"Prisoners of Hope" or "Amnesia"?

The Italian Holocaust Survivors and Their *aliyah* to Israel.

by *Arturo Marzano*

"You have to come to Palestine", the soldiers of the Jewish Brigade told me.
"There are so many Jews over there. A Jewish State will soon be created".
I was lured. But then I felt so homesick, maybe because of the Roman dialect songs we were singing. "Before that, I have to see Rome again" I said.
They replied: "Rome? After what they did to you?"
"Rome is Rome… it has nothing to do with Italy. It's something peculiar. It's Rome.[1]

Abstract

Out of the 38.000 Italian Jews residents in Italy in 1938, more than 4,148 were deported. Of these, only 312 survivors returned. This paper deals with the Italian Holocaust survivors' migration to Israel, and investigates the reason why only a very small percentage of those who returned from the Nazi camps migrated to Israel, compared to a much higher percentage of Italian Jews who were not deported and made aliyah. Were they "prisoners of hope"? Did they decide to reintegrate into the Italian political, social, and economic context hoping that their relationship with Italy could be the same as if nothing had happened? Or was it a question of "amnesia"? Was the lack of memory of the Fascist persecution a price they had to pay in order to succeed in their request of a full reintegration or was it due to the attitude of forgetting the past that Jews shared with the entire Italian society?

Introduction

Out of the 38.000 Italian Jews[2] who were residents in Italy in 1938, 4,148 were deported between September 16, 1943 and February 24,

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1 The meeting between Settimia Spizzichino from Rome and soldiers of the Jewish Brigade took place in the countryside near Bergen Belsen in May 1945. In Settimia Spizzichino and Isa Di Nepi Olper, *Gli anni rubati*, (Comune di Cava de' Tirreni, 1996), 61.

2 Renzo De Felice, *Storia degli ebrei italiani sotto il fascismo*, (Torino: Einaudi, 1993), 5.

1945.[3] Out of them, only 312 survivors returned.[4]
Historiography has not focused on what happened to them after their return, and no one investigated whether they emigrated to Israel or elsewhere, or whether they remained in Italy. At the same time, only limited studies have investigated on the post-war Italian *aliyah* [migration], which started in March 1945, even before the entire Italian territory had been liberated.
This paper deals with the Italian Holocaust survivors' migration to Israel, and wants to investigate the reasons why only a very small percentage of those who returned from the extermination camps migrated to Israel, compared to a much higher percentage of Italian Jews who were not deported and who made *aliyah*. Actually, the former were not an exception, whereas the latter were. In fact, the vast majority of Italian Jews did not leave the state that had betrayed them in 1938 and that had contributed to their deportation in 1943-45, but decided to remain in Italy.
Were they "prisoners of hope"?[5] Did they decide to reintegrate into the Italian political, social, and economic context hoping that their relationship with Italy could be the same as if nothing had happened, as if the Italian Government had not adopted the Racial Laws in 1938, and as if Italians had not played any role in their deportation? Or was it a question of "amnesia"?[6] Was the lack of memory of the Fascist persecution a price they had to pay in order to succeed in their request for a full reintegration or was it due to the attitude of forgetting the past that Jews shared with the entire Italian society?
While recent studies have aimed at replying to these questions, by focusing on the general picture of Italian Judaism, this paper intends to analyse the specific behaviour of that small group of Italian Jews who were deported and survived.

The post-war Italian *aliyah*. Some data.

Only five of the 312 survivors we have referred to in the Introduction made *aliyah*: Anna Di Gioacchino Cassuto left Florence in November

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3 Liliana Picciotto Fargion, "La ricerca del Centro di Documentazione Ebraica Contemporanea sugli ebrei deportati dall'Italia", *Storia e memoria della deportazione*, ed. Paolo Momigliano Levi, (Firenze: Giuntina, 1996) 51.

4 6806 Italian and foreign Jews were deported from Italy. 837 of them survived. In Liliana Picciotto Fargion, *Il libro della memoria. Gli Ebrei deportati dall'Italia (1943-1945)*, 3rd ed. (Milano: Mursia, 2002), 28.

5 I draw the expression from Henry Stuart Hughes, *Prisoners of Hope: The Silver Age of the Italian Jews (1924-1974)*, (Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press, 1983).

6 I owe the expression to Ilaria Pavan, *Persecution, Indifference, and Amnesia. The Restoration of Jewish Rights in Post-war Italy*, (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2006).

1945 to move to Jerusalem;[7] Martino Godelli and his wife Gisella Kugler, both from Fiume, moved from Trieste in 1954 to the *Nezer Sereni* kibbutz; Hanna Kugler Weiss, Gisella's sister, moved to Israel in 1949 and went to Nazaret Illit; finally, Giacomo Marcheria, originally from Trieste, went to Israel from Rome. This means that 1,6% of the Italian Jews who had been deported and had survived decided to migrate to *Eretz Israel*.

On the contrary, out of the 30,000 Italian Jews[8] living in Italy after the war, a much greater number moved to Israel. There are no definite figures, because in-depth research on that topic is still lacking, and different numbers are presented: according to Bernard Wasserstein, between 1948 and 1951 1305 Italians made *aliyah;*[9] Sergio Della Pergola affirms that between 1944 and 1951 2084 Italian Jews moved to Israel.[10] According to the latter data, a percentage of almost 7% of non-deported survivors left Italy to make *aliyah*.[11]

Why is there such a discrepancy between the two percentages? Is there a correlation between the fact that the great majority of people who had experienced deportation decided to remain in Italy, and therefore tried – more or less successfully – to reintegrate into the Italian

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7 She tragically died in the Arab terrorist attack against a Jewish convoy that was travelling from Jerusalem to the Hadassa Hospital on Mount Scopus, on April 14, 1948. See Massimo Longo Adorno, *Gli ebrei fiorentini dall'emancipazione alla Shoà*, (Giuntina: Firenze, 2003), 146-7.

8 Guri Schwarz, *Ritrovare se stessi. Gli ebrei nell'Italia postfascista*, (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2003), 5. See also Guri Schwarz,"The Reconstruction of Jewish Life in Italy after World War II", *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies*, 8/3 (2009): 360-377.

9 Bernard Wasserstein, *Vanishing Diaspora*, (London: Penguin Books, 1996), 92.

10 Sergio Della Pergola and Amedeo Tagliacozzo, *Gli Italiani in Israele*, (Roma: Rassegna Mensile di Israel – Federazione Sionistica Italiana, 1978), 33. Most probably, Wasserstein took the number 1305 from this book, as this is the figure provided for the 1948-51 period. Fano gives different numbers: 621 Italian Jews left Italy between 1948 and 1955. If we add 158 people (who made *aliyah* in 1944-45) and 273 people (who went to Israel between 1945 and 1948), we obtain the much lower number of 1052 Italian Jews. See Angelo Fano, "L'aliah dall'Italia dal 1928 al 1955", *Rassegna Mensile di Israel*, 21/7 (1955): 270. Therefore, according to Fano, the percentage of Italian Jews who migrated to Israel is lower, 3,5%.

11 An interesting comparison can be done with France. Between 1944 and 1949, there were around 225,000 Jews living there. According to Sergio Della Pergola, 2000 of them made *aliyah*. See Doris Bensimon and Sergio Della Pergola, *La population juive de France. Socio-démographie et identité*, (Jerusalem: Institute of Contemporary Jewry – CNRS, 1984), 36. Wasserstein presents a higher figure, as according to him, 3050 French Jews left France. See Wasserstein, *Vanishing Diaspora,* 92. This means that only 1,2% of French Jews made the Zionist choice. As far as I know, there are no statistics about how many French deportee moved to Israel. Telephone interview of the author with Serge Klarsfeld, July 29, 2008.

context, while a significant minority of people who had certainly lived a very difficult period – not the Nazi camps, though – decided to answer to the Zionist call, and to abandon their previous life for a new one in the Jewish State?

The return from extermination camps.

In order to reply to this question, let us start with what the deported victims found once they were back home.[12] Were they welcomed? How did Italy receive them? Did the Jewish communities support them and provide them with what they needed to overcome the tragedy they had been through? Or, at least, did their relatives – if still alive - and friends welcome them?
When the deportees came back home, their Jewish communities were slowly trying to recover, go back to their everyday lives and carry out the same activities they had been used to before the Shoah. The first communities to pass through this process were those located in the centre of Italy,[13] like Rome or Florence, which had been liberated in the summer of 1944. In those cities, almost everyone – Jews included – were trying to forget the past, overcome the tragic experience of the war, and go back to life, looking forward to the future.
This is how Giulia Sermoneta Cohen describes her life in Rome in an interview she gave in February 1996:

> We had a great will to live, to dance, to travel, to experience our first love stories. Our past was there, but we had to go on. We crave to be young. I knew some of those who had come back from the camps. They did not speak. And we did not ask them anything in order to respect them.[14]

Also Annamarcella Falco Tedeschi confirms that this was the situation

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12 On the topic, see *Il ritorno dai Lager*, ed. Alberto Cavaglion (Milano: Franco Angeli, 1993); Mario Toscano, "The Abrogation of Racial Laws and the Reintegration of Jews in Italian Society (1943-1948)", *The Jews Are Coming Back. The Return pf the Jews to Their Countries of Origin After WWI*, ed. David Bankier, (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2005), 148-68.

13 In the south of Italy, the first part of the country to be liberated, there were no Jewish communities, but only foreign Jews who had been placed in the Ferramonti di Tarsia concentration camp, or who had been able to find safety in the Allied occupied territory.

14 Federica Barozzi, "L'uscita degli ebrei di Roma dalla clandestinità", *Il ritorno alla vita: vicende e diritti degli ebrei in Italia dopo la seconda guerra mondiale*, ed. Michele Sarfatti, (Firenze: Giuntina, 1998), 44.

in Rome at that time.[15]
When survivors came back from the extermination camps long after Rome had been liberated,[16] everyone else wanted to go on with his/her own existence. Piero Terracina came back to Rome in December 1945, one and a half years after the liberation of the city in June 1944. Although he received much love and care from his friends, he understood that he could not share his experience with them.[17]

> With [my friends] and my relatives for many years I did not talk about what had happened to me. I was afraid they could ask me how I survived…. I was terrified by the possibility of somebody asking me "why did you survive, while my son and my husband did not?". At the same time, I thought that if I had spoken about something, many people would have got annoyed, or at least some of them would have thought: "What is he saying? It is not possible".[18]

The same happened to many others. Liana Millu describes two episodes that may explain the feeling most of the survivors felt after their return.

> In October [1945] I decided to accept my aunt's proposal to go to live with her in Pisa. (…) Later, I started to tell her. I wanted to talk, I needed to talk, to let people know, and my aunt sometimes was moved. But she was always interrupting me, overlapping her memories with mine. Her stories were those of an evacuee; she thought they were terrible, but to me they didn't seem so. I started to realise that people would not have understood.
> (…) A cousin wanted to meet me. Her daughter (…) had been deported in

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15 "If I think that in June 1944 Jews were still being massacred, while we were celebrating, I feel guilty. But at that time, we only wanted to live, and we were eager to enjoy ourselves, to relax, to dance, after so many years of deprivation". Interview of the author with Annamarcella Tedeschi Falco, Milan, February 1998. Annamarcella, her mother (widow of Mario Falco), and her sister made *aliyah* in March 1945. Her sister remained in Israel, while she and her mother came back to Italy a few months later.

16 According to the Zionist weekly *Israel*, which started to host an "Information Bulletin", a total number of 75 survivors had come back by August 3 (Bulletin n. 2); 226 by August 31 (Bulletin n. 6); 395 by September 20 (Bulletin n. 9); 426 by September 28 (Bulletin n. 10); 477 by October 12; 579 by January 11, 1946 (Bulletin n. 25).

17 "When I arrived in Rome, I found a group of friends who protected me, who never treated me as being different. And I was different, indeed, because whoever goes to hell and comes back, cannot be normal any longer. (…) Probably I wanted to talk, but the others did not care. There was indifference, or even intolerance. People said: What do you think? That in Italy it was a bed of roses? We were hungry; it was cold. As if that hunger and that cold could be the same we suffered in Auschwitz". Interview of the author with Piero Terracina, Rome, September 19, 2008.

18 Barozzi, *L'uscita degli ebrei di Roma dalla clandestinità*, 45.

1944, and she knew nothing of her. She started asking me questions I could only vaguely reply to. In the event, she stared at me angrily: "You came back. You, who did not have parents or a husband; you who always gave problems to your family. Why didn't she come back? She had a child, she was good, she deserved to come back! She had to come back! Is this God's justice?" (…) I said nothing, but I did not feel guilty.[19]

Actually, in the northern Italian communities – which were liberated in the spring of 1945 - the exact same thing happened just a few months later.
Israel De Benedetti, in his autobiography published in 2003, wrote:

During the first weeks of the summer of 1945, my friend Franco, with his father and mother, came back from Buchenwald. After a few days, Gegio Ravenna came back from Auschwitz. Only four out of the almost one hundred who had been deported came back. Four mute people, who said nothing, not a single word about what they had seen and had gone through, for days, months, years.[20]

When Martino Godelli, from Fiume, spoke about the camps, he was not believed and therefore he decided not to speak any longer about them.[21] And Primo Levi also described those years in the same way:

At that time, people had other things to do. They had to build their houses, they had to look for a job. The food was still rationed; cities were in ruins, Allies were still occupying Italy. People did not want to listen to this; they wanted something else, they wanted to dance, for example, to have parties, to have children. A book like mine, and like many others after mine, were almost an insult, a way to ruin the on-going party.[22]

Generalising the way Elsa Morante describes Rome in her novel *La Storia*, which was published much later, it is possible to have a clear picture of the situation in those years:

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19 Liana Millu, *Tagebuch. Il diario del ritorno dal Lager*, (Firenze: Giuntina, 2006), 98-9.

20 Corrado Israel De Benedetti, *Anni di rabbia e di speranze 1938-1949*, (Firenze: Giuntina, 2003), 113.

21 "Once, three months after I had come back from the camps, I was on a train. A guy asked me what my tattoo represented. I started telling him about what had happened. When I went out of the train compartment, probably in order to smoke, I heard him saying: «how many tall stories is that guy from Trieste telling?» I decided not to talk any more. When people asked me what my tattoo represented, I used to say: it is my girlfriend's telephone number". Telephone interview of the author with Martino Godelli, October 23, 2008.

22 In Schwarz*, Ritrovare se stessi*, 116.

> Soon they [the Jews] understood that no one wanted to listen to their stories: there were those who did not pay attention from the beginning, those who interrupted them with an excuse, and those who even avoided them, as if they meant: "Brother, I really understand, but in this moment I have other things to do". (…) People wanted to remove them as dead or mad relatives are removed from normal families.[23]

When Geo Josz, the main character of Giorgio Bassani's short story *Una lapide in via Mazzini* [A headstone in Via Mazzini], returned to Ferrara in August 1945, the community had already made a headstone to commemorate Ferrara's deported victims. Josz found his name among the dead and it took him a while to make other people accept he was alive and back. The difficulties he met in making other people listen to him, as everybody wanted to look forward to the future and to a better life, convinced him that it was better to leave Ferrara again.
This confirms that the setting and the atmosphere survivors found in Italy once they were back did not represent a reason to remain. It is pointless to highlight that the situation of Judaism in Italy cannot be compared to what had happened in Poland, where the virulence of anti-Semitism made it impossible for the survivors to stay.[24] But it is important to remember that – as we have seen - the reception in Italy was not warm. Moreover, as research has recently highlighted with regard to restoration of rights, restitution of personal property and real estate, and professional reintegration, Italian legislation was very poor, especially if we compare it to the rest of Western Europe.[25]

The "return to life" of the Jewish communities. The "victory" of Zionism.

When the survivors returned home, not only did they meet people who wanted to go on with their lives without listening to survivors, but they also encountered Jewish institutions, which were ready to turn over a new page. The Zionist organisations, in particular, were permeated by

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[23] Elsa Morante, *La Storia*, (Torino: Einaudi, 1974), 376-7, quoted by Cavaglion, *Il ritorno dai Lager*, 154.

[24] See the bibliography included in Fabio Maria Pace, "L'impossibile ritorno: gli ebrei in Polonia dalla fine della guerra al pogrom di Kielce", *Il ritorno alla vita e il problema della testimonianza. Studi e riflessioni sulla Shoah*, ed. Alessandra Chiappano and Fabio Minazzi, (Firenze: Giuntina, 2007), 127-53.

[25] Ilaria Pavan, *Persecution, Indifference, and Amnesia*. On the same topic, see Ilaria Pavan, *Tra indifferenza e oblio. Le conseguenze economiche delle leggi razziali in Italia (1938-1970)*, (Firenze: Le Monnier, 2003) and Giovanna D'amico, *Quando l'eccezione diventa norma. La reintegrazione degli ebrei nell'Italia postfascista* (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 2006).

lively energy and were looking forward to the future, more than to the past.

If one reads the issues of the re-born Jewish-Zionist weekly *Israel* published between 1944 and 1948, it is interesting to note that there are only a few articles related to the Shoah. The names of those deported were published in several issues, but, apart from that, not much else appeared in the press. The revival of Jewish life – which in Italy meant a Zionist life – was given much more space in the press: a huge quantity of activities and many newly created groups and associations were mentioned. But the *Yishuv* [the Jewish community resident in Palestine] - and later the state of Israel – was the principal topic of most of the articles published, which discussed the activities of the *chalutzim* [pioneers], their hard work, and their great achievements.

This is not a surprise. Italian Jewish communities had been almost completely "conquered" by Zionism, which had been first brought by the *chayalim* [soldiers], the Palestinian Jewish soldiers who were embedded in the British army, and later by the Jewish Brigade.[26] It was a question of timing. When the Jewish communities could finally celebrate the departure of the Nazi troops, and could start living again, they met the Jews from the *Yishuv*, who contributed greatly to their recovery. This contribution was both practical – for example water delivery to the local population[27] – but also ideological.

In Rome, their presence was extremely important, as evidence clearly demonstrates:

> The Palestinian soldiers (…) soon began to centre their efforts around the work for children and youth. A school was opened in Via Balbo with the intention of (…) helping their physical and moral rehabilitation. The syllabus was based mainly on Hebrew lessons and bringing the children into contact

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[26] Created on September 19, 1944, it sailed towards Italy from North Africa on November 3, 1944. On the shoulders of the members of the "Fighting Jewish Brigade", there was a tag consisting of a yellow Star of David against a blue-white-blue background. For the activity of the Jewish Brigade, see Hanoch Bartov and Yoav Gelber, *The Living Bridge. The Meeting of the Volunteers from Eretz Israel with the Holocaust Survivors*, (Tel Aviv: Beth Hatefutsoth, The Nahum Goldmann Museum of the Jewish Diaspora, 1983); Morris Beckman, *The Jewish Brigade. An Army with two masters (1944-45)*, (London: Spellmount, 1998); *La Brigata Ebraica in Italia (1943-45). Attraverso il Mediterraneo per la libertà,* ed. Bice Migliau and Ghila Piattelli, (Roma: Centro di cultura ebraica di Roma, 2003); Michael Tagliacozzo, "Attività dei soldati di Eretz Israel in Italia (1943-46). Il corpo ausiliario dei soldati palestinesi nell'armata di liberazione inglese", *Saggi sull'ebraismo italiano del Novecento in memoria di Luisella Mortara Ottolenghi*, ed. Liliana Picciotto Fargion, Numero speciale de *La Rassegna Mensile di Israel*, 59/1 (2003), 575-87.

[27] Leah Dana met the Jewish soldiers in Florence, after the liberation of the city. She was looking for water, and she saw a truck with a water-tank and the Star of David painted on it. She was very impressed by the fact that the soldiers could speak Hebrew. Interview of the author with Leah Dana, Kibbutz *Magaan Michael*, October 5, 2007.

with Modern Palestine. (…) After the school moved away from Via Balbo, the work there was concentrated upon (…) teenagers. The soldiers working there devoted all their soul and energies but the results of their work would have been far greater, if they had been able from the beginning to understand and to adapt themselves to the particular mentality and outlook of Roman Jews. (…) Here in Rome Jews argued that Anti-Semitism never had struck root in the Italian people – and they are right at his regard – and that the only thing they could do was to return to their pre-1938 way of life. And many of them who had begun to doubt and to look for new ideas and ideals were not attracted to the particular views and habits exhibited by many of the Palestinians. (…) Nevertheless, it is encouraging to note that in the Youth centre as well as in the Zionist Movement and in the Hakhsharah that have been recently established in Rome, the majority are Italian Jews and I have no doubt that in time many of them will find their way to Palestine and help to re-establish more intimate contact between Italian Jewry and their new Homeland.[28]

Also the northern communities took advantage of the presence of the Jewish Brigade, which in April 1945 reached Milan, where a centre for Palestinian soldiers was opened in Via Cantù.

At first the Palestinian soldiers were very helpful. Their work in the North was not as flashy as in the Centre and the South (…). Yet in the North, and in particular in Milan, the *chayalim* (…) supported the reconstruction of the Jewish institutions, transported the *olim* to the harbours, and helped their brothers to find the strength and will to live.[29]

The First post-war Zionist Congress[30] was held in Rome in January 1945;[31] it was the demonstration that Zionism had "conquered" the hearts and minds of the Italian Jews. An article which appeared in *Israel* is worth quoting, as it makes a comparison between the *Unione delle Comunità Israelitiche Italiane* (UCII) and the newly established *Federazione Sionistica Italiana* (FSI).

The UCII (…) does not seem willing to decide whether to start acting again.

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28 Unsigned letter sent to S. Wechsler, c/o Jewish Chaplain, Rome Allied Area Command, 3 October 1944, 0.31 Collection Italy, JM 1131, File 1, Yad Vashem Archive, Jerusalem.

29 Alfredo Sarano (Secretary of the Milan Jewish Community), "Sette anni di vita e opere della comunità di Milano", April 1945 – May 1952, 0.31 Collection Italy, JM 1716, File 1, p. 8, Yad Vashem Archive, Jerusalem.

30 In particular, the Congress was calling for the active participation of "the vigorous and promising youth communities that have already organized themselves in the preparing-for-agriculture camps, and in the first nucleus of *He-Chalutz*". "Un nuovo aspetto della vita ebraica in Italia", *Israel*, January 18, 1945.

31 "La prima iniziativa sionistica dell'Europa liberata", *Israel*, January 18, 1945.

(…) Until it can carry out its duties again, it will have to recognise that the FSI – as created in the recent Congress – represents Italian Judaism much more than the Union.[32]

The "victory" of Zionism explains why a relevant number of Italian Jews – clearly a minority, yet significant[33] - decided to leave Italy and to settle in Israel. It is as if a sort of "fever" had spread throughout Italian Judaism, in particular among its younger members. It was mainly these who migrated; because of their age, they had not experienced the successful Jewish integration into the Italian civil, political, socio-economic and cultural context in the decades preceding the Racial Laws. Unlike the older generations, it was much more difficult for them to consider the 1938-45 years as a parenthesis in an experience of full equality of rights, integration and identification with the Italian nation.[34] While their parents and grandparents had experienced those earlier years, and did remain "prisoners of hope", the younger generations could not. Zionism – which they joined thanks to the *chayalim* who arrived along with the American and British liberators – represented the ideological framework they needed in order to escape from such a "prison", and *aliyah* was the main tool for this.
The question that has to be answered, then, is why did not the survived deportee – the vast majority of whom was made up of young people - make *aliyah*?

The Zionist propaganda from *Eretz Israel*. Which was the impact on the deportees?

Despite being the main reason for the spread of Zionism among Italian Jews, the *chayalim* were supported in their task by the Italian Jews who had already migrated to *Eretz Israel* before the war. In fact, the latter started to send appeals to the Italian Jews to convince them to migrate. All of the messages sent to Italy shared the same idea: the duty of Italian Jews was to build Israel through the hard work in the

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32 "Un nuovo aspetto della vita ebraica in Italia", *Israel*, January 18, 1945.

33 Before the war, 500 Italian Jews had migrated to British Palestine: 100 between 1920 and 1938, and 400 after the Racial Laws. See Arturo Marzano, *Una terra per rinascere. Gli ebrei italiani e l'emigrazione in Palestina prima della guerra (1920-40)*, (Milano: Marietti, 2003). Compared to these numbers, the post-war *aliyah* seems huge.

34 Schwarz, *Ritrovare se stessi*, 82-85.

kibbutzim[35]. Many of the articles and newsletters sent to Italy dealt with the activities that needed to be carried out in *Eretz Israel*, such as agricultural projects, water canalization works, the foundation of new *yishuvim* [settlements], the enhancement of industrial activities.[36]

Also the first group of people leaving Italy in March 1945 - mainly Roman Jews - was involved in propaganda activities, in order to convince the Italian Jews to migrate. The main aim was to support the creation of a fully structured *chalutz* movement in Italy in order to carry out a mass migration from the country, as part of the gradual dissolution of the Diaspora.[37] The description of life in the *kibbutzim* represented the main topic of the newsletters written by the *italkim*, with all the details related to the hard work needed to *livnot ve lehivanot* [build and be built].[38]

Was this message successful? Given the numbers of those who migrated, we could state it was. Certainly, one of the main differences with the less successful pre-war *'aliyah* was the presence in *Eretz Israel* of a structured community of Italian Jews, which made the settlement there simpler for the new *olim*. Was this approach successful with the deportees, as well? Given the numbers of the few who migrated, we could assume it was not.

This type of message could work with those Italians who had not been

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35 "You have just started to do something very important, you are at the beginning of a new life and it seems that you have already put forth a lot of effort; you have already overcome the highest obstacle. (…) Like you, we came from the same country, from the same social classes and we have been through a radical transformation, but none of us could think of living a different life. Hard work under the sun for those who are not used to it requires a strong will and one has to be ready for huge material and intellectual sacrifices. (…) We have been waiting for the Italian Jewish youth to walk along the path of reconstruction of *Eretz Israel* for a long time; now you are here and we are welcoming you as our future *chaverim* [*kibbutz* members] and we can only hope you might grow in number. After the massacre of five million Jews, each of us has to realize that his own contribution is of outmost importance: *Eretz Israel* will be built again only if each of us will be ready to give all of himself". "Letter to the young Jews of Italy who prepare themselves in the hakhsharoth to come to Eretz Israel", Kibbutz *Givat Brener*, 3 September 1944, P 192, Box 63, Bag 5, Central Archive for the History of the Jewish People, Jerusalem.

36 Message of the *Irgun Olei Italia* [Organization of Italian Immigrants] to the Italian Jews, January 1945, P 192, Box 9, Central Archive for the History of the Jewish People, Jerusalem.

37 Gershon Calò and Tullio Segre to the Italian Jews, Degania Alef, 18 April 1945, P 192, Box 15, Bag 9, Central Archive for the History of the Jewish People, Jerusalem.

38 Tullio Segre, "Aspects of our group life", *Le iedideinu*, September–October 1945, 5-6, located in P 192, Box 15, Bag 9, Central Archive for the History of the Jewish People, Jerusalem.

deported, and had been able to hide: they were ready to act after so many years of passiveness; they had met the *chayalim* who had concretely demonstrated to them that Zionism was the best way to transform that passiveness into activism; they had been involved in several Zionist activities in Italy and had taken part in the reconstruction of Italian Jewish life. But it could not work with those Italians who had just returned from the death camps: they were "destroyed" in their bodies and in their soul; they were desperate to collect information about their families; they could not and did not want to think about anything else other than coming back slowly to life; they could not even conceive the possibility of making sacrifices and facing the harsh conditions of building a new state, after so many months in the Nazi camps.

At this regard, it is interesting to focus attention on what Hanna Kugler Weiss states in her memories. She wanted to move to *Eretz Israel*, but she thought that in Israel there were only *kibbutzim*, and when she saw a documentary showing what a *kibbutz* was like (with a tower and a wooden fence for self-defence), she was shocked by the similarity between the death camps she had experienced and the *kibbutzim*.[39]

The *aliyah* of the deportees. Reasons to leave. Reasons to stay.

Why, then, had the five deportees who migrated to Israel made such a decision?[40]

Anna Di Gioacchino moved to Israel because her children were already living there. After she returned from Auschwitz – while her husband Nathan Cassuto did not survive - she discovered that her sister-in-law had brought the children to Palestine and a few months later she migrated there. She belonged to a Zionist family, and she would have probably left Italy before the war, with other relatives, had her husband not been the Chief Rabbi of Florence. Zionism was a reason to leave, but the main cause is probably to be found in the fact that her children were already living in *Eretz Israel*.

Hanna and Gisella Kugler came back to Fiume even though they knew their mother had not survived. They were looking for Peppina, the old lady who had taken care of them. She was not Jewish, so they were sure she was still alive. When they discovered that she had been killed in a Nazi retaliation, they "lost all hope. [Their] dreams were destroyed. With the loss of Peppina, [they] realised that the past had gone, and

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[39] Hanna Kugler Weiss, *Racconta! Fiume-Birkenau-Israele*, (Firenze: Giuntina, 2006), 110. Telephone interview of the author with Hanna Weiss, October 22, 2008.

[40] Unfortunately, I do not have any information about one of those five. I have not been able to reach Giacomo Marcheria. His sister Ida, who is also a survivor, told me he does not want to speak about his experience. Telephone interview of the author with Ida Marcheria, October 23, 2008.

[they] had to start a new life".[41] When Gisella married Martino Godelli, Hanna remained alone and decided to leave. Why did she make *aliyah*? Was Zionism the main reason for her moving to *Eretz Israel*? Hanna's brother, Turi, was already in Palestine. He had migrated in January 1940, with the *'aliyat ha-noar* [youth migration]. Once her sister got married and moved to Trieste, Hanna decided to join him. Did Hanna Weiss choose to make *aliyah* for family reasons? Most likely it was for both reasons. After the adoption of the Racial Laws in 1938, she had become Zionist, she had started thinking of the possibility of migrating to Palestine, and this idea remained in her mind until 1949, the year she went to Israel. When her older sister moved to Trieste to live with her husband's parents, Hanna decided to reach her younger brother, still unmarried.

Martino Godelli was already a Zionist before the war. He had applied for an entry permit in 1939, while he was in the *hakhsharah* [agricultural institute] of Cevoli, near Pisa. On May 31, 1940 the Fascist government closed the *hakhsharah* and his permit arrived on June 16, 1940. But Italy had entered the war six days earlier, and he could not migrate. After his deportation, he still wanted to migrate to a *kibbutz*, but his father, sick with Parkinson's disease, would have not been accepted. This is the reason why he postponed his *aliyah* until 1954, when he moved to Israel with his parents, his wife Gisella, and their child.[42]

Family reasons explain why Fausta Finzi did not leave Milan, where she returned after being in Ravensbrück. Her mother was still alive; she was Catholic and therefore she had not been deported; she was old and it would have been too difficult to bring her to Israel.[43]

Finding their relatives, in particular their brothers and sisters, was the main reason why the deportees wanted to return home as soon as possible. For a long time Nedo Fiano hoped that his older brother Enzo might still be alive. Only after some time, when he was already back in Florence, he understood that his brother was dead.[44] Throughout her period of deportation, Goti Herskovitz Bauer hoped that her younger brother Tibor could survive. After her liberation, she met a group of Hungarians on their way to Berehovo, her parents' hometown, where she thought she might find some relatives; but she decided not to follow them in order to go back to Fiume, where she hoped she might meet her brother. And when she realised her brother had not survived, her desire was to move to the United States, in order

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41 Kugler Weiss, *Racconta!*, 108.

42 Telephone interview of the author with Martino Godelli, October 23, 2008.

43 Telephone interview of the author with Fausta Finzi, October 9, 2008.

44 Interview of the author with Nedo Fiano, Milan, September 26, 2008.

to look for her mother's brother.[45] Dora Venezia came back to Genoa to stay with her sister Flora, the only member of her family who had not been deported.[46] Virginia Gattegno, deported from Rhodes where her family had moved in 1936, decided to go back to Rome to look for some relatives who had not been deported.[47] Gilberto Salmoni wanted to migrate to Israel during the summer of 1945, but his brother did not allow him to leave. He remained in Italy.[48]

Therefore, family reasons had a fundamental role in the deportees' decision either to move to *Eretz Israel* or elsewhere.

But what happened to those deportees whose family members had all died? Piero Terracina's parents and his brothers and sisters did not survive. Nedo Fiano was in the same situation. In 1945, they were very young: Piero was 17 years old and Nedo was 20. They perfectly fit into the category of young people who were responding to the Zionist appeal to migrate to Israel. Why, then, did not Piero Terracina and Nedo Fiano leave?

Liana Millu had an aunt who was still living in Italy. But the main reason why she did not go to Israel was that she was not a Zionist, and she had no particular attachment to Judaism. The deportation had not changed her; although some of her relatives had made *aliyah*, she was not interested in moving to Israel, as she recognised Italy as her true homeland, despite a kind of "special relationship" with Israel.[49]

The question we need to answer is, then, why did the Zionist message not "conquer" the deportees while it was "conquering" many non-deportees? As we explained earlier, once people returned home from the death camps, they were not able to think about planning their future lives. The experience of the camps had taught them not to think about the future, because in the camps there was no future. They needed time to go back to life, slowly and gradually. They could not make radical decisions. Nedo Fiano continued to feel stunned long after returning home. He started working, and work was his real refuge, which allowed him to go on with his life. Any other idea, anything more complicated than living was too much for him. When Piero

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45 Interview of the author with Goti Bauer, Milan, October 18, 2008.

46 Interview of the author with Dora Venezia, Genova, October 16, 2008.

47 *Meditate che questo è stato*, ed. Federazione Giovanile Ebraica d'Italia (Firenze: Giuntina, 2006), 61.

48 At that time Gilberto was 20 years old, and he was under the care of his brother Renato, who did not allow him to leave. "I could not tolerate the idea that deportees might be killed in the war for independence. I wanted to join them in order to give my contribution. When the war was over, there was no such need any longer". Telephone interview of the author with Gilberto Salmoni, October 16, 2008.

49 *Meditate che questo è stato*, 79.

Terracina came back to Rome, working was the first thing he had to do, in order to be able to pay the rent for the room where he was living. He started working and kept on working, because work became a means to start living and getting on with his life.[50]

At the same time, Israel was perceived as too difficult a place to live in. Israel lacked those quiet living conditions the deportees had been dreaming about for so long. Lina Navarro met a friend in Venice, after she had returned from Theresienstadt; they talked about the possibility of going to Israel but she decided not to, because she "did not feel like going" due to the difficulties of living there.[51] And also Goti Bauer did not go to Israel in 1952, because of the hard life she and her husband knew they would find there.

Finally, two more issues have to be taken into consideration.

Did the perception of Italy as a country that had betrayed the Jews - expelling them from schools, depriving them of their rights, deporting them or not preventing their deportation - have any role in the decision to migrate? Miriam Benedetti and Yacov Viterbo, who were hidden in Italy during the war and were among the leaders of the Italian *chalutz* movement between 1945 and 1948, never forgave Italy for its behaviour. They never asked for Italian citizenship when, years later, in Israel, they were given the possibility of acquiring dual nationality.[52] Also Fausta Finzi thought that Italy was responsible for her deportation and for her father's death: she never considered Italy as her homeland and yet this was not enough for her to move.

Physical problems were also relevant in the decision not to leave. Shlomo Venezia, a Thessaloniki Jew with an Italian passport, was ready to move to Palestine with some friends, after his liberation. But he was affected by tuberculosis. He could not afford the trip; he was brought to the Forlanini Hospital in Udine, later to Merano, later again to Grottaferrata, near Rome. There he met the woman who would later become his wife and they both settled in Rome.[53] Piera Sonnino did not come back to Genoa until 1950, after almost five years of hospitalization. By that time, the situation was quite different and the Zionist boost had already started to decline.[54]

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50 Interview of the author with Piero Terracina, Rome, September 19, 2008.

51 *Meditate che questo è stato*, 113.

52 Interview of the author with Yacov Viterbo and Miriam Benedetti, *Givat Brener* Kibbutz, May 1999.

53 Shlomo Venezia, *Sonderkommando Auschwitz* (Milano: Rizzoli, 2007), 171.

54 Piera Sonnino, *Questo è stato. Una famiglia italiana nei lager*, ed. Giacomo Papi, (Milano: Il Saggiatore, 2004).

Conclusion

After the war, the Italian Jews decided to re-establish their relationship with Italy, which from the 1848 *Statuto Albertino* until the Racial Laws of 1938 had allowed for their successful integration. The vast majority chose to remain in Italy, while a relatively significant minority decided to make *aliyah*. This was not the case for the deportees, that – unless for family reasons or for a pre-war adherence to Zionism – did prefer to remain in Italy.

As we have tried to demonstrate, the experience of the deportation was too much a burden to allow a reflection that might lead to a radical decision, such as the *aliyah*; instead, other European Jews did so because their world had been destroyed and there was no chance to recreate it. But Italy gave the deportees the possibility of gradually getting back to life, even if the return was not as warm as they had hoped.

The majority of Italian Jews remained "prisoners of hope" and passed through a process of "amnesia". They preferred to forget what had happened, making the re-integration process as quick and smooth as possible. And almost all the deportees made that decision.

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