NYU-Roma Tre Permanent Global Seminar

Religious Diversity in Italian Urban History

2023 Calendar

All meetings, except the first one, will be held on Zoom at 12.00 pm (New York) / 6.00 pm (Rome). Registration is required and can be done via email at: rdiuhs@gmail.com. The Zoom invitation will be sent out the day before the seminar to the email address used for the registration. For more information, please visit: https://as.nyu.edu/departments/italian/Initiatives.html

For inquiries please email: Massimo Di Gioacchino (Chair, massimo.digioacchino@nyu.edu) or Angelica Federici (Secretary, angelica.federici@uniroma3.it).

Organizing Committee: Massimo Di Gioacchino (Chair, New York University); Angelica Federici (Secretary, University of Roma Tre); Maria Chiara Giorda (University of Rome Tre); Brice Gruet (Université Paris Est Créteil); Nicholas Harney (Western University); Silvia Omenetto (Sapienza University of Rome); Glauco Schettini (Yale University); Victoria Szabo (Duke University); Joseph Williams (University of Maryland).

March 22, 2023

1.00 pm (New York) / 6.00 pm (Rome)

Sean Wyer, University of California at Berkeley

Gourmet and the Ghetto

Respondent: Diana Garvin, University of Oregon

This paper analyzes the ‘foodification’ of Rome’s former Jewish ghetto. Once a residential area with some mixed-use retail, the ghetto’s central thoroughfare is now dominated by kosher and Jewish-themed restaurants: a development that has accelerated during the past two decades. What trends – local, international, and within the Jewish community – have influenced this shift in the urban environment? How do the area’s historic Jewish character,
its popularity among Jewish visitors, and its contemporary Jewish population, affect how this quarter is ‘gentrifying’? To answer these questions, I use urban geography methods, combined with anthropological research among Jewish and non-Jewish diners and hospitality workers, which I conducted during spring 2022. My results show that the ‘foodification’ of the former ghetto reflects a growing tourist interest in European Judaism, including in its so-called ‘intangible’ heritage, and the popularity of ‘hyper-local’ foods in Italy, of which Jewish-Roman cuisine is an exceptional example. This paper also demonstrates how the ‘kosher boom’ – an increased attention to religious dietary laws among observant Jews internationally – has impacted Rome’s food scene in locally specific ways. These include kosher versions of fast food outlets popular elsewhere in Rome, from Roman-style pizza to sushi, and restaurants specializing in kosher adaptations of archetypally Italian cheeses. Rome’s former ghetto must be distinguished from many historic Jewish quarters elsewhere in Europe. Ruth Ellen Gruber identifies a phenomenon she calls “Virtual Judaism,” in which former Jewish quarters, since the late twentieth century, are being re-filled with symbols of Judaism, despite the absence of a sizable contemporary Jewish population. Although there are commonalities between the ‘foodification’ of Rome’s former ghetto and the phenomenon described by Gruber, Roman Jews play a central role in the area’s restaurant industry. The exceptional nature of this Roman case study therefore makes it particularly worthy of close scholarly attention.

June 21, 2023
(12.00 pm, New York / 6.00 pm, Rome)
Giulia Massenz, University of Turin
The Urban Geographies of the Third Wave Pentecostal Churches in Turin

Respondent: Annalisa Butticci, Georgetown University

Pentecostalism is generally considered the greatest awakening in the history of Christianity worldwide, and nowadays has a global outreach and resonance. In Italy, the Third Wave of development of the movement, which coincided with the biggest immigration flow the country has ever experienced within its territory, significantly contributed to the increase of Pentecostal denominations from North to South. The so-called ‘ethnic churches’ formed mostly by Nigerians and Ghanaians have been extensively studied by social scientists over the past decade. Nonetheless, there is virtually no scholarship on the location of Neo-Pentecostal places of worship as a result of spatial governance, although this research thread has gained popularity in Italy and all over Europe. As suggested by Annalisa Butticci, the explanation of this gap could be partially found in the difficulty of properly locating them. Indeed, the very characteristics of the churches - namely proliferation, mobility, and vulnerability - constitute the reason for the impossibility of a precise mapping of the phenomenon. This latter inspires the article: the impossibility of a complete picture opens up the possibility of grasping a dynamic reality. Where are Neo-Pentecostal churches located and how did they arrive at that specific place? Finally, what do churches’ pathways tell about the relationship between this minority cult and the State? The article’s aim is to reconstruct a
diachronic map drawing upon the work of Luigi Berzano on the city of Turin in order to understand the lifecycle of the churches within this urban geography.

September 27, 2023
Isabella De Paolis, Sapienza University of Rome
(12.00 pm, New York / 6.00 pm, Rome)
Centocelle Between Urban Spatiality and Religious Diversity: Anatomy of a Changing Neighborhood in Rome

Respondent: Carmen Becker, Leibniz Universität Hannover

In the field of the research on the link between history and geography of religions and urban spaces, this article aims to analyze the religious and social space generated by the Islamic center Al Huda in the Roman outskirts of Centocelle. After having focused on the concept of urban religion, namely on the characteristics referable to the fluidity and dynamism of the religious fact, the article suggests an interpretation of the socio-cultural dynamics, with particular regard to the cultural relations that underlie the connections – made of open relationships and unresolved conflicts – within the network composed of Italian and non-Italian residents, of Muslims and non-Muslims believers and of representatives of the local authorities. The contribution aims to investigate the relevance of the territorial impact of the Islamic center and questions about the value of its social role through a perspective that interprets, on the one hand, urban spatiality as an instrument of understanding the religious phenomenon within the relations between the religious communities and the social, entrepreneurial and political forces and, at the same time, religious diversity as a category in constant redefinition. The common thread of the article is an approach that privileges the paradigm of the spatial turn as a vector of understanding the interrelated plural, religious and social dynamics as well as a tool for the analysis, reworking and transformation of all the functions - between individual and community needs, local and global issues, synchronic and diachronic perspectives - dealing with religion, space and place.

December 13, 2023
Paola Stelliferi, University of Roma Tre
(12.00 pm, New York / 6.00 pm, Rome)
In Accordance with Morality. Don Paolo Liggeri and the First Catholic Family Counseling Center Before the 405/1975 Law.

Respondent: Massimo Faggioli, Villanova University

Reproductive control is a crucial subject matter in 20th century world history. In all Western societies the post-WWII period witnessed a process of separating sex from reproduction and intense public debates on birth/population control and abortion laws. Nonetheless, the history of family counseling centers in Italy has yet to be adequately studied. This seminar will
analyze a case study: the experience of the first Italian family counseling center founded in Milan in 1948 (within the Catholic “La Casa” Institute) by an anti-fascist priest, Don Paolo Liggeri (1911-1996). This center (founded about 30 years before the 405/1975 law which established the public family counseling centers) sought to give psychological, moral, and religious support to displaced families in postwar Milan. Among the forms of assistance offered, Don Liggeri also taught sex education. After the “economic miracle” (1958-1963) which boosted the secularization process in Italian society, Don Liggeri expanded his sex education project by publishing several volumes (e.g., the book series *Il matrimonio. Otto lezioni*) and editing a letter column in the weekly “Oggi” (first titled *Risponde il sacerdote* and then *La parola al confessore*). Don Liggeri followed both the canons of Catholicism (in particular, the encyclical *Casti connubii*, 1930) and the Title X of the 1930 Italian penal code (*Crimes Against the Integrity and Health of the Race*) which was preserved by the Italian Republic after the fall of Fascism. Nonetheless, he displayed a freedom of thought that was exceptional for the period of “clerical regime” and of the Catholic moral restoration, in many ways anticipating and then embodying the spirit of the Vatican II Council.