

**Did the Germans Do It All?
The Italian Shoah in International Historiography
(1946-1986)**

by *Michele Sarfatti*

Abstract

This essay examines how the main historical writings in languages other than Italian (mostly English) published in the first forty years after the end of the war addressed the role played in the arrests and the deportations of the Jews in Italy by Mussolini's Italian Social Republic (Repubblica Sociale Italiana) between the autumn of 1943 and the spring of 1945. It discusses what reconstruction of this single, salient aspect in the Italian chapter of the Shoah has been advanced or accepted by foreign historians.

To this end, I have selected the (few) existing texts on Italy and the works offering a reconstruction of the Shoah in its entirety, adding the most significant essays published in periodicals or collective volumes and a few of the many books devoted to specific aspects of that event.

As I see it, a complex contagion has taken place between the historical reconstruction of the "final solution," the ethical judgement on it, the containment policies towards post-war Germany, the quest by the successor states of the non-German collaborationist countries to pursue their own "moral absolution."

On May 11, 1961 Hulda Campagnano née Cassuto gave evidence at the trial against Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem. She was the only Italian victim called as a witness, in accordance with a decision taken by the judges for most of the countries involved. Cassuto briefly touched on the anti-Jewish legislation of 1938-1943, explaining that it had been enacted by the Fascist regime and that those laws had not targeted people's lives and their personal freedom. Then she went on to describe the arrests carried out in November 1943 in Florence by the Nazi police, remarking that they had used lists which had been drawn up in previous years by Fascist authorities. She added that in many cases the population had helped the Jews: "Each of us, of the Jews of Italy, who was saved from this hell, owes his life to the Italian population"¹ (this statement, it should be said, would be just as true about any other European country). Hulda Cassuto, of course, was questioned in a trial against one individual, one of the most senior officers of the Nazi anti-Jewish police. The purpose of the hearings was to fully ascertain his responsibilities,

¹ The English translation of the testimony is in www.nizkor.org/hweb/people/e/eichmann-adolf/transcripts/Sessions/Session-036-05;06 (accessed on July 18, 2012).

but nothing beyond that. Therefore, when the witness stated that in Florence at least two Jewish women - mother and daughter - had been arrested when they went to have their ration cards renewed, no one wondered or questioned her about the municipal office that issued those cards (and I should add that other Jews in Florence have mentioned this odious and murderous activity).²

“The New York Times” reported the Cassuto hearing as: *Heroic Aid to Jews by Gentiles Recounted at Eichmann’s Trial*, dwelling on the fact that “many Italian Jews were warned of approaching Gestapo round-ups,” thus quoting Cassuto’s words on non-Jewish Italians as rescuers, rather than those about non-Jewish Italians as persecutors.³

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In its chief features, the Shoah which took place in Europe from the mid-1930s to 1945 was a unitary event, in that it began with a modern and unexpected curtailment of rights, followed by a violent persecution culminating in the planning and implementation of systematic murder. There were however territorial differences and varying timelines, both between one country and another, and between areas ruled or occupied by the same government. Since it was Nazi Germany that initiated the modern persecution of Jews by law in 1933, and later contrived and put into execution a comprehensive plan for their extermination on a continental scale, scholars who attempt to reconstruct the history of that tragic event have obviously devoted their attention mainly to that country.

Consequently, the progress of studies about the vast and varied range of antisemitic regimes orbiting around the Third Reich, whether independent, semi-independent or puppet states, has long depended on the advancement of the general research on the Nazi anti-Jewish ideology and practice, as well as on the availability of relevant documents.⁴

² Marta Baiardi, *Persecuzioni antiebraiche a Firenze: razzie, arresti, delazioni*, in *Ebrei in Toscana tra occupazione tedesca e RSI. Persecuzione, depredazione, deportazione (1943-1945)*, ed. Enzo Collotti, (Rome: Carocci, 2007), 127-129.

³ Homer Bigart, *Heroic Aid to Jews by Gentiles Recounted at Eichmann’s Trial*, *The New York Times*, May 12, 1961.

⁴ Among the first books on anti-Jewish persecution in individual countries are: Henri Monneray, *La persécution des Juifs en France e dans les autres pays de l’Ouest, présentée par la France à Nuremberg* (Paris: Editions du Centre [CDJC], 1947). Id., *La persécution des Juifs dans les pays de l’Est, présentée par la France à Nuremberg* (Paris: Editions du Centre [CDJC], 1949). *Les Juifs en Europe (1943-1945). Rapports présentés à la Première Conférence Européenne des Commissions Historiques et des Centres de Documentations Juifs* (Paris: Editions du Centre [CDJC], 1949). Jenő Lévai, *Zsidósors Magyarországon* (Budapest: Magyar Téka, 1948). *Black Book on the Martyrdom of Hungarian Jewry* (Wien: Central European Times Pub. Co., 1948). *In Memoriam. Hommage aux victimes juives des nazis en Grèce*, ed.

My present survey examines how the main historical writings in languages other than Italian (mostly English) have between 1946 and 1986 addressed the issue of the role played in the arrest and the deportation of the Jews in Italy by the Repubblica Sociale Italiana (RSI), ruled by Benito Mussolini and operating in central and northern Italy, from autumn 1943 to spring 1945. To this end, I have selected the (few) existing texts on Italy and the works offering a reconstruction of the Shoah in its entirety, adding the most significant essays published in periodicals or collective volumes and a few of the many books devoted to specific aspects of that event.

This essay does not address the question of the reciprocal relationship and influence that existed, or did not exist, between foreign and Italian historiography. It is a very complex issue that would require a specific focus; for a long time, however, the first has neglected the second and has ignored the question of history and memory of the Shoah in Italy.⁵

In choosing a single topic (the RSI and the arrests) one inevitably leaves out important issues such as the process leading up to the persecutory legislation of 1938, the manner in which Italian authorities acted in the occupied territories in 1941-1943, the debate on the nature and the systematizing of “fascisms,” etc. This essay addresses one question: what reconstruction of this single, salient aspect in the Italian chapter of the extermination has been advanced or accepted by foreign historians.

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And yet, the beginning of this work of historical reconstruction had been timely and sound. In 1946 Cecil Roth published a book devoted to the entire history of Jews in Italy, ending with an ample description of the final phase of what he already termed “the

Michael Molho, (Nicolaidès : Salonico, 1948-1949 (vol. I – vol II) ; Buenos Aires, 1953 (vol. III)). *Zločini fašističkih okupatora i njihovih pomagača protiv Jevreja u Jugoslaviji*, ed. Zdenko Löwenthal, (Beograd: Savez jevrejskih opština FNR Jugoslavije, 1952). See also, Ilse R. Wolff, *Persecution and Resistance under the Nazis* (London: The Wiener Library, 1960). Later republished as *Part I* in Ilse R. Wolff, Helen Kehr, *Persecution and Resistance under the Nazis*, revised ed. (London: The Institute of Contemporary History, 1978). Philip Friedman, Jacob Robinson, *Guide to Jewish History under Nazi Impact* (New York: Yad Vashem Martyrs' and Heroes' Memorial Authority and YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, 1960). Later: (New York: Ktav, 1973).

⁵ Some reflections on the parallel Italian historiography in those years are in Ilaria Pavan, “Gli storici e la Shoah in Italia,” in *Storia della Shoah in Italia. Vicende, memorie, rappresentazioni*, eds. Marcello Flores, Simon Levis Sullam, Marie-Anne Matard-Bonucci, Enzo Traverso (Turin: Utet, 2010), vol. 1, 136-164. Michele Sarfatti, “La storia della persecuzione antiebraica di Renzo De Felice: contesto, dimensione cronologica e fonti,” *Qualestoria*, 32/2 (2004): 11-27. Guri Schwarz, *After Mussolini. Jewish Life and Jewish Memories in Post-Fascist Italy* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2012), 155-173. Mario Toscano, *Fascismo, razzismo, antisemitismo. Osservazioni per un bilancio storiografico*, in *Ebraismo e antisemitismo in Italia. Dal 1848 alla guerra dei sei giorni*, ed. Mario Toscano (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2003), 208-243.

catastrophe.” Although very little time had elapsed since the events, Roth managed to grasp their import of the events and to describe them in considerable detail, thanks also to Italian friends who supplied him with information or who, like Gino Luzzatto, checked the first draft of his book.⁶ His text gave an account of the rapidly accomplished German occupation, of the founding and the activity of the Republican Fascist Party and of the RSI, and described both the first phase of arrests carried out by the Nazi police and the subsequent decision by the Fascist “puppet government” to provide the arrests with a regular and official legal basis by issuing its own arrest, internment and despoliation order. This, by the way, caused an increase in the number of arrests, as Italian fascists “could often recognize the Jews, and arrested indiscriminately those whom they happened to encounter in the streets.” Roth was also aware that arrests had been carried out in the “food offices.” According to him, although Italian authorities had declared that internees would not be deported, Germans deported them just like the Jews they had arrested themselves.⁷ If we take into account that at the time it would have been as yet impossible for him to delimit and impute responsibilities and actions to Mussolini’s and Hitler’s forces, his description is indeed very good. And yet, although he taught at Oxford, wrote in English, and his book was published by an important Jewish publisher, his narrative was not taken up by those of his colleagues who in later years undertook the task of writing comprehensive histories of the Shoah. Roth had written that paragraph together with some of the victims themselves; but both his reconstruction and the testimonies were to be disregarded by subsequent historiography, as this essay will show.

There was a second beginning, which unfortunately became the one true beginning. It was due to Leon Poliakov, cofounder of the Centre de documentation juive contemporaine (CDJC) in Paris. In 1951 he published in France the first comprehensive continental overview of the persecution. Events in Italy after September 8, 1943 were touched on in a short paragraph, which briefly mentioned the solidarity of other Italians and stated that approximately ten thousand Jews “furent arrêtés et déportés par les soins de Dannecker [were arrested and deported under Dannecker’s direction],” without as much as naming the RSI.⁸

⁶ Cecil Roth, “Gino Luzzatto and Jewish History,” *Nuova rivista storica*, 49/1-2 (1965): 166-169.

⁷ Cecil Roth, *History of the Jews in Italy* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1946), 541-553.

⁸ Leon Poliakov, *Bréviaire de la haine. Le IIIe Reich et les Juifs* (Paris: Calmann Levy, 1951), 192. English translation: *Harvest of Hate. The Nazi Program for the Destruction of the Jews of Europe* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1954). Theodor Dannecker was in charge of the anti-Jewish round-ups carried out by the German police in October-November 1943. See, Liliana Picciotto, *Il libro della memoria. Gli Ebrei deportati dall’Italia (1943-1945). Ricerca della Fondazione Centro di Documentazione Ebraica Contemporanea*, 3rd ed. (Milan: Mursia, 2002), 881-889. It ought to be mentioned that Poliakov quoted the data on the number of victims from a short speech given at a CDJC conference by Massimo Adolfo Vitale, who was in charge of the Comitato Ricerche Deportati Ebrei [Search Committee for Deported Jews] in

In 1953 Gerald Reitlinger published in England a new, ample volume with a comprehensive reconstruction. He advanced the view that “Mussolini’s officials and perhaps Mussolini, too, still tried to substitute half-measures for deportation to the gas chambers, but after his captivity on the Gran Sasso Mussolini was a deflated balloon and the Verona Government [i.e. the RSI] had nothing to bargain with.”⁹ In 1962 the book was translated into Italian, with some minor updating of the parts about Italy by Massimo Adolfo Vitale, but the sentence just mentioned was not modified.¹⁰

In 1961 Raul Hilberg published his vast documentary narrative on the destruction of the European Jews, which has seven pages dedicated to Italian events in 1943-1945. After referring to the fact that Italy had become an occupied country and that Germany had promoted the creation of a “shadow government under Benito Mussolini,” Hilberg mentioned the order issued by the RSI on November 30, 1943, which decreed the arrest of all Jews,¹¹ and wrote that it was “a warning as well as a threat.” This was an ambivalent conclusion that avoided dealing with the question of the RSI’s true responsibilities. The historian then went on to relate a meeting that had taken place a few days later between the most senior Nazi officials from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and from the police. On that occasion, the Ministry’s anti-Jewish office, in response to the police’s proposal to request that the interned Jews be handed over in order to deport them to the East, had objected that it would be advisable, at first, to make it appear as if the internment were the “final solution” [“Endlösung” in the original document] and not just a “preparatory measure” [“Vorstufe” in the document].¹² Taking it for granted that the

Rome, but did not quote Vitale’s remarks on the activity of the Fascist police. Massimo Adolfo Vitale, *La persécution des Juifs en Italie (1938-1945)*, in *Les Juifs en Europe (1943-1945)*, 43-46.

⁹ Gerald Reitlinger, *The Final Solution. The Attempt to Exterminate the Jews of Europe 1939-1945* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 1953), 352.

¹⁰ Gerald Reitlinger, *La soluzione finale. Il tentativo di sterminio degli Ebrei d’Europa 1939-1945* (Milan: Il Saggiatore, 1962), 425; transl. by Quirino Maffi. As regards the updating, see, 15, 440. In 1968 Reitlinger published a new revised and enlarged English edition: the text confirmed without any changes the previous opinion on Mussolini and on the RSI, and took from Raul Hilberg’s 1961 essay the information concerning the arrest and internment order of November 30, 1943 by the Fascist republican government. Gerald Reitlinger, *The Final Solution. The Attempt to Exterminate the Jews of Europe 1939-1945*, 2nd revised and augmented ed. (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 1968), 378; 382.

¹¹ Interior Minister Guido Buffarini Guidi to Chiefs of Provinces, November 30, 1943. In Michele Sarfatti, *The Jews in Mussolini’s Italy: from Equality to Persecution* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), 188; transl. by John e Anne C. Tedeschi. Valeria Galimi, Alessandra Minerbi, Liliana Picciotto, Michele Sarfatti, *Dalle leggi antiebraiche alla Shoah. Sette anni di storia italiana 1938-1945* (Milan: Skira, 2004), 192.

¹² Chief of Department Inland II of the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs Horst Wagner to Minister of Foreign Affairs Joachim von Ribbentrop (December 4, 1943). In *Judenverfolgung in Italien, den italienisch besetzten Gebieten und in Nordafrika* (Frankfurt am Main: United Restitution Organization, 1962), 201-

authorities of the RSI were unaware of Nazi plans or in any case intended to act as “protectors” of the Jews, Hilberg added that the internment had been carried out by the German police and their “Fascist helpers,” suggesting however that the former had had a greater share in the responsibility for and the carrying out of the arrests. Eventually, in spring 1944, Nazi police “sprang the trap” and deported the internees.¹³ Compared with Poliakov and Reitlinger, Hilberg showed the Italians as actors on the stage, but the role assigned to them was one of partial collaboration, motivated by their own agenda, and manipulated by the German occupier.

Two years later Hannah Arendt, who was not a historian but is too well-known and influential to be ignored here, wrote in her famous book on Eichmann, with regard to the events in 1943-1945: the Germans “agreed that Italian Jews [...] should not be subject to deportation but should merely be concentrated in Italian camps; this ‘solution’ should be ‘final’ enough for Italy. Approximately thirty-five thousand Jews in Northern Italy were caught and put into concentration camps. [...] In the spring of 1944 [...] the Germans broke their promise and began shipping Jews from Italy to Auschwitz.”¹⁴ It is apparent that Arendt took from Hilberg’s text the statements that most tended to absolve Italy and the Italians or to downplay their role.

In 1968 Nora Levin published a general history of the persecution, summarizing the Italian situation in a way that does not, after all, differ very much from Hilberg’s. According to her, Mussolini “obligingly provided for the S.S.” the decree about the “transfer” to the concentration camps, to furnish them with a “legal handle;” she, too, ignores the arrests carried out by the Italian police. For her, as for Hilberg, the concentration was the work of “the [German] Security Police and Fascist helpers.”¹⁵

As for historians who have dealt with specific issues or events, it may be noted that in a very brief passage in his 1964 text on Pius XII and Nazism, Saul Friedlander stated that, after the round-up of Rome’s Jews, “l’action allemande contre les juifs [*German action against the Jews*]” had extended to northern Italy, where however “les autorités italiennes locales, tant laïques qu’ecclésiastiques, aident les juifs a trouver refuge [*the*

202. *Akten zur Deutschen Auswärtigen Politik 1918-1945*, Serie E: 1941-1945, Bd. VII (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1979), 218-219.

¹³ Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1961), 426-432. In 1967 the same publisher issued a reprint of the volume with a two-page *Post-scriptum*, which signalled, among other things, that more recent data on the number of deportations from Italy were then available.

¹⁴ Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem. A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Viking Press, 1963), 162.

¹⁵ Nora Levin, *The Holocaust. The Destruction of European Jewry 1933-1945* (New York: Crowell, 1968), 464-468.

local Italian authorities, both secular and religious, helped the Jews to find refuge];” the arrest order by the RSI also “*reste sans grand effet [failed to achieve much effect]*.”¹⁶

In 1975, a new comprehensive history of the Shoah by Lucy Dawidowicz came out. It had only a very short paragraph on Italy, but the author did nevertheless differentiate herself from previous historians, writing, with regard to the consequences of the November 30 order, that “the Italian police, in their hunt for Jews, managed to send more than seven thousand to camps at Fossoli di Carpi (near Modena) and Bolzano, which served as assembly centers for deportation.”¹⁷

In George Mosse’s 1978 book about racism in Europe, on the other hand, the extremely brief narrative provided no details about the arrests and only stated that after the German occupation “the active persecution of the Jews also increased in the shadow republic which Mussolini retained, the Republic of Salò [RSI]; here the small anti-Semitic wing of the Fascist Party got the upper hand. However, the Germans were the real rulers of that republic, and enforced their Jewish policy.”¹⁸

A more in-depth assessment of Italian responsibilities is to be found in the 1976 work of the Italian-born Israeli historian Daniel Carpi. On the German round-ups in October-November 1943 he pointed out that they had been carried out “on the basis of lists put at the disposal of the Germans by the Italian prefectures” and that they had “generally” taken place without the involvement of the Italian police, although occasionally with that of “the armed bands of Fascists whom the Germans had begun to enlist.” He then stressed the role of Fascists in individual arrests. When describing the November 30 order, however, his interpretation did not diverge much from Hilberg’s: “It is possible to interpret these directives to mean that the government of the Social Republic did not as yet mean to adopt its ally’s extermination policy in full, preferring to postpone the issue until the end of the war.” This stance, however, was of no avail: “S.S. headquarters rapidly took over direct control, overrode the Fascist authorities, and employed local police auxiliaries merely to supervise the transport of captive Jews and guard the internment camps.”¹⁹

¹⁶ Saul Friedlander, *Pie XII et le IIIe Reich. Documents* (Paris: Seuil, 1964), 194. English translation: *Pius XII and the Third Reich. A Documentation* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1966), 209; transl. by Charles Fullman.

¹⁷ Lucy S. Dawidowicz, *The War Against the Jews 1933-1945* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1975), 370-371.

¹⁸ George L. Mosse, *Toward the Final Solution. A History of European Racism* (New York: Fertig, 1978), 230.

¹⁹ Daniel Carpi, *The Origins and Development of Fascist Anti-Semitism in Italy (1922-1945)*, in *The Catastrophe of European Jewry. Antecedents, History, Reflection*, eds. Yisrael Gutman. Livia Rothkirchen

At last, 1978 saw the publication of the first essay on the Jews during the entire Fascist era by a non-Italian scholar, namely Meir Michaelis's long and detailed study on Mussolini and the Jews, in the context of German-Italian relationships. In it, the author cited all the main essays mentioned above, including Roth's. His narrative was based on a truly vast bibliographic and documentary research, which led him to conclude, among other things, that between 1943 and 1945 many Jews were captured by "(willing or unwilling) Italian collaborators. Thousands of Jews were arrested and interned by the Fascist police to be deported and killed by Himmler's myrmidons." He described the order to arrest all Jews, issued by the RSI's Interior Minister Guido Buffarini Guidi, and the implementation rulings by the Chief of Police Tullio Tamburini. His interpretation, however, did not hinge on the responsibility for the arrests. In his view, on one side were the Nazis, who intended to exterminate the Jews, on the other the Fascist authorities, who issued a series of "moderate" antisemitic decrees, which aimed at "taking the wind out of the sails of the Germans and restoring a measure of Italian sovereignty," meaning that they were "Fascist laws designed to save the Jews from the death camps." His conclusion read: "Mussolini's attempts to remove the Jewish question from German hands were therefore doomed to failure from the start. His internment order, though designed to protect the Jews, had the effect of facilitating the task of Eichmann's emissaries. [...] A good deal has been written about the Duce's efforts to save the Jews from the gas chambers. But while it is true that Mussolini was too much of an Italian to approve of the 'final solution', it is no less true that he and his henchmen helped to create the conditions in which the Holocaust became possible."²⁰

Michaelis, in other words, while attesting to the collaborationism of the RSI and of the dictator, nevertheless maintained that this did not mean they had espoused extermination, and that on the contrary they acted with the aim of saving the Jews from it. It was a truly original interpretation, but not, after all, so very dissimilar from those put forward by Reitlinger and Hilberg.

Yehuda Bauer's 1981 work on the US aid organization Joint had a brief chapter on Italy, and is therefore another example of how the event we are here dealing with has been summarised in an essay devoted to one specific aspect of the Shoah. The author summed up the situation by stating that the RSI "was too weak to exert any influence, and a direct SS terror regime began;" that arrests and deportations began in April 1944; that this delay and "the ineffectiveness of the Italian law of December, 1943, providing for the

(Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1976), 283-298. Revised translation of "Hitpathutah u-Mahalakheha shel ha-Antishemiyut ha-Fashistit be-Italya," in *Yalkut Moreshet*, 10 (April, 1969): 79-88.

²⁰ Meir Michaelis, *Mussolini and the Jews. German-Italian Relations and the Jewish Question in Italy 1922-1945* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 342-406, 413-414 (quotes from pages 351, 352, 389, 413-414).

arrest of all Jews, enabled the majority of Jews to escape, despite intensive German and Italian search operations.”²¹

In 1982 an important international conference on the Third Reich and the genocide of Jews was held in Paris. Michel M. Marrus and Robert O. Paxton were invited to speak on “Nazis and Jews in occupied Western Europe;” they had just published a groundbreaking study on the Vichy government’s antisemitic zeal in legislative persecution and in arresting people for deportation.²² And yet, in the few sentences of their Paris paper devoted to Italy after September 8, 1943, the two authors claimed that, even after the re-establishment of a phantom of Fascist regime, “the renewed persecution and the deportation [...] was entirely a German operation.” Further on they asserted that the limited number of victims was due to the difficult war situation and to the “widespread opposition” of the Italian population and also of some German authorities.²³ Marrus and Paxton named the recent volume by Michaelis as their source. This interpretation was again put forward in 1987, in a volume written by Marrus alone: after September 8, in Italy “manhunts against Jews began. Yet even then it was obvious that if the Germans really wanted to move against Jews still nominally under Italian Fascist authority, they had to do so on their own.”²⁴

In 1985 Raul Hilberg published a revised edition (which he at the time considered “definitive”) of his great narrative. In fact, many pages and whole chapters had been extensively rewritten. In dealing with Italy in 1943-1945, the renowned scholar now described, among other things, the roles played by Guido Buffarini Guidi and Tullio Tamburini, and also wrote that there were name lists of Jews, drawn up since 1938 by the Fascist regime, and that they were made available to the Germans. Even so, he held on to the definition of the arrest order by the republican Fascists he had given in 1961 (“a warning as well as a threat”), and again quoted the subsequent German document about letting Italian authorities believe that concentration in Italy would be the final measure. The new version no longer mentioned the “trap” in spring 1944 [which anyway had never existed], nor the “Fascist helpers,” that vague formula he had used in 1961 when referring to Fascist collaborationism. It claimed instead that “frequently the Security Police did not rely on the Italian dragnet, but proceeded with its own personnel,” and that “in May [1944] the Security Police combed through hospitals, asylums, and

²¹ Yehuda Bauer, *American Jewry and the Holocaust. The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee 1939-1945* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1981), 290.

²² Michel M. Marrus, Robert O. Paxton, *Vichy France and the Jews* (New York: Basic Books, 1981).

²³ Michel M. Marrus and Robert O. Paxton, *The Nazis and the Jews in Occupied Western Europe, 1940-1944*, “Journal of Modern History,” 54 (December 1982), 687-714. cf. 688, 709. French ed.: *Nazis et Juifs en Europe occidentale occupée (1940-1944)*, in *L’Allemagne nazie et le génocide juif* (Paris: Seuil, 1985), 287-315.

²⁴ Michael R. Marrus, *The Holocaust in History* (Hannover: University Press of New England, 1987), 75.

convents, looking for Jews.”²⁵ These changes affected the entire narrative, in that they further augmented the role and as a result the dominance of the Nazi police in handling the arrests.

The following year saw the publication of a short essay in English on the anti-Jewish policy of the RSI by Italian historian Liliana Picciotto in the *Yad Vashem* journal.²⁶ It was the first writing on this topic published in English by an Italian historian. With it we come to the end of this survey on international historiography, spanning the years 1946 to 1986. Picciotto’s essay was entirely devoted, as its title indicates, to the anti-Jewish policy of the RSI. To begin with, it ought to be noted that this was the very first essay on this subject, so that writing and publishing it were in themselves a contribution to the debate. In its 33 pages the author documented how the RSI’s anti-Jewish policy evolved from November 1943 on, and published with due relevance the translation of the arrest order issued at the end of that month. She then went on to outline a brief critical appraisal of the respective roles of the RSI and the Third Reich: “Even though the RSI did not bear direct responsibility for the deportation and murder of its Jews, it was involved, from November 30, 1943 on, in all the preliminary steps of tracking them down, arresting them, and turning them over to the Germans,” and stated that “the search for Jews, which proceeded in parallel with the confiscation of their property, was both constant and meticulous. We found several Prefects’ letters urging their personnel and police stations to work with the greatest zeal.” After detailing the main moments in the unfolding of the event, Picciotto remarked that no proof had emerged of a “direct German pressure” on the RSI that had caused the Fascist government to decree the arrest of the Jews, and that the entire anti-Jewish policy of the *Repubblica Sociale Italiana* “seems to have been a voluntary Italian adaptation to the ideology of the dominant ally” and “should be considered as an act asserting independence rather than as a surrender to German demands.” Likewise, no documents had surfaced concerning an agreement about the handing over of the people arrested, but in the author’s opinion that agreement had “undoubtedly” existed.

The essay concluded that “the explanation that the *Salò* Republic served as a buffer zone between the Nazis and the Jews, and the widespread view according to which Fascism employed preventive strategy and certain oppressive measures so as to prevent the Germans from resorting to other, more severe measures, are not acceptable. We are convinced that German atrocities could have been much more limited had the Italian administration not extended its assistance.” In a nutshell: there was no direct pressure, it

²⁵ Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews* revised ed. (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1985), 668-679.

²⁶ Liliana Picciotto Fargion, “The Anti-Jewish Policy of the Italian Social Republic (1943-1945)”, *Yad Vashem Studies*, XVII (1986), 17-49 (quot. 23; 33; 45-47; 49).

was a case of competition and not of surrender, many of the arrests were carried out by the Italian police.

It can also be said that Picciotto's reconstruction gives back the Italian persecutors their individuality, analysing and detailing the context in which they operated and the motives behind their actions. Her narrative questions and goes beyond almost all interpretations of the previous forty years, except perhaps Dawidowicz's very concise one, and actually brings to mind and further develops Roth's groundbreaking text.

Picciotto's analysis was based mainly on the vast amount of documents stored in the offices of Italian *Prefetti* [i.e. the chief government officials at the provincial level] and *Questori* [police commissioners] which she had examined in the course of her research aimed at drawing up the full list and the biographies of the Jews who fell victim to the Italian chapter of the Shoah. The outcome of her research was in 1991 the first edition of the *Libro della memoria*.²⁷

It is hard to understand the motives that have led many eminent historians to embrace instead opposite or markedly diverging reconstructions. Clearly, the relative smallness of the Italian Jewish population rendered it marginal to Pan-European scholars; moreover, a certain weight must be attached to the fact that the first round-ups, notably the one in Rome on October 16, 1943, which was the vastest ever to take place in Italy, were decided in Berlin and carried out directly by Nazi police. It should also be mentioned that Italy's stance in the French and Balkan territories in 1942-1943, where it did not espouse Nazi, Croat and Vichy deportation policy,²⁸ - and which we find depicted in every one of the essays examined here -, appears to have heavily influenced descriptions of the subsequent Fascist policy in Italy in 1943-1945.

Apart from all that, however, I suspect that for many of these historians Mussolini mattered not so much for Fascism's own brand of antisemitic notions and actions, but rather because they might use him as a yardstick by which to measure Hitler, with only one end in mind: to paint the latter even blacker. As I see it, a complex contagion has taken place between the historical reconstruction of the "final solution," the ethical judgement on it, the containment policies towards postwar Germany, the quest by the successor states of the non-German collaborationist countries of their own "moral

²⁷ Picciotto, *Il libro della Memoria*.

²⁸ On two episodes that cannot be considered as instances of "not espousing," see, Michele Sarfatti, "Fascist Italy and German Jews in South-Eastern France in July 1943," *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 3/3 (1998): 318-328; transl. by Loredana Melissari. Michele Sarfatti, "Tra uccisione e protezione. I rifugiati ebrei in Kosovo nel marzo 1942 e le autorità tedesche, italiane e albanesi," *La Rassegna mensile di Israel*, 76/3 (2010): 223-242.

absolution.” Ever-changing combinations of these factors have at times given rise to some actual “pro-Italian” prejudices and to some odd oversights by worthy scholars.

As an example of the latter, I would like to cite the recurring lack of study of Italian documents on Italy, as if the truth of the RSI’s actions could be documented only through the Third Reich’s records. As if only they were honest, correct, accurate, panoramic, complete.²⁹

My survey ends with the second half of the 1980’s, years that saw a new advancement in documentary research and historiographical interpretation, both in Italy and among scholars writing in other European languages. Those years also, most importantly, saw an increased interest in the antisemitic persecution carried out by Benito Mussolini (both during the RSI and in earlier years), its originality and autonomy, and in his degree of collaboration and of independence.³⁰

(Translation: Loredana Melissari)

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²⁹ For two diverging accounts on a meeting between officers of the German and the Italian police see Sarfatti, *Fascist Italy*.

³⁰ Among the essays by foreign scholars that have been published after 1986 and have dealt with anti-Jewish persecution in the RSI, one should mention those by Susan Zuccotti, *The Italians and the Holocaust. Persecution, Rescue and Survival* (New York: Basic Books, 1987), [*L’Olocausto in Italia*, (Milan: Mondadori, 1988); transl. Vittoria Lo Faro]. Klaus Voigt, *Zuflucht auf Widerruf. Exil in Italien 1933-1945*, 2 voll. (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1989-1993), [*Il rifugio precario. Gli esuli in Italia dal 1933 al 1945*, 2 voll., (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1993-96); transl., Loredana Melissari]. Carlo Moos, *Ausgrenzung, Internierung, Deportationen, Antisemitismus und Gewalt im späten italienischen Faschismus (1938-1945)* (Zürich: Chronos Verlag, 2004). *Jews in Italy under Fascist and Nazi Rule, 1922-1945*, ed. Joshua D. Zimmerman, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005). Marie-Anne Matard-Bonucci, *L’Italie fasciste et la persecution des juifs* (Paris: Perrin, 2007), [*L’Italia fascista e la persecuzione degli ebrei* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2008); transl. Andrea De Ritis]. For Italian historiography see note 5.