Myths of legitimation and government of difference in the European Imperial regimes during the Modern and Contemporary age.

This Project gathers together twenty four scholars, subdivided in five research units (Universities of Naples Federico II, Florence, Venice Ca' Foscari, Trieste, Trento), and equipped with the assortment of disciplinary skills indispensable to carry out a coordinated survey of the European imperial past spanning from the late 15th century to the eve of the Second World War and specifically focused on two interrelated historiographical questions: how did the European empires cope (or failed to cope) with the mosaic of institutional, ethnic, cultural, religious, territorial differences inherent in the imperial form of polity? Which kinds of myths, discourses, representations of both the ruling peoples' identity and their subjects' otherness were forged and employed with the intent of legitimizing or delegitimizing the "politics of difference" deployed by the imperial authorities? The search for scientific answers to this couple of questions will require the examination of a wide range of sources in the archives and libraries of several countries, as it will be conducted through the interconnected and comparative study of relevant aspects of the history of nine imperial systems and regimes – Spanish, Ottoman, Venetian, Habsburg, Napoleonic, British, Russian, French republican, Italian – within the context of the development of the European imperial and colonial culture since the early modern epoch. By adopting the methodological approach hinted to above, and in selecting the study cases assigned to the participants for its implementation, this Project pursues two main scientific and scholarly goals. Firstly, it aims at establishing a more systematic and fruitful interchange between the Italian historical studies and the international historiographical currents – conventionally grouped under the label of "imperial turn" – which, during the last three decades, have been rediscovering and rewriting the imperial past of today's world with the help of new conceptual tools formed in their close dialogue with the cultural and global historians. Secondly, the participants to the Project set themselves the necessarily collective task of addressing a weakness in the growing literature on the "world history of empire": the absence of any serious attempt to determine the place occupied by imperial Europe as a whole within the global imperial history of the last five centuries. What ultimately underlies this Project, however, is the belief in the civic and pragmatic usefulness of a fuller, realistic and updated understanding of the role played by the empires in shaping a common European past and identity. Its dissemination in the Italian historical culture, even outside the academic community, could affect for the better the political and cultural attitudes of our countrymen when facing the ubiquitous contemporary challenge of governing differences as responsible citizens of a multicultural democracy, of the European Union, of the globalized world.