



# Languages of Discrimination and Racism in Twentieth-Century Italy

Histories, Legacies and Practices

*Edited by*  
Marcella Simoni  
Davide Lombardo

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ISBN 978-3-030-98656-8      ISBN 978-3-030-98657-5 (eBook)  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-98657-5>

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This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Switzerland AG.

The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

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# Introduction: The Languages of Discrimination and Racism in Italy in the Twentieth Century: Mobilities, Migrations, Racisms

*Marcella Simoni and Davide Lombardo*

This volume adopts an interdisciplinary perspective to investigate the history and the themes of race and racism in Italy from the liberal age to the colonial wars up to the present through Fascism and the First Republic, and the intertwining of the cultural, legislative and political dynamics of

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Marcella Simoni and Davide Lombardo have written this introduction jointly. For the purposes of the Italian academic system of evaluation, Simoni is the Author of pp. 1–9 and 13–23; Lombardo is the Author of pp. 9–13.

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Switzerland AG 2022

M. Simoni, D. Lombardo (eds.), *Languages of Discrimination and  
Racism in Twentieth-Century Italy*,  
[https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-98657-5\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-98657-5_1)

discrimination in post-war Italy. Drawing upon the expertise of historians, political scientists, sociologists, scholars of literature and experts in cultural studies, the original chapters collected in this volume show a remarkable continuity and the persistence of racism in the Italian cultural and political discourse; they also speak of the shifting of practices of Othering from one or more groups to other groups in different historical contexts.

It was never the intention of this volume to provide a comprehensive history of racism or an exhaustive analysis of the more recent intersection between mobility, migration and racism in Italy; such a quest would be too broad to be contained in any one volume. Rather, the aim of this collective work is to point out the multiple ways in which discrimination, racism, stereotypes and gender bias intersect in Italy, in a historical perspective and in current affairs. In general, the chapters that we collected tried to privilege hearing the voices of those who were discriminated in one context or situation over those of the institutions that engaged with them, and which often ended up (mis)representing, not acknowledging or excluding them. Therefore, this volume participates to the question of how we can construct a historical narrative from below, that includes the voices, histories, feelings and political actions and re-actions of groups of individuals that—while connected to Italy for reasons of migration, birth, work, family, descendance, language, heritage, etc.—have nevertheless been marginalized, discriminated or excluded from citizenship and the rights and obligations that come with it.

One of the questions underlying this volume is, therefore, how can we make those voices, memories and histories emerge, and how can they be included in a mainstream narrative that at least acknowledges the relational aspect of dealing with the Other(s) (Lockman 1996). Relational history implies acknowledging that one's own social, political and, ultimately, national identity takes shape not only in opposition, but also through interaction, with the Other(s). A crucial question is that of sources: if national archives hold the keys to shape how national history is told, and thereby can shape how collective memory is created on a particular topic, do they also preserve and perpetuate those versions of history that rarely make the voices of non-institutional actors heard? This applies, and is equally relevant, to different historical periods. This volume aspires to be a first foundation towards this process, by hearing the voices of



groups whose experiences (and the individual and collective memory of those experiences) have been placed—in different historical moments and in different cultural and political contexts—outside the national canon, on grounds of religion, skin color, religious belief or features considered to be identity markers. As explained below, with this volume we also would like to help further the demise of the “myth of the good Italian” by addressing the core of the relationship between national identity, memory and alterity.

### SETTING THE SCENE

It would be unfair to say that questions of discrimination and racism, of migrations and mobilities are silenced at the beginning of the twenty-first century in Italy. It is sufficient to browse through the daily press to encounter numerous articles of various lengths and detail that tell stories of human mobilities, migrations and racism. Some of these articles address the local dimension; others connect these stories—which are often tragedies—to questions of national relevance and link them to issues of civil and human rights, as well as of gender equality. Still others discuss the racism that many migrants encounter in Italy calling into the picture the lack of a collective assumption of responsibility of Italians as a former colonial and fascist country. The claim here is that such a suppression bears a direct impact on the perception and representation of the Other, and therefore also on the lack of adequate and comprehensive policies to deal constructively with mobilities, migrations and racism. Through these different frameworks one can follow individual stories; another possibility is to consider them as part of a broader discourse, where questions of unresolved collective memory, migratory flows, human and civil rights, right to citizenship and episodes of discrimination and racism intertwine; this appears today to be central in Italian society and politics and to stand at the core of how Italians see and imagine themselves in the twenty-first century.

A brief look at the national center-left daily *La Repubblica* from June 5, 2021, shows such a centrality and how these themes intersect: on that day the newspaper reported on the story of Seid Visin, an Italian teenager who had been adopted as a child from Ethiopia, who could not stand the racism he perceived around him when he was mistakenly assumed to be a recent migrant from Africa, and who killed himself near Salerno. In a letter addressed to his therapist and to some friends, he denounced the pressure that ultimately cracked him, “as if I should be ashamed to be black”, and his fear “of being mistaken for a migrant, as if I should show to those who

did not know me that I was like them, that I was Italian, that I was white”.<sup>1</sup> On the same day, Saman Abbas, an eighteen-year-old woman from a Pakistani family from Novellara, near Reggio Emilia, was reported missing and probably dead (as it later turned out), killed by her own family as she was refusing to submit to an arranged marriage. In Rome, on bus no. 3, a passenger filmed “a man of about forty, who was insulting two women of Asian origin” who were being defended by another passenger. Moving on from racist to homophobic insults, the “man of about forty” threatened to beat up the guy speaking up, invoking the need to defend our “poor Italy, [caught] between foreigners and gays” [*povera Italia fra stranieri e finocchi*].<sup>2</sup> The brief overview of the news from one random day on the Italian center-left national daily ends with the statement by Member of Parliament Matteo Mauri of the Democratic Party (PD), at the time Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs, that the *ius soli* (the right to citizenship by birth on the country’s soil) “will become a law by the end of the legislature” (2023), revealing once more the slow and inadequate response of institutions and political establishment to the quick-paced developments taking place in Italian society, and the challenges they posit, that go far beyond the belated introduction of the *ius soli*, as crucial as that would be.

These few examples speak of an ongoing present (of which there could be countless other daily examples at the local and national levels); others indicate the consequences of having suppressed the individual and collective responsibilities of colonial racism, Fascism and anti-Semitism. Borrowing from Susan Neiman (2019), one could argue that in Italy (as in other European countries) that process of “working off the past” (*Vergangenheitsaufarbeitung* *ibid.*, 29)—that took place in Western Germany from the 1960s onwards in relation to the collective responsibilities for racism and its implications for genocide—was very feeble, if non-existent. As Neiman herself points out, other countries, like the UK, for example, or France, have not worked through this process (31). And only very recently—and with much delay—have the Netherlands started to walk this path in the public sphere, with an important exhibition at the Rijks museum, which explored the role of slavery in building the nation

<sup>1</sup><https://ilmanifesto.it/la-lettera-di-seid-visin/> accessed September 23, 2021. On the coincidence between whiteness and Italianità see Patriarca (2010, 2021).

<sup>2</sup><https://video.corriere.it/cronaca/roma-insulti-omofobi-tram-mi-fai-schifo-finocchio/f4982d24-c5f0-11eb-8929-1c7e5315cef2>, accessed 23 September 2021.

and its fortunes (Sint Nicolaas and Smeulders 2021). To the list of countries where such a reflection is struggling to emerge with clarity, one can certainly add Italy, where the lack of such a process has carried, and continues to, multiple social and political consequences.

One of them is the widespread assumption that Italians are—and continue to be—overall good people (*Italiani brava gente*), a phenomenon that historiography described as “the myth of the good Italian” (Bidussa 1994; Del Boca 2005; Focardi 2013) that emerged during the Second World War and that has played an important symbolic and political role ever since. Whenever Italian society and politics have been confronted with an internal or external Others, regardless of the obvious different geographical provenances, they were met through the lenses of Otherness. Another is the creation of a broad and undifferentiated public discourse in which the chain of events that today we call the Holocaust appears to have lost its specificity and is often employed by politics and in the public sphere as a comparison for other experiences of displacement or discrimination, whether real or totally assumed (Schwarz 2021a).

In this context, a comparison between the deportation and extermination of the Jews during the Second World War and the hard destiny of migrants from the Middle East and Africa stranded at sea in the Mediterranean, although historically misleading, continues to appear in the public sphere. Ninety-one-year-old Holocaust survivor and life senator Liliana Segre, one of the most committed and active public testimonies to the horrors of genocide in Italy, and the initiator of a parliamentary commission on hate speech, never drew direct comparisons between her own dramatic experience as a victim of anti-Semitism and deportation and that of others. Nevertheless, she underlined that it had been widespread *indifference* that had allowed millions of Jews to become stateless, deprived of civil and human rights, be deported, imprisoned in inhuman conditions and assassinated then, and that it is the same feeling that allows “boats of migrants with no name that drown to be forgotten, with the sea closing on them” today.<sup>3</sup> Apparently, the works of Primo Levi—that have become a reference in Italian literature, and not only as Holocaust testimony—and the substantial legislative, economic and social investment made through the institution of a national Holocaust Remembrance Day (January 27) since 2000 (Schwarz 2021b) have only partially been successful in

<sup>3</sup> <https://video.repubblica.it/dossier/migranti-2019/sea-watch-liliana-segre-c-e-la-stessa-indifferenza-che-c-era-nell-epoca-nazista/325625/326241>, accessed 25 September 2021.

awakening Italian society from such indifference and to the ultimate consequences that racism entails. Such a limited achievement appears obvious, but particularly evident when one looks at the tragic history of twenty-two-year-old Pateh Sabally from Gambia who fell/jumped and drowned in the Grand Canal in Venice on 25 January 2017—the day after the municipality had begun the commemorations for Holocaust Remembrance Day—as some people watched, others threw a life jacket, and still others shouted in Venetian dialect *Neghite Scemo! Africa!* ([Annégati!] Drown yourself idiot! Africa!).<sup>4</sup> As with many other instances, racism too can be local-specific in Italy, and so can anti-racism, as the scathing ironic theatre of Andrea Pennacchi (just for one example) shows.<sup>5</sup>

### THE ORIGINS OF THIS VOLUME

This volume collects and presents a number of case studies that revolve around questions of historical and more recent mobilities, migrations, discrimination and racism in Italy from the late nineteenth century to the present. The project originated from discussions, activities and exchanges with students, colleagues and leadership that took place on the Florence campus of New York University between 2015 and 2018 and that culminated in an international conference entitled *The languages of discrimination and racism in Italy in the 20th century* that took place in Florence on October 3, 2018.<sup>6</sup>

The presence of the word “languages” in the title of this conference had at least three implications. An obvious one: historical and current racism—as well as anti-racism—in Italy have been expressed through different registers, in the language of the law, in jokes, in the homework of children in Italian public schools (Tabet 1997) through the practice of everyday life (Saraceno et al. 2013), in politics, in education, in the media, in some images used for political propaganda or, in a very different way, in those used to advertise one or the other product; (expressions of) racism could easily be detected on the historical press and, as discourse analysis has taught us (Schiffrin et al. 2001), it appears on some of today’s papers

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.la7.it/tagada/video/profugo-annega-a-venezia-cera-chi-gridava-presto-ho-il-treno-26-01-2017-202902>, accessed 25 September 2021.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m2cOU7z-mNs>, accessed 28 September 2021.

<sup>6</sup> <https://lapietra.nyu.edu/event/the-languages-of-discrimination-and-racism-in-italy-in-the-20th-century/>, accessed September 26, 2021.

in more subtle ways. In general, racism can be observed in historical and contemporary public discourses where the various Others are often constructed as unassimilable, essentialized as a security threat and as a problem of public order, or, last but not least, as extraneous to national values.

Within the medium-term historical perspective of our volume, the Other (and therefore the others) have changed, overlapped and added to one other: colonial subjects (from Eritrea, Somalia, Ethiopia, Libya and Dodecanese to list the major ones) in the Kingdom of Italy, Jews between 1938 and 1945, Southerners who migrated to the north of the country in the 1950s and 1960s, refugees from South America in the 1970s, migrants from Eastern Europe after 1989, refugees from former Yugoslavia in the 1990s and from Southern Mediterranean countries afterwards, Albanians arriving in the port of Bari in 1991 and migrants from various countries in sub-Saharan Africa throughout all this period. These shifts in Othering, which ultimately are all part of an integrated and intersectional racist discourse marked by historical continuity, reflect different phases and stages in the contemporary history of the Peninsula. Tabet (1997) compares such an ongoing discourse to a well-oiled automobile engine “that can be switched off, stay in neutral, go to 5000 rpm”, which was never really off and whose noise remained almost imperceptible until the first migrants started to arrive in the 1980s, and in later decades (v).

The second reason for framing a conference on racism in Italy through the idea of languages is connected to the site where it took place. Study-abroad programs in Italy (and elsewhere) represent particular cultural, political and economic contexts; young students educated in a non-European system spend a semester (or longer) of their education outside the USA and the expectations of many of them are—broadly speaking—to continue studying as in an American context while residing elsewhere (Citron and Kline 2001; Ogden 2008). On the one hand, these campuses are sites where different histories, cultural models, visions of individual and collective Self and Other are challenged, embraced and/or reformulated as part of an educational process that strives to be global. On the other, they can also be places where ideas, concepts and expressions that come from American history, culture and politics, whether past or present, can sometimes be applied flatly to the histories and representations of other contexts in which students spend a semester/year abroad, causing some sense of dislocation.

When such a process occurs with terms and concepts like racism, intersectionality and critical theory, the possibility for linguistic and political

misunderstandings on these very charged terms and questions can easily generate short circuits among all the parties involved. One of the reasons why this is so can be found in the obvious statement that the terms *race* and *razza* carry different implications, and that the histories of racism in Italy and in the USA are different, from a chronological, cultural, thematic and political point of view; therefore, the categories that are used to analyze such a complex and multifaceted phenomenon need to be historicized. It is sufficient to consider the very history of the word intersectionality, which also appears as a framework of analysis in some of the chapters in this volume, and the two points that Baritono (2018) raises about it; first, when using the “concept of ‘race’ in the European historical and present context, one cannot ignore (...) the impact of Nazism and the Shoah” (301), to which one could also add colonialism and Fascism; second, when using intersectionality, one should be cautious about falling into an essentialist vision whereby only those who belong and/or identify with the group which is discriminated can understand (and represent) their oppression (ibid.).

The third implication of the title of the conference that led to this volume—which could only be developed partially—was an attempt to reason on the differences and on the nuances between the linguistic entries that belong to the language of race and racism in Italian and in English: what is the history of the words that have been used in Italian to indicate migrants, religious, regional or ethnic groups? How are they different from those that have been used in (American) English? What are the cultural and political implications of the choice of words connected to the semantic field of race in Italy (Patriarca 2021: 22)?

This theme is relevant in a country like Italy, where, as Alessandra Tarquini has pointed out, until very recently “the most ancient of minorities” (i.e., Jews; Pugliese 2002) was described in some of the dictionaries of the main publishing houses in derogatory terms which only reflected—and at the same time perpetuated—anti-Semitic stereotypes. Paolo Colombo’s 1967 *Dictionary of the Italian Language* defined the entry *synagogue* as “Jewish temple, site of confusion, chaos” (Tarquini 2019: 239); ten years later in the *Elementary Dictionary* of the publishing house DeAgostini, at the entry *Jewish*, one could read: “adj. israelite, avid, greedy, who practices the religion of Jews”; finally, the dictionary of the publishing house Zanichelli defined the word “Jew” as “fig. derogatory of someone who shows great attachment to money” (ibid.). Throughout the whole post-war period the derogatory *terrone* (connected to the land, thus backwards, as opposed to urbanite) in its various center and northern

regional variations was used to define migrant workers and families from the south. Given these premises, it does not come as a surprise that, when in the 1980s different Others arrived in Italy from a southern South, the lack of a language to deal with alterity caused the emergence and spread of other derogatory neologisms like *vucumprà* [*vuoi comprare?* Do you want to buy?]. This is the expression that numerous African migrants used when trying to sell various items along the beaches of the hot Italian summers and it immediately became the standard to refer to African migrants especially in the early 1990s. And even if *vucumprà* was later substituted by the only apparently more neutral *extracomunitari* (of non-EU provenance), until this very day very seldom are black individuals (at whatever stage of their mobility or if born in Italy) addressed in a formal way (*Lei*, third person as opposed to *Tu*, second person). There could be many other examples that speak of a long history of discrimination through words.<sup>7</sup>

The question remains of how has this field changed throughout the decades. In part, a reply can be found in the different histories of Italian and American racism, and in the distinct impact that recent debates on questions of identity and diversity—and the development of a social protest movement like Black Lives Matter—have had in the USA and in Continental Europe/Italy.

In this context, this collective work would like to open a multi-disciplinary and multi-vocal perspective, where diverse historiographies and methodologies of research on race and racism as a historical, cultural, social and political phenomena can engage in a productive dialogue that can generate greater awareness to the complexity, diversification and need to contextualize racism, starting from the histories and from the sites in which it has found and continues to find expression.

## THE AGENDA OF THIS VOLUME

One of the first entries on the agenda for this volume is to move the discussion beyond the premises implied by the question: “are Italians racist?” (Bocca 1988; Patriarca 2015), a query that has deep resonances in twentieth-century Italian history. Historical research on Italian colonialism since the 1970s has made this question redundant, as we shall see below; however, half a century later, this important shift in the interpretation of Italian colonial history is far from being accepted as a starting point in

<sup>7</sup>See Andrea Pennacchi, Ciao Terrone. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vEtp8qpvc#0>, accessed 14 april 2022; see also Cassata and Schwarz (2021).

other research areas. Indeed, our ambition was to extend the interpretative paradigm that explore the specificities of the historical discriminations and racisms carried out by Italians in colonial and/or fascist times to more recent migratory phenomena that started to invest Italy since the 1980s. As historians, this meant extending to this more recent period the perspectives that were opened by those historical studies that demolished the “myth of the good Italian”.

A second item on the agenda is the question of intersectionality, that we wanted to pursue in various directions. The connection between race- and gender-based discriminations was highly apparent in the history of Italian colonialism and one explored with remarkable results (Barrera 2002, 2005, 2008; Lombardi-Diop 2005), in a dialogue with Crenshaw’s foundational contribution to critical race theory (Crenshaw 1991, 2017) and long before intersectionality became a widespread category as well as a buzz word in academia (Baritono 2018). Another example could be that the historical studies on Italian anti-Semitism and Italian colonialism have also started to entertain a dialogue, especially if connected through a gender perspective (Giuliani and Lombardi-Diop 2013).

A third item on the agenda is to contribute to shift the geographical premises of the conversation by embracing a comparative framework, while remaining focused on Italian matters. Adopting such a framework is essential to go beyond a national perspective while avoiding either a continental or Western perspective.

A fourth and final item in our agenda, which we will explore further in the next section, is the question of interdisciplinarity, that is, connecting different disciplines and subdisciplines—from social and cultural history to political science, from area studies to sociology, etc.—so that each discipline (different for methodology, analytical armory and sensitivities) could help create a dialogue with the others on the questions of discrimination and racism.

### A BRIDGE BETWEEN HISTORIOGRAPHY AND OTHER DISCIPLINES

In relation to the Italian debate, this volume intends to create a bridge between the historical studies on Italian racism that have been published in the last thirty years, and the ethnographic and sociological studies that have explored the changing Italian society since the arrival of the first wave of migrants in the 1980s, thus adding another layer to the deconstruction



of the “myth of the good Italian”. The emergence and the evolution of the “myth”, and the challenges it has encountered are well known (Bidussa 1994; Del Boca 2005; Focardi 2013; Schwarz 2013). However, it is relevant to this volume to remember that the historiographical debate in the last forty years has been greatly influenced by the arrival of the first waves of migrants starting from the 1980s and by the geopolitical earthquake of the late 1980s and early 1990s. In Europe this was generated by the fall of the Berlin wall and the end of the Cold War; in Italy (Falsini 2020), this was coupled with the collapse of the political party system that had ruled the country for the previous fifty years. Within this context, the emergence of the challenge to “the myth of good Italian” did not come from historians working on Mussolini and Fascism, an area somehow hijacked by the presence of the monumental work by De Felice. Rather, it came from scholars who engaged with Italian colonialism in Africa, a piece of the puzzle that had remained until then marginal if not ignored, save for the interest of military historians (Rochat 1973).

It was thanks to the seminal researches in this field, and then to the groundbreaking volumes by Giampaolo Calchi Novati (1987, 1994, 2005, 2011), who had come to study Italian colonialism via decolonization and the history of the African continent, and by Angelo Del Boca (1965, 1976–1984, 1986, 1992, 1996, 2007), who arrived to work on Italian colonialism by focusing on Fascism, that Italian colonialism and persecutions towards subjects of the Italian colonies and later Empire from the 1890s could become, especially since the 1990s, fully part of the historiographical panorama on post-unitary Italy. Particularly important was the volume by Del Boca, *Italiani brava gente* (2005), that succeeded in shifting the paradigm of historical analysis and in reaching out also outside academia. One of the features of this new expanding dimension of Italian historiography was that it developed within a solid interdisciplinary and multicultural framework. A possible testimony of this would be the number of volumes dedicated to this theme and that were published in English in the early 2000s; among them, the influential *A Place in the Sun* edited by Patrizia Palumbo (2003) and, in 2005, the publication of two edited collections by Andall and Dulkan, and Ben-Ghiat and Fuller. In the meantime, historians known outside academia like Giorgio Rochat (2005), as well an entire generation of scholars, began to integrate the issue of colonialism in their studies and publications. Examples of the varieties of backgrounds and approaches would include Nicola Labanca (1993, 2002) Giulia Barrera (2005, 2008), Nicola Camilleri (2018,

2020), Olindo de Napoli (2009) and Giuseppe Maria Finaldi (2009, 2017), among many others that have contributed to a new centrality and new interpretation of Italian colonialism.

Compared to the revolution taking place in the field of Italian colonial studies, the scholarship on the period of the Second World War remained less central. The most important book on the resistance of the 1990s, Claudio Pavone's *Una Guerra Civile* (1991), engaged also with the question of the "myth of good Italian" from the perspective of national unity; the challenge that this volume posed connected the political perspective and that of the scholar. It could be suggested that the historiographical breakthrough for studies that concerned the Second World War and the Resistance came a few years later than those that concerned colonialism, with the publication in 2013 of the successful volume by Filippo Focardi. His work only shows the Italian delay, for example, in a comparative perspective with the German public debate where the groundbreaking book *Die Unfähigkeit zu trauern* [The Inability to Mourn] by Alexander and Margarethe Mitscherlich (published 1967 and translated in English in 1975), indeed confronts the question of the inability to face and take collective responsibility for, as well as mourn, the Nazi period.

The spillover from the scholarly debate on the "myth of the good Italian" onto Italian public debate has been extremely slow, difficult and problematic. There could be many examples; one of these, taken from public debate (or rather lack thereof), provides a vivid picture of the difficulties, inertia, resistance and ambiguities of the Italian ruling class in relation to challenging the "myth of the good Italian". The example comes from the censorship on the movie *Omar Mukhtar* of 1981, which was distributed in English with the title *The Lion of the Desert* and never distributed in Italy, due to complicated censorship process (Tosatto 2009; Cragno 2006). The movie was financed by the regime of Muammar Gaddafi to celebrate Libyan resistance against Italian colonialism, engaging in an international production with some of the most well-known stars of the period (Antony Quinn to play Mukhtar, Rod Steiger for Mussolini, Oliver Reed to play the Italian vice governor of Libya and war criminal Rodolfo Graziani, Irene Papas in the female lead part of Mabrouka). The movie narrated the last years of the hero of the Libyan national resistance, the unequal fight against Italian forces and the capture, mock process and execution of Mukhtar by the Italian authorities that in the movie were led by Graziani. The movie shows Italians massacring a village, taking away young women to be used as comfort women for the Italian troops, and it

also shows the concentration camps set by Italian authorities for the Bedouin populations that were supporting Mukhtar, comprehensive of some black and white footage from the 1930s. Mustapha Akkad, the Egyptian director, recreated scenes with great accuracy, also thanks to the generous funds provided by the Libyan government. The movie premiered at the Cannes in 1982 and was distributed in Europe and shown at various film festivals but banned in Italy by Italian undersecretary to foreign affairs. The motivation—deftly avoiding references to massacres and concentration camps—stated that the movie was offending the royal Italian army. A movie screening at a festival was stopped by Digos (the Italian political police) in 1987 while in the ensuing years its screening was tolerated, while a *de facto* ban on its distribution and broadcasting remained in place. It was only in 2009, with the government led by Silvio Berlusconi, that the ban was officially raised, in concomitance with the signature of the Libyan-Italian pact that regulated to reciprocal advantage Libyan gas and oil to Italy and Italian funds to Libya to control migrants transiting through Libyan territory in the direction of Europe. During his state visit to Italy, and to the embarrassment of Italian media and authorities, Muammar Gaddafi exhibited in all public occasions a picture pinned to his uniform—that had been included in the footage of the movie—of Omar Mukhtar in chains before the trial surrounded by high Italian authorities. The movie was then broadcasted by the Italian satellite branch of Sky and also by the national Italian broadcasting television, RAI. It was worth following this long story to the end, to underline that the ban on the movie could be lifted not because of pressure that public opinion and intellectuals exerted, and the total silence of the more progressive political forces. Interestingly enough, the ban was ultimately lifted for international political and commercial gains, by a right wing government which included post-fascist elements in the cabinet.

### THE FIELDWORK OF SOCIOLOGISTS AND ANTHROPOLOGISTS

It is virtually impossible to provide a comprehensive picture of the political themes that surround the question of migrations and racism in Italy: legislation, citizenship, ethical questions, hate speech, representation in the media, cultural attitudes, sport, the impact and lives of second-generation migrants, migrant literatures, etc. Especially so, as the political debate on these questions in a swiftly changing international scenario causes a continuous repositioning of those involved on the national and local scales:

political parties, the Church, civil society and, last but not least, organized criminality.

From a historical point of view, the establishment of “Centra”—the “Centre for the history of Racism and Anti-Racism in Modern Italy” at the University of Genoa in 2021 by Francesco Cassata and Guri Schwarz—represents an important step, and an important physical and virtual site, where new research will shed light on the history, memory and representation of the historical experience of Italian colonialism, racism, anti-racism and anti-Semitism.<sup>8</sup> Considering the field of contemporary migrations instead, historical research has been slower for obvious chronological reasons and for the difficulties connected to collecting oral and written sources (Colucci 2018, 2020). In this context, sociologists, anthropologists and ethnographers have laid the foundations of the field, exploring the contemporary intersections between mobility, migrations and racism in Italy for many migrant groups and some of the connections between past and present (Marchetti 2013).

It seems to us that this type of research has followed at (at least) four paths: the first has adopted a vertical perspective, looking at nationality/religious or ethnic/linguistic specificity, thus focusing on single communities, be it the Filipino communities which have grown numerous in several Italian cities since the 1980s (Cominelli 2003; Zapponi 2011), labor migrations from South America, especially Perù, or those from Eastern European countries—at least Romania, Moldova, Belarus, Ukraine (Salvino 2018)—through which many women have arrived in Italy to work as caretakers (*badanti*) for aging Italian families. Other groups include Sikhs in the province of Reggio Emilia (Bertolani 2004, 2013), in particular in Novellara, where many work in the production of the Parmigiano Reggiano cheese (Bertolani 2010) and in agriculture around Latina (Omizzolo, 2010); Albanians (Barajaba 2011), whose exodus-like arrival in Italy on the ship Vlora in 1991 has left an indelible mark on the history of migration and of racism in Italy (De Cesaris 2018, 2020); and Nigerian migrants, in particular many women, who arrived in Italy through the trade of prostitutes (Beneduce and Taliani 2016) in the 1990s. Other groups could lengthen this list. This vertical perspective tends to produce separate narratives, and one of its outcomes is that it singles out each group and its relations *with* local and national institutions rather than pointing at the interaction *among* groups, including local and national institutions. Almost inevitably, this vertical approach also separates

<sup>8</sup><http://www.centrastudies.org/>, accessed 27 August, 2021.

between citizens that have resided in the country for several generations and those whose arrival is recent, or those who are not yet citizens. Moreover, an approach based on origins or other form of identity, religion or language inherently privileges a communitarian and identitarian view of migration and discrimination. And although a history of the Roms (Roccheggiani 2014) and of the Sintis in Italy (Bravi 2009), just to mention two groups whose presence in the peninsula is historically rooted in the country's history, is enlightening under several respects, such a vertical approach rarely allows for a comparative dimension, which seems to us essential in this field.

Experiences of discrimination are also connected to other factors: to social condition, class, education, workplace and work sector, geography and urban context. Therefore, a second way through which the connection between mobility, migrations and manifestations/perceptions of racism has been researched is horizontally, by looking at various themes that cut across the different experiences of the various groups, and that concern them all, either as individuals or as a collective. As above, sociologists and ethnographers have begun to analyze some of these transformations, and one of the fields that has been extensively covered is how migrations have affected and transformed Italian towns and major cities, as the broader contexts in which interactions take place and where mutual relations are (re-)shaped (Petrillo and Tosi 2013; Fioretti 2018), in Turin (Capello and Semi 2018), Milan (Vacca and Boffi 2009; Grimaldi 2016; Saibene 2017), Genoa (Gastaldi 2013), Padua (Ostanel 2013), Rome (Amico et al. 2013), Naples (Dines 2019) and other sites.

Legislation is another broad theme that cut across national and religious groups and that has allowed for a comparative and integrated perspective (Paoli 2016, 2018; Piro 2020) that includes an Italian, European and international perspective (Salvatici 2020; Paoli 2020). Investigation into the dynamics of the job market in its multiple and manifold aspects represents yet another horizontal perspective that has been applied to conduct research across groups, in different regions and contexts of work, whether in connection to agriculture and the exploitation of agricultural labor (Colloca and Corrado 2007; Corrado and Perrotta 2012; Perrotta 2013; Rigo 2016; Chiaromonte 2018; Cortese and Palidda 2018), gender dynamics and domestic work (Scrinzi 2004), legislation, organized criminality, trade unions or blue-collar and white-collar jobs. There are numerous other themes that could be investigated across national categories: consumerism, education, gender, welfare and sport, just to mention a few.

We think that at least two more approaches should be mentioned here as fruitful research paths that have been pursued, to which historians could also participate, especially given that they entail some chronological distance: one looks at relations between generations of migrants both within each group and across groups (Cologna 2004; Piacentini 2004) or across the country. The category of second-generation migrants is very broad and, for the purposes of this brief outline, includes both children born in the receiving country from foreign parents and children who joined parents that had previously migrated to the receiving country. As such, it also includes newly formed families in which one of the partners was a migrant and their offspring, as well as the dynamics of their educational, economic, linguistic and, broadly speaking, cultural integration (Balsamo 2003; Boccagni 2011; Benedetto et al. 2007). Such a research path considers the intergenerational dynamics of the experience of discrimination and the way that second and third generation live their diversity. Sons and daughters of migrants can be seen as a mirror of the problems of a society, assuming the existence of a dominant society to which they should assimilate; they could also be considered as mirrors of two distinct processes of transformation. As Enzo Colombo (2007) has written: “on the one hand they share, at least in part, the transformations that concern the contemporary migratory phenomena; on the other, as youngsters, they share more general transformations in (...) lifestyles and in daily experiences, which are usually summarized by using the concept of globalization” (71).

Last but not least, an internal perspective to the history of migrants makes us hear—in a more direct and complex way than we could ever achieve in this volume—the voices of newly arrived migrants from various countries, their experiences, and that of the second generations, as they all help shape Italian society. These should not be understood as testimonies of migratory experiences alone (Filippini et al. 2010), but as ways to bring to light the manifold ways in which migrant groups found and built their ways in Italy, from the local press of the Chinese community of Milan (Zhang 2016) to literary production for adults (Ghermandi 2005, 2008; Piazzarossa 2011; Mengozzi 2012) and for younger readers (Luatti 2007), from local migrant associationism to the transnational horizon (Waldinger 2010) of their personal and generational perspectives and aspirations (Notarangelo 2007). Special attention should be paid to the voices of that group represented as *clandestini*, whose voices are even harder to trace (Dino 2006).

## ORGANIZATION OF THIS VOLUME

This volume contains eleven chapters that address the intersection between mobility, migration and racism in Italy from different points of view and at different historical moments, from the end of the nineteenth century to the first twenty years of the twenty-first century. The overall order of the volume is chronological; at the same time, the editors grouped together chapters that speak to each other for thematic proximity or methodological similarity.

The volume opens with an chapter by Nicola Camilleri entitled “How a Colonial Subject Became an Italian Citizen: The Life and Naturalization of Sengal Workneh Between Colonial Eritrea and Italy (1880–1929)”. Camilleri’s research is devoted to the quite exceptional history of Sengal Workneh, a colonial subject from Eritrea who received Italian citizenship through naturalization in 1919. Adding an entry from Africa to the history of European colonialism and its segregatory citizenship system, Camilleri explores the exclusionary citizenship policy of the Kingdom of Italy before and after the First World War and discusses what factors—among the many possible—was useful to Workneh to obtain citizenship. This chapter is followed by the contribution of Davide Lombardo, “Leave It to Dogs and Horses: Italy’s Constitutional Debate on *Stirpe* and *Razza*” (1946–1947), that looks at the relationship between race and institutions from a different angle, and at a successive historical moment, that is, during the debate and the drafting of the post-fascist new republican Constitution, when the question was raised whether it would be appropriate, after the experience of racist anti-Semitism, to implicitly acknowledge the existence of human races by inserting the word *razza* in the fundamental law of the country, even if only to state that no distinction should be made between them. In her “Short and Long-term consequences of the Racial Laws and the Myth of the Good Italian” Elena Mazzini moves away from matters of law, race and citizenship to focus more directly on some of the questions that the return of Italian Jews to life in post-war Italy raised. This topic is not addressed here from the point of view of retribution and/or restitution, but the author combines two other perspectives: on the one hand, she shows some of the social and cultural long-term consequences of the Racial Laws of 1938, and of the ensuing persecution, on Italian Jews; on the other, she helps debunking the “myth of the good Italian”, discussing its return in the representation of anti-Jewish persecution in post-war Italy and especially during and after the

Eichmann trial (1961). By addressing the latter question, Mazzini introduces one of the leading threads of the whole volume which returns in several other chapters that do not specifically deal with anti-Jewish persecution, but with other older, contemporary or new racisms, against migrants from sub-Saharan countries, for example, Muslim women, or the Chinese community in Italy. Mazzini's work is followed by Marcella Simoni's chapter, "When Conflict Spills Over: Identities, Memories, Politics and Representations of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict in Italy, the 1960s". Simoni investigates the manifold ways in which the Israeli-Palestinian conflict spilled over in Europe, and especially in Italy starting from the 1960s interlocking with questions of local and ethnic identity, of traumatic memories, of youth politics and, ultimately, with perceived or real anti-Semitism and Islamophobia. This decade was crucial in shaping Palestinian, Jewish and Israeli identities in oppositional terms as a result of the traumatic memories of recent collective pasts, youth politics between 1967 and 1969 and obviously of the Six Day War. This chapter shows that these issues were not of Middle Eastern concern alone, but that they carried tremendous repercussions in Europe too. The following two chapters, by Laura De Giorgi and by Anna Marsden, move away from questions of colonialism and anti-Semitism to explore the historical and current outlook on the Chinese community, whose presence in the peninsula dates back to the late nineteenth century. Both chapters look into the origins of the recent re-emergence of anti-Chinese discourses in Italy. In "Between 'Yellow' and 'Red': Stereotypes and Racial Discourses in Italian Narratives on Communist China in the 1950s", De Giorgi considers how Orientalist stereotypes and Eurocentric prejudices inherited from the colonial era continued to shape the perception of China during the early years of the Cold War across political differences through the case studies of the political magazine *Il Ponte* and the travelogues on China published by the main daily newspaper *Corriere della Sera*. While Marsden—in her "Racism in Italy and the Italian-Chinese Minority"—takes an ample perspective on the presence of Chinese nationals in Italy, from the first arrival of a few families in the late nineteenth century to the present, in which they represent the third largest non-EU ethnic minority in the country, with 300,000 individuals, one third of whom were born in Italy. This chapter discusses the emergence of an Italian-Chinese identity shaped through the interaction between Chinese descendants and Italian society vis-à-vis persistent Italian perception of Chinese as perpetual strangers. Relying on a solid



theoretical framework and on examples taken from the French and the Italian cultural and political contexts, Debora Spini addresses Islamophobia as a type of cultural racism in her chapter “Islamophobia: Gender and Racialization of Religion”, and analyzes how religion can become the target of processes of racialization. In particular, her chapter discusses Islamophobic discourses from a gender perspective. With “Africa’s Delivery Room: The Racialization of Italian Political Discourse on the 80th Anniversary of the Racial Laws”, Angelica Pesarini follows up with a gender perspective on the so-called migrant crisis of the first and second decades of the twenty-first century, with special emphasis on 2018, using the eightieth anniversary of the Racial Laws as one of the lenses through which it is possible to observe the return of a language of race, especially in the Italian general press and in public discourse, which became filled with racist and misogynistic prejudices and stereotypes, as a new right wing political leadership took office and power. Stefania Bernini, in her chapter “South of What? In search of Italy’s Others”, discusses the notion of Italy’s Southern question and asks whether the *Meridione* still represents Italy’s internal Other, notwithstanding Italy’s regional variations. In her argument, three factors have significantly transformed the narrative of the North-South duality, favoring the emergence of Italy’s new South and therefore, a new and even stronger Southern “Other” in the Southern rim of the Mediterranean. These are the growing presence of non-Italian migrants (and of African migrants in particular), the hardening of the Mediterranean border and the transformation of the Lega from a once separatist party into a nationalist/nativist force. In Bernini’s view the Mediterranean is increasingly seen as a liminal, threatening and unregulated space. This conclusion also resonates in the chapter “The Italian White Burden: Anti-Racism, Paternalism and Sexism in the Italian Public Discourse” by Gaia Giuliani and Carla Panico. These two authors discuss iconographies of race and whiteness in Italy in mainstream media and political discourses through an analysis of the Italian white imaginary of disembarkation in the Mediterranean. Their contribution focuses on both securitarian and hegemonic humanitarian narratives, paying particular attention to Carola Rackete, the captain of the NGO *Sea-Watch 3*, who, in 2019, violated the ban imposed to Italian ports and landed forty-two migrants. Finally, we conclude this journey with a literary, personal and (broadly speaking) political reflection by Suzanne M. Menghraj, “Double-Sided Sleights of Hand: Race in the Mirror”, who makes us reflect on the

presence of questions of race and racism in well-known pieces of literature and two very famous Italian films of the 1950s and 1960s. And while, from a chronological point of view, this piece could have been placed earlier in the volume, the editors have decided to place it last in lieu of conclusions, for it uses forms of artistic expression and different literary languages (humor and absurdism) to go where history and politics do not seem able to, revealing the idea of race as a costume “that alienates people from themselves as surely as it alienates them from each other and that hides the truth of shared histories, biology, and humanity.”

**Acknowledgements** We would like to thank first and foremost the leadership and staff at NYU Florence that provided support for the conference that originated this project. In particular, we would like to express our gratitude to Ellyn Toscano who, as director, promoted the conference as part of the program “La Pietra Policy Dialogues”, a multi-year series of events and initiatives that reflected on the intersection between politics, race, place, art and education. We owe a debt of gratitude also to Lisa Cesarani, Cristina Bellini, Stefania Bacci, Lucia Ferroni, Marija Mihajlovic, Megan Metters, Elisabetta Clementi, Barbara Bonciani, Fernando Chaminda, Alexa Farah, Concetta Chiarabino and all the wonderful staff at NYU Florence.

We had the privilege of working with wonderful and very patient colleagues for the realization of this project, and we thank them for their patience and availability, as we have been piecing this puzzle together. We also thank our friends and colleagues who read this manuscript, or parts of it: Yesenia Pumarada Cruz, Ruth Franch De Llobet, Arturo Marzano and Marianna Scherini. It goes without saying that any mistake is entirely our own. Many friends, too many to be listed here, have supported us and provided a listening ear during the development of this project. Among them, we would like to thank in particular Alessandra Capodacqua, Raffaella A. Del Sarto and Enrico Conti. Last but not least, we would like express our deep love and gratitude to our respective extended families for their love and patience, notwithstanding the time we took away from them: Makar and Federico Damonte, Liana E. Funaro and Shiba.

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