

Francesco Cassata

Full professor

✉ francesco.cassata@unige.it

☎ +39 010 209 5741

Education and training

2005

PhD in Contemporary History

University of Turin

Academic experience

2017 - ONGOING

Full Professor

University of Genoa

2016 - 2017

Associate Professor

University of Genoa

2011 - 2016

Assistant Professor

University of Genoa

Research interests

The basic aims of my research and the most important chapters of my intellectual profile can be grouped into three general areas: first, the history of fascism and the radical right, with a specific focus on fascist racism and anti-Semitism; second, the history of eugenics; third, the history of cold war science (in particular biology). I have published extensively in all three areas, working through original archival sources and exploring the Italian case-study within a broad comparative perspective.

My first research area has been **the history of Italian fascism, especially racial cultures and policies**. Overturning the claim that fascist Racial Laws were a byproduct of diplomatic relations with Germany and were left largely unenforced, my two studies on this topic – an in-depth investigation of Julius Evola's political thought from the 1920s to the 1970s, and the analysis of the bi-weekly fascist propaganda magazine "La Difesa della razza" (The Defence of Race) (1938-43) - demonstrated that racial prejudice - not only toward the Jews - was an integral part of the Fascist culture and policy. Since 2005, I turned to **the history of Italian eugenics**, providing the first comprehensive account of this unexplored field. In comparative studies of eugenics, Italian history had been almost completely ignored, despite its notable international importance, particularly as concerns the presence of

fascism and the political and ideological influence of the Catholic Church. My research, which led to several publications in Italian and to the book *Building the New Man. Eugenics, Racial Science and Genetics in Twentieth Century Italy* (Budapest-New York: Central European University Press 2011), contributed to cover this gap. In contrast to Maria Sophia Quine's and Carl Ipsen's essays on fascist demography, the focus of my research was not limited to the connection between eugenics and fascist population policy. On the contrary, it assumed a long-period perspective, also considering the Liberal pre-fascist period and the post-war transition from fascist and racial eugenics to medical and human genetics. As far as fascist eugenics is concerned, my research provided a refreshing analysis, considering Italian eugenics as the most important case-study in order to define "Latin" eugenics as an alternative model to Anglo-American, German and Scandinavian eugenics.

Cold war science (and in particular biology) has been another of my research paths, from 2007 to present. I explored this large topic following two original and specific ways. First, I focused on the history of the "Lysenko controversy" in Italy, identifying its major actors, their motives, audiences, goals, means, and actions, as well as intended and unintended outcomes. This research added a relevant case-study to the new emerging historiography on Lysenkoism in Western Europe. Along the methodological suggestions provided by Nikolai Krementsov and William deJong Lambert, I considered the "Lysenko controversy" as a particular cultural resource deployed by different actors in order to address a variety of issues both in the domestic and international arenas: in particular, the tensions between different theories of heredity; the relations between science, state and society; and the meaning and uses of "pseudo-science" as a boundary category. My contribution on the history of the "Lysenko controversy" was supported by a research grant from the Luigi Salvatorelli Foundation and received wide and positive international recognition. In particular, a book, provisionally entitled *The Lysenko Controversy. Biology and Cold War Politics in Postwar Italy (1948-1984)*, will be forthcoming with Peter Lang Publishing. From the analysis of the "Lysenko controversy" as part of the cultural Cold War in Western Europe, I then moved to the study of the Cold War co-production of American hegemony in Western Europe, through the reconstruction of the case of the International Laboratory of Genetics and Biophysics (ILGB) in Naples (1962-1969), founded by the Italian geneticist Adriano Buzzati-Traverso (1913-1983). The foundation of the ILGB not only played a crucial role in the post-war development of Italian science policy in its relationship with United States, but also was a key element in early European attempts to organize forms of international scientific cooperation in the field of molecular biology. This project was supported by several grants I received from the Adriano Buzzati-Traverso Foundation, the Antonio Ruberti Foundation and the Rockefeller Archive Centre.