Introduction to M.S. Quine’s ‘Racial “Sterility” and “Hyperfecundity” in Fascist Italy’

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For decades after the Second World War it was the received wisdom of historians that Nazism was biologically racist and dominated by eugenic thinking while Fascism rejected biologism in its conceptualization of the nation and nationalist revolution. So deeply engrained was this assumption that when both Zeev Sternhell and James Gregor refused to accept Nazism as a member of the ‘family of fascism’ on account of its biological racism they caused little dissent. However, thanks to the work of historians such as Carl Ipsen, Francesco Cassata and Ruth Ben-Ghiat, evidence has been accumulating that the ‘bonifica’ of Italian society as the precondition of its rebirth involved projects that in some quarters were formulated in the language of racial hygiene and positive eugenics. Maria Quine is the author of major works on 20th century population politics and the emergence of a Fascist welfare state, and her latest research into Fascist racism demolishes the simplistic myth, born more of racial stereotypes than of primary research, of ‘Fascisti bravi’ contrasted with ‘Nazisti cattivi’. Fascism has decided to take the exceptional step of publishing Maria Quine’s long article in its entirety because it not only refutes attempts to cling to the myth of a Fascism in which racism was a barely perceptible subcurrent, but actually documents the existence of the impact of thinking shaped by the theories of negative eugenics. We hope it will be the stimulus to more research into the crosscurrents between racist and ‘cultural’ ultranationalism which characterized the fascist period.