

CONTEXTS AND DEBATES

Association for the Study of Modern Italy (ASMI) Summer School 2023: conference report

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Abstract

This report is about the ASMI Summer School held in Pisa on 22–23 June 2023. The conference focused on twentieth-century history issues: gender studies, cultural studies, resistance studies, fascism studies and mafia studies, with the addition of a round table and two keynote lectures, which discussed the profession of the modern historian and the history of racism in Italy from the Second World War to the present.

Keywords: twentieth-century Italian history; gender studies; cultural studies; resistance studies; fascism studies; mafia studies

Introduction

The 2023 ASMI Summer School was hosted by the University of Pisa and the Domus Mazziniana on 22–23 June 2023.¹ The organisers, Karen Bertorelli (University of Pisa) and Chiara Brogi (independent scholar), chose to focus on the ‘Long Twentieth Century’ to emphasise the social, political, economic and cultural transformations that have their roots in the last century and whose consequences are still felt today. Two distinguished scholars enriched the programme with their keynote lectures: Paolo Pezzino (formerly Professor at the University of Pisa, now President of the Istituto Nazionale Ferruccio Parri) spoke on *Lavoro, responsabilità e impegni dello storico*; and Silvana Patriarca (Fordham University, New York), presented on *Il razzismo e la storia della Repubblica*. Gender balance was a guiding principle in the design of all parts of the event. The following scholars who agreed to act as discussants ensured the success of the Summer School: Philip Cooke (Chair of ASMI, University of Strathclyde), Marica Setaro (Gerda Henkel Stiftung, Düsseldorf), Caterina Di Pasquale (University of Pisa), Alessandro Santagata (University of Padua), Guri Schwarz (University of Genoa), Carlotta Ferrara degli Uberti (University of Pisa) and Paolo Pezzino. As well as the organisers, Enrica Asquer (University of Genoa), Chiara Fantozzi (University of Pisa), Matteo Caponi (University of Genoa), Arturo Marzano (University of Pisa) and Mauro Capocci (University of Pisa) participated as session chairs.

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Day I

The first day of the Summer School was held at the Centro Congressi Le Benedettine and consisted of four sessions. The opening panel featured Lorenza Moretti (University of Rome La Sapienza) and Andrea Sortino (University of Pisa). Moretti's paper examined Italian feminist ecological activism in the 1970s and 1980s, tackling the institutional dimension of feminist ecologism, and analysing the characteristics of groups such as Donne Scienza (Turin) and Coordinamento nazionale donne e scienza (Bologna). Moretti brought to light Italian feminism's fierce criticism of the traditional structures of scientific knowledge and power. Sortino's paper meanwhile used medical records from the criminal asylum of Barcellona Pozzo di Gotto (1925–1950) regarding uxoricide to analyse the links between masculinity and gender violence. Through his sources, Sortino was able to present and deconstruct the murderers' self-justifications for their criminal behaviours.

The second panel focused on the 1970s. Domenico Mazza (University of Messina) analysed the 'Stato e Libertà' club, promoted in 1972 by Giulio Andreotti and by Giovanni Malagodi's liberals and soon to become openly critical of the Democrazia Cristiana's policies, and Augusto Del Noce's thought and influence. Elisabetta Sellaroli (Université Grenoble Alpes) then examined the role of information and security agencies in postwar Italy in stabilising the young republican institutions, trying to contain the reactionary and revolutionary forces that arose 20 years after the end of the Resistance. Sellaroli highlighted how, despite the large number of reforms involving the agencies (1948–1966, 1977–2007), there was no real change. The institutional reforms that took place between 2005 and 2007, resulting in a massive declassification of confidential documents, allowed scholars access to military records within a civil archive for the first time in the history of the Italian Republic. Finally, Federico Creatini (University of Pisa) discussed the development of the Italian *Terzo settore*. After detailing the legislative, political and cultural premises, Creatini examined the first regulatory references on volunteering, introduced by the *Legge Marcora* (1972), penitentiary reform (1975) and healthcare reform (1979). Creatini also explored the socio-political collaboration between the state and the private sector in counselling and support for psychiatric patients.

The third panel, on cultural and media studies, featured papers by Marco Bernardi (independent scholar) and Antonino Sciotto (University of Piemonte Orientale). Bernardi used quantitative and qualitative analysis to investigate representations of the Resistance and antifascism in RAI programmes since the mid-1950s. Sciotto's paper focused on the political communication of social movements via computer networks in Italy between 1989 (when the Pantera movement, also known as '*Movimento dei fax*', broke out in Italian universities) and 2000 (the birth of Indymedia). The research analysed the characteristics of the new media and the continuities and discontinuities with the previous media systems.

The final panel of the day consisted of papers by Luca Fiorito (University of Genova), Chiara Nencioni (University of Pisa) and Elisa Lo Monaco (University of Tuscia, Viterbo). Fiorito analysed the contacts between Fascist racial policy and foreign policy related to South-Eastern Europe, 1938–1940. His sources showed that Italian diplomats were well aware of the implications of Italian domestic policies after the introduction of the racist laws. Italy was presented as a model, with antisemitism as a tool of cultural soft power along the Danube basin and in the Mediterranean. Fiorito noted that Italian antisemitism was considered more 'benevolent' than its German counterpart, an element that forces us to revisit the chronology associated with the development of the myth of the 'good Italian'. Nencioni's paper examined the presence of the Roma community within the Italian Resistance. After 8 September 1943, those who managed to escape from

concentration camps (such as Prignano sulla Secchia and Giles) and did not fall victim to Nazi-fascist violence, joined the partisan groups. As highlighted by Nencioni, Roma and Sinti communities found in the Resistance not only a way to express their ideals of freedom, equality and justice, but also a way to celebrate their *mulé*, that is, their loved ones killed by the Nazi-fascists. In the final paper, Lo Monaco explored the multifaceted history of the Milanese Jewish Bernstein family, from the advent of Fascism to the Lebanon war (1982–1985). Lo Monaco reflected on the variety of identities developed by different family members, with some becoming closely linked to European federalism, while part of the family unit moved to Israel.

Day 2

The second day of the Summer School, held at the Domus Mazziniana, consisted of three sessions. The first focused on Italians abroad during the 1930s and 1940s. In the opening paper, Gianluca Bo (researcher at the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation) investigated the relationships between unskilled Italian workers, defined by the scholar Nicola Labanca as ‘poor whites’, and the Ethiopian population. Using criminal records kept at the Institute of Ethiopian Studies archives in Addis Ababa, Bo analysed economic crimes, such as theft, fraud and abuse, highlighting both the link between the context of poverty-precariousness and social disorder, and the social inter-racial promiscuity that challenged Fascist racial categories. The second paper, by Enrico Crepaldi (University of Florence and Siena) examined the relationship between Fascism and Italian emigrants through policies implemented on the eve of the Second World War. These policies, carried out in parallel with, and as a consequence of, the radicalisation of Fascist imperialism and the growing tension with France and Great Britain, were aimed not only at protecting the Italian migrant in the foreign country, but also at exporting Italian and Fascist values around the world. According to Crepaldi, the regime attempted to solidify the spirit of ‘Italianness’ and counteract denationalisation through a system of welfare and repatriation practices that were sometimes at odds with Fascist official domestic propaganda. In the third paper of the session, Cecilia Toninato (University of Naples ‘L’Orientale’, Université Libre de Bruxelles) explored the role of the Italian community during the occupation of Belgium and the measures taken against it after the country’s liberation. Toninato showed how German authorities during the occupation used Fascist structures to capture antifascists and increase their control over the Italian community and how Belgian courts after the war were more indulgent towards Italians who had played a political role in the occupation (e.g. fascist inspectors, consulate and embassy officials) than those found guilty of ordinary crimes.

The second session dealt with the period of transition from Fascism to the Republic and with the ‘Years of Lead’. The first contribution, by Jonathan Pieri (Director of the Istituto Storico della Resistenza e dell’Età Contemporanea, Province of Lucca) examined the rebuilding of the Italian airforce between 8 September 1943 and April 1949, when Italy joined NATO. The presentation showed how military personnel, who served in the Regia Aeronautica during Fascism, continued their careers in the airforce after 1945 and considered to what extent they were subject to the postwar purge process. The second paper, by Michelangelo Borri (University of Trieste and Udine), focused on the first phase of the so-called ‘strategy of tension’, shedding light on the policies towards and responses to ‘black’ terrorism implemented by regional institutions. Borri traced the history of the regional commissions set up between 1973 and 1975 to investigate and analyse neo-fascism, and clarified not only the socio-historical context and the genesis of individual regional council’s responses to far-right terrorism, but also the cooperation between regional commissions, municipal institutions, political parties and antifascist associations.

The morning of the second day concluded with Silvana Patriarca's keynote address on 'Racism and the history of the Republic'. The lecture, inspired by Patriarca's latest monograph *Il colore della Repubblica. Figli di guerra e razzismo nell'Italia postfascista* (Einaudi, 2021) also evaluated current Italian policies. Patriarca focused on the fate of mixed-race children born immediately after the Second World War to Black American soldiers and Italian women. The babies were called *mulattini*, a word with clear racist connotations. The lives of these children and their mothers were very difficult, since interracial sexual relationships were seen (and often are still seen) as degrading. Patriarca highlighted the case of Silvana Galli, who fell in love with a Black American soldier in 1944 and became a mother shortly after. Mrs Galli published the story of her and her mixed-race baby in an autobiography called *Little Blonde*. Patriarca demonstrated how these '*figli della guerra*' were perceived primarily as Black, not only by the society in which they lived but also by science and charity organisations. In this regard, we are reminded of *Il meticciano di guerra e altri casi* (1960), written by the racist Italian doctor Luigi Gedda (1902–2000). The mixed-race children were subjected to anthropometric measurement of their skulls, as testified by the photos taken and then published in Gedda's book. After discussing the adult lives of the *mulattini* and some of the fortunate cases (for example the saxophonist and composer James Senese, who was born in Naples in 1945), Patriarca examined the present day. An intense roundup of images recalled anti-Islamic policies and, more specifically, racist reactions in Italy against Black Italians. The strength of Patriarca's address lay above all in its denunciation of the growing xenophobic climate in Italy, which is supported by the recent political success of far-right parties and movements.

The afternoon began with a session on mafia history from an antimafia perspective, anticipating the theme of the annual ASMI conference in London (8–9 December 2023). The first speaker, Vincenzo Cassarà (University of Florence) reconstructed the historical path that led to the approval of the *Legge Rognoni-La Torre*, the law which introduced the crime of 'mafia-type criminal association' (art. 416 bis). Cassarà analysed the events that determined the 20-year gestation of the law, including the institution of the first Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry on the Mafia (1963), the Ciaculli massacre (1963), the subsequent repression by the state, and the Catanzaro and the Bari trials (1967–69). He then examined the legal problems which politicians and legislators had to contend with in order to draft the law. Three elements were crucial for the enactment of the law: the state's response to political terrorism, the murder of Pio La Torre, the first signatory to the law and the PCI secretary, and the assassination of General Carlo Alberto Dalla Chiesa. The second paper, by Brian O'Connor (European University Institute, Florence), analysed the role played by queer people in the struggle against the mafia. By focusing on the intersection of sexuality and anti-mafia activism and by moving beyond the heteronormative discourse of state-mafia contention, O'Connor was able to throw new light on the causes and dynamics of antimafia activism. To do so, he presented five biographies – of Nino Gennaro, Rosario Crocetta, 'Il Combattente' (whose identity cannot be revealed), Klaus Davì and Claudia Fauzia – reconstructed using interviews and archive sources.

The Summer School concluded with a roundtable on *Rapito* (2023), Marco Bellocchio's latest film, chaired by the film historian Pietro Finelli (Director of the Domus Mazziniana), with Carlotta Ferrara degli Uberti (University of Pisa), Chiara Tognolotti (University of Pisa) and Ignazio Veca (University of Pavia). The panel discussed the film, about the papal kidnapping of a six-year-old Jewish boy, Edgardo Mortara, in 1858, in the context of the director's filmography, exploring how the work tackles some of Bellocchio's most beloved topics, including the relationship with authority, the tyranny of power, and the oppressive nature of religion/s. The conversation then shifted towards the relationship between Bellocchio's representation of Mortara's story and the actual history

of his kidnapping and the international mobilisation that followed; that is, between the narrative truth created by the artist and the historical truth. The panellists noted that the film was clearly keen to reconstruct some aspects of the context and of the main characters in a way that is historically accurate. However, historical accuracy is not one of Bellocchio's main goals, as he has stated in various interviews given before and after the release of the film. He is not directly interested in bringing to the screen a faithful reconstruction of the Risorgimento, of Pius IX or of an important piece of Italian Jewish history. It is particularly important, then, to reflect on why a large section of the public, especially in the Jewish world, has interpreted *Rapito* as a denunciation of Italian and European Jews' sufferings at the hand of the Catholic Church, and as an attempt to draw a direct line between the practice of forced baptisms as they developed across the centuries and cases of Jewish children baptised in the 1940s. Both Carlotta Ferrara degli Uberti and Ignazio Veca noted that the reception of this film intersects with the contemporary dynamics of Holocaust memory and memorialisation.

Competing interests. The authors declare none.

Note

1. Chiara Brogi wrote the introduction and the second-day report. Karen Bertorelli wrote the first-day report and that of Silvana Patriarca's *Lectio Magistralis*. Carlotta Ferrara degli Uberti wrote about the *Tavola rotonda*.

Carlotta Ferrara degli Uberti, formerly based at University College London, is currently Associate Professor of Modern History at the University of Pisa. Among her research interests are modern Italian and European Jewish history, the history of antisemitism and of its definitions, the history of marriage and divorce in modern Italy, and the history of equestrian sports.

Chiara Brogi is an independent scholar. She graduated at the University of Pisa and did her Erasmus+ project at the University of Strathclyde, studying mafia organised crime and modern history. She is now a high school teacher. She contributed a reconstruction of the Aiale massacre (Casciana Terme-Lari) to the Atlas of Nazi-Fascist Massacres in Italy.

Karen Bertorelli is a History PhD student at University of Pisa and ASMI PG rep. Her doctoral research is focused on the Italian national and patriotic revival between 1999 and 2011.

Italian summary

L'articolo tratta della Summer School che Asmi ha tenuto il 22–23 giugno 2023 presso l'Università di Pisa. Il convegno si è concentrato sulla storia del XX secolo, trattando tematiche inerenti agli studi di genere, alla storia culturale, alla resistenza, al regime fascista e alla criminalità organizzata di stampo mafioso. Inoltre, ha ospitato gli interventi di due keynote, che hanno trattato il lavoro dello storico e la storia del razzismo in Italia dal dopoguerra a oggi. Le due giornate si sono concluse con una tavola rotonda, che ha discusso il film *Rapito* del regista italiano Marco Bellocchio.

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