Marcello Flores, Simon Levis Sullam, Marie-Anne Matard-Bonucci, Enzo Traverso (eds.), *Storia della Shoah in Italia*. two volumes. Torino: UTET, 2010.

by *Franklin H. Adler*

Publication of the two-volume *Storia della Shoah in Italia. Vicende, memorie, rappresentazioni* signifies an important turning point in our understanding of the persecution of Italian Jews under Fascism, the policy of deportation and extermination during the Nazi occupation, and how these events were reflected in public policy and in the national consciousness after the war. The collection is appropriately sweeping in scope, beginning with the nineteenth century and culminating in the contemporary period. The reader confronts close to thirteen hundred pages, divided into fifty essays written by different authors, not counting introductions to each volume by the four editors. More important than such statistics, which give some idea of the project's quantitative scale, a specialist would immediately recognize the qualitative strength of this collective endeavor, after a preliminary examination of its analytic architecture, indexes, footnotes and, most importantly, the intellectual stature of the assembled authors, all notable scholars who have made significant contributions to our contemporary understanding of this tragedy.

Why does publication of these massive volumes signify a turning point? Because with finality it puts to rest, with the full weight of scholarly authority, those mythical, folkloric, auto-exculpatory, and false truisms that went largely unchallenged until the late 1980s: that the anti-Semitic laws, never effectuated with commitment and rigor, were enacted simply to please the German ally; that Italians did whatever they could under the German occupation to protect and save Jews; and that the "good Italian" had to be clearly distinguished from the "bad German," the basis of what came to be understood in the popular expression*Italiani brava gente*. Reflected, if not commemorated, in *Storia della Shoah in Italia* is a new critical scholarship, emerging first in the wake of the fiftieth anniversary of the 1938 racial laws. The point of departure was precisely this common, generally uncontested view, so much so that the very expression*Italiani brava gente* is almost always targeted in the introductory remarks of everything written during the past two decades. Additionally, reflecting trends in current scholarship, this new collection reveals not only how the earlier view ascribed sole responsibility for what happened to the bad Germans, but avoided recognition of how Fascist anti-Semitic policy from 1938 to July 1943 facilitated the core practices of the Shoah under German occupation, deporting Jews and pilfering

their property. In turn, given the one-sided ascription of responsibility to the Germans, what had been masked was the nature and extent of Italian collaboration in all aspects of German policy. The second volume, dealing with postwar Italy, addresses the failure both to redress in a timely and equitable manner the wrongs visited upon Italian Jews and to facilitate their reintegration into national life. It demonstrates how such issues had never been major concerns of anti-fascism, generally speaking, or of the constituent political parties of the new republic. In fact, what had happened specifically to the Jews went largely unacknowledged to the degree that they became melded into a more general and less problematic category, victims of Fascism, as if they had been targeted for discrimination, then annihilation, primarily because they were "anti-Fascists" rather than "Jews." There never had been a Nuremberg type process and the so-called Togliatti *epurazione* was so minimal and insignificant that all but a few fascists were held to account, while thousands of others, including those who collaborated with the Gestapo and committed despicable acts of barbaric criminality, were set free and returned to normal live well before most Jewish victims were able to recover lost occupational posts and property. The major virtue of this collection is carefully laying all the cards on the table, so to speak, providing in one place a carefully researched empirical account that can serve as the basis for further scholarly elaboration and public discussion.

Reviewing such a collection, given the constraints of time and space, is a daunting task. It is impossible to give attention to each of the fifty separate essays, all of which are appropriately authoritative and merit serious attention, so the remarks to follow shall deal rather with the collection as a totality, recognizing the limits of this approach and apologizing in advance for omissions that necessarily flow from such a perspective. Structurally, the essays are roughly the same length and generally summarize findings more fully elaborated by the authors elsewhere in larger monographs. Given the varying scope and complexity of the different subjects, measured against common space limitations, the results are understandably uneven, though none of the essays are in any sense deficient.

Formalities aside, two criteria may be invoked for substantive criticism: breadth and depth. The first speaks to the question of coverage, the degree to which the collection offers an appropriate range of subject matter and, within that range, whether or not there might be conspicuous holes or missing pieces. Here we are concerned primarily with descriptive adequacy. The second concerns analysis, the degree to which inferences are drawn, interpretations generated and perhaps causation attributed. Here we are concerned primarily with understanding, making sense of the facts. Of course,

the two criteria are necessarily interrelated: we do not collect facts and construct narratives randomly and naively, without, at least minimally, the guidance of some intuitive insights and hunches, if not formally elaborated methodological principles. Nor, for that matter, do we interpret or theorize in general or in the abstract, without as least some basic sense of the facts to be accommodated and the lay of the land.

Concerning the first criterion, breadth, little need be said. The *terminus a quo* must necessarily precede Fascism in order to situate the place of Jews in post-Enlightenment Italian development, especially the Risorgimento, the formation of Liberal Italy, as well as the multiple crises of Italian liberalism that found resolution in Fascism. Here the context of Jewish emancipation needs to be elaborated in order both to understand the notable social and political mobility Italian Jews experienced, as well as sources of resentment against them and actual anti-Semitism. Since the Shoah persists as a theme that haunts contemporary consciousness, tracing its aftermath, especially on relations between the Jewish minority and the general population, makes perfectly good sense as well.

So far, so good. Problems do present themselves, however, when it comes to some conspicuous gaps, both in the historical record and in the scholarly literature. Most surprisingly there is virtually no analysis of Fascism per se, especially before the mid-thirties, though it had already been in power for a formative decade, half its historical duration. Only by elaborating the various stages of Fascism, or at least what distinguished the twenties from the thirties, can we begin to ascertain how and why anti-Semitism became problematic only during the second half of the thirties, and not before. Fascism certainly is more than a background variable or a simple, unambiguous given, and by bracketing out the 1922 to 1934 period, one cannot grapple with the internal contractions and growing problems of legitimation that made recourse to imperialism and to racism plausible. Related to the absence of any focused analysis of Fascism, is the absence of any chapters that deal directly with the primary architects and agents of anti-Semitic public policy, minimally Mussolini, Bottai and even that important faceless bureaucrat who has received far too little attention anywhere, but whose fingers seem to be everywhere, long-serving Undersecretary of State, Guido Buffarini-Guidi. None were driven by deeply seated, anti-Semitic beliefs or sentiments, as opposed to the cynical, opportunistic targeting of Jews largely for instrumental purposes. But in order to grapple with that, one needs to know the political problems for which anti-Semitism was put forth as a solution, an end toward which anti-Semitism was a means. Only a serious analysis of Fascism, above and beyond a narrow focus on Jews, can help explain the context from which the abrupt

and extreme turn towards anti-Semitism emerged in 1937 and 1938. I will return to this problem later.

Beyond gaps in the historical record, there are a number of gaps regarding important issues already well addressed in the scholarly literature. The first concerns the myth of *Italiani brava gente*: what were its origins, how was it generated and disseminated, what were the interests at play, and how did it serve nation-building after the war to promote a "culture and politics of collective absolution"? As suggested earlier, the myth of *Italiani brava gente* has been frontally attacked in practically all the scholarly work on Jews and Fascism produced since the late eighties; in most it has actually served as the necessary point of departure. In fact, here, too, it is invoked on the very first page of the editors' introduction to the first volume. And yet again, as in the case of Fascism, it is treated as little more than an unexplored given, despite the fact that the entire second volume is devoted almost entirely to the postwar period when this myth became so formative regarding common assumptions and public opinion, as well an instrument of Italian diplomacy aimed at strategically differentiating Italy from Germany, and playing the "Jewish card," as it was actually referred to in official documents; that is, appealing directly to American Jews who presumably had disproportionate influence over U.S. foreign policy on matters of vital importance to Italy (postwar reconstruction, foreign aid, etc.). No scholar has done more on the myth of the good Italian than Guri Schwarz who has focused most of his attention on the postwar period. His essay "On Myth Making and Nation Building: The Genesis of the 'Myth of the Good Italian," published by Yad Vashem Studies in 2008[1], stands as the definitive monograph on the subject, analytically incisive and rich in archival material.

Another gap regarding the scholarly literature concerns the Fascist concept of race, especially as it developed during the second half of the thirties. How can the ideological articulation of anti-Semitism be understood without substantively dealing with the protracted debates during the second half of the 1930s concerning biological and spiritual racism, as well as how such ideological articulations led both to the essentializing and racializing Italian national identity, leading to the "othering" of Jews? True, there is an essay on eugenics by Franceso Cassata, but this focuses on theories elaborated during an earlier period, and hardly exhausts all that could be said regarding how an interest in eugenics contributed to more fully articulated and institutionalized Fascist concepts of race. No scholar has devoted more attention to this than

[1] See *Yad Vashem Studies*, n. 1 (2008), pp. 111-143.

Giorgio Israel, whose book *Il Fascismo e la razza* will likely remain the definitive monograph on the subject. True, this was published only in 2010, but his earlier, extensive work on race, as well as on the expulsion of Jews from university science faculties and scientific associations, is amply referenced by many of the volume's contributing authors as well[2]. One wonders why there is no essay in the collection on these issues by so important and prolific a scholar.

This criticism regarding gaps in coverage perhaps is inevitable in a project of this kind. Even within the space afforded by two large volumes, decisions regarding topic selection are difficult ones for editors, especially a group of four editors, to make. Undoubtedly, they bring to bear distinctive interests, values and concerns that may or may not be shared by other specialists who might have organized such a collection differently, in whole or in part. Despite the afore-mentioned gaps, there is coverage given to relatively new and important topics. Roughly two hundred pages are devoted in the second volume to the cultural significance of the Shoah in contemporary Italy, including essays on literature, cinema, and television. Significant space is given as well to postwar attitudes to the Shoah, as well as changing relations with Jews, on the part of the left, the right and the Vatican. Such contemporary topics have been largely under-represented in the standard literature, and their inclusion undoubtedly will generate further interest in extending scholarly and public attention beyond what had been a rather narrow focus on the Shoah itself and the more immediate postwar period. The inclusion of photos was a wise choice as well, since most pictorial histories of Fascism, even those published in recent years, omit any material on the racial laws or compulsory labor by Jews during the war. Specialists, of course, are familiar with this iconography, but not non-specialists and the general public.

Criticism regarding analytic depth, and the degree to which the largely descriptive essays actually deepen our understanding of the Shoah, might be more severe. To be fair, such criticism might be leveled against most post-1988 Italian scholarship on Italian Jews as well, work that in general has been richly descriptive but at the same time somewhat insular, typically atheoretical and limited in explanatory power. In this respect, the collection under review mirrors the literature at large and breaks no new ground. Only one essay really addresses a central problem of interpretation, Ilaria Pavan's "Gli storici e la Shoah in Italia." Here Pavan focuses on perhaps the one significant area of

[2] G. Israel, P. Nastasi, Scienza e razza nell'Italia fascista, (Bologna: Il Mulino 1998); G. Israel, *Il fascismo e la razza: la scienza italiana e le politiche razziali del regime*, (Bologna: Il Mulino 2010)

scholarly debate in recent years: what precipitated the 1938 campaign against the Jews, and whether this signified an abrupt *svolta* in Fascist policy or rather an extension of earlier, less visible anti-Semitic tendencies (in short, continuity or discontinuity with the past). This is one of those rare areas where scholars have attempted to go beyond the facts and draw inferences, generate interpretations and even cautiously touch upon causality. Pavan's essay not only recounts what others have argued in this debate with nuance and sophistication, but adds her own more recent contributions on how the Lateran Treaty of 1929 and the penal code of 1930 anticipated a fundamental shift in Italian nationalism from, for example, Gentile's inclusive, fluid, phenomenological-actualist concept, based on the collective self-constitution of a nation's varied inhabitants, to a far more restricted and fixed one, defining Italian identity exclusively in terms of religion (Catholicism) and biology (*stirpe*, soon further reduced to race).

Beyond the debate over interpretations concerning the 1938 campaign against the Jews, a number of highly significant analytic questions are left unexplored, only two of which can be touched upon here. While the collection of course focuses on the Shoah in Italy, no consideration is given to situating the Italian case comparatively within the broader European context. Many of the historical factors that were implicated in the persecution of Jews elsewhere were largely absent in Italy, especially prolonged controversies over Jewish emancipation, a prior history of anti-Semitic movements and political parties, and concentrations of unassimilated foreign Jews who were part of a massive wave of migration from East Europe to points westward (Vienna, Berlin, Paris, London, New York). By way of contrast, Italy's small Jewish population was highly assimilated and socially mobile. Of course, no European country was without anti-Semitism, but the scale and intensity of Italian anti-Semitism was well below the European norm, and especially regarding such major cases as Austria, Germany and France. Italy's Jewish community had experienced the highest rate of inter-marriage in Europe and arguably produced the highest proportion, given its minute size, of major leaders in government, business, the professions and the academy. Add to that the fact that Fascism was not initially anti-Semitic, becoming so only during the second half of the 1930s, and it would seem that Italy was one of the least likely countries to persecute its Jews and then collaborate in their deportation to the camps. For many non-Italian scholars, this particular history of nonconforming factors is precisely what elevates the Italian case to such comparative importance. While the field of Holocaust Studies initially focused on Eastern and Central Europe, the heartland of European Jewry and locus of annihilation, in recent times it has extended its range geographically and conceptually to accommodate other

cases implicated in the Shoah. In that respect, it is a shame that the collection under review demonstrates such little interest in these broader comparative discussions, not even in an attempt to grasp the larger context of which it was a part. That too is treated as a given, part of the general background, not a phenomenon itself illuminated.

A prominent place in comparative Holocaust studies is given to bystanders and indifference, and this is of particular relevance to Italy where there never had been mass mobilizations and campaigns of State violence against the Jews before the German occupation. Generally speaking, Italians were indifferent to the racial laws initiated in 1938, manifesting neither popular support behind the campaign against the Jews nor solidarity with them. This indifference was carried over into the post-war period, accounting partially for a collective amnesia about what specifically had happened to the Jews from 1938 to 1943. Whereas the collection under review reveals particular aspects of that indifference and amnesia, it fails to analyze the phenomenon in its generality. To do that, less attention needs to be focused on Jews and more on the socialization of Italians, especially the future *classe dirigente*, during the thirties. A familiar refrain among intellectuals who were formed during this period was the degree to which the racial laws opened their eyes to the true nature of Fascism. Unfortunately, almost none acted on this insight, as collaboration with the regime actually increased rather than diminished. The fascist past of prominent intellectuals, journalists and politicians, including their response to the persecution of the Jews, has to be understood less in terms of *individual* culpability and more in terms of *generational* motivations and choices, during Fascism and afterwards, highlighted, for example, in the recent contributions of Mirella Serri and Pierluigi Battista[3]. Until 1938, Jews were no different so far as being attracted to the benefits derived from activity in the GUF, and especially participation in the Littoriali. They too were part of a cultural consensus generated by the regime, and most likely would have continued, like all the others, to respond opportunistically to the positive and negative inducements orchestrated by the government. Of course, continued collaboration after 1938 took on a different and far more sinister significance, as the regime now made Jews objects of vituperation and aspiring, ambitious intellectuals were expected to participate in, if not actually promote, official anti-Semitism. Thanks to Francesco Perfetti's *Gli intelletuali di Mussolini*, we now know the full degree to which intellectuals, journalists, artists and

[3] M. Serri, *I redenti. Gli intellettuali che vissero due vole 1938-1948*,(Milan: Il Corbaccio 2005); P. Battista, *Cancellare le tracce: il caso Grass e il silenzio degli intellettuali italiani dopo il fascismo*, (Milan: Rizzoli 2007); Id., *Il partito degli intellettuali: cultura e ideologia nell'Italia contemporanea*, (Rome-Bari: Laterza 2001).

musicians were actually subsidized, openly and covertly, by the regime to promote its efforts, and what happened in those few cases where opposition was publically expressed to the campaign against the Jews.

After the war, skeletons and blackshirts were consigned to the closet, so far as prominent and aspiring politicians, journalists, and academics were concerned, intent upon creating a new world and artfully forgetting the past. Yet the situation was far more complex, given the pitiful demise of Fascism and the somewhat contrived birth of a new republic, symbolically if not substantively anti-fascist. Beneath the level of official rhetoric and high culture, ample space was found for an alternative, popular public sphere of the center-right, where Fascism became an object, not so much of rehabilitation, as apologia and nostalgia. This is hardly surprising, given the fact that principled anti-fascism represented a small minority, and most Italians had supported Fascism, with varying degrees of enthusiasm, until the very end. It was in this context that the myth of *italiani brava gente* took root and found popular expression in such mass publications as*Borghese*, *Gente* and *Oggi*, thanks largely to the craft of journalists like Indro Montanelli, formed under Fascism, who cultivated and reinforced a largely uncritical, highly selective and almost benign recollection of Fascism. This phenomenon is skillfully analyzed and amply documented in Cristina Baldassini's *L'ombra di Mussolini*[4]. The point here is to understand the formation of a generalized culture where Jews and what had happened to them were subjects seldom raised and superficially dealt with when they were. To fully comprehend this generalized culture, so critical to understanding why Fascist anti-Semitism and the Shoah had been evaded, one needs to pay far more attention, not so much to Italian Jews, as to the contradictory nature of Fascism and the consensus it promoted, especially during the thirties, and then its aftermath.

In conclusion, *Storia della Shoah in Italia* is a major contribution that will be a point of reference for those interested primarily in what happened to Italy's Jews under Fascism, the German occupation, and the post-war period. It is unlikely to bridge the gap between this particular experience and more general scholarship on Fascism, not only because of the deficiencies noted above, but, in the larger sense, because of a curious situation that seems to persist in Italy: scholars who focus on the Jewish experience rarely have contributed to more general discussions on Fascism, and scholars who focus on Fascism have contributed still less on the Jewish experience. In fact, books continue to be

[4] C. Baldassini, *L'ombra di Mussolini. L'Italia moderata e la memoria del fascismo (1945-1960)*, (Soveria Mannelli: Rubettino, 2008).

published on Fascism that fail to even mention the racial laws and the persecution of the Jews. For example, in 2010 Il Mulino published *Lo Stato fascista* by Sabino Cassese[5], a significant monograph by a noted author. In practically all respects, it is a fine piece of scholarship, except there is not a word on how, when and why this state turned to racism after sixteen years, and what this signified in terms of its development. Precisely because of this bewildering lack of integration between the two fields of specialization, I fear that *Storia della Shoah in Italia* will largely stand apart, without significant impact on further studies of Fascism, however much these subjects are related historically, and however close in proximity they may be placed in bookshops.

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[5] S. Cassese, *Lo Stato fascista*, (Bologna: Il Mulino 2010).