayed a strong commitment to the international geographical debates in order to find models and ideas they could apply to the national question; secondly the two groups adopted a more militant than academic approach. The *Risorgimento* geographers, joining the international movement to invent national identities geographically (Hooson, 1994), were defined by Adriano Balbi as ‘special men who dedicated their evenings to the true description of their homeland’,⁶ by which he was implying of course that geography was not their main professional activity. This was the case of Annibale Ranuzzi (1810-1866), and generally speaking of a range of politically committed geographers, from Elisée Reclus and the anarchist geographers to a maverick Italian Marxist like Emilio Sereni (Ferretti, 2015a). There was Battisti, too, an Italian-speaking citizen of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire who, after taking his geography degree in Florence, was initially a journalist and militant in the Socialist Party, for which he represented the Italian minority in the Vienna Parliament from 1911 to 1914. This is also why he has a place among the national martyrs, having been taken prisoner in 1916 while fighting in the First World War as an officer of the Italian army, and thus immediately declared guilty of high treason as an Austrian subject and member of Parliament. He was hanged in Trento on 11 July 1916.

From the time Battisti was a student of geography, his bilingualism encouraged him to study German geography. He drew mainly on Friedrich Ratzel’s works to find useful ideas for an ‘anthropogeography’ of his region. If his main work, *Il Trentino, saggio di geografia fisica e di antropogeografia* (Battisti, 1898), recalls several aspects of the French regional monographs which characterized Vidal la Blache’s school of human geography from the early 20th century (Robic, Tissier and Pinchemel, 2011), Battisti seemed not to have read any French geographer of his day, save Reclus naturally. In fact, he clearly appears to be one of the Italian interpreters of Friedrich Ratzel, having undertaken a major piece of translation work, the rendering of Ratzel’s *Politische Geographie* into Italian, which was left unfinished and would only be published many years after Battisti’s death (Calí, 1988). To give readers an idea of the scope of this cultural enterprise, I should note that Battisti’s is still the only Italian version of the *Politische Geographie*, and that Ratzel’s 838-page work has never been translated in English, and only partially in French.

⁶ London, RGS-IBG, Department of Manuscripts, Dossier CB 3 / 41 Balbi Folder, A. Balbi to colonel Jackson, 21 December 1846.

Battisti's efforts to define a linguistic division of the area, rather than a physical one, implies that his anthropogeography did not lay claim to any region which did not have the Italian language and culture beyond the borders of that time. Battisti justified his assertions with arguments close to the *Risorgimento*'s earlier geographers, mobilising the works of ancient authors like Polybius and principally Strabo, who was the first to use the word *Trentini* to define the inhabitants of that region. Battisti shared a judgement that was very widespread among European geographers in the 19th century, i.e., that 'no geographer has yet to equal Strabo's work on Italy' (Battisti, 1898:10). Battisti's metaphor to define the physical shape of the region he described ('two butterfly wings on the two sides of the Adige River', Battisti, 1898:24), reminds us of Strabo's recommendation to geographers to use these kinds of organic metaphors to explain to the general public the shapes of every country and region (Strabo, *Geography*, II, 1, 30).

One originality Battisti introduced in terms of politics and geography at the time was his envisioning of a border that did not match the Brenner watershed, which was then aggressively claimed by right-wing Italian nationalists and finally achieved after the First World War. On this principle I would argue that Battisti's view, in this sense, was not the aspiration of an imperialist power like what Italy was then displaying in Eritrea and Somalia, and would later do so in Libya and Ethiopia. In fact, Battisti, a follower of Ghisleri, did not endorse Italy's African enterprises.

In 1899, after the publication of his monograph, Battisti tried to make his contribution to Italian geography, founding with Renato Biasutti (1878-1965) the short-lived journal *Cultura Geografica*, which ceased publication only after a few months when Biasutti abandoned the project (although he remained a geographer and would later obtain a university position). Nevertheless, this journal was important and original for at least two reasons. Firstly, it drew on what we now call a 'cultural geography'; while the word 'culture' did not have the same meaning then as it does now, it is nonetheless true that cultural difference was a founding point of Battisti's geography, and therefore the journal includes a section dedicated to ethnographic studies of the Alpine Italian-speaking peoples. Secondly, this enterprise clearly grew out of Ghisleri's *Geography of our home*. Battisti carried out an extensive correspondence with Ghisleri, notably seeking his patronage for the young journal (Calì, 1988:86; Battisti and Ghisleri, 1964:10), and presenting a clear programme based on the Ghisleri's claims for 'the study and exploration of our home' (Battisti and Ghisleri, 1964:15; Battisti, 1899). Battisti and Biasutti shared the conviction that Italian geography had to renounce its 'African follies' and get to know better and explore Italy's own regions for social purposes; thus, this small but influential part of Italian geography clearly distinguished itself from the imperial approaches of the institutional and academic geography (Gambi, 1991). The ideas of *Cultura Geografica* can be seen as doubly anti-colonialist since they were ranged against both the 'internal' Austro-Hungarian colonialism and the external Italian one, urging Italians 'not to imitate the Belgians, who have lost their minds over the Congo' (Calì, 1988:83).

Cultura Geografica denounced -in its pages- the lateness of Italian geography, which 'remained in an almost embryonic state' (*Cultura Geografica*, 1, 1899:1), with respect to the international development of the discipline. Among the material presented in an attempted renewal of the field, we find reviews of both Italian and international research which the two young editors thought

might contribute to Italian anthropogeography. The editors published an enthusiastic review of the geography programme at Brussels' *Université Nouvelle* (whose Geographical Institute was directed by Elisée Reclus, his brother Elie, and his nephew Paul), which was hailed as an example for Italian universities, where 'essentially conservative, and even reactionary, approaches' (*Cultura Geografica*, 1, 1899:9) defined the curriculum and instruction. The *Cultura Geografica* editors go on to underscore the need to promote a critical education to achieve 'freedom of teaching and thinking' (*Cultura Geografica*, 1, 1899:10), and thus revitalise, by opening it up to society, a geography that was otherwise 'characterised by the rot and academism of a hopeless speciality' (*Cultura Geografica*, 1, 1899:10).

Battisti's correspondence with Ghisleri further clarifies the former's political thinking. According to Alessandro Galante Garrone, the socially oriented and socialist content of Battisti's writing was often overshadowed by the reappropriation of his image as a national martyr 'by Fascists and Nationalists' (Galante Garrone, 1966:11), which wrongly pictured him in a purely patriotic context. Indeed, this misconception dies hard; its influence can be felt, for instance, in a few recent studies (see the Italian nationalist rhetoric widely deployed in Marconi, 2011). On the contrary, it is clear that Battisti's and Ghisleri's irredentism was not nationalistic, it was a socialistic one, and the two men sought a dialogue not among nationalists but among socialists and left-wing republicans on the two sides of the political fence (Battisti and Ghisleri, 1964:31). Their exchanges display all the classic elements of Italian political radicalism of the time, including a strong anticlericalism (Battisti and Ghisleri, 1964:25). Witness, for example, Battisti's initiative to open a section of the Free-Thinking Association in Trento (Battisti and Ghisleri, 1964:32), or the obituary he dedicated to the Spanish anarchist Francisco Ferrer y Guardia, a secular educator who was put to death in 1909 by the Spanish State, which accused him of fomenting the Barcelona anti-colonialist riots against the Spanish expedition in Morocco. Ferrer y Guardia quickly came to be seen as a martyr of free thought (Battisti, 1966:314-315).

Battisti also shared with Ghisleri a strong interest in and admiration for Cattaneo (Battisti and Ghisleri, 1964:14). His last point in common with both the *Risorgimento*'s activists and the anarchist geographers of his day was the persecution he suffered because of Austrian repression. In 1904, for example, Battisti wrote to Ghisleri that he was in jail for 'political crimes' (Battisti and Ghisleri, 1964:31). In 1914, the war compelled him to seek refuge in Italy, which was to remain neutral until May 1915. Only after this event, that is in the last year of his life, did Battisti seem to draw on a more heightened nationalism, which owed much to his difficult personal position involving exile and the impossibility of holding a university position in Italy as a geographer (Calì, 1988:68). Battisti's relative isolation, and the nationalists' fierce commitment to the Trentino cause, convinced him to enlist in the Italian army in order to free his native region by force of arms. In January of 1915, he wrote to his friend Gaetano Salvemini, a socialist and former colleague at *Cultura Geografica*, who also corresponded with Ghisleri, that he would recognise, if need be, a border on the Brenner pass, but only as a military solution, because he still thought that 'the pure linguistic border in Salorno' (Calì, 1988:100), a little town between Trento and Bolzano, would make a better border.

The relationship between Battisti, Ghisleri, and Salvemini further clarifies the link between left-wing irredentism and political thinking opposed to Italian internal and external colonialism,

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because Salvemini was also a meridionalist, one of the most forceful voices against the occupation of Southern Italy by *i re piemontesi di Savoia* (the Piedmont kings of Savoy). In the same vein Salvemini, after Battisti's death, was also an early and radical critic of Italian rule over South-Tyrol, the German-speaking region situated on the southern side of the Brenner watershed, which was occupied by Italian troops in 1918, together with Trentino. In the following years the policy of Mussolini's regime of forced cultural assimilation of the region's German-speaking habitants proved even more violent than the former Austrian rule in Trentino. Salvemini, then an antifascist exile with connections to anarchists, raged at Ettore Tolomei (1865-1952), a Trentino nationalist who is sometimes compared to Battisti, but with whom he had only the slightest of connections (Cali, 1988). According to Salvemini, Tolomei was the man responsible for the policy of forced Italianisation in South Tyrol, whose epistemic and physical violence was grounded in, among other things, the decision to apply an Italian toponymy to all the towns and villages of the region, names that had often no relation with the original German toponymy (Salvemini, 1952). Thus Italian colonialism in South Tyrol followed the Austrian example in Trentino.

Conclusion

Anarchism played a key role in inspiring different and 'heterodox' discourses within the scientific field in Europe between the 19th and the 20th centuries, including the Italian networks led by Ghisleri. This contributes to the present-day rediscovery of anarchist geographies (Springer, Barker, Brown, Ince, Pickerill, 2012) and their attempt to forge a universal brotherhood without erasing differences and local identities, applying to peoples and cultures the same anti-hierarchical principles that apply among individuals. The first aim of this paper has been to point out that the international circulation of the knowledge produced by the anarchist geographers Reclus, Kropotkin and Metchnikoff influenced Italy and Italian thought as well, and deserves additional research to evaluate its impact on other linguistic areas. The idea of 'an ethics of empathy as opposed to a politics of difference, as the latter is always carved out through oppression' (Springer 2012:1619) as addressed by anarchist geographers and their denunciations of the 'murderous' nature of civilisation are proving, by way of the numerous ongoing lines of research on these topics, more and more influential in the international scientific field of their day.

Secondly, drawing on the international literature devoted to 'heterodox discourses' and the anti-colonial imagination, this paper has demonstrated that in Italy during the Age of Empire, as well as in other colonising countries, a number of early critical geographers contested the prevailing colonial discourses in intellectual terms, beyond occasional political opposition to specific imperial enterprises. Although they were a minority in the broader panorama of imperial geographies, unorthodox nonconformists and dissenters existed and provide a fundamental lesson for current debates and issues: political power and academic conformism cannot silence all the voices calling for the development of an ethics in research. This confirms my former statement on the impossibility of essentialising and generalising 'Europe' as a consistent actor in imperial ages: in this vein, I should argue that one of the most important exceptions was anarchism, thanks firstly to its character of cosmopolitan and transnational movement (Hirsch and Van Der Walt, 2010; Shaffer, 2001). This deserves further consideration, if we consider that anarchist and left/libertarian theories seem to have been forgotten by a large part of the postcolonial literature.

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Finally, on Italian irredentism and internal anti-colonialism, the quoted sources make clear that leftist geographers like Battisti and Ghisleri did not promote an Italian imperialism by laying claim to lands well outside Italy's linguistic borders (Gambi, 1994:80). After the 1919 Versailles treaty, when the question of extending new conquered lands in Istria and Dalmatia arose in the debate taking place in Italy, Ghisleri was one of the rare scientific figures participating in an 'anti-chauvinist campaign' (Masini, 1961:20) opposed to Italian expansion in Eastern Europe. Such considerations lead naturally to a theoretical reflection on the different uses to which the science of geography lent itself, both to found empires and to oppose their founding, suggesting new answers to the classical question posed by Said which sought 'alternatives to Orientalism, [asking] how one can study other cultures and peoples from a libertarian, or nonrepressive and nonmanipulative, perspective' (Said, 1979:24).

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