

AAIS 2022 Conference Report
Virtual (May 12-15), Bologna (May 29-June 1, 2022)

The 2022 AAIS Conference was a full, enlightening experience in two parts. The online segment, May 12-15, opened with the first panel of the inaugural Executive Council Conference Series (ECCS), which aimed to contribute to the continuing need to diversify the landscape of Italian Studies. The curators of this successful series were Michela Ardizzoni, Shelleen Greene, and Angelica Pesarini. The Series' first panel, *Italy and Somalia: Legacies*, focused on Italian colonialism and race discourse and amply demonstrated how studies on immigration and emigration are now both a main focus of the discipline as well as central to the understanding of Italian history, society, and cultures. The colonial legacy is still with us: what do we do with Italy's colonial past? with what we know about it? Oral history can provide a useful tool to re-narrate the colonial and postcolonial history between Italy and Somalia, leaving an open space for counternarrative. Panelists in the ECCS were, for the most part, members of American colleges and universities, demonstrating how such discourses are being taken up more slowly by European Universities, which might be seen to tend to more conservative approaches. The ECCS panels incorporated analyses of diverse media: Momoka Banana spoke about the force of internet and social media, while Vetri Nathan's analysis beautifully unified political discourse and social media with the dangers of Orientalism. The panel entitled *The African American Experience in Postwar Italy*, which focused on cinema and visual arts, and the representation and presence of black people in Italy, with a focus on Rome, offered similarly diversified approaches.

Elements of the counternarratives proposed during the online segment were also characteristic of the in-person conference in Bologna (May 29-June 1). For example, both keynote addresses, Sandra Ponzanesi's "Migrant Figurations: New Questions for Italian Postcolonial Studies" and Dennis Looney's "Dante from the Deep South to the Global South", asked us to consider different approaches to subjects stretching over a range of historical periods, genres, and fields of inquiry. No report on a conference with over 500 attendees can comment on all aspects and, consequently, I chiefly limit my comments here to gather some thoughts on panels I was able to attend. The first full day of the conference, I attended a successful panel entitled *Gender Violence in Modern Italian Literature*, organized by Cristina Gragnani and Ombretta Frau. This was one of the first all-female panels, a fairly common phenomenon for the Bologna segment of the conference and one running counter to the general tendency of so many academic conferences wherein most of the panelists are men. Other prevalently female-composed panels included *Voicing the past: Women's Cultural, Civic and Political engagement in the Long Nineteenth Century* organized by Elena Emma Sottilotta, Sara Delmedico, and Elena Musiani; and *Lo spazio domestico per raccontare e raccontarsi*, organized by Martina Pala and Maria Giovanna Stati. Both panels highlighted the research of young scholars coming from both Italian and Anglophone contexts. Another panel which successfully prompted productive conversation and exchange of ideas among young scholars hailing from various backgrounds was the series of linked panels entitled *Sybils, Sirens and Crones*, organized by Costanza Barchiesi and Maria Florence Massucco. This series stretched over several days, featuring a number of different methodologies and innovative re-interpretations, like, for example, Catherine Saterson's presentation "The Sirens' Vengeance: On Flower-Filled Meadows and Rape", which shed new light on a classical *topos*. Special mention also goes to Sally Tucker, recipient of one of the graduate student awards sponsoring travel to the conference, for her "Hypnotic Hybridity: Desire and Horror in Dante's Female Monsters and the Renaissance Grotesque".

In conclusion, the first in-person meeting since 2019 found Italianists yearning for connection, with growing concern and attention for social justice and innovation. The shared hope is that we will be able to continue meeting in such circumstances, when necessary, persevering with hybrid

conferences, integrating both online meetings, which reduce pollution and are more affordable to some, with in-person panels. As was established, the scholarly community immensely benefits from closeness and connection.

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