



Silvana Patriarca

Marginal Subjects: Racism and Anti-racism in Post-fascist Italy
June 4

This year's Sanremo festival may be remembered not only for its winning song that alludes to gay love - and is sung by two male singers, one of whom of mixed-race background - but also for the stirring speech of actress Lorena Cesarini, a mixed-raced Italian who denounced the racist hate mail she received after being announced as co-host of the second day of the show. Drawing on this episode and recent research on racism in post-fascist Italy, I will reflect on the historical roots of Italians' still dominant - albeit contested - self-perception as a white people, a conception that is a major obstacle to the full inclusion of the growing number of non-white citizens.

After the fall of fascism, the Constitution of the democratic Republic explicitly banned discrimination on the basis of sex, religion, nationality, and race. Yet, well-rooted perceptions of racial difference persisted in society. The stories of the biracial children born at the end of WWII from the encounter between white Italian women and non-white Allied soldiers clearly show this persistence, as do the vicissitudes of the children of Italian men and African women in the former colonies.

These children were another group of Italians placed on the margins of the nation and in fact symbolically expelled from it. Until recently, they were also neglected by historians. This neglect requires interrogating post-1945 Italian historiography and its role in constructing a partial and selective memory of its recent past. It also requires interrogating dominant conceptions of racism as well as anti-racist sensibilities in the long postwar, from 1945 to the 1960s.

[Silvana Patriarca](#) has taught at [Columbia University](#) and the [University of Florida at Gainesville](#) and is currently professor of history at [Fordham University](#). She specializes in the social and cultural history of modern Italy, and particularly in the history of nationalism and the construction of national identities. She is the author of [Numbers and Nationhood: Writing Statistics in Nineteenth-Century Italy](#), and of [Italian Vices. Nation and Character from the Risorgimento to the Republic](#) (both published by Cambridge University Press and translated into Italian). She has co-edited with Lucy Riall [The Risorgimento Revisited: Nationalism and Culture in Nineteenth-Century Italy](#) (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012) and is the co-editor with Valeria Deplano of a special issue of the journal *Modern Italy* devoted to "Nation, 'Race', and Racisms in Twentieth-Century Italy" (2018). Her new book [Il colore della Repubblica: "Figli della guerra" e razzismo nell'Italia postfascista](#) was published by Einaudi in 2021. The English edition entitled [Race in Postfascist Italy: "War Children" and the Color of the Nation](#) is due to appear with Cambridge UP in March 2022.



Roberto Dainotto

Of Qanon Shamans and other Right-Wing Insurrections: Antonio Gramsci's
'Historiography of Subaltern Social Groups' in the 21st Century
June 2

"To a social elite," writes Gramsci in the incipit of Notebook 25 — "subaltern groups always have something barbaric or pathological about them." It would be easy to come up with examples from the liberal press depicting leaders of contemporary right-wing movements as "barbaric" and their followers as "pathological." But what are the limits — both practical and theoretical — of these "elitist" and dismissive understandings of contemporary subaltern "subversiveness"? And what can the concept of "passive revolution" tell us about the present moment characterized by an increasing number of revolutions from the right?

[Roberto Dainotto](#) is Professor of Literature, Italian and International Comparative Studies at [Duke University](#). He has been Professeur invité at the [Université Paris Ouest](#), and Fellow at the [Stellenbosch Institute for Advanced Studies](#) in South Africa. His main research and teaching interests hinge on the concepts of place and space as narrative, rhetorical, and geopolitical organizational categories. His publications include *[Place in Literature: Regions, Cultures, Communities](#)* (Cornell UP, 2000); *[Europe \(in Theory\)](#)* (Duke UP, 2007), winner of the 2010 Shannon Prize in Contemporary European Studies; and *[Mafia: A Cultural History](#)* (Reaktion Books, 2015). He has also edited *[Racconti Americani del '900](#)* (Einaudi, 1999), a monographic issue of [Italian Culture on Giambattista Vico](#) (2017), and co-edited with Fredric Jameson *[Gramsci in the World](#)* (Duke UP, 2020).



Luca Cottini

The Pursuit of Distinction. The Italian Way to Innovation
June 5

What elements define Italy's success in the premium niche of industry (fashion, design, automobiles, yachts, etc.)? Of what does Italian "excellence" consist? In this presentation, Luca Cottini explores the cultural and historical construction of Italy's industrial distinction and investigates three defining features of the Italian approach to product manufacture: the impact of limit on creativity, the idea of design as a form of storytelling, and the fusion of multiple languages, arts, and heritages.

[Luca Cottini](#) is Associate Professor of Italian Studies at Villanova University, and host/creator of the [Italian Innovators](#) YouTube project. He holds a PhD from [Harvard University](#), a MA from the [University of Notre Dame](#), and a BA from the [University of Milan](#). He was trained as both a classical philologist in Italy, and a cultural historian in the US. His interests touch upon Italian literature, visual arts, and intellectual history from the 17th to the 20th centuries, as well as on the history of Italian industrial culture, advertising, and design. His books include a monograph on Calvino ([I passaggi obbligati di Italo Calvino](#), Longo 2017) and a cultural history of the origins of Italian design ([The Art of Objects. The Birth of Italian Industrial Culture](#), 1878-1928). His YouTube work explores the Italian model of entrepreneurship and innovation through cultural profiles, interviews, and lessons across different disciplines (fashion, food, technology, sports, music, engineering).



Ruth Ben-Ghiat

Italy: Laboratory of Political Modernity

June 3

My talk will argue for the relevance of Italy as a laboratory of political movements that have repeatedly changed the political landscape. I will cover 3 periods: Fascism, Berlusconi's center-right coalitions and the mainstreaming of neo-Fascism (1994, 2000s), and M5's populism. I will highlight the importance of correcting the historical record to show how relevant and innovatory Italy has been (Mussolini's influence on Hitler as an example).

[Ruth Ben-Ghiat](#) is a historian and commentator on authoritarianism and propaganda. She is Professor of History and Italian Studies at [New York University](#), the recipient of [Guggenheim](#), [Fulbright](#), and other fellowships, and Advisor to [Protect Democracy](#). She is an [MSNBC columnist](#) and a regular contributor to *CNN*, *The Washington Post* and other media outlets. She publishes [Lucid](#), a newsletter on threats to democracy. Her latest book, [Strongmen: Mussolini to the Present](#) (2020, paperback with new epilogue on Jan. 6, 2021), looks at how illiberal leaders use propaganda, corruption, violence, and machismo - and how they can be defeated.