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# Italy's Margins: Social Exclusion and Nation Formation since 1861 (Cambridge Social and Cultural Histories)

*By David Forgacs*



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**Italy's Margins: Social Exclusion and Nation Formation since 1861 (Cambridge Social and Cultural Histories)** By David Forgacs

Italy's Margins explores how certain places and social groups in Italy have been defined as marginal or peripheral since unification. This marginalization involves not only concrete policies but also ways of perceiving people and places as outside society's centre. The author looks closely at how photography and writing have supported political and social exclusion and, conversely, how they have been enlisted to challenge it. Five cases are examined: the peripheries of Italy's major cities after unification; its East African colonies in the 1930s; the less developed areas of its south in the 1950s; its psychiatric hospitals before the reforms of the late 1970s; and its 'nomad camps' after 2000. Each chapter takes its lead from a symptomatic photograph and is followed by other pictures and extracts from written texts. These allow the reader to examine how social marginalization is discursively performed by cultural products.



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### **Review**

"This is a highly original and beautifully written book. The author takes as his subject matter the ways that marginal people and places have been represented and understood by photographers, filmmakers, writers and others in Italy since unification. His understanding of the creation of these 'margins' is linked to the formation of the Italian nation-state. Multidisciplinary, wide-ranging, constantly surprising and always incisive, *Italy's Margins* is a path-breaking piece of work."

John Foot, University of Bristol

"Meticulously researched and yet highly readable ... Drawing upon a richly comparative background, David Forgacs turns his discerning eye to the ideological work done by photography in determining ways of looking that constitute marginality as such. The result will change our way of looking at the history of modern Italy itself."

Barbara Spackman, University of California, Berkeley

"This is a brilliant book. Through the analysis of photographs and written texts, David Forgacs explains how the Italian nation has been built on the process of social and symbolic exclusion and, in so doing, he offers us an original and fascinating new perspective on modern Italian history."

Lucy Riall, European University Institute, Florence

"*Italy's Margins* is a landmark achievement. Drawing on compelling arrays of photographic and written material, Forgacs surveys post-Unification Italy's web of 'other spaces': its urban peripheries and colonies, its 'souths', asylums and migrant encampments. His dense cartography of these marginal social spaces, their sites of exclusion and resistance, captures with exceptional force their role as hidden matrices of Italy's modernity."

Robert S. C. Gordon, University of Cambridge

"*Italy's Margins* offers an extremely original, well-researched, and detailed analysis that raises key questions on the construction of national identity and of marginality, and sheds new light on a number of different fields, engaging the reader through a compelling argument and highly readable prose."

Marina Spunta, H-Net

"Forgacs's very impressive book offers a stimulating multidisciplinary account of modern developments in Italian history that should be required reading for any scholar working on marginality, no matter the national context. The book exposes the relations of power that preside over dynamics of exclusion and, more importantly, makes us aware of our own contradictory role in these dynamics: every time we speak in the name of the excluded we reaffirm our own privileged position as researchers, even as we try to counteract the structural imbalance in the scale of power."

Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi, *American Historical Review*

### **About the Author**

David Forgacs teaches in the Department of Italian Studies at New York University, where he holds the Zerilli-Marim- Chair of Contemporary Italian Studies. Before that (1999-2011) he held the Panizzi Chair of Italian at University College London and he formerly taught at the Universities of Cambridge and Sussex. He is author of *Italian Culture in the Industrial Era, 1880-1980* (1990), *Mass Culture and Italian Society from*

Fascism to the Cold War (with Stephen Gundle, 2007) and editor of Rethinking Italian Fascism (1986), The Antonio Gramsci Reader (1998, 2000) and Italian Cultural Studies (with Robert Lumley, 1996).

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