INTRODUCTION

Vital Subjects

Italy is a country on the frontier, not only in a geographic sense, but also culturally, between different worlds, between Europe and the Mediterranean, between North and South [...]. Italy is traversed but also in a certain sense constituted by this fracture.

Roberto Esposito (Campbell, “Interview with Roberto Esposito” 49)

In December 1887, Italian Prime Minister Francesco Crispi introduced unified Italy’s first legislation on emigration with the following words:

The Government cannot remain an indifferent or passive spectator to the destinies of [emigrants]. It must know exactly where they are going and what awaits them; it must accompany them with a vigilant and loving eye...it must never lose sight of them in their new home [...] to turn to
its advantage the fruits of their labor. Colonies must be like arms, which the country extends far away in foreign districts to bring them within the orbit of its relations of labor and exchange; they must be like an enlargement of the boundaries of its action and its economic power. (Atti Parlamentari, 2a sessione AC 85)

Crispi was referring to what had become one of the central questions for policymakers after Italian unification: how to address the fact that millions of hard-working and newly nationalized Italians were leaving Italy, more and more often permanently, in search of better fortune in Europe and, in ever-increasing numbers, across the Atlantic (Fiore 71–82). In this period, colonies were considered both the “spontaneous” settlements of emigrants abroad and the planned settlements in East Africa for which, as early as 1887, Italians had been sent to fight in deadly battles.¹

In describing the state's role in the regulation of emigration, Crispi stages a convergence between two modes of government. In the first of these two modes, government is a disciplinary agent, whose surveying (and “loving”) eye is armed with knowledge and aimed at individual emigrant bodies. In the second, the aim of government shifts to include individuals as elements of a national population, whose borders and numbers must expand, enveloping new territories and reproducing itself, in order to survive. This second mode of government, known as biopolitics, was, in 1887, yet to be named as such, though European nation-states had long been operating under similar imperatives. It was not until the publication of The State as a Living Organism (Staten som Lifsform) in 1916 that the Swedish political scientist Rudolph Kjellén would draw from his earlier work on geopolitics in order to name “biopolitics” the role of the national population in the security of the state.²

If geopolitics concerned the construction of the state through territory, biopolitics concerned its grounding in “the people.” Kjellén writes: “One cannot divorce land from the state without the state as a concept losing its

¹ For more on “spontaneous” colonies in the Americas and Crispi’s demographic colonies, see: Choate, “From Territorial to Ethnographic Colonies and Back Again” 65–75.
² On Kjellén’s coining of biopolitics, see: Roberto Esposito’s discussion of Kjellén’s Stormakterna: Konturer kring samtidens storpoltik (1905) in Esposito, Bios. Biopolitics and Philosophy 17. Kjellén also coined “geopolitics” as a politics that addresses a moment when “the great powers, vigorous states, endowed with a limited territory, discover the need for extending their borders through the conquest, fusion, and colonization of other lands.” Kjellén’s Staten som Lifsform has not, to my knowledge, yet been translated into English.
meaning, and the people leaving the land kills the state.”3 The state—as both territory and people—was thus itself an organic, and mortal, entity.

Prime Minister Crispi looked to African colonization (according to some accounts, Eritrea, Italy’s first official African colony, was named by him in 1890) to resolve the fragmentation of laboring Italian bodies by implanting them on the—as yet missing—limbs of the colonial nation-state (“colonies must be like arms”). Crucially, these laboring bodies were themselves figured as little more than “arms.” Agricultural laborers were named braccianti for the only tool they possessed, their braccia (arms). As Kjellén would put it, “like man, the state may lose a limb without perishing, but ‘there are [other limbs] without which the state could not survive’” (Tunander 453). In Crispi’s formulation, the passage from individual to member of a national population occurs through labor: the collective “fruits” of individual laboring Italian bodies were to nourish the newborn nation-state. “The population” is thus born, so to speak, through labor. This rhetorical link between primarily agricultural labor productivity and biological reproductivity was not limited to debates about turn-of-the-century Italian colonialism and emigration. Instead, it represents a larger current in post-Unification racial discourse and constitutes the basis for a variety of questions that this book sets out to examine.4

Since World War II, Italy has struggled to recast both its colonial past and its alliance with Nazi Germany. For many years, pervading much intellectual and public discourse was the contention that, prior to the great influx of racialized migrants in the mid-1980s, and with the exception of the fascist “parenthesis,” there simply was no race (racialized others, racist intolerance, etc.) in Italy. This book examines a selection of social scientific, political, literary, and cinematic texts from the years between Unification and the end of the World War I (c.1860 to 1920) in order to explore how race underpinned the discursive constitution of Italians as modern political subjects—a process often referred to as “making Italians,” to quote Massimo D’Azeglio’s

3 For an account in English of Kjellén’s Staten som Lifsform, see Tunander. I cite her translation of Kjellén (457), though what Esposito translates as “biopolitics” Tunander translates as “ethnopolitics.” Tunander is careful to rebuke post-World-War-II readings of Kjellén as a racist or a proto-Nazi (451).

ubiquitous but misquoted shorthand. As a growing number of scholars are asking what the turn of the twentieth century in Italy can demonstrate about modernity and nation formation, this book contributes a reading of how race was integral to these processes, and not merely a marginal afterthought (Choate, *Emigrant Nation*; Gambarota; Stewart-Steinberg). To that end, anthropologist Miguel Mellino has recently argued:

Taking as a necessary (postcolonial) starting point the underlying coloniality of [...] national formations [and] their necessary material inscription within the coloniality of modern global capitalist power means arguing that race, racism, and racialization have fractured the Italian space ever since the birth of the nation. (87)

Unlike scholars who have addressed race in this period through analytics of otherness, the stereotype, or the binary logic of inferiority/superiority, I read Italian formulations of race in a “vital” key, as I argue instead that a major point of articulation for Italian racial discourse is at the intersection of primarily agricultural labor productivity and biological reproduction. The present study thereby heeds Mellino’s call to “de-provincialize” Italy by helping to “cast the shadow of race and racialization over the very act of foundation of the modern Italian nation” (88). Four case studies—on liberal statesman Leopoldo Franchetti’s (1847–1917) proto-sociological writings on the southern question and early colonialism, and his later pedagogical project at the Villa Montesca; Italy’s first anthropologist Paolo Mantegazza’s (1831–1910) moral-scientific treatises and novels; poet, novelist, and political provocateur Gabriele D’Annunzio’s (1863–1938) decadent novels and speeches at Fiume; and early cinema pioneer Giovanni Pastrone’s (1883–1959) imperialist epic *Cabiria*—allow me to focus on how

5 In English, “We have made Italy, now we need to make Italians.” D’Azeglio’s dictum has become what Suzanne Stewart-Steinberg in *The Pinocchio Effect: On Making Italians (1860–1920)* refers to as an “almost mythic cliché” (1). The full statement (which appears to have been added by an editor as it does not appear in D’Azeglio’s manuscript) in Italian reads, “Pur troppo, si è fatta l’Italia, ma non si fanno gl’Italiani” (D’Azeglio and Ghisalberti 5). For comparison, see: D’Azeglio, *I miei ricordi* 3. For a publication history of the dictum in question, see Hom 4–7.

6 Mellino refigures Dipesh Chakrabarty’s charge to provincialize Europe by suggesting we de-provincialize Italy by revaluing its role in the promulgation of capitalist modernity wherein both European-Christian humanist culture and race were necessary to the spread of colonial capitalism.
distinct configurations of the rhetorical constellation of race and (re)productivity shaped post-Unification racial discourse, producing Italians as vital subjects. The readings of post-Unification cultural production that follow are also bound by their historical positioning vis-à-vis the convergence of the three most pressing post-Unification political anxieties about the (re)production and fragmentation of the Italian nation-state: the so-called southern question; mass emigration to the Americas; and early colonialism in the Horn of Africa and Libya. If the readings that follow are anchored in a particular time and place (Italy and its “missing limbs” between Unification and the end of World War I), on the other hand, they also interrogate both implicitly and explicitly some of the contemporary legacies and limitations of post-World-War-II anti-racism.

**The Deputy, the Doctor, the Decadent and the Director**

In the years between Unification and World War I, Italian racial discourse consistently transgressed disciplinary boundaries, shuttling across journalistic, literary, (social) scientific, and photographic media. This book deliberately engages texts produced across these fields in order to examine the pervasiveness of the biopolitical dimension of Italian racial discourse. As Lucia Re has argued with regard to Italian racial discourse and its literary intertexts in these years:

There was effectively no border, no substantial difference between literary and scientific discourse, between fiction and poetry on one side and empirical reality and objective observation and description on the other. From the very start, the discourse of the human and social sciences and of positivist anthropology was saturated with fantasy; it absorbed
and recycled literary images, literary devices, and fictional devices [...].
(“Italians and the Invention of Race” 18)

Similarly, Maria Sophia Quine has claimed that the historiography of the Risorgimento often depicts the “making” of the Italian nation-state as an exclusively aesthetic activity—confined to monuments, poetry, opera, and painting. Quine argues that social science should be “placed alongside the arts in a pantheon of patriotism,” given that the founders of Italian anthropology (she names Giustiniano Nicolucci, Paolo Mantegazza, and Giuseppe Sergi) “all produced ‘great’ works of fantasy, ‘fact’ and ‘fiction’ about the nation” (151–152).

Each thinker explored in the coming chapters was a pioneer in some form of cultural production—sociological reportage, visual anthropology, public hygiene treatise, the bourgeois novel, or popular cinema—in post-Unification Italy, aimed at making bodies, be they laboring, sexualized, and/or racialized, legible. Each transgressed conventional generic or disciplinary boundaries, between science and art, or between art and politics, for example, in explicitly political projects that may be considered, at worst, flagrant propaganda and, at best, part of the patriotic guiding (or governing, in the Foucauldian sense) of national subjects. Franchetti was an influential career statesman dedicated to the agricultural education of the masses whose writings helped to bring the so-called southern question and “demographic” colonialism into the halls of Parliament. Mantegazza was a physiologist by training, who, after traveling the world armed with both monocle and notebook, became Italy’s first chair of anthropology and went on to write countless popular treatises and romance novels on moral and physiological hygiene that enjoyed multiple translations and transnational circulation. D’Annunzio achieved international fame and infamy over the course of his literary and political career, publishing numerous volumes of critically acclaimed poetry, plays, and prose. Before his condemnation by postwar critics who found in his work the seeds of Mussolinian rhetoric and

7 In addition, three of the figures considered—Franchetti, Mantegazza, and D’Annunzio—served in the Italian Parliament during the period under consideration. The terms of each in public office overlapped: Mantegazza served as a parliamentary deputy (for Monza) from 1865 until 1876 and as a senator from 1876 until 1910. Franchetti served as a deputy (for Città di Castello) from 1882 until 1905 and was elected senator in 1909. D’Annunzio was elected a deputy (for Ortona del Mare) in 1897 and in 1900 made his famously theatrical transition from the right majority to the left; after suffering electoral defeat in that same year, he left public office.
Introduction

politics, D’Annunzio was celebrated in Italy for his unprecedented literary modernity. Pastrone first gained fame on a world stage with his colossal early film *Cabiria* (1914), which is credited with groundbreaking techniques such as the *carrellata* (or tracking shot, which was for years referred to in the U.S. as the "*Cabiria* shot"). More importantly, each of the works discussed here—from fiction to ostensibly non-fiction and film—stages the encounter between race and (re)productivity through a rhetoric of defense from collective contagion and degradation. This immunizing rhetoric was operative during this period in large part because it responded to a particular set of biopolitical anxieties about the implications of mass emigration and the potential presented by colonial acquisition. Chapter One of this volume discusses “Colonial (Re)productivity.” At stake for Franchetti is the stability (read racial integrity) of the liberal-democratic state, threatened from within by the destitution of primarily southern farmers who stand to become agriculturally productive and sexually reproductive in lands, particularly the Americas, that fall outside Italy’s juridical and ideological domain. Crucial to Franchetti’s scheme to resolve the southern question through the “demographic” colonization of Eritrea is the management of Italian peasant bodies, in terms of their territorial positioning (laboring bodies are rerouted to the Eritrean colony), daily alimentary intake, and biological and labor output.

The chapter discusses Franchetti’s founding of an internationally renowned teacher training institute and school for peasants at the Villa Montesca in 1901 together with his earlier projects in southern Italy and Eritrea in order to illustrate the breadth of his colonial biopolitics as a means of making Italians.

In Chapter Two, “Immunitary Technologies,” Paolo Mantegazza is haunted by the degenerate and diseased newborn, from his earlier, non-reproductive novel *Un giorno a Madera* (A Day in Madeira, 1868) to his later science-fiction

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8 Pastrone was also responsible for carving out a new role for the director-producer in an early Italian film industry that was gaining increasing recognition (during its "golden years" between 1908 and World War I) for its innovations in both production and publicity (Alvosio, “The ‘Pastrone System’”).

9 Franchetti’s work does not attempt to provide a thorough account of colonial reproductive politics, though the Eritrean memoir of military wife Rosalia Pianavia Vivaldi published in 1901 addresses the abandoned children of unions between “white” colonials and “blacks” in a chapter curiously entitled “My Children.” For a reading of the maternal rhetoric of Pianavia Vivaldi’s text, see Lombardi-Diop, “Madre della nazione.” For historical accounts of reproduction among Italians and Eritreans, see: Barrera, “Colonial Affairs”; Sòrgoni, *Parole e corpi*. 
novel about regulating reproduction, *L'Anno 3000* (The Year 3000, 1897). The first novel blocks the reproductive union of a tuberculoid Emma and her beloved William because of the threat posed to Emma’s offspring by her hereditary illness. The later text explores the possibility of the birth of such a being, resolving the threat it poses to the body politic through an immunizing death sentence. In *L'Anno 3000*, material technologies of racial visualization (an x-ray aimed at rendering skin “as transparent as glass,” a psychoscope that makes cerebral defects legible, and an incinerator into which biologically unfit newborns are tossed) are firmly rooted in fin-de-siècle fantasies about preserving the race, which is figured in this novel as emblazoned simultaneously upon and beneath the skin. Mantegazza’s use of technologies of racial visualization in *L'Anno 3000* can best be understood in relation to his pioneering contribution to the field of visual anthropology through the use of photography in ethnographic research.

The third chapter, “Mutilated Limbs,” draws from a selection of works across Gabriele D’Annunzio’s vast production in order to show how his deployment of blood shifts from his early “decadent” novels—the Romanzi della rosa trilogy, made up of *Il Piacere*, *L’Innocente*, and *Trionfo della morte* and published between 1889 and 1894—to his writings and speeches at Fiume (1919–1921). If in this first set of texts blood is confined to (tainted) genealogy, at Fiume the defense of the bio-territorial patria is enacted through the shedding of sacralized blood. Central to D’Annunzio’s earlier novels is the thwarted heredity (both retrospective and prospective) of his protagonists: the bodies of each of his male protagonists are therefore emphatically not reproductive. Instead, two of his protagonists destroy life, one through murder and the other through infanticide. At Fiume, blood is shed by mutilated soldier-patriots in order to restore a specifically racialized Italian primacy in the Adriatic. Furthermore, a dismembered body is mobilized in Fiuman rhetoric to mirror and remedy the fractured territorial gains of Italy’s “vittoria mutilata” (mutilated victory) in World War I.

How do these biopolitical logics of racialization migrate into the visual language of early cinema? Chapter Four, “Biopolitics and Colonial Drive,” returns to the colonial frontier and to the question of visual technologies of racialization by way of Italy’s first international blockbuster film *Cabiria*, which was produced to garner support for the Italian invasion of Libya (1911–1912). Yet the ambiguous racialization of the film’s protagonist, Maciste, whose

10 In English, the Romanzi della rosa are titled: The Child of Pleasure, The Victim, and The Triumph of Death.
skin was visibly darkened for his role as the slave-hero, fails to conform to what one might anticipate from an imperialist epic (logics of absolute racial difference, inferiority, or otherness). Instead, in Maciste’s artificial darkening I read a biopolitical racial logic, one that is haunted by Italian histories of “proletarian” emigration to the Americas (a term canonized by poet Giovanni Pascoli in his famed 1911 address La grande proletaria si è mossa (The Great Proletarian, She Has Risen!)). This biopolitical reading of Maciste’s racialization rests on the fact that the film posits a territorial loss (former Roman territories in Mediterranean Africa) alongside a corporeal one (the loss of a noble Roman girl to Carthaginian hands) in order to present colonial war as paradoxically productive, or life-affirming.

Vital Subjects asks how the contours of Italian modernity were sketched in positive biopolitical terms that focused on productivity, vitality, and preservation. These terms, including but not limited to race, stock, and people, are imbued with an immunitary logic that folds in upon itself as it forecasts the eugenic “removal” and/or “suppression” of other, threatening forms of life. Significantly, these other forms of life are not necessarily members of an apparently external collectivity (the colonized populations of Eritrea or Libya come to mind as examples), but instead members of the however tenuously defined Italian community that such terms (race, stock, people) attempted to solder together in the first place. In the texts under consideration, these terms are rooted most deeply not in Rome, nor
in the *Risorgimento* hotbed of Piedmont, but in the lands that constitute the “missing limbs” of the territorial *patria*: Eritrea, Fiume, Libya, and beyond.\footnote{Italian irredentism (*irredentismo*) is a literary and political movement that emerged in the late eighteenth century and promoted Italy’s wresting of the “unredeemed territories” from Napoleonic and Austro-Hungarian rule, in Piedmont, Liguria, and Tuscany and Trentino, Trieste, Istria, and Dalmatia, respectively. Irredentism is widely accepted as having prompted Italy’s entrance into World War I. Its most famous post-World-War-I champion was Gabriele D’Annunzio. See Chapter Three of the present study.} For Franchetti, landless southern peasants who were denied political and economic sustenance in Italy were to find it in Eritrea; their implantation on Eritrean soil would also enable them to emerge from their marginalization to become “true” representatives of the *razza italiana* (Italian race). The implications of such claims are much more nuanced and far-reaching than can be explained with recourse to dismissive categorization as “racist” or “pseudo-scientific.” The tenor of the post-Unification racial discourse under consideration was overwhelmingly positive, focusing on making Italians *vital subjects*—robust, vigorous, well-nourished, and (re)productive. Paradoxically, it was articulated through figures of racial degeneracy and corporeal mutilation that reflected specific anxieties: fears of famine, depopulation, political and economic impotence, and territorial dispossession can be detected between the lines of bombastic prose in praise of Italy’s post-Unification population.

**Biopolitical and Postcolonial Trajectories of Modernity**

Early colonialism, aviation, mass political spectacle, public hygiene, science fiction, and cinema—these are the loci of Italian modernity that *Vital Subjects* traverses. If these are some of the fields in which a kind of self-conscious Italian modernity was articulated in this period, modernity is also inscribed in the two theoretical pillars that anchor the present study: the postcolonial and the biopolitical. In the first case, a postcolonial critique necessarily relocates Italian colonialism with regard to modern Italian nation building, shifting it from a marginal or epiphenomenal position to a more central, indeed constitutive, one. For Mellino, it is impossible to understand what was often cast as a triumphant Italian ascent toward capitalist modernity from the post-Unification period on without taking into consideration “[Italy’s] underlying coloniality [and] its intrinsic racialization processes and racialized...
systems of domination” (87). This book therefore opens with a chapter on making Italians *vital subjects* through colonial technologies of power-knowledge, and concludes with a chapter on a film produced in celebration of liberal Italy’s last attempt at colonial conquest, the invasion of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica (Libya) that began in October 1911. Indeed, part of what lends Italian racial discourse its specificity vis-à-vis other European traditions is the temporal and rhetorical proximity of its (belated) “birth” as a modern capitalist nation-state, the apex of positivist and formulations of biological race most memorably articulated by Alfredo Niceforo, Giuseppe Sergi, and Cesare Lombroso, and the height of Europe’s so-called scramble for Africa.¹²

In the second case, biopolitics marks the transition from earlier forms of political subjectification to the making of the modern, or postliberal, political subject. For Suzanne Stewart-Steinberg, the figure of Collodi’s Pinocchio is emblematic of the fact that post-Unification Italy was the locus of a modern rethinking of the national subject (and one that anticipated later theories of ideology by influential theorists such as Louis Althusser, Judith Butler, and Slavoj Žižek) insofar as the discourse around “making Italians” was profoundly aware of the performativity or fictionality of political subjectification (5–6). If biopolitics gives us a way of thinking about the modernity of the Italian political subject in this period, the goal of the following pages is to illustrate how it also offers us a productive hermeneutic alternative to the prevailing paradigm of anti-racism that has characterized most understandings of racial discourse in Italy since World War II.

The turn-of-the-twentieth-century Italian racial discourse that I explore in the coming pages is overwhelmingly preoccupied with the (re)productivity of life. Biopolitics names this a constitutively modern moment, when protecting and enhancing the life of a national population becomes the primary object of governmental calculation and political action. While the term biopolitics was coined in 1919 by Rudolf Kjellén, it wasn’t until the mid-1970s when Michel Foucault would shed new light on it by tracing its emergence in the eighteenth century (and thus prior to Kjellén’s naming

¹² Caterina Miele makes a similar case in her call for an archeology of racist discourse in Italy that takes into account the cultural specificity of Italy. Miele describes Italy’s specificity with regard to racial discourse by identifying the importance of three critical features of Italian racial discourse: the contiguity of emigration and colonialism; the simultaneity of national unification with the height of positivist and biologist notions of race; and anti-southern racism as the necessary counterpoint to discourses of Italian modernity.
of it) through what Foucault figured as the apex of biopolitical thought in Nazi Germany. First and foremost in Foucault’s seminal theorization of biopolitics was rejecting “life” as a taken-for-granted, natural category or presupposition and insisting instead upon its coming into being as a modern “problem,” as a political question in itself that deserved consideration. Foucault understood biopolitics as a distinctively modern break with earlier forms of sovereign power through the emergence of what he termed “governmentality,” or “the conduct of conduct.” As Foucault explains, “Power is less a confrontation between two adversaries […] than a question of ‘government’ [that] did not refer only to political structures or to the management of states; rather it designated the way in which the conduct of individuals or groups might be directed.” Whereas sovereign power followed a “deductive” logic in its effort to protect and maintain the juridical existence of the sovereign ruler, biopolitics and governmentality constitute a rethinking of modern power in terms of the productivity of the population (Foucault, The History of Sexuality 136). If sovereign power rested on the ability of the sovereign to take the lives of its subjects, governmentality and biopolitics are characterized instead by guiding and augmenting the (re) productive lives of subjects.

Foucault’s insights proved enduring and provocative, as they have been taken up over the past several decades by notable Italian political philosophers such as Giorgio Agamben, Roberto Esposito, Antonio Negri (writing

13 Michel Foucault’s theorizations of biopower and biopolitics occur across a number of his published works and lectures from the mid-1970s. See, in this order: Foucault, The History of Sexuality Volume 1 142–143; Foucault, Society Must Be Defended; Foucault, Security, Territory, Population; Foucault, The Birth of Biopolitics.

14 Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” in Rabinow and Rose, 126–144 and Foucault, “Governmentality,” in Rabinow and Rose 229–245. The “Governmentality” lecture was delivered during Foucault’s 1978 course at the Collège de France, which was published in English as Security, Territory, Population. In the midst of one of these lectures, Foucault remarked: “[I]f I had wanted to give the lectures I am giving this year a more exact title, I certainly would not have chosen ‘security, territory, population.’ What I would really like to undertake is something that I would call a history of ‘governmentality’” (Foucault, Security, Territory, Population 108).

15 As Mitchell Dean explains, “The emergence of a form of rule that is distinct from sovereignty [governmentality] is also a rule over things but one that seeks to foster them, to increase the means of subsistence, to augment the wealth, strength and greatness of the state, to increase the happiness and prosperity of its inhabitants, and to multiply their numbers” (105).
with Michael Hardt), and Paolo Virno. What Foucault highlighted, and what these subsequent theorists of biopolitics have illustrated in a number of re-readings ranging from revolutionary to tragic, is that, in order to defend the life of some, others must be deemed threatening and must therefore die. Indeed, in distinguishing this new form of power from the earlier sovereign right to “Take life and let live,” Foucault famously distilled biopolitics to the edict, “Make live and let die.” Most relevant for the present study is Roberto Esposito’s theorization of the immunitary paradigm, which he has developed over the course of three works, *Communitas* (1998), *Immunitas* (2002), and *Bíos* (2004). Esposito identifies an immunitary logic at the heart of modern political categories, which accounts for biopolitics as paradoxically both “the protection and the negation of life,” or, alternatively, the paradox that, “protection is the negation of life” (Campbell, “Interview with Roberto Esposito” 50). Esposito draws from biomedical and juridical language in order to tease out how immunity, as biomedical protection from contagion and juridical exemption from law has, over time, come to extend to “all those other sectors and languages of our life, until it becomes the coagulating point, both real and symbolic, of [all] contemporary experience” (51). Tracing an immunitary paradigm through its earliest expressions in the Hobbesian imperative of *conservatio vitae*, through the Hegelian dialectic and its fullest elaboration in Nietzsche, Esposito illustrates how immunity both undergirds and compromises community. Immunity is what guarantees the protection of a community, yet that protection, when carried to a certain point, risks perilously insulating life from both individual and collective existence: “what safeguards the individual and political body is also what impedes its development, and beyond a certain point risks destroying it” (51). As Timothy Campbell explains, Esposito argues that “the modern subject who enjoys civil and political rights is itself an attempt to attain immunity from the contagion of the possibility of community. Such an attempt to immunize the individual from what is common ends up putting at risk the community as immunity turns upon itself and its constituent element” (Esposito, *Bíos. Biopolitics and Philosophy* xi). This, for Esposito, is the constitutive moment of modernity. Esposito thus advances Foucault’s reflections on the passage from sovereignty to governmentality as the linchpin of modernity by suggesting that both are

steeped in an immunitary logic that necessitates both self-preservation and self-negation (xii).

**Labor and Biological (Re)productivity**

A few notes on Marx’s seminal analysis of labor and (re)production will bolster this discussion of Foucauldian biopolitics and Esposito’s immunitary reading of it, and offer some crucial theoretical distinctions toward an analysis of how biopolitical rhetorics of (re)productivity shaped Italian racial discourse in the post-Unification period. The “making” of Italians as *vital subjects* by Franchetti, Mantegazza, D’Annunzio and Pastrone relies upon rhetorics of (agricultural) labor productivity and biological reproduction that sometimes overlap; these terms pertain unequivocally to the terrain of biopolitics, given that the (re)productivity of bodies conceived of as elements of a population is one of its constituent concerns. Though Marx posited labor as the basis of human and societal existence, he famously dedicated little space to the material processes of biological reproduction that create the conditions for such existence and for the system of capitalist production upon which it depends. Marx’s shortcomings in this regard were themselves subsequently “reproductive,” as they sparked an influential wave of Marxist feminist thought, which aimed to redress such critical lacunae in Marx’s analysis of capital.17 In his genealogy of late twentieth-century biopolitics in Italy, Andrea Righi positions the theoretical work of the post-1968 neo-feminist organization *Lotta Femminista*, or the Wages for Housework Movement, as a critical intervention, as it sought to include the non-waged labor of housewives and question the concept of female emancipation through work (58). Furthermore, *Lotta Femminista* repositioned human or biological reproduction vis-à-vis capitalist production, inverting the terms that made the former a mere auxiliary of the latter. Each of the terms of interest here (labor and [re]production) contains a complex dual and even tripartite structure; as such, Marx’s dialectical argumentation requires some patient elucidation.

Marx memorably begins *Capital* with the commodity, “an external object, a thing which through its qualities satisfies human needs of whatever kind” (125). The commodity, from boot polish and buttons to silk and gold, is a product of human labor and a material manifestation of use-value,

17 For a survey of these arguments, see: Hearn; Himmelweit.
Introduction

exchange-value, and value. The dialectical relationship between a commodity’s usefulness to oneself and others, its value as a unit of exchange, and the labor time necessary to produce it leads, following Marx’s quasi-Hegelian mode of argumentation, to a duality in his definition of labor. If value is socially necessary labor time (or the “[average] labor time necessary to produce [commodities] under given conditions of labor productivity,” as Harvey (25) explains), Marx identifies two kinds of labor embodied in the commodity as a unit of exchange: concrete labor (heterogeneous, from mining to weaving, etc.) and abstract labor (homogeneous, all products of labor considered in general). Like the commodity, which embodies multiple types of value, labor contains both concrete and abstract forms (the latter is itself synonymous with value, as socially necessary labor time). This discussion of the social relations of labor concealed by the “mysterious” commodity form will bring Marx to his groundbreaking analysis of commodity fetishism, which will become pertinent later on in the discussion. For now, one more note on the relationship between the commodity and the labor required to produce it. To discuss the way in which the capitalist searches for a commodity whose use-value is itself a source of value, Marx introduces another, third term: labor-power (270). Labor-power, defined as the aggregate physical, mental, and human capacity for labor, is thus exchanged as a commodity, as the sole commodity that the laborer owns (this is naturally the case only where laborers are ‘free,’ rather than enslaved). The laborer may sell this commodity to the capitalist, who in turn becomes the owner not of the laborer himself (as in slavery), but of his capacity to produce. But the laborer, a living being, must himself be sustained, indeed reproduced, in order for the value of labor-power to remain constant. “[A] definite quantity of human muscle, nerve, brain etc. is expended, and these things have to be replaced” (274). Enter again the value of all of those other commodities that replace these expended energies of the laboring body: food, clothing, fuel, housing, and so on (275). In this discussion of labor-power, then, one notes the passage from the realm of the capitalist production of commodities (including labor-power qua commodity) to the realm of the nourishment and reproduction of laboring bodies. A curious commodity, precisely because it is “a living agent of fermentation,” labor-power thus names a site where the economic and physiological coalesce (292). Furthermore, while Marx discusses labor-power as an abstraction, as an aggregate of the human capacity for labor, it is never fully removed from the concrete labor and the individual body of the worker, as in Crispi’s formulation with which this chapter began, which hails both the individual emigrant body and the collective “fruits of [Italian emigrant]
labor.” Indeed, for Righi, labor-power is precisely the “crucial theoretical point,” which “opens the gates to the biopolitical dimension.” (57)

Across Marx’s works but particularly in Capital, reproduction refers most often to the ability of social systems (such as capitalism) to reproduce themselves, to maintain their existence through processes that define and determine them (Himmelweit 197). Such social reproduction is thus tied to Marx’s materialist conception of history, according to which people, not nature, are the agents of history. Yet his materialism sometimes falters, particularly when it comes to fully considering the capitalist organization of human biological reproduction. As Susan Himmelweit alleges, “[Marx’s] failure to analyze the social relations of reproduction leaves incompletely fulfilled [his] own aim of offering a materialist account of the capitalist mode of production” (210). On the few occasions when Marx discusses it head-on, human reproduction is left to a kind of naturalized or psychological impulse for procreation on the part of the worker, which the capitalist only need harness. In Capital, he writes, “The maintenance and reproduction of the working class remains a necessary condition for the reproduction of capital. But the capitalist may safely leave this to the worker’s drives for self-preservation and propagation” (718). This tension between “natural” and social reproduction had appeared earlier, in Marx and Engel’s The German Ideology (1845–1846), where the authors stated that “the production of life, both of one’s own in labor and of fresh life in procreation, now appears as a twofold relation: on the one hand as natural, on the other as a social relation” (43). In Capital, Marx’s consideration of the social relations of production ambiguously brings together, without fully resolving, the biological reproduction inherent in labor-power and the social reproduction of capital and capitalist relations themselves. For instance, Marx writes:

The conditions of production are at the same time those of reproduction. No society can go on producing, in other words no society can reproduce, unless it constantly reconverts a part of its products into means of production, or elements of fresh production. All other circumstances remaining the same, the society can reproduce or maintain its wealth on the existing scale only by replacing the means of production which have been used up […] by an equal quantity of new articles. (711)

Here, one appears to be in the realm of social reproduction, but one can also see how this realm is never entirely separable from what Marx figures as “natural” human reproduction. Indeed, in the pages that follow this passage,
he refers to several additional meanings of reproduction: from the biological reproduction of the working class (noted above) to the reproduction of capital by the worker; reproduction as “a mere repetition of production,” or “simple reproduction” (712; 715); the maintenance of labor-power according to which “the muscles, nerves, bones, and brains of existing workers [are reproduced]” by the capitalist (717); and so on. These varied definitions, argues Jeff Hearn, are ultimately subsumed by the social reproduction of capitalism as the primary form of reproduction. Indeed, this was precisely where Lotta Femminista intervened when they inverted Marx’s logic, suggesting instead that the work of reproduction is carried out not by male workers, but instead mostly by women (who are virtually absent from Marx’s discussion of reproduction, except presumably as passive recipients of “the worker’s drives for self-preservation and propagation”). As Righi puts it, “Domestic work […] is what makes labor possible. […] As its prerequisite, reproduction is the condition of possibility for the capitalist realization of profit” (58).

What does Marx’s analysis reveal with regard to the biopolitical dimension of Italian racial discourse and the making of vital subjects with which this book is concerned? The social historian, following Italy’s preeminent Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci, might hasten to clarify that the largely agricultural economy of post-Unification Italy was far from the highly industrialized British context that Marx so attentively described. Nevertheless, labor-power provides a clear theoretical frame in which social and economic relations converge with biological concerns about the maintenance and reproduction of human life. Again, this is precisely the realm of biopolitics: when the primary rationale of government becomes managing the circulation of individuals, conceived of as elements of an aggregate national population. Indeed, it is in the field of political economy that Foucault argued life was introduced into history, thus becoming a political problem rather than a “natural” given. As soon as economy (the government of the family) and politics (the government of the polis) became imbricated with one another, Foucault argues that new techniques of power emerged. The rationality informing these techniques was governmentality, and addressed “the correct manner of managing individuals, goods and wealth within the family (which a good father is expected to do in relation to his wife, children and servants), and of making the family fortunes prosper – how to introduce this meticulous attention of the father towards his family into the management of the state?”
(Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population* 94–95). Modern political economy, Foucault contends, grew out of the Latin *oeconomia*, the management of the *oikos*, or home. Indeed, in Italian, as in English, the term *governare* contains this split or dual meaning (both semantic and gendered): *governante* refers to both statesman or ruler and domestic governess or housekeeper. Foucault’s governmentality, as a biopolitical apparatus, is, according to Maurizio Lazzarato, a “political economy of forces” (“From Biopower to Biopolitics”) that is both quite similar to and yet ultimately different from Marx’s analysis of labor-power as living labor (as opposed to the dead labor of capital, which “vampire-like, lives only by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks” (Marx 342), in the first case because both Marx and Foucault are concerned with modes of coordinating the economic and ontological relationships between living men and things, with the aim of extracting surplus value, or power. Yet Lazzarato also points out that, in the second case, Foucault accused Marx of reducing the entire, dispersed field of power relations to binary relations between capital and labor, making these relations “the source of all social dynamics” (11). Indeed, Foucault would point out how Marx’s model of antagonistic class struggle may itself get caught up in the racist drift of biopolitics, insofar as the basis for such a model is always already informed by the older logic of race war.18 Rather than a war of position between two opposing camps, Foucault’s governmentality is instead a diffuse material field in which natural resources, commodities, circulation and commerce are engaged, but also where urban planning, public health, and the perceived “fitness” of the population come into play.

**Biopolitical Rhetoric and “The Literariness of Life”**19

A postcolonial, biopolitical approach—rather than a strictly anti-racist one—reveals how race and colonialism were more central to Italian nationalist rhetoric prior to the fascist politics of demography and empire than was, until

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18 As Warren Montag writes, “For Foucault, it is not just that totalizing theories of opposing camps [classes] locked in a war of position are inaccurate descriptions of the real complexity of the field of struggle, it is even more that they tend to replicate the form, if not the content, of the older notion of race war” (116–117).

19 See Hunt and Rudolf. The article lacks page numbers; henceforth I cite instead from its numbered paragraphs.
the last decade or so, acknowledged in conventional scholarly accounts. Furthermore, the broad field of contemporary Italian political thought about biopolitics that Foucault inspired has yet to thoroughly account for the role that race thinking, colonialism, as well as the related experience of mass emigration played in the historical trajectory of biopolitical thought and practice in Italy. One aim of the close readings that follow is to link this influential current of biopolitical thought by contemporary Italian political philosophers to the post-Unification convergence of three “problematics of

20 Notable exceptions are: Silvio Lanaro, and Alberto Banti’s study, which explores how the myth of the nation gathered new force around the Risorgimento as its creators drew from a range of existing notions, from the Christian tradition (sacrifice, martyrdom, purity) to kinship relations (mother-nation, community of brothers, etc.). Banti explains how beliefs in a nation constituted by consanguinity, or blood relations, and rooted in a circumscribed territory (from town to region and eventually to nation) circulated in Italy from the end of the eighteenth century. Banti’s thorough study of the Italian nation as a rhetorical construction seeks to explain how a handful of intellectuals gave shape to an idea that men (and, though quite parenthetically, women) risked their lives defending. He describes in great detail the evolution and reception of the nationalist canon, though his treatment of the racialist components of Risorgimento nationalism serves primarily to illustrate his thesis about the symbolic potency of kinship (Banti, La nazione del Risorgimento 156–165).

21 For a reading of Giorgio Agamben’s Homo Sacer with regard to Italian colonialism in Libya, see Atkinson. Ann Stoler was one of the first readers (or listener, as the lectures were yet unpublished in English or French and Stoler came across them for the first time as “scratchy cassette recordings”) of Foucault’s 1975–76 Society Must Be Defended lectures to illuminate how they contributed to a colonial reading of Foucault. In Race and the Education of Desire, which appeared in 1995 (nearly ten years before the English publication of Society Must Be Defended), Stoler provided for English readers the most thorough reading to date of Foucault’s lectures on how biopower inscribed racism in the modern state. Her project aimed to resituate Europe’s colonial history within the frame Foucault had sketched of the biopolitical nation-state. Unsatisfied with how race and colonialism figured in Foucault’s analyses, but inspired by the potential they presented, Stoler made the case for placing race and other colonial regimes of power/knowledge at the center of bourgeois sexuality and statecraft. It is of note that, as the entirety of the lectures had not yet been transcribed into French (and, as we’ve seen, their complete English translation was not to appear until 2003), Stoler relied upon the text of an unauthorized Italian translation of the lectures that appeared in 1990 as Difendere la società and was promptly removed from bookshops at the request of the Foucault estate (Stoler, Race and the Education of Desire 57). Stoler is credited with having been the first to publish in English on the lectures, and her quotations of the text are derived from an unattributed translation of the Italian text. The introduction of Foucault’s most sustained analysis of biopolitics to an English-reading public, then, was itself effected through a linguistic detour through Italy. See also Scott.
the population”: the southern question; early, pre-fascist colonialism; and mass emigration, which lent lasting shape to Italy’s particular brand of racial discourse. While one might name several other significant thresholds in the development of current biopolitical thought and practice in Italy, focusing attention on the years around Italian Unification affords access to a critical prehistory of some contemporary phenomena that have received attention in critical thought about biopolitics, from Hardt and Negri to Esposito: regimes of the capitalist exploitation of human labor-power and rhetorics of immigration as biological contagion, to name just two. In addressing why Foucauldian biopolitics has received so much attention from Italian thinkers over the past few decades, Roberto Esposito asserts:

It’s true that Italy, perhaps more than any country, is the place in which Foucault’s reflections on biopolitics [...] have been extended with more breadth and originality [...]. Why? [...] Italy is a country on the frontier, not only in a geographic sense, but also culturally, between different worlds, between Europe and the Mediterranean, between North and South [...]. Italy is traversed but also in a certain sense constituted by this fracture. Perhaps the sensibility to a theme such as biopolitics may be linked to this liminal condition of the border, for biopolitics is also situated at the intersection between apparently different languages such as those of politics and life, of law and of anthropology. (Campbell, “Interview with Roberto Esposito” 49)

If Italy has been a particularly fertile site for recent theorizations of biopolitics, it is at least in part because Italy’s history as a (post)colonial nation-state has been profoundly shaped by the constitutive fractures that characterized Italy during the crucial years between its political formation as a liberal nation-state and the rise of fascism. An even more detailed snapshot of such fractures than the one offered by Esposito would include the linguistic pluralism of Italy’s diverse regions as well as other, similarly well-traveled scholarly itineraries of Italian disunity. The coming chapters illustrate how such fractures are ‘mended’ rhetorically (and somewhat paradoxically) by a brand of colonialism aimed at restoring missing “arms” (as in Crispi’s formulation) to a mutilated geopolitical body; formulations of emigration as responsible for carrying the “arms” of millions of productive worker-citizens

22 For a twentieth-century genealogy of biopolitics through the work of Antonio Gramsci, the workerist feminism of Lotta femminista, and Pier Paolo Pasolini, see Righi.
to far away nation-states; and decrying the threat to national unity presented by the entrenched divide between Italy's northern and southern regions with regard to capitalist industrialization and the potential for its exploitation by a newly centralized state.

Volumes have been dedicated to examining the contemporary effects of biopolitics in a number of national and intellectual contexts ranging from ecology and bioethics to political science and philosophy, particularly over the past few decades. In the present study of post-Unification Italy, biopolitics is taken up in two overlapping ways. Historically, biopolitics names a distinctively modern mode of power, or governmentality, aimed at enhancing and protecting the life of the population. Biopolitics as a mode of power emerged in the eighteenth century and continues, some would argue with increasing intensity, to the present day, with Nazi thanatopolitics representing one of its most grisly, and yet to be entirely overturned, expressions. Foucault coined governmentality in order to explain how the ways in which human beings are made into political subjects are irredicible to the workings of the state, but are instead carried out by a range of actors and institutions that ensure the “conduct of conduct.” Public hygiene, charitable institutions, demographic statistics, insurance, individual and collective savings, and other safety measures aimed at reducing the aleatory aspect of the life of the population are some of the technologies of governmentality that characterized the emergence of the biopolitical era in which we continue to live.

If biopolitics refers to an historically specific mode of power, my reference to a biopolitical approach to post-Unification cultural production signals a focus on questions of language and representation. Indeed, the biopolitical technologies listed above (demography, public hygiene, etc.) rely above all upon strategies and modes of representation. As Alastair Hunt and Matthias Rudolf argue:

> [L]ife, both in the work of Foucault and Agamben as well as other theorists of biopolitics, becomes accessible to biopolitical intervention, not as such, but through its entry into language and representation. [...] [P]olitics intervenes on life through the production, regulation, and manipulation of figural regimes—the statistics, estimates, data, totals, and sums that represent the life of the population at a general level [...]. What is decisive

23 For an excellent survey of the broad range of definitions of biopolitics see Lemke.
24 For the argument that we have yet to entirely overturn some of the fundamental presuppositions of Nazism, see Esposito, “Nazism and Us.”
is not any positive knowledge of the relation of power and life, but rather the mere facticity of the substitution of language for life that enables that intervention in the first place. (20)

Hunt and Rudolf explore how, in the decades since its explosion after Foucault and Agamben, biopolitics has been used most productively to formulate a number of important questions within the social sciences, as well as history and political philosophy. They demonstrate how biopolitical theory can benefit from a deeper engagement with literary culture, pointing out that “even the most assured representation of life turns upon an irreducible ‘literariness’” (4). Accordingly, the focus of this book is on discursive mechanisms and “figural regimes” that produce or destroy human life in order to figure Italians as modern, racialized political subjects. At stake for the post-Unification thinkers considered in this book’s upcoming chapters was how to make the biological lives of Italians, as members of a newly unified national population, (re)productive. As Nicole Shukin demonstrates in a different but related context, a biopolitical approach to post-Unification cultural production means that “textual logics of reproduction can no longer be treated in isolation from economic logics of (capitalist) reproduction” (20). The figurative “fruits” of Italian labor, which early colonial proponents such as Crispi imagined would be born from demographic colonization, and his recourse to the metaphor of the body politic and the “organic” state to describe Italy’s (bio)political economies of emigration and colonization attest to the centrality of a certain literariness inhering in racial and biopolitical discourse.

Situating racial discourse in the historical and theoretical contexts of biopolitics reveals a number of meanings of race in post-Unification Italy that might have been left unexamined with recourse to a strictly anti-racist analytic that instead focuses attention solely on instances of stereotypes or explicit racialism. While analyzing the construction of difference or otherness would undoubtedly be productive in the case of explicit attempts to represent racial and/or colonial otherness—the pages of weekly periodicals such as
Illustrazione italiana and Domenica del Corriere; the “southernist” literature of Giovanni Verga, Leonardo Sciascia, and Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa; the influential craniometry and criminology of Cesare Lombroso; the overt racism of Futurist poetics; and lesser-known fields such as early colonial photography all come to mind as examples—this book focuses on the constitution of racialized Italians in the context of biopolitics. Many Italian texts written in this period produce physiological expressions of race, focusing on the making of Italians through invisible elements such as blood, organs, and vital fitness. Often, more important than skin color or physiognomy is a unique preoccupation with which bodies are reproducing, laboring or sacrificing themselves in battle, and where—be it in the Americas, Italy’s southern regions and islands, the new Eritrean colony in the Horn of Africa, the mutilated territories of the Adriatic, or the “lost” ones of the Mediterranean (Tunisia and Libya). Given the breadth of cultural expressions of racial representation in post-Unification Italy, Ann Stoler’s observation is apposite:

Racial discourse is neither always a tool of the state nor always mobilized against it. Racial discourses diffuse over a broad field. Their genealogical histories should track their ‘spaces of dissention’ and unique sites of dispersion. [...] Racial discourse [...] accrues its force not because it is a scientifically validated discourse but just the opposite. It is saturated with sentimentalisms that increase its appeal. (Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power 159)

These “unique sites of dispersion” include not only racial science, but also domains such as literature, politics, popular hygiene, and cinema. Rather than

25 On the relationship between the commodification of the primitive in southernist literature, theater, and early film culture, see Bertellini, Italy in Early American Cinema 81–92. See also: Moe, “The Geographical Poetics of Giovanni Verga”; The View from Vesuvius 250–289; Rosengarten. One “accidental ethnographer,” Rosalia Pianavia Vivaldi, lived in Eritrea from 1893 to 1896 and later published her colonial memoir Tre anni in Eritrea, which blends ethnographic description, autobiography, and a number of photographs of Eritreans and Italian colonials taken by Pianavia Vivaldi herself. See: Sòrgoni, “Italian Anthropology and the Africans.” Photographers Luigi Naretti and Giovanni and Francesco Nicotra “captured” arrested rebels accused of aiding in the defeat of Italian troops at Dogali in 1887 for the Treves’ illustrated weekly Illustrazione italiana. For more on early colonial photography, see: Forgacs; Palma, “The Seen, The Unseen, The Invented”; L’Italia coloniale. For a gendered analysis of the influence of Lombroso on Italian sexual politics, see Gibson.
analyzing the many tropes of racial otherness that pervaded post-Unification Italian culture, the present study asks: what are the biopolitical coordinates of the racialization of Italians before fascism, and how have these boundaries helped stake out the parameters of modern Italian nationalist discourse? Taking into account Hunt and Rudolf’s claims about biopolitics and the “afterlives of [literary] romanticism” and Stoler’s claim about the “sentimentalism” of racial discourse, what sorts of romantic sentimentalism does Italian racial discourse attempt to harness and how are such appeals to affect grounded in the biopolitical? The answer to such questions lies in the specificity of an *italianità* (Italianness) that was defined in terms of what Mark Choate has aptly called a “sentimental tradition,” rather than in juridically binding formulations of citizenship, for example. If, following Stoler, racial discourse harnesses affect for its strength, and if, as a result of Italy’s heightened concerns with emigration and colonialism in this period, Italianness was forged above all through sentiment, one wonders about the inextricability of one term (race) from the other (*italianità*). In fact, the book that is widely recognized to have been, alongside Carlo Collodi’s *Pinocchio*, among the most significant examples of literary nation-building in post-Risorgimento Italy, and that was responsible for the sentimental and patriotic education of generations of Italians, is Edmondo De Amicis’ *Cuore* of 1886. Historian Giuseppe Maria Finaldi has argued that *Cuore*, as “almost a checklist […] describing Italy’s ideal citizen,” should be connected to a budding post-Unification “culture of colonialism” for the ways in which it foresees not only a population bound by the blood of genealogy and shared sacrifice residing within particular territorial limits, but also the expanding of those borders through the shedding of new blood, which would allow Italy to, in De Amicis’ words, “live and expand, calm in the majesty of [her] right and strength” (Finaldi 48–49). Moreover, the fact that at the center of *Cuore* is a relatively lengthy short story titled “From the Apennines to the Andes,” which foregrounds Italian patriotism and sacrifice in a tale about emigration to the Americas, adds yet another layer to *Cuore*’s relation to the “culture of colonialism” described by Finaldi.\footnote{The thirty-page “From the Apennines to the Andes” tells the story of Marco, a thirteen-year-old Genovese son of a manual laborer whose mother had emigrated two years earlier to Buenos Aires to seek well-paid domestic work. Marco embarks alone on a quest for his lost mother across the Atlantic, where he is generously aided by members of the “spontaneous colonies” of emigrant Italians in Argentina (De Amicis, “Dagli Apennini alle Ande”).} Nineteenth-century emigration to the
Introduction

Americas was inextricably linked to the liberal-era colonial schemes in both the Horn of Africa—where Francesco Crispi, with the aid of Franchetti, initially supported “demographic” agricultural settlements of Italians—and in South America, where Luigi Einaudi sought to harness “spontaneous” Italian emigrant colonies as an alternative to what he described as the “insanity” of African colonization à la Crispi (Choate, “From Territorial to Ethnographic Colonies” 68–70).

In the period following Unification, the dreams of the nationalizing project of the Risorgimento began to disintegrate, provoking the elaboration of ever-new imaginative strategies for the production and management of the Italian population. A focus on this period, when Italy was most self-consciously if somewhat desperately clamoring to join the triumphant European march toward capitalist modernity, enables an examination of how the very ideological structures of the modern nation-state—before their “infection” by fascism—were erected and reinforced on the backs of an explicitly biological population. In less than forty years, between 1880 and 1915, statisticians estimate that 13 million Italians left home, distinguishing Italy as the nation-state to undergo the largest emigration in world history (Choate, Emigrant Nation 1). Indeed, under Prime Minister Crispi (1887–1891; 1893–1896), Italy’s largest export was neither food nor fashion—it was manodopera, human labor-power. The three biopolitical fields, the southern question, migration, and colonialism, in which Italian racial discourse took shape, converged most markedly during the post-Unification period, when Italy experienced the mass exodus of peasants in search of work, land, and life elsewhere. Significantly, this mass migration was termed in official and popular discourse as either “hemorrhage” or “bloodletting,” thus bringing into focus the centrality of the relationship between the liquidity (in terms of fluids like blood and sperm) that courses through Italian bodies and the oceans and seas that conduct those bodies elsewhere, and territory: the “lost” (read formerly Roman) lands of Libya, or the “unredeemed” territories
of the Adriatic were at risk of falling into the wrong hands, thereby further "mutilating" an already tentative disposition of bodies and territory.  

In addition to shifting the focus on structures of racialization from fascist to liberal Italy, in the chapters that follow, I shift the focus from explicitly racialized objects to the making of Italians as racialized subjects. As Cristina Lombardi-Diop has argued:

On the whole, today’s social critique of racism [in Italy] has dedicated little attention to the ways in which race, as a system of differentiation, “shapes those on whom it bestows privilege as well as those it oppresses.” Moreover, studies on the construction of modern Italian identity have paid little attention to the impact of racial self-definitions and self-perceptions. Scholars, with few exceptions, have not interrogated the racial assumptions that have structured and supported the idea of Italianness as racially coded. (“Postracial/Postcolonial Italy” 176)

In order to contextualize the emergence of more violently racist language—particularly vivid examples include the language of high fascism during the invasion of Ethiopia in 1935–1936 and the racial laws of 1938–1939, or the virulently anti-immigrant vocabulary that has been most audible in the discourses of the extreme right since the 1980s—this book interrogates the discursive constitution of the subjects from whom such language eventually flows. Simply put, Italians are interpellated by the very logics of racialization that they employ. This presented some difficulties for many Italian thinkers in the post-Unification period, as within their nationalist narratives in praise of the Italian people was embedded an acute awareness not only of Italy’s marginal position with regard to stronger European powers, but also of the related risks of racial degeneracy and explicitly racist discrimination against Italians in the

27 Uli Linke ties recent anti-immigrant rhetoric in Germany to firmly embedded mythologies of blood through the former's metaphorical recourse to liquidity: "flood," "stream," "wave," "flow," etc. She suggests that "metaphors of water may well be circumlocutions for blood, [which] [...] finds expression in terms of other fluids or liquid substances: foam, sweat, whirlpool, river, stream" (Blood and Nation xi).


29 Though Italy’s first anti-Semitic laws were passed in 1938, laws prohibiting sexual relations between Italian citizens and colonial subjects were in fact passed in the African colonies a year earlier, in 1937. See: Barrera, “Sex, Citizenship, and the State” 157.
Introduction

Americas. Racialization thus blurs a distinction between subject and object, as the subject who racializes must him/herself be racialized. Such a contention is by no means an attempt to obscure the importance of racial discourse to the interplay of power-knowledge: indeed, in the case of race, what sets “subject” apart from “object” are power relations. Still, the Italian case is an interesting one precisely because of the threat of Italian racial inferiority that was inscribed in both Risorgimento-era and post-Unification texts by Italy’s subordinate position vis-à-vis established western European powers and the racialization of Italian emigrants in the Americas. As Stewart-Steinberg has argued in a somewhat different but related context:

Anxiety does in fact describe the post-1860 moment. [...] This anxiety [...] is fundamental to Italian modernity rather than an impediment to it. [...] [T]he formulation of an Italian national self was predicated on a language that posited marginalization and powerlessness as fundamental aspects of what it meant to be modern Italians. (2)

Perhaps the most paradigmatic example of the anxiety that characterized the national project was the southern question, arguably the leading question for policymakers after Unification. At stake was how to bring southern Italians—who were depicted in what became known as meridionalista (“southernist”) literature as either hapless victims of history plagued by poverty, illiteracy, superstition, and other forms of “backwardness” or as criminally, culturally, and/or racially resistant to the rationalist progress of liberal-capitalist development—into the fold, how to represent southerners in a newly nationalized political community. This project was intimately connected to another perceived fragmentation: the loss of Italy’s brothers and sons to transatlantic emigration. Panic about emigration resulted in an unprecedented campaign

30 In 1891, eleven Italians were lynched in New Orleans, and roughly thirty were killed by a mob in Aigues-Mortes, France. Mark Choate writes: “This drew uncomfortable parallels with the persecutions of African, Chinese, and South Asian minorities worldwide” (Emigrant Nation 15). News of these deaths traveled back to Italy, adding to the racial anxiety that characterized post-Unification emigration debates.
31 Philomena Essed and David Theo Goldberg argue, “All variations on and through ‘race’ serve as codes and manifestations of power more generally, and they so often factor more or less quietly or more or less explicitly into a complex of causes for political, economic and social conditions” (4).
32 For more on Italian “self-Othering” around the Risorgimento see Patriarca, “Indolence and Regeneration.”
by the new national government aimed at conquering the “hearts and minds” of Italians from a distance. While some thinkers devised strategies to instill *italianità* from across the Atlantic Ocean, others set their sights upon colonies across the Mediterranean to remedy this fracture. Race, as a way of thinking about the relations between peoples and lands whose primary mode is one of fragmentation, thus takes on a new shape when inscribed within such a rhetorical economy, as it cannot be explained as merely an ideology of the dominant, nor as innocuous, dated make-believe.

On the eve of the nineteenth century, Ugo Foscolo, who is considered, along with Giacomo Leopardi and Alessandro Manzoni, one of the foremost representatives of Italy’s Risorgimento-era literary Romanticism, put the following invective into the mouth of his tragic patriot-hero Jacopo Ortis:

*I tuoi confini, o Italia, son questi! ma sono tutto di sormontati d’ogni parte dalla pertinace avarizia delle nazioni. [...] E verrà forse un giorno che noi perdendo le sostanze e l’intelletto e la voce, sarem fatti simili agli schiavi domestici degli antichi, o trafficati come i miseri Negri* (*Le ultime lettere di Jacopo Ortis* 132)

[Oh Italy, your borders are these, but every day they are overcome by the persistent avarice of all nations. [...] Perhaps the day will come when we, having lost our possessions, our intellect, and our voice, will be made similar to the domestic slaves of the ancient lords or traded like wretched negroes] (“The Last Letters of Jacopo Ortis” 92)

As this canonical text of early Italian nationalism illustrates, nearly a century before the southern question and consequent emigration laid bare how Italians were faced with explicit racial discrimination in the Americas, the breaching of their borders by French and Austrian occupiers drew uncomfortable parallels between Italians and African slaves. Rhetorics of dispossession and loss (in terms of territory and labor-power, which, as we have seen, is both economic and physiological) that emerged most markedly in liberal-era discussions of emigration and colonialism were thus already inscribed in Risorgimento-era literary nationalism. Foscolo’s narrative of Italian dispossession (“[your borders] are overcome by the

33 See also: Choate, *Emigrant Nation*; Wong.
34 For more on the connections between African slaves and Italian immigrants, see Wong 113–148.
Introduction

persistent avarice of all nations”) and racial degeneration (“having lost our possessions, our intellect, our voice, [we] will be [...] traded like wretched negroes”) highlights the loss, rather than the fundamental absence, of Italian territorial and corporeal identity. An identity lost can be found again; an absent identity was never there in the first place.35

Race and Biopolitical Fantasy

Esposito’s discussion of Italy’s constitutive fractures as an explanation for why biopolitics has found such a wealth of theorizations there, and what I have been suggesting is a rhetorical mending of territorial and corporeal breaching, dismemberment, dispossession, and loss performed by biopolitical discourse in the post-Unification period raise the question of how biopolitics relates to psychoanalysis, and more specifically to the mechanisms of fetishism and ideological fantasy. Foucault, and consequently many of the theorists of biopolitics who followed in his wake, notoriously claimed that psychoanalysis, as a constitutive part of the larger “explosion” of the discourse of sexuality, was but one of several technologies to emerge in the passage from sovereign power (the power to make die, faire mourir) to biopolitics (as making live, faire vivre). With biopolitics, as “the people” become subjects of power, the object of power becomes “the population.” This objectification requires apparatuses of governmentality (public hygiene, charitable institutions, demographic statistics, etc.) aimed at the management of life, among which psychoanalysis emerges as, in Anna Kornbluh’s apt quip, a “regional manager, the storied lieutenant of a general deployment of sexuality”(17). Psychoanalysis is thus but one mechanism of governmentality. Seeking to quell the rift between the biopolitical paradigm and psychoanalysis with regard to their distinct, if parallel, theories of the (political) subject, Eric Santner has called convincingly “to put Freud and Foucault on the same team” (xiii). Santner argues that, given the centrality of the body of the king as the symbolic basis of sovereignty to Foucault’s analysis, the biopolitical paradigm has more in common with psychoanalytic theories of

35 Dominick LaCapra calls for greater clarity in distinctions between absence, which is foundational and transhistorical, and loss, which is instead historical. He warns that a conflation of loss and absence, particularly surrounding such traumatic events as the Shoah and South African apartheid, can reproduce the conditions that cause historical traumas in the first place, thereby preventing the acting-out and working-through required to address them. See his essay: “Trauma, Absence, Loss.”
Vital Subjects

the subject than has been conventionally acknowledged. Santner, like Stewart-Steinberg, explores the ties that bind physical bodies to the symbolic order of politics. He argues that with “the people,” newly vested with sovereignty in the wake of the French Revolution, is born an anxiety about the specter of the fragmentation of this biopolitical body. Anxiety also results from the mirror stage, as Jacques Lacan calls it, as the threat of bodily fragmentation ensues from one’s encounter with a whole image reflected back to him or her. The consequences for both models of sovereignty theorized by Foucault are thus: the body of the king as the symbolic basis of sovereignty is in fact a mortal body, on the one hand, and, on the other, the displacement of sovereignty onto the popular body intensifies the threat of fragmentation by placing political power into the indistinct and contested hands of “the people.” “The people” as the biopolitical agent of power is a constitutively fractured entity; its singular, unified name may belie a fundamental emptiness.

A figure simultaneously empty and fundamentally split, “the people” as the unified subject of sovereign power may be considered the ideological fantasy par excellence of all liberal democratic nation-states. For cultural theorist Slavoj Žižek, ideological fantasy—the illusion which structures “our real, effective relationship to reality”—reconciles Marx’s argument about how commodity fetishism disguises our social relation to labor through the exchange of things (summarized in the maxim “they do not know it, but they are doing it”) with the psychoanalytic structure of fetishistic disavowal, famously formulated by Octave Mannoni as “Je sais bien, mais quand même” (“I know very well, but all the same”) (18). Similar to the Freudian fetishist, who turns to alternative objects (the foot or the shoe) to stand in for a maternal lack (the phallus) and as such is able, through disavowal (Verleugnung), to maintain two contradictory beliefs (that woman both has and does not have a penis), Žižek argues that what Marx’s fetishist overlooks or misrecognizes is not reality itself, but the illusion which is structuring his or her reality. Individuals under the spell of commodity fetishism need not believe in the illusion of the intrinsically magical nature of money—they know, claims Žižek, that a commodity such as money merely represents a social relation of exchange, but nevertheless they behave as if it were the embodiment of wealth. Žižek explains, “The fundamental level of ideology […] is not of an illusion masking the real state of things but that of an (unconscious) fantasy structuring our social reality itself” (33). Ideology, far

36 For an analysis of the elusive notion of the people as the basis for American democracy, see Frank. For a distinction between “the People” as the basis of sovereignty and its necessary corollary, “the people” as bare life, see Agamben, Means Without End.
from false consciousness, binds subjects (and texts) to the necessary illusions (the body of the king; the sovereignty of “the people”) that structure their reality. Yet the illusion has concrete effects; so goes the saying, money makes the world go round. For Stewart-Steinberg, “the very idea that subjects are bound to the state in an ideological, that is, imaginary and yet material, manner coincides with the birth of another form of bondage, a disciplinary one founded on the production, management, and enhancement of life” (10). She goes on to discuss how biopolitics, as a means of “making live” through governmentality rather than a pre-modern notion of sovereignty exemplified by the king’s sword (instead, a means of “making die”), does not entirely displace sovereign power, and asks instead about the interaction in post-Unification Italy between these two forms of power. She suggests that the project of “making Italians” constitutes an attempt to negotiate between these two modes. Indeed, Foucault’s analysis of state racism in his canonical lectures on biopolitics at the Collège de France suggests that biopolitics does not rule out the function of the state in modern forms of subjectification (or the making of the social bond)—it simply becomes one of an array of mechanisms and apparatuses. As Nicolas Rose and Paul Rabinow put it in their gloss of Foucault’s governmentality:

We must now investigate the powers of the state and of its apparatus of rule in relation to all those many transactions where our own concerns with our own lives have also become the concerns of others—not just explicitly political agencies, but also all those other authorities (religious, medical, commercial, therapeutic) who whisper in our ears and advise us how to act and who to be. [...] And, in a way that is disturbing to many, we can now recognize that the precepts, norms, and values disseminated in these practices of government have made us the kinds of persons we take ourselves to be. (emphasis mine; xi)

The nationalization of Italians as a biopolitical project was not the well-organized plot of a conniving and malevolent state (nor, for that matter, a benevolent one), as much as it was a varied and dispersed ensemble of technological engagements (colonial regimes of power-knowledge; medical, aeronautical, and cinematic innovation), textual enunciations, and techniques of visualization, which aligned themselves with a range of ideological positions (from

37 Barbara Spackman translates Žižek’s theory of the subject to the textual realm when she writes of the paradoxical binding of textual knowledge and textual nonknowledge as the locus of ideological fantasy in the text (Fascist Virilities xi).
“left” to “right,” from “patriotic humanist” to “proto-fascist imperialist”), “whisper[ed] in the ears” of Italians in order to produce would-be modern—and, critically, racialized—political subjects.

Žižek’s notion of ideological fantasy is key, insofar as the racial, biopolitical, and colonial discourses in the texts under discussion are structured by fetishistic logics of disavowal. Like Stewart-Steinberg’s Pinocchio Effect, “a mode of thought that seeks to negotiate between the anxiety about the potential emptiness regarding national existence and the bond that nonetheless ties that Italian to his or her national existence” (367), the texts under consideration in this book “know” very well that the Italian national body and its “mutilated” or “lost” territories (Fiume, Libya, etc.) were never unified or whole to begin with, but all the same they “behave” as if they were. The rhetorical role of territorial and corporeal loss—from colonial military defeat and emigration to physiological degeneration and dismemberment—which I argue pervaded the Italian biopolitical discourse under consideration functions fetishistically: by recalling the loss of Italian emigrants, as Crispi did at this chapter’s outset, the “missing” limbs of Italian colonial territories, or the military defeat at Adwa in 1896, to name just a few examples, the fundamentally empty (to paraphrase Stewart-Steinberg), or constitutively fractured nature (to paraphrase Esposito) of Italian corporeal, territorial, and political identity is thus suspended. In this way, then, quite paradoxically, rhetorical loss serves to mend a constitutive absence in the unitary, racialized Italian subject.¹

As this book calls for a reading of the rhetorical making of that vital subject in light of early Italian racial and colonial discourse, it bears noting that fetishism also binds the European nation-state to racism and its colonial encounters. William Pietz’s ethno-historical reading of the fetish as it emerged as a result of sixteenth and seventeenth-century colonial Portuguese encounters with West African societies and Homi Bhabha’s influential reading of the colonial stereotype as fetishistic thus also situate the primary structure of ideological fantasy within the postcolonial frame. Bhabha uncovers a structural link between the disavowal of sexual difference (Freud’s fetishist), and the disavowal of racial difference that the stereotype (as fetish) enables (74). Žižek’s ideological fantasy lends itself particularly well to the ambivalent fictions that inhere in both racial and colonial discourse.

¹ The fundamental lack that characterizes the Italian national subject was decried perhaps most memorably and explicitly by Giacomo Leopardi in his 1824 Discorso sopra lo stato presente dei costumi degli’italiani (Discourse on the Present State of the Customs of the Italians) (Leopardi, Poesie e prose).
Introduction

The Race for Modernity: From Normal Man to Mechanized Post-Humanity

For readers familiar with the context of modern Italy, my discussion of racial discourse and biopolitics between Unification and World War I will likely bring to mind two of modern Italy’s most provocative and infamous theorists of the relationship between human bodies, politics, and technology: criminologist Cesare Lombroso (1835–1909) and the founder of Futurism F.T. Marinetti (1876–1944). Indeed, in many ways, Lombroso and Marinetti might be said to constitute the representational bookends of the constellation of terms that this book assembles in order to map the principal coordinates of textual strategies of racialization in post-Unification Italy. Lombroso’s relentless explorations of the physiological traces of criminality and degeneracy sought to prove the indexicality of the human body and the existence in nature of homo criminalis. In his two most famous studies, *L’uomo delinquente* (Criminal Man, 1876) and *La donna delinquente, la prostituta e la donna normale* (Criminal Woman, the Prostitute, and the Normal Woman 1893) and throughout his vast oeuvre, he deployed diverse technologies—among them photography, craniometry, and modes of writing—that have been linked to a distinctively modern rethinking of the (biological) subject’s relationship to the social.²

If for Lombroso men and women were irrevocably bound to the limitations of their physiology, Marinetti envisioned a hyper-modern post-humanity capable of overcoming its organic and hence limited composition in favor of a mechanized and impenetrable man. As Jeffrey Schnapp recounts, “The overcoming of physical decay by forging new bodies and materials had always figured among futurism’s heroic themes (and never without nationalist and/or imperialist connotations). […] Futurism was deeply haunted by the problematic of decline, whether in the domain of nature, the individual body, or the body politic” (198). From Futurism’s birthplace in the “maternal ditch” overflowing with the “nourishing sludge” that Marinetti recalls having suckled from the “blessed black breast of [his] Sudanese nurse,” through its most infamous novelistic incarnation in *Mafarka, le futuriste* (whose controversial opening chapter, “The Rape of the Negresses,” along with some of the novel’s other more “colorful” elements, made Marinetti the subject of a scandalous and wonderfully opportune trial for public indecency upon its translation into Italian in 1910), and beyond, vividly aestheticized racial

² For this reading of Lombroso, see Suzanne Stewart-Steinberg’s chapter, “In a Dark Continent: Cesare Lombroso’s Other Italy,” in Stewart-Steinberg, *The Pinocchio Effect*. 
otherness was quite self-consciously thematized as an integral part of Futurist poetics. The Futurist response to nineteenth-century physiological and literary decadence was both a turning towards embodiment (through a poetics of pulsating and abject ebony bodies, the black breasts of Sudanese wet nurses) and its neutralization through a transformation of its organic limitations into objects of desire and conquest (Sartini Blum 84). Though I would hesitate to situate Lombroso and Marinetti unproblematically along a biopolitical continuum that begins with the former’s crude scavenging for the corporeal traces of criminality and finds its fullest expression in Marinetti’s rambunctious techno-imperialist poetics, it might be helpful to keep them in mind as placeholders along this trajectory of race, biopolitics, and Italian modernity. While the implications of these two thinkers and their respective works for Italy’s history of racial representation remain to be fully explored, I have chosen to hold them in reserve for the present study, as their respective elaborations of racial difference—depicted with brash and unapologetically black and white brushstrokes—set them apart from the subtler, more insidious brands of racialization that emerge in the chapters that follow. Instead, this book focuses on texts across a range of fields whose racial investments are harder to pin down precisely because they, unlike those of Lombroso and Marinetti, are not at first glance so hysterically racist. The texts under consideration in this book are not populated with the kinds of racialized others and/or deviants on whom so much of these two thinkers’ respective works rely.

Rather than attempting to enshrine a new canon of racist Italian literary or political thought, or attempting to detail the institutional or cultural bases for the emergence of the Italian racial discourse, this book examines an eclectic range of canonical and non-canonical narrative forms in order to sketch the discursive, logical, and visual productivity of race, before a historical and theoretical backdrop that is unequivocally biopolitical. Stewart-Steinberg’s thoughtfully researched book covers an impressive ground with her reading of the roots of Italian modernity in the (invisible) ideological “strings” that

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3 For the reader who seeks a comprehensive account of the emergence of the racialized population as a target of intervention in post-Unification Italy, a number of recent monographs published in English provide thorough historical accounts of the institutional and social formulation of the Italian population in the fields of public health campaigns, demography and childhood, and statistics. See, for example: Ipsen, *Italy in the Age of Pinocchio; Dictating Demography; Snowden, The Conquest of Malaria; Naples in the Time of Cholera, 1884–1911; Patriarca, Numbers and Nationhood.*
tie Pinocchio to post-Unification nationalism. *Vital Subjects* engages this and other critical readings of Italian modernity by contributing an analysis of the territorial and biological grounds on which Italian racial discourse sought to anchor itself in the years between Unification and World War I. As Stewart-Steinberg herself concedes, her study of formulations of the social bond (namely, the project of “making Italians”) in this period of Italian history does not attempt to account for the fact that race, particularly when tethered to the seductive rhetorics of affect and education that Stewart-Steinberg’s study does trace, exerted a considerable influence on how those bonds were envisioned. What follows is by no means an exhaustive historical treatment of the vast field of racist discourse that extended from political doctrines, through the (social) scientific disciplines, to national literature and popular knowledge. Such ambitious and wide-reaching intellectual histories of the period in question are currently under way, illustrating a growing sense of awareness in the field of Italian literary and cultural studies about the degree to which the mythology of *italianità* has been shaped by race.

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4 In addition to the works I have already discussed, the readings of Italian modernity to which I refer are: Campbell, “‘Infinite Remoteness’”; Fuller, *Moderns Abroad*; Horn, *Social Bodies*; Schnapp.

5 See Re, “Italians and the Invention of Race.” Re’s article, a thoroughly researched piece (totaling over fifty pages in length), argues that the Italian invasion of Libya marked a turning point in the history of racialization in Italy, as Italians turned what had been until then an internal racialization (of women, criminals, southerners, etc.) toward the outside (the Libyan “other”). Re suggests that Italy’s racializing tradition has fundamentally literary origins. See also Giuliani and Lombardi-Diop.